

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report April 2022

An almost record-breaking dry month saw water levels falling around the Flats with some high spring tides putting a little back into the inundation area but overall wet grass fields saw some drastic changes in water depths and waterfowl numbers fell accordingly. Most spring migrants were late in arriving with hirundines in particular being recorded in small numbers but warblers generally increased in number towards the month's end.

The month started out with a rather unseasonal arrival of two winter swans a **Whooper Swan** and an adult **Bewick's Swan** the latter only the 6th record for the Flats. Both birds hung around the area to the 13th when a flock of 31 Whoopers were on the Trent late in the evening



with all the birds seemingly departing overnight. Up to 13 **Pink-footed Geese** joined the local **Greylag Geese** with the latter producing at least six broods of young. There were still 300 **Barnacle Geese** in the first week and up to 80 to the 30th with **Shelduck** producing their second highest count of the year when 114 were present on the 8th. Wintering wildfowl numbers fell rapidly with the highest count of **Wigeon** being 660 on the 1st but there were only 10 by the 17th while **Gadwall** fell from 154 on the 1st to 36 by the 29th and **Shoveler** went from 108 on the 1st to 11 by the 28th. **Teal** bucked the trend though with 730 on the 8th but still 450 on the 28th. Pintail peaked with 30 birds on the 1st before declining to 15 on the 19th and five on the 28th but it was a good month for **Garganey** with the eight birds from late March, five drakes, staying



to the 9th after which there were up to three birds to the 30th. Up to 55 **Tufted Ducks** were present all month but the only **Pochard** record was of seven on the 1st. **Little Grebe** pairs were more widespread than usual and the first Flats breeding record of **Great Crested Grebe** concerned a pair that were joined by a third bird on the 16th.

Booming **Bitterns** made themselves obvious throughout but the first breeding record of **Grey Heron** failed when the adjacent land owner disturbed the birds for a long period over the bank holiday weekend. Up to 14 **Little Egrets** were a daily sight with **Great White Egrets** peaking at three birds on the 14th with one or two being seen almost daily in contrast the Flats' third record of **Cattle Egret** a bird that appeared on the 13th but departed the same day. With rapidly increasing numbers in Britain though and the first confirmed Lincolnshire breeding record in 2022 the latter species will not doubt become more regular. The regular **Spoonbill** flock built up to six birds but there was clearly overlap with different individuals as the six were all adults.

With five male and six female **Marsh Harriers** present and occasionally joined by other passing young birds



there was almost constant aerial activity with males performing some spectacular sky-dancing performances. **Red Kites** passed through on the 2nd and 18th and the

14th was notable with not one but two different **Ospreys** heading north-east during the morning in a true raptor fest with the sky seemingly filled with **Marsh harriers**, **Common Buzzards** and a scatter of **Sparrowhawks** and **Kestrels**. Odd **Peregrines** were seen on a few dates and to complete a good raptor haul the first **Hobby**



arrived on the 26th with four birds taking advantage of the insect abundance over the new reedbed during the 29th – 30th.

On April 8th 2018 a party of 11 **Common Cranes** flew east over the Flats and the species has become more regular in recent years with up to six birds recorded in



most springs but the events of this April were rather exceptional with birds recorded on six dates including the iconic sight and sound of a flock of ten birds on the 12th and 17th with seven of the same birds on the 13th and 14th. With their bugling calls audible long before the birds are generally visible Cranes can be hard to



miss but when circling quietly in a vast blue sky even birds with a 2m wing span can be easily missed. The quintessential sound of wild Scandinavian bogs was certainly an uplifting experience for observers lucky to be in the area at the time.

It was not a great month for wader passage with most of the muddy pool edges going begging. Four **Oystercatchers** were in residence but **Avocets** were limited in number by available habitat and though the 40 – 50 birds were displaying and mating there was no real attempt at nesting. The first **Little Ringed Plover** arrived on the 13th with later birds on the 19th, 27th two and 30th while the only **Ringed Plover** was a bird on the 12th – 13th. A flock of 24 **Lapwings** was still present on the 25th when local breeding birds were incubating. A total of 40 **Dunlin** on the 1st was the highest count of the month and a reflection of the very poor winter for **Ruff** was a maximum of five birds on the 13th with the last three on the 15th – 19th. A **Jack Snipe** on the 19th was relatively late but failed to capture the latest spring record set by a bird on April 27th 2014. Following a count of 114 **Black-tailed Godwits** on the 1st numbers fell to c60 mid-month and less than 20 from then onwards. Similarly, Curlew departures were rapid after 158 being logged on the 2nd there were only 35 on the 16th and one or two from then onwards. The first **Whimbrel** arrived on the 12th and there were one to three on several dates with five on the 30th. **Spotted Redshanks** picked up after a dire winter with six on the 8th and then eight from mid-month to the 30th but **Greenshank** passage was again abysmal with singles on the 18th, 19th and 29th – 30th. A **Green Sandpiper** on the 10th was the first of the year but a **Wood Sandpiper** 24th – 25th set a new spring arrival record beating the previous earliest bird on April 26th 2019. Finally, a **Common Sandpiper** on the 19th was notable as the species appears to be in decline on the

Flats.



Four **Little Gulls** flew east on the 24th and pairs of **Mediterranean Gulls** flew through on the 10th and 19th but the only tern was an **Arctic Tern** on the Trent Flash on the 25th. Two **Barn Owls** were seen with one calling from a potential nest site on the 30th and the second **Short-eared Owl** of the year was by the breach on the evening of the 13th.

The first **Sand Martin** was not recorded until the 3rd and after a flush of 300 on the 13th the species was typically scarce. **Swallow** numbers were even worse with none until the 8th then a peak of just 14 on the 25th with there were also five **House Martins** after the first on the 13th. The first **Yellow Wagtail** appeared on the 13th with subsequent numbers peaking in the evenings when there were 30 on the 18th and 50 on the 23rd. Two **White Wagtails** on the 16th and 30th was a poor showing. After the first on the 11th there were up to five **Wheatears**. The 12th saw two fine male **Ring Ouzels** drop in and while



one seemed to move on quickly the other bird stuck around through to the 25th. Tardy **Fieldfares** included 50 on the 9th, 45 10th and one 30th with 150 Redwings also noted on the 1st.

A **Grasshopper Warbler** on the 10th arrived before



the first **Willow Warbler** 12th, **Sedge Warbler** 13th, **Reed Warbler** 14th and **Whitethroat** 16th with **Lesser Whitethroat** being added to the warbler tally on the 21st. At least seven Grasshopper Warblers were in residence by the month end. **Bearded Tits** were busily collecting food for their first broods in the last week.

Record breaking early *odonata* came in the form of **Four Spotted Chaser** 29th and **Blue-tailed Damselfly** 30th. A **Weasel** was seen on the 10th and 15th with **Daubenton's Bats** on the 13th and **Badgers** and **Otters** were rather obvious during the fine evenings.



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