

SMEW *Mergellus albellus*

1987 – A female over-wintered at Knotford Nook from 1986 (being last seen at 27th February. December produced an excellent series of records with four redheads on 3rd December reducing to three (infrequently) and then two, to 31st. These last two were a first-winter drake and almost certainly an adult female (last year's?) A single redhead at Otley Gravel Pits on 6th December was probably one of these individuals.

1988 – A first-winter drake and a presumed adult female remained at Knotford Nook in the early months, being joined by a very small dingy 'redhead' on several dates. The last sighting in this period was a single on 17th March. A 'redhead' returned to this site on 27th November with numbers peaking at four on 23rd December and three on several dates to the end of the year.

1989 – Knotford Nook had redheads overwintering from 1988, fluctuating from three to one and then five from 14th February to 4th March with the last spring record being four on 12th March. Two had returned to this site by 18th November and were joined by a third, thought to be a first-winter drake from 18th December until the year's end. Only Lindley Wood Reservoir could break Knotford's monopoly with a single on 19th November and three on 15th February. Just how many individuals were responsible for these records is debateable but obviously at least three birds were involved.

1990 – Only recorded at Knotford Nook. A party of three redheads over-wintered from 1989 and were present for most of the time until at least 11th February. From 17th February, only two birds remained with the last sighting of the first winter period being on 11th March, although on the previous day they were joined briefly by a third redhead. The first report in the second winter period was of two redheads on 1st December and these birds, one of which was thought to be a first winter drake, stayed at Knotford, on and off, until the year end but they proved less reliable than previous wintering birds.

1991 – As usual, only reported from Knotford Nook. However, The long sequence of wintering birds at this site (stretching back well beyond the start of records in 1987) was broken at last when none returned during the second winter period. This does not bode well for future records. Up to two redheads, including a definite adult female, remained at Knotford from 1990. Records were a bit sporadic compared with previous years, though two birds were seen several times until 9th February and a single was present from 9th to 18th March.

1995 – A female at Lindley Wood Reservoir on 8th March. Sadly this was not seen subsequently but a 'redhead' which turned up at Chelker Reservoir on 24th October was more obliging and remained until 5th November.

1996 – The Group's first recorded adult male Smew attracted many grateful admirers after being found at Knotford Nook on 21st December; it remained there until 25th. Following this splendid bird, two redheads were present at Elland Gravel Pits on the last day of the year.

1997 – All 1997 records refer to 'redheads'. This year's sightings began with two birds at Elland Gravel Pits on New Year's Day; these birds remained there until 12th, and a single bird was recorded there on 26th January. The 1st January also produced a bird on a small patch of unfrozen water at Knotford Nook; from this date through until 3rd March, records were received almost daily from this site, with up to four birds being reported – usually from the lakes there, but on one occasion from the adjacent River Wharfe. Also during this period, single birds were seen at Otley Gravel Pits on 26th January and at Yeadon Tarn on 30th January.

During December, a single bird frequented Knotford Nook between 4th and 29th, with two present on 19th and 20th. Another was seen at Otley Gravel Pits on 16th December.

1998 – The bird which had been at Knotford Nook since 4th December 1997 stayed on until at least 6th February and was seen by many observers.

On 8th November, a 'redhead' bird was reported from Otley Gravel Pits, and sightings of this bird occurred there through to 27th November. Also in November, records were received from Knotford Nook, on 23rd, 24th and 26th.

2000 – The Group's second recorded adult male was at Lindley Wood Reservoir on 19th December, where it remained until 22nd.

2001 – What was almost certainly the Lindley Wood Reservoir male of December 2000, was relocated there on 2nd January. There were then records during January to April of 'red heads', which, given the locations, might have involved just one wintering individual commuting between the reservoirs concerned. The sightings were: Chelker Reservoir 10th and 19th January, 3rd March and 10th April and Silsden Reservoir on 9th February.

2002 – A red-head found at Knotford Nook on 28th November was present for three days.

2003 – The one and only sighting was of two on the River Wharfe north of Barden on 11th January.