

# THE WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP



## ANNUAL REPORT 2014



**WILDLIFE**

Colin Woolf

**PAINTINGS**



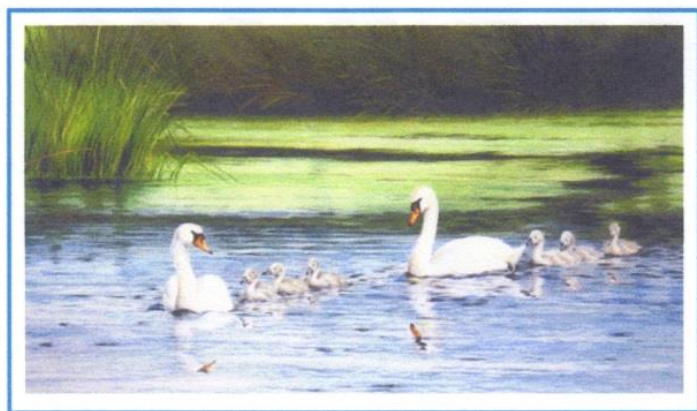
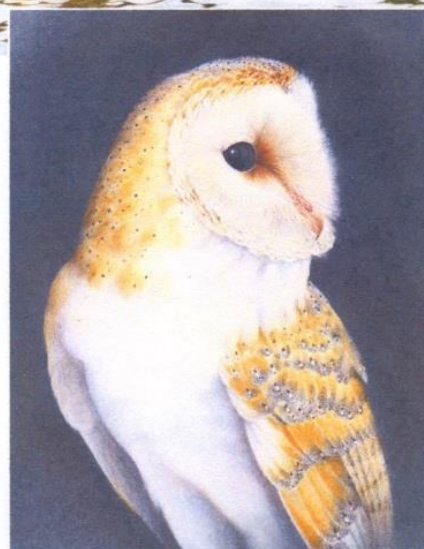
### **Wildlife as a work of art ...**

Colin Woolf has a gift for portraying birds and animals in their natural habitat. His paintings reveal the rich colour and detail of plumage as well as the ever-changing light of the landscape.

*The cover of this report is reproduced from an original painting by Colin.*

*The original painting is for sale to Woolston Eyes Members only, for a short period.*

*Please contact Colin for more details.*



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# WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP

## ANNUAL REPORT 2014

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A special welcome to all those members taking the Annual Report for the first time now that it is available online. I am sure you will find it an enjoyable and informative read.

Our income comes from the sale of permits and any grants that we manage to acquire, and all monies are put back into the Reserve. As you are aware, the management of the Reserve has always been undertaken by volunteers, but specialist work is done by our contractors so this is where a lot of our income is spent. I would therefore like to thank all of you for your continued support in renewing your permits, sending in donations and, in two cases, for bequests leaving money to the Reserve in wills.

You will see on the cover of our report the wonderful drawing produced free of charge to us by the highly thought of wildlife artist Colin Woolf. It is of the magnificent spectacle of the winter murmuration of Starlings, which at times reached 200,000 birds. What an awesome sight!. After they settled, the Barn Owl would sometimes come and help itself to a late supper! The original of the drawing is for sale, and if you would like to know more about this or any of his other drawings, please contact Colin: his details can be found on the inside of the cover.



As always the Annual Report is of an increasingly high standard, and much praise must go to the vice chairman David Bowman and his team of compilers for the hours they have put in, and for the very professional way they have produced it.

**Brian Ankers**  
**Chairman**

The exciting news this year was our nomination, by Chris Packham, as one of five Reserves for the Countryfile Magazine Nature Reserve of the Year Award. Sadly we did not win, but we are all very proud to have been nominated. It is welcome recognition of all the hard work and long hours put in by the wardens and other volunteers. I know a lot of you voted for us, which we appreciated very much, so thank you one and all.

A big development in 2015 has been the construction of a new hide on the Loop of No.4 bed. The massive amount of work that has taken place on there is paying dividends, so I would recommend a visit; it is a bit of a walk but a very pleasant one.



*Volunteers managing the reed beds*

*Douglas Buchanan*

## THE WEATHER 2014

The weather in 2014 will long be remembered for the severe gales and heavy rain in the first two months, as one depression after another was driven on by a very active jet stream that became stuck over southern England. The north-west was spared the worst of the conditions, however, and the rainfall total of 827mm (33 inches) was only a little above the yearly average. This was followed by the third-warmest spring on record and, for once, a warm and relatively dry June and July. Although August was dull and wet the autumn (September to November) was reported to have been the third-warmest since 1910 and the year as a whole saw little snow until the final week of December.

**January** with 118mm was the wettest month of 2014, as violent storms and heavy rain crossed the country. Fierce winds on the 3<sup>rd</sup> were reported to be the strongest for 20 years and parts of Warrington were flooded. Water levels on No.3 bed were high, and nationally the Meteorological Office reported it to have been the wettest January since records began in 1910.

**February** The weather followed a similar pattern of mild but stormy days, although not as wet as January. The wind reached near-hurricane force on the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup>, leading to disruption and damage. The 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> saw the first sunshine of note since the start of the year.

**March** was one of the drier months, with only 55mm of rain recorded. It was wet on the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>, but then high pressure built, and on the sunny 9<sup>th</sup> butterflies were on the wing and the first Black-necked Grebes returned. The settled weather lasted until the 15<sup>th</sup>, after which unsettled cool conditions became established, with a few days of hail showers and severe overnight frosts (down to -4C. on the night of 24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup>). Raw east winds blew from 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, but the last three days were warm and sunny, with 17C. recorded on the 30<sup>th</sup>.



*The Morgan Hide on No.3 bed*

*David Bowman*

**April** With 49mm of rain the dry pattern continued and April was the fifth successive month with above-average temperatures. However, the first week was wet, with over 70% of the month's total. The next two weeks saw high pressure in charge and although there were cool days, and a frost on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup>, there were also warm spells, especially in the final few days with 20C. recorded on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**May** in contrast was the fourth-wettest month, with 100mm of rain.

It was also reported to have been the dulllest May since 1991. Despite this, it was not a cold month, and temperatures were average or above. From 8<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> spells of heavy rain and gusty south-west winds saw the return of many migrants. After this period settled weather became established and it became warm. Heavy thundery rain on the 20<sup>th</sup> was followed by a brief return to warm days, but

heavy rain from 22<sup>nd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> was driven on by a cold north-east wind. The month, however, ended warm and dry.

**June** was a warm month, with only 37mm of rain, most of which fell in the first week. No rain was recorded from 13<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>, and with temperatures into the low 70s it was said by the Meteorological Office to have been the sixth warmest June on record.

**July** was also a dry month (43mm) and the eighth in succession with above-average temperatures. It was also sunny. Most of the rain fell on two days, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, when heavy thunderstorms moved north. High pressure was established from the 20<sup>th</sup> and the hottest weather of the year saw temperatures exceed 30C. from the 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>. By that time water levels on the Reserve were falling fast.

**August** was a disappointing month, being the third wettest of 2014, and the coolest and dullest August since 1993. The first two days set the tone, with over 20mm of rain, although it was warm. This all changed as ex-Hurricane Bertha brought strong north-west winds and 26mm of rain on 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>. Cool winds with frequent showers became a feature of the rest of the month and there was even a slight frost on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. A total of 104mm of rain fell.

**September** with just 10mm of rain was dominated by high pressure and warm settled weather throughout the month. It was said to have been the driest September since 1910 and, in fact, recorded the lowest monthly rainfall total at Woolston since the Reserve was established. Temperatures reached 20C. on many dates and the only significant rain (6mm) was overnight on 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup>.

**October** was an unsettled month, with above-average rainfall of 76mm recorded. Tropical air from the south, however, resulted in above-average temperatures and, as a result, late sightings of butterflies. The remnants of Hurricane Gonzalo brought stormy and wet conditions from 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, but by the final week the weather settled down and 19C. was recorded on the 31<sup>st</sup>, the highest October temperature since 1968.

**November** was drier than average with 53mm of rain. After the warmth of late October temperatures began to fall, but the month was generally mild although often cloudy, with no frost of note. Temperatures reached 12C on the 11<sup>th</sup> and contributed to the third warmest autumn (September - November) on record.



*Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar on Willow Herb  
Douglas Buchanan*



**December** This was the second wettest month of the year, recording 111mm of rainfall. The first six days were dominated by high pressure, and the first severe frosts of the winter left most of No.3 bed frozen. An unsettled period followed with strong winds and heavy rain producing 73mm from 8<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>. By this time water levels had recovered from their low autumn point. It was mild up to Christmas, but then temperatures fell rapidly. Heavy snow on the 26<sup>th</sup> was the most significant of the year and the final days were very cold with severe frosts.

**Brian Martin**



*Footbridge on to No.3 bed*

*Paul Hazelhurst*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### Mute Swan

*Cygnus olor*

Numbers overall were well above average, with the main feature of the year the unusually large gathering on No.3 bed in April and May. The breeding season was disappointing, with only two pairs successfully fledging young.

Twenty-seven on 18<sup>th</sup> January WeBS was the highest count in the first winter months, with up to 15 regularly reported across the Reserve. A major surprise was the influx of birds in the spring, with a peak count of 36 on No.3 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> April. Up to 20 were recorded on this bed in subsequent weeks, with 35 (23 adults and 12 immatures) still present on 8<sup>th</sup> May, and 33 on 1<sup>st</sup> June.

The first indication of breeding was a pair at a nest on the Loop of No.4 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> April. This nest was subsequently abandoned and a new nest built nearby. On 2<sup>nd</sup> June the pair on No.3 bed appeared with five newly hatched cygnets, four of which survived for many weeks. This pair eventually fledged two young. On 12<sup>th</sup> June a bird was sitting on a nest at Latchford Locks (a regular breeding site) and a pair with only one young was seen nearby on 4<sup>th</sup> July. This pair was seen with the now growing young in early August, with a second pair displaying nearby. A pair may well have attempted to breed on the Mersey north of No.2 bed, but no details are known. Finally, a pair with a large cygnet seen at Bollin Point on 13<sup>th</sup> July could well have bred elsewhere. It is not thought that any young were produced from the nests on the Loop of No.4 bed.

Numbers remained high post-breeding, with 40 on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 22 on 3<sup>rd</sup> September and 25 on 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

A number of birds wearing Darvic rings were reported, and the male of the successful pair on No.3, with the ring number CAF9, had originally been ringed at Acre Dell Pools, Somerford, Congleton, on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2010. There had been three previous sightings of it, one in late 2010 and two in late 2011, at sites along the Mersey valley.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
27	11	7	36	35	32	26	40	22	25	12	13



*Whooper Swan in February*

*David Spencer*

### Whooper Swan

*Cygnus cygnus*

The only record received was of one on No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> February. It was harried by the resident Mute Swans and soon left.



## **Pink-footed Goose**

*Anser brachyrhynchus*

The year began with 300 flying east over No.1 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. There were six further reports in January, the most significant being 120 overflying on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 190 on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 153 on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The only other sightings were of 40 flying west on 4<sup>th</sup> February, and nine to the east on 15<sup>th</sup> February. Numbers reported were much higher in the final months of the year, beginning with 895, recorded flying east during a five-hour Migration Watch on 11<sup>th</sup> October. Peak numbers were in November, starting with 505 on another Migration Watch on the 1<sup>st</sup> but this, however, was dwarfed by the 1450 which flew east on the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Smaller numbers continued to overfly in subsequent weeks, including 140 in two skeins on the 13<sup>th</sup>. However, 700 passed over No.1 bed on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, with 55 over No.4 bed on the same date.

The final sightings were of 21 over Butchersfield on December 18<sup>th</sup> and 50 flying south over No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> December.

## **Greylag Goose**

*Anser anser*

There was a further increase in numbers, with records in every month of the year, and the breeding population continues to rise.

The first two months saw a maximum of eight on 13<sup>th</sup> February. Similar numbers were present in March, and by then several had paired. The first brood of two small young was reported on 24<sup>th</sup> April and on 3<sup>rd</sup> May three broods were on No.3 bed (two of two and one of six young). On this date one of the young was taken by one of the ever-present Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Two days later a total of 26 was counted. A further two broods were found on the Ship Canal on 15<sup>th</sup> July, making a total of five broods overall.

Peak numbers were present in the autumn with 31 on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 41 on 3<sup>rd</sup> September and 52 on 15<sup>th</sup> October, when 59 were reported flying east over No.1 bed. In the final two months Greylags were scarce, with three the maximum in December.

## **Canada Goose**

*Branta canadensis*

Reported throughout the year in similar numbers to 2013. Breeding pairs, however, were at a record level.

The year began with peak counts of 56 on 18<sup>th</sup> January and 49 on 6<sup>th</sup> February. Bollin Point on the Ship Canal is an area favoured by this goose, with a flock of 154 there on 19<sup>th</sup> April.

The first brood was seen on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> May, followed by a second there two days later. In all, six broods were seen on No.3 bed. A further three broods were reported on the Ship Canal, with a Reserve-wide count of 39 adults and 17 young on 1<sup>st</sup> July. Many of the young subsequently fledged.

As always, the largest numbers occur in the autumn, no doubt attracted to spilt grain on nearby farmland. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 150 flew north-west over No.1 bed, and a flock of 100 was at Bollin Point on the last two days of the month. One hundred and sixty-six were present on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 240 on

20<sup>th</sup> September, 261 on 11<sup>th</sup> October and 250 on the 15<sup>th</sup>. At the end of October 98 were still on No.3 bed. After this numbers decreased rapidly, with 44 on 30<sup>th</sup> December the highest count in the final two months.

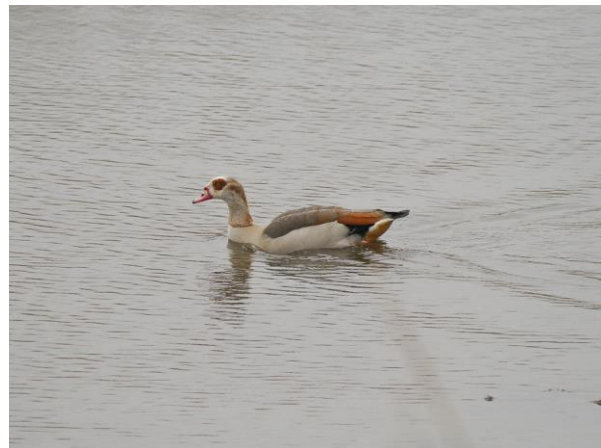
Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
56	49	47	154	29	36	56	150	240	261	39	44

**Egyptian Goose**

*Alopochen aegyptiaca*

A rare visitor to Woolston, the only record was of one seen by two observers on No.3 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> April.



*Egyptian Goose*

*David Spencer*

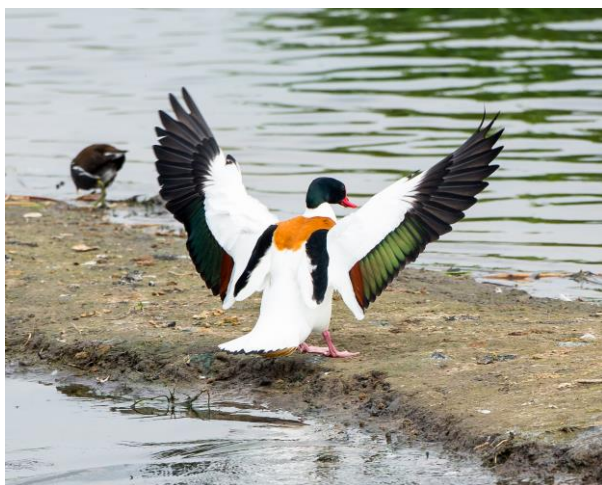
**Shelduck**

*Tadorna tadorna*

Recorded in every month except September, with peak numbers, as usual, in the first six months of the year. Many pairs bred, all but one on No.3 bed.

Counts into double-figures occurred on many days in January, with a maximum of 29 on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Twenty-one were reported on two February dates and 24 were noted on 15<sup>th</sup> March. On 24<sup>th</sup> May broods of three and 11 young appeared on No.3 bed, while the following day a pair with 17 small young was seen. On 5<sup>th</sup> June a chick from this brood was taken by a Magpie, and a week later a new brood of three young was found on the Loop of No.4 bed. In all a total of 11 adults and 18 young was on Beds 3 and 4 on 12<sup>th</sup> June, with a new brood of seven young appearing on No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> June. By then the brood of 17 had been reduced to 11, all but one of which probably fledged. The six broods this year (five on No.3 and one on the Loop) is a record for Woolston.

Most Shelduck had left by early August, with the last juvenile reported on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. None were seen in September and there were only small numbers recorded in the final three months, ten being the highest count at the end of the year.



*Shelduck*

*Andy Weir*

**Mandarin Duck**

*Aix galericulata*

For the second year in succession Mandarin Duck visited the Eyes, with two males and a female at Bollin Point on 11<sup>th</sup> October. A drake was reported at Woolston Weir on 30<sup>th</sup> October, with two at the east end of the Reserve on 6<sup>th</sup> December.



## Wigeon

*Anas penelope*

Although 83 records were submitted sightings followed a familiar pattern, with most Wigeon reported in the autumn and second winter period.

The year began with the highest counts being of eight on No.3 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> January and seven on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. A pair remained for two days in late April, but the only other record in the first six months was of one on No.3 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> June.



*Eclipse male Wigeon*

*Brian Burnett*

There were near-daily reports from September, with counts of 17 on 20<sup>th</sup> September and 13 on 11<sup>th</sup> October being notable. Eight were present on No.1 bed on 25<sup>th</sup> September, with 11 on No.3 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> November and 15 on 6<sup>th</sup> December the maximum year-end counts received.

## Gadwall

*Anas strepera*

One of the highlights of 2014 was the record-breaking numbers of this duck in the early autumn, while, in contrast, the breeding season was a disappointment.

In the first four months Gadwall were present in below-average numbers – 66 on 15<sup>th</sup> March being the highest count received. In the breeding season five broods were seen on No.3 bed between 31<sup>st</sup> May and 29<sup>th</sup> June (ten broods in 2013 and 13 in 2012).

The summer influx, which is a feature of the Woolston year, began with 110 on 24<sup>th</sup> May. On 17<sup>th</sup> June 200 were present, with arrivals continuing in July, with 257 on the 1<sup>st</sup> increasing to 329 on the 21<sup>st</sup>. These numbers, however, were dwarfed by the amazing numbers found on No.3 bed in the second half of August and the first week of September. On the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> August 536 were present, a record for the Eyes and Cheshire. On 28<sup>th</sup> August, however, 843 were on No.3 bed, increasing to 875 on 1<sup>st</sup> September. Even this was considered to be a minimum figure as Gadwall were known to be present in channels not visible from any of the hides. These two counts are of international importance, well exceeding the qualifying level of 600.

Interestingly, these huge numbers were counted in the late evening by two observers (D.Hackett and B.Martin), with much smaller numbers noted earlier in the day. However, despite regular observations, no Gadwall were seen flying in at any time, so were they roosting in the reed beds during the day and moving out to feed at dusk?

Counts of national importance were made well into September, with, for example, 516 on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 340 on the 19<sup>th</sup>. After this there was a steady decline with only double-figure numbers present in October. A small increase in November saw 106 on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 145 on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
42	42	66	48	110	200	329	843	875	72	145	83

## Teal

*Anas crecca*

The high numbers present in late 2013 were still recorded in January, with 1000 noted on the 8<sup>th</sup> (600 of which were flushed by a passing helicopter). The peak count of 1100 was on 18<sup>th</sup> January, with 800 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 650 on the 31<sup>st</sup>. The February maximum was of 450, and 130 were flushed by a Marsh Harrier on 31<sup>st</sup> March.

It is many years since Teal was proved breeding at Woolston, and a few pairs were present in May and June. On 11<sup>th</sup> July two adults were seen on No.2 bed, with a single downy young, while on 26<sup>th</sup> July two adults were reported with a juvenile bird on No.3 bed.

It was September before any build-up occurred, with 220 present across the Eyes on the 7<sup>th</sup>, 530 on 8<sup>th</sup> November and an end of year maximum of 800 on Beds 2 and 3 on 17<sup>th</sup> December.

The ringing team on No.3 bed trapped and ringed 45 Teal during the year, nearly double the total number ringed since 1980; it is likely that information will be received on the movements of some of these birds.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1100	450	130	60	5	6	5	30	220	450	530	800

## Mallard

*Anas platyrhynchos*

An improvement in both wintering numbers and breeding pairs compared with 2013.

The highest early-year count was of 100 on the 18<sup>th</sup> January WeBS count, with the following four months recording maxima of approximately 50.

The first two broods were seen at Woolston Weir on 19<sup>th</sup> April and in all a total of 34 broods was reported: ten on No.3 bed, two on No.2, five at Latchford Locks, seven on the Mersey and Weir Pool, five on the Ship Canal, three on the No.1 bed pools and two on the Loop of No.4 bed. Many growing young were reported during the summer, no doubt helped by the warm weather in June and July.

Numbers steadily increased during the final four months, with over 200 present from late November to the end of the year.

The ringing team on No.3 bed trapped 28 new Mallard, all but one in the period 15<sup>th</sup> March to 26<sup>th</sup> April. Many of these were subsequently retrapped. Up to this year only 63 Mallard had been ringed since the start of ringing at Woolston in 1980.



Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
100	52	47	51	56	74	121	77	98	141	226	232

### **Pintail**

*Anas acuta*

With only 17 records submitted the status of this duck as an uncommon visitor to the Eyes was confirmed.

The only sighting in the first six months was on 7<sup>th</sup> January when a male and female were on No.3 bed. The next record was of a female on 27<sup>th</sup> July, while a female on 1<sup>st</sup> September remained for nearly three weeks. Ten on 26<sup>th</sup> October was the highest count of the year, with a drake on No.3 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> November the last seen.



*Garganey from the Morgan Hide*

*David Spencer*

### **Garganey**

*Anas querquedula*

The only records of this scarce summer visitor were of a drake on No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> May and a female, also on No.3 bed, on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Shoveler**

*Anas clypeata*

Numbers were high on spring passage but about average during the rest of the year, with the autumn build-up, which used to be a feature of the Woolston year, again below one hundred.

The year began with a peak count of 56 on 4<sup>th</sup> January, mostly on No.3 bed, and 36, again on No.3, was the February maximum. An arrival in March saw 50-65 present on many dates and a peak of 109 on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Eighty on 1<sup>st</sup> April and 63 the following day were soon followed by a major fall in numbers as birds moved on.

Small numbers summered, for example three drakes and two females on 8<sup>th</sup> June and a pair on two other dates in June. There was, however, no evidence of breeding.

Autumn passage was relatively low, with 70 recorded on 2<sup>nd</sup> September and 75 on 8<sup>th</sup> September. There were then few reports until 44 were seen on No.3 bed on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 50 on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 49 on the 30<sup>th</sup>. During November over 30 were present on several dates.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
52	36	109	80	3	5	3	18	75	50	43	30



Pair of Red Crested Pochard Brian Burnett

**Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*

After a record of a drake in 2013 a pair was present on No.3 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> April.

**Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

Numbers continue to fall, not just at Woolston but across north-west Europe. For the first year since recording began at Woolston in 1978 a three-figure count was not made.

Low numbers were on the Eyes in the first few weeks of January, and 31 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 48 on the 26<sup>th</sup> were the maxima for that month. Traditionally, Pochard peak at Woolston in February and this was the case in 2014, but the largest counts were of only 54 on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. Thirty-two were on No.3 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and 30 on 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

It was a good breeding season, with a total of ten broods reported, eight on No.3 bed and two on No.1 bed (6 or 7 in 2013, 14 in 2012). Many young appear to have fledged in the warm and largely dry July.

Following the breeding season Pochard were absent for long periods. The only double-figure count was of 11 on 5<sup>th</sup> November, with none reported after 19<sup>th</sup> November.



Pochard Alan Debenham

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
48	54	26	32	30	15	7	3	1	2	11	nil

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

A good year for this duck with, as usual, many records submitted. It was also a good breeding season.

At the start of the year high numbers were present with 480 found on the 18<sup>th</sup> January WeBS, but peak numbers occurred in February with 785 on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 665 on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Other significant counts in the spring were 323 on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 169 on 24<sup>th</sup> April, and 161 still remaining on 2<sup>nd</sup> May.



The first brood was reported on No.3 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> June and was followed by at least another 15, the last being seen on 30<sup>th</sup> July. Unusually, all breeding records were from No.3 bed, with none seen on the Mersey or Ship Canal as in previous years. Several broods of large young were present in late July and August, suggesting a successful breeding season.



Tufted Duck

Alan Debenham

Later in the year numbers were below average, with 196 on 28<sup>th</sup> November and 379 on 6<sup>th</sup> December being the highest counts made.

A drake Tufted Duck was caught in the Duck Trap on 12<sup>th</sup> August, and is the first of this species to be ringed at Woolston since ringing began in 1980.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
480	785	323	169	161	94	54	24	45	81	196	379

### Goldeneye

*Bucephala clangula*

Numbers were below average, with five on 6<sup>th</sup> January the highest count received. All records were from the Woolston Weir Pool, where between one and three were seen on many dates, the last on 2<sup>nd</sup> April.

The first returning Goldeneye was at Woolston Weir on 4<sup>th</sup> November, with three drakes there the following day. Between four and six were present throughout November, with the year maximum of seven on 27<sup>th</sup> December.

### Goosander

*Mergus merganser*

Only two records were submitted, one at Bollin Point on 22<sup>nd</sup> February and two flying south over No.1 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

### Ruddy Duck

*Oxyura jamaicensis*

During the year 97 records were submitted of this now much sought after duck.

Although there were two records of a female there was no evidence that breeding was even attempted.

A drake was present on No.3 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> January. Up to two drakes were present during the spring and summer, with three drakes reported on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 13<sup>th</sup> July and 2<sup>nd</sup> August. Single females were seen on 24<sup>th</sup> February and 7<sup>th</sup> May. The last report of a Ruddy Duck was on 24<sup>th</sup> August.

During the summer one of the drakes became attached to an adult Great Crested Grebe, as later did a second drake, following the grebe wherever it went. On 30<sup>th</sup> July one of the drakes was seen displaying to the grebe!

### **Red-legged Partridge**

*Alectoris rufa*

A single record of one on the Canal track on No.2 bed at dawn on 4<sup>th</sup> April was the first since 2012 and only the eighth ever for Woolston.

*Perdix perdix*

### **Grey Partridge**

The decline of this once common species continues and there were only two sightings on the Reserve itself. Two were at Bollin Point on 4<sup>th</sup> January and one was found on No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> March. There were two records from adjacent sites with one at Rixton Paddocks on 24<sup>th</sup> May and five seen to the north on the September Migration Watch.

### **Pheasant**

*Phasianus colchicus*

Present in small numbers throughout the year, the highest counts are usually in spring and this proved to be the case again this year. On 19<sup>th</sup> April 12 were on the northern half of No.4 bed and there were Reserve-wide totals of 12 on two other dates in April and May. About 20 were present in early May. An interesting report was of a completely black individual on No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> October. The Migration Watches produced totals of 24 and 21 for October and November respectively but most of these were not on the Reserve itself. No evidence of breeding was submitted.

### **Red-throated Diver**

*Gavia stellata*

A surprising record was of one flying west along the Ship Canal on the unusual date of 16<sup>th</sup> May.

### **Cormorant**

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

A fairly uneventful year, with birds seen in every month. Early in the year 29 on 2<sup>nd</sup> January was a high count, exceeded only by 32 across the Reserve on 31<sup>st</sup> May. During the summer Bollin Point was a favoured area for Cormorants, with up to eight there in June and July.

Twenty-four on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 21 on 5<sup>th</sup> November and 27 on 6<sup>th</sup> December WeBS were other significant records. On 19<sup>th</sup> November 12 were perched in a tree near Woolston Weir.

### **Little Egret**

*Egretta garzetta*

With five sightings received, all from No.3 bed, it was an average year for this elegant egret, which is steadily increasing its population nationally. The first was on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, when one, which may have been present all morning, was seen flying off from the north-east corner of the bed. Two then flew over on 12<sup>th</sup> April. None was then seen until a flurry of records in August, all of singles. The first

was noted flying across the bed on the morning of 9<sup>th</sup> August, with another perched in a tree there on the 14<sup>th</sup> and, finally, one was present from dawn on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Great White Egret**

*Ardea alba*

On the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> May one was found on No.3 bed, eventually leaving to the east after a short stay. This represents the third record for Woolston, the previous two being of single birds in 2006 and 2007.



*Little Egret on 31<sup>st</sup> August*

*David Waterhouse*



*Great White Egret*

*John Barber*

**Grey Heron**

*Ardea cinerea*

Noted throughout the year in small numbers. In the first six months, five on 18<sup>th</sup> January and eight on 19<sup>th</sup> April were the largest gatherings. Later in the year nine, on No.3 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, took advantage of low water levels to feed on small fish. Seven on 28<sup>th</sup> October was the only other notable count. On 27<sup>th</sup> April a Heron took a Mallard chick at Latchford Locks.

**Little Grebe**

*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

An improved showing this year after poor numbers in 2013. The year began with eight found across the Eyes on 18<sup>th</sup> January and nine at Bollin Point, on the Ship Canal, on 1<sup>st</sup> February. Trilling was first heard on one of the No.1 bed pools on 27<sup>th</sup> February. There is always a spring influx and 13 were recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> March. Twelve adults were found on No.3 bed alone on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, and 15<sup>th</sup> with 12 also reported on 15<sup>th</sup> April.

The pools on No.1 bed are favoured by this grebe and a brood of four small young appeared on the west pool on 24<sup>th</sup> April, followed by a new brood of one young on the east pool on 4<sup>th</sup> May. Another three broods were reported on No.1 bed and it is likely that a number of young fledged from there.

The first brood on No.3 bed was found on 18<sup>th</sup> May, with subsequently another four, including a new brood of three young on 21<sup>st</sup> June. On 6<sup>th</sup> July four broods, each of one growing young were seen there along with ten adults. In all, it is probable that at least ten



*Little Grebe*

*Andy Weir*



broods were present on the Eyes this year, with three full-grown young still being fed on No.1 bed in late August/early September.

Later in the year seven were present on the redundant arm of the Mersey between No.2 and No.3 beds from late September to early December.

### **Great Crested Grebe**

*Podiceps cristatus*

As with Little Grebe the fortunes of this grebe improved considerably this year; most importantly in the number of young that fledged after several years of failure.

Six were present on 18<sup>th</sup> January, with others returning to breeding sites during February, e.g. 12 on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17 on the 18<sup>th</sup> when a pair was displaying at Woolston Weir. The first report of nest building was on No.3 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and the pair at Woolston Weir was seen on 14<sup>th</sup> May rebuilding a nest that had been washed out earlier. During May at least five pairs were present on No.3 bed with the first brood appearing on the 20<sup>th</sup>. On 16<sup>th</sup> June four broods, each of one young, were on No.3 bed and it is thought that a fifth pair also bred. Elsewhere, the pair at the Weir (as in 2013) eventually hatched two young, one of which is thought to have fledged. Another pair also bred on the Mersey between beds 3 and 4 and an adult with a large chick was present on the river north of No.2 bed in late July. A ninth brood of two large young was on the Ship Canal in mid-September, but could have bred away from the Eyes.

In the final months birds became scarce, with a maximum of six on 30<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Black-necked Grebe**

*Podiceps nigricollis*

Another excellent year for this rare grebe which continues to thrive at Woolston.

Two, still moulting out of winter plumage, were on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> March, a comparatively early date. Two days later they were joined by two in full summer plumage. Numbers remained at this level until 26<sup>th</sup> March when eight were present, steadily increasing throughout April to 13 on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 18 on the 17<sup>th</sup> when a pair was seen displaying, and a peak count of 31 on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the highest count since 2008.

In May, birds began to move to nest sites, with two sitting birds seen in a small patch of Typha on the 10<sup>th</sup>; a changeover at a nest was witnessed on the 13<sup>th</sup>. On 19<sup>th</sup> May the first brood appeared (one young), with a second brood of two on 1<sup>st</sup> June. On 16<sup>th</sup> June three sitting birds were on nests in the patch of Typha with five broods on the water of No.3 bed. Broods continued to appear, with twelve noted on 6<sup>th</sup> July and a total of 17 adults and 13 young. Fifteen adults and 16 young were present on 29<sup>th</sup> July, with 13 full grown, independent young on 26<sup>th</sup> July. By this date some of the early young had already fledged and left, as had many of the adults. It is believed that a minimum of 11 pairs bred and at least 15 young fledged.

Two adults on 14<sup>th</sup> August were the last seen. Two juveniles remained, with the last sighting on 1<sup>st</sup> September.



*Black-necked Grebe*

*John Nightingale*

### **Red Kite**

*Milvus milvus*

Two records of this rare visitor were received. A permit holder reported one flying over No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> April, and on 13<sup>th</sup> May, David Bowman observed one “drifting at low level along the south bank of No.3 bed before heading north. It had no wing tags or other obvious markers” These are the first records since 2010.

### **Marsh Harrier**

*Circus aeruginosus*

This species enjoyed a good year and over 50 records were submitted. From January to May there were regular sightings of one or two from No.3 bed. Almost all related to a female or immature bird which was joined by a second from 31<sup>st</sup> March to 4<sup>th</sup> April. There were two reports of a male; the first, an immature, on 23<sup>rd</sup> February and the second on 21<sup>st</sup> April when David Spencer saw two flying north, one at least being a male. None were seen from 24<sup>th</sup> May until 10<sup>th</sup> August. Two females were over No.1 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> September and there was a further sighting from this area on the 15<sup>th</sup>. All other records were from No.3 bed including a very dark individual, possibly an immature male, on 30<sup>th</sup> September. This was the last sighting of the year, unlike 2013 when reports continued to the end of the year.

## Sparrowhawk

*Accipiter nisus*

The 75 records received were a slight improvement on the previous year and there were regular sightings throughout the year. Three were reported on No.3 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> February followed by five on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Up to five were attracted to the Starling roost on No.3 bed in late February and early March.



Sparrowhawk

Rob Beynon

A pair was observed displaying over the north bank of the same bed on 31<sup>st</sup> March and a report of one carrying food towards the east bank was suggestive of breeding. At least one and possibly two nests were found on No.4 bed but although an egg was found in one of the nests, it was later predated. On No.1 bed a nest was built but there was no information as to whether breeding was successful there.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> July one was reported carrying food towards the east bank of No.3 bed and on the same date another was seen flying on to No.4 bed with prey. A male was also seen with prey on 9<sup>th</sup> August.

Many records were received from No.3 bed where the feeders regularly attracted birds in search of finches and other potential prey. On 21<sup>st</sup> October two were seen duelling with 13 Magpies over the north bank of No.3 bed “during high winds and torrential rain”.

Possibly the same duo was observed unsuccessfully hunting roosting Lapwing and Teal on 3<sup>rd</sup> November and at the end of that month one was watched bathing in a small pool near the Tower Hide for about 15 minutes. The Migration Watches produced counts of six and four at the eastern end of the Reserve in September and November.

Ringling was very successful with four captured on No.1 bed (the highest total since 1995) and three on No.3 bed (the best since 2008). Those ringed on No.1 bed comprised one adult and two juvenile males and an adult female. The birds ringed on No.3 bed were all males.

## Buzzard

*Buteo buteo*

This species is now well established at Woolston and it is almost guaranteed that at least one will be seen during a visit at any time of year. Up to six were reported during January and February, and on 31<sup>st</sup> March one of a pair was seen carrying prey into trees on the east bank of No.3 bed. There was a further sighting of one with prey in the same area on 21<sup>st</sup> May. The maximum count for the first half of the year was seven on a number of occasions, mostly from No.3 bed. A nest was found on this bed and two young were ringed there on 12<sup>th</sup> June. This was the first ever confirmed breeding on this bed and the two pulli were the first to be ringed at Woolston. Pairs also produced young on No.2 bed and on No.1 bed where at least two chicks were seen in a nest. A further pair bred just to the west of the Reserve but the outcome is unknown.



Adults took advantage of the supply of Black-headed Gull chicks and one was taken from a nest on 21<sup>st</sup> June and again on 1<sup>st</sup> July. Later that month an adult and one young were regularly heard calling over the east bank of No.3 bed.

Up to six were present during the autumn on both Nos.1 and 3 beds and the Migration Watchers reported counts of 17 on 11<sup>th</sup> October and nine on 1<sup>st</sup> November from their vantage point at the east end of the Reserve.

## **Kestrel**

*Falco tinnunculus*

In view of the decline which has occurred in recent years it was encouraging to have an increased number of reports this year. In the early months up to two were seen and an absence of reports in March was followed by April sightings of singles from Nos.1, 2 and 3 beds. A pair was at a traditional site on the Thelwall Viaduct on 31<sup>st</sup> May and four young were in the nest on 6<sup>th</sup> June of which at least two fledged. The female was seen feeding one of the young on 21<sup>st</sup> June. Birds remained on the Viaduct until early August and one was seen carrying food on 26<sup>th</sup> July. There was



*Kestrel*

*Roger Riley*

no evidence of breeding elsewhere on the Reserve.

During autumn the highest count was of six on the Migration Watch of 1<sup>st</sup> September; some of these would not be on the Reserve itself, however. One or two remained until the year end with reports from No.3 bed and the eastern end of the Reserve.

One was ringed on No.1 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> September, the first on that bed since 2011 and only the ninth ever.

## **Hobby**

*Falco subbuteo*

An above-average year with 20 records submitted. These included nine May sightings of one or two from Nos.1 and 3 beds, including two hunting dragonflies over the east bank of No.3 bed on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

There were further reports of one or two from July to September, mostly from No.3 bed where one was observed hunting Swifts on 14<sup>th</sup> July.

## **Peregrine**

*Falco peregrinus*

Up to two were present in all months and for the seventh successive year a pair bred on the Thelwall Viaduct. On 18<sup>th</sup> February they were seen calling, displaying and passing food near to the nest site. On 17<sup>th</sup> May the male was carrying prey to the nest and on the evening of 28<sup>th</sup> June an adult and a well-grown young were seen perched on the Viaduct. Earlier that day the male had been observed passing food to the female at the nest site. On 5<sup>th</sup> July an adult took a Feral Pigeon under the Viaduct. There were a number of reports away from the nest site but these probably related to the nesting pair. One took what was believed to be a Snipe on No.3 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> October. The maximum count of the year was of three over Butchersfield Tip on 18<sup>th</sup> November.

## **Water Rail**

*Rallus aquaticus*

Present in small numbers throughout the year although, given its secretive nature, sight records inevitably underestimate the actual prevalence of this species. Nearly all reports were from Nos.1 and 3 beds, the only exceptions being of one calling on No.2 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> July and one at the fish refuge to the north of that bed on 30<sup>th</sup> December. During the first half of the year maximum counts were of four on No.3 bed and three on No.1 bed.

Breeding was disappointing; two fully grown young were in front of the John Morgan Hide on 31<sup>st</sup> July and there was a record of two young calling from different areas of No.1 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> August. On the Loop of No.4 bed a nest with six small chicks was found. As there were no other reports of young it seems that only four pairs bred.

Six adults were on No.1 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> July and five were counted there on 11<sup>th</sup> November. The highest autumn total for No.3 bed was of four on 29<sup>th</sup> November. The ringing team captured two juveniles in front of the Rotary Hide on 31<sup>st</sup> August.

## **Moorhen**

*Gallinula chloropus*

The decline in recent years was reversed somewhat, with good numbers present and the most broods ever recorded. The first total of note was of 19 on the WeBS count on 18<sup>th</sup> January but there were few double-figure counts until the start of the breeding season

The first young appeared on 18<sup>th</sup> May and in total 28 broods were recorded. This compares favourably with the previous two years when 13 broods (2013) and 20 (2012) were reported. It is interesting to recall that in the early 1980's an estimated 40 -50 breeding pairs were present and this year's figures are the highest since that time. It was hoped that recent changes to the habitat on No.3 bed would benefit this species and this may prove to be the case. No less than 17 broods were on this bed with three on No.1 bed, two on No.2 bed and a further two on fields to the north. Of the remainder, two were on the river, one at Latchford Locks and one on No.4 bed.

Post-breeding, 18 were found on the WeBS count of 7<sup>th</sup> September and 24 on the 11<sup>th</sup> October. The highest total of the year was of 46 on 30<sup>th</sup> October of which 19 were on the favoured No.3 bed, where birds were attracted to the feeders at the John Morgan Hide. Over 30 remained through November and a successful year ended with 21 on No.3 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> December.

## **Coot**

*Fulica atra*

The year began with small numbers reported during January and February and a maximum count of 23 on 18<sup>th</sup> February. The WeBS count on 19<sup>th</sup> April produced 29 and this was the highest total before the start of a very successful breeding season. The first young were reported on 2<sup>nd</sup> May and even allowing for the possibility of double counting it seems likely that over 50 broods were produced. Of these, an estimated 35 were on No.3 bed with five on No.1 bed, four on No.2 bed and five on No.4 bed. Two others were on the river and one in flooded fields to the north of No.2 bed. The total of 52 broods is the highest ever recorded at Woolston.

In the 1980's it was estimated that there were between 80 and 100 pairs on No.3 bed alone but following the drainage of the bed in 1991 both Coot and Moorhen became very scarce breeders. In the 1992 Annual Report it was feared that "the future of this once very common breeding species (Coot) at Woolston seems bleak".

Good numbers were present post-breeding with 99 present on 15<sup>th</sup> July, the vast majority on No.3 bed. During August even more were recorded and No.3 bed held 152 on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 202 on the 20<sup>th</sup> and a total of 309 on 1<sup>st</sup> September was the highest since 1990. This coincided with a record number of Gadwall, a species known to associate with Coot to maximise feeding opportunities. From mid-September there was a rapid decrease in numbers and by October only 12 were found across the Reserve. Significant counts for the rest of the year included 37 on 5<sup>th</sup> November, of which 18 were at Bollin Point, and 25 on a small pool of open water on No.3 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> December when all the rest of the bed was frozen.

One was captured in the duck trap on No.3 bed and ringed on 15<sup>th</sup> March.

### Oystercatcher

*Haematopus ostralegus*

In a fairly typical year the first was reported on 23<sup>rd</sup> February and the majority of sightings occurred between March and May. Four were present on 8<sup>th</sup> March and again on 17<sup>th</sup> May. Apart from two records from No.1 bed, all were from No.3 bed. There were two June sightings, one in July and the last of the year was on 10<sup>th</sup> September when one flew over No.3 bed.



Oystercatchers, Morgan Hide in May David Bowman

### Golden Plover

*Pluvialis apricaria*

There were just two records of this infrequent winter visitor. A group of 16 was found in a flock of a hundred Lapwing on flooded fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip on 11<sup>th</sup> February and the only other report was on 6<sup>th</sup> November when 15 flew south over No.3 bed.

### Lapwing

*Vanellus vanellus*

During January and February a flock of up to a hundred was on fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip and there were several sightings of over-flying birds, notably 160 over No.1 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> February and 600 over No.3 bed on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Display was observed over Nos. 3 and 4 beds during March with up to three pairs seen. In early April one appeared to be on a nest on No.4 bed and three pairs were holding territory on the northern half of No.1 bed. Three nests were found in this area, all containing four eggs, and at least two of these nests were successful. On 19<sup>th</sup> April six adults and four chicks were found there and young were found on No.3 bed during May and June. On 25<sup>th</sup> July a group of 38 on the Loop of No.4 bed included a juvenile which was not fully grown. It seems likely that five or six pairs bred which is an improvement on the previous year.





Lapwing from the Morgan Hide

Brian Gort

As usual there was a build-up in August when a maximum of 144 was on the Loop of No.4 bed. The highest count of the year was on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September when 195 were on No.3 bed and 150 on the Loop, a total of 345. On 19<sup>th</sup> September about 260 were roosting on No.3 bed and on 20<sup>th</sup> October 150 were flushed by a Peregrine Falcon in the same area. The Migration Watches produced counts of 394, 131 and 222 for October, November and December respectively.

One was ringed on 11<sup>th</sup> October in front of the Frank Linley Hide.

### Little Ringed Plover

*Charadrius dubius*

The first sighting of the year was a pair calling, in suitable breeding habitat on No.1 bed, on 30<sup>th</sup> March and again on 12<sup>th</sup> April. Three were seen briefly in front of the John Morgan Hide on 16<sup>th</sup> April, where they were harassed by Lapwings. An unusual record was of eight on the flooded fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip on 17<sup>th</sup> April and two days later five were seen on the northern half of No.1 bed. On No.3 bed there were regular reports of up to three during May, June and July. Breeding took place on No.1 bed where two pairs were showing distraction behaviour on 24<sup>th</sup> May. On 14<sup>th</sup> June three pairs were in this area, one with a single small young and the other pairs suggesting by their alarm calls and general behaviour that they had young nearby. A fully grown juvenile was in front of the John Morgan Hide on 28<sup>th</sup> June and on the same day a pair with one young was observed in flight on the north side of No.1 bed. Two adults and two juveniles were on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide on 8<sup>th</sup> July and three juveniles were in the same location five days later. In total it seems that three to five pairs bred successfully. The final report of a successful year was of a pair with one young on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> August.

### Ringed Plover

*Charadrius hiaticula*

This is an infrequent visitor to Woolston and there were just two records; one was on the Loop of No.4 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> April and another was in front of the Frank Linley hide on 21<sup>st</sup> May.



Whimbrel on the Morgan Hide scrape

David Spencer

### Whimbrel

*Numenius phaeopus*

The only sighting of this occasional visitor was of one which landed in front of the John Morgan Hide on 16<sup>th</sup> April and remained for about twenty minutes.

## Curlew

*Numenius arquata*

There were eight records, similar to the previous year; all in spring and from No.3 bed. The first was seen on 21<sup>st</sup> February and two flocks of eight and seven flew south on 8<sup>th</sup> March. Three were flushed on 14<sup>th</sup> March and the final report was of one on 12<sup>th</sup> April.

## Black-tailed Godwit

*Limosa limosa*

Over a hundred records were received in what was probably the most successful year ever at Woolston. The first was seen on 15<sup>th</sup> March and reports continued until 17<sup>th</sup> April, when an excellent count of 36 was made on No.3 bed. None was then recorded until 24<sup>th</sup> June when three were on the favoured No.3 bed, with 12 also present there on 8<sup>th</sup> July. Odd ones were noted on the Loop of No.4 bed but the main interest was focussed on No.3 bed. On 13<sup>th</sup> September 14 were present and this built to an amazing count of 82 on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps surprisingly this is not a record for the Reserve as in 2001 there was a report of a hundred roosting on the north bank of No.3 bed. Up to 19 were noted during October and 14 were still present on 5<sup>th</sup> November. Small numbers were seen from time to time until the final record of the year on 21<sup>st</sup> December when two were in front of the John Morgan Hide. This is the latest ever sighting of this species.



*Black-tailed Godwit*

*Andy Weir*

**Ruff***Calidris pugnax*

Just two records of this occasional visitor were received, typically on passage. Both sightings were of a single bird on No.3 bed, the first on 8<sup>th</sup> April and the other on 17<sup>th</sup> September.

**Dunlin***Calidris alpina*

There were fewer reports than on 2013; six spring records between 12<sup>th</sup> April and 11<sup>th</sup> May with a maximum of seven on No.3 bed, one on No.4 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> April, and a further count of five on No.3 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> May. The only autumn sighting was of one, again on No.3 bed, on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

**Common Sandpiper***Actitis hypoleucos*

Another species seen mainly on passage, there were just five records. The three spring reports were all singles, on 26<sup>th</sup> April and 2<sup>nd</sup> May on No.3 bed and one at Latchford Locks on 11<sup>th</sup> May. The two autumn sightings were on 8<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> August, both of singles on No.3 bed. This represents a below average year for this attractive wader.

**Green Sandpiper***Tringa ochropus*

In contrast to the previous species there were 67 records submitted including reports of an overwintering individual on No.3 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> January and 9<sup>th</sup> February. None were then seen until 18<sup>th</sup> July when two were on No.3 bed and regular reports were received over the next two months. Most of these were from No.3 bed but with occasional sightings on No.1 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed during August. Numbers peaked in early September when four were on No.3 bed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and five on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Reports continued until 11<sup>th</sup> October and there was a late record of one on the Canal on 13<sup>th</sup> December.

Three were ringed on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> August. When the water level dropped in the summer months it was possible to place a net in the duck trapping area which resulted in these waders being trapped. As only three had ever been ringed previously, this year's captures were even more unusual.

**Spotted Redshank***Tringa erythropus*

This rare visitor was seen on No.3 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> August, the first sighting since 2010. Nearly all previous records have occurred during autumn passage in August and September and this was only the third since 1992.

**Greenshank***Tringa nebularia*

After an exceptional year in 2013 this was a more typical showing for this elegant large wader. The seven records were all from No.3 bed, the first, on 13<sup>th</sup> May, being the only spring sighting. Autumn

passage produced a series of records from 14<sup>th</sup> August to 7<sup>th</sup> September, all of a single except for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September when two were present.

### **Redshank**

*Tringa totanus*

Like the previous species numbers were less than in the previous year with 22 reports received. The first was on 17<sup>th</sup> March and sightings continued until 14<sup>th</sup> June with a maximum of two. Whilst most were seen on No.3 bed there were also three records from the Loop of No.4 bed. Sightings resumed on 21<sup>st</sup> August and there was a series of records of one until the final report of the year which was of three on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> November. There was no suggestion of breeding this year.

### **Jack Snipe**

*Lymnocyptes minimus*

Two records were received, both from No.3 bed. One was seen on 7<sup>th</sup> March and a second on the 31<sup>st</sup>, the latter flushed by a Grey Heron before landing close to the John Morgan Hide.

### **Woodcock**

*Scolopax rusticola*

The 19 reports of this rather secretive species made for an above-average year. There were 13 sightings between 4<sup>th</sup> January and 8<sup>th</sup> March, all singles from Nos. 1 and 3 beds except for three at Bollin Point on 1<sup>st</sup> February. The first record from the second winter period was in September and there were five in November and December with a maximum of two on No.1 bed on 28<sup>th</sup> December. Given its generally elusive character it was surprising to find one feeding in the open in front of the Frank Linley hide on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Snipe**

*Gallinago gallinago*

Up to forty were present during January, nearly all on No.3 bed. March saw birds roosting in front of the Frank Linley Hide where a maximum of 18 was recorded. On 11<sup>th</sup> March 25 were on the Loop of No.4 bed. The last double-figure spring count was of 17 on No.4 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> April and only small numbers remained until 2<sup>nd</sup> May. As usual none were present during the breeding season and the first to return was on 28<sup>th</sup> June. Odd ones were noted on both No.3 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed during July and August before a build-up occurred during September. Ten on the 12<sup>th</sup> increased to 20 the following day, 31 on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 35 on the 29<sup>th</sup>, all on No.3 bed. The highest count of the year was of 51 on that bed on 17<sup>th</sup> October. Up to 30 remained into November and there were just single-figure counts until the year end. Although this year's maximum total was lower than in 2013 when 77 were recorded, it seems that the habitat changes to No.3 bed are attracting increased numbers of this species. A juvenile was ringed on No.3 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Common Tern**

*Sterna hirundo*

One, on No.3 bed on the afternoon 8<sup>th</sup> July, was the only sighting of this locally breeding tern.



### Arctic Tern

*Sterna paradisaea*

On 22<sup>nd</sup> April three flew west over No.3 bed at 6.30a.m. and two hours later four were brought down by heavy rain. The only other record was of one on 9<sup>th</sup> May, again on No.3 bed.

### Black-headed Gull

*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Most early records were from the eastern end of the Reserve where up to 400 were to be found on flooded fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip. The first to return to the breeding colony on No.3 bed appeared on 8<sup>th</sup> February when 130 were noted, whilst a further 300 were still present to the south of No.1 bed. By mid-month a total of 660 included 230 on the Loop of No.4 bed. Numbers increased to 1250 by 27<sup>th</sup> February of which 850 were at the colony with 1150 present there on 30<sup>th</sup> March. Of the 650 present on 9<sup>th</sup> April 110 were first-summer individuals, which may be indicative of new birds being attracted to the colony. Adults were on nests by early May and on the 15<sup>th</sup> a chick was taken by a Lesser Black-backed Gull. The rafts were well used and breeding seems to have been more successful than in 2013 with 54 fledged young counted in front of the John Morgan Hide on 5<sup>th</sup> July. Significant predation by Lesser Black-backed Gulls remains a problem however.

By mid-July most had left the colony which was virtually deserted by the month end. Significant counts thereafter included 433 and 346 on the October and November Migration Watches. There were reports of about 35 plunge-diving on No.3 bed in November and December, presumably hunting for small fish. The year ended with a count of 300, of which 150 were at Latchford Locks.

### Little Gull

*Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Essentially a spring visitor the first report was of two on No.3 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> March. Two were again present on 7<sup>th</sup> May and singles were noted, again on No.3 bed, on 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May. No other records were submitted in what was a fairly typical year for this species.



Little Gull, 31<sup>st</sup> March

David Bowman

### Mediterranean Gull

*Larus melanocephalus*

Another regular migrant seen on spring passage, there were nine records between 12<sup>th</sup> April and 22<sup>nd</sup> June. All sightings were from No.3 bed, including two on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> April, one on the 29<sup>th</sup> and two on the 30<sup>th</sup>. An immature was found on 9<sup>th</sup> May and a single on 22<sup>nd</sup> June concluded an average year.

### Common Gull

*Larus canus*

This species occurs in small numbers outside the breeding season, and is often found at Latchford Locks. Of a total of 14 on the WeBS count of 18<sup>th</sup> January, 13 were at this location and a count of 15

there on 12<sup>th</sup> January was the highest total of the year. Reports from No.3 bed peaked at six on 4<sup>th</sup> April and the last spring record was on 25<sup>th</sup> May. The first evidence of a return was on 28<sup>th</sup> June but none were then seen until 30<sup>th</sup> July. There were regular sightings to the end of the year with a maximum count of eight on 27<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull**

*Larus fuscus*

Odd ones were seen during January and February and on 19<sup>th</sup> March a dawn roost on No.3 bed totalled 16. A further 22 were on the water there on 30<sup>th</sup> March. In summer up to four were regularly reported, mostly on No.3 bed where their predatory actions caused significant losses of Black-headed Gull chicks. A Little Grebe was also taken and one attempted unsuccessfully to take a Black-necked Grebe young. Although they do not breed on the Reserve they are known to do so on a factory roof in nearby Woolston. From July onwards there were a number of significant counts involving over-flying birds. About a hundred flew west over No.1 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> July and the Migration Watches produced a total of 304 in September and slightly lower numbers in October and November. A number of reports of singles at Latchford Locks completed the year.

### **Herring Gull**

*Larus argentatus*

Reports from Latchford Locks included singles in January and February. Four were on the water on No.3 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> February whilst a large movement was observed at the end of March and the beginning of April. On 29<sup>th</sup> March 90 passed through, stopping for a time on No.3 bed before moving on. The next day 50 were seen flying east and on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 90 flew east between 8 and 9a.m. The only other records were in single figures except for the 200 counted on a Migration Watch on 18<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Great Black-backed Gull**

*Larus marinus*



*Great Black-backed Gull, March*

*David Spencer*

This is a rare visitor to Woolston so a total of 14 records was well above average. There were two January reports of one or two over-flying and on 28<sup>th</sup> March a second summer individual was found on one of the rafts on No.3 bed. Regular sightings of two continued until 14<sup>th</sup> April with a peak count of eight on the 7<sup>th</sup>. These comprised four adults and four second-year birds. Two were at the Weir Basin on 2<sup>nd</sup> May and the following day an immature was seen perched on a buoy on the Canal. The only other record was of two over No.1 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

**Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon***Columba livia*

Only six records were submitted for this common species. A flock of 120 was observed on 15<sup>th</sup> October at Latchford Locks and the total count for the Reserve on the same day was 140. Although resident on the Viaduct, only a single sighting of 50 on 23<sup>rd</sup> October was submitted. All other sightings were from the Migration Watches, mostly of birds on the surrounding farmlands; the maximum recorded was 200 on 18<sup>th</sup> December.

**Stock Dove***Columba oenas*

Stock Doves are most commonly encountered at the eastern end of the Reserve. Thirty five were in fields adjacent to Rixton Paddocks on 1<sup>st</sup> February and the maximum count of the year was 66 on 18<sup>th</sup> December during a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip. In other areas the maximum counts were five on No.1 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, three on No.2 bed on 6<sup>th</sup> September and an exceptional count of 25 flying over No.3 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> August. A bird also frequented the feeders by the John Morgan hide in the late summer period. No records were received from No. 4 bed

The only suggestion of breeding was of a bird observed in suitable habitat on No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> May in an area where birds have previously bred.

On No.3 bed five new birds were ringed this year, the same as in 2013. This species was first ringed on the bed in 2010 when seven were ringed. There was a blank year in 2011, but, in total, 19 birds have been ringed on the bed.

**Woodpigeon***Columba palumbus*

During the first winter period large flocks were observed flying over No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip with 400 flying south on 2<sup>nd</sup> January and 500 on 13<sup>th</sup> February. The Breeding Bird Survey recorded birds on all four beds with 10 on No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> May, 28 on No.2 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> April, five on No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> April and 22 on No.4 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> April. Large movements were observed, as is usual, in the autumn and winter periods; 200 were observed leaving a roost on No.2 bed at dawn on the 4<sup>th</sup> October and 1000 were observed in fields to the north of Butchersfield Tip on 15<sup>th</sup> October. The peak counts were observed during Migration Watches with 1677 on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 4393 on 1<sup>st</sup> November and 1989 on the 18<sup>th</sup> December.

A total of seven was ringed during the year, all on No.3 bed. The 11 year average for this species is a little over five per year.

**Collared Dove***Streptopelia decaocto*

Although common in surrounding housing estates and farmland, Collared Doves are relatively infrequent visitors to the Reserve and most records are of single birds or pairs overflying the beds. The only records for No.1 and 2 beds were of single birds on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January and 6<sup>th</sup> September respectively. Three records were submitted for No.3 bed with a maximum count of four on 8<sup>th</sup> May. No. 4 bed had the most sightings with a total of six records and a peak count of three on 3<sup>rd</sup> September

and 30<sup>th</sup> October. Just outside the Reserve area, ten were at Latchford Locks on 23<sup>rd</sup> November and during Migration Watches 15 were in the fields north of Butchersfield Tip on 1<sup>st</sup> November and 43 in the same area on 18<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Cuckoo**

*Cuculus canorus*

Last year's report noted the sad decline of the Cuckoo with only three reports in 2013. This year proved worse still with none seen or heard on the Reserve. The only report was from Butchersfield Tip where a bird was heard calling distantly in fields south of the Ship Canal on 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

### **Barn Owl**

*Tyto alba*

The only sightings were during the first winter period on No.3 bed, where one was observed on several dates between 31<sup>st</sup> January and 23<sup>rd</sup> February. It was seen both at dawn in the centre of the bed and in the evenings hunting the Starling roost.

### **Tawny Owl**

*Strix aluco*

On No.3 bed an early season check of the nest boxes produced two retrapped birds. One of these was first ringed in January 2012; the other was first ringed in February 2011. A new male was ringed on the 26<sup>th</sup> April when the nest boxes were checked for breeding. Unfortunately no breeding was proven. Single birds were also seen perched on the John Morgan hide feeders at dusk on 14<sup>th</sup> July and at the Starling roost on 13<sup>th</sup> December.

There were several sightings on No.1 bed from July to December with four calling from various parts of the bed on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Swift**

*Apus apus*

The first record of the year was of two over the north bank of No.3 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, a week later than has been typical in recent years. For the remainder of May counts included 40 on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 68 on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 88 on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, all on No.3 bed. The maximum count was 200 seen feeding over the north bank of No.3 bed on the morning of 30<sup>th</sup> May. The only record from No.1 bed during the year was 30 on 16<sup>th</sup> May. In the summer months 20 to 60 birds were regularly seen over No.3 bed and the peak count was 160 on 14<sup>th</sup> July. Last year's large post-breeding flocks of up to 800 birds were not repeated; the maximum was 200 seen feeding over No.1 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> August. It is believed that the breeding season on surrounding estates was quite good so the lack of large gatherings on the Reserve may be due to the warm June and July weather, which meant they could feed relatively close to the nest sites. By mid-August most birds had departed, the last significant counts were 15 on 25<sup>th</sup> August and 16 on 27<sup>th</sup> August, both over No.3 bed. The final sighting was of a one on 1<sup>st</sup> September, seen from Butchersfield Tip.





*Kingfisher on No.3 bed*

*Glen Ellis*

### **Kingfisher**

*Alcedo atthis*

The first record of the year was of a single bird on 26<sup>th</sup> February on No.3 bed. One or two were then regularly seen throughout the spring and summer months, mostly on No.3 bed and along the Ship Canal. The maximum count was four on No.3 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> September and the last sighting was of one on 27<sup>th</sup> December on the same bed.

One pair is thought to have nested in the banks of the Ship Canal; a bird with food was seen flying to the nest hole on 19<sup>th</sup> June. On No.3 bed a juvenile was ringed on the 15<sup>th</sup> August in a net placed over the channel near the duck trap. No other evidence of breeding was reported.

Early in August, a perch placed in front of the John Morgan hide was an immediate success. By the next day a Kingfisher was regularly using the branch and provided excellent photographic opportunities for the remainder of the month. It was regularly seen to catch fish as well as seeing off competition from a second bird. It also had to cope with the attention of the local Sparrowhawk which, fortunately, did not succeed in its hunting attempts.

### **Green Woodpecker**

*Picus viridis*

It was a typical year for this species with all records originating from the eastern end of the Reserve, where they occasionally visit from the Lymm and Rixton areas. Nine records were received from No.1 bed and Bollin Point, all of single birds. The first sighting was on 29<sup>th</sup> January and the last on 16<sup>th</sup> November.

## **Great Spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos major*

This is the commonest woodpecker on the Reserve and was observed in all months. Most reports were from the John Morgan hide feeders and involved one or two birds with a maximum count of three on several dates. On other beds, three were seen on No.2 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> April and 6<sup>th</sup> September and two were seen on several dates during the year on No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip. There were no reports from No. 4 bed.

There was no definite evidence of breeding, although birds were observed drumming in April on No.1 bed and in the copse near the car park. On No.3 bed birds were heard calling in April and May and at least one juvenile frequented the feeders from mid-June to early August.

On No.3 bed 15 new birds were ringed during the year. This is a record total for the bed. The eleven year average is 9.9 new birds. On No.1 bed it was an average year with six birds, the first on the late date of 27<sup>th</sup> August. Just one new adult was caught during the year, a male on 6<sup>th</sup> December. Two others were caught from previous years, both from 2013.

## **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos minor*

One was heard calling from south of the Canal by the car park on 12<sup>th</sup> July. A late record from 2013 was of a bird heard calling in the copse by the car park on 7<sup>th</sup> October and then south of the No.2 bed copse and Canal on 8<sup>th</sup> October. Hopefully, this indicates local breeding for a species which has declined dramatically in the UK since the 1980s.

## **Magpie**

*Pica pica*

A common resident and observed on all beds with the maximum counts occurring on No.4 bed. Thirty nine were counted on No.4 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> January, including 20 in fields to the east of the Loop, 30 on 16<sup>th</sup> February and 18 on 10<sup>th</sup> December. There were fewer reports from No.3 bed with a maximum of 18 on 21<sup>st</sup> October. The only report for No.2 bed was of two on the 12<sup>th</sup> April. On No.1 bed 18 were observed flying south on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September and 32 were counted during the Migration Watch on 11<sup>th</sup> October.

On No.3 bed an above average total of five was ringed during the year. The eleven year average is 3.8 per year. On No.1 bed a bird ringed on 4<sup>th</sup> May was the first caught on the bed since 2010.

## **Jay**

*Garrulus glandarius*

A common resident that was observed in small numbers on all beds throughout the year. The maximum count for each bed in the first half of the year was seven on No.1 bed on the 15<sup>th</sup> April, two on No.2 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> April, three on No.3 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> April and three on No.4 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> May. In the autumn there was a notable influx. On the 13<sup>th</sup> September, 42 were counted between No.3 bed and Bollin Point. This is a record count for the Reserve; the previous maximum was 25 in September 2013.

Birds were present on all beds during the breeding season and five nests were found on No.4 bed and one on No.2 bed. The outcome of these nests is not known although the record numbers observed in September point to a successful breeding season but continental migrants could also be a factor.

On No.1 bed three new birds ringed was an average return for this species, with the first on 8<sup>th</sup> July. Just one adult was ringed, on 13<sup>th</sup> December. One was caught that had been ringed previously as an adult on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2012. On No.3 bed 13 new birds were ringed during the year. The eleven year average is 12.7 new birds. The first juvenile was ringed on the 9<sup>th</sup> July. This is ten days earlier than in 2013.

### **Jackdaw**

*Corvus monedula*

Jackdaws are most commonly observed flying over the eastern end of the Reserve as they move between their roosting areas south of the Ship Canal and their feeding areas on the mosses at Rixton. In the first winter period only small flocks were seen with a maximum count of 20 on 13<sup>th</sup> February. In the second winter period peak counts observed were 140 on 6<sup>th</sup> September, 196 on 1<sup>st</sup> November and 413 on 18<sup>th</sup> December. As was noted in last year's Report, sightings from No.3 bed have increased and this trend has continued; flocks were observed flying west at dusk on several dates including 375 on 13<sup>th</sup> December and 350 on 29<sup>th</sup> December. Unusually, in the last two weeks of September a small group of up to seven was regularly observed on No.3 bed, feeding amongst the roosting Lapwing flock.

### **Rook**

*Corvus frugilegus*

Rooks are relatively uncommon on the Reserve and there were only seven records this year all of which involved birds overflying the eastern end of the Reserve. Maximum counts were 40 seen from Rixton Paddocks on 24<sup>th</sup> May and 16 on the 1<sup>st</sup> November during a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip.

### **Carrion Crow**

*Corvus corone*

Small numbers breed on the Eyes and as with the two previous corvid species large flocks can be observed in farmland surrounding the eastern end of the Reserve. The maximum counts were 12 at Bollin Point on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 51 from Butchersfield Tip on 11<sup>th</sup> October and 30 from No.4 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> December. During the Breeding Bird Survey four were seen on No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> May, one on No.3 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> May and four on No.4 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. It appears to have been overlooked on No.2 bed as there were no records submitted from this bed. A pair of adults with three juvenile birds was regularly seen in front of the John Morgan hide during early August.

### **Raven**

*Corvus corax*

What was previously a scarce passage bird has become a regular but uncommon visitor in the past few years. There were 13 sightings spread throughout the year, all involving overflying birds. The first was of two flying east over No.1 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> January. Two were also seen flying east over No.3 and

No.1 beds on 1<sup>st</sup> March. Single birds were then seen from Butchersfield Tip on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, No.1 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> May and No.4 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> August. Four were seen during a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 1<sup>st</sup> September. Further sightings of single birds occurred in October and November before the last one of the year when four were seen over No.1 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Goldcrest**

*Regulus regulus*

This species is mainly an autumn migrant with small numbers over wintering. The first record was of three at Bollin Point on 4<sup>th</sup> January. For the remainder of the first winter period one or two were regularly found on No.1 and No.3 beds and the maximum count was three, seen moving along the south bank of No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> March. Singing males were heard at Bollin Point on 24<sup>th</sup> May, along Weir Lane on 23<sup>rd</sup> July and the north bank of No.1 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> July. Although this raises the possibility of breeding, there were no “locally fledged” (those still in completely juvenile plumage) birds ringed.

Typically, the maximum counts were observed during the autumn and early winter periods. Nine were counted between No.3 bed and Rixton Paddocks on 13<sup>th</sup> September, six were at Bollin Point on 20<sup>th</sup> September and the maximum count of the year was 18 between No.3 bed and Bollin Point on 8<sup>th</sup> November.

On No.1 bed, in contrast to the 25 ringed in 2013, 92 were ringed, the third highest since 1995. The first of the year was caught on 8<sup>th</sup> August with peak passage in October with 40 new birds, closely followed by September with 35 new; the last of the year was caught on 4<sup>th</sup> December. One bird was retrapped, having been originally caught on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2013; another was caught having been originally ringed elsewhere in Britain. On No.3 bed, 39 new birds were ringed during the year. This is above the eleven year average of 30.6 birds. The first autumn migrant was ringed on the 14<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Firecrest**

*Regulus ignicapilla*

One was heard calling and seen briefly in the company of three Goldcrests and a Chiffchaff by the south-east pool of No.1 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> January. What was presumably the same bird was heard calling on the 10<sup>th</sup> January at the eastern end of the same bed.

### **Blue Tit**

*Cyanistes caeruleus*

Blue Tits are a common resident which breeds on all four beds. Counts in April during the Breeding Bird Survey were 12 on No.2 bed, 11 on No.3 bed and six on No.4 bed. No records were received for No.1 bed. Other notable counts included eight at the John Morgan hide feeders on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, nine on No.3 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> October and six at Butchersfield Tip on 18<sup>th</sup> December.

Ringling evidence suggests a successful breeding season. On No.3 bed an eleven year record total of 215 new birds were ringed during the year. The average is 152 new birds. A total of 63 pulli was ringed in the nest boxes this year. This is a very high total for No.3 bed and exceeds the total of 48 ringed in the boxes in 2013. The first fledged juvenile was caught on 8<sup>th</sup> June. This is much earlier



than in 2013 and is a return to a more typical date. Retraps include 35 from 2013, five from 2012, five from 2011, two from 2010, one from 2009 and one from 2008. The latter was ringed as a pullus on the 17<sup>th</sup> May and has been retrapped 11 times subsequently.

On No.1 bed, 167 new birds were ringed, the best year since 2010 and the fourth best year on record for this species. A further 69 were caught that had been ringed in previous years, with the oldest ringed on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2009. Surprisingly, only one bird was caught in breeding condition, a male on 16<sup>th</sup> May, which was the only adult caught between 13<sup>th</sup> March and 15<sup>th</sup> August. The first juvenile was ringed on 20<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Great Tit**

*Parus major*

As for the previous species this is a common, yet under recorded, resident breeder. Most observations were made during the Breeding Bird Survey. Maximum counts were, nine on No.2 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> April including seven in song, 11 in song on No.3 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> March and 12 on No.4 bed. No records were received for No.1 bed. A fascinating record from No.2 bed was the successful nesting by a pair which nested in the stem of an old Giant Hogweed.

As with Blue Tit, ringing results indicate a successful breeding season. On No.3 bed, an above average total of 190 new birds were ringed. The eleven year average is 171 new birds. A total of 85 was ringed in the nest boxes as pulli. This is 13 birds higher than 2012. The first fledged young were trapped on 31<sup>st</sup> May. This is about three weeks earlier than in 2013 and is the fourth earliest date. Retraps from previous years include: 23 from 2013, five from 2012, four from 2011, four from 2010 and one from 2009. The latter bird was ringed as a fledged juvenile on the 12<sup>th</sup> September and has been handled 12 times since.

No.1 bed had the best year since 2010 and the sixth best year since 1995 with 97 new birds ringed. A further 38 were caught that had been ringed in previous years; the oldest on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2009. Only one bird was caught in breeding condition, a female with a brood patch on 29<sup>th</sup> April. This was the only adult bird caught between 4<sup>th</sup> April and 18<sup>th</sup> September. The first juvenile was ringed on 18<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Coal Tit**

*Periparus ater*

Coal Tits are a relatively scarce visitor and are most frequently seen along Weir Lane and in the Butchersfield Tip area. Breeding is suspected but not proven. There were only ten reports this year. The first was singing in Weir Lane on 31<sup>st</sup> May. Single birds were also heard singing here on 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June. Two were in the copse by the car park on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. In the autumn and early winter period there were regular sightings at Bollin Point and Butchersfield Tip with two on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1<sup>st</sup> September and 1<sup>st</sup> November.

On No.1 bed six were ringed in the fourth best year for the species on the bed. The first was caught on 25<sup>th</sup> June, probably from a local breeding population. Four of the remaining five were caught in September, with the final one on 17<sup>th</sup> October; all were birds of the year. On No.3 bed, after a blank year in 2013, two were ringed. This is a scarce bird on No.3 bed with an eleven year average of 1.8 new birds. The first was a recently fledged juvenile on the 14<sup>th</sup> June. The second was also a juvenile ringed on the 27<sup>th</sup> September. These are typical dates.

## **Willow Tit**

*Poecile montana*

The BTO Breeding Bird Survey shows a national decline in this species of 79% between 1995 and 2010. It is pleasing, therefore, that the Reserve remains a stronghold for the species. Birds were reported through the year on all four beds. As usual most records were from No.3 bed where they were regularly observed on the John Morgan hide feeders.

A detailed study by Allan Rustell on breeding Willow Tits in 2014 can be found towards the end of this report. The growth of Giant Hogweed makes surveying difficult but Allan has estimated at least six pairs to be present on No.1 bed and six or seven pairs on No.4 bed. Due to the hogweed no estimate was made for pairs on No.2 bed, although breeding is thought to take place; two birds were heard calling on the bed on both 11<sup>th</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> September. For the second successive year no active nests were found on No.3 bed.

Overall, the survey shows a stable population with the estimated number of breeding pairs the same as in 2013. This conclusion is also supported by ringing data. On No.1 bed, it was an average year, with 16 new birds caught and a further nine that had been ringed in previous years. The oldest of these being ringed on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2009, and another that was caught had been ringed at Birchwood. The first new bird to be ringed during the year, and the first juvenile, was caught on 20<sup>th</sup> June and no adults were caught from 26<sup>th</sup> March until 4<sup>th</sup> December, although six adults were caught during the year. On No.3 bed, it was a slightly above average year with 19 new birds ringed. The eleven year average is 17 new birds. Thirteen of the birds were juveniles. Fifteen juveniles were ringed in 2013. The first fledged date (8<sup>th</sup> June) was the same as in 2013 and a typical date. Retraps from previous years include two from 2013 and one from 2012.

## **Skylark**

*Alauda arvensis*

Most reports of Skylark are from the eastern areas of the Reserve where they breed and winter on surrounding farmland. In the spring two could be heard from No.1 bed singing in fields south of the Ship Canal. Another two could also be heard in the farmland adjacent to Rixton Paddocks. The first autumn passage was noted on 2<sup>nd</sup> September when 17 flew over No.1 bed. Thirteen were counted from Bollin Point on 20<sup>th</sup> September and 30 flew south over No.1 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> September. Passage continued in October with 48 on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 40 on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 35 on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 50 on the 30<sup>th</sup>, all over No.1 bed. Unusually, significant numbers were also counted over No.3 bed in the autumn with six on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 25 on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 13 on 28<sup>th</sup> October and 23 on 6<sup>th</sup> November.

As usual, the maximum counts were observed from Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watches with 174 on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 88 on 1<sup>st</sup> November and 104 on 18<sup>th</sup> December.

## **Sand Martin**

*Riparia riparia*

The first sighting was of three on No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> March, a relatively early arrival date and almost three weeks earlier than last year. Small numbers were then observed over No.3 bed in the remainder of March with a peak count of 20 on the 20<sup>th</sup>. In April and May the highest counts were 200 at dusk on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 175 on 12<sup>th</sup> April and 40 on 11<sup>th</sup> May, all on No.3 bed. In the early summer period only

small numbers were present with a maximum of eight on 14<sup>th</sup> July on No.3 bed. In August numbers on No.3 bed increased with counts of 25 on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 10 on 25<sup>th</sup> August and 15 on 27<sup>th</sup> August

There were no reports from previously occupied breeding colonies and the species appears to be scarcer away from No.3 bed. There were only two reports from No.1 bed with 11 flying west on 4<sup>th</sup> April and one on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. The only record from No.4 bed was five on 28<sup>th</sup> June. No records were received from No.2 bed. The last sighting was of two flying west over No.3 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> September.

On No.1 bed eight were caught between 23<sup>rd</sup> July and 11<sup>th</sup> September, an average number for recent years. Three were adults including two females with brood patches. On No.3 bed, 27 new birds were caught, a big increase on the six ringed in 2013. The eleven year average is 22.3 new birds. The first was ringed on 28<sup>th</sup> July with the last being ringed on 5<sup>th</sup> September. Only three were adults. One bird was caught wearing a ring from elsewhere.

### **Swallow**

*Hirundo rustica*

The first arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup> March when two were seen on No.3 bed. There was a short gap to 2<sup>nd</sup> April before the next sighting when 12 were seen on No.3 bed. The next day the first was observed on No.1 bed, with one seen flying west. Birds were then regularly reported, mostly from No.3 bed throughout April with 70 on the 17<sup>th</sup>. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 80 were seen at dusk on No.3 bed, possibly roosting there.

No information on breeding was received this year but birds were seen regularly around the Ship Canal jetty by No.2 bed, a traditional breeding sight and by jetties south of No.4 bed.

The largest roosts for over ten years formed in August. A pre-roost gathering of 550 over No.1 eastern reed bed was first noted on 7<sup>th</sup> July and 750 roosted there on 26<sup>th</sup> August. Five hundred roosted on No.3 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> July and on 15<sup>th</sup> August the roost had grown to 2000. Two thousand were still present there on the 25<sup>th</sup> August. Roosts in recent years have rarely exceeded 1000 and the last roost to exceed this year's total was on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2003 when 4000 roosted on No.3 bed.

On No.3 bed, 571 new birds were ringed. All were caught at the roost. This is the second highest total in eleven years, only 2007 with 665 being higher. The 11 year average is 229.5 new birds. The first birds were ringed on the 25<sup>th</sup> July and the last on 6<sup>th</sup> September. Three were caught wearing rings from elsewhere. On No.1 bed the 82 ringed between 7<sup>th</sup> July and 27<sup>th</sup> August was slightly down on the previous year, but was the second best year since 2008. As expected, the majority were birds of the year but six adults were caught including one male and four females in breeding condition.

In autumn, counts of note were 73 passing south over Bollin Point on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 100 over No.1 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> September and 23 at Bollin Point on 27<sup>th</sup> September; all these sightings were of birds flying south. The last record of the year was three seen from Butchersfield Tip on 11<sup>th</sup> October.

### **House Martin**

*Delichon urbicum*

The first sighting was of one on No.3 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> April. Single birds continued to be seen until 17<sup>th</sup> April when seven were seen over the bed. Other notable gatherings were 32 on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 36 on 23<sup>rd</sup>

April, 20 on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 30 on 7<sup>th</sup> May and 20 on 10<sup>th</sup> May, all on No.3 bed. Thereafter, numbers remained constant until August when post-breeding flocks formed. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 65 were over No.3 bed and by 20<sup>th</sup> August the count had increased to 100. During autumn migration, 100 were seen flying south over No.1 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 72 were seen from Butchersfield Tip on 1<sup>st</sup> September and 95 were feeding over Bollin Point on 6<sup>th</sup> September. The last sightings were of 10 drifting south over No.3 bed on 25<sup>th</sup> September and five flying south over No.1 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Cetti's Warbler**

*Cettia cetti*

A rare visitor to the Reserve with 11 previous records and last recorded in 2011. All were initially found in the ringers' nets and most have been caught in autumn, although one bird has summered. This year was extraordinary with eight new birds ringed on No.3 bed with the first on the early date of 14<sup>th</sup> September and the last on 1<sup>st</sup> November. There was a large movement of this species during the autumn with several trapped in North Lancashire and the second record for Scotland. Following the final ringing record, there were several sightings of what may have been the same bird near the Morgan hide until 6<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Long-tailed Tit**

*Aegithalos caudatus*

A common breeding resident found across the Reserve, often in small flocks. The first record of the year was of 11 seen on 4<sup>th</sup> January at Bollin Point and the highest count for the early part of the year was on 26<sup>th</sup> January, when 16 were seen along the Canal track. During the breeding season, three nests were found, one each on beds 1,2 and 3, and a family party with six juveniles was also seen on 8<sup>th</sup> June. During the autumn sightings became more regular with parties of 12 being seen on Butchersfield and Bollin Point and there were some high Reserve-wide counts of 26 on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 19 on 11<sup>th</sup> November and 16 on 10<sup>th</sup> December. The final field record was of 12 across the Reserve on 24<sup>th</sup> December.

The ringing team caught 134 new birds during the year, the best since 2010. On No.1 bed, 55 were ringed in what was considered an unusual year, with only 12 new birds being caught before the end of August. The following three months provided the remainder with the peak in October, when 20 were ringed. A further 12 were caught that had been ringed in previous years with the oldest from 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012. Four were caught in breeding condition, two males and two females while the first juvenile was ringed on the late date of 1<sup>st</sup> July. The ringers on No.3 bed had their best year since 2009 with 79 new, the 11 year average being 66, and the first juvenile was caught on 17<sup>th</sup> May, the earliest record for a fledgling by four days. A further 16 were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 2010.

### **Chiffchaff**

*Phylloscopus collybita*

This is one of our commonest breeding warblers, which usually winters in small numbers most years. One was on No.1 bed at the beginning of the year, on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> January, though the singing male on No.3 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> March may have been the first spring migrant. There were two on the same bed the following day and numbers gradually increased with 14 counted on No.1 bed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 59 on the Reserve on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The peak count of 60 was on 8<sup>th</sup> April and a nest was found along the main



track with six well grown young on 11<sup>th</sup> May. The peak autumn count of 27 was achieved on the Migration Watch on 1<sup>st</sup> September and the final bird of the year was recorded on No.3 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> November.

This species was caught in record numbers, with 550 ringed during the year across the Reserve. On No.1 bed a record 330 new birds were ringed, with the first appearing on 9<sup>th</sup> April when two returning adults were also caught. Of the 10 returning birds that were caught during the year, the oldest was ringed on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2010 and not caught since. During the breeding season, nine were caught in breeding condition, three males and six females, while the first juvenile was caught on 11<sup>th</sup> June, two weeks earlier than in the previous year. September proved to be an exceptional passage period with 130 ringed, far higher than any other month. The final bird of the year was caught on 23<sup>rd</sup> November.



*Siberian Chiffchaff*

*Kieran Foster*

The No.3 bed team also had a record year with 217 new birds ringed, their eleven year average being 154.3. The first was caught on 22<sup>nd</sup> March with the final two of the year on 29<sup>th</sup> November, one of which was of the Siberian subspecies, *tristis*, the second on the bed in two years. During the year a further 12 were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 2012. In the breeding season 17 were caught in breeding condition, ten males and seven females while the first juvenile of the year was caught on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

### **Willow Warbler**

*Phylloscopus trochilus*

A common breeding summer visitor. The first of the year was found on No.3 bed on the early date of 29<sup>th</sup> March and was also seen two days later. This was followed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April with one on No.4 bed. Numbers increased slowly after this with three on No.1 bed on the 5<sup>th</sup>, five on No.3 bed on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12 on No.2 on the 12<sup>th</sup>. During mid-April, counts indicate a population of 41 singing males with an additional three on nearby Rixton Paddocks. The last field record of the year was on No.4 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> August.

Generally, the ringing team had a poor year with 154 new birds caught. Although this was one more than in 2013, it was the second lowest since 2004. On No.1 bed, 126 were ringed, a further 10 were caught which had been ringed in previous years, with the oldest from 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012. The first of the year was caught on 9<sup>th</sup> April with the last on 4<sup>th</sup> September, one of six caught during that month. Twelve were caught in breeding condition, five males and seven females and the first juvenile was ringed 21<sup>st</sup> June, two weeks earlier than in 2013. The team on No.3 bed also had a poor year with just 28 ringed, compared with an eleven year average of 39. The first of the year was caught on 26<sup>th</sup> April with the final one on 14<sup>th</sup> September and the first of only nine juveniles was on 21<sup>st</sup> June.

## **Blackcap**

*Sylvia atricapilla*

This common, breeding summer visitor occasionally winters. The first of the year was found on No.4 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> March during the CBC survey, with another on No.3 the same day. There was a slow build up in numbers across the Reserve until 15 were counted on No.2 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> April. Other peak counts around this time included nine on No.1 bed, five on No.3 and 12 on No.4, giving a total of 41 singing males across the Reserve, with a further five in the Rixton Paddocks/Bollin Point area. One nest was found, on the south bank of No.3 bed, which contained five newly hatched young. During the late summer there were several single-figure counts across the Reserve with the exception of 10 on No.4 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> August. The final field sighting of the year was on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

The ringing team had a record year with 860 new birds caught, far higher than the previous record of 695 in 2010. On No.1 bed a record 334 were ringed during the year with the first caught on 24<sup>th</sup> April. September was the peak month with 131 newly ringed, though only one was caught which had been ringed in a previous year, a male from 2013. Five were caught in breeding condition, three males and a female while the first juvenile was ringed on 11<sup>th</sup> June. The last bird of the year was caught on 16<sup>th</sup> November and was clearly a migrant as it had large reserves of fat and weighed 23.7 grams. The team on No.3 bed also had a record year with 526 ringed, with the first of the year on the typical date of 5<sup>th</sup> April and the first juvenile on 8<sup>th</sup> June. Four were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 2011 and the final bird of the year was ringed on 11<sup>th</sup> October.

## **Garden Warbler**

*Sylvia borin*

An uncommon summer visitor, this rather skulking warbler breeds in small numbers. The first of the year was found singing in the centre of No.3 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, the same date as in 2013. Following this, singles, mainly singing males, were on all four beds until 21<sup>st</sup> May. The last field sighting was on No.4 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> August.

The ringing team had an average year with 38 ringed, with No.1 bed having the best year since 2003 with 24 new birds. The first, caught on 15<sup>th</sup> May, were a male and female, both in breeding condition. Only one other was caught in breeding condition, a female. The first juveniles were caught on 24<sup>th</sup> July and the final bird of the year was on 7<sup>th</sup> September. On No.3 bed they caught a below average total of 14 and the only adult was a male on 25<sup>th</sup> May. The majority were ringed during July and August with the latest on 6<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Lesser Whitethroat**

*Sylvia curruca*

The first of the year was heard singing near the sluice on No.4 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> April and there were no more records until 5<sup>th</sup> May, when birds were noted on beds 2 and 3. Two were reported near the Weir on the 13<sup>th</sup> with another two on No.3 bed on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Further May records were of singles on the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> with two counted on No.4 bed on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The only other field record after this was of one on Butchersfield during the 1<sup>st</sup> September Migration Watch. The ringing teams caught just two birds, both on No.1 bed with the first on 31<sup>st</sup> July followed by another on 22<sup>nd</sup> August.

## Whitethroat

*Sylvia communis*

A common breeding summer visitor. The first of the year was found on 18<sup>th</sup> April when three were on No.4 bed and one on No.3. Numbers built up gradually until 2<sup>nd</sup> May when 47 were counted on the Reserve with 21 on No.4 bed. Later counts around the Reserve reached 51 by the middle of May with the majority on the favoured No.4 bed, and another four in the Rixton Paddocks/Bollin Point area. Nest building was seen on No.1 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> May and a family party containing two or three juveniles was seen on No.2 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> June. Following this there were low single-figure counts around the Reserve until the final field sighting of the year on 20<sup>th</sup> September.

The ringing teams caught 133 new birds during the year with No.1 bed enjoying the best year since 2010 with 57 ringed. The first was on 29<sup>th</sup> April, with the first juveniles appearing on 5<sup>th</sup> July. Four birds were caught in breeding condition, two males and two females. Four were then caught in September with last on 18<sup>th</sup> September. There were 76 ringed on No.3 bed, slightly higher than the eleven year average but the lowest since 2009. The first of the year was on the late date of 17<sup>th</sup> May and the first juvenile on 21<sup>st</sup> June. The final one of the year was on 6<sup>th</sup> September. Three were caught from previous years with the oldest from 2011.

## Grasshopper Warbler

*Locustella naevia*

A species that is eagerly listened for in spring, the first record was on 12<sup>th</sup> April when two were heard on No.3 bed with another two on No.4 the same day. Following these, further reeling birds were reported mainly on beds 3 and 4, mostly singles, but with two on several dates during April and May. The only record away from the main sites was of a single on No.1 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> July, while the last field record of the year was on 18<sup>th</sup> July. Three were ringed during the year, all on No.3 bed, with the first on 18<sup>th</sup> April and the last on the very late date of 24<sup>th</sup> September, one of the latest records for Cheshire.

## Sedge Warbler

*Acrocephalus  
schoenobaenus*

A fairly common breeding summer visitor. The first of the year was found on No.4 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> April, a typical date, with two there the following day and four on the 19<sup>th</sup>. There were single-figure counts throughout spring on all four beds with a minimum of 12 singing males, including six on No.3 bed. This compares with 109 in 2005 and 256 in 1999, a significant reduction during the last 15 years. The final field sighting was on 30<sup>th</sup> August.

In comparison, the ringers had their best year for this species since 2003 with 185 birds ringed. On No.1 bed 71 were ringed, although the first of the year was caught on the late date



*Sedge Warbler*

*Andy Weir*

of 1<sup>st</sup> July, no birds were caught that had been ringed in previous years. Two, both females, were caught in breeding condition, with the first juveniles appearing on 8<sup>th</sup> July. The final one of the year was caught on the late date of 29<sup>th</sup> September. Three quarters of the birds were caught in the one reed bed net used on the bed. The total of 114 new caught on No.3 bed was the highest for eleven years, with the first on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and the last on 20<sup>th</sup> September. The first juvenile was caught on 12<sup>th</sup> July and it is interesting to note that only 13 were ringed before this date.

### Reed Warbler

*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

A common breeding summer visitor with most of the reed beds alive with their song in late spring. The first of the year was found on 15<sup>th</sup> April on No.3 bed and was followed by single-figure counts until 14 were singing in the north and east reed beds on No.3 on 10<sup>th</sup> May. During the spring, 36 males were heard singing across the Reserve with 14 on No.3 bed alone. The only confirmed record of breeding was of a recently fledged juvenile seen in front of the Morgan hide on 4<sup>th</sup> August. The final field record of the year was of two seen on No.3 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

The ringers experienced another excellent year for this species with 521 new birds ringed, the best year since 2011. The 165 ringed on No.1 bed was the best since 2010, a further nine were caught that had been ringed in previous years, with the oldest from 25<sup>th</sup> July 2008. The first of the year was on 16<sup>th</sup> May and 24 were caught in breeding condition, 10 females and 14 males. The first juvenile was caught on 1<sup>st</sup> July. Twenty two were caught after 1<sup>st</sup> September with the last on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. On No.3 bed, 356 were ringed, the highest total for three years and well above the eleven year average of 292. The first of the year was on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, later than in most years, a further 17 were caught from previous years with the oldest from 2009. The first juvenile of the year was caught on 14<sup>th</sup> June, an early date and the final bird was on 27<sup>th</sup> September.



Reed Warbler

Alan Debenham

### Nuthatch

*Sitta europaea*

An uncommon species on the Reserve, there were only seven records during the year. The first two sightings were both on No.3 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> June and 5<sup>th</sup> July, possibly relating to the same individual. All other sightings were from the east end of the Reserve with sightings of single birds from 1<sup>st</sup> September until 11<sup>th</sup> October, possibly involving two birds.



## Treecreeper

*Certhia familiaris*

An uncommon visitor, which probably breeds around the perimeter of the Reserve. There were only two field records during the year, both from No.3 bed, one on 29<sup>th</sup> January and one on 29<sup>th</sup> September. Most of the records came from the ringing teams with four ringed on No.1 bed between 22<sup>nd</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> October, while five were ringed on No.3 bed, slightly fewer than usual.

## Wren

*Troglodytes troglodytes*

A common, breeding resident. The majority of the field records came during the spring period when males were singing their explosive territorial songs. Maxima from the Breeding Bird Surveys were of: 10 on No.1 bed, 32 on No.2 bed, 29 on No.3 bed and 32 on No.4 bed.

The ringing teams caught 173 during the year, the highest total since 2009. The No.1 bed team reported their best year since 2010 with 55 ringed, four others were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Six were caught in breeding condition, five males and one female and the first juvenile was ringed on 20<sup>th</sup> June. It was also a good year on No.3 bed with and the total of 118 newly ringed was the best for 11 years, with the average during that period of 96.5. The first juvenile was ringed on 4<sup>th</sup> June, the second earliest date in the last 11 years.



Wren

Mike Owen



**Starling***Sturnus vulgaris*

One of the most anticipated events of the winter is the murmuration of Starlings on No.3 bed. During 2014 numbers began to build up from 1<sup>st</sup> February, when 1,000 were counted coming out of roost, the peak count was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> when 200,000 were estimated at dusk. Numbers began to fall after this, although 120,000 were still present on 2<sup>nd</sup> March and 80,000 on the 17<sup>th</sup> with a final 5,000 on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The CBC-type survey on the Reserve produced just two, on 25<sup>th</sup> April, both on the southern sector of No.4 bed and 300 were counted going to roost on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> June.

During the autumn, 501 were seen on the Migration Watch of 11<sup>th</sup> October with 630 going to roost on No.3 bed on the 28<sup>th</sup>. A small roost was also noted on No.1 bed, when 70 were seen leaving on 30<sup>th</sup> October. The Migration Watch on 1<sup>st</sup> November counted 4,837 and 2,750 were noted leaving the roost on No.3 bed on the 29<sup>th</sup>, the numbers here building up to a peak of 100,000 by 29<sup>th</sup> December.



*Starling roost on No.3 bed*

*Andy Weir*

**Blackbird***Turdus merula*

A common breeding resident and winter visitor.

The first significant count was of 26 on 25<sup>th</sup> January, spread between No.3 bed and Bollin Point. The Breeding Bird survey produced 38 present across the Reserve and as far as Bollin Point, between 2<sup>nd</sup> April and 24<sup>th</sup> May.

There were some high counts during the autumn, particularly from Bollin Point and Butchersfield with 44 counted there on 20<sup>th</sup> September, when there had also been a noticeable influx of Song Thrushes. The Migration Watches also had some high counts, with 31 on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 12 on 1<sup>st</sup> November and 13 on 18<sup>th</sup> December while there were 32 on No.4 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

The ringing teams caught 83 new Blackbirds during the year, with 29 on No.1 bed, the best year since 2010. A further three were caught from previous years with the oldest from 2010. Two were caught in breeding condition, both males, and the first juveniles appeared from 1<sup>st</sup> July. The remaining 54 were ringed on No.3 bed with the first juvenile caught on 14<sup>th</sup> June, one of 17 ringed in juvenile plumage and likely to be locally bred. Sixteen were caught during the year that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 2007.

### **Fieldfare**

*Turdus pilaris*

A winter visitor and migrant, the first of the year was a single on No.1 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. The eastern end of the Reserve produced all of the records during the first two months of the year with a maximum of 80 recorded at Bollin Point on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. The final record of the spring was on No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

The first of the returning birds were two seen flying west over No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> October, these were followed by the year's highest count, 635 seen on the Migration Watch on 1<sup>st</sup> November, other three figure counts were recorded throughout November with the peak, 588, on 8<sup>th</sup> November. Lower numbers were noted during December until the last of the year, 25 on the Migration Watch on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Song Thrush**

*Turdus philomelos*

A resident species with some migrants moving through the Reserve, mainly in autumn.

During the early part of the year, the highest Reserve-wide count was of ten singing males with four of these on Butchersfield. The CBC fieldwork during spring counted 18 territorial males and an adult was also seen collecting food along the Ship Canal track on 18<sup>th</sup> July.

The autumn Migration Watches had two high counts with 22 on 20<sup>th</sup> September, when there was also a notable influx of Blackbirds, and 47 on 11<sup>th</sup> October.

The ringing team had another relatively poor year for this species, with 46 ringed. Only 10 were ringed on No.1 bed, their worst year since 2007. Two adults were caught in breeding condition and just four in juvenile plumage, three on the same day, 15<sup>th</sup> August. Nine of the 10 were caught at the eastern end of the bed. The 36 ringed on No.3 bed was considered slightly above average and the first juvenile was caught on 8<sup>th</sup> June, six weeks earlier than in 2013.

## **Redwing**

*Turdus iliacus*

A winter visitor and migrant. The first for the year were seen on No.1 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January and three high counts were made during the first winter period with 120 over No.2 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 120 on No.4 bed on the 31<sup>st</sup> and 150 over No.3 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> February. The final spring sighting was on 30<sup>th</sup> March when two were on No.3 bed.

The first of the autumn were again on No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> October, this was followed by counts of 391 on No.1 bed and 400 on No.3, both on the following day. The highest count of the year was made on 17<sup>th</sup> when 803 were counted flying south-west over No.3 bed and 500 were seen on No.1 bed the same day in what must have been a very large scale movement. There were more high counts during early November with 513 counted on the Migration Watch of 1<sup>st</sup> November. The final sighting of an excellent year was of 25 seen over Butchersfield on 18<sup>th</sup> December.

A record 153 were ringed during the year with 62 caught on No.1 bed, an amazing total considering just 41 had been ringed during the years 1995-2013. Only one of these was ringed in the first winter period with the next on 15<sup>th</sup> October and the final bird of the year on 28<sup>th</sup> December. A record number was also caught on No.3 bed with 91 ringed there; as with No.1 bed, there was just one in the first winter period with the remainder between 18<sup>th</sup> October and 28<sup>th</sup> December.

## **Mistle Thrush**

*Turdus viscivorus*

A relatively scarce species at Woolston, which has occasionally bred.

There were 20 records for the Reserve during the year with all bar one coming from the eastern end of the Reserve or No.3 bed. The highest count was of 16 seen on the Migration Watch on 11<sup>th</sup> October

## **Spotted Flycatcher**

*Muscicapa striata*

Recorded most years on the Reserve in very low numbers, this year there were two field records, both from No.3 bed, one on 17<sup>th</sup> August and two on the 31<sup>st</sup>. One was ringed during the year, on No.1 bed, caught on 26<sup>th</sup> August. It was the first since 2009 and only the seventh to be caught on the Reserve.

## **Robin**

*Erithacus rubecula*

A common resident breeder and passage migrant, the highest counts during the early part of the year were of 56 on both 8<sup>th</sup> January and 18<sup>th</sup> February with good numbers of singing Robins on No.4 bed on both days (28 and 31 respectively). The CBC-type transects during the spring recorded 58 singing males on beds 2, 3 and 4. There were some excellent counts during the autumn, with a Reserve-wide count of 104 on 30<sup>th</sup> October, including 53 on No.4 bed alone.

Ringling produced 228 new birds for the year, the best since 2002. Ninety of these were caught on No.1 bed, which had its best year since 2006, the majority of these were in August and September when 51 were ringed. It was assumed that these were migrants moving through the site as just two of them were subsequently retrapped. The oldest retrap was from 15<sup>th</sup> May 2010 and another bird was

originally ringed in the nest on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2010. Four were caught in breeding condition, three males and one female and the first juvenile was ringed on 21<sup>st</sup> May. No.3 bed also had an excellent year with 118 ringed, including 78 juveniles with the first fledged bird caught on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and the last on 20<sup>th</sup> September, which was probably from a second brood. Of the nine birds retrapped, the oldest was from 2011.

### **Redstart**

*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Recorded most years in low numbers, 2014 was no exception with just one sight record, a female on No.1 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> August. Two were ringed on the same bed with a first year male on 27<sup>th</sup> August and a first year female on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Stonechat**

*Saxicola rubicola*

Just a single record of this uncommon species, with one on No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Wheatear**

*Oenanthe oenanthe*

An uncommon passage migrant on the Reserve, one was on No.3 bed on 25<sup>th</sup> April and the only autumn record was of one on the Canal track on 26<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Dunnock**

*Prunella modularis*



*Dunnock*

*Chris Monks*

A common resident at the Eyes, recorded on all four beds. The highest count of the year was of 27 singing males across the Reserve on 18<sup>th</sup> February and 10 were then recorded on No.4 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Reasonable numbers were found in the Butchersfield section during the autumn Migration Watches with a maximum of 12 on 11<sup>th</sup> October.

The ringing team caught 114 during the year, the highest total since 2009, with 22 ringed on No.1 bed. Seven were caught in breeding condition, six males and one female with the first juvenile caught on 16<sup>th</sup> May. The oldest to be caught on the bed had been ringed on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2008. The 92 ringed on No.3 bed was the highest total since 2009 and the first juvenile ringed on 31<sup>st</sup> May, the third earliest date for fledged young on the bed. A further 49 juveniles were ringed on the bed, indicating probable local breeding.

## House Sparrow

*Passer domesticus*

Despite the existence of small breeding populations not far from the Reserve, there are usually just a handful of sightings most years. This year was typical, with just four records received. One was in the reedbed on No.2 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> May, while another on No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> July may have been the first ever from that bed. Two were again present on No.1 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> September, with the last one noted on the farmland to the east of Rixton Paddocks on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Interestingly, a female which was caught and ringed on No.1 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> October was carrying some fat and may have been moving through the Reserve, which is unusual for such a sedentary species.

## Yellow Wagtail

*Motacilla flava*

Although small numbers breed on the farmland to north and south, this attractive but declining wagtail remains a scarce visitor. There were just two sightings of singles this year, both from the scrape in front of the Morgan Hide on No.3 bed, on 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> April.



Yellow Wagtail

Brian Burnett



Grey Wagtail

Brian Burnett

## Grey Wagtail

*Motacilla cinerea*

The Morgan Hide scrape, Latchford Locks, Thelwall Viaduct and Rixton Bridge are the favoured places for this elegant wagtail. One or two were seen on many dates though, unusually, none were noted between the end of March and early July. It may be this was down to observer oversight, as a pair usually breeds at Latchford Locks. Both ringing teams enjoyed a record year, with five ringed on both Nos.1 and 3 beds. On No.1 bed, just three Grey Wagtails have been ringed since 1995, with the last in 2000. This year five were caught, all birds of the year and over an eleven day period from 18<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> September. On No.3 bed, a total of five juveniles was ringed during the autumn. The overall total of ten ringed represents a record for Woolston and takes the total to 22 since 1980.

## Pied Wagtail

*Motacilla alba*

Much the commonest wagtail at Woolston, with breeding occasionally proved and winter roosts forming, which sometimes last until spring. Careful searching can turn up the occasional White Wagtail (*M. a. alba*) during passage periods. The No.3 bed roost, which held 31 on 27<sup>th</sup> February, has certainly benefited from the re-wetting and restoration of the reedbeds. The following evening an impressive pre-roost gathering of 96 was on the Morgan Hide scrape. Eighty were still present on 27<sup>th</sup>



March, with up to thirty on several dates through to 22<sup>nd</sup> April and finally, 20 on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. There were four records of White Wagtail, all from the Morgan Hide scrape in No.3 bed. Two were there on 11<sup>th</sup> April, with one still present the next day. There were then three autumn records, each of two, on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 20<sup>th</sup> October and 24<sup>th</sup> October. There was no evidence of breeding this year. The only significant counts from the second half of the year were of 27 on 11<sup>th</sup> October during the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip, 15 at the No.3 bed roost on 29<sup>th</sup> October and 65, again at the roost, on 29<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Tree Pipit**

*Anthus trivialis*

A scarce migrant, usually in autumn, there were three records this year, all from No.1 bed in August. The first was trapped and ringed on the 8<sup>th</sup> and was the 19<sup>th</sup> to be ringed there. Two more singles flew over on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of the month.

### **Meadow Pipit**

*Anthus pratensis*

Although there have been occasional breeding records, Meadow Pipits are predominantly a passage migrant and some over-winter. There were only single-figure counts from the first winter period and none from the breeding season. Autumn passage produced some good counts, with: 20 south over No.1 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 50 also south over the same bed on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 60 feeding on arable fields near Rixton Paddocks on 27<sup>th</sup> September and 270 south over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 11<sup>th</sup> October. The highest winter count was of 20- 30 on the fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip on 29<sup>th</sup> December. On No.1 bed, a record number of 109 was ringed this year with the first on 31<sup>st</sup> August and the last 21<sup>st</sup> September. Only four were adults, all caught towards the end of the period.

### **Chaffinch**

*Fringilla coelebs*

This resident breeder forms sizeable flocks during the winter. The winter seed crop on No.3 bed is particularly attractive to these ground-feeding finches, with 100 there on 9<sup>th</sup> January and 70 still present on 15<sup>th</sup> February. By 3<sup>rd</sup> March numbers had reduced further, with no more than 30 noted. Small numbers breed on all four beds and 11 were in song across the Reserve on the early date of 18<sup>th</sup> February. The Breeding Bird Survey produced the following counts of singing males: none on No.1 bed, 10 on No.2 bed, five on No.3 bed and eight on No.4 bed. The No.1 bed result was anomalous, as the survey was undertaken slightly later in the season and in less than ideal weather. The total of 23 singing males from beds 2 to 3 was about average, though below last year's total of 28. No confirmation of breeding was received this year, apart from the ringing data.

No.1 bed experienced its best year since 2010 with 77 ringed and a further 16 caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 25<sup>th</sup> February 2005. Nine were caught in breeding condition, five males and four females and the first juvenile was ringed on 20<sup>th</sup> June. On No.3 bed the total of 324 new Chaffinches ringed represents an eleven year record for the bed, the average being 169 new birds. This is despite the BTO reporting an adult decline of 23% and a breeding productivity decline of 8% on the five year average. The use of a new tape lure has played its part here. The first juvenile was ringed on 28<sup>th</sup> June which is quite a late date. Eighteen birds were re-trapped during the year.

The overall total of 401 ringed was a new record, exceeding the 384 achieved in 2010 and reversing the recent decline.

The autumn/winter flock using the No.3 bed seed crop was exceptional, this year, building to at least 200 by 13<sup>th</sup> November. By the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month, this had built to 250, with another flock of 100 disturbed from the west side of No.4 bed, which then flew in the direction of No.3 bed. By month end, 220 were still present, declining to 120 by 14<sup>th</sup> December and 60 by year end.

### **Brambling**

*Fringilla montifringilla*

Bramblings are mainly winter visitors and can arrive from the continent in huge numbers, in some years, when the beech mast crop fails. Although they can arrive early in the autumn and stay until late spring, they usually peak at Woolston during March. After an exceptional year in 2013, when a record count of 49 was recorded, this year was more mundane with only single-figure counts received, all from No.3 bed. The first was of two on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, followed by singles on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of the month and two on the 31<sup>st</sup>. One on 2<sup>nd</sup> February and two on the 15<sup>th</sup> were followed by singles on 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> March. The first returning winter visitors were noted on 13<sup>th</sup> November, with two again on the 15<sup>th</sup> and finally a single on the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month. The low numbers passing through the Reserve were mirrored by the ringing teams, with none caught, compared with 96 in 2013.

### **Greenfinch**

*Chloris chloris*

This resident breeding finch forms sizeable winter flocks, which can best be seen at the Morgan Hide feeding station or around the No.3 bed winter feed crop. Around 100 were present on No.3 bed on many dates during the first winter period, with maxima of 130 on 3<sup>rd</sup> January and 125 on 15<sup>th</sup> February. Smaller numbers were also present around the No.1 bed feeders, with, typically, 30 on 25<sup>th</sup> January. Eighty, on 15<sup>th</sup> March on No.3 bed, was the last significant count before the start of the breeding season. Small numbers breed on all four beds and the maximum number of singing males was 14, distributed as follows: three on No.1 bed, three on No.2 bed, four on No.3 bed and four on No.4 bed. The highest autumn/winter counts were of 120 on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 130 on 20<sup>th</sup> August and 100 on 17<sup>th</sup> December.

A total of 758 was ringed, which is very similar to last year's 749. Interestingly, with 512 of these from No.3 bed and 246 from No.1 bed, the distribution was almost the reverse of 2013 (when 301 came from No.3 bed and 448 from No.1 bed). While the No.3 bed total of 512 is the highest for the last 11 years, it is well below the 1199 ringed in 2002. There were large numbers on the bed in early autumn, but unfortunately trichomoniasis struck the flock and the numbers crashed. Interestingly, the BTO reported a decline of 36% in adult survival but an increase of 9% in breeding productivity. On No.1 bed, numbers ringed were a lot lower than 2013 but compare reasonably well with the years immediately preceding. Twenty six were caught on the bed in breeding condition, 13 males and 13 females.

## Goldfinch

*Carduelis carduelis*

This attractive finch breeds in small numbers, while mobile flocks roam the Reserve throughout the rest of the year. The highest counts from the first part of the year were of 18 at Bollin Point on 22<sup>nd</sup> February and 24 on No.4 bed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month. Unusually, none were noted in song during the breeding bird surveys, compared with 11 in 2013, though two were in full song on No.2 bed on the



*Juvenile Goldfinch*

*David Bowman*

late date of 11<sup>th</sup> July. Sizeable post-breeding flocks were then noted from all areas bar No.2 bed, with maxima of 35 on No.4 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 106 over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 70 on No.3 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> October and 120 on No.1 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> November.

Sixteen were ringed during the year, compared with 11 in 2013. It was an average year on No.1 bed, with nine ringed. The first was an adult female with a brood patch on 21<sup>st</sup> July and the first juveniles were ringed on 15<sup>th</sup> September. On No.3 bed, an above average

seven were newly ringed during the year. All were ringed on the north meadow by the winter seed crop and all but one was a juvenile.

## Siskin

*Carduelis spinus*

This agile, small finch is a passage migrant and winter visitor, usually in small numbers, and is most often seen feeding in the tops of Alders in No.3 bed or around Butchersfield Tip. Numbers were fairly typical this year and lower than in 2013. One or two were present on 19 dates, with just one higher count received. During January, five sightings were made, all from either No.1 bed or No.3 bed. On 22<sup>nd</sup> February, six were at Bollin Point, giving the year's highest count. Singles were then noted on five dates through to 4<sup>th</sup> April, again all were from Nos.1 and 3 beds. A similar pattern occurred during autumn/winter, with nine sightings of one or two and no flocks forming. The first returning individual was on No.3 bed on 28<sup>th</sup> October and the last two were on the same bed on 28<sup>th</sup> December. None were ringed for the second consecutive year, the first two blank years since 2007.

## Linnet

*Carduelis cannabina*

Linnets are "open country" finches, which have declined markedly in England and Wales while enjoying a resurgence in Scotland. At Woolston numbers were also declining, though scrub clearance on Nos.1, 3 and 4 beds, allied to the provision of a winter seed crop on No.3 bed seems to be turning this around. Although they were present on all four beds during the early part of the year, the highest count was of just 20 on No.3 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. The only indications of possible breeding came from males in song, with one on No.4 bed on 28<sup>th</sup> March, one on No.2 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> April and two close to a known breeding colony at Bollin Point on 24<sup>th</sup> May. The first significant count from the second half of the year came when 114 were counted flying over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 11<sup>th</sup> October. By mid-November a flock of 220 was feeding in the No.3 bed seed crop, with

120 still present by the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month and just 40 towards month end. Surprisingly, given the numbers present on No.3 bed, just two were ringed, one each from Nos.1 and 3 beds.

### **Lesser Redpoll**

*Carduelis cabaret*

Once a regular breeder in small numbers, they are now a passage migrant and winter visitor, which can form sizeable flocks. As with Siskins, they are most easily seen feeding in the tops of Alders, either in No.3 bed or around Butchersfield Tip. Small numbers were present from the start of the year, with the highest counts being of eight in No.3 bed on 25<sup>th</sup> January, nine in the same area on the 31<sup>st</sup> of the month and ten on No.1 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> April. The last spring sighting was of three on No.1 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> May. The first sign of autumn passage came when four were on No.1 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> September. On 15<sup>th</sup> October 48 were present on No.1 bed, with 41 flying south on the 30<sup>th</sup>. A flock of 20 on No.1 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> November had grown to 60 by 6<sup>th</sup> December. A smaller flock was regularly present on No.3 bed during the same period, with 30 on 30<sup>th</sup> November, reducing to 20 on 28<sup>th</sup> December and 15 by the 29<sup>th</sup> of the month.

The total of 76 ringed was an improvement on the previous two years (cf. 52 in 2013 and 63 in 2012), though still some way short of the 135 ringed in 2010. On No.3 bed 35 were ringed during the year. The eleven year average is 28 new birds. Thirty-three of these came in the first part of the year from 4<sup>th</sup> January – 26<sup>th</sup> April. The expected autumn passage did not occur and only two birds were ringed, on 29<sup>th</sup> November and 6<sup>th</sup> December. On No.1 bed, an average total of 41 was ringed, with another caught that had been originally ringed on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013. The majority were caught towards the end of the year with the best day being 6<sup>th</sup> December with 15. None in breeding condition were caught and the first birds of the autumn were ringed on 29<sup>th</sup> September.



*Lesser Redpoll by the Tower Hide*      *David Spencer*

### **Common Redpoll**

*Carduelis flammea*

A bird caught and photographed by Mike Baron on No.1 bed on 6<sup>th</sup> December showed characteristics of Common Redpoll.

### **Crossbill**

*Loxia curvirostra*

Breeding in extensive pine woods throughout the UK, with some years seeing an irruption of continental birds, Crossbills are a scarce visitor. The only sighting this year was of one which flew north over No.4 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> January.

## **Bullfinch**

*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

This, our most colourful finch, is a regular breeder on all four beds and forms small post-breeding and wintering flocks. High counts from early in the year included ten at Bollin Point on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 11 on No.3 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> January and 24 on No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> February. The only suggestion of breeding came when a male was in song on the north side of No.4 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> April, though this species is easy to overlook. Highest counts from the autumn/winter periods were of 15 on No.4 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> November and a Reserve-wide count of 20 on 28<sup>th</sup> November.

During the year, an excellent total of 192 was ringed, compared with 147 in 2013. On No.3 bed, the total of 136 new birds was the highest for 11 years and a welcome increase, as the last three years had shown a decline. Unfortunately this species was affected by trichomoniasis (a bird showing signs being found dead). The first juvenile was ringed on 31<sup>st</sup> May. This is the earliest date in the last 11 years. A total of 72 was ringed as juveniles and therefore indicative of local breeding. No.1 bed experienced an average year, with 56 ringed and a further 11 caught from previous years. The oldest of these was from 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010, three were also caught that had been ringed in other parts of Britain. Sixteen were caught in breeding condition, 11 males and five females with the first juveniles ringed on 25<sup>th</sup> June.

## **Yellowhammer**

*Emberiza citrinella*

It was a good year for this colourful bunting, which breeds on farmland close to the Reserve and is an occasional visitor. There were 14 sightings this year, though six of these came from a return to occasionally surveying the farmland immediately to the east of Rixton Paddocks. One flew over No.1 bed on 25<sup>th</sup> January, with six feeding near Rixton Paddocks on 1<sup>st</sup> February and two at Bollin Point on 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month. One was then in song from south of the Ship Canal, opposite No.1 bed, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, with another at Bollin Point on 19<sup>th</sup> April. Seven, along the lane to the east of Rixton Paddocks on 24<sup>th</sup> May, included two males in song, with four there at month end. There were seven further sightings from September to year end, with a maximum of six to the east of Rixton Paddocks on 27<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Reed Bunting**

*Emberiza schoeniclus*

Reed Buntings breed on all four beds and often form small winter roosts. In recent years numbers have declined, reflecting the national situation. The only double-figure count from the first winter period was of 12 at Bollin Point on 1<sup>st</sup> February. During the breeding season 21 males were in song, ten of these from No.1 bed, four from No.2 bed, three from No.3 bed and four from No.4 bed. This was significantly lower than the 35 the previous year. The continued loss of wet habitat on No.1 bed is certainly contributing to this reduction, with numbers having almost halved. A similar reduction on No.3 bed is less explicable and it may be beneficial to extend our Breeding Bird Survey on this bed into the now-accessible, re-wetted areas to see if territories have been relocated. Thirty, leaving the No.1 bed roost on 15<sup>th</sup> October, was the highest count from the second half of the year and low double-figure counts were then made, on No.3 bed, on two occasions in November

Despite the apparent reduction in breeding numbers, the ringing total of 117 was a heartening increase on the 66 from 2013, though still some way below the totals from 2010 to 2012. On No.3 bed, 32



new birds were ringed. This is a slight increase on last year, but is down on the 11 year average of 50 new birds. The first juvenile was ringed on 12<sup>th</sup> July. A total of six was ringed as juveniles, possibly indicating local breeding. Despite the reduction in habitat, No.1 bed experienced a good year with 85 ringed and a further 15 caught from previous years. The oldest of these was from 13<sup>th</sup> April 2007. Twenty one were caught in breeding condition, 15 males and six females, with the first juveniles ringed on 5<sup>th</sup> July.

## WeBS Counts 2014

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is organised jointly by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). WECG has contributed data to this survey since 1978. Counts from over five hundred sites are used by the BTO to assess trends and to aid habitat conservation. The WeBS counts were critical in establishing the Reserve's status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr		Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Little Grebe	8		13	8		6	4	4	7
Great Crested Grebe	5	12	12	16		9	6	2	5
Black-necked Grebe			4	18					
Cormorant	20	5	13	1		3	12	13	27
Grey Heron	5	1	2	8		3	7	6	5
Mute Swan	27	4	7	36		8	14	7	9
Greylag Goose			3	13		35			2
Canada Goose	56	31	10	154		166		18	19
Shelduck	29	21	24	20				1	2
Mandarin Duck							2		2
Wigeon						7	13		15
Gadwall	41	42	66	42		516	72	106	73
Teal	1100	310	123	44		220	420	530	398
Mallard	100	52	37	51		94	106	192	232
Shoveler	52	20	58	16		73	44	20	30
Pochard	6	45	23	15					
Garganey						1			
Tufted Duck	480	665	323	148		34	52	186	379
Ruddy Duck		1							
Goldeneye	2							2	5
Moorhen	19	10	3	13		18	24	37	14
Coot	19	22	15	29		221	8	10	20
Water Rail			1			2	1	1	2
Little Ringed Plover				5					
Oystercatcher			1						
Lapwing	2	100	25	4		171	5	16	8
Snipe		1	12	3		5	10	10	1
Woodcock	1								
Black-tailed Godwit							4	4	1
Greenshank						2			
Green Sandpiper						5	4		
Black-headed Gull	70	660	880	650		10	433	70	30
Common Gull	14		5				2		4

	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>		<b>Sept</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2		4	2		2	2	1	1
Herring Gull							1		
Kingfisher						4	1		1

## WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2014

**Michael Miles**

Ringling operations in 2014 were carried out in two areas of the Reserve: the east end of No.1 bed and the centre of No.3 bed. It has been widely reported that 2014 was a bumper breeding season for many species and Woolston appears to have been no exception. The grand total of 6,777 birds of 58 species newly-ringed across the Reserve was a 41% increase on the 4,802 birds of 48 species ringed in 2013. This total is exceeded only by the 7,025 new birds ringed in 2003, a year which included the ringling of 1,586 Greenfinches. Excluding this single species, 2014 was the best year since ringling started in 1980. Ringling effort calculated as the “number of ringling sessions” was about 20% higher than in 2013. This increase relates partly to the impact of weather and partly to more availability of ringers. The total of 58 species ringed represented a return to “the norm” after a very poor year in 2013. The commissioning of the duck trap on No.3 bed produced five species that were not ringed in 2013. The only species that can be considered a “miss” is Brambling. No Bramblings were ringed for the first time since 2005.

It is not surprising that in such a good year for breeding success a number of species were ringed in record numbers and these are referred to in the paragraphs below.

The commissioning of the fixed duck trap on No.3 bed, facilitated by some helpful reshaping during the management work on the bed, resulted in the ringling of 45 Teal and 28 Mallard, both record numbers for a single year. It also became clear that the Teal did not become “trap shy” as a good proportion of them were captured more than once, which will allow the collection of information such as changes in weight as they approach the start of their spring migration back to their breeding grounds in Northern Russia. It seems likely that the trap will have the capacity to catch over 100 Teal in a full year and may well generate a similar number of retraps. In recent years about 600 Teal have been ringed annually in the U.K. and less than 50 retrapped, so we can look forward to Woolston becoming a leading contributor to the U.K. totals for this species. As well as the above two species the trap produced Woolston’s first Tufted Duck. Diving ducks such as Tufted Duck and Pochard are far less likely to come ashore and enter the trap to feed than dabbling ducks such as Teal and Mallard and thoughts are already turning to the design of a trap that can be entered by swimming.

It was a good year for raptor ringling at Woolston. Two Buzzard chicks were ringed in a nest on No.3 bed, the first of this species to be ringed at Woolston. After several poor years seven Sparrowhawks were ringed, the highest total since 2007. These seven were evenly divided between No.1 bed with four and No.3 bed with three, and although catches of this species are somewhat opportunistic the high proportion of juveniles would imply successful local breeding.

After a blank year in 2013 Water Rail, Moorhen and Coot figured in the catch on No.3 bed. In large part this reflects welcome secondary success in the duck trap. Waders were represented by a Lapwing, three Green Sandpipers and a Snipe. The Green Sandpipers were another welcome side effect of the arrival of the duck trap, the groundworks for which have created a narrow channel through the reed bed across which a net can be placed when weather conditions allow. This net was deployed on five occasions and made just 15 captures, but these included a Kingfisher, three Green Sandpipers, two House Martins and two Grey Wagtails, all species caught in very small numbers at Woolston.

Catching Stock Doves at Woolston is a relatively recent occurrence, the first having been caught as recently as 2006. The five ringed in 2014 might now be described as typical. The great majority are caught under the feeders on No.3 bed in the months between May and July though the reasons for this pattern are not yet understood. Woodpigeons are common at Woolston and the ringing total of just seven in no way reflects this. These large muscular birds rarely “stick” if they enter a net. Great Spotted Woodpeckers and corvids were caught in typical numbers.

After just 47 in 2013, Goldcrests were present in significantly higher numbers and 131 new birds were ringed. Just two of these were ringed before the start of September and, whilst some of the other 129 will be locally fledged, many will be winter migrants from the continent. This winter influx varies from year to year depending on food availability on the breeding grounds. For the second year running no Firecrests were ringed. Never common, this is now a very rare bird at Woolston. Tits had a good year with productivity high in the boxes on No.3 bed. Blue Tits fared particularly well with the 382 ringed well above the ten-year average of 280. In the case of Great Tits the 287 ringed was in line with the ten-year average of 271. Thirty-five new Willow Tits were ringed. This is exactly in line with the ten year average and indications are that the population at Woolston is stable. Hirundines were caught in good numbers and the 653 Swallows ringed was the highest total since 2007. A good sized stable roost formed on No.3 bed coinciding with calm and settled weather making for very benign ringing conditions.



*Cetti's Warbler*

*David Bowman*

It was a very good year for warblers with 2,446 new birds ringed of ten species compared with 1,727 in 2013 and a ten year average of 2,121. After two blank years eight Cetti's Warblers were ringed, all in the usual area of the No.3 bed reed bed and all between 14<sup>th</sup> September and 1<sup>st</sup> November. All eight birds were aged as juveniles and these are known to make long distance post-fledging dispersal movements. At least one bird (not necessarily one of the ringed birds) has spent the winter on No.3



bed and we hope that the time is close when we can add this species to the list of Woolston's breeding birds. Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were ringed in record numbers. In contrast only 154 new Willow Warblers were ringed, the same as in 2013 and below the ten-year average of 218. Suitable breeding habitat for this species is now essentially restricted to No.1 bed and even there declining. The total of 185 Sedge Warblers ringed was the highest since 2003 but catches of Reed Warblers, though higher than 2013, were in line with the ten-year average. Grasshopper Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat hang on as ringed species at Woolston. The three Grasshopper Warblers were all caught on No.3 bed and the two Lesser Whitethroats on No.1 bed.

Part of the improvement in breeding success must derive from a return to "the norm" with respect to the start of the breeding season. The following table of first juvenile capture dates indicates that the breeding season for most species started about three weeks earlier than in 2013.

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Species</b>	1st Date	1 <sup>st</sup> Date
Chiffchaff	31 May	22 Jun
Blackcap	08 Jun	30 Jun
Whitethroat	21 Jun	22 Jun
Reed Warbler	14 Jun	07 Jul

With spring vegetation developing faster than had been the case in 2013, the resident ground feeders appeared to have more success with early broods, and again the breeding season started between two and four weeks earlier than in 2013 as the following table demonstrates.

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Species</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Date	1 <sup>st</sup> Date
Robin	3 May	1 Jun
Wren	14 Jun	30 Jun
Dunnock	31 May	22 Jun
Bullfinch	31 May	30 Jun

Wrens were ringed in the greatest numbers since 2010, Dunnocks since 2009 and Robins since 2002. The 83 new Blackbirds ringed represented a return to the ten-year average after just 54 in 2013. House Sparrows are to be found in small flocks around the edge of the Reserve but are rarely encountered in the centre of the beds. The one ringed on No.1 bed is the first since 2010. The second winter period saw a remarkable influx of Redwings and the total of 153 new birds ringed eclipses the previous best of 55 in the year 2000. In part this success results from the use of a new audio lure originally recorded in one of the Baltic Republics. Why this lure should be more effective than previous ones remains a mystery.

No.1 bed is the preferred habitat for transitory migrants and this year two Redstarts were ringed and Woolston's first Spotted Flycatcher since 2009. There was a strong autumn passage of Meadow Pipits across No.1 bed and a record 109 new birds were ringed. The only Tree Pipit of the year was also ringed on this bed. The pipit passage over No.3 bed has always been much lighter than is the

case with No.1 but the failure to catch any at all was a disappointment. Our understanding of the incidence of Grey Wagtails at Woolston has been changed by the adoption of another new audio lure, this time supplied by a fellow ringer in Lancashire. In the 34 years to 2013 just 12 Grey Wagtails had been ringed at Woolston but the use of the new lure has demonstrated the existence of a light autumn passage, presumably of birds flying reasonably high. As a result the cumulative ringing total was nearly doubled with ten new birds ringed.

Returning to the theme of high productivity, finches appear to have fared well. The 401 new Chaffinches ringed was the second highest total ever, exceeded only by 2002, and the 758 Greenfinches were exceeded only by the “freak” year of 2003. The winter of 2013/2014 was not a “Brambling winter” and none were ringed. After a blank year in 2013 just two Linnets were ringed and the 77 Lesser Redpolls ringed was in line with the ten-year average, although this somewhat irruptive species can fluctuate widely in the numbers present at Woolston. After a relatively poor year in 2013 numbers of Bullfinches ringed returned to the ten-year average but although catches of Reed Buntings also recovered there were very different results when comparing the two beds as the following table indicates:

<b>Bed</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>
No.1	85	42	64
No.3	32	24	74



*Redstart*

*David Spencer*

In view of the recovery in numbers on No.1 bed and increased ringing effort the results from No.3 bed are puzzling. It may be that the management work which is very positive when looking at the “big picture” has reduced the available breeding habitat for this species.

Two new species were ringed in 2013, Tufted Duck and Buzzard, bringing the cumulative total of species ringed at Woolston to 106. As might be expected in a record year of ringing there were a number of individual species milestones. In descending order these were the 13,000<sup>th</sup> Greenfinch, 12,000<sup>th</sup> Swallow, 10,000<sup>th</sup> Reed Warbler, 9,000<sup>th</sup> Blackcap, 5,000<sup>th</sup> Sedge Warbler, 4,000<sup>th</sup> Robin, 700<sup>th</sup> Meadow Pipit, 300<sup>th</sup> Jay, 100<sup>th</sup> Sparrowhawk and last and probably best the 700<sup>th</sup> Willow Tit.

All birds are ringed by members of Merseyside Ringing Group, licensed under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 by the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology). Ringing in Britain is supported by the JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) on behalf of the Government's nature conservation agencies including Natural England. Data on all birds ringed and retrapped are computerised and submitted to the BTO for incorporation into the national database and large-scale analyses. Readers wanting to know more of the technical aspects of ageing and sexing birds can find many photographic examples of Woolston birds on the Merseyside Ringing Group website [[www.merseysiderg.org.uk](http://www.merseysiderg.org.uk)].

I am indebted to David Norman for preparation of the maps and for helpful comments on the interpretation of the data.

**Michael Miles on behalf of the ringing team (Jason Atkinson, Mike Baron, John Blundell, Kieran Foster, Chris Piner, Margaret Rawlins and David Riley)**

## RINGING TOTALS 2014

SPECIES	No. 1	No. 3	Reserve Total	Grand Total
			2014	1980-2014
Mallard		28	28	63
Teal		45	45	69
Tufted Duck		1	1	1
Buzzard		2	2	2
Sparrowhawk	4	3	7	105
Kestrel	1		1	34
Water Rail		2	2	88
Moorhen		14	14	244
Coot		1	1	24
Lapwing		1	1	64
Green Sandpiper		3	3	6
Snipe		1	1	55
Stock Dove		5	5	29
Woodpigeon		7	7	109
Tawny Owl		1	1	15
Kingfisher		1	1	85
Great Spotted Woodpecker	6	15	21	284
Magpie	1	5	6	131
Jay	3	13	16	314
Goldcrest	92	39	131	1706
Blue Tit	167	215	382	9515
Great Tit	97	190	287	5915
Coal Tit	6	2	8	112
Willow Tit	16	19	35	716
Sand Martin	8	27	35	1146
Swallow	82	571	653	12636
House Martin		2	2	83
Cetti's Warbler		8	8	19
Long-tailed Tit	55	79	134	3601
Chiffchaff	333	217	550	6775
Willow Warbler	126	28	154	7614
Blackcap	334	526	860	9628
Garden Warbler	24	14	38	841
Lesser Whitethroat	2		2	250
Whitethroat	57	76	133	4860
Grasshopper Warbler		3	3	189
Sedge Warbler	71	114	185	5066

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>No. 1</b>	<b>No. 3</b>	<b>Reserve Total</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
Reed Warbler	165	356	521	10017
			<b>2014</b>	<b>1980-2014</b>
Treecreeper	4	5	9	185
Wren	55	118	173	5598
Blackbird	29	54	83	2548
Song Thrush	10	36	46	1181
Redwing	62	91	153	482
Robin	90	138	228	4223
Spotted Flycatcher	1		1	6
Redstart	2		2	27
Dunnock	22	92	114	3616
House Sparrow	1		1	25
Tree Pipit	1		1	26
Meadow Pipit	109		109	755
Grey Wagtail	5	5	10	22
Chaffinch	77	324	401	4725
Greenfinch	246	512	758	13027
Goldfinch	9	7	16	685
Linnet	1	1	2	1100
Lesser Redpoll	42	35	77	1836
Bullfinch	56	136	192	2524
Reed Bunting	85	32	117	6760
Others ( 48 species)				2036
<b>Total</b>	<b>2557</b>	<b>4220</b>	<b>6777</b>	<b>133798</b>



## SELECTED RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS

This section lists some of the Woolston-ringed birds that were reported from elsewhere ('recoveries') and birds caught at Woolston already wearing rings ('controls'). In addition to these birds, numerous birds ringed at Woolston were caught again ('retrapped') on the Reserve this year, some of them having undertaken long journeys in between ringing and recapture, and these all add to our knowledge of migration, survival/ mortality and longevity, habitat use and so on.

The age when ringed and method of finding are coded as follows:

- 1 Pullus (nestling or chick)
- 1J Fledged, but flying so weakly that it is obviously incapable of having flown far from the nest.
- 2 Fully grown – year of hatching unknown
- 3 Definitely hatched during the calendar year of ringing
- 3J Definitely hatched during the calendar year of ringing and still completely or partially in juvenile body plumage
- 4 Hatched before calendar year of ringing – exact year unknown
- 5 Definitely hatched during previous calendar year
- 6 Hatched before last calendar year – exact year unknown

Sex, when determined at time of ringing or finding:

- M Male
- F Female

Circumstances of finding:

- R Caught and released by a ringer
- B Breeding
- RR Alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field by ringer
- SR Sick or injured – released with ring
- S Sick or injured – not known to have been released
- X Found dead
- XF Found freshly dead or dying
- // Circumstances of finding unknown
- +F Shot

### **Mute Swan**

Z71015 3M 02.09.2013 Sefton Park, Liverpool, Merseyside SJ3787

RR 10.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 28km 87°

### **Mute Swan**

ZY7180 3M 20.12.2013 Sefton Park, Liverpool, Merseyside SJ3787

VV 05.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 28km 87°

RR 10.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 28km 87°

Typically Mute Swans do not breed until they are three or four years old and these two young males, ringed at a few months of age in Sefton Park, summered together as bachelors on No.3 bed.

**Mallard**

GC27616 4M 24.10.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
+F 18.01.2014 Warrington, Cheshire SJ6289 3km 310°

**Black-headed Gull**

EY26554 6 19.01.2013 Sale, Greater Manchester SJ7992  
RR 10.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 15km 256°

**Goldcrest**

DRX983 3F 15.10.2014 The Headland, Hartlepool, Hartlepool NZ5233  
R 09.11.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 169km 212°  
This Goldcrest is probably a Scandinavian bird that made landfall in Hartlepool after crossing the North Sea to spend the winter in Britain.

**Sand Martin**

Z174509 3 20.07.2014 Calliburn Croft, Argyll and Bute NR7125  
R 28.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 306km 140°  
A young Sand Martin attracted to the Woolston roost whilst undertaking its first southerly migration.

**Swallow**

V150883 1 (5/5) 25.06.2006 Atherton, Greater Manchester SD6702  
R 07.08.2006 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 15km 189°

**Swallow**

T606688 1 (4/4) 17.06.2014 Atherton, Greater Manchester SD6702  
R 28.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 15km 189°  
The first of these records was "lost in the system" but the second shows that eight years later the Woolston roost still attracts birds hatched in a wide surrounding area.

**Swallow**

K157286 4M 25.06.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201  
R 26.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°

**Swallow**

D141597 4 11.05.2014 near Warsop Vale, Nottinghamshire SK5467  
R (=F) 22.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 91km 283°

**Swallow**

D948040 3J 04.08.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 15.09.2014 Gautegiz-Arteaga, 43°21'N 2°39'W Vizcaya SPAIN 1115km 181°

**Swallow**

Y389959 3J 24.09.2011 Lamesley Sewage Works, Tyne and Wear NZ2656  
R (=F) 05.09.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 180km 200°

**Long-tailed Tit**

EBH073 3J 10.07.2013 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 01.09.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201 18km 317°

R 03.09.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201 18km 317°

**Blackcap**

D327472 3JF 08.09.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 03.05.2014 Queen Mary Reservoir, Surrey TQ0670 259km 148°

**Blackcap**

D327291 3M 07.09.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 28.06.2014 Fulwood Marsh, Merseyside SJ3499 33km 290°

**Blackcap**

TT10636 1 (5/5) 19.05.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201

R (=M) 23.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°

R (=M) 31.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°

**Blackcap**

Y384334 3J 08.08.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=F) 25.09.2014 Les Barthes-de-Quartier-Bas, Villefranque, 43°27'N 1°28'W

Pyrénées-Atlantiques FRANCE 1107km 176°

Most Blackcaps are relatively short distance migrants and this bird in the far south-western corner of France might have already reached its wintering grounds.

**Sedge Warbler**

L950758 3J 06.07.2013 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484

R 03.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 11km 291°

**Sedge Warbler**

D550514 3J 24.07.2013 Leighton Moss, near Silverdale, Lancashire SD4875

R 16.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

**Sedge Warbler**

D646739 3 15.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 23.08.2014 Titchfield Haven, Hill Head, Fareham, Hampshire SU5302 299km 163°

**Reed Warbler**

Y156486 3J 13.08.2011 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 22.08.2014 Paul de Arzila, 40°10'N 8°33'W Coimbra PORTUGAL 1538km 198°

**Reed Warbler**

D646084 3J 12.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 31.08.2014 Salburua, Vitoria-Gasteiz, 42°51'N 2°38'W Álava SPAIN 1171km 181°

These are two examples of the south-south-westerly autumn migration route taken by Reed Warblers bred at or passing through Woolston.

**Reed Warbler**

D948193 3J 20.08.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 06.09.2014 Scotman's Flash, Wigan, Greater Manchester SD5803 17km 336°

**Reed Warbler**

D277812 4 19.05.2013 Pennington Flash, Leigh, Greater Manchester SJ6399  
R 26.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 12km 175°

**Reed Warbler**

X925001 4F 23.07.2010 near Landgate, Bryn, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Greater Manchester SD5802  
R (=F) 14.06.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 17km 156°  
R 12.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 17km 156°

**Reed Warbler**

D277194 3 20.08.2013 Scotman's Flash, Wigan, Greater Manchester SJ5803  
R (=M) 01.07.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 17km 156°

**Reed Warbler**

Y155922 4 14.07.2012 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R (=M) 05.07.2014 Cors Ddyga, Llangefni, Isle of Anglesey SH4571 120km 262°

**Reed Warbler**

V880211 4F 30.05.2009 near Landgate, Bryn, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Greater Manchester SD5802  
R 20.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 17km 156°

**Reed Warbler**

V849947 3J 25.07.2009 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 29.04.2014 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484 11km 111°  
B (=F) 08.07.2014 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484 11km 111°

**Blackbird**

LA52711 6M 16.05.2009 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
X 20.01.2014 Thelwall, Warrington SJ6587 0km

**Chaffinch**

X928105 3M 13.11.2009 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 15.03.2014 Tarvin, Cheshire SJ4866 28km 217°

**Chaffinch**

Y156430 3JM 12.08.2011 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 15.09.2014 Warrington, Cheshire SJ6487 0km

**Chaffinch**

X930987 3JM 24.06.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 24.08.2014 Woolston, Warrington SJ6588 0km

**Chaffinch**

D950045 3M 11.10.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 25.10.2014 Kings Moss, Merseyside SD5001 20km 313°

**Greenfinch**

TT81036 3JM 21.08.2013 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 06.02.2014 Lymm, Warrington SJ6787 3km 91°

**Greenfinch**

TV09803 3JF 16.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 29.10.2014 near Lymm, Warrington SJ6685 3km 150°

**Greenfinch**

TT81279 3F 24.10.2013 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 12.10.2014 Kings Moss, Merseyside SD5001 20km 313°

**Greenfinch**

TV10076 3JF 03.09.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 19.09.2014 Golborne, Greater Manchester SJ6198 12km 344°  
(Hit window following Sparrowhawk attack)

**Greenfinch**

TP22142 3JM 20.05.2014 Woodlands, near Doncaster, South Yorkshire SE5307  
R 13.12.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 91km 259°

**Goldfinch**

X309632 3F 06.10.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 21.03.2014 Killough, Down J5233 Northern Ireland 226km 295°  
Only 89 Goldfinches have been ringed at Woolston in the past five years, with just 41 of them on No.3 bed, so we were lucky to get this interesting movement across the Irish Sea.

**Lesser Redpoll**

Y155779 5 22.03.2012 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R(=M) 28.02.2014 Petre Crescent, Rishton, Lancashire SD7329 42km 11°  
R (=M) 14.06.2014 Petre Crescent, Rishton, Lancashire SD7329 42km 11°

**Lesser Redpoll**

D327877 5M 29.03.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 14.04.2014 Branch End, Stocksfield, Northumberland NZ0661 178km 14°  
One day after this Lesser Redpoll was ringed at Woolston a Siskin was ringed by a fellow M.R.G. ringer in Birchwood some 6 km north of No.3 bed. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014 this Siskin was recaptured at the same site in Stocksfield having taken just three days to travel the 178 km.

**Bullfinch**

L408737 3F 23.10.2010 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 04.01.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 0km



**Bullfinch**

L951822 3M 26.12.2013 Great Warford, Cheshire SJ8078

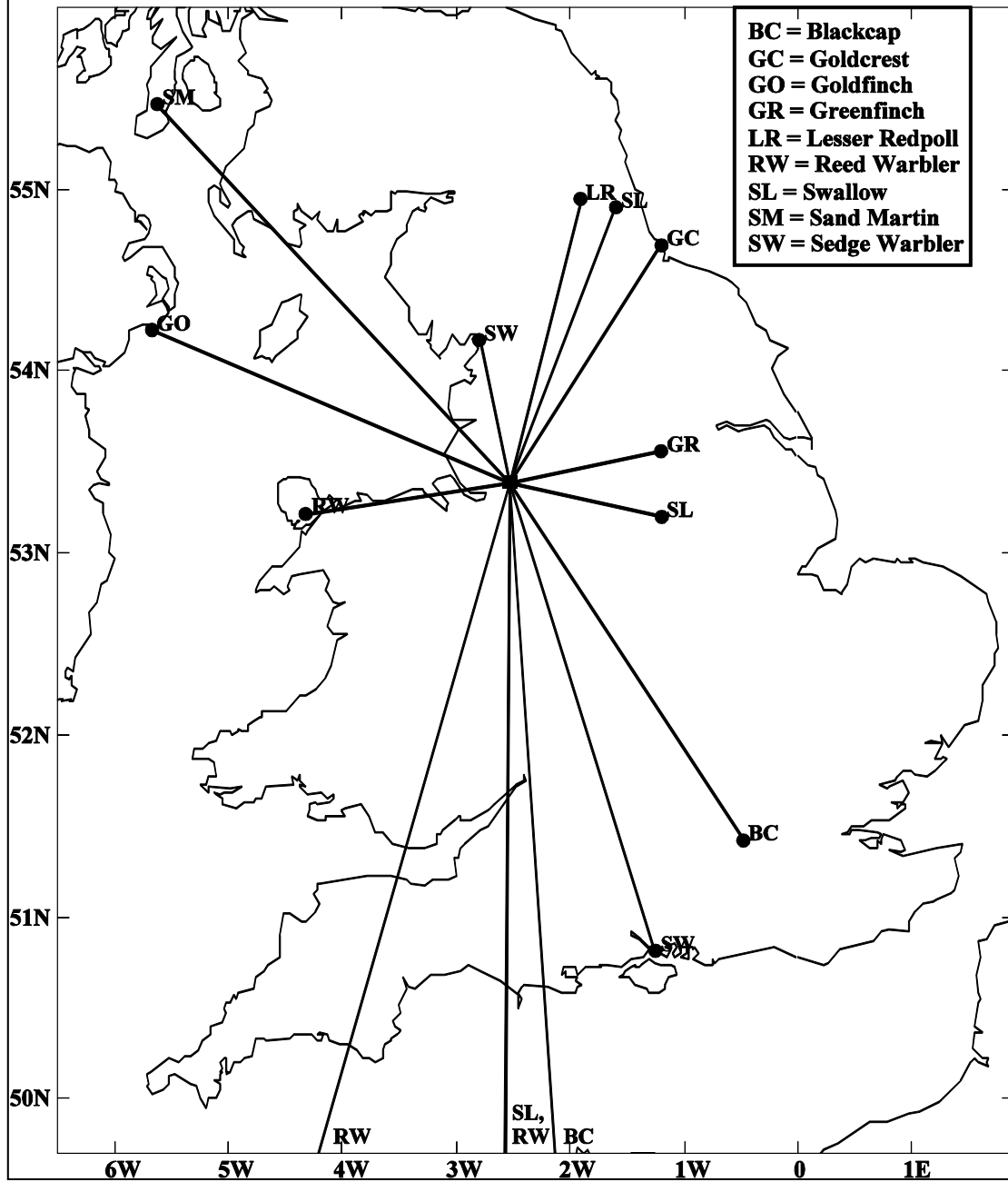
R 29.04.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 19km 301°

**Reed Bunting**

L950749 3J 17.06.2013 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484

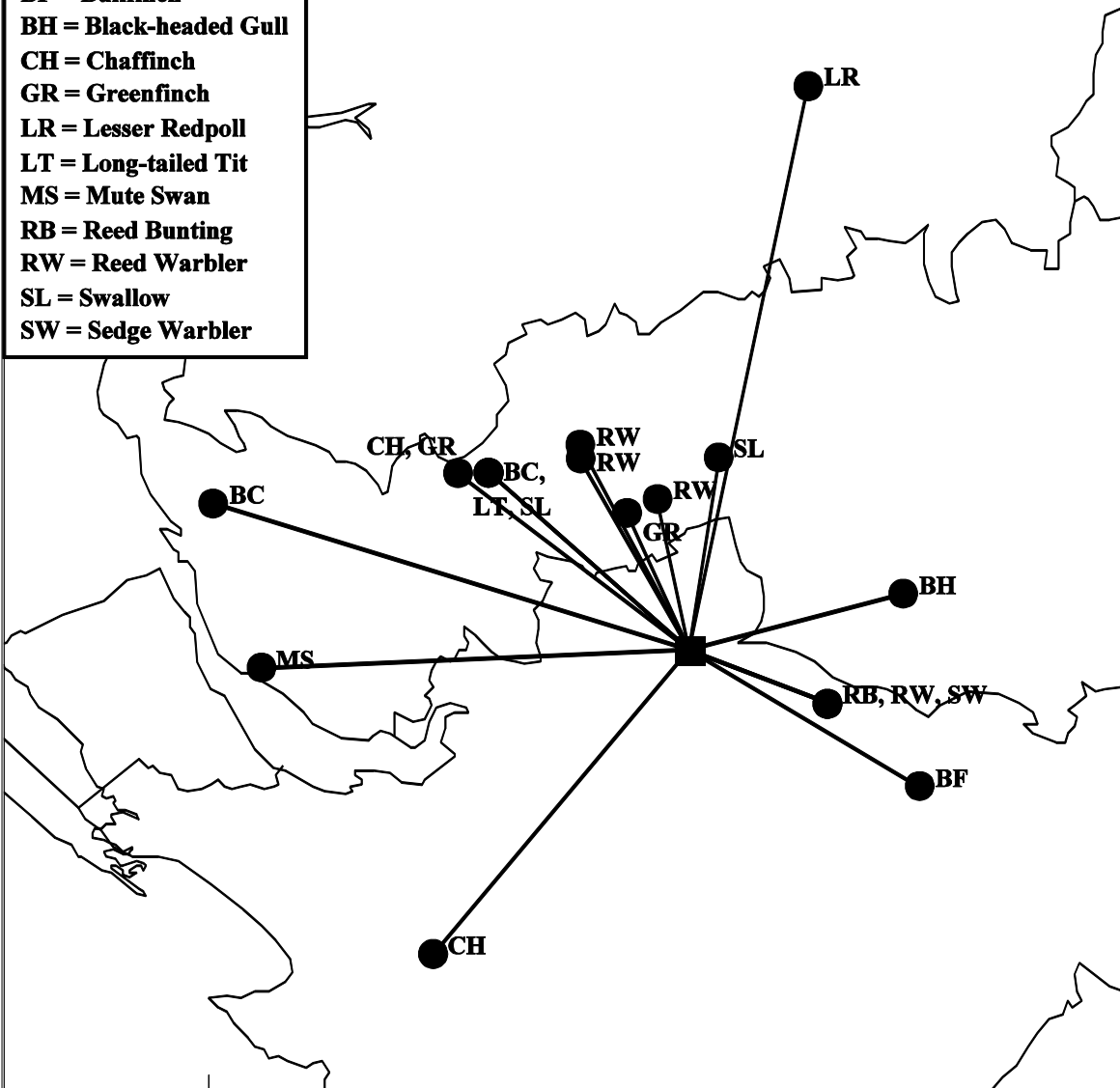
R (=M) 20.09.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 11km 291°

### Movements over 50km



### Local movements from 10km to 50km

- BC = Blackcap
- BF = Bullfinch
- BH = Black-headed Gull
- CH = Chaffinch
- GR = Greenfinch
- LR = Lesser Redpoll
- LT = Long-tailed Tit
- MS = Mute Swan
- RB = Reed Bunting
- RW = Reed Warbler
- SL = Swallow
- SW = Sedge Warbler



## MIGRATION WATCH

### Visit 1

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Spencer, Dave Steel and our latest recruits, Diane Shepherd and George Dunbar  
**Day** Monday  
**Date** 01/09/14      **Time** 0600-1200  
**Weather** A mixed bag of showers, grey skies and some brighter periods.  
**Highlights** The myriad cake selection baked by Diane and George.  
**Total** One thousand six hundred and ninety eight birds noted.

### Visit 2

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Les Jones, Dave Steel, Alan Warford, Paul Hazlehurst, Helen Allen, George Dunbar, plus latest recruits Kelly Ainsworth and Steve Dodd  
**Day** Saturday  
**Date** 11/10/14      **Time** 0730-1200  
**Weather** Dry and cool, with broken cloud at start, brighter later.  
**Highlights** The sermon on the mount - there being that many of us!  
**Total** Five thousand five hundred and eighty one birds noted.

### Visit 3

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Spencer, Les Jones, Dave Steel, Helen Allen, Brian Baird and Paul Hazlehurst  
**Day** Saturday  
**Date** 01/11/14      **Time** 0630-1200  
**Weather** Bright and dry, with a clear sky and sunny skies throughout.  
**Highlights** Seeing so many birds strutting and fretting upon their stage.  
**Total** Twelve thousand four hundred and eighty nine birds noted.

### Visit 4

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Spencer and Dave Steel  
**Day** Thursday  
**Date** 18/12/14      **Time** 0730-1200  
**Weather** Grey, wet and 'fresh', with some dry periods later on!  
**Highlights** Not Christmas shopping and devouring a huge pie (Ta DB!)  
**Total** Six thousand one hundred and thirty two birds noted.

## Woolston Eyes Migration Watches 2014

	<b>Date</b>	<b>01/09/14</b>	<b>11/10/14</b>	<b>01/11/14</b>	<b>18/12/14</b>
	<b>Time</b>	<b>0600-1200</b>	<b>0630-1200</b>	<b>0630-1200</b>	<b>0730-1200</b>
	<b>SPECIES</b>				
1	Mute Swan	4	6	2	11
2	Pink-footed Goose	0	895	505	21
3	Greylag Goose	0	0	0	2
4	Greater Canada Goose	27	261	11	2
5	Mandarin Duck	0	2	0	0
6	Wigeon	0	0	2	0
7	Gadwall	15	9	6	2
8	Teal	10	27	2	0
9	Mallard	71	141	138	126
10	Shoveler	0	1	0	0
11	Tufted Duck	2	140	18	64
12	Grey Partridge	5	0	0	0
13	Pheasant	7	24	21	3
14	Great Crested Grebe	0	0	1	2
15	Little Grebe	0	0	2	0
16	Cormorant	7	7	7	1
17	Little Egret	0	0	0	1
18	Grey Heron	8	4	2	0
19	Sparrowhawk	6	3	3	0
20	Buzzard	17	9	9	6
21	Kestrel	6	2	2	0
22	Hobby	1	0	0	0
23	Peregrine	0	0	1	1
24	Moorhen	1	2	3	2
25	Coot	0	7	1	0
26	Lapwing	131	394	131	222
27	Snipe	0	5	0	1
28	Woodcock	0	0	0	1
29	Black-headed Gull	34	234	346	106
30	Lesser Black-backed Gull	304	127	180	32
31	Herring Gull	5	0	2	200
32	Feral Pigeon	24	29	79	200



	<b>Date</b>	<b>01/09/14</b>	<b>11/10/14</b>	<b>01/11/14</b>	<b>18/12/14</b>
	<b>Time</b>	<b>0600-1200</b>	<b>0630-1200</b>	<b>0630-1200</b>	<b>0730-1200</b>
	<b>SPECIES</b>				
33	Stock Dove	14	12	12	66
34	Woodpigeon	328	1677	4393	1989
35	Collared Dove	9	1	15	43
36	Tawny Owl	0	2	0	0
37	Swift	1	0	0	0
38	Kingfisher	1	0	0	0
39	Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	2	1	2
40	Skylark	0	174	88	104
41	Swallow	213	3	0	0
42	House Martin	72	0	0	0
43	Meadow Pipit	12	271	9	6
44	Grey Wagtail	0	1	1	1
45	White/Pied Wagtail	5	27	1	0
46	Wren	2	5	5	5
47	Duncock	4	12	9	10
48	Robin	28	27	25	9
49	Blackbird	5	31	12	13
50	Fieldfare	0	0	635	25
51	Song Thrush	3	47	3	1
52	Redwing	0	0	513	21
53	Mistle Thrush	2	16	1	4
54	Blackcap	4	0	0	0
55	Lesser Whitethroat	1	0	0	0
56	Common Whitethroat	1	0	0	0
57	Chiffchaff	27	0	0	0
58	Goldcrest	2	3	2	1
59	Long-tailed Tit	2	12	3	2
60	Blue Tit	2	4	0	6
61	Great Tit	0	3	5	2
62	Coal Tit	2	0	2	0
63	Nuthatch	1	1	0	0
64	Jay	6	14	2	5
65	Magpie	3	32	6	1

	<b>Date</b>	<b>01/09/14</b>	<b>11/10/14</b>	<b>01/11/14</b>	<b>18/12/14</b>
	<b>Time</b>	<b>0600-1200</b>	<b>0630-1200</b>	<b>0630-1200</b>	<b>0730-1200</b>
	<b>SPECIES</b>				
66	Jackdaw	85	61	196	413
67	Rook	0	0	16	7
68	Carrion Crow	30	51	27	18
69	Raven	4	0	0	0
70	Starling	92	501	4837	2282
71	Chaffinch	10	26	45	55
72	Greenfinch	1	0	1	0
73	Goldfinch	33	106	55	21
74	Siskin	0	0	1	0
75	Linnet	2	114	72	6
76	Redpoll	0	0	10	0
77	Bullfinch	4	9	12	8
78	Yellowhammer	1	2	0	0
79	Reed Bunting	0	5	0	0
		<b>1698</b>	<b>5581</b>	<b>12489</b>	<b>6132</b>

## BUTTERFLY REPORT 2014

After the record numbers recorded in 2013 it was hoped that this would be another successful season, and to a great extent this proved to be the case. Species which performed well included Small Skipper, Common Blue, Peacock and Speckled Wood, whilst Red Admirals were seen in record numbers. Other highlights included the first ever Ringlet at Woolston and the return of Clouded Yellow after an absence of eight years.

The first sighting of the year was a Peacock on 1<sup>st</sup> March followed by reports of Small Tortoiseshell and Brimstone later in the month. Sunny weather during April resulted in excellent counts of both Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Numbers of Orange Tip recovered after two cold springs in 2012 and 2013 and numbers were about average.

Butterflies benefitted from warm and sunny weather in July and there were sightings of Clouded Yellow and Ringlet. Small and Green-veined White numbers were about average but counts of Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown were disappointing given the excellent weather conditions. August was a wet and cool month but the autumn proved to be generally fine with sightings of some species continuing until mid-October. The year ended with November records of Red Admiral and Peacock. Disappointments included the continued absence of Holly Blue which has not been reported since 2012 and low numbers of Small Copper and Purple Hairstreak.

This is the ninth year that the butterfly transect has been monitored and the support of fellow wardens David Bowman and Les Jones, who are prepared to cover in my absence, meant that surveys were completed in 24 out of the 26 weeks. Woolston Eyes continues to be one of the most important sites in Cheshire and held the highest totals in the county for no less than nine species.

Many records are submitted by permit-holders and fellow wardens and these are invaluable in providing detailed information about the distribution and prevalence of butterflies on what is a very large site comprising a variety of different habitats. The Annual Report of the Cheshire and Peak District branch of Butterfly Conservation enables the Woolston Eyes records to be seen in a wider context.

Finally, if any readers are interested in participating in butterfly surveys on the Reserve, regardless of level of expertise or time available, please feel free to contact me via the website.

### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

#### **Small Skipper**

*Thymelicus sylvestris*

As in 2013, this species enjoyed an excellent year. The first was seen on 25<sup>th</sup> June, which is about average. Peak numbers occurred during the first week of July and a total of 102 was the second highest count in recent years, beaten only by the 126 seen in 2013. Most were found at the eastern end of the Reserve with the northern half of No.1 bed producing 42. These high numbers were short-lived, however, and in the second half of July the only significant reports were of 12 on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 14 on the 26<sup>th</sup> on No.1 bed. The final sighting was of four on No.1 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> August.

## Large Skipper

*Ochlodes Sylvanus*

This species is never recorded in high numbers at Woolston and 2014 was a fairly average year. The first report was of one on the northern half of No.1 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> May followed by three on 8<sup>th</sup> June. A count of six on 12<sup>th</sup> June was the highest of the year; of these, three were on No.4 bed, two on No.1 bed and one on Butchersfield Tip. Two were seen a week later but the only other records were of singles on 1<sup>st</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> July, all on No.1 bed.



Large Skipper

David Bowman

## Clouded Yellow

*Colias croceus*

This rare migrant had not been seen at Woolston since 2006, a year notable for very hot and sunny weather in the summer months. Although there had been sightings at Risley Moss during July it was nevertheless a pleasant surprise to find a single butterfly on the northern half of No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> July. It was flying strongly over the area of the recycling plant. What was almost certainly the same butterfly was seen again two days later. On both dates there was a suspicion that two might have been present but given the rapid flight of this species it seems more likely that the same individual was seen in different areas.

## Brimstone

*Gonepteryx rhamni*

As usual, most records were in spring following hibernation. The first was seen on No.1 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> March and this was followed by a single on No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> April. The highest count of the year was on 15<sup>th</sup> April when singles were noted on Butchersfield Tip, No.3 and No.4 beds. One seen on No.3 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> May was probably the same individual. The only sighting of the summer brood was a female on Buddleia on the south bank of No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> September. A total of eight records was about average for Woolston.

## Large White

*Pieris brassicae*

Unlike 2013 when this species was seen in good numbers, this year was very disappointing with only seven records received. There were no spring sightings and the first was reported on 15<sup>th</sup> July. Two were found on 24<sup>th</sup> July, one on Butchersfield Tip and one on No.4 bed. Two days later five were on No.1 bed and this proved to be the highest count of the year! There were two records of singles in August and the final reports were of three on No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> September and one on 16<sup>th</sup> September.

## Small White

*Pieris rapae*

Following the record totals present in 2013 numbers returned to more normal levels but were still the highest in Cheshire. The first record was on 15<sup>th</sup> April when up to seven were present. Numbers

remained in single figures until July. A Reserve total of 13 on the 10<sup>th</sup> was thought to be of this species. The highest counts of the year occurred towards the end of the month and between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July about 80 were reported. The difficulties of distinguishing this species from Green-veined White are well documented, especially when butterflies are seen in flight and/or at a distance, and similar numbers of the latter species were present at the same time. From August onwards only single figure counts were submitted, and the last count of significance was a total of nine on Nos. 1 and 4 beds on 7<sup>th</sup> September. The final record of a fairly average year was of one on No.3 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> September.

**Green-veined White**

*Pieris napi*

This species enjoyed an above-average year with the first report on 9<sup>th</sup> April. Numbers remained low until 24<sup>th</sup> April when a Reserve-wide count of 55 was thought to have been almost entirely of this species. May produced counts of ten on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> from No.3 and No.1 bed respectively. Small numbers were present during June and early July and an increase was noted from mid-month. Up to 35 were present on the 15<sup>th</sup> and surveys of the whole Reserve between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> produced a total of 90, which was the highest of the year. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 26 were reported but thereafter only single figure counts were submitted until the final sighting of the year on 7<sup>th</sup> September.

**Orange Tip** *Anthocharis cardamines*

Early April is the normal time for this species to emerge and the first were seen on the 8<sup>th</sup> when two were on No.3 bed and one on No.4. Seven were present a week later and three visits between 21<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April resulted in the year's maximum total of 18. One of these was a female on Garlic Mustard and thought to be egg-laying. Thereafter they were only reported in single figures, the highest counts being five on 30<sup>th</sup> April and four on 14<sup>th</sup> May. The final sighting of a fairly typical year was on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

**Purple Hairstreak** *Favonius quercus*

The first sighting was of three on the Canal track near the entrance to No.3 bed on the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> July. On 4<sup>th</sup> August a further one was in Oak trees on the Canal track near the bund and four were on the south bank of No.3 bed. There were a number of reports from this latter area but no more than four were recorded



Purple Hairstreak

David Waterhouse



there. A maximum of eight was the highest count of the year. The final record of the year was on 31<sup>st</sup> August when a rather faded individual was photographed on Buddleias on the south bank of No.3 bed. Given the much greater numbers present in the two previous years this year's totals were rather disappointing but this was the case throughout Cheshire with no site hosting more than ten.

### **Small Copper**

*Lycaena phlaeas*

With only eight records, nearly all of single butterflies, this was a very poor year for this attractive species. The first of four spring records was on 18<sup>th</sup> April with others on 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> May. The second brood emerged on 26<sup>th</sup> July and there were further records up to 31<sup>st</sup> August. All sightings involved one insect apart from 5<sup>th</sup> August when two were found on No.1 bed. This year's figures were the lowest for many years but this species is notable for major fluctuations in numbers from year to year.

### **Common Blue**

*Polyommatus icarus*



*Common Blue*

*David Bowman*

This species enjoyed another excellent year, beginning with an early sighting on 15<sup>th</sup> May, and the first brood peaked at 65 during the first week of June. Only low numbers were present thereafter until a major emergence on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. The highest count of the year occurred at the end of July with a total of 270, of which 224 were on No.1 bed. This was only slightly lower than the record numbers recorded in 2013 but this year's peak came about a month earlier. Interestingly, no other site in the county held more than 50. Good counts continued through August; over a hundred were noted in the first week and surveys of the recycling plant area on the 17<sup>th</sup>

and 24<sup>th</sup> produced totals of 62 and 32 respectively. The final report was of four on 7<sup>th</sup> September, a fairly typical date. Until recent years, the highest counts of this species at Woolston related to the first brood but more recently the second brood has been more numerous.

### **Holly Blue**

*Celastrina argiolus*

For the second consecutive year there were no records of this species which is normally present in small numbers at Woolston.

### **Red Admiral**

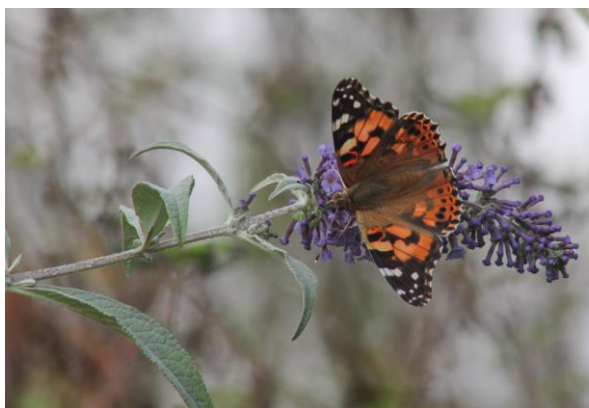
*Vanessa atalanta*

One of the highlights of the year was the record numbers of this migrant which was present from 21<sup>st</sup> May onwards. There were regular reports during June with a maximum of three. By mid-July 13 were present across the Reserve but peak numbers occurred from the end of August to mid-

September. A series of visits at this time resulted in a Reserve-wide total of 50, of which no less than 28 were on the recycling plant area of No.1 bed where they were attracted to Buddleias along the north bank. The previous highest total in recent years had been 28 in 2009 and this year's maximum was the highest in Cheshire. Reports continued throughout September and October with counts of five on 30<sup>th</sup> September and 10<sup>th</sup> October. There were November sightings of four on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and a final record on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

### Painted Lady

*Vanessa cardui*



Painted Lady

Paul Hazelhurst

The first was seen on 10<sup>th</sup> June on No.2 bed and what was probably the same one two days later. Three on No.1 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> July proved to be the highest total of the year, and, surprisingly, the highest in Cheshire. Two were found on No.1 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> August and there were September records of singles on No.2 bed on the 10<sup>th</sup> and No.3 bed on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. The final report was on 1<sup>st</sup> October. This migrant appears in very variable numbers and the last occasion on which large numbers occurred in this country was in 2009 when 46 were seen at Woolston.

### Small Tortoiseshell

*Aglais urticae*

An early record was of three on 9<sup>th</sup> March and there were four more sightings that month with a maximum of four reported. April saw a rapid increase with 50 on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 77 on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 65 on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Very few were present during May and June and there were no double-figure counts until July. Ten were found at the beginning of the month and by mid-July up to 25 were counted across the Reserve. Only single figures were reported in August and September and a sighting on the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month appeared to be the last of the year until a late record of two on 31<sup>st</sup> October on No.3 bed. Numbers were disappointing this year in spite of good counts during the spring. In recent years this species has emerged in large numbers in September but this was not the case in 2014.

### Peacock

*Aglais io*

The first was seen on 1<sup>st</sup> March and three were present on the 9<sup>th</sup>. There were no further reports until the 26<sup>th</sup> and by the end of the month five were present. Numbers increased during April to 81 on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 107 on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Very few were reported during May and there were no sightings between the end of May and 18<sup>th</sup> July when the summer brood began to emerge in large numbers. Surveys of the whole Reserve on 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> July resulted in a total of 327, which, although significantly less than the previous year's record of 600, was nevertheless an excellent count. This proved to be the highest total of the year, and by early August only about 50 were present. This year's maximum was by far the highest in the County. Around 20 were still noted at the end of August and odd ones lingered into early September with what was thought to be the last of the year on the 7<sup>th</sup>. However, there was a further sighting on 2<sup>nd</sup> October and, even more unexpected, one on the south bank of No.3

bed on 30<sup>th</sup> November, a sunny morning with a temperature of 11 degrees C. This is the latest ever sighting of this species at Woolston.

### **Comma**

*Polygonia c-album*



*Comma*

*Andy Weir*

A sighting on 10<sup>th</sup> April was the first of the year. There were no further records until 12<sup>th</sup> June when a single was found. Two more June records followed but it was not until 1<sup>st</sup> July that more than one was reported. Five were seen on 1<sup>st</sup> July and by mid-month about ten were present. No records were submitted for August until the 27<sup>th</sup> and by the end of the month up to five were noted. The highest counts of the year were between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> September when 15 were seen. This is slightly above average for a species that occurs in

variable numbers. In the second half of September up to four were on Buddleias on the south bank of No.3 bed. October saw records of singles up to the 15<sup>th</sup> and as in 2013 there was a November record when one was found on No.3 bed on the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Speckled Wood**

*Pararge aegeria*

Four on 15<sup>th</sup> April was a fairly typical start to the year and single-figure counts continued until the end of May when ten were found on No.1 bed. Slightly higher counts were submitted in June with 15 on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14 on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Numbers then declined and there were no further counts of significance until 18 were reported around 24<sup>th</sup> July. From 12<sup>th</sup> August there was a major emergence and a series of visits to all areas of the Reserve between 27<sup>th</sup> August and 10<sup>th</sup> September produced the excellent total of 138, the highest in the county this year. Of these, 42 were on Butchersfield Tip, 32 on No.1 bed and 27 on No.4 bed. This is only slightly less than the record count of 164 in 2013 and is the second highest ever recorded at Woolston. After this peak no more than ten were reported although sightings continued until 11<sup>th</sup> October which is about normal for this species.

### **Gatekeeper**

*Pyronia tithonus*

The beginning of July usually marks the emergence of this common species, and as expected the first appeared on the 1<sup>st</sup> when 29 were found. Numbers increased rapidly and by the 10<sup>th</sup> a total of 336 was present. The highest counts of the year were towards the end of July and surveys of the whole Reserve between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> found 642. Of these about 280 were on No.4 bed and 150 on No.1 bed. Given the excellent conditions during July numbers were slightly disappointing, especially when compared to the 1600 recorded in 2013. As usual numbers decreased into August and after a count of 120 on the 5<sup>th</sup> very few were reported with the last sighting on the 20<sup>th</sup>. This represents a fairly average year for a species which is invariably plentiful at Woolston, but as usual the Reserve held by far the largest number in Cheshire.

## **Meadow Brown**

*Maniola jurtina*

A first report of seven on 12<sup>th</sup> June was typical and there was a rapid increase with 82 on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Peak numbers were recorded in the first ten days of July when 231 were found during a series of visits to all areas of the Reserve. As usual the eastern end was the most productive and over half the total was on No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip. The uncut grassy areas in this part of the Reserve are particularly favoured by this species. Although numbers were probably about average they compare unfavourably with the record counts recorded in 2012 and 2013. Butterflies remained plentiful throughout July and 174 were counted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. By early August less than a hundred were present with 83 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and only 18 on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Very few remained to the end of the month and the final record was of one on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

## **Ringlet**

*Aphantopus hyperantus*

This species has been expanding its range northwards throughout Cheshire in recent years and although it has been reported in nearby areas such as Moore Nature Reserve it had never been seen at Woolston. It was very pleasing therefore, although not totally unexpected, to find one in the south-east corner of No.2 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> July. This was the only sighting of the year but given the expansion of its range it may well be that in future years this butterfly establishes itself as a breeding species. It remains a welcome addition to the Woolston list and is the third new species to be added in the past two years.



*Woolston's first Ringlet*

*David Hackett*

## **Dave Hackett**

## ODONATA REPORT 2014

The following review of the Dragonflies recorded at Woolston this season is the first for a few years and I hope that it complements the other records contained in the Annual Report. It is based to a large extent on the records and information held on the Group's website, individual records passed to me, and entries in the Log Book.

Sixteen species were recorded this year, commencing with Azure Damselflies and Broad-bodied Chasers on 16<sup>th</sup> May from No.3 bed. During the rest of the spring and the early summer period a variety of damselflies and the odd dragonfly were reported from No.3 bed. However, the greatest variety of dragonfly records throughout the summer period come from No.1 bed, at the eastern end of the Reserve. It is no coincidence that these records resulted from several surveys conducted at the New Pool in particular by a group of permit holders and Wardens. The season continued into the autumn with sightings from across the Reserve, ending on 11<sup>th</sup> October with a Migrant Hawker.

Dragonflies are most active during warm sunny days and this year we were blessed with a number of these from May onwards, encouraging the first damselflies to be on the wing. Sunny conditions with blue skies prevailed during the surveys on No.1 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> June, when eleven different species were observed. The weather was warm on 12<sup>th</sup> July and even hotter by the 26<sup>th</sup> when No.1 bed was revisited, and at least eight species were recorded. The weather conditions remained favourable during August and into September and on the final visit to the New Pool on 13<sup>th</sup> September the sun shone again on a beautiful early autumn morning.

Many thanks to all those who submitted their records and photographs to the website and also for entries in the Log Book, without which this Report would not have been possible. Last but not least, I am grateful to the Wardens for giving me and my fellow permit holders access to the pools on No.1 bed, on those lovely sunny Saturday mornings.

### Species Accounts

#### **Banded Demoiselle**

*Calopteryx splendens*

These stunning damselflies have coloured wings and are usually seen beside slow-moving lowland watercourses and even Canals. The male is metallic blue-green with a blue-black band across the wings. Females are pale green. The species has been recorded at Woolston increasingly since 2006. The earliest record this year came from Rixton Paddocks, at the eastern end of the Reserve, when a male was spotted on 31<sup>st</sup> May alongside the Ship Canal. There was an unusual sighting on 11<sup>th</sup> June when a male was found and photographed by David Spencer at the Rotary Hide on No.3 bed. The next record on 14<sup>th</sup> June was again from the Ship Canal when one was present at Thelwall Viaduct. There was another record from the No.1 bed area on the 21<sup>st</sup> June when two were found. The River Mersey, adjacent to the Weir, has often been a good place to spot this species and I recall seeing a male fluttering alongside the vegetation there on one occasion during the summer.





*Banded Demoiselle*

*David Bowman*

**Large Red Damselfly**

*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

This common early emerging breeding species seems to have been over-looked this year, with no records received.



*Emerald Damselfly*

*David Spencer*

**Emerald Damselfly**

*Lestes sponsa*

These rather delicate looking damselflies have metallic-green bodies and usually rest with the wings well-spread at around 45 degrees to the body. They are relatively common and have been recorded on the Reserve since 1990. All four records this year came from the New Pool on No.1 bed. On 21<sup>st</sup> June two were noted followed by 12 in the same area on 12<sup>th</sup> July. During the visit on the 26<sup>th</sup> July another two were recorded. The last



record for the year was on the 13<sup>th</sup> September when again two were noted.

### **Azure Damselfly**

*Coenagrion puella*



*Azure Damselfly*

*Andy Weir*

One of the most common of the blue damselflies which are abundant in early summer. Both sexes have narrow blue shoulder stripes and the male has a characteristic black U shape at the top end of the abdomen. The females are green with extensive black markings. They were first sighted this year on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> May and again on the same bed on 21<sup>st</sup> May when the observer noted “scores” ovipositing by the footbridge, during an afternoon visit. The

next record dated 26<sup>th</sup> May, also from No.3 bed states that 10 were present. A photograph of a male, taken on 27<sup>th</sup> May by Andy Weir, was submitted to the website. Numbers peaked on 31<sup>st</sup> May when during a survey 100 were estimated to be present on a sunny morning at the New Pool on No.1 bed. The species was recorded again on subsequent visits to No.1 bed on both 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> June when 50 were noted on the latter date. The final sighting this year was on 5<sup>th</sup> July.

### **Common Blue Damselfly**

*Enallagma cyathigerum*

Another of the most common damselflies which has been recorded at Woolston since records began in 1986. Both sexes have broad shoulder stripes and the male has a spot similar to a table tennis bat at the top end of the abdomen. The females occur as either blue or a dull green colour. There were five records this year. From the footbridge on to No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> May “scores” were seen to be ovipositing along with Azure Damselflies. When the New Pool on No.1 bed was visited on 21<sup>st</sup> June two were found. A report by a permit holder from No.3 bed for 22<sup>nd</sup> June mentioned “five blue damselflies”. There was further sighting of this species on 5<sup>th</sup> July, and finally the report for 26<sup>th</sup> July from the New Pool on No.1 bed probably included this species when “scores of the commoner damselflies” were noted.

### **Blue-tailed Damselfly**

*Ishnura elegans*

This is an abundant and widespread damselfly which is likely to be the most common across the Reserve. The males have a bright blue spot at the tail on an otherwise dark body but the females have five colour forms. The first sighting, dated 26<sup>th</sup> July, came from No.3 bed. An entry in the Log Book for 29<sup>th</sup> May mentions a “Green phase type”, which was spotted by a permit holder on the path of No.2 bed. A count of around 100 at the New Pool on No.1 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> May was a good record. However, the count of 200 recorded when the New Pool was once again surveyed on 21<sup>st</sup> June was

the maximum number this season. Two photographs, submitted to the website by Andy Weir on 21<sup>st</sup> June, show both male and immature forms of this species. The last record for this species was on 13<sup>th</sup> July when about eight were found, on No.3 bed, by a permit holder.

### **Red-eyed Damselfly**

*Erythromma najas*

As the name suggests both sexes of this species have reddish coloured eyes. The male has the more striking burgundy-red eyes and can be more easily identified. The footbridge on to No.3 bed seems to be a good place to see this species as they rest on the floating vegetation below. Seven records in total were received from 11<sup>th</sup> June onwards. Six were recorded here on 14<sup>th</sup> June and 10 on 16<sup>th</sup> June, followed by two on 21<sup>st</sup> June. On 12<sup>th</sup> July three were noted and more were present on 20<sup>th</sup> July. The last sighting was on 26<sup>th</sup> July when seven were recorded.

### **Common Hawker**

*Aeshna juncea*

A large dark blue or brown coloured dragonfly with either blue (male) or yellow (female) paired dots along the abdomen. Despite the name it is uncommon on the Reserve and we had just one record this year when one was spotted on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, during a Balsam-pulling session on No.3 bed.

### **Migrant Hawker**

*Aeshna mixta*

A smaller dark blue or brown dragonfly, again with blue or yellow paired dots, depending on the sex. However a narrow yellow triangle at the top of the abdomen aids identification. At one time this species was a true migrant but it has increased its range and is now a regular at Woolston. It was recorded on several dates this year beginning with a single on 26<sup>th</sup> July on No.3 bed. Another was spotted at Butchersfield Tip on 9<sup>th</sup> August followed by sightings on No.3 bed of a female on 14<sup>th</sup> August and a male on 23<sup>rd</sup> August. Records continued throughout September beginning with three on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and two on the 3<sup>rd</sup> both on No.3 bed. More were seen on No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> September whilst a female was found near the Loop of No.4 bed. Two were recorded on No.4 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> September and another was photographed by David Bowman on No.3 bed on the 9<sup>th</sup>. On a visit to No.1 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> September six were found. A male was observed on the same date resting on bracken along the south path of No.3 bed whilst three were recorded on



*Migrant Hawker*

*David Bowman*

No.2 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> September. I also found a record of this species in the Log Book for 30<sup>th</sup> September. Sightings continued into October when six were noted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the last record was of a single recorded on 11<sup>th</sup> October on No.3 bed.

### **Southern Hawker**

*Aeshna cyanea*

A large and colourful dragonfly with characteristic apple-green headlights on the thorax. They are an inquisitive insect and will often fly close to the observer. They have only been recorded in small numbers on the Reserve in the past. Typically it was recorded only once this year on 8<sup>th</sup> September when two were found on No.4 bed.

### **Brown Hawker**

*Aeshna grandis*

Another large dragonfly which is aptly named as it has a brown abdomen, amber- tinted wings and has two yellow stripes on the thorax. It has been recorded regularly across the Reserve in the past. There were nine records this year from 5<sup>th</sup> July onwards when three were noted. During the survey on 12<sup>th</sup> July at the New Pool on No.1 bed there was a maximum count of 12. The species was noted on No.3 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> July and four were counted during the visit on 26<sup>th</sup> July to the No.1 bed pools. There were further sightings on No.3 bed for 6<sup>th</sup> August and 4<sup>th</sup> September and at least one was also present on No.4 bed on the latter. Five were recorded during the visit to No.1 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> September. The last record this year was on 26<sup>th</sup> September when two were noted on No.2 bed.

### **Emperor Dragonfly**

*Anax imperator*

The largest British dragonfly and one of the most attractive hawkers. The males are bright blue with a green thorax and seem to fly continually over the pond in defence of their territory. The females are mostly a duller green colour and are less obtrusive. They were recorded on four dates this season, all at the No.1 bed pools. The first sighting was on 14<sup>th</sup> June at the Viaduct Pools and on 21<sup>st</sup> June two males and a female were recorded at the New Pool. A maximum count of six was recorded at the New Pool during the survey on a sunny 12<sup>th</sup> July morning. Five were present on 26<sup>th</sup> July when a further visit was made to No.1 bed and this was the last record of the summer.

### **Four-spotted Chaser**

*Libellula quadrimaculata*

This is a dull brown and black dragonfly with four distinctive dark spots on the wings. It has always been common at Woolston in the past and was recorded on seven dates this season. The first record was on 20<sup>th</sup> May when one was seen by a permit holder on the path of No.2 bed. Two were found on 31<sup>st</sup> May when the No.1 bed pools were visited. This figure increased to a maximum count of 20 on 14<sup>th</sup> June at the New Pool on No.1 bed and four were present there on 21<sup>st</sup> June. The following day David Waterhouse photographed one at the Wildflower Meadow on No.3 bed. On 5<sup>th</sup> July a count of 12 was recorded on the Reserve and finally the New Pool had four present on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

**Broad-bodied Chaser***Libellula depressa*

Both sexes of this species have a brown thorax and are broad bodied with yellow markings down the sides but can be told apart by the colour of their abdomen. The male is pale powder-blue whilst the female is yellow-brown and both have dark patches at the base of the wings. It was not until 2006 that this species was first discovered on the Reserve. However, ten were found this year on two separate dates. The first sighting was on 16<sup>th</sup> May when two were spotted on No.3 bed. A good count was obtained during a visit to the New Pool on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> June when eight were recorded.

**Black-tailed Skimmer***Orthetrum cancellatum*

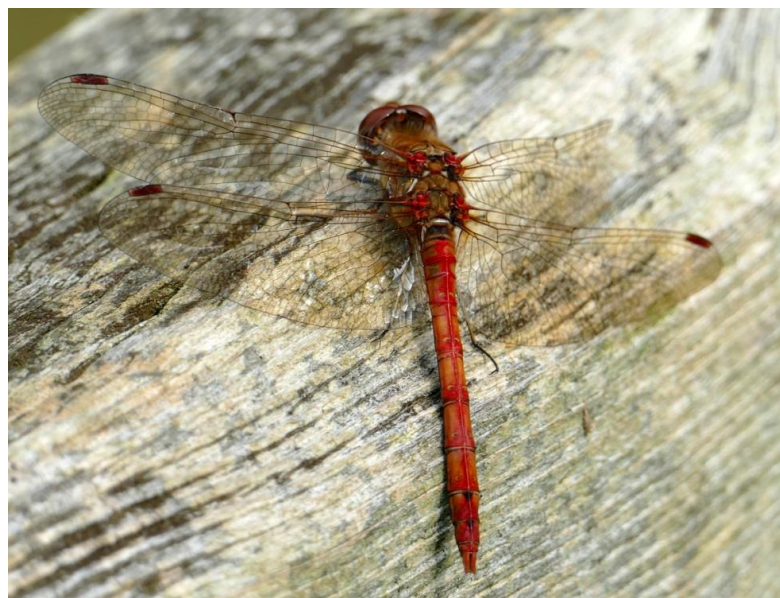
This is another dragonfly which has expanded its range northwards in recent decades and was not recorded at Woolston until 2006. The male's body is mostly a powder-blue colour tapering to a black tail. Female and immature insects are yellowish with two black stripes on the top of the abdomen, giving a ladder effect. The first record this year was from No.1 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> May and a photograph was duly submitted to the website. On 14<sup>th</sup> June six were found in the same location with two at the New Pool on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> June. There were further sightings in July beginning on the 5<sup>th</sup> when five were present in the area and the survey on 12<sup>th</sup> July at the New Pool produced a maximum count of 10. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July several were noted on No.3 bed and the last record was on 26<sup>th</sup> July when five were counted at the New Pool.

**Black Darter***Sympetrum danae*

This is now a rare dragonfly on the Reserve. The last confirmed breeding was in 1993 and 1994. In recent years it has been recorded infrequently on No.1 bed and in 2013 it was recorded on 10<sup>th</sup> August at the New Pool but no records were submitted for 2014.

**Common Darter***Sympetrum striolatum*

This small and active dragonfly is aptly named and can be found almost anywhere across the Reserve. The male has an orange-red body whilst the females are usually a dull ochre colour. There were twelve records this season from 14<sup>th</sup> June onwards. At the New Pool on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> June four were noted. The next records came from No.4 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> August and from No.1 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> August. Early September had a few sightings on No.3 bed but a maximum

*Common Darter*

David Bowman



count of 10 was recorded on 8<sup>th</sup> September when No.4 bed was visited again. Eight were seen at the New Pool on 13<sup>th</sup> September. Another five were found on 30<sup>th</sup> September and the last sighting was on 2<sup>nd</sup> October when a total of six was counted.

### **Ruddy Darter**

*Sympetrum sanguineum*

This is a very small red-black dragonfly which is much less common at Woolston. Mature males have a constricted blood-red abdomen with a clubbed tip, whilst females are ochre- yellow with black markings on the sides.



*Ruddy Darter*

*David Bowman*

Both sexes have entirely black legs which is a diagnostic feature. All six records came from No.1 bed beginning with the first on 5<sup>th</sup> July. When the New Pool was surveyed on 12<sup>th</sup> July a count of four was recorded. The species was present in the same area of the Reserve on 26<sup>th</sup> July when two were found, with another photographed on 9<sup>th</sup> August. The final record of the season on 13<sup>th</sup> September produced a maximum count of seven, once again on No.1 bed.

### **Brian Baird**



*Blushing Bracket Fungus (Daedaleopsis confragosa) on Willow trunk*

*Douglas Buchanan*



*Fly Agaric Fungus (Amanita muscaria) on No.1 bed*

*David Hackett*



## Breeding Willow Tits in 2014

### No. 4 Bed

1. 8/4 Eventually found a pair excavating in the south-centre part of the bed. Cavity in a willow stump about 1.2m high.  
24/4 Could discern nest material and feathers in the cavity, but worried as no birds present. Very tricky to reach site because Hogweed has exploded in growth.  
19/5 The Hogweed was extremely high and hazardous. Through my endoscope I could see the nest held chicks. Eggs may have been covered on my last visit. I did not check the site again because of the state of the Hogweed.
2. 8/4 Found three fresh excavations on the east side of the Loop, two of which were not used. The third was 0.92m high in a willow stump where I watched a bird excavating in 2012. No birds present  
15/4 I could see nest material in the cavity. Eventually a Willow Tit came and fed nearby, but was totally silent and although I watched for some time it did not enter the site.  
24/4 Through my endoscope I could see 5/6 eggs. No birds were present during my visit.  
15/5 I could discern small young through my endoscope. An adult visited the nest four times with morsels of food. This bird was extremely tame and quiet.  
27/5 The nest cavity was intact and I could not see any eggs or dead chicks through my endoscope and therefore conclude a successful fledge.
3. 27/4 This nest was just outside the western boundary of No.4 bed on what is described as the old landfill site. It was 1.7m high in a medium-size stump in a tree with bark similar to a Plane. Through my endoscope I could see nest material but no eggs. No birds visited the site although I did have a bird in the general area previously on two occasions.  
14/5 The cavity was extremely difficult to examine through my endoscope but could still see material with no eggs, unless covered. No birds in the vicinity  
27/5 By using my endoscope I could see the nest was obviously abandoned. There was a large slug plus woodlice in the chamber. A real puzzle as to at what stage this nest failed. Again, no birds seen in the general vicinity.

### No.2 Bed

1. 14/5 Mike Lloyd showed me a nest hole he had found being excavated by the birds in the centre of the bed around mid-April. Unfortunately the chamber had been drilled out by a Woodpecker.

### No.1 Bed

1. 9/4 Found a fresh excavation about 8cm deep and 1.68m high in a decrepit willow stump with many woodpecker piercings. The site was at the east end of No.1 bed. Despite a watch no birds visited.  
16/4 Wisps of material protruding from the entrance. The cavity which is now about 15cm deep was difficult to negotiate but the endoscope revealed definite material. No birds present.  
25/4 The endoscope photo revealed one egg, but it appeared very small, pale with faint spots like a typical Blue Tit. Alarmingly, there was a pair of Blue Tits demonstrating nearby. I watched and one of the Blue Tits came very close to the hole but didn't enter.  
27/4 The endoscope revealed an egg with probable wood chips in the nest from a possible woodpecker piercing. After 20 minutes a pair of Blue Tits appeared, one carrying material, but I didn't see it enter.

19/5 The cavity had been broken into in typical Great Spotted Woodpecker style with two gaping holes. The nest material had been completely removed with the remnants of three eggs resting on the bare base of the cavity. One sucked, one pierced (with fresh yolk) and one whole. They were smallish with light red freckles and surely Blue Tits. I have no doubt that the site was excavated by Willow Tits, then usurped or taken over by the Blue Tits and subsequently predated by the woodpecker.

## **SUMMARY**

Five active nests were found on the Reserve. Two were probably successful, one deserted, one predated and one probably usurped then predated.

No. 4 Bed: In addition to the nests described above, ML found a trial boring with birds in the vicinity of the north- centre of the bed. I watched birds behaving suspiciously at the west side of the Loop. I also found excavations in the old landfill site. In addition I watched birds in previous territories around the north-east corner without success. Estimate probably six or seven pairs.

No.3 Bed: I visited a few times early in the season but made unproductive searches and hardly heard a bird, so decided to concentrate on other areas.

No.2 Bed: Due the explosion in Hogweed growth and time factor I was unable to dedicate due effort to this area.

No.1 Bed: Most frustrating. I had birds calling from four separate areas and tried to track them on several occasions in known territories, but was unable to find a nest other than the one described above. Further disappointment was the fact that, this year, I did not locate any birds in the vicinity of the Viaduct Pools or in the willow scrub (now threatened by the 'wall of landfill') just before the first large pool. I have found several nests here in the past. However, I did find quite a deep, fresh excavation in the large dead Elder, by the track adjacent to the Viaduct Pools.

I still consider this bed to be a stronghold and estimate at least six pairs.

**Allan Rustell**

## HETEROPTERA & DIPTERA SURVEYS

Last year's WECG report contained some of the first results from a new programme of surveys on the heteroptera (true bugs) and diptera (true flies) across a range of sites and habitats in Warrington and North Cheshire. This work has continued during 2014 so that a cumulative total of 4607 records has been amassed covering 552 species across 18 sites. These records have been submitted to the relevant national recording schemes. The national list for the bugs covered by these schemes contains 511 species, of which I have now found 108. For the diptera groups covered by the surveys, there is a national total of 2079 species of which 444 have now cropped up in these surveys. It should be noted that the diptera groups covered are a minority of the total British list which now stands at just over 7000. They are groups for which identification is relatively easy with readily available literature – thus they are better recorded and there is more information about the ecology of many of them to compare with the results of the present surveys.

Two further visits were made to Woolston Eyes in 2014. The first was on 9<sup>th</sup> March, when nine species were added to the list from 2013: during this survey the path from the weir was followed to the Ship Canal and then onwards ending on No.4 bed. In the second survey, at the height of the season, a further 66 species were added from a circuit of the paths on No.3 bed. The total number of species from all three surveys is 122. The new species are listed in the tables below, which also include the total number amongst the 18 sites surveyed where each was found. Descriptive notes are given for the less common species, such as those which I have not yet recorded elsewhere or which have a national scarcity designation. Comments on previous records refer to data available from rECOrd or from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway. There may be other records in the literature or unpublished sources. As always, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Except for the shieldbug nymph in the last section, the photographs in this report have been taken from Internet sources and are for illustrative purposes only, not records of the Woolston Eyes specimens. For most of the unusual species, voucher specimens have been kept.

### Heteroptera

Woolston Eyes has been particularly fruitful for this group with a cumulative total of 36 amounting to 33% of the 108 species seen across all 18 sites. This is probably attributable to the large expanses of grassland sheltered by the belts of trees giving relatively warm conditions. The heteroptera generally favour hot and dry conditions, so although none of the species are nationally rare or scarce, several are approaching the limits of their northern spread in Cheshire and South Lancashire.

The only new shieldbug was the predatory Forest Bug *Pentatoma rufipes* which turns up in a wide range of habitats. The plant bug *Deraeocoris flavilinea* (see right) is an interesting case: it was first found in Britain only in 1996 at Walthamstow reservoirs and has gradually spread from the south. The earliest records I have found for Lancashire and Cheshire are from 2011, and I recorded it myself at Lancaster in 2013. There is also a record from Glasgow in 2013. The main foodplants are sycamore and field maple. Although “climate change” is often cited as a reason for the northwards spread of insect species, there must surely be other factors at work in this rapid spread and indeed in the initial colonisation – in fact there seem to be fewer records south of London.



Of the three species which I have so far only recorded at Woolston Eyes, *Orius majusculus* is only about 3mm long and is small and brown. Although the size does separate it from very similar but smaller species this is not a totally reliable character and so I have added the qualifier “cf.” (Latin *confer* = “compare”). These difficulties may account for the apparently very small number of records of this genus in the north-west.



According to the British Bugs website, *Orthonotus rufifrons* (see left) is fairly common throughout England and Wales on nettles, often in damp woodland. However, it is not listed on the 2011 checklist published by the Lancs and Cheshire Entomological Society, nor are there any records on rECORd or the NBN Gateway. The species is sexually dimorphic with the females having short wings and appearing rather antlike - my single specimen was a male (right-hand picture).

Even more antlike is *Pithanus maerkelii* (right) in which both sexes usually have very short wings (see right) as was the female found in the survey. This species was recorded in Lancashire and Cheshire before 1970.



Recording Scheme	Species	Number of sites
<b>SHIELDBUGS &amp; ALLIES</b>	<i>Pentatoma rufipes</i>	8
<b>PLANT BUGS &amp; ALLIES</b>	<i>Anthocoris nemoralis</i>	7
	<i>Closterotomus norwegicus</i>	7
	<i>Deraeocoris flavilinea</i>	5
	<i>Dicyphus globulifer</i>	2
	<i>Drymus sylvaticus</i>	2
	<i>Grypocoris stysi</i>	4
	<i>Leptopterna dolabrata</i>	6
	<i>Lygocoris pabulinus</i>	13
	<i>Lygus rugulipennis</i>	11
	<i>Megaloceroea relicticornis</i>	5
	<i>Nabis flavomarginatus</i>	5
	<i>Nabis limbatus</i>	11
	<i>Neolygus viridis</i>	4
	<i>Notostira elongata</i>	8
	<i>Orius cf. majusculus</i>	1
	<i>Orthonotus rufifrons</i>	1
	<i>Pithanus maerkelii</i>	1
	<i>Plagiognathus chrysanthemii</i>	6
	<i>Scolopostethus thomsoni</i>	9
<b>WATERBUGS</b>	<i>Saldula saltatoria</i>	5

## Craneflies

The characteristics of the site that are favourable for heteroptera are perhaps the reverse for craneflies: only five new species were found bringing the cumulative total to 11, less than 10% of the 115 species found across all 18 sites surveyed. Of the five, only the last in the list below, *Tipula helvola*, is at all unusual, being designated as nationally scarce. This species was listed in Coe's RES handbook of 1950 as rare and known only from Merioneth and Hampshire. The NBN Gateway distribution map shows how it has now been found widely to the south-east of a line from Portland Bill to the Wash. Also since 1980 it appears to have expanded from its Welsh stronghold eastwards to the Marches and into England.

My first record of a female *T. helvola*, from Holcroft Moss in 2012, met with some caution, not least on my own part: females are more difficult to distinguish from related common species. However, this summer on 22 June I netted six individuals there, five of them males, in the birch and willow areas bordering the lowland bog Reserve. Moreover, the species has turned up at two locations in Croft. Thus, with the record from Woolston Eyes (a male), we seem to have a small population explosion. The species has been detected in Shropshire only in the last ten years, but there is an earlier Cheshire record from 1995 near Crewe. The breeding habitat requirements would seem rather uncertain, as in the south of England it is known from dry woodland on heaths and chalky soils.

Despite this interesting history, *T. helvola* is drab-coloured with plain wings. The common species *Rhipidia maculata* has attractively speckled wings and the males have elaborate comb-like antennae, while *Nephrotoma quadrifaria* is one of the "tiger craneflies" with strong black and yellow markings on the thorax and abdomen.

Species	Number of sites
<i>Austrolimnophila ochracea</i>	10
<i>Dicranomyia chorea</i>	12
<i>Nephrotoma quadrifaria</i>	8
<i>Rhipidia maculata</i>	7
<i>Tipula helvola</i>	4

## Soldierflies & Allies

This group of 11 families includes many distinctive, large or colourful species. It is hoped that the publication of a second edition of "British Soldierflies and their Allies" by Alan Stubbs and Martin Drake in 2014 will encourage more interest in this group.

The robberflies rival the dragonflies as hunters, perching on vegetation and darting out to capture flying prey. They are mostly species of warm and dry conditions and so are more abundant and diverse in the South of England. *Dioctria baumhaueri* is widespread up to Cheshire and favours the scrub and the edges of woods.

The most notable addition to the Woolston Eyes list is *Pachygaster leachii*, which is neither large nor colourful, being black with mainly yellow legs. This is another mainly Southern species. The earliest Cheshire record is from 2007, though there is a single isolated record in Cumbria from 1993.

Family	Species	Number of sites
<b>Asilidae (Robberflies)</b>	<i>Dioctria baumhaueri</i>	2
<b>Rhagionidae (Snipeflies)</b>	<i>Rhagio tringarius</i>	6
<b>Stratiomyidae (Soldierflies)</b>	<i>Beris geniculata</i>	3
	<i>Beris vallata</i>	8
	<i>Chloromyia formosa</i>	10
	<i>Chorisops tibialis</i>	4
	<i>Pachygaster leachii</i>	2

### **Empidoidea**

This superfamily contains almost 700 British species. Nearly 300 of these are in the Dolichopodidae family, and are sometimes known as the long-legged flies, though this feature is nowhere near as extreme as in the craneflies. They are medium to tiny, but quite elegant and usually with metallic colours, often in the eyes as well. The males of many species have ornamentation on the legs in the form of plumes, tassels, or strange deformities: these are believed to be connected with courtship.



The families Empididae and Hybotidae have many species with elongated piercing mouthparts, used both for piercing insect prey and for drinking nectar from flowers (as in *Empis tessellata*, left). In some species the male presents the female with a gift of prey as part of the mating ritual.

As a result of this large diversity, information on most of the species is sparse. None of those found in these 2014 surveys is regarded as nationally scarce. *Achalcus cinereus* was found in the March survey and is recognised as a winter species: this may account for there being only two previous records in Lancashire and Cheshire. In the case of *Chrysotus femoratus/neglectus* only females have been found so far and these are indistinguishable. *Sciapus longulus* appears to have been recorded only once before in Cheshire and Lancashire before I found it at Holcroft Moss in 2013. In contrast, *Xanthochlorus ornatus*, has been recorded quite often in Cheshire.

Family	Species	Number of sites
<b>Dolichopodidae</b>	<i>Achalcus cinereus</i>	1
	<i>Argyra argentina</i>	2
	<i>Argyra leucocephala</i>	6
	<i>Campsicnemus scambus</i>	10
	<i>Chrysotus blepharosceles</i>	3
	<i>Chrysotus femoratus/neglectus</i>	3
	<i>Chrysotus gramineus</i>	6
	<i>Dolichopus claviger</i>	1
	<i>Dolichopus popularis</i>	9
	<i>Dolichopus trivialis</i>	11
	<i>Hercostomus metallicus</i>	6
	<i>Sciapus longulus</i>	2
	<i>Sybistroma obscurellum</i>	6



Family	Species	Number of sites
	<i>Sympycnus desoutteri</i>	11
	<i>Xanthochlorus ornatus</i>	1
<b>Empididae</b>	<i>Empis tessellata</i>	5
	<i>Rhamphomyia flava</i>	2
	<i>Rhamphomyia nigripennis</i>	4
<b>Hybotidae</b>	<i>Hybos culiciformis</i>	9
	<i>Hybos femoratus</i>	5
	<i>Ocydromia glabricula</i>	6

### Hoverflies

Although there have been only four additions to the hoverfly list for the Eyes, two are very noteworthy. *Meligramma trianguliferum*, a smallish but typical black and yellow species, was classified as “nationally scarce” until recently, when data from the Hoverfly Recording Scheme now shows it as found in more than the 100 hectad threshold for this designation. The other location in these surveys is from our garden in Croft. It is regarded generally as a woodland and hedgerow flower-loving species.

Species	Number of sites
<i>Cheilosia pagana</i>	12
<i>Meligramma trianguliferum</i>	2
<i>Neoascia interrupta</i>	1
<i>Neoascia podagrica</i>	6

The small, narrow-waisted species *Neoascia interrupta* remains nationally scarce, almost all records being in the east of England south of the Humber – outside this area the two previous records are from North Wales and North Lancashire. The species was added to the British list only in 1981, though a specimen from Kent dating from 1951 has been found in a collection, having been misidentified as the common *N. podagrica*. It is a wetland species with an apparent association with *Typha* (bulrush). I found two females at well-separated locations on No.3 bed, so there could well be a breeding population here.

### Picture-wing Flies

This unscientific designation covers a group of fly families which ranks with the soldierflies and hoverflies for the visual appeal and distinctiveness of many of the species. The name refers to intricate patterns of spots, bands or even star-like features on the wings which makes them stand out to the naked eye though they are generally quite small. There are several families with such species, but the most numerous in terms both of number of species and frequency of records is the Tephritidae, for which there is a specific national recording scheme. However, this year’s finds for Woolston Eyes are notable for three members of the family Pallopteridae and genus *Palloptera* to be added to the *P. umbellatarum* found at the Eyes last year. *P. muliebris* has very distinctive brown-edging to the wings (left). *P. saltuum* is the least common with no previous Cheshire or South Lancashire records, while the other two have a reasonable scattering of local records. There seems no particular reason for this concentration of species at



Woolston Eyes: the larval ecology in this family is uncertain, but there is a general association with shaded habitats near water.

Family	Species	Number of sites
<b>Pallopteridae</b>	<i>Palloptera muliebris</i>	1
	<i>Palloptera quinquemaculata</i>	1
	<i>Palloptera saltuum</i>	1
<b>Platystomatidae</b>	<i>Rivellia syngenesiae</i>	3
<b>Tephritidae</b>	<i>Urophora jaceana</i>	3

### Other diptera

This miscellaneous category covers a number of other families for which recording schemes exist and so are reasonably well served for identification resources and national data. Several of the species recorded are ubiquitous. The *Lonchoptera* species are small slender yellowish flies quite similar to the Dolichopodidae but with a distinctive pointed wing shape and unusual pattern of veins. Males of *L. bifurcata* are very rarely found. *Scathophaga stercoraria* is the common yellow dung fly, to be found virtually anywhere at any season, by no means confined to the vicinity of dung. The Sepsidae are a family of small flies resembling winged ants, and also associated with dung. There is a curious



coincidence in this survey in finding the only two British species of diptera (out of over 7000) named after William Elford Leach (1791-1836); a leading British zoologist and marine biologist of his day, he is now remembered mainly in the scientific names of the many species that honour him, according to Wikipedia.

The larvae of the Sciomyzidae nearly all feed on slugs or snails or their eggs and are often aquatic or semi-aquatic. *Coremacera marginata* (left) is a striking large insect with shiny black coloration extending to a reticulated pattern over the wings. It seems to be near the edge of its range on the Mersey.

Family	Species	Number of sites
<b>Lonchopteridae</b>	<i>Lonchoptera bifurcata</i>	9
	<i>Lonchoptera lutea</i>	16
<b>Psilidae</b>	<i>Psila fimetaria</i>	1
<b>Scathophagidae</b>	<i>Scathophaga stercoraria</i>	16
<b>Sciomyzidae</b>	<i>Coremacera marginata</i>	2
	<i>Tetanura pallidiventris</i>	3
<b>Sepsidae</b>	<i>Sepsis fulgens</i>	14
	<i>Sepsis orthocnemis</i>	8
	<i>Sepsis punctum</i>	6
	<i>Themira annulipes</i>	5
	<i>Themira leachi</i>	1
	<i>Themira lucida</i>	2



Finally, I refer back to the photo in last year's report of a nymph of the birch shield bug (*Elasmostethus interstinctus*, left). I speculated that the white speck on the thorax might be an egg of the parasitic fly *Subclytia rotundiventris* (right). In



2014, this species has indeed been recorded for the first time in Cheshire and Lancashire at Holcroft and Astley Mosses. This is a considerable extension in range from the south-eastern distribution of this fly which is designated nationally as a Red Data Book rare species. There seems no reason why it should not also be present at Woolston Eyes, but proving this may well be a matter of luck.

**Phil Brighton**

## MAMMALS - SPECIES ACCOUNTS

### Introduction

These brief accounts are an attempt to summarise the status of the mammals found on the Reserve and to thus encourage visitors and wardens to submit future records. More particularly, in 2014 we made an effort to survey the bats (using electronic bat detectors), which are such a regular sight during the warmer months. We will be organising more bat surveys in the coming year and if you would like to come along and get involved, you can contact me via email or our website or Facebook page (see contact details at the end of this report).

### Grey Squirrel

*Sciurus vulgaris*

Grey Squirrels are present in small numbers across all four beds. Introduced to the UK in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century from North America they have been a major causal factor in the decline of our national Red Squirrel population. One or two can be encountered anywhere but are most regularly seen visiting the feeders by the Morgan Hide.

### Hazel Dormouse

*Muscardinus avellanarius*

The only record was of one found on No.1 bed, during a survey in 1980.

### Bank Vole

*Clethrionomys glareolus*

Remains of this species were found in Short-eared Owl pellets, from No.1 bed, in 1982

### Field Vole

*Microtus agrestis*

Probably our most common breeding vole, occurring both in owl pellets and during all previous surveys. Most likely to be seen scurrying across the tracks in No.3 bed.

### Water Vole

*Arvicola terrestris*

This rapidly declining small mammal was once a regular sight on Nos.1 and 2 beds but, as in many places, it seems that the arrival of the carnivorous Mink has resulted in its extermination.

### Wood Mouse

*Apodemus sylvaticus*

A common species on the Reserve, most often seen around the feeding stations on No.3 bed.

**Brown Rat***Rattus norvegicus*

This large rodent breeds in small numbers and like the previous species is most often seen near the feeding stations on No.3 bed.

**Rabbit***Oryctolagus cuniculus*

The most commonly encountered mammal, with many breeding warrens spread across the four beds, particularly along the Canalside track. Originally native to Iberia, they were introduced to the UK as a food source by the Romans and are now a major prey item for our breeding predators, including Buzzard, Fox and American Mink.

**Brown Hare***Lepus europaeus*

This declining, medium sized mammal used to occur occasionally on No.4 bed until the mid-1980s but has not been seen in more recent times.

**Hedgehog***Erinaceus europaeus*

Hedgehogs are a relatively recent arrival at Woolston, with only small numbers presumably present across the four beds. Odd sightings have been made on No.3 bed and droppings found on Nos.1 and 2 beds.

**European Mole***Talpa europaea*

Another relatively recent arrival which is now spreading rapidly, with No.3 bed proving particularly to their liking. One was actually seen swimming on to the Reserve from across the Ship Canal during one of our Open Days.

**Common Shrew***Sorex araneus*

As the name suggests, this is our most common shrew and has been found during all past mammal surveys, as well as turning up in studies of owl pellets. Can occasionally be seen scurrying across the paths on No.3 bed.

**Pygmy Shrew***Sorex minutus*

Again, fairly common, this highly active but short-lived shrew is occasionally seen on the paths in No.3 bed and also turns up in owl pellets.

**Water Shrew***Neomys fodiens*

There is one confirmed record of this semi-aquatic shrew, from No.3 bed. They breed near water margins and will catch small fish as well as terrestrial prey.

**Daubenton's Bat***Myotis daubentonii*

This small bat mainly hunts by skimming water surfaces for low-flying insects, though it can also be encountered feeding along woodland edges. During the bat survey on 14<sup>th</sup> July, three were hunting over the water by the Morgan Hide on No.3 bed. Paul Hazlehurst then saw five over the water on the same bed at dawn on 13<sup>th</sup> September.

**Common Pipistrelle***Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Once assumed to be the most common of our small bats, initial surveys suggest that, at least on No.3 bed, it may be outnumbered by the next species. It is a generalist feeder and can occupy a wide variety of habitats. Four were located during the survey of No.3 bed on the evening of 14<sup>th</sup> July with three there on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month.

**Soprano Pipistrelle***Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

Slightly smaller than the previous species, it has a much stronger association with wetlands. On the nights of both 14<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> July 12 were located feeding around No.3 bed.

**Brown Long-eared Bat***Plecotus auritus*

This medium sized bat emerges late in the evening to glean moths, spiders etc. from the leaves of woodland trees. It was a nice surprise for Kieran Foster, on an October evening, to find one in one of his ringing nets on No.3 bed.

**Noctule***Nyctalus noctula*

This common, large, reddish bat emerges early in the evening, flying high and using steep swoops to capture a wide variety of large to small flying prey. It is mainly associated with lowland woods and parkland. On both of the evenings of 14<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> July three were feeding actively over No.3 bed.

**Red Fox***Vulpes vulpes*

Foxes are a regular breeder across the Reserve and if you visit during the early morning or late evening, you have a reasonable chance of seeing one. They are attracted to the area around the Morgan Hide, hunting for the small mammals which are attracted to the fallen seed under the feeders, or snatching an unwary duck or gull from its roost on the scrape.





Red Fox

David Spencer

**Stoat**

*Mustela ermine*

This beautiful and aggressive predator, which is presumed to breed, can occasionally be seen on any of the beds. They have been noted catching Rabbits at some of the warrens and trying to catch Lapwings on the islands on the Loop of No.4 bed.

**Weasel**

*Mustela nivalis*

With a similar status to the previous species, Weasels can be encountered anywhere at Woolston, where voles probably form the majority of its prey.

**American Mink**

*Mustela vison*

This large, rapacious mustelid is strongly associated with water bodies and it feeds mainly on water birds, voles, amphibians etc. It is a native to North America, was released from fur farms to become established as a wide-spread breeder in the UK and has been shown to be a key factor in the decline of the native Water Vole. They are regularly seen across the Reserve and particularly on No.3 bed, where they attract the attention of the whirling, mobbing Black-headed Gulls during the breeding season. Recently, one was seen emerging from a Barn Owl nest box, where it had eaten the occupying Stock Dove.

**Badger**

*Meles meles*



Badger under the Morgan Hide feeders

David Bowman

This, our largest and most charismatic mustelid breeds and is a regular sight at Woolston. On any late, warm evening from May through to October, there is a very good chance of encountering one or more on No.3 bed. The Morgan Hide feeders are particularly favoured, with small numbers often feeding quite happily on fallen seed during broad daylight.

## European Otter

*Lutra lutra*

Otters have made a strong recovery, in recent years, from near extinction in the north-west of England. They have started to spread out from their strongholds and we have long expected one to turn up at Woolston. Happily, 2014 was the year for this to happen, as on 3<sup>rd</sup> September Brian Gort managed to photograph one on the river near the footbridge to No.3 bed. This was followed by other sightings, of one at Woolston Weir and another which crossed the scrape in front of the Morgan Hide, before swimming across No.3 bed. We'll be keeping our fingers crossed that more than one is present and we can eventually add them to our breeding list.



*Otter*

*Brian Gort*

## Grey Seal

*Halychoerus grypus*

There are two previous sightings of this our largest native seal. On both occasions one managed to cross a weir and swim up-river to bask on the banks of the Mersey around Nos.3 and 4 beds.

## Roe Deer

*Capreolus capreolus*

There have only been a handful of previous sightings of Roe Deer, ranging from No.3 bed to Bollin Point. It seems doubtful that they have established themselves as a breeding species and most records are probably of stray individuals.

## David Bowman

## EDITOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many permit-holders, photographers, ringers, wardens and committee members who have, in their different ways, contributed to this Report. The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group has a long history of fostering scientific recording, across the full range of flora and fauna and we remain committed to sustaining this in the future. Given that we are not, as a group, getting any younger, I would encourage any permit holder with an interest in taking part in any of our many surveys, no matter what the level of experience or expertise, to contact either Brian Martin or myself as we would be grateful for the help.

In particular, my thanks are due to my fellow report-compilers: to Brian Martin, Dave Hackett, Dave Riley and David Spencer for assisting with the species accounts and to Brian, additionally, for his fascinating weather summary and for information on the WeBS Counts; to Mike Miles for the very detailed Ringing Report; to Dave Steel for his informative summaries of our traditional Migration Watches and to Phil Brighton for his supplementary article, on the Heteroptera and Diptera which enriches this report. Thanks also to Dave Hackett for his excellent report on our Butterflies, to Brian Baird for stepping in to the breach and giving us such an excellent summary of the status of our Odonata and to Allan Rustell for providing such detailed information about our Willow Tit population.

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This is also the first year in which we have offered people the option of receiving an electronic copy of the report and I am grateful to John Blundell for his work towards making this possible.

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**David Bowman**

**Editor**

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*Longhorn Beetle*

*Steve Dolan*