

# Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report May 2023

May saw the topsy turvy weather of spring 2023 continue into what almost felt like summer until the last few days when a cold north-easterly airflow again dropped temperatures right back. With no rainfall during the month and long periods of sunshine water in the fields evaporated quickly with levels dropping by up to 15cms and this produced a lot of mud that should have attracted passage waders but it was a very poor month for these species overall with birds possibly making the most of the warm settled weather and passing overhead rather than dropping in.

The month got off to a cracking start with a new and somewhat unexpected addition to the site list when a **Hoopoe** was found on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Initially reported in flight over the reedbed it was then re found feeding on the path



by the dead wood and it stayed in this area for the next three hours before disappearing. A fairly regular spring overshoot from its Mediterranean breeding grounds Hoopoes always create an impressing with their flashing black and white wing pattern revealed in their looping



but rapid flight on rounded wings but if seen perched the salmon pink to orange underparts and the black and white crest make Hoopoes one of those unmistakeable birds.

Sticking with passerines a male **Cuckoo** was particularly audible though he wandered widely over the whole Flats and across the Trent. The sight of a female on a few dates hopefully suggests breeding took place. Cool weather on some dates brought down some decent number so feeding **Swifts** with 50 on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 80+ on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. Hirundines were also in better numbers than 2022 with 150 **Sand Martins** in the first few days of the month, 25 **House Martin** and 70+ **Swallows** on the 4<sup>th</sup> but there



appeared to be no improvement in the number of local breeding birds around the village. The **Grey Wagtails** around the lower car park appeared to raise two broods but Yellow Wagtail was once against absent for the list of breeding birds. Following a long run of mild winters there were a record 29 **Wren** territories on the Flats and **Cetti's Warblers** jumped to yet another high with 38 territories established, up eight on 2022. Migratory warblers had more mixed fortunes with the only record of **Grasshopper Warbler** being on the 19<sup>th</sup> and possibly only one breeding in 2023 compared to nine territories in the last two years. A singing **Garden Warbler** on the 6<sup>th</sup> was a scarce local bird and two **Lesser Whitethroats** were singing on the same day with one staying to at least 22<sup>nd</sup>. Two pairs of **Long-tailed Tits** fledged broods on the Flats.

Six pairs of **Mute Swans** nested with four broods totalling 35 young hatching while the number of immatures on the Trent Flash field continued to increase from 70 on

the 21<sup>st</sup> to 116 on the 27<sup>th</sup>. **Greylag Geese** had another good season with 78 young still evident at the end of May and 280 birds on site on the 18<sup>th</sup> when there were 36 **Canada Geese**. Two **Egyptian Geese** were present on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 86 **Shelduck** the following day. Up to seven **Wigeon** lingered with a female maybe suggesting a breeding attempt. After a drop in numbers in April **Gadwall** built up again from mid-month with a count of 232 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> while there were up to 80 **Mallard** with a few broods appearing. There were still 70 **Teal** on the 4<sup>th</sup> but only 18 by the 12<sup>th</sup> and up to seven from then onwards but the wildfowl high point of the month was a drake **Green-winged Teal** found on the 18<sup>th</sup> paired to a female Eurasian Teal the pair stayed through to the 25<sup>th</sup>.



Although there are 16 records for the Flats they probably involve only nine or ten individuals and this was the first since 2019. A female **Pintail** lingered to the 21<sup>st</sup> but the peak count of **Shoveler** only just made double figures. In a good month for **Garganey** there were up to five drakes and two females and a slight resurgence in **Pochard** numbers saw two drakes on the 10<sup>th</sup> where a female had been seen in April then five drakes 12<sup>th</sup> and one 25<sup>th</sup>. **Tufted Ducks** peaked on the 15<sup>th</sup> with 28 birds present and the long stay of several drakes and females suggest a few breeding attempts are under way.

**Bitterns** were still vocal though less frequent than in April and odd birds could be seen flying around the major reedbeds. **Little Egrets** built up to 18 on the 12<sup>th</sup> but in general there were less than 10 birds daily. Two **Great White Egrets**, an adult in summer finery and a winter plumaged bird, were seen 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> with the winter plumaged bird remaining to the 4<sup>th</sup> after which there was a gap in sightings until a moulting adult appeared on the 25<sup>th</sup> staying to the 28<sup>th</sup>. **Spoonbills** though were in rather more modest numbers and after a peak of just four on the 10<sup>th</sup> there were never more than two birds meaning that they were outnumbered by a record-breaking influx of **Glossy Ibis** with an amazing flock of 11 birds dropping in on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The whole flock was still present on the following day with nine remaining to the 28<sup>th</sup> and



eight to the 30<sup>th</sup>. This was the largest flock ever seen in Lincolnshire and only the 5<sup>th</sup> record for the Flats with the first as recently as 2021 but the species is increasing as a vagrant to Britain and is predicted as a breeding species. The influxes in recent years appear to be a direct result of the desiccation of many of the wetlands in Southern Europe, particularly the Coto Donana in Spain, where excessive water extraction is ruining this former internationally important wetland. The conditions on the



Flats were ideal for the Ibis arrival with birds feasting on invertebrates amongst the rushes in the drying wet grass fields. A **Common Crane** on the 16<sup>th</sup> completed the long-

legged waterbird tally.

As **Marsh Harriers** were getting on with breeding birds were less obvious than earlier in the spring. A **Red Kite** on the 27<sup>th</sup> was the 5<sup>th</sup> of the spring but more unusual was an **Osprey** that lingered from the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> and then reappeared on the 22<sup>nd</sup> being individually identifiable by the pattern of its flight feathers. Ospreys are scarce



visitors to the Flats and records typically involve fly-overs so a bird attempting to fish was in itself an event. Hot days early in the month saw a good insect emergence from the new reedbed and this attracted up to four **Hobbies** with three again on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

A total of 13 **Oystercatchers** on the 9<sup>th</sup> was unusual while **Avocets** peaked at 15 birds with two nests being incubated only to be lost before hatching. Single **Little Ringed Plovers** on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> took the spring total to a meagre five birds and passage **Ringed Plovers** were not much better with 12 on the 5<sup>th</sup>, three on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and two 27<sup>th</sup> a very poor showing. A **Grey Plover** 20<sup>th</sup>, **Little Stint** 21<sup>st</sup> and two **Curlew Sandpipers** 22<sup>nd</sup> increased the species variety but not overall numbers.



Flocks of **Dunlin** were also missing with short-lived visits by 100 7<sup>th</sup> and 62 22<sup>nd</sup> being the exception to a generally bird free month. Up to 57 non-breeding **Black-tailed Godwits** swelled the wader totals with **Curlew** building up to 24 on the 13<sup>th</sup> as failed breeders returned. Twenty **Whimbrel** remained on site to the 7<sup>th</sup> with seven to the 14<sup>th</sup> and the last on the 20<sup>th</sup>. *Tringa* waders included three Spotted Redshanks 2<sup>nd</sup> with the last on the 14<sup>th</sup> and an unremarkable passage of **Greenshank** with a peak of three on the 7<sup>th</sup> but it was another very good month for **Wood Sandpipers** with one or two on many dates and a record-breaking peak of 12 on the 7<sup>th</sup>. A count of five **Common Sandpipers** 5<sup>th</sup> with two 7<sup>th</sup> and one 28<sup>th</sup> also formed a better spring for this species than of late but the main wader spectacle of the month was the arrival of a flock of 85 **Reeves** on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Male and female Ruff do winter in different areas and thus the appearance



of a single sex flock is not unusual but the number of birds was exceptional in spring though of course larger numbers have been recorded in autumn. Thirty birds stayed to the 5<sup>th</sup> with ten to the 8<sup>th</sup> and a single on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Finally, two 2ct **Little Gulls** arrived on the 19<sup>th</sup> with one staying to the 30<sup>th</sup> and a very modest tern passage saw an **Arctic Tern** pass north east on the 1<sup>st</sup> with two **Common Terns** over on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>.