

## Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report June 2022

It is probably fair to say that the spring passage of waders through the Flats was the worst ever and as early June turned rapidly into summer thoughts turn to the autumn passage of waders and hopefully better things to come as the water bodies shrank leaving increasing areas of black, gooey mud rich in insects. Thus, the events of June 21<sup>st</sup> were somewhat remarkable with initially one and later two small waders present it was already a better than average day! The first wader reported as a



Pectoral Sandpiper would have been a first site spring occurrence but closer examination of the bird revealed that it was in fact a stunning summer plumaged **Baird's Sandpiper** the first for the Flats and only the 6<sup>th</sup> record for Lincolnshire. It became the 44<sup>th</sup> species of wader recorded from the site and the third new species to be added this year so far after American Wigeon and Purple Heron. The second wader that joined it in the evening was a **Little Ringed Plover** the first since May 18<sup>th</sup>. Up to the end of 2020 there had been 295 records of Baird's Sandpiper in the UK averaging about seven per annum. An analysis of the records between 1958 and



1985 included 120 records of which only three were in spring with 117 between July and November showing the relevance of the Flats record. There were only five records prior to 1958. Baird's Sandpipers breed in the high Arctic from Chukotski Peninsular in eastern Russia east to north-west Greenland and Baffin Island, wintering in South America from Ecuador and southern Brazil south to Chile and Argentina. The world population is estimated at 300,000 birds. Birds breed in exposed, dry to moist upland tundra with sparse vegetation. During migration and winter, they use primarily inland habitats such as lake and river shorelines, rain-soaked pastures and rice fields. Eats almost exclusively insects but also spiders and crustaceans. Birds arrive on the breeding grounds between mid-May and early June with fall migration



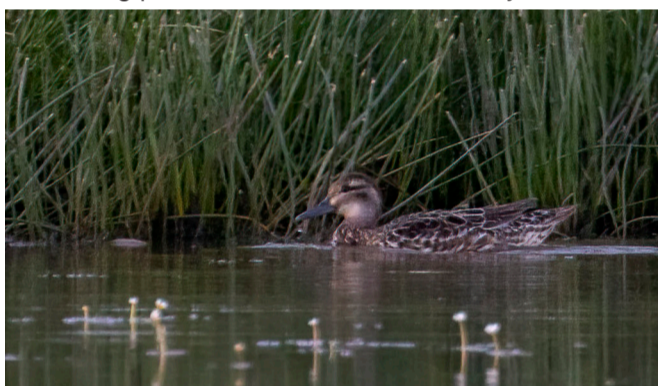
of failed breeders starting from late June so was the Alkborough Flats bird a late spring migrant or already on the return trip? Amazingly in this age of internet image sharing it quickly came to light that this same bird, identical on plumage, had been observed near Angers in central France from June 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> so it was heading north next stop Iceland, Greenland or Svalbard? Other waders were at a premium dominated by the increasing flock of **Lapwings**, up to 170 birds but some fine black, summer plumaged female **Spotted**

**Redshanks** returned from Scandinavia from the 16<sup>th</sup> when three birds were present being joined by three more



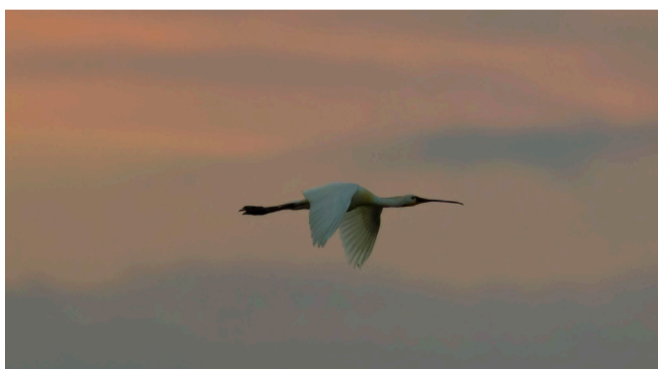
by the 21<sup>st</sup> and the flock peaked at 14 on the 27<sup>th</sup>. No **Redshank** bred or summered and after an absence of a few weeks two were back on the 16<sup>th</sup> with six by the 18<sup>th</sup> when five **Curlew** were noted and the first **Greenshank** was back on the 28<sup>th</sup>. An unseasonal flock of six **Knot** on the 13<sup>th</sup> were the first of the year, and **Wood Sandpipers** made an early appearance with singles 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> while **Black-tailed Godwits** started to filter back with one on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 30 by the 24<sup>th</sup> and **Avocets** built up to 20 on the 28<sup>th</sup> when a single Dunlin formed the only record of the month.

Wildfowl numbers fell with the water levels but there was a notable count of 259 **Gadwall** on the 18<sup>th</sup> and an additional 36 young were counted in five broods the same day. Up to six **Wigeon** were present most of the month while **Teal** numbers increased from four on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 17 by the 18<sup>th</sup>. A pair of **Garganey** suggested breeding was taking place but no brood was seen by the month's

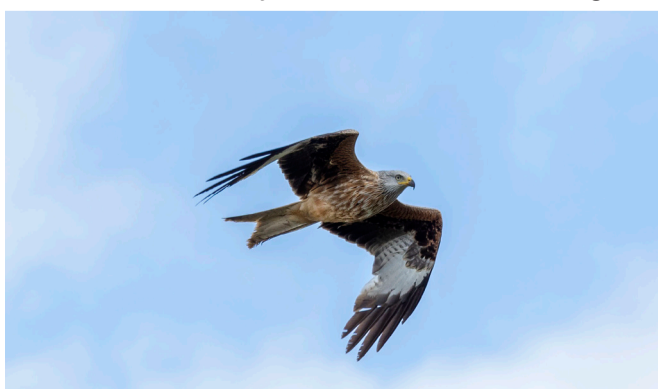


end. Up to 13 **Shoveler** joined the moulting assemblage of dabbling duck with two broods being seen.

**Bitterns** became more visible as they commuted around the drying water bodies and the abundance of food trapped in shrinking pools brought up to 40 **Little Egrets** and a maximum of 26 **Grey Herons** while **Great White Egrets** peaked at five on the 14<sup>th</sup> with four remaining for most of the remainder of the month and **Spoonbills**



settled at about 15 though there were 17 on the 16<sup>th</sup>. The excellent year for **Common Cranes** saw one bird present on several days and five flying over on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Two second calendar year **Red Kites** flew south together



on the 11<sup>th</sup> but otherwise it was a steady month for raptors and by the 30<sup>th</sup> none of the **Marsh Harrier** chicks

had started to fledge. A **Peregrine** was seen on the 6<sup>th</sup> and a **Hobby** was hunting at dusk on the 16<sup>th</sup> but both species were remarkably scarce considering how close they breed.

At least two **Barn Owls** were present and a **Cuckoo** seen on the 24<sup>th</sup> could have been one of the birds present all spring. The woeful state of the **Swift** population was reflected by a very poor showing peaking with just 50 birds on the 18<sup>th</sup> but **Sand Martin** numbers built up to 200+ by the 28<sup>th</sup>. The local breeding **Green Woodpeckers**

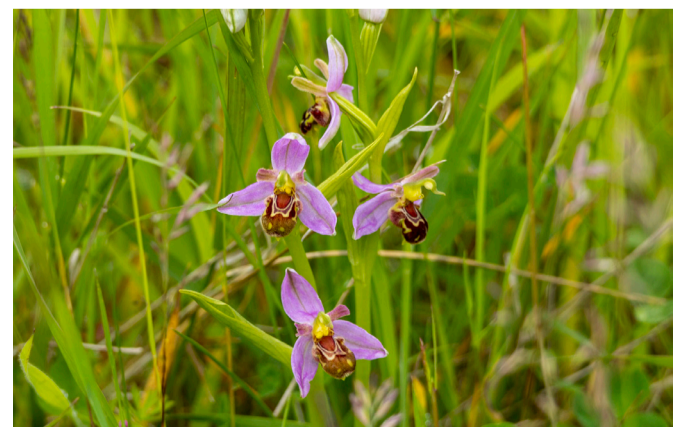


became more obvious again with birds venturing down onto the edge of the Flats while a **Nuthatch**, normally confined to the upper escarpment was down in the lower car park on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Three juvenile Grey **Wagtails** together in the sewage works 24<sup>th</sup> suggested they had been raised there but there was not a single record of Yellow Wagtail all month. One or two **Grasshopper Warblers** continued singing throughout as did the unpaired single **Willow Warbler**. **Bearded Tits** seems to be having a good breeding season with several parties of fledged juveniles wandering around the site while numerous broods of **Water Rails** were audible and two



juveniles were uncharacteristically visible by the main hide early in the month.

New butterflies for the year included **Common Blue** 2<sup>nd</sup> followed by a peak of ten, **Large Skipper** 3<sup>rd</sup>, peak of 15, **Meadow Brown** 13<sup>th</sup> with a maximum of 150 24<sup>th</sup>, **Ringlet** 18<sup>th</sup> with 70 on the 24<sup>th</sup> and record early dates for **Large White** and **Small Skipper** on 21<sup>st</sup>. Numbers of *odonata* were generally a bit mediocre but at least 500 **Azure Damselflies** were noted on the 16<sup>th</sup> and after the first on the 11<sup>th</sup> there were 40 teneral **Ruddy Darters** on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Three **Broad-bodied Chasers** were on the wing on the 3<sup>rd</sup> with the first **Red-eyed Damselfly** and **Emperor** appearing on the 11<sup>th</sup> followed by a **Black-tailed Skimmer** on the 16<sup>th</sup> and a **Brown Hawker** 22<sup>nd</sup>. Finally mention must be made of the unexpected appearance of orchids. With only one previous record of **Bee Orchid** finding 23 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> seemed exceptional



but by the 11<sup>th</sup> a total of 155 spikes were counted and these were followed by no less than seven **Pyramidal Orchid** spikes.

Graham Catley  
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