

Alkborough Flats Annual Bird and wildlife Report 2023

Graham P Catley BSc Env



Introduction:

2023 marked the 17th year of bird recording at the Alkborough Flats managed realignment site.

This report mainly concerns the occurrence of bird species but a section following the bird list summarises the observations of mammals, butterflies, dragonflies and other wildlife noted during the year.

In 2023 the new reedbed was surveyed for all breeding species and all Schedule 1 species and rare breeding birds were also surveyed across the whole of the site in addition to which all warblers, with the exception of Reed Warbler, were also surveyed and the results of these surveys were presented in the 2023 Breeding Bird Survey report with some of the results also referenced in this annual summary.

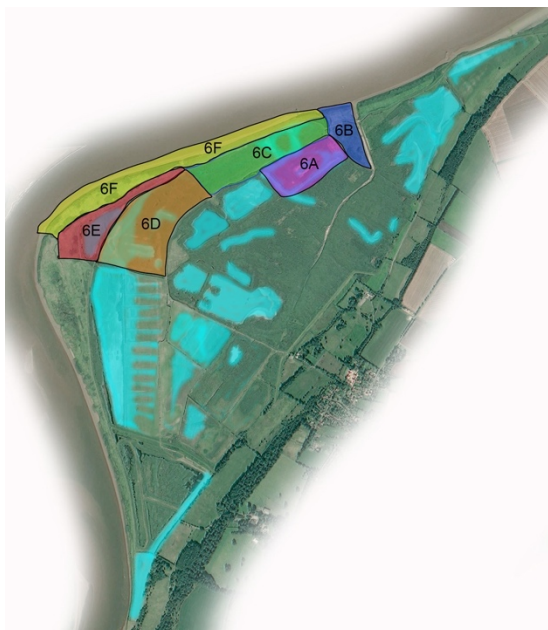
A total of 166 species was recorded from the Flats in 2023 including four new species in order of occurrence, Hoopoe, Marsh Warbler, Little Swift and Bluethroat. There were exceptional influxes of Glossy Ibis and Cattle Egret two rapidly increasing waterbird species and new record counts for Gadwall and Goldeneye. New record totals of booming Bitterns and breeding Water Rails and Bearded Tits were logged but Marsh Harriers had a disastrous breeding season. With the overall loss of mud many wader species continued to decline in numbers particularly Avocet, Spotted Redshank and Curlew though the latter species appears to be showing responses to international declines.

Graham Catley
January 2024

All photographs in the following report were taken at Alkborough Flats in 2023 and are © Graham Catley unless stated otherwise

The maps below delineate the site into surveyed areas mentioned in the texts that follow.





Inundation area looking to wet grass in Area 6



Area 8 following high spring tides – this area attracts wildfowl and Curlew but is easily disturbed by walkers on the Humber embankment



The remnant area of open water in Area 1



Field 6D October 2023



Foreshore becoming over run with reed and New Reedbed and Trent Flash September 2023



Remnants of the dead copse March 2023



Inundation area reedbed



Area 4 and Area 5 pools remaining in encroaching reed areas



Area 7 March 2023



Area 7 May 2023



Area 7 January 2023 field 7N upper left New Reedbed foreground



New Reedbed January 2023



Field 7K January 2023



Area 7 July 2023



Area 1 June 2023



Inundation area June 2023 looking to remnant water in Area 4 – dead copse on extreme left



Area 7 May 2023 still very wet at this stage of the spring



Area 4 May 2023



Area 7 May 2023 field in foreground now totally taken over by reed



Area 7 September 2023 compare with January shot – massive vegetation increases



December 1st 2023



Area 7 December 1st 2023



Area 4 December 1st 2023 most of water locked in ice with holes maintained by Mute Swans

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Nests	1	1	1	2	0	1	4	4	7
Young	2	6	7	7	6	5	9	19	43

Up to 20 birds were present in the first winter period with a new record total of seven pairs nesting and hatching 43 young. An influx of non-breeding immatures saw a peak of 116 logged on May 27th. At least 27 cygnets were still on site on August 6th and there were up to 35 birds from October to December most of them pairs and attendant broods from the previous summer.



Brood of 11 cygnets hatched and fledged in Area 6 2023

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

The only early year record was of one on site and ten flying over on January 6th. An exceptional spring passage saw two birds arrive on March 11th but on the 18th a total of **700** birds flew north with 250 the following day and 12 on the 26th. A single immature on April 13th was the last of the spring and the first of the autumn were six on October 12th. During October a total of 82 birds moved south on seven dates with a further 96+ following the same route in November. Five on December 10th, three 16th and six 26th were the last of the year.



Whooper Swans November 2023

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Up to 2000 flew over on several dates in January with a peak of 100 feeding on February 21st. Single injured birds were seen on April 30th and May 20th. The first of the autumn were 16 on September 7th increasing to 100 the following day with 400 on the Trent Flash between September 13th and October 1st roosting on some nights in a new precedent for the site. At least 1000 were feeding by the Humber on October 6th but disturbance of the Humber pastures meant that flocks seldom lingered for long. Small parties of up to 120 birds regularly joined the naturalised geese on the wet grass in area 6 through November and December.

European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

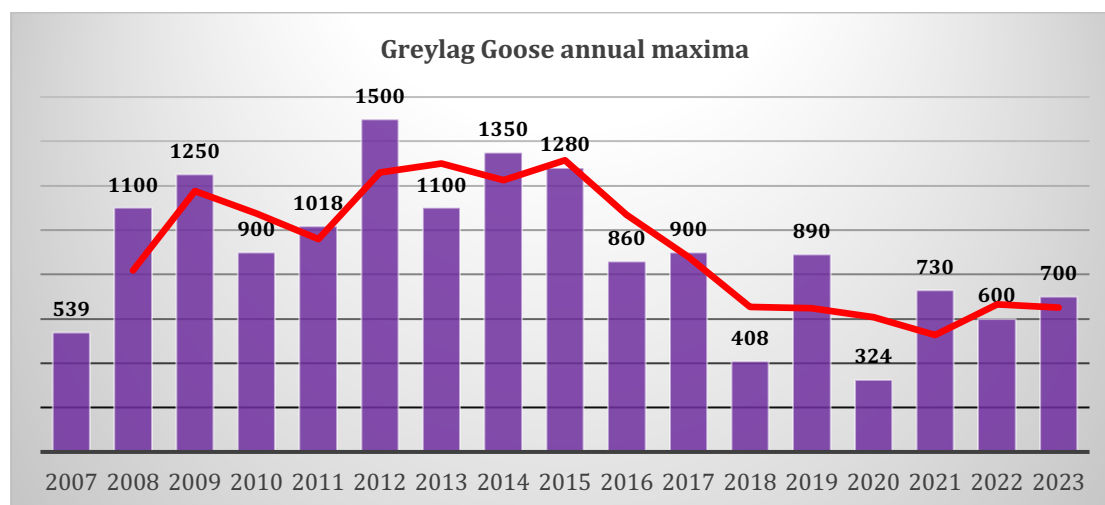
A better year for this species with a flock of 23 on January 11th then four on February 11th with 19 on the Trent Foreshore on the 23rd then two, and adult and juvenile, in the autumn on October 29th.



White-fronted Geese Trent foreshore February 23rd 2023

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

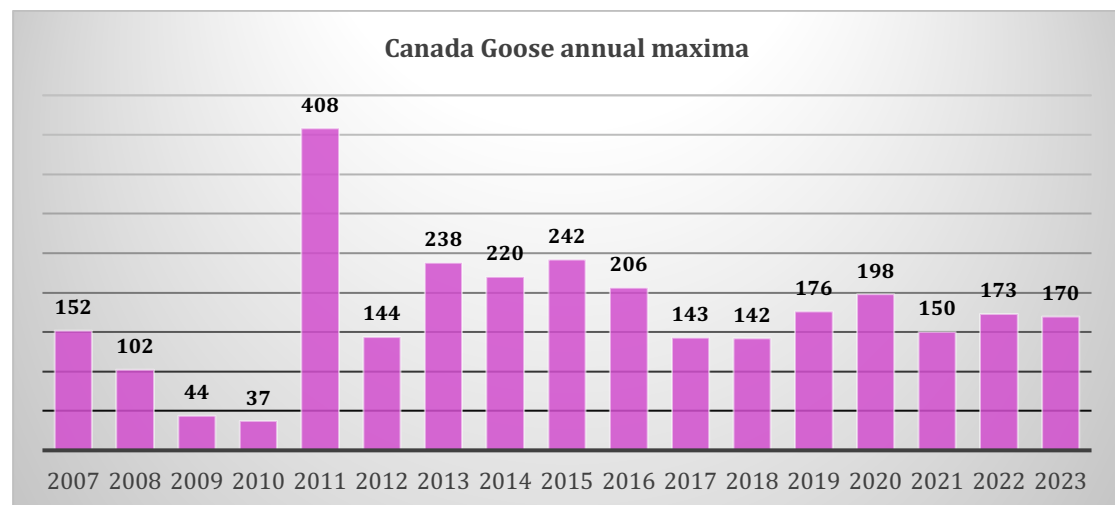
The first winter period produced a modest peak of 422 on January 6th with no more than 167 to April when the first brood of six goslings was seen on the 9th. A new record 17 broods hatched 89 young of which at least 78 fledged with 280 birds on site on May 18th. Up to 500 birds were feeding in July with the annual peak of 700 recorded on August 6th after which the number of birds varied daily between 150 and 620 with the upper estuary flock moving between the Flats and other sites around the Trent – Ouse – Humber complex.





Greater Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Very scarce early in the year with a maximum of just 36 on May 18th but a larger flock was occasional in the autumn with up to 170 birds during October – December.

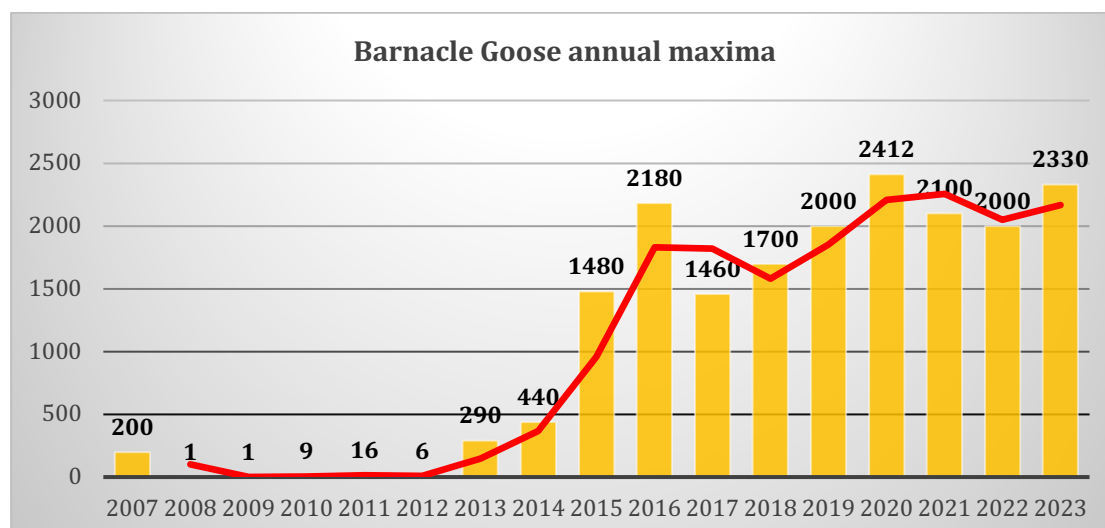


Canada Geese Area 6 November 2023

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

In the early winter period numbers peaked at 2330 on January 16th but a co-ordinated count of all areas on February 19th found only 1904 birds though there were **2520** from February 28th – March 1st including a number of neck collared birds. Over the years several suggestions have been made as to the origins and movements of the Humber flock but only observations of ringed or colour ringed birds have shed any light upon these theories. Currently the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust are colour ringing and adding neck collars to several 100 birds from the different populations of naturalised birds around Britain and some of these birds have now arrived on the Humber. Oddly a party that visited East Halton Marshes in January 2023 did not arrive on the upper estuary but on February 18th a flock of **12 birds** comprising three neck collared and five colour ringed birds all of which had been ringed at Scorton North Yorkshire in July 2022 arrived at Alkborough Flats. Their journey though had been much more complex firstly moving to Saltholme, Cleveland from August – November 2022 then travelling south to Sheppey in Kent where they stayed during January 2023 before heading back to Hornsea Mere, East Yorkshire in February 2023. This party, that were much tamer than the local birds, originally joined the local flock but then split from them on the 20th and interestingly stayed separate from the local birds thereafter until they departed on March 11th.

Up to 60 birds were noted in April with the first post-breeding influx bringing 400 birds to the site on June 7th – 17th. A mid-summer lull occurred in July before 500 were on the fields again on August 4th but records were then sporadic until 1520 arrived on October 2nd. Up to 600 were then irregular through to late November with 1320 on December 11th.



Barnacle Geese Area 6 January 2023



Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla bernicla*

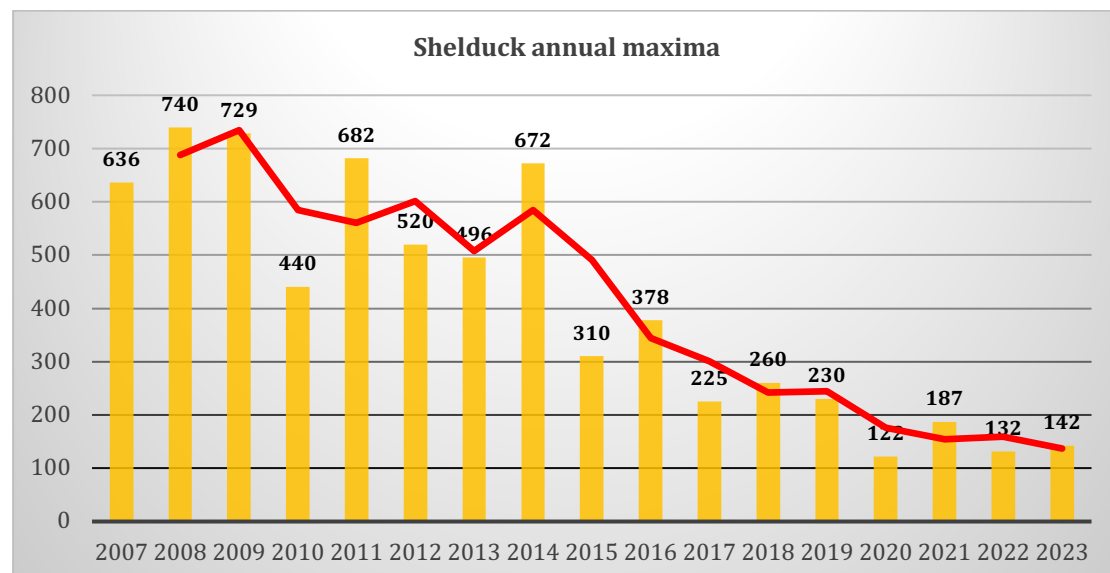
A first-winter on February 12th was the only occurrence.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

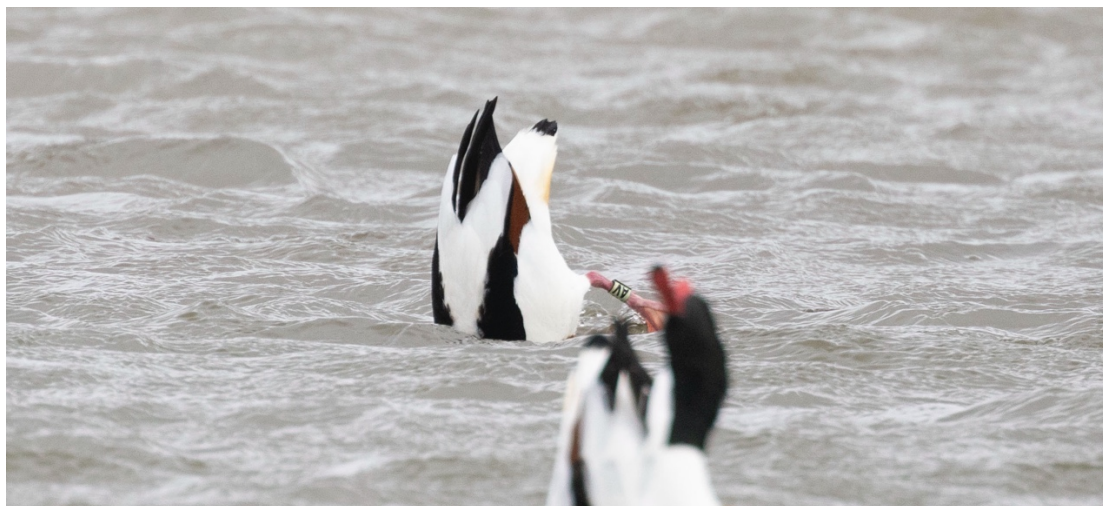
A party of eight in Area 4 on October 29th flew off down the Humber.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

As the availability of inter-tidal mudflats has declined so have the number of Shelducks using the site. In recent years the highest counts, albeit drastically lower than in the early years of the survey, have occurred in the spring when the birds are able to exploit the muddy edges of the pools on the wet grassland and also the lower water levels in the permanent water bodies in Areas 4 and 5. The annual peak this year occurred in February with 142 present on the 14th and there were up to 90 in March mainly feeding in Area 4. The April peak was 68 and May saw 86 on the 4th with 60 still on site on the 15th but thereafter there was an almost total exodus with a peak of just 12 in June and the only July occurrence was of six juveniles from 20th to August 4th. None were recorded in September or October with 13 on the wet grasslands on November 17th the first for 95 days! Thereafter, up to 21 birds were regular in the same area through November – December.



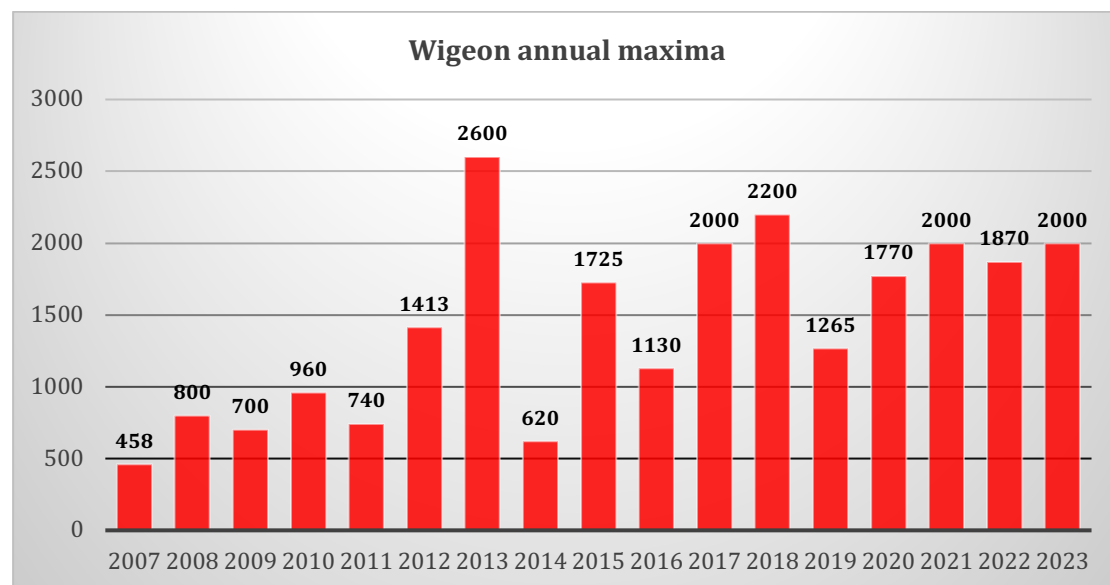
A colour ringed bird, White AV, seen on March 13th had been ringed at Martin Mere, Lancashire, on November 24th 2017 and subsequently seen there on a multitude of dates to November 25th 2021 the last sighting before the one at Alkborough Flats.





Wigeon *Anas penelope*

The wet grasslands in Area 7 particularly fields 7L and 7M attracted a large feeding flock in the first winter period with birds loafing and roosting on 7N as well as the adjacent Trent and its Sand Bar. The wet fields in Area 6 were less frequented. January's peak count was 1746 with 2000 in February and 1712 on March 1st. After 1030 on March 22nd numbers fell quickly with no more than 55 in April. Up to seven were present through May with an increase to 11 on June 2nd but as Area 7 dried out there were none after ten on July 11th until nine reappeared on August 1st. The autumnal build up was slow with no more than 27 in late August and 340 in September-October. Numbers increased through November with 511 on the 1st and 960 by the 20th then 1200 on the 23rd rising to 1600 December 18th.



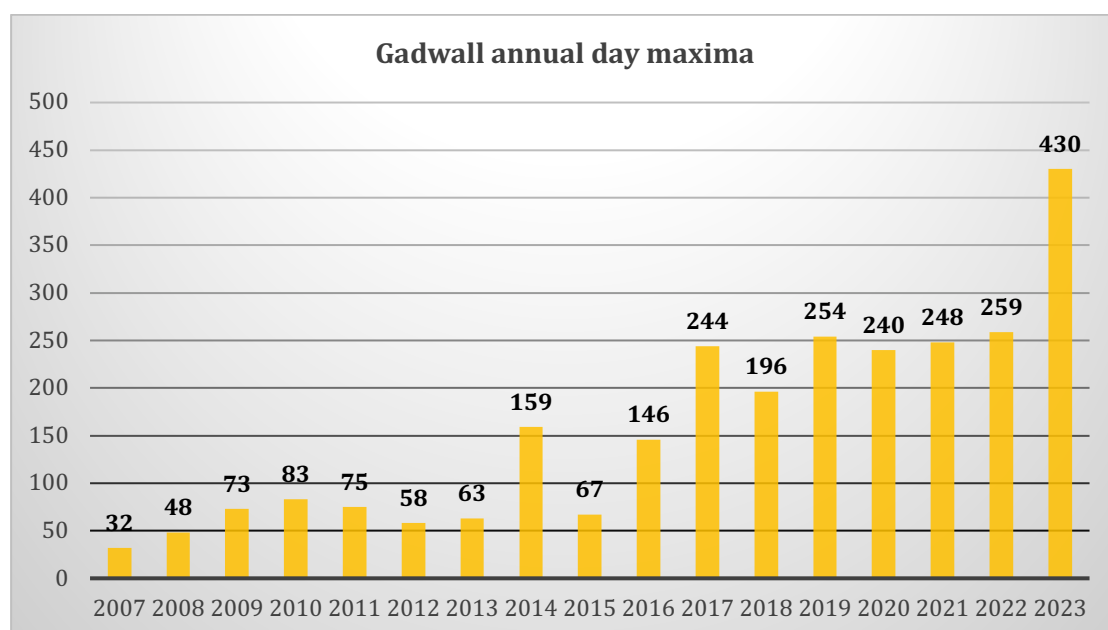
Wigeon Area 7 February 2023



Wigeon field 7M February 2023

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

It was another record-breaking year for Gadwall with counts in August and September exceeding the previous highest totals but daily counts did vary significantly as birds moved between the Trent and Blacktoft and presumably other sites in the upper estuarine area. Significantly all 12 monthly peaks were higher than 2022 and the new record totals were 171 birds higher than the previous peak recorded in 2022 an increase of 66%. In the early part of the year monthly peaks of 284 January, 302 February and 328 March were exceeded by the early autumn peak of **430** on August 19th a count that was subsequently equalled on September 28th. Numbers fell during October with peaks of 205 on the 1st and 164 on 21st being exceeded by 184 on November 28th, the highest count of that month with the December peak 228 on 5th. At least five females were considered to have nested and five broods were located with the first two appearing on June 10th and the last on July 3rd. A total of 38 young hatched and most of these fledged.



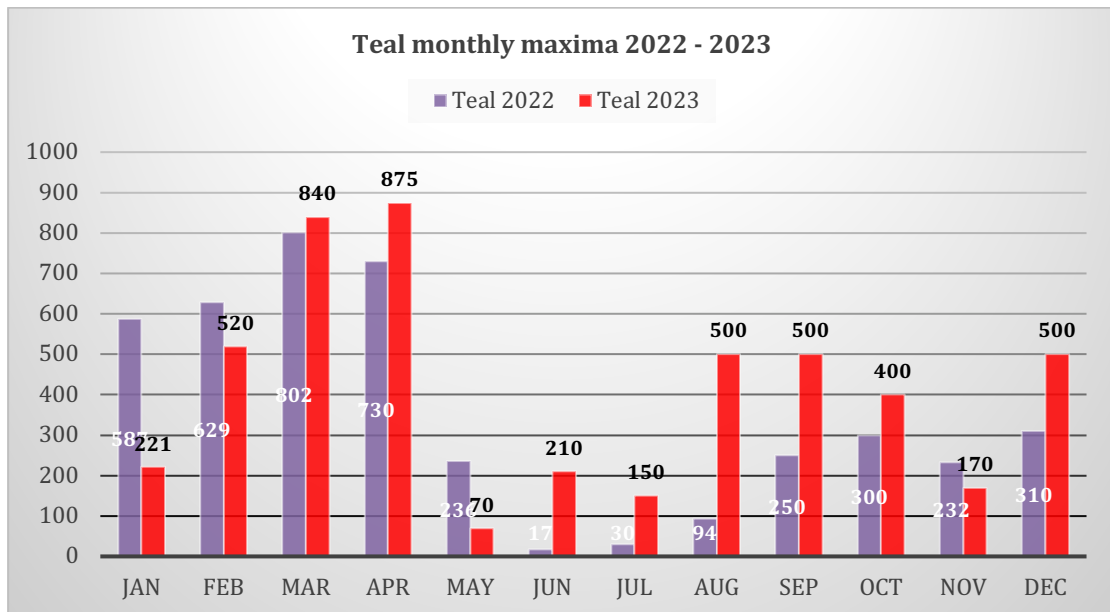
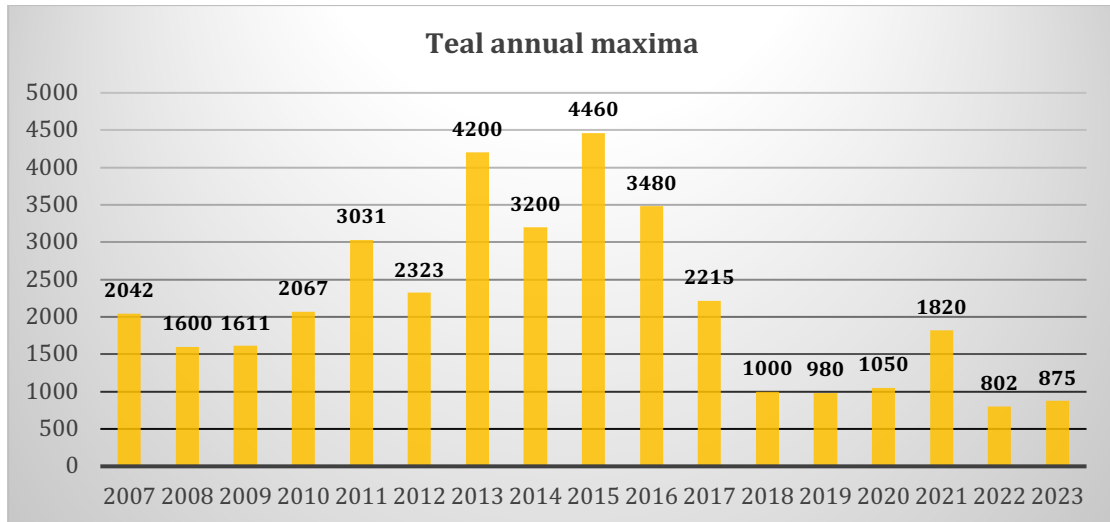


Above and below Gadwall Area 4 March 2023



Teal *Anas crecca*

In contrast to the fortunes of the Gadwall, Teal numbers continue to decline in the late autumn – winter period that traditionally produced the highest counts of the year. The highest annual totals now tend to occur in spring with clear peaks of passage birds occurring in March – April when the birds concentrate on the wet grass fields in Area 7 as the traditionally used inundation pools are generally flooded too deeply and are now very limited in extent with virtually no exposed mud for most of the period when Teal are present. The count of 221 on January 6th was the highest in that month with an increase in February seeing a peak of 520 on the 19th and 623 21st. The high numbers continued into March with 840 logged on the 11th following which there was another pulse of spring migrants in early April that produced the annual peak of **875** on the 9th. Although 270 stayed to April 25th departures were then rapid with 70 left on May 4th and 18 on 12th. Although at least two females were present in May there was no actual suggestion of breeding. Birds returned from early June before the Trent Flash started to dry out with 210 by the 24th and there were up to 150 in July. Numbers increased through August but were somewhat sporadic. As in 2022 very large numbers were on the Trent in late October – November when up to 2500 birds were visible but only a few birds were actually frequenting the Flats until 170 were noted on November 20th with 224 on December 11th and 500 23rd.



Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

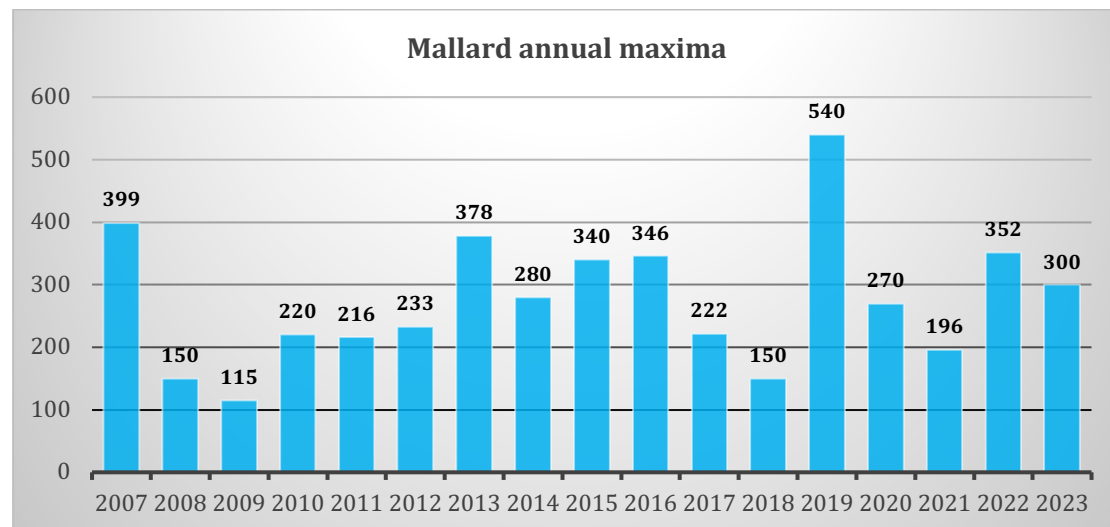
A drake, paired to a female Eurasian Teal, was on the wet fields in Area 7 from May 18th – 25th. Although there are 16 records for the Flats these probably involve only nine or ten individuals and this was the first since 2019.



Drake Green-winged Teal May 22nd 2023

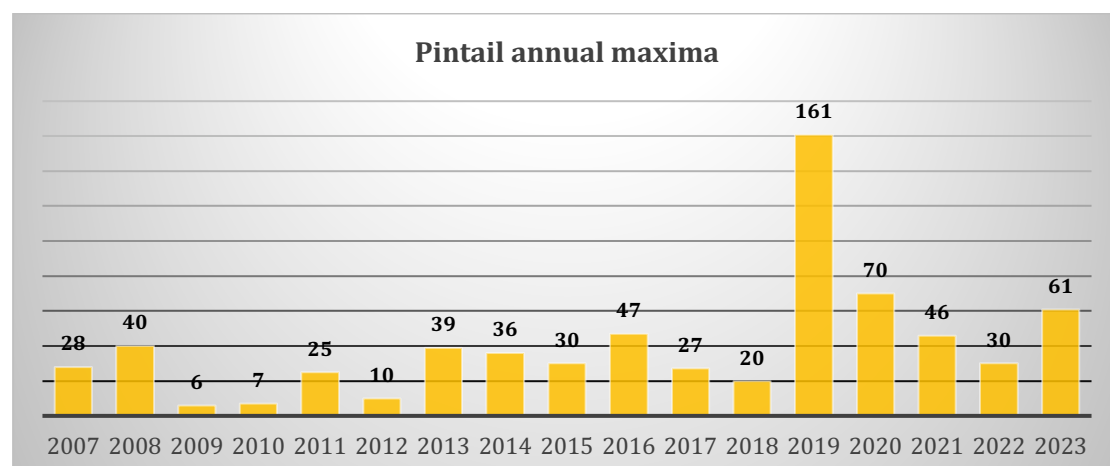
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Up to 187 were noted in January – February but as is now expected numbers varied considerably from day to day and week to week in response to movements to other feeding areas around the upper estuary and particularly across the Trent where Island Farm now attracts large numbers of waterfowl and waders. The count of 191 on March 1st was the highest of the first winter period. It was considered that at least 30 females bred and a minimum of 30 broods were seen with some late broods hatching in the first week of July and at least **120** young fledged. The presence of flood water later in the spring is clearly have a beneficial effect upon breeding waterfowl in general with Mallard being the most populous breeder. Counts of 170 in late June and July included many of the fledgling broods with 250 on July 11th including 80 juveniles. The annual peak of 300 July 30th – August 1st was unusually timed and it was mid-October before 200 were logged again with 240 in early November and up to 238 in December.



Pintail *Anas acuta*

It was a good year for Pintail during both passage periods. No more than ten were seen in January but numbers started to rise in February as birds fed on the wet grass fields 7L and 7M but also on 7N where water levels started to fall. Following a count of 21 on February 8th numbers rose to 47 on the 25th peaking with **54** on March 18th. The 44 on March 18th included 25 drakes with numbers falling from then onwards to 20 by April 3rd and ten 13th – 16th after which five on the 20th and four 25th with a lingering female from 30th to May 21st were the last of the spring. The first of the autumn were two on August 24th with a monthly peak of 13 on the 27th but no more than 15 were noted through September. October saw a notable arrival with **61** on the 8th and **59** 12th all of which were feeding on the recently re-flooded pools in Area 5. There was then an absence of birds until late November when four, three drakes, were on site on the 20th with three one drake 28th then up to eight in December.





Pintail over field 7N February 2023



Pintail with Wigeon, Teal and Shoveler field 7L March 2023



Garganey *Anas querquedula*

The first of the spring arrived on April 6th but there were six, three drakes and three ducks the following day and these all stayed to the 8th. There were then up to six birds, three pairs, through to the 15th but the number of birds seemed to vary daily. A daily presence then saw the number of females decline but there were five drakes on May 28th with four to June 6th, two 7th and one 18th after which none were seen until one on July 30th with eight on August 4th and a peak of ten on the 6th. Eight stayed through to the 13th with seven to the 20th after which one or two were noted to September 23rd with three on the 26th and a juvenile then remained to October 13th. There was no proof of breeding in 2023.



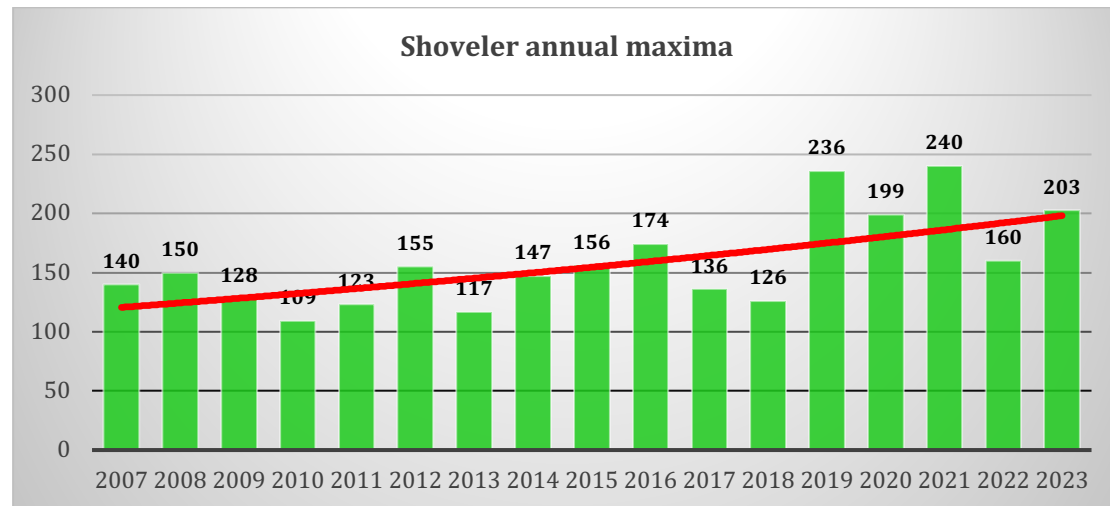
Garganey field 7G April 2023



Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

The general trend for increasing numbers of this species on the Flats continued through 2023 but the annual maximum fell slightly though it was still the third highest total ever. A high presence was again maintained through both winter periods with a resurgence in the late summer – early autumn, a period that formerly produced the higher counts of the year, before wintering birds became more prominent. Early winter peaks were 139 in January, 203 February and 140 March. It was considered that three females certainly nested in 2023 and probably four but only three broods were seen with two on the Trent Flash field 7N where they were located

late in the spring on June 21st and both broods by that time held only two young each and on the corner of Area 5 where a brood of eight was elusive from late June into mid-July. Following high numbers in the previous winter and early spring it was disappointing to see the number of breeding birds decline following a concerted rise in the previous two years. Numbers built up quickly in September as the water levels in the grass fields and pools produced good feeding but as water levels became too high the number of birds fell away in October but there were high numbers of 100 – 150 birds loafing on the Trent at this time. Feeding birds started to increase again in November with 90 on the 20th then up to 111 in December.



Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A poor year with no suggestion of breeding again. Four from March 30th to April 2nd with four again, three drakes on April 24th on the new reedbed hinted at a breeding attempt with two drakes there May 10th and five drakes 12th but thereafter there was just one record of a drake May 25th. Unusually a drake was present on November 20th in Area 4 showing how the depth of water was proving attractive to diving ducks.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

The first three of the year were on February 12th with numbers building to 15 by March 30th then 25 April 1st – 3rd before most departed with a short-lived arrival of 28 birds May 15th then 12 staying to the 22nd with two on August 19th, September 24th then up to nine in November with up to 11 from December 18th – 31st reflecting the presence of deeper water in the main inundation pools. No suggestion of breeding again in 2023.



Tufted Ducks and a Goldeneye Area 4 November 2023

Scaup *Aythya marila*

A first winter drake was on the Trent Flash from November 18th – 28th forming only the third occurrence on the Flats.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

A flock of 42 flew west on March 23rd and a drake was on the Trent on August 6th.

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

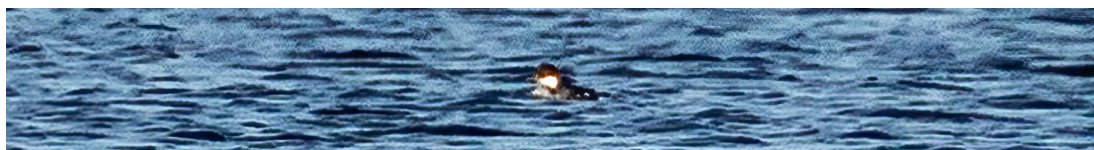
Up to three during January to April 10th were a reflection of greater abundance of deep water on the site through the winter periods. Two from October 25th with an increase to nine in early November then a peak of **13** on the 12th an all-time record with birds commuting between the Flats and the Humber. Up to four in December.



Goldeneye (background Tufted Ducks) Area 4 November 2023

Smew *Mergellus albellus*

A redhead on the Trent Flash from November 4th – 19th was only the second occurrence on the Flats following one on February 17th – 19th 2017.



Goosander *Mergus merganser*

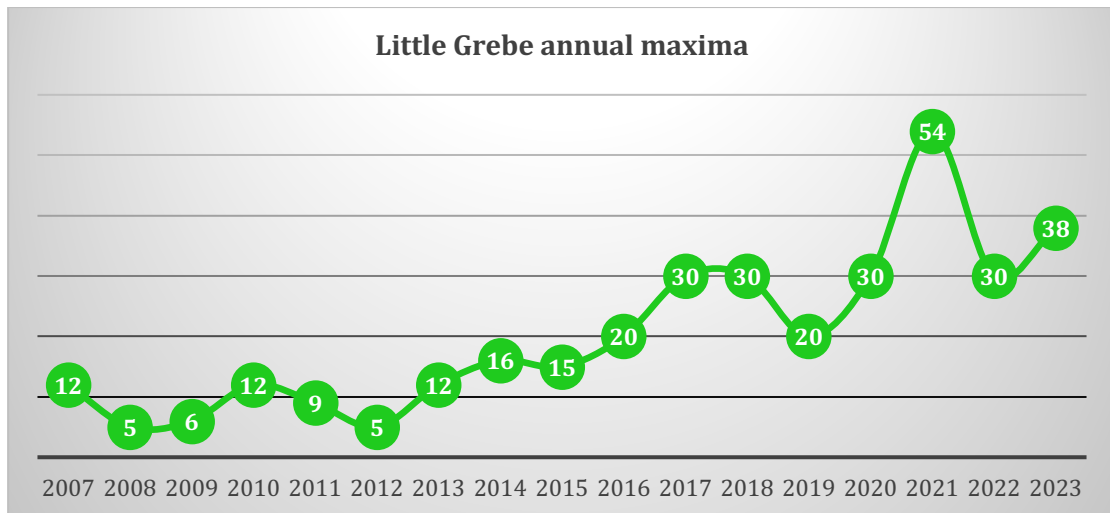
One on August 11th, two October 14th one on the Humber on November 1st and three on the Trent Flash 15th.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Up to 20 throughout.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

A single bird arrived on February 8th but it was the only bird on site until March 1st when a second bird arrived. Eventually 19 pairs established territories with breeding occurring in several new areas where deep water persisted from the previous winter. It was a reasonably good breeding season and there were 30 birds in evidence from mid-August with a high count of **32** on October 12th but from then on birds departed quickly though there were still at least six from November 7th – 20th but all had departed by December 5th following a sharp freeze.



Little Grebes Area 4 October 2023

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

A single bird was present from March 13th to April 8th with a pair from April 16th to May 12th but there was no sign of a nesting attempt. One was again on site from June 2nd – 29th and a juvenile from September 4th – 19th.

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Two juveniles flew over on September 17th during a displacement from the North Sea in poor weather.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Up to five on the Flats throughout the year.

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Single juveniles were on the Humber on October 18th and 29th the latter perching on the navigation marker by Area 6.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

One on the Humber on October 18th was the first for the area.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

One drifted down the Humber off Trent Falls on November 1st.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

There was an increase in one booming male over the previous three seasons with the new territory being in the area of the Tower hide where birds fed in 2022. The first boomer was heard on a new record early date of February 11th and this remained the only boomer until the 26th when another was booming in the Trent Flash. Five boomers were confirmed on April 15th for the first time though this number was suspected earlier but due to movements of birds this had not been confirmed. Females were seen in a number of areas with feeding flights being seen but how many nests were active could not be ascertained within the scope of these surveys. Up to three birds were seen through August – November with one in December which in itself was quite unusual as birds are normally rarely seen in the later autumn - winter.



Bittern April 2023

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

One on September 23rd – 24th with a flock of four flying south on October 3rd then one October 9th – 11th and finally one December 11th – 25th formed a new level of occurrence for this expanding species of which there were only three previous records in March 2017, September 2018 and April 2022.



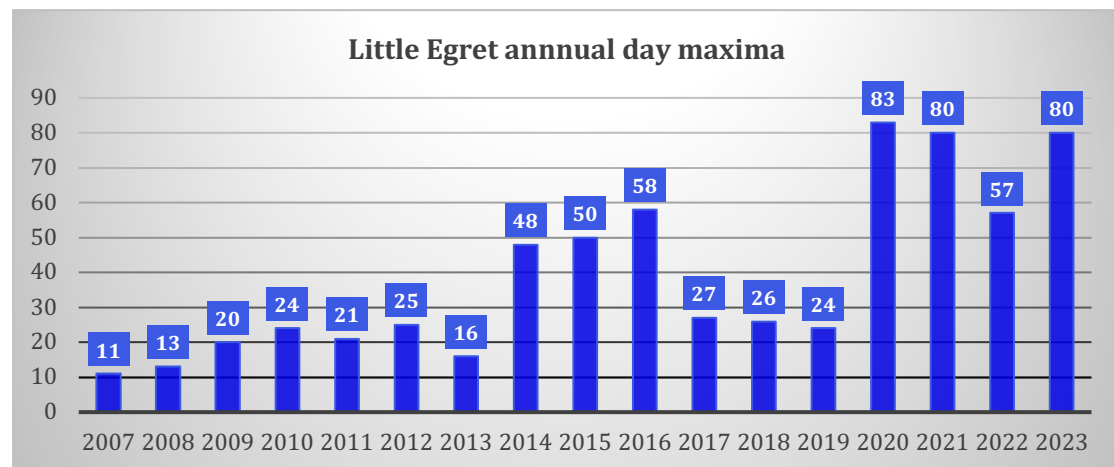
Cattle Egret December 11th 2023 in field 7K





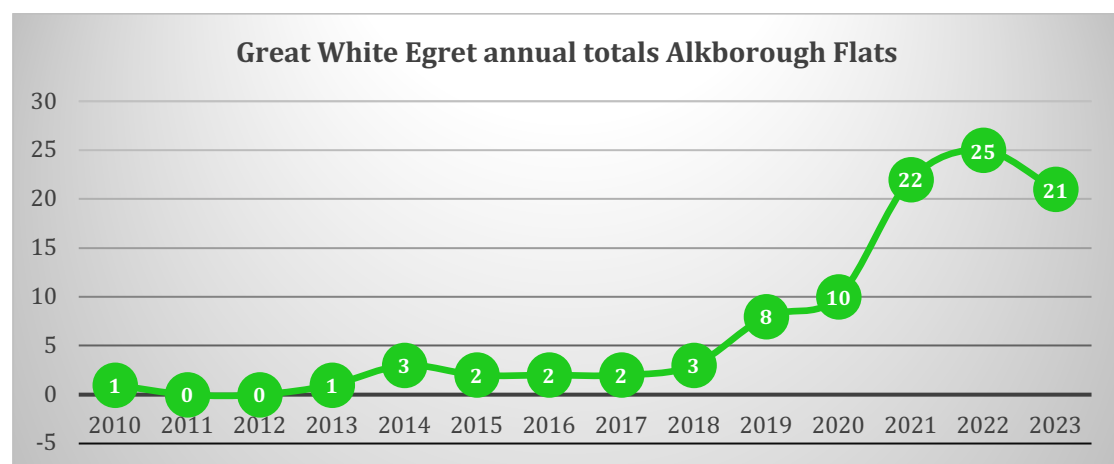
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

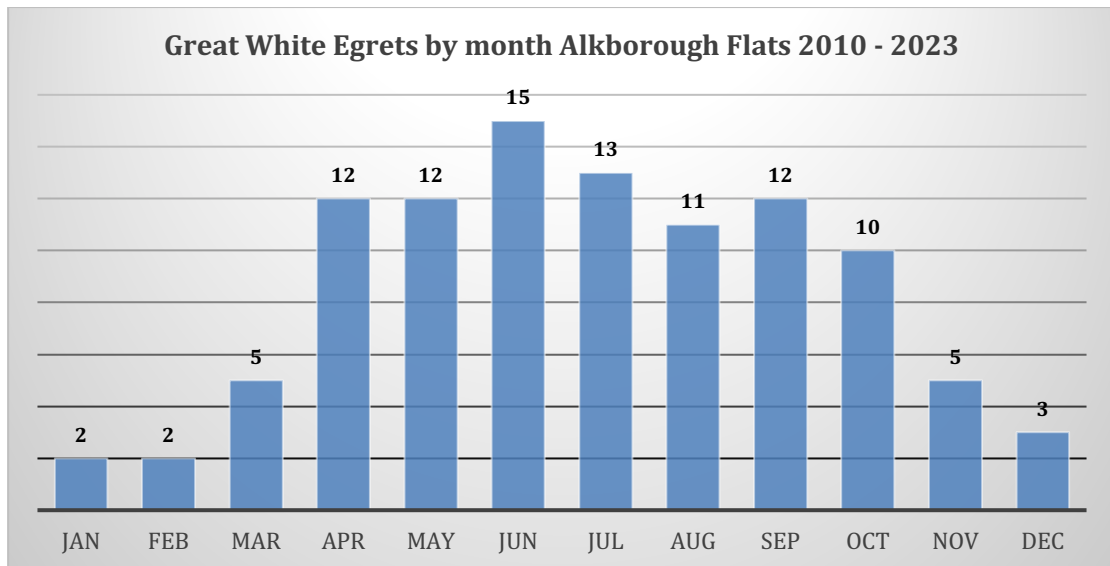
Until March no more than four birds were seen but there was a slow increase through the spring with peaks of nine in April and 18 May 12th. As the water levels started to fall through June feeding birds increased in number with 16 by 17th and then 29 on the 29th with the annual peak, a count of **80** on July 8th, being earlier than usual. Up to 70 were still present through July to August 1st but numbers fell to 43 by September 4th and there was then a dramatic exodus with a peak of just nine in October and no more than five in November – December.



Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

A maximum of 21 birds estimated from sightings through the year showed a small decline on the previous two years which was unexpected. None were seen in the first two months with the first on March 19th an adult in breeding plumage that was replaced by a winter plumaged bird from March 26th to April 29th. Thereafter there were up to two in May – August with three September 3rd – 19th and four on the 23rd. Two on October 4th with a single through to early November then two on the 5th and a gap until one flew west on 23rd with singles December 10th and 23rd – 26th.





Great White Egrets Trent Flash, field 7N August 2023

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Following the failed breeding attempt in 2022 there was no repeat in 2023. Eight in February was unusual and the annual peak was also strange coming in March with 12 on the 1st. Fewer than normal birds occurred in the summer – early autumn period with a peak of 10 July 14th.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

A record-breaking influx of Glossy Ibis occurred in May with an amazing flock of **11 birds** dropping in on the 25th. The whole flock was still present on the following day with nine remaining to the 28th and eight to the 30th with two 31st. This was the largest flock ever seen in Lincolnshire and only the 5th 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. In the autumn further birds arrived on October 8th, staying to the 12th, and November 13th completing an amazing year.



Glossy Ibis flock May 2023



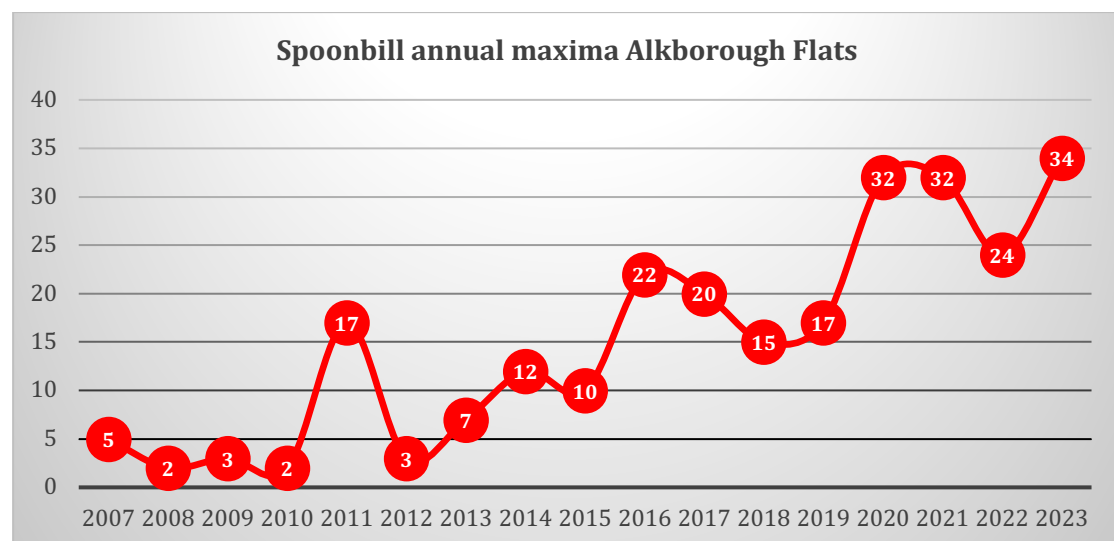


Glossy Ibis May 2023



Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Spring arrivals continue to be early with this year's first bird on February 26th but it was March 18th before the next bird, a breeding plumaged adult, arrived staying to the 22nd. April's peak was only eight and there were no more than four on any date in May but numbers built through June to 11 on the 24th. The first two fledged juveniles appeared on July 8th with that month's maximum count being **34** on the 30th a new record total for the Flats. Up to 28 were a daily occurrence through August with 30 on September 2nd and up to 16 to the 26th. October 1st saw seven lingering with three on the 3rd and the last of the year on the 4th.





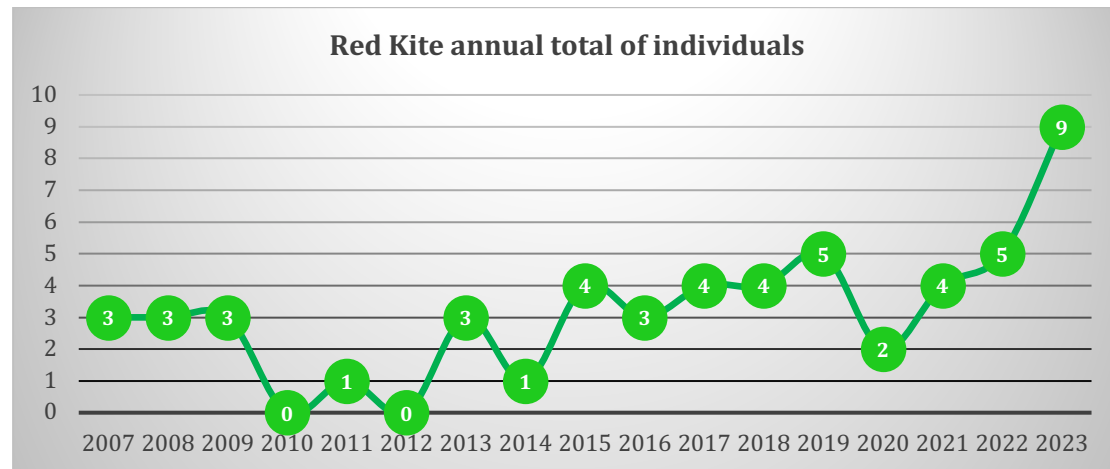
Spoonbills Trent Flash field 7N July 2023



Food begging juvenile Spoonbill chasing adult Area 7 August 2023

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

A good year for this species with one on February 8th followed by two birds during 19th then further singles April 8th, May 27th, June 3rd, 10th October 5th and 15th.



Red Kite February 2023

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Breeding Marsh Harriers Alkborough Flats

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Males	1	1	0	2	2	1	2	2	4	3	6	5
Females	1	1	0	2	2	1	2	2	5	4	7	6
Nests	1	1	0	2	2	1	2	2	4	4	7	6
successful	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	4	2
Fledged	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	2	7	11	3

At least seven birds were roosting in early January with 15 and probably 20 on the 27th. This is a new behaviour on the site. Up to 12 were noted through February and March. Five males and six females nested the number of males and females both down one on the previous year but all of the males were 3cy or older, one male having two breeding females. All of the females nested but only two nests fledged young; two that were first seen on the wing on July 6th and one that did not fledge until the late date of August 12th. Three nests appeared to all fail in June but one other nest was still active in the second week of July but then all appeared to be abandoned. At this time some heavy rain caused a lot of the taller reed to collapse and it is

possible that the nests were covered with reed and the adults unable to reach the young in the nests. Alternatively, food shortages could have been implicated but that seems less likely to have affected more than one nest at one time. With an ongoing increase in successful nests and young fledged over the previous three seasons this was a very disappointing result. The number of birds in September and October was particularly low with no more than seven seen well down on recent years and maybe a reflection of a poor breeding season over a wider area. The winter roost developed from early November with 15 on the 11th and peaked at **30** on December 22nd with an incredible **43** on the 30th. The dark-crowned juvenile male seen in the early winter and spring period reappeared as a 2cy male on November 23rd – 24th.



Adult male Marsh Harrier by Tower hide April 2023



Younger adult male that bred in 2023

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

A series of records in the early winter period involved at least two ringtails, seen together on January 4th, with a 2cy male roosting on site in early February. At least one bird was then seen regularly to April 15th with a different faded female on the 24th. In the autumn a juvenile on October 4th was joined by a second bird from 12th – 14th but both birds departed and there were no more records until a ringtail again on 16th then on November 18th a fine adult male hunted the Flats in the afternoon and probably roosted with the same bird being seen on 26th but a different second winter bird was then seen on December 16th – 23rd.



Juvenile Hen Harrier January 2023





Juvenile Hen Harrier sparring with young male Marsh Harrier January 2023



Hen Harrier March 2023



Juvenile Hen Harrier October 2023

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

One or two were regularly seen over the Flats particularly during the winter months with the usual pair breeding in the strip of oaks by the lower car park.



Sparrowhawk Area 4 March 2023



Juvenile female Sparrowhawk field 7K November 2023

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

The usual four pairs bred along the adjacent escarpment with the pair in the oak strip by the new reedbed fledging one juvenile. Birds regularly hunted the outer Flats throughout the year.



Adult Common Buzzard New Reedbed November 2023

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A good year for this species with the first on April 25th followed by the same bird identified by wing pattern, seen during May 13th – 15th then again on May 27th and June 10th. In the autumn one flew south on September 29th the latest ever on the Flats.



Osprey May 15th 2023



Osprey May 15th 2023



Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Up to three birds were hunting the Flats in the winter months with occasional visits from birds in the breeding season but none bred on site in 2023.



Male Kestrel January 2023

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

One on January 4th was the only record until March when one was seen 11th – 12th and a late bird on April 22nd. An early autumn bird arrived on August 19th with one September 29th then two, one adult male October 6th with the same male again on the 12th followed by two on November 5th and a juvenile hunted the site regularly to early December with one again 31st.



Merlin November 2023



Juvenile Merlin shadow hunting amongst Golden Plovers November 2023

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

First of the spring was one April 29th – 30th with the expected feeding assemblage over the New Reedbed peaking with four birds on May 7th – 10th. Three were seen again May 23rd and there were then sporadic records through to August 26th when two adults were hunting with three September 2nd – 3rd. At least one bird then lingered through to October 8th the latest ever record for the Flats.



Hobby hunting insects and dragonflies over New Reedbed May 2023





Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

Two adults were chasing a Lapwing over the Trent on January 8th and there were up to three different birds, adults and juveniles on a few dates through to April 10th with a local breeding adult hunting the waders on May 10th, 30th and June 2nd. One or two birds including adults and juveniles were then occasional through the remainder of the year.



Adult male Peregrine over Area 7 May 2023



Juvenile Peregrine over Trent Flash August 2023



Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Following the drought in 2022 it was considered that Water Rails may have been adversely affected but the total of at least **116** occupied territories was the highest ever recorded. Several broods were visible in the early autumn before all the site flooded.

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

Star bird of August was a juvenile Spotted Crake seen on the 26th and again on the 29th. Only the third or fourth record for the site this species probably passes through with regularity in the autumn but with so much cover birds are seldom seen out in the open unlike this year's bird.



Spotted Crake Trent Flash 7N August 2023 © N Drinkall

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Ten pairs bred but fewer birds were visible in the two winter periods.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Breeding pairs of Coots Alkborough Flats

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
4	5	8	13	6	4	6	10	10	15	12	25	30

The first bird of the year was not located until February 23rd and it was March 8th before the first double figure total of 36 birds was logged. Numbers peaked with **105** on April 8th but several left the site following this arrival and a total of 30 pairs bred, the highest ever total. Birds bred in several new areas where deep water remained from the previous winter and at least 58 young fledged but as usual most birds departed the site quickly following breeding with only four remaining on August 4th and two 6th but unusually a juvenile returned on September 28th and stayed to October 1st with presumably the same bird being seen briefly on November 19th and again on 22nd.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Three flew north-west on February 20th having been tracked up the Humber. A pair then arrived on March 1st and displayed until the 12th but they then left and unlike the previous year there were only two subsequent records of single birds on April 25th and May 16th.



Pair of Common Cranes Area 6 March 2023

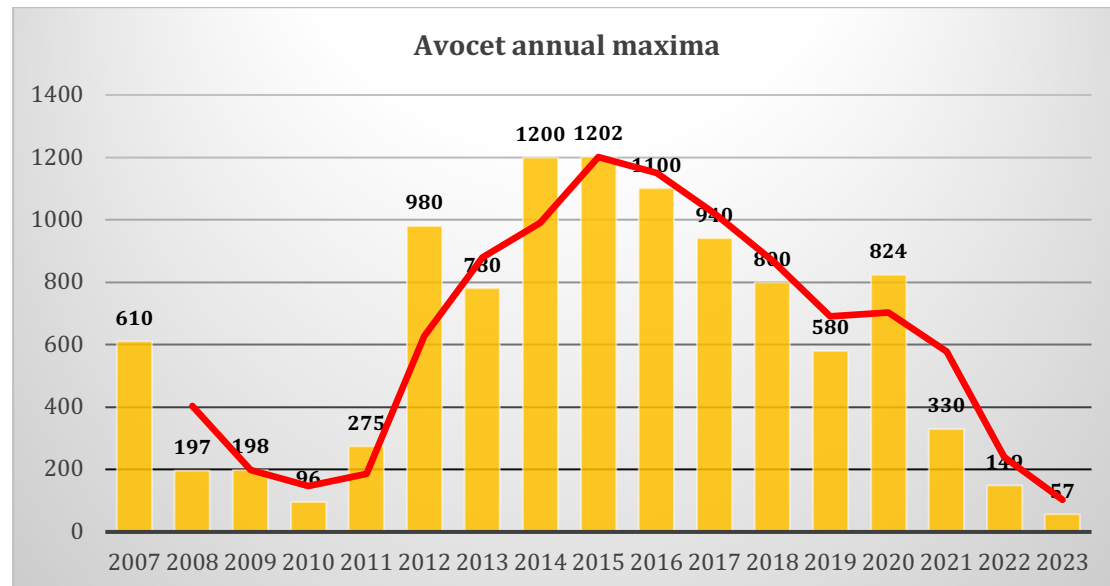
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

March 1st was a typical first date for this species on the Flats with five birds by May 7th and unusually 13 on 9th when two were sitting but as has become the norm both nests failed before hatching and no young fledged for the 16th successive year. Odd birds occurred later in the summer with one June 7th – 19th and singles July 17th, 28th, August 4th and September 13th.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

The dramatic declines of this formerly abundant species on the site were amply illustrated by the very low number of birds recorded in 2023 due entirely to changes in habitat throughout the site. Three on March 17th were the first of the year but the spring peak was just 15 birds on May 9th when two birds were incubating. Both nests failed before hatching presumably due to predation as they were on exposed parts of the wet grass fields. Only six birds were noted in

June with a maximum of seven on July 23rd. A small arrival saw 57 on site on August 4th as water levels in Area 4 were briefly favourable but the visit was short-lived with 18 on the 9th and 21 on September 3rd being the only other records in a dismal year for this species.



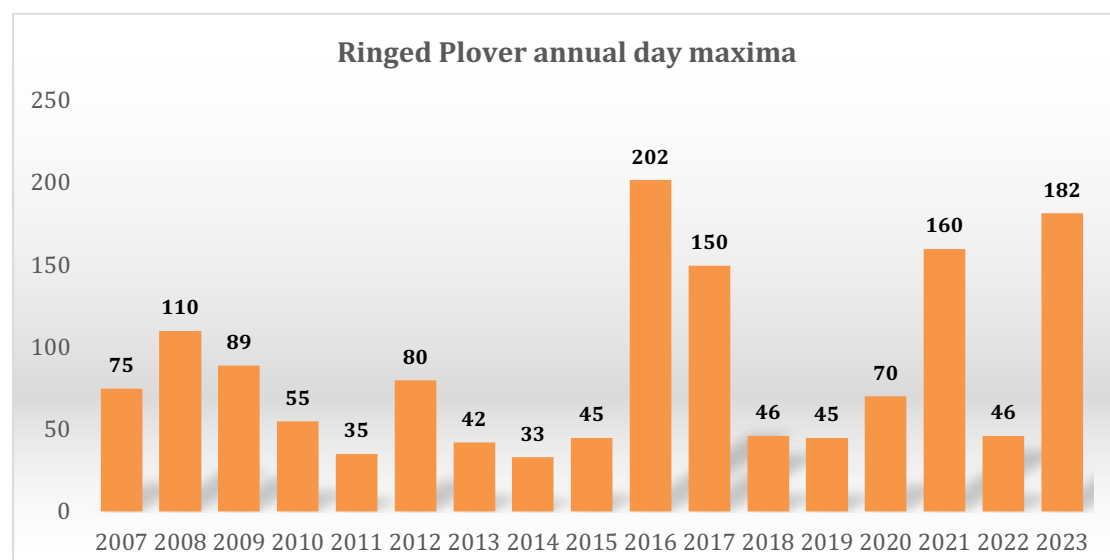
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

March 13th – October 25th

It was April 8th before the first bird flew over with two doing likewise on the 16th. In a dismal spring singles on May 1st, 27th and June 1st formed the worst showing ever. Three on June 10th were probably failed breeders and post breeding adults and juveniles arrived from late June peaking with 13 on July 9th. Up to five were noted fairly regularly from August 14th to September 2nd with two September 5th – 10th and the last of the year on the 11th.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

One that flew over on February 23rd was the only early winter record with the first of the spring on March 11th. May was a wash out with the only double figure count being 12 on the 5th but a restricted late passage of *tundra* birds in early June saw 130 logged on the 1st and 182 on the 6th but only 15 the following day spoke of the urgency of spring movements. Autumn passage was restricted by lack of suitable feeding habitat but as the Trent Flash water levels fell in August numbers peaked at 61 on the 30th with 167 gathering over high tide on September 2nd. Later spring tides in early October produced roost counts of 33 on the 1st and 50 on 2nd.



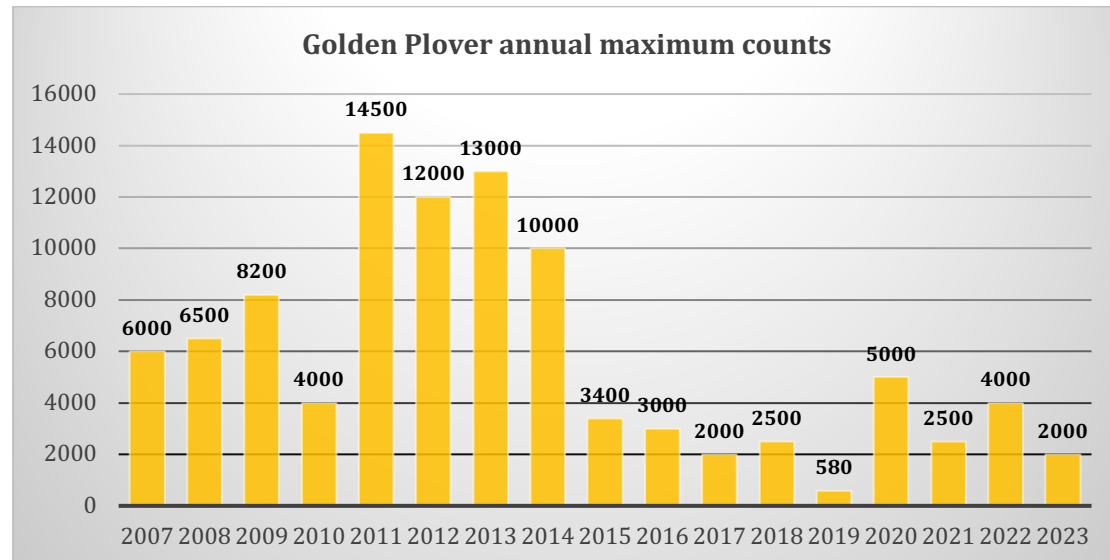


Tundra Ringed Plovers field 6E June 2023



Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

The fortunes of Golden Plover on the Flats get no better with all of the high counts in both winter periods being related to short-lived arrivals during high tides when the birds tend to loaf and bathe on the wet grass fields. There is little feeding on the site now and the loss of the inundation area has been the major factor in the huge declines seen since 2014. The early winter peak was 1050 on January 16th with the latter winter producing more birds including 1800 November 14th and 2000+ 20th.

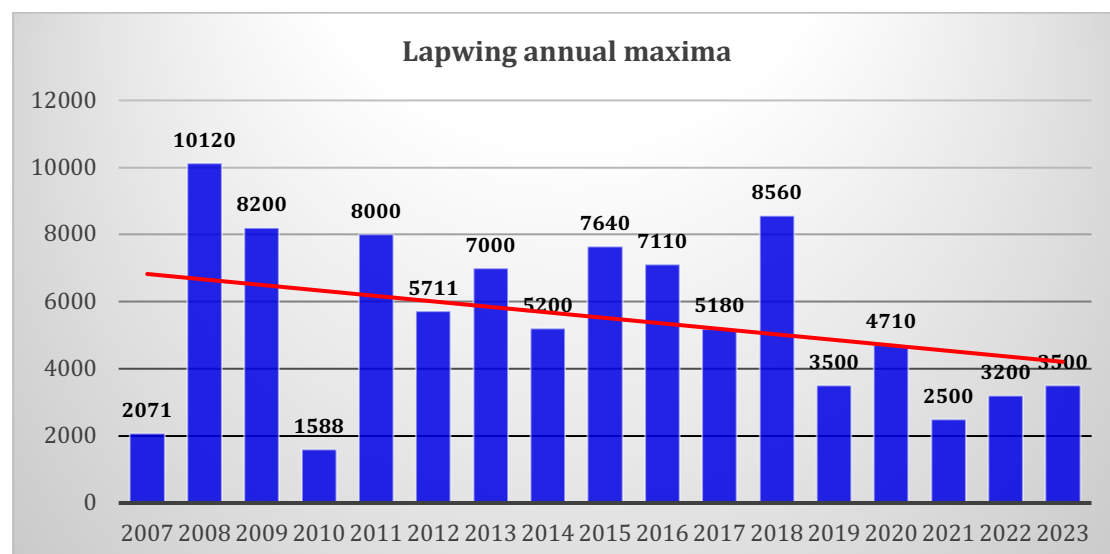


Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

There were three spring records with one April 2nd, three on 10th and one May 20th. In autumn more birds occurred mainly in high tide roosts with one September 17th, three 28th and October 1st then 12 on 2nd and 16 on 3rd with eight 14th and finally one November 19th.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

The second lowest annual maximum count pointed towards a continuing decline in the usage of the site by this iconic winter visitor. The first winter peak total was just 2000 on January 4th with 1100 on February 21st being the last high count of that period as birds departed early with only 138 remaining on March 1st. Up to 160 had returned by the end of June but there were never more than 500 birds on site until November 1st when 1484 were counted increasing to 2000 by the 4th with 3500 19th – 20th but only 93 after a severe freeze in early December though 2300 had returned by the 11th.



A total of 13 pairs bred in 2023 one more than 2022 but the distribution of nesting attempts was very similar though a pair did move from field 6D to 6E for their second clutch. In fact, all the first clutches laid were predated apart from three that hatched broods of four, four and three on fields 7L and 7M in late April – early May. Of these broods two of the fours reached a decent size surviving for almost two weeks before all were predated by an unknown predator but most probably a large mammal. Many of the pairs re-nested and at least 24 clutches were recorded but only six young were known to have fledged successfully. Five late juveniles hatched in the first week of July as the remaining pools where the adults nested were drying out rapidly but all fledged. With such high rates of predation there is little hope of this species continuing to breed on the site in the long term.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

An exceptional run of autumn records with singles August 20th and September 2nd then **32** flying north September 7th with one 15th, two 17th, 13 October 1st with 11 on 2nd, 6 on 3rd and 18 on 4th. Singles on November 5th and December 16th – 17th were more unseasonal.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

In a brief late spring migration, there was one on June 1st with an exceptional record-breaking total of **38** on the 6th with 20 on the 7th and one in the autumn on September 3rd.



Sanderlings field 6E June 2023





Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

One on May 25th presaged a brief late spring passage with four on June 1st, two 3rd and one 6th. Two juveniles from August 18th – 21st were the first of a rather weak autumn movement with a peak of five on September 2nd then four 30th and six October 2nd with the last three on October 3rd – 4th. There were no winter records again but as few Dunlin now occur in winter this is to be expected.



Two Little Stints with Ringed Plovers field 6E June 2023

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

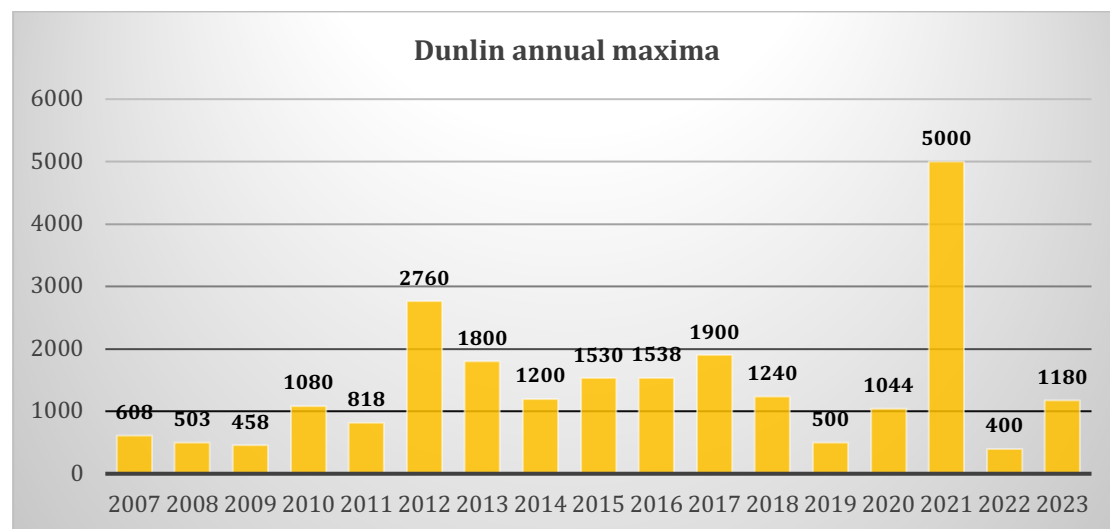
Two on May 22nd were the only birds in spring. An adult July 29th – August 1st was followed by the first juvenile 19th a further adult 20th and a peak of just six juveniles September 2nd but high spring tides in early October brought in **14** on the 2nd with eight to the 4th and five 5th before one 7th and the last of the year on November 5th.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

A juvenile on the Trent Flash from September 13th – 16th was about the 18th site record of this Nearctic vagrant.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

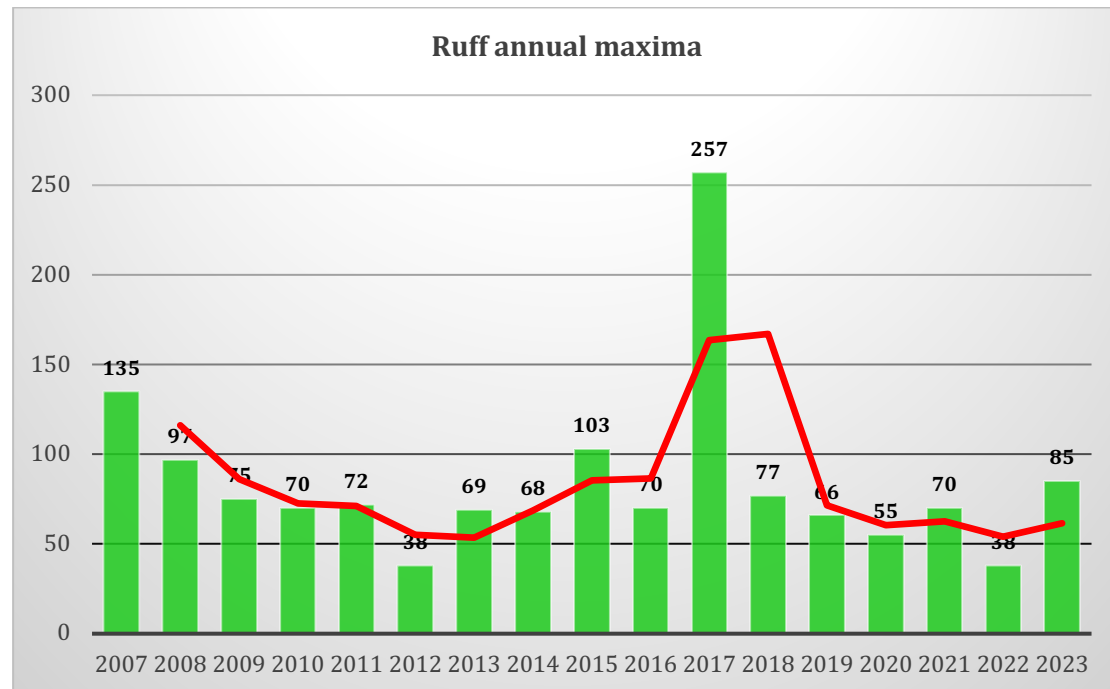
As the inter-tidal mudflats have disappeared Dunlin now rely upon the internal pools drying out enough to produce mud during passage periods as the water levels are now far too deep throughout the winter month. The wet grass fields attract some birds in the winter but it is the mud created by lower water levels on the Trent Flash field 7N that produces the best counts in spring and autumn. Most high counts refer to birds roosting over high tide periods, mainly on a series of springs. Such counts in the early winter included 416 roosting on January 16th with 250 on 27th, 450 February 23rd, 350 March 11th and 400 April 8th and 22nd. The only treble figure spring count was of 100 on May 7th with 62 on the 22nd and a late pulse of 33 on June 6th. The early autumn was dismal with no more than 40 before the end of August but 400 roosted on the high tide of September 2nd with 400 again October 2nd and by far the highest count of the year 1180 roosting on October 4th. Another roost of 450 October 18th with 400 – 500 in the first half of November roosting on the wet grass field 7L and 7M. Up to 120 noted in December.



Dunlin and two Curlew Sandpipers May 2023

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

The only early winter record was of one on January 5th. Three on March 22nd were followed by one on April 1st and five 10th with two from 20th – 23rd but May saw an unprecedented arrival of **85 reeves** on the 4th with 30 remaining the next day and 20 to the 7th with ten 8th. This was part of a huge displacement of reeves around Britain in May 2023. The two sexes often migrate independently so the single sex composition of this flock was not unusual. A single reeve was then seen on several dates to June 6th but there was no suggestion of breeding. The first Ruff returned on June 22nd with nine by July 11th and the first three juveniles being seen on August 11th. From August 17th numbers varied between 29 and 64 to September 1st falling to around 30 – 32 from then onwards to October 14th after which there were 15 on November 4th with 22 again intermittently 5th – 11th but then none during the rest of the month or December.



Reeves field 7G May 2023



Reeves field 7G May 2023



Jack Snipe *Limnocryptes minimus*

Only two single birds were recorded on October 10th and 25th.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

The number of Common Snipe recorded on site depends on dedicated walks and often luck in finding roosting concentrations but suitable habitats were much more restricted in 2023 particularly as the favoured field 6K was mis-managed with tall sea club rush allowed to dominate later in the autumn - winter. No more than three were found in January – February with 14 on March 27th. Spring passage brought a few more birds with 20 on April 29th including a total of 14 heading off high east at dusk. Singles on May 5th, June 3rd and 11th suggested a summering bird but there was no actual proof of breeding. Autumn birds returned from July with a count of 40 on October 8th and **69** in a restricted area of field 6D on 12th.

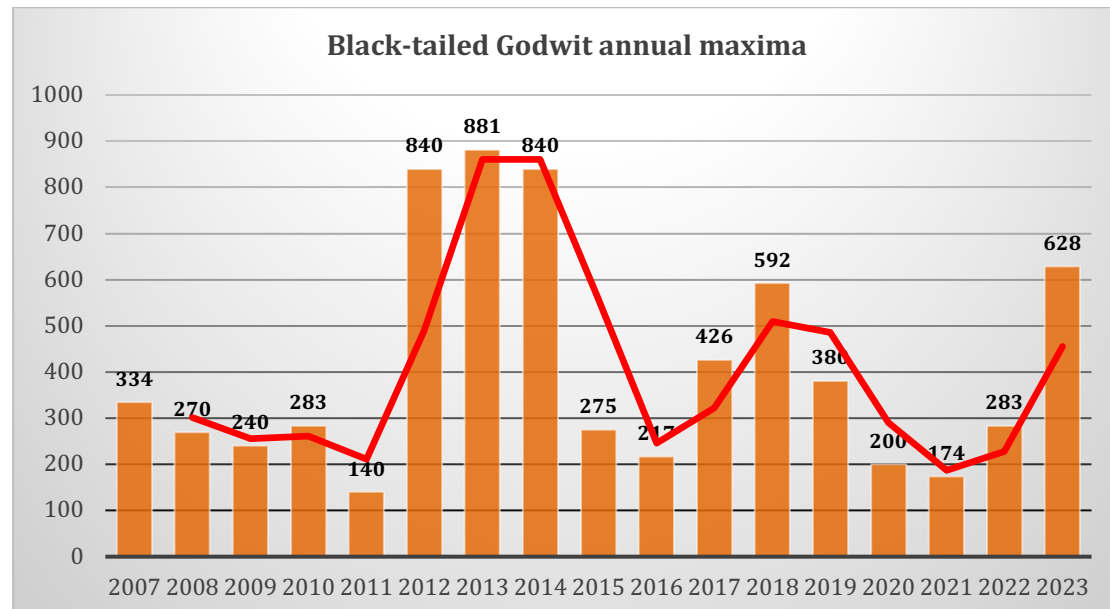
Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

One by the sewage works on January 6th and one by the oaks on November 12th were the only records.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Black-tailed Godwits cannot now be classed as wintering on the Flats with the few records being sporadic in occurrence and involving very low numbers of birds. Similarly autumn passage has been greatly reduced due mainly to a lack of suitable habitat in the crucial July – September period. In spring the birds feed on wet grasslands and hence spring passage numbers have tended to increase as Areas 6 and 7 have been wetter and more suitable in recent spring periods. No more than 18 were seen in January and February on four days. Spring arrivals started in March with 30 on the 11th and quickly built up to 135 by the 22nd. There was then clearly onward movement of birds and new arrivals with 436 logged on the 29th and a peak of **628** on April 3rd with 538 again on the 15th after which numbers fell away quickly with 70 on

25th and 20 May 1st – 2nd being all 2cy birds. Another pulse of 2cy birds then saw numbers rise again to 48 on May 25th with 57 on 27th. Autumn passage started in late June with a peak of 73 on July 1st after which there were 61 on 8th and 40 on 29th but no more than 17 in August and 26 in September while October's high was just ten birds. A flock of 85 was on the Trent Sand bar on November 7th with 57 in field 7L on December 23rd the highest count of the late winter.



Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

A small spring passage saw three feeding on April 20th with nine on 22nd, three 23rd and one 27th. In the later year singles on October 3rd, November 4th and December 16th were the only records.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

The wet grass fields proved attractive to a few passage Whimbrel in spring. Following the first on April 20th there were ten on the 23rd then numbers rose to 21 by the 29th with 20 staying to May 7th and seven to the 14th with three 15th and the last on the 20th. As usual autumn passage was much weaker with one July 8th, three south 15th and then just one August 19th and two 27th.

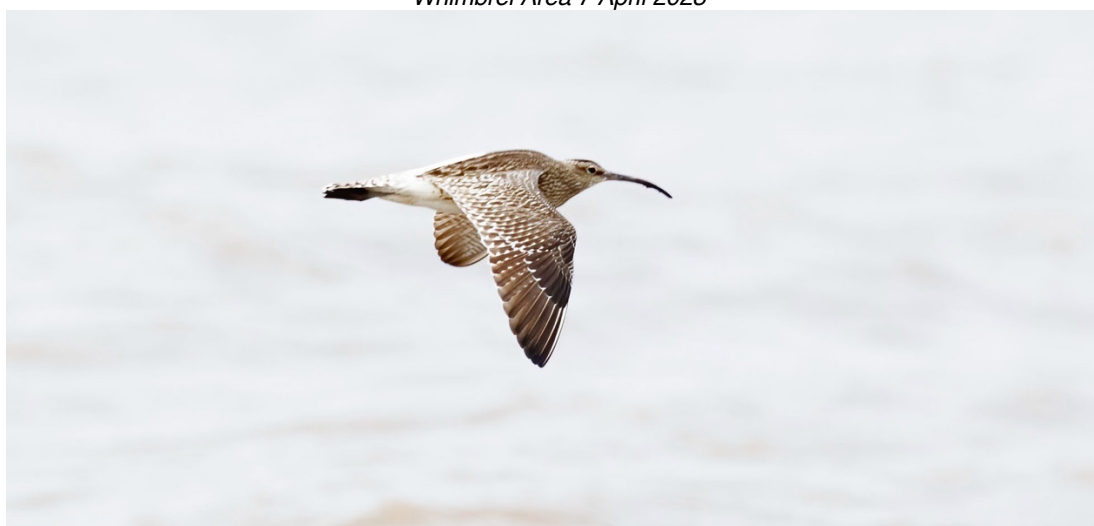


Whimbrel Area 6 May 2023



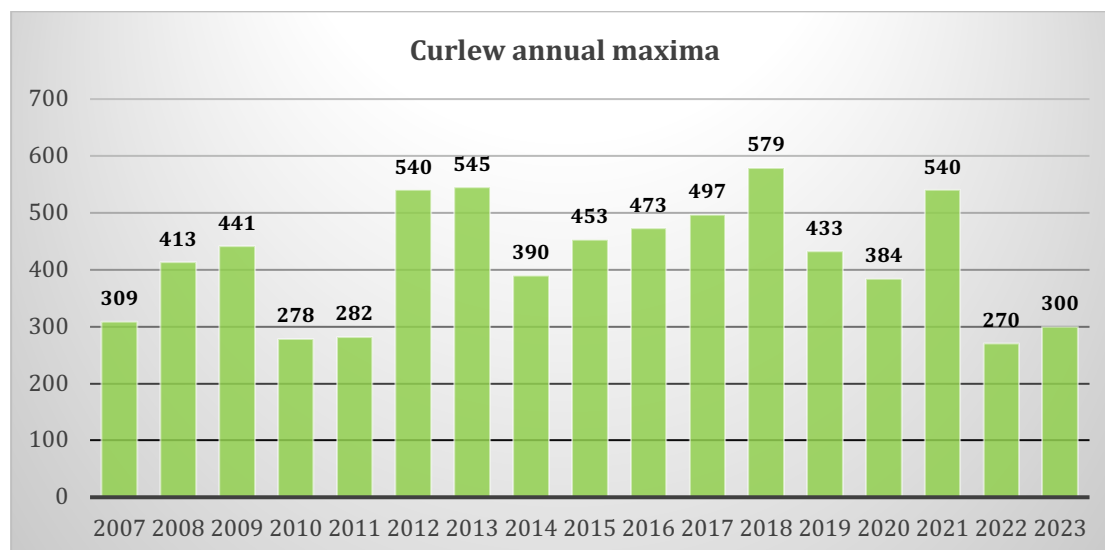


Whimbrel Area 7 April 2023



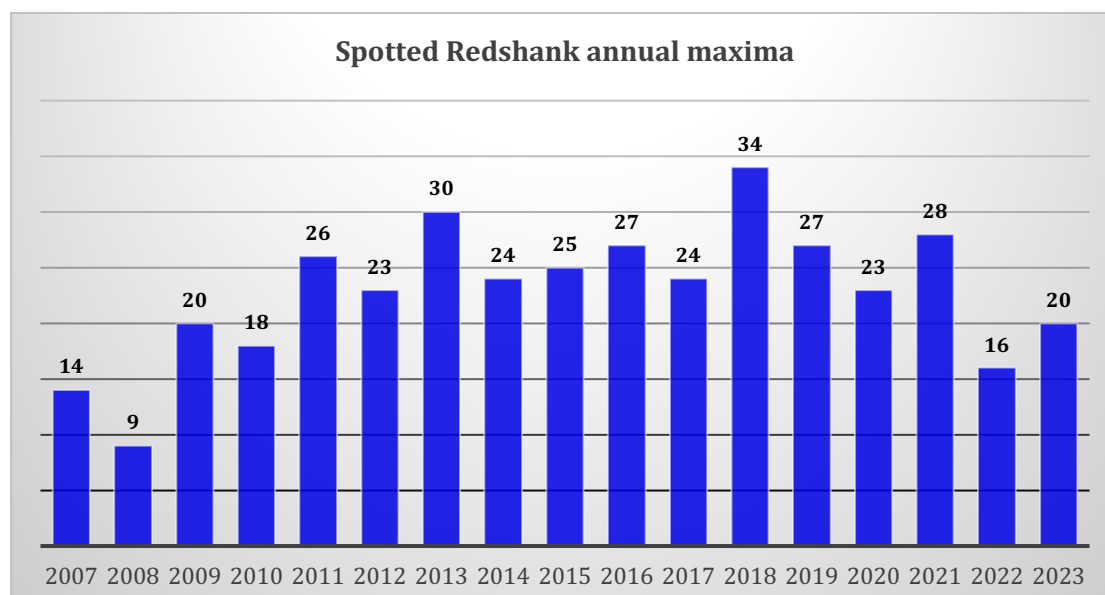
Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Up to 270 birds were feeding on the Flats in January – February with a roost count of 300 on January 6th being the highest count of the year. Spring passage brought a few more birds in April with 280 on 7th but departures were then rapid and only five remained from 24th to May 5th. A small number of non-breeding birds gathered in May peaking with 24 on 13th and the last two were seen on June 2nd. Autumn counts were much lower than normal with no more than 64 until October when 156 were using the site rising slightly to 179 by November 7th and 252 December 10th.



Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

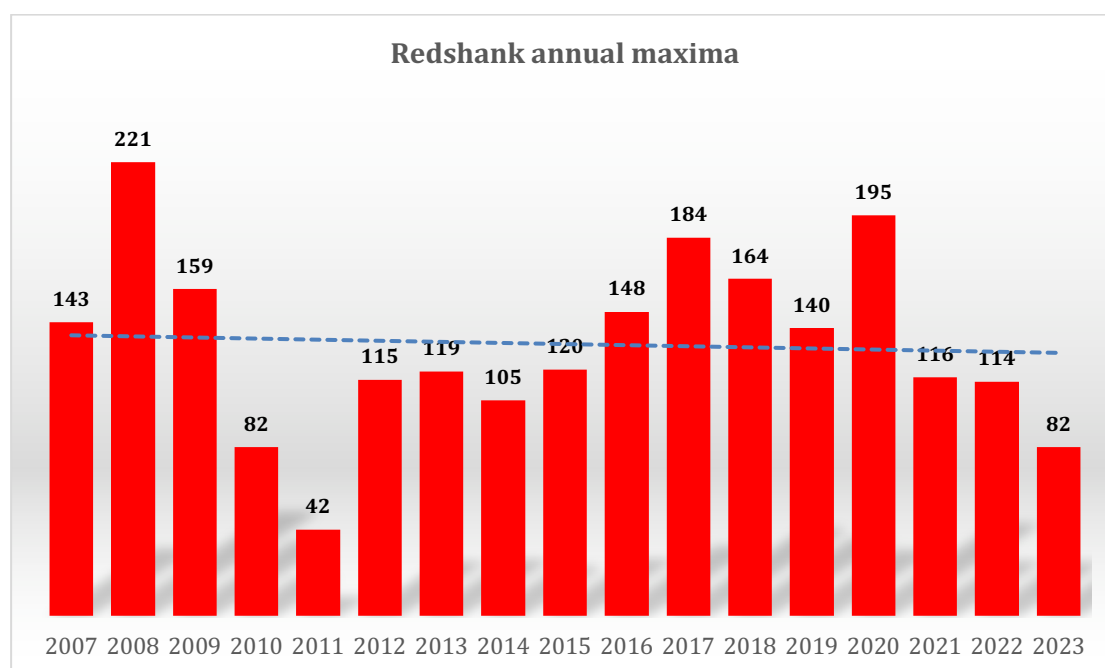
This once Nationally Important species has all but disappeared from the Flats in winter as habitat loss has affected their key feeding areas through overly deep flooding. There was only one record in January – February a single on January 16th but spring passage brought a few birds in with three March 10th then a peak of just four April 10 – 14th and 30th, three May 2nd and one or two to 14th. The first returnee arrived on June 7th with a peak of just five on July 29th before the Trent Flash field started to dry out and the number of birds feeding there shot up to **20** by August 27th, four juveniles, with 12 – 14 on and off to September 13th after which there were no more than five until 12 were counted again on October 2nd with seven 18th and thereafter just singles on November 1st, 18th with two 20th.



Redshank *Tringa totanus*

In the early part of the year there were sporadic counts of up to 44 birds to March 19th when all of the wintering birds appeared to depart. No Redshank bred in 2022 for the first time in the survey history so it was pleasing to see four pairs on territories in 2023 no doubt in response to the high-water levels in the late spring. However, only one brood hatched with four young growing to a good size by mid-July in field 7M and they were assumed to have fledged. The loss of the other three nests appeared to be related to the loss of most of the Lapwing nests and broods and was again probably the result of predation by Badgers, Otters or Red Foxes though there was a mobile flock of non-breeding Carrion Crows in the same fields during the spring period. A count of 38 on July 26th was very much a one-off as no more than seven were then seen until August 28th with less than 20 on any date from then until November 1st when 40 gathered at high tide on the wet grass fields in Area 7. A few more occurred later in the month with the annual peak of just 82 roosting on December 18th.

With the loss of the inter-tidal mudflats within the inundation area and deep winter flooding this species is rapidly being lost as a regular wintering species and passage numbers are also in severe decline.



Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

First of the dismal spring was April 29th to May 1st with one to three in May and singles in early June to 10th. Autumn passage commenced on July 3rd peaking with 10 on the 11th but no more than four in August though there were 12 on September 3rd, the annual peak, then seven to October 12th with four to 14th and the last on the 22nd.

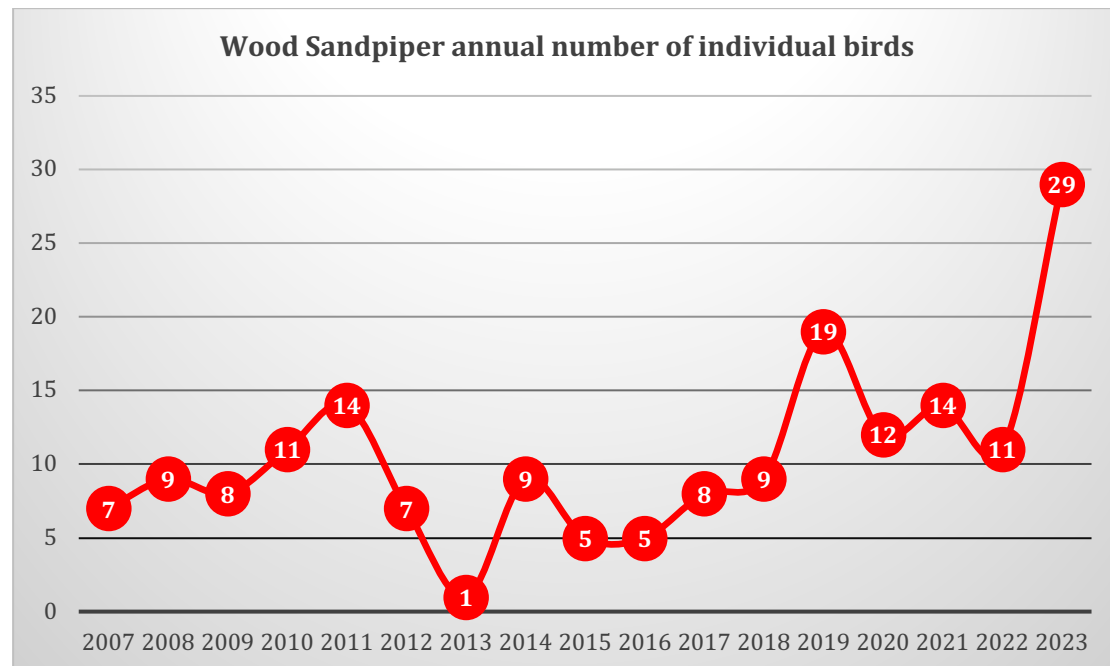
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

A slightly better year for this species but with no winter records again and the first on April 3rd followed by one on 24th the only spring occurrences. Autumn passage commenced on July 8th with one to three on several dates and a peak of four on August 22nd but the last being on the early date of September 13th.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* April 26th – October 28th

The excellent fortunes of this species continued to be reflected in the number of birds recorded in 2023 from the Flats with an estimate of 29 individuals recorded in spring and autumn between April 23rd and September 3rd. In spring six were present on May 6th with twelve the following day of which seven flew off high east. Two on May 17th included a bird in song flights and a singing bird was then heard on a few dates through to June 4th presumably the same bird. One

on July 14th was presumably the first of the autumn with most birds in that period being juveniles as expected and there was a peak of five on August 19th with the last on September 3rd.



Juvenile Wood Sandpiper field 6E August 2023

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

April 18th – October 27th

A better year for passage Common Sandpipers mainly in spring; the first two of the year were seen on April 23rd with singles 28th and 29th then five May 4th with at least two on 7th and one 28th with two autumnal records on July 23rd and September 17th.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

An exceptional year for records of this typically scarce species; one April 30th then singles June 1st, 6th and 7th with two juveniles August 6th, one 16th, one 26th with two 27th then one September 1st and four on the 2nd.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

Another poor year with two May 19th then one of these to 30th with two again June 1st, one 7th and a flock of six on the Humber on October 21st.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Only two records in 2023 with a pair of summer plumaged adults on June 10th and one adult July 8th.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Up to 100 feeding on the wet grass fields in March and up to 50 on several dates through the remainder of the year.



Black-headed Gull Area 4 March 2023

Common Gull *Larus canus*

A peak of 30 birds on the lagoons on March 22nd otherwise up to 15 on a few dates.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

A gathering of 330 on the Trent Sand Bar on August 21st was notable but none use the Flats themselves.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

At least two on the Trent August 5th – 6th; a poor showing but no large gulls now occur on the Flats itself due to the lack of suitable habitat and general massive declines in large gull numbers around the estuary.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Birds pass over the site but none use the area any longer.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Not recorded on the Flats though a few birds still present on the Humber and Trent particularly around Trent Falls.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Two flew west on August 13th.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

A run of records this year with two on May 3rd then two 5th, four north on June 2nd with one 7th then an unusual set of autumn observations with singles July 8th, August 13th and three September 23rd the latest ever site record.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

One flying east on May 1st was the sole record in a poor spring passage.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Three on the Trent Flash on April 23rd and five there June 1st were the first records since 2019.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Up to eight recorded on the outer Flats on a few dates but more typically recorded from the adjacent escarpment and its woodlands.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Up to 80 on the Flats in the winter months with odd pairs breeding in the internal hedgerows.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

April 13th – August 17th

The first male arrived on April 28th, a relatively late date, and there were up to two males and two females recorded through the spring but usually just one male and an occasional female with a hepatic female being seen on June 1st. The species presumably bred but there was no direct evidence of successful breeding and the only record of a passage juvenile was on August 9th.



Male Cuckoo May 2023

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

With a local abundance of voles in the early winter a peak of seven birds noted hunting the Flats and particularly the Trent foreshore in January – February. Numbers fell to four in March and there were very few records through the summer with up to three occasionally in the autumn.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Birds were regularly heard calling from the sewage works area and the adjacent escarpment.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Another poor year for this species with one March 17th – 18th then one mobbing a juvenile March Harrier August 16th and one October 21st.

Swift *Apus apus*

April 25th – September 16th

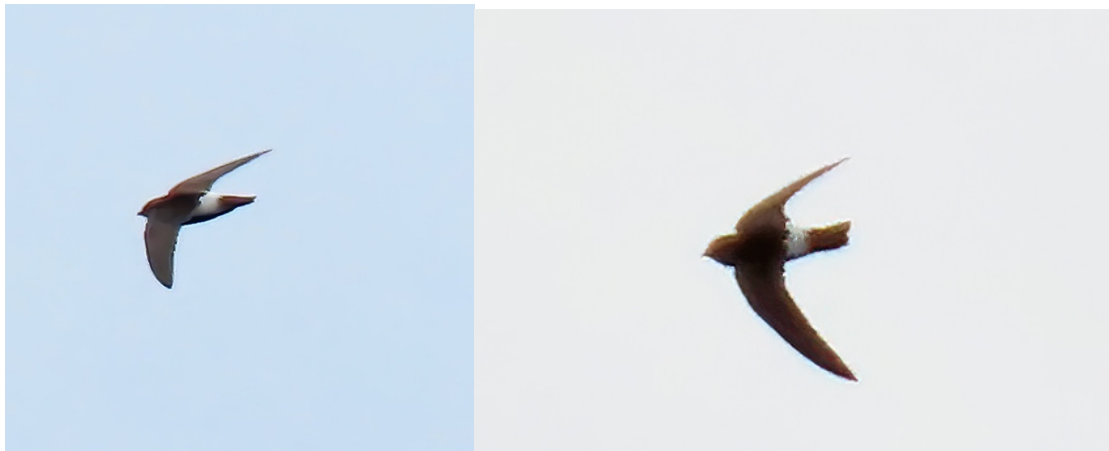
April 27th saw the first Swift appear over the Flats but it was May 2nd before the first double figure count was achieved with 24 on that date increasing to 50 by the 8th with 80 on the 12th. Poor weather saw a concentration of 160 over the reedbeds on May 30th with 100 on June 1st and 80 on 6th but these were the last notable counts of the year with just 32 on July 25th the last double figure total and the last five of the year noted on the very early date of August 20th.



Swift New Reedbed May 2023

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

On the early morning of June 29th Simon and Tim Jump came across a **Little Swift** feeding over the reedbeds by the Trent embankment. 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 British records to the end of 2021.



Little Swift June 2023 © Simon and Tim Jump

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

May got off to a cracking start with a new and somewhat unexpected addition to the site list when a Hoopoe was found on the 2nd. 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 impression 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 species that even to a non-birder are totally unmistakeable.



Hoopoe by dead copse May 2023





Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

A scatter of records with singles on March 19th, June 18th, September 5th and 18th then two 23rd and singles October 1st and December 16th.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

The calling bird from the adjacent escarpment wandered down onto the edge of the Flats on several days through the year with at least two birds being present in the post – breeding period and two together in the willows by the lower car park December 12th.



Green Woodpecker in dead copse May 2023

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Odd birds at the foot of the escarpment in the willows and dead trees throughout the year.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

No notable records with the usual declining breeding population and a few birds in the winter months.



Sand Martin *Riparia riparia***March 8th 2008 – October 30th 2023**

A flock of eight on March 17th were reasonably early arrivals with a total of 120 by the 30th and 200 April 1st. During spells of wet and cool weather in April up to 150 birds were feeding over the reedbeds and Trent Flash. A total of 100 on June 27th was the first autumn concentration with 150 on July 11th being eclipsed by 800 on the 15th the highest count of the year but almost the last with only odd birds noted thereafter. The latest ever site record though, came on October 30th when a single bird fed over the Flats following an incursion of warm southerly air over the previous days.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***March 31st 2021 - November 12th 2015**

First of the spring arrived on March 30th but it was another abysmal year for this declining species with a spring peak of just 70 birds on April 24th and May 5th. The annual peak was actually an unusual one-off count of 100 birds roosting on October 1st and three lingered to the 13th with the last singleton on the 16th.



Swallows Trent foreshore April 2023

House Martin *Delichon urbicum***April 1st 2021 – October 19th 2020**

Like the Swallow it was a terrible year for House Martin on the Flats with the first on April 9th but the highest spring count being only 25 on May 4th and there were hardly any autumn records with the last on October 1st.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

At least 40 were still on site in January but the only other record of note was a count of 150 on September 10th.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

Singles on October 10th and 12th.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

October 10th – March 31st

In the first winter period birds were very elusive and thin on the ground with a maximum of six on February 19th and five March 1st with the last of the season seen on March 27th. The first of the late winter was on November 7th with at least two on the 18th and three 20th then at least seven 28th through December.



Water Pipit November 2023



Water Pipit by field 7K December 2023

Yellow Wagtail *Montacilla flava*

March 26th – October 4th

The first male arrived on April 1st with seven males present by the 8th and a peak in that month of 29 on the 15th that proved to be the highest count of the spring. None bred or even summered and the first fledged juveniles of the autumn returned on July 6th with numbers building rapidly from mid-month when there were 70 on the 31st. Numbers remained high through August with around 50 – 70 birds daily then the annual peak of 80 occurred on September 7th with five still present on the 18th and the last on the 23rd.



Male Yellow Wagtail Trent foreshore April 2023



Male Yellow Wagtail and cow Area 6 April 2023

Grey Wagtail *Montacilla cinerea*

A pair again bred around the sewage works with this year's nest being in the culvert by the lower car park where they appeared to attempt three broods. The adults were still feeding young on July 31st but sightings then declined until rising in regularity again from early October.

Pied Wagtail *Montacilla alba*

At least 16 were feeding on the wet pastures at the Whitton end of the site in early January and there were 14 on March 5th. No nests were known on the Flats in 2023 but some good counts in the early autumn peaked with 100 on August 1st.

White Wagtail *Montacilla alba alba*

A good spring passage with singles April 4th and 8th then a record-breaking **20** on the 15th with 11 still present the following day and five 24th.



White Wagtail Area 6 April 2023

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

At least 20 were in the reedbeds on January 27th and the breeding bird survey located 29 territories two higher than 2022 and a new record count. Good numbers were again scattered around the reedbed fringes in the late winter.



Wren inundation area November 2023

Dunnoek *Prunella modularis*

The breeding birds survey located eight territories the highest total since ten in 2008 with odd birds on the outer Flats in both winter periods.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Birds were present in the hedgerows of the outer Flats throughout the year with at least five on January 27th while the breeding bird survey located five territories.



Robin inundation reedbed December 2023

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Birding highlight of September was the discovery of a male **Bluethroat** on the Trent Flash on the 3rd a somewhat unexpected fourth addition to the site bird list for 2023. Actually, unexpected should be qualified to unexpected in autumn as the species has a history of spring vagrancy to wetland sites in the UK that has been slowly increasing in recent years though the sub-species involved is the White-spotted Bluethroat that breeds as close as the Netherlands, Belgium and Northern France in marshes and wetlands with extensive areas of phragmites. In fact, a singing male was present for a few days at East Halton in early April 2018. The majority of British records involve the Red-spotted race that breeds in open northern forests, in scrub dominated wet habitats and on the tundra from Sweden east to Siberia with a small population even nesting in Alaska, one of the few Palearctic passerines to breed there along with Wheatear and Arctic Warbler. Autumn records on the East coast were regular up to the 1970's but numbers have declined dramatically since then with less than annual occurrences in Lincolnshire in recent years. As shown by the Report on Scarce Migrant birds in 2021 in British Birds Nationally the species is now very rare away from Shetland in the autumn. *Autumn passage began with one on St Mary's (Scilly) on 29th August, followed by 11 in September, 19 in October and two in November, which included the last of the year, at Nanjizal (Cornwall) on 18th. As in spring, the lion's share of the 33 autumn records were in the Northern Isles, where 26 were found, 22 of these on Shetland.* So how did a Bluethroat end up at Alkborough Flats in early September? There were none on the East coast and no obvious arrival of eastern passerines so it is tempting to suggest that this bird may have summered somewhere in the UK and relocated to Alkborough as it headed south? It was incredibly elusive and could have been overlooked on 99% of visits; in fact in the 18 days it was known to be present it was only seen 5 or 6 times and for a combined total of less than five minutes! One observer searched the right location for 9 hours before seeing the bird. The extended stay was also unusual even for an autumn migrant and it seemed clear that it was defending a feeding territory along the edge of a muddy reedbed

with its habit of chasing off intruding juvenile Sedge and Reed warblers in fact offering the chance of seeing it darting out of the reed fringe. So, was this bird in fact intent on wintering in the area? Birds winter in a variety of habitats but often in marshes and wetland sites where they favour scrubby edges of reedbeds and paddy fields but the bulk of the population winters from Africa East to Southern China with one population in Spain. Wintering in Britain is extremely rare but a bird, shown below, was clearly wintering at a wetland site in South Lincolnshire though it was only discovered in February when forced into the open by freezing weather conditions. Unfortunately, the Alkborough bird's favoured territory was flooded out by rising water levels late in the month.



Male Bluethroat Trent Flash field 7N September 2023 © N Drinkall

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

April 17th – November 16th

The dramatic declines in this once common species are being reflected in the low number of birds found on passage on the Flats. There were no spring records again and in the autumn, the only records were one July 23rd, two August 20th with one 27th then three September 2nd with one lingering to the 9th.

Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*

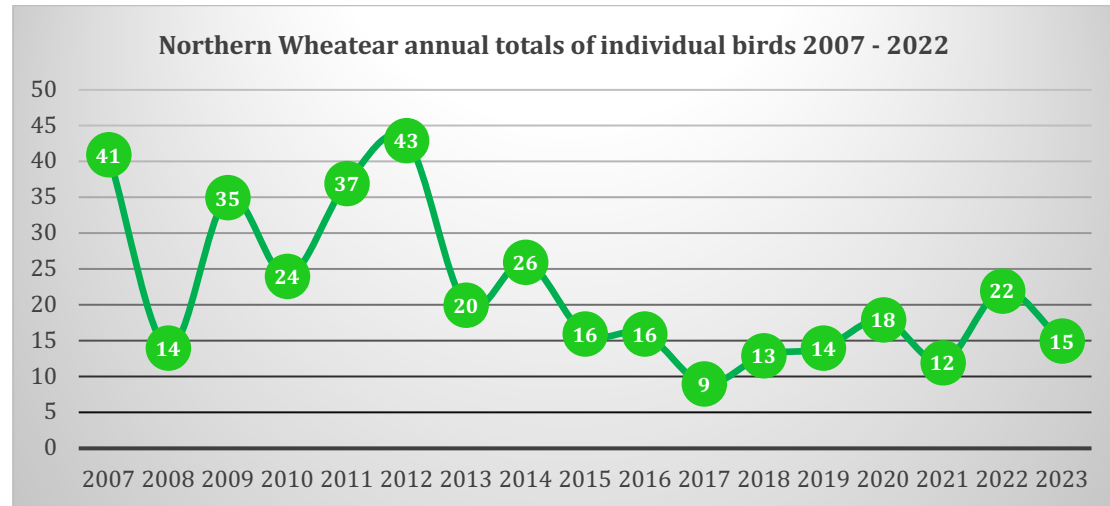
At least seven were present in January – February with spring passage starting in late February when new birds were seen on the 21st with a peak of **17** on March 5th. Two females on March 22nd were though, the last of the spring and there was again no breeding attempt in 2023. Autumn passage started in early September with five on the 3rd after which there was a sudden increase in October seeing 15 on the 1st – 2nd then at least **40** from 8th – 9th but thereafter birds moved on quickly and it seemed that only six to eight birds remained into early November but at least **14** were counted on the 20th with at least 10 in December.





Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe Oenanthe*March 21st – October 25th

With a total of just 15 birds recorded in spring and autumn, 2023 was the third worst year on record for this species on the Flats a fact reflected by very poor passage numbers elsewhere in North Lincolnshire. The first arrived on April 7th with a spring peak of five on the 15th and the last May 8th. Just three autumn records on August 26th, September 9th and 11th.



Wheatear Humber foreshore April 2023

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

At least 20 birds were present in January and five pairs bred with 10 – 20 in November – December.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*October 7th – May 5th

A very poor early winter with 25 on January 27th the only count of note and the last being one April 16th. First of the autumn were three October 21st with 130 moving south on the 29th. Up to 20 in November with an arrival of 200 December 18th.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Four on January 27th was the highest early winter total and two pairs bred.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*October 7th - April

Eight on January 27th was the only count in the first winter period and birds were in low numbers during October after the first two on the 8th.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Three on November 1st on the lower Flats was a fairly typical showing of this declining species.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

No counts of wintering birds were obtained but several territories outside the spring – summer breeding territories were occupied in the pure reedbeds avoided by breeding birds. The breeding season total of 38 occupied territories was another 26% increase on the 30 recorded in 2022 and this species seems to go from strength to strength given the lack of severe winter weather.



Cetti's Warbler feeding newly fledged young August 1st 2023



Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*April 8th 2020 – September 6th 2021

It was a terrible year for Grasshopper Warblers on the Flats following three consecutive good breeding seasons. The first on April 17th was not heard again and the next was not recorded until the 29th. Two territories were identified late in the season in June – July with the last of the year heard on the very early date of July 2nd.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*April 2nd 2021 – October 10th 2015

A singing male on April 7th was the forerunner of the spring arrivals with three by the 14th. The breeding bird survey located 60 occupied territories one below the highest ever total recorded in 2017. At least 20 birds were counted on August 26th with ten to September 10th and the last of the year on the 30th.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*April 14th 2020– October 12th 2009

April 16th produced the first spring songster with 40+ by the 28th. At least four were still on site on September 30th with two on October 7th being the last of the year.



Juvenile Reed Warbler August 2023

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

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>.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

A male on April 2nd preceded a total of eight territorial birds in the breeding season with most nesting.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Two records in 2023 was above the norm with one May 6th and one July 28th.



Garden Warbler May 6th 2023

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

April 15th 2007 – September 17th 2009

After one on April 30th two birds held breeding territories though neither are thought to have attracted females. Two were noted in autumn on August 19th and 26th – 28th.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

April 11th 2020 – September 30th 2017

Ten occupied breeding territories was up on the last two years but the number of birds now nesting on the Flats is a fraction of what it was at the start of the project when 26 – 34 territories were occupied. The last of the year was seen on September 13th.



Juvenile Whitethroat August 2023

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Wintering birds were seen on January 5th and February 2nd with one in song by the sewage works from February 18th – 21st. The first spring arrivals saw four birds on site on March 22nd with a minimum of 15 on the 27th. Six breeding territories were occupied one more than 2022 and the highest ever total. At least 15 birds were present on October 2nd. Two on November 16th were clearly wintering with one in the same area December 17th.

Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

A bird first noted on March 1st on the island in Area 4 proved to be particularly elusive but was present through to April 2nd. This was only the fourth record for the Flats with the previous birds in November 2016 (2) and January – February 2019.



Siberian Chiffchaff March 2023

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

April 5th 2020 – September 19th 2013

After the first on April 2nd the spring peak was only seven on the 28th. Three birds held territories but were not thought to have attracted mates. Two on August 1st were the last of the year in a particularly poor autumn passage.



Juvenile Willow Warbler August 2023



Juvenile Willow Warbler August 2023

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Occasionally recorded in the willows and scrub at the base of the escarpment with one on the outer Flats on November 7th – December 11th.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

At least 60 were noted in January and it proved to be yet another record-breaking breeding season with 70 pairs located. The first fledged juveniles were seen on June 18th with 30+ on the wing on July 14th and 60 irrupting by the Tower hide on October 2nd. Counts of over 100 gritting on the main track and large flocks around the site during October suggested a population of at least 400 birds at that time but more may well have been present. Good numbers remained through November and December.



Juvenile Bearded Tit July 2023





Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

The breeding season survey located six pairs most of which seemed to fledge young successfully. Occasionally seen in the reedbeds in the winter months with a flock fairly regular on the outer hedgerows in November – December.



Long-tailed Tit lower car park January 2023

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Five pairs were located in the breeding bird survey. In winter birds forage in the extensive reedbeds.



Blue Tit inundation area November 2023

Great Tit *Parus major*

Three pairs bred at the foot of the escarpment.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Two pairs bred in the same locations at the foot of the escarpment where they were recorded in 2022.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

One or two were seen at the base of the escarpment in the early part of the year with a peak of just three birds in the autumn – late winter.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Up to five on the outer Flats on a few dates.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Up to 60 fed amongst the sheep in the April – June period.

Raven *Corvus corax*

Following a blank year in 2022 there was an improvement in 2023 with one February 21st then one April 15th with two August 27th – 28th and September 2nd probably the same birds in the latter two records then two again October 29th and one south December 26th.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Up to 40 fed amongst the sheep in the April – June period.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Up to 40 birds around the site in both winter periods with the 14 breeding pairs forming the highest total since 2012.



Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

No early winter roost was recorded. Up to 500 birds fed on the wet grass fields in spring and autumn with 1000+ in early to mid-November.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Single birds on September 3rd and October 12th showed the dire state of this species in the local area.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Eight pairs bred in 2023 and there was a small-scale southerly passage in late September – October.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Odd birds flew south in late October with six on 22nd and singles again in early November.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

A notable feeding aggregation was found on the sea club rush in the middle of the site in January peaking with **117** birds counted on January 6th – 16th with 56 still present on February 5th. A much smaller flock of up to 32 birds was again feeding on the sea club rush in November – December.



Greenfinches Area 7 January 2023



Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

A flock of 19 on February 11th was the highest total in the early winter. Autumn typically produced some large flocks with peaks of 100 September 7th and 230 on the 26th before the flock declined.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

In the early year the alders attracted one February 23rd with five March 22nd and three 27th to April 2nd. In the autumn birds passed overhead fairly regularly from July onwards.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

A total of 39 pairs bred in 2023 the highest total since 2015. There were no large autumn flocks with a peak of just 24 in September.

Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret*

Two on January 6th with four September 23rd and one October 1st but other birds passed over in September – November mainly heading south.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Two flew south on October 6th.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

One on January 6th and two May 6th with one December 11th were the only records.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

A total of 25 territories in the new reedbed hinted at an ongoing decline in this species on the Flats but up to 40 were counted in the autumn.



Reed Bunting inundation area December 1st 2023

Butterflies:

It was another dismal year for butterflies on the Flats, with the very odd exception, with formerly common species like Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock being in particularly low numbers while there were also very few Common Blue's another species that formerly occurred in good numbers on the grassed embankments.

Extreme dates for all butterfly species recorded at Alkborough Flats 2007 - 2023

	Earliest date	Latest Date
Small Skipper	June 21 st	August 3 rd
Essex Skipper	July 8 th	August 3 rd
Large Skipper	May 29 th	July 15 th
Clouded Yellow		
Brimstone	March 17 th	June 13 th
Large White	June 21 st	September 29 th
Small White	April 8 th	October 11 th
Green-veined White	March 23 rd	October
Orange-tip	April 15 th	June 16 th
Purple Hairstreak	August 7 th	August 7 th
Small Copper	May 10 th	October 8 th
Brown Argus	May 26 th	September
Common Blue	May 20 th	September 20 th
Holly Blue	April 24 th	August 28 th
Red Admiral	March 22 nd	November 12 th
Painted Lady	May 19 th	October
Small Tortoiseshell	March 2 nd	October
Peacock	March 18 th	November 22 nd
Comma	March 18 th	October 23 rd
Speckled Wood	April 14 th	October 6 th
Wall Brown	April 27 th	September 22 nd
Marbled White	July 18 th	July 25 th
Gatekeeper	July 4 th	August 3 rd
Meadow Brown	June 9 th	August 3 rd
Ringlet	June 18 th	July 23 rd
Small Heath	May 15 th	July 6 th



Male Brimstone April 8th 2023

Notable records, positive and negative, were as follows:

Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*

The first four located on July 14th but a maximum of just 12 on the 25th was very disappointing.



Essex Skipper July 14th 2023



Large Skipper *Ochlodes venata*

A maximum of just two on June 18th was abysmal.

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

First April 3rd but maximum of just three April 8th.

Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

A peak of just three in May.

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Just three July 25th and three October 9th.



Small Copper July 25th 2023

Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*

No records.

Common Blue *Polymmatas icarus*

Maximum of just four June 17th.

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

One of the species that had a good year with a peak of five on the outer Flats on August 9th and a run of records in the early autumn.



Holly Blue on outer Flats August 6th 2023

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

A peak of only eight on October 12th with a late individual on November 7th.

Painted Lady *Vanessa (Cynthia) cardui*

Just two records all year one May 16th and one July 25th.



Painted Lady July 25th 2023

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

A maximum of just six on July 25th.

Peacock *Inachis io*

First March 18th but a dismal emergence with a peak of just 20 on August 6th.

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

First not until April 24th and very few records.

Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*

Peak of just two on May 20th.



Wall Brown August 16th 2023

Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*

Decent totals of 40 July 11th and 25th.

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

A reasonable year for this species though in lower numbers than many recent years; peaks of 30 June 17th and 50 on 21st.



Meadow Browns June 22nd 2023

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

A good count of 58 on June 21st.



Ringlet June 17th 2023

Odonata:

It was another generally poor year for most odes on the Flats with odd exceptions.

Interesting records:

Common Spreadwing *Lestes sponsa* (Emerald Damselfly)

After a number of years with only the odd record up to five males were located on the Humber – Trent embankment by the Trent hide from July 30th to August 8th suggesting that the species is breeding in the newly established areas of sea club rush in field 6E.



Male Common Spreadwing August 9th 2023



Western Willow Spreadwing *Lestes viridis* (Willow Emerald Damselfly)

An early emergent was found on July 9th with one or two on a few dates to August 6th.



Western Willow Spreadwing July 25th 2023

Common Bluetail *Ischnura elegans* (Blue-tailed Damselfly)

After the first on May 6th a count of 120+ on the New Reedbed on May 23rd.

Azure Bluet *Ceriagrion puella* (Azure Damselfly)

At least 40 on May 22nd with a high count of 300+ on the New Reedbed on May 23rd.

Small Red-eye *Erythromma viridulum* (Small Red-eyed Damselfly)

The first was seen July 25th with 20+ on August 13th.

Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

This species hangs on with two May 20th and at least ten on the 23rd.



Large Red Damselfly May 23rd 2023

Moorland Hawker *Aeshna juncea* (Common Hawker)

A male by the Oak strip on August 6th continued the annual run of records of this vagrant to the Flats.

Hairy Hawker *Brachytron pratense* (Hairy Dragonfly)

At least ten around the New Reedbed May 23rd was the only notable count.



Hairy Hawker May 25th 2023



Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*

Only one record on May 26th.

Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*

After the drought of 2022 that affected their main breeding pools early in the season Ruddy Darters were expected to have been badly affected but there was a notable emergence in 2023; at least 40 teneral were on the wing on June 11th with 60+ on July 11th then 100+ 14th and 120+ 25th.



Male Ruddy Darter June 22nd 2023



Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

At least 1000 counted in late September with five still on the wing on November 1st and two on the 7th.

Other insects of note:

Roesel's bush-cricket *Roeseliana roeselii*

A minimum of 30 located on August 6th. This species had not previously been recorded from the Flats but could have been overlooked.



Roesel's bush-cricket August 6th 2023



Long-winged conehead *Conocephalus discolor*
At least three on August 6th



Long-winged conehead August 2023



Blackening Waxcap November 2023

Mammals:

The usual regular species were recorded with several Roe fawns seen during the spring and several sightings of Muntjac. Two earths of Red Fox and the usual Badger sets were present and Otters were seen in a number of areas with a female and cub on the frozen Area 4 pool on December 1st. The odd Brown Hare was also seen and there were a number of sightings of Weasel and Noctule Bats in the autumn.



Otters December 1st 2023





Roe Deer 2023





Bee Orchid New Reedbed June 2023 – 85 spikes were located in June 2023



Pyramidal Orchid New Reedbed June 2023 – at least seven spikes were found

Graham Catley
January 2024