

Rostherne Mere Quarterly Review Jan-Mar 2020

As I sit here writing the Quarterly Review we have just finished the first week in lockdown due to a Coronavirus which causes the respiratory disease COVID-19. However, we did almost get to the end of Mar before the lockdown was implemented and this report represents the birdwatching highlights between Jan and Mar. A total of 89 species were recorded during the first three months of 2020 and a big thanks to everyone who has contributed with records and photos. I hope it is not too long before we can return to savour the beauty and tranquillity of this special place.

January



Blue Tit, photo by John Hancock

Up to 20 Blue Tits visited the Bird Table in front of the Observatory throughout the month suggesting that 2019 was a good breeding year for the species. In addition, Malcolm managed to ring 22 near the Bittern Hide on the 1st and only three were retrapped birds. Up to six Bullfinch were also seen feeding on the table. Waterfowl records documented the return of two Mute Swans, presumably our resident pair and occasionally a pair of noisy Egyptian Geese with conservative numbers of Canada and Greylag Geese. Goldeneyes and Goosanders were seen on most days with 20 Goldeneyes (four males, 16 females) on the 12th and 10 Goosanders including seven males on the 28th. Twenty Mandarin Ducks flew into roost on the 8th and 21 Great Crested Grebes were recorded on the 12th. A Little Grebe was first heard trilling on the 23rd and three were seen on two days during the month. Several Cormorants started nest building and a Little Egret flew over on the 28th. Numbers of wintering duck species peaked in Jan with 110 Wigeon and 118 Teal recorded. Up to three Water Rail were often heard calling from the reed beds near the Bittern Hide. Wader sightings included around 100 Lapwings over Gale Bog, seven Snipe and one Jack Snipe in 'the triangle' at the foot of Long Pasture and a Woodcock which flew out of the Snipe Marsh on the 29th. The highlights in the gull roost were two sightings of an adult Caspian Gull and seven reports of Yellow-legged Gulls with two seen on the 20th. Seven Buzzards were reported circling on the 12th. Three Kestrels were observed defending the dead Alder nest site from four Carrion Crows. A Peregrine provided spectacular views as it was seen hunting over the Reserve on six days, on one occasion it was harried by two Sparrowhawks. Barn Owls were frequently seen with two, one in each of the Mere Field and Penny Croft boxes on the last day of the month. A Little Owl was heard calling from Shaw Green Farm on one evening, the only record for the quarter, and two Tawny Owls were calling from the Split Limes during the evening of the 15th. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were heard

drumming from three different locations on the 31st while a Kingfisher was seen on only two days. Over 150 Redwing were in Mere Meadow on the 12th. A flock of 135 Fieldfare and nine Mistle Thrushes were seen feeding on the Sprout Field on the 18th. Cetti's Warblers were heard singing from the Boathouse and the Bittern Hide. Finally, the reed beds around Shaw Green Willows were not flattened by the winter Starling roost as they have been in previous years. Subsequently observers were treated to murmurations of between 5,000 to 10,000 birds which were still roosting in the beds throughout the month.

February

If Jan was wet then Feb was even wetter, in fact the wettest on record for the UK. Much of the Reserve was inaccessible due to flooding but the month still provided some good records.



Flooding in the Snipe Marsh, photo by Sheelagh Halsey

Single Oystercatchers flew over the Mere on two days and up to five Snipe flew from 'the triangle' at the foot of Long Pasture on several occasions. Goosanders were seen almost daily and peaked at 11 on the 6th. Three Shelducks dropped in on the 12th and two were seen flying over the Mere on the 24th. Around 470 Lesser Black-backed Gulls were counted in the gull roost and a pair of Great Black-backed

Gulls often visited during evening vigils. An adult Mediterranean Gull was seen on two evenings and single Yellow-legged Gulls on three dates. A Great White Egret visited Dolls Meadow on the 25th and a Little Egret was recorded on the 12th. A pair of Kestrels were seen mating near the previous nest site in the dead Alder on the 16th. It was a good month for Barn Owl activity with three, one in each of the Brook Meadow, Mere Field and Penny Croft boxes reported and two seen in the Mere Field box. One even flew out of the Boathouse on several dates. A Green Woodpecker was seen in Mere Field on the 8th, the only record for the quarter. However, encouragingly a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was heard calling in Wood Bongs during the same week. A Meadow Pipit flew past the Observatory on the 12th and eight Skylarks were singing over Church Field on the 26th. Up to four Song Thrushes were often heard singing around the Reserve, near Rostherne House, Wood Bongs, Old Hall Wood and near the Boathouse. It had been a poor winter for Siskin sightings but around 50 were seen

moving between the Alders in front of the Observatory on the 16th. Cetti's Warblers were heard singing from the Boathouse and the Bittern Hide.

March

Numbers of waterfowl remained low throughout the month with the exception of Cormorants who's numbers increased as they busily constructed their nests. There were 54



Looking south from Dolls Meadow, photo by Phil Dell

nests completed by the 12th. A skein of Pink-footed Geese was heard flying over on the 23rd, the only record of the species in the quarter. Up to two Curlew and three Oystercatchers were heard calling over on several days. Up to two Mediterranean Gulls and single Yellow-legged Gulls were spotted in the gull roost. A pair of Sparrowhawks were seen displaying on the 9th. Two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were recorded on the 13th and a Kingfisher was seen on two

dates. A pair of Stock Doves took up residence in the Mere Meadow Barn Owl box and four were seen fighting over the Brook Meadow box on the last day of the month. A rare sighting was of a Firecrest reported in front of the Observatory on the 8th. The first Chiffchaff was heard on the 17th with three singing on the 19th. Malcolm Calvert managed to catch the Cetti's Warbler near the Bittern Hide and confirmed that it was a male ringed in Oct last year. Interestingly, Malcolm also caught a senior female Dunnock with a brood patch which was ringed in Sep 2011!



Male Goosander and Great Crested Grebes, photos by Sheelagh Halsey



Great White Egret, photo by Bill Bellamy



Barn Owl in the Mere Field Box, photo by John Hancock



Female Bullfinch, photo by Jules Hill and Nuthatch, photo by Rob Wang



Flooding of the boardwalk in Shaw Green Willows, photo by Sheelagh Halsey



Near Miss!

A large Sycamore fell close to the Dave Clarke Memorial Hide after Storm Ciara and Dennis, photo by Bill Bellamy