

## Stockbridge Report 2008

### January

A total of 38 species were recorded on New Year's Day including two Water Rail and an unseasoned Oystercatcher that rested on one of the islands. An observer was intrigued to see Black-headed Gulls feeding by picking food off the surface of the water. What could they be eating this time of the year? A pair of Kestrels remained on site and occupied the Kestrel Box at times. Regular flyovers were noted by Goosanders throughout the month and also seen were chasing Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The Reserve was visited by Redpoll, Bullfinch and Siskin and this month Song Thrush was in full song. Occasionally, Peregrine Falcon was seen flying high over the site.

### February

At the beginning of this month, a pair of Oystercatchers mated beside the scrape and a female Kestrel watched from the box her mate's display flight. The number of Water Rail recorded rose to three with birds often squealing and chasing one another whilst the Owl Box was examined more than once by pairs of Goosanders. An observer watched a female Mallard enjoy eating a large frog. Two Snipe were flushed from the field next to the Reserve and by the end of the month, Song Thrush was seen carrying food towards the riverside area.

### March

An attractive finch to visit the Reserve is Lesser Redpoll and can often be in a mixed flock with Siskins. However, six Redpolls, on their own, perched in the hawthorn block probably feeding on new shooting buds. This sum increased to ten birds by the end of the month providing superb views and at times in song. Overcast, wet and dull conditions did not prevent birds taking up territory with Canada Geese sitting and a pair of Kestrels claiming the box. Coot was also on nest by the time the first migrant was noted, a Chiff-Chaff on 29<sup>th</sup> of the month. By that time, Curlew, Lesser Black-back Gull and Meadow Pipit were recorded passing the Reserve.

### April

With Mute Swan on nest to the left of the hide amongst the reed mace again, a Great Spotted Woodpecker was hollowing out a hole in a tree above the Stock Dove nest box. The box was now an interest to a pair of Goosanders and birds were seen to enter it on a few occasions. Also observed was the male Kestrel bringing food to its mate. She usually waited away from the box and on a low willow tree stump. This spot was where she also repaid him by mating. With the Redpoll flock now up to 14, it was hoped a pair might breed on the site but it was not to be. However the Reserve had plenty of other birds arriving to keep members interested with Swallow and Sand Martin on 3<sup>rd</sup>, a Redshank on 5<sup>th</sup>, Willow Warbler on 17<sup>th</sup> and in the final week, Sedge, Garden and Grasshopper Warbler plus Whitethroat, Swift and House Martin all appeared. The Grasshopper Warbler took started reeling in an area close to the small ponds. At times, the bird perched out in the open, providing tremendous views. The bird probably stayed until mid May as this was the last record of a calling bird. Last record for Water Rail was 6 April.

### May

Breeding records for this month included Canada Geese, Mute Swan, Mallard, Coot, Dunnock and Blackbird with display flights noted by Sedge Warblers. A record of White Stork flying past was not expected and likely to have been a wandering bird from Harewood House and the sight of a Barnacle Goose on the Reserve's open morning by members had everybody guessing as to where it belonged. Two good records received were of two Common Sandpipers on 17<sup>th</sup> that dropped in for just a day and a Reed Warbler on 22<sup>nd</sup>, the latter, unfortunately, it is believed, did not breed on the Reserve this year. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were now bringing food to their hole.

### June

There were no new species observed in this month but the Kestrels kept observers guessing as to the number in their family. It was eventually established that they had four young, the same number as last year. Mallard chicks had suddenly disappeared and likewise did the Coot. Mink had been seen this month as well as in the previous one. A pair of Oystercatchers successfully bred close by (again) on the flat gravel roof on the industrial estate with one chick seen. An adult visited the Reserve this month to remove a fresh water mussel. A female Pheasant was seen with three chicks and three more Mallard families were noted. Records show how cold and cloudy this month

was at a time when young Dunnock, Greenfinch, Robin, Song Thrush and Great Tit were looking for food. Great Spotted Woodpeckers brought two young to the feeders.

### **July**

A Common Sandpiper seen on the island on 6<sup>th</sup> may have been a bird already moving out for migration purposes. The fruiting raspberry patch produced plenty of sightings of families of Whitethroat, Blackcap and thrushes. However, one Browncap was seen taken by a Sparrowhawk. A juvenile Redstart on 17<sup>th</sup> was a good find along with a family of three Spotted Flycatchers, seen on silver birch located on 21<sup>st</sup>. A pair of Peregrine Falcons flew high overhead on quite a few days and sightings of Kingfisher increased somewhat.

### **August**

This proved a rather wet and disappointing summer month and noticeably with a lack of family groups at the feeders. Records failed to show any double figure numbers for Blue Tit or Great Tit at a time of the year when you would expect them. Young Willow Warblers in particular were noticeable for their absence. Swifts started moving by 11<sup>th</sup> with parties of 24 and 28 noted. A week later 700 to 800 Black-headed Gulls flew east along with 30 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The juvenile Great Spotted Woodpeckers appeared to have survived this poor weather.

### **September**

Flocks of Swallows and House Martins now accumulated with records of 39 and 30 respectively feeding ahead of threatening rain clouds. The autumn roost of Mallards reached 70 on 14<sup>th</sup> when on the same day, three Whinchat were seen. The birds had taken advantage of some cutting of the fringe of the scrape and after work had finished, came on to the beach area in search of grubs and seeds. The move towards autumn was noted with sightings of Siskin, Redpoll and Redwing again on 17<sup>th</sup> and Water Rail, four days later. However, Chiff-Chaff remained calling at this time with four birds heard on 24<sup>th</sup> when 46 House Martin passed through. A late record for Reed Warbler on the next day was welcome as were the 4 Bullfinches at the end of the month.

### **October**

There were three new species to add to the annual list this month. Two Tree Sparrows called as they flew in before landing in bushes next to the hide. Having moved then on to the bird table, they were finally seen in the willows in front of the hide. Unfortunately, these birds failed to visit the Reserve again this year. A Teal also only stayed a single day as did a Little Grebe. The Grebe may have found fish stocks low in the scrape due to there being pike in the water. This has meant less sightings of Kingfisher. Three Water Rails were recorded this month and a male Merlin was seen diving down the sky over the riverside area. Later it flew across the Reserve from out of cover and providing a decent sighting. A flock of 30 Siskin were on the reserve at the end of the month and proved to be a good count compared to records thereafter. A Snipe flying in from the west to settle on the Reserve was a good record as this species is becoming uncommon.

### **November**

Water Rail numbers remained at three birds but a spectacular count was when 500 Pink-footed Geese were seen on 16<sup>th</sup> flying over the Reserve. Fieldfare was recorded but not in any large numbers. Long-tailed Tits were seen regularly with a dozen or so birds recorded. Two Grey Wag-tails was a good record on 4<sup>th</sup> and sightings of Goldcrest were regular. More Goosanders move into the Aire Valley this month and this was reflected in the increased sightings recorded.

### **December**

In freezing conditions, a flock of 16 Lapwing flew east obviously displaced by the cold weather. Reed Bunting numbers were also poor with three birds being the maximum for the month. This may reflect the poor breeding for this summer. The annual list of species reached 79 when on 14<sup>th</sup> two Greylag Geese flew in with Canada Geese. A flock of 40 Fieldfare seen on 21<sup>st</sup> was welcome during drizzle and dull conditions. The cold weather had brought Cormorant to the area with regular sightings this month.

Summary of nest boxes used – Kestrel successfully reared four chicks although one soon disappeared after fledging, up to 10 tit boxes were used. Stock Dove box was used by Goosander. Young were not observed but a broken shell was there when the box was checked this winter.

May I take this opportunity to thank the willing volunteers who have assisted in the work undertaken throughout the year.

Should you wish to join this very friendly party, please ring me for further details.

Shaun Radcliffe