

## Stockbridge Report for 2006

### January

In an ice free month with many overcast and dull days the reserve had a variety of visiting birds. On the first day of the month a female Brambling was recorded and a male on 27<sup>th</sup>. The embankment was full of berries so Bullfinch visited regularly with a maximum of 8 mid-month. Small numbers of Redpoll were seen this month as were Siskin. An early arrival to the reserve was an Oystercatcher on 7<sup>th</sup> whilst a Herring Gull was recorded from the football field. Only one Snipe was seen when it was flushed from the adjacent field to the right of the reserve. Two Water Rails were seen regularly with one bird providing excellent views under the feeders immediately in front of the hide. A pair of Kestrels had taken an interest in the boxes mounted and interestingly, a female flew to one box empty handed but picked a dead mouse out of it, a present from the male maybe? Pheasant numbers reached seven this month whilst Goosanders were often seen flying along the River Aire.

### February

Although temperatures fell, only 30% of the water surface froze during one of the weekends. Another weekend produced snow but generally it remained cold but not excessively. Water Rail numbers increased to three birds, two of which were under the feeders. The feeders attracted up to seven House Sparrows along with the usual finches and tits. A species the feed is helping is Reed Bunting with six recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> and nine the next day. Elsewhere on the reserve up to seven Bullfinch were seen and small numbers of Redpoll continued to visit. A reasonable number of Siskin was seen in flocks of 30 and 60 during the month. There were now two Oystercatchers throughout the month flying often to the gravel islands and 13 Lapwing flew west on 5<sup>th</sup>. The record of two Goldcrests was welcome along with a single Stock Dove. Winter thrushes were seen with small numbers of Redwing on the embankment and up to 100 Fieldfare noted on 26<sup>th</sup>. Sadly a dead Mute Swan was discovered close to the overhead power cables.

### March

Cold easterly winds made this a particularly raw month but it remained ice free and warmed up in the final few days. A female Mallard was seen sitting on top of the Kestrel box but by the end of the month the appropriate species was using it. Despite the cold wind plenty of birds were showing signs of nest building. Long-Tailed Tits were carrying moss plus one bird carrying a feather, Magpies also seen flying with nesting material and Greenfinch nest building in laurel. Observers noted mating Dunnock and Mallard whilst Oystercatchers in the area had risen to four. A good record was that of a Teal flying past during snow showers. Greylag and Canada Geese were now in the vicinity waiting to claim nest sites on the reserve but by now the Mute Swan had started building their nest. Two Redshank appeared on 29 March and seven Meadow pipits flying through three days earlier. Grey Wagtail was also recorded this month and a Brambling seen on the feeder on 18<sup>th</sup>. One record was that of a Reed Bunting with its tail lost. There were no sightings of any migrants this month.

### April

A period of windy weather but dry was followed by cool, sunny days. The two Redshanks stayed in and around the reserve until 11<sup>th</sup> and another pair or the same again were seen six days later. Four Pair of geese had established breeding territories, one being the "odd couple", Canada and Greylag! The abundance of frogs attracted up to three Grey Herons at times. A male Brambling fed of the fallen seeds from the feeder on 6<sup>th</sup> but by that time the first Sand Martins, six, were seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> which was also the last date for Water Rail. Five Swallows were recorded a week later and a further week saw Willow Warbler on the reserve. It sang throughout the day along with

Blackcap, Great Tit, Robin, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Dunnock. House Martin arrived on 17<sup>th</sup>. Observers enjoyed many days watching the aerial display provided by the pair of Kestrels. This was a series of swooping, weaving between the riverbank trees and the male flying fast in front of the perched female, and showing off his flying skills. Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat appeared on the typical date of 22<sup>nd</sup> whilst two Redshanks (new birds?) were recorded the next day along with a Shelduck (fly through going west). A Cuckoo called from the Utley direction and moved within a few fields of the reserve. The final migrant for the month was Garden Warbler on 29<sup>th</sup>. By this time a Mallard escorted 5 ducklings was being pursued by five adult males. A Coot had a family of 3 young. Other interesting observations were of a Willow Warbler begging for food from a male, Song Thrush carrying food off to a nest site and Chaffinch mating.

### **May**

A cool start to the month was followed by a period of wet weather before warmer conditions arrived as the month ran out. Despite the cold start, Willow Warbler, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Great Tit, Dunnock, Wren, Blue Tit, Song Thrush and Blackbird were all in full song. Swifts arrived on 2<sup>nd</sup> when two Coot chicks hatched. The next day Canada Geese brought their goslings on to water along with a Mallard and six ducklings. The Mute Swan sat tight on her nest for now. Displaying continued on an almost daily basis by the Kestrels with mating taking place at times on the "high wire" of the power cables. Unfortunately, a female Mallard had by now taken over their box. The Stock Dove box was still available. A pair of Shovelers landed on the water on 6<sup>th</sup> but had left by the next day. A record was made of two Garden warblers mating on the 7<sup>th</sup>. The Oystercatchers had ignored the gravel islands and chosen a nest site on a gravel roof top on the other side of the river.

### **June**

It was a mainly dry, warm and sunny month and breeding continued under near perfect conditions. On the first day of the month the Mute Swans paraded their four cygnets. A sighting of Grey Partridge brought the annual species list to 70 birds. A Carrion Crow was seen to be carrying an egg thought to have been raided from a Pheasant nest. During this month, young Willow Warbler, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Whitethroat, and Chaffinch were seen. An interesting sight was that of a Great Spotted Woodpecker arriving at the feeder with a juvenile. The adult bird was seen to remove whole peanuts, break each one up using the trunk of a willow before feeding particles to its young. A Long-Tailed Tit family numbered seven birds whilst a family of four Whitethroat was noted. On 25<sup>th</sup> a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker visited the reserve. It was seen on a small dead tree and remained motionless for some minutes. The bird was seen again two days later. Added to this years list was Curlew (flyover) and Chiff-Chaff which was missed in the spring. A Kestrel was seen carrying away a frog.

### **July**

It remained rain free, warm and sunny this month but the water level on the reserve stayed normal.

The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen again taking food to the riverbank on 2<sup>nd</sup> whilst Blackcap sang and Chiff-Chaff called. Up to five Whitethroat were on the reserve and 30 Swifts counted as they circled overhead. A juvenile Sedge Warbler was seen perched at the top of the feeders and a family of Song Thrush seen. One remark entered for this month was that the willows in front of the hide were thick with young birds. In a quiet corner of the reserve, a Tawny Owl was discovered roosting. The bird enjoyed a daily sleep there for quite a few months allowing a few good photographs to be taken. A Green Sandpiper flew in on 26<sup>th</sup> and remained to feed and bathe despite attempts by a juvenile Moorhen to move it on. It had gone by the next day but now a pair of Reed

Warblers was found. The site was extremely overgrown and difficult to observe so the birds may have bred.

### **August**

The fine summer weather continued for the first half of the month, and then showers and cool conditions prevailed. The year's species count reached 77 when a Jay flew from the riverbank with food on the second day. Swift numbers were now diminishing but Sand Martins regularly visited the reserve to hawk over the water in search of flies. Some early cutting on the fringes brought their interest as the raking released more flies into the air. It was sad to see a Mallard fly in and then limp when it climbed out of the water. Its legs were tied together by nylon fishing line but despite efforts to catch the bird, it flew off still entangled. Observers continued fine views of the Tawny Owl this month but it became obvious that the Kestrels were not going to breed. Observers were however encouraged by the displaying and visit to the boxes to believe that next year looks hopeful. A sign of the seasons progressing was the return of Water Rail on 19<sup>th</sup>, another two the next day along with a record for Green Sandpiper too. Although the last date for Swift was 24<sup>th</sup>, the reserve still retained plenty of migrants on site with Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat showing well.

### **September**

Warm conditions dominated with no rain until heavy showers near the close for the month. A Reed Warbler was noted in the willows in front of the hide on 1<sup>st</sup> and Kingfisher records increased after a lack of visits. A good record for the year was of a Yellow Wagtail flyover on 6<sup>th</sup> followed two days later by Common Sandpiper. It used both the gravel islands and beach area. The reserve now held two Water Rail, seen so regularly that it was almost guaranteed to have a sighting under the willows at each visit with a bird often preening or bathing. The Tawny Owl in mid-month was mobbed by seven Jays but remained in its usual roosting spot. Two Kingfishers perched on the "goal posts" on 12<sup>th</sup> whilst three Willow Warblers and a Chiff-chaff were good records, the latter on 21<sup>st</sup>. An unfortunate immature Sparrowhawk flew into the willows to perch and became the target of nearly every local bird. First Blue Tit, the Great Tit flew in to mob it. Altogether 5 Blue Tits, 6 Long Tailed Tits and Chaffinches never gave the hawk any peace. Remarkably, the final attack came from two Kingfishers that had arrived. They flew in calling and perched very close to the Sparrowhawk. They continued their metallic call which did the trick. The Sparrowhawk had met its match and left.

### **October**

The weather was changeable with a little rain with some windy days at times. The record of a Goldcrest was welcomed at the start of the month along with Chiff-Chaff. The reserve still held Blackcap with single birds seen on three occasions. On a wet and windy day, Little Grebe was recorded but stayed just the one day on 6<sup>th</sup>. This was to be our penultimate bird species for the year. The reserve held three Water Rails at times and Redwing were first seen on 13<sup>th</sup>, an entry made by the school caretaker. Two small flocks of Fieldfare were recorded on 26<sup>th</sup> totalling 42 birds and a Siskin turned up on 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **November**

Cooler conditions now existed with dull but dry days experienced with some windy periods. Despite more work being directed towards the fringes, it is difficult to attract waders during the winter periods. Snipe rarely visit so a record of a bird on 4<sup>th</sup> was welcomed. Another was seen on 29<sup>th</sup> in the pond area. The attractive Bullfinch was regularly recorded with a maximum of five on 26<sup>th</sup>. A mixed flock of Siskin and Redpoll totalling 30 birds was seen on 16<sup>th</sup> whilst on the same day an observer noted a grey coloured Reed Bunting. The Kestrels continued to visit the boxes on the reserve and Water Rails numbers remained at a maximum of three birds. An evening roost of Starling

produced 600 birds on 27<sup>th</sup> and as they swirled across the reserve, the mass split up with about 200 birds dropping down into the common reed bed whilst the remainder headed towards Keighley town centre.

### **December**

The weather was changeable this month with a small number of frosts but no ice on the water. Windy, cold, wet days occurred but also mild periods. A Little Owl was discovered at the corner of the school fields and was brought to the observer's attention by the alarm call of a Blackbird. This brought the year's total species to a respectable 80 birds. A female Blackcap was recorded on 2<sup>nd</sup> and Reed Bunting numbers this month reached a maximum of seven. Redwing appeared to use the embankment as a roost and one evening 64 birds was counted. A small Siskin flock was seen on 7<sup>th</sup> which consisted of 19 birds and a Green Sandpiper visited the reserve on 21 December. It was pleasing to see that a Kestrel was now using a new box provided regularly. Cold conditions forced a Jay to scavenge around the feeder area and take bread whilst a Sparrowhawk was seen perched amongst the reeds and searching them for any prey, unsuccessfully!

Many thanks to all those who have helped at Stockbridge during the year (from the birds).

Shaun Radcliffe