

Stocker's Lake Bird Report 2015

There was plenty of interest around the lake this year: Oystercatchers bred successfully again, common terns also had great success this season with at least 15 pairs breeding and little egrets continue to flourish as breeding birds. A pair of smew delighted many early in the year and a male lesser spotted woodpecker also provided great entertainment in the early spring as it adopted an oak tree as a drumming spot. Other noteworthy sightings were the first barn owl and water pipit for many years.

Mute Swan – common breeding resident. As was the case last year, at least two pairs bred, one of these pairs was seen with four cygnets on June 11th. The highest count of the year was 51 on March 14th - an impressive count for this site.

Greylag Goose – regular visitor and annual breeder. At least two broods were seen, but it is not known how many goslings actually fledged. The highest count was of at least 50 birds on January 28th.

Canada Goose – very common resident and breeder. At least two pairs bred (which is surely an under-estimate), but apart from this no other records were submitted.

Egyptian Goose – increasingly common resident and breeder. At least three birds were seen either at the lake or on the seasonal flood at Stocker's Farm during the year. One pair was seen with four goslings initially (although it is not known where they bred), this reduced to two goslings on May 15th, and then just one gosling was seen with the pair on the canal on July 27th. The peak count was ten on March 13th.

Mandarin – very scarce and irregular visitor. A drake was seen on April 10th, but this was the only sighting of the year.

Eurasian Wigeon – fairly common winter visitor. The year started well with 58 on January 13th, this reduced to 20 on March 13th. Rather strangely there were no further records until the autumn when four were seen on October 1st, this was followed by one on November 3rd, rising to 30 by November 22nd, 35 on December 13th and a late winter peak of 50 on December 20th.

Common Teal – winter visitor in small numbers. Disappointingly this was an even poorer year than in 2014. Just two records this year: one on March 6th and two on 7th.

Gadwall – fairly common resident outside the breeding season. Sadly, there were virtually no reports of this species this year, although it is a common resident. Significantly there was a count of 150 birds on Bury Lake on Jan 23rd – many of these birds no doubt use the adjacent Stocker's Lake as well.

Mallard – common resident. No reports this year

Shoveler – fairly common winter visitor. No significant counts this year, but a joint count of Bury Lake and Stocker's Lake produced a count of 50 birds at the start of the year.

Red-crested Pochard – well-established and colourful resident. Virtually a year-round resident of the lake, but there were no reports of breeding this year. The peak counts were: 14 on January 23rd, 12 on February 13th, but no more than six were logged between March and October. Numbers started to build up again in November: a count of 12 on November 9th got the ball rolling and numbers slowly increased to reach an impressive peak of 24 birds (19 drakes) on November 28th, with this flock remaining largely intact until the end of the year. Interestingly at least two gingery individuals were present during the year and presumably reflected some degree of Leucism.

Common Pochard – fairly common resident. Pleasingly a female was seen with a brood of seven ducklings on June 13th, but the eventual outcome was not known. Very few dabbling duck young survive on the lake because of the large number of predators around, especially pike and terrapins. The highest count of the year was 96 on October 2nd.

Tufted Duck - common resident and regular breeder. There were at least two broods on the lake this year, one of which was a female with four ducklings on August 4th – the same comment regarding survival rates for the previous species applies here as well. The highest count of the year was an impressive 199 on December 12th.

Common Goldeneye – fairly common winter visitor. This is one of the more iconic birds that frequents the lake and certainly adds great enjoyment to a walk around the lake in winter. The first winter peaks were: 21 on January 4th, 19 on February 11th, 18 on March 6th, declining to four on April 2nd, with just a pair remaining until April 9th. During the summer a female was seen on June 11th, but no young were seen and no breeding was reported from nearby Springwell Lake. The first returning bird was seen on November 3rd, rising to ten by the end of November, with a final winter peak of nine on December 29th.

Smew – scarce and declining winter visitor in small numbers. After a completely blank year in 2014, there was a slight return to form this year. A splendid pair arrived on January 11th and, although the female promptly disappeared, the drake stayed around until January 16th. It was seen again on January 21st and the same, or another, drake was seen from February 9th until February 14th. There were no sightings at the end of the year, indeed the winter of 2015/2016 was perhaps the poorest one for Smew in this country in living memory.

Goosander – scarce and declining winter visitor. A drake was seen on the lake on January 31st and this was disappointingly the only sighting at the start of the year. The next report was of a female on November 26th, then a smart drake on November 30th (before it was chased off by Coots!). A drake was also sighted on December 12th, 16th, 17th and 22nd. The final sighting of the year was an impressive gathering of five birds (including 4 drakes) at dusk on December 22nd. A very satisfactory conclusion to the year.

Pheasant – uncommon resident. A few birds are resident in the meadow on the Mill End side of the River Colne, but there were no reports this year.

Little Grebe – occasional winter visitor. One on February 26th, then two from

February 28th until March 13th were the only reports of the year.

Great Crested Grebe – a common resident and breeder. There were no reports this year. Although it undoubtedly bred successfully, we have no data available on the number of broods.

Cormorant – all year round resident. There were only three counts this year: seven on January 2nd, 40 on March 12th and 55 on December 22nd. It would appear that at least one pair attempted to breed, but was unsuccessful.

Little Egret – all year round fairly common resident and scarce breeder. This small heron is now a permanent resident throughout the year and a substantial breeding colony is now becoming established. Peak counts during the year were up to two in January and February and ten in March. At least five pairs bred this year, but this figure is probably an under-estimate of the true total and it is not known how many young were fledged. Roost counts were: 17 on October 20th, 18 on December 17th, rising to 48 on Dec 22nd and an incredible total (and Hertfordshire record) of 64 birds on December 24th.

Grey Heron – common resident and breeder. An ever-present sight around the lake from dawn until dusk! The BTO Heronries survey count in April to assess the number of nests reached a total of 23 (down from 27 in 2014), most of which were undoubtedly successful.

Osprey – rare visitor. One on the early date of March 27th.

Red Kite – fairly common resident. Nowadays a regular sight over the reserve, with a peak count of six over Stocker's Farm on March 4th, although at least as many can usually easily be counted from the reserve over Mill End and Rickmansworth.

Sparrowhawk – regular visitor throughout the year. Single sightings on February 26th, December 5th and 31st were the only reports.

Common Buzzard – fairly common resident. Single birds were seen on: February 3rd, 26th, March 8th and November 9th.

Kestrel – scarce local resident. Just four sightings this year: one on January 2nd, a juvenile on July 23rd, August 10th and 11th – a rather disappointing total and compares with 16 sightings in 2014. How nice it would be if a nest-box could be placed around the lake to try and encourage this species back as a regular breeder.

Hobby – scarce summer visitor. The first record of the year was a remarkable sighting of four birds over Stocker's Farm on April 11th. Further sightings (of single birds) followed on: May 20th, May 24th, June 1st, June 6th, 27th, July 7th, 8th, 27th, August 25th, September 2nd and 11th, with the last sighting of the year on September 25th.

Water Rail – uncommon winter visitor, more often heard than seen. Singles were seen on five dates in January, then one on February 6th and March 14th. At the end of the year two were seen on October 3rd, then singles on four dates in November and three dates in December. It seems likely that the wintering population around the lake comprises at least four or five birds, but given their secretive habits, that remains a matter of speculation.

Moorhen – common resident and breeder. A pair with five young was noted on June 20th. This was the only record.

Coot – common resident and breeder. The peak counts were: 410 on January 18th and 557 on December 12th. There was no assessment of the number of pairs breeding.

Lapwing – regular visitor throughout the year, scarce breeder. The lake is often used as a refuge and roost site by birds feeding on nearby farmland. The peak monthly counts were: 66 on January 12th, 71 on February 13th and seven on March 4th. The only sighting between March and November was of three birds on June 22nd. In the late autumn/winter period 26 were counted on November 24th, rising to up to 60 in December. They tend to favour the cleared islands at the Springwell end of the lake as roosting sites during the day.

Oystercatcher – occasional visitor and possible breeder. The first sighting of the year was of two birds on March 4th, with regular sightings after that. One pair bred on one of the islands raising two young which were seen on May 21st, although it is not known if they reached flying stage. The only other sightings were single birds on June 17th and three on July 13th (the latter sighting would suggest that at least one youngster survived). This is the second year running that they have successfully bred on the reserve.

Little Ringed Plover – uncommon passage migrant. Disappointingly one bird at Stocker's Farm on March 21st and 22nd was the only sighting of the year.

Common Snipe – rare winter visitor. All sightings were on the seasonal flood at Stocker's Farm. One on January 14th, then singles on February 2nd and 10th, rising to two from February 14th to March 7th, increasing to three from March 9th to 14th, then four on March 15th, and finally three on March 17th. There were no further sightings. A nice series of sightings of this locally scarce bird.

Redshank – scarce and irregular visitor. One on April 2nd was the only sighting of the year.

Common Sandpiper – scarce passage migrant. Two birds on April 16th on the tern raft at the Aquadrome end of the lake was the only spring record. In the autumn, there were singles on July 14th, August 16th and 17th, but this was then followed by a remarkable count of eight birds again on the tern raft at the Springwell end of the lake on August 24th – probably the highest total ever recorded at Stocker's.

Black-headed Gull – common resident and breeder. At least six pairs bred successfully on the raft opposite the tern hide, but no further reports were forthcoming, but it is likely that more pairs did actually breed. There were no winter counts this year.

Mediterranean Gull – rare visitor. A first-winter bird was present on February 28th.

Common Gull – regular visitor in small numbers. Six on October 3rd and two on November 11th were the only documented sightings

Lesser Black-backed Gull – common visitor and nearby breeder. Although it is a frequent sight around the lake in small numbers, there were only two reports

this year: eight on January 2nd and an impressive pre-roost gathering on December 28th.

Herring Gull – common, all year round visitor. Four on January 2nd was the only report from the start of the year, but a pre-roost count of 43 birds on December 28th was more noteworthy.

Great Black-backed Gull – uncommon visitor. A more regular visitor this year with single birds present on four dates in January, two dates in November and five dates in December.

Common Tern – regular passage migrant and breeder in small numbers. The first sighting of the year was on April 15th, then April 28th, but no more were seen until 13 on May 21st. At least 15 pairs bred on rafts around the reserve this year and at least 21 juveniles were counted on the rafts on July 9th – a very satisfactory breeding season for this attractive bird.

Stock Dove – common year-round resident and breeder. The highest count was of ten birds on March 13th, when many birds could be heard calling.

Disappointingly there were very few reports of this common resident.

Woodpigeon – common resident and breeder. There were no reports this year.

Collared Dove – fairly common nearby, but infrequent visitor to the lake. There were no reports this year.

Ring-necked Parakeet – common resident. This gaudy introduction has now become very much part of the avifauna around the lake and their screeching calls can be heard almost daily! Two pairs were observed at nest-holes on March 10th. The highest counts were 24 on October 16th and 25 on December 13th.

Cuckoo – increasingly scarce summer visitor. A male flew over the reserve on April 19th and the same, or another, was heard calling on May 12th. A disappointing year.

Tawny Owl – scarce breeding resident. One was heard calling from the islands at the Stocker's Farm end of the reserve at 07:15 on March 13th. Another flew over the Stocker's Farm track at 16:45 on December 28th and then started calling from near the canal.

Little Owl – uncommon resident and breeder. All sightings were at Stocker's Farm: one on January 7th, then singles on February 5th and 14th, two on February 18th and 18th and then one on February 20th and 25th. The only summer sighting was on June 23rd. There were no more sightings until September 19th, then single birds were seen on September 27th, two dates in October, four dates in November and just one in December.

Barn Owl – rare visitor. Two late evening sightings at Stocker's Farm were just reward for two very lucky observers on July 27th and August 3rd. The first records from here for many years.

Common Swift – summer visitor in small numbers. Almost ever-present throughout the summer over the lake, but there were surprisingly few reports. The first of the year was on April 28th, then 30 were counted on May 5th and 18th and at least 40 on May 30th. The only other reports were of seven on July 13th and the last one on August 25th.

Kingfisher – common year-round resident; subject to cold weather fluctuations. At least one pair bred again this year – adults were observed carrying fish to a nest-hole, but the eventual outcome was unknown. They are normally multi-brooded, so hopefully they successfully raised several broods.

Green Woodpecker – fairly common resident, most often seen at Stocker's Farm. The only report this year involved an aggressive, presumably territorial, dispute between two females on April 7th along the track to Stocker's Farm. This involved considerable mutual head-swaying and wing stretching whilst the two birds were on a grass verge only a few feet apart. The contest was only ended when a car drove past (sadly an all too frequent event!) and flushed them off.

Great Spotted Woodpecker – common resident and breeder. One of the most familiar sounds around the lake in spring is the drumming of this species and up to three birds could be heard drumming on March 13th. At least one pair bred and the adults could be observed carrying food onto one of the islands adjacent to the causeway.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – very scarce resident. Stocker's Lake proved very popular this year when a male selected a tall oak tree on one of the islands adjacent to the Bury Lake causeway as one of its drumming posts. The first sighting was on March 6th, followed by sightings on March 8th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 22nd, then again on April 3rd, with the last sighting on April 6th. Although it was seldom present for more than about 10-15 minutes it would return at fairly regular intervals during the day, consequently, with perseverance, everyone was able to see this splendid little (House Sparrow-sized) woodpecker.

Sand Martin – uncommon summer visitor. – Just three sightings this year was disappointing: three on March 18th were the first of the year, followed by two on April 4th and then at least 15 on August 25th. Clearly this is not an accurate representation of its true status on the reserve.

Swallow – common summer visitor and nearby breeder. Although frequently seen around the lake, they are more often seen at Stocker's Farm where quite a few pairs breed in the stables and farm buildings. The first spring arrival was at Stocker's Farm on April 3rd, then 15 were at the lake on April 4th, birds were seen collecting mud at the farm on April 12th. The peak count of the year was of 30 over the causeway on August 13th, then 25 on September 3rd over the lake, the last observation of the year was back at the farm where six were seen on September 12th.

House Martin – common summer visitor and nearby breeder. Up to 26 birds were counted at Stocker's Farm on July 20th, then at least 50 on August 22nd (presumably including many juveniles). The last sightings were at the farm: 25 on September 14th, four on September 29th and 11 on October 5th.

Meadow Pipit – scarce passage migrant. After an almost record year in 2014, this was the complete reverse with no reports whatsoever!!

Water Pipit – rare visitor. One at Stocker's Farm on March 21st was an excellent record. The first for many years.

Yellow Wagtail – scarce summer visitor. There were disappointingly no sightings

this year.

Grey Wagtail – scarce visitor, occasional breeder. Just a few rather scattered sightings this year: singles were seen on January 7th, March 7th, then two on March 14th and 17th. In the autumn one was along the River Colne on September 25th and further singles were seen on three dates in October, then one on November 11th.

Pied Wagtail – scarce resident and occasional breeder. One on January 2nd was the only record.

Stonechat – scarce migrant and winter visitor. The pair that were first seen at Stocker's Farm on October 1st 2014 remained in residence until March 6th and proved to be a constant source of delight to local birders as they frequently fed along the track to the farm. Interestingly, three birds were seen on January 8th, but the 'interloper' was not seen again! A male was back at the farm on September 21st and 23rd, perhaps the wintering bird from March, but he was not seen again.

Robin – abundant resident and breeder. A juvenile at Stocker's Farm on May 24th was the only sighting!

Northern Wheatear – uncommon passage migrant. Just two records this year: one at Stocker's Farm on August 26th and another on September 7th.

Dunnock – abundant resident and breeder. There were no reports this year.

House Sparrow – common nearby resident and breeder. A very frequent sight around Stocker's Farm where at least 20 birds live and breed, but are only occasionally seen around the lake.

Fieldfare – common winter visitor. There were some impressive counts at Stocker's Farm early in the year: 45 on March 8th, rising to 100 between March 11th and 15th. The first autumn sightings were all at the lake: five on Nov 12th, soon increasing to 100 by November 22nd. In December there were counts of 75 on December 17th and then the best count of the year, 150 on December 28th. Most of the latter counts were roost counts.

Song Thrush – common resident. No reports this year.

Redwing – common winter visitor. Sightings at the start of the year were all at Stocker's Farm (with Fieldfares): 20 on February 5th, 24 on February 14th, 16 on March 8th, and 20 on March 15th. The first autumn bird was on October 15th, rising to 25 on October 19th. There were just two further sightings before the end of the year, both in November: singles on 5th and 22nd.

Mistle Thrush – fairly common resident. One on January 20th was the only report.

Blackbird – abundant resident and breeder. No counts this year.

Cetti's Warbler – scarce resident. – The first report of the year was of a singing bird on April 7th, but strangely there were no more reports until August 16th, then again on September 14th; subsequently up to two birds were singing intermittently along the causeway and another along the River Colne.

Sedge Warbler – summer migrant. The first arrival was on Apr 11th, followed by two on Apr 16th, 19th, and 28th, rather oddly there were no other reports,

although at least one pair bred

Reed Warbler – summer migrant and breeder. Five on May 24th and two on August 4th were the only reports, despite the fact that 11 pairs bred!!

Blackcap – common summer visitor and breeder. – Two on Apr 1st were the first arrivals, and totals had reached ten birds (8 males) by April 12th and then eight singing on May 24th. A common breeding bird here. The only winter sighting was of one bird on November 12th.

Garden Warbler – summer visitor and breeder. One on April 15th was the first of the spring and there were six singing birds on May 24th.

Common Whitethroat – summer visitor. Disappointingly there were just two sightings this year: one on April 19th and another on September 3rd.

Lesser Whitethroat – scarce passage migrant. No sightings this year.

Common Chiffchaff – scarce winter visitor, summer migrant and breeder. A single on February 8th was presumably a winter visitor, but further birds on March 6th and 12th were presumably summer migrants. An arrival took place on March 20th with four singing birds, increasing to seven by April 8th. There were no further reports until six were counted on August 4th, then one on September 14th.

Willow Warbler – uncommon passage migrant. There were four sightings of single birds this year, all involving migrants: on April 4th, 11th, and 12th and then one on July 6th.

Goldcrest – uncommon visitor, usually in winter. There were a few records this year at the start and end of the year. Singles were seen on March 3th, 9th and 10th. An adult and juvenile on October 1st, singles on November 18th, one on December 2nd, three on 3rd and one on December 15th.

Spotted Flycatcher – scarce passage migrant. One at Stocker's Farm on the typical date of September 17th.

Blue Tit – common resident. There were no reports this year.

Great Tit – common resident. There were no reports this year.

Coal Tit – uncommon visitor. There were no reports this year.

Long-tailed Tit – common visitor, usually outside the summer period. At least 20 birds were present during January and February, then up to ten in December.

Bearded Tit – very rare visitor. One was reported on December 3rd, but no further details were forthcoming.

Nuthatch – uncommon resident. One on March 5th was the only sighting of the year.

Treecreeper – uncommon resident and breeder. Singles were seen on January 27th, February 2nd and 27th and then on July 6th, although there were no reports of breeding this year.

Wren – abundant resident and breeder. Probably one of the commonest small birds around the lake. The highest count was ten in April.

Starling – common resident. A common sight around the reserve, but mostly flying over. The peak count was 300 at the start of the year.

Magpie – common resident and breeder. There were no reports this year.

Jay – irregular visitor. Seen in most months of the year, but most visible in the autumn when they fly around collecting acorns to store for the winter. There were no reports this year.

Jackdaw – common, non-breeding, resident. Often seen over the lake, usually when they fly in to roost. There were some impressive roost counts this year: 500 on January 11th was the highest total in the first winter period. In December a huge count of 1,060 birds was logged on December 12th and then 500 on 28th.

Rook – scarce visitor, although nearby breeder. At least 18 nests were counted in the rookery above Stocker's Farm, but it remains a scarce sight over the reserve.

Carrion Crow – common resident. This opportunistic predator is seldom missed on a walk around the lake. There were no reports this year.

Chaffinch – common resident and breeder. There were no reports this year.

Bullfinch – uncommon resident. Pleasingly, a pair were seen on January 12th and then on three dates in March. The only other sighting was of one bird on October 8th. It seems likely that they breed nearby.

Greenfinch – uncommon resident. There were no reports this year.

Lesser Redpoll – uncommon winter visitor. The only report this year was of a single bird with Siskins on November 20th.

Goldfinch – fairly common resident. A fairly regular sight around the lake, the best count being 60 on January 21st.

Siskin – common winter visitor. There were up to 11 in January and ten in February, with the last sighting being on Feb 25th. A flock of 35 had returned on the early date of September 3rd, then ten on 18th, up to 50 in October and November and an impressive peak of at least 100 birds throughout December.

Reed Bunting – scarce resident and breeder. There were no reports this year.
Escapes:

Black Swan – an obvious escape. The regular bird was only seen on January 2nd and April 2nd

Andrew Moon