

1996 Highlights (in no particular order)

A female Smew (*Mergus albellus*) was present on Melchett Mere (a smaller mere situated between the main Mere and the Hall) until well into April.

A good year for Goosanders (*Mergus merganser*) with many records: on the 18th February a male was actively enjoying the company of 3 females!

Knutsford Moor held a very elusive Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) for 4 weeks during January and February.

19th. March - first Summer migrants, 7 Sand Martins (*Riparia riparia*), despite the cool spring other visitors all arrived earlier than usual. Chiffchaff (*phylloscopus collybita*) 23rd March, Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) 29th March, House martin (*Delichon urbica*) 10th April, Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilis*) 11th April, Common Sandpiper (*Tringa hypoleucos*) 12th April, Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), Swift (*Apus apus*) and Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) all on 15th April. A male of the continental race of Yellow Wagtail - the Blue-Headed - (*M.f.flava*) was present from 16th to 18th April.

2 Fieldfares (*Turdus pilaris*) flew east on 18th April, the final record, on the same day Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) and Blackcaps (*Sylvia atricapilla*) were both singing on The Moor. Common Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) returned on 27th April, the day after the last of the Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) had left for the North. Species on passage included Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*), Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*), Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*) and Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisea*). Of the breeding species Blackcaps and Whitethroats seemed to do well and two pairs of Lesser-Spotted Woodpeckers (*Dendrocopus minor*) were on territory. For the first time in more than 30 years Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) successfully bred, as their slow rehabilitation continues.

Tatton is not a good Wader site, so we were pleased to see a Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) on 8th July, this was species 191. This total rose to 192 shortly after with 2 Ravens on 21/9, they remained with us until mid-October. Sand Martins were seen up to 21/9 and Swallows were still in evidence up to 12/10 when four were seen over the Mere. A single Fieldfare on 21/9 was two days earlier than the previous record set in 1989, Redwing came later, one on 13/10 being the first of the Autumn. A very late Swift over the Mere on 26/9 came close to the all-time record (01/10/77), but a Jack Snipe on 2/10 did better the old record by a considerable margin. A juvenile Black Tern arrived on 29/9 and was present up to 6/10.

The bird of the Month for October was a Long-tailed Duck found on Melchett Mere on 01/10, it was seen by only one lucky observer and remained for 10 minutes before being flushed by a boat - only the second record.

Buzzard numbers continue to rise with no less than 15 being seen in the air simultaneously in early October! Also of interest during the month were 2 Ravens that suddenly appeared, remaining in the park

until the end of the year and a Wheater, last seen on the 17th. the latest date for this Summer visitor.

The first Brambling of the Autumn was heard calling on the 26th. October with further evidence of the onset of Winter early in November when a skein of Pink-footed geese flew west on the 1st. followed by the first large-scale Thrush movement on 3/11, c.200 Fieldfare and c.100 Redwings being counted. c.60 Redpolls were seen on 17/11 and a Bar-tailed Godwit on the 23rd was only the second record for Tatton. At the end of the month 6 Water Rails were in residence on Knutsford Moor, where the Corn Bunting roost reached 18 on the 27th.

December started mildly but by the end of the month the Mere was nearly completely frozen over as the much-hyped "Arctic" conditions continued. All three species of Woodpecker were seen regularly, the Starling roost peaked at 2000, attracting 3 Sparrowhawks and even a Peregrine on one occasion. A Red-breasted Merganser arrived on Christmas Eve and a Brent Goose over the Moor on the 27th. gave us yet another new species. The year ended well with 130 Pink-feet flying south-east on the 29th. and on the sameday a female Scaup was picked out by the County Recorder - an equally rare visitor! This brought the species count to 130 for the year.

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