

Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report June 2023

Spring migration is typically winding down by the end of May with a few stragglers and non-urgent immatures wandering northward in the first half of June as local breeding birds are well on with their nesting cycle and many already feeding growing broods and fledged young. This broad summary though, fails to take into account the later passage of Arctic Tundra bound waders who's prospective nesting sites may still be under snow in early June. In fact, May was a pretty poor month for wader passage on the Flats so the condensed passage of small waders in the first seven days of the month was a bit of a tonic for lovers of the smartly global dressed wanderers. All figures are minima as it was clear that there was a daily turnover of birds with most dropping in on the high tides. Smart and smaller than their southern breeding cousins **Tundra Ringed Plovers** formed the bulk of the arrivals with a count of 130 on the 1st being eclipsed by



182 on the 6th but as is typical in this period of rapid onward movement there were only 15 on the 7th and none thereafter. Birds are in a state of high breeding excitement in the later stages of their migration and there was a lot of singing, calling and squabbling fights taking place even as the birds fed avidly on the rich pickings presented by the drying pools. **Dunlin** tend to be earlier migrants and the early June peak was a rather more limited 33 birds on the 6th but what they lacked in number they made up for in smartness of dress with the rich orange spangled



upperparts and black bellies presenting a striking image. Four adult **Little Stints** on the 1st included one in full summer orange brightness and there were two on the 3rd with one on the 7th while single stonking summer **Turnstones** also joined the gathering on the 1st, 6th and 7th. It was though, the true global migrant, the **Sanderling** that stole the show. As one of the northernmost breeders in the world Sanderling regularly move 20,000kms between their breeding and wintering areas in West Africa with the reasons for these movements analysed in this wader tales blog post; <https://wadertales.wordpress.com/2019/10/04/travel-advice-for-sanderling> . In Britain the bulk of Sanderling are found on coastal beaches with smaller numbers appearing at inland sites in spring and more rarely autumn and in fact prior to June 2023 the highest count at Alkborough Flats was of nine in 2009. One amongst the Ringed Plovers on the 1st was a fairly typical record with another on the 2nd but the count of



38 on the 6th was truly exceptional. Birds sported a mix of developing summer plumage features with a few full summer males standing out like the proverbial soar thumb. Disturbance from hunting raptors on the morning of the 7th saw all the waders move off east but a flock of 20 Sanderling returned briefly before also deciding that it was still a long way to northern Canada or Siberia and

they needed to get going. The wader gathering on the 1st also included a **Reeve** left over from the May influx and



it stayed through to the 6th with the first returning **Ruff** of the *autumn* appearing from the 22nd. A **Wood Sandpiper**, also present in the first week indulged in bouts of song possibly trying to impress one the local Redshank. The first returning **Spotted Redshank** arrived on the 7th with two on the 10th and one 11th and a lingering **Greenshank** was feeding from the 7th – 10th. All of the **Avocet** nesting attempts failed and the eight birds eventually departed mid-month. None of the **Lapwing** chicks from the early broods survived but birds were sitting on replacement clutches into late June by which time the return of failed breeders has raised the number of birds present to over 160. Up to four **Little Ringed Plovers** were also noted regularly. The lingering flock of **Black-tailed Godwits** numbered 50 on the 2nd but the only bird after that was one on the 7th before seven returned on the 29th. Waterfowl continued to produce the bulk of the bird abundance if the species variety was somewhat more limited. A total of seven broods of **Mute Swans** hatched with an impressive 11 in one brood by the Trent path



but as water levels plummeted the ultimate survival of the broods remains questionable. Up to 400 **Barnacle Geese** on site suggested a poor breeding season on Whitton Sand and typically **Shelducks** failed to produce any broods with a monthly peak of just 12 birds. Wigeon numbers were up to 11 on the 2nd with six drakes to the 7th while the usual June build up **Gadwall** saw numbers slowly rise from 230 on 2nd to 300 by the 23rd with four broods appearing. **Teal** were down to seven in the first week but returning birds seemed to be early with 120 by the 17th and 210 on the 24th again suggestive of a failed breeding season in what has been a very unusual spring. Around 100 **Mallard** also swelled the dabbling throng with c15 broods seen some hatching late in the month while **Garganey** numbers fell from four drakes on the 2nd to one on the 18th. Only six drake **Shoveler** were obvious on the 2nd but suggested females were sitting and two broods eventually appeared with numbers increasing to 17 drakes on the 7th. A few **Little Grebe** broods hatched but again falling water levels meant that some clearly perished before fledging but some of the early **Coot** broods looked set to fledge and there were c20 broods around the site in June. **Little Egrets** increased from 10 on the 1st to 16 mid-month and 29 on the 29th while **Great White Egrets** were noted almost daily with at least two different birds, and two together 10th – 11th but there was no suggestion of potential breeding behaviour. After four **Spoonbills** on the 1st there was something of a poor showing with only one on several dates to mid-month when seven arrived



on 17th and numbers then peaked with 11 on the 24th. The good year for **Red Kite** records continued with singles on 3rd and 10th and up to three more individuals

seen over the adjacent escarpment and the same **Osprey** seen in May reappeared on the 10th clearly a prospecting immature. There were odd sightings of **Hobbies** and **Peregrines** while at least two Kestrels were often hunting the field voles but again no nest



was recorded on the Flats itself. **Barn owls** were also hunting in daylight indicative of having broods to feed. Two **Little Gulls** on the 1st and a 2cy on the 7th with a pair of **Mediterranean Gulls** 10th, the first record of the year, four **Common Terns** 2nd and one 7th and five **Black Terns** 1st were all notables. A hepatic female **Cuckoo** on the 1st with two males and a female 3rd hopefully suggested breeding on site but there was a gap in records mid-month until a male was singing again 21st. The dramatically declining **Swift** reached 100 over the insect rich reedbeds on the 1st with 80 still on the 6th but there were few screaming around the village later in the month. A **Kingfisher** 18th was no doubt a dispersing fledged juvenile and the pair of **Grey Wagtails** continued rearing broods by the lower car park. Following a marked arrival of **Marsh Warblers** on the East coast and at several inland sites this species became the second new bird for the Flats in 2023 when a singing male took up temporary residence in the willows by the lower car park on the 18th. Although it sang on and off for most of the day it proved to be almost impossible to see and unsurprisingly it was not present the following day. Marsh Warbler formerly bred in a number of counties in Britain but the last stronghold in Worcestershire was abandoned in the 1980's since when pairs have occasionally bred following marked spring arrivals but most birds are detected by their striking song that includes lots of mimicry and in the case of the Alkborough bird the calls of several species were noted including Bee-eater. A copy of the recording of the song can be found here <https://xeno-canto.org/812215> . Amazingly after this second site list addition a third species, and a much rarer one, was added on the 29th when Simon and Tim Jump came across a **Little Swift** feeding over the reedbeds. Unfortunately, it only stayed



for a few minutes and was lost never to be seen again. The sighting echoes the first Lincolnshire occurrence at Barton on Humber on June 26th 1998 and the second at Gibraltar Point on June 25th 2002 so late June is



clearly the time to hope for this rare vagrant of which there have been only 27 records to the end of 2021. Butterflies were again in mainly dismal numbers but **Meadow Browns** and **Ringlets** were in better abundance with 50 of the former and 58 of the latter 21st. **Ruddy Darters** were the only dragonfly in decent numbers with 40+ 11th.

Graham Catley
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Tim and Simon Jump