

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report July 2022

The year has certainly been a mixed one thus far with regard to rare and scarce bird species on the Flats but with three new species added to the list by the end of June, American Wigeon, Purple Heron and Baird's Sandpiper, the odds were on for a somewhat quieter autumn but the increasing heat and consequent falling water levels revealed a lot of attractive looking mud for passage waders but was the timing just too early? **Avocets** started their post-breeding build up with 24 including the first fledged juveniles on the 10th and there



were 80 by the 16th with a high proportion of juveniles in the flock but the monthly peak was just 149 on the 25th. No **Little Ringed Plovers** bred again but 11 birds arrived in the first week, a mix of adults and juveniles, and even odd **Ringed Plovers** dropped in while **Dunlin** numbers jumped from 15 on the 6th to 56 on the 15th and 60 on the 19th but as was the case with most species numbers fell from mid-month as the area of water and consequently feeding habitat declined rapidly. Eight **Snipe** were back on the 8th and Icelandic **Black-tailed Godwits** returned in force with 80 by the 4th and 283 from the 15th – 21st then up to 250 to the month end with the first five juveniles on the 31st. The **Spotted Redshank** flock peaked at 16 birds in the first week but then fell and rose again with new birds appearing still in their black summer dress while the earlier arrivals had quickly moulted to rather the more sombre grey and white of winter. **Redshank** also built up to 54 by the 15th then 78 on the 21st with the odd juvenile in the flock and a **Greenshank** lingered from the 4th – 10th with odd birds from then on and three on the 28th. **Lapwings** reached about the 250 mark while



moulted **Ruffs** reached eight on the 17th and the first Reeve arrived on the 27th. A single **Green Sandpiper** on the 10th and 17th was followed by three, all juveniles on the 20th and there were three again on the 28th but one was an adult. The first **Wood Sandpiper** of the autumn proper dropped in on the 17th and there were then frequent reports of an increasingly frequent visitor with single birds through to the 31st. Single **Whimbrels** on the 12th and 17th were a good autumn omen and **Curlew** built up to 55 by the 12th and peaked at 125 on the 31st with the feeding birds concentrating in the remaining pools of the inundation as inland fields were baked hard and impenetrable. A fine summer plumage **Knot** on the 15th was followed by two in the last week but would there be something special before the remaining water bodies dried out in the extreme heat? That question was answered rather emphatically on the evening of the 15th when an adult **Stilt Sandpiper** in summer plumage



appeared; the second really rare Nearctic wader to be added to the Flats list in 2022 and only the fourth

record for Lincolnshire. What were the chances of two new waders for the site in consecutive months? The significance of this record can be judged from the fact that up to the end of 2021 there were in fact only 40 accepted records of Stilt Sandpiper in the UK since the first record at Spurn Point in 1954. *Stilt Sandpiper breeds in coastal subarctic to arctic areas from north Alaska to*



James Bay and winters primarily from the west Gulf coast south to Costa Rica and in interior or South America from eastern Peru and southern Brazil to northern Chile and Argentina. Estimates of world population range from 50,000 to 200,000. A long-distance migrant the primary routes pass through the Great Plains in spring and fall and along the Atlantic coast of North America in fall with small numbers elsewhere. Migrates mostly at night and early morning. Adults depart the breeding grounds in late June, failed breeders, early to mid-July (females) mid to late July (males) with arrival at the wintering grounds in early August to early September. They frequent shallow pools, mudflats, marshes. Even in coastal areas tends to occur on lagoons or ponds, not on tidal mudflats. Breeds on tundra especially in sedge meadows with raised ridges for nest sites. In spite of its best attempts at hiding behind the ever-widening areas of reed the Stilt Sandpiper continued to show itself occasionally to several 100 visitors during its prolonged stay that saw



it still present on the 31st. The 45th species of wader to be recorded on the Flats bets are on what will be the 46th – could the Black-winged Stilts that have bred near Doncaster wander northwards when they fledge?

As mentioned above the area of water on the site fell to its lowest levels for over ten years and this certainly did not benefit some species notably waterfowl with several broods of young ducks and some of the cygnets succumbing to the lack of water and hence suitable feeding. With the exception of the grass munching **Greylag Geese**, up to 700 were around all month accompanied by up to 40 **Canada Geese** the number of all waterfowl species fell rapidly from the June peaks. The monthly **Shelduck** tally numbered just four birds with three on the 6th and one on the 28th, three **Wigeon** were still present on the 6th but not thereafter, two new broods of Gadwall took the spring total to seven but losses increased as they were forced into smaller and smaller areas of water. The **Teal** maximum was just 30 but 150 **Mallard** on the 4th was a notable total and at least 25 broods of young were considered to have fledged. **Shoveler** numbers also fell to single figures but the 4th saw a pair of **Tufted Ducks** and six drake **Pochard** appear briefly. The concentration of small fish and amphibians benefitted



herons and egrets for the first half of the month but

even their numbers started to drop away as the available fishing areas declined in abundance and there were also some large die offs of fish in the ditches following the heat wave. **Little Egrets** reached a high of 57 mid-month but were reduced to about five by the month end and after four **Great White Egrets** on the 4th only one was seen to the 10th with a new colour-ringed juvenile bird, Red ABM, from Shepwick heath passing through on the 17th and proving to be the last record of the month. **Spoonbill** numbers held up better with a monthly peak of 24 on the 6th and 16 to the 30th and there were also 14 **Grey Herons** and the odd **Bittern**.

With four successful **Marsh Harrier** nests fledging 11 young this is a record year for the Flats; four young from a brood opposite the main hide showed very well often sitting together on the exposed dry mud. Otherwise, it was not a great month for raptors but single **Hobbies** were seen on a few dates and the first juvenile **Peregrine** was terrorising all the waders on the 19th. Four **Common Cranes** were present on and off to the 16th but as the Trent Flash dried out all of the **Coots** left the site along with most of the **Little Grebes**. A flock of seven **Sandwich Terns** that tracked across the site on the 16th was the largest group of this species ever recorded. Notable passerines were very thin on the ground but a juvenile **Cuckoo** on the 8th was briefly chased



by a Hobby and young **Green Woodpeckers** made occasional forays down onto the Flats from the adjacent hillside. Up to 60 **Swifts** were foraging over the reedbeds in the heat wave along with c80 **Sand Martins**. The first two **Yellow Wagtails** of the autumn appeared on the 8th but there were never more than ten thereafter being well outnumbered by the 20+ **Pied Wagtails**. A wandering juvenile **Stonechat** on the 3rd was earlyish but **Grasshopper Warblers** seemed to stop singing early with the last heard on the 8th.

In spite of the hot weather it was not a great month for invertebrates. A male **Common Hawker** 8th – 16th was the best dragonfly and there were several **Brown Hawkets** with a peak of 60 teneral **Ruddy Darters** on



the 20th before most of their breeding pools evaporated. A late **Red-eyed Damselfly** was seen on the 20th on the same date that the first **Small Red-eyed Damselflies**



were seen and a rather faded male **Emerald Damselfly** was notable as it was the first record for a few years. A bright fresh **Painted Lady** on the 21st was the best butterfly though **Essex Skippers** are still breeding with the first eight on the 6th.

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