

London Birding Annual Highlights: London Wetland Centre (WWT Barnes) Compiled by Adam Salmon

The LNHS recording area occupies a 20-mile radius surrounding St Paul's Cathedral. This area encompasses a wide range of wildlife habitats and some outstanding nature reserves, which are inhabited by a surprisingly high number of bird species that are recorded each year. Around 350 species of birds have been recorded since 1900. In a typical year, over 200 species are recorded. Given below are a series of annual highlights from the London Wetland Centre (WWT Barnes) to the west of London. The London Wetland Centre is arguably one of the best urban nature reserves in the wild for its combination of rich biodiversity combined with the facilities it has for visitors.

2024

Wildfowl had a strong year on the SSSI with peak counts of **Shoveler** (289) in February and **Pochard** (73) in November. **Gadwall** numbers were down though. Other peak waterbird numbers included 299 **Coot**, 193 **Mallard**, 128 **Wigeon**, 2 **Goosander**, 1 **Goldeneye**, 124 **Moorhen**, 2 **Brent Geese** and 2 **Shelduck** with most peaks for all waterbirds in January.

2 **Bittern** were present all winter with a max of 4 birds in January. Also a **Cattle Egret** in August, 1-2 **Great White Egret** May-October and a **Spoonbill** in October. **Little Grebe** had a better breeding season with 4 fledged.

Water Rail numbered an excellent 18 birds in November and a pair held territory in the main reedbed. **Snipe** counts were again lower than usual with a peak of 13 in September. 1-2 **Jack Snipe** were present through the winter. An **Oystercatcher** pair looked like breeding again on the main lake but were not successful, with a maximum of 5 adults around. **Little Ringed Plovers** were present spring and summer. Migrant waders included **Ringed Plover**, **Golden Plover**, **Black-tailed Godwit** (18 in July), **Whimbrel**, **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Turnstone**, **Dunlin**, **Wood Sandpiper** (3 in May), **Common Sandpiper** and **Curlew** all recorded this year. **Green Sandpiper** were recorded almost every month with maximum of 9 in August. The winter **Lapwing** flock reached 76 birds in January.

Gull highlights included **Caspian Gull** Nov, **Yellow-legged Gulls** Nov/Dec and **Mediterranean Gulls** Feb, April and July. **Common Terns** bred successfully on the rafts.

Raptors numbered 1-2 **Red Kite**, 1-3 **Hobby**, 1-5 **Buzzard**, 1 **Osprey**, 3 **Kestrel**, 6 **Sparrowhawk** and 1 **Marsh Harrier**.

There was a **Short-eared Owl** in the winter. **Skylark** and **Meadow Pipit** peaked in October/November, 1-2 **Water Pipit** were present all winter. Some other migrant passerines this year included **Whinchat**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Wheatear**, **Yellow Wagtail**, **Black Redstart** and **Redstart**. **Siskins** were in good numbers during winter (41 birds), along with an increase

in **Lesser Redpoll** (12) in the alder and birch trees. Wheatear sightings were notably down. A highlight in September was a **Wryneck** by the sheltered lagoon found by one lucky observer.

Among the breeding passerines **Reed Warblers** and **Cetti's Warblers** remained high with little change, and there was a slight increase in **Greenfinch**, **Song Thrush**, **Blackcap** and **Dunnock** territories. **Starling** and **Chaffinch** territories continue to decline. **Sand Martins** had another great breeding year with the majority of nest chambers occupied. **Grasshopper Warbler** again held a territory. **Whitethroat** bred successfully.

2023

Wildfowl had a strong year on the SSSI with healthy peak counts of **Shoveler** (187) in February and **Pochard** (56) in the autumn. **Gadwall** numbers peaked at 230 in October, along with 289 **Coot** that associate so much with their dabbling companions on the reservoir lagoon. Submerged aquatic plant growth on this waterbody remained excellent throughout the summer/autumn resulting in good wildfowl activity. 2 **Brent Geese** in February was the first record for some time, and a maximum of 6 **Shelduck** were on site during January but with no successful breeding this year despite a pair being present in the spring.

Water Rail numbered an excellent 17 birds in November and a pair held territory in the main reedbed. Winter **Snipe** counts were lower than usual with a peak in October. 1-2 **Jack Snipe** were present through the winter. An **Oystercatcher** pair looked like breeding again on the main lake but were not successful. **Little Ringed Plovers** were present on and off during spring and summer. Migrant waders were well represented with **Grey Plover**, **Ringed Plover**, **Black-tailed Godwit** (with a lovely flock of 23 birds in March), **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Whimbrel**, **Redshank**, **Greenshank**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper** and **Curlew** all recorded this year.

Gull highlights included 2 **Caspian Gull** Nov/Dec, 7 **Little Gull** Oct, 2 **Iceland Gull** late winter, **Yellow-legged Gulls** in first few months of the year. **Mediterranean Gulls** were mostly spring records, and the **Black-headed Gull** colony recovered to 230+ birds. **Herring Gull** figures were down throughout the year. **Common Terns** bred on the nest rafts, with **Black Tern** and **Arctic Tern** spotted June and April respectively.

Red Kite records continue to increase and were recorded spring to late autumn. 2 **Ospreys** in March and April, 1-2 **Hobby** April to end of October, and **Marsh Harrier** and **Buzzard** were recorded during spring and autumn.

A **Turtle Dove** in May was a real highlight, as was a **Citrine Wagtail** in June. **Little Owls** were present during the winter, **Short-eared Owl** in January, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in April, **Skylark** and **Meadow Pipits** peaked in October, 1-2 **Water Pipit** were well watched throughout Oct-April. Some other migrant passerines this year included **Whinchat**, **Wheatear**

and **Redstart**. **Siskins** were in good numbers during winter, along with a few **Lesser Redpoll** in the alder and birch trees.

Breeding passerines had a strong year on the whole with the highlight being a first breeding record for **Grasshopper Warbler**. This pair held territory around the reedbed with at least one juvenile spotted. **Whitethroat** bred again at the sheltered lagoon. **Reed Warblers** and **Cetti's Warblers** remained high with no change, and there was a slight increase in **Sedge Warbler**, **Chiffchaff** and **Dunnock** territories. **Starling** territories continue to decline. **Sand Martins** had a great breeding year with the majority of nest chambers occupied.