

THE WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP



ANNUAL REPORT 2014

WILDLIFE

Colin Woolf.

PAINTINGS



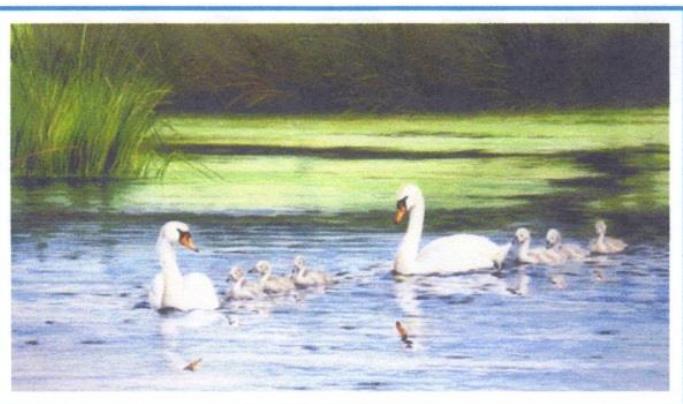
Wildlife as a work of art ...

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

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

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

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WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT 2014

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

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

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

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



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

Brian Ankars
Chairman

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

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



THE WEATHER 2014

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

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

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

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



The Morgan Hide on No.3 bed

David Bowman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar on Willow Herb

Douglas Buchanan

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

Brian Martin



Footbridge on to No.3 bed

Paul Hazelhurst

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Mute Swan

Cygnus olor

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

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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



Whooper Swan in February

David Spencer

Whooper Swan

Cygnus cygnus

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

Pink-footed Goose*Anser brachyrhynchus*

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

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

Greylag Goose*Anser anser*

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

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

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

Canada Goose*Branta canadensis*

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

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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

Egyptian Goose

Alopochen aegyptiaca

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

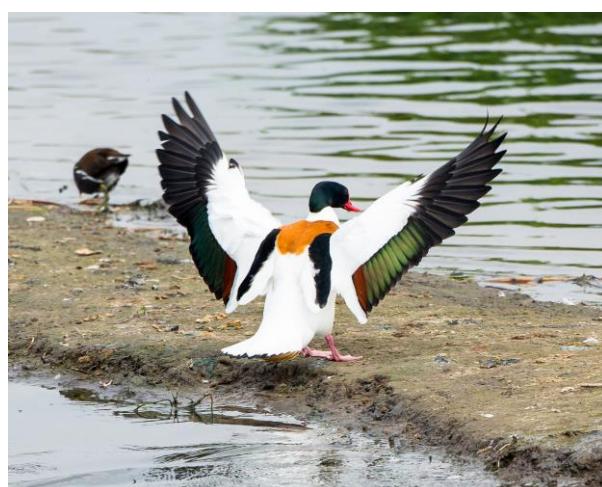
Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

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

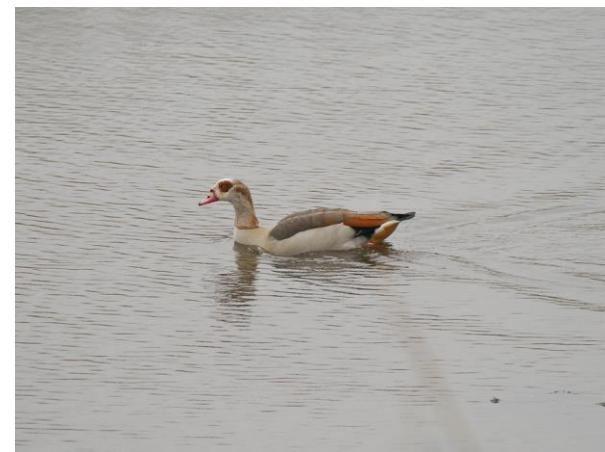
Counts into double-figures occurred on many days in January, with a maximum of 29 on the 19th. Twenty-one were reported on two February dates and 24 were noted on 15th March. On 24th May broods of three and 11 young appeared on No.3 bed, while the following day a pair with 17 small young was seen. On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

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



Shelduck

Andy Weir



Egyptian Goose

David Spencer

Mandarin Duck

Aix galericulata

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

Wigeon

Anas penelope

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

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



Eclipse male Wigeon

Brian Burnett

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

Gadwall

Anas strepera

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

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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

Teal

Anas crecca

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

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

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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

Pintail

Anas acuta

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

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



Garganey from the Morgan Hide

David Spencer

Garganey

Anas querquedula

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

Shoveler

Anas clypeata

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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



Pair of Red Crested Pochard

Brian Burnett

Red-crested Pochard

Netta rufina

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

Pochard

Aythya ferina

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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



Pochard

Alan Debenham

Tufted Duck

Aythya fuligula

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

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

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

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

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

Monthly maxima:

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



Tufted Duck

Alan Debenham

Goldeneye

Bucephala clangula

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

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

Goosander

Mergus merganser

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

Ruddy Duck

Oxyura jamaicensis

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

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

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

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

Red-legged Partridge

Alectoris rufa

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

Grey Partridge

Perdix perdix

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

Pheasant

Phasianus colchicus

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

Red-throated Diver

Gavia stellata

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

Cormorant

Phalacrocorax carbo

A fairly uneventful year, with birds seen in every month. Early in the year 29 on 2nd January was a high count, exceeded only by 32 across the Reserve on 31st May. During the summer Bollin Point was a favoured area for Cormorants, with up to eight there in June and July. Twenty-four on 30th October, 21 on 5th November and 27 on 6th December WeBS were other significant records. On 19th November 12 were perched in a tree near Woolston Weir.

Little Egret

Egretta garzetta

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

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

Great White Egret

Ardea alba

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



Great White Egret

John Barber



Little Egret on 31st August

David Waterhouse

Grey Heron

Ardea cinerea

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

Little Grebe

Tachybaptus ruficollis

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

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

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



Little Grebe

Andy Weir

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

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

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

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

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

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

Black-necked Grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

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

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

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

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



Black-necked Grebe

John Nightingale

Red Kite

Milvus milvus

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

Marsh Harrier

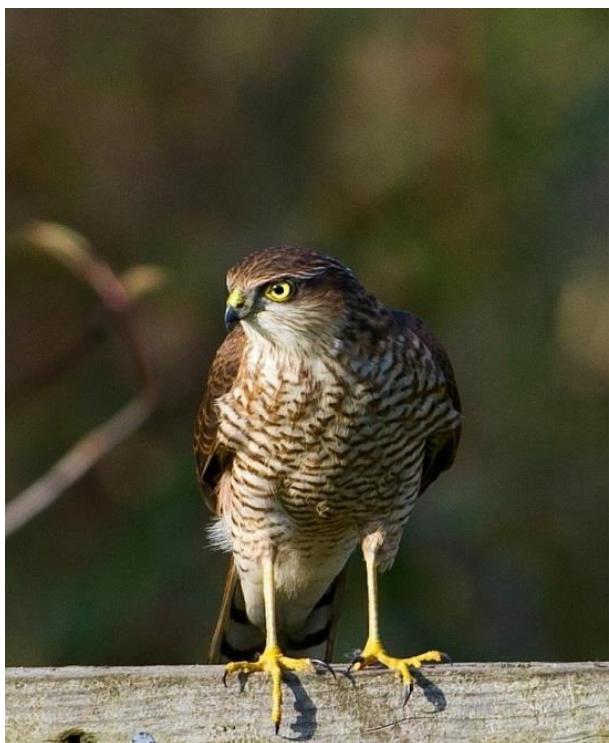
Circus aeruginosus

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

Sparrowhawk

Accipiter nisus

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



Sparrowhawk

Rob Beynon

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

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

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

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

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

Buzzard

Buteo buteo

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

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

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

Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

In view of the decline which has occurred in recent years it was encouraging to have an increased number of reports this year. In the early months up to two were seen and an absence of reports in March was followed by April sightings of singles from Nos.1, 2 and 3 beds. A pair was at a traditional site on the Thelwall Viaduct on 31st May and four young were in the nest on 6th June of which at least two fledged. The female was seen feeding one of the young on 21st June. Birds remained on the Viaduct until early August and one was seen carrying food on 26th July. There was no evidence of breeding elsewhere on the Reserve.



Kestrel

Roger Riley

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

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

Hobby

Falco subbuteo

An above-average year with 20 records submitted. These included nine May sightings of one or two from Nos.1 and 3 beds, including two hunting dragonflies over the east bank of No.3 bed on the 17th. There were further reports of one or two from July to September, mostly from No.3 bed where one was observed hunting Swifts on 14th July.

Peregrine

Falco peregrinus

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

Water Rail*Rallus aquaticus*

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

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

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

Moorhen*Gallinula chloropus*

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

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

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

Coot*Fulica atra*

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

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

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

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

Oystercatcher

Haematopus ostralegus

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



Oystercatchers, Morgan Hide in May

David Bowman

Golden Plover

Pluvialis apricaria

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

Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus

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



Lapwing from the Morgan Hide

Brian Gort

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

One was ringed on 11th October in front of the Frank Linley Hide.

Little Ringed Plover

Charadrius dubius

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

Ringed Plover

Charadrius hiaticula

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

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

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



Whimbrel on the Morgan Hide scrape

David Spencer

Curlew*Numenius arquata*

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

Black-tailed Godwit*Limosa limosa*

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

*Black-tailed Godwit*

Andy Weir

Ruff*Calidris pugnax*

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

Dunlin*Calidris alpina*

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

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos*

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

Green Sandpiper*Tringa ochropus*

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

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

Spotted Redshank*Tringa erythropus*

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

Greenshank*Tringa nebularia*

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

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

Redshank*Tringa totanus*

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

Jack Snipe*Lymnocryptes minimus*

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

Woodcock*Scolopax rusticola*

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

Snipe*Gallinago gallinago*

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

Common Tern*Sterna hirundo*

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

Arctic Tern*Sterna paradisaea*

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

Black-headed Gull*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

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

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

Little Gull*Hydrocoloeus minutus*

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

**Mediterranean Gull***Larus melanocephalus**Little Gull, 31st March*

David Bowman

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

Common Gull*Larus canus*

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

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

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Larus fuscus

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

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

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

Great Black-backed Gull

Larus marinus



Great Black-backed Gull, March

David Spencer

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

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon*Columba livia*

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

Stock Dove*Columba oenas*

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

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

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

Woodpigeon*Columba palumbus*

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

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

Collared Dove*Streptopelia decaocto*

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

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

Cuckoo

Cuculus canorus

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

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

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

Tawny Owl

Strix aluco

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

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

Swift

Apus apus

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



Kingfisher on No.3 bed

Glen Ellis

Kingfisher

Alcedo atthis

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

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

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

Green Woodpecker

Picus viridis

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

Great Spotted Woodpecker*Dendrocopos major*

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

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

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

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker*Dendrocopos minor*

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

Magpie*Pica pica*

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

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

Jay*Garrulus glandarius*

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

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

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

Jackdaw

Corvus monedula

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

Rook

Corvus frugilegus

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

Carriion Crow

Corvus corone

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

Raven

Corvus corax

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

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

Goldcrest

Regulus regulus

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

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

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

Firecrest

Regulus ignicapilla

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

Blue Tit

Cyanistes caeruleus

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

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

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

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

Great Tit

Parus major

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

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

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

Coal Tit

Periparus ater

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

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

Willow Tit*Poecile montana*

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

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

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

Skylark*Alauda arvensis*

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

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

Sand Martin*Riparia riparia*

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

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

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

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

Swallow

Hirundo rustica

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

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

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

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

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

House Martin

Delichon urbicum

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

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

Cetti's Warbler

Cettia cetti

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

Long-tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus

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

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

Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus collybita

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

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

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

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

Willow Warbler

Phylloscopus trochilus

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

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



Siberian Chiffchaff

Kieran Foster

Blackcap*Sylvia atricapilla*

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

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

Garden Warbler*Sylvia borin*

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

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

Lesser Whitethroat*Sylvia curruca*

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

Whitethroat

Sylvia communis

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

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

Grasshopper Warbler

Locustella naevia

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

Sedge Warbler

Acrocephalus schoenobaenus

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

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



Sedge Warbler

Andy Weir

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

Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus scirpaceus

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

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



Reed Warbler

Alan Debenham

Nuthatch

Sitta europaea

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

Treecreeper*Certhia familiaris*

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

Wren*Troglodytes troglodytes*

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

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



Wren

Mike Owen

Starling*Sturnus vulgaris*

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

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

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



Starling roost on No.3 bed

Andy Weir

Blackbird*Turdus merula*

A common breeding resident and winter visitor.

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

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

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

Fieldfare

Turdus pilaris

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

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

Song Thrush

Turdus philomelos

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

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

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

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

Redwing*Turdus iliacus*

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

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

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

Mistle Thrush*Turdus viscivorus*

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

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

Spotted Flycatcher*Muscicapa striata*

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

Robin*Erythacus rubecula*

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

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

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

Redstart

Phoenicurus phoenicurus

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

Stonechat

Saxicola rubicola

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

Wheatear

Oenanthe oenanthe

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

Dunnock

Prunella modularis



Dunnock

Chris Monks

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

The ringing team caught 114 during the year, the highest total since 2009, with 22 ringed on No.1 bed. Seven were caught in breeding

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

House Sparrow*Passer domesticus*

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

Yellow Wagtail*Motacilla flava*

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



Yellow Wagtail

Brian Burnett



Grey Wagtail

Brian Burnett

Grey Wagtail*Motacilla cinerea*

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

Pied Wagtail*Motacilla alba*

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

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

Tree Pipit

Anthus trivialis

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

Meadow Pipit

Anthus pratensis

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

Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs

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

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

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

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

Brambling

Fringilla montifringilla

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

Greenfinch

Chloris chloris

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

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

Goldfinch

Carduelis carduelis

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

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



Juvenile Goldfinch

David Bowman

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

Siskin

Carduelis spinus

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

Linnet

Carduelis cannabina

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

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

Lesser Redpoll

Carduelis cabaret

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

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



Lesser Redpoll by the Tower Hide

David Spencer

Common Redpoll

Carduelis flammea

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

Crossbill

Loxia curvirostra

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

Bullfinch*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

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

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

Yellowhammer*Emberiza citrinella*

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

Reed Bunting*Emberiza schoeniclus*

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

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

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

WeBS Counts 2014

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

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

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

WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2014

Michael Miles

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Cetti's Warbler

David Bowman

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

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

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

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

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

	2014	2013
Species	1 st Date	1 st Date
Robin	3 May	1 Jun
Wren	14 Jun	30 Jun
Dunnock	31 May	22 Jun
Bullfinch	31 May	30 Jun

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

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

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

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

Bed	2014	2013	2012
No.1	85	42	64
No.3	32	24	74



Redstart

David Spencer

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

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

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

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

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

RINGING TOTALS 2014

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

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

SELECTED RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS

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

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

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

Sex, when determined at time of ringing or finding:

- M Male
- F Female

Circumstances of finding:

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

Mute Swan

Z71015 3M 02.09.2013 Sefton Park, Liverpool, Merseyside SJ3787
RR 10.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 28km 87°

Mute Swan

ZY7180 3M 20.12.2013 Sefton Park, Liverpool, Merseyside SJ3787
VV 05.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 28km 87°
RR 10.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 28km 87°
Typically Mute Swans do not breed until they are three or four years old and these two young males, ringed at a few months of age in Sefton Park, summered together as bachelors on No.3 bed.

Mallard

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

Black-headed Gull

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

Goldcrest

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

Sand Martin

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

Swallow

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

Swallow

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

Swallow

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

Swallow

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

Swallow

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

Swallow

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

Long-tailed Tit

EBH073 3J 10.07.2013 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 01.09.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201 18km 317°
R 03.09.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201 18km 317°

Blackcap

D327472 3JF 08.09.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 03.05.2014 Queen Mary Reservoir, Surrey TQ0670 259km 148°

Blackcap

D327291 3M 07.09.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 28.06.2014 Fulwood Marsh, Merseyside SJ3499 33km 290°

Blackcap

TT10636 1 (5/5) 19.05.2014 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201
R (=M) 23.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°
R (=M) 31.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°

Blackcap

Y384334 3J 08.08.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R (=F) 25.09.2014 Les Barthes-de-Quartier-Bas, Villefranque, 43°27'N 1°28'W
Pyrénées-Atlantiques FRANCE 1107km 176°
Most Blackcaps are relatively short distance migrants and this bird in the far south-western corner of France might have already reached its wintering grounds.

Sedge Warbler

L950758 3J 06.07.2013 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484
R 03.05.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 11km 291°

Sedge Warbler

D550514 3J 24.07.2013 Leighton Moss, near Silverdale, Lancashire SD4875
R 16.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

Sedge Warbler

D646739 3 15.08.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 23.08.2014 Titchfield Haven, Hill Head, Fareham, Hampshire SU5302 299km 163°

Reed Warbler

Y156486 3J 13.08.2011 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 22.08.2014 Paul de Arzila, 40°10'N 8°33'W Coimbra PORTUGAL 1538km 198°

Reed Warbler

D646084 3J 12.07.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 31.08.2014 Salburua, Vitoria-Gasteiz, 42°51'N 2°38'W Álava SPAIN 1171km 181°
These are two examples of the south-south-westerly autumn migration route taken by Reed Warblers bred at or passing through Woolston.

Reed Warbler

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

Reed Warbler

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

Reed Warbler

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

Reed Warbler

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

Reed Warbler

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

Reed Warbler

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

Reed Warbler

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

Blackbird

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

Chaffinch

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

Chaffinch

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

Chaffinch

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

Chaffinch

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

Greenfinch

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

Greenfinch

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

Greenfinch

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

Greenfinch

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

Greenfinch

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

Goldfinch

X309632 3F 06.10.2012 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 21.03.2014 Killough, Down J5233 Northern Ireland 226km 295°

Only 89 Goldfinches have been ringed at Woolston in the past five years, with just 41 of them on No.3 bed, so we were lucky to get this interesting movement across the Irish Sea.

Lesser Redpoll

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

Lesser Redpoll

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

Bullfinch

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

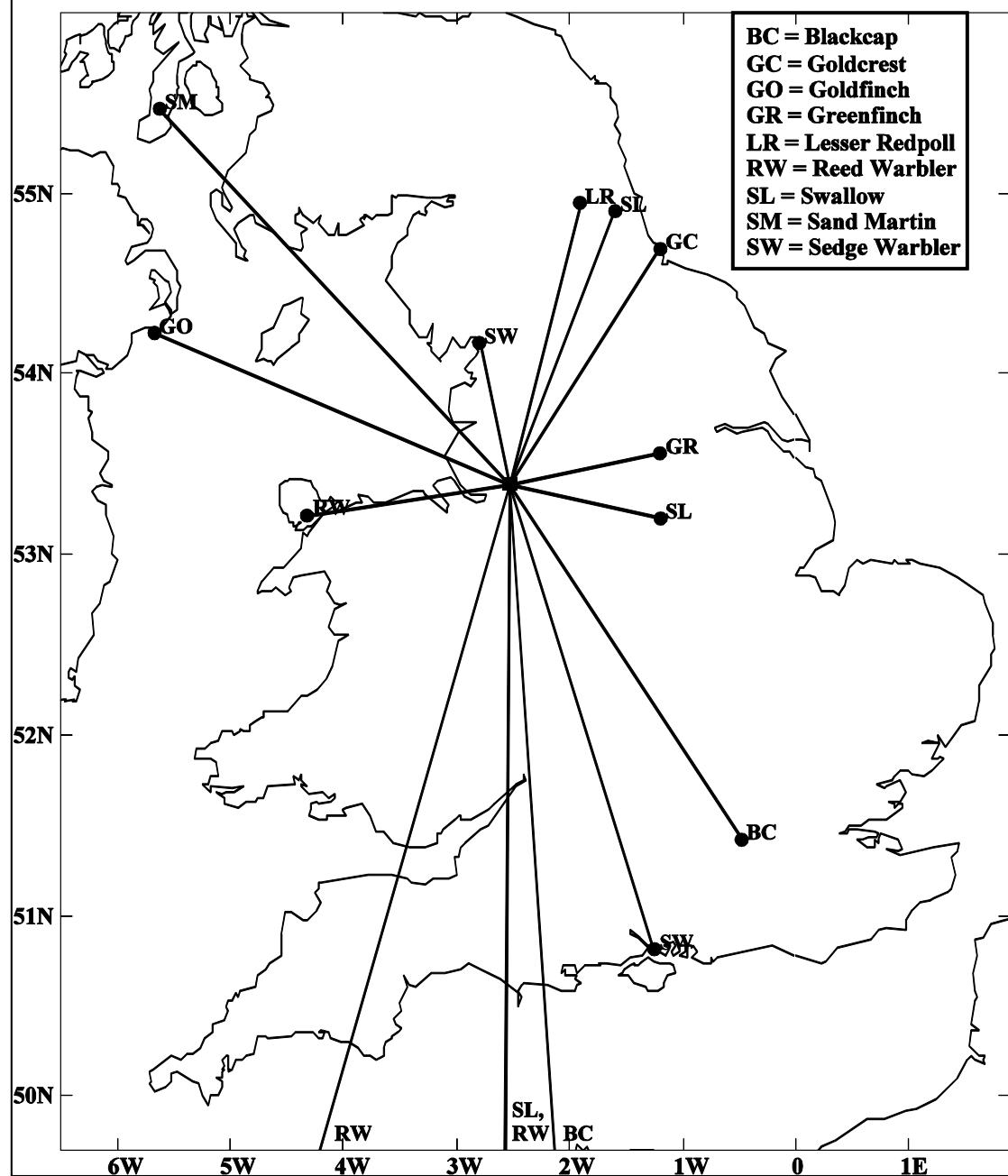
Bullfinch

L951822 3M 26.12.2013 Great Warford, Cheshire SJ8078
R 29.04.2014 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 19km 301°

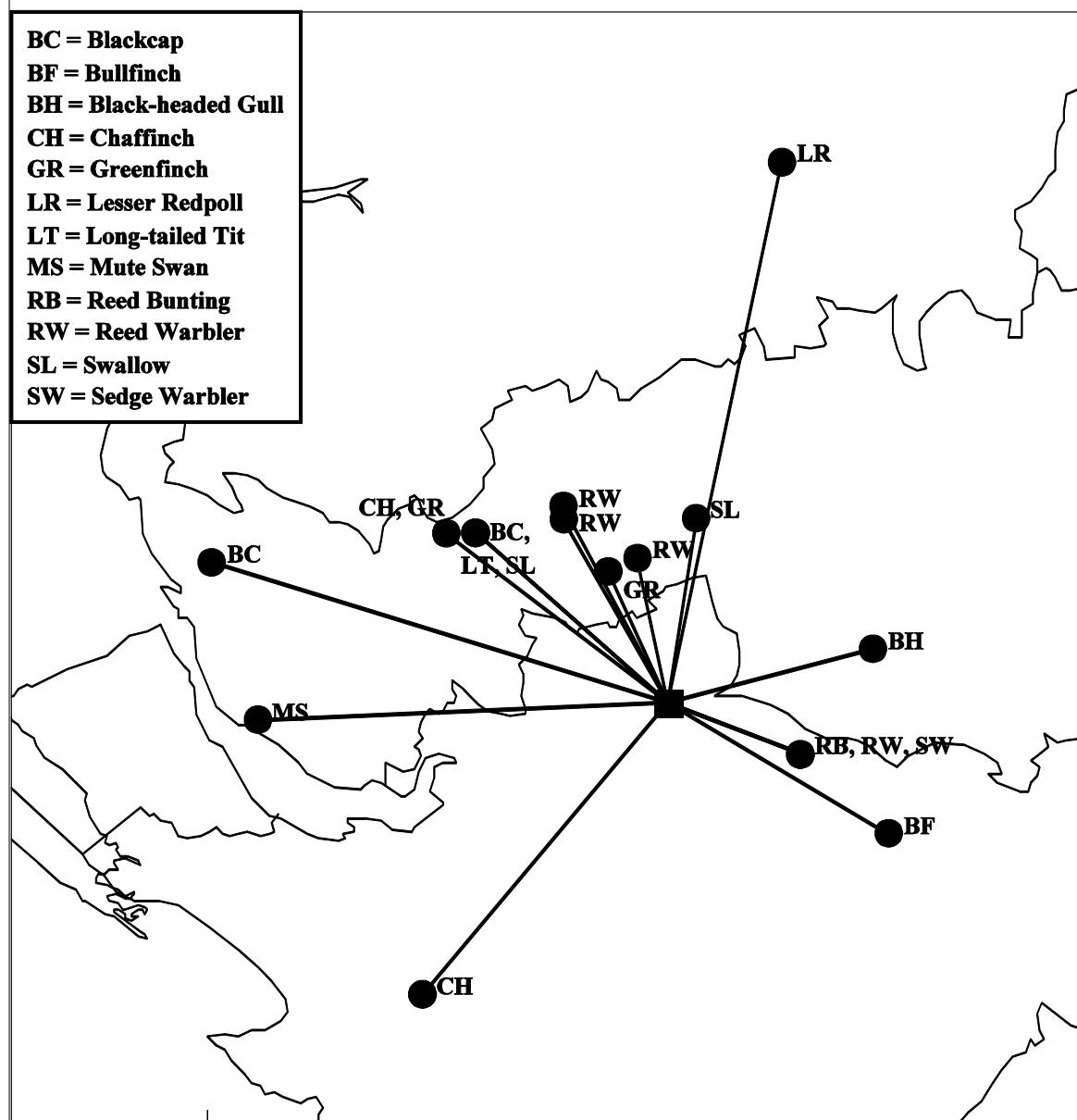
Reed Bunting

L950749 3J 17.06.2013 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484
R (=M) 20.09.2014 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 11km 291°

Movements over 50km



Local movements from 10km to 50km



MIGRATION WATCH

Visit 1

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

Visit 2

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

Visit 3

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

Visit 4

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

Woolston Eyes Migration Watches 2014					
	Date	01/09/14	11/10/14	01/11/14	18/12/14
	Time	0600-1200	0630-1200	0630-1200	0730-1200
SPECIES					
1	Mute Swan	4	6	2	11
2	Pink-footed Goose	0	895	505	21
3	Greylag Goose	0	0	0	2
4	Greater Canada Goose	27	261	11	2
5	Mandarin Duck	0	2	0	0
6	Wigeon	0	0	2	0
7	Gadwall	15	9	6	2
8	Teal	10	27	2	0
9	Mallard	71	141	138	126
10	Shoveler	0	1	0	0
11	Tufted Duck	2	140	18	64
12	Grey Partridge	5	0	0	0
13	Pheasant	7	24	21	3
14	Great Crested Grebe	0	0	1	2
15	Little Grebe	0	0	2	0
16	Cormorant	7	7	7	1
17	Little Egret	0	0	0	1
18	Grey Heron	8	4	2	0
19	Sparrowhawk	6	3	3	0
20	Buzzard	17	9	9	6
21	Kestrel	6	2	2	0
22	Hobby	1	0	0	0
23	Peregrine	0	0	1	1
24	Moorhen	1	2	3	2
25	Coot	0	7	1	0
26	Lapwing	131	394	131	222
27	Snipe	0	5	0	1
28	Woodcock	0	0	0	1
29	Black-headed Gull	34	234	346	106
30	Lesser Black-backed Gull	304	127	180	32
31	Herring Gull	5	0	2	200
32	Feral Pigeon	24	29	79	200

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

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

BUTTERFLY REPORT 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Small Skipper

Thymelicus sylvestris

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

Large Skipper*Ochloides Sylvanus*

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



Large Skipper

David Bowman

Clouded Yellow*Colias croceus*

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

Brimstone*Gonepteryx rhamni*

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

Large White*Pieris brassicae*

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

Small White*Pieris rapae*

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

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

Green-veined White

Pieris napi

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

Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*



Purple Hairstreak

David Waterhouse

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

Purple Hairstreak *Favonius quercus*

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

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

Small Copper

Lycaena phlaeas

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

Common Blue

Polyommatus icarus



Common Blue

David Bowman

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

The final report was of four on 7th September, a fairly typical date. Until recent years, the highest counts of this species at Woolston related to the first brood but more recently the second brood has been more numerous.

Holly Blue

Celastrina argiolus

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

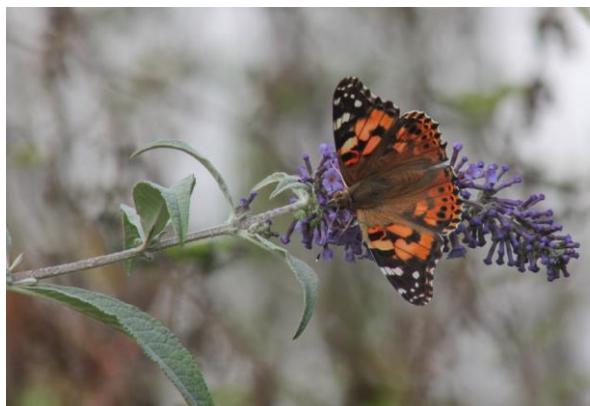
Red Admiral

Vanessa atalanta

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

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

Painted Lady



Painted Lady

Paul Hazelhurst

Vanessa cardui

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

Small Tortoiseshell

Aglais urticae

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

Peacock

Aglais io

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

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

Comma

Polygonia c-album



Comma

Andy Weir

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

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

Speckled Wood

Parage aegeria

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

Gatekeeper

Pyronia tithonus

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

Meadow Brown

Maniola jurtina

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

Ringlet

Aphantopus hyperantus

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



Woolston's first Ringlet

David Hackett

Dave Hackett

ODONATA REPORT 2014

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

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

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

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

Species Accounts

Banded Demoiselle

Calopteryx splendens

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



Banded Demoiselle

David Bowman

Large Red Damselfly

Pyrrhosoma nymphula

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



Emerald Damselfly

David Spencer

**Emerald
Damselfly**

*Lestes
sponsa*

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

record for the year was on the 13th September when again two were noted.

Azure Damselfly

Coenagrion puella



Azure Damselfly

Andy Weir

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

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

Common Blue Damselfly

Enallagma cyathigerum

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

Blue-tailed Damselfly

Ishnura elegans

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

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

Red-eyed Damselfly

Erythromma najas

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

Common Hawker

Aeshna juncea

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

Migrant Hawker

Aeshna mixta

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



Migrant Hawker

David Bowman

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

Southern Hawker

Aeshna cyanea

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

Brown Hawker

Aeshna grandis

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

Emperor Dragonfly

Anax imperator

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

Four-spotted Chaser

Libellula quadrimaculata

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

Broad-bodied Chaser*Libellula depressa*

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

Black-tailed Skimmer*Orthetrum cancellatum*

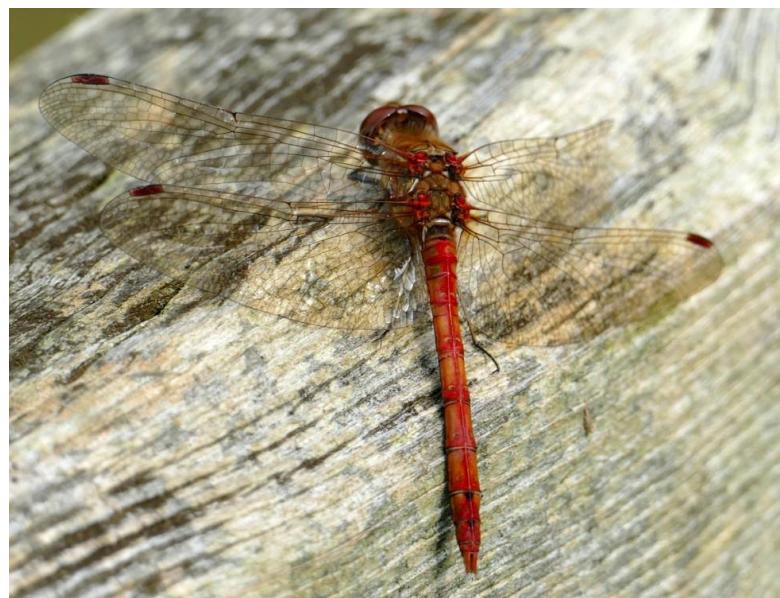
This is another dragonfly which has expanded its range northwards in recent decades and was not recorded at Woolston until 2006. The male's body is mostly a powder-blue colour tapering to a black tail. Female and immature insects are yellowish with two black stripes on the top of the abdomen, giving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

Black Darter*Sympetrum danae*

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

Common Darter*Sympetrum striolatum*

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

*Common Darter*

David Bowman

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

Ruddy Darter

Sympetrum sanguineum

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

All six records came from No.1 bed beginning with the first on 5th July. When the New Pool was surveyed on 12th July a count of four was recorded. The species was present in the same area of the Reserve on 26th July when two were found, with another photographed on 9th August. The final record of the season on 13th September produced a maximum count of seven, once again on No.1 bed.



Ruddy Darter

David Bowman

Brian Baird



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

Douglas Buchanan



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

David Hackett

Breeding Willow Tits in 2014

No. 4 Bed

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

No.2 Bed

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

No.1 Bed

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

Estimate probably six or seven pairs.

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

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

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

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

Allan Rustell

HETEROPTERA & DIPTERA SURVEYS

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

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

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

Heteroptera

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

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



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



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

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



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

Craneflies

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

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

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

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

Soldierflies & Allies

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

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

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

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

Empidoidea

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



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

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

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

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

Hoverflies

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

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

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

Picture-wing Flies

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



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

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

Other diptera

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



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

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

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



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



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

Phil Brighton

MAMMALS - SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Introduction

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

Grey Squirrel

Sciurus vulgaris

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

Hazel Dormouse

Muscardinus avellanarius

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

Bank Vole

Clethrionomys glareolus

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

Field Vole

Microtus agrestis

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

Water Vole

Arvicola terrestris

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

Wood Mouse

Apodemus sylvaticus

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

Brown Rat*Rattus norvegicus*

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

Rabbit*Oryctolagus cuniculus*

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

Brown Hare*Lepus europaeus*

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

Hedgehog*Erinaceus europaeus*

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

European Mole*Talpa europaea*

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

Common Shrew*Sorex araneus*

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

Pygmy Shrew*Sorex minutus*

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

Water Shrew*Neomys fodiens*

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

Daubenton's Bat*Myotis daubentonii*

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

Common Pipistrelle*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

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

Soprano Pipistrelle*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

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

Brown Long-eared Bat*Plecotus auritus*

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

Noctule*Nyctalus noctula*

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

Red Fox*Vulpes vulpes*

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



Red Fox

David Spencer

Stoat

Mustela ermine

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

Weasel

Mustela nivalis

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

American Mink

Mustela vison

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

Badger

Meles meles



Badger under the Morgan Hide feeders David Bowman

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

European Otter*Lutra lutra*

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

*Otter**Brian Gort***Grey Seal***Halychoerus grypus*

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

Roe Deer*Capreolus capreolus*

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

David Bowman

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

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

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

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David Bowman

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Longhorn Beetle

Steve Dolan