

# The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group



*Colin Wolf*  
2016.

Annual Report

2015



**WILDLIFE**

Colin Woolf

**PAINTINGS**

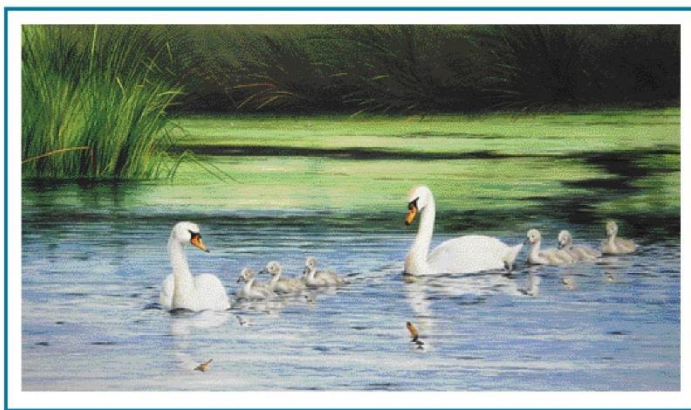


## Wildlife as a work of art ...

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.*

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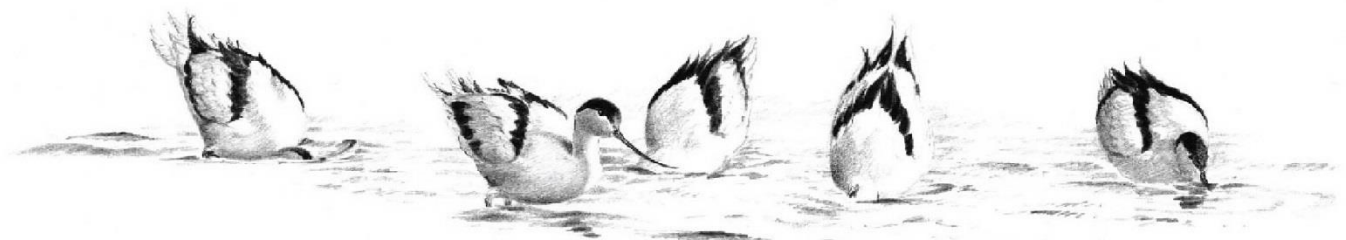


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# WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP

## ANNUAL REPORT 2015

### CONTENTS

|   |  | <b>Page</b> |
|---|--|-------------|
| <b>Chairman's Report</b>                            | <b>B. Ankers</b>   | <b>4</b>    |
| <b>Weather</b>                                      | <b>B. Martin</b>   | <b>6</b>    |
| <b>Systematic List</b>                              | <b>B. Martin</b><br><b>D. Hackett</b><br><b>D. Spencer</b><br><b>J. Blundell</b><br><b>D. Bowman</b> | <b>8</b>    |
| <b>WeBS Counts</b>                                  | <b>B. Martin</b>   | <b>71</b>   |
| <b>Ringling Report</b>                              | <b>M. Miles</b>  | <b>72</b>   |
| <b>Recoveries and Controls</b>                      | <b>M. Miles</b>  | <b>78</b>   |
| <b>Migration Watch</b>                              | <b>D. Steel</b>  | <b>85</b>   |
| <b>Willow Tit Report</b>                            | <b>A. Rustell</b>  | <b>90</b>   |
| <b>Butterfly Report</b>                             | <b>D. Hackett</b>  | <b>93</b>   |
| <b>Odonata Report</b>                               | <b>B. Baird</b>  | <b>101</b>  |
| <b>Editor's Acknowledgments</b>                     | <b>D. Bowman</b>   | <b>112</b>  |
| <b>Officers of Woolston Eyes Conservation Group</b> |  | <b>113</b>  |

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

First of all can I thank you for the magnificent support you have given to Woolston Eyes by renewing your permits and providing us with the finance to manage the Reserve and offer such good visitor facilities. It has also been particularly encouraging to receive so much positive feedback. I know that producing the report electronically has made it available to many more members and trust you will find it interesting and informative.

A particularly big thank you must go to Colin Woolf, the renowned wildlife artist, for the wonderful drawing produced free of charge to us on the cover of this report; it is of our most recently added breeding species, the skulking but highly vocal Cetti's Warbler. The original of the drawing is for sale and if you would like more information about this or any other of his work you will find his details on the inside of the cover.

Another major thank you must go to Peel Holdings and the Manchester Ship Canal Co. for their support over the past thirty five plus years, which has enabled us to provide such a variety of habitats for the diverse birds and other wildlife found on the Reserve. Their commitment to conservation and willingness to support our efforts has been much appreciated and I look forward to many more productive years ahead.

As Woolston is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) we also work closely with Natural England (NE) and I cannot speak too highly of the advice and support we get from this organisation. Over the past five years we have also been working very closely with the RSPB and have undertaken some major work projects, in particular the restoration of the reed beds on Nos.3 and 4 beds. Working with NE and RSPB we have obtained substantial grants to help with this work. We are already seeing the benefits of this with increased broods of wildfowl in summer and waders in winter.

For many years we have relied solely on the hard work and dedication of our voluntary wardens. However we are not getting any younger and so I am delighted that in conjunction with the RSPB we have employed an Estate Worker, John Langley, whose enthusiasm and hard work in tackling all the practical conservation jobs is much appreciated. He is already making a huge and visible difference on the Reserve. As ever, we are always looking for volunteers to help out and John has been instrumental in developing this aspect of our conservation work.

We continue to look at ways to maximise the potential of our habitat and create links with other local wetlands. Our Vice-Chairman, David Bowman, represents us on the Greater Manchester Wetlands and the Carbon Landscape Steering Groups. So far, these strategic bodies have collectively raised £2.2 million for wetland conservation/development and we are optimistic that Woolston Eyes will be one of the beneficiaries.

This year's Annual Report is of the same outstanding professional standard as usual, and thanks must go to David Bowman (Editor) and all the contributors for the hours of work they have put in to produce it.

**Brian Ankers**  
**Chairman**





*View from the John Morgan hide in May*

*Roy Fallon*



*The new hide on No.4 bed in January*

*David Bowman*

## THE WEATHER 2015

Nationally, 2015 will be long remembered for the huge amounts of rain which fell over north-west England in the final two months of the year. Warrington, however, though very wet at that time, saw only a fraction of the totals in Cumbria, north Lancashire and parts of Yorkshire. The annual total of 809mm (32.5 ins) was almost identical to 2014 (827mm) and only a little above the average of recent years. This is because rainfall amounts in six months (February, April, June, August, September and October) were below average. Apart from May it was a dry spring and autumn, the latter leading to low water levels and, therefore good conditions for wader passage. May was very disappointing for the second successive year, being not only wet but also dull, as also was November. Frosts and snow were few and far between, and apart from late June and early July, when temperatures peaked at an unusually high 31C on the 1<sup>st</sup>, it was a summer of about average temperatures and sunshine levels.

**January**, with 84.5mm of rain was the fourth wettest month. The year began mild but the first week as a whole was cold, with some severe frosts. Heavy rain on the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> saw a return to mild weather. The temperature was a balmy 14C on the 9<sup>th</sup>. For much of the month it was unsettled and very windy at times. The month ended, however, with a return to colder weather with snow and hail on 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> and a bitter northerly wind.

**February**, in contrast, was largely dry with only 45mm of rain recorded. No rain fell until the 18<sup>th</sup> as high pressure became established, bringing raw but sunny weather, ideal conditions for viewing the huge Starling roost. The high pressure slipped to the east by mid-month, allowing Atlantic depressions to sweep in. A few cold days saw frosts return but the month ended mild, unsettled and windy.

**March** with 72mm saw above-average rainfall, but also above-average temperatures which continued throughout much of the spring. Sunshine levels were also above average. The 7<sup>th</sup> was unusually warm (16C) but much of the rest of the month was unsettled, with over half of the rainfall total recorded in the final few days.

**April** was the driest month of 2015, with only 25mm noted and rain falling on just seven days. Well above average sunshine levels occurred, with temperatures of up to 19C on many days. Not surprisingly, many butterflies and migrant birds were seen.

**May** in contrast was the second wettest month, with 101mm of rain. Temperatures were below average and it was reported to be the coolest and dullest May since 1996. Heavy rain on the 2<sup>nd</sup> set the scene. There was a settled spell mid-month, but cool north-west winds persisted for much of the remainder of May and below-average temperatures and above-average rain sums up May 2015.

**June** was a dry month (33mm), with half the month's rain falling on the 1<sup>st</sup>. Overall, temperatures were well above average, with many days reaching the low to mid 20sC. Apart from one or two cooler days (notably the 19<sup>th</sup>) high pressure built and the final ten days saw settled and increasingly warm weather as hot air from France and Spain arrived on a southerly wind.

**July** began with one of the hottest days for many years (31C on the 1<sup>st</sup>), warmer than Rome, Athens and even Accra in Ghana! Typically, this was soon brought to an end that evening by a severe thunderstorm and a dramatic fall in temperature. Warmer weather soon returned, however, and much

of the month was largely dry, with only the odd wet day. The 26<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> was very unsettled, with over 20mm of rain contributing to a near-average total of 71mm.

**August**, with 51mm, continued the pattern of below-average rainfall in the previous months (May excepted), with the first 13 days dry and warm, despite some cool early mornings. This was broken on the 13<sup>th</sup> when a thundery airstream arrived from the south of England and between 14<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> a total of 30mm of rain fell in the area. Thereafter, no further rain was recorded until the final two days as high pressure brought settled conditions.

**September** was the third-driest month, with just 35mm of rain recorded. The first week was one of sunshine and showers, followed by a few warm days (up to 20C) as high pressure settled over the country. By the 11<sup>th</sup>, however, it was replaced by heavy rain and generally unsettled weather before high pressure returned on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Warm days but cool nights followed and apart from a short wet 24 hours on 21<sup>st</sup> /22<sup>nd</sup> the final week was dry. Warm days and cool nights predominated, with many butterflies on the wing.

**October** (49mm) continued the trend for below-average rainfall and above-average temperatures. The Meteorological Office reported it as the driest October since 2007. High pressure was in charge for the first week, with a maximum of 19C on the 1<sup>st</sup>. Nights, however, were cool, with thick fog on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. By the 5<sup>th</sup> the long-staying high pressure finally gave way allowing gusty south-east winds and heavy rain to arrive from the west – with 19mm recorded on the 7<sup>th</sup>. No rain at all was recorded from 9<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, with high pressure again in control. Very heavy rain fell on the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup>, but most other days were dry and cool, although on 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> the temperature peaked at 18C in an airstream from north Africa.

**November** All was to change dramatically as a succession of Atlantic depressions swept in on a very active Jet Stream. Large amounts of rain fell over the north-west of England. With 146mm (nearly 6 inches) November was by far the wettest month of the year and in Warrington the wettest month since December 2012. Not surprisingly, it was also said to have been the dullest November on record. Despite this the first three days were dry, with 22C recorded in west Wales and 16C on the Eyes. It was then all downhill, with one depression after another producing torrential downpours. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> a total of 84mm (nearly 3.5 ins) was recorded. It was, though a mild month apart from 20<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup> which was a period of cold days and overnight frosts. More heavy rain in the final week brought a further 50mm, and flooding occurred widely over the north-west of England.

**December** Although not as wet as November, December, with 96mm was largely a repeat of the previous month. Storm Desmond on the 5<sup>th</sup> dropped record amounts of rain on Cumbria. Warrington, however, escaped the worst of the rain. The month was exceptionally mild and according to the Meteorological Office was the warmest December since records began in 1910. On two rare dry days there were two sightings of single butterflies on No.3 bed, at least one being a Red Admiral. Storms Eve on the 26<sup>th</sup> and Frank on 29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> caused severe flooding in Lancashire, parts of Yorkshire and Greater Manchester, but once again the Eyes was spared the worst of it.

**Brian Martin**

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### Mute Swan

*Cygnus olor*

Mute Swan has now been moved from the green list to the amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC). There was a more successful breeding season than 2014 and the late spring and summer build-up in numbers, first noted last year, was repeated in 2015.

Counts in January peaked at 28 on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 31 were on the Reserve during the 7<sup>th</sup> March WeBS. The first nest was seen at Latchford Locks on 12<sup>th</sup> April and another pair was seen nest building on No.3 bed five days later. A third pair was at a nest near Woolston Weir on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, a long-standing breeding site.

The first young (two) were reported from Latchford Locks on 30<sup>th</sup> May, and a pair with one small cygnet was on No.3 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> June. Two days later a pair with five small young was on the Ship Canal near the Ferry while on 22<sup>nd</sup> June two pairs, each with one cygnet, were present on No.3 bed. Two other broods were observed, one on 23<sup>rd</sup> June near Bollin Point and one of four small young just to the west of Latchford Locks. It is not known where these pairs bred. The outcome of the nest near Woolston Weir is not known, although a pair with a large cygnet could have been that nesting pair. No breeding occurred on the Loop of No.4 bed this year.

The influx of Mute Swans on to No.3 bed occurred once again, with high numbers remaining until early August. The count of 52 on 15<sup>th</sup> July may well be a record for the Eyes. Some birds left in the second half of August, but by October high counts were once again reported, with 36 across the Reserve on 6<sup>th</sup> November and 46 on 13<sup>th</sup> December.

Monthly maxima:

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J  | J  | A  | S  | O  | N  | D  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 28 | 17 | 31 | 22 | 28 | 42 | 52 | 39 | 20 | 36 | 36 | 46 |

### Whooper Swan

*Cygnus cygnus*

A scarce, amber-listed winter visitor. Four flew down the Mersey from Woolston Weir on 23<sup>rd</sup> December and later in the morning were relocated near Paddington.

### Pink-footed Goose

*Anser brachyrhynchus*

This winter visitor is currently amber-listed. The usual movements were reported in both winters, with ten over No.3 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> January being the first. Forty flew south-east on the 10<sup>th</sup> January, followed by 160 flying west over No.4 bed on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The only other early-year sighting was also in January when 500 flew west on the early morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>.

Later in the year 400 (in two skeins) flew west over No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> October and 70 went east three days later. The highest count of the year was of two impressive skeins totalling 630 birds which flew



west over No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> October. Two hundred to the west on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 250 west on 7<sup>th</sup> November and 300 in the same direction on 21<sup>st</sup> November ended a fairly typical year.

## **Greylag Goose**

*Anser anser*

Although ours are undoubtedly of feral origin, the wild, migratory population, which occurs in the north of the UK, is currently amber-listed. There was a further increase in numbers this year, with Greylag Geese recorded in every month. Breeding pairs also showed a slight increase.

During January birds were reported on only four dates, with no more than four seen. Eighteen were on No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> February, but there were only four other double-figure counts up to late March. By then two pairs were noted, with the first brood of nine small young appearing on No.3 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> April. A second brood of 13 young was reported two days later, and a third of six on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. On 28<sup>th</sup> April four broods were on No.3 bed with a total of 28 young. A fifth brood of six tiny goslings followed on No.3 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and a sixth on 18<sup>th</sup> May. Intriguingly, two broods were present on the Mersey Oxbow below No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> May and it is not clear whether these were broods that had moved off No.3 bed or from pairs that had bred alongside the river. Clearly a minimum of six pairs bred. It is not known how many young fledged but in late May two separate broods of large goslings were regularly grazing on the paths in the centre of No.3 bed. After the breeding season Greylags were ever present, with up to 34 in August, but it was from late September that the highest numbers were seen, with 60 on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> September increasing to a record count for Woolston of 74 on 6<sup>th</sup> October. This coincided with peak numbers of Canada Geese. In the final two months only single-figure counts were made, with just one record of two in December.

A young bird was caught and ringed on 13<sup>th</sup> June, the first ever at Woolston.

## **Canada Goose**

*Branta canadensis*

A common resident, with a record number of pairs breeding and some high counts in September and October.

Canada Geese were present in every month. They were relatively scarce for most of January until a total of 38 was noted on the 31<sup>st</sup> on No.3 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed. In early February 78 were present on the Eyes and 77 on 29<sup>th</sup> March.

The first evidence of breeding was on 2<sup>nd</sup> April when one was seen on a nest on No.3 bed, while on 11<sup>th</sup> April a bird was also on eggs on No.1 bed. The first broods (of seven and two young) appeared on No.3 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> April and in all a total of 12 broods was reported: eight on No.3 bed, two on the Loop of No.4 bed and two on the River Mersey. The outcome of the nest on No.1 bed is not known. The number of confirmed breeding pairs is double that of 2014, which was then a record. Many of the young fledged.

As always, the peak counts were made in the autumn, with 128 on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 320 on 18<sup>th</sup> September and 350 on 8<sup>th</sup> October. After this, numbers fell, with relatively few present in the final two months.

## **Egyptian Goose**

*Alopochen aegyptiaca*

One flew on to No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April from the north-east before carrying on to the west. This is the second year in succession that this species has appeared at Woolston.

## **Shelduck**

*Tadorna tadorna*

Another good year, for this amber-listed species, with records from every month and many pairs breeding.

During January only single-figure counts were submitted, but numbers steadily built up to 20 on 25<sup>th</sup> February and 15 were on the Loop of No.4 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Mid-April brought counts of 30 on the 14<sup>th</sup> and a record for the Reserve of 33 on the 18<sup>th</sup>. By then many were paired up, with four pairs alone on the Loop of No.4 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> April and 13 birds there the following day.

The first brood, of eight young, appeared on No.3 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> May, with a second of nine young on the old river below the footbridge on 1<sup>st</sup> June. Sadly, by the 4<sup>th</sup> June only one of the young from this brood had survived. A further four broods were seen, three on No.3 bed and the other on the Mersey below the Loop of No.4 bed. The total of six broods is the same as in 2014. How many young fledged is hard to assess for although both adults usually remain with the young some were observed feeding away from their brood, leaving them vulnerable to predators such as the Lesser Black-backed Gulls. One of the last broods to hatch on No.3 bed, however, almost certainly fledged, with the five young first seen on 15<sup>th</sup> June still alive on 24<sup>th</sup> July, when nearly full grown.

In most years Shelduck numbers fall by August and 2015 was no exception. No more than one or two were reported in September and October, with a maximum of four in November and seven in December.

## **Wigeon**

*Anas penelope*

Amber-listed Wigeon is a scarce but annual visitor, with the majority of records in the autumn and early winter.

In the first three months there were maxima of six in January, two in February and four in March. There were then no sightings between 29<sup>th</sup> March and 14<sup>th</sup> July. Two females on No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> July were followed by four on 5<sup>th</sup> September. Up to six were present on No.3 bed on many October dates, with a maximum of 20 on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Ten were reported on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November, with six on 25<sup>th</sup> December the highest of the 17 records submitted in the final month.

## **Gadwall**

*Anas strepera*

Another very good year for this amber-listed duck and although peak counts were below last year's record, they were still of national importance. Breeding numbers showed a pleasing improvement on the poor showing in 2014.

The year began with regular counts in excess of 30, including 41 on 18<sup>th</sup> January and 70 on 5<sup>th</sup> February. On 6<sup>th</sup> March 50 were flushed from the isolated north-east pools on No.3 bed, an area favoured by Gadwall throughout the year, and 63 were present the following day. Up to 15 were also resident on the Loop of No.4 bed. By April many were paired and three pairs were observed displaying on the Loop on 1<sup>st</sup> May.

A nest with three eggs was found on the east bank of No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> May, two pairs were flushed from suitable habitat on No.1 bed and a pair from the centre of No.2 bed three days later. From then on broods appeared with great regularity, the first on No.3 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> May. June and early July saw the peak of Gadwall broods with a total of 16 reported: 11 on No.3 bed, one on the Loop of No.4 bed, one on the Ship Canal and three others on the Weir Basin, the Mersey by No.1 bed and No.2 bed. As mentioned earlier, the north-east pools of No.3 bed were a much favoured area during the breeding season, with five broods alone located there. After the poor showing in 2014 (six broods) this year was helped, in part, by the new hide on No.3 bed which provides excellent viewing of the north-east pools and channels.

The large gatherings of adults reported from mid-summer in recent years occurred once again in 2015, with significant counts of 110 on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 285 on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 400 on 25<sup>th</sup> June and the year's maximum of 539 on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> June. Numbers remained at a high level into July, when 525 were present on No.3 bed on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 352 on 3<sup>rd</sup> August. After this numbers fell to levels present in the first few months, with maxima of 80 in October, 34 in November and 52 in December.

The count of 539 in late June is of national importance and only just below the qualifying level for International Importance.

Monthly maxima:

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M   | J   | J   | A   | S  | O  | N  | D  |
|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|
| 41 | 70 | 63 | 78 | 110 | 539 | 525 | 352 | 76 | 80 | 34 | 52 |

## Teal

*Anas crecca*

This attractive small duck remains on the amber list. A largely uneventful year in terms of wintering birds, but the ringing team on No.3 bed caught nationally significant numbers in the duck trap. Unlike 2014, breeding was not proved.

The high count in December 2014 was repeated in January with 1150 present on 18<sup>th</sup> January WeBS. At that time it was particularly cold and Teal were frozen out of cover. Numbers remained at this level with 1000 across the Reserve four days later. Slightly fewer were present during February when birds began to depart to their East European and Russian breeding grounds. Even so, the March WeBS found 472 still on the Reserve. During April up to nine pairs were on No.3 bed, with others observed on the Loop of No.4 bed. In May and June pairs were seen in cover along the undisturbed north-eastern pools and channels, but without any confirmation of breeding.

Returning Teal appeared from mid-August, but in the very mild final months no more than 300-400 were present and the peak count was only 456 on 13<sup>th</sup> December.



A total of 121 was ringed on No.3 bed during the year, 79 of which were drakes. Sixty-five were subsequently re-trapped, four of which were ringed in the first winter period of 2014. With the national total of ringed Teal in 2014 being 497 the importance of the duck ringing programme at Woolston is obvious.

Monthly maxima:

| J    | F   | M   | A  | M | J | J  | A  | S   | O   | N   | D   |
|------|-----|-----|----|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1150 | 780 | 472 | 88 | 2 | 5 | 13 | 80 | 222 | 377 | 400 | 456 |



Pair of Teal from the John Morgan hide

David Bowman

## Mallard

*Anas platyrhynchos*

Despite its familiarity, Mallard is an amber-listed species. With both winter periods largely mild, numbers of Mallard were about or slightly below average; high counts traditionally being in prolonged cold spells. It was a good breeding season with many broods reported.

The highest count at the start of the year was 177 on 18<sup>th</sup> January when the weather was cold, and some of the pools were frozen. Similar numbers were present in early February. The first brood was seen on 18<sup>th</sup> April and was one of 29 reported widely across the Reserve. They were distributed as follows: seven on No.3 bed, seven on the Loop of No.4 bed and also seven on the Mersey. Six were noted on the Ship Canal and single broods on the Sandpit Pond and No.1 bed. Interestingly, the majority of broods appeared in June and July, suggesting that nests and young may well have been lost in the cold wet weather in May.

There were only three counts in excess of one hundred in the second half of the year, with a maximum of 143 on 16<sup>th</sup> December. The ringing team on No.3 bed trapped 16 Mallard (ten males and six females) between 18<sup>th</sup> February and 8<sup>th</sup> April. In addition another 12 were retrapped, of which five were first ringed in 2014.

Monthly maxima:

|     |     |    |    |    |    |     |    |    |     |    |     |
|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|
| J   | F   | M  | A  | M  | J  | J   | A  | S  | O   | N  | D   |
| 177 | 174 | 62 | 80 | 14 | 98 | 117 | 88 | 95 | 116 | 86 | 143 |

**Pintail**

*Anas acuta*

Amber-listed, this elegant duck is a very scarce visitor to the Eyes. There were just two records in the first half of the year, three (a drake and two females) on 20<sup>th</sup> March and two drakes and a female on 20<sup>th</sup> April. There were then many records, mainly of single birds, between late August and late November, but three were noted on two dates in September and one date in November. The maximum count was of four on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> October.

**Garganey**

*Anas querquedula*

There were more records than usual of this scarce, amber-listed, summer visitor, beginning with a drake on No.3 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> April. Another drake was seen by four different observers on 22<sup>nd</sup> May and the same (or another) on 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June. An eclipse male was present on 9<sup>th</sup> July in the north-east pools on No.3 bed and the same observer had four sightings of at least two Garganey in sheltered pools inside the east bank of No.3 bed in late August, one of which was thought to be a juvenile. The possibility that breeding could have taken place cannot be ruled out.



*Garganey in August*

*David Spencer*

**Shoveler**

*Anas clypeata*

Numbers of this amber-listed duck were relatively low throughout the year and the large autumn passage, which was once a feature of the Woolston year, has not occurred for several years. Breeding though was proved for the first time in many years.

Very few Shoveler were seen in the first three weeks of January, but an arrival saw 18 on No.3 bed on the 24<sup>th</sup>, increasing to 31 on 7<sup>th</sup> February and 37 on 19<sup>th</sup> February. The peak spring count was of 57 on the 7<sup>th</sup> March WeBS count and this proved to be the maximum Shoveler count in 2015.

A small number remained into the spring and early summer, with three pairs reported on 9<sup>th</sup> June in the remote channels and pools of the north-east corner of No.3 bed. Three days later a drake was found on the Loop of No.4 bed and it was there that a female with a brood of eight very small young appeared. This brood was still intact two days later but, sadly, was never seen again. This is the first proved breeding at Woolston since 2007.

For the remainder of the year numbers were well below average with 29 on 17<sup>th</sup> October and 24 on 11<sup>th</sup> November the highest counts submitted.

Monthly maxima:

|    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|
| J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J | J | A | S  | O  | N  | D  |
| 18 | 37 | 57 | 29 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 14 | 29 | 24 | 16 |

**Errata**

From records submitted to CAWOS the January 2014 maximum count should be 100 not 52, and the July 2014 maximum 30 not 3 as indicated in the 2014 Report.



*Shoveler brood on No.4 bed*

*David Waterhouse*

**Pochard**

*Aythya ferina*

Woolston is an important breeding site for this declining species, which was recently moved from the amber list to the red list. Although peak counts remain well below the levels of even five years ago there was an improvement on those of 2014, but the number of proved breeding pairs showed a slight decrease on last year.



In January 30 on the 25<sup>th</sup> was the maximum but, as so often, it was February which saw numbers rise to a peak of 82 on the 19<sup>th</sup> (73 on the favoured No. 3 bed) and to the highest count of the year of 95 on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Many Pochard remained well into the spring and early summer, with 23 (18 drakes) noted on 7<sup>th</sup> June. The first brood appeared on the Loop of No.4 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> May, followed by another on No.3 bed four days later. Six further broods were reported, in June five on No.3 bed, and the other on the east pool of No.1 Bed. The total of eight broods was two short of those seen in 2014.

Numbers fell dramatically after the breeding season, with only five records between the beginning of August and the end of October. There were no reports of Pochard in November and no more than three were seen in December.

Monthly maxima:

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J  | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30 | 82 | 95 | 49 | 19 | 23 | 7 | 5 | - | 2 | - | 3 |

### Tufted Duck

*Aythya fuligula*

Tufted Duck were present in high numbers in the first two months and many broods were reported in the breeding season.

Large gatherings of Tufted Duck always coincide with cold weather and in such conditions 504 were present on the Reserve on 14<sup>th</sup> January. Numbers increased in early February to a maximum of 879 on the 7<sup>th</sup>. A high proportion was in the Bollin Point area at the east end of the Eyes. Big flocks remained throughout February, with 652 on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 444 on the 25<sup>th</sup>. A March peak of 306 on the 10<sup>th</sup> was followed by 221 on 1<sup>st</sup> April and 116 on 29<sup>th</sup> April.

Fifty-one adults were noted on No.3 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, with six pairs on the Loop of No.4 bed the following day. The first brood was seen on No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> June and the last new brood on the Loop of No.4 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> August. In all a minimum of 21 broods was reported (16 broods in 2014). Fourteen of these were on No.3 bed, six on the Loop of No.4 bed and one on the Mersey by Woolston Weir.

In August and September, Tufted Duck were relatively scarce and numbers only began to increase in October and November. The exceptionally mild December did not bring any large gatherings, the maximum being 260 on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August the ringing team on No.3 bed caught a juvenile in a mist net set for waders. This is only the second Tufted Duck to be ringed at Woolston, following a drake in 2014.

Monthly maxima:

| J   | F   | M   | A   | M  | J  | J  | A  | S  | O   | N   | D   |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| 504 | 879 | 306 | 221 | 20 | 51 | 40 | 19 | 44 | 170 | 256 | 260 |

## **Errata**

In the 2014 Report the April maximum should be 203 not 169 and the October maximum 140 not 81.

## **Goldeneye**

*Bucephala clangula*

Another relatively poor year for this amber-listed diving duck, with only single-figure counts in both winter periods. As always, the Woolston Weir basin produced the majority of records.

In the first three months, up to five were observed on many dates, with a maximum of six on 25<sup>th</sup> March. There were then no further reports until 2<sup>nd</sup> November, when a drake was present on the Weir Pool. This was followed by a further 20 records, including maxima of six on four November dates. Fewer were seen in December (no more than two) with the last sighting on the 26<sup>th</sup> when two drakes were present on No.3 bed, forced off the Weir Pool when the Mersey was in full spate after weeks of heavy rain.

## **Goosander**

*Mergus merganser*

There were just three records of this infrequent visitor to the Eyes, all in the early months of the year. Two flew west along the Ship Canal on 7<sup>th</sup> February and a drake was seen flying over No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> March. The only other sighting was of one found on 18<sup>th</sup> April WeBS count.

## **Ruddy Duck**

*Oxyura jamaicensis*

Despite the fact that the long-running cull has killed all but a few Ruddy Duck, there was a total of 93 records submitted between February and 1<sup>st</sup> September. No more than three adults were seen. One pair bred.

An adult drake on 25<sup>th</sup> February was the first and it was joined by an immature male two days later; this bird was never seen again. The adult drake was reported on many dates in March, with one observer seeing two drakes on the 25<sup>th</sup>. A single drake remained throughout April, but on 6<sup>th</sup> May a pair was present and three (the pair plus another drake) were seen on 12<sup>th</sup> May. This trio was noted on three other occasions, twice in late May and once in June. Most reports, however, were of either one or two drakes. On 9<sup>th</sup> July a pair was found on No.3 bed with three newly hatched young. This brood thrived and the three young were virtually fully grown when last seen on 30<sup>th</sup> August. The adult drake disappeared after 25<sup>th</sup> July and there were no sightings of the adult female after 8<sup>th</sup> August. From then on the young birds became elusive, with no records between 14<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> August. They were then located again on No.3 bed on the 30<sup>th</sup> with two (reported as “female types”) there two days later. These were the final sightings of the year. Information supplied to the Recorder by the Agency responsible for the cull indicates that this was the only pair of Ruddy Duck known to have bred in the UK in 2015.

**Red-legged Partridge***Alectoris rufa*

Just one record was received from No.1 bed, where one was seen on 19<sup>th</sup> April. This is the second record in two years and the ninth ever at Woolston.

**Grey Partridge***Perdix perdix*

This red-listed species continues to decline and there were only two sightings this year. On 1<sup>st</sup> September two were on Butchersfield Tip and the only other record was from the Migration Watch on 31<sup>st</sup> October when five were seen to the north on Rixton Moss.

**Pheasant***Phasianus colchicus*

The year began with a Reserve-wide count of six on 8<sup>th</sup> January and on the 12<sup>th</sup> a total of 14 was at the feeding station on No.1 bed. The only other double-figure counts were from No.4 bed where eleven were present on 4<sup>th</sup> April. Three were reported from No.2 bed on the same date so it seems likely that the whole Reserve held a total of around twenty. A Common Bird Survey of the northern half of No.4 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> May produced a count of 15 and this year's population seems to be similar to that in 2014. The first evidence of breeding was on 15<sup>th</sup> July when two young were found on the north bank of No.4 bed. On 1<sup>st</sup> August a female with three small young was on the track leading to the Loop of No.4 bed and on the 13<sup>th</sup> two broods, each of two, were seen on No.1 bed. A nest with seven eggs was also found on No.2 bed but the outcome was not determined. As there was no evidence of breeding submitted in 2014, this represents an encouraging sign for a species that has been in decline in recent years.

**Cormorant***Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted throughout the year either over-flying the Reserve, in diurnal roosts, or feeding on the main waters. In the early months of the year the maximum was 35 on the February WeBS count and later in the year 25 on 5<sup>th</sup> September. In the final months Cormorants were reported in smaller numbers than usual, with no more than 14 seen from October to December.

**Bittern***Botaurus stellaris*

This enigmatic and elusive species has recently been moved from the red list to the amber list, as a result of concerted conservation efforts nationally. So, given the potential of Woolston as a possible future breeding site, it is pleasing to report another sighting this year. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May, three fortunate observers watched one fly past them, early in the morning on No.3 bed. It flew past the No.3 bed footbridge towards No.2 bed and was not relocated.



## Little Egret

*Egretta garzetta*

Remains a scarce bird at Woolston, with 11 records, probably referring to just five individuals, between 7<sup>th</sup> July and 2<sup>nd</sup> September. Why this should be so is not clear. In fact, there were actually more sightings of the scarcer Great White Egret in 2015.



*Little Egret from the John Morgan hide*

*David Mercer*

## Great White Egret

*Ardea alba*

There were 42 records submitted for the period mid-July to mid-September, probably involving no more than four or five birds. The first was seen on 18<sup>th</sup> July on No.3 bed where it remained until the 21<sup>st</sup>, moving on one day to the Loop of No.4 bed. In August another appeared on No.3 bed on the 8<sup>th</sup> and was present daily until the 24<sup>th</sup>. The following day it was joined by a second bird, with possibly a third also present. Over the next four days at least one was present, with two seen on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August. None were seen in the next three weeks until a single bird was present briefly on 17<sup>th</sup> September before leaving to the west.

## Grey Heron

*Ardea cinerea*

Noted throughout the year, with no more than three reported in the first three months. During the late summer and autumn water levels were low on No.3 bed and this attracted many more Herons, with, for example, 14 on 25<sup>th</sup> August on No.3 bed and 13 on 30<sup>th</sup> August. Ten on 17<sup>th</sup> October WeBS was

the only other double-figure count, but six to eight were reported on a number of dates up to the end of the year.



*Great White Egret on No.3 bed*

*Andy Weir*

### **Little Grebe**

*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

The improved showing in 2014 continued this year with more broods seen for perhaps a decade or more.

Although normally scarce in the winter at Woolston, up to five were present in January and February, with trilling heard on several dates on No.1 bed. Numbers remained at this level during March, but an influx in April saw 15 on No.3 bed alone on the 17<sup>th</sup>, with others on No.1 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed. Certainly, at that time in excess of 20 Little Grebes were on the Eyes.

The first brood was, as in most years, seen on No.1 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and during June and July further broods appeared at regular intervals. Later broods included one of three very small young on No.1 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> July and another of two small young on No.3 bed on 11<sup>th</sup> August. One of the latter was soon taken by a Lesser Black-backed Gull. In all, 13 broods were reported. Four, possibly five, pairs were present on No.3 bed, two pairs on No.4 bed and at least two on No.1 bed. There were many reports of large young being fed in August and into early September. High counts noted (adults and young) were 13 on 1<sup>st</sup> August on No.3 bed and 19 on the Reserve as a whole on 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

Later in the year peak counts included 16 on 12<sup>th</sup> September, and 12 on 14<sup>th</sup> November and 13<sup>th</sup> December WeBS.

### **Great Crested Grebe**

*Podiceps cristatus*

A very well reported species which also had a good year at Woolston in 2015, with many broods seen.

Up to five were present in January but, as always, breeding birds began to return in February, with ten noted on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16 on the 25<sup>th</sup>. A pair was displaying on No.3 bed on the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> February, and a second pair was nest building at Woolston Weir on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. At least five pairs settled to breed on No.3 bed, with a maximum count of 22 on the Reserve in mid-April. At that time two were on nests on No.3 bed, and single nests had sitting birds at the Weir Basin, the Mersey north of No.2 bed and on the river between Nos.3 and 4 beds.

During May and June broods appeared at regular intervals, with five on No.3 bed alone on 7<sup>th</sup> June. Other broods were subsequently seen on the Weir Basin and the Mersey, and one on the Ship Canal at Bollin Point. It is believed that a minimum of nine pairs bred. On No.3 bed up to three full-grown independent young were still present into early September.

For the rest of the year relatively few were reported and after eight in the 12<sup>th</sup> September WeBS no more than four were observed in the final months of the year.

### **Black-necked Grebe**

*Podiceps nigricollis*

Woolston is one of the key breeding sites, nationally, for this attractive, amber-listed grebe. Fewer pairs bred this year and the peak number of adults was significantly less than the very successful 2014 breeding season.

Two on 9<sup>th</sup> March were the first to return, with one present until the 11<sup>th</sup>. In the following three weeks, no more than three were reported and it was early April before more arrived, with seven on the 4<sup>th</sup>, nine from the 10<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> and 15 on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The maximum count in April was 16 on the last three days of the month. Seventeen adults on 30<sup>th</sup> May was the highest count of the year (c.f. 31 in 2014).

By 7<sup>th</sup> May two birds were on nests on No.3 bed and the first brood (two young) appeared on 13<sup>th</sup> May. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May three broods were seen and a week later five broods were present. At that time a total of 22 was present, 17 adults and five young. A sixth brood was noted on 18<sup>th</sup> June and by 30<sup>th</sup> June 23 Black-necked Grebes were present on No.3 bed, 15 adults and eight young, seven of which were near or full grown. During the breeding season two pairs failed to breed, building nests which were later abandoned.

In all eight pairs were present, six of which bred successfully. It is thought that eight young fledged. This compares to 11 pairs and 15 young fledged in 2014.

The last adult was seen on 25<sup>th</sup> July, while the last juvenile remained until 11<sup>th</sup> August.



**Red Kite***Milvus milvus*

For the second successive year there was a sighting of this rare visitor when one was observed in flight over No.3 bed. It appeared from the east, on 28<sup>th</sup> March and was mobbed by three Buzzards before flying west along the north bank of No.3 bed.

**Marsh Harrier***Circus aeruginosus*

This amber-listed harrier is a scarce breeder in the north-west and we remain hopeful that we will eventually see it as an established breeder at The Eyes. From 15<sup>th</sup> February to mid-April a bird described as a female or immature was seen regularly on No.3 bed. Two females were present on 15<sup>th</sup> March and there were two reports of a single from No.4 bed which could well have moved across from No.3 bed. The only records after 22<sup>nd</sup> April were of one on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> May and a different individual on 27<sup>th</sup> May. There were no autumn records.

**Hen Harrier***Circus cyaneus*

The reappearance of this heavily persecuted, red-listed species, after an absence of three years, was exciting. One appeared on No.3 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> November and unusually it remained until the 25<sup>th</sup>, seen by a number of observers, showing well from the John Morgan Hide.

*Hen Harrier**David Humphries*

## **Goshawk**

*Accipiter gentilis*

On 9<sup>th</sup> April a male and a female were reported from No.1 bed, soaring near the Viaduct before flying east. They were observed from a distance of about 50 metres. There were no reports in 2014 but occasional birds are seen most years.

## **Sparrowhawk**

*Accipiter nisus*

The population of this resident raptor appears stable and this year's records were fairly typical. Recorded throughout the year but there were only two sightings in June and July and three December reports, the latter possibly due to unsuitable weather at the time. Although most records were from No.3 bed there were sightings from all areas of the Reserve. The massive Starling roost at the beginning of the year attracted good numbers and there were reports of four on 31<sup>st</sup> January and 16<sup>th</sup> February with birds feeding on the Starlings as they came in to roost. No less than five were seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> March.

The first indication of breeding was on 14<sup>th</sup> March when a pair was seen displaying over the east bank of No.3 bed, whilst display was also reported over No.2 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June a male was seen carrying prey onto the north bank of No.3 bed and a family party of four was in the same area on 6<sup>th</sup> August. A single nest was found on No.1 bed which was predated by a squirrel after the first egg.

Later in the year four were on No.3 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> August but thereafter only ones or twos were reported until 21<sup>st</sup> November when five were over No.3 bed.

The ringing teams had a successful year with four males ringed on No.3 bed, one in March, one in September and two in October. Three were ringed on No.1 bed including, unusually, a female, only the sixth on the bed since 2002.

## **Buzzard**

*Buteo buteo*

Now well established as a breeding species at Woolston, records were received throughout the year, starting on 1<sup>st</sup> January when nine were over No.3 bed. This was the maximum for the early months. On 14<sup>th</sup> February one was seen near the previous year's nest site on No.3 bed whilst on 14<sup>th</sup> March a pair was observed displaying over the east bank of No.3 bed and on the same date a male was seen carrying prey in the same area. April began with a report of nine from the John Morgan Hide on the 4<sup>th</sup> whilst on the 8<sup>th</sup> six were soaring over No.3 bed, including a pair displaying over the south-east corner and in competition with Carrion Crows for a nest site in a tall Willow. One was seen dropping several times into trees near the previous year's nest site on 17<sup>th</sup> April and on the 20<sup>th</sup> one was found on a nest on No.4 bed. Back on No.3 bed one was seen carrying prey on 5<sup>th</sup> May. Two nests were found. One on No.2 bed produced two young but it is not known if they eventually fledged but the nest on No.4 bed did fledge two young.

A juvenile was reported on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> July and two adults and one juvenile on the same bed on 1<sup>st</sup> August. An adult and two juveniles were on the Loop of No.4 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> August so it seems likely that two or three pairs bred successfully on the Reserve. In the summer months there were reports of birds taking Black-headed Gull chicks on No.3 bed.

There were no significant counts after the breeding season apart from a total of eleven reported from the Migration Watch on 5<sup>th</sup> September, not all of which were on the Reserve itself. None were recorded after 11<sup>th</sup> December but birds were almost certainly present to the year end.



*Common Buzzard*

*Hazel Rothwell*

### **Osprey**

*Pandion haliaetus*

Amber-listed, but slowly increasing in range, one was seen over No.4 bed in the early morning of 9<sup>th</sup> May at 7.20a.m. It flew across No.3 bed and along the north bank before flying off to the north-west. This is only the second sighting since 2009.

### **Kestrel**

*Falco tinnunculus*

This amber-listed species was scarce in January and February but there were sightings in every month apart from December. Reports came from all areas of the Reserve but mostly from the well-watched No.3 bed. During a Common Bird Survey on 4<sup>th</sup> April a pair was seen displaying over No.2 bed before entering a nest box near to a traditional nest site on the Viaduct. Three were on No.3 bed on 28<sup>th</sup> March and two were hunting over No.2 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> May. One flew east over No.3 bed carrying prey on 9<sup>th</sup> June and on 18<sup>th</sup> July a family party with at least one young was calling loudly to the south of the Canal opposite No.2 bed. There was no evidence that more than one pair bred and this is the same as in 2014. The only count of significance after the breeding season was on 5<sup>th</sup> September when

six were seen by the Migration Watchers; some at least of these would be seen at a distance from the Reserve itself.



*male Kestrel from the Frank Linley hide*

*David Spencer*

### **Hobby**

*Falco subbuteo*

With 28 records received this was an above average year for this attractive summer visitor. The first was reported on 11<sup>th</sup> April and there were a number of sightings between 11<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May. All but two of these were from No.3 bed though there were also single reports from No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip. June produced two records of birds hunting over No.3 bed and there was then a gap until 11<sup>th</sup> August. From then until 10<sup>th</sup> September one or two were seen on a number of occasions including 23<sup>rd</sup> August when one was seen chasing a Sparrowhawk along the river and calling noisily.

### **Peregrine**

*Falco peregrinus*

A pair has bred on the Thelwall Viaduct for the past eight years and birds were at this location from January onwards. One was seen hunting Starlings leaving the roost on No.3 bed at dawn on 24<sup>th</sup> February. Whilst the pair was at the nest site there was concern that maintenance work being carried out under the Viaduct could cause them to desert the nest. Urgent representations to the Highways Agency resulted in the work being halted and the birds returned to the nest site. Two were flying around the Viaduct calling noisily on 17<sup>th</sup> June and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> an adult and two juveniles were



perched on the structure. A juvenile was found on the concrete base of the Viaduct on 23<sup>rd</sup> June and it allowed the observer to approach within a few yards before hopping away. One of the adults was present nearby and calling loudly so observations were cut short. The last report of the year was on 21<sup>st</sup> November when a male flew low over No.3 bed flushing a flock of Teal.



*Juvenile Peregrine on viaduct*

*David Bowman*

### **Water Rail**

*Rallus aquaticus*

In the early months of the year there were reports from Nos.1 and 3 beds and the Loop of No.4 bed. Most records were of singles but two were heard calling on the East Pool of No.1 bed. No.3 bed is the stronghold of this species and on 6<sup>th</sup> March five were calling in the reeds along a 200 metre stretch on the east bank. The WeBS counts in March and April both produced totals of five. On 22<sup>nd</sup> March two were heard calling in the reed bed on the Loop of No.4 bed but there was no evidence of breeding in that area. Confirmed breeding appears to have been confined to No.1 bed, where two adults and three young were heard calling near the East Pool on 12<sup>th</sup> May and another young bird was heard in a different location the following day. On 24<sup>th</sup> July at least three broods were heard calling on No.1 bed. After the breeding season there were reports to the end of the year with maxima of four on No.1 bed and three on No.3 bed.



## **Moorhen**

*Gallinula chloropus*

A count of 38 on 8<sup>th</sup> January was the highest in the first few months of the year, although there were in excess of thirty on three other occasions from January to March. Less were seen as the breeding season approached. Three pairs were on the Loop of No.4 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> May and broods began to appear from the end of that month. A total of 20 broods was recorded, slightly down on the 2014 total of 28, but nevertheless a reasonable number given the less than ideal conditions in the summer months. The distribution of broods was interesting with seven on the Loop where none have bred since 2011. This is possibly due to the improvement in the habitat as a result of work undertaken in the past two winter periods and is by far the highest number of broods ever recorded there. The increase in this area was counterbalanced by a reduction in numbers on No.3 bed, where eight broods this year was less than half the number (17) recorded in 2014. The remaining broods were two on No.1 bed, two on flooded fields to the north of No.2 bed and one on the river. Post-breeding counts of significance included 29 on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 28 on No.3 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and Reserve-wide totals of 28 and 31 in December. Five were ringed on No.3 bed; two caught in a duck trap in January and three juveniles in a mist net set for waders in August.

## **Coot**

*Fulica atra*

The first WeBS count of the year on 18<sup>th</sup> January found a total of 51 and between 20 and 30 were regularly reported during the month. On 19<sup>th</sup> February 64 were present of which 51 were on No.3 bed. Totals in March and April averaged around 40 and the first brood appeared on the 26<sup>th</sup> when a pair with five small young was seen on the river near the footbridge. Counting Coot broods is not straightforward but the best estimate is of 42 across the Reserve. Of these 17 were on No.3 bed, ten on the Loop of No.4 bed, two on the Sandpit Ponds, five on the river, six on No.1 bed, one on No.2 bed and one on flooded fields to the north. This is less than the record number (52) present in 2014 but nevertheless represents a successful breeding season. As with Moorhen it is interesting that broods on the Loop increased from five to ten whilst on No.3 bed there were only half the number present the previous year.

Post-breeding, 80 were on No.3 bed on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> June. The highest count of the year was on 11<sup>th</sup> July, when a minimum of 165 were on No.3 bed alone. By the start of August 72 were still present on No.3 bed and up to forty were on the Loop. By mid-September very few remained and it was thought that many had moved to Appleton Reservoir. On 17<sup>th</sup> October only 14 were present and the WeBS count on 13<sup>th</sup> December produced 33.

Two were ringed on No.3 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> January and 18<sup>th</sup> February; only 26 have ever been ringed on the Reserve.

## **Avocet**

*Recurvirostra avosetta*

This elegant wader is currently amber-listed. One was found on the scrape on No.3 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> May and on 20<sup>th</sup> June two were seen in the same location by a number of observers. This species has extended its range as a result of climate change but this year's sightings are only the fourth and fifth ever at Woolston.



*Avocet on No.3 bed*

*David Bowman*

### **Oystercatcher**

*Haematopus ostralegus*

Now amber-listed, the first were seen typically on 28<sup>th</sup> March, when two were on No.3 bed. Regular sightings were reported from April to June, all from No.3 bed with the exception of one on No.1 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> April. On 14<sup>th</sup> April three were on the scrape and two mated. Further mating was reported in the same location on 28<sup>th</sup> April. There were two July records including three on No.4 bed on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The only subsequent sighting was of one on the Migration Watch on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

### **Golden Plover**

*Pluvialis apricaria*

There was just one report of this infrequent visitor, when 23 flew west in three groups on the morning of 21<sup>st</sup> November.

### **Lapwing**

*Vanellus vanellus*

Once a very common breeding bird, nationally, Lapwing is now red-listed. At Woolston, the species enjoyed a comparatively successful year and nearly two hundred records were submitted. The year began with flocks of more than a hundred over-flying the Reserve and smaller numbers gathered on fields to the north of No.1 bed, with a maximum of 50 on 5<sup>th</sup> February. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of that month about 120 were flushed from No.3 bed by a Marsh Harrier.

As the breeding season approached a pair was displaying on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide on 18<sup>th</sup> March and two pairs were on the Loop of No.4 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> April where display was observed at the end of that month. On 30<sup>th</sup> April one was sitting on four eggs on the scrape and remained until 22<sup>nd</sup> May when two eggs were present. On No.1 bed two pairs were found in suitable breeding habitat. Two nests were found on No.1 bed, one with four eggs and one with three eggs. Successful fledging was not determined. Back on the Loop, eight were seen on 17<sup>th</sup> June including a pair with two small young. The same location held 41 adults and a well grown young on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

From mid-July there was a build-up on No.3 bed, with 83 on the 16<sup>th</sup> increasing to 128 on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Numbers continued to increase during August; 135 were on No.3 bed on the 15<sup>th</sup> whilst, on the 20<sup>th</sup> 130 were on No.3 bed and a further 50 on the Loop. On 26<sup>th</sup> August 333 were counted on No.3 bed and over 400 were recorded in mid-September. The year's maxima were on 10<sup>th</sup> October when 785 flew west and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> when, with water levels very low on No.3 bed, no less than 765 were congregated in the shallows. This is the highest total since 2006. A few days later numbers had decreased to around 400 and by mid-November none remained. For the remainder of the year records consisted of flocks over-flying with a maximum of 390 moving west on 21<sup>st</sup> November.



*Lapwing nesting in front of the John Morgan hide*

*David Spencer*



## Little Ringed Plover

*Charadrius dubius*

As recently as 2011 this species was an infrequent visitor but since then it has become much more common and this year over a hundred records were submitted. Present during spring and summer the first sighting was of one on No.3 bed on 6<sup>th</sup> April, followed by regular reports of up to two from that bed. Three were on No.1 bed on the 11<sup>th</sup>. From 18<sup>th</sup> April there were almost daily sightings from the scrape on No.3 bed until the end of May. A single record from No.4 bed was of two on 12<sup>th</sup> May. On 17<sup>th</sup> May two were seen mating in front of the John Morgan Hide and a search of suitable habitat on the northern section of No.1 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May revealed three pairs.

Breeding was successful in this area and on 5<sup>th</sup> June eight were found there including a pair with two young and two pairs, showing distraction display suggestive of young being present. Six were on No.3 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> June and on the 27<sup>th</sup> nine were on No.1 bed including a family party of two adults and one fledged young. On 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July two adults and one juvenile were on No.3 bed and the juvenile remained until 6<sup>th</sup> August. In total it seems that at least four pairs bred, three on No.1 bed and one on No.3. A single adult was reported on No.3 bed until 28<sup>th</sup> August.



*Little Ringed Plover*

*Andy Weir*

## Ringed Plover

*Charadrius hiaticula*

In serious decline, Ringed Plover has now been moved from the amber list to the red list. The only record was of three in front of the John Morgan Hide, which were seen by a number of observers on 20<sup>th</sup> June.

## **Whimbrel**

*Numenius phaeopus*

Red-listed, there were just two records of this occasional visitor; one flew north on 12<sup>th</sup> April and one landed briefly on No.3 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> May.

## **Curlew**

*Numenius arquata*

Another of our nationally declining waders, Curlew has been moved from the amber list to the red list. Eight records were submitted between 6<sup>th</sup> March and 27<sup>th</sup> June, all of single birds. It does not appear from the records that any landed.

## **Black-tailed Godwit**

*Limosa limosa*

Despite being red-listed, this species is seen in ever-increasing numbers and this was a record year with no less than 175 records. Nine circled No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> April but did not land. The next report was of 26, again on No.3 bed, on 9<sup>th</sup> June, increasing to 119 two days later and a year maximum of 211 on the 13<sup>th</sup>. This is a record figure for Woolston, more than doubling the previous highest total of a hundred in 2001. These numbers were short-lived but birds remained in smaller numbers with regular counts of 15 to 35. There were reports of five on the Loop of No.4 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> August and six in the same area on 20<sup>th</sup> September. This month saw numbers increase again on No.3 bed with 54 on the 1<sup>st</sup> rising to 86 on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Up to 34 remained into October but only single-figure counts were submitted for November and December with the last sighting on 25<sup>th</sup> December, the latest ever sighting of this species at Woolston. On 2<sup>nd</sup> December the two on No.3 bed were considered to be an adult and a first winter bird of the islandica race.



*Black-tailed Godwits on No.3 bed in June*

*David Bowman*



**Ruff***Calidris pugnax*

This was an excellent year, with over fifty records of this red-listed wader. On 25<sup>th</sup> August a Ruff and a Reeve were found on No.3 bed and there were then regular reports until the end of September. An unusual record was of three on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> September but all other sightings were from No.3 bed. The maximum count was of six on 8<sup>th</sup> September and five were still present a week later. By the month end no more than one was present and there were two October records on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Sanderling***Calidris alba*

A bird in adult summer plumage was found on the scrape in front of the John Morgan hide on 18<sup>th</sup> May. This is the first record since 1998.

*Sanderling**David Spencer***Dunlin***Calidris alpina*

Unlike many of the UK's breeding waders, Dunlin seems to be responding to conservation efforts, recently being moved from the red list to the amber list. Birds were reported on both spring and autumn passage with the first on 24<sup>th</sup> April when one flew onto No.3 bed ahead of a rain-bearing weather front. Regular sightings followed, all of singles except for two flocks totalling 20 birds which circled No.3 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> May but did not land. The only record away from No.3 bed was on 9<sup>th</sup> May when one was on No.4 bed. Return passage began on 18<sup>th</sup> August and all reports were from

No.3 bed. All related to singles apart from three on 8<sup>th</sup> September and the final record of an above average year was on 12<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Common Sandpiper**

*Actitis hypoleucos*

Although amber-listed, with more than fifty records this was another wader to have an excellent year. One was on No.3 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> April and two the following day. There were further records of one or two on this bed until 3<sup>rd</sup> May. Return passage began with one on No.2 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> June, the only record away from the favoured No.3 bed. From 25<sup>th</sup> June one was seen on a number of occasions until the end of July, and August saw almost daily reports of one or two on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide. Four were present on 4<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> August and a year maximum of five on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Sightings continued on an almost daily basis until 2<sup>nd</sup> September and there were a further four records of singles between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of that month. There were no further records.



*Green Sandpiper on No.3 bed*

*Andy Weir*

### **Green Sandpiper**

*Tringa ochropus*

As with the previous species there were many more records of this amber-listed wader than in 2014 and for the second consecutive year, there was evidence of over-wintering. One found on the flooded fields to the north of No.2 bed on 11<sup>th</sup> February almost certainly came into this category. There were further sightings on the Loop on 17<sup>th</sup> March and one was on No.3 bed on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. April reports were of one on No.2 bed on the 4<sup>th</sup> and one on No.4 bed on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The final spring record was of one on No.3 bed on 1<sup>st</sup> May. No more were seen until 10<sup>th</sup> June when one was found on No.3 bed and from 25<sup>th</sup> June to 23<sup>rd</sup> September there were almost daily reports of up to three birds, nearly



all from No.3 bed. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July four were on the north east corner of that bed and the only records from other areas of the Reserve were of singles on the Loop on 21<sup>st</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> July. Numbers peaked at the end of August with four on the 21<sup>st</sup> and a year maximum of five on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. Reports continued into September with a minimum of four on No.3 bed on the 11<sup>th</sup>, whilst singles were found on the Loop and the pool on the northern section of No.1 bed on the 20<sup>th</sup>. There were five October records, including two on the fields to the north of No.2 bed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and an excellent year ended with singles in the same area on 19<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November, on which occasion the bird flew south onto No.2 bed.

The ringing team on No.3 bed captured a record total of eleven during August. Only 17 have ever been ringed at Woolston and, of these, no less than fourteen were in the last two years.

### **Greenshank**

*Tringa nebularia*

There were regular sightings of this attractive, amber-listed wader on autumn passage, with the first on No.3 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. A second report on 1<sup>st</sup> August was followed by almost daily records of one or two until 25<sup>th</sup> August, all from No.3 bed. An excellent passage ended with singles on the scrape on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September.



*Greenshank*

*David Bowman*

**Wood Sandpiper***Tringa glareola*

Amber-listed, and a rare visitor to Woolston, one was found by a visiting group in front of the John Morgan Hide on 22<sup>nd</sup> April. It remained for much of the day and gave good views to a number of observers who had been alerted to its presence.



*Wood Sandpiper*

*David Spencer*

**Redshank***Tringa totanus*

Amber-listed, this was one of the few species of wader to fare less well than in 2014. Nevertheless there were records of both spring and autumn passage. Two were on No.3 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> April and there were further sightings of one in the same area on 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April. No more were seen until 3<sup>rd</sup> June and there were a number of reports, all from No.3 bed, until 14<sup>th</sup> August. All were of singles apart from 27<sup>th</sup> July when two were present. All this year's records were from No.3 bed.

**Jack Snipe***Lymnocyptes minimus*

The only record of this rather elusive species was of one on No.1 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> November.

**Woodcock***Scolopax rusticola*

A species showing continuing decline, this enigmatic wader has now been moved from the amber to the red list. Ten records were received, typically in the first and last two months of the year. On 10<sup>th</sup> January one flew in front of the John Morgan Hide and there was a further sighting on No.3 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> January. There were three February reports; one on the 8<sup>th</sup> on No.1 bed, three in the same area on the 21<sup>st</sup> and one, again on No.1 bed, on the 28<sup>th</sup>. On the same date one was found on No.3 bed. There were no further records until 16<sup>th</sup> November when two were flushed from a small area of Birch on No.1 bed. The remaining two sightings were from No.3 bed; one flushed from the west bank on 19<sup>th</sup> November and one on 13<sup>th</sup> December.

**Snipe***Gallinago gallinago*

The days when this amber-listed wader bred at Woolston are unfortunately long gone. The year began with two on No.1 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> January. Numbers were low with a maximum of six on each of No.3 and the Loop of No.4 bed. Most records were from No.3 bed but there were reports from all areas of the Reserve except No.2 bed. Sightings continued until 20<sup>th</sup> April but typically none were then reported until 2<sup>nd</sup> July. Only low numbers were present until 22<sup>nd</sup> August when 26 were on No.3 bed. September saw an increase with 41 on the 18<sup>th</sup> and numbers peaked in early October when 55 were counted on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The highest total of the year was on 10<sup>th</sup> October when 90 were flushed in a single flock from No.3 bed. There were counts of over 50 into November with a maximum of 63 on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Fewer were present into December; 14 were on No.3 bed on the 5<sup>th</sup> and none were recorded after the 13<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Tern***Sternula albifrons*

A very scarce visitor to Woolston, one of these amber-listed terns was reported on No.3 bed but unfortunately there is no information about when it was seen.

**Common Tern***Sterna hirundo*

Amber-listed, the first of the year was on 16<sup>th</sup> April when two flew north-west and during May there were two reports of one and four birds over-flying the Reserve. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June one was on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide. The next sighting was on 1<sup>st</sup> July when two were seen briefly before flying off to the south. On 5<sup>th</sup> July a pair took over one of the rafts from the resident Black-headed Gulls; one brought a fish for the other and display was observed. The pair was seen on a number of occasions until 25<sup>th</sup> July on which date they were again passing small fish to each other. There were further reports of up to three until the final report of the year on 21<sup>st</sup> August. All records were from No.3 bed.





*Common Tern on No.3 bed*

*David Bowman*

### **Black-headed Gull**

*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Now amber listed, the steady decline of our breeding population mirrors the national picture. January reports of 140 and 225 were mostly birds over-flying the Reserve but by mid-February there was evidence of a return to the breeding colony on No.3 bed. On 14<sup>th</sup> February 52 were seen and numbers built rapidly to 670 at the end of the month and 700 on 1<sup>st</sup> March. The maximum count was of 1100 to 1200 at dusk on 20<sup>th</sup> April. The first young was noted on 16<sup>th</sup> May and by 9<sup>th</sup> June some had fledged. Although little detailed information about breeding success is available the indications are that this was not a good year. The maximum number of fledged young reported was 20 on 3<sup>rd</sup> July and although use was made of the breeding rafts the low number of young remains a matter for concern. There was evidence of predation by Buzzards, although Lesser Black-backed Gulls did not appear to have taken young, but there are probably more significant factors at play. Post breeding, 110 were roosting on No.3 bed on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> September but there were no further significant counts from this bed. On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 200 were at Bollin Point and a Reserve-wide total of 550 on 16<sup>th</sup> December (excluding over-flying birds) contained some already in breeding plumage.

### **Mediterranean Gull**

*Larus melanocephalus*

This amber-listed species is a regular spring visitor with occasional sightings later in the year and this pattern was continued. Two adults were seen on No.3 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> March and four days later there were reports of an adult and a second summer bird; two further adults arrived later that day. Thereafter, a second summer bird was seen regularly on the scrape until 2<sup>nd</sup> April. From 11<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>

April two adults were present and at the end of the month two second summer birds were seen. From 2nd to 8th May a pair was at a nest site but although mating took place there was no evidence of breeding. Three were found on 9th May and sightings continued until 25th May. The only other records were of one on 9th June, two adults on 27th June and an adult on 5th August.



*Mediterranean Gull*

*Andy Weir*

### **Common Gull**

*Larus canus*

Like many of the UK's breeding gulls, Common Gull is now on the amber list. Found in small numbers outside the breeding season this was a fairly typical year. Many sightings are from Latchford Locks and most of the early reports were from this location with between five and seven regularly present. The highest count for this period was of nine on 22nd March. Up to three were occasionally seen on No.3 bed until 3rd June. The first returned to Latchford locks on 22nd July and up to three were noted there up to the end of October. An unusual record was on 27th November when 13 were disturbed from the nearby Westy Park and flew onto the Loop of No.4 bed. One was also on No.3 bed on that date and the total of 14 was the highest of the year. The only other count of significance was of nine at Latchford locks on 6th December.

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

*Larus fuscus*

Amber-listed, this is the most common of the large gulls to visit the Reserve. The year began with reports of small numbers in January and February, with five present on 20th February and 27 on the

water on No.3 bed on the 28<sup>th</sup>. This was by far the highest number seen and there were no other counts of significance during the spring. In June there were reports from the Loop of No.4 bed of four on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and eight on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Although birds were regularly seen on No.3 bed there was little evidence of predation; one took a first winter Black-headed Gull on 19<sup>th</sup> April and on 15<sup>th</sup> August a juvenile Little Grebe fell victim to attack. On 1<sup>st</sup> August 13 were on the water on No.3 bed but the only other notable counts were from the September and October Migration Watches, which recorded over-flying flocks of 95 and 16 respectively.

### **Herring Gull**

*Larus argentatus*

Rarely seen in large numbers the first report was of two at Latchford Locks on 4<sup>th</sup> January. Sightings from No.3 bed included three on the rafts on 19<sup>th</sup> February and 12, also on the rafts, on 12<sup>th</sup> March. Ten were on the water on No.3 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> March but only odd ones were seen thereafter until the end of May. There was one June record when one was seen on No.3 bed on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and two sightings in July; an adult and a first summer on No.3 bed on the 13<sup>th</sup> and one at Latchford Locks on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Very few were reported in the rest of the year. There were records of singles on 15<sup>th</sup> September and on two dates in November. The only other report was of ten flying west over No.3 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> December.

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

*Larus marinus*

Until 2014 this amber-listed gull was a rare visitor but, with 14 records that year and 20 this, it has become much more common. One was on the Loop of No.4 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> February and what may have been the same bird was mobbed by two Lesser Black-backed Gulls on No.3 bed two days later. There were sightings of singles on No.3 bed on five dates during March and two adults there on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May two adults and an immature were present with a third adult joining them the next day. Up to two remained until 25<sup>th</sup> May. An immature was seen on the water on 13<sup>th</sup> June and on 10<sup>th</sup> July one was at the Weir. For the remainder of the year there were only two records, both of over-flying birds; one was seen over the Loop on 17<sup>th</sup> October and a week later eleven were counted during a Migration Watch.

### **Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon**

*Columba livia*

Feral Pigeons are a widespread but overlooked species with only five records submitted. The largest flock was 200 at Latchford Locks on 4<sup>th</sup> January. They breed on the Thelwall Viaduct and 10 were noted on the Viaduct during a Common Bird Census on 21<sup>st</sup> March.

### **Stock Dove**

*Columba oenas*

In most years the majority of sightings of this under-stated, amber-listed dove are from the eastern end of the Reserve which borders farmland. It is encouraging, therefore, that this year over 50 records were received from No.3 bed. Birds were regularly seen near the John Morgan hide feeders during the spring and summer periods. There was also an exceptional flock of 20 feeding on the Winter Feed meadow on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Other notable sightings on No.3 bed included eight on 24<sup>th</sup> January and five on

12th July. Elsewhere on the Reserve the maximum counts were on Migration Watches from Butchersfield Tip; 10 were recorded on 5<sup>th</sup> September and 13 on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

Evidence of breeding was noted on both No.1 and No.2 beds. A bird was seen flying out of an owl box on 3<sup>rd</sup> June on No.1 bed and four birds were recorded on the same bed in suitable breeding habitat during a Common Bird Survey. On No.2 bed, two pairs were observed displaying on the Thelwall Viaduct on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Woodpigeon**

*Columba palumbus*

Woodpigeons are common and widespread on the Reserve. In addition to being resident throughout the year, this was a typical year where large numbers were observed during the autumn migration and winter periods. Birds regularly roost on No.2 bed and 300 were observed leaving the roost at dawn on 10<sup>th</sup> January and 330 on the 31<sup>st</sup> January. In the autumn period, peak counts were observed during Migration Watches from Butchersfield Tip with 553 on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 985 on 10<sup>th</sup> October and 1986 on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

During the Common Bird Survey counts of birds in suitable breeding habitat were as follows: 10 on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 21 on No.2 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April, five on No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March and 23 on No.4 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> April.

### **Collared Dove**

*Streptopelia decaocto*

Although Collared Doves are a common breeding bird in the housing estates surrounding the Reserve, they are only occasionally seen on the Reserve and this year there were only seven reports. Two were at Latchford Locks on 25<sup>th</sup> February and one was at the same location on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. The maximum count of the year was three on the Canal track alongside No.4 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> September. There were only three sightings from No.3 bed with singles flying over on 6<sup>th</sup> February and 9<sup>th</sup> May and two flew over on 28<sup>th</sup> March. The only other sightings were two at the Weir on 17<sup>th</sup> June. There were no sightings from No.2 and 4 beds.

There was no evidence of breeding this year. The last confirmed breeding on the Reserve was in 2004 when birds bred alongside the Ship Canal, No.3 bed and Woolston Weir.

### **Cuckoo**

*Cuculus canorus*

Once a fairly common breeder at Woolston, this red-listed migrant is now in serious decline. There were no sightings on the Reserve in 2014, so the two sightings this year were very welcome, although it is doubtful whether they represent any real improvement in the fate of this species. The first record was on 17<sup>th</sup> April, when there were several reports of a bird calling and flying over No.3 bed. The only other sighting was on No.1 bed, where one was heard and seen in the south east corner on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

**Barn Owl***Tyto alba*

A single bird was regularly seen on No.3 bed in the first half of the year. The first sighting was on 22<sup>nd</sup> January and the bird was then regularly seen at dawn and dusk until 9<sup>th</sup> June. At dawn on the 24<sup>th</sup> January one landed on the window ledge of the John Morgan hide, only a few feet away from the lucky observer! There were no further sightings after this but in December, Barn Owl pellets were found underneath the John Morgan hide and in the Tower hide.

The only other sighting came from No.1 bed where a single bird was seen on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> January.

**Tawny Owl***Strix aluco*

Our commonest owl is now showing signs of national decline and has been moved onto the amber list. Birds were regularly heard on both No.1 and 3 beds. Three were calling on No.1 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> August and two were present at the Starling roost on 7<sup>th</sup> February. There were several other records of single birds throughout the remainder of the year including birds calling from the centre of No.3 bed. However, there was no evidence of breeding which has only occasionally been confirmed on the Reserve. The last occasion was 2010 when a pair raised three young on No.3 bed.

**Long-eared Owl***Asio otus*

Two were reported from No.4 bed in the spring period but no further details are available.

**Short-eared Owl***Asio flammeus*

Under serious pressure on their upland breeding grounds, this scarce migrant/winter visitor remains on the amber list. On 31<sup>st</sup> October during a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip a single bird was observed circling high over Woolston Moss, north of the A57. This coincided with an influx of the species into the Northwest region. In the 1980s and early 1990s Short-eared Owls were a regular winter visitor to the Reserve but this is only the fourth record this century and the first since 2011.

**Swift***Apus apus*

Swifts are amber-listed and typically arrive in the last week of April or early May. So a single bird on 17<sup>th</sup> April on No.3 bed was exceptional and equals the earliest date recorded for the Reserve. It was another week though until the next sighting when one was seen feeding along the north bank of No.3 bed and they did not arrive in significant numbers until 3<sup>rd</sup> May when 13 were feeding over the same bed. The next day further birds arrived with 120 hawking over the bed. Throughout the remainder of May there were regular sightings of between 100 and 150. Numbers decreased in June and July with maximum counts of 110 on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 50 on 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June and 70 on 18<sup>th</sup> July.

Similar to last year there were no large post breeding flocks with a peak counts of 150 on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> August. The majority of birds had left by 21<sup>st</sup> August and the final sightings were six on 27<sup>th</sup> August and one on 29<sup>th</sup> August.



The latest reports from the BTO indicate an overall fall in the Swift population of approximately 40% since 1995. Numbers at Woolston in recent years have reflected this decline, although they still breed in reasonable numbers on the adjacent housing estate in Latchford. Brian Martin made several evening visits to the Westy Estate and numbers of Swifts there were high, e.g. 50 screaming around houses in just one part of the estate on 11th July. Many others could be seen around other parts of the estate with birds seen entering nest holes. Departure was early with most Swifts gone by mid to late August. This would suggest a reasonably good breeding season for those that returned. Although loss of nest sites is undoubtedly a factor, lack of insects must also play a significant part in the decline.

### **Kingfisher**

*Alcedo atthis*

Kingfishers are on the amber list and were recorded in all months except April. The first sighting of the year was on 7<sup>th</sup> January and birds were regularly reported from the No.3 bed footbridge until the middle of March. Most sightings were of single birds but two were seen from the footbridge on 17<sup>th</sup> March. There were no further sightings on No.3 bed until 5<sup>th</sup> May and then only occasional reports up to 7<sup>th</sup> July. For the remainder of July and August birds were seen almost daily. Like last year there were excellent photographic opportunities, as one took to fishing from the perch immediately in front of the John Morgan hide, no doubt attracted by the thousands of Sticklebacks which could be seen in the channels. In the autumn and second winter periods birds were still being regularly reported both on the old river and No.3 bed. The last sighting of the year was on 15<sup>th</sup> December.

Away from No.3 bed, there were few reports. One was on the Sandpit Pond on No.4 bed on 25<sup>th</sup> February and on No.1 bed there were three records of single birds on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 25<sup>th</sup> March and 6<sup>th</sup> August.

There was no breeding on the Reserve but given the frequency of sightings, it is thought breeding occurred close by, probably in the banks of the Ship Canal. On No.3 bed a single juvenile male was caught and ringed on 12<sup>th</sup> August.

### **Green Woodpecker**

*Picus viridis*

Green Woodpeckers are an uncommon visitor to the Reserve and birds are thought to originate from populations in the Rixton and Lymm areas. Most sightings are usually on the eastern end of the Reserve. However this year there was only a single record from No.1 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> April. More sightings came from No.3 bed where one was regularly seen or heard in various parts of the bed between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> August. All sightings are assumed to relate to the same individual but views were not good enough to sex or age the bird.

### **Great Spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos major*

Although the commonest of our woodpeckers, only 24 records were submitted this year. This compares to 43 for 2014. This may be simply a case of under recording but data from the ringing teams also suggests a poor year. On No.3 bed the first sighting was on 10<sup>th</sup> January when two were

seen. Birds were regularly seen in February and March with a peak count of three on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> February. From April to July there were only five sightings submitted and no records for August and September. The last sighting of the year was of a single bird on 5<sup>th</sup> December. On No.3 bed no birds were ringed during the year. The average is nine new birds per year. In 2014 a record 15 were ringed on the bed. Six were retrapped between the 4<sup>th</sup> January and 16<sup>th</sup> May. No birds were handled after this date. This is very unusual. In 2014 this species was handled on 40 occasions throughout the year. The ringing data and paucity of records could point to a poor breeding season. A less likely alternative is that there was a such good supply of natural food that they did not need to visit the feeding stations, which could account for both the lack of ringing and sight records. Observers are encouraged to submit all records for this species, noting the sex and age where possible.

The situation was similar on the other beds. There was only a single record for No.4 bed where one was recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> April. Similarly No.2 bed had only a single record on 26<sup>th</sup> May. On No.1 bed there were two records, each of a single bird. On No.1 bed, only three were ringed with the last of those on 16<sup>th</sup> April, the worst year since 2003. All of them were second year males and were caught at the eastern end of the bed. Three others were retrapped during the year, two from 2013 and one from 2014, two males were caught in breeding condition, and only one bird was caught after 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

There was no confirmation of breeding but birds were observed drumming on No.1 and 2 beds and two juveniles were seen at the feeders by the John Morgan hide on 11<sup>th</sup> July.

### **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos minor*

It was a very encouraging year for this diminutive, red-listed woodpecker. The first sighting was of one in the copse by the gate to No.2 bed and then along the south bank of No.3 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> March. Ten days later a female was seen again on No.3 bed and later calling in the copse. There were no further sightings until 15<sup>th</sup> April, when a single bird was heard calling along the south bank. There were then almost daily sightings until 20<sup>th</sup> April when a pair was observed and one was seen excavating a hole. The male bore a ring and Mike Roberts' excellent photographs allowed the ring number to be read and revealed it was ringed on No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2011 as a juvenile. This raised the hopes of breeding but unfortunately there were no further spring sightings. The only other record was of one near the South Meadow of No.3 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Magpie**

*Pica pica*

Magpies are a common and widespread resident species. The largest counts were recorded on No.4 bed where 37 were on the Loop and the old Woolston Tip on 17<sup>th</sup> March. Twenty five were in the area of the Sandpit Pond at dusk on 11<sup>th</sup> December, probably going to roost. The only other notable count was of 20 seen near the car park by No.3 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> December, also gathering to roost. The only proof of breeding was on 14<sup>th</sup> June when an adult and two newly fledged juveniles were seen near the car park. However, the Common Bird Surveys, in March and April, recorded three on No.1 bed, four on No.2 bed and eight on No.4 bed, all in suitable breeding habitat. Surprisingly, none were recorded on No.3 bed during the surveys.



*Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker*

*Mike Roberts*

## **Jay**

*Garrulus glandarius*

A typical year for this species, with small numbers observed on all beds throughout the year and a passage of autumn birds. Maximum counts during the Common Bird Surveys were seven on No.1 bed, one on No.2 bed, four on No.3 bed and six on No.4 bed. Two nests were located, one on No.2 bed which fledged three young and one on No.4 bed which had one egg when found though nesting success was not determined.

In autumn peak counts were all from No.3 bed in October with 36 seen passing through east on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 10 on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 12 on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

On No.1 bed the ringers had the best year since 2005 with eight ringed, three were caught in breeding condition, two females and a male, the only juvenile of the year was ringed on 19<sup>th</sup> August. On No.3 bed only three birds were ringed during the year. This compares to 2014 when 13 were ringed and the 12 year average of 11.9 birds per year. The only juvenile bird was ringed on 29<sup>th</sup> August.

## **Jackdaw**

*Corvus monedula*

Most observations of Jackdaw relate to birds seen flying over the Reserve with the largest numbers occurring in the winter periods. At Bollin Point, 100 were seen flying south on 2<sup>nd</sup> January and in the second winter period, 150 on 17<sup>th</sup> October. In addition, 200 were seen moving between Butchersfield

Tip and fields to the south on 22<sup>nd</sup> October. On No.3 bed similar size flocks were seen with 201 flying east on 10<sup>th</sup> January and 150 on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. On No.3 bed, three feeding on the newly ploughed winter feed area on 1<sup>st</sup> May was notable as it was one of the few non fly-over sightings of the year. The maximum count from No.4 bed was of 100 flying west on 14<sup>th</sup> January. There were no reports from No.2 bed.

### **Rook**

*Corvus frugilegus*

There were no reports of Rook this year. It is never a common bird on the Reserve and usually only seen overflying the eastern end as they move between farmland on either side of the Ship Canal. However, this is the first blank year since 1981. Hopefully, the lack of sightings is due to under recording rather than a significant decline in their population.

### **Carrion Crow**

*Corvus corone*

A regular breeding species recorded on all four beds. In the breeding season Common Bird Surveys recorded two on No.1 bed, three on No.2 bed, two on No.3 bed and 13 on No.4 bed. An active nest was discovered on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> April. The peak counts were 41 on the Loop of No.4 bed on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 30 from Butchersfield Tip during a Migration Watch on 5<sup>th</sup> September and 40 in fields to the south of Bollin Point on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Raven**

*Corvus corax*

In recent years Ravens have been increasingly recorded flying over the Reserve, so it is slightly disappointing that there were only six reports this year compared to 13 in 2014. The first report was on 7<sup>th</sup> April when one was seen flying east over No.3 bed. On 13<sup>th</sup> May a single bird flew south over No.1 bed. The maximum count was of two flying east over No.3 bed on 25<sup>th</sup> July. There were then no other sightings until October when singles were seen on the 19<sup>th</sup> on No.1 bed, the 29<sup>th</sup> on No.3 bed and the last sighting for the year on the 31<sup>st</sup> during a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip.

### **Goldcrest**

*Regulus regulus*

Goldcrests were observed in small numbers throughout the year, although there were no large autumn counts this year. The maximum was three at Bollin Point on 2<sup>nd</sup> January and three on No.2 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> November. Otherwise most records were of single birds on No.1 and 3 beds throughout the year. There were no records from No.4 bed. Singing males were heard at Weir Lane on 4<sup>th</sup> April and at Bollin Point on 24<sup>th</sup> April both potential breeding areas.

On No.1 bed the ringers had an excellent year with 90 ringed. Two were caught in the spring, both returning birds that had been ringed in 2014. Six were caught during the summer, from 11<sup>th</sup> June and were probably local breeders while the first returning birds were caught on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. The final bird of the year was caught on 5<sup>th</sup> November.

On No.3 bed 30 were ringed during the year. The 12 year average is 30.4 new birds. Two new birds were ringed during the spring (21<sup>st</sup> March and 4<sup>th</sup> April). Two “locally bred” juveniles were ringed on 11<sup>th</sup> July and 8<sup>th</sup> August before the first birds of autumn on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

### **Firecrest**

*Regulus ignicapilla*

The only record this year was on the afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> November when a single bird was observed on the south bank of No.3 bed. Hopes that it might winter on the bed were not realised as there were no further sightings.

### **Blue Tit**

*Cyanistes caeruleus*

Few records were submitted other than those made during the Common Bird Survey. The peak counts during these surveys were ten on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 19 on No.2 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April, three on No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March and ten on No.4 bed on the same day.

For the ringers on No.1 bed, it was the best year since 2003 and the third best since 1995 for this species with 183 ringed, including 57 nestlings, 13 of which were caught later in the year. A further 78 were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 21<sup>st</sup> August 2009. The first fledged juvenile was caught on 11<sup>th</sup> June

On No.3 bed it was a below average year with just 129 new birds ringed, the average in a year is 150 new birds. Fifty one were ringed in the nest boxes. This is less than last year, but is quite a good total. The first fledged juvenile was caught on 27<sup>th</sup> June. This is the latest date in the last 12 years by five days. Twenty three birds were retrapped from 2014, nine from 2013, three from 2012, one from 2011, one from 2010, one from 2009 and one from 2008. From August to the year end only 34 birds were retrapped (twenty birds) plus 46 new birds ringed (80 handlings). In 2014 there were 223 handlings in the same period. It was very clear that there were not the number of birds around, suggesting a poor breeding season on the bed.

### **Great Tit**

*Parus major*

As for the last species, the majority of counts submitted were from the Common Bird Survey. Nine were on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March, eight on 4<sup>th</sup> April on No.2 bed, nine on 21<sup>st</sup> March on No.3 bed and seven on No.4 bed on the same day.

On No.1 bed it was a reasonable year for this species with 95 ringed including 20 nestlings, four of which were caught later in the year. The first fledged juveniles were ringed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. A further 55 were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 26<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

On No.3 bed a total of 146 new birds were ringed during the year. The 12 year average is 169.5 new birds. This is the lowest annual total since 2008 when just 93 new birds were ringed. The first fledged juvenile was ringed on the 6<sup>th</sup> June. A total of 77 was ringed in the nest boxes. This is slightly down on last year when 85 were ringed, but is slightly more than 2013. Birds retrapped from previous years were 29 from 2014, eight from 2013, one from 2012, one from 2011, two from 2010



and one from 2009. During the year a total of 364 handlings occurred. This compares to 721 in 2014 and 390 in 2013.

### **Coal Tit**

*Periparus ater*

Coal Tit used to be an uncommon visitor to the Reserve and in some years would not be recorded at all. More recently, although remaining relatively scarce, sightings have increased with most reports from Bollin Point and Weir Lane. Breeding is suspected in both areas. In 2015, birds continued to be seen at these traditional sites and there was an increase in sightings on No.1 and 3 beds. A juvenile was seen near the east pool on No.1 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> June and one was also on the bed on 19<sup>th</sup> August. On No.3 bed there were regular records of a single bird in October and one was also seen on 8<sup>th</sup> December.

The increased number of observations is also reflected in the ringing results from No.1 bed which had an unprecedented year for this species with 28 ringed, the previous highest was just nine in 2011. The first of the year was an overwintering bird originally ringed in 2014, while a further three were caught in the first winter period; all of the above were caught at the eastern end of the Reserve. The first juvenile was ringed on 6<sup>th</sup> June and was probably locally bred and autumn passage started on 5<sup>th</sup> September with new birds being caught until the end of October although some of these did stay until the end of the following month. Passage on No.3 bed was not as impressive; only two were ringed during the year on 26<sup>th</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> October. The 12 year average is just 1.8 new birds.

### **Willow Tit**

*Poecile montana*

Given the national decline in its numbers and its red list status, Willow Tit is one of the Reserve's most important breeding species. It is pleasing, therefore, to report continued breeding success on all four beds. Not surprisingly most sightings were from No.3 bed where it was reported throughout the year, with birds regularly observed at the John Morgan hide feeders and in the areas of the willow scrub on the bed.

A detailed study by Allan Rustell on breeding Willow Tits in 2015 on the Reserve and the adjacent Paddington Meadows can be found towards the end of this report. In summary, Allan estimates six or seven breeding pairs on No.1 bed, at least three or four pairs on No.3 bed and six or seven pairs on No.4 bed. A single breeding pair was found on No.2 bed but because of the difficult terrain this bed was not fully explored. Overall, Allan found 12 active nests of which three were predated, one was possibly usurped by Blue Tits and was then predated. Another was definitely usurped by Blue Tits and seven were presumed successfully fledged. In addition to these nests several trial excavations were found and subsequently abandoned.

Whilst it was a successful year for Allan for locating Willow Tit nests, only 21 new birds were caught by the ringers. This is well below the ten year average of 35. This reduction was evident on both beds so it is unlikely that ringing effort is the driver of this change and it appears that breeding success was poor.

On No.1 bed just ten were ringed during the year, the lowest total since 2007, no adults were caught in breeding condition and the first juveniles were ringed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. A further three were caught during the year that had been ringed in previous years, two from 2012 and one from 2013.

On No.3 bed 11 new birds were ringed during the year. This is below the 12 year average of 16.5 birds and is the lowest total since 2008 when just nine were ringed. The first fledged juvenile was ringed on 27<sup>th</sup> June. This is the latest date in the last 12 years. Nine of the birds ringed were juveniles. Birds were retrapped from the following years: three from 2014, one from 2013, and one from 2012.



*Willow (left) and Marsh (right) Tit*

*David Spencer*

### **Marsh Tit**

*Poecile palustris*

A rare visitor and red-listed species, one frequented the feeder at the John Morgan hide in the second winter period. It was first noted in mid-November but had probably been present on No.3 bed since September. Confirming its identity proved problematic. It gave an odd “chui” call and not the characteristic “pitchoo” call of a Marsh Tit. A recording of the call was made and sent to Richard Broughton an expert on Marsh and Willow Tit identification. Unfortunately, the call did not match any of Richard’s own recordings and, although he thought it had the “ring” of a Marsh Tit, he did not consider a positive identification possible from the recordings. At times it was observed feeding with a Willow Tit and in comparison the glossy cap, lack of wing panel and neat bib were all noted. However, given the ambiguous nature of the call and the known overlap in plumage features some doubt remained as to the identity. On 4<sup>th</sup> December, to resolve the issue, a Marsh Tit song was played

and the bird immediately responded giving the fill “pitch-dee-dee” call, finally confirming its identity. The next day the bird was caught by the ringing team together with a Willow Tit allowing a rare opportunity to see these species side by side.

This is the first record on the Reserve since 1993.

### **Skylark**

*Alauda arvensis*

As with many of our farmland species, Skylarks are in serious decline and are red-listed. As usual most reports were from the eastern end of the Reserve. All reports were of birds overflying the Eyes or adjacent farmland. The largest count was 120 in a single flock flying north over No.1 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> January. Other significant counts were 20 in fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip on 9<sup>th</sup> February and 10 in song in the same area on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. In the autumn period 40 were reported over No.1 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 98 during a migration watch from Butchersfield Tip on 31<sup>st</sup> October and 50 over No.1 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> November.

Last year’s unusual autumn passage over No.3 bed was not repeated; there were only five reports with a maximum of three on 24<sup>th</sup> October. The only record from No.4 bed was of one on 24<sup>th</sup> February. Similarly, there was only a single report from No.2 bed with four overflying on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Sand Martin**

*Riparia riparia*

The first report was of a single bird hawking over No.3 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> March, the same day the first two Black-necked Grebes returned. This is a very early arrival date for the Reserve. In most years, the first birds arrive between mid to late March; the only earlier record was in 2009 when the first arrived on 2<sup>nd</sup> March. The next sighting was on 14<sup>th</sup> March and this was followed by two on 20<sup>th</sup> March. It was not until the end of March that significant numbers arrived. Seven were seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 15 the following day. The largest counts for the year occurred in mid-April when 210 were feeding over No.3 bed on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 220 on the 15<sup>th</sup>, also on No.3 bed. Other significant counts during the spring period were 100 on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 59 on 5<sup>th</sup> May and 60 on 19<sup>th</sup> May. There was no evidence of breeding this year along the Ship Canal and numbers during the summer period were low. The peak counts were 20 on 14<sup>th</sup> June with all other counts being in single figures. Similarly there were no large post breeding flocks observed with a maximum of 12 on 10<sup>th</sup> September.

There were few records received away from No.3 bed; one was on No.2 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> May and 20 were feeding over No.4 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> July.

The last sighting of the year was of one on 15<sup>th</sup> September on No.3 bed

On No.1 bed seven were caught between 23<sup>rd</sup> July and 1<sup>st</sup> September with only one adult amongst them. On No.3 bed only three were ringed during the year. The 12 year average is 20. This species is generally caught at roost, but due to the weather conditions, there was a lack of opportunity to visit the roost, which accounts for the reduction in birds caught.

## Swallow

*Hirundo rustica*

The first sighting of the year was on 4<sup>th</sup> April when one was seen on No.3 bed. This was followed by one on the 5<sup>th</sup> and three on the 6<sup>th</sup>. It was not until 15<sup>th</sup> April that double-figure counts were made, with 10 on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 12 on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 50 on the 28<sup>th</sup>. In May peak counts were 100 on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 220 on the 14<sup>th</sup>. In the summer period birds were regularly seen around the pumping station on No.2 bed, a traditional breeding site and are presumed to have bred there but there was no confirmed evidence. In 2014, 2000 roosted on No.1 bed in mid-August, the largest numbers for ten years. Unfortunately there was no repeat of such large roosts this year. On 10<sup>th</sup> June 37 were recorded at the roost on No.1 bed; by the 25<sup>th</sup> July the roost size had increased to 250 but by mid-August had dropped to 150. There are no records of birds roosting on No.3 bed this year but this may be due to the lack of ringing effort on the bed.

In the autumn, the peak count was 607 from Butchersfield Tip on 5<sup>th</sup> September during a Migration Watch. Other notable autumn counts were 50 in the evening of 14<sup>th</sup> September on No.3 bed and 20 on the same bed on 17<sup>th</sup> September. Twelve flew south over No.4 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> September and six flew south over No.3 bed on 28<sup>th</sup> September. There were then no other sightings until 10<sup>th</sup> October when three flew south over No.3 bed.

On No.1 bed, 167 were ringed between 23<sup>rd</sup> July and 31<sup>st</sup> August, the best year since 2006. The majority were juveniles as expected, but 15 adults were caught including 10 still in breeding condition, five males and five females. A further bird was caught that had been ringed elsewhere in Britain.

On No.3 bed it was a poor year with only 59 new Swallows ringed. This was due to lack of opportunities due to weather and time rather than numbers of birds. The 12 year annual average is 215 new birds.

## House Martin

*Delichon urbicum*

This amber-listed hirundine continues to show signs of a decline in breeding numbers nationally. The first sighting of the year was of three on 11<sup>th</sup> April on No.3 bed. There were few other records until 28<sup>th</sup> April when there was a large hirundine movement over No.3 bed during the morning in rainy conditions. Total numbers comprised at least 150 House Martins together with c50 Swallows and two Sand Martins. Other notable counts in the spring included on No.3 bed, 65 on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 50 on 18<sup>th</sup> May and 50 on 25<sup>th</sup> May. In the summer period the largest flocks were observed over No.4 bed with 40 present on 17<sup>th</sup> June and 80 feeding over the Loop and Giant Hogweed areas on 17<sup>th</sup> July. On No.3 bed in the summer most counts were of one or two birds with the largest counts of 20 on 14<sup>th</sup> June and 21 on 27<sup>th</sup> June. The low numbers on No.3 bed may reflect the decline in breeding numbers in the housing estates surrounding Weir Lane. In late summer and autumn numbers increased with 55 on No.3 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> August and 30 on the same bed on 4<sup>th</sup> September. On 5<sup>th</sup> September 176 were recorded from Butchersfield Tip during a Migration Watch and 50 were on No.1 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> September. The last large count was 40 on No.3 bed on the evening of 14<sup>th</sup> September and the final sightings of the year were nine flying south over No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> September.

## **Cetti's Warbler**

*Cettia cetti*

In recent history this species has been noted as a rare visitor with just 11 records prior to 2015. Eight were ringed in 2014, all autumn birds, although one bird was considered to have summered. In contrast, 2015 provided a dramatic increase in records for this species with 89 reports of sightings of singing males from No.1, 2 and 3 beds and the Reserve's first confirmed successful breeding on No.1 bed.

Over half the records came from the spring/summer period with the first bird in song on 7<sup>th</sup> March on No.3 bed. No.1 bed followed with a singing male on 5<sup>th</sup> April. It is thought this bird was subsequently caught by the ringing team on 17<sup>th</sup> April in the same locality and was identified as a dispersed bird ringed at Leighton Moss in the autumn of 2014 as a juvenile. On 16<sup>th</sup> April, two were observed in the north-east corner of No.3 bed, a singing male and a second bird, close by, presumed to be a female, entering a suitable nest site. Singing males were regularly heard at two locations on No.1 bed and the north-east corner and south bank of No.3 bed and north-west bank of No.2 bed. Movements of these birds probably accounted for the majority of records through the summer, although perhaps not those of reports and sightings of birds in the centre of the bed by the Tower and John Morgan hides.

It was an excellent year for the ringing teams, with No.1 bed ringing seven birds, including the first nestlings to be ringed in Cheshire. Three juveniles were caught, all between 24<sup>th</sup> July and 19<sup>th</sup> August and the final bird of the year, on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, was also a juvenile. A further two birds were caught that had been ringed elsewhere in Britain, the bird mentioned above from Leighton Moss, and one from Oxmoor, Runcorn. On No.3 bed seven new birds were ringed, including three single juveniles on 25<sup>th</sup> July and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August and four others on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> (two).

The first breeding was confirmed on the Reserve with a nest on No.1 bed with a clutch of four eggs, from which two birds were subsequently ringed (the first for Cheshire) and fledged. A mild 2015 – 2016 winter followed by a decent summer and this species could become securely established at Woolston.

## **Long-tailed Tit**

*Aegithalos caudatus*

A common breeding resident across the whole Reserve. The majority are reported outside the breeding season when feeding flocks advertise their presence with their consistent contact calls. The first record was on 10<sup>th</sup> January, of ten on No.3 bed and the highest count was of 24 across the whole Reserve on 5<sup>th</sup> February, of which 16 were on No.2 bed. Regular counts of ten plus were reported up mid-February.

The Common Bird Surveys identified an average of four pairs in suitable breeding habitat on No.2 bed, five birds on No.1 bed and two birds on No.4 bed. Four nests were found: two on No.1 bed, which were both predated at the egg stage; one on No.2 bed, which was not monitored and hence the outcome unknown and one on No.4 bed, which had six eggs but fledging success was not determined.

The ringing teams recorded the lowest totals ringed for this species for over a decade, since 2003 on No.3 bed and 1997 on No.1 bed. Just 22 new birds were ringed on No.3 bed compared to the 12 year average of 63. No.1 bed also recorded a significant drop with 35 new birds ringed compared to a 12 year average for that bed of 66. The combined beds recorded just 11 females in breeding condition



(brood patches), five on No.3 bed and six on No.1 bed. No.3 bed caught 16 birds ringed in previous years, the oldest from 2010 whilst No.1 bed had a higher number of 33 captures of previous ringed birds, the oldest from 2012. This means just 106 Long-tailed Tits were handled in 2015, less than the expected total for new birds only.



Chiffchaff

Andy Weir

## Chiffchaff

*Phylloscopus collybita*

One of the first migrants to return from annual migration, although small numbers may overwinter. The first returning bird of the year was singing on No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> March. By 22<sup>nd</sup> March birds were recorded on all four beds. Numbers rapidly increased through late March and early April. The highest count of the year was recorded on a Common Bird Survey of 8<sup>th</sup> April when 95 were reported across the Reserve, of which 39 were on No.4 bed.

Three nests were located, one on No.1 bed and two on No.3 bed, but only one nest on No.3 bed fledged young; the others being predated at the egg stage.

The highest autumn count of 16 occurred on the Migration Watch from Butchersfield on 5<sup>th</sup> September and ten were heard on a survey of No.1 & 3 beds on the 12<sup>th</sup> September. Three, three and five birds were recorded on beds 2, 4 and 3 on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September respectively. An overwintering bird was heard calling on No.1 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> December and one ringed, presumably the same, on 15<sup>th</sup> December.

No.1 bed had another excellent year for this species with 316 new birds ringed, the third highest total since 1995 with the first of the year caught on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Just three returning birds were caught, one

originally ringed in 2013 with the others from 2014. Fourteen were caught in breeding condition, four females and ten males, the first juveniles were caught on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. The majority, 161, were caught in September.

In contrast, No.3 bed had the lowest total since 2012 with just 114 new birds ringed, the twelve year average being 151. The ringing team managed far fewer ringing sessions during the summer months and therefore it is difficult to say whether this total of over 100 less than 2014 is down to poor breeding or lack of ringing. The first of the year was a recaptured, previously ringed, individual caught on 4<sup>th</sup> April and is the latest date for this species in the last 12 years. Eight returned ringed from previous years, six from 2014, one from 2013 and one from 2012. The first juvenile was ringed on 27<sup>th</sup> June, the latest date in the last twelve years by five days, and the final one of the autumn was ringed on 10<sup>th</sup> October (one day earlier than last year).

### **Errata**

In the 2014 report it was stated that the maximum count of singing males was 60 on 8<sup>th</sup> April. It should have been 96 plus six just off the Reserve on 30<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Willow Warbler**

*Phylloscopus trochilus*

Another common summer visitor, this amber-listed warbler breeds on all four beds. The first returning migrant was found in the centre of No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> April. By mid-month numbers had increased and the Common Bird Surveys recorded the following singing males: six on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup>, ten on No.1 bed on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 12 on No.4 bed on the 18<sup>th</sup> and four on No.2 bed on the later date of 26<sup>th</sup> May. The highest count of the year was 19 across the Reserve on 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

Ringing records from the teams on No.1 and No.3 beds provided some disappointing statistics. No.1 bed had their lowest number of captures since the current ringing regime started in 1995, with 86 newly-ringed. The first was caught on 17<sup>th</sup> April and the last on 10<sup>th</sup> September. A further nine were caught that had been ringed in previous years, with the oldest ringed on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2012. Seventeen were caught in breeding condition, eight females and nine males and the first fledged juvenile was caught on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. No.3 bed ringed 27 new, one less than 2014 but still well below their twelve year average of 39 and the fourth consecutive year of a decline in numbers ringed for this species. The first was ringed on 18<sup>th</sup> April and the last of the year on 5<sup>th</sup> September (11 days earlier than 2014, but fairly typical nevertheless). The first juvenile was caught on 25<sup>th</sup> July (over a month later than in 2014 and the latest date in 12 years) and none were retrapped from previous years.

### **Blackcap**

*Sylvia atricapilla*

One of the most numerous summer visitors to be found on the Reserve. The first record was of two on 7<sup>th</sup> April, a week later than the species return in 2014. By the end of April, numbers had built to a Reserve total peak count of 20. Common Bird Surveys on individual beds during May provided counts of singing males of: 11 on No.4 bed on the 10<sup>th</sup>, nine on No.3 bed on the 16<sup>th</sup>, ten on No.2 bed on the 26<sup>th</sup>, and five on No.1 bed on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The last field record of the year was of a single from No.3 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> October.

The ringing teams had mixed fortunes. No.1 bed had another excellent year with 266 ringed, the second highest total since 1995, but No.3 bed only ringed 183 new; their lowest total since 2008 and

the second lowest in the last twelve years, the twelve year average being 320. For No.3 bed the usual September peak for this species did not really occur this year, despite a large amount of elder fruiting on the bed only 60 were ringed in the whole of September 2015 compared to 134 in 2014.

The first captures of the year were a day apart, 8<sup>th</sup> April on No.3 bed and 9<sup>th</sup> April on No.1 bed, a fairly typical date. Ten were retrapped from previous years, seven from 2014 and the earliest from 8<sup>th</sup> July 2012. No.1 bed caught 14 birds in breeding condition, eight females and six males, and the first juveniles were ringed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. The first juvenile on No.3 bed was caught over two weeks later on 11<sup>th</sup> July, the latest date since 2003 and a full month later than 2014. The last of the autumn were 10<sup>th</sup> October on No.3 bed, a day earlier than 2014 but towards the early side of the average and a more typical date of 20<sup>th</sup> October on No.1 bed.

### **Garden Warbler**

*Sylvia borin*

A dozen field records of this uncommon summer warbler were reported from late April to early July. The first was found on a Common Bird Survey of No.4 bed on 22<sup>nd</sup> April and two were recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> April at the opposite end of the Reserve on Butchersfield. One on each of No.1 and No.2 beds were reported on 7<sup>th</sup> May, with two in song on No.4 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> May. The highest count was of three birds during a CBS of No.4 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. A singing male was recorded on a number of occasions in the north-east corner of No.3 bed from mid-May to mid-June.

Typically for this species the ringing teams provided evidence of juvenile dispersal and passage through the Reserve that field records do not capture. This year a total of 16 new was ringed, 14 on No.1 bed, an average number, but just two were ringed on No.3 bed, the lowest annual total for 12 years. The bed average is 16 with 14 ringed in 2014 and a peak year of 38 in 2011. None were caught in spring, the first captures being typical passage dates of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August for the two No.3 bed birds and 7<sup>th</sup> August, when five were ringed on No.1 bed including the only adult of the year. There were three September captures on No.1 bed with the last of the year on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

### **Lesser Whitethroat**

*Sylvia curruca*

This is arguably our scarcest summer warbler, with just five field records relating to at least one pair and one other individual. The first of the year was a singing male in the Woolston Weir area on 9<sup>th</sup> May. A second report of a singing male on 28<sup>th</sup> June in the same area could relate to the same bird. On 4<sup>th</sup> June, one was watched several times, for a considerable period, alarming and carrying food into thick bramble on No.1 Bed. It almost certainly had young, but the cover was too dense to find a nest.

The two ringing teams both recorded captures of this delicate warbler with two juveniles ringed on No.1 bed, both in August, on the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup>, with the latter also recaptured on the 24<sup>th</sup>. After two blank years one was ringed on No.3 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> September which proved to be the last record of the year.

## Whitethroat

*Sylvia communis*

A common breeding summer visitor. The first record of a returning spring bird was on 15<sup>th</sup> April on No.3 bed and others were then reported across the Reserve by the end of the month. The peak count was on the Common Bird Survey of 10<sup>th</sup> May when 27 birds, which included 26 singing males, were noted on No.4 bed. CBS counts of singing males on the other beds during May recorded nine on No.3 bed on the 16<sup>th</sup>, two on No.1 bed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 14 on No.2 bed on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The low count on No.1 bed confirms a decline of this species in that area of the Reserve, possibly due to habitat loss connected with the landfill operation and the increasing encroachment of woodland, principally birch. The ringing team on No.1 bed caught four birds in breeding condition, three females and a male.

Only two records of the species were reported after the flurry of spring arrivals, three on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> August and what was the last field report of the year, again on No.3 bed, of a single bird on 10<sup>th</sup> September.

The ringing teams on No.1 and No.3 bed both reported poor records for Whitethroats, with 26 newly ringed on No.1 bed, the third worst total since 1995 and 20 on No.3 bed, the lowest total since 2005. Only one was retrapped from previous years, captured on No.3 bed on the typical date of 25<sup>th</sup> April, having been originally ringed in 2014. The first juveniles were ringed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June on No.1 bed and on 11<sup>th</sup> July, the latest date in the last twelve years, on No.3 bed. The last were ringed on 25<sup>th</sup> August on No.3 bed, whilst No.1 bed ringed five on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September.



Whitethroat

David Spencer

## **Grasshopper Warbler**

*Locustella naevia*

A summer visitor and red-listed species, which breeds across the Reserve in small numbers and whose distinctive 'reeling' song gives rise to the majority of field records. The first report of the year was of one on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> April, with two 'reeling' in the centre of the bed on the 17<sup>th</sup> along with one on the west bank of No.2 bed. The first record for No.1 bed was from the eastern end on 22<sup>nd</sup> April and there was one in the north-east corner of No.4 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

Reeling was regularly recorded in three areas on No.3 bed; in the south meadow, the south bank and the area next to the Envirolloo. One was seen carrying food on 5<sup>th</sup> June near the Envirolloo. The last field records were of 'reeling' in the south meadow on 13<sup>th</sup> July and the centre of the bed on 24<sup>th</sup> July.

The ringing teams caught two this year, both on No.3 bed and both males, on 26<sup>th</sup> April and 16<sup>th</sup> May which are typical dates.

## **Sedge Warbler**

*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

A fairly common breeding summer visitor with the first recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> April on No.1 bed, with others reported the next day on Nos.3 and 4 beds. Over three quarters of the records were of only one or two birds and the highest counts from the Common Bird Surveys were: four singing males on Nos.3 and 4 beds and three on No.1 bed. The final field record of the year was one on No.1 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> September.

The ringing teams caught 79 new, 68 on No.3 bed, a low average number, and 11 on No.1 bed, the lowest total since 1995. Only one was re-trapped, on No.3 bed, from 2014. The first one ringed was on 18<sup>th</sup> April on No.3 bed, the earliest date in the last 12 years. No.1 bed ringed its first 25 days later on 13<sup>th</sup> May when four were caught. The first juveniles were ringed in July, the 11<sup>th</sup> on No.3 bed (the latest date since 2008) and the 16<sup>th</sup> on No.1 bed and the last processed were one on No.3 bed on 12<sup>th</sup> September and two on No.1 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Reed Warbler**

*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

The first returning bird of this common breeding summer visitor was found on 14<sup>th</sup> April on No.3 bed. The peak counts reported through spring were records of singing males from Common Bird Surveys when ten were found on No.4 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> May, six on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 12 on No.1 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and five on No.2 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> May. One nest was found on No.4 bed, containing four eggs, though the fledging success was not determined.

Only single digit numbers were recorded throughout the rest of the season, with the last field sighting reported on 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

A total of 431 new birds was ringed this year: 309 on No.3 bed, slightly above their 12 year average catch of 294 but the lowest number of the last three years and 122 on No.1 bed, an average total. A total of 32 was re-trapped from previous years, 16 on both beds. The oldest was ringed on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2007 on No.1 bed but not caught again until this year. An adult male, ringed on No.3 bed in 2009 (so hatched in at least 2008), has been handled six times since, but went missing or evaded the nets in



2012 and 2013 before being retrapped once in 2014 and 2015. Six were caught carrying rings from sites other than Woolston Eyes.

The first were ringed in April, the second earliest date in the last 12 years for No.3 bed, on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> April on No.1 bed. The first juveniles were ringed on fairly typical dates of 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> June on No.1 bed and No.3 bed respectively. The last were ringed on an early date of 26<sup>th</sup> September on No.3 bed and 25<sup>th</sup> September on No.1 bed. Of those caught on No.1 bed, 24 were in breeding condition, nine females and 15 males.



*Reed Warbler*

David Bowman

### **Nuthatch**

*Sitta europaea*

Eight records were reported during the year all of single birds between 22<sup>nd</sup> April and 16<sup>th</sup> December, although the two separate records received on the latter date could have related to the same individual. The majority of reports of this uncommon visitor have traditionally been from the eastern side of the Reserve, however this year No.3 bed provided four records on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 14<sup>th</sup> August and 10<sup>th</sup> October. Two singles were reported on 16<sup>th</sup> December from the Weir Basin and No.2 bed with only two sightings from the eastern region of Butchersfield on 5<sup>th</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> October during the annual Migration Watches.

## Treecreeper

*Certhia familiaris*

There were six field records received during the year all of singles: three from No.3 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December; one each on No.1 and No.4 beds on the same date of 3<sup>rd</sup> November and one in song on No.2 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> March.

In contrast to the field sightings, the ringing teams ringed 16 new birds. It was a record year for this species on No.1 bed, with 12 newly ringed, the first of the year, both juveniles, were caught on 11<sup>th</sup> June and a further five juveniles were ringed, with the last on 19<sup>th</sup> August. The last of the year was on 8<sup>th</sup> October. On No.3 bed four were ringed during the year, below the 12 year average of 6.5, and unusually two were ringed on the early date of February 28<sup>th</sup>. More typically, the first of the others was ringed on 16<sup>th</sup> August, as juveniles began to disperse. The last one was ringed on 27<sup>th</sup> December.



Wren

Andy Weir

## Wren

*Troglodytes troglodytes*

A common breeding resident found on all four beds and surrounds. The peak counts were typically recorded during the Common Bird Surveys of the spring when singing males are recorded. The highest counts on No.1 and No.3 bed were of: 14 on 21<sup>st</sup> March, followed by counts of 17 on No.4 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> March and 17 on No.2 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April. The single highest count was of 33 on No.2 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> May on one of the final CBS of the year.

Two nests were reported, one with six eggs on No.2 bed, the fledging outcome for the nest is unknown and one on No.3 bed, where on 31<sup>st</sup> July, young were watched fledging from the Frank Linley Hide.

The ringing teams collectively recorded a total of 115 newly ringed and 14 retrapped, from previous years. No.3 bed team ringed 67 new, the lowest total of the last 12 years and comes after the 2014 record total of 118. Their 12 year average is 94. In contrast, No.1 bed with 48 ringed was a reasonable number for the bed. There were nine retrapped on No.3 bed, four originally ringed in 2014, two from 2013, two from 2012 and one from 2011. The oldest of the five retrapped birds caught on No.1 bed was originally ringed on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2011. The first fledged juveniles were ringed on 27<sup>th</sup> June (over three weeks later than 2014) on No.3 bed and two weeks later on 10<sup>th</sup> July on No.1 bed. Eleven were caught in breeding condition on No.1 bed, five females and six males.



*Starling murmuration on No.3 bed*

*Andy Debenham*

## **Starling**

*Sturnus vulgaris*

The first record of the year for this red-listed species was on 4<sup>th</sup> January, when around 300 came to roost in the reeds on No.3 bed. By the end of the month this roost had built to a peak of ca 200,000 and providing spectacular murmurations. Roost numbers continued to increase during the first half of February with a peak count of ca 350,000 birds mid-month recorded on 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February and attracted a number of predators, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk, Marsh Harrier and Barn Owl being regularly reported. The roost decreased in early March to 200,000 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and just 150 on the 5<sup>th</sup> with the last record of the period of 35 on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

The Migration Watches from Butchersfield reported counts of 45 on 5<sup>th</sup> September and 1366 on 31<sup>st</sup> October and a flock of 250 was recorded feeding on fields south of Bollin Point on 17<sup>th</sup> November. A small roost, peak count of 200 on 15<sup>th</sup> June, developed during June and July on No.3 bed and again in the autumn starting with 100 seen leaving at dawn on 17<sup>th</sup> October and built to a peak count of 800

birds by 21<sup>st</sup> November. A roost developed on No.1 bed at the year end, first noted on 17<sup>th</sup> December when 3000 roosted in the small east pool reed bed. It moved to the larger west pool reed bed on the 19<sup>th</sup> with numbers increasing to ca 10,000.

## **Blackbird**

*Turdus merula*

This is a common breeding resident bird on the Reserve with winter visitors swelling the population. The Common Bird Surveys during spring provided high counts of 15 found on No.4 bed and 16 on No.2 bed, including one carrying nest material on 4<sup>th</sup> April. In contrast, only six were recorded on No.1 bed, two in song, one with food and three others on 23<sup>rd</sup> May with just three in song on No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March. Two nests were found, one on No.1 bed which was predated after the fourth egg was laid. The other, on No.4 bed, was found containing three young but it was not determined if these fledged.

During autumn the Migration Watches recorded high counts in October with 15 on the 24<sup>th</sup> from No.3 bed and 17 from Butchersfield on the 31<sup>st</sup>. The highest count of the year was of 29 on 14<sup>th</sup> November at Bollin Point.

There were only 31 ringed this year, the lowest number for at least 12 years. The 13 ringed on No.1 bed was the third lowest number over 20 years and No.3 bed ringed just over a third of the average number for that bed. Only four were ringed as 3Js (indicating local breeding) three on No.3 bed on 6<sup>th</sup> June and 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August with a single on No.1 bed on 6<sup>th</sup> August, which is very disappointing. Six were caught on No.1 bed in breeding condition, only one female and five males. This species was only handled on a total of 41 occasions on both beds during the year, which is just below half of the total of 84 for No.3 bed alone last year.

## **Fieldfare**

*Turdus pilaris*

A red-listed winter visitor which is most often recorded flying over the Reserve in large numbers, with significantly smaller numbers staying to feed.

During the early winter period the first large flock was recorded on 5<sup>th</sup> February flying over No.1 bed from the fields to the north, while 75 flew east over No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March. Small single numbers were reported on beds Nos.1, 3 and 4 from 10<sup>th</sup> January to the latter date above.

The first autumn migrants were recorded in mid-October, with two on No.1 bed and 38 on No.3 bed on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> respectively. The Migration Watch on Butchersfield on 31<sup>st</sup> October recorded the highest count of the year, with 1875 birds passing through. High double-figure counts were then reported on numerous dates through November and December.

There were no birds ringed or processed by the ringing teams this year.



## **Song Thrush**

*Turdus philomelos*

A resident, red-listed, breeding species with an autumn passage usually evident. Low single digit numbers were reported from the start of the year until a Reserve wide count of 27 was recorded, of which 14 were on No.4 bed, on 25<sup>th</sup> February. The Common Bird Surveys recorded singing male high counts of: five on No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March, eight on No.2 bed (from 15 birds observed) on 4<sup>th</sup> April, nine on No.4 bed on 18<sup>th</sup> April and three on No.1 bed with one carrying food on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. Two nests on No.1 bed and one nest on No.3 bed were found. One nest on No.1 bed fledged three young, with both the other nests predated at the egg stage.

On 16<sup>th</sup> October 31 were recorded on No.3 bed, twenty counted from around the bed and 11 which were seen to drop into the east bank suggesting a significant arrival of migrants.

This was another poor year for this delicate thrush, with one third lower numbers ringed than in the poor year of 2014. The six ringed on No.1 bed was the lowest total since 1997 and the No.3 bed ringing total of 18 was disappointing against a 12 year average of 28. Between the two beds only four breeding females were handled, with just one on No.1 bed. The first young, probably a local juvenile, was ringed on No.3 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August whilst on No.1 bed the first juvenile was not ringed until the autumn passage on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Redwing**

*Turdus iliacus*

A red-listed, autumn/winter migrant from September to April. The first field record was of one on No.2 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Double-figure counts were recorded throughout January with a peak of 70 on the 19<sup>th</sup>. A drop in sightings was noted in February from a high of 50 on the 5<sup>th</sup> to 14 on the 7<sup>th</sup>, ten on the 8<sup>th</sup> and a single on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Three sightings were recorded in March with 40 in trees on the south bank of No.3 bed on the 17<sup>th</sup> being of note. The last record of the first winter period was of three on No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

Returning autumn passage was first noted when four were seen on No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> October, followed by 70 on No.1 bed on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 350 there three days later on the 16<sup>th</sup>. A movement westward over No.3 bed totalled 1050 on the 17<sup>th</sup> October, which was the peak count for the year. The last record for the year was of 50 flying south observed from Butchersfield on 30<sup>th</sup> December.

The use of a new lure by the ringing teams proved very effective in enticing birds into the mist nets with a record 101 ringed on No.3 bed but, despite its success in 2014 when its use provided a record 52 birds, only 28 were ringed on No.1 bed this year.

The only ones ringed in the first winter period were ten on No.3 bed, the last on 7<sup>th</sup> February. The first bird of the autumn period was ringed on 10<sup>th</sup> October on No.3 bed, the third earliest date in the last 12 years and 12<sup>th</sup> October on No.1 bed. On 17<sup>th</sup> October 55 birds were ringed on No.3 bed. This daily total is more than would be ringed in most years prior to the use of the new lure. The majority caught were juveniles with four adults on No.1 bed and 28 on No.3 bed and the final one of the year was ringed on 4<sup>th</sup> November.

**Mistle Thrush***Turdus viscivorus*

Now showing worrying signs of a breeding decline nationally, this large, vocal thrush has now been moved from the amber to the red list. There were 14 records of this irregular visitor across the Reserve during the year. The first, on 10th January, of a single on No.3 bed, was followed by six records between 19<sup>th</sup> March and 28th October of two birds. Singing males were noted on No.1 bed on 6<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March.

The highest counts of the year were typically from the Migration Watches from Butchersfield of 28 on 5<sup>th</sup> September and four on 31<sup>st</sup> October. The last record was of two around the No.3 bed meadows on 21<sup>st</sup> November.

**Robin***Erithacus rubecula*

A common resident across the whole Reserve, with the highest first quarter count of 45 singing males on 25<sup>th</sup> February, closely followed by a Reserve total of 43 birds on 25<sup>th</sup> March. The highest counts of singing males from the Common Bird Surveys in the spring were: 13 for No.1 bed, 28 for No.2 bed, 27 for No.4 bed and 12 for No.3 bed. Autumn records peaked at 61 on 16<sup>th</sup> September and 63, the highest count for the year, on 29<sup>th</sup> October.

Ringers on the Reserve ringed 133 new birds. No.1 bed ringed 80 and recaptured a further ten from previous years, the oldest ringed on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2010. Seven adults were caught in breeding condition, three females and four males and the first juvenile was ringed on 30<sup>th</sup> May. The team on No.3 bed had the lowest total for the last 12 years, with just 53 ringed, against an average of 87. The first juvenile was ringed on 23<sup>rd</sup> May (almost three weeks later than in 2014).

**Redstart***Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

No field records were received of this amber-listed migrant during the year but a single first year male was ringed on No.1 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> August. This is the third successive year the species has been ringed on that bed and the 15<sup>th</sup> for the bed since 1995.

**Stonechat***Saxicola rubicola*

A single passage record from the north side of No.1 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> March was the only report this year.

**Wheatear***Oenanthe oenanthe*

Although uncommon on the Reserve, reports are usually received annually during migration passage. The only record this year was of one on No.3 bed on 7<sup>th</sup> April.

**Whinchat***Saxicola rubetra*

This uncommon passage migrant, last recorded in 2010, has now been moved from the amber list to the red list. Just one was reported, from No.4 bed on 11<sup>th</sup> May.

**Dunnock***Prunella modularis*

A common resident, breeding on all four beds, Dunnock remains on the amber list. The highest counts across the Reserve were of 11 on 25<sup>th</sup> February and again on 21<sup>st</sup> March. The results from the Common Bird Surveys in spring gave the highest totals of singing males as: five on both No.1 and No.3 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> March, eight on No.4 bed on 27<sup>th</sup> March and nine on No.2 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

The ringing teams caught 69, below the 12 year average of 90 and a far cry from the 114 ringed in 2014. No.1 bed had an average year with 21 ringed and three previous years' recaptures, the oldest from 2013. Three adults were caught in breeding condition, two males and a female and the first juvenile was ringed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. No.3 bed ringed 48, just over half of the 92 ringed in 2014 and against the bed's 12 year average of 69. The first juvenile was ringed on a typical date of 6<sup>th</sup> June. It was however seven weeks, on the 25<sup>th</sup> July, before the next juvenile was ringed. In total twenty-three juveniles were ringed and the oldest recaptured bird was from 2011.

**House Sparrow***Passer domesticus*

This red listed species breeds on some of the adjacent housing estates and occasionally strays on to the nearby beds. There were just seven sightings this year and only one double-figure count. On 5<sup>th</sup> February four were near Latchford Locks and then two were near the Latchford entrance to the Reserve on 26<sup>th</sup> March. Singles were then noted on 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June, the first a male on the Canal bank by No.4 bed and the second a female on the east bank of No.3 bed. A further female was on the east bank of No.3 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> July. There were then two September records, with 20 on the No.4 bed Canal track on the 1<sup>st</sup> and one on No.1 bed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Given their relative scarcity, only small numbers are ringed and not in every year. This year just one, an adult male, was ringed, on No.3 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> May.

**Yellow Wagtail***Motacilla flava*

Red listed, this attractive migrant wagtail seems to be making something of a comeback locally, with increasing numbers breeding on arable fields to both north and south of the Reserve. This was reflected in our sightings during both passage periods, with an exceptional eight records received. Unless noted otherwise, all were from No.3 bed. The first was a single on 12<sup>th</sup> April, followed by two on the 15<sup>th</sup> and one on the 19<sup>th</sup> of the month. Two were then on the Morgan Hide scrape on 4<sup>th</sup> May, followed by a male there, briefly, on the 25<sup>th</sup>. On 11<sup>th</sup> July, a juvenile was feeding with Pied Wagtails on the muddy area inside the north bank of No.3 bed. Finally, seven were counted during the Migration Watch of 5<sup>th</sup> September, all of which were feeding on the arable fields to the north of Butchersfield Tip.

### **Grey Wagtail**

*Motacilla cinerea*

Recently moved from the amber list to the red list, this smart wagtail is showing worrying signs of a continuing decline nationally. One or two were seen on numerous dates throughout the year, across the Reserve and breeding was proved at Latchford Locks, with another pair present under the Thelwall Viaduct.

Six were ringed during the year. Five were caught on No.1 bed between 15<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> September, all of which were first years. On No.3 bed just one was ringed, despite using a tape lure which had proved effective in attracting passage birds the previous year. It was ringed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, having been caught in a net set to catch Green Sandpipers.

### **Pied Wagtail**

*Motacilla alba*

This is our commonest wagtail and is present throughout the year, with occasional small roosts forming in reedbeds. During passage periods, careful searching can turn up occasional White Wagtails (*M.a.alba*). Counts from the first half of the year included: 15 on No.3 bed on 30<sup>th</sup> January, eight going to roost on the same bed on 6<sup>th</sup> February, nine on the Loop of No.4 bed on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 14 (including four White Wagtails) on the Morgan Hide scrape on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 12 which may have been going to roost on No.3 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> April and two White Wagtails on the north side of No.1 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> April. The highest autumn count came during the Migration Watches from Butchersfield Tip on 5<sup>th</sup> September, when 15 were feeding on fields to the north.

### **Tree Pipit**

*Anthus trivialis*

A red listed summer visitor, Tree Pipit is a scarce passage migrant at Woolston. The only sighting was of three flying south over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch of 5<sup>th</sup> September.

From a ringing perspective, however, it was a record year with six ringed between 11<sup>th</sup> August and 10<sup>th</sup> September, all from No.1 bed and all first years.

### **Meadow Pipit**

*Anthus pratensis*

This predominantly upland breeding pipit is now amber listed, having been in steady decline as a breeding species since the 1970s. Never very numerous, they are more often seen at the eastern end of the Reserve and during passage periods. Highest counts were of: 20 to the south of Butchersfield Tip on 9<sup>th</sup> February, 18 on No.1 bed from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> March, 30 on No.1 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> October and 43 passing over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch of 31<sup>st</sup> October.

On No.1 bed it was another excellent year, with 59 ringed between 18<sup>th</sup> September and 12<sup>th</sup> October, with a higher than expected number of adults, 15, caught. On No.3 bed six were ringed, one on the 19<sup>th</sup> September and five on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Just 21 have been ringed on the bed during the last twelve years and this year's was the joint highest total. Passage over the bed occurs during a very brief window and seemingly earlier than on No.1 bed.

## **Chaffinch**

*Fringilla coelebs*

This is one of the commoner finches, particularly when flocks form in winter, feeding on the seed crop in No.3 bed or at any of the feeding stations. Small numbers usually breed across all four beds. The first winter period opened with 25 on No.3 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, increasing to around 100 towards month end. Eighty were still present on No.3 bed on 6<sup>th</sup> February, with numbers slowly declining as spring approached, with 40 there on 28<sup>th</sup> February and 30 on 4<sup>th</sup> March. Although sizeable flocks are usually present around the No.1 bed feeding station, no counts were received this year.

During the breeding season males can be heard in song right across the Reserve and the Common Bird Surveys located a maximum of 17 such territories, distributed as follows: six on No.1 bed, five on No.2 bed, 1 on No.3 bed and five on No.4 bed. Breeding was confirmed when a nest on No.2 bed fledged four young.

October saw the start of the usual autumn/winter build up on No.3 bed, with 20 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> growing to 80 by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month. The only count of significance away from No.3 bed was of 71, during the Migration watch from Butchersfield Tip on 31<sup>st</sup> October. By 19<sup>th</sup> November, just over 100 were spread between the seed crop and the feeding stations on No.3 bed. The flock then peaked at 200 on 28<sup>th</sup> November, all feeding together on the No.3 bed seed crop, before starting to decline as seed stocks were reducing towards year end. The last count of significance was of 60, in the same area on 27<sup>th</sup> December.

The total of 276 ringed during the year was fairly typical, though substantially lower than the previous year's 401. On No.1 bed, though, it was the best year since 2010 with 103 ringed and 11 caught from previous years. The oldest was ringed on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2005 as a second year, making it 11 years old when caught this year, with another that was ringed on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2007. Ten adults were caught in breeding condition, eight males and two females and the first juvenile was caught on 27<sup>th</sup> June. On No.3 bed it was a slightly above average year with 173 ringed. The first juvenile was ringed on the quite early date of 6<sup>th</sup> June. As with some other species this year, the first fledgling didn't lead to more being ringed and it was 2<sup>nd</sup> August before the next juvenile was ringed. The winter feed crop and the feeding station provided 112 new birds during October–December. Many of these had long wing lengths (90mm and above) indicating probable Scandinavian origin.

## **Brambling**

*Fringilla montifringilla*

This passage and winter visitor is a common breeder in the more northern latitudes of Europe. Numbers vary from year to year depending on the availability of natural seed crops and particularly of beech mast. The early part of the year was typical, with just a few present on many dates and gave no sign of what a good autumn/winter was to follow. The year opened well with seven on No.1 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> January and two under the Morgan Hide feeders on No.3 bed on the same date. Thereafter, all sightings refer to single birds, usually males, on No.3 bed, between 20<sup>th</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> March.

The first sign of autumn passage was of one on No.3 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> October. Single figure counts were then regular until 28<sup>th</sup> November, when 30 were feeding on No.3 bed, 25 of them under the Morgan Hide feeders. From then on, the flock grew to record levels for the Reserve, with peak counts of 80 on 13<sup>th</sup> December and 60 on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month.



The numbers present on No.3 bed were not fully reflected in the numbers ringed, with the 41 being significantly less than the 96 from 2013. On No.1 bed, just one ringed during the year, a first year male on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. For No.3 bed it was a good year, with 40 ringed. These all came from the second winter period from 7<sup>th</sup> November to year end, nine in November and 31 in December. To have caught 40 birds at the back end of the year is slightly unusual for Woolston. The table below shows the numbers ringed in each month (in the 11 years from 2004-2015). As can be seen, peak numbers usually occur in March and April, with many of them almost in full breeding plumage by that stage.

| November | December | January | February | March | April |
|----------|----------|---------|----------|-------|-------|
| 15       | 53       | 31      | 19       | 69    | 83    |



*Brambling under No.3 bed feeders*

*David Humphries*

## **Greenfinch**

*Chloris chloris*

A common species at Woolston, with good-sized flocks around the feeding stations and No.3 bed seed crop in winter and small numbers breeding across all beds. Peak numbers during the first part of the year occurred during early January, with 100 present on No.3 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> January. Smaller counts were then regularly made on No.3 bed, with maxima of 60 on 22<sup>nd</sup> January and 50 on 6<sup>th</sup> February. During the breeding season the Common Bird Survey located 13 singing males, with: two on No.1 bed, seven on No.2 bed, three on No.3 bed and one on No.4 bed. Only one nest was found, on No.4 bed and this was predated at the egg stage.

A post-breeding flock of around 60 was regularly noted on No.3 bed throughout August. Maxima for year end then included: around 70 on 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> October, 100 on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 130 on 5<sup>th</sup> December and 150 on 12<sup>th</sup> December.

The total of 603 ringed during the year was about average, though with differing fortunes between the two beds where ringing takes place. On No.1 bed, it was the third best year since 1995 with 474 ringed and a further 16 from previous years caught. The oldest of these was from 2012. Ten were caught in breeding condition, eight males and two females, while the first juvenile was ringed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. On No.3 bed it was the second lowest total of the last 12 years with just 129 ringed. The 12 year average is 273 new birds (the record year was 2003, with 1199 new birds being ringed and was therefore not included as part of the averages to avoid skewing the figures). The first juvenile bird was ringed on 6<sup>th</sup> June, not an untypical date. The attraction of an alternative feeding station on the bed has been thought to reduce the number of birds being ringed, possibly due to its more open aspect. This may not be the full picture however as only three birds were retrapped from 2014.

### **Goldfinch**

*Carduelis carduelis*

This attractive finch is predominantly resident at Woolston, though some UK birds do move south to the Mediterranean in winter. Winter feeding flocks usually form and small numbers breed. The first winter period saw only small gatherings, with maxima of 12 on No.3 bed on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 15 on Butchersfield Tip on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month and 20 on No.3 bed on 3<sup>rd</sup> February. Although a few were present on each bed during the Common Bird Surveys, just three were singing males, two on No.2 bed and one on No.3 bed and there was no confirmation of breeding.

Most of the highest counts from the autumn and late winter came from the seed crop area of No.3 bed. An exception was a count of 103 over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 5<sup>th</sup> September. No.3 bed then held 100 on 10<sup>th</sup> September, with 40 still there on the 15<sup>th</sup>. A flock of 20 was regularly present on the bed during November, with 30 on 10<sup>th</sup> December, while No.4 bed had a feeding flock of 40 on 12<sup>th</sup> of the month.

The total of 15 ringed during the year was a little below average. The 11 ringed on No.1 bed was considered a reasonable total and the first juvenile was ringed on 10<sup>th</sup> July. Never commonly ringed on No.3 bed, this year four birds were ringed compared with the 12 year average of five.

### **Siskin**

*Carduelis spinus*

The UK's Siskin breeding population is thriving and is supplemented by the arrival of European migrants in the winter. At Woolston it is a passage migrant and winter visitor, with numbers varying from year to year. This year, unusually, none was reported from the first half of the year though return passage was well above average. The first returning migrants were two, over No.3 bed, on 11<sup>th</sup> July. Sightings were then very regular through to year end. No.1 bed saw two notable movements in July, with 25 heading south on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 30, also moving south, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month. A similar movement, of 20, also passed over No.1 bed on 19<sup>th</sup> August. On the same date, 30 were watched passing west along the south bank of No.3 bed. September brought three more notable counts, with 50 south during the Migration watch from Butchersfield Tip on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 40 over No.1 bed on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 30 feeding in trees by the No.3 bed footbridge on the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month. The last sizeable count was of 15 by Butchersfield Tip on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

The good numbers noted visually were also reflected in the ringing totals, with 21 ringed during the year, which compares with just 54 in the previous thirty-five years. All of these were from No.1 bed, where the previous highest total was 11. There had been a nationwide influx during the summer with record counts at east coast observatories and the Woolston total probably reflects that. All captures were between 16<sup>th</sup> July and 13<sup>th</sup> October, all were birds of the year and most were still in juvenile plumage.

### **Linnet**

*Carduelis cannabina*

This red listed finch breeds in small numbers and can form sizeable winter flocks. Numbers have been declining steadily across England and Wales in recent years, though with something of a resurgence in Scotland. At Woolston, the winter seed crop on No.3 bed continues to attract reasonable numbers during the winter. The year opened with 200 just south of the Ship Canal, across from Butchersfield Tip, on 30<sup>th</sup> January. By 9<sup>th</sup> February this flock had reduced to 150. During the breeding season a total of 25 was located across the four beds, distributed as follows: eight on No.1 bed, 16 on No.2 bed, one on No.3 bed and none on No.4 bed. Of these, just two were males in song, on No.2 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> May. Five nests were located in total, four on No.2 bed and one on No.4 bed. The No.4 bed nest and one of those on No.2 bed each contained three eggs, while two of the nests on No.2 bed held four eggs. None of these were further monitored to determine fledging success. The remaining nest on No.2 bed resulted in successfully fledged young.

All counts of significance from the second half of the year came from around the seed crop on No.3 bed. Twenty were present in early November, rising to 48 by the 19<sup>th</sup> and to 140 by the 28<sup>th</sup>, though few were noted after that.

Despite the presence of a large flock on No.3 bed, just one was ringed during the year and this from No.1 bed, a male in breeding condition on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

### **Lesser Redpoll**

*Carduelis cabaret*

Red listed, this diminutive finch once bred in small numbers but is now just a passage and winter visitor. Highest counts from early in the year, all from No.3 bed, were of eight on 14<sup>th</sup> March, seven on the 18<sup>th</sup> of the month and 11 on 20<sup>th</sup> April. There were, as usual, no sightings during the breeding season. Return passage was first noted on 10<sup>th</sup> July, when one flew over No.1 bed. Small numbers were then regularly encountered on all beds through to year end, with the only sizeable flock being of 50, which was present on No.1 bed between 13<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> October, reducing to 20 by 27<sup>th</sup> of the month. During late November and early December up to a dozen offered exceptionally close views on No.3 bed, as they fed on Mugwort, at eye level in front of the Morgan Hide. Ten, feeding in Alders around the Loop of No.4 bed on 15<sup>th</sup> December was the last notable count.

Overall, it was a good year from a ringing perspective, though fortunes differed between the two ringing teams. On No.1 bed it was a record year with 93 ringed. There were no captures from previous years but two were caught that had been ringed elsewhere in Britain. All were caught between 16<sup>th</sup> July and 7<sup>th</sup> December, and three adults were in breeding condition, two males and a

female. October was the peak month on No.1 bed, with 47 ringed. It was a contrasting experience on No.3 bed with just 15 of these lovely finches ringed. This compares with a twelve year average of 27.



*Lesser Redpoll feeding in front of the John Morgan hide*

*Brian Burnett*

### **Common Crossbill**

*Loxia curvirostra*

This occasionally irruptive species breeds in extensive pine woods across the UK and is a less than annual visitor. The sole sighting this year was of one which flew over Butchersfield Tip calling, during the Migration Watch on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

### **Bullfinch**

*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Despite its amber listed status, Bullfinch remains common at Woolston, breeding regularly on all four beds. Double-figure counts are regular outside the breeding season, particularly around the Morgan Hide feeding station. Highest counts from early in the year were of: 13 across the whole Reserve on 8<sup>th</sup> January, up to a dozen (with eight males) regularly visiting the Morgan Hide feeders into early February and a Reserve-wide count of 21 on 5<sup>th</sup> February.

Given its secretive nature, it is easy to overlook this species during our Common Bird Surveys. This year was a little more productive than usual, with two singing males located on No.2 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> April and a female flushed off an active nest on No.3 bed on 16<sup>th</sup> April. In addition, four were present in suitable breeding habitat on No.1 bed on several dates. A single nest was found with three eggs on No.4 bed, though fledging was not determined.

The highest counts from the second half of the year were of 24 around Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 31<sup>st</sup> October and 15 across the whole Reserve on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

A truer sense of the prevalence of Bullfinches at Woolston comes from the ringing data. The 264 newly ringed this year is a record. When the 86 re-traps from previous years are taken into account, a remarkable 350 different birds were handled by the ringing teams during the year. The 82 ringed on No.1 bed equalled the previous best from 2010, with a further 26 also caught from previous years. Twenty adults were caught in breeding condition, 15 males and five females while the first juveniles were caught on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. On No.3 bed it was also a record year with 182 ringed, taking the twelve year average to 100. Amazingly, of the 3446 handlings of birds on No.3 bed during the year 511 (14.8%) were of Bullfinch. The first juvenile bird was ringed on 6<sup>th</sup> June, with another on the 27<sup>th</sup>. It was then 2<sup>nd</sup> August before the next juvenile was caught. Poor weather must have really devastated the earlier breeding attempts. In total 128 juvenile birds were ringed. In August 84 juvenile birds were ringed including 24 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> alone and 47 by the 8<sup>th</sup>. Breeding continued quite late with three that were still undergoing post juvenile moult ringed on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Yellowhammer**

*Emberiza citrinella*

This red listed species breeds in small numbers on farmland adjacent to the eastern end of the Reserve and is an occasional visitor. After an increase in sightings last year, it was disappointing to have only two reports in 2015, though this can be partially explained by the lack of visits to the farmland to the east of Rixton Paddocks. The first was of an over-flying male by Butchersfield Tip on 18<sup>th</sup> April, while two were noted during the Migration Watch from the same area on 31<sup>st</sup> October. For the fifth consecutive year, none were ringed.

### **Reed Bunting**

*Emberiza schoeniclus*

Reed Bunting is an amber listed species, which breeds on all four beds, though in declining numbers and often forms small winter roosts. A few were present on all beds during the first winter period, with a maximum count of 18 on No.3 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> January, where they were feeding on the winter seed crop. During the breeding season 18 males were in song across the Reserve, which shows a continued decline from 21 in 2014 and 35 the year before that. They were distributed as follows: 11 on No.1 bed, two on No.2 bed, three on No.3 bed and two on No.4 bed. Breeding was confirmed with an adult feeding young in front of the Linley Hide on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and a female carrying food near the Morgan Hide on 27<sup>th</sup> May. During the late autumn/winter the usual small roost formed in the eastern reed-bed on No.1 bed. Twenty were noted entering the roost on the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> October, with 60 there on 17<sup>th</sup> December.

The ringing data seems to confirm a poor year for the species, with the 63 ringed being the lowest total for almost thirty years. On No.1 bed, it was the worst year since 1995, with only 37 ringed, compared with 85 in 2014. A further 18 were caught from previous years, the oldest having been ringed on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2008. Seventeen adults were caught in breeding condition, 16 males and one female, but the first juvenile wasn't caught until the late date of 11<sup>th</sup> August. On No.3 bed the situation was similar, producing the second lowest total in the last twelve years with just 26 ringed. The twelve year average for the bed is 48. The first juvenile was ringed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, which is the



latest date in the last twelve years. Two birds were re-trapped from 2014, one from 2013 and two from 2012.

## Escapes

### Bufflehead

*Bucephala albeola*

On 2<sup>nd</sup> May, there was great excitement on No.3 bed when a group of observers located a female Bufflehead. It eventually showed a green colour-ring, indicating that it was not a wild bird. What was almost certainly the same individual had been seen, during 2014, in Norfolk and Fife.



*Bufflehead No.3 bed*

*David Spencer*

## WeBS Counts 2015

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.

|                          | Jan  | Feb | Mar | Apr |  | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|--|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Little Grebe             | 5    | 4   | 6   | 11  |  | 16   | 7   | 12  | 12  |
| Great Crested Grebe      | 5    | 8   | 8   | 22  |  | 8    | 3   | 1   | 3   |
| Black-necked Grebe       |      |     |     | 15  |  |      |     |     |     |
| Cormorant                | 14   | 35  | 9   | 11  |  | 6    | 14  | 14  | 7   |
| Grey Heron               | 2    | 2   |     | 6   |  | 3    | 10  | 4   | 8   |
| Mute Swan                | 28   | 12  | 31  | 22  |  | 16   | 36  | 34  | 46  |
| Greylag Goose            |      |     | 4   | 9   |  | 23   |     | 6   |     |
| Canada Goose             | 2    | 11  | 55  | 39  |  | 13   | 11  | 32  | 20  |
| Shelduck                 | 7    | 4   | 14  | 33  |  |      |     | 2   | 3   |
| Wigeon                   | 3    |     |     |     |  |      | 6   | 5   | 1   |
| Gadwall                  | 41   | 26  | 63  | 78  |  | 63   | 69  | 34  | 52  |
| Teal                     | 1150 | 455 | 472 | 88  |  | 222  | 377 | 325 | 456 |
| Mallard                  | 177  | 100 | 102 | 80  |  | 95   | 92  | 54  | 78  |
| Pintail                  |      |     |     |     |  | 2    | 1   |     |     |
| Shoveler                 | 5    | 31  | 57  | 29  |  | 14   | 29  | 22  | 10  |
| Pochard                  | 4    | 14  | 45  | 18  |  |      |     |     |     |
| Tufted Duck              | 284  | 879 | 287 | 124 |  | 44   | 71  | 33  | 176 |
| Goldeneye                |      | 1   | 4   |     |  |      |     |     |     |
| Goosander                |      | 2   |     | 1   |  |      |     |     |     |
| Moorhen                  | 30   | 17  | 34  | 10  |  | 29   | 27  | 26  | 31  |
| Coot                     | 51   | 45  | 41  | 40  |  | 26   | 14  | 17  | 33  |
| Water Rail               |      |     | 5   | 5   |  |      |     |     | 1   |
| Little Ringed Plover     |      |     |     | 2   |  |      |     |     |     |
| Lapwing                  | 3    |     | 6   | 5   |  | 168  | 45  |     |     |
| Black-tailed Godwit      |      |     |     |     |  | 79   | 13  |     |     |
| Ruff                     |      |     |     |     |  | 5    |     |     |     |
| Dunlin                   |      |     |     |     |  | 1    |     |     |     |
| Woodcock                 |      |     |     |     |  |      |     |     | 1   |
| Snipe                    | 1    |     | 2   | 1   |  | 22   | 30  |     | 1   |
| Common Sandpiper         |      |     |     |     |  | 1    |     |     |     |
| Green Sandpiper          |      |     |     |     |  | 4    |     | 2   |     |
| Greenshank               |      |     |     |     |  | 1    |     |     |     |
| Black-headed Gull        |      | 115 | 765 | 900 |  | 12   | 48  | 50  | 10  |
| Mediterranean Gull       |      |     |     | 2   |  |      |     |     |     |
| Common Gull              | 6    | 7   | 2   |     |  |      |     |     | 2   |
| Lesser Black-Backed Gull | 1    | 2   | 7   | 2   |  |      | 1   |     |     |
| Herring Gull             |      |     | 3   |     |  |      |     |     |     |
| Kingfisher               |      |     |     |     |  | 1    | 1   |     | 1   |

## WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2015

**Michael Miles**

Ringling operations in 2015 were carried out in two areas of the Reserve: the east end of No. 1 bed and the centre of No.3 bed. It is difficult to make comparisons between 2015 and the previous year because there were significant variations in ringling effort. On No.1 bed the retirement of John Blundell facilitated a significant increase in ringling effort whilst on No.3 bed a combination of theft, vandalism and illness resulted in a significant reduction in ringling effort from 89 sessions in 2014 to 56 sessions in 2015. With that caveat in mind the grand total of 4,793 birds of 57 species newly-ringed across the Reserve was a 29% decrease from the 6,777 birds of 58 species ringed in 2014. It is the case that 2014 was an exceptional breeding season and maybe a better comparison is with the average of 5,363 new birds ringed in the ten years up to 2013. When compared with this average 2015 will be viewed as an unexceptional breeding season with the below average numbers ringed accounted for by reduced ringling effort.

The reduction in numbers ringed was not reflected in the diversity of species encountered and the total of 57 species ringed can be considered an average year.

The Fixed Duck Trap on No.3 bed continued to catch impressive numbers of wildfowl with 121 Teal and 16 Mallard ringed. The number of Teal ringed makes Woolston a significant contributor to the British ringling totals for this species and the first recoveries were recorded with birds shot on Anglesey and in Denmark. Whilst on the subject of wildfowl it should be noted that Kieran Foster put his time in the gym to good use by out-running and then ringling Woolston's first Greylag Goose, a species being seen in increasing numbers since the management work on No.3 bed.

Seven Sparrowhawks were ringed, the same number as in 2014 and the highest total since 2007. As in the previous year these seven were evenly divided between No.1 bed with three and No.3 bed with four. Moorhen and Coot figured in the catch on No.3 bed as bycatch in the duck trap but it was a blank year for Water Rails, which are more likely to be caught in small walk-in traps.

In last year's Report it was noted that the management works on No.3 bed had created an opportunity to place a net across a narrow channel near the duck trap when weather conditions were suitable. This net was deployed on seven occasions in 2015 and made 25 captures including 11 Green Sandpipers, 3 Common Sandpipers, a Kingfisher and Woolston's second Tufted Duck. A fourth Common Sandpiper was caught in a walk-in trap. In Britain Green Sandpipers are caught in relatively small numbers, mainly during autumn migration. The manner in which they use stopover sites such as Woolston is not well understood and a national colour ringling scheme is in operation, attempting to improve our knowledge. If catches at Woolston can be maintained at the 2015 level then Woolston can make a useful contribution to this initiative. To this end we hope to be colour ringling our Green Sandpipers in autumn 2016 and hope that sightings by permit holders will give us information about how long individual birds spend on the Reserve.

The 12 Stock Doves ringed in 2015 was a record. Three of these, an adult and two pulli, were ringed in a nest box on No.1 bed and the other nine were netted in the usual site by the feeders on No.3 bed. As in previous years, the five Woodpigeons that were ringed represent a small fraction of the number

of these powerful birds that escape from the nets. The first Barn Owls to be ringed at Woolston were found roosting in nest boxes, two each on Nos 1 and 3 beds. The only previous capture at Woolston was of a bird ringed near Northwich. The two birds on No.3 bed were a male and a female, both young birds hatched in 2014 and although no breeding was attempted it is hoped that this charismatic species will soon join the list of Woolston's breeding birds. It was the worst year for Great Spotted Woodpeckers since 1997 with just three birds ringed, all on No.1 bed and the last on 16<sup>th</sup> April. To emphasise this point, not a single bird of the year was caught and we have no evidence that Great Spotted Woodpeckers bred successfully. As an aside, the nest boxes on No.3 bed suffered an unusually high incidence of damage from Great Spotted Woodpeckers breaking into them to predate chicks or eggs and it may be that these two facts are related, a shortage of more easily obtained food forcing the adults to attack the nest boxes.

It was another very good year for Goldcrests with 120 new birds ringed. Whilst small numbers, including juveniles, were caught in the summer and were probably local most were caught from September onwards and were a mixture of British birds and continental migrants. For the third year running no Firecrests were ringed. Blue Tits and Great Tits had an average breeding season. In the nest boxes on No.3 bed a total of 131 pulli was ringed, below the total of 156 ringed in the very good breeding season of 2014 but better than the 120 ringed in 2013 which was a poor year. It was a remarkable year for Coal Tits and the 30 birds ringed was exactly double the previous best total of 15 in 2010. No.1 bed contributed 28 of the 30 new birds and here there was a noticeable autumn passage. Woolston's first Marsh Tit was ringed on No.3 bed. This bird is ringed on the left leg to facilitate separation in the field from the Willow Tits present on the bed. Twenty new Willow Tits were ringed. This is well below the ten year average of 35. This reduction was evident on both beds so it is unlikely that ringing effort is the driver of this change and it appears that breeding success was poor.

Catches of hirundines at roost sites tend to be opportunistic and dependent on weather conditions. After very favourable conditions in 2014 the reverse applied and the 226 Swallows ringed was the lowest total since 2012.

A total of 1,567 warblers of ten species was ringed in 2015, a reduction of 36% from the 2,446 new birds, also of ten species ringed in 2014 and 23% below the ten year average of 2027. However, these changes must be interpreted with caution. Warblers ringed on No.3 bed were 56% below 2014 and reduced ringing effort certainly contributed to this reduction. On No.1 bed, where effort increased the reduction when compared to 2014 was only 13% and the best that might be said is that after an exceptional year in 2014, breeding success returned to something nearer "the norm". It was an exceptional year for Cetti's Warblers with a record 14 ringed including Woolston's first pulli on No.1 bed. On No.3 bed, where all previous captures have been in autumn, three birds in post-juvenile moult were caught in late July and early August and these probably fledged locally. Given the variations in ringing effort it is not possible to draw detailed conclusions about individual species. It is clear, however that Willow Warblers continue to decline in response to habitat changes, Garden Warblers are becoming rarer at Woolston and Whitethroats had a very poor breeding season. It is necessary to go back to 1987 to find a year when fewer Whitethroats were ringed.

Breeding success derives, in part, from the timing of the adult's return and the prevailing weather which must facilitate their achieving breeding condition. The table below shows that 2015 was a very late breeding season, three to four weeks later than 2014 and one to two weeks later than the poor season of 2013 and this must have limited opportunities for multiple broods.

Ringling date of first juvenile

|              | 2015   | 2014   | 2013   |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Chiffchaff   | 27-Jun | 31-May | 22-Jun |
| Blackcap     | 11-Jul | 08-Jun | 30-Jun |
| Whitethroat  | 11-Jul | 21-Jun | 22-Jun |
| Reed Warbler | 11-Jul | 14-Jun | 07-Jul |

In the case of the resident ground feeders it can be seen from the table below that the breeding season for these species started between one and three weeks later than in 2014 and in some species was more in line with the cold late spring of 2013. Although the first juvenile Dunnock was caught on the relatively early date of 6<sup>th</sup> June, it was 27<sup>th</sup> July before another was caught.

Ringling date of first juvenile

|           | 2015   | 2014   | 2013   |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|
| Robin     | 30-May | 03-May | 01-Jun |
| Wren      | 27-Jun | 14-Jun | 30-Jun |
| Dunnock   | 06-Jun | 31-May | 22-Jun |
| Bullfinch | 06-Jun | 31-May | 30-Jun |

Wrens, Dunnocks and Robins were all ringed in numbers of around 70% of the ten year average and, whilst ringing effort may contribute to this level, the late start to the breeding season must also have had an impact. The 31 new Blackbirds ringed was the lowest number since 1987 and we have to go back to 1994 to find a year when fewer Song Thrushes were ringed than the 24 in 2015. In the 2014 report I remarked on the remarkable influx of Redwings that arrived in the second winter period. A similar arrival took place in October 2015 and the 129 Redwings ringed in the year are second only to the total of 153 new birds ringed in 2014. On 17<sup>th</sup> October Kieran Foster ringed 55 Redwings on No.3 bed which is the “one day record” for the Reserve.

Transitory migrants were represented by a single Redstart ringed on No.1 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> August, the third year running that this species has been ringed on the bed. House Sparrow got into the ringing totals for the second year running with an adult male ringed on No.3 bed on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. There was a strong autumn passage of Meadow Pipits across No.1 bed and the 65 new birds ringed compares with a ten year average of 33. The Tree Pipit passage must also have been notable with a record six ringed on No.1 bed between 11<sup>th</sup> August and 10<sup>th</sup> September. These were all first year birds. The six Grey Wagtails ringed constituted the second highest total at Woolston surpassed only by the ten birds ringed in 2014. Five birds were sampled from the autumn passage on No.1 bed. The only bird ringed on No.3 bed was a juvenile caught near water on 12<sup>th</sup> August and it is unclear why the passage in September did not manifest itself on this bed.

Finches appeared to have fared reasonably well. Chaffinches and Greenfinches were ringed in average numbers. There was a modest Brambling invasion” centred on No.3 bed, where 40 birds were ringed with just a single on No.1 bed. This arrival occurred in the second winter period whereas



historically March and April are the peak months for Bramblings at Woolston. A record 21 Siskins were ringed on No.1 bed, all juveniles and with the first on 16<sup>th</sup> July. A large summer arrival of primarily juvenile birds was noted at east coast observatories. Another irruptive finch at Woolston is Lesser Redpoll and the 108 new birds ringed was the best total since 2011. Bullfinches were ringed in record numbers with 262 new birds ringed which compares to a ten year average of 161. In contrast catches of Reed Buntings continue to decline. On No.1 bed it was the worst year since 1995 and on No.3 bed the second worst year since 2002.

| Bed   | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|
| No.1  | 37   | 85   | 42   | 64   |
| No.3  | 26   | 32   | 24   | 74   |
| Total | 63   | 117  | 66   | 138  |

Whilst the population on No.3 bed may have stabilised at a reduced level the trend on No.1 bed is unclear.

Three new species were ringed in 2015, Greylag Goose, Barn Owl and Marsh Tit, bringing the cumulative total of species ringed at Woolston to 109. As ever there were a number of individual species milestones. In descending order these were the 10,000<sup>th</sup> Blackcap, 7,000<sup>th</sup> Chiffchaff, 6,000<sup>th</sup> Great Tit, 5,000<sup>th</sup> Chaffinch, 700<sup>th</sup> Goldfinch and 200<sup>th</sup> Treecreeper.

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. Consent for ringing at Woolston is given by the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group (WECG), on behalf of the landowners, Peel Holdings and the Manchester Ship Canal Company. 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 map and for helpful comments on the interpretation of the data.

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

### RINGING TOTALS 2015

| <b>SPECIES</b>           | <b>No.1</b> | <b>No.3</b> | <b>Reserve Total</b> | <b>Grand Total</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------|
|                          |             |             | <b>2015</b>          | <b>1980-2015</b>   |
| Greylag Goose            |             | 1           | 1                    | 1                  |
| Mallard                  |             | 16          | 16                   | 79                 |
| Teal                     |             | 121         | 121                  | 190                |
| Tufted Duck              |             | 1           | 1                    | 2                  |
| Sparrowhawk              | 3           | 4           | 7                    | 112                |
| Moorhen                  |             | 5           | 5                    | 249                |
| Coot                     |             | 2           | 2                    | 26                 |
| Common Sandpiper         |             | 4           | 4                    | 7                  |
| Green Sandpiper          |             | 11          | 11                   | 17                 |
| Stock Dove               | 3           | 9           | 12                   | 41                 |
| Woodpigeon               | 1           | 4           | 5                    | 114                |
| Barn Owl                 | 2           | 2           | 4                    | 4                  |
| Kingfisher               |             | 1           | 1                    | 86                 |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | 3           |             | 3                    | 287                |
| Magpie                   | 1           | 2           | 3                    | 134                |
| Jay                      | 8           | 3           | 11                   | 325                |
| Goldcrest                | 90          | 30          | 120                  | 1826               |
| Blue Tit                 | 183         | 129         | 312                  | 9827               |
| Great Tit                | 95          | 146         | 241                  | 6156               |
| Coal Tit                 | 28          | 2           | 30                   | 142                |
| Marsh Tit                |             | 1           | 1                    | 1                  |
| Willow Tit               | 10          | 10          | 20                   | 736                |
| Sand Martin              | 7           | 3           | 10                   | 1156               |
| Swallow                  | 167         | 59          | 226                  | 12862              |
| Cetti's Warbler          | 7           | 7           | 14                   | 33                 |
| Long-tailed Tit          | 35          | 22          | 57                   | 3658               |
| Chiffchaff               | 316         | 114         | 430                  | 7205               |
| Willow Warbler           | 86          | 27          | 113                  | 7727               |
| Blackcap                 | 266         | 183         | 449                  | 10077              |
| Garden Warbler           | 14          | 2           | 16                   | 857                |
| Lesser Whitethroat       | 2           | 1           | 3                    | 253                |
| Whitethroat              | 26          | 20          | 46                   | 4906               |
| Grasshopper Warbler      |             | 2           | 2                    | 191                |
| Sedge Warbler            | 11          | 66          | 77                   | 5143               |
| Reed Warbler             | 122         | 309         | 431                  | 10448              |
| Treecreeper              | 12          | 4           | 16                   | 201                |
| Wren                     | 48          | 67          | 115                  | 5713               |
| Blackbird                | 13          | 18          | 31                   | 2579               |
| Song Thrush              | 6           | 18          | 24                   | 1205               |
| Redwing                  | 28          | 101         | 129                  | 611                |

| <b>SPECIES</b>      | <b>No.1</b> |  | <b>No.3</b> | <b>Reserve Total</b> |  | <b>Grand Total</b> |
|---------------------|-------------|--|-------------|----------------------|--|--------------------|
|                     |             |  |             | <b>2015</b>          |  | <b>1980-2015</b>   |
| Robin               | 80          |  | 53          | 133                  |  | 4356               |
| Redstart            | 1           |  |             | 1                    |  | 28                 |
| Dunnock             | 21          |  | 48          | 69                   |  | 3685               |
| House Sparrow       |             |  | 1           | 1                    |  | 26                 |
| Tree Pipit          | 6           |  |             | 6                    |  | 32                 |
| Meadow Pipit        | 59          |  | 6           | 65                   |  | 820                |
| Grey Wagtail        | 5           |  | 1           | 6                    |  | 28                 |
| Chaffinch           | 103         |  | 173         | 276                  |  | 5001               |
| Brambling           | 1           |  | 40          | 41                   |  | 408                |
| Greenfinch          | 474         |  | 129         | 603                  |  | 13630              |
| Goldfinch           | 11          |  | 4           | 15                   |  | 700                |
| Siskin              | 21          |  |             | 21                   |  | 75                 |
| Linnet              | 1           |  |             | 1                    |  | 1101               |
| Lesser Redpoll      | 93          |  | 15          | 108                  |  | 1944               |
| Bullfinch           | 82          |  | 182         | 264                  |  | 2788               |
| Reed Bunting        | 37          |  | 26          | 63                   |  | 6823               |
|                     |             |  |             |                      |  |                    |
| Others (53 species) |             |  |             |                      |  | 1959               |
|                     |             |  |             |                      |  |                    |
|                     |             |  |             |                      |  |                    |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>2588</b> |  | <b>2205</b> | <b>4793</b>          |  | <b>138591</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
- VV Alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field.
- 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

ZY8537 3F 06.12.2014 Rhodes, Middleton, Greater Manchester SD8505  
VV 30.06.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 26km 230°

### Mute Swan

W36840 1M 10.11.2013 Acre Dell Pools, near Congleton, Cheshire SJ8366  
VV 09.07.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 30km 320°

Typically, Mute Swans do not breed until they are three or four years old and Woolston usually has a small number of non-breeding birds summering.

**Mute Swan**

Z94854 6F 23.11.1997 Westport Lake, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire SJ8550

VV 14.03.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 43km 331°

At least two years old when ringed, this female would have been at least 20 years old when spotted on No.3 bed. The B.T.O. longevity record for a Mute Swan, (measured from date of ringing to most recent sighting) is 29 years 1 month and 11 days.

**Teal**

EY43992 3F 29.11.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

+F 01.10.2015 Logstor, 56°57'N 9°14'E Nordjyllands Amt, DENMARK 845km 63°

**Teal**

EZ03552 5M 07.03.2015 No.3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

+F 14.11.2015 Trefdraeth, Isle of Anglesey SH4070 126km 261°

Since the commissioning of the new duck trap on No.3 bed 166 Teal have been ringed. We must expect that most information on the movement of these birds will come from birds that have been shot. EY43992 was shot in Denmark whilst returning from its breeding territory farther east whilst EZ03552 may have wintered on Anglesey and been ringed at Woolston at the start of spring migration.

**Mallard**

GR54648 5M 14.03.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

+F 08.10.2015 Rixton Firs, Warrington SJ6890 4km 61°

**Sparrowhawk**

EG82189 3F 15.08.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

X 24.03.2015 Runcorn, Halton SJ5381 14km 237°

**Kestrel**

EG82190 3 29.09.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

XF (=M) 04.05.2015 Lymm Golf Club, Warrington SJ6788 3km 91°

**Lesser Black-backed Gull**

GR48624 3 07.08.2012 Spike Island, Widnes, Halton SJ5184

RR 23.05.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 14km 75°

**Goldcrest**

JDP666 3M 16.10.2015 Kilnsea, East Riding of Yorkshire TA4115

R 05.11.2015 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 179km 262°

This Goldcrest must be a Scandinavian bird that made landfall in Yorkshire after crossing the North Sea to spend the winter in Britain and follows from the 2014 recapture of a bird ringed on Hartlepool Headland.

**Blue Tit**

Y675387 3J 20.07.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

X 07.03.2015 Woolston, Warrington SJ6588 0km



**Blue Tit**

Z208417 3 17.10.14 Oxmoor Wood, near Runcorn, Cheshire  
R 04.01.15 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington 11 km ENE

**Blue Tit**

D937841 3J 23.07.2015 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484  
R 29.08.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 11km 291°

**Blue Tit**

Z212801 3J 19.09.2015 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 12.10.2015 Woodvale Airfield, near Formby, Merseyside SD3009  
40km 301°

The latter three records are examples of post-natal dispersal of juvenile birds. Whilst 40km is an above average movement for a Blue Tit, the longest recorded is from Essex to The Highlands, a distance of 717km.

**Willow Tit**

D648141 3J 23.07.14 Birchwood, Warrington  
R 31.08.14 Woolston Eyes No.1 Bed, Warrington 6 km S  
R 06.09.14 Woolston Eyes No.1 Bed, Warrington 6 km S

**Swallow**

D949476 3 30.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 18.05.2015 Fazakerley, Liverpool, Merseyside SJ3896 28km 286°

**Swallow**

Z219535 3 24.07.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201  
R (=M) 31.08.2015 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°

**Swallow**

D327057 3 27.08.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R (=F) 10.09.2015 Chelmarsh Reservoir, near Bridgnorth, Shropshire SO7387 101km 175°

**Cetti's Warbler**

Z296371 2 04.11.2014 Leighton Moss, near Silverdale, Lancashire SD4875  
R (=M) 17.04.2015 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

**Long-tailed Tit**

EJY912 3J 17.05.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 09.08.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 06.09.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 20.09.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 11.10.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 16.11.14 Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire 11 km WSW

**Long-tailed Tit**

ERP244 3J 26.07.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 16.11.14 Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire 11 km WSW

**Long-tailed Tit**

ERP399 2 31.08.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 11.10.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 24.01.15 Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire 11 km WSW

**Long-tailed Tit**

ERP309 3J 09.08.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 14.09.14 Woolston Eyes No.3 Bed, Warrington  
R 16.11.14 Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire 11 km WSW  
R 07.03.15 Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire 11 km WSW

Although ringed on different dates on No.3 bed these four Long-tailed Tits were part of the same roving flock. At some point between 11<sup>th</sup> October and 16<sup>th</sup> November 2014 the flock moved the 11km to David Norman's site at Norton Priory.

**Blackcap**

D948595 3M 18.09.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 26.04.2015 Holme Pierrepont, Nottinghamshire SK6239 108km 117°

**Blackcap**

Z634184 3J 05.09.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R (=M) 17.09.2015 Greenham Common, West Berkshire SU4964 240km 160°

**Sedge Warbler**

Y941261 3 01.08.2013 Icklesham, East Sussex TQ8815  
R 10.05.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 352km 322°

**Sedge Warbler**

D949216 3 23.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 14.08.2015 Granary Lane, Budleigh Salterton, Devon SY0782 311km 190°

**Reed Warbler**

Y157988 4F 30.06.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 29.06.2015 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484 11km 111°

**Reed Warbler**

D646497 3J 29.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 23.05.2015 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484 11km 111°

**Reed Warbler**

Z131211 3 24.08.2014 Leighton Moss, near Silverdale, Lancashire SD4875  
R (=M) 06.08.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

**Reed Warbler**

L869605 3J 15.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 17.05.2015 Rowlands Gill Sewage Works, Tyne and Wear NZ1759 179km 17°

**Reed Warbler**

Y259152 1 (2/2) 17.06.2011 Pickmere, Northwich, Cheshire SJ6877  
R 02.05.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 12km 344°

**Reed Warbler**

D026077 3J 10.07.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R (=F) 16.07.2015 Fleetwood, Lancashire SD3346 66km 331°

**Reed Warbler**

Y719304 3 27.08.2013 Titchfield Haven, Hill Head, Fareham, Hampshire SU5302  
R (=F) 12.08.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 299km 343°

**Reed Warbler**

D950960 3J 16.08.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 19.09.2015 Sewage Treatment Works, Swindon, Wiltshire SU1285 208km 167°

**Reed Warbler**

Z634063 3J 29.08.2015 No.3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 06.09.2015 Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7578 15km 130°

**Chaffinch**

Y157334 3F 22.10.2011 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 11.04.2015 Slaley, near Hexham, Northumberland NY9758 174km 11°

**Brambling**

Y573846 5M 12.02.2013 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
SR 11.04.2015 Todmorden, West Yorkshire SD9026 47km 34°

**Greenfinch**

TV10701 3JM 05.09.2015 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
XF 16.10.2015 Lymm, Warrington SJ6788 3km 91°

**Greenfinch**

TV10634 3JF 24.08.2015 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588  
R 19.10.2015 Rossall School, Lancashire SD3145 67km 330°

**Lesser Redpoll**

Z414823 5 08.04.2015 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Greater Manchester SD5201  
R (=M) 13.10.2015 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°

**Lesser Redpoll**

Z652570 3M 19.10.2015 Barnacre Reservoir, Lancashire SD5348  
R 04.11.2015 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 61km 169°

**Lesser Redpoll**

D327806 5 16.01.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

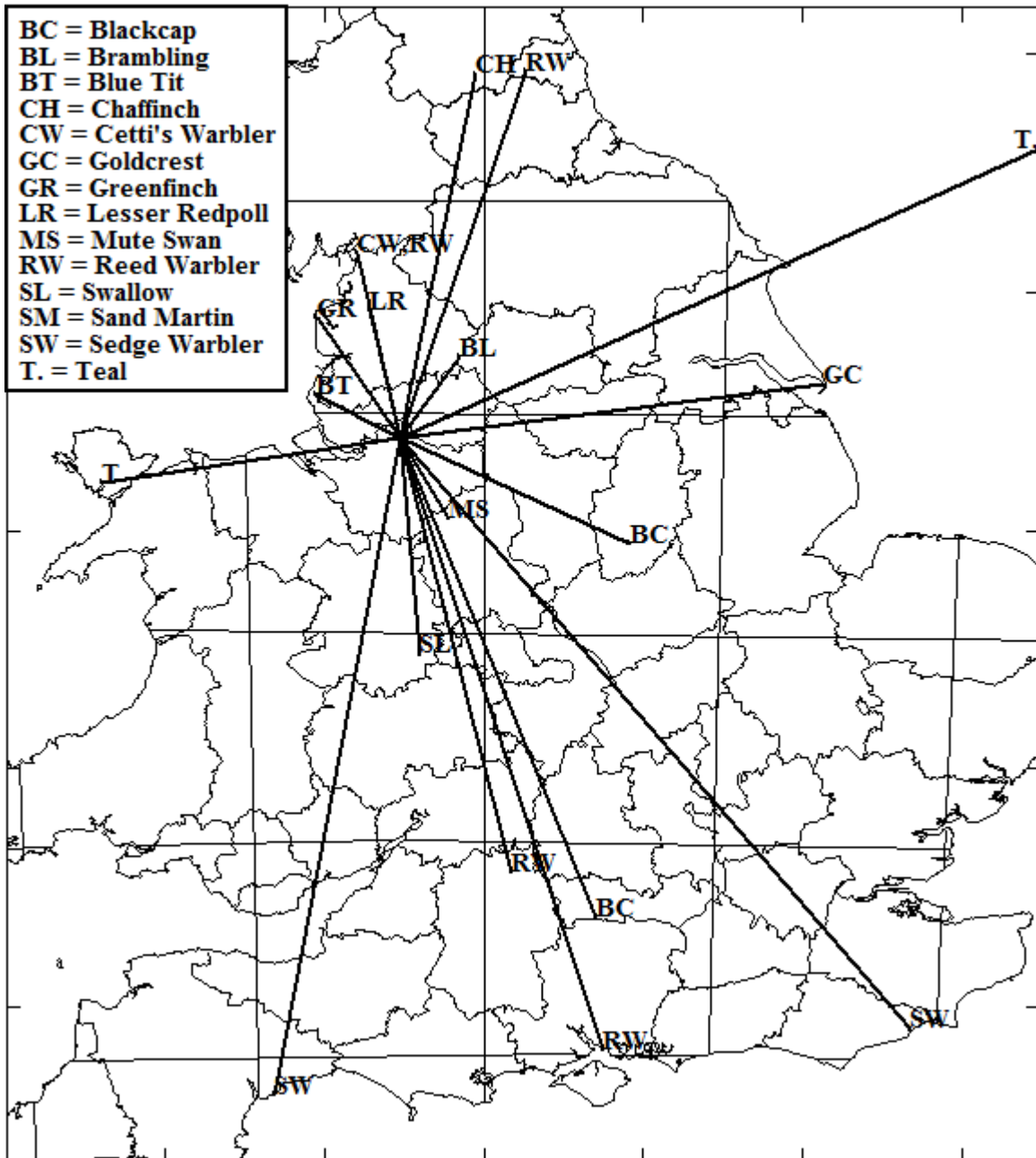
X 24.03.2014 exact location unknown, Warrington SJ6588 0km

**Reed Bunting**

D026063 3J 05.07.13 Woolston Eyes No.1 Bed, Warrington

R=M 25.03.15 Great Sankey, Warrington 8 km 270°

## Movements of 40km or more





## MIGRATION WATCH 2015

### Visit 1

**Participants** George Dunbar, Les Jones, Dave Spencer, Dave Steel, Al Warford, Diane and *Dave Bowman in spirit only (due to home improvement duties!)*

**Day** Thursday

**Date** 16/04/15      **Time** 0630-1200      **Place** Eastern edge of No.1 Bed

**Weather** Dry/Clear/Cloudy/Sunny

**Highlights** A lack of migration - no doubt due to our un-spring like weather this year!

**Total** Seven hundred and three birds noted.

### Visit 2

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Steel, Dave Spencer, George Dunbar, Alan Warford, Helen Allen, Paul Hazlehurst and Brian Baird

**Day** Saturday

**Date** 05/09/15      **Time** 0630-1200      **Place** Eastern edge of No.1 Bed

**Weather** Dry and sunny with a light north wind

**Highlights** The Swallows/The Tree Pipits/Helen's home-baked cakes/George's Bardsey Isle de-brief/Overflowing badger latrines.

**Total** Two thousand two hundred and seventy one birds noted.

### Visit 3

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Steel, Les Jones, Dave Spencer, Alan Warford, Helen Allen, Paul Hazlehurst and Brian Baird

**Day** Saturday

**Date** 24/10/15      **Time** 0700-1200      **Place** Morgan Hide No.3 Bed

**Weather** Heavy rain predicted –it took its time but came!

**Highlights** Sitting in the comfort zone of the Morgan Hide on No.3 Bed, rather than being upon a wind and rain swept 'hill'

**Total** One thousand two hundred and ninety one birds noted

### Visit 4

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Steel, Les Jones, Dave Spencer, Alan Warford, Helen Allen, Paul Hazlehurst, Brian Baird, Kelly Ainsworth and Diane Shepherd

**Day** Saturday

**Date** 31/10/15      **Time** 0630-1200      **Place** Eastern edge of No.1 Bed

**Weather** Dry bright and sunny with a touch of easterly breeze

**Highlights** Adding a 'new bird' to our list - Oystercatcher - and a notable 'restlessness' of birds on the move, with Fieldfare/Redwing/Skylark and Bullfinch dominating the list but all not quite ousting a lone Brambling from the 'most enjoyed bird spot'!

**Total** Seven thousand and eighty five birds noted.

### Visit 5

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Steel, Dave Spencer, Alan Warford, Helen Allen, Paul Hazlehurst and Brian Baird

**Day** Saturday

**Date** 21/11/15      **Time** 0700-1200      **Place** Morgan Hide No.3 Bed

**Weather** Very cold with an unforgiving north wind throughout

**Highlights** The satisfaction gained in seeing how successful the winter seed flock was in drawing in Brambling/Chaffinch and Linnet. Plus being rewarded for staring straight into the north wind when twenty three Golden Plover passed by.

**Total** Two thousand eight hundred and sixty three birds.

### Visit 6

**Participants** Dave Bowman, Dave Steel, Dave Spencer, Alan Warford, Helen Allen and Paul Hazlehurst

**Day** Saturday

**Date** 05/12/15      **Time** 0700-1200      **Place** Morgan Hide No.3 Bed

**Weather** Cool and grey

**Highlights** The ever obliging photogenic Kingfisher posing on its favourite perch, being usurped by the equally dapper twenty three Brambling, which themselves graciously gave way to a Marsh Tit, a Woolston rarity if ever there was one!

**Total** One thousand two hundred and seventeen birds.

## Woolston Eyes Migration Watches 2015

|    | <b>Date</b>         | <b>16/04/15</b>  | <b>05/09/15</b>  | <b>24/10/15</b>  | <b>31/10/15</b>  | <b>21/11/15</b>  | <b>05/12/15</b>  |
|----|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|    | <b>Time</b>         | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0700-1200</b> | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0700-1200</b> | <b>0730-1200</b> |
|    | <b>SPECIES</b>      |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| 1  | Mute Swan           | 7                | 4                | 6                | 2                | 16               | 1                |
| 2  | Pink-footed Goose   | 0                | 0                | 0                | 200              | 300              | 0                |
| 3  | Greylag Goose       | 15               | 0                | 1                | 9                | 3                | 2                |
| 4  | Canada Goose        | 23               | 83               | 72               | 97               | 14               | 19               |
| 5  | Common Shelduck     | 0                | 0                | 2                | 0                | 6                | 3                |
| 6  | Eurasian Wigeon     | 0                | 0                | 3                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 7  | Gadwall             | 6                | 0                | 16               | 1                | 18               | 7                |
| 8  | Teal                | 0                | 2                | 289              | 330              | 158              | 375              |
| 9  | Mallard             | 20               | 29               | 116              | 34               | 0                | 21               |
| 10 | Shoveler            | 0                | 0                | 6                | 0                | 14               | 14               |
| 11 | Common Pochard      | 1                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                |
| 12 | Tufted Duck         | 34               | 4                | 1                | 170              | 28               | 4                |
| 13 | Goldeneye           | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 2                | 0                |
| 14 | Grey Partridge      | 0                | 0                | 0                | 5                | 0                | 0                |
| 15 | Pheasant            | 12               | 11               | 2                | 29               | 1                | 2                |
| 16 | Great Crested Grebe | 3                | 1                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 17 | Little Grebe        | 0                | 0                | 0                | 2                | 0                | 0                |
| 18 | Cormorant           | 10               | 25               | 13               | 12               | 20               | 11               |
| 19 | Grey Heron          | 2                | 3                | 3                | 2                | 4                | 1                |
| 20 | Sparrowhawk         | 7                | 2                | 2                | 2                | 4                | 0                |
| 21 | Common Buzzard      | 9                | 11               | 0                | 5                | 3                | 0                |
| 22 | Kestrel             | 4                | 6                | 0                | 2                | 1                | 0                |
| 23 | Peregrine Falcon    | 1                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                |
| 24 | Water Rail          | 0                | 0                | 2                | 0                | 0                | 1                |
| 25 | Common Moorhen      | 2                | 2                | 8                | 12               | 4                | 12               |
| 26 | Common Coot         | 0                | 0                | 2                | 1                | 0                | 17               |
| 27 | Oystercatcher       | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                |
| 28 | Golden Plover       | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 23               | 0                |
| 29 | Lapwing             | 28               | 164              | 79               | 159              | 398              | 201              |
| 30 | Common Snipe        | 1                | 0                | 50               | 0                | 1                | 14               |
| 31 | Green Sandpiper     | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                | 0                |

|    | <b>Date</b>              | <b>16/04/15</b>  | <b>05/09/15</b>  | <b>24/10/15</b>  | <b>31/10/15</b>  | <b>21/11/15</b>  | <b>05/12/15</b>  |
|----|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|    | <b>Time</b>              | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0700-1200</b> | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0700-1200</b> | <b>0730-1200</b> |
|    | <b>SPECIES</b>           |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| 32 | Black-Tailed Godwit      | 0                | 0                | 34               | 0                | 5                | 2                |
| 33 | Black Headed Gull        | 26               | 10               | 124              | 75               | 232              | 265              |
| 34 | Lesser Black-backed Gull | 11               | 95               | 7                | 16               | 17               | 8                |
| 35 | Herring Gull             | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 62               | 1                |
| 36 | Great Black-backed Gull  | 0                | 0                | 11               | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 37 | Feral Pigeon             | 30               | 11               | 10               | 4                | 0                | 0                |
| 38 | Stock Pigeon             | 36               | 11               | 0                | 13               | 2                | 1                |
| 39 | Wood Pigeon              | 178              | 553              | 68               | 1986             | 242              | 13               |
| 40 | Collared Dove            | 4                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 41 | Tawny Owl                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 42 | Short-eared Owl          | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                |
| 43 | Kingfisher               | 1                | 0                | 1                | 1                | 1                | 1                |
| 44 | Great Spotted Woodpecker | 1                | 1                | 0                | 1                | 1                | 1                |
| 45 | Sky Lark                 | 2                | 0                | 3                | 98               | 0                | 0                |
| 46 | Sand Martin              | 3                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 47 | Barn Swallow             | 9                | 607              | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 48 | House Martin             | 0                | 176              | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 49 | Tree Pipit               | 0                | 3                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 50 | Meadow Pipit             | 2                | 8                | 0                | 43               | 0                | 0                |
| 51 | Yellow Wagtail           | 0                | 7                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 52 | Grey Wagtail             | 1                | 1                | 2                | 0                | 0                | 1                |
| 53 | White/Pied Wagtail       | 4                | 15               | 8                | 1                | 4                | 3                |
| 54 | Winter Wren              | 8                | 1                | 5                | 1                | 1                | 6                |
| 55 | Dunnock                  | 7                | 1                | 6                | 2                | 1                | 2                |
| 56 | Robin                    | 14               | 18               | 8                | 0                | 6                | 0                |
| 57 | Common Blackbird         | 10               | 4                | 15               | 17               | 7                | 1                |
| 58 | Fieldfare                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1875             | 63               | 3                |
| 59 | Song Thrush              | 3                | 0                | 2                | 1                | 3                | 0                |
| 60 | Redwing                  | 0                | 0                | 85               | 234              | 9                | 0                |
| 61 | Mistle Thrush            | 4                | 28               | 0                | 4                | 2                | 0                |
| 62 | Grasshopper Warbler      | 1                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 63 | Blackcap                 | 6                | 6                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 64 | Common Whitethroat       | 1                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |

|    | <b>Date</b>      | <b>16/04/15</b>  | <b>05/09/15</b>  | <b>24/10/15</b>  | <b>31/10/15</b>  | <b>21/11/15</b>  | <b>05/12/15</b>  |
|----|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|    | <b>Time</b>      | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0700-1200</b> | <b>0630-1200</b> | <b>0700-1200</b> | <b>0730-1200</b> |
|    | <b>SPECIES</b>   |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| 65 | Chiffchaff       | 15               | 16               | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 66 | Willow Warbler   | 13               | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                |
| 67 | Goldcrest        | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                |
| 68 | Long Tailed Tit  | 6                | 12               | 7                | 6                | 0                | 12               |
| 69 | Blue Tit         | 5                | 7                | 3                | 2                | 5                | 0                |
| 70 | Great Tit        | 2                | 6                | 2                | 1                | 2                | 0                |
| 71 | Coal Tit         | 2                | 2                | 1                | 1                | 0                | 0                |
| 72 | Marsh Tit        | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1                |
| 73 | Willow Tit       | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 1                | 1                |
| 74 | Nuthatch         | 1                | 1                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                |
| 75 | Jay              | 5                | 3                | 12               | 2                | 1                | 0                |
| 76 | Magpie           | 9                | 9                | 2                | 7                | 11               | 5                |
| 77 | Jackdaw          | 26               | 26               | 0                | 34               | 21               | 0                |
| 78 | Carrion Crow     | 20               | 30               | 11               | 35               | 9                | 0                |
| 79 | Raven            | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                |
| 80 | Starling         | 0                | 45               | 82               | 1366             | 828              | 25               |
| 81 | Chaffinch        | 7                | 17               | 29               | 72               | 140              | 0                |
| 82 | Brambling        | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 7                | 23               |
| 83 | Greenfinch       | 2                | 0                | 72               | 6                | 86               | 130              |
| 84 | Goldfinch        | 2                | 103              | 2                | 29               | 16               | 0                |
| 85 | Siskin           | 1                | 50               | 1                | 9                | 1                | 2                |
| 86 | Linnet           | 35               | 32               | 0                | 31               | 48               | 0                |
| 87 | Lesser Redpoll   | 1                | 2                | 0                | 5                | 0                | 0                |
| 88 | Common Crossbill | 0                | 0                | 0                | 1                | 0                | 0                |
| 89 | Bullfinch        | 1                | 5                | 2                | 24               | 5                | 3                |
| 90 | Yellowhammer     | 3                | 0                | 0                | 2                | 0                | 0                |
| 91 | Reed Bunting     | 0                | 0                | 0                | 0                | 4                | 3                |
|    |                  | <b>703</b>       | <b>2271</b>      | <b>1291</b>      | <b>7085</b>      | <b>2863</b>      | <b>1217</b>      |

## WILLOW TITS BREEDING AT WOOLSTON EYES IN 2015

### No.1 Bed

#### Nest 1

5/4 A pair watched excavating 2.5m high in a decrepit birch stump, standing in water at the Viaduct Pools.

14/4 No birds were present but a Blue Tit nearby.

28/4 Nest has been usurped by Blue Tits. Female Blue Tit sitting on nine eggs.

#### Nest 2

5/4 Found a deep excavation in a willow limb in reeds to the south of the Bed. Pair calling nearby.

14/4 Cavity contained material.

28/4 Female incubating nine eggs.

22/5 The entrance had been smashed into by a woodpecker, but eight chicks ready to fledge in the cavity. This nest was successful and I presume the chicks were too large for the woodpecker's appetite (see photos below).

#### Nests 3 and 4

28/4 Having found trial borings in the area, I found two separate nests in low stumps both a few metres out in the water of the main pool. One held nine eggs, the other two+ eggs. Both birds were incubating and the nests were only 50m apart and this is, notably, the closest I have ever encountered two occupied nests. Having only heard one singing male in the general area I speculated whether a cock had two hens.

22/5 Heartbreak! Both nests predated. The first with a single hole at the back of the cavity, completely empty and devoid of any material. In the second the lining had been left but no contents. Both attacks were the work of Great Spotted Woodpecker.

### No.2 Bed

#### Nest 5

28/4 Mike Lloyd told me of a pair in the centre of the Bed. I found the nest and the female was incubating eight eggs.

22/5 The pair was feeding feathered young.

### No. 3 Bed

#### Nest 6

20/3 Found a shallow excavation in a willow limb in the north-west corner.

5/4 The excavation seemed complete at 15.5cm deep, but a Great Spotted Woodpecker had drilled the cavity level with the bottom of the chamber.

#### Nest 7

18/4 After a difficult search I eventually found a cavity being excavated in a prostrate willow stump in the centre of the Bed.



23/4 Nest material in cavity.

8/5 Female incubating at least three eggs.

22/5 Visited the site with D. Bowman. Feathered young in the nest and a later visit confirmed a successful fledge.

#### **No.4 Bed**

##### Nest 8

12/4 Pair excavating 3.4m high in a decrepit birch stump east of the Loop. This was just 13m from a site where I had watched one of the birds excavating in a low stump on 25/3

8/5 Bird flushed from the nest and presumed incubating.

22/5 Pair feeding young.

Note: Because of the height and frail condition of the stump it was impossible to inspect the nest without the risk of damage.

##### Nest 9

12/4 Found a nest to the west of the Bed just off the Reserve where Mike Lloyd had seen the pair excavating. It contained material.

22/4 Female incubating ten eggs.

8/5 Adult brooding naked chicks.

22/5 Nest contained feathered young and a later visit confirmed the cavity was intact and a successful fledge.

##### Nest 10

23/4 Found a nest, advised by Mike Lloyd, in the limb of a willow at the north-east corner. It contained material which may have covered the eggs. A pair of Blue Tits was showing unwelcome attention and they were fighting the WTs and appeared to be winning the battle. One of the Blue Tits was continuously pecking the entrance and an inspection showed that the nest lining was now covered with fine chippings. I cannot think of the reason for this because the Blue Tit could easily enter the hole. I have noticed this behaviour before with Great Tits and have often noticed the entrance holes to nest boxes are finely chipped, which I now attribute to titmice.

8/5 Predated! A neat narrow slit drilled level with the nest. The cavity appeared completely empty with only fine chips and dust at the base. It is presumed that it was too early for the Blue Tits to have successfully usurped the site and inconclusive as to whether the Willow Tit had laid (or even hatched young), but another example of how Great Spotted Woodpecker completely empties the cavity.

##### Nest 11

28/4 ML disturbed a Great Spotted Woodpecker plundering a nest at the south of the bed. It was 2.7m high in a willow and held 10 eggs. He made a temporary repair to the damage with mud and then returned the next day to make a more permanent repair with silicone.

20/5 Both adults feeding young. 27/5 Young calling from the nest.

2/6 I inspected the site with Mike Lloyd. Nest intact with no young or eggs. A successful fledge and a real triumph!

## **Paddington Meadows**

Nest 12

16/4 Nest found with material (possibly covering eggs) in a low elder stump opposite No.4 Bed.

29/4 Female incubating eight eggs.

25/5 At least three feathered young in the cavity and presume went on for a successful fledge.

## **SUMMARY**

2015 was a successful season for locating Willow Tit nests in the general area of the Reserve and I acknowledge the help of Mike Lloyd in directing me to some of the sites. Twelve active nests were found, of which three were predated, one was possibly usurped and was then predated. Another was definitely usurped and seven were presumed successfully fledged. In addition to these nests several trial excavations were found and subsequently abandoned.

No.1 Bed: In addition to the nests described I had a bird consistently singing around the centre of the Bed and as I didn't have the opportunity to visit the north bank I feel an estimate of six or seven pairs is not unreasonable.

No.2 Bed: Other than the nest recorded, I did not have the opportunity to explore the Bed. A bird was heard singing on occasions just west of the Viaduct, but searches proved unsuccessful.

No.3 Bed: In addition to the nests described, Mike Lloyd found a possible excavation near the Tower Hide which was too high to inspect. Birds were consistently singing adjacent to this area, in the centre of the Bed and in the north-west corner. I didn't explore the eastern or northern edges satisfactorily, but think a reasonable estimate is three or four pairs, possibly more.

No.4 Bed: In addition to the four nests found, Mike Lloyd found an abandoned excavation in the centre and I found several trial borings and shallow excavations. Estimate six or seven pairs.



Nest 2 (No.1 Bed)

**Allan Rustell**

## BUTTERFLY REPORT

Although 2015 was not a very good year overall, there were nevertheless some positive features. The first sightings were in early March with reports of both Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell on the 7<sup>th</sup>. There were few records for the rest of that month, however, and it was April before these species were present in reasonable numbers. Totals of 90 Peacock and 54 Small Tortoiseshell around mid-month proved to be the highest counts of the year for both species, as the summer turned out to be generally cool and cloudy.

The highlight of an otherwise disappointing summer was the record number of Large Skippers, with a total of 34 present at the end of June. Another species seen in above-average numbers was Comma, whilst it was encouraging to have five reports of Ringlet, which was recorded for the first time at Woolston in 2014. Holly Blue made a welcome reappearance after two blank years but most other species fared badly.

The very hot weather at the beginning of July raised hopes of a successful year for butterflies, which peak in high summer. The temperature on the Butterfly Transect reached 27 degrees on 1<sup>st</sup> July but cooler and cloudier weather followed and continued for the rest of the summer months. Totals of Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown were unspectacular and the usual emergence of Peacock at the end of July was delayed and disappointing. Purple Hairstreak was another species to fare badly and proved very difficult to find, even when conditions appeared to be suitable.

Mild weather continued into autumn but few butterflies were reported and a Small Copper on 5<sup>th</sup> November appeared to be the last of the year, as persistent wet weather set in. However, on 20<sup>th</sup> December a Red Admiral was on No.3 bed, the latest ever sighting of this species at Woolston.

In view of the often indifferent weather conditions, it was remarkable that the Butterfly Transect, now in its tenth year, was monitored every week from April to the end of September. This is due in large part to the support of David Bowman and Les Jones, who are willing to cover in my absence, and it is the first year that full coverage has been achieved.

Woolston Eyes regularly records the highest totals in Cheshire for many species and the Annual Report of the Cheshire and Peak District branch of Butterfly Conservation allows comparisons to be made with other local sites. This year, Woolston held the highest numbers of Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood and Gatekeeper.

As always, the records submitted by fellow wardens and permit holders, via the logbook and website, are invaluable in providing a fuller picture of distribution and flight periods and I would encourage all visitors to the Reserve to enter their butterfly records in the logbook. Again, if any readers are interested in surveying butterflies at Woolston on a regular or occasional basis please contact me via the website.

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS

### Small Skipper

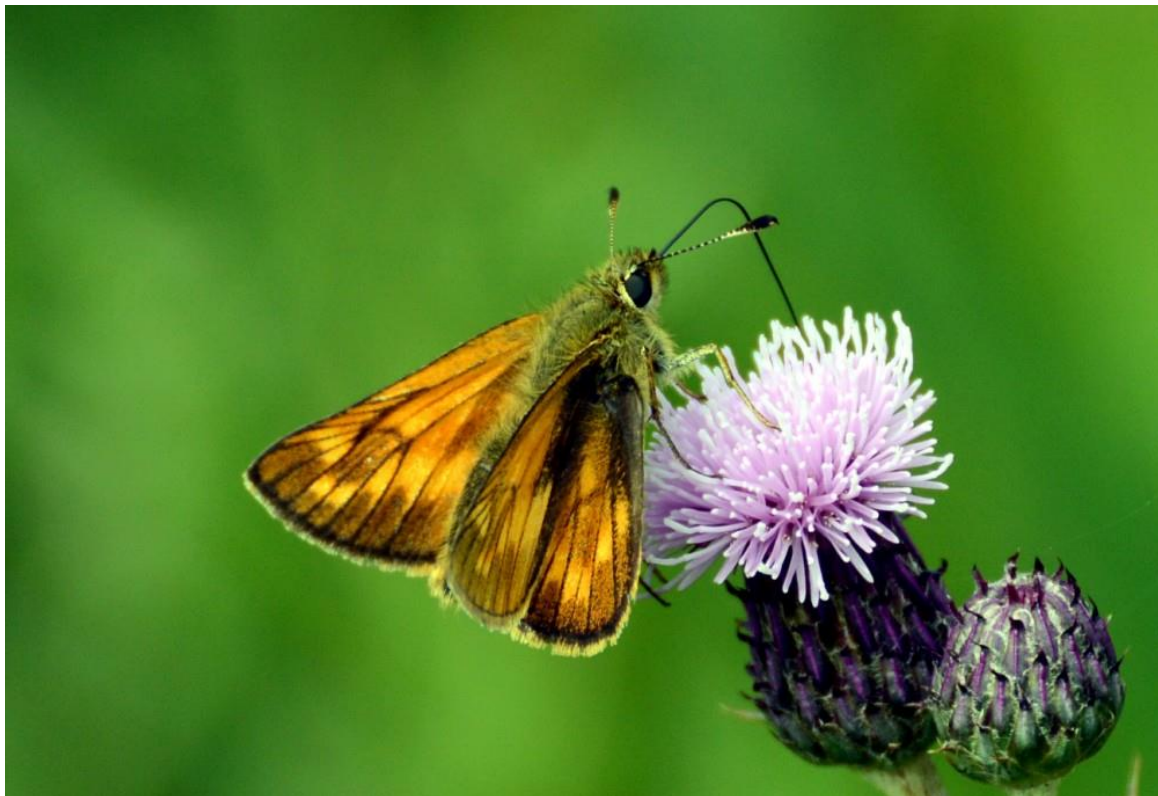
*Thymelicus sylvestris*

Numbers were down on the two previous years when there were counts of over a hundred but this season's totals were still above average. The first sightings were on 1<sup>st</sup> July, when nine were found, and during the first week of the month a total of 15 was present. The highest counts of the year occurred at the middle of July and a maximum of 37 was well above average for a species that seems to have become more prevalent in recent years. No more than ten were reported during the remainder of July and the final record was on 16<sup>th</sup> August, which is the latest ever at Woolston.

### Large Skipper

*Ochlodes sylvanus*

This proved to be a record year for a species that is never seen in large numbers at Woolston. The first appeared on 10<sup>th</sup> June, which is about average. What was not expected however was the exceptional numbers present at the end of June and beginning of July. No less than 34 were found across the Reserve and butterflies were present in all areas. Fourteen were on No.1 bed, five on No.2, ten on No.3, four on No.4 and one on Butchersfield Tip. The previous highest total in recent years was 16 in 2011. In contrast, this species had a poor year in the rest of the county and the reasons why this species fared so well at Woolston are unclear. Reasonable counts continued until mid-July when ten were found. The final reports were of three on 29<sup>th</sup> July and two on 8<sup>th</sup> August.



*Large Skipper*

*David Bowman*

**Brimstone***Gonepteryx rhamni*

There were twelve records, which is above average for a species which is not common at Woolston. Eight of these were between 4<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> April and a maximum of two on three dates. From the distribution of the sightings it seems that four individuals were present at this time. There were further reports of singles on 4<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> June. Other sightings were a female on Butchersfield Tip on 16<sup>th</sup> August and there were September records from Nos.3 and 4 beds on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> respectively.

**Large White***Pieris brassicae*

A fairly average year began with singles on 22<sup>nd</sup> April and 11<sup>th</sup> May. There were no further reports until 18<sup>th</sup> July. On 8<sup>th</sup> August five were counted on the northern half of No.1 bed and the maximum for the year was about seven around this time. This is similar to the previous year's total. The only other sightings were of singles on the 1<sup>st</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September.

**Small White***Pieris rapae*

The first of the year appeared on 7<sup>th</sup> April and by the 22<sup>nd</sup> ten were present. There were no further definite sightings until 27<sup>th</sup> June as all the "whites" in this period were thought to be Green-veined, although it is impossible to be certain of this. Odd ones were then reported in early July and a count of 22 on 18<sup>th</sup> July was thought to be almost entirely of this species. The highest count of what proved to be a disappointing year was on 8<sup>th</sup> August when about 30 were found, mostly on the northern half of No.1 bed. There were no further significant totals and the last sighting was on 19<sup>th</sup> September.

**Green-veined White***Pieris napi*

This species, in common with the other "whites", had a poor season. The first record was on 22<sup>nd</sup> April and very few were recorded until early June when a total of nine "whites" was thought to be exclusively of this species. July saw no counts into double-figures and the year maximum of about 30 was on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> August. This is well below average and compares unfavourably with the 90 recorded in 2014. The final record was on 18<sup>th</sup> September, the latest ever seen at Woolston.

**Orange Tip***Anthocharis cardamines*

It was not until 11<sup>th</sup> April that the first was reported on No.4 bed. This was followed by three on No.3 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> April. The highest count of the year was on 22<sup>nd</sup> April when a total of 12 was present. This proved to be the only double-figure count and only small numbers were reported subsequently. Unusually, butterflies remained into June with a male and a female found on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the latest ever for Woolston on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Although down on last year's figures numbers were about average for this species.

## Purple Hairstreak

*Favonius quercus*

This species fared poorly this year and butterflies were hard to find, even when conditions appeared favourable. The first was seen on 20<sup>th</sup> July on the south bank of No.3 bed and there were a number of further reports, all of one butterfly, from this area. The highest count of the year was of six on the evening of 12<sup>th</sup> August, again on the south bank of No.3 bed. Unusually, four of these were found in Sycamores rather than their usual habitat of Oaks. None were seen along the Canal Track in spite of repeated searches.



*Purple Hairstreak on the south bank of No.3 bed*

*David Waterhouse*

## Small Copper

*Lycaena phlaeas*

This was one of the worst years on record for this species. None were seen before 7<sup>th</sup> June, the latest ever for a first sighting, when three were found on the northern half of No.1 bed. There were just four further records, all of singles, on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1<sup>st</sup> September and 5<sup>th</sup> November, the latest ever record at Woolston. Although cyclical variations are the norm for this species, the exceptionally low numbers present do give rise for concern but hopefully next year will see an upturn in the fortunes of this attractive little butterfly.

## Common Blue

*Polyommatus Icarus*

After two excellent years with numbers well in excess of two hundred, this year's totals were disappointing and this was only the second time since 2008 that less than a hundred were recorded. The first report was on 30<sup>th</sup> May and during the first week of June 36 were present, including 30 on the favoured northern half of No.1 bed. A survey of the whole Reserve on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> June produced a total of 38 and the last of the first brood was reported on 1<sup>st</sup> July. The beginning of August marked the emergence of the second brood and by mid-month a total of 58 was found. Of these 27 were on the northern half of No.1 bed and eleven on No.4 bed. This proved to be the highest



count of the year for both Woolston and the county as a whole. Butterflies remained in reasonable numbers until the end of August when 19 were still on the recycling area of No.1 bed. The last report of a disappointing year was on 19<sup>th</sup> September.



*Small Copper*

*David Hackett*

### **Holly Blue**

*Celastrina argiolus*

Following two blank years it was encouraging to witness the return of this species to Woolston. There were four records between 3<sup>rd</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> September, all of single butterflies. The other sightings were on 25<sup>th</sup> July and 8<sup>th</sup> August. As all these records were from different beds it seems likely that at least three different butterflies were present during the summer.

### **Red Admiral**

*Vanessa atalanta*

Although fewer than the previous year's record totals were present, reasonable numbers were seen with the first on the evening of 16<sup>th</sup> June. Two were found on the Butterfly Transect two days later, although one of these could have been the one seen on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Numbers increased from early July, with eight on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 13 on the 11<sup>th</sup>. No more than ten were reported during August and the maximum count was of 14 towards the end of September. These included 12 on the northern half of No.1 bed on the 19<sup>th</sup>. On 26<sup>th</sup> October three were on No.4 bed. With mild conditions continuing into late autumn and winter, butterflies were recorded locally until December and one was found on No.3 bed on the 20<sup>th</sup>, the latest ever at Woolston by one day! A week later, on 27<sup>th</sup> December, a butterfly was seen briefly in flight in the same area and, while it seems highly likely that this was the same insect, a positive identification was not possible.

**Painted Lady***Vanessa cardui*

The eight records of this migrant were above average. The first record was on 21<sup>st</sup> June and all sightings were of singles apart from 23<sup>rd</sup> August when two were on No.1 bed. The final record was on 25<sup>th</sup> September, the second latest ever for Woolston.

**Small Tortoiseshell***Aglais urticae*

For the second successive year numbers peaked in April and the summer brood was disappointing. The first was seen on 7<sup>th</sup> March and the only other March records were of one on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup>. The main emergence began in early April with 28 on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The maximum count occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> April when 54 were counted across the Reserve. This is down on the previous year's total of 77 and much lower than in 2012 and 2013, when well over a hundred were seen. Twenty one were still present on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and up to twelve persisted until mid-May. Very few were reported thereafter until the emergence of the summer brood on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. This peaked around mid-month when 32 were found. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 12 were still present on the northern half of No.1 bed and this proved to be the last count in double figures. September began with nine on the 6<sup>th</sup> and the final records were of five on the 19<sup>th</sup> and one on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Peacock***Aglais io*

The first was reported on 7<sup>th</sup> March and there were four other March records, all of single insects. In early April numbers increased and on the 7<sup>th</sup> a total of 74 was counted across the Reserve. The spring brood peaked at 90 on 14<sup>th</sup> April and of these 31 were on No.4 bed. There was little change for the rest of the month and 79 were still present on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Numbers decreased during May with a maximum of 20 on No.3 bed on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The last of the first brood was seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and there was then a gap until the summer brood began to emerge on 2<sup>nd</sup> August. This is later than normal, with butterflies usually appearing around the third week of July. Not only was the second brood late to emerge but numbers were very disappointing, with a maximum of 82 noted around mid- August. It is most unusual for the summer brood to be less numerous than the spring totals at Woolston but this was the case this year. By the first week of September about eight remained and two were reported on each of the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup>. The last of a poor year were singles on 25<sup>th</sup> September and 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

**Comma***Polytonia c-album*

One of the few species to be seen in above average numbers this year. The first report was on 8<sup>th</sup> April when two were seen. There followed two further April records but none were then reported until 4<sup>th</sup> July when three were present. A rapid increase to mid-month produced an excellent count of 40 between 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July. This is the third highest total since systematic recording began in 2003 and was exceeded only by counts of 60 in 2006 and 45 in 2011. It is interesting that this species performed so well when Small Tortoiseshell, which emerged on the same date in July, had a poor season. There were no further large counts, the maximum August total being four on the 16<sup>th</sup>. September saw four records and the last of the year was on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

## **Speckled Wood**

*Parage aegeria*

Although numbers were much less than in the previous two years, they were about average for a species that is expanding its range northwards and is probably benefitting from the increase in mature woodland at Woolston. The first was seen on 7<sup>th</sup> April and then none were reported until 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> April when seven were present. There was only one May record and only odd ones during June, with a maximum of five. Eleven on 11<sup>th</sup> July was the only double-figure count around this period and the next report of significance was of 14 on 13<sup>th</sup> August. Maximum numbers appeared in September as usual and the month opened with a count of 39, of which 34 were on Butchersfield Tip. Nos. 3 and 4 beds were not surveyed on this date so the overall total was certainly greater. A series of visits between 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September resulted in a count of 73, the highest of the year. Fifty-eight were still present a week later but by the end of the month very few were reported and the last definite record was of four on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. A late sighting on 25<sup>th</sup> October was probably of this species but it was not possible to make a positive identification.

## **Gatekeeper**

*Pyronia tithonus*

The first emerged on 3<sup>rd</sup> July and three were seen the following day. Two visits on 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July resulted in a Reserve-wide total of 492 and the maximum for the year occurred typically around 27<sup>th</sup> July. At this time a total of 640 was present, almost exactly the same as the previous year. Of these about two hundred were found on No.4 bed and 160 on No.1 bed. This was a reasonable total given the relatively poor weather conditions and the fact that it was not possible to survey the outer banks of No.4 bed, which had become overgrown with vegetation. Although numbers declined during August, 270 were still present on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 37 were found on the centre path of No.4 bed on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Reasonable numbers remained until 26<sup>th</sup> August and four were seen on 1<sup>st</sup> September. It seemed likely that butterflies would persist for a few days into September and this was in fact the case, the last being found on the 6<sup>th</sup>, which equals the latest ever sighting at Woolston.

## **Meadow Brown**

*Maniola jurtina*

A first sighting on 17<sup>th</sup> June was fairly typical and by the end of the month a total of 98 was recorded, of which no less than 84 were on the northern half of No.1 bed. By early July numbers had increased to around 225 and remained at this level for the rest of the month. The highest total was recorded on 18<sup>th</sup> July when 254 were counted. The vast majority of these (about 170) were on No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip. This is a little above the previous year's maximum of 231 but about average for this species. The usual decline then set in and during August the highest total was 112. There were no significant counts after 6<sup>th</sup> September when twelve were on No.1 bed and the final sighting of the year was on 19<sup>th</sup> September. This is one of the latest ever records of this species at Woolston but a week earlier than the record latest sighting in 2010.

## **Ringlet**

*Aphantopus hyperantus*

Following the first ever sighting in 2014, there were a number of records this year as this species continues to expand northwards throughout Cheshire. The first of the year was found on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, not only on the same date as last year but in exactly the same area of No.2 bed, the south-east corner.

This may well indicate that breeding took place in 2014, although only one butterfly was actually seen that year. There was a total of seven records this year with a maximum of three on 11<sup>th</sup> July. Of these, one was found on each of Nos.1, 2 and 3 beds. One was seen on a number of occasions in the centre of No.3 bed; other records were from the Copse on No.2 bed and the Viaduct path on No.1 bed. On 25<sup>th</sup> July one was on the Canal Track opposite the palisade gates at the entrance to No.2 bed and this was the last sighting of the year. Given the increase in records, it seems likely that this species will soon become established as a breeding species and better weather during its flight period would facilitate this.



*Ringlet*

*Douglas Buchanan*

**Dave Hackett**

## ODONATA REPORT 2015

It proved to be another interesting year for dragonfly recording on the Reserve, despite a hesitant start due to the cool damp weather during the spring. Although it was the middle of May before the first species emerged, the season lasted until November, thanks to a prolonged mild spell in the autumn. A total of sixteen species was recorded, including nine species of dragonfly and seven of the smaller damselflies. It is pleasing to report that breeding activity was either observed or confirmed for the majority of species, including Large Red Damselfly and Southern Hawker. Once again however, there were no reports of Black Darter and, equally disappointing, there were no sightings of the elusive Common Hawker this year.

The season commenced on 15th May, when newly emerged Broad-bodied Chasers and unusually early Common Darters were spotted on No.3 bed. The following day, Azure Damselflies were found on the bed, but during the rest of May there were only a few more records of this common species. At the beginning of June temperatures began to improve, resulting in more species being recorded, including Banded Demoiselle, Large Red Damselfly and Blue-tailed Damselfly. By 6th June, Common Blue Damselflies had emerged on No.1 bed, whilst on 10th June the first Black-tailed Skimmer, Four-spotted Chaser and Red-eyed Damselfly were found on No.3 bed. During a survey of Nos.1 and 3 beds on 27th June three more species were added to the list, when Brown and Southern Hawkets, as well as Emperor Dragonflies were recorded. Around the pools on No.1 bed on 11th July, Ruddy Darters were identified and the first Emerald Damselfly was also spotted. As expected, the last species to appear was Migrant Hawker, which was initially recorded on the relatively late date of 29th August, on No.3 bed. Appropriately, it was this species which finally brought the season to a close on 12th November, when a single was spotted at Butchersfield Tip.

Personal highlights during the season included observing Large Red Damselflies egg-laying (ovipositing) at one of the Viaduct Pools on 4th June, and also identifying the exuvia, or larval case, of a Southern Hawker, which was found at the same pool on 18th July. It was notable this year that there were more reports from No.3 bed, particularly of Black-tailed Skimmers, as well as both Broad-bodied and Four-spotted Chasers, which may partly be attributable to the recent habitat and water level management work on the bed. After a lack of records from No.4 bed of late, it was a pleasant surprise to find both Emperor Dragonflies and Brown Hawkets present there on 14th July. The report on 26th October, of a pair of Common Darters ovipositing on No.4 bed, may hopefully result in more sightings from this bed in future. The encounter with a drowning Brown Hawker, on 15th October, was yet another personal highlight during the season, and was actually the last recorded sighting of the species in the whole of the UK in 2015.

This year a number of our records were submitted to the County Dragonfly Recorder, for eventual inclusion in the Dragonfly Recording Network database. Consequently several reports and photographs appeared on the Cheshire Dragonfly website, which hopefully brought Woolston Eyes to the attention of a more widespread public.

I would like to thank all those who assisted me during the season, as well as those who either entered their sightings in the Log Book or submitted records, including excellent photographs, to the Group website.



## **Banded Demoiselle**

*Calopteryx splendens*

These large and colourful damselflies are usually found by slow-flowing rivers, brooks, and canals containing muddy sediment. The metallic-blue males have a fluttering flight action and are often mistaken for butterflies, but the shy metallic-green females are more difficult to find and are probably under recorded. This species has been present in small numbers on the Reserve since at least 2007, when breeding was first confirmed. Typically there were six records this year, beginning with 3<sup>rd</sup> June, when one was spotted on the east bank of No.4 bed. The lush vegetation alongside the Mersey, at the Weir basin is a favourite perching area for this species and four were recorded here on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. A single was also found at this spot, by the same observer, on 30<sup>th</sup> June. A wandering male was then discovered on No.3 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> July. On a warm and sunny 15<sup>th</sup> July, two were recorded, during a butterfly count. Later that same afternoon, a male was seen flying around the riverbank vegetation by the Weir, probably searching for a female.



*Banded Demoiselle on No.3 bed*

*David Spencer*

## **Large Red Damselfly**

*Pyrhosoma nymphula*

This striking red and black damselfly, which is widespread throughout the country, is usually one of the first to emerge in spring. Past records indicate that this species was present in small numbers on all beds, but recently it appears to be confined to No.1 bed, where it was previously recorded in 2013. As there were no records last year, it was reassuring to find a small active colony, on 4<sup>th</sup> June, at the Viaduct Pools. Breeding activity was also noted, when two pairs were observed ovipositing in tandem. At the same time up to four territorial males were spotted chasing each other, low over the



water's surface. There were no further sightings on subsequent visits to these pools but since this species has a two year life cycle, it will be fascinating to see what emerges during 2016.

### **Emerald Damselfly**

*Lestes sponsa*

This common species prefers shallow ponds with plenty of emergent vegetation. Unlike the other damselflies they typically perch with their wings half open, but can be difficult to spot because of their metallic-green colouration. Recent records have been from the pools on No.1 bed, and with one exception this pattern continued again this year. They are a late emerging damselfly, and it was 11<sup>th</sup> July before the first was recorded this year. On 18<sup>th</sup> July, four were spotted, followed by six on 25<sup>th</sup> July, when both the Viaduct and New Pools were visited. During another survey at these pools on 27<sup>th</sup> August a maximum count of 10 was recorded, which included a pair flying in tandem, indicative of probable breeding. Also on 27<sup>th</sup> August I was surprised to find a newly emerged insect, resting on vegetation, along the east side of No.3 bed. Despite further visits however, this proved to be the last sighting of the year for this species.



*Azure Damselfly*

*David Bowman*

### **Azure Damselfly**

*Coenagrion puella*

These common blue and black damselflies emerge in the early spring and are amongst the first to be seen. The flat U-shaped marking on the male's abdomen is diagnostic and helps to distinguish it from the other blue damselflies. They often perch on vegetation along the south bank of No.3 bed, where the first two immature insects were spotted on 16<sup>th</sup> May. Incidentally, this was the same date and

place where they were first recorded during 2014. During the rest of May however, only odd ones were seen, before numbers peaked in the first half of June. In warm sunshine on 4<sup>th</sup> June, at least 50 were present, with pairs seen egg-laying in tandem, from the footbridge on No.3 bed and 20 plus were also noted at the Viaduct Pools. The following week similar numbers were reported on No.3 bed, with high counts of 60 on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 50 on 10<sup>th</sup> June. It was disappointing that on No.4 bed, only a single male was found on 10<sup>th</sup> June, and on another visit to this bed on 14<sup>th</sup> July just four were spotted, at the smaller Sandpit Pond. When Nos.1 and 3 beds were surveyed on 15<sup>th</sup> July, this species was once again abundant, but by 6<sup>th</sup> August only four remained, on No.3 bed.

### **Common Blue Damselfly**

*Enallagma cyathigerum*

This widespread, bright blue and black species is found at both still and slow-moving waters. It is often seen in company with Azure and Blue-tailed damselflies, but has a much stronger and faster flight action, low across the water's surface. On 6<sup>th</sup> June at the New Pool on No.1 bed two were seen struggling in the breeze to climb up the rushes, but a few days later, on a sunny 9<sup>th</sup> June, 40 were estimated to be present on No.3 bed. By the 27<sup>th</sup> June they were abundant on both beds and good numbers were noted in early July. On 15<sup>th</sup> July 30 plus were spotted amongst the nettles, including pairs in tandem, along the west footpath of No.2 bed. On 16<sup>th</sup> July, at least 10 were present on the south bank of No.3 bed, and a mating pair was discovered. On both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> July, about 40 were estimated at the New Pool, mixed with other damselflies. During further visits to No.1 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> August, around 20 were still present, including several pairs ovipositing.

### **Blue-tailed Damselfly**

*Ishnura elegans*

This is another of the most widespread species which can be found at most water bodies, including garden ponds. The male has a bright blue band near the end of an otherwise black abdomen, whereas females have five colour forms. They are often active in cooler weather which probably accounts for them being recorded on twenty two dates this year, commencing on 4<sup>th</sup> June, when two were spotted on No.3 bed. On 9<sup>th</sup> June about 20 were present on the bed and scores were noted on 27<sup>th</sup> June, when both Nos.1 and 3 beds were visited. During the first half of July at least 20 were present on No.3 bed, but only two were found on No.4 bed, on 14<sup>th</sup> July. From 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> July they were at a peak when 50 or more were counted on Nos.1 and 3 beds, plus another 20 along the west path of No.2 bed. Counts in double figures continued in August and breeding activity was witnessed on 20<sup>th</sup> August, when a mating pair, in the wheel position, was present on No.3 bed. Numbers declined after this and the last two were spotted on 9<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Red-eyed Damselfly**

*Erythromma najas*

This distinctive species, which has expanded its range from the south, was first confirmed as breeding at Woolston in 2007. The small colony, still present here, appears to be at the north-west edge of its range. Although found elsewhere in Warrington and in neighbouring St. Helens, they have not yet been recorded further north in Lancashire. On sunny days, the dark coloured males, with their conspicuous blood-red eyes, can be spotted perching on floating leaves and vegetation, in the slow moving part of the river, below the footbridge to No.3 bed. Our first record this year was on 10<sup>th</sup> June, when a male was found, at this favoured location. On 27<sup>th</sup> June, three were spotted here and on

9<sup>th</sup> July at least six were present, including a pair in tandem. On 15<sup>th</sup> July I was surprised to find two perched on vegetation in the river at the Weir basin. Just one or two were present, south of No.3 bed on both 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July. Once again in this area of the river five were spotted on 6<sup>th</sup> August, followed by four on 8<sup>th</sup> but only one was present on 20<sup>th</sup> August. The final record was on 29<sup>th</sup> August,



*Red-eyed Damselfly*

*Keith Gallie*

when two territorial males were observed from the footbridge.

### **Common Hawker**

*Aeshna juncea*

This large dark dragonfly tends to be wary and is usually associated with acidic boggy pools, in more open upland areas. They are not as common as the name suggests and the alternative English name of Moorland Hawker seems to be more appropriate. The species has been a scarce visitor to the Reserve in the past and after having a record of a single last year, it was disappointing that there were no confirmed sightings during the season.

### **Migrant Hawker**

*Aeshna mixta*

The smallest of the hawker species found on the Reserve. Males are dark brown with paired blue spots on the abdomen, whereas females are brown with small dull yellow spots. They have a lively flight action and hawk high up around the trees and above the bushes and brambles. By contrast they often bask low down, when the diagnostic yellow triangle at the top of the abdomen, may be seen at close range. Although it is generally late summer before this species emerges, they seem to have been later this year, as the first record was not until 29<sup>th</sup> August from No.3 bed. Following this there was a series of nine records from 1<sup>st</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> September of ones and twos, spotted on Nos.1, 2 and 3 beds. On



22<sup>nd</sup> September a maximum count of 12 was recorded, mainly along the Canal track and on No.1 bed, where one pair was in tandem. On the south side of No.3 bed singles were noted on 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September followed by three here on 30<sup>th</sup> September. Unusually there were no confirmed sightings during October. There was however, a surprisingly late record on 12<sup>th</sup> November, when a male was spotted at Butchersfield Tip. This last sighting, which was four weeks later than in 2014, appears to have been the latest record for Cheshire, this year, of any species of dragonfly.



*Migrant Hawker*

*David Bowman*

### **Southern Hawker**

*Aeshna cyanea*

This species is marginally our largest and most colourful hawker, with bright green and blue markings on the abdomen and broad green shoulder stripes, on the thorax. They are solitary by nature but also inquisitive and males will often hover close to the observer. Small numbers have occurred at the Eyes previously, but this season they were recorded on nine dates and breeding was also confirmed. The first record was on 27<sup>th</sup> June, when typically two were reported. During further visits to Nos.1 and 3 beds similar numbers were recorded on 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July, followed by three on 18<sup>th</sup> July, when both beds were visited once more. It was at the Viaduct Pools on the 18<sup>th</sup> July, that I found quite a large larval case or exuvia, in the rushes. On closer examination later at home, I was able to confirm that it belonged to this species, and therefore proved breeding for the first time. This shaded west pool, with

plenty of emerging vegetation, is obviously ideal habitat for this particular species. Further sightings were recorded on 25<sup>th</sup> July with singles on both Nos.1 and 3 beds, followed by a gap of a few weeks until another single was spotted on No.3 bed on 20<sup>th</sup> August. On 27<sup>th</sup> August one was hunting around the trees along the Canal track and on 29<sup>th</sup> August another single was observed, from the footbridge to No.3 bed, flying low over the river. The last record of the year was on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, when a male was spotted perching on brambles adjacent to the Viaduct Pools.

### **Brown Hawker**

*Aeshna grandis*

This distinctive large dragonfly is easily identified, since both sexes are mainly brown with amber tinted wings and two yellow stripes on the sides of the thorax. They breed at a variety of water bodies including ponds, lakes and canals and have usually been the most common hawker on the Reserve. The south bank area of No.3 bed and the New Pool are often the best places to spot them. This year they were recorded on twenty eight different dates beginning with two on 27<sup>th</sup> June. One or two were seen on No.3 bed, from the 30<sup>th</sup> of June until 11<sup>th</sup> July. During my visit to No.4 bed on 14<sup>th</sup> July eight were present. Numbers increased further when a survey of Nos.1 and 3 beds was completed on 15<sup>th</sup> July and a maximum count of 25 was reported. During the remainder of July and the first week of August there were six records in multiple figures, again from Nos.1 and 3 beds. On 8<sup>th</sup> August 10 were counted on both Nos.3 and 4 beds and 11 were present on Nos.2 and 3 beds on 20<sup>th</sup> August. Seven were noted when Nos.1 and 3 beds were visited on 27<sup>th</sup> August, before numbers began to decline. There were at least two present on No.3 bed on 29<sup>th</sup> August, when a female was also seen, ovipositing in the marginal vegetation along the riverbank. Singles continued to be present on No.3 bed throughout September and two were present at the Weir on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. Finally, on 15<sup>th</sup> October, I spotted a waterlogged male, obviously in distress in the river near the footbridge, and managed to coax it on to a stick. I then left it to dry out in the sunshine, on the bank of No.3 bed. After about twenty minutes and several bouts of rapid wing vibrating, it appeared to have recovered sufficiently to survive for another day or so at least. This was the last recorded date for the whole of the UK.

### **Emperor Dragonfly**

*Anax imperator*

This distinctive apple-green and blue dragonfly is the largest on the Reserve and they have been recorded in small numbers since 2001. In recent years most records have been confined to the pools on No.1 bed. Emergence occurs in late spring and our first record this year was on 27<sup>th</sup> June, when six were counted during a survey of Nos.1 and 3 beds. On 11<sup>th</sup> July, a male was spotted at the New Pool on No.1 bed. However, when No.4 bed was visited on 14<sup>th</sup> July, I was surprised to find a territorial male, patrolling across the smaller Sandpit Pond, and two more were flying along the river, near the Loop. On a sunny 15<sup>th</sup> July five were present on Nos.1 and 3 beds, when a further survey was conducted. On 25<sup>th</sup> July two were found at the New Pool, and finally a single male was holding territory at the same pool on 13<sup>th</sup> August.

### **Four-spotted Chaser**

*Libellula quadrimaculata*

These medium-sized dull brown and black dragonflies have regularly been recorded at Woolston since 1986. They have four obvious spots on the leading edge of the wings, and both sexes are

similar. Males are territorial and are often seen perched on marginal vegetation, from which they defend their patch, usually returning to the same perch. Emergence occurs from late spring but seemed to be slightly later this year, probably due to the cooler conditions in May. The first sighting was on a warm 10<sup>th</sup> June, when a single was spotted on the south bank of No.3 bed. Four were then noted on this bed on 25<sup>th</sup> June. When a survey covering Nos.1 and 3 beds was conducted on 27<sup>th</sup> June an excellent count of 17 was recorded. On 29<sup>th</sup> June, there was an interesting photograph of this species on our website. This particular insect, which was spotted on No.1 bed, appears to be that of the praenubila type, having larger spots and dark smudges near the end of the wings. On 30<sup>th</sup> June another single was present on No.3 bed. On 11<sup>th</sup> July, four were found on No.1 bed, including a newly emerged insect, and a pair in cop. The last record this year came from a survey of Nos.1 and 3 beds on 15<sup>th</sup> July, when two were noted.



*Broad-bodied Chaser*

*Brian Baird*

### **Broad-bodied Chaser**

*Libellula depressa*

This is another medium-sized chaser which breeds in ponds and small shallow lakes and often colonises newly created ponds. Both sexes have a brown thorax, dark patches at the base of the wings, and broad flattened abdomens. Mature males have a pale blue abdomen with yellow markings on the sides, whereas immature males and females are ochre and yellow. This species, which has extended its range northwards, was first recorded on here in 2006 and seems to have been present in small numbers since then. The majority of our records this year stem from No.3 bed, and began on 15<sup>th</sup> May, when four newly emerged insects were found around the meadows on No.3 bed. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June, two were observed on the south bank of No.3 bed, and then a female was spotted, at the south



east corner of the bed on 4<sup>th</sup> June. The next day another three were noted on No.3 bed, followed by a single reported on 9<sup>th</sup> June. In warm sunshine on 10<sup>th</sup> June, two more were spotted on No.3 bed. The last sighting this season was on 27<sup>th</sup> June, when another single was noted during a survey of Nos.1 and 3 beds.

### **Black-tailed Skimmer**

*Orthetrum cancellatum*

This species has also been present at Woolston since 2006, having expanded its range over the last fifty years or so, possibly as a result of climate change. Immature males and females are yellowish, with two black lines along the top of the abdomen, whilst mature males develop a powder-blue coloured abdomen, which becomes black towards the end. Males fly low over the water's surface and often rest on bare soil or stones at the margins. Our first sighting this year was on 10<sup>th</sup> June, when a newly emerged or teneral male was spotted on No.3 bed. Four were noted on 27<sup>th</sup> June and on 29<sup>th</sup> June a male was present on No.1 bed. At the north east corner of No.3 bed, five were recorded on 30<sup>th</sup> June. Numbers increased during July, beginning with a single male on the 9<sup>th</sup>, resting on the south bank of No.3 bed, followed by four at the New Pool on 11<sup>th</sup> July. A maximum count of 16 was recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> July, during a survey of both Nos.1 and 3 beds. On 16<sup>th</sup> July, four were spotted on No.3 bed, and on 18<sup>th</sup> July another good count of 13 was recorded on both Nos.1 and 3 beds. This included two seen basking in the sunshine on dried mud in front of the Morgan Hide. Five were noted during another survey of Nos.1 and 3 beds on 25<sup>th</sup> July. Sightings continued throughout August, with two on 8<sup>th</sup> on No.3 bed and then 2 on 13<sup>th</sup> on No.1 bed, followed by the final record on 29<sup>th</sup> August when a single was reported on No.3 bed.



*Black-tailed Skimmer*

*David Bowman*

**Black Darter***Sympetrum danae*

Sadly there were no records again this year of this small dragonfly, which normally prefers more acidic, boggy pools. It was last recorded on No.1 bed in 2013, where it apparently once bred, some twenty years ago. Given that it breeds locally at both Risley Moss and Rixton Clay Pits, it is surprising that wandering individuals are not found more frequently on the Reserve.

**Common Darter***Sympetrum striolatum*

This widespread and familiar species was found on all beds this year. They have a long flight season and were recorded on twenty two dates, stretching from 15<sup>th</sup> May, when two relatively early insects were spotted on No.3 bed, until the last week of October. Surprisingly there was only one record in June, when three were noted on 27<sup>th</sup> during a survey of Nos.1 and 3 beds. Regular sightings commenced in July on both Nos.1 and 3 beds, starting with six on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 20 plus on the 15<sup>th</sup>, six on the 18<sup>th</sup> and seven on 25<sup>th</sup> July. A male was resting on the west path of No.2 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> July. Low numbers were noted at the beginning of August and on the 13<sup>th</sup> a pair was seen ovipositing at the New Pool on No.1 bed. On 20<sup>th</sup> August, a male was perched on the wooden gate at the entrance to No.3 bed. On 27<sup>th</sup> August 16 were counted on Nos.1 and 3 beds and on 29<sup>th</sup> August at least four were present on No.3 bed, whilst a male was also spotted at the car park. One or two were along the west path of No.2 bed on both 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September. During a brief spell of sunshine on 5<sup>th</sup> September at least eight were found at Butchersfield Tip. Sightings continued throughout September, with a good count of 11 on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, including a pair in tandem laying eggs at the New Pool. During the first half of October there were just a few noted and finally on 26<sup>th</sup> October there was a report of a pair ovipositing on No.4 bed.

**Ruddy Darter***Sympetrum sanguineum*

This small dragonfly is very similar to the previous species, but is less widespread and not as common. Mature males have a blood-red, clubbed abdomen, whilst females are a yellow-ochre colour. Both sexes have completely black legs, which distinguishes them from the other darter species. The vegetated ponds on No.1 bed are the preferred habitat for this species, and it was recorded around this area on eight dates this year. On 11<sup>th</sup> July, five were spotted at the New Pool and on 15<sup>th</sup> July they appeared to be the predominant darter species here. Numbers peaked on 18<sup>th</sup> July with a maximum count of 22, also on No.1 bed, and during the next visit to the area on 25<sup>th</sup> July 14 were found, including nine males. On 13<sup>th</sup> August, 10 were still present at the New Pool, but only two remained here on 27<sup>th</sup> August. During a bird Migration Watch at Butchersfield Tip on 5<sup>th</sup> September, an immature male was identified, by keen observers as it perched in the sunshine along with Common Darters. The last record this season once again came from No.1 bed, where just a single was present on 20<sup>th</sup> September.



*Ruddy Darter*

*Brian Baird*

**Brian Baird**

## EDITOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

More than anything else, this Report tries to catch the flavour of the incredible variety of wildlife present over the year at Woolston Eyes, so close to Warrington town centre. It is also part of the scientific record and we do our best to be rigorous in our recording, so I want to thank everyone who has taken the time to note what they have seen and submit it to us by whatever means. I would encourage all visitors to record any sightings of note in the log-book in the John Morgan Hide. This year I have chosen to include, in the species accounts, the conservation status of all the birds occurring during the year. This is to remind us all of the worrying decline in so many of our once common birds. Of the 150 species recorded this year, 29 feature on the Red List of the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) and another 45 on the Amber List. So, about half of the species occurring last year were either in serious decline already or starting to show warning signs of being so. If you want to read more about the BoCC, go to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) website at <http://www.bto.org/>

I would also like to thank the many permit-holders, photographers, ringers, wardens, volunteers and committee members who have, in their different ways, contributed to this Report. In particular, my thanks are due to my fellow report-compilers: to Brian Martin, Dave Hackett, John Blundell 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. Thanks also to Dave Hackett for his excellent report on our Butterflies, to Brian Baird for giving us such an interesting summary of the status of our Odonata and to Allan Rustell for providing such detailed information about our Willow Tit population, ably assisted in the field by Mike Lloyd.

Additionally, the group owes Colin Woolf a vote of thanks for again preparing the sketch for the front cover, which is as evocative as ever and also to those photographers who kindly allowed us to use their photographs and whose names are acknowledged in the centre spread.

This is the second year in which we have offered people the option of receiving an electronic copy of the Report and I am grateful to David Spencer, for all his hard work in formatting this.

I would particularly like to express my appreciation to Brian and Rosalind Martin for their repeated and meticulous proof-reading and to David Spencer for his ever-willing IT back-up. Last and by no means least, my thanks go to Emma Birchall for all the time-consuming formatting, typing and proof-reading she has undertaken.

**David Bowman**  
**Editor**

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