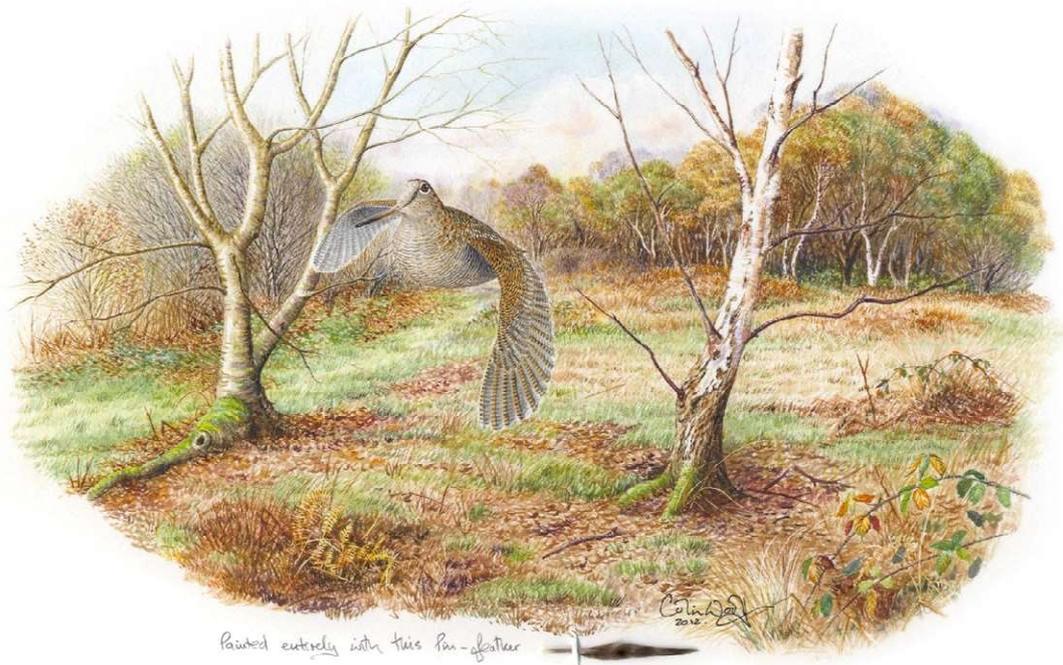


The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group



Annual Report
2017

Colin Woolf Fine Art



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 from an original painting using a pin-feather of a woodcock instead of a brush

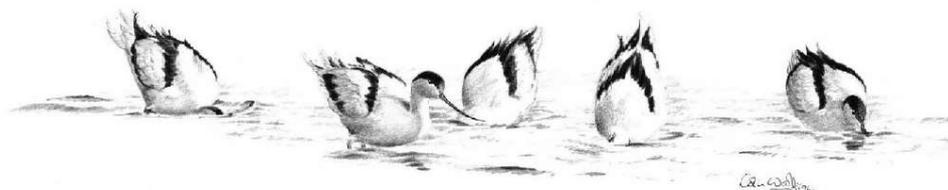
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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome to yet another excellent and professionally produced wildlife report. I can safely say this without being accused of self-praise, because it is all down to the hard work of David Bowman and his editorial team, to whom we are very grateful.

We owe a significant vote of thanks to Peel Holdings, Peel Ports and the Manchester Ship Canal Company, for allowing us to develop the wildlife aspects of their land over the past forty years. Without their support, none of what we have achieved would have been possible. John Rutherford and Brian Grundy in particular, have been unstinting in giving their time, which has been greatly appreciated.

Someone else to whom we owe a great many thanks is Colin Woolf, the extremely talented artist who does our fantastic cover painting every year free of charge. I recommend you to look at his website (you can find the details on the inside of the front cover) and consider purchasing one of his many beautiful paintings.

Every year Woolston progresses, and this year is no exception: negotiations are moving ahead steadily with regard to the proposed wetland development on No.4 bed.

Our alliance with the RSPB is proving to be highly successful and our warden Ashley Radford is diligently undertaking a lot of the manual work that some of us more senior wardens find difficult now. Ash is always looking for volunteers to help with a variety of conservation tasks, which take place most Wednesdays. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact him at: ashley.radford@rspb.org.uk

In last year's Report I mentioned that the potholed track would be repaired and the contractor did a good job, but sadly the weather was awful for such a long period that most of the good work was undone. We will try again in 2018, when the weather improves using a slightly different method, and hopefully have more success. If there are any civil engineers out there who can help with any advice at all, we would be pleased to hear from them.

As we are a registered charity it is very encouraging that people continue to support us by buying annual permits and making donations, and for this I sincerely thank you. All the money you continue to contribute is invested back into the Reserve and, in particular, without your generosity we could not afford the invaluable services of our Assistant Warden. In addition, we have recently purchased a power-driven machine with front blades which will be very useful for reed management and other conservation tasks. You may be surprised to learn that it is actually called a Ferrari, but 0 to 60 mph in three seconds will be beyond it!

Brian Ankers
Chairman

THE WEATHER 2017

2017 was the wettest year at Woolston since 2012, with a total of 1012mm (just over 40 inches) recorded. It was, however, a year of two halves, the first six months seeing average rainfall, and two of the driest months (April and May), while the second six months were characterised by most being very wet with total rainfall either near or above 100mm. As usual, there was little snow and no prolonged cold spells. During the spring and summer there were two warm periods in late May and early June, with the highest temperatures – up to 29°C – in mid- June. The second half of August was also warm. There were a number of named storms in the year, some producing floods and damage – Doris in February, Aileen in September, ex-hurricane Ophelia and Storm Brian in October and finally Caroline and Dylan in December.

January, with 67mm, saw average rainfall. It began cold and frosty with a low of -6°C on the night of 5th/6th. It was unsettled and mild for a few days, but on the 12th cold weather returned with strong winds and frequent hail showers. The only snow – a light covering – fell on the 13th. Further heavy rain (9mm) on the 14th was followed by ten days of cold, frosty conditions as high pressure was firmly in charge. Most of No.3 bed was frozen, apart from small areas kept open by the waterfowl. Atlantic fronts brought unsettled weather in the final four days with temperatures back to normal. Overall, a largely cloudy and raw month with below average sunshine.

February began mild and largely dry, with strong south-westerly winds lifting the temperature to a balmy 13°C on the 2nd. Frost soon returned, but was replaced by heavy rain on the 6th. The 8th – 12th were cold and dry, with a moderate east wind which made it feel raw, and the dry theme continued well into the second half of the month. It did, however, warm up with 14°C noted on the 20th. On the 23rd all changed as Storm Doris brought very wet and windy weather from the Atlantic. Winds reached up to 80mph, bringing down trees and causing localised flooding. In the final five days 51 of the 71mm month's total rain fell, including 21mm on the 28th.

March, with 99mm, was wet, with nearly half the monthly total in the first week. The next ten days were more settled and warm, with southerly winds which brought in the first returning Black-necked Grebes. With high pressure dominating the temperature peaked at 17°C on the 15th. The 18th – 23rd were very unsettled, with a further 42mm of rain falling. Many sunny and warm days followed, with early migrants arriving, notably Sand Martins, Chiffchaffs and a couple of Ospreys. Nationally it was the joint fifth warmest March since 1910.

April recorded just 19.5mm of rain, and was the driest month of the year with the first significant rainfall on the 14th. Apart from the 7th and 8th, which were warm, the first two weeks were cool, with north-west winds predominating. The 16th was wet while on the 17th the temperature fell to near freezing in the late evening. Only 6mm of rain was recorded in the final ten days. On the warm 22nd many butterflies were on the wing, including Orange Tips, Peacocks, Speckled Woods, 2 Brimstones, 2 Red Admirals and a Painted Lady. On the 23rd ten singing Willow Warblers were noted on No.4 bed alone. With sunshine above average this was the tenth driest April since 1910.

May was also dry, and in fact, the last dry month in 2017, with only 35mm recorded. The month began with south-east winds, classic conditions for Black Terns, two of which arrived on No.3 bed on the 1st and remained until the next day. A remarkable flock of 47 Arctic Terns also passed through that morning. No rain fell until the 12th, the first rain for 17 days. With high pressure very much in charge there were many sunny days, but a few cool days as well. Almost all the rain in May fell between the

12th and 16th. Thereafter, the weather became progressively warmer, with a high of 27°C on the 25th and 26th, raising concerns about falling water levels. During this time there were some magnificent sunsets over the Eyes. The final few days were cooler with some much-needed rain. Nationally it was the second warmest May since 1910.

June, with a total of 88mm of rain, was the beginning of a major change to wet weather which persisted until the end of the year. It began, however, with a continuation of the dry, warm days of May. On the 5th all this changed with persistent heavy rain on a cool north-west wind. The following day was even wetter, with torrential rain and gale force winds, - more November than June! Totals of 18mm on the 6th, 10mm on the 8th and 15mm on the 9th left everywhere awash. The weather settled over the next week and temperatures rose despite the ever-present wind. High pressure then produced the warmest weather of the year, with 26°C on the 17th, increasing to 29°C on the 19th, 20th and 21st. Cooler conditions followed, with some drizzle, and apart from the 26th which was sunny and warm, the last few days were wet with 25mm added to the rainfall total.

July, recording 120mm, was the second wettest month of the year, although, like June, it began with five fairly warm dry days. The remainder of the month was unsettled with many days of heavy rain. Seven to ten millimetres were recorded on many days, but the worst period was 26th - 29th, when a total of 46mm was recorded. The month ended quietly and despite the rain temperatures were slightly above average.

August, with 73mm, was the driest month in the second half of the year with only four or five days with significant rainfall, notably the 6th with 22mm and the 16th with 10mm. The second half of the month was warm and at times humid, with a high of 25°C on the 28th.

September, atypically, was the wettest month, with 139mm; there were few days when it did not rain. Temperatures were near to average. A particularly wet spell from 10th - 14th co-incided with the arrival of Storm Aileen that brought gale force winds and localised flooding as 54mm fell on the area. The 22nd - 24th was warmer, with 19°C recorded on the 24th, encouraging many Red Admirals and Commas to appear. Unsettled weather soon returned, however, with 10mm of rain on the 25th and 13mm on the 27th.

October continued the pattern of the previous months, with a rainfall total of 89mm. The month began very windy and wet, with 16mm noted on the 4th, and other significant totals on the 7th and 11th. What followed was remarkable as ex-hurricane Ophelia crossed the Atlantic and drew up very warm air from Iberia. From 13th - 15th temperatures up to 20°C were recorded. Butterflies responded with good numbers of Red Admirals and Commas seen on the Reserve. Sadly, the Indian summer was short-lived and gale force winds on the 16th brought a return to cool weather, and on the 19th 18mm of rain fell. On the 21st yet another named storm, Brian, battered the area, adding to rainfall totals. High pressure then built and the month ended dry with the first frost on the morning of the 30th.

November brought little improvement with continued wet weather leading to a total of 100mm. Over 25mm was recorded on the 4th and 5th. Conditions were generally cool with a heavy frost on the morning of the 8th. From then until the 13th it was more settled, but very cold with frosts at night. Further heavy rain brought milder weather on 21st/22nd with 15°C reached on the latter date. This was followed by raw north-west winds and heavy downpours, some of hail. The month ended dry but cold, with heavy frosts.

December, with 111mm was the third wettest month and unsurprisingly water levels rose on No.3 bed. There was little rain until the 6th when yet another named storm, Caroline, brought strong winds and

heavy rain, followed by hail and snow showers. The 11th was particularly cold, with a low of -6°C. As so often in this very wet year more heavy rain on the 13th and 14th added a further 30mm to the monthly total. The week before Christmas was mild (up to 12°C), but dull and dry. On the 25th however, 15mm fell overnight, while on the 29th there were a few hours of heavy wet snow and the wind increased to gale force. The year ended with even more rain and strong winds as Storm Dylan arrived from the west.

Brian Martin



View from John Morgan Hide in November

David Bowman

BIRDS: SYSTEMATIC LIST

Mute Swan

Cygnus olor

Amber listed

An improved showing this year with some large counts, notably in the autumn, and five pairs were present in the breeding season, three of which hatched young.

In the early months average numbers were noted, with 28 on 1st February the highest count in the first winter period. On 26th April a Reserve-wide survey found a total of 42, with 19 of these on the Ship Canal near Bollin Point.

Breeding activity culminated in late May with a brood of six very small young appearing on No.3 bed on the 29th, followed by a second brood of four small cygnets the next day on the same bed. On 31st May a pair was found on the Loop of No.4 bed where they remained for a time, but with no evidence of breeding. On 3rd June a pair was present at a nest on the Weir Basin and they hatched two young on or about 6th July. A week later, however, they were down to one young and this cygnet, too, disappeared soon after. Meanwhile, the two pairs on No.3 bed thrived, each losing only a single chick as the summer progressed. A fifth pair summered on the Oxbow around No.3 bed but showed little interest in breeding. One was wearing a green Darvic ring, CHX6, and had been ringed as a male cygnet on 26th November 2013 at Bewdley, Worcestershire, on the River Severn.

On 30th August four pairs were found with large young, one on No.3 bed with four cygnets and another on the Mersey nearby with three young, possibly the second brood from No.3 bed. A further two broods, of two and one young respectively, were at the eastern end of the Eyes on the Ship Canal and the Mersey. There is no evidence that those pairs bred on the Eyes.

Well above average numbers were present in the early autumn, with peak counts of 50 on 30th August and a Reserve record of 57 on 9th September. Fewer were seen after this, but 20 – 30 were recorded on many dates and a good year ended with 31 on the 9th and 27th December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
18	28	18	42	18	18	30	50	57	25	23	31

Pink-footed Goose

Anser brachyrhynchus

Amber listed

Record numbers passed over the Eyes in early November, but the year began with 80 flying east on 16th January and 100 to the north-west on the 20th. There were three further sightings, with a peak of 175 in three skeins on 4th February.

There were then no reports until 22nd September, a fairly early date, when 200 passed over No.1 bed. Three skeins were reported on 4th October, with a maximum of 137. Many passed over during the following two weeks, with 610 flying to the east on 18th October in two large skeins. That number, however, was completely dwarfed by the huge movement on the morning of 2nd November, when one observer saw 15 skeins fly east just to the north of No.3 bed, with a total of 4,700 birds involved. Two days later 1,513 flew east over Butchersfield during a Migration Watch, after which only four further reports were submitted, with a maximum of 150 on 18th November.

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Amber listed

The status of this goose at Woolston has changed little in recent years, with most seen in spring and summer when a few pairs breed but rarely fledge young.

In the first two months only single-figure counts were made until late February, when 18 were on No.1 bed on the 19th and 21 across the Reserve on the 21st. As usual Greylags were relatively scarce in March, but on 14th April one was paired with a Canada Goose near Butchersfield at the east end of the Reserve, and what may well have been the same pair was observed on the Loop of No.4 bed in late May. The first brood appeared on No.3 bed (three young) on 18th April, with another two broods, both of two young, on 28th April. On 30th April four broods were present on No.3 bed, with broods five and six reported on the first two days of May. A seventh brood, of seven young, was present near the south screen at the same time, and unlike 2016, the broods and young were present over the next few weeks but sadly by 23rd May, although ten adults were on No.3 bed no young could be found and had clearly all been lost, as has occurred so often at Woolston.

Adults continued to be reported, although mainly as overflying flocks: for example 40 on 9th August and 56 on 3rd September. On 7th October 58 were present on No.3 bed and 100 flew west over No.1 bed on 9th October. From mid-October only single-figure sightings were made, but on 30th December a count of 32 included 30 flying west.

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

Overall, numbers fell again this year from the peak counts of 2015, but in the breeding season a minimum of 12 pairs bred, a slight increase on last year and the same as 2015.

During the first three months birds were reported almost daily, with peak counts of 32 on 4th January, 44 on 13th February and 42 on 1st March. On 3rd March one was paired with a Greylag on the Loop of No.4 bed and this pair was reported on other dates in the spring. The first brood appeared on No.3 bed on 26th April, with another adult on a nest there on the same day. Over the next two weeks new broods appeared almost daily on No.3 bed, with eight found on 8th May with a total of 34 young. Broods nine and ten were noted on 12th May and the eleventh on the Oxbow surrounding No.3 bed two days later. A visit to No.1 bed on 17th May found two pairs on a new pool, one with seven growing young. Throughout the summer adults with young formed a crèche on the paths in the centre of No.3 bed and resented the presence of birdwatchers! The number of goslings peaked at 52 on 17th May. Seven of the

goslings were caught and ringed between 24th June and 1st August; only one other Canada Goose had been ringed at Woolston, in 2007.

During the remainder of the year birds were present in good numbers, with peak counts of 80 on 17th June, 97 on 5th July and 90 on 18th September, the last flying in at dusk.

Barnacle Goose

Branta leucopsis

The only record was of a single bird on No.3 bed on 21st January



Barnacle Goose on No.3 bed scrape

David Spencer

Egyptian Goose

Alopochen aegyptiaca

One was reported flying east over No.3 bed on 23rd September.

Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

Amber listed

Many more were present this year compared to 2016, but only one pair bred (c.f. four pairs in 2016).

The year began with numerous sightings of 18 or more, with a peak of 36 on 25th January. Most reports were from No.3 bed where numbers increased to the year's maximum of 40 on 11th February WeBS Count. There was a small decrease after this, but 21 were present on 12th March and 26 on 8th April.

On 19th March a pair was investigating a sandhill bank on the Oxbow while on 4th April up to 12 were present at rabbit warrens on No.2 bed, with display noted. Six were seen there again on 1st May. On 7th June a pair with five very small young was seen on No.3 bed. On 9th June the brood was attacked by a Lesser Black-backed Gull which took one of the chicks and after this date there were no further sightings of either adults or young. This has become a familiar pattern at Woolston, where young Shelduck rarely fledge. The parents often leave the young unattended or even swim close to Lesser Black-backed Gulls with no apparent concern for the danger this poses.

There were no further reports of Shelduck until October when two were on No.3 bed on the 18th, increasing to a year's end peak of 22 on the 30th. There were then daily reports until the end of the year with a November maximum of 18 on the 18th and a December peak of 20 on the 27th.

Wigeon

Anas penelope

Amber listed

Although a scarce winter visitor to the Eyes there were more records than usual, with only three summer months when none were reported.

In late January 11 on No.3 bed would normally have been regarded as a high count, but on 8th February a total of 47 on beds 3 and 4 was the third highest count ever at Woolston. Seventeen were still present the next day, but between then and 2nd April there were only six reports, all of six birds or less.

The next record was of a single on 17th August and from then until the last sighting in December nine on 16th October was the maximum seen.

Gadwall

Anas strepera

Amber listed

This year there was a return to the large mid-summer numbers, although breeding was less successful than in 2016.

The first four months saw peak counts less than last year, with 44 on 8th February, 59 on 1st March and the same number on the 8th and 28th April. The first brood, (of two young), was seen on No.3 bed on 11th May, but Gadwall were scarcer than usual on No.3 bed during May, with most birds present on the Loop of No.4 bed: for example four pairs on 25th May and 34 on 31st May. A survey in late May using the RSPB methodology for assessing wildfowl breeding numbers estimated 15 pairs on No.3 and 5 pairs on the Loop of No.4 bed. Subsequently, however, no broods were reported on No.4 bed and many fewer than usual on No.3 bed. A second brood was seen there on 2nd June while on 27th June a female was flushed off a nest with nine eggs inside the east bank of the bed. A further four broods followed, including one of ten small young on 8th July. On 17th July four broods were noted on No.3 bed. In all

it is considered that eight pairs were confirmed breeding, fewer than the 10 – 13 broods seen in 2016. The late dates on which many of the broods appeared suggests that nests were lost in the very wet weather in June, when water levels rose significantly on No.3 bed.

By mid-June the summer build-up of adults was apparent, with 85 on the 10th increasing to 207 on the 21st and 316 on the 27th. Typically it was in the evening that peak numbers were recorded, with 578 on No.3 on 17th July, the year's maximum a count of just below the qualifying level for international importance. Gadwall flocks continued to impress into September, with 500 on beds 3 and 4 on 26th August and 359 on No.3 bed alone on 4th September. By late September most had moved on and in the final months 43 on 14th December was the highest count received.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
18	46	59	59	47	316	578	500	359	37	21	43



Gadwall

Hazel Rothwell

Teal

Anas crecca

Amber listed

The high numbers present in December 2016 remained into the first two months of this year, with a peak count of 1,700 on 28th January when birds were flushed out of cover by a passing Buzzard. This is the highest count at Woolston since January 2005! In addition, many Teal were forced out of cover when a period of very cold weather froze over the shallow areas in which they like to feed. On 4th

February 1,500 were still present on No.3 bed. The usual steady decline then took place as Teal left for their breeding grounds in Eastern Europe and beyond, with the last significant count being 192 on the 12th March WeBS.

There was no proof of breeding this year, although there were reports of a small number of males and females throughout May and June.

Numbers began to increase from late August and by 21st September 150 were present on No.3 bed, but it was late October before more were noted, with 300 on No.3 bed on the 25th. The remainder of the year saw numbers below average, with 760 on the 9th December WeBS the highest count at the end of the year.

The ringing team on No.3 bed made a total of 256 captures of Teal in the duck trap, of which 148 were new, a record number for Woolston. The total of 108 handlings of previously ringed birds is of national importance, bearing in mind that in 2016 the B.T.O. reported a total of 181 retrapped Teal for the whole country. Sixteen birds were retrapped from 2016, ten from 2015 and five from 2014.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1700	1500	300	37	4	5	6	25	150	300	460	760

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Amber listed

Numbers reported during the year were near average, and this duck had a good breeding season.

During January 92 on the 25th was the highest first winter count and numbers remained near this level into February. The first brood, of nine young, was seen on the Loop of No.4 bed on 18th April, with others appearing across the Reserve in the following three months. One observer reported a total of 40 young on 10th May. In all, 32 broods were recorded, their distribution being as follows: seven on No.3 bed, eight on the Ship Canal, eight on the Loop of No. 4 bed, five on the Mersey, two on No.2 bed and two on the Sandpit Pond by No. 4 bed. (c.f. 25 broods in 2016, 29 in 2015 and 34 in 2014).

In the final four months Mallard were more numerous than earlier in the year, with maxima of 126 on 29th November, 128 on 6th December and 129 on the 14th and 27th December.

The ringing team on No.3 bed caught just one new Mallard during the year. Two birds were retrapped on 30th December, one first ringed as a second-year male on 18th February 2015 and the other, a female was first ringed on 22nd November 2014. This bird had been retrapped a total of six times.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
92	88	47	54	47	53	85	74	115	88	126	129

Pintail*Anas acuta**Amber listed*

There were just 13 records submitted during the year, all bar one in October.

The first was a female on No.3 bed on 15th August., but there were no further reports until 1st October when four females were on No.3 bed, increasing to six by the 4th. The following day four remained, with just one reported until the last sighting on 25th October.

Garganey*Anas querquedula**Amber listed*

This is a scarce summer visitor and a drake was seen intermittently on No.3 bed from 26th – 31st May. A female was then reported on the same bed on 29th July, and the only other sighting was of a juvenile male on the Loop of No.4 bed on 14th October.



Female Garganey on No.3 bed

Brian and Helen Burnett

Shoveler*Anas clypeata**Amber listed*

Reported in every month in good numbers, and although pairs were present during the breeding season on beds 3 and 4 no broods were seen.

The year began with up to 47 on No. 3 bed in January, and a maximum of 85 on 11th February WeBS count. By March most were paired up and a flock of 60 on the north-west pool of No.3 bed consisted of 27 pairs and six drakes. On 18th April six pairs were flushed from cover on No.3 bed by a Marsh Harrier, with others known to be present on the Loop of No.4 bed wetland. Birds continued to be seen throughout May and June, but with no evidence of breeding.

As always, Shovelers increased in numbers during the autumn passage period, with peaks in September of 43 on the 4th, 56 on the 21st, and 44 on 7th October. The WeBS count on 18th November found 52 on the Eyes, while 33 were reported on 9th December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
47	85	60	40	6	7	6	10	56	44	52	33

Pochard

Aythya ferina

Red listed

Wintering numbers remain low and fell back this year, with no repeat of the three-figure count of March 2016. In contrast, it was an excellent breeding season with more broods produced than for many years.

With birds reported in every month except October the year began with only single-figure counts, before steadily increasing in January to 20 on the 20th and 33 on the 31st. The year's maximum of 49 occurred on 21st February with 44 still present on 12th March and 42 on the 8th April WeBS.

The first brood was reported on No.3 bed on 14th May, after which females with young appeared regularly during May and June on beds 3 and 4. In total 19 broods were seen, 13 on No.3 and six on the Loop of No.4 bed. This is the highest number of broods at Woolston since the 22 broods in 2005. Pochard is a scarce breeding species in the United Kingdom, monitored by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. In their latest report (2015) the national population was considered to be in the range of 350-700 pairs, making the Woolston population extremely important and almost certainly in the top ten breeding sites in the country for this duck.

From July very few Pochard were at the Eyes, with maxima of seven in November and December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
33	49	44	42	31	15	2	3	3	n/c	7	7



Pochard brood

Brian Martin

Tufted Duck

Aythya fuligula

Another good year for one of Woolston's most numerous duck species, with a high winter count at the end of the year and many broods reported.

Numbers at the beginning of the year were similar to last year, with 303 on 11th January, 364 on 16th February and 301 on 23rd March. Many remained into April, with 283 still on No.3 bed on the 8th and 184 on the Reserve as a whole on the 26th.

The first brood was seen on 16th June and as usual others then appeared throughout the rest of June and July with the last newly-hatched brood seen on 3rd August on No.3 bed, where most pairs had bred. On 24th June a minimum of nine broods was present including some large ones of 10, 12, 13 and 14 young. In total 28 broods were reported, the largest number since the 29 broods in 2012. Twenty of these were on No.3 bed, four on the Loop of No.4 bed, three on the Mersey and one on the Ship Canal. It was also a successful year in terms of young fledged, with many well grown birds seen into early September.

It is interesting that the wildfowl breeding survey, carried out across the Eyes in April and May using the RSPB methodology assessed the breeding population of Tufted Duck on beds 3 and 4 as 28 pairs, exactly the same as the number of broods counted later in the summer!

As usual, it was November before significant gatherings of Tufted Duck occurred, with 355 on the 21st. The onset of cold weather in early December saw a major influx, with 615 present on the 9th, 350 of which were on the Ship Canal at Bollin Point.

A juvenile was caught on No.3 bed in a mist net set for Green Sandpipers, only the third Tufted Duck to be ringed at Woolston.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
303	364	301	283	107	58	42	26	84	115	355	615

Common Scoter

Melanitta nigra

A rare visitor to the Eyes, one was on the Ship Canal near Bollin Point on 2nd December. This is the first record since November 1996, and only the fourth year that Common Scoter has been recorded at Woolston, the others being 1985, 1986 and 1990.



Common Scoter on the Ship Canal

David Spencer

Goldeneye

Bucephala clangula

Amber listed

Reported in relatively low numbers in both winter periods. At the beginning of the year there were only eight records submitted, with a maximum of four on 14th January. There were no further sightings until November, when many more reports were received, the peak count being nine on 18th November.



Drake Goldeneye at the Weir Basin

David Spencer

Goosander

Mergus merganser

Increasingly being reported at Woolston in both winter periods, and the appearance of a brood on the Ship Canal on 3rd June was a major surprise.

On 3rd and 4th January several observers found two drakes and a female on the Ship Canal near the Reserve car park, and a lone female was on the Canal on 15th January. Five days later a drake was on No.3 bed and the last early-year record was of two Goosanders flying past Rixton Bridge near Bollin Point on 21st January.

An unexpected sighting on 3rd June was a female with 14 recently fledged young on the Canal near Bollin Point. Where they had bred is not known.

There was a series of sightings in November and December beginning with a drake and three females, again on the Ship Canal on 18th and 24th November, and four reports of up to two on, or flying along, the Canal during December.



Female Goosander with brood on the Ship Canal

David Bowman

Ruddy Duck

Oxyura jamaicensis

Despite the on-going cull of this duck, which began in 2006, a few birds were present on No.3 bed during the spring and summer. It is possible that breeding could have been attempted, but no young were seen.

A drake, which was first seen on 31st March, remained on its own until 10th May. On 11th May three drakes were present, two adults and an immature male; they were reported regularly into early June when they were joined by a female, probably on the 4th. All four kept together for a few days, but by 11th June one of the drakes was not seen again, and the female and one of the other drakes had paired up. In late June the pair settled on the south side of No.3 bed and became rather elusive. It is possible that breeding was attempted, but no young were ever seen. A drake was seen on 15th July, after which there were no reports until a probable female and immature male were seen together on No.3 bed on 31st July. This turned out to be that last sighting of the year.

Red-legged Partridge*Alectoris rufa*

There was just one record this year, a single on No.1 bed on 30th October which flew under the Viaduct towards No.2 bed. Sightings of this species have now become annual and this is the fourth year in succession that one or more has been recorded. Somewhat surprisingly, in the past two years it has been reported more often than the indigenous Grey Partridge.

Grey Partridge*Perdix perdix**Red listed*

After a blank year in 2016 a single record was evidence that this traditional farmland species maintains a tenuous foothold at and around Woolston. This year's sighting was of two on fields immediately to the south of Butchersfield Tip on 19th February.

Pheasant*Phasianus colchicus*

Unfortunately there was no evidence of an upturn in the fortunes of this formerly common species and numbers remained at a fairly low but apparently stable level. The year began with eight on Butchersfield Tip on 11th January but the highest counts were in March during Common Bird Surveys covering the whole Reserve. Nine were on the northern half of No.4 bed on 23rd and 30th March and it appears that about fifteen were present across the whole Reserve. The only evidence of breeding came from No.3 bed where an adult was seen with two fairly small young on 1st September. Two juveniles, presumably the same birds, were found in the centre of that bed on 17th September. The Migration Watch on 4th November produced a total of 13 but there were no other significant counts.

Cormorant*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Reported in every month, with many sightings of over-flying birds but, as always, present at at least three diurnal roosts on the Reserve. During the first six months 27 on 11th February was the highest count on the Eyes, while on 5th September 11 roosted in a favourite tree on the Oxbow near Woolston Weir. Up to 20 were present on many dates.

Little Egret*Egretta garzetta*

Just 14 records were received this year (c.f. 21 in 2016). All were in the period May to late October, and apart from six on 12th July, two on 21st July and four on 25th August, all the other sightings were of single birds.

Great White Egret*Ardea alba*

As in 2016 there was just one record this year, one on No.3 bed on 24th September.



Cormorant

Keith Gallie



Little Egret, No.3 bed

Hazel Rothwell

Grey Heron

Ardea cinerea

Recorded in every month, the Grey Heron is a regular visitor to the Eyes and in the breeding season birds from the nearby Parr's Wood heronry move to and from the Reserve. The highest count in the first half of the year was six on 8th March and the same number on 21st June. The only double-figure count was of 11 on the 7th October WeBS.



Little Grebe

Hazel Rothwell

Little Grebe

Tachybaptus ruficollis

Woolston is a stronghold of this grebe in Cheshire and 2017 was a good breeding season. In most years Nos.1 and 3 beds hold most of the breeding population, but several pairs also raised young on the Loop of No.4 bed this year.

In the first two months Little Grebes were more numerous than usual, with nine on 8th January and seven on 1st February. Trilling was first heard on the No.1 bed pools on 10th February and on No.3 bed on the 21st. Further birds began to arrive, with ten on 12th March increasing to 15 on the 21st and the year's maximum of 26 on the whole Reserve on 2nd April.

Breeding was noted in May when one observer found five pairs on No.3 bed on the 18th, while on the same date there was a report of seven pairs on No.3 bed with one small young. On 2nd June two newly fledged young were seen on No.1 bed, where early breeding is often reported, while two days later attention switched to the Loop of No.4 bed where there were nine adults, including one feeding a well grown chick. On 7th June three broods were present on No.1 bed, two of one young, and the third of

two half-grown young. On the same date a pair with two small chicks was on No.3 bed and on 16th June two pairs were seen on No. 3 bed, each with one small young. Also on No.3 bed, on 1st July, two pairs were seen, one feeding two half-grown young, the other with two small chicks. Three days later three well-grown young were found on No 3 bed, and also an adult with three young. More reports followed from No.1 bed, including an adult with four young on 24th July, clearly a new brood, which was reported into August and early September. The final sighting of young was on the Loop of No.4 bed on 20th August, where two adults were feeding two large young.

Overall, it was considered that a minimum of 11 pairs definitely bred and possibly a twelfth – 6 or 7 pairs on No.3 bed, two on the Loop of No.4 bed, and three on No.1 bed (c.f. ten pairs in 2016).

In the final months the maximum counts received were of eight on 17th October and 1st November and ten on the 18th November WeBS.

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

Recorded throughout the year Great Crested Grebes were scarce in the first six weeks, with only one or two reported. Even so, a pair was seen with nest material on No.3 bed on 1st February. As always, numbers increased from late February into March, with 11 found across the Eyes on 21st February, 12 on 12th March and a peak of 13 on 10th May.

On 19th March three pairs were present on No.3 bed, with one pair displaying; one was on a nest on the Loop of No.4 bed on 2nd April and five pairs were found on No.3 bed on 28th April. The first broods (two) appeared on No.3 bed on 26th May and another of three small young on 31st May. The following day a total of seven pairs was located, those on No.3 bed plus a pair with young at Woolston Weir, and a sitting bird on the Mersey between Nos. 3 and 4 beds. A new brood appeared on No.3 bed on 2nd June and the pair on the Loop of No.4 bed was feeding two small young on 21st June. The final new brood was on No.3 bed on 5th July. In all, it is considered that 11 broods hatched at Woolston this year, with several large young reported in late July, the last on the Loop of No. 4 bed on 9th August.

In the remainder of the year birds were present in good numbers, with maxima of 11 on 6th December and 12 on the WeBS count three days later.

Black-necked Grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

Amber listed

The breeding population of this rare grebe was similar to that of recent years and fledging success was good. As many visitors come to Woolston to see Black-necked Grebes in summer plumage it is not surprising that 123 records were entered on the Woolston database this year.

Three on 13th March were the first, two in summer plumage and the other still largely in winter plumage. Over the next week more arrived, with eight present on No.3 bed on the 18th. During the final week of March seven were reported on many dates, with nine on the 30th and 31st, including one still partially in winter plumage. On 2nd April ten were noted – four pairs plus two single birds – and numbers remained at this level until 13th April when a co-ordinated count found 13 adults.

The first confirmation of breeding was on 8th May when one of two pairs by the north-east hide was feeding one very small chick. A further two broods appeared on 10th May and a fourth on the 24th. On 18th May one observer found a total of 17 Black-necked Grebes on No.3 bed, 12 adults and five young, including three broods of two, two and one young. An apparent arrival of adults occurred on 2nd June when four pairs without young were calling and displaying as newly-arrived birds often do. Throughout late May and June adults and young could be seen daily across No.3 bed, and it is considered that a minimum of nine broods was produced, similar to 2016.

Fully independent young were noted from as early as 31st May and with others seen during June and July it is believed, after careful monitoring, that a minimum of eight young, (although possibly more), fledged.

The last adult was on No.3 bed on 27th July and the last juvenile on 22nd August.



Juvenile Black-necked Grebe

Andy Weir

Red Kite

Milvus milvus

For the fourth year in succession there was a sighting, when one flew north-east over No.1 bed on 24th March. Nevertheless, this still remains a rarity for Woolston.

Marsh Harrier*Circus aeruginosus**Amber listed*

This species is usually seen during spring and autumn but this year all sightings were between February and May, apart from a single August record. The first report was of a female/immature on No.3 bed on 4th February with a female again there later that month. March saw two females on the 6th and one on the 8th, again on No.3 bed. On 12th April there were reports, again of a female, from No.3 bed and Butchersfield Tip, which may have related to the same individual. There were six sightings in April including a second summer male on No.3 bed on the 18th. The remaining records were of “female” types on Nos.1 and 3 beds. The final report was of a female, again on No.3 bed, on 22nd August.

Goshawk*Accipiter gentilis*

The only report was of one on the Migration Watch on 2nd December. This is about average for a species that remains a rare visitor to Woolston.

Sparrowhawk*Accipiter nisus*

As usual most of the records of this common resident were from No.3 bed. There were reports throughout the year but there was only one sighting in February, and very few in June, July and August. In the first three months of the year only one or two were reported but on 15th April three were seen on No.3 bed, including a pair displaying over the north bank. Display was again observed in the same area on 26th April, with two pairs involved and a fifth bird was on No.4 bed the same day. The first sign of breeding was on 6th May when one was seen at a nest on the north bank of No.3 bed. On 11th May four were on the northern half of No.4 bed. As stated above, records in June and July were infrequent but breeding was proved on No.4 bed. On 12th June five young hatched from that nest but by the 16th only three remained. A clear path was found leading to the nest and it is feared that human interference was the reason for the disappearance of two chicks. A pair was reported on No.1 bed on 4th August and on 19th August a female and two juveniles were seen in a dead Birch opposite the John Morgan Hide. It seems likely that two pairs bred on the Reserve. After the breeding season four were seen at the eastern end of the Reserve during the Migration Watch on 4th September and on 14th October, three were on No.3 bed, with a fourth on No.4 bed. Thereafter no more than two were seen to year end.

It was a record year for the ringing teams with five caught on No.1 bed and seven (all juvenile males) on No.3 bed. Three first year males were ringed on a single day (16th August) on No.1 bed, another first for Woolston.

Buzzard*Buteo buteo*

There were about 80 records of this now common species, slightly down on 2016 but not necessarily indicative of a reduction in actual numbers. Records were submitted throughout the year and from all areas of the Reserve. The year began with four on No.3 bed on 2nd January and six on the same bed on the 25th. Mid-March saw evidence of a northerly movement with sightings of about 20 over No.1 bed on the 10th and 15th flying north in groups of up to six. On 18th March six were over No.3 bed and a

pair was displaying over the west bank of that bed the following day. A second pair was observed displaying over No.4 bed on 23rd March and a Reserve total of six was recorded that day. Further evidence of breeding was noted on 27th March when a pair was observed mating in a tree on the north bank of No.3 bed. The next day one flew eastwards over the north bank of No.3 bed carrying nest material. On 4th April five were over No.3 bed and on the 8th a total of eleven was reported between No.1 bed and Bollin Point.

Breeding was successful with three nests found, one on each of Nos. 2 and 3 beds, but the outcome is unknown. The third nest was just off No.4 bed and held at least two chicks. On 3rd June a second year male was found in a mist net on the edge of Phragmites Reeds on No.3 bed. This is the first free-flying bird to be ringed on that bed and only the fourth of this species at Woolston. Two juveniles had previously been ringed in a nest on No.3 bed.

On 2nd September there was an unprecedented movement involving 34 birds over No.3 bed. Small groups of between two and ten arrived from the north-west and drifted off to the south-east between 11.55 a.m. and 12.45p.m. and another four followed at 1.15p.m. A group of observers on Winter Hill about 20 miles to the north reported similar numbers earlier that morning. This was by far the highest count of the year although the Migration Watches on 4th September and 4th November produced impressive counts of 18 and ten respectively. A successful year ended with five over No.3 bed on 30th December.



Buzzard

Hazel Rothwell

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Amber listed

Just two records were received, both from No.3 bed. On 29th March one flew east mobbed by Black-headed Gulls and two days later what may have been the same bird was reported flying north.

Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Amber listed

It appears that there were more records this year with a total of 60 sightings reported. Certainly in the first three months of the year there was an increase in the number of sightings with 14 compared with just eight reports in 2016. One was on No.3 bed on two dates in January and there were five February records, all of singles. A pair was on the same bed on 21st March and by 1st April one was near the usual nest site on the Viaduct. Later that month a pair was displaying over No.3 bed and on the 22nd two on No.1 bed included a female on the Viaduct. A pair was nearby on 23rd May and although no young were reported it seems that breeding was at least attempted. Two were on No.3 bed on 26th April and a third was on No.4 bed.

There were no records between 17th June and 15th July but from that date there were fairly regular sightings of one or two on No.3 bed. The autumn Migration Watches produced sightings of two or three and the only December record was of three soaring together over No.3 bed. Although there were more reports submitted this year it does not appear that there has been a significant revival in the fortunes of this once common raptor.

The ringing team on No.3 bed caught an adult male and female on 3rd and 17th June respectively, the first on that bed since 2012.

Merlin

Falco columbarius

Red listed

This remains an infrequent winter visitor with just one record this year. On 28th March a male flew rapidly over the John Morgan Hide and headed off to the north-west.

Hobby

Falco subbuteo

This summer migrant was seen frequently between April and October and 53 records were submitted. Singles were reported from Nos.1 and 3 beds and Butchersfield Tip during April, the first being on the 11th of that month. Two were on No.3 bed on 7th May and there were regular reports, mostly from No.3 bed, during the summer months. On 24th July one was hunting Swifts over No.3 bed and two were together in the same area five days later. One was seen to catch a Brown Hawker in front of the John Morgan Hide on 22nd August and on the same date one was at the Swallow roost on No.1 bed. On a number of dates, between 22nd and 29th August, one was in a dead Birch tree opposite the John Morgan Hide and two were present there on 5th September. Two were over No.3 bed on 9th September and on

6th October one was perched on the hide in the north-east corner of that bed. The final record of a successful season was on 11th October.

Peregrine

Falco peregrinus

This is probably the most charismatic British falcon and it has bred on the Thelwall Viaduct for the past ten years. There were three January reports of singles including one on the Viaduct on the 21st. None was seen during February but in March there were three records of singles. On 1st April one entered the nest on the Viaduct and two were at the nest site on the 8th. They were then seen fairly regularly during April and May. The male was seen to catch a Pigeon over No.3 bed on 25th May before heading off to the nest site. The first sighting of young was on 26th May when at least two small chicks were seen in the nest. On 3rd June both adults and three young were observed and by the 13th at least two of the young had fledged. Unfortunately, an almost fully grown young was subsequently picked up under the Viaduct by a passer-by. It was then taken into care for rehabilitation but unhappily, failed to recover. Away from the nest site an adult and two juveniles were seen soaring over the south bank of No.3 bed on 15th August. Other records of note were of one harassing a pair of Buzzards over No.1 bed on 30th August and of a pair hunting waders, on No.3 bed, on 9th September and eventually catching a Black-headed Gull. October saw regular reports of one on both Nos.1 and 3 beds and on the Migration Watch of 4th November three were seen. On 9th November a juvenile was observed being chased by two Ravens. Two were at the nest site on 11th November and there were two December sightings of two on the Viaduct.



Raven mobbing Peregrine over No.2 bed

Keith Gallie

Water Rail

Rallus aquaticus

This species remains fairly common and the population appears to be stable. The majority of this year's sightings were as usual from Nos.1 and 3 beds with January records of two on No.3 bed on the 2nd and four on No.1 bed on the 30th. February produced two interesting sightings on No.4 bed; one from the Sandpit Pond on the 16th and one on the Loop on the 21st. On 10th March a count of six on No.1 was felt to be a conservative estimate and there were five in the same area on the 13th. The WeBS count on 8th April produced a total of six. The systematic breeding surveys during April located 13 territories, distributed as follows: five on No.1 bed, five on No.3 bed and three on No.4 bed. The first evidence of successful breeding came on 9th June when an adult and two young were seen at the Tower Hide on No.3 bed, while four young were noted there on the 13th. On 5th July an adult was heard calling at the Sandpit Pond and back on No.3 bed a small juvenile in front of the Tower Hide was probably one of the brood previously reported in that area. There were further reports from the Tower Hide on 17th and 25th July and 12th August when an adult and one young were present. On 1st September two juveniles were found on the north bank of No.3 bed and a further one at the John Morgan Hide. As young had also been reported from the Tower Hide and the South Screen it appears that at least four broods were present on No.3 bed alone.



Water Rai in front of the John Morgan hide

Hazel Rothwell

On 14th September there was a further report of one at the Sandpit Pond. Four were on No.1 bed on 6th and 21st November and the only two December records were also from that bed. An interesting development this year has been the increase in records from the Sandpit Pond and Loop areas of No.4 bed.

None was ringed this year but this is because no specific attempts were made to capture them.

Spotted Crake

Porzana porzana

One was reported from No.3 bed on 15th July and full field notes have been submitted. This is the first record since 2005.



Moorhen feeding young on No.3 bed

Andy Weir

Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

The first report was on 2nd January when about 40 flew across No.3 bed to roost in the reeds at dusk. The WeBS count on 14th January found a Reserve total of 60 which proved to be the highest of the year, although there were a number of almost equally high counts. Totals of 46 in February, 28 in March and 30 in April were significantly higher than in 2016 and this translated into an excellent breeding season. Although adults were less visible at this time a total of 28 broods was recorded, the first being on 22nd April. The majority (16) were on No.3 bed with the remainder distributed as follows: three on the Sandpit Pond, two on No.4 bed including one on the Loop, four on the river, two on the flooded fields to the north of No.2 bed, and one on No.1 bed. This compares favourably with the past two years when 19 (2016) and 20 (2015) broods were found. In 2014, there was a total of 28 broods, the highest since the early 1980's so this year's breeding performance was particularly encouraging.

Post breeding, high numbers were again reported, for example 49 and 57 on the September and November WeBS counts. A Reserve total of 59 on 26th November included no less than 35 on No.3 bed where between 20 and 30 were regularly present at the John Morgan Hide feeding station. By the year end about 30 were still present. In summary, this was an above average year and this is confirmed by the ringing records. A total of 21 was ringed on No.3 bed, the highest since 2008, and all were

captured in the duck trap. No less than 19 of these were caught between 18th November and 10th December, including 14 on 18th November alone.

Coot

Fulica atra

In common with the previous species this proved to be an excellent year, beginning with a total of twelve on 4th January. On 27th January when most of the waters were frozen, 33 were present in a small area of open water on No.3 bed. Up to 30 were reported regularly during February and March and 54 were found on the WeBS count of 8th April.

The first sign of breeding was on 6th March when one was seen nest building on the river near the footbridge. The first brood appeared on 28th April and this was the start of an excellent season. A total of 49 broods was recorded and this may well be a conservative estimate as allowances were made to avoid the risk of double counting where the two adults divide the brood between them. The distribution was as follows: 32 on No.3 bed, 11 on the Loop of No.4 bed, three on the Sandpit Pond, two on No.1 bed and one on the river near the footbridge. The number of broods found on the Loop is particularly encouraging as birds responded to the recent improvements in habitat.

Whilst good numbers were clearly present during the breeding season a build up occurred from early July onwards with evening visits to No.3 bed on 24th and 31st July resulting in totals of 136 and 167 respectively. The highest count of the year was on 6th August when 210 were present. Post-breeding flocks of Coot often associate with Gadwall and good numbers of the latter species were present at this time. September saw about a hundred on No.3 bed reducing to 62 towards the month end. Numbers declined thereafter with 32 on the December WeBS count and only twelve by the end of the year. A single bird was captured in the duck trap and ringed on No.3 bed on 26th November.

Oystercatcher

Haematopus ostralegus

This was a typical year with 44 records submitted between March and July. The first sighting was of two mating on Vikki's island on No.3 bed on 11th March. Birds were seen regularly in the same area with mating noted on 4th and 12th April and up to three were reported. The maximum count was of four on 15th April and three were seen on No.1 bed on the 19th. An interesting record was of one in fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip, suitable breeding habitat, on 13th May. There were, however, no further reports from this area. Sightings of up to three continued from No.3 bed until 19th June. There were a number of July records including one flying east over No.1 bed on the 5th and three on No.3 bed on the same date. The last of the year were two and one on No.3 bed. on 20th and 24th July.

Golden Plover

Pluvialis apricaria

After a blank year in 2016 there were just two records. On 3rd October two flew onto No.3 bed calling and appeared to drop in near the south pool. Four days later six were reported by the Migration Watchers at the eastern end of the Reserve.



Lapwing chicks on Vikki's Island

Andy Weir

Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus

Red listed

This species had a reasonably successful year although maximum numbers were a little lower than in 2016. January began with 20 on fields to the north of Butchersfield Tip and 45 on the No.3 bed scrape on the 13th. About 250 flew west on 17th January and on the 21st 145 were on fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip, increasing to 250 by 19th February.

With the start of the breeding season up to eight were recorded on No.3 bed, three on the Loop of No.4 bed and four on fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip. Display was noted on No.3 bed from the end of March and on 4th May a female was on a nest with one egg in front of the John Morgan Hide. A pair was also seen displaying inside the north bank of No.3 bed but it is not known whether breeding took place in this location. On 10th May three pairs were on No.3 bed and four birds on the Loop. A pair was also on territory to the south of Butchersfield Tip. The only confirmed breeding, however, took place on Vikki's island on No.3 bed. Two young were seen on 30th May and the following day three tiny young were present. The female soon encouraged them to swim to the relative safety of an island to the left where there was more cover. It was fascinating to watch the family undertake this move, especially as the smallest chick was reluctant to take the plunge! On 1st June the three were still present but by the following day only one had survived, at least one having been taken by a fox. The surviving chick fledged and by 8th July was seen in flight.

The usual post-breeding build-up was in evidence from mid-June when 56 were on No.3 bed. Numbers increased steadily through July and August and the year maximum was 410 on No.3 bed on 4th October. About 200 were still present on 25th October but all subsequent significant records were of birds

overflying. The Migration Watches recorded 412 on 4th September and 609 on 7th October. A flock of 600 flew west on 6th November and the last record was of a hundred over the north bank of No.1 bed on 20th December.

Little Ringed Plover

Charadrius dubius

This attractive small wader was seen from the end of March until the beginning of August and breeding again took place. The first was noted on 27th March when one flew south-east over No.1 bed. The stony northern half of No.1 bed is always a favoured area and seven and eleven were found there on 1st and 8th April. Two were on flooded fields to the north of No.2 bed on 4th and 10th May and one was observed in display flight, on No.3 bed, on 25th May. During June and July up to four were regularly on No.1 bed and a pair was on territory on No.3 bed on 23rd June. Two adults and a juvenile were on the fields to the north of No.2 bed on 13th July and two weeks later a juvenile was reported on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide. An adult and a juvenile were in the same location on 8th August and the juvenile was seen regularly up to 18th August, which proved to be the last sighting of the year. It seems that a minimum of two pairs bred but given the presence of two pairs on the northern half of No.1 bed it is reasonable to assume that up to four pairs bred on the Reserve. This is similar to 2016 and it seems that the breeding population has stabilised at around three to four pairs.



Juvenile Little Ringed Plover, No.3 bed

Andy Weir

Whimbrel*Numenius phaeopus**Red listed*

There were just two records of this occasional visitor, both on spring passage. Three flew east along the north bank of No.3 bed on 4th May and two days later eight also flew east over the same bed

Curlew*Numenius arquata**Red listed*

Another infrequent visitor, with just three records. One flew west over No.3 bed on 8th March, with another heading south-west on 5th August. The final report was of a single which circled No.3 bed on 20th October before leaving to the west. There were no records of any actually landing on the Reserve this year.



Black-tailed Godwits in flooded fields north of No.2 bed

David Spencer

Black-tailed Godwit*Limosa limosa**Red listed*

Excellent numbers were present in the autumn, although slightly down on the past two years. The first was reported on 20th April when four were on No.3 bed. The next record was of a bird still in winter

plumage on 24th May, again on No.3 bed where the vast majority of sightings took place. One or two were noted regularly until 21st June when four appeared. During August there was a gradual increase and by the 26th the flock totalled 23. An interesting report was of a large flock on the flooded fields to the north of No.2 bed which comprised 34 on 11th September and 48 the following day. Added to the 37 on No.3 bed this gave a Reserve count of 85, the highest of the year. Numbers remained high during October; 61 on the 4th declining to between 30 and 40 at the beginning of November. On 8th November seven were on No.3 bed and six on the Loop of No.4 bed, the only record from that part of the Reserve. The final report was of one on No.3 bed on 4th December. This species was once a rare visitor but in spite of its red-listed status, has now become a regular feature of the Woolston year.



Ruff with Black-tailed Godwits in horse paddocks north of No.2 bed

David Spencer

Ruff

Calidris pugnax

Red listed

Ruff remains an infrequent passage migrant. The first was on the flooded fields north of No.2 bed in the flock of Black-tailed Godwits on 11th and 12th September. It flew onto No.3 bed with them on 12th September but was not seen again. A juvenile female was on No.3 bed on 6th October and what could have been the same bird was spotted in a flock of Lapwing on the Migration Watch the following day. Three further sightings, again possibly of the same individual, occurred on No.3 bed on 10th, 11th and 14th October and these were the last of the year.

Dunlin*Calidris alpina**Amber listed*

Only six records were received, less than in recent years. All sightings were on No.3 bed, the first being on 4th April when two were present. The only other spring report was of one which circled the bed a few times on 20th April but did not land. The remaining four records were in August, one being seen on the 5th, 7th, 16th and 17th.

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos**Amber listed*

The first of only ten records was on 24th April when three were found in front of the John Morgan Hide. One was at Latchford Locks on 4th May and another on No.3 bed on the 30th. None was then seen until 4th July when one was on No.3 bed. By far the highest count was on 14th July when no less than seven were on the John Morgan Hide scrape. No more than one was seen subsequently and the last of a disappointing year was on 2nd August. Unsurprisingly, none was ringed this year.

Green Sandpiper*Tringa ochropus**Amber listed*

The first report was of an over-wintering bird flushed from the River Mersey at Rixton on 21st January. As in 2016 there were no spring records and sightings were confined to autumn passage which was first noted on 29th July. All autumn records were from No.3 bed and up to four were reported in August and early September. Thereafter only singles were present with reports on 11th and 21st September and, the last of the year, on 21st October.

Just four were caught and colour-ringed by the No.3 bed team; two were captured on each of 10th and 22nd August.

Greenshank*Tringa nebularia**Amber listed*

The two sightings were of one on No.3 bed on 10th June and 23rd July. This species is never common at Woolston but as with many other waders, numbers were lower than in recent years.



Greenshank from the John Morgan Hide

Keith Gallie



Wood Sandpiper in front of the John Morgan hide

David Bowman

Wood Sandpiper*Tringa glareola**Amber listed*

Although only one record was submitted this is the third consecutive year in which this rare species has been found, with one on No.3 bed on 24th July.

Redshank*Tringa totanus**Amber listed*

This was an average year. Two on No.3 bed on 16th March were the first and singles were found on the same bed on two other March dates. The final spring record was of one, again on No.3 bed, on 10th May. A single was on the scrape on 6th July and on 4th August one circled No.3 bed but did not land. The last record from this bed was of one on 7th October and the only other sighting was of one on the Migration Watch of 2nd December, a very late date for a species that is normally only noted on spring and autumn passage.

Jack Snipe*Lymnocyptes minimus*

After a blank year in 2016 it was encouraging to receive three records of this often elusive species. One was in front of the Frank Linley Hide on 12th April and the other two sightings were towards the end of the year. On 27th October one flew onto No.1 bed from the west, circled the east pool and flew low over the observers' heads before leaving to the east. The final record was of one on No.3 bed on 2nd December.

Woodcock*Scolopax rusticola**Red listed*

A total of 26 records represents an apparent upturn in the fortunes of this enigmatic wader. These were divided fairly evenly between the first and second winter periods and sightings came from both No.1 and No.3 beds. On 14th January one was seen on each bed, and the following day three were found inside the west bank of No.3 bed. A total of five was reported on 16th January; one near the Palisade Gates at the entrance to No.2 bed, one on the Canal track on the same bed and three on the main track on No.1 bed. On 25th January five were in the same locations and a further individual was seen on Butchersfield Tip, this being the highest count of the year. Ones and twos were reported on a number of dates until 19th April. Between 9th October and the year end there were twelve sightings of one or two from both No.1 and 3 beds with a maximum of two on each.

Snipe*Gallinago gallinago**Amber listed*

In comparison with recent years numbers were low. On January 17th 14 were on No.3 bed and four were found on No.1 bed on the 21st, giving a Reserve total of 18. Even fewer were present in February

with a maximum of four on No.1 bed and one on fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip. Up to ten were reported in March and five were on No.3 bed on 12th April. The last spring record was of one on 7th May. As birds are not usually present during the breeding season, one on No.3 bed on 8th and 9th June was unusual. Typically, no more were seen until 24th July and there followed regular sightings, albeit of small numbers, until year end. The few counts in double figures included ten on No.3 bed on 22nd August, a Reserve wide total of 16 in September, 12 overflying No.1 bed on 13th and 15 on No.3 bed on 18th October. It was surprising, therefore, when two flocks of 35 and 20 dropped into the No.3 bed reeds at dusk on 5th December. This was by far the highest count of a disappointing year.

The ringing team captured a single bird on No.3 bed on 15th April. This was caught in a net set across a gap in the Phragmites Reeds. This species has become more difficult to capture due to improvements in the habitat which have provided many more roosting places in areas not regularly covered by the team.



Little Tern on Vikki's island

David Spencer

Little Tern

Sternula albifrons

Amber listed

There was one sighting of this rare visitor. On 16th May one was brought down by heavy rain and landed on Vikki's island in front of the John Morgan Hide. It remained for about 30 minutes and left in a north westerly direction as soon as the rain cleared. It was seen to have a yellow Darvic Ring but

unfortunately it was not possible to read it. This is the first record since 2015 and only the second since 2001.



Black Tern

David Spencer

Black Tern

Chlidonias niger

A sighting of this infrequent passage migrant at Woolston is always an exciting event. Two were on No.3 bed on 1st May where they were seen by several fortunate observers. They remained until the 2nd but left later in the day. On 6th May three appeared at 7.25a.m., hawked the bed for ten minutes, and flew off to the east.

Common Tern

Sterna hirundo

Amber listed

There were 24 records of this species, very similar to 2016, all except one from No.3 bed. Two were seen on 24th April and were still present two days later. The next sighting was on 8th May and on the 12th, one was seen flying north over No.1 bed carrying a small fish, suggestive of breeding nearby. Two were observed flying in a north-westerly direction on 17th May and the next day two landed briefly on Vikki's island before heading off to the west. There were further reports of singles in late May and early June and on 9th June one was seen perched on a twig in front of the John Morgan Hide. Four were

present the following day and during July there were no less than eight records of two or three. The only other record was of one on the late date of 7th October.



Common Tern

Hazel Rothwell

Arctic Tern

Sterna paradisaea

Amber listed

Although there was only a single sighting, it was of a dramatic nature. On 1st May, the same day as two Black Terns were present, a tight flock flew east over the north bank of No.3 bed and over No.1 bed. It was not possible to positively confirm either the identity or exact number but from an analysis of photographs taken it was established that the birds were of this species and totalled 47. This is by far the highest number ever recorded at Woolston, the previous maximum being eleven in 2009.

Kittiwake

Rissa tridactyla

Red listed

For the second consecutive year this normally coastal species was recorded. On 10th May two were found on No.3 bed and on the 29th one flew in, apparently from the north, landed briefly in front of the John Morgan Hide before disappearing behind an island of reeds. It could not be relocated. Prior to 2016 there had been no records since 2001.

Black-headed Gull*Chroicocephalus ridibundus**Amber listed*

The first significant report was of a Reserve-wide total of 92 on 25th January. By 3rd February the first were returning to the breeding colony on No.3 bed. Twenty were counted, rising to 52 the next day. Numbers soon increased and by 21st February 550 were present and a year maximum of 950 was recorded on 8th March. Totals remained at about 700 as breeding got underway. An unusual record was of a leucistic bird with all-white wingtips on 26th April. The first young was seen on 6th May and a survey on 22nd May produced a total of 41 occupied nests on the rafts and a further 27 visible from the John Morgan Hide alone. Breeding was the best for many years and 125 juveniles were counted on 27th June. This is the highest number of young since 2000 when 250 juveniles were recorded, although counts of young have not always been carried out on an annual basis. Not all this year's young fledged of course and predation by Lesser Black-backed Gulls was a continuing hazard. On 5th July a hundred juveniles were seen from the John Morgan Hide alone but by mid-July most birds had left. By 25th July just four adults and four small young remained and the last young were noted on 15th August. The only other high totals were an October report of 80 on the water on No.3 bed and a successful year ended with a Reserve-wide count of 600 on 27th December. None of these were overflying and the total included 220 on the Canal, 200 on fields to the east of the Loop of No.4 bed and 150 on the river to the north of No.4 bed.

Little Gull*Hydrocoloeus minutus*

There was just one sighting of this attractive spring migrant. An adult was found on No.3 bed on 30th April but did not remain.

Mediterranean Gull*Larus melanocephalus**Amber listed*

This year's records were fairly typical with over 50 sightings between late March and mid-July. Nearly all were from No.3 bed, starting with two adults on 25th March. On 29th March a pair, a third adult and a second summer bird, were noted. The only records away from No.3 bed were two on No.4 bed on 11th April and four over Butchersfield Tip the following day. Regular reports throughout April and May included a year maximum of six adults on 22nd April. On 30th May a second summer bird was found with a green Darvic ring. It was established that it had been ringed as a pullus in Northern France in June 2015 and subsequently re-trapped in France, Spain, Portugal and Holland before its arrival here! It was seen again on 7th and 8th June and on the latter date was one of three present, including one with an injured leg. Two different second summer birds appeared on 9th June, making a total of at least seven for the week. On 16th June a second summer individual appeared to be displaying to a Black-headed Gull on Vikki's island. Records continued to the end of June and there were two July records, both of singles, on the 6th and 17th.



French ringed Mediterranean Gull

David Spencer

Common Gull

Larus canus

Amber listed

Never seen in large numbers, this was a poor year for a species that is usually found only outside the breeding season. Most of the records received were from either Latchford Locks or No.3 bed. In the first few months of the year the highest total was of three on the January WeBS count. The year maximum was a disappointing seven on No.3 bed on 27th March. A first summer bird was seen on No.3 bed on three dates during April and the last spring sighting was on 30th April. The first returning bird was found on No.3 bed on 14th July but there were no more records until 7th October. Only one or two were reported until the year end.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Larus fuscus

Amber listed

Very few were seen during the first three months of the year and reports were confined to Latchford Locks and No.3 bed. No more than four were recorded in January and February, with five on No.3 bed on 8th March. As in 2016, April and May saw large numbers on the Loop of No.4 bed, with 25 on 18th April and 32 on 10th May. As wildfowl chicks began to hatch, birds were attracted to No.3 bed where they were seen to take a variety of hatchlings, including Canada Geese, Black-headed Gull, Tufted

Duck and Coot. At least nine were counted up to the end of May. On 11th July 36 were roosting on the No.3 bed lagoon, including three juveniles one of which was trying unsuccessfully to catch Sand Martins in flight. A large influx of newly-fledged young was noted on 24th July when 72 were on No.3 bed. This increased to 140 (mostly juveniles) on 29th July. They appeared to be resting on the water and no predation was noted. This post-breeding assembly is a new phenomenon which has not been seen previously at Woolston. Numbers reduced in early August and 80 on the 6th and 60 on the 16th were the last of the big counts. No more than ten were seen subsequently although the Migration Watches recorded some big totals of over-flying birds, notably 272 on 4th September and 60 on 7th October.

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

This species is not usually recorded in large numbers and this year was no exception, although there were some high totals of over-flying birds. Thirty flew east on 17th January and 34 flew west three days later. One or two were at Latchford Locks in January and February and three were on the water on No.3 bed on 24th March. Four were in the same location on 6th May, and six were roosting at the Weir on 11th July. Only single figures were noted to year end, apart from two high counts of over-flying birds. About 80 flew west in small flocks on 24th November and about a hundred were observed flying west, again in small groups, on 6th December. Interestingly, the highest count of 2016 was of 117 flying east on 22nd December.

Great Black-backed Gull

Larus marinus

Amber listed

The increase in records since 2014 was maintained and the 22 records submitted was similar to the two previous years. There were two January reports of over-flying birds but no sightings in February or March. Singles were noted on No.3 bed on three dates in April and two dates in May. A June record, again of one on No.3 bed, was followed by a sighting of one on the Weir basin on 6th July. On 1st August a family party of two adults and one juvenile arrived on No.3 bed with the juvenile constantly begging for food from one of the adults. August saw three records from No.3 bed and one from Latchford Locks on the 30th. One or two were reported in October and November and the last of another successful year, was of one on the Migration Watch of 2nd December

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon

Columba livia

Only five records were submitted this year. Three were from the Migration Watches on Butchersfield Tip, with a maximum count of 57 on 4th September. The largest count was at Latchford Locks where 220 were seen on 9th September. The only other sighting was of six flying west over No.3 bed on 21st January.

Stock Dove

Columba oenas

Amber listed

Stock Doves are easily overlooked but despite this over thirty sightings were submitted this year. The species is most common on farm fields surrounding the eastern end of the Reserve; the peak count was of 49 on 4th November. On the Reserve itself records were received and breeding probably occurred on all four beds. On No.1 bed six were in suitable breeding habitat on 1st April and two were present in similar habitat on No.2 bed on 4th April. On No.3 bed there were regular sightings in the spring and summer months and birds could be frequently seen under the feeders by the John Morgan Hide. On 24th May two were heard singing from the centre of the bed and near the John Morgan Hide. A notable sighting on No.3 bed was of 12 in the winter feed area on 26th May. The only record from No.4 bed was of one on 11th May.

On No.1 bed, four were ringed during the year, an average total. Two of these were pulli, ringed on 28th April, one of which was retrapped at the feeding station on 24th July. The other two were adults, both ringed on 10th March. On No.3 bed a record total of 11 was ringed. Nine were ringed in June and were all adults, as has been the pattern over the last few years. One, caught in September, was more unexpected. One was also caught which was ringed on the bed in 2010.

Woodpigeon

Columba palumbus

Typically, the maximum counts of Woodpigeon occurred in the autumn and winter periods. 492 and 2055 were recorded on 7th October and 2nd December respectively from Butchersfield Tip. On 20th December 1200 flew north over No.1 bed in flocks of up to 150. The largest count from No.3 bed was 260 seen leaving a roost at dawn on 14th October.

In spring, birds were observed in suitable breeding habitat on all four beds; two were on No.1 bed on 22nd April, 18 on No.2 bed on 4th April, nine on No.3 bed on 26th April and 35 on No.4 bed on 26th April.

On No.1 bed, the first since 2015 was ringed on 15th September and was an adult. On No.3 bed it was an average year with six new birds ringed, all of which were adults. Three were ringed in June and as with Stock Dove, the feeding stations clearly provide the adult birds easy feeding while they are raising young. The last bird of the year was ringed on 28th December.

Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

There were more records than usual for this relatively uncommon visitor to the Reserve. Twenty-nine observations were made, compared to 16 in 2016. Most sightings were from No.4 bed and Latchford Locks, where they were seen throughout the year, with a maximum count of six on 8th November. On 12th April and 25th May a bird was singing near the entry barrier. At the eastern end of the Reserve, 10 were seen in the farmland surrounding Butchersfield Tip on 4th November and seven were at the farm beyond Rixton Paddocks on 2nd December.

Cuckoo*Cuculus canorus**Red listed*

The slight increase in sightings in 2016, of this once common breeding species, was maintained in 2017 with a total of five sightings. The first was of a single bird calling from the South Meadow of No.3 bed on 8th May. The next was on No.1 bed at its eastern end, on 10th May where two were also seen on 19th May, including a hepatic female. One was in the northern half on 11th May and the final sightings of the year were both of singles, on No.3 bed on the 22nd and 26th May.

Barn Owl*Tyto alba*

There were only four records this year. The first was on No.1 bed on 21st January. This was followed by two reports from No.3 bed, of one at first light on 13th February and one hunting the meadows near the John Morgan Hide at dusk on 22nd May. Although there were relatively few sightings, for the third year in succession this species was ringed when one was found roosting in one of the specially provided nest boxes on No.1 bed on 24th March.

In 2016 there was a failed attempt at breeding on No.3 bed. Disappointingly, there was no evidence of breeding this year, so despite the regular use of the nest boxes for roosting, Barn Owls have yet to breed successfully on the Reserve.

Tawny Owl*Strix aluco**Amber listed*

Tawny Owls are widespread across the Reserve and are regularly heard calling at dawn and dusk. The largest population appears to be on No.1 bed where birds were heard throughout the year, with a maximum of three calling. On No.2 bed there were two records, of one on 11th August and two on 25th August. On No.3 bed singles were heard calling at dawn on 10th May and 30th December. Although there were no records this year from No.4 bed this is thought to be due to the lack of observer coverage at the appropriate time of day rather than the absence of birds.

Long-eared Owl*Asio otus*

There were no reports this year. The last reports of this former breeding species were in 2015 and 2012.

Swift*Apus apus**Amber listed*

The first sightings were of two on No.1 bed on 26th April and one on No.3 bed on 27th April. There were no other sightings until 5th May when 12 flew east over No.1 bed. This was the start of a large arrival as the next day 130 were feeding over No.3 bed. Other significant counts in the spring were 80 on 8th May, 48 on 15th May and 200 on 29th May, all on No.3 bed.

In the late summer there were some spectacular gatherings and movements. On 15th July a steady stream of approximately 480 birds passed southwest over the east bank of No.3 bed. On the same bed on 22nd July, 200 moved through in small groups flying west. On 25th July 200 were feeding over No.1 bed. The highlight was on 27th July when on No.4 bed an estimated flock of 2000 covered the whole bed, feeding over willows and Giant Hogweed. Similar numbers were seen on 29th July, passing west over No.3 bed during the morning, presumably again gathering to feed over No.4 bed. In August numbers reduced but birds remained throughout the month with maximum counts of 250 on No.1 bed on 2nd August and 75 on No.3 bed on 19th August. The final sighting of the year was of nine seen from Butchersfield Tip on 4th September.

In the Warrington area, the 2017 breeding season initially appeared to be poor, with little activity around colonies in Grappenhall and Westy but this was weather related. As the summer progressed and the weather improved Swifts in Grappenhall became much more active and there were screaming flocks over the colonies in the area. It would appear that despite the poorish summer weather Swifts did reasonably well in south Warrington. However, it is known that other areas did not do as well. In Chester, for example, where the local RSPB group has been censusing breeding numbers for the past couple of years, numbers continued to fall, largely from loss of breeding sites.

The national position is that Swifts have declined by 63% since 1995 and continue to decline by 4% per annum. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature criteria, Swifts are currently regarded as "endangered" and are very close to being "critically endangered" in the UK. Nest box schemes, in other areas, have been successful in establishing new breeding sites and therefore, in early spring, Swift boxes and a call attraction system were installed for the first time on the sides of the John Morgan hide. Although no breeding occurred, birds were observed swirling around the boxes attracted by the call system. Hopefully in future years breeding may be attempted, although experience from other nest box schemes suggest it may take several years before they are used.

Kingfisher

Alcedo atthis

Amber listed

There were records of Kingfisher in all months of the year except January. The first was on No.3 bed on 4th February and on 21st of the same month a single was seen on No.1 bed. From late March onward sightings became regular. A popular spot to see them is the footbridge leading over to No.3 bed. In the summer they could be seen almost daily from here with a maximum count of three on 27th July. In late summer they were also regularly perching in front of the John Morgan Hide. Breeding is thought to have occurred along the Ship Canal; on 1st April one was perched under a nest hole on the north bank near the Viaduct. On No.4 bed two were seen on the Loop on 4th June and 26th August.

The final sighting of the year was on No.3 bed where two were seen under the footbridge on 6th December.

On No.1 bed the ringers had the best year since 2008 with ten ringed. The first, an adult, was caught on 10th March, with the first juvenile caught on 22nd May. The remainder were also birds of the year. One was caught on 3rd November that had previously been ringed on 5th September 2016. No.3 bed ringers had a record year with seven new birds ringed; three (all juveniles) in each of July and August

and another juvenile in September. The net set for the Green Sandpipers has been a regular place for Kingfisher over the last few years. This year birds were caught in all the net rides in this part of the bed including the double height net in the shelter belt.

Green Woodpecker

Picus viridis

Green Woodpecker is an uncommon visitor to the Reserve and there were only ten records this year. Typically, most were from the eastern end of the Reserve where they are thought to breed in the Lymm and Rixton Areas. All sightings were of single birds. The first was on 14th January but all other sightings were between June and September. There was a single sighting on No.3 bed on 26th May when one was seen in the centre of the bed. Birds were also heard calling from south of the Ship Canal near the car park on 8th and 17th April. There were no reports from Nos.2 or 4 beds.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos major

The Reserve's commonest woodpecker, which can be regularly seen at the feeders by the John Morgan hide. Records were received from all four beds, with all but one sighting involved one or two and the maximum of three seen on No.3 bed on 14th January. Although a common bird, there is little evidence submitted regarding breeding. Two were present in suitable breeding habitat on No.1 bed on 1st April. Additionally, two were in similar habitat on No.4 bed on 11th May. The only record of a juvenile (other than those caught by the ringers) was from No.2 bed on 19th July.

For the ringers on No.1 bed, it was a poor year for this species with just four ringed, all birds of the year, with the first on 24th July. One other was retrapped that had been ringed on 26th May 2012 and only retrapped once since then. However, the ringers on No.3 bed had a record year with 19 new birds ringed. Fifteen of these were juveniles ringed between 23rd June and 18th November. The average is 9.9 new birds ringed. There is just one blank year (2015) and three birds were retrapped from 2016.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos minor

Red listed

The male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker which was seen and heard in spring 2015 and 2016 was also regularly noted this spring. A female was also seen and the pair was observed making a nest hole although it was subsequently abandoned and it is thought they were disturbed by a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The last spring sighting was on 17th April. The only other record for the year was on 30th September when one was heard calling on No.3 bed.

Magpie

Pica pica

A common resident breeder observed on all four beds. In the breeding season there were records from suitable breeding habitat with: one on No.1 bed on 22nd April, seven on No.2 bed on 23rd May including a pair at a possible nest, eight on No. 3 bed on 25th March including a pair at a nest on the north bank

and five on No.4 bed on 26th April. Outside of the breeding season there were some significant gatherings, most notable was 44 in the centre of No.4 bed on 29th November.

The only ones ringed were two on No.3 bed, which is below the average of 3 since 2004. The first was a juvenile ringed in July and the second an adult in September.

Jay

Garrulus glandarius

Like the last species, Jay is a common breeding resident although, perhaps because of their shyer behaviour, not as frequently observed. Breeding is thought to occur on all four beds. During the Common Birds Surveys, one was observed on No.1 bed, three on No.2 bed, three on No.3 bed and one on No.4 bed. Peak counts occurred during the autumn with 11 noted on No.3 bed on 9th September and nine from Butchersfield Tip during a Migration Watch on 7th October.

For the ringers it was a poor year on both beds. On No.1 bed it was the worst year since 2013 with only two newly ringed, both birds of the year and caught near the year end. Four were retrapped from previous years: two from 2016, one from 2015 and one originally ringed on 9th December 2005 as a first year and only retrapped once since, on 6th November 2010. Just six were ringed on No.3 bed, compared with an average of 11 since 2004. Four of these were juveniles, ringed between 29th July and 30th September.

Jackdaw

Corvus monedula

Jackdaws do not breed on the Reserve and the majority of records are of over-flying flocks. Single figure counts were made regularly during the year of birds over-flying No.3 bed with a peak count of 19 on 2nd September. There were occasional sightings of one or two at the feeders by the John Morgan hide. Not surprisingly, given the proximity of local farmland, the highest counts were seen at the eastern end of the Reserve. 125 were recorded during a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 4th September, 64 overflow No.1 bed on 20th September and on the same bed 26 were seen on 27th December.

Rook

Corvus frugilegus

There were only nine sightings of Rook reported, although four of these were from No.3 bed where it is relatively scarce. All records were of over-flying birds. On No.3 bed one was seen on 21st March, 10 on the 1st and 2nd May and three on 10th June. The only other records were from Bollin Point and No.1 bed in April and May, all of single over-flying birds.

Carrion Crow

Corvus corone

A common breeding resident which is thought to breed on all four beds. On No.1 bed a pair with one fully grown young was at a nest under the Viaduct and three were in suitable breeding habitat on 4th April on No.2 bed. On No.3 bed one was seen carrying nest material to a nest on the north bank on 8th

March and another was carrying food to a nest on the west bank on 10th May. On No.4 bed six were recorded during a Common Bird Survey on 26th April.

Raven

Corvus corax

Once a scarcity on the Reserve, Ravens are becoming increasingly common and this year the number of records was exceptional. There were 33 sightings in total compared to eight in 2016. They were seen in all months bar January, February and May, although there was no evidence of breeding and there are no known local breeding sites. The first sighting of the year was on 10th March when one flew north over No.1 bed. There were no other sightings from the eastern end of the Reserve until 4th September when five were seen from a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip. Other sightings from this area were of one flying east over No.1 bed on 18th September and three from Butchersfield Tip on 4th November.

The first sighting on No.3 bed was on 21st May when two flew west, tumbling in the air, and a third flew east. There were then sightings in all months except May. Most sightings were of one or two birds and the maximum count was three. All sightings were of over-flying birds except for a bird seen and heard calling from the trees alongside the Ship Canal on the south bank on 24th September.



Goldcrest

Keith Gallie

Goldcrest

Regulus regulus

There were relatively few records submitted for Goldcrest this year (18 in total) but given the large numbers caught by the ringing teams this must be due to under-recording rather than a fall in numbers. There were no records from mid-May to early September, reflecting the status of this species as primarily an autumn and winter visitor. Favoured wintering areas were along the south bank of No.3 bed and along the west bank of No.2 bed where between two and four could regularly be seen. The maximum counts occurred in the second winter period with a total of nine on No.3 bed on 7th October and a Reserve wide count of 16 on 11th November.

The ringers on No.1 bed had another excellent year for this species with 407 ringed, a further seven were caught from previous years, six from 2016 and one from 31st October 2014. There was also one caught that had been ringed elsewhere in Britain. Three were ringed in the late first winter/early spring period with two in January and one in March and there was a small summer movement of presumably locally bred juveniles from 19th June. The peak months were September (83 new) October (226 new) and November (76 new).

On No.3 bed a record total of 110 new birds was well above the average of 40 per year. The last of the first winter period was ringed on 11th February. A record 13 recently fledged juvenile birds were ringed from the 3rd June to the end of August. This was partly due to the use of lures being used for the first time during this period. These will be used in future years to see if this is a regular occurrence.

Firecrest

Regulus ignicapilla

Two were caught on No.1 bed, the first time that more than one has been ringed in a single year and only the fifth and sixth there since 1995. The first on 25th September is the earliest to arrive on the bed while the second was caught on the more typical date of 13th November and it was also retrapped the following day.

Blue Tit

Cyanistes caeruleus

A common resident species breeding on all four beds. The Common Bird Surveys recorded six on No.1 bed, five on No.2 bed, 10 on No.3 bed and four on No.4 bed.

On No.1 bed a record 258 were ringed during the year which included 43 nest box pulli, with 11 of these retrapped after fledging. A further 96 were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest of these from 10th June 2011. The earliest fledged juvenile was caught on 21st June. Away from the nest boxes only six adults were caught in breeding condition three males and three females.

On No.3 bed it was also a record year with 271 ringed, compared with an average of 161. Sixty-nine pulli were ringed in the nest boxes on the bed. The first fledged young to be ringed was on 3rd June, a typical date. More were still being newly ringed in December, the last on the 28th. Twenty-seven were retrapped from 2016, 13 from 2015, 9 from 2014, 8 from 2013, two from 2012, one from 2011 and one from 2010. Not many of the ringed pulli are retrapped and they are thought to disperse soon after fledging. The large number of young that are ringed in August-October are thought to be ones moving into the area to replace those which have left.

Great Tit

Parus major

Like the last species, Great Tit is a common and widespread resident. The Common Bird Surveys recorded four on No.1 bed, nine on No.2 bed, eight on No.3 bed and six on No.4 bed.

For the ringers on No.1 bed it was a record year with 194 ringed, including 40 pulli, of which 14 were retrapped after fledging. A further 66 were caught during the year which had been ringed previously on the bed, with the oldest from 3rd September 2010. Away from the nest boxes, 18 were caught in breeding condition, 10 females and 8 males while the first fledged juvenile was ringed on 26th June.

It was also a record year for the ringers on No.3 bed with a total of 226 ringed compared with an average of 172. A total of 94 pulli was ringed in the boxes. The nest box in the copse between the North and South Meadows produced the most interesting record; two young were ringed on a typical date and when the boxes were checked to complete the nest record cards on the 1st July a new brood of three was found. This is thought to be the first record of Great Tit double brooding on the Reserve and was, perhaps, due to the parents having a relatively easy time rearing just two young in their first brood allowing them to try again. During the year 716 handlings were achieved, with sixteen retrapped from 2016, 11 from 2015, six from 2014, two from 2013, four from 2012 and two from 2010.

Coal Tit

Periparus ater

Coal Tits breed in local areas surrounding the Reserve and are a regular but relatively scarce visitor. Most records occur post-breeding in the autumn and winter periods. The maximum count was of three on Butchersfield Tip on 4th September and again on 4th November. On No.3 bed all records were of singles, including one visiting the John Morgan hide feeders on 20th November. One was also regularly seen in the copse by the gates to No.2 bed in November and December.

On No.1 bed the ringers had the second-best year on record with 16 ringed and a further three retrapped, all from 2016. Four juveniles were caught between 3rd and 21st June before late summer passage started from 18th September, with the last ringed on 1st November.

On No.3 bed it was an exceptional year with 13 ringed. The average since 2004 is just 2.4 new birds per year and there have been four blank years, including 2016. All those ringed were juveniles, between 3rd June and 8th November. The best month was October with six ringed.

Willow Tit

Poecile montana

Red listed

Willow Tits are an important breeding species for the Reserve given their decline nationally. Of all the species monitored by the British Trust for Ornithology's Breeding Bird Surveys, the Willow Tit has showed the greatest decline. Their numbers reduced by 77% between 1994 and 2007. In view of their vulnerable status, the estimated breeding population on the Reserve of 30 pairs is considered of national importance. A report on the surveys of the breeding population can be found towards the end of this Report. Fifteen nests were found and the population estimates are: seven to nine pairs on No.1 bed, four to five pairs on No.2 bed, six pairs on No.3 bed and 10 pairs on No.4 bed. The population seems to be stable with a minimum of 30 pairs for the Reserve. Willow Tits also appear to be using green

corridors to expand into other areas, such as sites west of the Reserve, along the New Cut area and on to the Twiggeries Reserve. They could also be expanding to the south of the Ship Canal.

The ringers on No.1 bed caught a similar total to the previous year with 14 ringed and a further ten caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest from 14th August 2009. There were ten juveniles ringed during the year, with the first being caught on 16th June and two females were caught with brood patches.

On No.3 bed 23 were ringed, all juveniles, the highest total since 2010 when 33 were ringed. The average since 2004 is 17. The first was ringed on the fairly typical date of 3rd June. Four were retrapped from 2016 and two from 2015.

Skylark

Alauda arvensis

Red listed

Typically for this species, most sightings came from the eastern end of the Reserve, where they breed on surrounding farmland. In the spring and summer small numbers could be heard singing over fields south of the Ship Canal. Skylarks used to breed on Nos.1 and 4 beds but the last breeding was thought to be in 2003. The record on 4th May of one singing over No.1 bed, possibly on territory, is therefore notable.

The high counts, as is usual, were observed in the autumn and winter periods. Forty flew east in a single flock over No.1 bed on 10th March and 20 flew over the same bed on 4th October. Sightings on other beds are less frequent but single birds were regularly observed in October overflying No.2 and 3 beds.

Sand Martin

Riparia riparia

Favourable southerly winds on 13th March saw the arrival of the first Sand Martins, with six over No.3 bed, together with the first Black-necked Grebes of the year. Weather conditions changed after this and there were no further sightings until 21st March when 20 flew north. They continued to arrive in small numbers until 28th March, when there was a large arrival, with 265 feeding over No.3 bed in the afternoon. In April large numbers passed through with 170 arriving in small groups on the morning of the 1st, 670 passing north over a five-hour period on the 11th, most stopping briefly to feed before moving on and 425 feeding over the bed on the 12th. In the summer period good numbers were still present, with 60 on 5th June, 70 on 25th June and 50 on 13th July, all on No.3 bed. A breeding colony was found on the bank of the Ship Canal by No.1 bed and there were at least seven adults there on 3rd June. In August the return south began and numbers fell; the maximum count was 30 on 1st August. The last sighting was of 20 on No.3 bed on the evening of 11th September.

For the ringers on No.1 bed, following the previous year's record total, 2017 proved to be another successful year with 35 ringed, the second highest total for the bed. A further one was caught that had been ringed elsewhere in Britain. Unusually, there were three spring captures starting on 17th April, all from nets set along the track. A fourth was also caught in the same net on 26th June and these were all probably from a colony on the Canal, coming over to feed on the bed. The remainder were with the

Swallow roost that built up in the reed bed from 10th July, with the final one of the year on 27th August. Unlike the previous year when only three adults were caught, eleven were ringed at the roost this year.

On No.3 bed this species is not ringed in large numbers but this year's total of 24 was slightly above the average, since 2004, of 19. A single adult male was caught on the 20th May in a mist net set for other species. The rest were caught at roost between 31st July and 1st September.

Swallow

Hirundo rustica

The first Swallow was a single with Sand Martins on 31st March. In April most counts were in single figures and maximum counts were 17 on the 1st, 21 on the 12th and 50 on the 24th. There was no proof of breeding but birds were regularly seen near the Pumphouse on the Ship Canal where they have bred previously. In August they roosted on No.1 bed, as usual, but the maximum count was just 350 on the 15th and 22nd, well below last year's maximum of 1500. In September large movements were observed, with 200 on the 1st, 800 on the 15th and 600 on the 22nd, all flying south. There was one sighting in October of a single bird on No.3 bed on the 9th.

On No.1 bed the ringers had another excellent year with 456 ringed the second highest total for the bed. A further three were retrapped from the previous year and two were caught that had been ringed elsewhere in Britain. The first of the year was on 10th July and last on 5th September when the roost broke up. There were 55 adults caught, of which 15 were females with brood patches and two were males in breeding condition.

The ringers on No.3 bed had a better year than the last two but a total of just 112 newly ringed was still disappointing. The average since 2004 is 198 new birds. The first were ringed on 31st July and the last on 1st September. Like last year, the hirundine roost didn't really establish itself on the bed.

House Martin

Delichon urbicum

Amber listed

The last of the hirundine species to arrive, the first sighting was of seven on No.3 bed on 11th April. In April there was regular sightings with maximum counts of 22 on the 15th and 40 on the 26th. As has been reported in previous annual reports the local breeding populations have reduced significantly in recent years, reflecting the national decline. Most counts in the summer months were in single figures with a few counts of 20 birds and a maximum of 60 on 5th June and 27th July. In August there was no significant increase and the peak count dropped to 40, seen on No.3 bed on the 19th. The highest count of the year and the final sightings, were of 250 flying south over No.1 bed on 15th September.

Cetti's Warbler

Cettia cetti

The explosive burst of the Cetti's Warbler is now a familiar call at Woolston Eyes with regular records from No.1, No.2 and No.3 beds throughout the year. The majority of records, from every month of the year, were of single males in song with two males reported on frequent dates on No.1 and No.3 beds

and on 23rd May on No.2 bed. Three were in song on No.3 bed on 12th March and 11th October and four were in song there on 19th March, the highest individual count of the year.

A total of 16 was ringed across the Reserve, 10 on No.3 Bed and six on No.1 bed, with seven also retrapped from previous years, giving a total of 23 individuals processed. Both No.1 and No.3 beds provided evidence of breeding, with four recently fledged juveniles on No.3 bed and a single juvenile with some of the flight feathers still in 'pin' on 3rd July, on No.1 bed, as well as three adults in breeding condition, two males and a female.

Long-tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus

Typically for this species, records relating to the winter period at the start of the year and the autumn period at the end of the year concern sightings of foraging flocks. In the first winter period the highest count was of 17 on No.1 bed on 16th January with a single autumn flock of 20 on No.2 bed on 11th November. Reported numbers dropped during the breeding season to single figures but a count of 13 from the northern half of No.4 bed on 11th May is noteworthy.

A combined total of 173 Long-tailed Tits were ringed on the Reserve with 97 on No.3 bed, just one less than the 2009 record and 76 on No.1 bed, the same total as in 2016. A further 51 birds were retrapped from previous years ringing illustrating the residential status of the species. The oldest of the retraps was from 2010 which compares with 43 of the remaining 50 birds ringed in the preceding three years 2014-2016.

The first juvenile was caught on No.3 bed on the relatively early date of 20th May and a more usual date of 16th June on No.1 bed. Over one third of the birds ringed on No.3 bed were juveniles and 11 adults in breeding condition were processed on No.1 bed, six females and five males.

Yellow-browed Warbler

Phylloscopus inornatus

The influx experienced in 2016 was not repeated in 2017, just a single record of the species was reported of a calling bird in the early morning of 3rd October by the Tower Hide on No.3 bed.

Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus collybita

Over-wintering Chiffchaffs are now a common occurrence and a number of such records were received. A single on 14th January from No.2 bed was followed by another from No.1 bed on the 19th while three, possibly four, were reported from Butchersfield on 26th of the month.

The first singing was recorded on 11th March when three males were located on No.3 bed. Numbers rapidly increased to a Woolston record count of 134, across the Reserve during a two day survey on 30th March and 1st April. Other notable counts were of 77 on 6th April and the highest autumn count of 26 during the Migration Watch of 4th September from Butchersfield Tip. Thereafter only singles were reported until the last field record of two, on 18th November on No.3 bed.



Chiffchaff

Andy Weir

A total of 699 Chiffchaff were ringed, a record of 321 on No.3 (the average since 2004 was 166) and 378 on No.1 bed. In addition, a further 28 were retrapped from previous years, the oldest, from No.1 bed in 2012. The first juvenile was ringed on 24th May on No.1 bed, two weeks earlier than in 2016. Thirty-five were caught in breeding condition on No.1 bed, 23 females and 12 males. The last captures were of seven, caught between 5th November and 23rd December, which were presumably going to over winter due to the late dates.

Willow Warbler

Phylloscopus trochilus

Amber listed

This small leaf warbler arrives back from its Sub-Saharan wintering grounds later than the very similar Chiffchaff. The first record at Woolston was two weeks later than Chiffchaff, on 25th March on No.3 bed and by 6th April the species was present across the whole Reserve. Willow Warbler numbers are considerably lower than those for Chiffchaff and subsequent surveys were of single digit counts until mid-April when the high counts of 21 and 20 were reported on 18th and 22nd respectively.

Singing, an important separator for the two species generally stops after breeding and is probably responsible for the reduced number of records in the summer and autumn period. In consequence only single-figure counts were reported until the last field record of one on the Migration Watch on Butchersfield Tip on 4th September.

A total of 203 Willow Warblers was ringed, 161 on No.1 bed, the highest number since 2010 and 42 on No.3 bed, a slightly higher than average number. A further 13 were retrapped from previous years, with the oldest from 24th May 2012 on No.1 bed. The first juvenile was ringed on No.3 bed on 17th June, the second earliest record for the bed. No.1 bed produced 38 birds in breeding condition, 22 females and 16 males and there were five captures in September with the last on 25th September.

Blackcap

Sylvia atricapilla

The presence of this summer migrant was first noted on the Reserve on the south bank of No.3 bed on 21st March, when a male was in song. By mid-April a total of 27 males was singing across the Reserve. Breeding Bird Surveys conducted in May reported 68 singing males, with: 27 on No.3 bed, 24 on No.4 bed, 12 on No.2 bed and 5 on No.1 bed. The last field record was of a male on 31st October on No.4 bed.

It was a very good year for the ringing teams with 696 Blackcaps ringed. On No.3 bed, a record total of 411 was ringed, over 25% higher than the annual average of 321 and 285 were also ringed on No.1 bed, the second best total since 1995. In addition, nine were retrapped from previous years, the oldest being from 2013. The first juveniles were ringed in June, the earliest on No.3 bed on the 9th just one day later than the earliest date on record. The last of the summer residents/ autumn migrants were caught on 16th October but the No.3 bed team caught two late females, one on 5th November and one on 16th December, which perhaps were attempting to over winter.



Juvenile Blackcap

David Bowman

Garden Warbler

Sylvia borin

This secretive migrant is an annual passage and breeding species for Woolston. It is never recorded in large numbers, perhaps the separation of its song from that of the closely similar Blackcap is a factor. Nevertheless, it was recorded across the Reserve, predominately single males in song on territory.

The first record was of a singing male on No.3 bed on 15th April. This was followed by single males principally on the west bank, east bank and Rotary Hide on No.3 bed, on No.2 bed adjacent to the footpath and the Weir, on No.1 bed along the access track and a single record on No.4 bed.

Greater evidence of Garden Warbler presence is usually provided by the ringing data. The species is predominately captured in summer from July onwards with a total of 49 ringed, 25 on No.3 bed, the highest total since 2012 and 24 on No.1 bed. The first was, unusually, in spring, on 10th May on No.1 bed and the last, a more typical date, on 10th September on No.3 bed. Just seven of the 49 captured were adults, five on No.1 bed including a female originally ringed in 2014 and two on No.3 bed, making 86% of captures juveniles.

Lesser Whitethroat

Sylvia curruca

Only one field report of this smart summer migrant was submitted this year of a single on No.3 bed on 6th May.

There were six ringing captures on Nos1 and 3 beds during the year. Just a single male, hatched in 2016, was caught on the north meadow of No.3 bed on 6th May. Interestingly the same bird was recaptured on 24th August in the south meadow before its migration south. No.1 bed fared better with five ringed, the highest total since 2009, when nine were captured. All five were juveniles, ringed between 12th July and 30th August.



Whitethroat

Hazel Rothwell

Whitethroat

Sylvia communis

This common breeding summer migrant can be found throughout the Reserve and the first of the year, a singing male, was reported from the west bank of No.2 bed on 6th April. A Breeding Bird Survey on 26th April found 16 males in song on No.4 bed, with numbers increasing in May with counts of 14 on No. 3 bed on the 2nd, 23 on No.4 bed on 11th and seven on No.2 bed on 23rd. Just two singing males were reported from No.1 bed on the later date of 3rd June. The highest count was of 28 from No.4 bed on 1st June. The latest field record was of two on 2nd September on No.3 bed.

The ringers had a mixed year with 89 ringed: an average number of 63 on No.3 bed but a low 26 birds on No.1 bed. Not many Whitethroat are retrapped from previous years, so it was pleasing to have five recaptures this year. The oldest were singles from 2014, one each from Nos1 and 3 beds. The first juveniles were ringed in June with the first on No.3 bed from the particularly early date of the 17th. The

last were ringed in September with the final one on No.3 bed on 10th September, a week earlier than in 2016.

Grasshopper Warbler

Locustella naevia

Red listed

Grasshopper Warblers remain well-hidden, in dense undergrowth, which make sightings uncommon but the ‘reeling’ song is both distinctive and audible, which helps in the location of this scarce, summer migrant. Small numbers visit and breed annually and in 2017, at least two males held territories on both No.3 and No.1 beds, with another on No.4 bed. There were no records from No.2 bed this year.

The first singing male was on No.3 bed on 3rd April. This was followed by a number of reports, of singles, until mid-April when, on the 21st, two males were recorded on No.3 bed with another two on No.1 bed. These were reported again on the 26th and 28th during Breeding Bird Surveys of the respective beds, along with a single male singing on No.4 bed on the 26th. It is probable that all subsequent records relate to these individuals. The last field report was of a ‘reeling’ male by the Enviroloo in the centre of No.3 bed on 8th July.

Six birds were ringed, three each on No.1 and No.3 beds, with two adults and a juvenile on each bed. Additionally, a male originally ringed in 2016 was retrapped on No.3 bed. Both juveniles ringed on 5th and 20th July were, due to their development and early date, probably locally bred. The last capture was on the late date of 6th September, on No.3 bed.



Grasshopper Warbler

Keith Gallie

Sedge Warbler

Acrocephalus schoenobaenus

This is a common breeding summer migrant which occurs across the Reserve. The first arriving bird was a male singing on 15th April, recorded from the John Morgan Hide on No.3 bed. Subsequent sightings and reports were frequently of single birds but five were recorded on No.1 bed on 1st May, four on No.3 bed on 20th May and five on No.4 bed on 1st June. The last field report was of a single male in song on No.3 bed on 17th July, again from the John Morgan Hide.

A combined total of 173 Sedge Warblers was ringed. The record number of 124 on No.3 was almost twice the average of the last twelve years and numbers on the bed have been steadily increasing over the last decade. In contrast, the numbers on No.1 bed have decreased over the past six years, but appear to be returning to the pre 2010 level of 40-60, with 49 ringed compared with 43 in 2016.

Just two were retrapped from previous years, both on No.3 bed, originally from 2016 and 2015. A French ringed bird was also captured on No.3 bed, on two occasions: firstly on 29th April and then again on 28th May, suggesting breeding on the Reserve. The first juveniles ringed were in July with the earliest on the 10th on No.1 bed and the last of the year was ringed on 6th September and was one of five September captures.

Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus scirpaceus

This is a very common summer migrant which breeds on all four beds. The first returning bird was noted on 8th April, with two in song on No.3 bed, one by the Tower Hide and one on the east bank. By May, the Breeding Bird Surveys recorded the highest counts of: 16 on No.3 bed on the 6th, six on No.4 bed on the 11th and two on No.2 bed on the 23rd. The survey on No.1 bed on 3rd June recorded 15 singing males, an increase from the nine singing males reported on 22nd April.

It was an above average year for the ringing teams with 629 processed, of which 578 were newly ringed, with 329 of these on No.3 bed and 249 on No.1 bed. With such high numbers recaptures from previous years are expected and 21 were retrapped on No.3 bed and 27 on No.1 bed, with the oldest from 16th July 2010. Three which had been ringed at other sites were also caught on No.1 bed, two in Britain and one in France. The first juveniles were ringed in June the earliest on the 26th on No.1 bed. The last capture was on 30th September, on both No.1 and No.3 beds, a typical date. A total of 22 females and 29 males were captured on No.1 bed in breeding condition.

Nuthatch

Sitta europaea

Nuthatches are infrequent but annual visitors, with most records coming from the eastern end of the Reserve. It was pleasing to have a few sightings from No.3 bed, mainly from the south bank and from the adjacent Copse area on No.2 bed. It is likely that the multiple records, from June through to September, relate to the same bird moving around those areas.

The first record of the year, however, was in the more familiar location at the eastern end of the Reserve, at Bollin Point on 21st January. Two were recorded on the Migration Watch on 4th September from Butchersfield Tip and singles were observed on 7th October and 2nd December from the same location.

Three were ringed but, unusually, two were from No.3 bed. These were the first for the bed, a juvenile female on 24th June followed by a male on 29th August, which was subsequently seen and heard regularly by the ringing area. The No.1 bed team caught their 10th bird since ringing started on the eastern end of the Reserve, where the majority of the previous nine have been caught.

Treecreeper

Certhia familiaris

There were five records of Treecreeper on the Reserve, four from No.3 bed and one from No.2 bed. The first was observed in the copse by the south-west corner of No.2 bed on 10th April. The remaining reports were in the autumn, from the south bank of No.3 bed and the copse area of No.2 bed. They involved one associating with a roving flock of tits and crests, on the 6th October, 28th November and the 1st and 5th December. It is possible, location and duration of sightings, that the autumn reports relate to the same individual.

The ringing teams had a record year, with a combined total of 26 ringed. The 14 from No.3 bed was the highest total ever from that bed, whilst the 12 ringed on No.1 bed equalled the record from 2015. Of the 26 ringed 23 were juveniles. The first of these were ringed in June, the 11th on No.3 bed and the 16th on No.1 bed. Just one was retrapped from previous years. None of the three adults were in breeding condition when captured.

Wren

Troglodytes troglodytes

Wrens are common residents and occur across the Reserve throughout the year. The maximum counts for each of the beds occurred during Breeding Bird Surveys during April and May, totalling 123 singing males, divided as follows: 21 on No.1 bed on 22nd April, 34 on No.3 bed on 2nd May, 46 on the northern sector of No.4 bed on 11th May and 22 on No.2 bed on 23rd May.

There were 191 ringed, 115 on No.3 bed, the second highest ever total, just short of the 118 from 2014 and 76 on No.1 bed, the same total as in 2016. In addition, 26 were retrapped from previous years. The original ringing year of the retraps was: 20 from 2016, three from 2015, 2 from 2014 and one from 2013, providing an indication of the longevity of our second smallest resident species. The first juveniles were ringed in June, on the 11th on No.3 bed and the 21st on No.1 bed.

Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Red listed

Starling records usually relate to roosts which develop in the reed beds, fly-overs or sightings from the urban areas adjacent to the Reserve. A small roost started on No.1 bed, in the eastern reed bed in December 2016 and by 16th January had reached an estimated 8,000. The roost developed further to a maximum of 20,000 by the 23rd but broke up rapidly in the last week of January, reducing to 2,000 by 1st February and completely dispersing by 3rd February. In contrast, on 2nd January on No.3 bed, a flock of c.500 was seen flying east from the bed at dusk, after being harassed by Sparrowhawks. Then a roost of c.5000 birds formed on 14th January but was not repeated on subsequent nights. Thereafter, just small numbers continued to roost on No.3 bed, with c.50 on the 18th, 21st and 25th January, the last

winter record. A feeding flock of c.100 was reported on 19th February from Butchersfield Tip, presumably utilising the adjacent farmland. Thereafter only single digit numbers were reported until a flock of c.200 was watched murmuring over No.3 bed on the evening of 30th May. A small roost of c.240 was seen leaving the reed bed on No.3 bed at dawn on 21st June and in July, c.50 were seen leaving a roost on No.1 on 5th and a similar number came into roost on No.3 bed on the 13th. A record of six Starlings on the John Morgan Hide feeders, on the 5th August, was unusual.

Autumn records started with 80 leaving a roost on No.3 bed on 2nd November. This was followed by the Migration Watch total of 8,316 passing over Butchersfield Tip on 4th November and 70 coming into roost on No.3 bed on the 16th. Sixty then flew north over No.1 bed, to feed on the adjacent agricultural fields, on 4th December and 200 were finally reported at Bollin Point on 27th December.

Starlings are seldom ringed at Woolston and 2017 was another blank year.

Blackbird

Turdus merula

Another very common resident, found across the whole Reserve. Records started with a Reserve-wide count of six on No.3 bed, four on No.2 bed, eight on No.1 bed and nine at Bollin Point on 14th January. High counts from the Breeding Birds Surveys were of: 21 on No.2 bed on 4th April, 16 on No.3 bed on 6th May, incorporating four in song and 17 present, four on No.1 bed on 3rd June and 26 on No.4 bed on 1st June. A combined count of 85 for Nos 3,2 and 1 beds, plus Bollin Point, on 11th November was the highest day count of the year, while the Migration Watch of 2nd December produced a count of 39 and was the last significant record of the year.

A total of 108 Blackbirds was ringed, 47 on No.3 bed and 61 on No.1 bed. Nine were retrapped from previous years, the oldest being originally ringed in 2012, on No.3 bed. The first juvenile was ringed on the early date of 20th May on No.3 bed, while it was 5th July before a juvenile was ringed on No.1 bed. Eighteen birds in breeding condition, 10 females and eight males, were caught on No.1 bed.

Fieldfare

Turdus pilaris

Red listed

The majority of records for this autumn/winter visitor were from the eastern end of the Reserve, as this area is on a flightpath between rough pasture to the south and agricultural land to the north. The first report was of 15 flying over the eastern end of No.1 bed on 20th January, followed by single digit counts as the month progressed, until a significant flock of c.200 was over Butchersfield Tip on 1st February. A smaller flock of 50 was reported in the same location on 8th February and three were seen leaving a roost from the east reed bed on No.1 bed on 10th February. A second large flock of c.250 was again over Butchersfield on the 19th February, while three on 1st April were the last of the first winter period.

The first autumn arrival was when flew 15 over No.1 bed on 16th October. No.3 bed then saw 24 on the 2nd November, before the 11th saw the arrival of large flocks with c.220 feeding in Hawthorn around Rixton Paddocks and the lane beyond. A circuit of No.3 bed, Bollin Point and Rixton Paddocks produced a total of 430 on the 18th. The Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on the morning of

2nd December noted 440 but the highest count of the year was on 30th December, when c.500 birds were reported, again from Butchersfield Tip.

Fieldfare are not often caught in the ringers' nets but a lone representative of the species obliged for the second successive year when one was ringed on No.1 bed on 1st December, only the seventh to be ringed since 2002.

Song Thrush

Turdus philomelos

Red listed

Song Thrush is a widespread resident, frequently encountered but more often located through its distinctive song. Seldom seen in large numbers records are usually of single figure counts. On 1st February a Reserve wide count of eight was made, increasing to 21 birds, including 19 singing males, on 21st February. Breeding Bird Surveys in spring recorded maximum numbers of singing males on the individual beds as follows: four on No.1 bed on 1st April, five on No.2 bed on 4th April, four on No.3 bed on 2nd May and 14 on No.4 bed on 1st June. The Migration Watch of 7th October recorded nine, the highest count of the three watches undertaken.

It was a poor year for the ringers, with a combined total of just 30 ringed, 20 on No.3 bed and 10 on No.1 bed. A further three were retrapped all of which were originally ringed in 2016. Only four locally bred juveniles were ringed, two on each bed, with the first of these on 16th June on No.1 bed. Four males and a single female were caught on No.1 bed in breeding condition.

Redwing

Turdus iliacus

Red listed

This second, common winter visiting thrush, often associates with Fieldfare and is widely reported flying over the Reserve or feeding in the Hawthorn scattered around the perimeter. The first report of the year was of 15 which came into roost, on 2nd January, on No.3 bed. A slightly larger group of 20 flew over No.1 bed on 21st January but only small numbers were reported until the end of March when a total of c.450 flew east over No.3 bed on 1st April. This movement was the last report of the first winter period.

The first autumn arrivals were reported in October, with 15 feeding on Hawthorn along the Canal track on No.1 bed on the 6th. The first large flock, of 150, was reported flying south over the eastern end of the same bed on the 16th followed by regular movements of 100 – 200 birds through the remainder of October. Two movements of c.240 were observed in early November, on No.3 bed, and during the Migration Watch on Butchersfield Tip on the 4th. A count of 330 on a circuit of the Reserve was recorded on the 11th. A movement of c.500, was noted over No.1 bed, during the morning of 17th and a Reserve wide count of 675 was reported on the 18th, the highest count of the autumn/winter period. Between the dates of these larger movements, reports of up to 100 were regularly submitted. In general, numbers were lower in December, with the exception of c.220 noted during the Migration Watch on the 2nd. The last significant sighting of the year was of 120, on the 20th, flying south over the east end of No.1 bed.

It was an exceptional year for the ringing teams with 376 ringed, 173 on No.3 bed and 203 on No.1 bed. In addition, the first ever retrapped birds between winters were made, with two on No.1 bed and one on No.3 bed. The original ringing dates of these birds were 8th October and 23rd November 2016 and 18th October 2014. An indication of the build-up of the numbers of Redwing from first arrival in October followed by their dispersal to wider feeding areas can be seen in the monthly ringing numbers, 106 in October, 211 in November and 59 in December. Analysis of the No.1 bed ringing records also identified that the majority of captures, in the early days to the end of October were adults. Thereafter, first years outnumbered adults through to the year end.

Mistle Thrush

Turdus viscivorus

Red listed

Mistle Thrushes occur but are uncommon, hence the low number of nine records submitted. Reports are usually of singles or pairs, with the first being a single on 6th February, on No.3 bed. Two were then on Butchersfield Tip on 6th April. One was then in suitable breeding habitat, on No.1 bed, on 3rd June. Two were noted on the south bank of No.3 bed on 18th July and one was in the Copse between Nos 3 and 2 beds on 6th October. Four flew south over the eastern end of No.1 bed on 2nd August and the Migration Watch from the adjacent Butchersfield Tip, on 4th September, produced a count of four, with two also on the Watch of 7th October. Another two were at Bollin Point on 11th November which was the last sighting of the year.

Robin

Erithacus rubecula

A very common resident across the Reserve with many reports received. Surveys of the whole Reserve on 4th January, 1st February and 1st March recorded 19, 82 and 75 respectively. Breeding Bird Surveys located 120 as follows: 41, including 40 singing males, on No.4 bed on 23rd March, 35 singing on No.3 bed on 25th March, 28 singing on No.2 bed on 4th April and 16 singing on No.1 bed on 3rd June. The highest day count of the year was of 97 on a walk round the whole Reserve on 25th October.

A total of 176 Robins was ringed, 106 on No.3 bed and 70 on No.1 bed. Additionally, 52 were retrapped from previous years, the oldest from 10th July 2011 on No.1 bed. The first juvenile was ringed on the early date of 8th May.

Redstart

Phoenicurus phoenicurus

Amber listed

This vibrant passage flycatcher, although uncommon, is usually noted annually. Just a single record was received this year, from No.4 bed on 26th August, when one was flushed from a bush along the central track.

Stonechat

Saxicola rubicola

Stonechats are uncommon but annual passage visitors to Woolston and four records were received of this attractive chat, three in spring and one in autumn. A male was located on No.1 bed on 21st February, closely followed by a female, by the Rotary Hide on No.3 bed, on the 28th. A second male arrived and spent some time in front of the John Morgan Hide, on No.3 bed, on 28th March. The only autumn sighting was on 23rd October and again entertained watchers in front of the John Morgan Hide on No.3 bed.



Stonechat on No.3 bed

David Bowman

Wheatear

Oenanthe oenanthe

Like Redstarts, Wheatears are uncommon passage visitors, recorded annually in small numbers. Three were reported, all during spring passage: two on No.1 bed on 1st April which could have related to the same bird, a male, and one on No.3 bed which flew across the centre of the bed before briefly landing, on 19th April.

Dunnock*Prunella modularis**Amber listed*

A common resident, usually unobtrusive, though there were many single-figure counts throughout the year. Twelve were noted during a walk around the whole Reserve on 1st March. As usual, the maximum counts were made during the annual Breeding Bird Surveys, with: 10 on No.3 bed, five of which were singing males, on 25th March, three singing males on No.1 bed on 1st April, 10 on No.2 bed on 4th April, including five singing males and seven on the northern transect of No.4 bed on 11th May. A walk of bed Nos 3, 2 and 1 and on to Bollin Point produced an autumn count of 15 on 11th November.

Out of a total 135 Dunnocks ringed, 110 were from No.3 bed, just 1 short of a record total, while No.1 bed had a more typical year, with 25 ringed. A combined total of 37 was retrapped from previous years with the oldest originally from 2011. The first juvenile (just fledged, from the stage of the feather development) was ringed on 6th May on No.3 bed, the earliest ever date by over three weeks

House Sparrow*Passer domesticus**Red listed*

House Sparrows breed in the houses to the north and south of the Reserve and are most often seen near Woolston Weir or on the Canal Track by No.4 bed. On 15th April four were on the latter and included a male carrying food, while one was at the same site on 25th May. Two were then seen on the south bank of No.3 bed on 9th June, one of which was a male carrying either food or nest material. The year's highest count, of 20, came from No.2 bed on 21st November and finally, a female was on the Morgan Hide feeders on 11th December.

Tree Sparrow*Passer montanus**Red listed*

Once a regular sight at Woolston, then absent for many years, Tree Sparrows are now a scarce visitor. There were two sightings this year, with two feeding in the No.3 bed seed crop on 4th February and unusually, seven on the Morgan Hide feeders on the morning of 26th August.

In addition, there was one ringing record, from No.1 bed, when one was caught on 1st September. A bird of the year, it was still in post juvenile moult.

Yellow Wagtail*Motacilla flava**Red listed*

Although small numbers breed on arable land to the north and south of the Reserve, this declining wagtail is a scarce passage visitor, with just two records this year. One headed south over No.1 bed on 11th August and another was noted, also passing southwards, during the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 4th September.

Grey Wagtail

Motacilla cinerea

Red listed

This attractive wagtail is present year-round in small numbers, occasionally breeds and there is increasing evidence, since the adoption of a particularly effective tape lure by the ringing teams, of a previously un-noted autumn passage. There was the possibility of breeding at three suitable sites across the Reserve, with activity noted at Latchford Locks, Thelwall Viaduct and Woolston Weir, though no proof of breeding was obtained. Visible passage was observed during the autumn, with 10 south over No.1 bed on 15th September, four over the same bed on 4th October, four over No.3 bed on the 7th and five over No.1 bed on the 18th.

The total of 28 ringed was typical of the numbers caught since the adoption of tape lures. On No.1 bed it was the second best year since 1995 with 18 newly ringed. The first was caught on 30th August and the last on 9th October, all were birds of the year and one was still in post juvenile moult. Ten were ringed on No.3 bed between 22nd August and 4th October, a record, narrowly beating last year's nine. All were juveniles.

Pied Wagtail

Motacilla alba

This, our commonest wagtail, is present throughout the year, occasionally breeds and can form winter roosts in the reed-beds. No more than three were seen, on many dates, until eight were noted, feeding in the Horse Paddocks immediately to the north of No.2 bed, on two dates in mid-September. Seventeen then passed over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 7th October, with 20 over No.1 bed on the 11th. From mid-October onwards came signs of a roost forming on No.3 bed, with, for example, a pre-roost gathering of 45 on the nesting rafts on the 19th and 25 flying directly into the roost on 2nd November. Numbers then began to rise rapidly, with 160 roosting on 16th November and a minimum of 240 on the evening of the 18th.

Tree Pipit

Anthus trivialis

Red listed

All records came from the No.1 bed ringing team with the four ringed regarded as a reasonable total, the first was on 21st August and the last three on 1st September.

Meadow Pipit

Anthus pratensis

Amber listed

Meadow Pipit is a declining upland breeder, which is mainly seen at the eastern end of the Reserve during passage periods and into the winter. One, on No.1 bed on 20th January, was the only record from the first winter period. Seven, heading north over No.1 bed on 13th March, was the first sign of spring passage. Small numbers were then noted in early September, including the unusual sight of one landing on the Morgan Hide scrape on No.3 bed on the 5th and another single over the same bed on the 7th. The first sizeable movement was of 66, flying south over No.1 bed, on 20th September, with 100

south over the same bed on the 22nd. Counts from October included 83 during the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on the 7th and 100 over No.1 bed on the 15th. November saw 20 on No.1 bed on the 3rd, 61 during the Migration Watch on the 4th and 20 again on No.1 bed on the 15th. The last sighting of the year, unusually, was of two feeding in the weedy south-west corner of No.2 bed on 5th December.

The ringing teams caught 26, compared with 91 the previous year. For No.1 bed it was the poorest year since 2012 with just 25 ringed. Spring was not as productive as the previous year with only three caught, all on 24th March. The first late Summer/Autumn captures were made from 15th September and the poor passage had ended with a late one on 18th October. Just two adults were caught during this period compared with 29 the previous year. One, a juvenile, was ringed on No.3 bed on 28th September and they remain a scarce visitor to this bed.

Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs

Chaffinches are common residents and breed on all four beds. Maxima from the early part of the year were of: 30 on No.3 bed on 21st January, 35 at Bollin Point on the same date, 25 again at Bollin Point on 6th February and 26 on No.3 bed on 21st March. The Breeding Bird Survey located a total of 25, distributed as follows: three, including one in song, on No.1 bed, seven in song on No.2 bed, two in song on No.3 bed, and 13, including five in song, on No.4 bed. Highest counts from the autumn and winter were of: 60 on No.3 bed on 2nd November, a similar number from Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 4th November, 80 at Bollin Point on 11th November, 120 across the whole Reserve on 9th December and 100 around the No.3 bed seed crop on the 30th of the month.

The 535 ringed indicated an exceptional year for this species, compared with the 276 from 2016 and even exceeding the 401 from 2014. The No.1 bed total of 141 was the best since 2005 and the second best since 1995. On this bed a further 13 were re-trapped from previous years, the oldest from 9th April 2010. Just five were caught in breeding condition, all males, and the first juvenile was caught on 22nd May. A poor Spring was more than compensated for by an excellent autumn, with 87 caught in November/December. For No.3 bed it was a record year, with 394 ringed, compared with an average of 185 and a previous record of 259 in 2010. The first juvenile was ringed on 26th May, the earliest recorded date (four days earlier than the previous earliest record set in 2009). There were re-traps from five previous years, the oldest from 2009. This individual has been handled on the following dates 28/11/09 when it was first ringed, 23/11/13 and 18/11/17. These dates point to it being a regular winterer at Woolston. It has a wing length of 83.5mm and is therefore unlikely to be of Scandinavian origin, as Scandinavian birds have much longer wings, of 90 mm or more.

Brambling

Fringilla montifringilla

It was a disappointing year for this striking Scandinavian finch, with little sign of the expected spring passage and only small numbers present in autumn and winter. The only spring record was of a male, under the Morgan Hide feeders on No.3 bed, on 18th March. Return passage was first noted on 16th October, with two on No.3 bed and a similar number a couple of days later. From then through to the end of the year, a handful were present on many dates, all on No.3 bed. Maxima were: six on 11th November, eight on the 14th, six on 5th December, eight on the 13th and five on the penultimate day of the year.

The 40 ringed was a moderate total, compared with the previous year's 110. On No.1 bed, seven were ringed between 18th November and 15th December, four males and three females. On No.3 bed, 33 were ringed, which is slightly above the average of 25 since 2004. The first of these was caught on the 30th October and the last on 23rd December. The highlight of the year for this species occurred on 15th November when one wearing a Norwegian ring was caught on the north meadow. This is the first foreign Brambling to be caught on the bed.



Brambling at the John Morgan hide feeders

Hazel Rothwell

Greenfinch

Chloris chloris

This is our commonest finch by far, present all year round, breeding on all four beds and forming large feeding flocks after the breeding season. Greenfinch populations declined during the late 1970s and early 1980s but increased dramatically during the 1990s. A recent decline in numbers has been linked to an outbreak of trichomonosis, a parasite-induced disease which prevents the birds from feeding properly, though there has been little sign of this decline at Woolston. From mid-January to late March a flock of between 45 and 65 frequented the feeding stations on No.3 bed on a daily basis.

The Breeding Bird Survey produced the following counts: three in song on No.1 bed, nine in song on No.2 bed, eight, including two in song, on No.3 bed and seven in song on No.4 bed. Following the breeding season, from mid-August to the end of the year, a flock of in excess of 100 was regularly present on No.3 bed. This may represent a significant underestimate, as feeding flocks roam around the bed, visiting both feeding stations and are thus difficult to count accurately. The highest estimates for the year were of 120 on 7th October and again on 27th December. There is also, usually, a large flock

visiting the feeders on No.1 bed, but no records were received from that bed, though the ringing data gives an idea of the numbers present.

The excellent total of 1,074 was ringed, compared with an above average 711 in 2016. On No.1 bed, it was the best year since 2013, with 438 ringed. A further 46 were caught that had either been ringed in previous years or on No.3 bed, with three others having been ringed elsewhere in Britain. The oldest to be re-trapped was first ringed on 6th October 2013. Just 12 were caught in breeding condition, nine males and three females, while the first juvenile was caught on 22nd May. On No.3 bed, it was an outstanding year, with 636 newly ringed. This is the highest number of Greenfinches ringed on No.3 bed since the exceptional 1199 in 2003. The average since 2004 has been 302 new birds. The first juvenile was ringed on 2nd June which is a typical date.



Goldfinch

David Bowman

Goldfinch

Carduelis carduelis

Goldfinches are present year-round, with a few breeding and some sizeable post-breeding flocks forming. The maxima from early in the year were of 18 across the whole Reserve on 4th January and 20 on No.2 bed on 1st February. The Breeding Bird Survey found: two in song on No.1 bed, five present with one in song on No.2 bed, five present with one carrying nest material on No.3 bed and six present with one in song on No.4 bed. August then saw 25 around the Sandpit Pond on the 6th and 40 on the 20th. The year's highest count came from Butchersfield Tip, during the Migration Watch on 4th

September, with 141 counted during the morning. There were then three more notable counts before the end of the year, with 60 on No.4 bed on 7th October, 45 during the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 4th November and 85 at Bollin Point on 11th November.

The 27 ringed during the year was well above average. On No.1 bed the highest number since 2010, 12, was ringed. Just one, a male, was in breeding condition and the first of five juveniles was caught on 12th July. The No.3 bed ringing team achieved a record total for the bed, with 15 ringed between 3rd June and 28th December. This compares with an average of just six per year since 2004.

Siskin

Carduelis spinus

The UK breeding population of Siskins is steadily expanding, with numbers augmented in autumn and winter by influxes of continental migrants. At Woolston, it remains a passage and wintering species in variable numbers. During the first half of the year up to three were present, on eight dates, between 21st January and 6th May. Return passage was first noted on 7th October, when two flew over Butchersfield Tip during the monthly Migration Watch and a flock of 40 was observed dropping into Alders around the North Meadow on No.3 bed. While one or two were noted on several dates after this, the only significant counts from later in the year came with 19 during the Migration Watch on 4th November and eight on No.3 bed on the 11th of the month.

From a ringing point of view, it was a below-average year. Just one was caught on No.1 bed, a male, on 13th March. This is a rare species to ring on No.3 bed and a single adult male was ringed on 25th October, was just the sixth since 2004.

Linnet

Carduelis cannabina

Red listed

Linnets are present all year round and breed in small numbers, mainly where stands of Gorse occur. The only notable flock from the first winter period was of 20 on No.2 bed on 21st February. The annual Breeding Bird Survey located 19 in suitable habitat, distributed as follows: 6 on No.1 bed, including one male in song, 10 on No.2 bed, again with one male in song, none on No.3 bed and four on No.4 bed. While smaller numbers could be encountered right across the Reserve after the breeding season, the maxima were of: 40 on No.2 bed on 7th August, 60, which moved regularly between No.4 bed and the seed crop on No.3 bed between 7th October and 2nd November and 100 which were perched in trees around the seed crop on 6th November.

Few Linnets find their way into the Ringing Teams' nets, so the 13 ringed this year was a decent total. Three came from No.1 bed, including two adults, a male and a female in breeding condition, caught on 10th May. The final one, a juvenile, was ringed on 21st July. On No.3 bed, the 10 ringed was a record total. A very recently fledged juvenile was ringed on 28th May, the first confirmed breeding of this species in the centre of the bed, though breeding has previously been confirmed from the perimeter of the bed. The remainder were ringed between 30th October and 28th November and were part of a large flock regularly feeding in the seed crop.

Lesser Redpoll

Carduelis cabaret

Red listed

This agile, small finch is most often seen feeding high up on Alder cones, during passage and winter periods. There were six records of one or two from January through to mid-March, all from No.3 bed, except for two at Bollin Point on 14th January. Return passage was first noted on 15th July, when one arrived on No.3 bed. Highest counts from the remainder of the year were of 10 on No.1 bed on 4th October, 16 on No.3 bed on the 23rd of the month and 10 on No.4 bed on 9th December.

From a ringing perspective the 68 ringed was about average. On No.1 bed, it wasn't quite as good a year as 2016 but the 40 ringed was a reasonable total. One was re-trapped that had been previously ringed on 16th October 2015, while another re-trap originated from elsewhere in Britain. Just one adult, a female, was caught in breeding condition and the first juvenile was ringed on 30th September. The species tends not to summer on the bed with the captures from two distinct time periods, the first from February to mid-April and the second from late August to late November. On No.3 bed, 28 were ringed compared with an average of 26, the first on 25th March and then the remainder between 7th October and 10th December.

Bullfinch

Pyrrhula pyrrhula

Amber listed

Despite a steady national decline, this shy, colourful finch is surprisingly common across the Reserve. The highest counts from early in the year were of seven on No.2 bed on 4th January and eight at Bollin Point on the 14th. They were then a common sight, in small numbers, at the Morgan Hide feeding station on most days right through to the breeding season. The Breeding Bird Surveys located 19 in suitable habitat, across all four beds, including a male in song on No.2 bed on 4th April. Distribution was as follows: No.1 bed four present; No.2 bed three, including a male in song and a pair; No.3 bed, three present; No.4 bed, nine present including four pairs. Highest counts from the rest of the year all came from the Migration Watches on Butchersfield Tip. These were of 11 on 7th October, 15 on 4th November and 10 on 2nd December.

The true story of the occurrence of Bullfinches at Woolston, however, comes from the ringing data. A remarkable 442 were ringed on Nos.1 and 3 beds during the year, far exceeding the record of 264 from 2015. On No.1 bed 145 were ringed during the year compared to the previous record of 94 during 2016. A further 37 were caught from previous years with the oldest from 21st July 2012. An indication of the numbers which might be breeding in the locality came from the 38 which were in breeding condition, including 15 females and 23 males. The first juvenile was ringed on 31st May.

On No.3 bed the 297 ringed was a record for the bed, far exceeding the 2015 figure of 182. This compares with an annual average, since 2004, of 117. The first juvenile was ringed on 11th June, about two weeks later than last year, but the breeding season went on for a considerable time. An un-sexable juvenile bird was caught on the late date of 16th September. There were re-traps from 2016 (44), 2015 (13), 2014 (2) and 2013 (3). Including re-traps 359 different Bullfinches were therefore handled on No.3 bed during the year.

Hawfinch*Coccothraustes coccothraustes**Red listed*

This, the UK's largest finch, is a very scarce visitor to the Reserve. Despite the continuing decline in national breeding numbers, 2017 saw an unprecedented, UK-wide arrival of continental birds, presumably in response to a failure in their food crops. It looked for a while as if Woolston might miss out on this influx but on 25th October a large finch which dropped in on No.1 bed, close to where a Hawfinch tape was being played in a ringing ride, was thought to be one. Then, on 16th December on No.3 bed, two were seen to land briefly in a tree in the centre of the bed before flying away over the Morgan Hide.

Yellowhammer*Emberiza citrinella**Red listed*

Despite the fact that the surrounding farmland holds quite a few breeding pairs, this colourful bunting is a scarce visitor throughout the year. There were just five sightings, all from the eastern end of the Reserve or the adjacent farmland. On 21st January six, three males and three females, were in the lane to the east of Rixton Paddocks, while on 17th February two were in trees near the No.1 bed feeding station. On 14th April one was on Butchersfield Tip, with five recorded at the same site during the Migration Watch on 9th December. Finally, two were also over the Tip on 9th December.

Reed Bunting*Emberiza schoeniclus**Amber listed*

Originally a species of wetland margins, in recent years Reed Buntings have also adapted to breeding in farmland crops. Numbers breeding on the Reserve have declined steadily over the past couple of decades, reflecting the national situation. Although they are easy to overlook in winter, it was unusual to receive only three records from the early winter period, all from No.3 bed, with no more than three present and no winter roosts located. The spring breeding bird surveys located a maximum of 16 singing males, slightly down on the previous year's 18, with: eight on No.1 bed, one on No.2 bed, three on No.3 bed and four on No.4 bed. In addition, a minimum of eight were present in suitable habitat across all four beds. Breeding was confirmed on 21st June, when one was observed carrying food into a suitable nest site. Although odd ones were noted on several dates in the second half of the year, the only significant sightings were of: 13 feeding in the seed-rich south-west corner of No.2 bed on 11th November and 30 leaving a roost on No.1 bed at dawn on 20th December.

As with many of the passerines, the ringing data gives a more accurate picture of prevalence than do sight records. From a ringing perspective the 148 ringed was considered a good total, though down on the 174 ringed in 2016. On No.1 bed it was an excellent year with 109 ringed, the highest total since 2010. A further 28 were caught that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest were two males both ringed on 26th June 2009! A further two were originally ringed elsewhere in Britain. There were 12 caught in breeding condition, three females and nine males and the first juvenile was ringed on 3rd July. It was a different story on No.3 bed as, after last year's record total of 102, just 39 were ringed, compared

with an average of 52. Only three juveniles were caught in plumage indicative of local breeding. Four were re-trapped from 2016, four from 2015 and one from 2014.

Saker Falcon

Falco cherrug

On 21st November a large falcon, presumed to be an escape of either this species or a Saker/Gyr cross, chased a small male Peregrine which it dwarfed over the east end of No.1 bed.

WeBS COUNTS 2017

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 been contributing data to this survey since 1978. Counts from over five hundred sites are analysed by the BTO and used to assess species' trends and to aid in 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	9	6	10	21		7	7	10	5
Great Crested Grebe	1	3	12	7		0	3	8	12
Black-necked Grebe	0	0	0	9		0	0	0	0
Cormorant	17	27	4	6		6	15	15	15
Grey Heron	2	3	3	4		4	11	3	4
Mute Swan	9	23	18	27		57	22	16	31
Shelduck	20	40	21	26		0	0	18	7
Greylag Gose	0	0	10	6		0	0	1	1
Canada Goose	41	31	19	38		20	72	7	36
Wigeon	0	0	0	0		0	7	2	2
Gadwall	18	29	53	59		223	37	8	40
Teal	1000	828	192	24		101	189	406	760
Mallard	48	75	45	54		115	88	106	113
Pintail	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0
Shoveler	47	85	40	40		17	44	52	33
Pochard	3	17	44	42		0	0	1	2
Tufted Duck	264	291	226	283		50	105	296	615
Goldeneye	4	0	0	0		0	0	9	2
Goosander	0	0	0	0		0	0	4	0
Ruddy Duck	0	0	0	1		0	0	0	0
Water Rail	1	0	0	6		1	1	2	0
Moorhen	60	46	28	30		49	32	57	28
Coot	14	28	31	54		33	40	8	32
Kingfisher	0	0	0	1		5	1	0	0
Oystercatcher	0	0	2	1		0	0	0	0
Lapwing	14	0	2	4		271	115	0	0
Black-tailed Godwit	0	0	0	0		27	40	7	0
Redshank	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0
Jack Snipe	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	1
Woodcock	1	0	0	0		0	0	1	1
Snipe	0	2	0	3		12	5	1	0
Black-headed Gull	20	25	610	600		44	104	20	78
Mediterranean Gull	0	0	0	2		0	0	0	0
Common Gull	3	0	0	2		0	1	1	0
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	3	0	2		3	0	0	1
Herring Gull	0	0	0	0		0	0	1	0
Common Tern	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0

WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2017

Michael Miles

Ringling operations in 2017 were carried out in two areas of the Reserve: the east end of No. 1 bed and the centre of No.3 bed.

It was a record year for ringling at Woolston with 8,578 birds of 60 species newly ringed. This is a 26% increase on the 6,787 birds of 66 species ringed in 2016 and 57% ahead of the 10 year average. Whilst 60 species is below the record variety ringed last year, it is ahead of the 10 year average of 56. This exceptional achievement is the result of three positive factors. Firstly, ringling effort was at record levels. On No.1 bed John Blundell and David Riley were, between them, ringling on 143 days in 2017. On some of these visits they were assisted by Phil Guest. The 2016 comparison is that some ringling took place on 146 days. On No.3 bed after 2015 was reduced to 56 ringling days by a combination of theft, vandalism and illness, in 2016 effort returned, to a more normal 82 ringling days and in 2017 some ringling took place on 121 days. A factor in the increase was that George Dunbar achieved his Ringling Permit which allowed him to ring independently when others were not available. Overlying these changes is the fact that several members of the team are in what might be described at the “window of opportunity”, being old enough to have the time to commit and just about young enough to be moving around unaided. The second positive factor is that very few ringling sessions were thwarted or curtailed by adverse weather and finally, it appears to have been a reasonable breeding season for a number of species.

One of the highlights of 2017 was the continuing success of the fixed duck trap on No.3 Bed, where 148 Teal and a single Mallard were ringed. Although this probably represents about one quarter of all the Teal ringed in the U.K., the particular value of the trap comes from the subsequent recapture of previously ringed birds. There were 99 of these in 2017. The latest year for which national figures are available is 2016 when there were 181 re-traps of Teal in the U.K. and 100 of these were at Woolston. It is from such recaptures that survival estimates can be calculated. On 3rd February 2018 a female Teal was trapped for the fifth consecutive winter. Numerous similar examples demonstrate that Woolston is the regular wintering site for these birds. We await a recovery on the breeding grounds (somewhere in arctic Russia) to give a clue as to where “our” birds breed. In the case of ducks, such recoveries inevitably come from hunters and in 2017 Woolston-ringed birds were shot in Denmark and locally in Lymm (two), Arley, High Legh and Parbold. It is striking how much wildfowling takes place within 10 kilometres of Woolston. Diving ducks rarely enter the trap and the only Tufted Duck ringed in 2017 flew into a net set for Green Sandpipers. A recent development on No.3 bed is the occurrence of sizeable “crèches” of Canada Goose goslings, being shepherded around the mown paths by a few noisy and aggressive adults, the mown paths being exactly the right height grass to attract them. The younger fitter members of the team intercepted seven goslings for ringling, just one having been ringed in the previous 37 years. Coot do not enter the trap very often and just one, an adult female, was ringed. Moorhens are far more tolerant and the 21 ringed was a record. It was a blank year for Water Rail, which are widespread on the Reserve but trapping effort was very low.

Woolston’s second free flying Common Buzzard was ringed on No.3 bed on 3rd June, the first having been ringed on No.1 bed on 17th June 2016. We would like to think this would become an annual occurrence but in truth a bird as large and powerful as a buzzard very rarely “sticks” in a mist net. The same is true of the larger female Sparrowhawks, so it was no surprise that all 12 ringed were males.

This is our largest annual total and eleven of them were juveniles, indicating successful local breeding. To complete the raptor picture two adult Kestrels were ringed on No.3 bed in June, the first since a single on No.1 bed in 2014.

On No.3 bed the seasonal net across the channel by the duck trap was deployed on seven occasions, making 13 captures including: Green Sandpipers, Kingfishers, Reed Warblers Tufted Duck and singles of Wren, Chiffchaff, Great Tit and a Dunnock that must have been well outside its “comfort zone”. The notable absentee was Common Sandpiper and just four Green Sandpipers were ringed during a moderate autumn passage. Although two of these were juveniles, nationally ringing of this species detected a low proportion of juvenile birds in 2017, perhaps indicating a poor breeding season. To complete the wader picture, a single Common Snipe was ringed on No.3 bed on 15th April, the first since 2014.

Whilst seven Woodpigeons ringed was a typical year, it was a record year for Stock Doves with two squabs ringed in an owl box on No.1, while the two free-flying birds caught on No.1 bed and the 11 netted at the feeders on No.3 bed were all judged to be adults. (The latter feed on the broken seeds that fall from the feeders). It was also a record year for Kingfishers with 17 ringed, 16 of these being birds of the year, implying successful breeding somewhere along the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal. For the third year running a Barn Owl was ringed on No.1 bed. It was a year of contrasting fortunes for Great Spotted Woodpeckers, with just four ringed on No.1 bed but a record 19 ringed on No.3 bed. There were 19 juveniles ringed across the Reserve, so it must have been a reasonable breeding season. An adult re-trapped on No.1 bed had been ringed on 26th May 2012. Two Magpies were ringed which is fairly typical but Jays had their worst year since 2004, with just eight ringed. Admittedly, six of these were birds of the year but the first of these was ringed on 29th July and they are not obviously locally hatched.

It was the second record year in succession for Goldcrests with 517 birds ringed just topping the 502 in 2016. Although we catch small numbers of adults in the first part of the year and enough “summer juveniles” to indicate successful local breeding, the large majority of birds are caught on autumn passage and will be a mixture of British birds and continental migrants. In 2017 just 21 of the 517 ringed were caught before August 13th. With so many Goldcrests on the Reserve it was no surprise that two Firecrests were trapped on No.1 bed, the first year that more than one has been caught on the bed.

Both Blue Tits and Great Tits enjoyed a successful breeding season in the nest boxes, with 161 chicks ringed on No.3 Bed and 83 on No.1 bed. These species are usually single-brooded, so it was a notable occurrence when a pair of Great Tits raised a second brood of three chicks in the box where they had raised their first brood. The first brood was of only two chicks and they grew fast and fledged early because of the lack of competition for the food the parents brought in. This “easy” parenting and early fledging date left the adults with sufficient time and condition to try again. Coal Tits continue to establish themselves at Woolston. The 16 ringed on No.1 bed was a slight increase on the 14 in 2016 whilst, on No.3 bed, after a blank in 2016 a total of 13 Coal Tits was ringed. The first juvenile on each bed was ringed on 3rd June and these are probably locally hatched birds. It was an average year for Willow Tits, with 37 ringed, compared with a ten year average of 34. Juveniles accounted for 27 of those ringed. A notable re-trap on No.1 bed was of one originally ringed on 14th August 2009. The population appears stable and successful aided, of course, by sympathetic habitat management. A further 40 faecal samples were collected and forwarded to the R.S.P.B. for their project to study the diet of this species.

It was “groundhog day” on the hirundine front. For the second year running a good-sized roost formed, on No.1 bed in August. The ringers sampled it regularly, with the result that 35 Sand Martins and 456 Swallows were ringed. By contrast no significant roost formed on No.3 bed and whilst the 24 Sand Martins and 112 Swallows ringed was a slightly better return than in 2016, these catches are a great reduction on historical totals. It was a blank year for House Martins which have been caught in only five of the last ten years.

A total of 2,517 warblers of ten species was ringed in 2017. Whilst this is an increase of 25% on the 2,009 of eleven species ringed in 2016, it is only a little above the 2,454 warblers ringed in 2014, despite records levels of ringing effort. After a number of below average years, the 176 Long-tailed Tits ringed was the highest number since 2010. One, re-trapped on No.3 bed, had been ringed in 2010 and was being handled for the 31st time. In line with the last two years the significant variations in ringing effort mean that it is not possible to draw detailed conclusions about individual species. All species showed an increase in catches when compared with 2016 and with the ten-year average, with the exception of Common Whitethroat. The biggest increases occurred on No.3 bed, as might be expected, as this bed had the biggest increase in ringing effort. The 90 Common Whitethroats ringed compares with a ten-year average of 122 and the decline is found on both beds. Amongst the less frequently caught warblers, numbers of Garden Warblers increased for the second year running, from 32 to 49. The six Lesser Whitethroats ringed is a marked upturn for a species where just one was ringed in 2013. Similarly, six Grasshopper Warblers were ringed, the best total since 2011. After the excitement of autumn 2016 it was a return to the norm and no Yellow-browed Warblers were ringed.

In the case of migrants breeding success derives, in part, from the timing of the adult’s return and the prevailing weather, which must facilitate their achieving breeding condition. In the case of our migrant warblers the following table of “first juvenile” dates indicates that the breeding season, for most of them, started neither particularly early nor late and was very similar to 2016.

<u>Ringling date of first juvenile</u>				
	2017	2016	2015	2014
Chiffchaff	03-Jun	04-Jun	27-Jun	31-May
Blackcap	03-June	25-May	08-Jun	08-Jun
Whitethroat	17-Jun	25-Jun	11-Jul	21-Jun
Reed Warbler	02-Jul	02-Jul	11-Jul	14-Jun

There is no strong pattern in the “first juvenile” dates of the resident species. The very early date for Dunnock refers to a single very recently fledged bird. The next juvenile Dunnock was not ringed until 26th May.

<u>Ringling date of first juvenile</u>				
	2017	2016	2015	2014
Robin	28-May	07-May	30-May	03-May
Wren	11-Jun	25-Jun	27-Jun	14-Jun
Dunnock	06-May	04-Jun	06-Jun	31-May
Bullfinch	11-Jun	28-May	06-Jun	31-May

Wrens and Robins were all ringed in numbers similar to 2016 and significantly above the ten-year average, whilst the 135 Dunnocks ringed was the highest number since 2009. Nuthatch is another species that is now encountered more often than in the past. One was ringed on No.1 bed and two on No.3, the first ever for that bed. Treecreepers also appear to be on the increase and the 26 ringed is a record total. The total of 108 Blackbirds ringed was the best since 2006 but Song Thrushes continue to decline, with just 30 ringed compared with the 10 year average of 46. This decline mirrors the trend in the wider countryside. It was a tremendous year for Redwings with a strong and prolonged influx on both beds resulting in record numbers ringed. Two were re-trapped on No.1 bed, having been ringed in 2014 and 2016, whilst a single re-trap from 2016 occurred on No.3 bed. This is our first evidence of returning Redwings. For the second year running a single Fieldfare was ringed on No.1 bed.

After a run of four good years the autumn passage of Meadow Pipits across No.1 bed was not very pronounced and only 25 were ringed with, typically, just one trapped on No.3 bed, where the passage is always lighter. Four Tree Pipits were ringed on No.1 bed, all between the 21st August and 1st September. In 2016 five were ringed between 6th and 17th August, from which we might infer that the passage was about two weeks later in 2017. Of the 84 Grey Wagtails ringed at Woolston, 68 have been in the last four years, since the use of a new audio lure has uncovered the existence of a protracted autumn passage. In 2017 a total of 28 was ringed, all juveniles, in a passage spanning 22nd August to 9th October. A single juvenile Tree Sparrow was ringed on No.1 bed on 1st September, the first free flying Tree Sparrow to be caught at Woolston since 2004.

It was a good year for several of the eight species of finch which feature regularly in the Woolston ringing report. There was a strong autumn influx of Chaffinches and the 535 ringed was a record. The winter of 2016 / 2017 was not a "Brambling winter" and the first Brambling was not ringed until 30th October. By year end 40 had been ringed. Annual totals for this species vary greatly but the 10-year average is 43. Greenfinches were caught in exceptional numbers and the 1,074 ringed is second only to 2003 when a never to be repeated 1,574 birds were ringed. We see very little *trichomonosis* at Woolston despite the feeders being under observation on almost a daily basis and it may be that the relatively large distance, between our feeders and the local gardens, provides an element of protection. Never caught in numbers at Woolston, just two Siskins were ringed. Another irruptive finch at Woolston is Lesser Redpoll and the 68 ringed was a little below the ten-year average of 87. The 442 Bullfinches ringed was a record total. To put this in perspective, the previous highest total was 262 in 2015. The three best years for this species have been the last three and it is clearly thriving at Woolston, despite being in trouble in the wider countryside. There was no repeat of the autumn 2016 accumulation of Reed Buntings, in the sacrificial crop on No.3 bed, but the total of 148 ringed was in line with the ten-year average of 144. It was a good year on No.1 bed but a poor year on No.3. After ten in 2016, just a single Yellowhammer was ringed on No.1 bed.

No new species were ringed at Woolston in 2017 and the cumulative total of species ringed remains at 110.

As might be expected, given the large number of birds ringed, it was again a big year for individual species milestones. In descending order these were the 15,000th Greenfinch, 11,000th Blackcap, 11,000th Reed Warbler, 8,000th Willow Warbler, 7,000th Reed Bunting, 6,000th Wren, 5,000th Whitethroat, 1,000th Redwing, and 100th Kingfisher.

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].

Michael Miles on behalf of the ringing team (John Blundell, George Dunbar, Kieran Foster, Phil Guest, Mike Longden, Margaret Rawlins, Ashley Radford and David Riley)

Ringling Totals 2017

			Reserve Total	Grand Total
SPECIES	No.1	No.3	2017	1980-2017
Canada Goose		7	7	8
Teal		148	148	435
Mallard		1	1	85
Tufted Duck		1	1	3
Buzzard		1	1	4
Sparrowhawk	5	7	12	129
Kestrel		2	2	36
Moorhen		21	21	285
Coot		1	1	29
Green Sandpiper		4	4	28
Common Snipe		1	1	56
Stock Dove	4	11	15	68
Woodpigeon	1	6	7	128
Barn Owl	1		1	7
Kingfisher	10	7	17	114
Great Spotted				
Woodpecker	4	19	23	328
Magpie		2	2	139
Jay	2	6	8	352
Goldcrest	407	110	517	2845
Firecrest	2		2	14
Blue Tit	258	271	529	10739
Great Tit	194	226	420	6861
Coal Tit	16	13	29	185
Willow Tit	14	23	37	808
Sand Martin	35	24	59	1267
Swallow	456	112	568	13999
Cetti's Warbler	7	10	17	67
Long-tailed Tit	76	97	173	3957
Chiffchaff	378	321	699	8490
Willow Warbler	161	42	203	8106
Blackcap	285	411	696	11303
Garden Warbler	24	25	49	938
Lesser Whitethroat	5	1	6	264
Whitethroat	27	63	90	5082
Grasshopper Warbler	3	3	6	199
Sedge Warbler	49	124	173	5422
Reed Warbler	249	329	578	11491
Nuthatch	1	2	3	12
Treecreeper	12	14	26	245
Wren	76	115	191	6079

Blackbird	61	47	108	2762
Fieldfare	1		1	42
Song Thrush	10	20	30	1278
Redwing	203	173	376	1204
Robin	70	106	176	4716
Dunnoek	25	110	135	3918
Tree Sparrow	1		1	114
Grey Wagtail	18	10	28	86
Tree Pipit	4		4	41
Meadow Pipit	25	1	26	941
Chaffinch	141	394	535	5823
Brambling	7	33	40	558
Greenfinch	438	636	1074	15415
Goldfinch	12	15	27	743
Siskin	1	1	2	81
Linnet	3	10	13	1119
Lesser Redpoll	40	28	68	2089
Bullfinch	145	297	442	3466
Yellowhammer	1		1	1
Reed Bunting	109	39	148	7145
Other (50 species)				1721
Totals	4077	4501	8578	153956

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 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

ZY6486 5M 10.10.2012 Chorlton Water Park, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Gtr Mcr SJ8291

VV 13.03.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 19km 259°

VV 07.07.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 19km 259°

Teal

EZ03662 5M 20.02.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

+F 01.09.2017 Vestjylland area, 56°04'N 8°37'E Ringkøbing, Denmark 777km 68°

This is the second Woolston ringed teal to be shot in Denmark.

Teal

EZ03640 5M 06.02.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

+F 10.01.2017 Parbold, near Wigan, Lancashire SD4911 28km 326°

Teal

EZ03668 5M 20.02.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 31.01.2017 Lymm, near Warrington SJ6887 4km 91°

Teal

EZ03726 3M 24.12.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 31.01.2017 Lymm, near Warrington SJ6887 4km 91°

Teal

EZ03727 5M 07.01.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 29.01.2017 Arley, Cheshire SJ6780 8km 164°

Teal

EZ69734 3M 27.12.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF (=F) 29.12.2017 High Legh, Cheshire SJ6984 6km 130°

Twelve Woolston ringed Teals have now been reported after being shot. This group of five records gives an indication of how much wildfowling takes place in close proximity to Woolston.

Goldcrest

KHR171 3F 01.11.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF 23.11.2017 Clifton Green, Swinton, Greater Manchester SD7902 21km 45°

Goldcrest

JVH917 2F 18.10.2017 Heysham Harbour, Heysham, Lancashire SD4060
R (=4) 25.10.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 77km 161°

Goldcrest

JHV435 3M 19.10.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF (cat) 21.01.2017 Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire SJ6372 15km 185°

Blue Tit

S268842 3J 07.08.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 28.08.2017 Scotman's Flash, Wigan, Greater Manchester SD5803 17km 336°

Great Tit

VZ50240 6F 06.03.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF 07.05.2017 Partington, Manchester, Greater Manchester SJ7191 8km 61°

Coal Tit

S552233 3 22.10.2016 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside SD5201
R 21.01.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 18km 137°

Sand Martin

Z755789 4F 22.06.2016 River Lune, Whittington, Kirkby Lonsdale, Lancashire SD6176
R 26.04.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 178°

Very few Sand Martins are caught at Woolston during their spring migration. This bird was passing through No.1 bed on its way north to a breeding area in Lancashire.

Sand Martin

Z584841 4 21.07.2016 near Gressingham, Lancashire SD5469

R 31.07.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 83km 173°

In contrast to the previous record, this is a typical autumn capture at a roost of a bird heading south to Africa.

Sand Martin

Z212666 3J 01.09.2015 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=M) 20.06.2017 Nether Burrow, Lancashire SD6175 88km 358°

Swallow

S524745 3 25.07.2017 Scotman's Flash, Wigan, Greater Manchester SD5803

R 09.08.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 17km 156°

Swallow

Z750745 1 (5/5) 24.06.2017 Thornton, Merseyside SD3300

R 25.07.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 34km 110°

Cetti's Warbler

Z296371 2 04.11.2014 Leighton Moss, near Silverdale, Lancashire SD4875

R (=M) 17.04.2015 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

R (=M) 08.04.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

R (=M) 20.05.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

R (=M) 18.06.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

R (=M) 07.10.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

R (=M) 28.04.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

R (=M) 03.07.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 89km 169°

Willow Warbler

HJP277 3J 01.08.2015 Martin Down, Hampshire SU0420

R (=F) 06.06.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 272km 352°

R 01.05.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 272km 352°

Blackcap

D950466 4M 27.06.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 17.09.2017 Haxton Down, Wiltshire SU1951 244km 168°

A typical leisurely migration for a Blackcap that is going no further than the Mediterranean Basin.

Blackcap

S687878 3J 02.09.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=F) 23.09.2017 Filey, North Yorkshire TA1181 174km 58°

Sedge Warbler

S267880 3 29.07.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 11.08.2017 Reserve de Chasse du Massereau, Frossay, 47°15'N 1°53'W Loire-Atlantique, France 683km 177°

Sedge Warbler

Z434630 4F 18.07.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 25.08.2017 Tour aux Moutons, Donges, 47°19'N 2°04'W Loire-Atlantique, France 675km 178°

Reed Warbler

S268383 3J 05.07.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 09.08.2017 Terres d'Oiseaux, Braud-et-Saint-Louis, 45°16'N 0°40'W Gironde, France 910km 172°

Reed Warbler

S267801 3J 22.07.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 19.08.2017 Terres d'Oiseaux, Braud-et-Saint-Louis, 45°16'N 0°40'W Gironde, France 910km 172°

Reed Warbler

S268569 3J 17.07.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 14.08.2017 Roseliere, Chenac-Saint-Seurin-d'Uzet, 45°31'N 0°49'W Charente-Maritime, France 883km 172°

Five examples of the well documented migration path down the Atlantic coast of France for *acrocephalus* warblers breeding at or passing through Woolston.

Reed Warbler

7292708 4 25.08.2014 Arjuzanx 44°00'N 0°51'W Landes, France FRP

R 03.05.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 1050km 354°

Reed Warbler

S687239 3J 10.08.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

XF 01.09.2017 Alvington, Lydney, Gloucestershire SO6000 188km 182°

Reed Warbler

S687714 3J 26.08.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 16.09.2017 Ballard Down, Dorset SZ0481 309km 173°

Reed Warbler

S157577 4F 06.07.2016 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484

R 13.05.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 11km 291°

Reed Warbler

D277854 3J 14.07.2013 Pennington Flash, Leigh, Greater Manchester SJ6399

R (=M) 20.05.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 12km 175°

Reed Warbler

S268161 5 01.05.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 10.08.2017 Knutsford Moor (RS), Cheshire SJ7578 15km 130°

Here are three examples of the inter-connectivity of local reed bed nesting sites. The recently reactivated South Manchester Ringing Group site at Knutsford Moor appears for the first time.

Blackbird

LH19088 4F 14.12.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

XF 01.07.2017 Pitajanmaki, Pyhajarvi 63°31'N 25°33'E Oulu, Finland 1973km 56°

Redwing

RF83695 3 17.10.2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 20.10.2017 Ripon Parks, North Yorkshire SE3075 110km 38°

Robin

S024580 4 27.08.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

XF 03.04.2017 Altrincham, Greater Manchester SJ7790 13km 82°

Chaffinch

S267047 3M 28.10.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

SR 17.06.2017 Eikernveien, Sandbakk, Ovre Eiker 59°42'N 9°52'E Buskerud, Norway 1033km 48°

(Sick, wounded, unhealthy, now released. (Road Casualty))

Chaffinch

AAA1295 4F 30.10.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

XF 15.11.2017 Thelwall, Warrington SJ6487 0km

Brambling

NOS EM12026 3M 21.09.2016 Grimstadvatn, Hareid, 62°22'N 6°00'E More og Romsdal,

R 15.11.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 1117km 207°

It is, of course, well known that the Bramblings that winter in the U.K. originate in Scandinavia but this is the first Norwegian ringed Brambling to be trapped at Woolston. Grimstadvatn is a National Nature Reserve on an island off the central coast of Norway south of the town of Alesund and it is likely that the bird was migrating when ringed there.

Greenfinch

VZ50468 3JM 07.09.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

X 31.05.2017 High Legh, Cheshire SJ7084 7km 124°

Greenfinch

NY03381 3 24.08.2017 West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside SJ2387

R (=F) 16.10.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 41km 88°

Greenfinch

NY04165 3JF 18.08.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

XF 01.11.2017 Lymm, Warrington SJ6787 3km 91°

Greenfinch

NY03363 3 08.08.2017 West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside SJ2387

R (=M) 28.11.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 41km 88°

Lesser Redpoll

Y155779 5 22.03.2012 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=M) 18.02.2017 Petre Crescent, Rishton, Lancashire SD7329 42km 11°

Lesser Redpoll

L406875 3 20.10.2015 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=F) 10.03.2017 Penrith, Cumbria NY5130 144km 354°

Lesser Redpoll

Z519998 3 09.10.2016 Bodenham Lake Nature Reserve, Herefordshire SO5251

R (=F) 17.08.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 138km 5°

Lesser Redpoll

Z634607 5 16.01.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=F) 25.04.2017 Peebles, Scottish Borders NT2540 256km 351°

Reed Bunting

S704910 4M 05.02.2017 Brandon Marsh, Warwickshire SP3875

R (=5) 21.04.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 135km 328°

Reed Bunting

S266983 4F 03.10.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=5) 05.01.2017 Little Heatley, Nr Dunham Woodhouses, Cheshire SJ7187 7km 91°

Reed Bunting

Z434999 4F 02.12.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 05.01.2017 Little Heatley, Nr Dunham Woodhouses, Cheshire SJ7187 7km 91°

Reed Bunting

Z434702 3J 26.07.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=M) 22.01.2017 Little Heatley, Nr Dunham Woodhouses, Cheshire SJ7187 7km 91°

Three Woolston Reed Buntings moving to a farmland site on the Greater Manchester/Cheshire border where the farmer provides a winter feed crop.

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Reed Bunting

Y157430 3F 05.11.2011 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 18.04.2017 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484 11km 111°

MIGRATION WATCH

Visit 1

Participants Diane Shepherd, David Bowman, George Dunbar, Dave Spencer , Dave Steel

Day Monday

Date 04/09/17 **Time** 0630-1200

Weather Misty with drizzle until 0900 then sunny with south-easterly breeze

Highlights Hearing a snatch of song from a migrating Willow Warbler...a degree of poignancy in that subdued waft of Summer Breeze....Swallows being swept south away from summer by Lapwing bringing Autumn.

Total 1,843 birds noted

Visit 2

Participants David Bowman, Alan Warford, Dave Steel, Dave Spencer, Helen Wynn

Day Saturday

Date 07/10/17 **Time** 0630-1200

Weather Showers, cool north-westerly wind

Highlights Gaining a new bird for our 'centuries old 'Vis-Mig List' ...well sat atop that rain blessed windswept 'hill' made ancients of most of us on this visit - the new species being a Ruff in amongst a flock of Lapwing. The retreat to a warm car felt 'quite' nice!

Total 2,238 birds noted

Visit 3

Participants David Bowman, Dave Spencer, Dave Steel, Brian Baird, Sue Haddock

Day Saturday

Date 04/11/17 **Time** 0730-1200

Weather Showers, grey skies becoming sunny, with a cool westerly wind

Highlights Noting the 'desperation' in the search for Grey Partridge for this year's Woolston List by our favourite Twitcher (yes this is EXACTLY what he did as last year!) Sue's 'Parkin Cake', the team's determination to outwit the weather, the success of Brian's alarm clock!

Total 11,767 birds noted.

Visit 4

Participants David Bowman, Dave Steel, Alan Warford, Helen Wynn

Day Saturday

Date 02/12/17 **Time** 0700-1200

Weather Low cloud, misty and damp, cool with poor visibility

Highlights The fact that we took the easy way up the hill at dawn—a first! The endless supply of food to sustain us during our last vigil of the year. The addition of two new species to our long-standing list. The effervescent company—as ever!

Total 3,415 birds noted.

Woolston Eyes Migration Watches 2017					
	Date	04/09/17	07/10/17	04/11/17	02/12/17
	Time	0615-1200	0630-1200	0730-1200	0700-1200
	Species				
1	Mute Swan	9	9	3	10
2	Pink-footed Goose	0	60	1513	0
4	Greylag Goose	0	24	0	0
5	Canada Goose	9	0	0	0
6	Wigeon	0	0	0	1
7	Gadwall	0	0	5	13
8	Teal	0	25	0	4
9	Mallard	44	32	42	34
10	Tufted Duck	0	17	37	177
11	Common Scoter	0	0	0	1
12	Goldeneye	0	0	0	2
13	Pheasant	4	2	13	2
14	Great Crested Grebe	9	3	2	5
15	Cormorant	22	6	15	0
16	Grey Heron	5	1	2	0
17	Northern Goshawk	0	0	0	1
18	Sparrowhawk	4	3	2	0
19	Common Buzzard	18	7	10	0
20	Kestrel	2	2	3	0
21	Hobby	1	0	0	0
22	Peregrine Falcon	2	1	3	0
23	Moorhen	0	1	6	2

Woolston Eyes Migration Watches 2017					
	Date	04/09/17	07/10/17	04/11/17	02/12/17
	Time	0615-1200	0630-1200	0730-1200	0700-1200
24	Coot	0	0	2	36
25	Golden Plover	0	6	0	0
26	Lapwing	412	609	500	0
27	Redshank	0	0	0	1
28	Ruff	0	1	0	0
29	Black Headed Gull	28	463	138	240
30	Lesser Black-backed Gull	272	60	24	25
31	Herring Gull	15	3	5	0
32	Great Black-backed Gull	0	2	0	1
33	Feral Pigeon	57	4	15	0
34	Stock Pigeon	14	13	49	2
35	Woodpigeon	149	492	399	2055
36	Collared Dove	0	0	10	6
37	Tawny Owl	0	0	0	1
38	Swift	9	0	0	0
39	Kingfisher	1	0	0	1
40	Green Woodpecker	1	0	0	0
41	Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	0	2	0
42	Skylark	0	39	26	0
43	Swallow	141	0	0	0
44	House Martin	49	0	0	0
45	Meadow Pipit	11	83	61	0
46	Yellow Wagtail	1	0	0	0
47	Grey Wagtail	2	0	0	0
48	White/Pied Wagtail	2	17	5	4
49	Wren	5	3	2	6
50	Dunnock	3	0	5	5
51	Robin	12	26	7	5
52	Common Blackbird	12	29	24	32
53	Fieldfare	0	0	7	440
54	Song Thrush	5	9	1	2
55	Redwing	0	0	240	222

Woolston Eyes Migration Watches 2017					
	Date	04/09/17	07/10/17	04/11/17	02/12/17
	Time	0615-1200	0630-1200	0730-1200	0700-1200
56	Mistle Thrush	4	2	2	0
57	Blackcap	4	0	0	0
58	Chiffchaff	26	1	1	0
59	Willow Warbler	1	0	0	0
60	Goldcrest	3	3	2	1
61	Long Tailed Tit	7	17	8	0
62	Blue Tit	5	5	3	0
63	Great Tit	5	4	2	2
64	Coal Tit	3	1	3	0
65	Willow Tit	0	2	0	0
66	Nuthatch	2	1	1	1
67	Jay	4	9	3	1
68	Magpie	2	4	8	2
69	Jackdaw	125	32	23	0
70	Carrion Crow	71	23	63	11
71	Raven	5	0	3	0
72	Starling	74	0	8316	12
73	Chaffinch	18	21	60	22
74	Greenfinch	3	12	8	2
75	Goldfinch	141	16	45	4
76	Siskin	0	2	19	2
77	Linnet	4	19	3	0
78	Lesser Redpoll	0	0	1	2
79	Bullfinch	3	11	15	10
80	Yellowhammer	0	0	0	5
81	Reed Bunting	1	1	0	2
		1843	2238	11767	3415

Dave Steel

WILLOW TITS BREEDING AT WOOLSTON EYES

by Allan Rustell

2017 was another good year for locating Willow Tit nest sites with fifteen nests located in the general area of the Reserve.

No. 1 Bed

Nest 1

On 5th April a deep excavation was found two metres high in a Willow limb at the east end of the bed. This had progressed to 27cm by 18th April but had then been drilled out by a Woodpecker. On 4th May the cavity had been opened-up further, but two titmice eggs had been ‘dumped’ in the bare chamber. They were almost certainly Blue Tit eggs. I have experienced this phenomenon on two previous occasions but cannot explain it.

Nest 2

On 23rd April one was sitting on nine eggs in a stump one metre high, in a patch of scrub near the Ship Canal. By 4th May, the nest held nine newly-hatched chicks, which had progressed to medium-size by 10th May. By 17th May, a woodpecker had drilled a hole into the cavity, but there were two fully-feathered chicks inside, which ejected upon inspection. These flew quite strongly, with both parents calling nearby. I am optimistic that the rest of the brood had fledged safely, probably proving unappetising to the predator because of their size.

Nest 3

On 23rd April a bird was sitting on at least two eggs, in a tall, narrow stump, over two metres high, close to the West Pool. By 6th May, the nest contained at least six newly-hatched chicks, plus one egg. On 17th May the nest had been predated by a Woodpecker, ripped open from the entrance to the base.

No. 2 Bed

Nest 4

On 14th April, a nest with base lining was located 1.6 metres high in a stump, at the entrance to a Badger sett, on the south bank. This gave cause for concern but suffered no visible interference from the occupants and the female was incubating nine eggs on 29th April and again on 4th May. By 15th May the chicks were ‘in pin’ and on 4th June the nest was empty and intact, so presumably the young had successfully fledged.

No. 3 Bed

Nest 5

On 28th March a Willow Tit excavation was located in the dead limb of a large Willow tree in the centre copse. This was of particular interest, being in excess of three metres high. On 9th April it was noted that there was no discernible progress and it had obviously been abandoned.

Nest 6

On 28th March a pair was excavating in a Willow in woodland at the west of the bed. By 9th April the excavation had progressed but appeared abandoned on the 14th. By 29th April, Blue Tits had taken over the cavity and the female was sitting seven eggs, with the female Blue Tit brooding newly-hatched chicks, plus one egg, on 10th May.

Nest 7

On 9th April a lined excavation was located in a Willow stump in the centre copse, with a female incubating eight eggs by 29th April. On 10th May the nest held at least six chicks, with these being

feathered by the 17th. By 2nd June the nest was empty and intact, so the young had presumably fledged successfully.

Nest 8

On 14th April a deep excavation, in the end of a willow stump, near the Linley Hide contained nest material and by 21st April a female was incubating eight eggs which were still present on the 29th. By 10th May the nest contained at least seven chicks 'in pin', which were close to fledging on the 17th. A visit on 2nd June found the nest empty and undamaged so presumably a successful fledge.

Nest 9

On 23rd April a nest was located, 2.7 metres high in a narrow elder stump, on the south bank of the river. By the 29th the female was sitting on nine eggs, which were still present on 10th May followed by at least seven chicks 'in pin' on 22nd May. A subsequent visit on 2nd June found the nest empty and intact so presumably a successful fledge.

No. 4 Bed

Nest 10

On 2nd April a boring was found 1.2 metres high in a willow stump, in scrub in the centre of the bed, and an adult was watched taking in nest material on the 15th. By the 29th a female was sitting on nine eggs. On 19th May, the nest held noisy, restless chicks ready to fledge. The site was not visited again because of the height of the Giant Hogweed but a successful fledge is presumed.

Nest 11

On 21st April, a nest containing lining was located at the edge of willow scrub in the centre of the bed. It was 1.3 metres high in a willow stump, which had abandoned borings and Woodpecker drillings in it. By 29th April a female was incubating at least seven eggs but by the 19th the nest had been predated by a woodpecker. It is suspected this stump was used regularly by foraging Woodpeckers.

Nest 12

On 23rd April, after we had previously heard birds calling and scolding in the area, Mike Lloyd found an unobtrusive excavation over 3 metres high in woodland to the south of the bed. This was of medium depth but was subsequently abandoned.

Nest 13

On 29th April, a nest was found one metre high in a willow stump, in woodland south of the bed, with the female incubating eight eggs. Giant Hogweed was engulfing this site but by 9th May the nest contained large chicks close to fledging. The site wasn't visited again but the young were presumed to have fledged successfully.

Nest 14

On 10th May a nest, one metre high in a willow limb, contained at least seven naked chicks in scrub in the north-east corner of the bed but by 1st June the nest was empty, having been ripped open by a Woodpecker.

Nest 15

On 13th May this nest was located just outside the western boundary of the bed and was inaccessible, the cavity being bored into the top of a 3.66 metre stump of a thin Ash tree. The pair was feeding young there and also again on the 22nd. By 1st June the site was intact with no activity, so presume a successful fledge. The site was visited again on 3rd August and two Woodpecker holes had been drilled into both sides of the cavity. Another example of a site being attacked post-fledging.

SUMMARY

I am again grateful for the invaluable help given by Mike Lloyd in locating nest sites and territories and for braving the Giant Hogweed. The Hogweed has been a particular menace, its growth exploded much earlier than usual this year thus making many parts of the Reserve almost inaccessible and curtailing monitoring operations.

Of the nests found, three were abandoned, four were predated and eight presumed to have fledged. As usual these figures do not include many trial and abandoned borings which can give a further insight to the number of territories across the Reserve. The cavity that was used by Blue Tits (Nest 6) has been attributed to being abandoned, then taken over, but not usurped. Because of the 'hallmarks' of the damage, all predations were considered the work of Great-spotted Woodpeckers. Several nest cavities had been attacked by woodpeckers post-fledging, which highlights the fact that, if a nest is not closely monitored, wrong conclusions may be drawn as to its success. This also highlights how attractive the timber used by nesting Willow Tits, is for foraging woodpeckers. I am convinced that the Great-spotted Woodpecker has contributed significantly to the decline this species. Again, many cavities were found around and in excess of two metres showing that high nests are not unusual.

No.1 Bed: Birds were watched singing and calling around the Viaduct Pools on several occasions, but no nest was found. This area could easily hold two pairs. Birds were heard singing and calling in the centre of the bed and Mike Lloyd found a deep cavity to the east of the West Pool, but this was not used. Previously, territories and nests have been found along the north bank but because this was not checked an estimate of 7-9 pairs is reasonable.

No.2 Bed: Although only one nest was located, the threat of the Hogweed and time constraints meant that the area was not satisfactorily monitored. In view of the large amount of suitable habitat and past records, a conservative estimate is 4-5 pairs.

No. 3 Bed: In addition to the nests recorded, trial excavations were found and birds were heard singing and calling from the west woodlands, north-west and east banks. There could be territories along the north bank and in areas between the bund and the river. Estimate 6 pairs.

No.4 Bed: In addition to the nests found, birds were heard in several areas of this vast bed together with trial and medium excavations. Areas to the north and around the Loop were not monitored as efficiently as last year and the peril of the Hogweed reduced visits. It is not unreasonable to estimate 10 pairs and probably more.

In view of the above, the population seems to be stable with 30 pairs for the Eyes or even more. It is also gratifying to know that birds appear to be using green corridors to expand into other areas such as sites west of the Reserve, along the New Cut area and on to the Twiggeries Reserve. They could also be expanding south of the Ship Canal, where recent fieldwork by other wardens located at least three pairs.

Over the past fifteen years, during which I have made an effort to monitor this species, it is true to say that there is not a stand of scrub or woodland where I have not seen or suspected the likelihood of a nest. Classic habitat has been lost by the expansion of the landfill on No.1 Bed. In my view the importance of all scrub should be taken into consideration in the plans for any future development of Woolston Eyes. It again underlines the national importance of the site for this vulnerable species which is a national treasure.

BUTTERFLY REPORT

The picture was very mixed this year with some species performing well and others poorly. Some of the more conspicuous butterflies were amongst the less successful species and this gave the impression that this was a poorer year than in reality. The season began predictably with late March records of Brimstone, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. Early April saw the emergence of Speckled Wood and Orange Tip and the latter species was seen in record numbers. A sighting of Holly Blue on 4th April was the earliest ever Woolston record for this species.

The summer saw mixed fortunes; Purple Hairstreak reappeared in good numbers after a blank 2016 and other species to perform better than the previous year included Common Blue, the two Skippers and Small Copper, although in this case numbers were still worryingly low. The “whites” were seen in about average numbers but Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper were very disappointing. The major successes were Red Admiral which was present in record numbers, and Comma, which had its best year since 2006. Both benefited from spells of very warm weather in late May and mid-June.

Butterflies were seen regularly until virtually the end of November with Red Admirals particularly prominent. Poor weather was undoubtedly a factor in explaining the poor performance of some species, especially those which normally peak in July and August, but this did not appear to affect all butterflies equally so other factors must be at play.

The Butterfly Transect is now in its 12th year and with the support of Les Jones who is always prepared to cover for holidays etc. full coverage was again achieved, a not insignificant achievement considering the often unsuitable weather conditions. It is essential that the Woolston Eyes records are seen in context and the importance of the Reserve was confirmed by the fact that the highest counts in Cheshire for six species were recorded here.

This report is dependent on the submission of records by fellow wardens and permit holders and I am grateful for their help. Any sightings are welcome but it is important to provide details of dates, numbers and location to avoid double counting. As always I would welcome any assistance in monitoring what is a very large site and would be happy to assist with details of monitoring methods and/or identification.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Small Skipper

Thymelicus sylvestris

The flight period of this often- overlooked species was particularly short this year. The first was found on the northern section of No.1 bed on 1st July. A series of visits between 5th and 12th July produced a total of 23 which is a considerable improvement on the 2016 maximum of nine. Of these, 12 were on the northern half of No.1 bed and five on Butchersfield Tip. This inconspicuous butterfly is largely confined to the eastern area of the Reserve but three were on the north bank of No.2 bed and a single on No.4 bed. The last record was on 18th July, the earliest final date since systematic recording began in 2002.

Large Skipper

Ochlodes sylvanus

A single on No.3 bed on 11th June was the first of a fairly average year for a species that is never seen in large numbers at Woolston. Maximum numbers occurred between 17th and 21st June when a total of ten was recorded. As with the previous species the vast majority were found on No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip with singles on Nos. 3 and 4 beds the only records from the rest of the Reserve. The final sighting was of two on the northern section of No.1 bed on 9th July.

Brimstone

Gonepteryx rhamni

There were only three records of this attractive butterfly which is often one of the earliest to emerge from hibernation. The first was found on Butchersfield Tip on 23rd March and one was on the Canal track on 18th April. The only other sighting was on 25th October when Brian Baird photographed one on No.2 bed. This is the second latest ever record of this species at Woolston.

Large White

Pieris brassicae

This year was about average for a species that is only rarely present in high numbers at Woolston. A single on Butchersfield Tip on 10th May was the first record with a further sighting in the same area on the 31st May. None were then reported until 5th July. Between 9th and 16th July a total of nine was present across the Reserve, the highest count of the year. Of these, seven were on No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip with the other two on No.3 bed. After July there were only two sightings, both from No.3 bed where three were present on 9th August and two on 14th September.

Small White

Pieris rapae

Numbers of this common but often under-recorded species vary considerably from year to year and this year's totals were probably about average. The first was found on 8th April and about 13 were present on the 18th of that month. Small numbers were seen during May and June with the second brood emerging in early July. Between 5th and 12th July about 46 were found, including 15 on the northern section of No.1 bed and 14 on daisies in the centre of No.2 bed. This was the highest count of the year but was less than half the 2016 total. Reasonable numbers continued to the end of July and up to fifteen were counted on 20th and 23rd August. There were no further counts in double figures and a single at Latchford Locks on 18th September brought a fairly typical year to a close.

Green-veined White

Pieris napi

The fortunes of this species mirrored those of the Small White but in this case maximum numbers were similar to those recorded in 2016. The first record was of two on 18th April and by 4th May about 22 were present. The 20 "whites" seen on 10th May were thought to be all, or nearly all, of this species. Very few were reported during June but July opened with a pair seen mating in the centre of No.3 bed. As with the previous species the second brood emerged about 5th July and maximum numbers occurred between the 5th and 18th with an estimated 46 present which is about average. Ten were on the northern section of No.1 bed on 22nd July and on 9th August 23 were seen, of which 12 were on No.3 bed.

Between 15 and 20 were present on 23rd August and ten on No.4 bed on 30th August were considered to have been exclusively of this species. The year ended with up to five on No.4 bed on 14th September and two on No.3 bed on the 18th.

Orange Tip

Anthocharis cardamines

The first of the year was on 7th April when one was found in the car park. The following day one was on No.3 bed and a second on No.4 bed. By 18th April a survey of the whole Reserve resulted in a total of 21 and by the 22nd this had increased to a year maximum of 39. These were distributed as follows: 11 on No.1 bed, six on Butchersfield Tip, seven on No.2 bed, three on No.3 bed and 12 on No.4 bed. This is the highest count since systematic recording began in 2002, just exceeding the previous maximum of 34 in 2009. It was also the highest in Cheshire this year. It seems probable that this species benefited from the dry weather throughout April, which was in fact the driest month of the year. There were no further double-figure counts with Reserve totals of seven and nine on 26th April and 10th May the only records of significance. Singles on 19th, 26th and 31st May concluded an excellent year.

Purple Hairstreak

Favonius quercus

After a blank year in 2016 it was encouraging to find two on the early date of 3rd July. These were found in Oak trees next to the entrance to No.3 bed. Two days later three were at the same location and on 17th July six were on the Canal track and a seventh on the south bank of No.3 bed. Three were on the south bank on 24th July and what was almost certainly a different individual was found near the viewing screen on 7th August. The final sighting was of one near the footbridge on 10th August. Careful analysis of the records indicates that a total of ten butterflies was present which is the third highest total ever recorded at Woolston where the species was first discovered in 2011. A brief survey of Oak trees on the south banks of Nos.1 and 2 beds failed to find any butterflies. It appears that this species is confined to the south bank of No.3 bed and the Canal track but given its elusive and often unpredictable nature it is impossible to be certain. This year's sightings raise the question of why none were found the previous year in spite of a series of evening visits, sometimes in suitable conditions, during the flight period which is more or less confined to July and August. Hopefully this species is now permanently established on the Reserve.

Small Copper

Lycaena phlaeas

Following a disastrous year in 2016 when only one record was received, this year represented a slight improvement. One was found on No.1 bed by Dave Riley on 5th May and what was probably the same butterfly was present in the same area five days later. On 12th July there was a further sighting from the same area of No.1 bed. Records of singles included what was described as a "battered" individual on 7th August, again on No.1 bed. A search of the northern section of No.1 bed on 26th August produced a single and the final record of the year was on 7th October. All sightings were from No.1 bed and the future of this attractive butterfly at Woolston remains precarious.

Common Blue

Polyommatus icarus

This species normally emerges in mid-May but due to holidays no surveys of the favoured eastern end were carried out until the end of the month. On 31st May eight were present; five on No.1 bed, one on No.2 bed and two in the Sandpit Pond area of No.4 bed. On 18th June the northern section of No.1 bed held 16 and the Reserve total around this time was about 26. The last sighting of the first brood was on 21st June and none were then reported until 18th July when one was on No.1 bed. Ten were on the northern half of No.1 bed on 22nd July and this had increased to 16 by 6th August. Maximum numbers appeared around 23rd August when no less than 40 were on the northern section of No.1 bed. A further 21 were found in other parts of the Reserve making a total of 61, the highest anywhere in Cheshire. This included a single butterfly in the centre of No.4 bed. Although not spectacular, this is the highest count since 2014 and double the 2016 maximum. By the end of August butterflies had disappeared with the final sighting (three) on the 30th.



Common Blue

Brian Baird

Holly Blue

Celastrina argiolus

After a very disappointing 2016 when there were only two sightings there was an improvement this year with nine records submitted. The first was of a single on 4th April, the earliest ever record for The Eyes. This sighting was from under the footbridge on No.3 bed. During April and May there were six reports, all of singles, from Nos.1, 2 and 3 beds. There were no further records until 12th July when one was on No.2 bed. Two (possibly a pair) were on the Butterfly Transect on the west bank of No.2 bed

on 16th July and the final sighting of the year, again on No.2 bed, was of a single on the Canal track on 6th August. This attractive small butterfly is never common at Woolston so this year's records are probably above average.

Red Admiral

Vanessa atalanta

Without doubt this species provided the highlight of the year with record numbers present. The first was on No.3 bed on 26th May and corresponded with a short period of warm weather. Odd ones were reported until 21st June when nine were present. Again this was associated with a spell of hot weather – a temperature of 29 degrees was recorded at this time. Numbers increased dramatically and a series of visits to all areas of the Reserve between 26th June and 12th July resulted in a total of 78. Of these, 13 were on the northern section of No.1 bed, two on the southern half, six on Butchersfield Tip and 19 on No.2 bed. No less than 27 were found on No.3 bed where the Buddleias on the south bank proved particularly attractive. No.4 bed held a further nine and two were at Latchford Locks. This is by far the highest total ever recorded at Woolston, exceeding the previous record of 50 in 2014, and the highest in Cheshire since 2011. It seems likely that these record numbers were a result of an influx during the hot weather brought in by southerly winds in mid-June. Butterflies remained plentiful throughout July and into August with fifteen still present on the 9th. On 2nd September eight were on No.2 bed and on the 17th no less than ten were on the northern half of No.1 bed where self-seeded Buddleia is plentiful. Six were found on 15th October and there were five November records, the last being of one on No.3 bed on the 24th.

Painted Lady

Vanessa cardui

On 31st May at least three were found; one on No.1 bed, one on the west bank of No.2 bed and one in the Sandpit Pond area. A possible fourth butterfly was seen briefly on the west bank of No.4 bed. Unfortunately these were the only spring records and the only other sightings were of singles on No.1 bed on 16th and 26th August. This migrant species is very unpredictable and rarely seen in good numbers at Woolston.

Small Tortoiseshell

Aglais urticae

One of the first butterflies to emerge in spring, the first was not seen until 24th March. Very few were reported until 18th April when a Reserve-wide survey produced a total of 24. Disappointingly this proved to be the highest count of the year, the lowest since 2009. Numbers have declined each year since 2013 and a species that was once abundant at Woolston is becoming increasingly uncommon. On 22nd April ten were on No3 bed but no more than three were reported during May and June. The second brood emerged at the beginning of July and eleven were on the northern section of No.1 bed on the 9th with another six in the rest of the Reserve. There were few subsequent sightings; one on 20th August, one in the Sandpit Pond area on 23rd August and five on the northern section of No.1 bed on the 26th. A single on 14th September was the last of a poor year.

Peacock

Aglais io

Like the previous species the Peacock emerges from hibernation in early spring and the first was reported on 23rd March. Two were on No.3 bed on 8th April and Reserve totals of 15 and 12 on 18th and 22nd April were disappointing. Very few were seen during May with a maximum of five on the 5th. None were present during June and the second brood emerged on 18th July with a single on Butchersfield Tip. The next report was of five on No.3 bed and the Canal track on 29th July. The highest count of the year was on 6th and 9th August when a total of 29 included 16 on the northern section of No.1 bed and 12 on No.3 bed. Fourteen were still present on 23rd August and the final record was of two on No.1 bed on the 26th. This is the second consecutive year in which there have been no September sightings. As with the previous species numbers have declined dramatically since 2013 when over 600 were recorded.



Comma

Andy Weir

Comma

Polytonia c-album

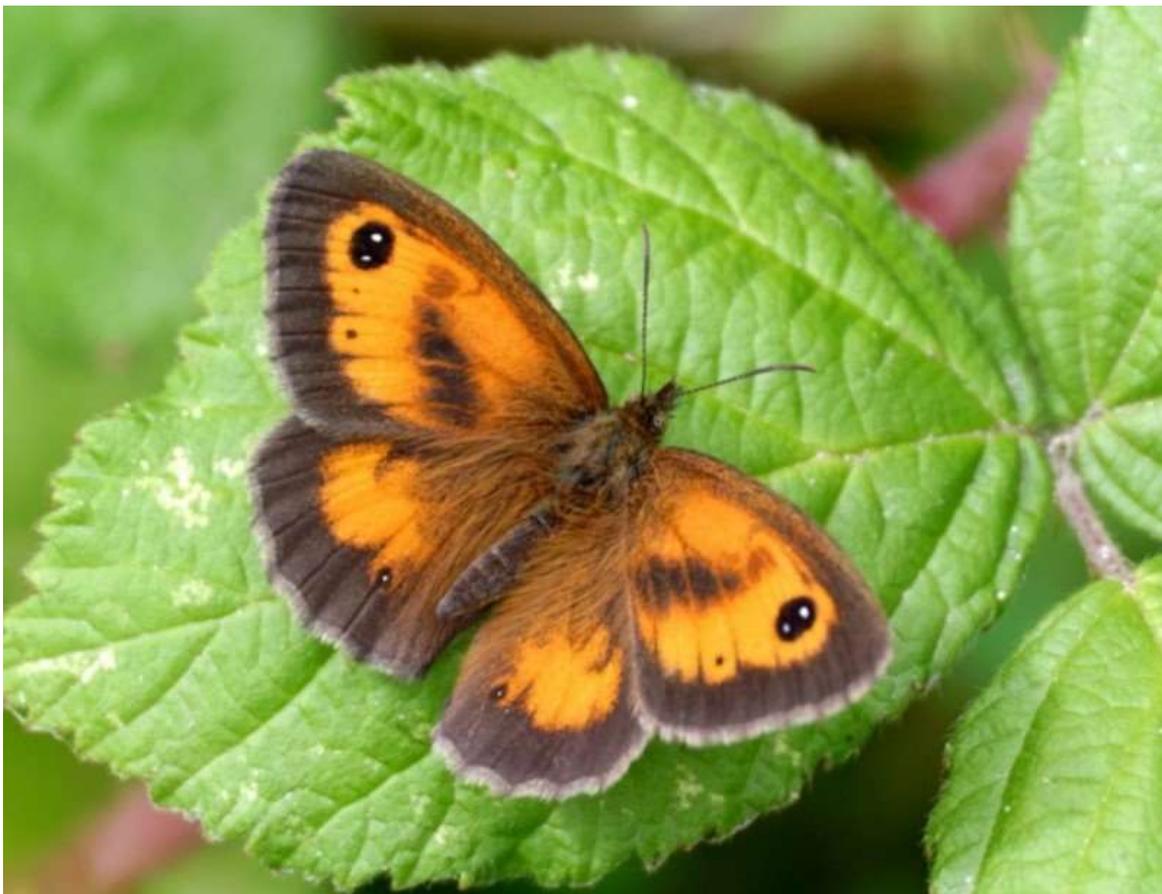
Early April saw the first record with further sightings of single butterflies on 18th April and 10th May. The summer brood emerged on 18th June when three were present. Numbers increased rapidly and by 26th June 14 were found. A series of visits between 26th June and 12th July produced the excellent total of 51, the most since 2006 when over sixty were recorded and the highest in Cheshire this year. They were distributed as follows: eight on No.1 bed, five on Butchersfield Tip, 14 on No.2 bed, 14 on No.3 bed, seven on No.4 bed and three on the Canal track. By August numbers had reduced to single figures but six were still present on 14th September. A successful year ended with two on No.2 bed on 15th October and one on No.3 bed on 1st November. This species is spreading northwards, almost certainly

in response to climate change. The fascinating history of this attractive butterfly shows that it was near to extinction a hundred years ago and more or less confined to the Welsh Borders. In the early 19th century its range was similar to that of today but between then and now it has undergone a spectacular decline and subsequent recovery.

Speckled Wood

Parage aegeria

Although the record counts of 2016 were not repeated, this was still a good year for a species which has become increasingly common at Woolston in recent years. Two were reported on 4th April and a total of thirteen was recorded on the 18th. Butterflies were seen more or less continuously throughout the season with counts of between ten and thirteen during May and June. Numbers increased towards the end of July and ten were on the south bank of No.3 bed on the 25th. At the end of August 101 were counted across the Reserve, a good performance but much lower than the 235 recorded in 2016. It was still the highest in Cheshire for the year. Early September found 34 still present on Nos.1 and 2 beds and a Reserve total of 13 on the 14th was the last of the year although no further Reserve-wide surveys were carried out during the remainder of September.



Gatekeeper

David Bowman

Gatekeeper

Pyronia tithonus

This is the second year in succession in which numbers have been disappointing. An early sighting on 24th June was the earliest since 2010 but there were no further reports until 5th July when 15 were found.

Visits on 9th and 12th July resulted in a Reserve total of 93 and numbers peaked at 133 between 18th and 25th July. This is the lowest total since systematic recording began in 2002 and represents a marked decline since 2013 when over 1600 were present. Perhaps surprisingly this was still the highest total in Cheshire. Poor weather during the flight season was undoubtedly a factor and it is hoped that better conditions in future years will result in a recovery. The usual decline occurred during August and the last record was of six on 23rd August.

Meadow Brown

Maniola jurtina

Numbers were very disappointing in spite of a promising start to the flight period. The first were noted on the fairly typical date of 14th June and there was a rapid increase. Two visits on 18th and 21st June resulted in a Reserve total of 105, of which 98 were on No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip. At this point it looked as though this species would have a successful season but surprisingly this proved to be the highest count of the year. By 1st July numbers had reduced by about 50 % and although 42 were on the northern section of No.1 bed on 9th July and 45 on the 22nd very few were found in other parts of the Reserve. By early August only 30 remained and the final sightings were of two on Butchersfield Tip on 30th August. This year's counts were the lowest since 2007.

Ringlet

Aphantopus hyperantus

This was another disappointing year and despite repeated surveys none were found until 4th August when a visiting member of the ringing team who is familiar with the species observed one on No.3 bed. Since its arrival at Woolston in 2014 this species has maintained a tenuous foothold and better conditions during its flight period would help it to become more firmly established.

Dave Hackett



Lunar Hornet Moth on No.3 bed in June, the first record for the Reserve

Kieran Foster

DRAGONFLY REPORT

For the second successive year, the changeable weather during late spring and throughout the summer appeared to affect the abundance of several species in 2017. Although other factors may be involved, the numbers of Blue-tailed Damselflies, Broad-bodied Chasers, Black-tailed Skimmers and Southern Hawkers were down again on the previous year and significantly lower than those recorded in 2015. Despite this, a total of seventeen species was recorded, consisting of seven damselflies and ten dragonflies, including the first Black Darter since 2013. The majority of records again came from No.1 bed, with a good proportion from No.3 bed and the remainder from elsewhere on the Reserve. The flight season, which began in May, was extended until early November, by virtue of a late Common Darter record, but significantly only four species were on the wing during September and none were recorded in October.

There was a promising start to the season on 9th May, when the first Common Blue Damselfly was spotted and the following day a small number of Azure Damselflies were reported. On 11th May, both Large Red and Blue-tailed Damselflies were spotted and about two weeks later on 24th May, the first Broad-bodied Chaser appeared. Three more species were recorded on 27th May, including Four-spotted Chasers, plus a single Banded Demoiselle and the first Red-eyed Damselflies. In warmer conditions on 31st May, the first Emperor Dragonfly was on the wing. On 17th June, a single Black-tailed Skimmer was noted and the first Brown Hawkers also appeared. More species emerged during July, beginning with a Common Darter on the 2nd followed by Ruddy Darters and Emerald Damselflies on the 8th, whilst the first Migrant Hawker was recorded on 25th July. The last two additions to the year list occurred towards the end of August, with a Southern Hawker on the 26th and finally a Black Darter on 29th August.

The damselflies which emerged from the spring onwards appeared to be less affected by the cooler conditions during the summer, than the later emerging dragonflies. Common Blue Damselfly, which was on the wing from early May until September, was the most numerous species. Both Azure and Large Red Damselflies, which also emerged in early May, were present in average numbers and the small population of Red-eyed Damselflies on No.3 bed, seemed to be stable. A small number of Banded Demoiselles were again present at the Weir Basin during July, whilst two males on No.3 bed, were interesting records. However, it was a disappointing season for both Blue-tailed and Emerald Damselflies whose numbers appear to have declined of late.

There were contrasting results for the first dragonflies, which appeared towards the end of May. Only four Broad-bodied Chasers were found on No.3 bed, which was half that recorded in 2016, whereas the 37 Four-spotted Chasers, which were recorded on No.1 bed, was similar to last year. Emperor Dragonflies appeared from the end of May, but only seven were recorded during a comparatively short flight period. Just four Black-tailed Skimmers were recorded this year, compared to nine in 2016 and 59 in 2015. The most recorded dragonfly was the Brown Hawker, but numbers overall were below average and the flight period was about four weeks shorter than last year. Common Darters were also less abundant compared to previous years, whereas Ruddy Darter and Migrant Hawker numbers were only slightly reduced. Since there were only a couple of Southern Hawker sightings this year, it seems likely that this solitary species was under-recorded. The report of a Black Darter, which was discovered on No.1 bed on 29th August, was a very welcome addition to the species list, in what was a challenging season.

As you are probably aware the Group is involved with the Carbon Landscape Partnership, which hopes to restore and enhance former industrial areas in Warrington, Wigan and Greater Manchester, into one of the greenest areas of the North West. In connection with this project, four representatives from the Group attended a Dragonfly ID and Survey Workshop at Risley Moss in August. The project aims to monitor the abundance and distribution of odonata at key wetland sites, by conducting structured surveys, between May and September each year, over a five year period. Following on from the Workshop, a Dragonfly Transect route was quickly marked out and mapped around the New Pool on No.1 bed, which enabled the first two surveys to be completed successfully. I am grateful to Ashley Radford, our RSPB Assistant Warden, for all his efforts in this respect.

I would also like to express my thanks to all who have contributed records, either verbally or in the Log Book, as well as those who assisted with surveys or submitted reports and photographs to the Group website. Incidentally, the photographs which are referred to in the following species' accounts are still available to view on the website.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Emerald Damselfly

Lestes sponsa

The Emerald Damselfly is the most widespread of the four *Lestes* species, currently breeding in the UK. This species emerges later than other damselflies and occurs at shallow ponds and bog pools, where they remain perched in marginal vegetation for long periods. Only very small numbers have been recorded at the pools on No.1 bed in recent years. Typically, just five were discovered at these pools, during the current season. The first record was on 8th July, when two were spotted in the grass at the New Pool and another two were found at the Viaduct Pools. The only other record was of a single male, which was present at the New Pool on 29th July.

Banded Demoiselle

Calopteryx splendens

The River Mersey appears to be clean enough, especially at the Weir Basin, to support a small population of this stunning damselfly species. Single-figure counts have now been recorded here annually for a number of years. However, our first record this year was of a wandering male, which was photographed on No.3 bed on 27th May. There were no records in June, but on a sunny 12th July, five were present at the Weir Basin, either side of the footbridge. This figure included a pair in cop, plus two males and a metallic green female, which was photographed as it perched on the bank-side vegetation. On 25th July, a male was spotted fluttering low over the water's surface by the Weir. Finally, there was a fairly late record on 16th August of another single male on No.3 bed.



Banded Demoiselle

Brian Baird

Azure Damselfly

Coenagrion puella

The common and fairly widespread Azure Damselfly was present from the early spring period. The first of the year was on 10th May, when six were spotted by the footbridge leading on to No.3 bed. The following day 20 were perching in the grasses around the pools on No.1 bed. Along the south bank of No.3 bed on 14th May at least 25 were counted, including four pairs which appeared to be egg-laying, in the river below the footbridge. Nine were at the Loop of No.4 bed on 22nd May and two days later similar numbers were found on No.1 bed. During further visits to No.1 bed on 27th and 31st May, the species was found to be abundant and breeding activity was observed at the New Pool. Unusually there was just one record from No.2 bed, where a single male was spotted along the west path on 31st May. Numbers peaked at the No.1 bed pools on 17th June, where more than 50 were present and double-figure counts continued at these pools until the beginning of July. They were last recorded on 8th July, when 30 plus were spotted around both the Viaduct and New Pools.

Common Blue Damselfly

Enallagma cyathigerum

This widespread damselfly was recorded on 23 dates during the season which began on 9th May, when a teneral female was spotted at the Loop of No.4 bed. Two weeks later, on 24th May, at least 24 were present at the New Pool on No.1 bed and similar numbers were reported here on 27th May. By 31st May, numbers at this pool had peaked to 50 plus, including several tandem pairs. Also on the same day, 15

were counted along the west path of No.2 bed and a few more were present on No.3 bed. Along the south bank of No.3 bed on both the 7th and 14th June, a minimum of 10 were spotted, whilst 20 were present at the New Pool on 17th June. At least 12 were along the west path of No.2 bed on 2nd July and similar numbers were found on 8th July along the south bank of No.3 bed. Following several several single-figure counts during the rest of July and the first half of August, 11 were noted at the New Pool on 16th August. Four were recorded when the first Dragonfly Transect survey was completed at this pool on 26th August. Finally, two were at the New Pool on 16th September and then a single was recorded here on 20th September, during the second Transect survey.

Red-eyed Damselfly

Erythromma najas

The small population of Red-eyed Damselflies, which has been present on the Reserve for a decade, along with others found locally, appears to be at the north-west limit of its range. The species has a preference for still-water habitats with water lilies, on which males often perch for long periods. At Woolston, however, they rest on mats of algae and floating vegetation, in the sluggish stretch of the river, along the south bank of No.3 bed. Our first record this year was on 27th May, when three were spotted from the footbridge and similar numbers were present in early June. On 9th June a pair was photographed whilst apparently egg-laying in submerged weed. By 14th June, numbers had increased to a maximum of 12, which included two more ovipositing pairs. Nine were recorded on both 24th June and 8th July, when tandem couples were also noted. There was an interesting record at the Weir Basin on 12th July, when three males were found perching on floating debris. On 29th July, there was a Log Book record of, “two pairs in cop underneath the footbridge” whilst on the same day at least six males were also spotted here. After this date, the highest count was on 22nd August when six were present and the final record was of a single under the footbridge on 26th August.

Blue-tailed Damselfly

Ishnura elegans

This widespread species was recorded on all four beds, but only in comparatively small numbers. The first three were found on 11th May at the pools on No.1 bed, followed by two a few days later on No.3 bed. On 22nd May, another three were disturbed from vegetation at the Loop of No.4 bed. Seven were present on No.1 bed on 24th May, including a mating pair. On 31st May, four were along the west path of No.2 bed and a similar number was at the New Pool on No.1 bed. Despite the breezy conditions on 7th June, a maximum count of 30 was recorded at the south east corner of No.3 bed. During another visit to No.3 bed on 14th June, at least 16 were spotted including two different colour forms of immature females. A male was photographed for the website on 24th June. On No.1 bed there were two double-figure counts in July, when 13 were noted on the 2nd and 12 on 8th July, including several pairs in cop. On 29th July, a mating couple was photographed at the New Pool. Two more singles were recorded at this pool on 9th August and also during the Transect survey on 26th August.



Blue-tailed Damselfly

Brian Baird

Large Red Damselfly

Pyrrhosoma nymphula

The Large Red Damselfly is an attractive species, which is always one of the first to appear in the spring. Although it breeds in a variety of still water habitats our most recent records have been confined to the No.1 bed pools. There were just six records during the season, commencing on 11th May when 10 were spotted by these pools and a mating pair was photographed at the New Pool. Eight were present at this pool on 24th May and another two were found nearby at the Viaduct Pools. A single was reported at the New Pool on 27th May whilst five were recorded here on 31st May. On 17th June, a single was present at one of the Viaduct Pools. The final record was on 8th July, when another single was present at the New Pool.

Southern Hawker

Aeshna cyanea

The Southern Hawker breeds in shallow woodland ponds, lakes and even garden ponds. Males are inquisitive and often hover close to an observer for a few moments before continuing along a woodland ride or hedgerow. It is a solitary species which has usually been recorded in small numbers across the Reserve. Nevertheless, it was a poor year, with only one confirmed record during the season. This was on 26th August, when a male was recorded at the New Pool, during the initial Dragonfly Transect survey. There was also a verbal report, of two more being seen in flight, in front of the Morgan Hide, but no further details are available.

Brown Hawker

Aeshna grandis

There were fourteen records of this distinctive species but only three were in double figures this year and overall numbers were down by a third, compared with the previous year. The majority of sightings were from the south of No.3 bed, where the species was spotted patrolling along the river or hawking over the bank-side vegetation. The first were recorded on 17th June, when a single was on No.3 bed, whilst two more were present on No.1 bed. On 1st July four were reported on No.3 bed followed by five on 6th July. An exuvia, which was spotted near the footbridge on 8th July, appeared to be of this species. On 16th July, two singles were spotted on No.4 bed and later on 22nd July, six were recorded on both Nos.2 and 3 beds. In sunnier weather on 25th July, a total of 13 was present on Nos.2 and 3 beds and along the Canal track. A few more singles were noted by the end of July, before the next double-figure record on 5th August when 12 were counted on a walk around No.3 bed. At the New Pool on 9th August, a female was photographed whilst ovipositing into decaying vegetation. On a further visit to No.4 bed on 15th August, another two singles were spotted. The highest count this year was on 22nd August when 14 were recorded on Nos.1 and 3 beds. Four were recorded during the Transect survey at the New Pool, on 26th August. The final record was on 6th September, when a single was seen patrolling the river below the footbridge in cool and breezy conditions.



Brown Hawker Ovipositing

Brian Baird

Common Hawker

Aeshna juncea

Once again there were no records of this large, rather dark hawker dragonfly which is usually associated with moorland areas and more acidic bog habitats. The most recent record dates back to July 2014.

Migrant Hawker

Aeshna mixta

The relatively small Migrant Hawker appears from late summer onwards and is often spotted hunting above the trees and hedges, along the Canal track and other paths across the Reserve. Although the first record on 25th July was earlier than usual, numbers overall were slightly below average. Two were spotted on No.3 bed on 29th July, followed by a single on 16th August on No.1 bed. A maximum count of nine was recorded on 26th August, which included three on No.3 bed plus another six during the Dragonfly Transect survey at the New Pool. On 30th August five were present along the Canal track, by Nos.1 and 2 beds. On 9th September two were noted on No.3 bed and a week later on 16th September three were along the Canal track on No.1 bed. During the last survey at the New Pool on 20th September, a female was photographed whilst ovipositing into a reed stem and three males were also recorded around the pool. The final record was on 23rd September, when two were present on No.3 bed.



Migrant Hawker Ovipositing

Brian Baird

Emperor Dragonfly

Anax imperator

Although this large hawkler species is normally only present in small numbers it was disappointing that just seven were recorded, during a shorter than usual season. Emergence normally occurs from late spring and this year our first Emperor was recorded at the New Pool on 31st May. There was just one record from No.3 bed, where a male was seen patrolling in front of the Tower Hide on 17th June. On the same day three were reported at the New Pool. The last two records were also at this favoured open pool, where single males were noted on 2nd and 8th July. It is perhaps no coincidence, that on these particular days the weather was warm and sunny, with temperatures in the mid-twenties centigrade.

Broad-bodied Chaser

Libellula depressa

There were just three records of this medium-sized dragonfly, which seems to reflect a continuing decline in the numbers present at Woolston. The breeding habitat includes new ponds and shallow lakes, preferably with bare margins from which emergence occurs in the spring and early summer. No.3 bed has provided the majority of our most recent records and this was the case again this year. The first record was on 24th May, when a single was spotted along the south bank. The other two records came from the Tower Hide area, where two were spotted on 3rd June and later on 14th June a male was observed defending territory from a reed stem, in front of the hide.



Broad-bodied Chaser

Brian Baird

Four-spotted Chaser*Libellula quadrimaculata*

This familiar and widespread dragonfly, which also appears during the spring and early summer, was present in average numbers this year. Unusually, all records were at the New Pool on No. 1 bed, where 17 were counted on 27th May. Proof of breeding was established on 31st May, when an exuvia of this species was found in the marginal rushes. On the same day, after a brief copulation, a female was spotted egg-laying at the New Pool and a perching male was also photographed. On 17th June, seven were present at the pool, including another ovipositing female. At the beginning of July, two were noted on the 2nd and a single female was present on 8th July. The last record was on 29th July when three were reported on No.1 bed, which was a fairly late record for the Reserve.

Black-tailed Skimmer*Orthetrum cancellatum*

For the second year in a row numbers of this dragonfly were disappointing, with just four being recorded across the Reserve. This compares with nine in the previous year and perhaps an exceptional total of 59 in 2015. The species breeds in a wide range of ponds and shallow lakes, where males often settle to bask in the sunshine on bare ground or wood close to the water's edge. The first of the year was spotted on 17th June at the New Pool, when the weather was warm and sunny. The next record was not until 27th July, when a male was photographed on No. 4 bed. Two days later on 29th July, in cool and breezy conditions, a single male was spotted at the New Pool. The final record came from the meadows on No. 3 bed, where one was flushed on 5th August.

Black Darter*Sympetrum danae*

After three blank years, it was pleasing to receive a report of a Black Darter, which was spotted by a ringer on the Canal track of No.1 bed on 29th August. This small dark dragonfly has a northern distribution and usually occurs at shallow acidic pools and moorland peat bogs. It is possible that this individual had strayed from another local site, but it is interesting that our last record in 2013 was also from No.1 bed.

Ruddy Darter*Sympetrum sanguineum*

Numbers of this small darter were similar to last year, with a total of 17 being recorded. In contrast to the previous species, it has a southern distribution range and prefers to breed in shallow vegetated ponds, often close to woodland. The pools on No.1 bed appear to provide a suitable habitat and our first record was at the Viaduct Pools, where two were present on 8th July. Mature males are blood-red with a club-shaped abdomen and all-black legs. On 9th August, a male was photographed at the New Pool. The highest count of the season occurred on 16th August, when seven were present around the New Pool. The other records were also at this large pond, where three were spotted on 22nd August and also during the Transect survey on 26th August. The last record was of a single male, which was present at the New Pool on 20th September, when the final survey was completed.



Ruddy Darter

Brian Baird

Common Darter

Sympetrum striolatum

Although this widespread species is one of the most recorded dragonflies on the Reserve, numbers seem to have declined recently. This year a total of 64 was recorded, but this was twenty per cent down on 2016 and thirty per cent below that recorded in 2015. Unusually, the first sighting was a female, which was photographed at the New Pool on 2nd July. Virtually all of the records came from this pool, although there were also a few casual sightings on No. 3 bed, but no details were noted. The maximum count was on 9th August, when 15 were at the New Pool, including several freshly emerged teneral. In the following weeks, nine were recorded at the pool on 16th August but only four on 22nd August. However, during the Dragonfly Transect survey on 26th August, 14 were recorded. Six were present on No.1 bed on 30th August. In cool weather on 16th September, eight were found perching low in the grass at the New Pool. In similar conditions on 20th September, six were recorded at this pool, during the last survey. Surprisingly, there were no records in October, but there was a good late record for Cheshire on 11th November when a single was spotted on No.1 bed.

Brian Baird

BEETLE RECORDING AT WOOLSTON EYES IN 2017

Beetle recording at Woolston in 2017 followed a similar pattern to 2016, using largely similar techniques, i.e. litter sieving, sweeping, and suction sampling. A total of 11 visits were made between 19th February and 14th December. Many of the previous year's records were reconfirmed, and additional species increased the total recorded since 2016 to 290 species, an increase of 76 from the 2016 total. This, of course, reflects continued effort rather than an increase in the biodiversity of the site.



Wasp Beetle, *Clytus arietis*

Clive Washington

A number of the additional species were found by investigating the water habitats which had not been previously searched for beetles. This was done by pond netting (9th April and 29th October) and by setting bottle traps baited with minced beef (1st May, recovered 1 week later). A single bottle trap was set at the margin of the No. 3 bed, and a single trap among reeds in the Mersey Loop. There was a very marked difference in the captures, with the No. 3 bed yielding only a few common *Hydroporus* species, and limited small invertebrates such as *Daphnia*. In contrast, the Mersey Loop trap contained a wide range of species, including ten Great Diving Beetles *Dytiscus marginalis*, the Screech Beetle *Hygrobia hermanni*, saucer bugs *Ilyocoris cimicoides*, and the Water Stick Insect *Ranatra linearis*. Leeches, dragonfly

nymphs, stonefly nymphs, snails, etc. were all present in the Mersey Loop but absent from No. 3 bed. The difference between the two habitats was quite remarkable. By mid-May the heavy algal growth on No. 3 bed suggested that it was nutrient-rich and probably highly anoxic. This is likely due to the volume of nutrients derived from bird droppings. In contrast, the Mersey Loop attracts rather small numbers of birds and is presumably well oxygenated.

Two vane traps were sited at the beginning of the year, but these produced limited results as one vanished in late spring, only to be found when the vegetation was cleared in winter, and the other rapidly became inaccessible due to heavy undergrowth. Lesson learned for 2018. Despite their restricted use, vane traps continued to capture beetles not found by other means, such as the small but striking rove beetle *Siagonum quadricorne* which has two large horns on the heads of males. However, it was not necessary to use specialized capture methods to find beetles at Woolston. Visitors in late spring and mid-summer could easily see and photograph



The Malachite Beetle *Malachius bipustulatus*

Clive Washington

striking species such as the bright red Cardinal Beetle *Pyrochroa serraticornis*, the black and yellow Wasp Beetle *Clytus arietis*, and the Grey Longhorn *Agapanthia villosoviridescens*, which has become quite abundant in recent years.

Interesting species found in 2017 include the moss-eating Pill beetle *Curimopsis maritima*, the rove beetle *Dalotia coriaria*, which has spread due to its use as a greenhouse biological control species, and the seed weevil *Amalus scortillium*, which has only two previous records in the North West. The seed beetle *Bruchidius varius* was found by suction sampling the winter seed meadow. This beetle is normally confined to the South East of the country but is gradually spreading; one possibility is that the use of harvested wild flower seed (such as that sown for the seed crop) could be a significant vector of this species.

The majority of the readily locatable species at Woolston have now probably been recorded, and specialized methods will have to be used to find the more cryptic species. MV light trapping is planned, as is the use of baited traps (mushrooms, bananas and raw meat are frequently successful). The author looks forward to continued interesting discoveries through 2018.

Clive Washington.



Beetles from number 3 bed from top left, Cardinal Beetle (*Pyrochroa serraticornis*), Soldier Beetle (*Cantharis decipiens*), Golden-bloomed Grey longhorn Beetle (*Agapanthia villosoviridescens*), Thick-Knee Flower Beetle (*Oedemera nobilis*)
Keith Gallie

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many permit-holders, photographers, ringers, Wardens and committee members who have, in their different ways, contributed to this Report. The Woolston Eyes 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, John Blundell and David Spencer for assisting with the ornithological 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 and informative Ringing Report; to Allan Rustell for his vital work on our Willow Tit population and to Clive Washington for his fascinating work and report on our Beetles. Thanks also to Dave Hackett (ably supported by Les Jones) and Brian Baird for their diligent fieldwork in relation to the Butterflies and Dragonflies respectively and to Dave Steel for his continued reporting on our many hours spent watching visible migration.

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

I would particularly like to express my appreciation to Brian Martin for his repeated and meticulous proof-reading. Penultimately, I would like to thank David Spencer for all his technical support and for producing the electronic version of this Report. Last and by no means least, I would like to thank Emma Birchall for all the time-consuming formatting, typing and proof-reading she has undertaken.

David Bowman
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