

Ken Moore's Birding highlights of 2017

DECEMBER 2016: The BITTERN that had arrived in November was still to be seen at White Swan Lake, Dinton Pasture, now a regular wintering site. A first winter drake SCAUP on Hotel Lake, Burghfield on the 5th December. On the 28th December, a JACK SNIPE was at Padworth Lane GP, another JACK SNIPE at Eton Wick on the 29th and a further two JACK SNIPE at Lea Farm GP on the 31st

JANUARY 2017: An adult CASPIAN GULL at Lea Farm on January 1st started the month well. The same day confirmed that the female SCAUP was still present at Moatland and the GOLDEN PLOVER flock near the Barn at Englefield had risen to 528. Three WAXWING were reported in the Twyford Waitrose Car Park on the 5th January, seen again on the 9th on Slough Trading Estate. Also on the 5th a BRENT GOOSE flew onto Lea Farm GP. Up on Cow Down a ringtail HEN HARRIER was reported and down on White Swan Lake the now regular drake FERRUGINOUS DUCK. On the 6th, a redhead SMEW was at Searles Farm Lane with a pair of PINTAIL. The same day, the wintering GREAT GREY SHRIKE was seen on the Berkshire side of the border for a change, at Wishmoor Bottom, where many CROSSBILLS were pairing up. Single SHELDUCK were at both Moor Green Lake and Lea Farm GP on the 7th. A 3rd winter CASPIAN GULL in the Gull roost at Main Pit, Theale on the 13th January. The second GREAT GREY SHRIKE of the year was seen at Cow Down. Eight SMEW were at Sunnyside GP, Wraysbury on the 26th and five WAXWING appeared briefly on the 28th in Bracknell. The following day, a LESSER WHITETHROAT recorded in South Ascot was likely to have been one of the Eastern forms. In the month FIRECRESTS were reported across the centre and east of the county and in the west, WILLOW TITS were seen in Combe Wood and there was a flock of 45 CORN BUNTING at Wellbottom Down.

FEBRUARY: began with the first OYSTERCATCHER of the Year on the 3rd at Hosehill. A few days later, on the 6th, a female LONG-TAILED DUCK appeared at Moor Green Lakes - only staying for the day- the bird was seen again on the 28th February and stayed into March. On the 21st February, four WATER PIPIT were well-watched at QMR.

MARCH: A total of twelve STONECHAT at Dorney Wetlands was a good count on the 4th, as was a minimum of seventeen CHIFFCHAFF on Dorney Common the same day. The first returning REDSHANK was noted on the 8th at Hosehill. Three OYSTERCATCHERS visited the recently cleared islands at Rowney Predator Lake, Woolhampton, on the 10th March. Two of them paired up and fledged one young, the first breeding record for the lake.

On the 11th March, a drake GARGANEY was found at Lea Farm GP. The first hirundines, 25 SAND MARTINS, arrived on 16th March at Lower Farm GP. The 17th March also heralded the first arrivals of WHEATEAR at Greenham Common, of LITTLE RINGED PLOVER at Pingewood GPs, and, on the rarity front, a CATTLE EGRET on one of the cleared islands at Woolhampton. The 21st March was notable for a WATER

PIPIT on Bottom Lane Floods. On the 29th, at Padworth Lane GP, in amongst the 200 plus flock of GreyLag Geese, was an adult PINK-FOOTED GOOSE. During the same afternoon, on the southern side of the Heron's Nest Land Fill, a STONE-CURLEW was disturbed. Finally, on the 31st March, a bright SANDWICH TERN early in the morning at Main Pit was followed a few hours later by a COMMON TERN. SWALLOWS were seen over Lower Farm GP and a drake COMMON SCOTER at QMR.

APRIL: April 4th, early morning at QMR a winter SANDERLING was seen and at Fobney, a mating pair of GARGANEY gave us all hope. The following day a 'cracking' male COMMON REDSTART was at Wishmoor Cross, Swinley Forest. The same day, two LITTLE GULLS were on Hosehill Lake and a drake GARGANEY and a SEDGE WARBLER at Padworth Lane GP. On the 10th, a male HEN HARRIER at Bury Down flew over one of the fields to the south, a BLACK-TAILED GODWIT was at Fobney Meadows, a YELLOW WAGTAIL called over Spencer's Wood, and an OSPREY was seen flying low over LOWER FARM GP. Approx 250 LESSER REDPOLLS were around Wishmoor Cross on the 12th. The 15th brought a RUFF at Burnthouse Lane GP. A single GREENSHANK was found on a BOC walk at Crookham Pools on the 20th. Later the same day, some fortunate observers who had gone over to Winter Hill, Berkshire saw, at some distance, the BLACK WINGED STILTS in Bucks at Little Marlow. A male Whinchat was at Burnthouse Lane on the 21st, with 9 Green Sandpipers on the pool edges there. There was a brief visit from a HOBBY over Woolhampton on the 22nd, a BLACK TERN flew through Main Pit, Theale, on the 24th and a fabulous WOOD SANDPIPER arrived at Fobney Meadow. Finally, on the 30th to close the month, a brief visit by a WRYNECK at Fobney Meadow, two BLACK TERNS at Moatlands GP and a single WHIMBREL at QMR.

MAY: On the 2nd a discussion between the BOC and the remediators for the centre section of Burnthouse Lane led to a large volume of graded soil being left untouched until August; c 50 pairs of SAND MARTINS colonised the heap and bred very successfully. On the 5th May, a diver was seen from the Spit at Theale Main pit across in the far NE corner. So, as a small crowd gathered, some went the lake for a closer view of the RED-THROATED DIVER. Black Swan Lake, at Dinton Pastures, was notable for a LITTLE TERN located there in the morning of 7th May, followed up by a LITTLE GULL in the afternoon. On the 10th May, the second CATTLE EGRET of the year was found at Twyford GP and soon moved to Lea Farm Lake. On the 12th May, a full summer BLACK-NECKED GREBE was on Main Pit, Theale. Later that day both WOODCOCKS and NIGHTJARS were displaying at ROUND OAK PIECE. The following day, a GREAT WHITE EGRET was seen distantly flying away from Lea Farm Lake. Five BLACK TAILED GODWITS were on Plover Island, Moor Green Lakes on 18th May and on the 26th two MED.GULLS were there. Another LITTLE TERN was at Lea Farm Lake on the 27th.

JUNE 2017 On 11th an apparent winter plumaged ARCTIC TERN turned up at Main Pit, Theale. The bird turned out to be a first summer ARCTIC- quite a rare plumage for the Northern hemisphere. The following day, an adult RED-BREASTED GOOSE

arrived at Lower Farm GP - who lost that one?

JULY: Two adult BLACK TERNS were busily dip-feeding on Main Pit, Theale on the 4th July. On the 9th July some 20 BLACK-TAILED GODWITS were on Hosehill Lake; by late evening the next day, the party had increased to 29 all bar three of which had gone by the following morning. A GREAT WHITE EGRET on the 14th at Lower Farm Lake had moved on the 15th to Woolhampton. A TURTLE DOVE was purring at Lower Farm GP on the 19th July only, one of the very few reports for the year. On the 21st July at QMR, four TURNSTONE, three YELLOW-LEGGED GULLS and eight COMMON SANDPIPERS. Then on the 24th, again at QMR, there were three COMMON SCOTER, a WHIMBREL, two OYSTERCATCHERS, a single DUNLIN and a LITTLE TERN.

AUGUST: On the 3rd August approximately 700 Cormorants were recorded at QMR. On the 9th August, an adult summer SABINE'S GULL at Lower Farm; unfortunately, it did not stay very long on either of its two appearances, so very few people saw the bird. At the New Workings, Moor Green Lakes on the 13th, the second WOOD SANDPIPER of 2017 arrived and stayed for a while. Two AVOCETS arrived at QMR on the 14th, with another at Padworth Lane GP on the 22nd. On the 21st, a flock of 12 GREEN SANDPIPERS flew in for a very short visit at Burnthouse Lane. On 28th August three SHAG arrived; two on Hosehill Lake and one on Main Pit, Theale; the Hosehill birds moved off within days but one stayed for a few weeks on Main Pit.

SEPTEMBER: On the 1st a juvenile MARSH HARRIER flew north over Roden Down and a GREAT WHITE EGRET flew into the BA Sailing Pit at Wraysbury. Four Whinchat were at Burnthouse Lane GP on the 4th. Main Pit, Theale was memorable for a MANX SHEARWATER on the 8th. Billingsbear Golf Club near Wokingham was a new location for many birders in Berkshire and a new location too for the GREY PHALAROPE which was found on their small lake! An OSPREY went through Dinton Pastures on the 13th and a RUFF visited Burnthouse Lane on 16th. On the 18th, a PECTORAL SANDPIPER arrived at Moor Green Lakes and at Greenham on the 19th, a total of 18 WOODLARK were counted. Then on the 25th a winter plumaged BLACK-NECKED GREBE was at QMR. Crookham Common was the place to be on the 26th, when a YELLOW BROWED WARBLER found early in the morning stayed all day. The last day of September another GREY PHALAROPE was located, this time at Lower Farm GP.

OCTOBER: On the 1st, a winter SLAVONIAN GREBE was on Main Pit, Theale. A ringtail HEN HARRIER reported at Wishmoor Bottom on the 3rd was followed by a MERLIN at Lower Farm GP on the 5th. The 11th October recorded another RUFF at the New Workings, Moor Green Lakes and then on the 13th a ROCK PIPIT was located at QMR. Most Berkshire Birders were on the Isles of Scilly during October, so records tend to be sparser for this period. The next notable record is on the 21st October, when an observer at Main Pit, Theale found three winter plumaged BLACK-NECKED GREBE. The following day a female/1st winter BLACK REDSTART was seen on the roofline of some new-build houses in Wokingham and a male MERLIN flew close to Streatley Farm. The UK HAWFINCH INVASION started in mid-October and Berkshire's first recorded birds were five flying South over Wokingham on October 24th. On the 26th, our second YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER of the year was found, close to the Berks/Oxon border in a Berkshire

Birders back garden - lucky individual- we are sure that the date will forever stay in his memory. Moving to the 27th, six HAWFINCH were seen at Wraysbury GPs, then on the 28th a count of 15 at Lavells Lake, Dinton and 13 more flew over Wokingham. On the 29th Oct there was a WHITE WAGTAIL at Lea Farm Lake, and the 30th a PURPLE SANDPIPER at QMR. The last day of October gave us another BLACK-NECKED GREBE and a BRENT GOOSE at QMR. Lastly, two HAWFINCH began the first of many appearances at Padworth College.

NOVEMBER: At Dinton Pastures there was a BITTERN at White Swan Lake on the 3rd, which has been seen on and off since, a drake PINTAIL at Black Swan Lake on 6th and at Padworth Lane on 12th. A female/imm MERLIN was seen over Cold Harbour on 6th. And a BEARDED TIT has been in a reedbed at Moor Green over the last few days.

Finally, the Hawfinch invasion continues with records from across the County and in the last few days a party of 16 PARROT CROSSBILLS at Wishmoor Bottom has brought great excitement – the second record for Berkshire. So it is HAWFINCH and PARROT CROSSBILL that have Ken's vote as joint Birds of the Year for 2017.