

# Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report April 2023

A persistent cold north to north-easterly airflow dominated most of April and it was not until the last week that temperatures rose and summer migrants started to significantly increase in number. The Flats remained very wet with some periods of heavy rain during the month topping up the already exceptional April water levels which is hopefully good news for wetland breeding birds.

The first **Cuckoo** crept into the month on the 28<sup>th</sup> one day after the first **Swift** with seven on the latter by the 30<sup>th</sup>. Hirundines were in better numbers than 2022 but still not abundant with 200 **Sand Martins** on the 1<sup>st</sup> the peak count but up to 150 were seen on several later days and there were up to 70 **Swallows**, 24<sup>th</sup> with the first **House**



**Martin** 9<sup>th</sup> and a peak of ten in the last week. The first **Yellow Wagtail** arrived on the 1<sup>st</sup> and there were seven males on the 8<sup>th</sup> with a rather poor peak of 29 on the 15<sup>th</sup> but fewer birds from then onwards. Associated with the Yellows was a notable but short-lived passage of **White Wagtails** after singles on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> numbers peaked with 20 on the 15<sup>th</sup> with 11 the next day and there



were five on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The **Grey Wagtails** by the car park appeared to be fledging at the very end of the month with the vocal male being particularly evident. The spring passage of **Northern Wheatears** started on the 7<sup>th</sup> with singles on four dates, two on the 24<sup>th</sup> and a maximum of five on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The breeding bird survey of **Cetti's Warblers** located 38 singing males a notable increase on 2022 and proof that the species did not suffer in the two cold snaps of the previous winter. A **Grasshopper Warbler** was singing on the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> but the next bird was not found until the 29<sup>th</sup> with two on the 30<sup>th</sup>. The first **Sedge Warbler** arrived on the 7<sup>th</sup> with a good influx bringing at least 35 birds in the last week



when **Reed Warblers** had increased to at least 40 males after the first songster was noted on the 16<sup>th</sup>. A **Willow Warbler** on the 2<sup>nd</sup> was the forerunner of a small influx that saw up to eight birds on site with a few establishing breeding territories. **Whitethroats** were late arriving in the last week with a **Lesser Whitethroat** 28<sup>th</sup> and the lingering **Siberian Chiffchaff** was seen again on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The second **Raven** of the year flew over on the 15<sup>th</sup> and the **Green Woodpecker** was present on the hillside all month.

An immature **Whooper Swan** on the 13<sup>th</sup> was the only bird of the month but several influxes of immature **Mute Swans** saw day counts often reach 35 – 40 birds while the high water levels encouraged six pairs to settle down to nesting. The first brood of **Greylag** goslings, six, was

seen on the 9<sup>th</sup> and there were at least six broods by the month's end while **Canada Geese** nested for the first time. Up o 60 **Barnacle Geese** lingered on the site and three **Egyptian Geese** on the 25<sup>th</sup> were the first record of 2023. **Shelducks** peaked at 68 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> but the month saw a very rapid reduction in most other species of wildfowl as wintering birds departed en masse. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> there were only 55 **Wigeon** left on site and numbers fell to 20 by the 16<sup>th</sup> with only five in the last week. **Gadwall** were slower departing with 210 still present on the 8<sup>th</sup> but numbers had fallen to 86 by the 25<sup>th</sup> with **Pintail** following suite dropping from 20 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10 by the 13<sup>th</sup> and only four remained on the 25<sup>th</sup> with one 30<sup>th</sup>. **Teal** initially bucked the trend with totals rising from 500 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the winter peak of 875 on the 9<sup>th</sup> but then they also started to depart with 350 remaining on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 270 by the 25<sup>th</sup>. The first **Garganey** of the spring appeared on the 6<sup>th</sup> with six birds, three drakes and three ducks present on the 7<sup>th</sup> and there were then up to six birds daily to the



15<sup>th</sup> though at least seven birds were involved as four drakes were counted one day, then numbers dropped in the last week leaving one drake but two again on the 30<sup>th</sup>. **Shoveler** numbers also fell quickly in spite of the high water levels from 126 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 56 by the 13<sup>th</sup> and 40 on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The deeper flooding encouraged a few diving duck to appear with up to four **Pochard** and 25 **Tufted Ducks** though the number of both species fell in the last week. A female **Goldeneye** was present to the 8<sup>th</sup> with three birds from 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> and one or two **Great Crested Grebes** looked set to breed but appeared to depart in the last week. **Coot** numbers rose to 105 on the 8<sup>th</sup> with several pairs obviously nesting but a lot of non-breeding immatures were also clearly present. Booming **Bitterns** were audible across the site with



flying birds being noted in several areas. **Little Egret** numbers started to increase after a quiet winter with eight or nine birds in the latter half of the month and the **Great White Egret** that arrived on March 26<sup>th</sup> stayed all month feasting on amphibians along with a few **Grey Herons**. The number of visiting **Spoonbills** rose from two on the 3<sup>rd</sup> to five by the 10<sup>th</sup> and peaked with eight birds on the 22<sup>nd</sup> but only one to four were seen in the last week though one of these was a colour ringed Dutch bird that spent a long period on the Flats in 2022. A single **Common Crane** was noted on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

It was a decent month for raptors with breeding **Marsh Harrier** numbers on a par with 2022 but of interest the dark crowned first-winter male, first seen in October 2022, established a breeding territory though he appeared to fail to attract a mate. What was assumed to be the same first-winter male **Hen Harrier** was seen regularly to the 15<sup>th</sup> with a paler bird that appeared to be a female seen on the 24<sup>th</sup>. An **Osprey** that passed through on the 25<sup>th</sup> would have been an immature or a bird heading for Scandinavia as most British birds were already on eggs by that date. The fourth **Red Kite** of the year flew through on the 8<sup>th</sup> with a late **Merlin** seen on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the first **Hobby** of the spring being seen at 05:00 on the 29<sup>th</sup>;

an immature **Peregrine** on the 10<sup>th</sup> topped up the falcon set and the usual four pairs of **Common Buzzards** were all in situ along the escarpment with a few additional immatures passing through on fine sunny days.

The first **Whimbrel** arrived on the 20<sup>th</sup> with a steady



increase to 10 by the 23<sup>rd</sup> 16 on 28<sup>th</sup> and 21 on the 29<sup>th</sup> the highest count since 2012. The declining status of **Spotted Redshank** was affirmed by a monthly peak of just four birds and **Redshank** never got into double figures while the only **Greenshank** was recorded on 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>. Completing the *Tringa* line up **Green Sandpipers** were



found on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> and the first **Wood Sandpiper** of the spring on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Up to four **Oystercatchers** performed their usual attempts at establishing breeding territories while three or four pairs of **Avocets** also made rudimentary nesting attempts but the status of this species has changed dramatically with a peak of only 12 birds seen in the month contrasting with 200 – 400 in pas years. Similarly with a lack of breeding habitat the only **Little Ringed Plover** records were of one flying over on the 8<sup>th</sup> and two also failing to land on the 16<sup>th</sup>. A **Grey Plover** 2<sup>nd</sup> and three 10<sup>th</sup> were first for the year but wader variety was overall fairly poor. At least ten pairs of **Lapwings** were attempting to nest and a single Golden Plover flew over on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Up to 400 **Dunlin** roosted on high spring tides and there was a marginal increase in **Ruff** abundance with one 1<sup>st</sup> then five 10<sup>th</sup> and two 20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> but no more than four **Snipe** were seen until the 29<sup>th</sup> when 20 were noted at dusk with 14 heading off high East. An excellent passage of Icelandic **Black-tailed Godwits** saw counts of 460 on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 628 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> with 538 again on the 15<sup>th</sup> and up to 70 in the last week. The cold northerlies produced a small passage of **Bar-tailed Godwits** with three 20<sup>th</sup> then



nine on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, three 23<sup>rd</sup> and one 27<sup>th</sup>. Two **Common Sandpipers** on the 23<sup>rd</sup> with singles 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> and a fly over **Turnstone** on the 30<sup>th</sup> completed a rather paltry month for waders.