

The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group



Annual Report
2019

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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

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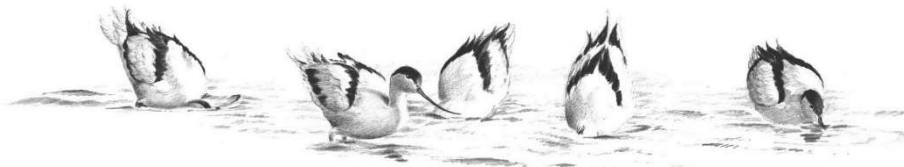


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WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Unfortunately, as I write this Report the Reserve has had to close due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Hopefully by the time you come to read it things will have improved and we will be free to go out and once more enjoy and appreciate all that Woolston Eyes and other similar areas have to offer.

The great work of interest on the Reserve currently is the development of a large new wetland area on No. 4 bed which began in January 2020. This project was initiated a number of years ago and is being led by our Vice Chairman David Bowman along with our partners Peel Ports, RSPB and Natural England. We have managed to raise around £650,000 to fully fund the development, with roughly 80% coming from a Country Stewardship grant and the balance from the Heritage Lottery Fund's Carbon Landscape scheme. The income we receive from permit renewals is essential for all the other work undertaken on the rest of the Reserve, and I would therefore like to thank you all for your continued loyal support.

The development is due to finish in December 2021 and will be accessible to permit holders: the resulting increased habitat, one of the group's main objectives, should provide more breeding opportunities for our notable species like Black-necked Grebe, Willow Tit and Pochard, and should confirm our position as one of the North West's most important Reserves.

At this point I should like to make a special mention of Peel Ports for allowing us to carry out this wetland development, and also of the RSPB and Natural England for their massive support and expert technical advice which were very much appreciated.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking our Assistant Warden Dan Gornall who joined us in December 2018 and left in April this year to become Assistant Warden at Fair Isle Bird Observatory. He has been a great asset to the Reserve and a dedicated colleague. We wish him well in his new role: he will I am sure be a great asset to the Fair Isle team. Thanks as ever of course to our dedicated band of volunteers (Wardens, Ringers, Committee members etc.) who give hours of their time to managing and running the Reserve, monitoring wildlife, habitat development and fund-raising.

As ever, I need to thank Colin Woolf for his outstanding front cover drawing of the Garganey which bred in 2019 for the first time on the Reserve. The original is for sale so if you wish to invest in this drawing or any other of his fantastic wildlife artwork please see his details on the inside front cover.

Finally but by no means least a special thank you to all those who collect and contribute data for our report, and to the editor David Bowman and his dedicated team for yet another in depth and very professionally produced wildlife Report.

Brian Ankers
Chairman

The Weather 2019

It probably comes as no surprise that 2019 was an exceptionally wet year. At Woolston 1216mm of rain was recorded (just under 49 inches), the highest total since systematic weather recording began in 2003. Over 1000mm has fallen in a few previous years, but the persistence and intensity of the rain, notably in the last six months of 2019, was unique. In most years the water level on No.3 bed is lowered in late summer to provide ideal habitat for migrating waders. This year, however, even with the sluice open the level continued to rise. There was some warm, even hot, weather in the summer, but this never lasted long. In the winter months there was little snow and no prolonged frosts. There were five named storms and one ex-hurricane that made 2019 also a windy year.

January saw an average level of rainfall with 60mm. With high pressure in charge the first two weeks were mainly dry and cold. There were some frosts, but cloudy and raw summed up much of the first part of the month. The 6th was an exception, with 9°C recorded but it was another week before that was recorded again, when a depression with strong winds brought milder air from the 12th-15th. The next day a cold front introduced cooler air once again and temperatures barely reached above freezing during the day. The final ten days saw the first significant rainfall, with 11mm recorded on the 27th and 10mm on the 30th. The 27th was also very windy, with gusts of up to 60 miles per hour, and the month ended very cold, with some sleet and snow. The 31st was reported to be the coldest night for seven years, when the temperature fell to -5°C.

February was the second driest month of 2019 with just 37mm recorded, nearly a third of which fell on the 7th. The first three days continued the cold from January, but most of the month was mild. On the 8th the first named storm, Erik, brought strong winds but little rain, and lifted the temperature to 11°C. The wind damaged part of the roof of the Morgan Hide. By the 12th it was warmer as high pressure began to build, and with south-east winds it was an unseasonal 14°C on the 25th, tempting a Peacock butterfly into flight on No.3 bed. A few cooler days followed, only to be replaced by very warm air from north Africa, resulting in record February temperatures across the country. With long periods of sunshine it became warmer by the day (although still cool at night), and peaked at 20°C on the 26th. Brimstone, Comma and several Small Tortoiseshell butterflies were seen across the Reserve, in warmth that seemed more like June! On the 28th, however, the anticyclone moved east, allowing Atlantic fronts to move in, introducing unsettled and much cooler conditions.

March could not have been more different, and turned out to be the third wettest month of the year with 134mm recorded. The first two days were settled and cool, but late on the 2nd the wind increased considerably as Storm Freya approached from the west, bringing heavy rain on the 3rd. Persistent north-west winds brought heavy downpours of rain and hail. Between the 4th and the 19th 133mm of precipitation was recorded, surely one of the highest two-week totals ever on the Eyes! Matters were not helped by yet another named storm, Gareth, that brought in several days of wild weather. The jet stream produced a conveyor belt of depressions that left the Reserve awash. There was a major change at last on the 19th when calm settled weather became established and the temperatures began to rise. The first Black-necked Grebes returned and a Little Gull stayed for several days. By the following day 18°C was recorded, encouraging butterflies to appear. The high pressure that brought this settled weather dominated in the final ten days. It was cold overnight but warm during the day. A total of 14 Peacock butterflies was seen in flight on Beds 3 and 4, 2 Orange Tips and also a few Small Tortoiseshells. Black-necked Grebes continued to arrive in the benign conditions, with 14 on No.3 bed on the 31st.

April was one of the drier months, with a total of just 61mm recorded. The first significant rain for almost two weeks fell overnight on the 1st - 2nd. The latter was one of sunshine and showers, some of hail, conditions which brought down large numbers of Sand Martins, some Swallows and a few House Martins also passed through. The first Willow Warbler was heard in song on No.3 bed. The 4th was an awful day of strong winds, heavy rain and a temperature barely above freezing. High pressure then built up and with it more settled and warmer weather; the nights, however, were cool. Many butterflies were on the wing, including the first Speckled Woods, while Blackcaps and Willow Warblers were singing across the Reserve. By the 14th 24 Black-necked Grebes were on No.3, the highest number for five years. No rain was recorded until the 24th. Suddenly yet another named storm, Hannah, arrived and brought 39mm of rain on the 27th and 28th, accompanied by gale force winds. The final two days, however, saw warm and settled weather return.

May was the driest month of 2019, with just 32.5mm of rain recorded, but in fact it was soon to be a distant memory as month after month of heavy rain followed. There were a number of warm days, particularly in mid-month, but the wind often made it feel cool, and the 5th was reported to be one of the coldest May days on record. Gale force winds on the 8th and 9th blew in a Kittiwake and two Black Terns, but by the 31st summer finally arrived when 20°C was recorded.

June The first three days were dry, with the 1st pleasantly warm, but this did not last, being soon replaced by showers and cool winds. The 4th was very wet and this set the pattern for the rest of the month, with 18mm recorded on the 8th and a total of 61mm from the 10th to the 15th. The second half of June was much drier, with only 17mm noted in the last ten days. The temperature continued to rise, with the final week very warm when 25°C was recorded on several days. The total rainfall was 127.5mm, and together with the heat of the final week it was reported to have been one of the wettest and hottest Junes on record.

July This was the wettest month of the year with 164.5mm. In fact, it was the wettest of any month at Woolston since 2004! Despite this the first three weeks were warm with relatively little rain, and were hot at times; 25°C was noted on the 16th, a hot 28°C on the 23rd and the year's highest temperature of 31°C on the 28th, one of the hottest July days ever. This was the result of very warm air from southern Europe that brought with it increasingly unstable weather. The 19th saw torrential rain (18mm), including 13mm in half an hour, and there was 14mm on the 24th, much of it from a severe thunderstorm. The bulk of the rain, however, was in the final few days, with 28mm on the 27th and 28th, 30mm on the 29th and 37mm on the 31st. This led to widespread flooding across the north of England and rapidly rising water levels on the Eyes.

August too was wet with 110mm, but like many previous months was largely dry and warm during the first week. All this changed in the early hours of the 9th when a deep Atlantic depression introduced torrential rain (22mm) and strong winds with a further 25mm from the 10th – 14th. At least it was warm. A brief dry day was followed by one of the more unpleasant days of the month on the 16th when it rained nonstop from 07.00 to 18.00 hours on a cold north-west wind. Several dry and warm days followed before further heavy rain on the 19th added another 16mm to the month's total. By now the Reserve was awash with the paths on No.3 bed very muddy and water levels again high on the main waters. On the 22nd a shift in the position of the jet stream allowed very warm air from southern Europe and north Africa into the U.K. Temperatures soared to 28°C on the 24th and 30°C the following day, with numerous butterflies across the Reserve, including Painted Ladies and Red Admirals. The final week saw cooler conditions, and apart from some showers on the 28th and 31st it was largely dry.

September The never-ending rain continued in September, which is often a dry month, and a total of 142mm made it the second wettest month of the year. Once again the rainfall was concentrated into a short period of time, with 110mm recorded from the 22nd to the 31st. With the ground still sodden there was widespread flooding across the area. Most of the month was cool and the only warm spell was in mid-month when an anticyclone was in charge and temperatures peaked at 24°C on the 21st. The nights, however, were cool with heavy dews.

October The appalling weather continued throughout October, with no decrease in the number of depressions arriving from the Atlantic. Much of the month was autumnal and the only warm days were the 4th, 5th and 12th. On the 3rd ex-Hurricane Lorenzo brought strong winds for a short time before more low pressure systems increased the rainfall total. High pressure began to build on the 20th and for the next four days led to a short respite from the rain. On the 25th the rain returned on an amazing front which stretched from the Azores to Norway – a distance of 3000 miles! It put a further 33mm on the Eyes, after which the weather became much colder as a north wind set in and the first frosts occurred. Despite the dry final four days the October rainfall total was 119.5mm.

November became the sixth consecutive month with more than 100mm of rain, something never recorded before at Woolston, underlining the predictions of more intensive rain events occurring as a result of climate change. As the high pressure dominant in late October finally moved away the rain returned, with only one dry day in the first two weeks, and 89mm was added to the year's total. The remainder of November had rain on all but three days, but with high pressure dominating it was often cold with heavy overnight frosts and a raw south-east wind. Milder damp conditions returned by the 24th with 13°C recorded the next day. Sunshine was rare and after heavy rain on the evening of the 27th everywhere was again awash. The last three days saw an anticyclone in charge with attendant frosts and a low of -3°C on the 30th.

December There was little change in the first five days of the month, with heavy frosts and some sunshine but no rain. A named storm, Atiya, then brought another period of very unsettled weather with 52mm of rain falling between the 8th and 14th. This again resulted in much local flooding. The remainder of December produced just 28mm of rain, with cold frosty weather on many days. The 19th was the only exception with a southerly wind leading to a balmy 13°C. It remained mild until the end of the month, although cooler, and the total precipitation of 92mm, though high, was in fact the lowest monthly amount since May.

Brian Martin

BIRDS: SYSTEMATIC LIST

Mute Swan

Cygnus olor

Amber listed

Numbers were below the 2018 maxima in the first winter period, but comparable at the end of the year. Breeding pairs were slightly down on last year.

During cold weather in the first ten days of January 26 were found on the Reserve, River Mersey and Ship Canal, with 27 present on the 19th. Many remained into mid-February and 21 were noted on the 28th. Up to 24 were observed on two dates in March, and there were similar peaks in April.

The first indication of breeding was a pair at a nest at Latchford Locks on 17th April where a sitting bird was incubating up to 30th May. This nest sadly failed to produce any young. During April a pair settled on the Loop of No.4 bed where they hatched six young in mid-June. Meanwhile two pairs built nests on No.3 bed, one of which hatched seven young on 22nd May, but the outcome of the second pair is not known.

A pair bred on the Weir Pool and from a clutch of at least seven eggs hatched four cygnets on 1st June, and another pair bred at the Environment Agency fish refuge on the Mersey adjacent to No.1 bed.

Overall, there appear to have been at least six nesting attempts on the Reserve, the pair at the Loop fledging three young and those on No.3 bed raising six young. The pair at the Weir raised one young, while a pair with six large cygnets on the Mersey by No.4 bed could well have bred off the Reserve.

After the breeding season there were 30 on the Eyes on 8th August, 26 across the whole Reserve on 14th September and 34 found on 12th October WeBS. A year's maximum of 43 was present on 27th November, with a similar number in mid-December.

On 5th June an adult wearing a green Darvic ring CHX6 was seen on No.3 bed. This bird has been seen before on the Eyes, and was ringed as a male cygnet on 26th November 2013 on the River Severn at Bewdley, Worcestershire.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
27	21	24	24	30	15	18	30	26	34	43	40

Whooper Swan

Cygnus cygnus

Amber listed

The only record this year was of a flock of 15 found on No.3 bed on the early morning of 22nd January. By 10.00 hours they had moved on.

Pink-footed Goose

Amber listed

Anser brachyrhynchus

This goose was unusually scarce in the first winter period with the only skein reported being 120 flying south on 8th January. An interesting record was of one which associated with a number of Greylag Geese from January until at least 22nd March.

Birds were much more numerous in the autumn, beginning with 13 flying east over No.1 bed on 18th September, when seven also flew east over No.4 bed. The main movements, however, were in the last three months with peaks of 500 seen by the Migration Watch team on 5th October and 1000 flying to the east over No.3 bed on 12th October. Skeins were reported on many dates in November and December, with the most numerous being 400 in three skeins moving east on 9th November, 310 on 15th November and 260 over Butchersfield the next day, all flying east. In December, however, most reports were of birds flying west or north-west, the maximum being 90 over No.3 bed on the 4th and 94 on the 21st.



Pink-footed Goose on Vikki's Island from the John Morgan hide

Andy Weir

Greylag Goose

Amber listed

Anser anser

More numerous in recent years Greylag Geese breed annually but rarely fledge many young. At the beginning of the year 17 flew on to No.3 bed on the foggy 10th January, and 19 were found on the Reserve during the WeBS count of 19th January. As has been seen in recent years one was paired with a Canada Goose.

In February 12 flew east on the 6th and 15 grazed a field just to the south of No.1 bed on the 23rd. During March few were seen but in April a number returned, and a bird was on a nest on No.3 bed on the 13th. By the 19th two broods of four and nine young were on No.3 bed, with a third brood there the following day. On 22nd April a further two broods of four and three young were on the Oxbow below the footbridge, and a new brood was seen on No.3 bed on 29th April.

Traditionally, at Woolston few young Greylags survive, but on 4th May a pair was seen with two growing young and on 8th May a pair was on No.3 bed with six well grown young. Finally, yet another new brood appeared on No.3 bed on 6th June, making a total of seven broods. Sadly, there were no reports of young after this and it is assumed that most, if not all, were lost.

Few were reported in July, but numbers began to increase in August with 62 seen flying over No.1 bed on the 18th, 71 on No.3 bed on the 20th, 99 on the 22nd and the year's peak of 103 on the 27th. Flocks of Greylags regularly flew on to No.3 from the east, including 76 on 18th September and 70 on 12th October. Birds were less numerous in the second half of October and throughout November, while in December up to 26 were present on the Reserve on several dates.

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

Recorded in every month, and many pairs bred.

In the early months there were peak counts of 29 in January and 78 in February. On 27th March 86 were present on the Eyes. Four days later 16 pairs were established on No.3 bed alone.

On 17th April one was on a nest on the Loop of No.4 wetland, and three were on nests there on 30th April. The first two broods, of six and two young respectively, were seen on No.3 bed on 4th May. The next day a bird was reported to be on a nest on No.1 bed. Soon after many young hatched on No.3 bed, where a total of 14 adults and 26 young were on the water. This included three pairs with very small young and two crèches of five and eight with four adults. A new brood of four young appeared on No.3 on 27th May, while on the Loop of No.4 bed two broods, of one and four young, were present on 30th May, with a third brood of four large young on 7th June. No.3 bed and the Loop of No.4 had a total of eight broods and one observer on No.1 bed noted two broods there with a further two seen on the River Mersey nearby, making a total of 12 broods in all.

Numbers are usually at their highest in the autumn and this was certainly the case this year. In August 120 flew west along the Ship Canal on the 8th and on the 15th a flock of 102 was on No.3 bed, with 107 on the 22nd. The WeBS count on 12th October found 83 across the Reserve, with 86 on 15th November. The only other significant flock was 53 on 11th December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
29	78	86	61	40	82	6	107	82	83	86	53

Barnacle Goose

Branta leucopsis

A presumed feral bird was seen flying north over No.1 bed on 20th May. What was probably the same bird was seen on No.3 bed on 18th June associating with Greylag Geese.

Egyptian Goose

Alopochen aegyptiaca

A family party of two adults and four immatures were on No.3 bed on 22nd October, eventually leaving to the south.



Family of Egyptian Geese

Daniel Owen

Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

Amber listed

Many were present in the early months, but the breeding season was very disappointing.

The year began with 12 on No.3 bed on 2nd January, increasing to 16 on the 9th and the year's maximum of 23 on the 19th January WeBS. Numbers were maintained into February, with 20 on the 13th and 15 on 27th March. Twenty-two were still present on 20th April.

On 9th May four were seen displaying by rabbit warrens on No.2 bed, but there was no evidence to suggest that breeding occurred there. On 27th May hopes were raised when four pairs appeared settled on one of the islands on the Loop of No.4 bed, but subsequently did not breed there. The first brood was recorded on No.3 bed when a pair was seen with eight newly-hatched young on 29th May. A second brood of five growing young was noted on 6th June and three broods of nine, six and four young were

present on No.3 bed on 13th June. This was a time of persistent heavy rain and on 21st June a pair with three developing young was all that could be found. It is believed that only two fledged.

From August to the end of the year there were many reports, mostly of a single juvenile, but three Shelduck were recorded on 14th October and a maximum of six on 20th November.

Wigeon

Mareca penelope

Amber listed

Remains an uncommon visitor to the Eyes, mostly seen on spring and autumn passage. This year, however, a pair was present for a few days in June.

The year began with four records in January, one on No.3 bed on the 1st increasing to four (three females) on the 3rd. They were followed by a flock of eight, also on No.3, on 8th January. There were no further sightings until 22nd May when a female made a brief appearance on the Loop of No.4 bed, but a pair was then present on No.3 bed from the 10th to 12th June. Five were noted on 9th July, with records in every month to the end of the year, with a maximum of 19 on No.3 on 5th October and 13 on the 14th. In the final two months there was a total of seven reports, with four seen on two dates in November.

The only December sighting was of two, again on No.3 bed, on the 28th.

Gadwall

Mareca strepera

Amber listed

An excellent year for this fine duck, with large numbers present in July and an exceptional breeding season.

Up to 43 were on No.3 bed in January and 66 on 13th February, the majority of which were on the Loop of No.4 bed. Numbers slowly increased during March and April when 109 were on the Reserve on the WeBS count of the 20th. On the same day a Breeding Wildfowl Survey, using RSPB methodology, indicated a potential breeding population of 31 pairs on No.3 bed alone. The first brood (11 young) appeared on 23rd April, but it was nearly a month before a second was located on the north-east pool of No.3 bed, followed by a further four broods on the Mersey. During June broods appeared thick and fast on No.3 bed and the Loop of No.4. In all a total of 19 broods was found – nine on No.3, five on the Loop of No.4, and five on the Mersey. Even this may be a minimum for up to three pairs were reported on the No.1 bed pools in the spring, and a nest with seven eggs was found in the centre of No.4 bed on 22nd June, the outcome of which is unknown. The number of broods this year is the highest since the same number in 2009 and 2001. It is even more remarkable given the very wet weather in June and the high water levels.

The annual summer build-up in numbers began in June, with 230 on the evening of the 17th and 318, also in the evening, on the 24th. The peak count of the year was 633, 580 of which were on No.3 bed on 22nd July. Impressive counts continued into August, with 300 found on No.3 on the 29th and 150 still remaining on 5th October. In December 82 were present on the Reserve.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
300	66	73	109	108	338	633	300	129	150	64	82



Gadwall pair

Andy Weir

Teal

Anas crecca

Amber listed

Numbers of wintering Teal remain relatively low, and there has been no four-figure count since February 2017. A few birds lingered into May and June, but with no evidence of breeding.

During January good-sized flocks were present and were particularly noticeable when cold weather led to the freezing of the shallow water in which they prefer to feed, pushing them out into open water. The WeBS count on 19th January located 760 Teal across the Reserve, and there was a year maximum count of 800 on the 25th. Numbers remained at this level into early February, but by mid-month many had left, and 174 on the 16th was the last significant first winter count. Less than 50 were present during March and April, but most were by then paired, for example ten pairs on 10th April, and 14 pairs when a Marsh Harrier flushed them from cover. A Breeding Wildfowl Survey on 20th April found ten pairs on No.3 bed. By May only a few remained, including a pair in front of the Morgan Hide on the 5th, one in suitable breeding habitat on No.1 bed on 1st June and single pairs on No.3 bed on 8th June and on the north-east pool of No.3 on 15th June.

Returning birds began to arrive from late July, and 100 were counted on 1st September. By 21st September 250 were disturbed out of the reedbed on No.3 bed and 440 were present on 12th October,

most on No.3. The maximum count at the end of the year was 600 on 20th November, after which numbers in December were well below average.

The Ringing Team on No.3 handled 296 Teal during the year – the same as in 2018 – with 139 new birds ringed, 80 of which were from the period 9th November to the end of December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
800	640	44	36	2	3	15	36	250	440	600	300

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Amber listed

There were fewer Mallard present on the Reserve this year, and almost half the number of broods recorded in 2018.

The highest count of 2019 was 127 found on a full survey carried out on the very cold 2nd January when many of the waters were partially frozen. The WeBS count on the 19th recorded 115, and there were 101 on 28th February. During March and April numbers fell as birds paired and prepared to breed.

The first brood was seen on No.3 bed on 19th April (11 young), while on the following day a Breeding Wildfowl Survey, using RSPB methodology, indicated that as many as 15 pairs were on No.3 bed and 11 pairs on the Loop of No.4 bed. The Weir Pool, River Mersey and Ship Canal, where Mallard often gather, were not surveyed at that time.

Many broods appeared from late April to late June, with a minimum of 20 across the Reserve (c.f. 36 in 2018) which were distributed as follows: seven on No.3 bed, two on the Loop of No.4 bed, seven on the Mersey, three on the Ship Canal and at least one on No.1 bed. It is likely that some broods were missed on No.1 bed as Mallard were noted in suitable habitat during April, including a nest with ten eggs found on the 13th, which was successful. Following the breeding season numbers were less than in 2018, but notable counts included 93 flying over Butchersfield on 7th September, 112 on 27th November and 108 and 106 on two dates in mid-December.

The ringers on No.3 bed trapped six new birds in the duck trap, three in the first six months and the other three in the last two weeks of the year.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
127	101	37	61	64	31	27	1	93	55	112	108

Pintail*Anas acuta**Amber listed*

Just four records were submitted for this once common winter visitor. One was on No.3 bed on 11th April, another on 28th August and an eclipse male was reported by two observers on 18th September.

Garganey*Spatula querquedula**Amber listed*

Undoubtedly one of the highlights of the year was the first proved breeding of this summer visitor at Woolston.

A pair was present on No.4 bed on 15th April, the first of 67 sightings between April and October. The pair commuted between Nos. 3 and 4 beds during April and May until, excitingly, on 10th June, a female with six small young was seen on No.4 bed and photographed by Daniel Owen. The importance of this record is that it is the first time a brood of Garganey has been seen in Cheshire since 1960, when young were seen on Halton Moss. There is a more recent record of proved breeding in the county when a nest with eggs was found, but there was no later evidence of a brood. A fine pencil sketch Daniel drew whilst ageing and sexing the juvenile Garganey is reproduced overleaf.

*Juvenile Garganey**David Bowman*

All subsequent sightings were on No.3 bed where a juvenile female was reported on many dates in July and August.

Greater Secondary Coverts



White not extensive <math>< \frac{1}{3}</math>rd on some, white bears a brown smudge on tip of inner vane

Narrow, obtuse tip

Lesser + Median Coverts



Dull brown, not blue-grey

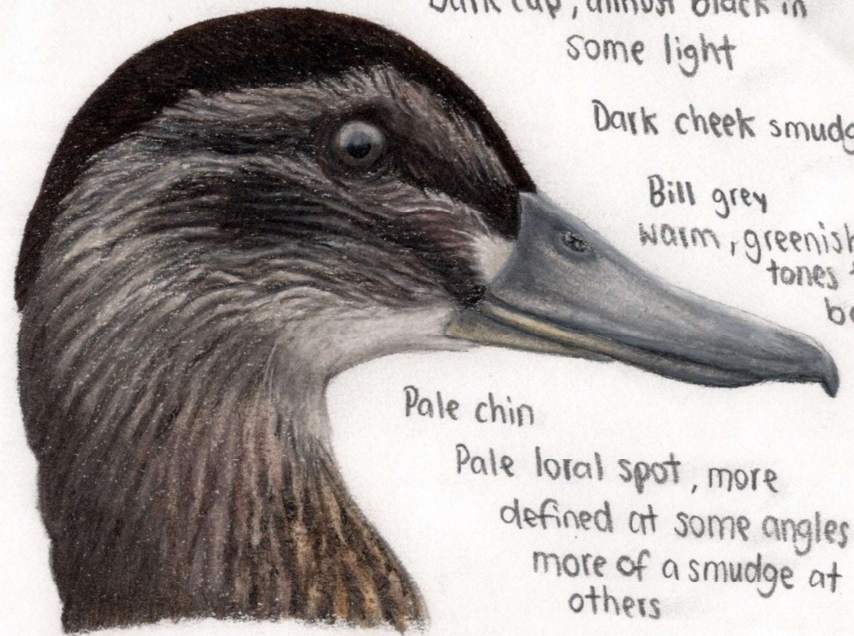
pale margin

abrupt end to cap

Dark cap, almost black in some light

Dark cheek smudge

Bill grey warm, greenish tones to base



Pale chin

Pale loreal spot, more defined at some angles more of a smudge at others

Back strikingly dark
Still had some down on belly

All feathers fresh with no visible wear

Notched retrices, although not always a useful feature in-the-field as often wet and overlapping

Warm-toned, chestnut tones in breast + chest
Also more heavily streaked than an adult female / eclipse drake

Feeding
Nearly always sifts mud at the water's edge, occasionally venturing further out.

Noticeable when alongside Teal, which tend to feed more in the water - due to the heavier bill of the Garganey?

The Garganey was also seen paddling it's feet in between feeding - attempt to stir sediment? Hadn't noticed with other dabbling sp., albeit less time spent watching these could be the reason.



Dull speculum - no metallic green

Secondaries pointed

narrow terminal white border

Shoveler*Spatula clypeata**Amber listed*

Although many were seen throughout the year overall it was a slightly disappointing year, with fewer present on spring and autumn passage compared to 2018. Once again there was no evidence of breeding, which was last proved in 2015.

Many were present in January, with over 70 noted on several dates, and there was a maximum of 93 on the 19th. Up to 56 were present in February. In April up to five pairs were on No.3 bed with several flushed out of cover by a Marsh Harrier on the 12th, while on the 22nd most on No.3 bed were paired. On 18th May a pair was on No.3 bed, while between 6th and 8th June single pairs were seen on No.3 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed. The final sighting in the breeding season was of three drakes and a female in suitable breeding habitat on No.3 bed on 15th June. Why Shoveler rarely breed at Woolston is something of a puzzle. The habitat is suitable and much improved from the 1980s and 90s when up to five pairs regularly bred.

During August Shoveler began to return, with 63 on the 12th and there was a definite arrival on the 24th when 85 were on No.3 bed. On 21st September 100 were disturbed out of the reedbed on No.3 and up to 95 were on the Reserve during October. Many were found during December, with notable counts of 106 on the 11th and 102 on the 14th.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
93	56	22	24	5	6	20	85	100	95	75	106

Red-crested Pochard*Netta rufina*

Two drakes in eclipse plumage were present on No.3 bed on 9th September.

Pochard*Aythya ferina**Red listed*

Apart from a high count in February numbers of Pochard were generally low. Despite this a near-record number of broods was seen.

No more than ten were seen in January, but the usual February build-up began with 39 that flew on No.3 bed to roost on the 5th. The year's maximum of 100 was present across the Reserve on the 13th and there were 90 at Bollin Point on the 23rd. Forty-three was the peak count in March, after which no more than 18 were noted in April. A Breeding Wildfowl Survey on No.3 bed on 20th April found eight pairs, with another pair on the Loop of No.4 bed.

The first brood, (five young), appeared on No.3 bed on 18th May, followed by two further broods a few days later. After this more broods kept appearing with great regularity, including a remarkable one of 17 young with one female on 28th May; this brood was never seen again. Throughout June and into July it was hard to keep track of the broods, the last of which was reported on 15th July on No.3 bed.

Four broods were present on the Loop of No.4 bed and it is possible that breeding may also have taken place on No.1 bed, where a female was seen on 31st May at a pool where breeding has occurred in the past.

After careful consideration of the records it is believed that 21 pairs bred, 17 on No.3 bed and four on the Loop of No.4 bed. This has only been exceeded in 2000 and 2005 when 22 broods were recorded, years when Pochard were much more numerous than they are now. A nest with four eggs was found on No.3 bed in early June, but the outcome is unknown. Unfortunately, the number of young that fledged was low, with the only known full-grown young being a brood of six or seven on the Loop of No.4 bed. Nevertheless, it was a memorable breeding season.

After July very few Pochard were seen, with five on No.3 bed on 28th November and a year-end maximum of eight on 31st December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
10	100	43	18	35	11	8	2	1	4	5	8



Red-crested Pochard

Daniel Owen

Tufted Duck

Aythya fuligula

High numbers were on the Reserve at both ends of the year, and many broods were seen in the summer.

The year began with very cold weather in the first week, which always brings big numbers on to the Reserve. On 2nd January 257 were found in a Reserve-wide survey, increasing to 607 a week later, and 507 were still present on the 19th January WeBS count. The majority of these were concentrated on the Weir Pool, the Mersey to the east of the Weir and at Bollin Point. Over 500 were still on the Reserve on several dates in late January and early February, with an impressive 770 on the 6th February the highest number recorded during the year. Many were still to be found into late April. Like Pochard a large number of broods was seen, so much so that it was very difficult at times to assess the number on No.3 bed, with adults and ducklings everywhere. The first brood appeared on No.3 bed on 31st May and was followed by many others throughout June and July. Some very large broods were reported, including one of 13 on 22nd June, one of 15 on 27th June and a female with a crèche of 18 young on No.3 bed on 2nd July. Even more amazingly was the sight of four females with a creche of 60 young on No.3 bed on 6th July. Not to be outdone there were several broods on the Weir Pool (one of 15 young) and the Mersey north of No.2 bed (13 young). Many of these almost certainly fledged, with a total of 24 well-grown young at Woolston Weir in three broods on 25th July. As mentioned above, it has been difficult to assess how many pairs of Tufted Duck bred on the Eyes in 2019 with so many broods on No.3 bed often coming together in creches, but a best estimate is 22, distributed as follows: 16 on No.3 bed, four on the Weir Pool and river and two on the Loop of No.4 bed (c.f. 11 broods in 2018 and 28 in 2017).

Following the breeding season numbers were relatively low until October, with 323 on 27th November the first evidence of a significant arrival. In December the WeBS count on the 14th found 450, which was followed by the year-end peak of 582 on the 18th.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
607	770	239	255	110	42	64	27	41	98	323	582

Scaup

Aythya marila

Red listed

A scarce winter visitor, the only record in 2019 was of a female which moved between No.3 bed and Woolston Weir from the 18th to 20th February.

Common Scoter

Melanitta nigra

A female was at Woolston Weir on 24th March. This is the third consecutive year Common Scoter has been recorded, a surprising run of records given that prior to these sightings the last record was in 1996.



Scaup on the River Mersey

David Spencer



Male Goldeneye

David Bowman

Goldeneye
Amber listed

Bucephala clangula

Relatively small numbers were again seen in both winter periods, with most records as usual from the Woolston Weir Pool and the River Mersey nearby.

In the first months there was a maximum of six present, with the last reported on 26th February. The first returning bird, a female, was on the Ship Canal on 8th July, with an eclipse drake also on the Canal on the 10th and 11th July. Goldeneye were scarce thereafter, with just one reported in September and October. There was a maximum of three in November and several reports of four in December. The year's maximum was five on 18th December, with more reports from the Bollin Point area of the Ship Canal.



Goosander on scrape

David Bowman

Goosander

Mergus merganser

Although there has been no repeat of the 2017 confirmed breeding sightings continue to increase. On 30th January a male and female flew west along the Ship Canal, while a pair frequented the Ship Canal from 19th February to 2nd March. On 3rd March two 'red heads' made a brief stop on No.3 bed, with another there on 16th March. One was on that bed the next day, and two drakes flew west over No.3 on 17th March. There were no further reports until a female was found on No.3 bed on 22nd August. On 22nd October up to four 'red heads' were seen on No.3 bed, and there were three on the Ship Canal on 27th October. A drake was on No.3 bed on 6th November and a female frequented the river from 24th

– 27th. Finally, there were two December sightings when two ‘red heads’ flew south over No.3 on the 6th and three flew south-east over the same bed on the 18th.

Ruddy Duck

Oxyura jamaicensis

The only record of this duck was of an adult female present on No.3 bed from 9th to 18th May.

Grey Partridge

Perdix perdix

Red listed

Given the national decline in numbers, which has been reflected at Woolston in recent years, a total of four reports was on a par with 2018 when there were three sightings. Two were in fields to the north of the river opposite No.1 bed on 6th February and was the only spring record. Two were on No.3 bed on 20th September and there were further records of singles on the same bed on the 24th and 25th, almost certainly the same birds.



Grey Partridge on No.3 bed

Daniel Owen

Pheasant*Phasianus colchicus*

There was a welcome increase in records of this often overlooked species, and sightings were submitted for every month of the year. This does not necessarily imply an increase in numbers however and it seems that the population of this resident is stable at around 20. January saw six under the feeders on No.3 bed on the 16th and five at the feeding station on No.1 bed on the 30th. On 20th March a Reserve-wide count of eight was followed by a series of Common Bird Surveys in April when about 18 were present. A count on the northern half of No.4 bed on 5th May produced a total of 14 and five on No.1 bed on the 9th included two recently fledged young. It would appear that a minimum of 22 were present across the Reserve around this time. Two chicks were flushed on the northern section of No.1 bed on 30th June but no adults were seen with them. The only other evidence of successful breeding came on 10th September when a juvenile was flushed on No.1 bed. A total of two or three broods would confirm that numbers are fairly stable at Woolston. Reports continued to the year end with the majority, unsurprisingly, from No.3 bed.

Cormorant*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Cormorants were recorded throughout the year, often flying to and from roosts and resting on pylons by the Loop of No.4 bed. This year for the first time a roost formed in trees below the east bank of No.3 bed in February and March, with 43 present on 6th February and 33 on the 11th. In March 34 roosted on the 3rd and 27 on the 11th, after which the roost broke up.

Apart from the roosts 25 were counted on 19th January WeBS Count and 30 on the Weir Pool and river on 31st January.

There were many reports of over-flying Cormorants, including 40 to the west on 6th April and 20 flying in the same direction at dawn on 4th May (from the Rostherne roost?). Later in the year 18 were on No.3 bed on 30th August and 28 were seen across the Eyes on 14th September WeBS. The Migration Watchers at the east end of the Reserve recorded 20 flying over on the morning of 5th October and 12 on 16th November. Finally, 20 flew west over No.3 bed on 7th December.

Bittern*Botaurus stellaris**Amber listed*

There was only a single record of one flying from south of the Ship Canal into No.3 bed at dawn on 9th February.

Little Egret*Egretta garzetta*

Although increasingly common in the north-west, this egret remains a scarce visitor to Woolston with just six records received, singles on 10th July and on 12th August, while another circled No.3 bed on 12th September before leaving to the south. One was again on No.3 on 21st September followed by a further report of one on 30th November. The final sighting was of two flying south on 4th December.

Great White Egret

Ardea alba

Six records were received this year, beginning with one flying south over No.3 bed on 26th February. Another flew west over No.4 bed on 3rd May, and one was feeding on No.3 bed on 28th August. There were no further reports until 5th October when one arrived from the east and dropped into the reeds on No.3 bed. Two single birds were also present on No.3 bed in October on the 15th and 19th.

Grey Heron

Ardea cinerea

Although this species did breed at Woolston in 1999 and 2000 sightings are now of small numbers seen throughout the year. At the beginning of January when many waters were frozen four were on No.3 bed on the 2nd. Most reports are of one or two birds, but five were on No.3 bed on 21st June and six on one of the No.4 bed Loop islands on 2nd July. The highest count was of 12 feeding on No. 3 bed on 24th August, taking advantage of lowered water levels. Five were present on two dates in November and the same number on 11th December.

Little Grebe

Tachybaptus ruficollis

Surprisingly, over 180 records were submitted for this grebe, a number only exceeded by Tufted Duck. High numbers of Little Grebes were present in the spring, but breeding pairs were slightly lower than in the previous two years.

Small numbers winter and the seven found on the 19th January WeBS was typical. One was heard trilling on a small pool just to the north of No.1 bed on the early date of 30th January, and two others on the east and west pools of No.1 bed on 13th February. The annual influx of Little Grebes in the second half of March saw ten on No.3 bed on the 21st and 23rd and a full survey of all the waters on 28th March located a total of 25 (16 on No.3 bed, six on No.1 bed and 3 on the Loop of No.4 bed). One was seen with nest material on No.3 on 5th April and another slipped off a nest on the Loop of No.4 bed on 17th April, with a pair and two singles there three days later. The WeBS count on 20th April recorded a total of 23 on the Reserve. On 30th April two pairs were on the Loop of No.4, and there were also two trilling birds on pools on No.1 bed.

The first brood, of one small young, was reported on the Loop of No.4 bed on 27th May, but it was 12th June before breeding was confirmed on No.3 bed when a nearly full-grown juvenile was seen on the remote north-east pool.

Overall, it is believed that eight or nine pairs bred, four on No. 3 bed, two, possibly three, on the Loop and two on No.1 bed, slightly down on the previous two years. Adults were still feeding young on both Nos.1 and 3 beds in late August.

Following the breeding season there were peak counts of 15 on 15th September and 12 on 4th November.

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

For the second successive year it was a disappointing breeding season, with few young fledging on the Eyes.

Birds were scarce as usual in January, with a peak count of seven on the 19th. Eight were present on No.3 bed on 6th February, but an influx on 16th February saw 22 across the Reserve. On 27th February two pairs were nest building on No.3 bed. Good numbers were still present in April, with 21 counted on the 20th.

By 29th April one was on a nest at a regular breeding site on the river between Nos. 3 and 4 beds, with another nest on the Woolston Weir Pool. Three birds were on nests on No.3 bed on 11th May.

The first brood appeared on No.3 bed on 23rd May when a pair was feeding two very small young. On 29th May a pair with two young was on the Mersey near No.3, with a third brood on the Ship Canal by Latchford Locks two days later. Two further broods were reported, one each in June and July. The outcome of the nest at the Weir is not known, although pairs that nest there are unsuccessful most years. It is known that the young from the first brood on No.3 bed did not survive, and it seems likely that the others suffered a similar fate as no juveniles were reported after July. The reason for the poor breeding success in recent years is not clear. One can point to the high rainfall in June and July as a likely cause, but this would not have applied to the summer of 2018 which was hot and dry.

After the breeding season there were no records at all in August and only 12 reports in the final three months. Six on 27th November and the same number on 18th December were the highest counts received.

Black-necked Grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

Amber listed

Another good year for this Woolston speciality despite concerns at the lateness of the first brood.

Three on the 19th March were the first to return. Two days later five were present, including a pair still in partial winter plumage, and a third bird in full winter plumage. The additional birds arrived overnight on a 'super' moon and were seen displaying and nest building! Numbers then increased steadily to seven on 24th March, 13 on the 28th, while in April 15 were counted on the 3rd, 17 on the 5th and 6th and a co-ordinated survey found 19 on the 10th. More continued to arrive over the next ten days with 24 present on the 14th, and the year's peak of 26 on the 19th and 20th April. This was the largest number of adults since 2014.

One was watched taking nest material into a stand of *phragmites* on 29th April, and although many were still present on No.3 bed, for example a minimum of 21 adults on 1st May, there was increasing concern throughout May at the non-appearance of any broods. In most years many broods are seen in May and why this did not happen this year is not clear. Possibly it was weather-related, with heavy rain and rising water levels in April when eggs would normally be laid.

A brood eventually appeared on 4th June – the latest date this century at Woolston – followed by a further two on 10th June. Others followed quickly, with six broods on No.3 bed on the 12th, and on the 14th a total of 27 Black-necked Grebes was counted, 19 adults and at least eight young. A full survey

on 14th June located eight, possibly nine, broods. The following day a well-grown juvenile was seen and must have been from an earlier missed brood. This would suggest an overall breeding population of nine, possibly ten, pairs, which has been the population size at Woolston in recent years.

On 6th July ten adults and ten growing young were noted, with ten adults and nine full or nearly full grown young four days later. After this date adult numbers began to decline, with few left in the final week of July. On 27th July nine full-grown independent young were present. The last adult was reported on 29th July and the last juvenile on 28th August.



Black-necked Grebe

David Bowman

Red Kite

Milvus milvus

As this species continues to expand its range there have been sightings in the last six years. Nevertheless, it remains an infrequent visitor and the majority of reports relate to birds over flying the Reserve. This year there was a single record when one flew north over No.3 bed on 20th July.

Marsh Harrier

Circus aeruginosus

Amber listed

This regular visitor was recorded in spring and from July to the end of the year. The first sighting was on 2nd April when one was present on No.3 bed. On 12th April a female flushed many duck on the same bed and what was probably the same bird was reported three days later. There were two May records, both of singles on No.3 bed. The next sighting was on 8th July when a juvenile flew onto No.3 bed from

the east and went to roost in reeds on the north bank. What was presumably the same individual was reported twice during the following week. The next sighting was again of an immature bird on 30th July. There were no further records until 2nd September when a “female type” flew west over No.1 bed. A further September sighting was on the 23rd, again from No.3 bed. On 20th November a female/immature bird was seen hunting the No.3 bed reed bed and it was reported regularly until 19th December. The only other record came on 28th December when what was described as a “well-marked female with unusually extensive pale shoulder patches”, probably not the same one as reported earlier that month, was found on No.3 bed. In summary this was a fairly average year for this species.

Hen Harrier

Circus cyaneus

Red listed

A “ringtail” was seen on No.1 bed on 27th November and was subsequently reported on five other dates in the same area. It was seen hunting Starlings as they left a roost which had formed on the bed on 11th and 16th December, which was the last record of the year. This species remains an infrequent visitor to the Reserve and it is unusual for one to stay for such a protracted period. This was probably due to the Starling roost which offered a welcome feeding opportunity.

Sparrowhawk

Accipiter nisus

There were records of this resident raptor throughout the year except for the usual gap in July and August. The year began with records of one or two on No.3 bed and three on 15th January. Two were found on No.1 bed on 23rd January and a pair was attracted to the Starling roost there on 1st February. The following day no less than seven were seen on No.3 bed including five soaring together. The Starling roost continued to attract raptors and up to three Sparrowhawks were seen on a couple of dates in February and early March. April saw five on No.3 bed on the 6th and display was noted over the north bank on the 10th. On 25th May one was seen carrying prey into the same area and there was a similar report on 22nd June, the only sighting between May and August. On 3rd August a female was observed carrying prey onto No.2 bed and during that month up to three were reported on No.3 bed. September saw an increase in sightings beginning with one on No.1 bed on the 2nd. Two adults and a juvenile were reported from No.3 bed on the 12th whilst on the 23rd one took a Snipe from one of the rafts. The month ended with a record of five, again on No.3 bed, on the 28th. October began with a count of four during the Migration Watch and on the 12th four were hunting over No.3 bed with a further three at Bollin Point. Up to three were present during November and the year ended with a number of reports, all of singles, from Nos.1 and 3 beds including one at the Starling roost on No.1 bed.

On No.1 bed a second-year male was ringed on 20th May and, unusually, a first-year female was trapped and ringed on 15th August. A juvenile male was ringed on No.3 bed on 15th August.

Buzzard

Buteo buteo

Together with Sparrowhawk, this is the most recorded raptor at Woolston and its distinctive appearance and soaring flight make it easily recognisable. Reports were submitted throughout the year apart from July. Three were on No.3 bed on 19th and 23rd January and numbers increased in February, which began with four over No.2 bed on the 2nd. A total of eight on the 16th comprised four on each of Nos. 2 and

3 beds. Similar totals were recorded through the rest of the month and on the 25th seven were present on No.1 bed. A count of twelve on 2nd March included five soaring over No.2 bed and seven over No.3 bed. Display was noted over Nos.3 and 4 beds on 6th and 19th March respectively whilst a total of eight on 20th March included six soaring over Butchersfield Tip. Other high counts from No.3 bed were eleven and nine on the 25th and 26th. The month ended with six over No.1 bed and a further six over No.3 bed on the 29th.

Evidence of breeding was submitted in April with a record of one with prey flying into the north bank of No.3 bed on the 24th. During May and June birds took prey into both the north and east banks of the same bed.

There were no reports between 17th June and 1st August when two were over No.3 bed. The next record occurred on 12th August and five were over No.3 bed on the 21st. The highest counts of the year were in September; the Migration Watch on the 7th produced nine and a minimum total of 19 on the 30th was made up of small flocks of up to six passing over No.1 bed. There were no further high counts, the largest being of six during the Migration Watch on 31st October. Four were on No.1 bed on 22nd November but no more than two were present during December.

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Amber listed

There were three sightings of what has now become an annual visitor normally seen on passage. All reports were from No.3 bed and related to birds over-flying the Reserve. On 9th April one flew west mobbed by a Raven and on 17th May one circled briefly before heading south. There was a single record of return passage when one flew west on 29th August being mobbed by gulls.

Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Amber listed

An increase in records submitted (72 this year) included sightings in every month which was encouraging considering this species' decline at Woolston. January saw reports of singles from Nos. 1, 3 and 4 beds and on 27th February four were noted including three soaring together over No.2 bed. There were no further sightings until 26th March when five were reported over No.3 bed. Only singles were present during April but there were records from all four beds. Two were on No.1 bed on 18th May but most records were of singles during the summer months. Two were observed on 29th August on No.3 bed but, surprisingly, there were no further records from that bed until 20th November. December saw 19 reports, more than in any other month, with one or two regularly seen on No.3 bed. None was ringed this year.

Merlin

Falco columbarius

Red listed

This was an excellent year for this dashing small falcon with 20 records submitted throughout the winter periods and sightings in eight months of the year. January and February each produced a single record and in March a female was reported three times on No.3 bed and once on No.1 bed. The final spring sighting was of one on No.3 bed on 6th April. The first evidence of returning birds came from the

Migration Watch on 7th September when one was seen from the eastern end of the Reserve. This was followed on 12th September when one chased a Swallow as it flew south over No.3 bed. October saw two records, both of singles, and in November a female, presumably the same individual, was spotted on No.3 bed on the 18th, 20th and 26th. The year ended with a further two records from No.3 bed, a female on the 9th and one on the 20th.



Merlin on No.3 bed

Keith Gallie

Hobby

Falco subbuteo

With no less than 62 records submitted between 26th April and 28th September this attractive summer migrant enjoyed a very good year. All except five sightings were from the favoured No.3 bed and were mostly of single birds although two were noted on eight occasions and a possible three on 2nd September. Records of note included one attacking hirundines on 9th May and one flying onto No.2 bed carrying prey on 8th June. A juvenile was over the east pool on No.1 bed on 2nd September, possible evidence of local breeding, whilst on the same day one caught a Swallow over the south bank of No.3 bed. A juvenile seen hawking in front of the John Morgan Hide on the same day may have been the same one reported from No.1 bed. The final report of the year was of two feeding over No.3 bed where they were mobbed by a Sparrowhawk. The fact that sightings were less frequent during July may indicate that they bred fairly locally but not on the Reserve.



Hobby

Daniel Owen

Peregrine

Falco peregrinus

As has been the case for the past twelve years a pair bred successfully on Thelwall Viaduct and there were sightings throughout the year. In January there were reports of one or two hunting the Starling roost on No.1 bed and a pair was at the traditional nest site on the 19th. The Starling roost continued to attract them until it dispersed in early March. On 13th April the female was seen on the nest calling to the male which was observed hunting over No.3 bed from time to time. By 18th May the pair were at the nest brooding small young and on 4th June the male was seen carrying a Blackbird towards the Viaduct. Successful breeding was confirmed when two young were seen on the Viaduct on 27th June and two days later the adults and juveniles, now free flying, were together on the Viaduct structure. On 6th July one of the young was over No.3 bed and the following week the female and two young were seen hunting together, again over No.3 bed. There were regular sightings in the second half of July and into August. On the 22nd of that month a juvenile made three unsuccessful passes at a flock of Lapwings on No.3 bed and reports of one or two birds continued through September and October on Nos. 1 and 3 beds. Towards the end of the year sightings were less frequent with just two November records of one on No.3 bed and three December reports of singles on No.1 bed.



Juvenile Peregrine harassing gulls

Daniel Owen



Juvenile Peregrine

Keith Gallie

Water Rail

Rallus aquaticus

Because of its secretive nature and the extensive reed beds in which it is found, it can be difficult to assess the size of the population. There were sightings throughout the year, mostly from Nos.1 and 3 beds. The maximum count in January was two, rising to three in February. On 1st March four were on No.1 bed and three on No.3 bed, a total of seven. The first confirmation of breeding came in May when at least two broods were in the reed beds on No.1 bed. On 31st May a nest containing eight eggs was found on No.1 bed. When the nest was checked on 9th June it was empty but an identical nest with eight eggs was found close by. It appears that when they are under stress, birds can move their eggs and this may account for the second nest. A juvenile was seen in front of the south screen on No.3 bed on 27th June and a minimum of three broods was found at the eastern end of No.1 bed. A sighting of two juveniles in front of the John Morgan Hide on 5th August could well have been an additional brood. Later that month there were reports of four on No.3 bed and three on No.1 bed. The highest count of the year was on 24th and 25th October when four were on each of Nos. 1 and 3 beds. It appears that four or five pairs bred and this would indicate a Reserve-wide population of at least twenty pairs. A further two were found on the Loop of No.4 bed on 16th November and the year ended with reports of four on No.3 bed on three occasions.

Four were ringed, all on No.3 bed. An adult male in January, a single juvenile in August, and a female and a juvenile in December.

Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

In many ways this year was very similar to 2018 which would indicate that the population of this resident but unobtrusive species is fairly stable. However, the breeding statistics for the last two years show a marked reduction from the previous three years. The first total of note was of 22 on 2nd January, a day when some waters were frozen, rising to 47 on the WeBS count on the 19th. Fewer were present during the remainder of the spring and summer and it was not until October that similar totals were recorded. The first brood appeared on 10th May on No.3 bed and was followed by reports of four others on the same bed during the remainder of the month. In total it appears that eleven pairs bred, exactly the same as in 2018. The distribution was also almost identical with six broods on No.3 bed, two on the Sandpit Pond, two on the Loop of No.4 bed and one on No.1 bed. Numbers began to build up from mid-September when 21 were found on the WeBS count on the 14th. The remaining counts of the year in October, November and December produced totals of 29, 48 and 32 respectively, the November survey being the highest count of the year. Coincidentally the highest total for 2018 (49) also occurred during the November WeBS count!

Eleven new birds were ringed on No.3 bed and there were four re-traps.

Coot

Fulica atra

Twice as many records were received for this species as for Moorhen, which tends to be under-recorded at Woolston. The highest counts during the first three months were all recorded on the WeBS counts; namely 59 (January), 41 (February) and 46 (March). By the time the first brood appeared on 11th April, 35 adults were still present and numbers remained around this level through May. On 1st June a Reserve total of 57 adults was the highest of the year so far and this rose to 139 by 27th June. The month ended

with a report of 71 roosting on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide at dawn on the 29th. As with the previous species breeding was identical to 2018 and an analysis of the reports submitted indicates that about 35 pairs bred. The distribution was as follows: 22 on No.3 bed, nine on the Loop of No.4 bed, two on No.1 bed and one on the river and the Fish Refuge. This year saw an increase in broods on No.3 bed and a reduced number on the Loop of No.4 bed. After the breeding season there was the usual increase in numbers with 240 on 10th July, and a year maximum on 23rd July when 320 were on No.3 bed and at least 30 on the Loop of No.4 bed. This is more than double the highest count in 2018. The last three figure total was on 29th July when 110 were present, and the remaining counts of significance were obtained on the WeBS counts, notably 72 in October and 95 in December.

The No.3 bed ringing team caught and ringed two, which were captured in the duck traps during March.

Oystercatcher

Haematopus ostralegus

Amber listed

A pair bred on No.1 bed. This is the first time since the Reserve was created in 1979 although there are records of breeding having taken place around 1947. A nest with three eggs was found on the northern half of No.1 bed on 27th May and although they were judged to have hatched successfully no chicks were seen and it is assumed they were predated. Two pairs were in this area in early June, but there is no evidence that the second pair bred. The first record of the year was on 14th February when one was on No.3 bed and one or two were seen there almost daily until mid-June. Reports from the western end of the Reserve included one on fields to the east of the Loop on 16th February, two north of the river on 19th March and one on the Loop islands on 30th April. A pair was seen mating on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide on 25th March and the first of a series of sightings on No.1 bed came on 1st April. Three on No.3 bed on 21st June were chased off by breeding Lapwings and regular sightings continued until 13th July. The only further records were on 22nd July and 29th August when three and one were found on No.3 bed.

Golden Plover

Pluvialis apricaria

There were just two records of this infrequent visitor. One flew north over No.3 bed on 6th February and three were seen during the Migration Watch on 31st October. There were no reports of birds actually landing on the Reserve.

Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus

Red listed

This red-listed wader was reported in every month of the year and successful breeding was confirmed. On 15th January a flock of 80 flew over No.3 bed and six were on the scrape on the 19th. February saw over-flying flocks of 70 on two occasions and singles were on No.1 bed on the 1st and No.3 bed on the 22nd. With the arrival of the breeding season there were reports of 17 roosting on No.3 bed on 13th March and small numbers on the scrape, including one excavating a nest site on the 20th. A pair was also on the Loop islands on the 19th and 20th of the month. By 5th April one was sitting on three eggs on Vikki's Island and other early April sightings included two pairs on No.3 bed, four pairs on the Loop of No.4 bed and three birds on No.1 bed. Two were on nests on the Loop islands on 17th April whilst

back on No.3 bed a male was seen mating with one female with a second female on eggs. Two nests on the No.3 bed scrape contained two and three eggs on 20th April but by the 23rd one was empty and on the 29th a pair was defending a nest containing only one egg from an aggressive Greylag Goose.

A nest with four eggs was found on No.1 bed on 28th April and two chicks fledged. One of the nests on the Loop was attacked by Black-headed Gulls which chased a sitting bird off its eggs. A third nest with three eggs was found on No.3 bed on 4th May and on the 9th four pairs were on No.1 bed, all with young. A further nest was found on the No.3 bed scrape on 28th May when it contained three eggs, increasing to four the following day. The four eggs were still there on 4th June and a further nest with three eggs was found in front of the Hide in the north-east corner of No.3 bed. Unfortunately, this nest was washed out by rising water levels before hatching took place. The first of the four eggs on the scrape hatched on 22nd June and three chicks were noted two days later. However, by the 25th only one remained due to suspected predation by Black-headed Gulls which were seen to take one of the young. There was no sign of any young the following day. The birds on No.1 bed appeared to have had more success and on 29th June four pairs with a total of six young were at the nest sites.

It would seem that at least nine pairs attempted to breed but that only the birds on No.1 bed were known to have been successful.

Following the breeding season there was the usual build-up on No.3 bed which peaked at 330 on 22nd August. During the autumn there were a number of reports of large flocks mostly over-flying the Reserve. These included 410 on 28th September whilst on 16th October a total of 344 was seen to the north of No.1 bed. The WeBS count on 15th November totalled 1100 and a Migration Watch the following day 1050. The year ended with reports of birds flying west over No.3 bed: 720 on 7th December, 540 on the 19th and 250 on the 28th.

Little Ringed Plover

Charadrius dubius

This species now breeds annually at Woolston and this year there were records from late March to early September. The first sightings were from No.1 bed when two were found near the new pools on 24th and 29th March. One flew over No.3 bed on 3rd April and by the 12th three pairs were in suitable breeding habitat on No.1 bed. Three days later one was on No.3 bed and a second on flooded fields to the north of No.4 bed. This would indicate a total of eight birds which is around the average in recent years. On 24th May one was on fields to the north of No.2 bed but there were no further records from this area. June opened with a record of five on No.1 bed and their agitated behaviour was indicative of breeding. At the end of June two pairs with three young were present in this area and it appears that two or three pairs bred there. This is similar to recent years. There was no evidence of breeding elsewhere on the Reserve but a juvenile was on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide from 2nd to 4th September. No further records were submitted.

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

Red listed

This species remains an infrequent visitor. After a blank year in 2018 there were three records, all of birds over-flying No.3 bed on spring passage. Two flew west on 13th April, five flew east on 22nd April and the final reports were of three flying east and three west on 29th April.

Curlew*Red listed**Numenius arquata*

Another species normally seen on passage, there were a series of records in both the spring and autumn periods. One flew in and, unusually, landed on No.3 bed on 16th February. The rest of the spring sightings related to singles over-flying No.3 bed on the following dates: the 2nd, the 11th and the 30th March, 10th April and 16th May. There were just three reports of autumn passage; one from No.3 bed on 25th July, two, again from No.3 bed, on 17th August, and finally on 23rd August when one flew west over No.1 bed. What was presumed to be the same individual was seen to circle No.3 bed on the same day before flying off to the north-west. This was a relatively good year for a species which is normally only seen in small numbers.

*Curlew**David Bowman***Black-tailed Godwit***Red listed**Limosa limosa*

For the last few years large numbers have congregated on No.3 bed in late summer but this was not the case this year, though all sightings did come from this bed. There was one January sighting of three on the 11th but there were no further records until 13th April when seven were reported. On 19th April there was a further record of seven circling the bed. A single was present on 20th and 26th April and on 18th May 37 circled the bed before flying off to the west. None were reported between 28th May and 13th

July when a bird in summer plumage landed on the scrape and another four flew west. A single was reported on 20th, 21st and 22nd July and there followed almost daily records until September with a maximum of eight on 31st July. About 250 were seen flying west on 13th August and five were regular on the bed from 7th to 12th of that month with seven present on the 27th. September began with six and then up to three until the final report of the year on 27th September. After the large numbers seen recently this was a rather disappointing year but it has to be remembered that until recently this species was an infrequent visitor to the Reserve.



Black-tailed Godwit

David Bowman

Bar-tailed Godwit

Limosa lapponica

There were two records of this rare visitor which is normally confined to coastal areas. On 23rd April one landed on the scrape on No.3 bed and stayed for only six minutes before flying off high to the east. The other sighting was of one flying east, again over No.3 bed, on 16th May. Previously, the most recent records have been in 2011, 2005 and 2000.

Ruff

Calidris pugnax

Red listed

There was just a single record of one from the John Morgan hide on 29th August.

Sanderling*Calidris alba*

There was a single record of this rare visitor; on 8th August three birds in summer plumage flew towards the scrape on No.3 bed before veering off to the west. Prior to this year the most recent record was in 2015 and, before that, 1998.

Dunlin*Calidris alpina**Amber listed*

The nine records submitted made for a fairly average year for this infrequent visitor. Nearly all reports were from No.3 bed where two were present on 4th March, and one in each of April, May and June. There were July sightings of two on the 21st and four on the 27th. The final record from No.3 bed was of two on 15th August and reports ended with one during the Migration Watch on 31st October.

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos**Amber listed*

In comparison with 2018 when only six records were received, this was a much more successful year. A total of 46 reports was submitted between 7th April and 13th September, all from No.3 bed. The first was a single seen on one of the nest rafts and there were three further sightings of singles on the 27th, the 28th April and the 29th May. None were reported subsequently until 17th July. Two were found on 21st July and one or two were seen regularly until the end of that month. There was a further gap until 26th August and one or two were reported until the 29th. Singles were present on a number of dates in early September and the last record was on the 13th of that month.

Green Sandpiper*Tringa ochropus**Amber listed*

Sightings of this wader have increased significantly in recent years and it has become by far the most commonly recorded sandpiper. An overwintering bird had been present towards the end of 2018 and a report of one on No.3 bed on 5th January was probably this individual. There were no further records until 17th June and autumn passage began in earnest on 9th July when one was seen regularly from then until 22nd July when two were reported. The vast majority of this year's records were from No.3 bed and sightings continued throughout August with one or two seen on an almost daily basis. Three were present on three dates in the first half of August and, typically, numbers increased towards the end of the month. Five were seen on 23rd and 24th August and seven on the 26th was the highest of the year. Reports continued from No.3 bed throughout September and one was at Bollin Point on the 18th. There was a series of sightings on No.1 bed from 20th September onwards where one or two were reported on a number of occasions. Records continued during October when up to three were present on five dates. The year ended with two November sightings, the last being of two on No.3 bed on the 18th.

The ringing team on No.3 bed continued their colour-ringing programme and nine were ringed between 30th July and 14th September; eight of which were juveniles.

Greenshank*Tringa nebularia**Amber listed*

Only four records of this elegant wader were submitted which represents a poor year, especially when compared to 2018 when there were 35 sightings. All records were from No.3 bed and began with a report of two on 20th April. One flew west on 13th June and one was on the scrape on 12th August. The final sighting was of a single on 2nd September.

Wood Sandpiper*Tringa glareola**Amber listed*

There have been sightings of this rare passage migrant in each of the past five years. One landed very briefly on No.3 bed on 3rd May before being chased off by Black-headed Gulls. It flew round the bed a few times and then left high to the south west. The only other record came on 3rd August when a group of 14 waders, judged to be of the *Tringa* species, flew south over the east bank of No.3 bed. Although it was not possible to definitively confirm their identity, their appearance and the fact that this was a period of sizeable movements of this species nationally led the observers to conclude that they were possibly Wood Sandpipers.

Redshank*Tringa totanus**Amber listed*

With only five records submitted this year was disappointing. All reports were of singles on No.3 bed. One flew west on 9th May and there was a further sighting on 1st June. One was on the rafts on 1st July and there was a second July record on the 27th. The final record was of one on the scrape with Lapwings on 2nd October.

Jack Snipe*Lymnocyptes minimus*

There were just two records submitted, one on 28th January and the other on 16th December. The first sighting was of one disturbed from the West Pool on No.1 bed and the second was one flushed from the track by one of the new pools on No.1 bed.

Woodcock*Scolopax rusticola**Red listed*

Like the previous species this is a secretive and unobtrusive bird that is normally only seen when flushed. The 44 records submitted were a considerable increase on the previous year but this does not necessarily imply an increase in actual numbers. Typically, records were restricted to the two winter periods with the majority occurring between September and December. The year began with singles reported from all four beds and on 6th February two were flushed from the top of Butchersfield Tip. The majority of records were from Nos.1 and 3 beds with just one sighting from each of No.2 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed. On 26th and 27th February a total of four were present across the Reserve. The first autumn sighting was of one on No.3 bed on 21st September, and the most productive period of the

year was November and December. Four were flushed around No.3 bed on 9th November and on 20th November four were on No.1 bed alone. December saw a report of three in flight at dusk on the 16th and records continued to the year end with singles on both No.1 and No.3 beds.

Snipe

Gallinago gallinago

Amber listed

Somewhat unusually there were records submitted in every month, although there were no sightings between 16th June and 23rd July. Most reports were from Nos.1 and 3 beds. In the first three months of the year only low numbers were present apart from a flock of 27 which flew over No.3 bed on 28th February. An interesting record was of two flushed from trial excavations on No.4 bed on 27th March. April produced an increase in sightings but no more than three were reported. May saw fewer records and again the highest count was three. A single record of one on 16th June was the last until the end of July when birds began to return to the Reserve. There were twelve August reports with seven on the 26th and six on two other dates. An increase in numbers during September started with ten on the 2nd and 26 dropped into No.3 bed the following day. There were a number of double-figure counts in September including 15 during the WeBS count on the 14th and the same number on the 27th with nearly all the birds on No.3 bed. The October Migration Watch recorded 23 and high counts during November included 19 on No.3 bed on the 14th and 27 dropping into the same bed on the 26th. No more than three were seen during December.

The No.3 bed ringing team caught just one bird on 5th January, which had hatched in 2018.

Black Tern

Chlidonias niger

A scarce but near annual species at Woolston, normally involving just one or two records per year. Black Terns are often associated with easterly winds during late spring, when large numbers of passage migrants can move through the UK, add a bit of rain to the mix and any inland water body is in with a chance of hosting this charming species. So, it was perhaps not much of a surprise on 9th of May, during just these weather conditions and a big Black Tern day country wide, when two full summer plumaged adults dropped into No.3 bed. They fed for just 15 minutes before departing high, north-west. Somewhat more unusual for Woolston, was the second record of the year, on 27th of September when a juvenile arrived during a very heavy squall. Again, this bird stayed for just 10 minutes to feed, before disappearing south-east during a break in the weather. This constitutes just the 6th autumn record of Black Tern at Woolston and the first since 11th August 1986.

Common Tern

Sterna hirundo

Amber listed

Just 10 records in 2019, significantly fewer than the 24 in both 2017 and 2018. All records occurred on No.3 bed between 1st May and 9th August, the bulk of which involved single over flying adults. However, two flew north on both the 1st & 9th May and three birds were present on both the 10th and 26th July. Finally, on 9th August a juvenile did a few circuits of No.3 bed, before continuing on its way.



Black Tern

David Bowman



Arctic Tern

David Bowman

Arctic Tern*Sterna paradisaea**Amber listed*

An infrequent but just about annual passage migrant, so three passing through No.3 bed on the morning of 27th April was typical.

Kittiwake*Rissa tridactyla**Red listed*

This charismatic coastal wanderer is by no means common for the Reserve and after last year's hiatus, the four No.3 bed records in 2019 were more than welcome. Three of these were spring adults on the 15th and 24th March, and the slightly more unusual date of 9th May. Typically, these came after spells of wet and windy weather. The last record of the year came from a juvenile on 10th August. As to be expected, these birds were on the move and were all one-day wonders.

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

Numbers in January remained low, with a Reserve total of 92 birds on 19th being the peak count. The onset of February saw numbers begin to steadily rise, as breeding birds started to return, and on the 22nd 650 were counted on No.3 bed. Numbers remained high into the first half of March, with counts of 680 on the 4th and 800 on the 14th, as more and more birds started to settle in the breeding colony. By the start of May many birds were on eggs and a count of 108 nests was made around No.3 Bed on the 3rd May. It is estimated that there were around 150 pairs in total, many occupying both the scrape and various rafts. It wasn't long after, on 12th May, when the first chicks appeared, and just a few days later, on the 16th, 14 chicks could be viewed on the rafts. Additional chicks appeared by the day, and a minimum of 52 were counted on 25th May. Chick survival seemed to be a lot better than last year, and no mass predation events occurred on the scrape, seemingly thanks to the new electric fence. The breeding season progressed steadily through June, with chicks of varying ages scattered across No.3 bed. Meanwhile on the Loop of No.4, three gulls sitting on nests on 5th June was a notable event, however by the end of the month all birds had deserted. This does perhaps offer some promise for the hope of getting a Black-headed Gull breeding colony established on this bed in the near future. By the start of July many chicks on No.3 bed had fledged and on the 6th 93 fully grown juveniles were counted. A few late broods remained however, and an adult was still feeding two small young on the scrape on 31st July. After which the numbers of breeding birds started to dwindle and post breeders and juveniles started to disperse. The 17th August saw the last two adults and two juveniles on No.3 bed.

The number of Black-headed Gull on the Reserve is considerably lower outside the breeding season and autumn mainly saw just small groups dropping onto No.3 bed to bathe and drink. However, as winter sets in, and more wintering gulls start to arrive in the UK from the continent, some impressive daily movements can be seen over the Reserve. Birds fly west following the Manchester Ship Canal/River Mersey in the early evening as they presumably go out to roost on the estuary, and then move back inland to feed in the mornings. The most impressive of which was 1,920 moving east during the morning of the 30th November.

Little Gull*Hydrocoloeus minutus*

As in both 2017 & 2018, there was just one record of this species in 2019. An adult winter was on No.3 bed from 14th until the 21st March and was presumably brought in by the gale force westerly winds a few days previous. This is an early date for Little Gull at Woolston, the only earlier record being 5th February 1990.

Mediterranean Gull*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus**Amber listed*

Typical of this species at Woolston, all records in 2019 were from No.3 bed, during the spring and summer months. Presumably attracted by our Black-headed Gull colony, the timing of these sightings differs somewhat to other (mainly coastal) sites, that tend to see a large post-breeding peak during late summer/early autumn. The first record of the year was quite early, and involved a single adult on the 26th February amongst a large gathering of returning Black-headed Gulls. The next sighting wasn't until the 19th March, when a pair of adult summer birds displayed on the scrape. Interestingly, one of the pair was bearing a white darvic ring with the inscription 'E718'. It was ringed in the Netherlands in 2012 and was previously seen at Woolston in April 2016, thus making a return appearance three years later. This pair was seen most days for a week or so, and on 23rd March they were joined by an additional pair of adults. Regular sightings continued throughout March and April, mostly involving adults, although two second summer birds appeared during this time, both of which were seen together on 16th April. The peak count of seven birds was made on 25th April, consisting of five adults, a third summer and a second summer. Sightings again continued with some regularity throughout May, and on the 30th a pair was seen nest building on one of the rafts. Although, as with all previous signs of breeding, this didn't come to anything, and we still await our first breeding record for this species. The final sighting of the year was of a pair of adults on 15th June.

Common Gull*Larus canus**Amber listed*

Records were spread throughout the year, with 44 records split across 10 months. Most refer to single birds, largely adults. No doubt the raucous Black-headed Gull colony plays its part in bringing this species in, and most records come from early spring, with a peak count of 10 on the 9th March. The last record of the year came on 29th December with four at Latchford Locks.

Lesser Black-backed Gull*Larus fuscus**Amber listed*

Counts remained low through the early months of the year, with 28th March seeing the first double-figure count of 14 on No.4 Bed. Numbers stagnated until 20th April when 90 were on the Weir Basin, these birds are presumed to be the local breeders on a nearby industrial estate. With hungry mouths to feed the adults inevitably venture over the Reserve during the breeding season in the search for an easy meal, however the level of predation seemed to be comparatively lower than in previous years, though they were seen to take the young of Pochard, Tufted Duck, Moorhen, Coot and Black-headed Gull. A peak count of 214 (31 adults and 183 juveniles) came on 8th August, and numbers quickly dropped off



Mediterranean Gulls, one with a Dutch ring

Daniel Gornall



2nd calendar-year Mediterranean Gull

Daniel Owen

with single-figure counts resuming by 28th August. Most records in the latter half of the year refer to flyover birds, usually going to, or coming out of, their evening roost further along the Mersey Estuary.

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

A familiar species for many, but a fairly scarce bird for the Reserve, nonetheless a healthy 75 records were submitted. Most records are of flyover birds with individuals rarely joining the bathing Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Small numbers were recorded in the first half of the year with 12 dropping onto No.3 Bed on 18th April, and two hunting over No.3 on the 24th. The largest count came on 16th November, when 157 were counted over Butchersfield Tip, presumably leaving their evening roost. Interestingly, 30 were recorded flying south over No.3 Bed throughout the day on the 26th and were perhaps birds on the move.



Kumlein's Gull

Daniel Owen

Iceland Gull

Larus glaucooides

There was a single record of this highly unexpected winter visitor, and even more unusually the sighting involved a bird of the Canadian subspecies known as “Kumlien’s Gull”. A single bird flew west over No.3 bed on the afternoon of 28th October, which represents the first Iceland Gull record for the Reserve since 1999 and was the first-ever record of this rarer subspecies. It was also an early date for this species nationwide with most records relating to storm-driven birds in the latter half of winter.

Great Black-backed Gull

Larus marinus

Amber listed

An increasingly common species on the Reserve, mainly involving over-flying birds, with some dropping in to spend just a few minutes on the No.3 lagoon. Unsurprisingly the winter months seemed to dominate the records, with many gulls wintering inland before returning to their coastal breeding colonies. There were records from every month of the year during 2019. Both January and February hosted six records each, including high counts of three at Latchford Locks and five on No.3 on the 6th of each month respectively. March and April both had three records, involving single birds or pairs. Sightings dropped off slightly during the summer months, but there were six August records including an adult and juvenile on No.3 bed on the 20th. Singles were noted during Migration Watches on 7th September and 16th November. This was followed by high counts of three birds on No.3 bed on the 18th November and 16th December. A final record on 19th December was the last of the year.

Feral Pigeon

Columba livia

Although Feral Pigeons are a resident species and can be observed flying over the Reserve on a daily basis relatively few counts are submitted. The largest count was of 20 seen from No.3 bed on 19th March. A similar number passed over No.1 bed on 16th April. There were no counts received this year from Latchford Locks where typically up to 200 birds can be seen. It is not known if this is because of their real absence or, unsurprisingly, the species is ignored by most observers!

Stock Dove

Columba oenas

Amber listed

Stock Doves are thought to breed on all four beds. Maximum counts made during the Common Bird Surveys were nine on No.1 bed, three on No.2 bed, four on No.3 bed and two on No.4 bed. In the summer birds could regularly be seen at the feeding stations by the John Morgan hide. The species is relatively common on the farmland surrounding the eastern end of the Reserve and, during the Migration Watches from Butchersfield Tip, the maximum count was 41 on 7th September.

On No.1 bed two were ringed during the year, both at the feeding station, one being a female with a brood patch.

No.3 bed saw the lowest total ringed (4 new birds) since 2012 when two were ringed. They were ringed between 19th March and 5th June. This spread of dates is greater than has been typical since the first was ringed on the bed in 2010. Typically, though all were adults.

Woodpigeon

Columba palumbus

A common breeding species on all four beds. Maximum counts of birds in suitable breeding habitat made during the Common Bird Surveys were 24 on No.1 bed, 20 on No.2 bed, 14 on No.3 bed and 20 on No.4 bed. In autumn there were some significant roosts and movements. Four hundred and twenty were roosting on No.3 bed on 11th December and by the 16th this had increased to 750. The largest

southward movements were 3600 over No.3 bed on 17th October and 4800 on 9th November over the same bed

Four new birds were ringed on No.3 bed compared with an average of five. They were caught in January, March, November and December. The first three were adults. The final one of the year on the 21st December was a fairly recently fledged juvenile!



Stock Dove

David Bowman

Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

Collared Doves breed in the housing estates of Latchford and Woolston which surround the Reserve and can occasionally be seen overflying the beds. Most observations were of single birds and the maximum seen was on 18th July when five flew west over No.3 bed. Only a single bird was seen during the Migration Watches from Butchersfield where the species is usually more regularly seen on the surrounding farmland. It will be interesting to note in future years if this represents a real decline or if this year is considered an anomaly.

Cuckoo
Red listed

Cuculus canorus

A relatively good year for this declining species. Birds were heard calling on both No.1 and No.3 beds. The first arrived on No.1 bed on 19th April and there were a further five sightings of singles on this bed, the last on 31st May. The first seen on No.3 bed was on 23rd April and sightings continued until 4th June. Again, all sightings were of singles. It seems certain that the No.1 and No.3 bed sightings are of different birds and there was possibly a third bird present as there was a single record of one calling near the Sandpit Pond on No.4 bed on 25th May. Unfortunately, no juveniles were observed.

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

One of the highlights of the year was the first breeding record of Barn Owl in the Reserve's history. A pair nested in a nest box on No.1 bed. Three pullus were ringed on 27th July. Although there were no further records of the young it is hoped that they all successfully fledged. Away from No.1 bed, there were only two other sightings; one hunting over the reed bed at dusk on 3rd January and one flying over the river at dusk by the footbridge on 25th January.

Tawny Owl
Amber listed

Strix aluco

A typical year for this species with individuals seen or heard calling on No.1, 2 and 3 beds. Most records were of singles and the maximum was three on No.3 bed on 7th December. None of the owl boxes were used for breeding but the birds are assumed to breed elsewhere on the beds. There were no records from No.4 bed but this is likely to be due to lack of observer coverage rather than to absence.

On No.3 bed a ringed female was picked up dead near the tractor shed on 21st April. It had originally been ringed as an adult in February 2011 and had been handled again in 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2017. The ringing team sent the body away for post-mortem and it was found that the fatality was probably due to a collision with a branch (based on the damage to the bird and the location of finding). There were no toxins found in its system.

Long-eared Owl

Asio otus

This former breeding species had not been reported since 2015 but this year there were two records. The first was on 28th February when one was seen hunting Starlings at roost on No.1 bed. The second record was on 7th December of one hunting along the south bank of No.2 bed at dusk.

Swift
Amber listed

Apus apus

The first arrival was on 30th April, a fairly typical date, when three were seen over No.3 bed. More arrived over the first week in May with 20 on the 1st, 36 on the 2nd and 78 on the 4th. Although reasonable

numbers continued to be seen on the Reserve in May, very cold weather and unfavourable winds resulted in only small numbers around local breeding sites for much of May. With the first warm days on 23rd May there was a clear arrival with the one or two birds over Grappenhall suddenly increasing to five or six screaming over Albert Road breeding sites and several birds calling from nest holes on three properties. There was a return to cool and windy weather in the last week of May, but on 2nd June at least 30 Swifts were screaming above one road in the Westy estate. They appeared to have a good breeding season; on the 26th July, the hottest July day ever, 21 were above Albert Road the highest count for many years. On the Reserve the largest post-breeding counts were 140 on 8th August and 183 on 22nd August. Birds remained until early September with 17 on 2nd September and the last sighting was of two on No.3 bed on 12th September.



Kingfisher

David Bowman

Kingfisher

Amber listed

Alcedo atthis

Kingfishers were relatively scarce in the first quarter of the year with only four sightings, two on No.3 bed and two on No. 4 bed. However, from spring onwards, there were regular sightings on both of these beds and also at Woolston Weir. In July and August, they were seen daily from the John Morgan Hide and the maximum count on No.3 bed was four on 3rd August. This year in addition to using the Willow branches in front of the hide they frequented the new electric fence posts as perches for fishing.

There were no known nest sites but they are assumed to have nested along the Ship Canal or River Mersey as at least one juvenile was regularly observed on No.3 bed in August. Evidence of breeding also came from the ringing teams. On No.1 bed seven were ringed, six of them juveniles. The first was on 10th June with the last, the only adult, on 23rd October. Six new Kingfishers were ringed on No.3 bed. All were juveniles ringed between 3rd August and 5th October. All except one was caught in the

net set to catch Green Sandpipers. On 27th August two birds were caught, the second bird was already wearing a ring. It had been ringed by David Norman at Oxmoor, Runcorn and had presumably followed either the Ship Canal or the Mersey before being re-trapped at Woolston.

Green Woodpecker

Picus viridis

This species remains scarce on the Reserve, with only eight records in the year. Six of these were on No.1 bed where it is thought the species breeds in the surrounding areas of Lymm and Rixton. There were two records from No.3 bed; one was heard calling by the car park on 30th and 31st July.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos major

Great Spotted Woodpecker was a common sight and sound throughout the year and was recorded on all four beds. The maximum counts were three on No.1 bed on 18th December, two on No.2 bed on 20th June, four on No.3 bed on 19th March and four on No.4 bed on the same date. Birds were heard drumming on No.3 and No.4 beds and breeding is thought likely to have occurred on all four beds.

On No.1 bed, after last year's record total of 15, eight were ringed, a more average number. The first juvenile was caught there on 12th July and a female with a brood patch was ringed on 22nd April. Two were re-trapped from previous years, both from 2018

Thirteen were ringed on No.3 bed which is slightly above the average of ten. The first juvenile was ringed on 26th June and a total of 10 juveniles were ringed. Four were re-trapped from 2018 and two from 2017.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Dryobates minor

Red listed

After a disappointing year in 2018 with only one sighting, it is pleasing that this year there were several sightings. On 28th March a male was drumming and displaying and a week later a pair was seen in the centre of the No.3 bed. There were no further sightings until July when there were two records of single birds in flight over the same bed. On 16th September one was heard calling on No.2 bed. Finally, in November there was a series of records of one bird along the south bank of No.3 bed. Unfortunately, the age and sex of the birds involved in these later sightings is unknown.

An adult male in breeding condition was caught on 8th July, the first since 2008 and was only the third to be ringed on No.1 bed.

Magpie

Pica pica

A common and widespread resident, although surprisingly this year there were no records from No.1 bed. This is probably due to observers ignoring the species rather than their absence. On the other beds the following maximum counts were made: six on No.2 bed, 15 on No.3 bed and 11 on No.4 bed.

On No.1 bed the first were ringed since 2016, a second-year female with a brood patch caught on 20th May and an adult on 16th October. On No.3 bed four were handled during the year. Three new and one re-trapped from 2018. The new birds were all juveniles. The average annual total is three, so this year was typical.

Jay

Garrulus glandarius

Jay breeds on all four beds. During the Common Bird Surveys, two were counted on No.1 bed, three on No.2 bed, five on No.3 bed and one on No.4 bed. In some years there are significant autumn influxes but this year the maximum count was just 16 on 12th October, 10 of which were on No.3 bed and another six were at Bollin Point.

Five were ringed on No.1 bed, an average year, with a further three re-trapped, one from 2014 and not caught since, one from 2017 and one from 2018. Two were caught in breeding condition, a male and a female.

Ringers on No.3 bed had a poor year with just four ringed, all of which were adults caught between April and September. The average total ringed is 11.

Jackdaw

Corvus monedula

Jackdaw is not known to breed on the Reserve but are regularly seen overflying the beds. The largest numbers are seen from No.1 bed as the birds move between the surrounding farmland. The maximum count from here was 75 flying north on 30th October. There was also a similar number gathering on No.1 bed on 2nd October. On No.3 bed they can occasionally be seen at the feeding stations but are more regularly seen in overflying flocks, with peak counts of 48 on 12th August and 74 on 29th October

Rook

Corvus frugilegus

Of the corvid species recorded on the Reserve, Rooks are the scarcest. They are best observed in the arable and pastureland surrounding the eastern end of the Reserve and it was from here that the largest count was made, of 20 overflying No.1 bed on 2nd October. The maximum count on No.3 bed was eight flying over on 8th October. In late April and early May there were regular sightings of an adult flying north-east over the bed and then returning with a bulging crop, presumably to a nest site somewhere south-west of the Reserve.

Carrion Crow

Corvus corone

Carrion Crows are thought to breed on all four beds. The Common Bird Surveys recorded 15 on No.1 bed, three on No.2 bed, two on No.3 bed and 11 on No.4 bed. As is typical, the maximum counts were made during the Migration Watches from Butchersfield tip with a peak count of 171 on 16th November.



Ravens flying over No.3 bed

Daniel Owen

Raven

Corvus corax

Once a scarce visitor, Ravens are now a regular, almost daily, sighting on the Reserve. Although not confirmed it is reported that they nested in 2019 on the nearby Grange industrial estate, which might account for the increase in sightings. Most records were of one or two birds and the peak count was four over No.3 bed on 29th August.

Goldcrest

Regulus regulus

Goldcrests were recorded on all four beds and in all months except for July. Singing males were noted on No.2, No.3 and No.4 beds. On No.4 bed a bird was observed feeding young, which is the first confirmed breeding for the bed. In the autumn and early winter periods, as is typical, numbers increased due to the arrival of migrant birds; peak counts were on No.3 bed with 12 on 31st October and 15 on 18th November.

There were 177 ringed during the year on No.1 bed and although lower than each of the previous three years' totals, it was still the fourth highest since 1995. A few overwintered on the bed with four re-trapped during the first winter period that had been ringed the previous year. A further one was originally ringed on No.3 bed and another was caught that had originally been ringed elsewhere in the

UK. The first juvenile was caught on 21st June, while most appear to move straight through, two, both ringed as juveniles (presumed locally bred) on 15th July were both re-trapped on 18th November. The peak months on the bed were September and October with 56 and 77 ringed respectively. A further re-trap was one that was ringed on 2nd November 2018 and re-trapped on 23rd October 2019.

On No.3 bed the ringers had a record year with 93 ringed. Three were from the first winter period. The first juvenile appeared on the 8th August and catching continued until the year end, with October and November being the best months.

Firecrest

Regulus ignicapilla

The only record was of a first-year male caught on No.1 bed on 4th November, a typical date. This is the fourth successive year one has been caught on the bed.



Blue Tit from the Sybil Hogg Hide

David Bowman

Blue Tit

Cyanistes caeruleus

Blue Tit is a common resident breeding species. The Common Bird Surveys recorded 12 on No.1 bed, 16 on No.2 bed, six on No.3 bed and 10 on No.4 bed.

On No.1 bed the ringers had the second-best year for this species, after 2018, with 264 ringed including seven pullus from nest boxes, three of which were re-trapped after fledging. 132 others were caught during the year that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest was from 2014 (7), with others from

2015 (7), 2016 (23) and 2017 (26) and the remainder from 2018. Three were originally from No.3 bed and one had been ringed elsewhere in the UK. The first fledged juveniles were caught on 31st May and five males and four females were caught in breeding condition.

The ringers on No.3 bed had a record year with 417 ringed. The first pulli were ringed on 4th May, with 61 pulli ringed in total. The first fledged juvenile was ringed on 18th May (a bird that had just fledged). A total of 314 young birds were ringed during the year against an average of 185, making it an exceptional year for the species.

Great Tit

Parus major

Great Tit is another common resident breeding species. The Common Bird Surveys recorded seven on No.1 bed, two on No.2 bed, eight on No.3 bed and six on No.4 bed.

Similar to Blue Tit, Great Tit enjoyed a third successive excellent breeding season. The ringers on No.1 bed had the third best year since 1995 with 178 ringed of which 13 were pullus from nest boxes, none of which were re-trapped following fledging. A further 82 were caught that had been ringed in an earlier year, including ten from No.3 bed and one from elsewhere in the UK. The oldest to be ringed originally on No.1 was from 23rd September 2012, a second was from that year and others were from 2014 (3), 2015 (2), 2016 (2), 2017 (14). The remainder were from 2018. The first juveniles were ringed on 29th May and 11 adults were caught in breeding condition, five females and six males.

No.3 bed had a record year with 344 ringed compared with an average of 189. The first pulli were ringed in the boxes on the 4th May and the first fledged young on 3rd June. In total 112 pulli were ringed, with a total of 187 additional juveniles ringed. Many birds were re-trapped from previous years, 57 from 2018, 12 from 2017, eight from 2016 and five each from 2015 and 2014.

Coal Tit

Periparus ater

Once a scarcity, Coal Tits have now established themselves in small numbers on No.3 bed and in the Butchersfield Tip area. On No.3 bed, one could regularly be heard singing in trees adjacent to the footbridge and in trees along the south bank. The ringing report highlights that, although the 27 ringed is a reduction from the record 42 in 2018, the average of the last five years is 28 and over the last ten years it is 18, so the population is clearly increasing.

On No.1 bed 19 were ringed, the third best year since 1995, and there were three re-traps from previous years, one from 2017 and two from 2018. Unusually two were caught in breeding condition a male and a female and the first juvenile was caught on 7th June, a typical date, followed by three others in August with the regular Autumn passage starting 23rd September.

On No.3 bed, eight birds were ringed against an average of three and the first juvenile was ringed on 15th June.



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Coal Tit on No.3 bed

Andy Weir

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*
Red listed

Perhaps second only to our Black-necked Grebes, Willow Tits are one of the Reserve highlights. The national decline of this species has been discussed in previous annual reports so it is pleasing to note that our population appears to be stable. A detailed study by Allan Rustell on breeding Willow Tits is included towards the end of this report and he estimates a total population of between 24 and 33 pairs.

A further indication that our population is stable comes from the ringing data. The 39 ringed compares well with a ten-year average of 37. Juveniles accounted for 33 of those that were newly ringed compared with 37 in the previous year and 2019 would appear to have been another good breeding season for this species.

On No.1 bed, 2019 was an average year with 14 ringed, a further five were caught that had been ringed in previous years with the oldest from 23rd July 2014, others were from 2016 (1), 2017 (1) and 2018 (2). Four adults were caught in breeding condition, two males and two females and the first juvenile was ringed on 21st June.

No.3 bed had the second highest total in the last 16 years with 25 ringed compared with an average of 17. The first juvenile was ringed on 1st June, the second earliest ever date. Of the 25 ringed 21 were juveniles. The only birds re-trapped from previous years were four from 2018.

Bearded Tit

Panurus biarmicus

Two males were caught on No.3 bed on 27th October. This is only the 6th record for the Reserve and the first since 2007. There were sightings after their release until the 29th October when three were seen from the John Morgan Hide, though the views were not sufficient to sex any of them. There were then no further sightings for the remainder of the year and the birds were thought to have moved on. However, at the time of writing (March 2020) at least two birds have been heard calling in the reed beds on several occasions. Unfortunately, they haven't been seen so it is not known if they are a potential breeding pair, which would be an exciting addition to the Reserve list!

Skylark

Alauda arvensis

Red listed

Skylarks breed in the farmland surrounding the eastern end of the Reserve. They have also returned as a possible breeding species to the Reserve, on the landfill area of No.1 bed. Two singing males were observed here on several occasions during the spring and summer and at least four birds were seen in the area. In addition to breeding there were also some notable autumn and winter movements. On No.1 bed the maximum count was 100 seen flying south on 30th September. On No.3 bed a similar number was seen flying north on 30th January and in the second winter period 65 flew west in one flock on 4th December.

Sand Martin

Riparia riparia

The first arrival was on a fairly typical date of 14th March when four arrived in the late afternoon and fed low over No.3 bed before heading off north west. There were no further sightings until the 19th when five were observed on No.3 bed. For the remainder of March small numbers continued to arrive but early April saw a large arrival. On the 2nd, 700 passed through during the day, large flocks dropping in during hail showers before departing north-west. Other notable arrivals during April were 200 on the 9th, 570 heading north on the 10th and 150 on the 16th. Passage continued in early May when 150 were seen on the 4th during a morning long passage of all three hirundines. Most counts in July and August were in single figures, with the maximum of 25 on 23rd August. The last sighting was of two on 15th September.

The only evidence of breeding was at a nesting colony along the bank of the Ship Canal. Disappointingly, however, numbers were small. The maximum count was of four birds and on the 29th June only a single bird was seen.

Further evidence of the decline in numbers comes from ringing data. The ringers on No.1 bed caught none for the first time since 2012. On No.3 bed, 13 new were ringed during the year which is a little below average. They were all caught with Wwallows at roost in August.

Swallow

Hirundo rustica

The first record was of one on No.3 bed on the fairly early date of 27th March but there were few other sightings until 2nd April when six were observed. This was the start of a steady passage during April.

The peak passage occurred in late April and early May. On 26th April 100 passed through and in early May counts were, 45 on the 2nd, 190 on the 4th, during a morning long passage of all three hirundines, and 100 on the 6th. Breeding occurred along the Ship Canal near the Viaduct and birds were also seen around the pumping station on No.2 bed, a traditional nesting site. There was no large roost on No.1 bed and the maximum count was just 40 on 12th August. This compares to 400 in 2018, 350 in 2017 and 1500 in 2016. The roost on No.3 bed was somewhat larger with 300 on 24th August.

Return passage was observed throughout September and a count of 758 during a Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on the 7th was notable. A southward movement of 350 flew was then over No.1 bed on the 16th. On 5th October 29 were seen moving south over Butchersfield Tip and the last sighting was on the 24th, a very late date for the Reserve.

For the ringers on No.1 bed, with no real roost forming, it was the worst year since 2012 with just 20 ringed, all on 20th August. All were birds of the year except for two adult females, one of which had a brood patch. The No. 3 bed ringers had much better fortune with the best year since 2014 and 184 ringed during August, compared with an average of 192.

House Martin

Delichon urbicum

Amber listed

House Martins are usually the last of the hirundines to arrive and this year was no exception. The first were four on No.3 bed on 3rd August. Further passage during the remainder of April was limited with, in the first three weeks, only nine further sightings with a maximum count of six. The first large arrival was on 25th April with 150 birds observed over No.3 bed. Two hundred were recorded there the next day and 550 on 4th May. This last count is the largest ever on the Reserve (the previous maximum was 500) and was part of a morning long passage of all three hirundines.

In the summer counts were very low, illustrative of the decline in the local breeding populations. On No.3 bed almost all counts were of one or two birds only. On No.4 bed there was a count of 40 on 7th June, feeding over the Loop and it is thought that there may be a surviving breeding colony on the industrial estate north of the bed.

The first significant return passage was noted on 7th September when 67 flew south over No.1 bed. Fifty-five passed through No.3 bed on 5th September and the largest autumn movement was noted on the 7th September when 335 flew south over Butchersfield Tip during a Migration Watch. The last sighting was of 10 passing over No.3 bed on 26th September.

Cetti's Warbler

Cettia cetti

An established breeding resident which skulks in dense vegetation making sightings uncommon and usually brief. The explosive song is distinctive and the volume it is delivered at gives rise to easy identification resulting in close to 200 records submitted this year across the Reserve's four beds. All the records refer to single or low digit numbers of birds. The highest counts were of singing males; four on No.3 bed on 2nd March, five on No.1 bed on 20th March, six on No.3 bed on 30th March and 10th April, four on No.2 bed on 18th April and two on the northern transect of No.4 bed on 20th April. The year ended with five calling around No.3 bed on 21st December.

A total of 27 was caught by the ringing teams, 24 of which were new, six from No.1 bed and 18 from No.3 bed. Three were re-trapped from previous years, one from 2016 and two from 2017. One was also caught on No.3 bed on 27th October having been ringed on 16th July at Rutland Water, Rutland. Two juveniles were ringed in July, four in August and September, nine in October and one in November.



Long-tailed Tit

Andy Weir

Long-tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus

A common breeding resident across the Reserve which may be under-reported given that only 28 records were received. Singles and low digit numbers were reported throughout the year. The only double-digit count prior to breeding completion was 11 on No.3 bed on 15th January. Spring breeding bird surveys recorded birds in suitable breeding habitat as follows; three on No.2 bed on 18th April, six on No.3 bed and one on No.4 bed on 20th April and an adult and two recently fledged young on No.1 bed on 9th May. The highest count of 26 was recorded on the Migration Watch from Butchersfield on the morning of 31st October.

It was a very good year for the number of Long-tailed Tits, ringed with a total of 210. The 104 from No.1 be was the third best total since 1995 while the 106 from No.3 bed was well above the average of 66. A further 34 were re-trapped from previous years, 23 from 2018, seven from 2017, six from 2016, two from 2015 and 2014 and one from 2013. The first juveniles were ringed on typical dates from mid to late May, on the 17th and 25th on No.1 and No.3 beds respectively.

Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus collybita

A common breeding summer migrant across the Reserve with occasional over-wintering individuals. The year started with one on No.3 bed on 3rd January, an obvious over-wintering bird. Further reports of singles on No.3 bed on 26, 27th and 28th February were probably the first returning migrants. By 2nd March seven were in song around the Reserve, four on No.3 bed, two on No.4 bed and one on No.2 bed. Numbers increased throughout March and the maximum counts of singing males in the breeding bird surveys were: 20 on the northern transect of No.4 bed on 27th March, eight on No.1 bed on 12th April, 21 on No.2 bed on 18th April and 11 on No.3 bed on 11th May. The highest count was recorded on 17th March, of 60 on a survey of the whole Reserve. Records of one or two were frequent on No.3 bed from 14th October through to 21st December involving at least two over-wintering individuals. The last migrants were probably the three reported on 5th October on No.3 bed after seven were present on the same bed on 28th September.

The 454 Chiffchaff's ringed during the year, included a below average 248 on No.1 bed, due to the reduced ringing effort and 206 on No.3 bed, a 20% increase on the ten-year average of 167 new birds. Seventeen were re-trapped from previous years, 13 from 2018 and two each from 2017 and 2015. A presumed early migrant was caught on No.1 bed on 25th February, which then stayed to breed. No others were caught on the bed until a more usual date, on 20th March, with the first on No.3 bed on 30th March. Fourteen were caught on No.1 bed in breeding condition, six females and eight males with the first juvenile ringed on 31st May (13th June in 2018). The last migrant was ringed on 20th October with 11 probable wintering birds caught from 19th November to 28th December, one on No.1 bed and ten on No.3 bed, one of which was of the race *Tristis*, known as Siberian Chiffchaff, caught on 5th December.



Chiffchaff

Andy Weir



Siberian Chiffchaff

Daniel Gornall

Willow Warbler

Amber listed

Phylloscopus trochilus

A commo, breeding summer migrant. The first returning individual was recorded on 2nd April on No.3 bed and 15 singing males were then counted on a walk of No.2, 3 and 4 beds on the 15th and 20th April. Spring bird surveys high counts were: 19 on No.1 bed on 16th April with 14 singing males recorded on the same bed on 9th May, six singing males on No.2 bed on 18th April, 15 on No.3 bed on 15th and 20th April and 11 singing males on the No.4 bed southern transect on 13th May. The last records were in August, all from No.3 bed, with five on the 19th, one on the 22nd and the 23rd then three on 24th which was the final record.

After the first was ringed, on typical dates of 8th and 10th April on No.1 bed and No.3 bed respectively, it was a poor year, with combined totals down a third on the ten-year average with only 129 ringed, 94 on No.1 bed and 35 on No.3 bed. There were 13 re-traps from previous years, two from 2016, one from 2017 and ten from 2018. The No.3 bed team ringed its first juvenile on 9th July, quite a late date compared to their average. The final one was ringed on the early date of 24th August on No.3 bed and 30th August on No.1 bed.



Willow Warbler

David Bowman

Blackcap

Sylvia atricapilla

A common, breeding summer migrant across the whole Reserve. The first melodic tones of the year of this songster were reported from No.4 bed on 27th March. On 18th April the highest count of the year, 49, was recorded from a walk of the whole Reserve. The breeding bird surveys reported maximum singing male territories as follows: 11 on No.1 bed on 12th April, 31 on No 2 bed on 18th April, 26 on No.3 bed on 20th April, 30 on the northern transect of No.4 bed on 5th May and 19 on the southern transect on 13th May. The final record of the year was of one on 31st October on No.3 bed. There were no records of over-wintering individuals.

This was the second-most ringed species on the Reserve, after Greenfinch, with 729 ringed. On No.1 bed 347 was the second highest total since 1995, while the 401 from No.3 bed was 15% above the average. The first captures of returning individuals were two days apart, the 8th and 10th April, on the two ringing beds. No.1 bed reported 32 caught in breeding condition, nine females and 23 males with the first juvenile on 10th June, a day later than on No.3 bed. The last capture was on No.3 bed on 31st October. Thirty-eight were re-trapped from previous years ringing, 28 from 2018, six from 2017 and four from 2016.



Blackcap

David Bowman

Garden Warbler

Sylvia borin

A breeding summer migrant widespread on the Reserve but in low numbers, approximately three quarters of the 2019 records were of singles. The first returning individual was reported singing on 20th April on No.3 bed. The highest counts were of four on No.3 bed on both 9th and 10th May, four singing males on No.4 bed and two singing males alongside the public footpath by No.2 bed on 13th May.

The ringing teams had a less productive year with this species than 2018 with only 26 captures, 24 ringed and two re-trapped from previous years, one each from 2017 and 2018. The first returning migrant, caught on 13th May on No.1 bed, was the re-trapped individual originally ringed in 2018. No.1 bed reported four caught in breeding condition, two females and two males with their first juvenile ringed on 23rd July, two weeks later than in 2018 and three weeks later than No.3 bed where the first juvenile was trapped on 29th June. The final captures of the year were on No.1 bed with two in September, the last on the 15th whilst No.3 bed experienced a very early last capture date of 8th August. This contrasts with historical data where August has generally been the best ringing month for this species.

Lesser Whitethroat

Sylvia curruca

This delicate, breeding summer migrant was recorded on 14 dates between the first return date of 14th April and the last Reserve record on 24th August. All the reports related to sightings on Nos.3 bed and 4 beds. Most were singles, with the exception of three recorded on No.3 bed on 29th April, two in song on the Canal Track on 2nd May and two on No.3 bed on 21st and 24th May.

With a ten-year Reserve average of five ringed per annum, 2019 was another reasonable year for the species with six new birds ringed, three on each bed. The captures on No.1 bed were all juveniles with two on 19th and 21st June and were probably locally bred, with the last on 7th August. No.3 bed ringed a returning male on 28th April followed by two juveniles in August.

Whitethroat

Sylvia communis

A breeding summer migrant common across the Reserve in suitable habitat. The first returning migrant, a singing male, was reported on No.1 bed on 16th April. The highest counts of the year were from No.4 bed with the breeding bird surveys identifying 46 singing males, 29 on the northern transect on 5th May and 17 on the southern transect on 13th May. In contrast, No.1 bed recorded just six males on 9th May. The last record of the year was of a single on No.3 bed on 16th September, the latest date in the last three years.

2019 was a poor year for numbers of Whitethroats ringed with just 57, 24 on No.1 bed and 33 on No.3 bed. Numbers ringed over the decades show a marked trend in reduced captures of this migrant warbler with averages of 202 in the 1990's, 169 in the 2000's, and 119 in the 2010's. Apart from 2018 when the total ringed was 132, in the context of historical captures, four of the last five years ringing totals have been below 100 resulting in the recent five-year average of just 82.

The first returning individuals were ringed in April, on the 21st and 26th on No.3 and No.1 beds respectively. The last were ringed on 27th August and 2nd September in the same bed order. There were seven re-trapped from previous ringing years, two each from 2018 and 2017 and one from each year, 2016, 2015 and 2014. On No.1 bed seven were caught in breeding condition, two females and five males and the first juvenile was caught on 3rd July, five days earlier than on No.3 bed.

Grasshopper Warbler

Locustella naevia

Red listed

Numbers of this secretive, breeding summer migrant have fluctuated over recent years but a reducing trend in numbers is evident. Just four records were submitted this year, all from No.4 bed on three dates 23rd April, 6th May and 14th June. It is possible these were related to the same reeling individual. No Grasshopper Warblers were ringed during the year.

Sedge Warbler

Acrocephalus schoenobaenus

A breeding summer migrant which shares similar habitat to the Reed Warbler which outnumbers it by a ratio of c 6:1. The first returning male was singing on No.3 bed on 17th April, a typical date. Breeding

bird surveys provided only low numbers of singing males on all of the dates conducted. The highest counts of the season were all recorded on No.3 bed with six on 27th August and five recorded on both the 10th and 17th May and on 24th August. The last report was of a single individual on No.3 bed on 16th September.

Another species that had poor ringing numbers with a Reserve total of 71, plus a single re-trapped bird which had been previously ringed elsewhere in the UK. The 12 ringed on No.1 bed was the second lowest number since 1995 whilst No.3 bed numbers were 13% below the average. The first and last captures were 22nd April and 26th August on No.1 bed and 4th May and 30th August on No.3 bed. These last capture dates are the earliest on record. There were no reports of birds caught in breeding condition and the first juveniles were late on both beds, plus two weeks on 26th July on No.1 bed and plus one month on 17th August on No.3 bed. The No.3 bed date is so late the bird could just as likely have been a migrant moving through as being bred at Woolston. This data would suggest that it was a poor year for this species breeding on the Reserve.



Juvenile Sedge Warbler

David Bowman

Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus scirpaceus

A common, breeding summer migrant. The first returning individual was reported on 14th April on No.3 bed. Spring surveys of breeding birds reported maximum numbers of singing males of: 15 on No.4 bed on 30th April, ten on No.1 bed on 9th May and 11 on No.3 on 11th May. Nine records were

submitted from 14th to 28th September with the last record being a single bird on No.3 bed on 2nd October, the latest Reserve record since 2013.

It was an average year for ringing this species with a total of 449, 130 on No.1 bed and 319 on No.3 bed. In addition, 58 were re-trapped from previous years, one from 2014, six from 2015, six from 2016, nine from 2017, 36 from 2018 and one ringed elsewhere in the UK. No.3 bed caught a male with a Dutch ring on 20th June which was still present on 3rd August. The first returning individuals were ringed on 21st and 22nd April. No.1 bed caught 47 birds in breeding condition, 22 females and 25 males with the first juveniles ringed on 22nd June and 3rd July on No.3 and No.1 beds respectively. The final captures were typically in September when four were caught on No.1 bed on the 2nd and one on No.3 bed on the 28th.



Juvenile Reed Warbler

Hazel Rothwell

Nuthatch

Sitta europaea

Not a common or frequently encountered species on the Reserve but reported annually. In the traditional favoured eastern end of the Reserve, reports matched historical numbers with three birds recorded on Butchersfield, one during each of the Migration Watches of 7th September and 31st October and one on 18th September. On the western side of the Reserve, and in No.3 bed in particular, Nuthatch was a rarity until 2018 when, surprisingly, 11 sightings occurred and five were ringed. This reporting period has seen that increase continue, with records from 36 dates and in every month of the year except May. Most of the records related to singles, though with two noted on 27th June, one in the centre of the bed and one in the copse between No.3 and No.2 beds. Another two were reported on 30th June and two were calling from the west bank of No.2 bed on 14th September.

Treecreeper

Certhia familiaris

A resident species frequently recorded with one or two on many dates throughout the year. The first record was on 2nd January and the last on 20th December with a further 38 reports in between, with sightings in every month. Most records were of single birds but seven related to sightings of two.

As far as the ringing teams are concerned, 2019 was a record year for Treecreeper, with 31 ringed. Fourteen of these were from No.1 bed, along with a re-trapped individual originally ringed in 2018. On No.3 bed 17 were ringed, easily exceeding the ten-year average of eight. None were caught in breeding condition and the first juveniles were ringed in June, the 10th on No.1 and the 15th on No.3 bed.

Wren

Troglodytes troglodytes

A widespread common resident across the four beds, occurring throughout the year and regularly recorded in single and low double-digit numbers. During the spring breeding bird surveys recorded numbers increase as singing males are more visible. The maximum counts of the year were: 31 on No.3 bed on 20th April, 48 on No.4 bed, southern transect, on 13th May, 26 on No.1 bed on 1st June and 26 on No.2 bed on 20th June.

With a combined total of 174 ringed, 63 on No.1 bed and 111 on No.3 bed, it was an average year for the ringers. A further 36 were re-trapped from previous years ringing, two from 2015, nine from 2017 and 25 from 2018. No.1 bed caught seven in breeding condition, four females and three males with their first juvenile ringed on 3rd July, over two weeks later than in 2018 and three weeks later than the first on No.3 bed on 9th June.

Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Red listed

Outside of the autumn-winter period, when Starling roosts form, records are generally limited to single figures recorded on the Reserve or, more likely, higher numbers of flyover groups commuting between the urban and feeding areas encircling the Reserve. From January to March and November to year end the interest and reports are centred on roost counts.

The year started with a roost on No.3 bed on 1st January of ca.10,000 which reached c 40,000 by the 20th. This roost suddenly dispersed and a small roost of 500 formed on No.1 bed on 25th January increasing to ca.12,000 by the 18th February. A dramatic increase to ca.100,000 birds occurred on 22nd February rising to an estimated 200,000 by the end of that month and remaining until 4th March, after which it just as dramatically dispersed. The first autumn roost was recorded on No.3 bed on 16th October when 100 were observed leaving the reed bed at dawn. This roost fluctuated in numbers from 5,000 to 500 but dispersed on 27th November. .About 10,000 were reported leaving the eastern reed bed on No.1 bed also on 27th November, increasing to 20,000 and remained at that level until the end of the year.

Blackbird

Turdus merula

A common resident species across the Reserve. Sightings were widely reported and included 21 along the north bank of No.2 bed on 2nd February. The breeding bird surveys located: 19 on No.2 bed on 18th April, nine on No.4 bed on 5th May(of which three were singing males), with two pairs and two singles, ten on No.3 bed on 11th May, (three of which were singing males) and 12 on No.1 bed(of which five were singing males) and seven were in suitable breeding habitat on 1st June. The highest counts of the year were recorded during the Migration Watches on Butchersfield Tip with 38 on 31st October and 66 on 16th November.

It was an above average year for the number of Blackbirds ringed with a Reserve total of 100, 46 on No.1 bed and 54 on No.3 bed. An additional 24 birds were re-trapped from previous years' ringing, three from 2014, one from 2015, five from 2016, eight from 2017 and seven from 2018. Eight were caught on No.1 bed in breeding condition, three females and five males and the first juvenile was ringed on 10th June, a month later than No.3 bed which was on 11th May.

Fieldfare

Turdus pilaris

Red listed

A common winter visitor from October to March, feeding on the numerous berry-bearing shrubs and trees, mainly Hawthorn, on and around the Reserve. Roosts of small double-digit numbers formed in January and were still reported to the end of February on No.1 and No.3 beds, the largest containing 40 birds on No.1 bed on 28th February. The last report of the first winter period was from No.3 bed, with 20 birds on 4th March and then two on 5th March. The first autumn migrant was recorded on 5th October when 30 were counted during the migration watch on Butchersfield Tip. Numbers increased throughout the month with 590 recorded during the migration watch on 31st October and 864 on the corresponding watch of 16th November. A large flock of 350 flew east from a roost seen from No.3 bed on 19th December.

Song Thrush

Turdus philomelos

Red listed

A common breeding resident on the Reserve with low single digit numbers generally reported. Notable counts in February were 18 on the 13th and 11 on 28th February on walks around the Reserve. Spring breeding bird surveys recorded maximum numbers of singing males as follows: five on No.3 bed on 12th April, eight on No.2 bed on 18th April, 15 on No.4 bed on 5th May and five on No.1 bed on 9th May. The only other double-digit counts were in October when ten were recorded on No.1 and No.3 bed on the 15th and 16th respectively.

The split of the 49 birds ringed on the Reserve showed mixed fortunes for the ringing teams, with No.1 bed ringing 31, the highest total since 1995 and No.3 bed just 18, more than 25% down on their average of 25. Twelve were caught in breeding condition on No.1 bed, nine males and three females. The first juveniles were ringed a month apart on 10th June on No.1 and 13th July on No.3 bed.

Redwing*Turdus iliacus**Red listed*

A common autumn-winter visitor, from January to March and October to December. The autumn period generally sees the highest flock numbers as berry supplies are still plentiful and over the morning migration watch on Butchersfield Tip, on 5th October, a count of 2684 was the highest of the year. Other notable counts were: 565 moving west over No.3 bed on 16th October, 1200 flying south over No.1 bed on 21st October, 2530 on the 31st October Butchersfield Migration Watch and 1600 moving south-east over the morning on No.3 bed on 20th November. There were numerous counts in the hundreds across the Reserve up to the year- end but the highest count in the January-April period was of a flock of c 200 leaving a roost in willow and birch scrub on No.2 bed on 21st March. The last reports in early April were of two on the 8th and two on the 12th, both on No.3 bed.

It was another ‘good’ year for numbers of Redwing ringed with 120 on No.1 bed, the third highest since 1995 and 177 on No.3 bed. Eleven were ringed in the first winter period with the remainder ringed from autumn through to year end. with the first migrant ringed on 5th October on No.3 bed. No.1 bed provided the following analysis of their captures; 12% were adults, 88% were first year birds, 32% were ringed in October, 41% in November, 23% in December, 3% in January and 1% in February. There were no re-traps from previous years ringed caught in 2019.

Mistle Thrush*Turdus viscivorus**Red listed*

Never common but regularly reported on the Reserve. There were a series of records this year from No.3 bed, around the footbridge, car park and south bank from 17th March to 30th May which included a male in song and a bird carrying food or nesting material, suggesting that local breeding took place. No.1 bed also recorded a singing male on 24th April which was observed flying north then south repeatedly on 29th May. The majority of records related to sightings of single birds but reports of two and three were also submitted with; two, one, three and two recorded in the migration watches from Butchersfield on 7th September, 5th October, 31st October and 16th November respectively. Three were recorded on the 17th and two on the 22nd October on No.3 bed, with three on No.1 bed on 11th December. Finally, five were at Bollin Point on 14th December.

Spotted Flycatcher*Muscicapa striata**Red listed*

Typically, there are just one or two sightings of this scarce passage migrant each year. This was mirrored in 2019 with just a single record of one on No.3 bed, by the Tower Hide on 25th August.



Spotted Flycatcher

Brian Burnett

Robin

Erithacus rubecula

Robins are a very common resident. Counts of note were: 15 on the footpath along the north bank of the Mersey on 2nd February, 99 on a walk of the whole Reserve on 13th February and the highest count of the year, a total of 111 on a repeat Reserve walk on 28th February. The maximum counts from the spring breeding bird surveys recording singing males were: 21 from No.4 bed on 27th March, eight on No.1 bed on 12th April, 17 on No.2 bed on 18th April and 24 on No.3 bed on 20th April.

The 102 Robins ringed on No.1 bed was the highest total since 2005 and the 100 ringed on No.3 bed, compared to ten-year average of 90, proving a productive year for the species. Additionally, 49 were re-trapped from previous years: three from 2014, five from 2015, seven from 2016, 19 from 2017 and 14 from 2018. The first juveniles were ringed on 7th and 11th May on No.3 and No.1 beds respectively. No.1 bed recorded 19 birds in breeding condition, eight females and 11 males, while No.3 bed caught and ringed 89 juveniles by the end of September, out of their total 100 ringed.

Redstart*Phoenicurus phoenicurus**Amber listed*

An uncommon but generally annual passage migrant, which historical records suggest favours the eastern end of the Reserve. This bias was repeated with reports probably relating to the same bird on the 7th and 8th September at Bollin Point and on Butchersfield.

After a gap of two years an adult female was ringed on No.1 bed on 11th May, the 18th to be ringed on the bed since 1995.

*Redstart**David Steel***Whinchat***Saxicola rubetra**Red listed*

An uncommon passage migrant but generally recorded annually. Two records were submitted this year both on 16th September around the South Screen on No.3 bed which suggest were of the same individual.

Stonechat*Saxicola rubicola*

There were five reports of this uncommon but regular passage visitor, all in the autumn period. A pair was recorded feeding on the cut reed piles in front of the Tower Hide, No.3 bed, on 26th and 27th September. A third bird, a female, was recorded a month later, on 22nd October on No.3 bed in front of the John Morgan Hide.



Female Stonechat from John Morgan hide

Daniel Owen

Dunnock

Amber listed

Prunella modularis

A common resident species often overlooked as a result of its inconspicuous and quiet nature and ground feeding habits. Most records are therefore of low digit numbers with the exception of counts from Reserve walks and the spring breeding bird surveys. Notable records were of nine along the north bank of No.2 bed on 2nd February and 16 on a walk of the whole Reserve on 28th February. Counts of singing males reported; seven on No.1 bed on 12th April, six on No.4 bed on 13th April, ten on No.2 bed on 18th April and 11 on No.3 bed on 20th April.

It was an average ringing year for Dunnock on the Reserve, with a total 101 ringed, 30 on No.1 bed and 71 on No.3 bed. An additional 49 were re-trapped from previous years, two from 2014, two from 2015, seven from 2016, ten from 2017 and 28 from 2018. No.1 bed recorded 10 birds caught in breeding condition and the first juvenile was ringed on 10th June, nine days later than the team on No.3 bed who ringed their first on 1st June followed by a further 48 juveniles up to the end of September.

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus

Red listed

The House Sparrow population in the UK dropped by 71% between 1977 and 2008, though the reasons are not fully understood. Despite a recovery in other parts of the UK, the population in England continues to decline. They still breed in reasonable numbers in the housing estates which border the Reserve, occasionally straying on to the periphery of the beds to feed, particularly during the post-breeding period. The Weir Basin is a good place to see them and 13 were there on 31st January, with 10 on 2nd February. Four were then on No.3 bed on 19th March and 25 at the Weir on 10th April. Only single figure counts were then made, from all beds except No.1, through to early August, when 40 were along the Ship Canal track between the second barrier and the Ferry on 3rd August. The final sighting was of 25 on 8th August to the north of the Weir Basin.



House Sparrow along the canal track

David Bowman

Tree Sparrow

Passer montanus

Red listed

Once regular in small flocks, Tree Sparrows have suffered an even more dramatic national decline than the previous species. Between 1970 and 2008, that decline was estimated at 93% and only recently have there been signs of a reversal in fortunes. This slight up-turn was reflected in this year's sightings,

with all three records coming from No.3 bed. Six flew over there on 21st January, with singles also passing over on 29th August and 18th September.

Yellow Wagtail

Motacilla flava

Red listed

This attractive wagtail has been hit hard by changes in agricultural practices, declining by 75% between 1970 and 2009. We are fortunate, locally, to still have a scattering of breeding pairs in the surrounding farmland, usually nesting in cereal or vegetable crops. Nevertheless, they rarely stray onto the Reserve and it was pleasing to receive an above average six records this year. The first was obviously a spring migrant, being brought down by a rain squall over No.3 bed on 24th April and circling the bed before flying strongly to the east. Singles then flew over the same bed on 29th April and 6th May, while the last spring sighting was of one on fields to the north of No.1 bed on 24th May. The only sign of return passage was of one flying south, calling, over No.3 bed on 9th September.

Grey Wagtail

Motacilla cinerea

Red listed

After a rapid national decline in the 1970s and early 80s, this resident wagtail has made a partial and continued recovery as a breeding species. They are a resident breeder and passage migrant on the Reserve and can usually be encountered throughout the year. The only record received from the first winter period was of two on No.2 bed on 2nd February. It was a better than average breeding season, however, with three confirmed pairs breeding and a fourth pair probably breeding. On 18th May a pair was watched entering and leaving a regular nest-site under Thelwall Viaduct. On 21st May an adult was watched feeding young below the No.3 bed Footbridge, while on 1st June a nest with eggs was located on No.1 bed. Finally, a pair, which had been seen regularly near a culvert on the north side of the Mersey from No.2 bed, was confirmed when an adult was observed feeding a fledgling there on 4th June. Two juveniles which turned up on the Morgan Hide scrape two days later may have been from one of our local breeding pairs. A small return passage is regularly noted and maxima this year were of: six over No.1 bed on 26th August, 12 over No.3 bed on 14th September, 15 south over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 5th October, eight over No.3 bed on 8th October and six over the same bed on the 18th of the month. Odd ones were regularly seen, then, through to year end.

Eighteen were ringed during the autumn, a typical number since the ringing teams discovered the effectiveness of using tape lures. On No.1 bed it was the fourth best year yet, with eight ringed. As usual, all were birds of the year and three were still in juvenile plumage. The first was on 23rd August and the final one on 25th September. It was also a good year on No.3 bed, where the ten ringed was above the average.

Pied Wagtail

Motacilla alba

This, our commonest wagtail, is a resident which occasionally breeds and can form sizeable autumn/winter roosts. Single figure counts were received on many dates from all months, with the highest count from early in the year being of nine on No.3 bed on 3rd January. Two on the Morgan Hide scrape on No.3 bed, on 8th April, were of the subspecies *alba*. Breeding was confirmed on No.1 bed on

9th May, when an adult was watched feeding two recently fledged young. The only notable count indicative of autumn passage was of 17 flying south over No.1 bed on 10th September, while the only roost count was of 100 on No.3 bed on 9th October. Seven on the Morgan Hide scrape at dawn on 12th October had probably roosted on No.3 bed, where seven also left a roost at dawn on 6th November.

Tree Pipit

Anthus trivialis

Just two records of this scarce passage migrant this year, with one passing over No.3 bed on 27th August and another, which landed on Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 7th September.

Meadow Pipit

Anthus pratensis

Amber listed

Although this unobtrusive pipit is one of the UK's commonest birds, breeding primarily in upland areas, it is suffering a slow but steady decline. A very occasional breeder on the Reserve it occurs as a passage migrant, particularly in autumn, with smaller numbers remaining for the winter. As ever, there was little evidence of spring passage, with a maximum of 20 moving north over No.1 bed on 20th March. Return passage was concentrated into September and October, with the usual movements over No.1 bed and for the second year running No.3 bed produced some counts of note. Maxima from No.1 bed were: 29 on 10th September, 200 on the 16th, 60 on the 18th, 90 on the 30th and 250 on 2nd October. Also, from the eastern end of the Reserve was a count of 42 from the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 5th October. While not reaching the levels of the previous year, easterly winds at the right time drifted a fair number of Meadow Pipits over No.3 bed, with maxima of: 30 on 16th September, 50 on the 18th, 52 on the 28th, 53 on 12th October and finally, 51 on the 17th. Only single figure counts were then received, through to year end.

After 2018's excellent 92 ringed, it was back to more normal levels with 35 ringed, all but two from No.1 bed. Of the 33 ringed there, three were caught between 20th March and 10th April. The first of the autumn were trapped on 16th September and of the remaining 30, five were second calendar year individuals or older and six were still in juvenile plumage. The final one was on 2nd October, which was also the best day of the year with 17 ringed.

Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs

The Chaffinch is one of the UK's most abundant birds and it experienced a population explosion from the 1970s onwards. Recently, however, there has been a slight downturn in its fortunes, associated with the spread of the avian disease Trichomonosis. They remain a common sight throughout the year on the Reserve, breeding on all four beds and forming winter flocks. Most counts of note come from No.3 bed, where they are attracted to the winter seed crop and the feeding stations with 45 there on 5th January, 70 on the 25th, peaking at 80 on 2nd February. On that same date 25 were feeding on an open area of No.2 bed. On 19th March two flocks of around 30 were noted, one each on Nos.3 and 4 beds. During the Breeding Bird Surveys maxima were: two in song on No.1 bed, five present on No.2 bed, five present on No.3 bed and six in song on the north side of No.4 bed. Peak counts from No.3 bed during the second half of the year were: 20 on 31st July, 60 on 2nd November, 100 on 24th November

and 50 on 19th December. In addition, there were some good counts from the Migration Watches from Butchersfield Tip with 49 on 7th September, 178 on 31st October and 44 on 16th November.

The 291 ringed was similar to the previous year, though a long way short of the 535 in 2017. On No.1 bed it was a quieter year than of late with just 92 ringed. A further 15 were caught from previous years (13) or from No.3 bed (2), the oldest of these was from 7th December 2013 and had not been retrapped since then. Six were in breeding condition, three males and three females (seven in 2018) and only three were caught in juvenile plumage, the first on 7th August. The No.3 bed total of 199 ringed was slightly above the average of 187. The first juvenile was ringed on 15th June and nine were retrapped from 2018, seven from 2017, three from 2016 and one each from 2015 and 2014.

Brambling

Fringilla montifringilla

This colourful finch is a passage migrant and winter visitor in variable numbers, with peak counts usually occurring in March. Small numbers were regularly present on No.3 bed from the beginning of the year through to 24th April. Up to 15 were noted there on many dates throughout January, with nine on 23rd of February the maximum from that month. A dozen or so were then regularly present until the end of March when the peak count of 40, on 30th March, occurred. Twelve on 8th April had dwindled to just two when the final sighting was made on 24th April. Surprisingly, there were no sightings from No.1 bed this year. The first returning individual was under the Morgan Hide feeders on 21st October, after which just single figure counts were made. The highest of these was of six flying over Butchersfield Tip on 31st October and finally one was in No.3 bed on 21st December.

The 112 ringed were all from No.3 bed and just one of these was from the second winter period. March and April are the best months for this species and the last of the first winter period was ringed on the 19th April. One, wearing a ring from Norway had been ringed as an adult male on 4th August 2018 at Birkeland, Sokndal, Rogaland, Norway before being retrapped on 6th April 2019. One, having been ringed at Welshpool on 4th January 2019, was retrapped on 30th March. A second, from Powys, was also retrapped on 30th March, having been ringed on 31st October 2018 at Bryn Picca, Dolfor, Powys.

Greenfinch

Chloris chloris

After a decline in the 1970s, this stocky finch recovered well in the 1990s, due to its association with garden feeding. This has proved to be a double-edged sword as the species' recent decline has been linked to the avian disease Trichomonosis, which can be caused by failure to keep feeders and bird-baths clean. Woolston, however, remains one of the few places locally where you can see the species in high numbers, particularly around the centre of No.3 bed. Maxima from No.3 bed during the early part of the year were: 100 on 2nd January, 140 on the 16th, 150 on the 19th, 140 on 2nd February, 140 on 9th March and 30 on the 14th. The Breeding Bird Surveys found small numbers on all beds, with the highest totals being: seven (including four in song) on No.1 bed, seven in song on No.2 bed, three in song on No.3 bed and 11 (including three in song and one carrying nest material) on No.4 bed. Peak counts from later in the year from No.3 bed included: 40 on 20th July, 100 on 24th August, 90 on 12th September, 230 on 5th November, 160 on 14th November and a similar number on 21st December. Away from No.3 bed the only notable count came during the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 5th October, when 109 flew south during the morning.

The 819 ringed was about average, though well below the 1,074 ringed in 2017. For No.1 bed it was the poorest year since 2011 with just 209 ringed, with a further 18 caught that had either been ringed elsewhere in Britain (1), on No.3 bed (14) or previously on No.1 bed (3). It is interesting to note that, unusually, far more were retrapped from No.3 bed than from No.1 bed. The oldest from No.1 was ringed on 10th July 2015. Very few (10) were caught in the first three months, with the peak months September (36) and October (146), and just one was caught in December. Twelve were caught in breeding condition (25 in 2018), two females and 10 males and the first juveniles were ringed on the late date of 12th July (14th May 2018).

Goldfinch

Carduelis carduelis

This colourful, common resident breeds in small numbers and forms winter feeding flocks. It can be most often seen wherever the best stands of Thistle are found, feeding on the seed heads. The highest counts from the first winter period all came from No.3 bed, with 50 on 2nd January rising to 120 by the end of the month. Thereafter, only single figure counts were made as the stocks of Thistle seed around the bed were depleted. The breeding Bird Surveys produced the following maxima: five in song on No.1 bed, five (with two in song) on No.2 bed, three present on No.3 bed, with none reported from No.4 bed. During the second half of the year most of the high counts came from No.3 bed, with 120 on 27th July, 200 on 14th August, 60 on 1st September, 150 on 4th November and 100 on 14th November. The only count of significance away from No.3 bed was of 70 on No.1 bed on 18th September.

With so many around the Reserve it is not surprising that the ringing teams did well and the total of 97 was well above the average. On No.1 bed it was the third best year since 1995 with 28 ringed, though there were no retraps from previous years. Six caught in breeding condition, two females and four males and the first juvenile was ringed on 7th August (9th July 2018). On No.3 bed it was a record year with 69 ringed, compared with an average of 11. The first juvenile was ringed on 15th June and 35 young were ringed during August.

Siskin

Spinus spinus

This small, agile finch is a passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers. The only double figure counts for the year came from No.3 bed, with 30 on 2nd January and 20 on the 30th of the month. Odd ones then passed over on several dates in February and April before the last spring sighting, of one over No.3 bed on 15th April. There was a surprisingly early returning individual, also passing over No.3 bed, on 27th June, though autumn passage started in earnest on 7th September, when one was noted during the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip. After that, single figure counts were made on many dates, in all months, through to year end.

After a blank 2018, five were ringed this year, the highest total since 2015. All were caught on No.1 bed on the same day, 4th December, were together in one flock and all were birds of the year.



Goldfinch

David Bowman

Linnet

Linaria cannabina

Red listed

Linnets are heavily dependent on seed stocks throughout the year and have suffered badly due to changing farming practices. Their numbers have declined by nearly 60% between 1970 and 2014 and that downward trend continues. They are a breeding resident and form moderately sized post-breeding flocks. Recently they have benefited from the seed crop in No.3 bed, where they are now a regular visitor. The only sizeable flocks from the first half of the year were of 50 on No.4 bed on 8th January and 45 on No.3 bed on the 26th of the month. During the breeding season small flocks can be found wherever there are stands of Gorse for nesting. The results of the Breeding Bird Survey were: 20 on No.2 bed (including one carrying nest material and one in song), and two present on No.1 bed. Maxima from the second half of the year were: 30 on No.1 bed on 18th September, 80 on No.3 bed on 14th October, 39 during the Migration watch on 31st October and 30 were still visiting the No.3 bed seed-crop in mid-December.

Just three were ringed, a lower than average figure. Of these, one was from No.1 bed, a juvenile on 8th August and the other two from No.3 bed were ringed in October.

Lesser Redpoll

Acanthis cabaret

Red listed

A passage migrant and winter visitor, Lesser Redpolls were decidedly scarce, particularly during the second half of the year. Thirty, which were feeding near the Weir Basin on 11th January, was the year's highest count, with nine on No.3 bed on 2nd March and 10 on No.1 bed on 5th April also notable. As a few used to breed on the Reserve we are always on the lookout for signs of breeding activity. On 21st March a male was in song from the South Bank of No.3 bed, while a displaying male was by the West Pool on No.1 bed on 17th April. The last spring sighting, though, was of two on No.2 bed on 20th April and the first evidence of return passage was of one over No.3 bed on 3rd October. The only double-figure counts from the autumn/winter periods were from No.3 bed, with 15 on 5th December and 11 on 17th December.

The total of 57 ringed was about average, with the 35 ringed on No.1 bed typical of recent years. Two that were ringed elsewhere in the UK were also caught on the bed. The vast majority (31) were caught before the end of April while seven males were caught in breeding condition. Just one was caught in juvenile plumage during the year, on the late date of 23rd October. On No.3 bed 22 were ringed during the year, compared with an average of 26. The final one of the first winter period was ringed on 13th April and the first of the Autumn was caught on 12th October, while the last of the year was on 27th October. The two ringed on No.3 bed were from 13th April and 5th October.

Bullfinch

Pyrrhula pyrrhula

Amber listed

While this colourful finch is experiencing a slow decline nationally, it continues to occur in surprisingly high numbers and to breed across all four beds. Most of the highest counts come from No.3 bed, where parties are a daily sight at the various feeding stations. Maxima from No.3 bed include: 13 on 30th March, 17 on 15th June, 15 on 3rd July and 17 on 15th August. Away from No.3 bed the highest count was of 17 moving around Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 16th November. The breeding bird surveys produced the following counts: four males in song and two recently fledged young on No.1 bed, seven present in suitable habitat on No.2 bed and four present on No.4 bed. There was no survey information from No.3 bed.

The total of 237 ringed was typical and similar to the previous year, though some way below the remarkable 442 of 2017. After the previous two bumper years on No.1 bed, an average 65 was ringed. A further 16 were retrapped, either from No.3 bed or from previous years, with the oldest from 7th August 2015, two others were from the same year, others were from 2016 (2), 2017 (4) with the remainder from 2018. Fourteen were caught in breeding condition (40 in 2018), five females and nine males, the first juvenile was ringed on 21st June (11th June in 2018). No.3 bed saw another increase, with 172 ringed compared with an average of 120. The first juvenile was ringed on the 25th May, a month earlier than in 2018. Many were also retrapped from previous years: 40 from 2018, 26 from 2017, 10 from 2016, 5 from 2015 and 2 from 2014.

Hawfinch*Coccothraustes coccothraustes**Red listed*

This enigmatic finch is a very scarce visitor to the Reserve, usually in late autumn. The only record this year was of one which flew eastwards right in front of the observers conducting the monthly Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 31st October.

Yellowhammer*Emberiza citrinella**Red listed*

This declining bunting breeds in adjacent farmland and is a scarce visitor, mainly to the eastern end of the Reserve. The eight sightings this year was typical, though it was less usual for them to turn up on No.3 bed. Two flying over No.3 bed on 14th January and one on No.1 bed on 17th January were the only ones during the first winter period. Interestingly, for a species we have never proved to breed, males were in song on No.1 bed on 16th April and 1st June. One on No.4 bed on 2nd June was a real surprise and a juvenile was on No.1 bed on 8th August. A second sighting from No.3 bed came on 21st October, when one flew east calling. Finally, one flew over Butchersfield Tip during the Migration Watch on 16th November.

As ever, all of the 11 ringed came from No.1 bed, where it was the best year since 2006. A further seven were retrapped from previous years, making 18 caught in total. The oldest of the seven was ringed on 17th May 2016, two others were from the same year, while one was from 2017 and three from 2018. Just one was in breeding condition when caught, a male and no juveniles were ringed. The last capture of the year was made on 8th April.

Little Bunting*Emberiza pusilla*

One of the birds of the year, a first calendar year individual was caught on No.1 bed on 21st October. It was only the second record of the species for the Reserve and the first to be ringed.

Reed Bunting*Emberiza schoeniclus**Amber listed*

This attractive bunting is present all year round, breeds in small, though declining numbers and often forms small winter roosts. All sightings from the beginning of the year, almost through to the end of March, came from No.3 bed where a few regularly fed on the sacrificial seed crop. The highest counts during this period were of 12 on 19th January and 10 on the 25th. The spring breeding bird surveys produced a maximum of 12 males in song: eight on No.1 bed, two each on Nos.2 and 3 beds and none on No.4 bed. While this is a welcome improvement on the 2018's six singing males, it is still well below the totals of most previous years. The only really notable count from the second half of the year came when 66 left a roost on No.1 bed at dawn on 18th October. Thereafter, only two double-figure counts were received, both from No.3 bed, of 10 on 19th November and 12 on 21st December.

The 197 ringed during the year compared well with the three previous years, with 178 in 2018, 148 in 2017 and 174 in 2016. For No.1 bed it was the best year since 2010 with 116 ringed, a further 46 were

either ringed elsewhere in the UK (7), on No3 bed (3) or in a previous year on No1 (36). The oldest was ringed on 6th June 2011, as an adult and was the oldest bird handled in 2019. Others were from 2013 (1), 2016 (7), 2017 (9) with the remainder from 2018. Just nine were caught in breeding condition (17 in 2018), all males and only three in juvenile plumage were ringed, the first on 10th July (18th June in 2018). For the No.3 bed team it was also an above average year, with 81 ringed, compared with an average of 55, the additional feed placed into the seed crop by the ringing team attracting good numbers in December. The first juvenile was ringed on 21st July and there were retraps from 2018 (11), 2017 (2) and one each from 2016 and 2015.

WeBS COUNTS 2019

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).

WeBS Counts 2019	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr		Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Little Grebe	7	8	10	23		15	17	5	7
Great Crested Grebe	7	22	8	21		7	2	4	5
Black-necked Grebe	0	0	5	26		0	0	0	0
Cormorant	25	28	11	10		28	12	5	10
Grey Heron	5	2	2	2		7	8	5	3
Mute Swan	27	16	22	23		26	34	27	40
Shelduck	23	14	7	22		1	1	2	3
Pink-footed Goose	0	0	1	0		0	0	0	0
Greylag Goose	19	0	10	14		0	70	0	25
Canada Goose	16	62	72	44		0	83	86	33
Wigeon	0	0	0	0		0	2	0	0
Gadwall	35	48	73	109		129	81	64	75
Teal	760	174	25	17		103	440	340	267
Mallard	115	70	37	61		65	55	57	85
Garganey	0	0	0	2		0	0	0	0
Shoveler	93	56	18	24		87	95	44	102
Pochard	5	78	22	18		1	1	0	0
Tufted Duck	507	578	226	131		22	34	180	450
Goldeneye	6	1	0	0		0	1	3	4
Water Rail	1	0	1	3		4	2	5	0
Moorhen	47	25	21	18		21	29	48	32
Coot	59	41	46	31		60	72	68	95
Kingfisher	0	0	0	0		2	1	0	0
Oystercatcher	0	2	0	0		0	0	0	0
Lapwing	0	0	3	14		50	0	1100	0
Little Ringed Plover	0	0	0	6		0	0	0	0
Curlew	0	1	0	0		0	0	0	0
Black-tailed Godwit	0	0	0	1		3	0	0	0
Green Sandpiper	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	0
Greenshank	0	0	0	2		0	0	0	0
Woodcock	0	0	0	0		0	0	1	0
Snipe	0	0	0	3		15	1	0	0
Black-headed Gull	92	310	600	550		42	55	30	279
Mediterranean Gull	0	0	4	2		0	0	0	0
Common Gull	0	0	1	0		0	0	0	0
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	1	4	9		2	0	0	0
Herring Gull	0	0	0	1		0	0	2	0
Great Black-backed Gull	0	0	2	0		0	0	0	2

WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2019

Ringling operations in 2019 were carried out in two areas of the Reserve: the east end of No.1 Bed and the centre of No.3 Bed. All ringling activity was overshadowed by a serious accident suffered, not at Woolston, by John Blundell, one of the two regular ringers on No.1 Bed. John was unable to visit Woolston for a number of months and even as I write this, nearly a year after his accident, he has not recovered full mobility. It goes without saying that this very unfortunate event had a major impact on the amount of ringling carried out on No.1 Bed.

The year ended with 7,003 birds ringed of 59 species. This represents a reduction of 9% when compared with 7,824 birds of 63 species ringed in 2018. However, it appears likely that this reduction is entirely accounted for by the enforced reduction in ringling effort on No.1 Bed. Ringling took place there on just 115 days compared with 140 days in 2018. In addition to the reduced frequency, whilst John was absent David Riley was often ringling alone with a consequent reduction in the number of nets that could be deployed. As a result, the numbers ringed on the bed fell from 3,696 in 2018 to 2,687 in 2019. In contrast, on No.3 bed the number of days when ringling took place rose slightly from 105 to 111 and the numbers ringed likewise from 4,128 to 4,316. At this somewhat simplistic level it would appear that productivity in 2019 was broadly similar to the previous year.

Last year I reported that it was not possible to use the fixed duck trap on No.3 Bed during the second winter period of 2018 because of very low water levels on the bed. These conditions persisted into the first winter period of 2019 and the first Teal were not trapped until the 9th February. With this late start 57 were ringed in the first winter period with the last on 30th March. Water levels were higher in the second winter period and trapping restarted on 9th November. A further 82 Teal were ringed by the year end. This year total of 139 is only a little below the record of 148 in 2017. Although this represents a significant proportion of the Teal ringed in the U.K., the primary value of the trap is in the subsequent recapture of previously ringed birds. There were 157 of these in 2019 involving 72 different birds. Woolston is, by some margin, the most prolific recapture site for Teal in the U.K. It is from such recaptures that survival estimates can be calculated. Two Teal were trapped for their sixth winter although one bird had been handled in five out of those six and the other in four out of six. Both birds were males whereas the four previous birds to achieve at least a fifth winter return were all females. Our most "faithful" bird is EZ69576, ringed as a second-year male on 4th February 2017 and handled 19 times. Four Woolston Teal were reported elsewhere in 2019. Predictably three of these were shot, two locally and one in Angus but the fourth was re-trapped in the Manche Department of northern France. Mallards enter the trap only occasionally and the six ringed was the highest number since 2015. A combination of the duck trap and the opportunistic deployment of Potter traps accounted for three Water Rails, 11 Moorhens and two Coots. These are typical figures.

The only raptors ringed in 2019 were three Sparrowhawks. This is the lowest figure since 2013 and it does appear that this species is declining at Woolston. Unusually, one of the birds caught on No.1 Bed was a female, these being larger than males and more likely to escape from mist nets.

On No.3 bed the seasonal net across the channel by the duck trap was deployed on thirteen occasions making 38 captures including nine Green Sandpipers, three Kingfishers and two Grey Wagtails. In an eclectic year fifteen different species were captured over the channel. Other notable captures being a Cetti's Warbler, five Swallows and a Sand Martin. Nine Green Sandpipers was the best return since eleven were ringed in 2015 and eight of the nine were juveniles. For the third year running no Common

Sandpipers were ringed. To complete the wader picture a single Common Snipe was ringed on No.3 bed.

Four Woodpigeons were ringed which is the lowest total since 2009. However, this species is not targeted and being large and muscular, has a high propensity for escaping from mist nets so nothing can be deduced from this trend. For the second year running six Stock Doves were ringed compared to a ten-year average of 6.8. One of the two birds ringed on No.1 Bed was a female with a brood patch. Although slightly down on the two previous years 13 Kingfishers were ringed and for the second year running all but one of these were juveniles, implying successful breeding somewhere in the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal or River Mersey. Three young Barn Owls were ringed in a box on No.1 Bed. Great Spotted Woodpeckers appear to have recovered from the population crash in 2015 and 21 were ringed of which 17 were juveniles. An adult male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in breeding condition was caught on No.1 bed on 8th July. This is just the eighth of this species to be ringed at Woolston and the first since 2011. Five Magpies were ringed and nine Jays. These are also species that are not targeted.

In recent years the number of Goldcrests ringed at Woolston has increased greatly as a result of sampling the autumn influx of continental birds, principally on No.1 bed. The 270 Goldcrests ringed in 2019 was a reduction from 314 in the previous year but this is probably an artefact of the reduced ringing effort available on No.1 bed, where the total fell from 256 to 177. In contrast, on No.3 Bed where effort was broadly constant, the ringing total increased from 58 to 93, a record for the bed. The year followed the established pattern with a number of presumed locally bred birds caught in June and July and a sizeable autumn passage sampled from September onwards. For the fourth year in succession a Firecrest was ringed on No.1 Bed.

Both Blue Tits and Great Tits enjoyed a third successive excellent breeding season, in the nest boxes on the Reserve, with 173 chicks ringed on No.3 Bed (2018-163, 2017-161). It was not possible to check all the boxes on No.1 Bed. Coal Tits are becoming more common at Woolston. Although the 27 birds ringed is a reduction from the record 42 in 2018, the average of the last five years is 28 and of the last ten years it is 18 so the trend is clearly upwards. Willow Tits continue to do well with 39 ringed compared with a ten-year average of 37. Juveniles accounted for 33 of the those that were newly ringed, compared with 37 in the previous year and 2019 would appear to have been another good breeding season for this species. The two ringing teams combined handled 50 different Willow Tits in 2019 compared with 54 in 2018 again demonstrating the apparent stability of the population. A single bird was handled by both teams being ringed on No.1 Bed and subsequently relocating to No.3 Bed.

In recent years the main area for hirundine ringing has been the roost on No.1 Bed but in 2019 no significant roost formed. The 20 Swallows ringed is in stark contrast with 311 ringed in 2018 although, once again, reduced ringing resource plays a part in this reduction. On No.3 Bed a roost of about 300 birds did form for a few weeks in August and the 184 birds ringed is the best total since 2014. A small number of Sand Martins are usually caught associating with the Swallow roost and the 13 ringed were all caught on No.3 Bed.

A total of 1,943 warblers of nine species were ringed in 2019. This is a 26% decrease from the 2,624 of eleven species ringed in 2018. Whilst it is tempting to look to reduced ringing resource as the reason for this decline, the fact is that the reduction was 27% on No.1 Bed and 25% on No.3 Bed. The two “missing species” when compared with the previous year were Yellow-browed Warbler, a less than annual capture, and, more depressingly, Grasshopper Warbler which was absent from the ringing totals

for the first time since 1987 and has become a rare bird at Woolston. With 24 birds ringed compared with 28 in 2018 it is possible that Cetti's Warbler is reaching maximum density in the areas of the Reserve covered by ringing. It was a very good year for Long-tailed Tits. The 210 birds ringed is the highest number since 2000 and the ten-year average is 132. There was a significant decline in this species in the years from 2011 to 2015 but a recovery appears to have taken place for reasons unclear. After a record year in 2018 it was to be expected that Sylvia warblers would be caught in more typical numbers. This was true for Blackcaps and the 729 ringed was ahead of the ten-year average of 622. However, it was a poor year for Garden Warblers with just 24 ringed, the second lowest total in the last ten years and for Common Whitethroats with 57 ringed being the lowest total since 2014. Six Lesser Whitethroats ringed was a typical number. It was a poor year for Acrocephalus Warblers. The 449 Reed Warblers ringed was below the ten-year average but can be considered as within the range of normal variation, being lower than 2018 or 2017 but on a par with 2016 and 2015. In the case of Sedge Warbler however, the 71 birds ringed is the lowest number since 2012 and a more marked decline may be taking place. It is probable that Phylloscopus warblers had a reasonable breeding season with 454 Chiffchaffs ringed being in line with the ten-year average. Whilst the number of Willow Warblers ringed declined sharply, 2018 had been the best year since 2011 and catches of this species are very much centred on No.1 Bed and will have been impacted by the aftermath of John Blundell's accident.

As a result of this misfortune the following comments concerning first juveniles rely heavily on comparisons from No.3 Bed.

The following first ringing dates for juvenile birds on No.3 bed indicate that for resident species the timing of their breeding season was at the early end of the normal range with the exception of Dunnock. This species appears to have had a poor breeding season with the 55 ringed on No.3 bed being a 45 per cent reduction on the 99 ringed in the summer of 2018.

Ringing date of first juvenile:

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Robin	07-May	26-May	28-May	07-May
Wren	09-June	22-Jun	11-Jun	25-Jun
Dunnock	11-June	08-Jun	06-May	04-Jun
Bullfinch	23-May	29-Jun	11-Jun	28-May

In the case of our migrant warblers the following table of "first juvenile" dates indicates that the timing of the breeding season for Chiffchaff and Whitethroat was early whilst the dates for Blackcap and Reed Warbler are more typical.

Ringing date of first juvenile:

	2019	2018	2017	2016
Chiffchaff	31-May	13-Jun	03-Jun	04-Jun
Blackcap	09-Jun	02-Jun	03-Jun	25-May
Whitethroat	09-Jun	23-Jun	17-Jun	25-Jun
Reed Warbler	22-Jun	23-Jun	02-Jul	02-Jul

Amongst the resident species Wrens, Robins and Dunnocks were all ringed in numbers consistent with the ten-year average. For the second year running Treecreepers were ringed in record numbers, the total of 31 comparing with a ten-year average of 16. Whilst the four Nuthatches ringed was less than last year's record of six it is the case that this species is also encountered more frequently than in previous years.

The totals of 100 Blackbirds and 49 Song Thrushes ringed were both ahead of 2018 and about 20 percent above their respective ten-year averages. Redwing catches vary according to the numbers that arrive from Scandinavia each autumn and trends do not mean a lot but, with 297 ringed, 2019 was the second best of the six years since adoption of the Latvian sound lure revolutionised our ability to catch this species. After three years of catching a single Fieldfare on No.1 Bed, 2019 drew a blank.

The autumn passage of Meadow Pipits across No.1 bed appears to follow a two-year cycle. After a very quiet 2017 there was a much stronger passage in 2018 and 83 were ringed. 2019 was much more like 2017 with just 33 ringed on No.1 Bed, three in spring and 30 in autumn. On No.3 Bed a single bird was caught in each season. Spring catches on this bed are very unusual. There was no discernible Tree Pipit passage and 2019 was the first blank year since 2013. The 18 Grey Wagtails ringed compares with an annual average of 19 for the years since we started using the new audio lure. To complete the suite of passage migrants an adult female Common Redstart was caught on No.1 Bed on 11th May. A single Pied Wagtail appeared in a mist net in the Phragmites on No.3 Bed on 3rd August, the first to be ringed at Woolston since 2005.

Of the eight species of finch that appear regularly in the Woolston ringing report Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Lesser Redpoll and Bullfinch were caught in typical numbers. Catches of Bramblings vary according to the numbers arriving from Scandinavia and after a record 2018 when 251 were ringed the total of 112 in 2019 was still well above the ten-year average of 68 and the second best year on record. The winter of 2019/2020 does not, at the time of writing, appear to be a "Brambling Winter". It was a record year for Goldfinches with 97 ringed. A large flock formed on No.3 Bed in response to a very large crop of thistles. Siskins are never caught in numbers at Woolston but after a blank year in 2018 five were caught together on No.1 Bed on 4th December. Three Linnets were ringed with two of these caught beside the sacrificial crop on No.3 Bed. After a number of blank years Yellowhammers do now appear to be established at the eastern end of the Reserve and around the golf course on the opposite side of the Manchester Ship Canal. The total of eleven ringed was the best total since 2006. It was another good year for Reed Buntings with 197 birds ringed, the best total since 2010. Of the 81 birds ringed on No.3 Bed 35 were ringed in the second winter period in the sacrificial crop. This was the only species to turn up with any regularity in the crop.

The Little Bunting ringed on No.1 Bed on 21st October was the second Woolston record and the first to be ringed and takes the cumulative total of species ringed to 111. If the Little Bunting was "bird of the year" from a ringing perspective a close second would be the two male Bearded Tits trapped on No.3 Bed on 27th October. These are just the third and fourth to be ringed at Woolston.

After a bumper year in 2018 it was a slightly quieter year for individual species milestones. In descending order these were the 17,000th Greenfinch, 13,000th Blackcap, 12,000th Blue Tit, 9,000th Chiffchaff and 5,000th Robin. Amongst the comparative scarcities, we ringed our 300th Treecreeper and two interesting "centurions". We have reached 101 Yellowhammers, a species restricted to the eastern end of the Reserve. The first was ringed in 1988 so it has taken 32 years to reach 100. This said, 24 have been ringed in the last four years indicating at least a stable population. The other "centurion" is

Cetti's Warbler which is a colonisation success story. Of the 119 that have now been ringed 100 of these are in the last five years.

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 re-trapped 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, Rebecca Jones, Dan Owen, Margaret Rawlins and David Riley)

RINGING TOTALS 2019

			Reserve Total	Grand Total
SPECIES	No.1	No.3	2019	1980-2019
Teal		139	139	688
Mallard		6	6	93
Sparrowhawk	2	1	3	137
Water Rail		3	3	97
Moorhen		11	11	312
Coot		2	2	33
Green Sandpiper		9	9	41
Common Snipe		1	1	60
Black-headed Gull		1	1	845
Stock Dove	2	4	6	80
Woodpigeon		4	4	139
Barn Owl	3		3	11
Kingfisher	7	6	13	143
Great Spotted Woodpecker	8	13	21	376
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	1		1	8
Magpie	2	3	5	146
Jay	5	4	9	371
Goldcrest	177	93	270	3429
Firecrest	1		1	16
Blue Tit	264	417	681	12062
Great Tit	188	344	532	7885
Coal Tit	19	8	27	254
Willow Tit	14	25	39	888
Sand Martin		13	13	1306
Swallow	20	185	205	14633
Cetti's Warbler	6	18	24	119
Long-tailed Tit	104	106	210	4319
Chiffchaff	248	206	454	9356
Willow Warbler	94	35	129	8461
Blackcap	328	401	729	13035
Garden Warbler	14	10	24	1034
Lesser Whitethroat	3	3	6	275
Whitethroat	24	33	57	5271
Sedge Warbler	12	59	71	5597
Reed Warbler	130	319	449	12578
Nuthatch		4	4	22
Treecreeper	14	17	31	303
Wren	63	111	174	6420
Blackbird	46	54	100	2947
Song Thrush	31	18	49	1367
Redwing	120	177	297	1633
Robin	102	100	202	5090
Common Redstart	1		1	30
Dunnock	30	71	101	4171
Grey Wagtail	8	10	18	124
Pied Wagtail		1	1	45
Meadow Pipit	33	2	35	1068

Chaffinch	92	199	291	6414
Brambling		112	112	921
Greenfinch	209	610	819	17078
Goldfinch	28	69	97	883
Siskin	5		5	91
Linnet	1	2	3	1131
Lesser Redpoll	35	22	57	2209
Bullfinch	65	172	237	3937
Yellowhammer	11		11	101
Little Bunting	1		1	1
Reed Bunting	116	81	197	7520
Others (51 species).				1180
Totals	2687	4316	7003	168783

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 ('re-trapped') 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
- VV Alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field by non-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

Teal

EZ69733 3M 27.12.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 27.01.2019 Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7578 15km 130°

Teal

EZ69632 5M 15.02.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 30.01.2019 Grimsargh, Lancashire SD5933 45km 353°

Teal

EZ69594 6M 13.02.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 21.12.2019 Friock Mains, Friockheim, Angus 360km 359°

Teal

EZ03683 5M 27.02.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF 20.08.2019 Kalajoki, Siipo, Oulu, Finland, 1920km 52°

This Teal was not reencountered at Woolston after ringing and probably spent the three intervening winters elsewhere. It may have been on migration when found dead in Finland.

Teal

EA32339 5M 13.02.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
*** 22.12.2019 Route de Crisbecq, Saint-Marcouf, Manche, France 508km 149°
*** (Alive and probably healthy, ultimate fate unknown, intentionally taken, captured in Gabion Trap)

The circumstances of this recapture are not entirely clear but the French derivation of Gabion comes from the Italian Gabbione meaning cage so it is likely that this Teal was caught in a walk-in trap of some kind either in the pursuit of science or of dinner.

Black-headed Gull

EZ64351 1 07.06.2017 Confidential Site in West Midlands SP2180
RR 06.04.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 122km 333°

Black-headed Gull

ES95854 1 13.06.1996 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF 31.07.2019 Frodsham, Cheshire, SJ5277 18km 231°

Although over 23 years elapsed between ringing and finding this Black-headed Gull the longevity record for this species is 32 years 3 months and 26 days.

Mediterranean Gull

NLA 3725713 1 21.06.2012 De Kreupel 52°46'N 5°13'E Noord-Holland, The Netherlands
RR 19.03.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 521km 278°

The colour rings of this bird were read from the Morgan Hide, an annual springtime occupation in recent years.

Goldcrest

LHH927 2M 14.10.2019 Middleton Nature Reserve, Lancashire SD4159
R 19.11.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 75km 161°

Goldcrest

KPT380 4F 2.10.2019 Carse of Ardersier Nr Nairn, Highland,
R 22.11.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788 477km 169°

Here are two examples from the autumn influx of Goldcrests to The Eyes.

Swallow

ADA7201 3 22.08.2017 Scotman's Flash, Wigan, Greater Manchester
R 4(=M) 23.08.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588 17km 153°

Swallow

S266741 3 02.09.2016 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6688
SR 03.06.2019 Dundrum, Down IJ3935 241km 294° (Sick, wounded, unhealthy, now released, taken by Cat)

This gives an indication of the breeding area of a Swallow that passed through Woolston on its first autumn migration.

Cetti's Warbler

AVH2181 3J 16.07.2019 Lax Hill, Rutland, SK8806
R (=M) 27.10.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588 149km 305°

Cetti's Warbler

AAA4516 3JF 25.06.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6688
R 18.05.2019 East of Aqualate Mere, Newport, Staffordshire SJ7820 70km 171°

Several Cetti's Warblers, such as the first example above, have been trapped at Woolston having undertaken juvenile dispersion from other sites but this second record is the first example of a bird that was probably hatched at Woolston moving to another area.

Chiffchaff

HDK565 4 16.04.2016 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 14.06.2019 Fair Isle, Shetland HZ2172 684km 5°
R 01.08.2019 Fair Isle, Shetland HZ2172 684km 5°

This Chiffchaff may well have bred on Fair Isle

Chiffchaff

KRT103 3J 08.07.2019 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 17.09.2019 Titchfield Haven Nature Reserve, Hampshire, SU5302 300km 164°

Chiffchaff

KHV395 3J 11.08.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488
XF 07.04.2019 Thelwall, Warrington SJ6387 3km 211°

Willow Warbler

KRR066 3J 06.08.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
XF 25.04.2019 Knowle Green, Longridge, Lancashire SD6438 51km 358°

Blackcap

S820105 3J 12.07.2017 Lostock, Nr Woodford, Cheshire SJ9083
R (=M) 06.04.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488 27km 283°

Blackcap

AZC7676 3J 23.06.2019 Jackson's Brickworks, Middlewood, Cheshire, SJ9484
R (=F) 26.08.2019 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788 27km 278°

Blackcap

ALD2077 3J 16.08.2018 Knutsford Moor (RS), Cheshire SJ7578
R (=M) 24.04.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788 14km 326°

Three Blackcaps controlled at Woolston from South Manchester Ringing Group sites in East Cheshire.

Blackcap

AYH5156 3M 27.08.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588
R 12.09.2019 Brook Farm, Reculver, Kent, TR2268 337km 132°

Blackcap

AEF3219 3F 12.08.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 07.09.2019 Beachy Head, East Sussex, TV5996 349km 148°

Two Blackcaps controlled whilst making a leisurely autumn migration

Blackcap

AEF3433 3F 28.08.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 03.10.2019 La Bruyère, Epineu-le-Cherreuil, Sarthe, France 619km 165°

Blackcap

S267259 4F 13.05.2017 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588
R 28.09.2019 Jews' Gate, Gibraltar 1,931km 187°

Woolston's breeding Blackcaps winter around the Mediterranean Basin

Blackcap

S687330 3J 13.08.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R (=M) 23.03.2019 Portland Bill, Dorset SY6868 319km 179°

Blackcap

AAA4277 5F 25.04.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 21.04.2019 Billinge Hill, Merseyside, SD5201 20km 313°

Blackcap

ATD3378 3J 21.06.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R (=F) 28.08.2019 Newport, Telford and Wrekin, SJ7519 71km 174°

Blackcap

ATD0491 3J 30.08.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R (=F) 20./04.2019 Hightown, Merseyside, SD3003 39km 293°

Blackcap

AEB8583 5F 03.05.2018 Portland Bill, Dorset, UK, SY6868

R 17.07.2019 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788 321km 0°

This total of twelve controls or recoveries of Blackcaps is a record for any year at Woolston. This should not be a surprise after a record 1,003 Blackcaps were ringed at Woolston in 2018.

Sedge Warbler

AEF2628 3 08.08.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 13.08.2019 Stanford Reservoir, Northamptonshire, SP6080 145km 140°

Sedge Warbler

AZA5391 3 28.07.2018 Icklesham, Sussex TQ8815

R 24.04.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 350km 323°

Reed Warbler

S706630 37 16.08.2017 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7483

R (=M) 12.07.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 9km 296°

Reed Warbler

AXC4503 3J 03.09.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R (=F) 26.06.2019 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484 9km 116°

Reed Warbler

AXC0687 3J 24.07.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 14.05.2019 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7484 12km 109°

Reed Warbler

AAA1849 4 28.04.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 05.05.2019 Brook Vale, Liverpool, Merseyside SJ3497 32km 284°

Four examples demonstrating the interchange of Reed Warblers between local sites.

Reed Warbler

AXC6959 4M 28.06.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 11.07.2019 Stanford Reservoir, Northamptonshire, SP6080 145km 140°

Reed Warbler

AEF2849 3J 21.08.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 14.09.2019 Hengistbury Head Centre, Bournemouth SZ1691 301km 171°

Reed Warbler

AEF3165 3J 07.08.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 01.09.2019 Wilstone Reservoir, Hertfordshire, SP9012 216km 146°

Reed Warbler

Z212187 3J 07.08.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

R 29.08.2019 Icklesham, East Sussex, TQ8815 351km 142°

Reed Warbler

S902661 3 22.07.2017 East of Aqualate Mere, Newport, Staffordshire SJ7820
R 22.04.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788 70km 351°

Reed Warbler

B951948 3 22.08.2013 Fish Lake Meadows, Romsey, Hampshire SU3521
R (=M) 22.06.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588 276km 346°

Reed Warbler

BJ11579 4 18.05.2019 Wassenaar, Zuid-Holland, The Netherlands
R (=M) 20.06.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588 482km 287°
R (=M) 13.07.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588 482km 287°
R (=M) 03.08.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588 482km 287°

This Reed Warbler, which bred on No.3 bed, may well have undertaken a “Loop migration” with an autumn route down the Atlantic coast of France and through Iberia but a more easterly route in spring.

Robin

AND7762 3J 03.06.2019 near Kettlestone, Norfolk, TF9630
R 12.10.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588 237km 286°

This is a significant post fledging dispersal for a Robin bred in Norfolk

Chaffinch

ATD3190 3F 30.10.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488
R 24.03.2019 Lostock, Nr Woodford, Cheshire SJ9083 27km 103°

Chaffinch

S691975 3M 29.11.2017 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 03.01.2019 Nr Partington, Greater Manchester SJ7089 7km 75°

Chaffinch

AAA1530 3F 25.11.2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 01.03.2019 Little Heatley, Nr Dunham Woodhouses, Cheshire SJ7288 7km 91°

Three Chaffinches exchanged with South Manchester Ringing group sites east of Woolston, the latter two utilising sacrificial wild bird crops on farmland.

Brambling

ACD0451 3F 31.10.2018 Bryn Picca, Dolfor, Powys SO0684
R 30.03.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488 120km 29°

Brambling

ACD2647 6M 02.01.2019 Caermeirch near Pontrhydygroes, Ceredigion SN7573
R 19.01.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488 146km 37°

Brambling

AAD0121 5M 04.01.2019 Welshpool, Powys SJ2208

R 30.03.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488 92km 28°
R 06.04.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488 92km 28°
R 11.04.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488 92km 28°

These three Bramblings used Woolston as a stopover between winter sites in Wales and breeding areas in Scandinavia

Brambling

AXC6441 5F 30.03.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488
X 21.05.2019 Hollumberbos, Hollum 53°25'N 5°37'E Ameland, The Netherlands 539km 90°

This Brambling perished in The Netherlands whilst on spring migration back to Scandinavia

Brambling

BLB 4F 04.11.2017 Bassevelde 51°13'N 3°40'E Oost-Vlaanderen, Belgium 15239606
R 09.04.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6688 484km 300°

Brambling

15239606 4F 04.11.2017 Bassevelde, Oost-Vlaanderen, Belgium
R 09.04.2018 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6688 484km 300°

Brambling

EM15792 4M 04.08.2018 Birkeland, Sokndal, Rogaland, Norway
R 06.04.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588 772km 225°

Brambling

NOS EM15279 3F 05.10.2018 Havsoy, Eigersund 58°27'N 6°00'E Rogaland, Norway
R 11.04.2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6488 773km 224°

Brambling

AXC6552 5F 14.04.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588
R 12.05.2019 Garlivegen, Nord-Aurdal, Opland, Norway 1100km 240°

Six international controls or recoveries of Bramblings in one year is unprecedented at Woolston

Greenfinch

NZ56968 3JF 05.08.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R 23.02.2019 Lostock, Nr Woodford, Cheshire SJ9083 27km 98°

Greenfinch

TW04434 3JF 14.09.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588
R 10.11.2019 Lostock Nr Woodford, Cheshire, SJ9083 27km 98°

Greenfinch

NF60940 3F 05.09.2019 Ramsley Reservoir, Derbyshire
R 28.10.2019 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788 63km 284°

Greenfinch

NZ56172 3F 09.10.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF 09.02.2019 Stalybridge, Greater Manchester SD9700 34km 71°

Greenfinch

TW03629 3J 29.06.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588
XF 13.09.2019 Knutsford, Cheshire SJ7478 15km 142°

Greenfinch

TV10991 3M 09.10.2019 No.1 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
XF 24.11.2019 Nr Partington, Greater Manchester SJ7089 4km 91°

Greenfinch

NF72358 5F 05.02.2019 No 3 bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588
XF 02.09.2019 Warrington, SJ6487 3km 211°

Lesser Redpoll

S903220 5M 17.02.2018 Market Drayton, Shropshire SJ6733
R 19.04.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6688 56km 0°

Lesser Redpoll

ATD3082 3 05.11.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6688
R (=6F) 31.03.2019 Crow Wood Farm, Lancashire SD6845 56km 2°

Lesser Redpoll

AED3598 3 02.11.2018 Drayton Pond, Clumber Park, Near Worksop, Nottinghamshire SK7363
R 08.04.2019 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788 98km 279°

Lesser Redpoll

AXC6172 4M 23.11.2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
R (=5) 08.03.2019 Watchtree Nature Reserve, Cumbria NY3154 171km 349°

Each of these four Lesser Redpolls was recaptured in the course of a northerly spring migration

Bullfinch

AAA4479 5M 20.06.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
XF 15.06.2019 Wilmslow, Cheshire SJ8381 19km 120°

Bullfinch

D327759 3M 14.12.2013 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
XF 02.01.2019 Warrington SJ6588 0km

Reed Bunting

AXC4075 4M 27.07.2018 No.1 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 01.03.2019 Little Heatley, Nr Dunham Woodhouses, Cheshire SJ7288 5km 91°

MIGRATION WATCH 2019

Visit 1

Participants: David Bowman , Dave Steel , Les Jones , Helen Allen and Alan Warford

Day: Saturday, No.3 bed John Morgan Hide

Date: 06/04/19 **Time:** 0630-1130

Weather: Bright, dry and blessed with a cold easterly wind.

Highlight: Doing a bonus Migration watch from the comfort of the Morgan Hide on Number Three Bed.

Total birds seen: 856.

Visit 2

Participants: David Bowman , Dave Steel , Les Jones , Helen Allen , Alan Warford and David Spencer

Day: Saturday

Date: 07/09/2019 **Time:** 0700-1200

Weather: Mild, still and bright.

Highlights: A Redstart which actually posed to have its photo taken. A juvenile Goldeneye so early in the season...the flurry of frenetic migratory activity by both Swallow and House Martin...Helens expansive baking talents producing another excellent cake!

Total birds seen: 2434

Visit 3

Participants: David Bowman , Dave Steel , Helen Allen , Les Jones and Alan Warford

Day: Saturday

Date: 05/10/2019 **Time:** 0700-1200

Weather: Grey and cool with some bright creeping in by late morning.

Highlights: The realisation that the Morgan Hide on this morn would make a great Vis-Mig venue, A comfy hide, No hill to climb, Helen's lemon drizzle cake, The rush of Redwing, The flush of Redwing, The push of Redwing as nearly three thousand flew further and further south from their Scandinavian home.

Total birds seen: 4586.

Visit 4

Participants: David Bowman and Dave Steel

Day: Thursday

Date: 31/10/19 **Time:** 0630-1200

Weather: Cool fresh clear skies with an easterly breeze bright.

Highlights: Being in the right place at the right time...the weather conditions pumped life into migrating wings with Redwing trying to steal the show...perhaps the lone Hawfinch clinched the top spot!

Total birds seen: 6034.

Visit 5

Participants: David Bowman , Les Jones , Dave Spencer , Helen Allen , Alan Warford and Dave Steel

Day: Saturday

Date: 16/11/19 **Time:** 0630-1200

Weather: A mix of grey bright and breezy conditions.

Highlights: Having such a large Team, seeing Starlings in good number leaving their roost, the sweep of Fieldfare wings when sixty birds rushed low over our heads.

Total birds seen: 5701

Counts from 2019 Migration Watches						
	Date	06/04/19	07/09/19	05/10/19	31/10/19	16/11/19
	Time	0615-1200	0630-1200	0700-1200	0640-1200	0630-1200
1	Mute Swan	4	1	15	0	14
2	Pink-footed Goose	0	0	500	130	260
3	Greylag Goose	6	1	21	0	0
4	Canada Goose	9	82	12	6	17
5	Common Shelduck	4	0	1	0	0
6	Wigeon	0	0	19	0	0
7	Gadwall	23	19	65	0	0
8	Teal	14	15	188	0	19
9	Mallard	0	93	0	9	0
10	Shoveler	5	0	17	0	0
11	Pochard	14	0	0	0	0
12	Tufted Duck	24	5	0	0	48
13	Goldeneye	0	1	0	0	2
14	Pheasant	1	2	0	0	0
15	Black-Necked Grebe	22	0	0	0	0
16	Great Crested Grebe	4	0	0	0	3
17	Little Grebe	4	0	2	0	0
18	Cormorant	40	4	20	4	12
19	Grey Heron	0	0	0	1	1
20	Sparrowhawk	4	2	4	1	3
21	Common Buzzard	5	9	4	6	3
22	Kestrel	0	1	0	2	2
23	Merlin	1	1	0	1	0
24	Peregrine Falcon	1	1	1	1	0

25	Water Rail	1	0	0	0	1
26	Moorhen	10	0	0	0	1
27	Coot	7	0	0	1	0
28	Golden Plover	0	0	0	3	0
29	Lapwing	12	90	253	688	1050
30	Dunlin	0	0	0	1	0
31	Common Snipe	0	0	23	0	0
32	Woodcock	0	0	0	1	1
33	Green Sandpiper	0	0	1	0	0
34	Black Headed Gull	365	103	12	454	341
35	Common Gull	0	0	0	1	0
36	Lesser Black-backed Gull	82	178	24	29	73
37	Herring Gull	1	5	1	5	157
38	Great Black-backed Gull	0	1	1	0	1
39	Feral Pigeon	5	11	0	1	0
40	Stock Dove	1	41	1	8	32
41	Woodpigeon	28	209	368	423	287
42	Collared Dove	0	0	0	1	0
43	Tawny Owl	0	0	0	2	3
44	Swift	0	2	0	0	0
45	Kingfisher	0	2	0	0	0
46	Great Spotted Woodpecker	0	1	1	0	0
47	Skylark	0	0	0	13	11
48	Sand Martin	43	1	0	0	0
49	Swallow	1	758	29	0	0
50	House Martin	1	335	0	0	0
51	Tree Pipit	0	1	0	0	0
52	Meadow Pipit	0	125	42	1	5
53	Grey Wagtail	1	3	15	0	0
54	White/Pied Wagtail	0	0	0	1	4
55	Wren	7	3	0	11	6
56	Dunnock	4	4	0	4	5
57	Robin	1	17	0	10	17
58	Redstart	0	1	0	0	0
59	Common Blackbird	0	11	0	38	66
60	Fieldfare	0	0	30	590	864

61	Song Thrush	0	1	0	7	0
62	Redwing	0	0	2684	2530	172
63	Mistle Thrush	0	2	1	3	2
64	Cetti's Warbler	3	0	3	0	0
65	Blackcap	0	3	0	0	0
66	Chiffchaff	7	26	3	0	0
67	Goldcrest	0	0	0	1	2
68	Long Tailed Tit	0	7	4	26	8
69	Blue Tit	0	8	16	7	3
70	Great Tit	3	1	2	6	0
71	Coal Tit	0	3	0	1	1
72	Willow Tit	0	1	0	0	0
73	Nuthatch	0	1	0	1	0
74	Jay	1	1	14	4	1
75	Magpie	6	2	10	3	6
76	Jackdaw	0	67	12	49	94
77	Rook	0	0	1	0	0
78	Carrion Crow	43	70	7	62	171
79	Raven	1	2	0	1	1
80	Starling	0	33	5	624	1802
81	House Sparrow	20	0	0	0	0
82	Chaffinch	0	49	9	178	44
83	Brambling	6	0	0	6	0
84	Greenfinch	1	0	107	8	8
85	Goldfinch	2	13	16	15	46
86	Siskin	0	0	0	3	8
87	Linnet	0	1	20	39	0
88	Lesser Redpoll	0	0	0	3	5
89	Bullfinch	4	4	0	9	17
90	Hawfinch	0	0	0	1	0
91	Yellowhammer	0	0	0	0	1
92	Reed Bunting	4	0	2	0	0
		856	2434	4586	6034	5701

David Steel

REPORT ON BREEDING WILLOW TITS

2019 was a much-improved season for locating Willow Tit nest sites compared with last year. Fourteen sites were found in the general area of the Reserve. This may have been due to the milder and more favourable weather in early Spring.

No.1 Bed

Nest 1

6th April. Birds were found excavating a cavity 17cm deep, 2.28 metres high in a willow stump at the Viaduct Pools. On 29th April there was no further progress and it was subsequently abandoned. Birds were heard in the general area on several, successive visits but no further nests were found.

No.2 Bed

Nest 2

6th April. An excavation was found west of the centre of the bed with adults present. This was 2.1 metres high in a narrow stump of a multi-stemmed willow. On 15th April there was no progress, but birds were seen in area, and despite a search, no other nest was found. No further checks were made due to the menace of the Giant Hogweed. However, when the cavity was checked on 19th June it had been opened up by GSW. There was a family party of Willow Tits calling nearby so it seems they bred in the area.

Nest 3

6th April. Birds were excavating a cavity 1.3 metres high in a medium-size willow stump on the south bank of the bed. The female was incubating nine eggs by 15th April and on 4th May. On 24th May the young were ready to fledge, so presumed a success.

Nest 4

13th April. A nest was found 1.6 metres high in a willow at the north of the bed. It was a difficult cavity to inspect, but it was obvious the nest was active and on 5th May it held seven eggs. On the 24th May the nest was empty and intact with fledged young calling nearby.

No.3 Bed

Nest 5

In early April an excavation was found in the Centre Copse. It was 2.7 metres high in a decrepit willow stump which had been the site of an abandoned cavity in 2017. It was lined on 23rd April but on 8th May a Blue Tit was sitting tight therein. No further visits were made until 29th May and although the hole was intact, there were remnants of a mossy nest below, so it may have been predated.

Nest 6

Willow Tit song was heard in scrub and woodland to the west of the bed and on 10th April a promising unobtrusive cavity, 10 cm deep, was found in a pollarded willow. This did not progress but on 24th April, a nest was found with seven eggs at the west of the bed, not too far from the first excavation. It was an attractive site, bored into the vertical sawn end of a medium size willow and only 53 cm from the ground. Alarmingly it was only 25m from an active Great-spotted Woodpecker nest! It held small chicks on 7th May and was empty and intact on 24th May so had obviously been successful. It may have avoided predation by being so low and screened by the emerging vegetation.

Nest 7

Dan Gornall had noticed birds visiting a site on the north bank and on 21st April a female was found sitting on nine eggs in a nest 2.24m high in a willow stump. On 11th May the nest held chicks 'in pin' and on 29th May the nest was empty and intact with fledged young making begging noises in thick

foliage nearby. It had been hoped that Dan's site was the nest of another pair, but investigation proved this was not the case.

No.4 Bed

Nest 8

5th April. A pair was found excavating a cavity 1.14 metres high in a sawn-off willow stump, in the Sandpit Pond area. It was just a few meters from a specially designed and erected nest box which was ignored. On 10th April the cavity was lined but the birds were being harassed by a pair of Blue Tits. The rim of the entrance hole was chipped and fine chippings could be seen on the nest lining. This behaviour has been noticed before and it is hard to explain because the Blue Tits could easily gain access to the chamber. On the 23rd April the site had been usurped and a Blue Tit was sitting on six eggs. On 7th May the nest held seven naked chicks but on 22nd June the cavity had been opened from the entrance to the base of the chamber, so it is likely the chicks were taken by GSW.

Nest 9

5th April. A pair was observed excavating in a narrow willow stump, in scrub close to the central track. This stump had been used in 2018 and the top was sawn off during the winter. It was a difficult cavity to inspect but appeared to be lined, or the eggs covered, on 10th April. On 21st May a clear view was obtained which showed nine eggs, but the site appeared to have been abandoned. On 28th May a predator had broken into the back of the cavity, but the eggs were still inside, so for some unknown reason it had failed at the egg stage.

Nest 10

5th April. A fresh excavation was found about 2.2 metres high and difficult to inspect, in scrub west of the central track, with birds calling in the vicinity. However, lack of activity on later visits concluded it had been abandoned.

Nest 11

11th April. Birds were excavating a cavity just 1m high in a thin willow stump in scrub east of the Loop. On 4th May the female was sitting on eight eggs and on 28th the pair was feeding large chicks ready to fledge.

Nest 12

23rd April. A cavity with an extremely large entrance, and with copious chippings below, was found near the west bank of the bed. It was at the base of a willow that contained a nest in 2018. Obviously the work of a Willow Tit but may have been enlarged by GSW, or even other titmice. However, there was no further progress.

Nest 13

4th May. A female was incubating eight eggs in a cavity on the north bank of the bed and on the 28th the nest was empty and intact, indicating a successful fledge. This was a classic unobtrusive site being bored into the end of a thin sloping willow stump, 1.5 metres high and proved difficult to find. It was only a few metres from last year's nest.

Nest 14

7th May. A high cavity was found in a decrepit alder stump in scrub, to the west of the western perimeter of the bed. The pair was very vocal and it was suspected the nest contained young. On 19th May a careful inspection was made which showed at least five chicks, ready to fledge. The entrance was 3.1m high.

SUMMARY

I would like to thank Mike Lloyd for his tireless and invaluable work in locating territories and nest sites. Also, Dan Gornall for bringing my attention to a territory on no.3 bed and for conducting Playback

Surveys in early Spring and making the results available. The season's tally was back to the usual acceptable level compared with 2018, but the formidable menace of the Giant Hogweed still prevents adequate monitoring of certain areas of the Reserve.

Of the fourteen nest sites found, five were abandoned (including one at the egg stage), two were usurped by Blue Tits and seven presumed successful. Despite searches no repeats were found. Over the years this study has shown a significant number of nest holes above 2m in height which can make them difficult to detect, especially with emergent foliage.

No.1 Bed: despite our efforts, it is disappointing that no active nests were found. A pair was definitely by the Viaduct Pools but because of the difficult terrain, parts of this were not adequately monitored. There was regular activity at the east end of the bed and a definite territory. A family party was seen there on 6th July. The western bank of the west pool was not searched, but a family party was seen close to the five-bar gate on 9th June. Again, the north bank was not monitored. There were singing males in other parts of the bed and reports of the ringers catching females with brood patches. Despite the ongoing (tragic) encroachment of the landfill site, this bed could easily hold 6-8 pairs, or even more.

No.2 Bed: this is the most difficult bed to monitor and visits were limited because of the scourge of the Hogweed. However, it is gratifying to report three successful breeding records and 4-5 pairs is still a reasonable estimate.

No.3 Bed: an improvement on last year with three nest sites located. Singing males were heard from other parts of the bed but previous territories seemed unoccupied, so there is possibly a slight reduction from other years, although 4-5 pairs are a feasible estimate. The eastern flank was not monitored. However, in the first days of August the ringers reported catching six juveniles. Three had plumage that suggested they had fledged in the past two months; and three with plumage suggesting they fledged within the past two weeks. This evidence strongly suggests there had been repeat clutches.

No.4 Bed: another improvement on 2018 with six nest sites found. Again, birds were heard singing in several other areas and it was not possible to monitor the whole of this vast bed, with some parts inaccessible due to the hogweed. In early Spring a Willow Tit song survey was conducted by D. Spencer and D. Gornall. On this particular bed they achieved positive responses that could equate to 12 territories and it is gratifying to note that these correspond with nest sites and territories that we have found over several years. It could be reasonable therefore, to assume that this bed and immediate area could support as many as 10-15 pairs.

Note: In addition to the Playback Survey on no.4 Bed, Dan Gornall conducted surveys on the other three Beds. All responses corresponded closely to known territories found by nest monitoring. In addition, he surveyed the Butchersfield Tip and had three responses from adjacent areas on the south bank. It was disappointing however, that no responses were received from the north banks of Nos.1 and 2 Beds, or the eastern flank of No.3 Bed.

As mentioned previously, it was not possible to monitor the whole of the Reserve due to time limits and inaccessibility. In general, the riverbanks and slopes of the bunds were not visited. The species is notoriously unobtrusive and nest sites can easily be missed. However, a reasonable total population estimate could be 24-33 pairs, which is wonderful for such a small area. Careful Reserve management may be needed to pReserve this nationally declining species. Much valuable habitat has been lost due to the continued encroachment of the landfill site on no.1 bed. Pumping operations are planned for No.2 bed which could restrict breeding habitat. The importance of even isolated stands of scrub and woodland should be carefully considered in planning the future development of the Reserve. Woolston Eyes continues to be a precious jewel in the Willow Tit's declining distribution.

Allan Rustell

BUTTERFLY REPORT

This year will be remembered for the remarkable influx of Painted Ladies which were seen in record numbers at Woolston and nationally. This was not the only species to have a successful year and Orange Tips were also present in record numbers during April. Overall, it was a very good year for most of our butterflies and eleven of the 19 species recorded were seen in greater numbers than in 2018. Fears that there would be a decline following the hot dry summer of 2018 proved unfounded although there were, as always, some species which did not perform as well.

Exceptionally high temperatures in February produced the earliest ever record of Peacock when one was found on the 15th. By the end of February Brimstone, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell had also been recorded. The first Orange Tip appeared on 25th March and Small White by the end of the month, both earlier than normal. April saw records of Speckled Wood (1st), Green-veined White (11th) and a very early Common Blue on the 22nd.

In general, the summer was characterised by periods of sunny weather interspersed with rain and this seemed to be to the benefit of most of our species.

The Skippers had mixed fortunes with excellent counts of Small Skipper but only average numbers of Large Skipper. Perhaps unsurprisingly there were no reports of Essex Skipper which was first recorded in Cheshire in 2018 but has yet to be found at Woolston.

During the summer months there were excellent counts of Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell with the latter species recovering from its worst ever year in 2018. Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown also improved on the previous year when they were adversely affected by the drought conditions during their flight season. Purple Hairstreak also had a good year although numbers were slightly down. The “whites” were about average, with the exception of Large White which was very disappointing.

Other species which had a poor season were Small Copper which failed to build on last year’s recovery and Comma which was present in below average numbers. There was no repeat of last year’s sightings of Dark Green Fritillary and another blank year for Ringlet meant that none have been reported at Woolston since 2016.

In autumn sightings continued until the end of October but there were no records from then onwards.

The Butterfly Transect continued to be monitored on a weekly basis with the help of Les Jones and only one week was missed due to unsuitable weather. Much of the time it was touch and go whether the necessary conditions for monitoring the transect, sunshine and a minimum temperature of 13 degrees, could be met.

As always, I am grateful for records submitted by permit holders and fellow wardens and would encourage all visitors to enter their sightings in the logbook in the John Morgan Hide with details of numbers and location where possible. Thanks also to Rupert Adams of the Cheshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation for supplying details of Cheshire sightings which enable our records to be seen in context. As always, Woolston produced the highest totals in the county for a number of species; Small and Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Purple Hairstreak, Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Gatekeeper.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Small Skipper

Thymelicus sylvestris

After a very poor year in 2018 there was a dramatic improvement, no doubt as a result of less extreme weather conditions. The first sightings were on 27th June when five were seen across the Reserve, followed by an additional three on the northern half of No.1 bed on the 30th. By 10th July a total of 37 was judged to be present and on the 17th a Reserve-wide survey produced 32 butterflies. Peak numbers occurred around this time and an analysis of the records showed that no less than 52 were present. The distribution was as follows: 13 on Butchersfield Tip, 13 on No.1 bed, 12 on No.2 bed, one on No.3 bed and 13 on No.4 bed. Thereafter numbers declined and the last was seen on 2nd August. This year's maximum was the third highest total for the Reserve since 2003. In recent years this species has been largely confined to the eastern end of the Reserve but it now appears to be more widely distributed.



Large Skipper

David Bowman

Large Skipper

Ochlodes sylvanus

Like the previous species there was an upturn in the number of reports received and the flight season returned to normal. An early sighting on 1st June was the first record and small numbers were present until early July. This species is rarely found in large numbers at Woolston and the maximum count was of five around 23rd June. Although this is the same as in 2018, many more records were received this year. The last sighting was of one in the centre of No.2 bed on 4th July

Brimstone*Gonepteryx rhamni*

The first emerged from hibernation on 21st February, the earliest ever record for Woolston. Two were on Butchersfield Tip on this date. A further February report was of one on the Canal track on the 26th. None were then seen until 20th March when three were present. Between 17th and 24th April no less than seven different butterflies were reported with a further one along the river. This represents by far the best year for this species since systematic recording began in 2003. There was a single record of the summer brood, a female found on the south bank of No.3 bed on 8th August.

Large White*Pieris brassicae*

Following an excellent year in 2018 when over 60 were present, this season was the worst since 2004! Very few records were received and a maximum count of three was disappointing. The first was found on No.3 bed on 27th June and there were only seven sightings. Even allowing for under recording this was a poor showing for a species that is not usually present in double figures. The highest total occurred on 1st August and the final record was of one on the northern section of No.1 bed on 25th August.

Small White*Pieris rapae*

The first of the year was on the early date of 31st March and small numbers were seen during the remainder of the spring period with a maximum of five on 11th April. There were no counts in double figures until 24th July when about 25 were counted across the Reserve. Numbers built up during August and peaked at about 70 towards the end of that month, perhaps surprisingly the highest total in Cheshire this year. Due to the difficulties in distinguishing this species from Green-veined White when in flight and/or at a distance this figure has to be a best estimate. This total shows a return to normal numbers after an excellent year in 2018 when over 400 were recorded. This year's figures are slightly above average. On 8th September 17 were on the northern section of No.1 bed but there were no further significant totals, the final record being of one in the same area on 20th October, a late sighting for this species.

Green-veined White*Pieris napi*

This species had a poor year in 2018, due to the prolonged drought but numbers improved this year with above average numbers present. The first of the year was on 11th April and the last spring record occurred on the 24th of that month. The next confirmed sighting was on 7th July when three were found. There was an increase in numbers from mid-July with estimated total of 43 on the 17th and 52 on the 24th. The highest count of the year was between 1st and 4th August when a series of visits produced a Reserve-wide total of around 80, which, as for Small White, was the highest in the county. An estimated 41 were reported on 8th August and eleven were still present at the end of the month. The last record was of one on the Butterfly Transect on 18th September, a late sighting for this species.



Green-veined White

Dave Hackett

Orange Tip

Anthocharis cardamines

A first sighting on 25th March was the earliest ever record at Woolston and there were two further March reports. Butterflies were present in small numbers until 11th April when 27 were found across the Reserve. On 17th April no less than 101 were counted and a series of visits between 17th and 24th April resulted in a record total of 135 with a further 16 along the river. This is by far the highest total ever recorded on the Reserve, the previous highest being 36 in 2017. It was also the highest in Cheshire by a considerable margin. The record numbers were no doubt due to the warm dry spring. In view of the large numbers present it was a little surprising that the last sighting was on 3rd May, the earliest ever final record.

Purple Hairstreak

Favonius quercus

This species enjoyed another successful year although numbers were slightly down on the 2018 maximum. The first sightings were on 12th July which is about average for a butterfly whose flight period is normally limited to July and August. The six found on the 12th had increased to 12 on the 15th and there were further records when weather conditions were suitable to the end of July. Sightings were restricted to the Canal track south of No.3 bed and to the south bank of that bed where mature Oak trees are plentiful. Always elusive and often hard to find as they flit about in the canopy in early evening, analysis of the records submitted would suggest a year maximum of 20, which is well above average for a species which was first identified on the Reserve in 2011. It also proved to be the highest count in Cheshire. Unfortunately, there were no reports from the North Meadow area where two were found in 2018. There were two daytime records, one on 24th July when one was seen at the entrance to No.3

bed and the second on 8th August. Thereafter there was only one sighting of a single butterfly on the evening of 26th August.

Small Copper

Lycaena phlaeas

After a successful year in 2018, there was a return to more normal levels this year. The first was found on 29th June but there were no further records until 1st August when a Reserve-wide survey found three. A number of sightings followed, all of singles, until 29th August when two were present. One was on No.1 bed on 8th September and what was assumed to be the same individual was found in the same area two days later. The only other record of a disappointing year was on 23rd October when one flew across the north bank of No.4 bed. The highest count of the year was three which, with the exception of 2018, has been about average since 2013.



Purple Hairstreak

David Bowman

Common Blue

Polyommatus icarus

An early record of one on No.1 bed on 22nd April was the first of the year. It was not until 22nd May however that the next sighting occurred; four were on No.1 bed on this date. On 30th May, a day of

cloud and occasional rain, a Reserve-wide survey found eight and from the beginning of June numbers increased dramatically. The northern section of No.1 bed held 66 on 9th June and on the 14th a further 25 were found on the rest of No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip. As four were known to be on the Canal track to the south of No.3 bed, this gave an overall total of 95 which proved to be the highest of the year, and the highest in Cheshire. By 23rd June, 23 were still on the northern section of No.1 bed. Small numbers were present throughout July and the second brood emerged on 1st August when there was a Reserve total of 23. This brood peaked between 21st and 25th August when a series of visits resulted in a total count of 68. In recent years the second brood has comfortably outnumbered the first but that was not the case this year. Very few were seen after 25th August and the final count was of five on No.1 bed on 8th September. As usual the vast majority were to be found at the favoured eastern end of the Reserve with small numbers on No.2 bed, the north meadow of No.3 bed, the Canal track and the centre of No.4 bed. This year's maximum was considerably lower than in 2018 but still an above average total.

In order to improve the habitat for this species an area of the Canal track which forms part of the Butterfly Transect has been cleared of brambles which were crowding out Birdsfoot Trefoil. It is planned to introduce more of this wildflower, which is the main food plant of the Common Blue, in the coming year.



Common Blue

Hazel Rothwell

Holly Blue

Celastrina argiolus

There were only three records of this attractive species which is often overlooked or even confused with Common Blue. Found more commonly in gardens, it is uncommon at Woolston but its delicate beauty is always a welcome sight. There were no records of the spring brood and the first sighting was of one on No.1 bed on 24th July. On 1st August one was on the Canal track and a second on No.4 bed. The final report was of one on the northern section of No.1 bed on 25th August. It seems likely that all

records were of different butterflies and that a total of four was present across the Reserve, which is above average.

Red Admiral

Vanessa atalanta

This summer migrant was seen in excellent numbers. The first was found on No.4 bed on 1st June and by the month end six were present across the Reserve. A maximum of ten was recorded on 17th July with seven counted a week later. The highest numbers were recorded between the end of August and mid-September when a Reserve-wide total of 41 was the highest of the year. They were fairly evenly distributed across the Reserve with 13 on No.1 bed and 14 on No.3 bed where, as always, Buddleias attracted good numbers. This was the third highest year maximum since systematic recording began in 2003. Other high totals occurred in 2014 and 2017 with counts of 50 and 78 respectively. Butterflies continued into October with counts of 13 and 20 on the south bank of No.3 bed alone. By 16th October eight were still on one Buddleia on the Transect and the last sighting was in the same area on 27th October, a sunny day with a temperature of 10 degrees centigrade.

Painted Lady

Vanessa cardui

This species is an inter-generational migrant which moves north from Morocco, through Spain and France to Britain, a journey which takes three or four generations over about five or six months. When there is a combination of favourable circumstances it arrives in Britain in exceptional numbers and this year was one of the best for many years with record numbers recorded across the country. The first sighting was of one on No.1 bed on 29th May followed by further reports on 7th and 14th June. These were of one or two butterflies but an arrival towards the end of the month produced a total of 41 which was close to the previous record for the Reserve (46 in 2009). There was then a slight lull before a second surge around the end of July which resulted in a count of 212! Painted Ladies seemed to be everywhere and in unprecedented numbers. It appears that this second high was a result of a fresh arrival from Europe combined with the emergence of a second brood from those that had arrived and bred earlier. Many sites in Cheshire reported exceptionally high totals, notably on the Wirral coast where an amazing total of over a thousand was present in one location. These exceptional numbers continued through August with 81 on the northern section of No.1 bed alone on the 18th and 64 there a week later. Smaller numbers remained during September and the final sightings were of two on the Butterfly Transect on 2nd October and one in the Sandpit Pond area on the 17th.

Small Tortoiseshell

Aglais urticae

After a disastrous year in 2018 when there was a maximum of only eleven, there was a considerable improvement in the fortunes of this attractive and formerly abundant species. The first appeared on 25th February, the earliest ever record at Woolston and only the second ever February sighting. Two were on No.4 bed on 26th February and the following day two were recorded on No.2 bed. This early emergence was a result of the unseasonably high temperatures during February. The next reports were of seven on 20th March and five on No.4 bed on the 23rd. Regular sightings occurred during March and the spring maximum was of 22 on 17th April. The last record of over-wintering butterflies was on 24th April and none were then found until 21st June. This brood was seen in small numbers, with less than



Painted Lady

Andy Weir



Painted Lady

Hazel Rothwell

ten present until late August when there was a dramatic increase. On 25th August no less than 42 were on the northern section of No.1 bed, many attracted to Buddleias which have self-seeded in that area. A further 13 were found in the rest of the Reserve the following week, and an overall total of 55 was the highest since 2014. It was also the highest in the county. In the last four years there had been a marked decline and it is hoped that this year's improvement is the start of a recovery. Early September found 17 still on No.1 bed (8th) and there were two further reports that month. The final sighting of a successful year was of six on the Butterfly Transect on 2nd October.

Peacock

Aglais io

Like the previous species there was a considerable upsurge in numbers this year, starting with the earliest ever record on 15th February, and what was presumed to be the same individual the following day. There were no further sightings until 20th March when a Reserve-wide total of twelve was recorded. Numbers increased from 11th April and a series of visits between 17th and 24th April resulted in a total of around 40. There were no further spring records but, unusually, singles were seen on three dates in June. The summer brood emerged on 23rd July, a fairly typical date, and there was a rapid increase in numbers, culminating in a Reserve-wide total of 335 around 1st August. This is the highest count since 2013, when over 600 were present, and the first in excess of a hundred since 2014. It was the highest total in Cheshire in 2019. Butterflies were distributed fairly evenly across the Reserve with over a hundred on No.1 bed and 46 attracted to Buddleias on the south bank of No.3 bed. A Reserve-wide survey on 8th August produced a total of 59 but this was the last double-figure count of the year. The final sighting was on 8th September, a relatively early date.

Comma

Polytonia c-album

As with the two previous species, exceptionally mild conditions in mid-February resulted in an early emergence from hibernation. The first sighting of two on No.3 bed on 25th February was the second earliest ever and was quickly followed by singles on Nos.4 and 2 beds on the 26th and 27th. There were no further records until 20th March when three were found across the Reserve. The spring maximum was four on 8th April and the final report of an over-wintering butterfly was on 11th April. The summer brood emerged on 27th June when five were present and similar numbers were reported until the end of August. The autumn emergence is often the most numerous and this was the case this year. Eight were seen on 10th September and on the 18th no less than 14 were found on the Butterfly Transect and Canal track alone. None were reported from the rest of the Reserve, at this time but this was perhaps unsurprising as no Reserve-wide counts were carried out due to holidays. Given that 14 were found on the Transect on 2nd October it seems certain that more were present in un-surveyed parts of the Reserve. Although the counts obtained were slightly below average these were almost certainly an underestimate, so it appears that numbers were around average. The final record was on 23rd October.

Speckled Wood

Parage aegeria

This species normally emerges around the beginning of April and the first was seen on the 1st. Numbers soon increased and a series of visits between 17th and 24th April resulted in an excellent total of 47 with a further seven along the river. Conditions were in marked contrast to those in 2018, when April was exceptionally cold and the first Speckled Wood was not seen until 26th April. During May only one or

two were present and no more than ten were seen until 27th June when 14 were counted. During July numbers increased; 38 were present on the 24th and 45 on 8th August. The year maximum occurred in the first half of September and an overall total of 95 on the 10th was about average for a species which has expanded northwards in recent years. Although numbers then declined, 17 on No.4 bed on 14th September was still a good count. The year ended with three October records, the final sighting being on the 23rd, a relatively late date.



Speckled Wood

Dave Hackett

Gatekeeper

Pyronia tithonus

After two poor years there was a marked improvement in the fortunes of this species which can be seen in good numbers in most areas of the Reserve. The first was seen on 30th June and as always there was a rapid increase with 87 present on 10th July. The peak counts were at the end of July and a total of 346 was the highest for three years although still far lower than a few years ago when counts in excess of 500 were the norm. Nevertheless, Woolston typically recorded the highest count in Cheshire. The distribution was fairly even across the site with 40 on Butchersfield Tip, 42 on No.1 bed and 88 on each of Nos. 2, 3 and 4 beds. A butterfly identification workshop held at this time found excellent numbers along the Canal track where the habitat is especially suitable for this species. Early August saw just less than 200 still present but the usual decline soon set in with 94 on the eighth and no further double-figure counts. The last sightings were of singles on Nos. 1 and 2 beds on 25th August.

Meadow Brown*Maniola jurtina*

In common with the previous species there was a recovery after disappointing numbers in the past three years. Like Gatekeeper, this species is a butterfly of high summer with a preference for grassland. An early emergence started with four on No.1 bed, on 9th June but only odd ones were seen until 21st June. A series of visits around the end of the month gave a Reserve total of 195 and by 10th July a year maximum of 297 was the highest since 2013 when a remarkable 828 were present. The vast majority was found at the favoured eastern end of the Reserve with 140 on No.1 bed and 88 on Butchersfield Tip. On 17th July 140 were counted, excluding the northern section of No.1 bed and by the beginning of August a Reserve total of 114 was the last three figure count. Numbers reduced further as August progressed and the final record was of nine on the 29th. Both Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper are dependent on suitable conditions in their flight season and do not appear to have suffered from the drought in 2018.

David Hackett

DRAGONFLY REPORT

In contrast with the previous year the cooler and more changeable weather during the spring and early summer period resulted in fewer numbers being recorded for several species this year. Inevitably the damselflies and early emerging dragonflies seemed to be most affected especially the Large Red and Red-eyed Damselflies, Four-spotted Chasers and Emperor Dragonflies. It was not completely disappointing since increased numbers of Brown and Migrant Hawkers as well as Ruddy Darters were present from mid-summer onwards. In most cases the highest numbers were recorded during the surveys which were conducted along the Dragonfly Transects on Nos.1 and 3 beds, in connection with the Carbon Landscape Citizen Science Project. Once again a recurring population of sixteen species was recorded including seven damselfly and nine dragonfly species, all of which are now classed as either common and widespread or locally common.

The season began slightly later than usual on 13th May, with a report of two Four-spotted Chasers on No.3 bed. Two days later a Broad-bodied Chaser was spotted by the Rotary Hide and the first Azure Damselflies were recorded on Nos.1 and 2 beds. On 23rd May both Large Red Damselflies and a single Blue-tailed Damselfly were found on No.1 bed. From 3rd to 14th June there were three reports of single Banded Demoiselles, across the Reserve. On 19th June the first Common Blue and Red-eyed Damselflies were seen on No.3 bed and a Black-tailed Skimmer was also present. By the end of June there were reports of both Brown Hawkers and a Common Darter. In mid-July an Emerald Damselfly was spotted on No.3 bed. The first report of a Migrant Hawker on 21st July was four days earlier than the previous two years, whereas the first Ruddy Darters recorded on 22nd July, was about two weeks later. On 1st August an Emperor Dragonfly was reported on No.3 bed where the first Southern Hawker was also noted on 5th August.

Although the overall numbers of damselflies were lower than the previous year, all the usual species were recorded. The most abundant of these was Azure Damselfly, with over four hundred being recorded, from mid-May to the end of June. Good numbers of Blue-tailed Damselflies were present during a flight period stretching from late May until the end August. Significantly, just under one hundred Common Blue Damselflies were recorded, which was about half that of the previous year and seemingly continue to decline year on year. It was also a disappointing season for Red-eyed Damselflies whose numbers were well below average, despite a few being spotted again at the Weir Basin. It was also a poor year for Large Red Damselflies, with only two records in single figures on Nos.1 and 3 beds. Just a few Emerald Damselflies were found on No.1 bed whilst a single record on No.3 bed was more of a surprise. However, it was a better year for sightings of Banded Demoiselles, which were spotted across the Reserve in early June and at the Weir Basin during July and August.

There were mixed results as far as the dragonflies were concerned. As usual Brown Hawkers were the most numerous with around one hundred being recorded from the end of June until mid-September. Over fifty Migrant Hawkers were recorded again this year mostly during August and September. Increased numbers of Ruddy Darters were also present and this species now appears to be more numerous than Common Darter, which has declined of late. Similarly to last year small numbers of Black-tailed Skimmers, Southern Hawkers and Broad-bodied Chasers were recorded. There was however a sharp decline in the number of Four-spotted Chasers recorded this year and a solitary Emperor Dragonfly was also very disappointing.

On 16th July a possible Red-veined Darter was reported on No.3 bed. Unfortunately, the observer only had a very brief view of this scarce Continental migrant before it disappeared and was unable confirm the identification. Even so it is an intriguing report, as it later transpired that there had been an influx of this species to our shores in 2019. There has been one previous record of this species at Woolston dating back to 1989, when a similar influx occurred.

As always, I would like to thank the wardens and permit holders for contributing reports of their sightings and photographs to the Group website or to me personally. Once again the records were submitted to the Cheshire Dragonfly Recorders and to the Greater Manchester Record Centre.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Emerald Damselfly

Lestes sponsa

Recent records of this inconspicuous species have all been in low single figures at the New Pool on No. 1 bed. There were just three records this year but unusually the first of these on 13th July was of a single female on No. 3 bed. The species was last recorded on this bed in 2015. The other records were at the New Pool, where two males were observed flying slowly around the emergent rushes on 29th July and four weeks later a single male was present on 27th August.



Banded Demoiselle

Brian Baird

Banded Demoiselle

Calopteryx splendens

There were eight records of this distinctive damselfly from across the Reserve, which was better than average. The first two reports were of singles which were spotted along the Canal track on 3rd and 10th June. On 14th June a single was reported on Butchersfield Tip, at the eastern end of No.1 bed. It is likely that these were all immature males. On 27th June, another male was in flight along the northern bank of the River Mersey at the Weir Basin, where breeding activity has been recorded in the past. There was further evidence of breeding here again this year when a female was seen egg-laying (ovipositing) on emergent rushes on 8th July with an attendant male nearby. The last three sightings were also from this favoured area, where single males were seen patrolling the riverbank on 18th and 22nd July and finally two males were present on 27th August.



Azure Damselflies

Brian Baird

Azure Damselfly

Coenagrion puella

This common damselfly was the most numerous odonata species on the Reserve. Although numbers were lower than the previous year more than 400 were recorded during the spring and early summer period. The first was on 15th May when 29 were found around the Viaduct Pools on No.1 bed, including newly emerged teneral and a single exuvia (larval case) plus another six on No.2 bed. On 18th May at least 31 were present along the east bank of No.3 bed. The first survey at the New Pool on No.1 bed on 23rd May produced a peak count of 135, which included three ovipositing pairs. On 25th May, 120 were recorded on No.3 bed. Following these peaks the numbers declined, probably due to cooler and often cloudy weather. On 15th June, only four were found on No.3 bed although on 19th at least 25 were

present on the bed. Around the New Pool on 22nd June a total of 58 were counted, including several mating pairs. The same day five were spotted along the north and east banks of No.2 bed. The last record was on 29th June, when 28 were counted along the south bank of No.3 bed, including both egg-laying and mating pairs.

Common Blue Damselfly

Enallagma cyathigerum

For the third year in succession the numbers of this common species have declined. An overall total of 97 was recorded this year compared to 180 in 2018 and 250 in 2017. Although there were thirteen records the majority of these were in single figures. The first record was later than usual on 19th June, when three were spotted on No. 3 bed. On 22nd June just two were noted during a survey at the New Pool and a single was on the north path of No.2 bed. Three were at the Weir Basin area on 27th June, including a mating couple. The highest count this year was on 29th June, when 29 were recorded during a survey along the south bank of No.3 bed. The next double-figure count was on 8th July when 27 were recorded at the Weir Basin and along the west path of No.2 bed. Only single-figure numbers were seen after this but on 29th July, eight were recorded at the New Pool and two on No.2 bed. Very few were present in August and the last sighting was at the New Pool on 27th August, when seven males and a single female were recorded.

Red-eyed Damselfly

Erythromma najas

It was a poor year for sightings of this localised species with only 28 being recorded, compared to 134 the previous year. There were just eight records in total and as usual the majority of these were from the slow-moving stretch of river along the south bank of No.3 bed. The first record was on 19th June, when a single male was seen resting on floating algae below the footbridge on to No.3 bed. On 27th June, three were spotted at the Weir Basin, where they were perching on floating aquatic vegetation. A maximum count of 10 was recorded on 29th June, when a survey was completed along the south bank of No.3 bed. There were only two records in July including one at the Weir Basin, where two were present on 8th July. On 22nd July, three were noted along the south bank of No.3 bed. On 5th August, seven were resting on floating vegetation below the No.3 bed footbridge. The last two records were of singles, which were also along this stretch of the river on 13th and 17th August.

Blue-tailed Damselfly

Ishmura elegans

The numbers of this common and widespread damselfly tend to fluctuate each year even though they appear to be more active in cloudy weather conditions than other damselfly species. During a three-month flight season, a total of 133 were recorded this year compared with 230 in 2018 and 107 in 2017. A single at the New Pool on 23rd May was the first sighting of the year, followed by three on No.3 bed on 25th May. On 15th June 11 were found on No.3 bed in cool and overcast conditions. Also, on No.3 bed on 19th June 15 were present. Nine were counted during a survey on No.1 bed on 22nd June whilst two were on No.2 bed the same day. Another two were at the Weir Basin on 27th June. The highest count was on 29th June when 17 were recorded along the south bank of No.3 bed. The majority of records in July were in single figures, but 13 were present on the south bank of No.3 bed on 22nd July and 15 were recorded at the New Pool on 29th July. On 1st August 15 were counted on No.3 bed followed

by a single on the 3rd and two on 13th August. A single at the New Pool on 27th August was the final record of the year.



Blue-tailed Damselfly

David Bowman

Large Red Damselfly

Pyrrosoma nymphula

It was a disappointing season for numbers of this attractive damselfly, which emerges in early spring. Just nine were recorded in total during the last week of May, which was later than usual for this species. The previous year 45 had been recorded from early May until mid-June. The first record was on 23rd May, when seven were counted during a survey at the New Pool. All recent records of this species have been on No.1 bed and it was a surprise to find two males along the south bank of No.3 bed on 25th May. However, despite further searches on both beds there were no further sightings.

Southern Hawker

Aeshna cyanea

This large dragonfly is a solitary species which is usually found perching on bushes and trees away from water. It is normally recorded in low single figures across the Reserve and typically there were four records this year. Unusually all sightings were on No.3 bed where the first single was spotted on 1st August. Two were present along the south bank of the bed on 5th August, including one on a Buddleia bush. The next record was on 10th September, when three were reported. The last sighting was of a male on 14th September, which was recorded during a survey along the south bank Dragonfly Transect.

Brown Hawker*Aeshna grandis*

It was a good year for sightings of this distinctive amber-winged dragonfly with 102 being recorded, from late June until mid-September. As usual the majority of records were on No.3 bed although the first report was of a single on the west bank of No.2 bed on 29th June. The next day two were reported on No.3 bed where a single was also noted on 10th July. Three were present on No.4 bed on 15th July and 12 were reported the following day on No.3 bed. During the rest of July small numbers were recorded on No.3 bed. On 29th July, a single was on No.2 bed and three were at the New Pool on No.1 bed, including an egg-laying female. During August increased numbers were recorded on No.3 bed, including four double-figure counts, beginning with 12 on 1st and 10 on 5th August. On the 13th August there was a maximum count of 13 on No.3 bed, followed by a report on the 17th of 11 on the bed. Numbers declined after this, when seven were recorded on No.3 bed on 24th August and three were counted at the New Pool on 27th August. The last sighting was on 14th September, when two were patrolling along the south bank of No.3 bed.

*Brown Hawker**David Bowman***Common Hawker***Aeshna juncea*

There were no reports of this irregular visitor, which was last recorded in July 2014.

Migrant Hawker

Aeshna mixta

The species appears later in the summer than the other hawkers and is often still present later in the autumn, as was the case this year. A total of 59 was recorded during the season which was above the recent average. The first report on 21st July was of a single along the west bank of No.2 bed. Two were on the north path of No.2 bed on 29th July and a single was spotted the following day on No.3 bed. Between 1st and 10th August, seven were recorded on No.3 bed. On 13th August, seven were counted during a survey on the south bank of the bed, including four perched close together. Also on the south side of No.3 bed, five were recorded on 17th August and three were present on the 24th. Two were along the Viaduct Path on 27th August and seven were counted at the New Pool on No.1 bed. Two singles were on No.3 bed on 3rd September but a week later, on 10th September, a total of 14 was recorded on the bed including a paired couple in flight. Six were recorded when the last survey was completed at the New Pool on 21st September and a single was also present on No.2 bed. The final sighting was on 8th November, when a single was reported at the north east area of No.3 bed.



Migrant Hawker

David Bowman

Emperor Dragonfly

Anax imperator

The only record this year was of a single on No.3 bed, on 1st August. This was disappointing as over twenty had been recorded in 2018, the majority of which were on No.1 bed. The species emerges from late spring onwards and may have been affected by the cooler conditions during this period.

Broad-bodied Chaser*Libellula depressa*

The species is often one of the first dragonflies to appear at Woolston in the spring. Only small numbers are recorded each year and the majority of these are usually on No.3 bed. The first report was of a single on 15th May, which was spotted near the Rotary Hide. On 25th May, a minimum of five were present on the bed, one of which was successfully released from a Ringer's mist net. On 9th June, there was an interesting report of a single on No.1 bed. The last sighting was on 19th June, when three were present on No.3 bed, including what appeared to be a brief mating pairing.

Four-spotted Chaser*Libellula quadrimaculata*

It was a poor year for this species which also appears from the spring and is usually recorded in good numbers on No.1 bed. Only eight were recorded during the season compared with 39 in 2018 and 38 in 2017. The first two were reported on 13th May, along the south bank of No.3 bed. On 23rd May, a single was noted during a survey at the New Pool on No.1 bed. Four were counted when another survey at this pool was completed on 22nd June. The final record was on 15th July, when a single was spotted along the west bank of No.4 bed.

*Four-spotted Chaser**Brian Baird*

Black-tailed Skimmer*Orthetrum cancellatum*

Although there was a shorter flight season a small number of this species was recorded which was similar to the previous year. There were no records in May and a single on 19th June at the north east corner of No.3 bed was the first sighting. Unusually there were no records on No.1 bed this year, but two more singles were reported on No.3 bed on 20th and 21st June. On No.4 bed, three were reported on 22nd June and a single was also spotted on No.3 bed the same day. Individuals often bask in the sunshine on bare earth or stones and several were noted along the paths of No.3 bed, between the 24th and 28th June. The next record was not until 22nd July, when a single was present on the south bank of No.3 bed. The last record was also on No.3 bed, where two were reported on 23rd July.

*Black-tailed Skimmer*

David Bowman

Black Darter*Sympetrum danae*

There were no reports again this year of this irregular visitor. The most recent record was of a single on No.1 bed in August, 2017.

Ruddy Darter

Sympetrum sanguineum

There was an increase in the numbers of this small blood-red darter species, which appears to be spreading across the Reserve. Previously it was confined to No.1 bed, but a small number were discovered along the south bank of No.3 bed in 2018. It was present in single-figure numbers on No.3 bed again this year and was also recorded on both Nos.1 and 2 beds. The first few records were all on No.3 bed where five were spotted on 22nd July, two on 23rd and the following day a mating couple was present. During a survey at the New Pool, 17 were recorded on 29th July, including an egg-laying pair. Between 1st and 17th August, there were five single-figure records on No.3 bed. The last sightings were on 27th August, when a single was present on No.2 bed and 26 were recorded during another survey at the New Pool on No.1 bed.



Ruddy Darter

Brian Baird

Common Darter

Sympetrum striolatum

A single on 30th June was the first report of the season. On No.3 bed, two were reported on 10th July followed by four on 23rd July. Three were noted at the New Pool on 29th July and two were along the south bank of No.3 bed on 3rd August. Singles were recorded on No.1 bed on 7th August and on No.3 bed on 13th and 17th August. Three were present on No.3 bed on 24th August. Numbers peaked on 27th August, when 14 were counted at the New Pool, including an egg-laying pair and a single was present on No.2 bed. On 14th September, two were on the south bank of No.3 bed. On 21st September a single

was on No.2 bed whilst 11 were recorded at the New Pool. There were no records in October and the final record of the year was on 8th November, when a single was reported on No.3 bed.



Common Darter

David Bowman

Brian Baird

The Discovery of a large Population of Broad-leaved Helleborine

The Reserve supports several species of orchid, although sadly no longer in the large numbers of about 20 years ago when over 2,000 Marsh Orchids flowered annually, notably on the south side of No.4 bed. We have also lost the small numbers of Pyramidal and Fragrant Orchids, but Bee Orchids can still be found most years, again on No.4 bed, and also on No.2 bed near the Thelwall Viaduct.

One species, Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*), was discovered in 2004 in the centre of No.3 bed, with 28 flower spikes. They were growing near to one of the paths and are likely to have been overlooked in the deep shade that they prefer; their flowers are not particularly distinctive either. This population continues to thrive, with up to 15 specimens noted most years. A number of botanical surveys failed to find any others at the Eyes until 2019. On 27th July of that year I was walking along the Ship Canal track from Thelwall Lane when I noticed several familiar flower spikes growing in deep shade, and soon realised that they were Broad-leaved Helleborines. When I began to look more closely I discovered more and more growing in a relatively small area. I returned the next day with my wife and carried out a full survey - the total number of Broad-leaved Helleborines found was 209!

In the next week or so several more plants were discovered near the Ship Canal further east and on No.2 bed. Together with those on No.3 bed the grand total was approximately 240 in flower on the Eyes in 2019.

Broad-leaved Helleborine is nationally one of the commonest of our native orchids, but I was interested to know if the numbers found at Woolston are of significance, either regionally or nationally. Eric Fletcher of rECOrd, the Cheshire Biological Record Centre, told me that they have only a limited number of records of this orchid in the County data base. A local orchid enthusiast, Sarah Bird, also contacted Sean Cole who is shortly to publish a book on orchids, and his comments are interesting. “[Broad-leaved Helleborine] isn’t a species that occurs in large numbers in many of its sites”. He added that he was aware of a site in Leicestershire where there were 300-400 “so yes, a population of 240 is a good count”. A note of caution needs to be exercised, however, as the national plant database does not for the most part contain data on population levels. More enquiries will be made about Woolston’s Broad-leaved Helleborine numbers and it is hoped that a few parts of the Eyes with suitable habitat will be visited in 2020 to see if any other populations of this unassuming but interesting orchid await discovery. Full details of the 2019 numbers have been submitted to the Cheshire Botanical Recorder.

Brian Martin

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This report is very much a collaborative effort; permit holders, volunteers, visiting groups, ringers, voluntary wardens, experts in the various fields and committee members have all contributed to the collection of a vast array of records. We now have a forty-two year, unbroken history of rigorous wildlife recording at Woolston, starting with Brian Martin's first report for 1978/79. Brian set the standard, which we have been trying to maintain ever since. As our core group gets older, it is pleasing to report that there are signs of a younger generation coming through, though more active volunteers are always welcome. I would encourage all visitors to record any noteworthy sightings in the logbook in the Morgan Hide. Once again, I have chosen to include in the species accounts, the conservation status of all the birds occurring last year. It is sobering to see that of the 140 species recorded, 25 feature on the Red List of the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) and 44 on the Amber List. This is a salutary reminder of the reason we all work so hard to keep the habitat at Woolston in prime condition, as our small contribution to future species' survival. If you want to read more about the BoCC, go to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) website at <http://www.bto.org/>

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David Bowman
Editor

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