

Stockbridge Report 2005

January

A movement of Woodpigeon was witnessed when a flock of 10 birds followed by another of 50 flew west on the first of the month. The next day flocks of 25 and 175 also passed in the same direction. An old tree in the adjacent field that annually housed breeding Stock Dove unfortunately was blown over during stormy weather during the first week. Two of our riverbank trees also came down. On the 9th saw a Chiff-Chaff searching for food at the base of the willows and bathing there. A week later Woodpigeon were displaying during milder a calmer conditions. A large flock of 300 Lapwing flew in the distance towards the Harden direction on 23rd whilst on the same day, an amazing 24 Reed Bunting were recorded after roosting in the phragmites. The discovery of a large pellet provided interesting theories as to which species deposited it near to the riverbank. Eventually it was agreed to be from Grey Heron. Redwing numbers recorded remained low but 2 Water Rail remained on the site throughout the month. Increased sightings of Goldcrest were expected but 14 Brambling on 23rd for one day were welcome. By the end of the month, Woodpigeon was seen mating and the Kestrel box had a pair occupied there.

February

An Oystercatcher was seen on an island during the first week and two birds recorded a week later. Little Grebe called for one day and two Mute Swans took up residence joined by an immature one. The pair was seen mirroring and mating on 27th and began best building during very cold conditions. Just one Snipe and a Brambling was recorded with a Teal flying through this month. House Sparrow numbers increased to five whereas Canada Geese totalling 20 were in and around the Reserve waiting to claim a nesting site. Song Thrush was by now in full song and just one Water Rail was seen or heard. Two Redpoll were recorded eating hawthorn buds.

March

Unexpected action took place at the Kestrel box when a female Mallard attempted to get inside it, without success. By mid-month, relationships between the dominant Mute Swan and the immature bird had reached breaking point. Aggression broke out with the older bird finally pinning the younger one under the willows. Continual pecking took place relentlessly to such an extent that there was going to be a fatality. Observers decided to intervene and managed to free the young bird so that it could leave the site safely. Elsewhere a Kingfisher hovered several times at the Sand Martin nest boxes but did not take up the free accommodation and a Brambling was at the feeding station for a day. Mating Moorhen were seen with Blackbird, Song Thrush and Dunnock all nest building. A Redshank called in on 18 March with two Sand Martin flying west a week later. The Chiff-Chaff seen on 24th may have been a new arrival.

April

Birds were now visiting the Reserve for breeding purposes whether it was to build a nest on site or for material. A Mute Swan continued to build up the nest in the reed mace whereas a Greenfinch stripped dead nettle for nest material. A pair of Goosanders showed off their flight display up river from the Reserve whilst a Kingfisher paused to investigate the man-made Sand Martin Holes. The first Swallow was noted on the 3rd but Willow Warbler not until the late date of 12th. By 23rd Moorhen were with chick and a day later Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and House Martin were all recorded. A Raven flying down the Aire Valley was not an expected sight. On the last day of this month Swifts arrived. Also a pair of Tufted Duck turned up but soon put off by the marauding Coot. By now Blue Tits were busily gathering moss.

May

The first day brought wet and misty conditions and an easterly breeze. However the birding was good with Grasshopper Warbler, Wheatear (2), Whinchat and Common Sandpiper all on site. The Warbler stayed just for the one day and was only heard reeling close to the hide in dense bushes. Moorhen had two chicks during this generally cold month. Counts of Willow and Sedge warblers reached five apiece with Canada Geese now up to six pairs. The number of Whitethroat on the Reserve appeared down but two pairs of Blackcap were breeding. Both Reed Bunting and Robin showed breeding activities.

June

Breeding records of waterfowl showed that there was a pair of Coot with 2 chicks and Moorhen with 3 chicks. Reed Bunting records were interesting with up to two juveniles seen and adult catching flies from the top of the willows. Swift numbers now totalled 26 flying over the neighbourhood whilst the first Rook for the year was recorded. An unusual agitated alarm call was witnessed on 19 June and sounded similar but quieter to a Moorhen chick's begging call. It turned out to be from a Whitethroat as the bird was eventually seen still making the sound. Blackcaps were feeding young this month but a male was in full song again by 25th probably hoping for a second brood. The general impression was that Whitethroats seemed down in numbers this year. Kestrels showed their agility by mating whilst balancing on the power cables. A bird was seen catching a mammal and switching it from beak to talons in flight. Two good records were of Cuckoo calling up river and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker seen in the willows in front of the hide before it flew up river.

July

A family of Willow Warblers had two juveniles and Blackcaps had three young. The count of Whitethroat reached five which is more than thought. The hirundines visited the Reserve in greater numbers this year. Is this because of the covering on the settler beds at Marley? Counts of 18 Sand Martin were recorded. Swifts reached 40 at one time circling high over the local houses. The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen again, this time on the dead trees near to the gardens. Two Sedge Warbler juveniles were seen. A pair of adults was still feeding young in a nest close to the raft area, a site used last year. A flock of 11 Goosander flew down the valley showing probable local breeding success whilst a Blue Tit box, now vacant, was taken over by wasps.

August

Numbers of feeding Sand and House Martins plus Swallows were certainly greater this year. As mentioned previously is this due to flie control at Marley? With the raspberries now in fruit they proved irresistible to a Browncap. Pheasant was seen with four juveniles that very likely bred on the Reserve. Besides a record of a family of Whitethroat an observer noted one bird catching flies. On the 27th a lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen flying up the valley and conveniently settled on an uprooted tree on the riverbank providing good views. Two Kingfishers were seen posturing on the platform for some time obviously agitated with each other's presence. The usual chase then took place with both birds leaving the Reserve and towards the river. A late Moorhen chick appeared on 21st and two Bullfinches noted at the end of the month was the start of some very good records for this species over the next few months

September

As the year progressed, a Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler plus two Willow Warblers hung on until mid-month. The lase record for Sand martin was 17th but a passing Whinchat the previous week was a good find. The bird was observed as it perched on meadowsweet near the small pond. On the same day, the 11th, the first returning Water

Rail was heard, with two birds by the end of this month. Up to 27 House Martin were counted moving west on 10th. The Bullfinch records on the Reserve are usually limited to seeing the odd pair so a male and two juveniles on one day was welcome and on 17th six birds were noted. Although pairs of this species visited the Reserve until the end of the year it wasn't until 2006 when we would record even more birds.

October

To record 40 species at an eight acre site is pretty good for Bradford. This took place on 1st and included Chiff-Chaff, Siskin and Redpoll the former recorded also as late as 26th. An evening roost of Mallard produced a disappointing 92 but this month saw a pair mating. Redwing records started on 8th with a count of 227 on 16th that comprised of small flocks moving through going east. Both Pied and Grey were recorded with 56 Pied seen heading to a town roost. The Water Rail numbers had reached three and a female Kestrel using the box aroused interest as the branches covering the box had recently been removed. Other records noted was of three Goldcrest and 11 Fieldfare on 23rd.

November

The Kestrel was seen frequently on the Reserve throughout this month but more unusual was an Oystercatcher recorded on 16th and 26th when noted on an island. Is this the start of the overwintering of this species in the Aire Valley? Up to eight Siskin fed on Alders at the back of the hide whilst Greenfinch preferred the rosehips that grow down towards the gate. Reed Bunting numbers recorded reached just four and Siskin numbers increased to 20 birds. A Red-legged Partridge crouching under a weeping silver birch right next to the school was a first for the year and a surprise. Emptying boxes produced two wood mice in one and five in the other, the latter more popular because of the climber available up the trunk to get to the accommodation. A pair of Bullfinch was recorded and a Cormorant regularly patrolled the river valley. Up to three Water Rail were noted.

December

A new Tawny Owl Box donated by John Marsden was soon inspected but by Great Tits. A Green Sandpiper passed through on 9th chased by Carrion Crows and two Snipe flew east during freezing conditions on 18th. Water Rail remained very vocal and dropping marks now appeared on the front of the Kestrel Box. The usual winter visitors called at the Reserve with 15 Siskin counted and 29 Redpoll. The Redpoll were seen eating dock, nettle and meadow-sweet head and also great willow herb. Close views from the hide provide this detail. Reed Bunting numbers reached five whilst a Sparrowhawk was observed chasing a female Blackbird, unsuccessfully. On the final day of the year a Snipe was seen feeding on the far bank.

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