

Berkshire Birding highlights of the past 12 months.

by Ken Moore, 19th November 2013

December 2012 produced seemingly the most popular birds in County history - BUFF BELLIED PIPITS -The first arriving on the 13th, the second on The 26th- both at QMR. Both found by Mike Mckee. They stayed on into January and we raised over £2,000 for club funds.

Also at QMR were a RED-THROATED DIVER , a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER , a first winter RED-NECKED GREBE and a LONG-TAILED DUCK.

13 RUFF at Borough Marsh together, brought back memories for some.

The first WAXWINGS of a small irruption appeared, building up in January and February.

January 2013 brought the third Diver species - a BLACK THROATED DIVER on the 13th again at QMR. QMR managed more Jan records with a fly through HEN HARRIER and a first winter ICELAND GULL.

Approx 200 PINK FOOTED GEESE over Woodley on the 2nd January was a super record.

However, perhaps the event of the YEAR was at Moor Green a PALLAS' WARBLER, the first for the County and a rare inland record.

February's Main Events were 2 WHOOPER SWANS & a single PINK FOOTED GOOSE in Mid Berks, and small groups of WHITE FRONTED GEESE in the East.

March. Two drake GARGANEY ,and much later in the month 4 MARSH HARRIERS were recorded. Up to 4 AVOCETS at different sites, and a STONE CURLEW on a landfill site in Colnbrook, OYSTERCATCHERS were back at their breeding sites too.

Two counts of over 100 SNIPE in late March at Borough Marsh were rare sites these days.

APRIL produced another SUPERB bird: a fabulous summer adult BONAPARTES GULL picked out by Chris Heard among the gulls at Theale. He went on that day to find a DOTTEREL on the Downs. A brief visit by another or the previous RED THROATED DIVER to QMR on the 27th. The first MONTAGU'S HARRIER of the year flew by Hampstead Norreys. Two OSPREYS were seen during the month, and there was a PIED FLYCATCHER at Dinton Pastures. And the Pallas's Warbler was still at Moor Green, singing its heart out.

MAY's sightings at QMR included RED THROATED DIVER, Berkshire's first May record of this species, an adult LONG TAILED SKUA for a 17 minute visit on the 24th, only the 8th County Record, and two more ROSEATE TERNS, which seem to be turning into annual visitors.

JUNE – confirmed that TURTLE DOVE really are having a hard time- only 3 sites recording arrivals. Whilst another ROSEATE TERN, again at QMR, being the highlight.

JULY- the long staying MARSH HARRIER at Moor Green Lakes stayed until at least the middle of the month. Four COMMON SCOTER were on Theale Main Pit briefly early in the month. WOOD SANDPIPERS at Slough SF and Moor Green marked the start of the autumn migration.

AUGUST – a noteworthy group of 27 Stone Curlew up on the Downs (followed up by 33 in September). A PECTORAL SANDPIPER, this time for only 3 days, again at Eton Wick.

One of Berkshire's largest flocks of TURNSTONES, a total of 21, circled QMR three times, and flew off West. Whilst brief visits by a BONXIE on the 24th, and an adult SABINES GULL on the 27th completed QMR'S log.

SEPTEMBER looked to be getting into the swing of Autumn. A GREAT WHITE EGRET over LEA FARM, on the morning of the 5th, headed towards the N.E. corner, but kept going, never to be seen again. The first MERLIN of the autumn were seen at Moor Green and at Theale. And a CURLEW SANDPIPER at QMR topped the waders.

Greenham Common had a good month with a RED BACKED SHRIKE on the 20th, only the seventh in the past 35 years or so, a WRYNECK and a BLACK REDSTART on the 29th.

Incredibly another RED BACKED SHRIKE was seen in Colnbrook in East Berks, 2 days later.

OCTOBER started off with a YELLOW BROWED WARBLER on the 6th at Dinton Pastures; it or another was seen well on the 17th. A MEALY REDPOLL was caught & ringed at Padworth Common, a popular site for ringers and Redpoll, on the 19th. A GREAT WHITE EGRET flew over Lower Farm GP and at the end of the month a GREAT GREY SHRIKE visited Streatley Warren.

NOVEMBER has begun with two Shags at QMR on the 5th and another GREAT WHITE EGRET, this time at Heron Lake, Wraysbury on the 9th. Finally on the 10th of November a flock of 7 WHOOPER SWANS flew past Lea Farm.