

STOCKBRIDGE REPORT 2004

By Shaun Radcliffe

Unfortunately, we are not able to bring you details of other wildlife due to technical reasons. They may appear in the next edition of Lapwing.

January

Rather unpleasant weather welcomed in the New Year with a frozen scrape, drizzle with low overcast clouds. The nearby moors were snowbound. Birds were however on the move with a flock of Golden Plovers flying west just above the tree line, next to the river. There were 39 birds but 15 minutes later another flock of 22 went through in the same direction. Between these sightings, a Peregrine Falcon circled in front of the hide ignoring the Crows mobbing it. Later a flock of nine Lapwing headed west. What a start to the year! Earlier a Water Rail was seen on the ice whilst another fed in the triangle area. Up to two Snipe were noted this month favouring the triangle area. The Siskin flock by the river reached to approximately 50 birds but the skein of 150 geese flying west, high over the canal were not identified.

February

Brambling turned up this month with eventually five counted on the 29th but the record of Great Black Backed Gull is a good record for the year. A pair of Teal enjoyed the triangle area, feeding there throughout the month. Icy conditions saw them landing unceremoniously on the ice, Mute Swans also crash landed and broke the ice by swimming strongly through it to reach food under the feeder on the bank. Two Grey Partridges were seen close to the football fields. By mid-month, the first Oystercatcher was noted on one of the gravel islands with up to three in the area by the following week.

March

The Water Rails remained active with up to three birds. However the body of one Rail was found close to the drainage area and was thought to have died recently because of the good condition it was in. Very little damage was found other than a small tear on the base of the throat. Brambling numbers reached six but a flock of Meadow Pipits consisting of 17 birds flying west was an unusual record. Two detached skeins of Whooper Swans flew west on 22nd totalling 28 birds and provided an excellent sight for the fortunate observers. A single Curlew flying east on 11th and mating Oystercatchers on 14th brought the hint of Spring, as did the invasion of Canada Geese to the reserve with up to 12 at times. Controlling the species on site may need to be considered.

April

The first migrant, a Willow Warbler was seen on the 3rd with Swallow and House Martin recorded that same week. The trimmed triangle attracted two Redshank but they only stayed 10 minutes. Territories were being prospected by the Pheasants. There were interesting disputes with fighting but also confrontation just by running along phantom parallel boundaries with stopping to face intruding males. Posturing took place more than fighting. A Spring record for Chiff-Chaff was good for the reserve with Garden Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler noted. It was the case of the early birder seeing the bird as the Gropper was observed on two occasions on days immediately following its arrival. After that sightings proved more difficult.

The display of the Muscovy Duck, all "beaks up in the air" is not dissimilar to Albatross! Bramblings stayed until 17th, just a week before Common Sandpiper and Swift were seen. By then the Moorhen had five chicks and three pairs of Canada Geese had settled on nest. A pair of Mute Swans was still mating but had chosen a site by the end of the month. The species count for the year was now 69 after two Linnet were seen on 26th.

May

Sedge Warbler and Blackcap arrived in the first week as expected but the triangle attracted a Little Ringed Plover on 9th. This species has been recorded further up the Aire Valley, however this sighting was very welcome. A mallard had six ducklings, one of which was almost lifted by a Black-headed Gull. The family took refuge up the stream.

Another act of aggression was noted when Carrion Crow attacked a Moorhen chick. The parents vigorously saw the crow off. An unidentified Tern flew low west on 22nd whilst the end of the month, a calling Cuckoo was heard from the canal area. On the final day, two Redshank visited the shingle beach, whereas in the evening, the Grasshopper Warbler was reeling away.

One observer noted the possible call of the Reed Warbler, but was unsure. At this point, the species count was now 76.

June

A sighting of the Reed Warbler confirmed the situation in the very first week. However on 6th another good bird was seen on the reserve. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker came out of the bushes to mob a Kestrel. Two weeks later, (probably), the same bird returned and landed on the willow trunk in front of the hide. It then flew over to the river. It was back the very next day but this time flew to the river again carrying food. In between these visits, a Treecreeper was noted on a large willow by the river and proved to be a juvenile.

The Mute Swan had four cygnets whereas the two pair of Canada Geese produced 10 goslings.

Throughout this month, Grasshopper Warblers (2), were constantly reeling, Sedge Warblers were carrying food and the reserve populated by young Blue and Great Tits. A Kestrel was seen catching a vole and passed it from beak to talon in one swift movement whilst in flight. An unusual record for this time of the year was that of a single Snipe seen on 29th amongst the yellow flag.

July

There were no additions to the yearly list of species but still plenty of action. Whitethroat families were moving around the reserve and Song Thrush in fine song with at times mimicking the Oystercatcher call! On 4th the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker called from the gardens whilst young Willow Warblers were seen in the riverside trees. Canada Geese flocked up in the field to the right of the hide totalling 33 which is a real warning for the future for this dominant species. Up to five Browncaps harvested the raspberry patch mid- month. Adult Reed Buntings were carrying food from the feeding station back to breeding sites and two juveniles were recorded on 31st. A Mallard family originally with four ducklings had disappeared, presumably because of Mink.

August

Two juvenile Kestrels entertained observers with their “play flying” so breeding nearby must have been successful but unfortunately, not in the Reserve’s box. Hirrundines regularly came swooping over the water to feed and one Swallow decided to mob a passing Sparrowhawk. Three new species for the year arrived on the same day which was on the 15th. Five Herring Gull flew east, a male Bullfinch was on the embankment and the arrival of a Greylag Goose boosted the total. Incidentally, the goose was immediately challenged by the male Mute Swan. The elderberry crop was ripe so Blackcaps soon appeared down by the gate where the bush stands. A Little Grebe stayed for a few days and seven Swift flew east during drizzle on 22nd, a good late record. During the annual “Balsam bashing” at the end of the month, the absence of Sedge Warblers and Whitethroats was noted.

September

As the year progressed with the departure of most migrants, it was pleasing to note good House Martin numbers passing through. At first there were just single figures but then 62 on 18th was impressive with 16 on 26th. Both Chiff- Chaff (calling) and Willow Warbler (up to three birds) hung on along with small numbers of Swallows but rarely making double figures. Sparrowhawk became very active this month with one reported of entering the reserve from the gardens to try to take a bird in the rosebushes, unsuccessfully. By the end of the month, the first returning Water Rail was heard “chipping”.

October

The year list was now at an impressive figure of 82 but an uncommon visitor was heard on the 3rd. A Green Woodpecker was calling from the embankment but unfortunately not seen. Grey partridge and Redpoll was also recorded on the same day. A pair of Bullfinches visited the reserve the previous day. A few days later, four returned to feed on mountain ash berries. Chiff- Chaff was recorded this month with Redwing appearing on 17th. A Cormorant actually landed and started fishing whereas most records received are of birds flying through. A flock of 35 Goldfinch was a good number. Water Rail eventually reached three birds but a second record of Treecreeper on the 24th was unexpected. Fieldfare had arrived by the end of the month.

November

Although already on the year list, Whooper Swan was recorded again as three birds were seen flying east and calling. Observers enjoyed plenty of sightings of Bullfinch whilst also seen this month was a flock of 80 Woodpigeon going north, a good record. On 7th, there were four Water Rails noted giving superb close views below the willows in front of the hide. After so many years, it was nice to see a Kestrel in it on 28th. At least they know where it is!

December

The movement of Woodpigeon recorded last month continued with 36 birds on 5th and a further 80 on 24th, made up of many small flocks passing by. Goldcrest was reported along with Siskin and Redpoll. Fieldfares were in the area but just one flock of 60 was notable whereas Redwing was not at all obvious. Observers wondered whether the annual list was complete. However Stockbridge enjoyed the invasion of Waxwings along with the rest of BOG's reporting area with four on 19th and 30 on 20th bringing the total for the year to an impressive 84. One of our better years for species.