

Stockbridge Report 2007

January

Cold, wet and windy conditions dominated the month but it remained ice free.

Observers watched with interest the nest box erected for Tawny Owl and Kestrel. On the 13th a Tawny Owl flew on to the box accompanied by Magpies and Carrion Crows. The Owl perched on the edge for a few seconds and then disappeared into the box. It later came out and sat in the willows. More action was taking place involving a Kestrel and their box. A bird was seen in it on 12th briefly only to leave but returned to remove a Jackdaw twice from claiming the box. Observers noted on five occasions of the species seen in the box. A Green Sandpiper was recorded on 3 January and a good count of 60 Siskin on 7th whilst two Water Rail were seen in the month, one taking pieces of bread that had fallen into the water. Reed Bunting numbers were low with a maximum of four recorded.

February

The weather was changeable with a brief cold period but overcast, wet days were the norm.

Two Oystercatchers arrived on 4th and a Brambling seen a week later when a Pinkfooted Goose joined the 14 Canada Geese. The Pinkfoot remained all month and was last seen on 1 April. A flyover of 10 Lapwing on 14th was appreciated as this species is not recorded very often from Stockbridge. By mid-month the Oystercatchers were seen mating and another pair had settled in the field to the right. Two Snipe were flushed on 25th, the same day that a Redshank dropped into the triangle to feed. There were three Water Rails this month and to prove that spring was around the corner, a Mallard was seen mating with an Aylesbury Duck!

March

The arrival of pairs of Canada Geese this month provided plenty of noise with disputes over potential nesting sites and territories watched on by the single Pinkfoot Goose. The two Kestrels were undecided about their site visiting the new box, old box and a Stock Dove nest box, the latter being defended against a Carrion Crow. Meanwhile Jackdaws surveyed the new Kestrel box with interest. On the field next to the reserve, three Snipe were flushed on 15th whilst two Meadow Pipits were seen four days later. Two Brambling remained in the copse on 22nd, the same day when a Chiff-Chaff fed in the willows by catching flies. Another was heard calling from the river bank whilst a Blackcap was in full song on 25th along with a Reed Bunting. Nest building was now underway by Coot, Carrion Crow and Long-Tailed Tit. Water Rail was last recorded on 25th as this species remains a winter visitor at the reserve.

April

During the month there were eight species to be entered on the year list namely

Swallow 1st, House Martin 2nd, Sand Martin 5th, Willow Warbler 14th, Stock Dove 15th, Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat 22nd and Swift on 29th. The pair of kestrels at times mated on the roof of their box and were seen again chasing off Jackdaws who also fancied the site. Two pairs of Oystercatchers frequented the reserve with the dominant pair seeing the other off. The Mute Swans nest was in the same position as last year in the reed mace to the left of the hide. Also nest building at this time was Blackbird, Moorhen, Whitethroat and Starling but this month saw a fledged Robin being fed and a juvenile Tawny Owl positioned outside the nest box. A Song Thrush had built her nest in gorse. By the end of the month, the male Kestrel was bringing rodents in to the female to a feeding post often followed by mating. Things looked good for them breeding this year.

May

Garden Warbler arrived on the 2nd and providing throughout the month excellent views from the hide. It singing took place mostly in and around the bird cherry area giving useful comparison with singing Blackcap also in the same place at times. Being able to view these species whilst they sing greatly helps identification of their songs. Unfortunately the Song Thrush abandoned its nest whilst the Oystercatchers preferred a flat gravel roof in the industrial site across the river to the purpose gravel islands provided on the reserve. Their activities however could still be seen from the hide as at times one bird would fly in carrying food. A Common Sandpiper dropped in for one day on 11th but the singing Reed Warbler heard on 27th did stay. The pair of Mute Swans produced two cygnets, a female Goosander accompanied her six young on the river nearby and young Blackbirds,

Dunnocks and Canada Goslings were noted. On the last day of the month it was noted that the female kestrel is now sitting in the new box with food brought to her by the male.

June

Observers have noted that over recent years Jay is visiting the Reserve more often. When they did it was usual a winter month but this species was recorded this month. This year, the Kestrels raised a family in the box provided. At first, the female appeared to sit higher in the box than before. Then two young were seen and eventually it was established that there were in fact four young birds. Unfortunately, we lost one of the cygnets without any clue as to why. A Tufted Duck arrived on 14th but was chased off by a Coot It stayed for a few days and appeared to have an injured leg. This incident takes place nearly every year with Tufted only nesting once ever at the Reserve. Reed Bunting was taking food to a nest site whilst a family of Whitethroat was noted with three juveniles. A Peregrine visited the site on 23 June and the next day, probably drifting over from Keighley where birds had bred this year. A Sparrowhawk caught a Greenfinch but was disturbed by an observer, released the bird and flew off. The Greenfinch was picked up and examined but had no injuries from its ordeal and was placed back into the hedgerow. Blackcaps were now visiting the raspberry patch which is an annual event but less expected was the green Parrot on 30th. It was mainly green with orange fringes on the primaries.

July

Juvenile Reed Buntings visiting the feeding station confirmed breeding success whilst young Jackdaws preferred to beg food from their parents. The young Kestrels fledged this month but one bird had difficulty finding a perch and failed to clear vegetation. It is believed that it may have fallen into the river as only three juveniles were ever seen after this incident. Sparrowhawk was carrying food over the reserve whilst Chiff-Chaff and Blackcap sang. Swifts on the wing numbered 30 on 8th when the green Parrot returned. A young Jay feeding on peanuts on 21st made observers discuss where it may have bred. Birds had been seen near a small conifer plantation on the Reserve. Late July saw Sand & House Martin hawking over the water with juvenile Blackcaps and Sedge Warblers noted.

August

The Mute Swans remained with their cygnet waiting now until it could fly. A very dark looking Great Tit turned up on 9th along with the young Jay again. A Cormorant landing on the lake on 16th was unusual even though his species is regularly seen flying over. Observers were pleased to record a pair of Reed Warblers feeding their two young on 19th. It is thought that this species bred here last year but no young were sighted then. Two young Bullfinches were also recorded along with a Whitethroat eating a large black hairy caterpillar. In the final week of the month, an adult Great Spotted Woodpecker brought its juvenile to the peanut feeder and a Green Sandpiper flew over the Reserve going west. With some relief, the first recorded Pied Wagtail for the year was made on 30th bringing the year's total so far to 73 species.

September

Evening visits were now producing large counts of Mallard for such a small site, a sure sign that seasons are moving on. A total of 177 birds were noted on 6th but earlier in the day, a juvenile male Wigeon and two Teal were seen feeding on the scrape fringes. Three days later saw a record showing two Water Rail whilst the adult Mute Swans had left the cygnet on its own. Observers later witnessed many attempts of take off before a successful maiden flight. A party of four Bullfinches seemed to visit the Reserve daily feeding on the many berries available. Pheasants numbered well with seven birds on 28th and Chiff-Chaff recorded near the close of the month. By then a flock of 30 Redwing was recorded.

October

Three Redpoll on 3rd was a good record. Also a Sparrowhawk was seen to fly into the area where 20 Redwing had been feeding on berries. Chiff-Chaff continued calling this month and the two Water Rail sorted out their feeding areas by chasing each other off. On 14th two flocks of Pinkfoot Geese flew over, one of 250 birds, the other smaller 45 minutes later with 64 counted. By mid-month Siskin were visiting the Reserve with a dozen on 13th. A Green Sandpiper was waiting for the first observer to arrive on 21st but unfortunately it flew off once the hide window was raised as the bird was just on the fringe of water nearest to the hide. A mixed flock of 30 winter thrushes

brought Fieldfare into the area on 25th. The next day a male Teal was on site joined a few days later by another. The birds at times fed directly in front of the hide.

November

The day before Bonfire Night meant that locals were setting off bangs close by. Do they scare wildlife? You bet!! Immediately after a loud bang "exploded" one of the Water Rails started squealing and all the Black-headed Gulls took off. A juvenile Little Grebe brought the final total for species for the year at 76, an average number. It was seen for just a few days. Sadly, the bird was discovered dead in one of the small ponds. The pond had been covered by an invasive plant and it is believed the bird became trapped under it when searching for sticklebacks. Sparrowhawk was seen carrying food on 11th with another bird, a juvenile decided to perch on the feeders themselves on 29th, the same day when 50 Siskin were recorded. A good omen for next year was the return of a Kestrel to the box.

December

Despite cold and wet weather, a Chiff-Chaff was calling on the first day of this month. The next day a flock of 38 Fieldfare flew up the valley. Greenfinches were now feeding on the rosehip heads and during freezing conditions up to four Redpoll, four Bullfinches and 17 Siskin came to feed on the Reserve. Pheasant number reached 15 birds using the feeders left out by the pupils of St Mary's School. An unusual record was of an Oystercatcher that flew in on 20th making observers believe birds may well be over-wintering in the Aire Valley. Black-headed Gull numbers rose to 87 on 26th whilst a Siskin flock on the previous day numbered 30 birds.

My sincere thanks go to all those dedicated helpers who attend the Reserve.

Shaun Radcliffe