

Stocker's Lake Bird Report 2013

I have decided to refresh the appearance of our annual bird report and to move away from the month-by-month summary that has been used up until now. This will enable me to highlight certain species and to request information for those that are being overlooked.

Greylag Goose – regular visitor and annual breeder. One pair bred and 7 goslings were seen on April 19.

Canada Goose – very common resident and breeder. The only count was of at least 50 on Dec 17.

Egyptian Goose – an increasingly common resident and breeder. A pair bred at Stocker's Farm and hatched 8 goslings on May 22, but all but one were predated (presumably by gulls or foxes) by the end of the month - this youngster was still present in July. Surprisingly no more than 2 adults were seen together during the year.

Eurasian Wigeon – a fairly common winter visitor. Numbers were low in January due to the cold weather, but 45 had returned by Feb 12, rising to 62 by the end of the month, with similar numbers in March. The last bird of the spring was of 10 on Apr 9. The first returnee was back by September 1, rising to 17 on 23. Subsequent peaks were: 30 in October, and 25 in December.

Common Teal – a winter visitor in small numbers. Up to eight in January and February, increasing to 14 in March, with the last bird of the spring on Apr 26. There were no reports in the second winter period.

Pintail – a scarce autumn and winter visitor. Just two on September 22 was the only record of the year.

Shoveler – a fairly common winter visitor. There were few reports this year, with the highest count being at least 50 on February 15 and up to 17 at nearby Stocker's Farm flood in March.

Red-crested Pochard – a well-established and colourful resident. Present throughout the year with up to 8 in February, 7 in March, 3 in April. A pair with 3 young was seen on May 17 and 29, but not subsequently – probably the first time that they have bred at Stocker's. Numbers peaked at the end of the year with peaks of 11 in October, 18 in November and 12 in December.

Common Pochard – a fairly common resident. The only report was of a count 45 on November 7.

Common Goldeneye – a fairly common winter visitor. There were up to 20 in January and February, but then just 3 in March, then strangely rather more in April with a peak count of 8 on April 14 with the last bird of the spring on April 28. The first autumn returnee was on November 2, with numbers building up to 15 by the end of the month, with a similar peak in December.

Smew – a scarce winter visitor in small numbers. This most attractive and much sought after duck again put in an appearance around the lake this year. A drake was seen on many dates in January and was then joined by a second drake on

February 7, which remained until 16, with the last bird being seen the next day. There were no reports at the end of the year.

Goosander – a scarce and declining winter visitor. Another attractive visitor to Stocker's, up to 3 birds (including 2 beautiful drakes) were present in January and February, with the last bird being seen on March 3. A drake returned on December 9, but was only seen on 2 other dates as it mostly spent its time on nearby Inns Lake.

Pheasant – uncommon resident. Just 2 males reported on Dec 25 (Christmas fare?) was the only record.

Little Grebe – unpredictable visitor. Although breeding nearby this tends to be a scarce autumn and winter visitor; the only records were: 1 on September 23 and 2 on October 18.

Cormorant – all year round resident. This ever-present piscivore did not breed this year; the only counts were 20 on February 6 and 3 on May 18.

Bittern – very scarce winter visitor. One from January 22 to 27. The arrival of this very popular and much-watched bird along the River Colne coincided with the coldest spell of the winter, as temperatures plummeted to -10C; it was clearly frozen out from its normal haunts.

Little Egret – fairly common resident and scarce breeder. The peak roost count at the start of the year was 20 on February 22, by mid-April they were starting to associate with Grey Herons around the islands. The first evidence of successful breeding was on July 7 when juveniles were first seen; the number of pairs was unknown but certainly involved more than one and at least 3 juveniles were successfully reared. The peak roost counts towards the end of the year were: 15 on December 10 and 19 on 27.

Red Kite – fairly common resident. The transformation in the status of this fabulous raptor is remarkable. It is now seen very regularly from the reserve and occasionally over it. There were frequent sightings during the year.

Marsh Harrier – scarce passage migrant. A male was seen from the Tern hide on Mar 26, this was the only record this year.

Common Buzzard – fairly common resident. Like the Red Kite this raptor has also become significantly commoner. There were occasional sightings over the reserve.

Osprey – scarce passage migrant. A northbound bird was seen on May 15; in the autumn the long-staying bird at nearby Maple Lodge NR was seen over the lake on October 21 & 24.

Kestrel – scarce local resident. Sadly, this raptor has become a much less frequent visitor to the lake since the demise of the nest-box near the Kingfisher hide. There were only two reported sightings this year.

Hobby – scarce summer visitor. There were sightings on May 10, 2 on May 17, 1 on May 24 and 27 and one on July 7. Not perhaps as regular as it has been in previous years.

Peregrine Falcon – rare visitor. One on February 28 was the only sighting.

Water Rail – uncommon winter visitor, more often heard than seen. Single birds

were seen on 3 dates in January, two dates in February, one in March, with the last sightings being on the late dates of April 12 and 20; the first returning birds were on November 2, with another on December 22.

Lapwing – regular visitor throughout the year, scarce breeder. Peak counts at the start of the year were: 30 on January 31, 59 on February 28 and 41 on March 9. A pair managed to breed at nearby Stocker's Farm and did hatch at least 3 chicks, but they may not have survived the depredations of Carrion Crows and foxes. The highest counts at the end of the year were 25 on November 30 and 64 on December 31.

Oystercatcher – occasional visitor and possible breeder. The first bird returned on February 16, and then 2 by March 5 and 3 on March 30, up to 2 birds were seen in April and May. Singles were seen on June 10, July 10 and the last one on July 9. They may have bred nearby.

Little Ringed Plover – uncommon passage migrant. Disappointingly there were only three records this year of single birds on April 8, 28 and May 16, all at Stocker's Farm.

Ringed Plover – scarce passage migrant. 2 seen on May 24 and 3 on June 10, both at Stocker's Farm.

Golden Plover – rare winter visitor. Following the demise of the regular wintering flocks at nearby Woodoaks Farm, this has now become a rarity over the lake; the only record was a flock of 20 on February 28.

Dunlin – rare passage migrant. Just two sightings at Stocker's Farm: 1 on February 20 and 1 on March 9.

Common Snipe – rare winter visitor. This species generally only visits the reserve during exceptionally cold weather, as was the case this year when 2 were seen on January 19.

Woodcock – rare winter visitor. Like the above species, this wader is usually only seen during very cold weather, but one seen at dusk on November 19 over the causeway was during a mild spell of weather.

Common Sandpiper – scarce passage migrant. Singles were seen on April 18, 19, 20 and 26, with 2 on May 10.

Green Sandpiper – scarce visitor. One on April 20 at Stocker's Farm was the only record.

Redshank – scarce passage migrant. Singles were seen on March 22, April 3 and then an impressive 6 on April 9 – all at Stocker's Farm.

Black-headed Gull – common resident and breeder. There were at least 31 nests this year on a combination of islands, floating rafts and the fixed raft, many young birds fledged; all birds had left the breeding sites by July 10.

Mediterranean Gull – rare visitor. A 1st-winter bird on February 19 was ringed and had previously been seen in Hemel Hempstead.

Common Gull – regular visitor in small numbers. A count of 20 on February 19 was the highest count.

Lesser Black-backed Gull – common visitor and nearby breeder. Since they started breeding on nearby industrial estates this species is frequently seen

around the reserve.

Great Black-backed Gull – uncommon visitor. 1 on February 11 was the only record.

Black Tern – rare passage migrant. 1 on April 27 was the only record.

Common Tern – regular passage migrant and breeder in small numbers. The first returning birds were 2 on Apr 9, increasing to 6 on by April 24. At least one pair bred successfully, with others attempting to nest. Unfortunately the arrival of breeding Black-headed Gulls has displaced the terns from their favoured breeding sites, so productivity has been significantly reduced. Fortunately the newest 'tern' raft doesn't seem to be so popular with the gulls.

Stock Dove – common year-round resident and breeder. 1 seen leaving a nest-box on Mar 19 was the only record.

Ring-necked Parakeet – common resident. The spread of this noisy and seemingly ever-present parrot continues apace. Peak counts were: 20 in February, September and October.

Cuckoo – increasingly scarce summer visitor. Single birds were seen or heard on Apr 13, 20, 21, 24, May 6, 7, 8 and 31

Little Owl – uncommon resident and breeder. There were regular sightings of up to two birds at Stocker's Farm until April 22 when their nest-box was discovered to have collapsed and was obviously unusable. There were a few sightings in May, but no more until November and December. It seems likely that they were nesting in the nest-box at the time it collapsed and didn't raise any young during the year.

Tawny Owl – uncommon resident. One was hooting from the island near Stocker's House at 16.55hrs on March 19.

Common Swift – summer visitor in small numbers. The first bird was seen on April 28, then 3 on Apr 29, increasing to 10 on May 16, the only other report was of 20 birds on July 10.

Kingfisher – common year-round resident; subject to cold weather fluctuations. At least one pair was resident this year, with a possibility of 2 pairs. They were not known to have bred on the reserve this year, but probably bred nearby.

Great Spotted Woodpecker – common resident and breeder. Commonly seen and heard around the reserve, but no proof of breeding this year.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – very scarce resident. Single birds on January 6 and 11 were the only reports during the year.

Sand Martin – uncommon summer visitor. The only reports were: 1 on April 10, 6 on April 12 and 3 on April 13.

Swallow – common summer visitor and nearby breeder. The first returning migrant was seen on April 10, with 15 by April 12. They bred as usual at nearby Stocker's Farm and a count of at least 50 on August 19 included many juveniles which presumably related to local birds. Subsequent noteworthy counts were 15 on September 23, 19 on October 1 and the last two on October 13.

House Martin – common summer visitor and nearby breeder. The first sighting of the spring was of ten birds on April 12, a flock of at least 20 birds on August 19

included quite a few juveniles, presumably locally bred, the last report of the year was an impressive count of at least 100 on September 17.

Meadow Pipit – scarce passage migrant. 6 on March 29 and 3 on October 10 were the only records.

Yellow Wagtail – scarce summer visitor. Singles were seen on April 20, 21 and 27, the last of the year was on September 17.

Grey Wagtail – scarce visitor, occasional breeder. Now that they have stopped breeding at Stocker's Lock they are only infrequently seen around the lake: 2 on October 19 and 1 on 30 were the only reports..

Black Redstart – very scarce passage migrant. One lucky observer watched 1 on March 29 near Stocker's Farm.

Whinchat – scarce passage migrant. A juvenile in the meadow on September 17.

Northern Wheatear – uncommon passage migrant. Just 2 on April 18, 27 and 1 on April 28, all at Stocker's Farm

Fieldfare – common winter visitor. The highest count at the start of the year were at least 150 on Feb 11, the last bird of the spring was seen on April 10; the first returnee was seen on November 2, with the peak count being 14 on December 17.

Redwing – common winter visitor. The peak first winter was at least 150 on February 11 and the last birds of the spring were 14 on April 9, which included many singing birds; the first of the autumn was 10 on November 23.

Cetti's Warbler – scarce resident. At least 1 bird was present throughout the year, more often heard than seen due to its explosive song usually given from deep within a bush, more than one bird was suspected to be present, but breeding was not proven this year.

Grasshopper Warbler – very scarce passage migrant. 1 on April 20 was singing in the lockkeeper's garden and photographed by one lucky observer.

Sedge Warbler – summer migrant. The first bird arrived on April 15, but no more than 2 were reported subsequently and none were reported after May 24. It is not known if they bred this year.

Reed Warbler – summer migrant and breeder. The first back were seen on April 19, which increased to 4 by May 14. It was presumed to have bred; 1 on August 19 and 2 on September 17 were the last of the year.

Blackcap – common summer visitor and breeder. The first arrivals were 6 singing birds on April 13. At least 8 birds were singing on July 10, so it is likely that at least that number of pairs bred around the lake; the last sightings were: 3 on September 17 and 1 on September 24.

Garden Warbler – summer visitor and breeder. Always a difficult bird to see, the first to be spotted was on April 19, increasing to 4 by May 3 and 5 on May 14; it seems probable that they bred, but the last sighting was on July 30.

Common Whitethroat – summer visitor. The only reports were : 1 on June 3, 2 on July 10 and 1 on September 17.

Wood Warbler – rare passage migrant. A singing bird on April 19 proved to be

very popular - 1 on Apr 19.

Common Chiffchaff – scarce winter visitor, summer migrant and breeder. The first report was of 1 on April 3, increasing to 5 by April 12. There were no further reports until 12 were counted on September 24, followed by 8 on Oct 1, 1 on October 10, November 24 and up to 3 in December.

Siberian Chiffchaff – rare winter visitor. 1 first seen on December 7, was relocated on December 22 and remained until 29 – it was always frequenting the margins of the River Colne.

Willow Warbler – uncommon passage migrant. 1 on April 10 was the first of the year, followed by 1 on 12, 3 on 15 and then 6 on April 19; there were no reports during the autumn.

Goldcrest – uncommon visitor, usually in winter. The lack of any substantial stands of conifers prevents this diminutive bird from staying to breed around the lake, however 1 or 2 birds were seen between January and April, then there were no more reports until 5 on November and 3 on December 12.

Spotted Flycatcher – scarce passage migrant. Two birds on September 4 were the only sightings during the year.\

Pied Flycatcher – rare passage migrant. A cracking male was seen alongside Bury Lake on April 19 by one lucky observer (the same day the Wood Warbler was at Stocker's).

Marsh Tit – rare winter visitor. One seen along the canal side of the reserve on February 5, 7 12 and 21, unfortunately it proved to be very elusive and was only seen by the lucky few.

Nuthatch – uncommon resident, 2 were seen on January 25, then singles on three dates in February, October 31 and November 25; they probably breed in Garretts Wood.

Treecreeper – uncommon resident and breeder. One or two birds were seen around the lake in January, February and March, then less frequently between August and December, it is likely that they bred somewhere around or near the reserve.

Jay – irregular visitor. 2 on March 26 and then 5 on April 22 were the only reports, but clearly it is more regular than these records suggest.

Linnet – uncommon visitor. 1 flew over on September 17.

Bullfinch – uncommon resident. A pair on April 6, 3 on 17 and 1 on 19; the only other report was on November 30. Most sightings were at the Springwell Lake end of the lake and they probably breed nearby.

Greenfinch – Uncommon resident. A pair on April 5 was the only report.

Hawfinch - very rare visitor. A female on March 6 was seen by one fortunate observer, it was almost certainly a migrant.

Goldfinch – fairly common resident. Peak counts were 12 on February 3, 40 on October 17 and 10 on November 26.

Siskin – common winter visitor. This attractive finch tends to frequent the alder trees around the lake. Peak counts were: 40 on January 7, 20 on February 13, with the last 3 of the spring on March 27; the first returning birds were back on

October 26 with the highest counts being 25 on November 2, increasing to 50 by December 7 and then at least 100 by December 26.

Reed Bunting – scarce resident and breeder. The only reports were 2 on February 19, 4 on April 12 and 13, and 1 on May 3.

There were no reports during the year of the following, mostly very common breeding, birds: **Mute Swan, Gadwall, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Sparrowhawk, Moorhen, Coot, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Wren, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow** and **Chaffinch**. All reports on the status of these species would be most welcome.

Escapees

Black Swan – an obvious escapee. At least 16 records during the year, with 4 dates in April and the rest between September and the end of the year.

Snow Goose – an obvious escapee. An adult (from 2012) was seen on Jan 1 and 19.

Cackling Goose – an obvious escapee. This tiny subspecies of Canada Goose was present at Stocker's Farm on Dec 7 and 17 stayed into 2014.

Andrew Moon