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## BIRD HIGHLIGHTS AT WELL-WATCHED SITES, 2011

### Full-text versions of some of the summaries published in LBR No. 76

These Site Highlights reports are as presented by the authors. Some records in them may not have been received by the LNHS, others may still need to be assessed by the LNHS Rarities Committee. See *Birds of the London Area, 2011* and the Appendices (pages 21-178) and the summary accounts (pages 233-239) for details.

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# BIRD HIGHLIGHTS AT ALEXANDRA PARK, 2011

ANDREW GARDENER

A summary of these highlights is published in LBR 76: 233-234

## Site information

Alexandra Park is mixed parkland of 80ha (196ac)

Location LB Haringey; Vice-County Middx; Grid ref TQ302900; Postcode N22 7AY

Information <http://friendsofalexandrapark.org>

Annotated map As above - 'Map of the park'

A very good total of 109 species was recorded - not as good as the previous two years, but still the fourth highest total on record. One more species was added to the Park's list, namely Short-eared Owl; unfortunately, the sighting was a single-observer record. This brings the overall species total for the Study Area to 174.

Despite the good total, there were some species absent, namely Ring Ouzel, Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher and Brambling; even though these may not all be annual species, it would normally be expected to have two or three of them on the year-list. There were other species where numbers were down on recent years: Kingfisher (two dates), Whinchat (five dates), Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (one date), Sedge Warbler (one date), Reed Warbler (six dates), Treecreeper (one date) and Bullfinch (two dates).

**Winter:** First recorded in the Park in 2009, Waxwing was recorded on five dates with a maximum of 40+ on January 19th. Two Wigeon were present on January 6th, and the wintering Firecrest stayed until at least February 10th. Other birds of interest included Peregrine Falcon (two dates), Lapwing (one date), Snipe (one date), and Yellowhammer present from January 1st to 2nd. Sixteen Shoveler were on the Boating Pond on February 4th, and at least three Water Rail wintered in the Conservation Area.

**Spring:** Waxwings lingered, being recorded on three dates within the Park. A fly-through Turtle Dove was seen on May 7th, a Redstart on April 10th, and a Firecrest on May 5th. Other birds included Little Egret (one date), Red Kite (two dates), Buzzard (four dates), Peregrine Falcon (four dates), Lapwing (two dates), Snipe (one date), Common Sandpiper (two dates), Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on March 30th, Stonechat (two dates) and Rook (two dates). There was a good count of five Wheatear on April 3rd.

**Breeding:** Little Grebe (two pairs), Great Crested Grebe, Mute Swan, Tufted Duck (at least three broods), Pochard, Mallard (c15 pairs), Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Coot (16+ nests), Stock Dove (c8 pairs), Grey Wagtail, Mistle Thrush (at least four territories), Lesser Whitethroat (two territories), Whitethroat (at least six territories), Coal Tit, and Nuthatch (three pairs). On June 19th, a 'mixed' singing Willow Warbler - that sang Willow Warbler song interspersed with 'Chiff Chaff' song - took up territory in the Cricket Scrub, staying until late July, but there was no evidence of breeding.

**Summer/Autumn Migration:** A Wryneck, present in the Cricket Scrub from August 20th to 28th, represented the fourth record for the Study Area. Six Crossbills on July 24th represented the fifth record for the Park, and there was a second record of the year for Turtle Dove on July 15th. Three more Redstarts were seen, on August 20th and 29th and September 2nd, and a Tree Pipit was recorded on August 25th. Other birds of interest were Little Egret (one date), Buzzard (one date), Peregrine Falcon (one date) and Common Sandpiper (two dates).

**Autumn/Winter:** Bird of the year was a fly-through Short-eared Owl on October 29th - a site-first. A Golden Plover on November 22nd represented the third record for the Study Area. There was also Dunlin on November 6th, Woodlark on October 8th and Meally Redpoll on December 25th. Other birds of note were, Little Egret (one date), Teal (one date), Peregrine Falcon (one date), Lapwing (one date), Snipe (one date), Yellow-legged Gull (two dates), Stonechat (two dates), Rook (one date) and Yellowhammer (two dates). A feeding group of 450+ Woodpigeons was present on November 1st. Passage counts of Woodpigeon included 260 on November 1st, 670+ on November 2nd and 200 on November 20th. Chaffinch movement during October included 40+ on 9th, 50+ on 22nd, 40 on 23rd and 50+ on 29th.

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## BIRD HIGHLIGHTS AT BRENT RESERVOIR, 2011

ANDREW VERRALL

A summary of these highlights is published in LBR 76: 235

### Site information

Brent Reservoir (Welsh Harp) is a Local Nature Reserve and SSSI

Location Neasden; Vice-County Middx; Grid ref TQ215870

Information [http://londonbirders.wikia.com/wiki/Brent\\_Reservoir](http://londonbirders.wikia.com/wiki/Brent_Reservoir)

Annotated map <http://www.aardvarkmap.net/maps/MP1YP4X5>

This year 133 species were seen, a good year for waders, and more Buzzards were seen than ever before. Our autumn Vis-Mig covered 63 days, a little in August/September then October the best, continuing until 29th November. Watching from the Dump the final total was 18,100 birds. Best birds were Goshawk, Marsh Harrier, Merlin, Short-eared Owl, Great Skua, Black-necked Grebe, Jack Snipe, Woodcock, Smew and Garganey.

**January:** On 1st a Rook, eight Skylarks, a female Goosander and 26 Snipe made it a good start to the year. In the best ever year for Buzzards the first was seen on 2nd. The Cetti's Warbler from the previous year was still present on 3rd, seen until the end of the month. A 2nd-winter Mediterranean Gull appeared on 15th, then a single Waxwing flew over on 16th.

**February:** Siskins increased to c50 on 8th and on 9th a Jack Snipe was found. Next was a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker calling on 18th.

**March:** On 5th a Curlew flew in and landed next to an Oystercatcher, both birds soon leaving. Then on 8th a Stonechat was found with another on 14th. Two Green Sandpipers on 13th stayed for two days then on 15th a Dunlin was seen; also on 15th a flock of 21 Waxwings in a tree not far from the bridge soon flew off. A Woodcock was flushed on 19th then Redshank and two Green Sandpipers arrived on 25th. Little Egrets were present on 26th and 29th, six Swallows came in on 29th then a good bird at Brent, an Avocet was found on 30th.

**April:** Spring continued on 2nd with Little Ringed Plover, Wheatear, Sand Martin and Willow Warbler. Then on 3rd Lapwings were displaying, three Green Sandpipers were seen and in the afternoon a fem/imm Marsh Harrier flew west. On 6th a male Pheasant appeared, then on 7th the first Common Tern and Whitethroat then Sedge Warbler and Yellow Wagtail on 9th when a 2nd-summer Yellow-legged Gull was seen. One of the best days of Spring was 16th: Black-necked Grebe in summer plumage that stayed for two days, a Goshawk flew north, fem Marsh Harrier over, male Peregrine Falcon, a flock of 32 Waxwings some of which landed briefly in a tree and six Shelduck. On 23rd an adult Kittiwake stayed for 20 minutes and the first Hobby was seen. Common Terns built up to 40 by 28th. Five species of wader on 29th included four Bar-tailed Godwits, two Dunlin and a Greenshank. Spring Birdcount Day on 30th, 81 species were seen - a new

record. A Whimbrel was on the playing fields early morning, then five Bar-tailed Godwits, Curlew, Dunlin, Greenshank, three Green Sandpipers, Lapwings, Little Ringed Plovers and Sandpiper made this the best ever wader number day with nine species being seen. A Shag roosted on a raft for part of the morning.

**May:** A flock of 15 Waxwings flew over on 1st when a Greenshank and a Hobby were recorded. A leucistic Swift with white belly and rump and pale wings was around, seen again on 21st; this bird was first seen in 2010. A single and two Whimbrel flew over on 2nd when four Little Ringed Plovers and one Ringed Plover were present and the last two single Waxwings flew over. On 14th at least two pairs of Sand Martins were proved to have bred for the first time at the reservoir in drainage holes in the dam. There was a drake Garganey in East Marsh on 15th and on 16th a pair of Little Egrets in breeding plumage.

**June:** Little Ringed Plovers stayed throughout summer but there was no proof of breeding. Displaying Lapwings were present, one seen on a nest but another failure. Common Terns did well with 26 nests/broods. A pair of Black-necked Grebes in summer plumage turned up on 9th then a locally scarce Treecreeper was found on 26th.

**July:** The first Sandpiper of autumn arrived on 1st along with a Redshank. By 13th the Swift flock had built up to a massive 2,500+ birds. Also that day were four Little Ringed Plovers with a Ringed Plover, and the Treecreeper was seen again.

**August:** Green Sandpipers were seen all month, with seven on 7th, eight Willow Warblers were counted on 9th and there were c200 House Martins on 13th. A Hobby on 16th was seen several times in the month. A Curlew flew over on 20th, a good day with Tawny Owl calling and both Hobby and Peregrine Falcon seen. One definite Arctic Tern was seen with c12 Common Terns on 23rd then on 24th a Ruff and six Common Sandpipers were recorded. Autumn Birdcount Day on 27th produced a total of 69 species, including a Tree Pipit, three Yellow Wagtails, four Spotted Flycatchers, a Hobby and a Tawny Owl flushed. Two Black-tailed Godwits - an adult and juvenile - were found on 29th feeding in north marsh then, to end the month, the first Water Rail of autumn, a Whinchat and a Yellow Wagtail were seen on 31st.

**September:** Curlew and Greenshank flew over on 1st, then on 2nd were four Green Sandpipers. On 3rd a Nuthatch was found, so seldom seen. Two Spotted Flycatchers arrived on 11th, then the last Swift of the year flew around on 13th. The largest flock of Buzzards ever seen at the reservoir, 17 birds, were counted high over East Marsh on 15th. Also on 15th Meadow Pipits started flying over and totalled 84 by Nov 25th. Jackdaws began to move on 25th, totalling 96 by Nov 12th.

**October:** Into the best Vis-Mig month Chaffinches started moving on 1st with a total of 978 by 29th Nov. First Siskins on 3rd totalled 167 by 13th Nov and the first Redwings came on 8th totalling 1,318 up to Nov 27th. Also on 8th Skylarks started but only totalled 29 by Nov 17th. Then on 9th Lesser Redpolls with 136 by Nov 26th. A Rook flew over on 16th then Fieldfares on 16th became 947 by Nov 29th. Even Linnets, with the first on 16th got up to a total of 89 by Nov 26th. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen on the Dump on 20th and a Crossbill enlivened the Vis-Mig on 21st, with another on 28th. A Short-eared Owl was in the area in the early morning of 22nd then on 24th the returning

Mediterranean Gull appeared and was seen off and on until Dec 7th. At first light on 28th a Woodcock was flushed, then a female Merlin flew north on 30th.

**November:** A leucistic Black-headed Gull with snow-white wings was present on 1st, seen again on 21st, also seen in the previous winter. On the Vis-Mig 1,310 Woodpigeons flew south on 2nd, with 1,440 on 13th (autumn total 10,038). A drake Goldeneye on 5th was joined by a second male on 6th and a fem/imm Scoter came in on 8th. The first definite record of a Great Skua at Brent came on 9th; there is a very old record from 1942 for Kingsbury but no evidence that it came to the reservoir, so this represents the first record for the Reservoir. This rare visitor flew in from the dam direction, up to the bridge, circled for a while then headed up to North Marsh. Just by luck and chance it was seen by two observers and interesting to note that three Great Skuas were seen the day before (8th) in the Thames at Canvey Point, with 64 on 7th, helping to explain how one could reach us, but a very surprising and fine bird. Several Lapwing flocks were on the mud with 27 on 10th and best 78 on 13th. A wintering Cetti's Warbler came in on 13th, very elusive and only staying until 24th of the following month. Two Jack Snipe were seen on 14th with a single on 18th seen daily until 23rd. Three redhead Smew were present on 21st morning only, seen later in the day at the Wetland Centre. Jack Snipe on 27th ended a good month.

**December:** Some interesting counts this month were c200 Common Gulls on 3rd, 27 Snipe on 10th and nine Ruddy Ducks on 11th. Also on 11th a single Jack Snipe was found. An adult Mediterranean Gull, probably different from the regular one earlier in the winter, was present on 26th.

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## BIRD HIGHLIGHTS AT CROSSNESS, 2011

JOHN ARCHER

A summary of these highlights is published in LBR 76: 236-237

### Site information

Crossness is a Local Nature Reserve of 25.5ha (63 ac) on the Thames Estuary

**Location** LB Bexley; Vice-County Kent; Grid ref TQ478815; Postcode DA17 6FB

**Information** [www.lnr.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.lnr.naturalengland.org.uk)

**Annotated map** <http://natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk>

Observer coverage dropped from last year's levels, and this was reflected in the number of species recorded, which was 150, compared with 164 in 2010. Nevertheless, there were some excellent records, including the site's first Roseate Terns in September, Honey Buzzard, Osprey, several Red Kites and Marsh Harriers, two Iceland Gulls, four Arctic Skuas, two Bearded Tits, a flock of 20 White-fronted Geese, two Little Stints, three Wood Sandpipers and a cracking summer-plumaged Spotted Redshank. All of these would be eclipsed, however, in the (perhaps unlikely) event the Marbled Duck seen in January is accepted as a wild bird. Cetti's Warbler established itself as a breeding species, with at least two successful pairs, and Barn Owls nested successfully for the first time since 2007.

**January:** The year got off to an excellent start on 1st, with a drake Red-breasted Merganser flying east, two Scaup west in the morning, and an exceptional count of 23 Grey Plovers that included a flock of 15 flying west around midday. Up to eight of the latter were seen on several dates throughout the month, with odd ones over the rest of the winter and early spring. A Jack Snipe was on the foreshore on 2nd, and a juvenile Iceland Gull off the Golf Centre on 3rd. Forty Snipe on Southern Marsh scrape on 5th was a very high count for the site. Two Bearded Tits were in the Protected Area on 9th. A 1st-winter Marbled Duck by the outfall on 10th caused much debate about its origin. It was fully-winged, unringed and very wary, but its plumage was extremely tatty. We'll probably never know for sure, but if the BOURC ever admits this species to the British List, this has to be a candidate London's first record. The rest of the month was rather quiet until 30th, when a female Brambling was trapped and Grey Plover numbers rose to 20.

**February:** A Ruff was by the outfall on 9th and 11th. An unprecedented flock of 12 Avocets was in Barking Bay on 20th, with two remaining to the following day. Also on 20th, two adult Little Gulls flew east and a flock of eight Rock Pipits was an unusually high number. Another Little Gull flew east on 21st, when an adult Mediterranean Gull was also on the river. Four Jackdaws flew north on 27th.

**March:** A quiet month. A juvenile Iceland Gull on the Thames on 26th was the undoubted highlight. The only other scarce species were an adult Mediterranean Gull west on 2nd, and a Redpoll west on 19th. The first summer visitors were two Wheatears on 24th,

followed by a Blackcap on 26th. An adult Red-breasted Goose on the Sewage Works angling lake on 28th sported a yellow ring, leaving no doubt over its origins. It reappeared at various localities around the patch during the year.

**April:** The start of April saw summer visitors arriving in force, with the first Common Tern, Swallow and Sand Martin all on 2nd. An immature male Marsh Harrier flew north-west on 3rd. A smart male Redstart was in the Protected Area on 6th. An escaped Harris's Hawk on Southern Marsh on 10th caused alarm briefly to the observer, and for rather longer among the resident crows. A Wood Sandpiper on 12th was both very early and very mobile, being seen on several flooded areas of the Nature Reserve. A flock of 12 immaculate adult Little Gulls was a fine sight flying east on 17th, with another adult lingering on the river. A Greenshank was on Norman Road pond on 19th, and the first Cuckoo of the year was in the Protected Area the same day. The 22nd was a good day, with another Wood Sandpiper flushed from the ditch by Norman Road Field, a Red Kite south-west, a Tree Pipit north-west, at least two Yellow Wagtails over, four adult Mediterranean Gulls upriver (later seen at the Wetland Centre), and a drake Mallard x Gadwall hybrid by the outfall. An Arctic Tern flew east on 25th, and there were at least two Hobbies that day. A Greenshank and 26 Bar-tailed Godwits were on the foreshore on 29th, the start of an excellent wader passage. The final day of the month saw "big day" competition with Brent Reservoir, and turned out to be an excellent choice of day. Thirteen species of wader (without Lapwing, Redshank or Curlew!) included a Curlew Sandpiper, the third Wood Sandpiper of the spring, a Ruff, two Turnstones, nine Grey Plovers and at least 24 Bar-tailed Godwits. Other good birds recorded during the day included a Tree Pipit, a Turtle Dove, nine Black Terns and an Arctic Tern, and the final species count was 84, narrowly beating Brent.

**May:** The superb run of waders continued on 1st, with two Little Stints in Barking Bay in the morning, and a superb summer plumaged Spotted Redshank on the Essex foreshore by the Ford works in the afternoon, the latter remaining until 2nd. A single Bar-tailed Godwit was also on the foreshore on 1st, with another seen on 7th. Two Sandwich Terns flew east on 4th. A drake Mandarin Duck flying rapidly upriver on 7th was a surprise, and the first patch record since one on Southmere in the winter of 1983-4. A Spotted Flycatcher and a female Redstart were trapped and ringed on 8th. Two Sanderlings were on the foreshore on 11th. A Rook flew south on 13th, and the Mallard x Gadwall hybrid was back that day, and also seen on 22nd. Another Spotted Flycatcher was seen on 17th. On 18th, a Little Tern flew downriver, as did six Sanderlings, with a seventh Sanderling on the foreshore. A Black Redstart was singing just east of the Incinerator on 19th. Another Sanderling was on the foreshore on 20th, with four more on 28th and two on 30th. The second Rook of the spring flew north on 28th.

**June:** A Greenshank on 4th was the only unusual bird in a typically quiet month.

**July:** A Sandwich Tern was on the river on 3rd, and two more flew east on 30th. The first juvenile Mediterranean Gull of the autumn was by the outfall on 11th. A Black Tern flew west on 22nd, and two drake Common Scoters were on the river on 27th. A Red Kite was over the new reed bed in Island Field on 31st.

**August:** A female Marsh Harrier was watched distantly over Barking Levels on 5th. An Osprey flew south on 10th, the first on the patch since 2006. A Garden Warbler on 13th was the first record this year. Two juvenile Black Terns were off the Golf Centre on 18th, the start of a moderate autumn passage which saw up to seven on a further ten dates in August and September. A Guillemot was on the Thames for about an hour over lunchtime on 23rd before flying upriver. This is the third consecutive year a Guillemot has been seen on the river here in late August or early September (but never by the author, who still needs this species to fill a gap in his London list!). Two juvenile Arctic Terns were also on the river on 23rd. An adult female Goldeneye on the Thames on 24th was unseasonal, and only the fourth patch record, following three last year. Four Sandwich, one Arctic and six Black Terns the same day were more typical for the month. Another Sandwich Tern flew west on 27th. A Greenshank was seen on 29th.

**September:** The month started surprisingly quietly. The second (and last) Garden Warbler of the year was seen on 11th. A juvenile Bar-tailed Godwit on 13th remained on the foreshore until 16th. The latter day was one of the best of the autumn, with three adult Arctic Skuas flying high south just after midday, followed four hours later by a pale juvenile Honey Buzzard. The skuas were added to a Sidcup garden list a few minutes after they passed Crossness, thanks to a tip-off that they were on the way. Other good birds on 16th included a juvenile Arctic Tern and the autumn peak count of seven Black Terns. A Curlew Sandpiper on the foreshore on 17th was the second record of the year, but only the third or fourth ever. The birds of the year (unless that marbled Duck ends up on Category A) were an adult Roseate Tern feeding a 1st-winter by the power station outfall in the afternoon of 25th. The first record for the site, they remained until dusk, to the delight of all the patch regulars and a number of birders from further afield. The only Garganey of the year, a juvenile, was found on the foreshore the same day, and remained until 10th October.

**October:** A juvenile Greenshank on the foreshore on 9th remained until 14th. A juvenile Arctic Skua was seen on the Thames at Belvedere on 12th, having been seen off Rainham earlier. Two Brent Geese flew east on 14th, and the only Pintail of the year, a female, was in Barking Bay the same day, as was a Grey Plover. Twenty-one Siskins flew over the same day, mostly heading south. A Marsh Harrier was seen on 15th. Two Redpolls flew south-west on 21st. A Pair of Jackdaws checked out the new owl box on 24th, raising a possible dramatic change in status from rare visitor to breeding resident, but were not seen subsequently. A 1st-winter Little Gull flew east on 30th, and two Lesser Redpolls and a Siskin flew south-west the same day.

**November:** Sixteen Brent Geese flew west in two flocks on 6th, with two more the next day. A Red-breasted Merganser flew east on 8th. An Avocet was watched from Barking, flying towards the high-tide roost by Crossness Engines, on 9th and another flew east along the Thames on 14th. A Golden Plover flew over the golf centre on 12th. A male Black Redstart was around the sea-wall and paddocks from 13th to 17th. A female Common Scoter was on the river on 17th. A Woodcock was flushed from the Protected Area on 25th.

**December:** Another Avocet was by the outfall on 8th. The 11th saw a Siskin in the Protected Area, and three Grey Plovers in the high tide roost. A Short-eared Owl was in Norman Road Field on 14th. A flock of 20 White-fronted Geese was a surprise as they flew west on 18th; over half were juveniles, suggesting a good breeding season. The only Knot of the year was in Barking Bay on 22nd.

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## BIRD AND OTHER HIGHLIGHTS AT RAINHAM MARSHES, 2011

HOWARD VAUGHAN

A summary of these highlights is published in LBR 76: 237-238

Rainham Marshes RSPB Reserve is a Metropolitan SINC and SSSI on the Thames Estuary

**Location** LB Havering; Vice-County Essex; Grid ref TQ525800; Postcode RM13 9YQ

**Information** [www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/r/rainhammarshes](http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/r/rainhammarshes)

**Annotated map** A link on the above site with suggested walks and other features

**January:** The 1st was surprisingly memorable with nearly 100 species recorded including both Whooper and Bewick's Swans, 60 Pink-footed Geese north, a single White-fronted Goose, three Barnacle Geese, ringtail Hen Harrier, male Merlin, Snow Bunting and Waxwing! Who could ask for more? Waxwings were reported on a further six dates with a high of 29 on the 3rd. The White-front was seen again on 15th-16th and three adults dropped in on 19th. Needless to say the adult Slaty-backed Gull that was seen on the 13th and 14th was the show stopper for January. Various reports suggest that it was seen by some people on the 15th. There were over 20 reports of Caspian Gulls with six seen on the 15th along with a Glaucous Gull on the 19th, a couple of Med Gulls and an unseasonal Arctic Skua. Wetter weather prompted a wildfowl arrival and on 18th 2,500 Teal were counted while on 16th there were 1,122 Wigeon and 391 Gadwall. A Goosander on the 31st was the only duck of note on the Thames although a Brent Goose was seen on a couple of occasions. The usual waders were reported including a couple of Avocets, Turnstone and Jack Snipe. A flurry of Lapland Buntings were seen with up to 11 reported (6th) but none lingered, while Corn Buntings and Yellowhammers continued to be found along the river frontage. Tree Sparrow and Bramblings were occasionally seen with the finch flock and a Bullfinch appeared in the woodland along with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on the 3rd. The three Marsh Harriers continued to pop in and another Hen Harrier was seen on the 22nd. Peregrine Falcons were daily and a female Merlin was seen every now and then. A Red Kite (5th) and female Goshawk (24th) added interest. Short-eared Owls were very tricky and the Barn Owl was only seen once.

**February:** The reappearance of our Slaty-backed Gull on the 16th stirred things up again and we were ready for the influx of visiting birders over the next few days. It showed very well at times and was seen again on the 17th, 20th, 22nd, 24th and 26th to the best of my knowledge. A juvenile Iceland Gull was seen on both the 11th and 17th with an adult Glaucous Gull on the latter date. There were several Caspian and many Yellow-legged Gull sightings. Easterly winds brought four Little Gulls upriver on the 21st with another and two Kittiwakes on the 28th. Mediterranean Gulls began to appear with four on the 25th and with the gulls came a little flurry of new waders including two Turnstones (28th), 16 Avocet (20th), 106 Black-tailed Godwits (numbers have been low this winter), early Whimbrel (22nd), Common Sandpiper and 12 Oystercatchers. The

Golden Plover lingered with just over 100 present and Lapwing numbers started to dwindle. Six Brent Geese were seen on the 19th and an Egyptian Goose on the 28th was unexpected. Both the immature male and female Marsh Harriers were seen occasionally and the female Hen Harrier was actually seen most days, making it the first truly wintering one on the site since the 1980s! A good sign indeed. Peregrine Falcons were very active and a female Merlin was seen on several dates making hunting sorties. Parties of 80, 14 and 32 Waxwings were seen briefly and two Penduline Tits reappeared on the 7th and were then seen again on the 17th-18th. Where do they go?

**March:** A mixture of the seasons this month with various winter visitors such as six White-fronted Geese (10th), an adult Shag (8th), three male Goldeneye (6th) hinting at the winter just past while another three flocks of Waxwings (totalling 104!) pointed to northbound passage of birds heading homewards. The same could be said of the Lapland Bunting seen on 10th along with our Water and Rock Pipits, the odd Brambling and Siskin and the two different Merlins seen. The female Hen Harrier lingered all month and several Marsh Harriers were noted along with no less than five different Red Kites. Little Egrets rose to 13 (we suspect that they are nesting locally) and a Great White Egret was seen briefly on the 12th. A season high of 264 Stock Doves was counted out on Wennington on the 8th. Further gull-watching produced several Caspian Gulls and a little flurry of 17 Little Gulls on the 26th and two more on the 29th. Up to 12 Avocets were seen on the river and the local Oystercatchers were definitely back. Golden Plover and Lapwings slowly departed and a Woodcock (29th) was a surprise. The first Little Ringed Plovers arrived on the 11th and the day before brought an early dapper Wheatear. Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were new in by mid-month with all three hirundines, Willow Warbler and White Wagtail before month-end. Star prize went to the Garganey that arrived on the 21st with two pairs on the marsh by the 25th. Other goodies included a Short-eared Owl on several dates, four pinging Bearded Tits from the 19th and a male Bullfinch on two dates. The common seal was seen twice and water voles, weasels and stoats were out and about while the first grass snakes were seen out hunting the marsh frogs!

**April:** The fantastic weather brought in a flurry of migrants including countless Reed and Sedge Warblers and Whitethroats along with pulses of Wheatears that peaked at 26 on the 16th; interestingly, up to this date, the Wheatears all appeared to be of the British race but a new arrival of 15 on the 19th all seemed to be of the larger, brighter, more upright Greenland race. Within a few days we were back to British birds again so just how many Wheatears actually passed through is anyone's guess! A male Pied Flycatcher was a star find on the 6th with a male Redstart on the 10th being equally smart. At least six Grasshopper Warblers took up territory. Yellow Wagtails were recorded most days and Tree Pipits were seen on the 19th and 23rd. A Ring Ouzel was seen briefly on the 5th and another female arrived on the 19th and stayed for the rest of the month. There were plenty of Sand Martins through but very few House Martins or Swallows and we had to wait until the 24th for the first Swift. However, its mountainous congener the Alpine Swift graced the marsh for seven glorious minutes on the 16th. The second year on the trot that we have had this imposing species. The pair of Garganey lingered on, giving hope that they may stay and breed, but most other duck species moved on for the

summer leaving a few stragglers. The female Hen Harrier was last seen on the 2nd but Marsh Harriers and Buzzards continued to be regular with some suggestion of passage by both species, while there were five sightings of Red Kite. A pair of Peregrine Falcons were around all month and a late Merlin was seen, while dashing Hobbies put on a spectacular show and peaked at 22 on the 30th. The Ravens made their first appearance of the year on the 16th with both birds being seen on the 23rd. The river was fairly quiet but predictably Common Scoters were recorded, with one on the 10th and five on the 13th. Terns were slow to move but by the end of the month Common, Arctic, Sandwich and Black (30th) had all been recorded along with a couple of Little Gulls (25th) and near daily Med Gull sightings from the 20th. Our first Greenshank arrived on the 15th and five were here on the 22nd. A Whimbrel and five Green Sandpipers were seen on the 17th and the former reached 12 by the 30th. Singles of Spotted Redshank and Common Sandpiper were also seen along with an early Wood Sandpiper on the 20th and four together on the 23rd. The most obvious passage was from Bar-tailed Godwits that started with a single on the 27th, and by the 30th there were 45 on the foreshore.

**May:** Aside from a mediocre wader passage it was a disappointing month. Birds were still moving in the first week and included a high of 75 Bar-tailed Godwits on the 1st along with a Spotted Redshank that visited several other local sites. The 3rd saw four each of Sanderling, Knot and Grey Plover as well as a few terns upriver, including four Arctics, nine Black and a single Sandwich. Six Avocet were around for a few days and another Wood Sandpiper and two Little Stints were seen on the 6th when a Little Tern was also seen. Six more Sanderling were found on the 16th with four again on the 27th and 31st. Two Ring Ouzels were found on the 2nd with three the next day and two still on the 4th. It was fairly quiet raptor-wise with some Marsh Harrier passage but only one Red Kite (22nd) and a fine female Montagu's Harrier that drifted through on the 15th. Spotted Flycatchers were seen on the 19th and 27th and a pair of Bearded Tits reappeared.

**June:** The pair of Bearded Tits that reappeared at the end of May were obviously busy and within a week two youngsters were seen following their parents around! Marsh Harriers were occasionally seen and a Red Kite was noted on the 11th. Hobbies and Peregrine Falcons were visible daily while Raven was again noted on the 10th and on the 14th when two were seen. Quiet wader-wise, with Avocets on the 2nd and 15th, and the first returning Curlews and Green Sandpipers moved through. Little Ringed Plovers look like they may have bred and two Ringed Plovers were on the foreshore on the 15th. Med Gulls were seen regularly and Yellow-legged Gulls crept into double figures as the month drew on. Two Little Terns (4th) were notable and an adult Kittiwake on the 11th and 17th was well out of season. A Long-eared Owl was seen briefly on the 10th and 23 Crossbill headed south on the 24th. Two Common Scoter were seen on the 17th and two broods of Shelduck were found; but although the Garganey were still present on the 3rd, no broods were seen. At least three Grasshopper Warblers started reeling again in the last week.

**July:** The trickle of waders that started in June continued throughout July with up to six Whimbrel becoming a daily site at high tide on the posts while early Black-tailed Godwit passage peaked at 44 on the 9th. All told, 19 species of wader were recorded and also included a Curlew Sandpiper (22nd), Sanderling and Turnstone (23rd) and Wood

Sandpipers on the 24th and two from the 30th. Yellow-legged Gulls reached 22 on the 16th and a few terns were logged including four Black Terns on 21st and a Sandwich Tern on the 23rd. Two Wigeon returned on the 26th and an Egyptian Goose very briefly graced the reserve on the 16th. A Whinchat was an early returnee on the 17th and stayed into August, and the odd Wheatear and Yellow Wagtail were reported. Two young Cuckoos were seen and even the Barn Owls came out for a change. Eyes on the skies produced fly-through Turtle Dove and 13 more Crossbills (29th) and a good selection of raptors that included at least eight different Marsh Harriers, some excellent Hobby and Peregrine Falcon action, a Honey Buzzard and all-too-brief Red-footed Falcon (26th).

**August:** The main event during August was in the last week when grotty weather and a vague easterly pushed some good birds upriver. Terns featured heavily with the 23rd being a big day when 329 Common, 24 Arctic, five Little and a single Black were recorded, but it was the two Razorbills and a Guillemot that stole the day. Five Little Gulls were also logged. Three days later on the 26th we witnessed another movement with 223 Common, two Sandwich, 20 Arctic and 17 Black Terns seen. Two more species of tern made for an astounding session with a juvenile White-winged Black Tern and then a summer-plumaged Whiskered Tern passing through! Earlier that morning when the weather had been at its worse we also hosted two flocks totalling over 500 Golden Plover and 32 Whimbrel! Wader Passage was otherwise slow but there were some highlights including Wood Sandpipers on the 4th and 12th, Spotted Redshank (18th), up to ten Greenshank and 14 Avocet (24th), Sanderling and 13 Turnstone (24th), and Knot on four dates. Bearded Tits raised another brood and a smattering of Whinchats, Wheatears and Yellow Wagtails added interest, while two Tree Pipits flew over on the 20th. Yellow-legged Gulls peaked at 48 on the 16th and a juvenile Kittiwake was seen on the 30th-31st. Marsh Harriers were seen on at least six dates with mostly juveniles going through.

**September:** With westerlies predominating it was a tricky month for migrant birds with little on the move. However a count of 46 Blackcaps on the 1st was notable along with several Whinchats and Wheatears and a single Redstart (17th). Spotted Flycatchers were recorded on several dates and a single Tree Pipit was noted on the 2nd. There was a good passage of Swallows and martins and a Red-rumped Swallow was seen heading across the Thames on the 8th. Two more juvenile Cuckoos were noted and westward-bound finches included several Mealy Redpolls and over 100 Siskin. Out on the river a few terns were still moving including ten Sandwich (28th) and 15 Arctic (10th). A Manx Shearwater was battling for survival against the Great Black-backed Gulls on the 7th and a single Kittiwake was seen on the 16th. In the skies above, big raptors were on the move and during the course of the month there were at least 19 Marsh Harriers (including a regular immature male) and a staggering 54 Buzzards reported! Ospreys were seen on the 9th and 10th and a beautiful male Hen Harrier was seen on the 16th.

**October:** Sixteen species of wader were seen on the reserve in October including a Spotted Redshank (from 20th), Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling, Knot, two Jack Snipe, four Grey Plover, Little Stint and 323 Black-tailed Godwits. Arctic Skuas were seen on five dates with a record five on the 13th. A Long-tailed Skua on the 7th was new to the list and a Sabine's Gull was seen the same day. A few late Common and Arctic Terns were noted and the first Caspian Gulls were seen on the 10th and 22nd. Marsh Harriers were

seen on several dates and the first Short-eared Owl was back on the 13th. Peregrine Falcons were seen daily and Merlin and Hen Harrier (27th) were watched hunting. Small birds were on the move in all directions with martins and Swallows heading south and the first Fieldfares, Redwings and many finches heading west including Lesser and Mealy Redpolls, Bramblings and a few Siskins. A Bullfinch was a good find on the 28th and a Tree Sparrow (16th) was the only autumn record. Yellowhammer and Lapland Bunting both flew through, and other scarce migrants included a Richard's Pipit (22nd), Ring Ouzel (23rd) and a Firecrest on the 25th. Up to eight Bearded Tits were seen but none lingered. The end of the month saw a new Spoonbill drop in for a couple of hours (28th), a Black Redstart on the 29th and a Wheatear that managed to stay into November.

**November:** A good selection of waders again with the low water-levels working some magic. Eighteen species were recorded with the Little Stint staying until the 2nd and another on the 23rd, the Spotted Redshank all month, a record 550 Black-tailed Godwits (27th), seven Avocets, 622 Golden Plover (21st) and singles of Knot, Jack Snipe and Woodcock. The Thames was quite productive with Brent Geese on six dates, Red-breasted Mergansers on three dates including a record four on the 14th, Goosander (8th), Goldeneye (15th), Smew (17th), several Little Gulls and a Pomarine Skua on the 7th. A single Caspian Gull was the *Larid* highlight. Duck numbers were low but our leucistic female Pintail returned and three White-fronted Geese dropped in on the 12th. A couple of Marsh Harriers were seen with the immature male being regular while Peregrine Falcons were seen every day. There were two Merlin sightings and up to five Short-eared Owls were seen at the west end. Surprisingly, Yellowhammers were recorded on four dates and the first three Corn Buntings were back on the saltings (21st) while a Snow Bunting (23rd) was almost expected. A Lapland Bunting (7th) completed a good bunting month and a Brambling was with the growing finch flocks on the 7th. Three Bearded Tits arrived on the 8th and there were nine by month-end. Blackcap and Chiffchaff may have been expected and the Wheatear (4th) and Ring Ouzel (23rd) not too unusual but the Sedge Warbler seen on the 20th was most definitely a tad late in leaving!

**December:** Not much changed during December with little immigration. Lapwing hovered around the 1,800 mark and Black-tailed Godwit reached a high of 560 while Golden Plover struggled over 100 on several dates. The Spotted Redshank stayed until the 21st and a Turnstone (11th) was new. Snipe were scarce and a single Jack Snipe was seen bobbing on the 30th. Scarcest wader was a Pectoral Sandpiper that was seen on the 7th and 8th but it proved elusive with the vast Lapwing flocks. A pair of Red-breasted Mergansers were seen on the Thames on the 2nd along with two female Common Scoter the same day and a male Goldeneye on the 5th. A Gannet (29th) was not entirely unexpected and two Kittiwakes (28th) were the only ones to get past the QE II Bridge. Several Yellow-legged Gulls were around and there were single Meds seen along with at least six different Caspian Gulls. A probable Azorean Yellow-legged Gull was found on the 28th. Pintail crept into double figures and Teal leapt from 30 on the 20th to 1,350 on the 21st. Most had gone again by the 23rd! Three pairs of Peregrine Falcons were using the marsh and a male Merlin was seen occasionally. The immature male Marsh Harrier dropped in and at least three Short-eared Owls were still around.

Star passerines were the Bearded Tits with about four on the trails along with eight Stonechats, two Water Pipits, 14 Rock Pipits and three Corn Buntings along the foreshores. Finally, Ring-necked Parakeets reached a new county high of 155 south on the 6th.

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