

Birding Highlights: December 2010 - November 2011

A very interesting ornithological period for Berkshire.

December 2010 was very much a 'wow or a perhaps a 'monster; month. There were up to 7 wintering BITTERNS in the County, a very good number indeed, and THEN we had the INCREDIBLE THREE -GREAT WHITE EGRET, GLOSSY IBIS and DIPPER - all three in the West of the County. These were more than ably supported by two belatedly reported CATTLE EGRETS, both WHOOPER and BEWICK SWANS, 6 species of Geese and 3 species of Sea Duck. HEN HARRIER, SANDERLING, RUFF, ICELAND GULL, TREE SPARROW, MEALY REDPOLL, HAWFINCH and BEARDED TIT almost became also-rans for the month. Incredible numbers of WAXWING arrived during this period too.

January seemed quiet in comparison. Just a RED NECKED GREBE, which briefly visited QMR, whilst WAXWING numbers increased with more than 40 sites recording their appearances during the month.

In February the OYSTERCATCHERS were back- being reported at 4 sites, whilst an AVOCET put in appearance on St Valentines Day- how sweet. Eight TREE SPARROW at Jealots Hill was a return to an old site for them, whilst 3 sites reporting MEALY REDPOLL made for interesting observation.

Two different groups of three BLACK NECKED GREBES were good for March, and fabulous to see those in summer plumage. The observers hoped they would stay, but neither group did. A brief visit by a ROUGH LEGGED BUZZARD and also four OSPREYS during March were fantastic. The RINGED PLOVERS were back at Greenham Common early March, whilst 5 sightings of LESSER SPOTS from 5 different sites gave hope for a reasonable breeding year. SAND MARTINS returned on the 9th March, with the first SWALLOWS and HOUSE MARTINS a week or so later. Two DARTFORD WARBLERS at two of their regular sites at least confirmed survival.

April Fools Day certainly delayed some birders from going to Theale Main Pit, but by the days end most had seen the LEACHES PETREL. Another GREAT WHITE EGRET made a short visit to Lavells for one observer, whilst a COMMON CRANE fly over was another single observer sighting. Four more OSPREYS kept the monthly average up. The third week of April saw very good numbers of HOBBY arrive, whilst RUFF, GREY PLOVER and both GODWITS enlivened the normal wader species. WAXWINGS finally departed Berkshire during April-the last being recorded on the 26th.

The first of a few SPOONBILLS for the year turned up on the 8th May at Lower Farm, whilst bird of the month had to be the ROSEATE TERN at QMR. What a fantastic bird - the first for 27 years, this bird arrived on the 9th May. Breeding OYSTERCATCHERS for the second year running were proven, whilst 18 species of wader visited the county during May.

June started with a drake Garganey on the 1st, then an adult GANNET on the 18th at QMR, whilst the 16th had another SPOONBILL - all were single day visitors. A rufous morph HONEY BUZZARD spent 10 minutes over Dorney Wetlands on the 9th. At the end of June, and for most of July the draining of Berry's Lane Pit did concentrate the local LITTLE RINGED PLOVER population into a feeding group, the 29th June with 22 LRP's -including 16 juveniles - was the highest recorded.

July was a typical July - not too much happening. Two drake COMMON SCOTERS at QMR was one of the few highlights.

August had only the second record of GARGANEY for the year on the 21st at Berrys Lane Pit (an immature), whilst COMMON SCOTER and another OSPREY were in the county

during the month. However, waders did provide some interesting sightings - GREY PLOVER at Theale Main and two KNOT at QMR were joined by a single SANDERLING, with a couple of RUFF and a BLACK-TAILED GODWIT at Slough Sewage Farm. Two WOOD SANDPIPERS at Lea Farm were the first there for 11 years, and the first multiple sighting ever.

A few BLACK TERNS in August, at both QMR and Theale Main were normal, but the 25th September was anything but normal. A flock of at least 50 BLACK TERNS (mostly immatures, but some moulting adults too) arrived at Theale Main Pit, and stayed for most of the day – plus two 1st winter LITTLE GULLS, and even better, two 1st winter KITTIWAKES.

Going back a little to the 12th September, this was a small but very noteworthy period too. On the 12th September, QMR had a young GREY PHALAROPE, then on 13th September, both a PECTORAL SANDPIPER at Crookham Common Pools, and a GREAT SKUA at Theale Main Pit were available whilst the 16th had 3 juvenile SHAGS at QMR, with the next day, also at QMR a MANX SHEARWATER visited. What an incredible month.

The first of October brought a drake FERRUGINOUS DUCK to Dinton Pastures, and indeed it is still there today. Towards the end of October another GLOSSY IBIS turned up at the small Arthur Jacob Reserve for a few days.

November, another incredible month. On the 2nd a GREAT GREY SHRIKE was up on the Ridgway on the Berks /Oxon border, whilst on the 3rd two RUFF were at Hosehill LNR. During the first week or so of November, a few BRENT GEESE were located in the East of the County; they then filtered through to the West. However the 8th November was another significant day. QMR had a juvenile PURPLE SANDPIPER, plus a female COMMON SCOTER, BRENT GOOSE and a SLAVONIAN GREBE, whilst early afternoon Theale Main Pit chipped in with 4 redhead RED BREASTED MERGANSERS. The following day, the 9th, another SLAVONIAN GREBE was located at Theale Main. The 12th November had the first confirmed record of BEARDED TIT at Lavells Lake for that area. However the most incredible record was yet to come. On the 17th November, just a few days ago, at 1138 hrs a GREAT BUSTARD flew North East over QMR - picked up in flight by the best birder in Berkshire - our County Recorder Chris Heard.