

## Alkborough Flats Monthly Wildlife Report September 2011

The arrival of **Pink-footed Geese** was a little later than usual with the first notable flock of 550 birds being seen on the 27<sup>th</sup>; the local **Greylag Geese** meanwhile had been using the Flats regularly during the month with up to 1018 birds present in the evenings when flocks made a fine sight as they came in to roost. Following the sudden arrival of **Canada Geese** in late August their numbers dropped as rapidly with only 64 present on the 1<sup>st</sup> and <30 thereafter. The maximum number of **Shelduck** was just 300 on the 1<sup>st</sup> with high spring tides and autumnal departures keeping numbers below 200 during the rest of the month. The flock of **Ruddy Shelducks** and hybrids continued to visit the site through the month



peaking with eight adult pure birds and the three hybrids from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> after which two adults and the three hybrids stayed through to October. Experts consulted suggest that two of the hybrids are Shelduck / Ruddy Shelduck or back-crosses while the third bird is probably a Cape Shelduck / Ruddy Shelduck hybrid, a complex situation but presumably involving captive original origins. As in recent years **Wigeon** were slow to increase with a peak of 90 birds on 30<sup>th</sup> but as usual **Teal** were often present in large numbers with a maximum of 1480 on 30<sup>th</sup>. As water levels varied during the phases of high spring tides, when



the site was under deep water, and neaps when it was mainly mud so the number of dabbling ducks also varied with a low of 39 **Shoveler** on 19<sup>th</sup> compared to a peak of 123 on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Other wildfowl included 11 **Pintail** on 1<sup>st</sup>, 25 on 4<sup>th</sup>, 12 7<sup>th</sup> and 3 27<sup>th</sup> with **Mallard** peaking at 150 birds and the reedbed pools had three juvenile **Pochard** to 14<sup>th</sup> with one on 19<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> but just one **Tufted Duck** was seen on 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Egrets** peaked at 14 on the 30<sup>th</sup> after a month when 9 – 11 had been the usual count and surprisingly there were no observations of colour-ringed birds. The **Spoonbill** flock declined to 11 on the 1<sup>st</sup> then 8 on 5<sup>th</sup> with 4 by 7<sup>th</sup> and the final two birds finally departed on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The wing-tagged juvenile **Marsh Harrier** from Sheppey in Kent was seen through to the 11<sup>th</sup> and was one of up to 12 different birds occurring around the site. An adult male **Osprey** flew in from the north and attempted to fish on the site on the afternoon of the 3<sup>rd</sup>



before flying off south down the River Trent. One was then reported a couple of days later but it is not clear if it was the same bird. Occasional adult **Hobbies** visited the site with the last sighting being of two hunting the pre-roosting hirundines on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Both juvenile and adult

**Peregrines** were seen during the month sometimes with two birds on the same date: a juvenile on the 3<sup>rd</sup> spent a considerable time mobbing the male Osprey and effectively hindering its attempts to find a meal.

One of the highlights of the month was the return of the **Common Crane** first seen on May 31<sup>st</sup>; it had moved to the Ancholme Valley in June and subsequently spent the summer there moulting into adult plumage before making a return visit to the Flats on the 18<sup>th</sup> when it roosted



overnight. From then to the end of the month it roosted almost nightly in the inundation area and moved out onto nearby fields during the daytime to feed but on the 22<sup>nd</sup> it was back at Bonby and Worlaby Carrs. This flight of 15kms is well within the daily distances birds move to feed and would have taken the bird only about 30 minutes. A particularly vocal individual its resonant calls could be heard from the top of the escarpment to the east as well as across the site where their evocation of wilderness enhanced the quiet of the wetland atmosphere.



An apparent return of **Avocets** to the site produced high counts of 163 on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 114 on the 11<sup>th</sup> after none on the 1<sup>st</sup>; of those on the 11<sup>th</sup> a total of nine were colour-ringed with birds identified to date having fledged in Cleveland, Northumberland and Orfordness in Suffolk an amazing mixture and a demonstration of the post-juvenile dispersal of Avocets that would never be understood without ringing. The last three juvenile **Little Ringed Plovers** were still on the reedbed on 3<sup>rd</sup> while **Ringed Plovers** tended to arrive on high tides peaking with 35 birds mid-month. The high spring tides also brought in exceptional numbers of roosting **Grey Plovers** with 22 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and a new record 37 on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Up to six **Knot** were around in the first two weeks with **Dunlin** also peaking at 74 on the late month spring tides 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>. Scarce waders from the east included 2 -3 juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> and two juvenile **Little Stints** 11<sup>th</sup> with one on the 26<sup>th</sup>. There was an exceptional influx of nearctic waders into Britain and Ireland during September following the passage of hurricanes Katia and Irene; Alkborough Flats had to wait until the 11<sup>th</sup> for its first arrival when a juvenile **Pectoral Sandpiper** made a three hour stop on the inundation area before disappearing to the east never



to be seen again. Two weeks later on the 26<sup>th</sup> an adult **White-rumped Sandpiper** was located in a flock of Dunlin but its residence was even shorter being seen only from 18:15 to 19:10hrs. This was the second record of this nearctic vagrant on the Flats following that seen on November 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 2008. There were impressive numbers of **Ruff** during the month with up to 50 birds on many dates and peaks of 72 recorded on the 11<sup>th</sup> and

60 on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. **Black-tailed Godwit** have had a very poor breeding season in Iceland so the number of birds present was much reduced compared to recent years as Alkborough tends to attract more juveniles than adults. The highest count of the month was 83 birds on the 11<sup>th</sup> with 14 of these being juveniles. The number of **Spotted Redshanks** was exceptional with the 25 recorded during the last week of the month forming a new site record for this long-legged and long-billed tringa wader. By contrast **Redshanks** were rarer with no more than 11 birds seen which meant that they also outnumbered by passage **Greenshank** of which there were 14 on the 10<sup>th</sup>. In a



good year for **Wood Sandpipers** the final bird of the year was present from 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> while the number of **Green Sandpipers** fell to 5 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> with the last on 19<sup>th</sup> the day also seeing the last three **Common Sandpipers** of the autumn. An early **Jack Snipe** was put up on the 27<sup>th</sup> to complete a reasonable autumn wader movement.

One or two **Kingfishers** were feeding around the site and 200 **Swallows** attempted to roost on the 18<sup>th</sup> but the passerine highlight of the month was the number of **Bearded Tits** that were in the reedbeds. It is always difficult to gauge how many birds are lurking in the reeds with their calls being the only indication of their presence



but in some autumns flock erupt from the reeds and fly up calling noisily as they move off to search for new breeding habitats. In a species that has such specific habitat requirements and is subject to high mortality in cold winters this autumnal dispersal is the means by which they colonise new reedbeds that are often many miles from their natal reedbed. Although birds were seen irrupting on a few different days the 27<sup>th</sup> produced the largest numbers with a minimum of 50 birds being counted and probably 70 – 80 being present judging



from calls heard from different parts of the site at the same time. Considering that the species suffered such high mortality in the previous winter this was an amazing event. Other notable passerines were a **Redstart** on the hillside to the east on the 18<sup>th</sup>, the first **Stonechat** of the year, a male on 23<sup>rd</sup>, 4 **Greenland Wheatears** on the 12<sup>th</sup> and a **Spotted Flycatcher** 5<sup>th</sup>.