

Birding highlights of the last 12 months  
by Ken Moore

December 2011 started with the drake FERRUGINOUS DUCK at Dinton Pastures and the arrival of two juvenile GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS at Queen Mother Reservoir.

The usual flurry of December CASPIAN GULLS at QMR were noted, whilst single GLAUCOUS GULL and ICELAND GULL became regular visitors into the first quarter of the New Year.

The only MEALY REDPOLLS of the Review period were at Padworth Common ,three on the 31st December.

A brief visit by 4 BEWICKS to Dorney Wetlands on January 2nd was matched by a single WHOOPER SWAN flying over Lower Farm GP in February.

Mid January, the Dinton drake FERRUGINOUS DUCK, or another, turned up at Woolhampton, stayed on and of, until the 12th February, and then reappeared at Bray GP on the 16th.

Remenham with just a single TREE SPARROW was the only site this year to record this species, what a shame....Let us all hope that the reason is insufficient observer coverage and nothing else.

BITTERN were not very evident this year, the busiest period was February with perhaps 5 individuals at 3 sites.

However SMEW counts culminated in February with at least 32 individuals at five distinct sites-the best figures since the Eighties.

An overwintering MARSH HARRIER in the East of the County was the first overwintering MARSH HARRIER since the 19th Century.

Two BEARDED TITS were regular at Dorney Wetlands , but 5 on one mid-February date was exceptional.

February with the Siberian Chiffchaffs at Eton Wick which were in both Berkshire and Bucks, were very educational and that followed up by Chris Heard's article in the latest County Report completed everybody's learning curve.

A CATTLE EGRET at Hosehill on the 20th March , and stayed in the local area until early April , maybe only the fourth recent record.

Another BRENT GOOSE arrived in March, this time at Summerleaze, that's three so far in 2012 , with more to come.

The drake COMMON SCOTER which turned up at Padworth Lane Gravel Pits in the middle of March and stayed for a month , narrowly missed becoming the longest staying Berkshire Common Scoter. But what a strange place for a Scoter .

Again in March, Tilehurst become Berkshire's centre for OSPREY - two flew over -and now Richard Crawford has no fish left in his pond.

March was also good for waders, no less than 20 wader species passed through. A few LITTLE GULLS and MED GULLS, with an early SANDWICH TERN were all pointers in March for the next few months, and were augmented by regular BLACK and ARCTIC TERNS - even a LITTLE TERN .

The wettest April for many a year did not deter the arrival date of summer migrants, but the quantity later in May seemed much reduced.

A GREAT GREY SHRIKE visited for 2 days, its second day being April Fool's Day-not quite the same as last year's April Fool's day when the LEACHES PETREL turned up.

May, for a few fortunate observers, saw the movement through our County's airspace of 3 COMMON CRANES on the 5th- undoubtedly one of Birding highlights of the year, they were visibly tracked through Berks and headed off to the North East.

A single PINK-FOOTED GOOSE was at Borough Marsh, whilst 2 parties of COMMON SCOTER also graced the county in May. A REDFOOTED FALCON probably entered Berkshire, after spending a lot of its time in Bucks at Dorney Wetlands, whilst two more brief OSPREYS certainly did.

As we all know, a lot of being successful in finding good birds, is being in the right place at the right time. It seems that Mike McKee has got the knack. LAST YEAR on the 9th May Mike located the first Berkshire record of ROSEATE TERN for a generation at QMR, this year he found another. SAME place, SAME date - What are the chances of that??

Without question, the bird of the month in June was a GREAT BUSTARD-not a fly over-but one settled up on the Downs-wing-tagged Black 17.

However, when we say that it was in a stony set-aside area, already occupied by Stone Curlews, we hope that everybody will understand why the news was not made very public.

July star-birds were few and far between, an early MERLIN, a remaining SHORT EARED OWL, a single GARGANEY and a single GRASSHOPPER WARBLER were the contenders.

August was interesting- 4 reported MARSH HARRIERS, singing QUAIL, but a small flock of 10 KNOT at QMR, two RUFF, the first WOOD SANDPIPER of the year and four TURNSTONES helped too.

For one Berkshire birder, the WRYNECK, found by Fraser at the edge of the Car Park field at Lavells,was his first for BERKSHIRE- it had only taken 30 years.

Deja vu, MANX SHEARWATER - the second in just a couple of years - QMR again, this time in September. On September 18th , a PECTORAL SANDPIPER was in a flooded field at Eton Wick, closely followed by a LITTLE STINT later in the month in the same flooded field. However QMR with two LONG TAILED SKUAS as well as the MANXIE took the September honours.

October delighted with some good birds, a RICHARDS PIPIT on the 9th in Colnbrook, ringtail HEN HARRIER and a claimed YELLOW BROWED WARBLER on Ascot Heath. Two ROCK PIPITS at QMR. BLACK REDSTART in Caversham Park, a first winter KITTIWAKE at Theale Main , and finally on the 29thOctober two WHITE FRONTED GEESE at Hosehill. For a truly spectacular bird, the male LADY AMHERSTS PHEASANT located in Woodley wins the prize-who could have lost such a beautiful bird-AND where did it go?

To date ,this month has produced both WATER PIPIT and SANDERLING at QMR , with additional ROCK PIPIT there too , whilst a moulting adult GREAT NORTHERN DIVER at Theale Main has brightened many observers dull days. The first BITTERN of the second winter period at Lavells Lake,Dinton Pastures is about on time, whilst reports of WAXWING near to the BUCKS/BERKS border indicates that Berkshire records are only a matter of time.

Keep a look out!