

Birding highlights of 2015 compiled by Ken Moore

Ornithologically, 2015 has, up to the date of the AGM, been one of the least eventful in Berkshire for many-a-year. Currently, the leader in the annual Berkshire Year Listing is the BOC's world traveller, Roger Stansfield, has recorded 164 species in the county - at least 20 species below par for the past few years.

Back 12 months to **December 2014** - what did December bring to the table - RAVENS everywhere, but also 2 WHOOPER SWANS at Moor Green Lakes on the 10th December, a long-staying drake RING NECKED DUCK found on the 23rd December at Bray GPs, a long staying GREAT WHITE EGRET at Lower Farm GP and three BEWICK SWANS on December 28th at Lea Farm.

January 2015-the 2nd brought the first GREAT NORTHERN DIVER of the period, at Theale Main Pit, followed by a BLACK-NECKED GREBE two days later at Searles Farm Lane GP. Information from QMR was limited overall during the Review Period, however January was notable for both COMMON SCOTER and BLACK REDSTART. A drake SCAUP was reported on January 18th, and twice more subsequently from Moor Green Lakes, whilst a BITTERN was seen regularly at Dinton Pastures, also from the 18th.

In early **February** there was a single BITTERN was at the Moatlands Car Park Pit, Theale and little else to report.

On to **March** - a male RING OUZEL was at QMR for a day in Mid-March; there was a GREAT GREY SHRIKE on the Downs near West Ilsey and a ROCK PIPIT at QMR towards the end of the month.

April started with a GARGANEY at Burnthouse Lane on the 2nd, then on the 3rd two SANDWICH TERN visited Theale Main Pit, whilst another (or perhaps the same) GARGANEY appeared at Fobney Island on the 4th, staying for a few days. QMR recorded a male Hen Harrier on the 4th; there were two COMMON SCOTER at Theale Main Pit the following day and six BLACK-TAILED GODWIT were found at Lea Farm on the 6th.

RING OUZEL numbers began to build in various locations: the 13th April was **the** RING OUZEL DAY with at least 52 counted on the western slope beneath the Gibbet at Inkpen Hill, Berkshire's highest ever count. For the next ten days, up to 14 were still around the same area, last being seen on the 21st.

The first definite OSPREY of the year was at Whistley Green, Twyford on the 15th April and a TURNSTONE was seen at the New Workings at Moor Green Lakes the same day. On the 16th, a BOC midweek walk was treated to a male BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL at Crookham Common together with three *flavissima* males. Another OSPREY at Theale Main Pit was seen on the 17th, with yet another on the 21st at Winnersh and a MARSH HARRIER was over Field Farm GP on the 22nd. On the 26th there was a KITTIWAKE at Hosehill and a LITTLE TERN at Theale Main Pit where the next day a drake GARGANEY arrived. April closed with three BLACK TAILED GODWITS at Hosehill on the 29th, two CRANE flying over Wishmoor Bottom the next day, plus a WOOD SANDPIPER, reported as a 'heard only' at Sandhurst.

MAY brought perhaps the best birds of the Year. A RED-BACKED SHRIKE at Burnthouse Lane on the 17th May and a fabulous female RED-NECKED PHALAROPE at Theale Main Pit

on the 30th. Other notable birds for May were three reported GOSHAWKS - I believe all three still need written descriptions to support the sightings. Additionally there were another two OSPREYS, one at Woolhampton GPs and the other at Moor Green Lakes; a single RUDDY SHELDUCK at Moatlands GP, a single GARGANEY at the Loddon Reserve, a reported HONEY BUZZARD over a Bracknell garden and two (no doubt escapes at this time of year) WHOOPER SWANS at Moss End.

The highlights of **June** were an ICTERINE WARBLER trapped and ringed at Kintbury on 6th and a COMMON ROSEFINCH in a Greenham garden around the same date. Finally a one-day visit by a SANDWICH TERN on the 30th at Hosehill Lake.

During **July**, BLACK-TAILED GODWITS were well represented in Berkshire, with 28 at five sites (a single on the 6th, 11 on the 13th, 7 on 21st, 3 on 22nd and 6 on the 25th). At QMR on the 19th July there were two COMMON SCOTER and single TURNSTONE and KITTIWAKE - the only report from QMR for the month.

In **August** – 11 more BLACK TAILED GODWITS (7 on 2nd August, 2 on the 5th, one on the 16th and another on the 23rd). There was a KNOT at QMR on the 4th, a COMMON SCOTER on the 10th at Dinton Pastures, followed by two reported SANDWICH TERNS and three LITTLE TERNS on 14th at Theale Main Pit. Three BLACK-NECKED GREBES, a single at Moatlands GP (staying until 26th) and two at QMR which arrived on the 22nd and remained until the 31st.

At Aldworth on 23rd August there was a MARSH HARRIER, whilst in the east of the county 3 SANDWICH TERNS made a brief appearance at QMR on the same day. On 26th August another MARSH HARRIER, this time at Lower Farm GP, and two WOOD SANDPIPERS at Moor Green Lakes.

September brought 8 records of that popular species, the BITTERN at two different sites, all before the 15th. There was a single Garganey at Moor Green on the 9th, a RING OUZEL at Greenham Common on the 17th, a GREAT WHITE EGRET on the 18th at Lea Farm, and a MARSH HARRIER on 19th at Searles Farm Lane.

October -what a strange month – it started with a very flighty, mobile BLACK NECKED GREBE at Searles Farm Lane on the 4th, then little excitement until much later in the month. On the 20th October a GREAT GREY SHRIKE took up residence at Cow Down, on the Ridgeway. Then on 27th October another GREAT GREY SHRIKE arrived, this one took up residence at Woolhampton/Brimpton GPs.

November, the 2nd had skulking DARTFORD WARBLER at Fobney, a very good record for the Reading area, and on the 4th a SHORT-EARED OWL was there too. Up on the Downs, the GREAT GREY SHRIKE was seen for the last time, whilst nearby a HEN HARRIER was hunting. On the 9th, an adult female GARGANEY was at Padworth Lane GP loosely mixed with a group of TEAL. Lastly, on the 15th a winter adult MEDITERRANEAN GULL at Hosehill and the GREAT GREY SHRIKE still in attendance in the Brimpton/Woolhampton GP area.

Overall perhaps this was the year the YEAR of the RAVEN, recorded from all over the County. Let us all hope the expansion continues.