



Normal Reserve Opening Times:

Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday  
9am - 5pm (4pm Nov - end of Feb)

Visitor Centre

10am - 4pm

Trustees:

Kirsty McLeod - Treasurer  
David Nesham  
John Brook  
Peter Murphy  
Graham Barlow  
Ian Willoughby  
Jerry Knapp  
Maggie Bellwood  
John Hart

Company Secretary - Peter Murphy  
Report Editor - Peter Murphy

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### Photographs:

Front and back cover: The Wet Grassland - from an original photograph by Barbara Murphy

See page 115 for other Photograph Credits.

## Introduction

“As we move into 2020 no doubt there will be further challenges to be met...” Written at the end of 2019, this is how we started the last page of the new book “Rodley Nature Reserve - The First Twenty Years” which describes how the Reserve came into being and how it has continued to evolve over the last twenty years. How prophetic those words proved to be. We were probably thinking more about the possible effects of climate change and the planned replacement of the canal swing bridge but certainly not a pandemic. 2020 was a year like no other. The arrival of the Coronavirus brought hardship and sorrow for many people.

Due to lockdown the Reserve had to close its gates on 24<sup>th</sup> March and was only able to open again on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July but then only on a very restricted basis. The Visitor Centre, toilets and hides remained closed until the end of the year and the Reserve itself was only open on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. With a one way system in place at the Mike Sheldon viewpoint overlooking the Lagoon and the Wet Grassland viewpoint visitors were able to watch the wildlife on these wetland areas but sadly there were very limited views onto the Duck Marsh and Reedbed. We have been told how nature is good for our health and wellbeing and we have never needed it more than we did this year.

The fact that 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the official opening of the Reserve by the then Minister for the Environment Michael Meacher would have passed unnoticed had we not announced it on social media. All planned events and school visits had to be cancelled.

It has been a very difficult year not just for our visitors but for our volunteers too. When it was announced to them that the Reserve would be going into lockdown in March with all activities being suspended until further notice it felt like the issuing of redundancy notices. Subsequent easing of restrictions some weeks later allowing local travel for essential purposes meant at least the 195 newly planted trees in the Dragonfly Ponds area, desperate for water, could be saved by a small group of local volunteers. The ponds themselves were desperately short of water but the water pump had yet to be refitted after the winter frosts so another local volunteer team had to be called in to reinstall and subsequently fill the ponds. Subsequent to further relaxation of restrictions and risk assessment we were able to establish two teams of habitat management volunteers in July, one working on Mondays and one on Fridays with social distancing strictly observed. This enabled all routine activities to restart with volunteers working hard on catch up.

Prior to the lockdown work on removing the pernicious *Crassula helmsii* - New Zealand Pygmy Weed - from the long ditch on the Dragonfly Ponds area had been frustrated because of high water levels. The subsequent hot dry spell may have caused concern over the newly planted trees but provided low water levels sufficient to complete the removal task. *Crassula* is a serious threat to our wetland habitats and its immediate removal from site is essential to mitigate establishment elsewhere. Further areas of *Crassula* were found on the Education Pond and two of the Dragonfly Ponds in the autumn.

Tim's Field is always a hive of activity late March through to May with ploughing and harrowing ready for the sowing of the winter bird seed crop to provide food during the "hungry gap" period. The seed sowing would normally be undertaken by volunteers but this season, because of the situation, it was carried out by our farm contractor. An excellent crop of Quinoa on the field provided ideal perches for Stonechats in September and October and in the last two months of the year Tree Sparrows, Reed Buntings, Chaffinches and Linnets were all recorded visiting for seed.

Work started last year on a project to create a wildflower meadow on an area of what was fairly uninteresting rough grassland on Poplar Field. Having taken expert advice a lot of time was spent preparing the site and seed and plug plants were introduced that autumn. The result was a nice display of various wildflowers and good numbers of bees and butterflies taking advantage of them this year. Unfortunately, a lovely but very dry late spring resulted in a poor seed set for some species and more seeding had to be done in the autumn. This mini-meadow is going to provide a stunning display of wildflowers in years to come. It will only get better and certainly increase the wildlife diversity of the area. This project was made possible thanks to very generous donations from three of our good friends.

Later in the year work started on the construction of two new ponds. The small, lined pond in the Manager's Garden had become very overgrown and was in need of a facelift. Volunteers started work in the autumn digging out a much larger pond which should prove much more attractive to wildlife and provide good viewing opportunities from the hide. A larger pond was also constructed in the Rodley Robins' garden though this presented rather more problems thanks to a large number of buried boulders!

Like last year, thanks to the very wet weather, drying out the Wet Grassland for its annual autumn cut proved virtually impossible and the

work had to be carried out with great care using the Reserve's small tractor and brush cutters. This was completed in December and the area re-flooded for the wildfowl.

The fact that there was much less human disturbance this year almost certainly suited the wildlife. Among the birdwatching highlights was a Firecrest that was seen throughout January, almost certainly the same bird that was present from 14<sup>th</sup> December the previous year. Tree Sparrows had a good year with nesting taking place in two boxes on the Visitor Centre and it was the best year ever for sightings of Common Buzzard with successful nesting taking place in trees on the far riverbank. A pair of Kestrels again nested in the east facing Barn Owl box in the compound successfully raising three young this year. Following numerous sightings in 2019 a Great White Egret was reported on the wetlands on two dates in July and Little Egrets had another good year with up to seven birds seen. Surely, it will not be too long before a Cattle Egret turns up here. There was just one new species added to the Reserve list this year - a juvenile Pied Flycatcher photographed on the Willow Path on 1<sup>st</sup> August. On the debit side Tufted Ducks failed to nest for the fifth year running, Common Terns for the third year running and the Mute Swans' nine cygnets all disappeared mysteriously.

Barn Owls were in residence on the Scrubland throughout the year but there were no reports of juveniles. An exciting development in December was the replacement of the old Barn Owl box on the Scrubland with a new box with a camera installed. A Barn Owl was seen shortly afterwards at its new home. Hopefully, we will be able to relay live footage from the box to a monitor in the Visitor Centre in 2021. The work was carried out by experts in this field and was made possible thanks to the generous support of Yorkshire Water Services.

The Grey Partridge has undergone a massive decline of more than 80% since the 1970s. As such it is a red listed species - one of the birds of the highest conservation concern. The habitat on the Reserve is ideal for them and small releases have been made here in the past, the last in 2017. At least one pair bred successfully the following year but sightings since then have been few and far between. Five breeding pairs were released in July this year and at the beginning of October 25 young birds were released, the majority on Tim's Field. There have been numerous sightings since then of up to eight birds together.

One thing that has become apparent over recent years is the decline in the number of wading birds passing through the Reserve. Following an

assessment of the current Duck Marsh habitat we can announce that, in partnership with Yorkshire Water, the area is to be completely redeveloped and landscaped. The plan is to provide a series of spits and islets with various water depths across the three acre site. Positioning of the features will provide the optimum viewing from the two hides. An improved system for controlling water depths to the area will also be introduced. The project will significantly improve the area's diversity and hopefully attract a variety of new species for the benefit of our visitors. As the Duck Marsh forms part of a flood plain several permissions are required from the Environment Agency before the work can commence but we are hopeful these will be received quite soon. Once they are the work itself is likely to take 10 to 15 days. There will inevitably be some short term disruption to the area. The Trust would like to thank Yorkshire Water Services for their investment in the Reserve and for their technical assistance which is greatly appreciated.

The former Barkers site by the entrance to the Reserve has remained undeveloped during 2020. The site appears to have been sold but development cannot occur until agreement has been reached over the construction of a new swing bridge to replace the current ageing bridge. The Trust has been in regular contact with both Yorkshire Water (who are of course our landlords) and the developers to monitor progress on this issue which may affect the Reserve. Our main concern is the likely short term impact of the bridge construction on access to the Reserve for visitors and volunteers. It is unlikely that any development will occur before October/ November 2021. No building on the Barkers site can start in advance of bridge replacement - at the earliest this would be in the winter of 2021/2. Before any work occurs on the site full planning permission will need to be obtained and the Trust will examine any detailed applications to try to ensure that the protections for the Reserve and for wildlife which were present in the outline planning permission remain in the final permission.

In conclusion, 2020 has been an awful year for everyone and no doubt it will be some time before we get back to anything like some sort of normality. Writing this in January we again find ourselves in national lockdown with the Reserve closed to the public. A big thank you must go to all our volunteers and visitors who have continued to support us through this very difficult period in all our lives.

## **Rodley Nature Reserve - Monthly Roundup for 2020**

### **January**

New Year's Day was calm and sunny with a maximum temperature of 6°C but by the following day temperatures had reached double figures and this rather set the tone for the rest of the month. There was the odd cold day but it was generally mild. Low pressure brought several unsettled days with rain around the middle of the month but unusually high pressure from 18<sup>th</sup> brought a lot of dry weather and some lovely sunny days. It became more unsettled towards the end of the month and there were some wintery showers on 28<sup>th</sup> but they were short-lived and on 31<sup>st</sup> the temperature reached an unusually high 14°C though it felt much cooler in a stiff wind.

There are two important habitat management jobs to be done on the Lagoon early in the year - cleaning out the nest holes in the Sand Martin bank and clearing vegetation from the three islands. Fortunately, the islands had been cleared in time for the first Oystercatcher which arrived on 29<sup>th</sup>.

In the absence of a sustained cold spell some winter visitors to the wetlands were thin on the ground. No more than two Wigeon were reported; Shovelers failed to put in an appearance and two male Pochard arrived on 29<sup>th</sup>. The best Goosander count on the Lagoon was just nine. A few Goldeneye were present on four dates with six on 19<sup>th</sup>. However, some ducks were present in reasonable numbers and a count of 46 Gadwall on the Lagoon on 15<sup>th</sup> was the second highest ever for January. A total of 27 Teal on the Duck Marsh on 12<sup>th</sup> was the highest January count since 2014. Tufted Duck numbers on the Lagoon reached 14 on 12<sup>th</sup> but a count of 16 on 26<sup>th</sup> included 11 on the river. There was also a distinct improvement in Coot numbers this month, a best count of 17 being the highest since March 2018.

Water Rails were hard to find this month with just one sighting on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> and a bird heard calling on two dates. Snipe were just as hard to find with just a single bird on one date on the Duck Marsh. Cetti's Warbler was also elusive with just one sighting around the Wet Grassland Hide on 18<sup>th</sup>. A Black Swan though was hard to miss. First seen on 26<sup>th</sup> December, it was present throughout the month, alternating between the wetlands and the canal.

The main focus of attention for birdwatchers this month though was the area around the river bridge. The target species was a Firecrest which had first been seen on 14<sup>th</sup> December and was present throughout the month, always in the same area. The bridge area also proved productive for Goldcrests and Treecreepers, the latter being recorded on eight dates, most of these from the bridge. Up to three Goldcrests were also seen on the River Path on two dates. An overwintering Chiffchaff was reported on three dates, two of these in the bridge area.

Other sightings included a Tawny Owl on 6<sup>th</sup>, a Nuthatch on two dates - a scarce species here, a Woodcock on two dates, Grey Wagtails on two dates, two Lesser Redpolls on 12<sup>th</sup> and one on 18<sup>th</sup> and a Brambling in the Coppice on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Tree Sparrows were recorded daily with up to four in the Bee Garden and three in the Manager's Garden. A flock of Linnets could be found on Tim's Field most days but numbers were disappointing with a best count of just 31 birds. Gatherings of Grey Herons on the farmland are a feature of the winter months but a report of 12 there on 5<sup>th</sup> was the joint highest ever January count.

On the farmland Canada Geese numbers reached 136 and Greylags 196 despite a recent cull. A single Pink-footed Goose was picked out among the flocks on three dates and on 25<sup>th</sup> more than 100 Pink-feet flew over the Reserve. The farmland was also the place to check the Jackdaw flocks for Nordic birds. Two were spotted on 4<sup>th</sup> and one on 12<sup>th</sup>. A first winter Caspian Gull on the farmland on 4<sup>th</sup> was only the second record for the Reserve.

It was a good month for raptor sightings with both Common Buzzards and Red Kites reported on eight dates. Kestrels were active on several dates with two around their usual east facing nest box in the compound on at least two occasions. A Merlin on 8<sup>th</sup> was a nice record and Peregrine Falcons were seen on two dates. On 19<sup>th</sup> two birds were reported on a pylon near the river, one with pigeon prey. Interestingly, one of these was a ringed bird.

Little Owls can be hard to find at this time of year but one was seen close to the Manager's Garden on 1<sup>st</sup>. Barn Owls were active on the Scrubland throughout the month but nearly all sightings were early morning. At least one bird roosted in the thatched gazebo, leaving numerous pellets.



## **February**

It proved to be the wettest February since records began in 1862. It was also an exceptionally windy month, three named storms, Ciara, Dennis and Jorge bringing gale force winds and heavy rain. Storm Ciara arrived on 9<sup>th</sup> with gusts of between 60 and 80 miles per hour. An already very high river finally broke its banks and flooded the farmland. As water started to creep into the bridge car park it was decided to close the Reserve at lunchtime. The Dragonfly Ponds and Education Pond suffered worst as flood water raced over the Wet Grassland inundating the area. It was the turn of Storm Dennis the following weekend bringing more gale force winds and heavy rain - but it was very mild at 13°C. It certainly came much colder subsequently and there was a good covering of snow on 24<sup>th</sup> but it had gone within a few hours. The last day of the month saw the turn of Storm Jorge but this, fortunately, did not cause any further problems.

Not the best of conditions for birdwatching but there were still plenty of visitors and a good range of species was seen. An early Great Crested Grebe arrived on the Lagoon on 8<sup>th</sup> but it only stayed one day. Two Oystercatchers were there throughout the month and the first Lapwing of the year arrived on 1<sup>st</sup>.

It was an excellent month for Gadwall with some of the highest ever February counts and 96 on 22<sup>nd</sup> the best. Tufted Duck numbers though dropped back somewhat and a best count of 10 was the lowest for February since 2004. February last year produced double figure counts of both Goldeneye and Pochard but numbers were disappointing this year with no more than three of the former and two of the latter. Two Shovelers on 12<sup>th</sup> were the first of the year but they didn't stay. It was another poor month for Wigeon with no more than two birds on just three dates. Teal numbers were very similar to recent years, 23 on the Wet Grassland on 24<sup>th</sup> being a good count. With river levels so high Goosanders spent more time on the wetlands with up to eight reported on the Lagoon. Coot numbers continued to improve with a best count of 26. The Black Swan was present all month. A Shelduck was on the farmland on 7<sup>th</sup> but didn't visit the wetlands. A Pink-footed Goose on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> was a nice record.

Water Rails and Snipe were again hard to find. A Water Rail was heard on just two dates and there were no reported sightings. Five Snipe were flushed by a female Sparrowhawk on the Duck Marsh on 16<sup>th</sup> but otherwise there was just a single bird reported on two dates. However, a Green Sandpiper was a nice record on three dates.

The area around the river bridge was again well watched but there were no further sightings of the Firecrest after 1<sup>st</sup>. However, it again proved to be the place to spot Treecreepers with sightings on six dates. Up to three Goldcrests were seen in the same area, the big Alder overhanging the river being a prime site.

The flooded farmland attracted large numbers of gulls, among them a sub-adult Caspian Gull on 29<sup>th</sup>. More than 600 Black-headed Gulls were reported on the same date. Seven Curlew were there briefly on 23<sup>rd</sup> before flying off north east - a nice record these days. Thirty-three Lapwings flew over on the same date and two were there on 29<sup>th</sup>. Other birds flying over the farmland included 11 Golden Plover on 7<sup>th</sup> and a Skylark on 19<sup>th</sup>.

A count of 178 Canada Geese on the farmland on 16<sup>th</sup> was the second highest ever for February (beaten only by 206 in 2010), this despite a resumption of culling locally. Greylag Geese number were very much lower with a best count of just 26.

Other sightings this month included a "Nordic" Jackdaw on 1<sup>st</sup>, a Cetti's Warbler on two dates, 20 Siskins in roadside Alders on 10<sup>th</sup> and 25 on 16<sup>th</sup>, a Grey Wagtail on three dates, a male Blackcap on the Willow Path on 23<sup>rd</sup> and a Lesser Redpoll over the bridge car park on 29<sup>th</sup>. There was another report of a Nuthatch this month - this time on John Ackroyd Meadow on 5<sup>th</sup>, this the third record of this scarce (for Rodley) bird. Tree Sparrows were daily visitors to the feeders in the Manager's Garden with up to five birds reported. Linnet numbers visiting Tim's Field for seed remained low with a best count of just 22 and usually less than half that number. Among the winter thrushes, Fieldfares were conspicuous by their complete absence. No more than a handful of Redwings were seen on the Reserve most days but 30 were on the farmland on 15<sup>th</sup> and more than 60 flew over in a westerly direction on the same date.

There was lot of Common Buzzard activity despite the weather with five birds together on one occasion. There were sightings on 11 dates with two displaying over the Wet Grassland on 12<sup>th</sup>. Red Kites were reported on nine dates with five on one date. Both male and female Kestrels were seen at the nest box in the compound. There was just one sighting of a Peregrine Falcon flying east on 15<sup>th</sup>. There were no reports of Little Owl but Barn Owls were resident at the Scrubland nest box throughout the month.

Up to three Roe Deer were seen but the real mammal highlight was an Otter photographed on the Lagoon on 5<sup>th</sup> and on the same day on the riverbank near the bridge feeding on a dead Mallard.

## **March**

It remained very windy into the beginning of the month but the winds soon died down and there was a hard frost and a thin covering of snow on 2<sup>nd</sup>. It remained cold but dry with several beautiful sunny days from 4<sup>th</sup>. Temperatures did start to rise in the second week of the month but the wind again became very strong at times (south westerly) and there was some rain. The second half of the month produced some beautiful cloudless days from 22<sup>nd</sup>, temperatures reaching 16°C at times. It became much cooler and unsettled on 28<sup>th</sup> with wintry showers and a north easterly wind on 29<sup>th</sup> saw temperatures down to 6°C.

On the wetlands Gadwall numbers remained high and a count of 70 on two dates was the highest ever for March. Coot too had a good month with 24 the best in any month since 2013. Six Goldeneye flew onto the Lagoon on 7<sup>th</sup> and there were sightings of up to four birds on several subsequent dates. However, most wildfowl species were conspicuous by their absence. There were no reports of Wigeon, Pochard or Shoveler and eight Tufted Ducks was the lowest ever March count. A Great Crested Grebe arrived on the Lagoon on 2<sup>nd</sup> and was joined by a second bird on 4<sup>th</sup> when the two were reported displaying.

A Water Rail was seen on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> and from the Reedbed Hide on 15<sup>th</sup>. Snipe were reported on two dates - one on the Duck Marsh on 21<sup>st</sup> and three on the Lagoon on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Oystercatchers were present daily with as many as six on the Duck Marsh on 7<sup>th</sup>. After a poor month in February it was a better one for sightings of Kingfishers with reports on six dates and two in the Reedbed on 14<sup>th</sup>. Five Grey Herons were on the Wet Grassland on 21<sup>st</sup>.

As many as six Mute Swans were on the flooded farmland in the early part of the month and later in the month one was spotted on a nest on the Duck Marsh. There were no reports of the Black Swan after the 8<sup>th</sup>.

A Caspian Gull on the flooded farmland on 1<sup>st</sup> was the third record of the year. Other sightings this month included a Peregrine Falcon on two dates, a Merlin over the compound on 6<sup>th</sup>, Goldcrests on five dates, a Treecreeper on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, a Nuthatch heard on 14<sup>th</sup> and two Grey Wagtails on 15<sup>th</sup>. Tree Sparrows continued to visit daily, one pair taking

possession of the camera nest box on the side of the Visitor Centre from early in the month. A pair of Stonechats were on the farmland on 7<sup>th</sup> and single birds were reported on 8<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. Skylarks were seen on three dates, two flying off Tim's Field on 7<sup>th</sup>.

Common Buzzards were seen most days with up to five reported. On 18<sup>th</sup> two were seen displaying over woodland across the river. Kestrels were active throughout the month with several sightings at the nest box in the compound. Barn Owls continued to be resident at the Scrubland box throughout and a Little Owl was seen at the box in the Manager's Garden on three dates.

The first early summer visitors started to arrive. Single Sand Martins were recorded over the Lagoon on 15<sup>th</sup> and around the bridge on 21<sup>st</sup>. A Chiffchaff near the bridge on 7<sup>th</sup> was probably an overwintering bird but there were a number of sightings from 14<sup>th</sup> with at least two birds singing on that date and four on 21<sup>st</sup>.

As the first summer visitors arrived the last winter thrushes departed. Most Redwings and Fieldfares had gone by the middle of the month, c40 Redwings flying east on 15<sup>th</sup> being the last group with c50 Fieldfares going in the same direction on the same date. A single Redwing was seen flying east on 21<sup>st</sup>. Up to 15 Siskins were reported flying north on 8<sup>th</sup>. Four Whooper Swans flew over on 6<sup>th</sup> with 13 on 14<sup>th</sup>. Flocks of Pink-footed Geese were recorded flying over on three dates, a total of 793 being counted in three big skeins on 14<sup>th</sup>.

Sadly the Reserve had to close from 25<sup>th</sup> due to a countrywide shutdown as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic which had swept across Europe. Only a handful of volunteers were able to do some monitoring of the wildlife from this point during security visits.

## **April**

It proved to be the sunniest April on record and there was no rain at all until 28<sup>th</sup>. There were some windy days and some chilly ones, temperatures as low as 9°C in the first few days of the month, but by 5<sup>th</sup> it had reached 18°C. It had climbed to 21°C on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> but then as low as 9°C again on 13<sup>th</sup> in a north easterly wind. There were several cloudless days from 19<sup>th</sup> and butterflies responded in numbers with Orange Tips and Brimstones very much in evidence. It became more unsettled at the end of the month with a spell of steady rain on 29<sup>th</sup> much needed by the gardeners.

Sand Martins started to arrive in numbers from 5<sup>th</sup> and by the middle of the month 60 nest holes had been excavated in the bank on the Lagoon. By the end of the month 100 holes could be counted. The first Swallow was over the Lagoon on 6<sup>th</sup> and the first two House Martins of the year on 15<sup>th</sup>. An early Swift was picked out among the Sand Martins on 20<sup>th</sup>.

Other summer visitors started to arrive in numbers too. The first Willow Warblers were recorded on 6<sup>th</sup> but the Coppice, normally a stronghold for this species, was devoid of their song throughout much of the month. Chiffchaffs were much easier to hear. The first singing Blackcap was heard near the bridge on 6<sup>th</sup>. A Garden Warbler was singing in the John Ackroyd Meadow hedgerow on 16<sup>th</sup> and several Common Whitethroats were in song by the end of the month. The first Reed Warblers were heard on the Wet Grassland and Reedbed on the earliest ever date of 15<sup>th</sup> April and the first singing Sedge Warbler was on the Wet Grassland just five days later.

On the Lagoon the Great Crested Grebes chose their usual nest site at the back of the middle island and were resident there from early in the month. The pair of Oystercatchers showed off their three chicks for the first time on 29<sup>th</sup>. Typically, several pairs of Canada and Greylag Geese stayed to nest on the islands and the first two Greylag goslings appeared on 28<sup>th</sup>. Duck numbers on the Lagoon were generally low and the main wildfowl highlight was the five Pochard that arrived on 24<sup>th</sup> - four males and a female. A second pair of Mute Swans had a nest on the Wet Grassland from early in the month.

More families started to appear - a Moorhen with three chicks in the Reedbed and families of five and seven Mallard ducklings on the river. A Goosander with seven or eight chicks on the river above the bridge on 28<sup>th</sup> was a nice record.

Six Snipe were flushed around the Lagoon and Wet Grassland on 14<sup>th</sup> during a check of the water inlets. Wader passage though was again disappointing with just one Little Ringed Plover briefly on Tim's Field on 7<sup>th</sup>.

Other sightings included a Little Owl in the Manager's Garden on 6<sup>th</sup>, two White Wagtails on Tim's Field on 6<sup>th</sup>, two Curlew calling over the farmland on 14<sup>th</sup>, a Grey Wagtail on 25<sup>th</sup> and Kingfishers on six dates. Thirty-two Linnets on Tim's Field on 5<sup>th</sup> was a good count in what had been a poor year for this species. Twelve birds on 11<sup>th</sup> were the last of the spring. There was a lot of Kestrel activity with both male and female birds seen

at the east facing nest box in the compound on several occasions. Two small Fox cubs in the Coppice close to the eastern gate on 23<sup>rd</sup> was a nice record as was a tiny Roe Deer fawn in the Coppice the next day.

With the Reserve closed throughout the month most habitat management work had to be put on hold. However, after a month with no rain the Dragonfly Ponds were getting desperately low and the newly planted trees there were in need of water. A few volunteers, observing strict social distancing, were able to attend to these tasks in the latter part of the month. Sadly no visitors were able to enjoy the fine show of Cowslips on the John Ackroyd and Mike Fisk Meadows this month.

## **May**

May was not only another very dry month, it was also the sunniest month since records began and the sunniest spring on record. Temperatures were often up in the low twenties and on 20<sup>th</sup> they reached 28°C in a light southerly breeze. But there were also spells of very windy weather, unseasonably so on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> with wind speeds reaching 40 to 50 mph bringing down a lot of tree branches and fresh leaves. The last few days of the month were very pleasant with temperatures around 22°/23°C and virtually cloudless skies. Not surprisingly, it was a good month for butterflies and dragonflies.

On the Lagoon the Great Crested Grebes were seen with three chicks early in the month and all were still present at the end of the month despite the presence of up to 10 very noisy Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The Oystercatchers were not so fortunate and there was no sign of any of their three chicks after 2<sup>nd</sup>. A pair of Lapwings on the middle island did enjoy some success, a single chick being seen on several dates from the middle of the month.

The first Coot chicks appeared on the Lagoon on 11<sup>th</sup> and a female Gadwall was seen there with five tiny ducklings on 25<sup>th</sup>. Tufted Duck numbers were disappointingly low with no more than three pairs reported. A pair of Shovelers were on the Duck Marsh on 9<sup>th</sup> and a male was seen there on 11<sup>th</sup>. The two pairs of Mute Swans had mixed fortunes. The Wet Grassland pair had abandoned their nest by the middle of the month but on 20<sup>th</sup> the Duck Marsh pair appeared with nine tiny cygnets.

A number of Canada and Greylag Geese remained on the Lagoon throughout the month but there was limited evidence of successful nesting. A Canada Goose was seen in the bridge car park with four

goslings at the beginning of the month and one was reported on the middle island on the Lagoon with two goslings on 6<sup>th</sup>. Two Greylag Geese were seen with a solitary, very small gosling on the bank of the Lagoon on 29<sup>th</sup>.

Little Egrets have become regular annual visitors these days and the first two of the year were seen on the Wet Grassland 14<sup>th</sup>. With a wonderful show of Yellow Flag Iris birds could be very hard to spot among them but there were further sightings on 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. On 29<sup>th</sup> two were seen on the bottom island on the Lagoon.

Summer visitors were now present in numbers with Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers singing on all four main wetland areas. Common Whitethroats tend to favour the large bramble patches and those on Poplar Field held several birds this month. Lesser Whitethroats are much less frequent but one was “rattling” in roadside trees by the Lagoon on 2<sup>nd</sup>.

At least one pair of Swallows took up residence in the shed by the containers this month and Sand Martin activity at the nesting bank on the Lagoon was intense. Swift numbers though were disappointing with a best count of just four over the Lagoon. Sadly, the Swift nest box tower on the Reedbed again remained unoccupied apart from an enterprising pair of Bluetits.

The Kestrels were often elusive but were certainly in residence throughout the month at their usual nest box in the compound. One or two Common Buzzards were seen most days with nesting in trees across the river strongly suspected. Barn Owl monitoring was difficult with limited volunteer presence but a rare evening visit on 31<sup>st</sup> produced a bird flying over the Scrubland to trees across the river at 9.45pm.

Other sightings this month included a Grey Wagtail on 2<sup>nd</sup> and a Goldcrest singing on the River Path on 9<sup>th</sup>. A female Goosander on the river with 15 ducklings on 9<sup>th</sup> was a nice record. A pair of Tree Sparrows had taken up residence in the camera nest box on the side of the Visitor Centre in March and on 2<sup>nd</sup> May an adult could be seen feeding three chicks in the box. On 15<sup>th</sup> it became evident that another pair was nesting in the terrace box on the other side of the Centre.

A limited amount of essential maintenance work was able to take place during the month with strict social distancing observed and it was possible for Tim’s Field to be seeded on 21<sup>st</sup>. Two further releases of Harvest Mice - a total of 101 mice - also took place this month at a site near the Lagoon.

## June

Weather-wise it was a month of extremes with hot, sunny conditions some days, a lot of rain many days and some very strong to gale force winds. The month started as May had ended with sunshine and temperatures reaching 24°C on 2<sup>nd</sup> but it changed dramatically from 3<sup>rd</sup> with temperatures plummeting to 11°C in a chilly, northerly wind. There were several warm, sunny days around the middle of the month and on 24<sup>th</sup> in hot, cloudless conditions temperatures reached 29°C but it was very unsettled for much of the month with blustery winds and rain. The sunny days did bring out butterflies in some numbers and there was an excellent emergence of Small Tortoiseshells which was encouraging after years of decline. Dragonflies too enjoyed the sunny days with plenty of activity at the Dragonfly Ponds and an early Emperor on the Duck Marsh on 1<sup>st</sup>.

More families of Gadwall started to appear on the Lagoon this month but a male Wigeon and two females there from 16<sup>th</sup> was unexpected at this time of year. Only two of the three young Great Crested Grebes were seen from the beginning of the month but both, fortunately, were still present at the end. The Mute Swan family was on the river on 4<sup>th</sup> but minus one of their nine cygnets. They were seen subsequently on the Lagoon, Wet Grassland and Reedbed but by 25<sup>th</sup> had lost two more cygnets. One or two Little Egrets were seen most days, often on the Wet Grassland, but they could easily be missed among the dense clumps of Yellow Flag Iris.

Other sightings this month included a Little Owl at the top end of Poplar Field on 4<sup>th</sup>, a female Roe Deer and fawn on John Ackroyd Meadow on 13<sup>th</sup>, eight Grey Herons on Tim's Field on 16<sup>th</sup>, a Curlew flying south calling also on 16<sup>th</sup> and a juvenile Tree Creeper on the Willow Path on 20<sup>th</sup>. A male and female Reed Bunting catching Azure Damselflies one after the other on the Dragonfly Ponds on 13<sup>th</sup> was an interesting record. Tree Sparrows were on their second brood in the camera nest box on the side of the Visitor Centre this month, five chicks being visible on the camera. Among the summer visitors Swift numbers were again disappointing apart from one sighting of more than 50 over the main entry road in windy, wet conditions on 6<sup>th</sup>.

There was a lot of Kestrel activity this month. A bird was observed harassing a Common Buzzard over the Reserve on several dates. On 18<sup>th</sup> a juvenile Kestrel was photographed on the ground in the compound by a Yorkshire Water employee and on 20<sup>th</sup> three juveniles were seen on the ledge of the nest box as the male bird brought in prey. The birds had fledged and left the box by the end of the month. Single Common



Buzzards were seen on a number of dates but on 23<sup>rd</sup> three were over the farmland.

## July

It proved to be a wet and windy month with few calm days and winds very strong to gale force at times - strong enough to bring down several large willows in the first week of the month. However, it ended with a very hot, cloudless day on 31<sup>st</sup> with the temperature reaching 34°C in the shade at 4pm. This triggered off a short spell of heavy rain, thunder and lightning during the evening.

The Reserve re-opened on 11<sup>th</sup> July, albeit just two afternoons each week - Saturday and Wednesday. The Visitor Centre, toilets and hides remained closed and extra volunteers were on duty to ensure visitors followed the rules on social distancing and signposted one-way systems. None of this affected the wildlife, of course, and there was plenty for visitors to see.

On the Lagoon one of the two adult Great Crested Grebes had disappeared by 8<sup>th</sup> and the second had gone by 12<sup>th</sup>, leaving the two juveniles to fend for themselves. On 22<sup>nd</sup> the two juveniles were reported displaying to each other but only one was seen from 26<sup>th</sup>. One or two Little Egrets were present throughout much of the month, often well hidden on the Wet Grassland, but up to three were in trees on the bottom island on the Lagoon in the latter part of the month. The trees were also popular with up to eight Cormorants. On 15<sup>th</sup> a Great Egret was on the Wet Grassland and was later seen flying off in an easterly direction. On 19<sup>th</sup> the bird was reported on the middle island on the Lagoon.

Common Terns finally put in an appearance on 17<sup>th</sup> - an adult and juvenile perched on buoys on the Lagoon. On 19<sup>th</sup> a second adult arrived, one of them bringing a substantial fish for the juvenile which it struggled with for some time. The three birds were last seen on 21<sup>st</sup> but one adult and juvenile were back again on 30<sup>th</sup>.

Not surprisingly, Gadwall were the most numerous of the ducks on the Lagoon and more new families appeared. In sharp contrast, there were no more than four of the once common Tufted Duck and just a single female some days. Four Teal were on the Duck Marsh on 29<sup>th</sup>. The Mute Swan family continued to reduce, just the adult male and five juveniles being seen on 24<sup>th</sup> and by the end of the month the male was only looking after four juveniles.

Kingfishers were seen on the Lagoon on three dates, on one date an adult and juvenile very active around the Sand Martin nesting bank, the adult frequently hovering at the nest holes. Water Rails had been conspicuous by their absence since March but one was photographed on the Wet Grassland from the viewing screen on 29<sup>th</sup>. A Green Sandpiper flew over the Wet Grassland calling on the same date.

Bird song along the Willow Path had largely died down in the second half of the month but Song Thrushes were still singing in the Coppice, on the Butterfly Bank, at the back of the Lagoon and in riverside trees. Some of the summer visitors were becoming increasingly hard to spot now but their contact calls could be heard all round the Reserve. An obliging Garden Warbler did provide good views on the Willow Path on 31<sup>st</sup>.

Other sightings this month included a Peregrine Falcon on 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, a Treecreeper on the Willow Path on 15<sup>th</sup>, a Little Owl in the compound on 19<sup>th</sup> and a Cetti's Warbler in trees behind the Education Pond on 20<sup>th</sup>. Five pairs of Grey Partridge were released on the Reserve this month and on 17<sup>th</sup> one pair was reported at the Dragonfly Ponds. With no pond dipping two Moorhens took up residence on the Dipping Ponds this month. Swift numbers improved a bit in the second half of the month with reports of around 20 birds on two dates.

As regards mammals, a Rabbit seen near the Education Pond on 22<sup>nd</sup> was the first record since 27<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Rabbits are rare here. A less welcome visitor was an American Mink swimming on the Wet Grassland on 18<sup>th</sup>.

Evening visits to monitor Barn Owl activity were limited but a bird was seen at the nest box on the Scrubland on 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. There was again a good deal of Common Buzzard activity, a bird calling in trees on the far riverbank in the latter part of the month again suggesting nesting may well be occurring. Three were reported over the Scrubland on 21<sup>st</sup>.

## **August**

The weather was very unsettled throughout much of the month, often wet and unseasonably windy with gusts up to 50mph on 21<sup>st</sup>. There were a handful of beautiful, warm, sunny days in the first half of the month, temperatures reaching 30°C on a couple of days, but in the latter part of the month it was very chilly. Daytime temperatures were as low as 13°C

some days in a stiff northerly wind. There was also a lot of rain which resulted in the river running very high and coloured for several days.

August can be a difficult month for the birdwatcher at the best of times but this year with the strange weather, the Reserve only open two half days each week and no access to the hides it was even more so. Nevertheless, there were one or two highlights, one of these the almost guaranteed sightings of Common Buzzards with one pair now certainly nesting in woodland across the river. A very obvious juvenile was seen early in the month calling and attempting several very clumsy landings in riverside trees. There were further sightings most days of one and sometimes two birds.

Little Egrets were another highlight with sightings most days and as many as six on one occasion in trees on the bottom island on the Lagoon. Here and the Wet Grassland were the best places to find this species.

Both juvenile Great Crested Grebes were on the Lagoon again for the first few days of the month and were last seen on 6<sup>th</sup>. Little Grebes were seen daily with as many as 10 on the Lagoon on 22<sup>nd</sup>. Up to 54 Gadwall were counted here but Tufted Ducks were conspicuous by their total absence for the second August in a row. Six juvenile Goosanders were on the Lagoon briefly on 2<sup>nd</sup>. Cormorants fished here daily, frequently resting in the trees on the bottom island but a count of 15 on 12<sup>th</sup> was exceptional. A female Shoveler was seen on the Reedbed with a small group of Mallard on 30<sup>th</sup>.

The Mute Swan family continued to surprise, a second adult turning up with the four surviving juveniles on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Following the sighting of a Water Rail on the Wet Grassland from the viewing screen last month a bird was heard in the same area on 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Kingfishers proved hard to find this month with just three sightings reported - on the river, Lagoon and Wet Grassland.

Other sightings included a juvenile Pied Flycatcher on the Willow Path on 1<sup>st</sup>, a Peregrine Falcon on the pylon on the farmland on 8<sup>th</sup>, a Little Owl on two dates, a Red Kite on just one date and a Treecreeper in willows on the River Path on 29<sup>th</sup>. Six Grey Herons gathered on the farmland on 20<sup>th</sup> and seven were counted in trees at the back of the Duck Marsh on 23<sup>rd</sup>. A Grey Partridge heard calling on the Scrubland on 23<sup>rd</sup> followed the sighting of two at the Dragonfly Ponds last month and was only the second record of the year. On 30<sup>th</sup> one was reported going onto Tim's Field. Five Swifts over the Reserve on 12<sup>th</sup> were the last sighting of the month. A Barn

Owl was seen at or near the nest box on the Scrubland on several dates and over John Ackroyd Meadow on one date.

By the third week of the month bird song had largely finished but the contact calls of Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs could be heard all round the Reserve. Several mixed feeding parties were reported towards the end of the month, these including Bluetits, Great Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps. On the wetlands Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers were now hard to find and there were no reported sightings after 8<sup>th</sup>. Hirundines were rather easier to spot. House Martins had been few and far between this year but 18 were counted on overhead wires near the Visitor Centre on 19<sup>th</sup> and a flock of more than 50 hirundines on 26<sup>th</sup> were said to be mainly this species. A number of Swallows regularly gathered on the overhead wires throughout the month.

With the vegetation high at this time of year mammals can be hard to spot but single Roe Deer were reported on paths round the Reserve on five dates and a Fox was also seen on five dates.

## **September**

The weather was not too different to August - unsettled for much of the month with blustery winds and rain and just a handful of warm, sunny days. Two such days on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> saw temperatures reach 25°C but just a day later it had dropped to 14°C. It turned very unpleasant from 23<sup>rd</sup> with daytime temperatures as low as 10°C, a northerly wind and a spell of torrential rain, hail, thunder and lightning on 24<sup>th</sup>. Overnight temperatures dropped as low as 2°C. A rare fine, sunny day with just a light breeze on 29<sup>th</sup> was followed by a grey, wet, cold end to the month on 30<sup>th</sup> - unpleasant for the few visitors who came that day and the volunteers on duty.

September is the month to start looking for passage visitors such as Stonechats en route to their wintering areas and Tim's Field is usually the best place to look. Perching on top of crops such as Quinoa, they can be quite easy to find when they are around. The first bird this autumn was photographed on a post on the Scrubland on 16<sup>th</sup> but in the last week of the month three were spotted on Tim's Field on 23<sup>rd</sup>, four on 26<sup>th</sup> and five on 29<sup>th</sup>.

Siskins and Lesser Redpolls were among other birds passing through this month. One or two Siskins were recorded on three dates but eight were seen in the bridge car park area on 19<sup>th</sup>. A Lesser Redpoll was reported

at the Dragonfly Ponds on 16<sup>th</sup> and three were in trees there on 19<sup>th</sup>. Three Meadow Pipits flew south on 12<sup>th</sup> with two on 16<sup>th</sup> but on 26<sup>th</sup> one was reported heading north!

A few summer visitors hung on. Five Common Whitethroats were seen on the River Path on 2<sup>nd</sup> and one was spotted in the same area on 5<sup>th</sup> but there were no reports after this date. Single Blackcaps were recorded on three dates but Chiffchaffs were active throughout the month with at least three birds still singing on 29<sup>th</sup>. The following day seven flew through near the Visitor Centre with at least 12 Long-tailed Tits. A very late Swift flew over the Visitor Centre on 7<sup>th</sup>. There was a report of 17 Swallows over the Lagoon and Duck Marsh on 20<sup>th</sup> and five flew east over Tim's Field on 30<sup>th</sup>. Seven House Martins were high over the Lagoon on 26<sup>th</sup> and 11 in the same area on 30<sup>th</sup>. Three Sand Martins were also recorded on 30<sup>th</sup>. However, a report of 21 Pink-footed Geese flying south east on 23<sup>rd</sup> was a sure sign that autumn had well and truly arrived, as was the sighting of a handful of Redwings on 30<sup>th</sup>.

On the wetlands the first two Wigeon of the autumn were on the Lagoon from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>; two were there again on 23<sup>rd</sup> and three on 30<sup>th</sup>. Three Shovelers were present on 19<sup>th</sup>, two on 23<sup>rd</sup> and seven on 30<sup>th</sup>. A few Teal started to arrive from 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11 were reported on 26<sup>th</sup>, six of these on the Wet Grassland. Good numbers of Gadwall were on the Lagoon daily with an excellent count of 84 on 2<sup>nd</sup> the best. Two Water Rails were heard on the Wet Grassland during a WeBS visit on 20<sup>th</sup> and on 30<sup>th</sup> an adult and juvenile were photographed there. Kingfishers were again hard to find with sightings reported on just two dates. Little Egrets too were much harder to find this month with single birds on just four dates and two on one date. There were more unusually high counts of Cormorants on the Lagoon this month - 17 on 20<sup>th</sup> and 15 on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Tufted Ducks were again conspicuous by their absence for the most part with three on the Lagoon during a WeBS visit on 20<sup>th</sup> the only sighting of the month. Unusually, Coots were just as hard to find with just a single bird on the Lagoon on 15<sup>th</sup>.

Other sightings included a Treecreeper on the Willow Path on two dates, a Grey Wagtail on three dates with two on 20<sup>th</sup>, a Goldcrest at the Dragonfly Ponds on 23<sup>rd</sup>, a Coal Tit in the Bee Garden on 26<sup>th</sup> (the first record since 1<sup>st</sup> January), a Little Owl in the compound on 16<sup>th</sup>, a Peregrine Falcon on 20<sup>th</sup> and single Red Kites on three dates with two on one date. Eight Tree Sparrows flew south east over the Dragonfly Ponds on 16<sup>th</sup> and two were seen in the Bee Garden on 26<sup>th</sup>. There was a lot of

Jay activity with up to five noisy birds together - presumably on their regular hazelnut and acorn forays at this time of year. A Snipe over Tim's Field on 26<sup>th</sup> was the first of the autumn as were three Linnets there on the same date.

There was again a good deal of daytime Fox activity with animals seen on eight dates. There had been few reports of Weasels this year but two Wrens were seen keeping a very careful eye on one as it left the ramp to the Reedbed Hide and crossed the path onto the Wet Grassland on 29<sup>th</sup>.

Barn Owls were in residence throughout the month at the nest box on the Scrubland but sightings were, as usual, limited to very early morning and late evening. Two birds were seen on a couple of dates. A Tawny Owl flew over the Willow Path at 9.00pm on 11<sup>th</sup> during the first of two Rodley Robins Bat Nights and one was calling in woodland across the river the next evening.

It was another good month for sightings of Common Buzzards. Birds were reported on nine dates with as many as five circling over the Scrubland on 17<sup>th</sup> and seven on 29<sup>th</sup>. There was also a lot of Sparrowhawk activity in the second half of the month with numerous sightings reported and plenty of evidence of successful kills on paths round the Reserve.

Small teams of volunteers continued to work on Mondays and Fridays doing essential habitat management tasks but the local farmer had to be brought in to cut the John Ackroyd and Mike Fisk Meadows at the beginning of the month.

## **October**

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October was the wettest day in the UK since records began in 1891. With persistent steady rain throughout the day over much of the UK experts have calculated that we received enough rainfall in a single day by volume to fill Loch Ness. It was certainly enough to fill most of our ponds. And it didn't get much better. There were only nine dry days in the whole month and visitors and volunteers endured another very wet one on 31<sup>st</sup>.

But there was still some good birdwatching to be had even on the wet days. Tim's Field was again the place to look for Stonechats this month and there were sightings most days up to 21<sup>st</sup> with as many as five birds perching on the Quinoa. A small flock of Linnets was also present some days with at least 40 birds on one occasion but often just a handful. A total

of 25 young Grey Partridges were released at the beginning of the month, 17 of these on Tim's Field and they soon found the cover and ready food source to their liking. Up to eight were counted at the edge of the field on 20<sup>th</sup> with another bird calling close by. Seven were spotted in the Bee Garden on 31<sup>st</sup>.

More Redwings started to pass through from 10<sup>th</sup> and there were sightings most days from that point with parties of up to 30 birds reported. The first Fieldfares of the autumn were recorded on 18<sup>th</sup> - a total of 15 birds. On 21<sup>st</sup> around 40 were seen flying over the Reserve in a southerly direction and on 30<sup>th</sup> five were spotted flying over Tim's Field. Blackbirds also start to arrive from Scandinavia this month and a high count of 19 during an early morning WeBS visit on 18<sup>th</sup> may well have included some migrants.

On the Lagoon Gadwall numbers were again high with several 80+ counts and a best of 112 on 16<sup>th</sup>. A few Shovelers could be picked out among them with 10 on 3<sup>rd</sup> the second highest ever count here. Small numbers of Wigeon were present on several dates with seven on 18<sup>th</sup>. However, perhaps the main highlight was the male Pintail in eclipse plumage which arrived on the very wet 3<sup>rd</sup> and was present until 18<sup>th</sup>, the first record of this species since 2018. Tufted Ducks were again hard to find with just a single female on two dates but for Coots it was even worse with not one record for the first time in the Reserve's history. Where have they gone? A Water Rail was heard on the Lagoon on two dates.

There was no sign of the remaining four juvenile Mute Swans this month apart from a solitary one on the Duck Marsh on 6<sup>th</sup>. An injured juvenile picked up on the river bridge by Swan Rescue on 17<sup>th</sup> was one of three collected in the area that morning, at least two of which were juveniles.

The Wet Grassland was drained this month in readiness for habitat management work. Birds were generally less easy to see as a result but this is often a good time to look for Water Rails here. Two were seen on 21<sup>st</sup> and one on 24<sup>th</sup>. A Green Sandpiper was seen here on three dates and on two other dates on the Duck Marsh. A few Teal were recorded most days on the remaining few small pools of water. Grey Wagtails were seen on five dates with two on 7<sup>th</sup>. A Cetti's Warbler photographed in a willow at the edge of the Wet Grassland on 24<sup>th</sup> was the first record of this elusive species for three months.

A Little Egret was reported on four dates, more often than not flying around though one was seen on the Lagoon on a couple of occasions with two there early in the day on 24<sup>th</sup>. With the river high and coloured for much

of the month we might have expected more Kingfisher activity on the wetlands but there were only four sightings - two on the Wet Grassland, one on the Lagoon and one on the Reedbed.

Other sightings this month included a Goldcrest on four dates, a female Goosander on seven dates, a Little Owl in the compound on 17<sup>th</sup> and a Coal Tit in the Manager's Garden on 31<sup>st</sup> - only the third record of this species this year. Jays were again very active and noisy. There were regular reports of Chiffchaffs throughout the month, some of these hopefully overwintering birds. There was also a lot of raptor activity. Sparrowhawks were reported on nine dates, a Kestrel on seven dates, Common Buzzards on eight dates with three on two dates and Red Kites on five dates with three on one date. Two Peregrine Falcons were watched chasing Wood Pigeons over the farmland on 10<sup>th</sup> and one was seen on the pylon behind the Manager's Garden on 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>.

Barn Owls were present at the nest box on the Scrubland throughout the month and two birds were seen at dusk on two dates. There were the usual signs of a bird roosting or certainly spending time in the roof of the thatched gazebo.

Three Roe Deer were seen in the Coppice by the western gate on 10<sup>th</sup>. What may have been the same three animals were reported on Tim's Field the following day. Foxes were only seen on two dates but there were signs of their presence everywhere. A Weasel was spotted on the River Path on 18<sup>th</sup> and a Rabbit by the Dipping Ponds on 25<sup>th</sup> was the second sighting this year - these the first records of this mammal for four years! A release of 55 Harvest Mice at the Scrubland site at the beginning of the month followed several earlier releases near the Lagoon between May and August.

This is the time of year when Harlequin Ladybirds start looking for their hibernation sites and the hides are always popular, even when they are locked up. A rare warm, pleasant day on 20<sup>th</sup> saw large numbers on the wing, many landing on the hides and managing to get in.

## **November**

A wet and very windy start to the month was soon replaced by more typical November weather in the form of fog. Fortunately, it did clear quite quickly some days to give some pleasant sunshine. It became increasingly windy again around the middle of the month for a time but it was quite mild with temperatures reaching 14°C on 17<sup>th</sup>. There were some chilly nights in the



latter part of the month with the first white frosts some evenings but these had largely disappeared by the following morning.

On the wetlands the Lagoon was the main focus of attention this month with winter visitors eagerly awaited. Some only stay a day or so and a male Pochard that dropped in on 7<sup>th</sup> was only there two days. The first three Goldeneyes of the autumn, a male and two females, arrived on 10<sup>th</sup> but had moved on by the following day. Shovelers were seen daily with five on 4<sup>th</sup> the best count and up to three Wigeon were present most days. Gadwall numbers fluctuated daily reaching 62 on 6<sup>th</sup>. Tufted Ducks were reported on several dates from 8<sup>th</sup> with numbers getting up to five by 28<sup>th</sup>. A single Coot put in a brief appearance on 10<sup>th</sup> - the joint worst ever November along with 2018 for this species. The Lagoon is not usually the best place to see Teal but with the other wetland areas low or drained for habitat management work birds could be seen most days with a best count of 24 on 8<sup>th</sup>.

The Duck Marsh has always been a good place for Snipe but with the hides closed there were few reports. However, five were accidentally flushed during habitat management work on the Wet Grassland on 23<sup>rd</sup> and four were seen on the Lagoon on 28<sup>th</sup>. Water Rails were heard on all four main wetland areas but were typically hard to spot - apart from one obliging individual who came out of Tim's Field on 14<sup>th</sup>, crossed the path and walked up the banking to the Wet Grassland. There were also sightings on the Lagoon and Duck Marsh. A Green Sandpiper was recorded on seven dates, mainly on the Back Reedbed and Duck Marsh with a second bird on two occasions. A Kingfisher was reported on the wetlands on five dates and on the river on one occasion. Following last month's sighting, a Cetti's Warbler was heard on the Wet Grassland on 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.

Greylag Geese numbers built up on the farmland to 110 by 21<sup>st</sup> but Canada Geese were thin on the ground with just four birds seen. There were no reports of flocks passing over the Reserve until 21<sup>st</sup> when a small group of 18 Pink-footed Geese flew over in a westerly direction. On 30<sup>th</sup> several hundred geese flying high over the Reserve in a westerly direction in five large skeins were almost certainly this species.

There were no further reports of Stonechats on Tim's Field this month but a small flock of up to 46 Linnets was seen there on a number of occasions and as many as 11 Chaffinches, these possibly migrants. Small numbers of Reed Buntings were also seen visiting the field for seed.

Common Buzzards were reported on eight dates with four on one date and three on one date. One or two birds were heard and seen on several occasions in trees on the far riverbank close to where nesting took place this year. Red Kites were reported on six dates with two on three dates. Barn Owl pellets were found in both the thatched gazebo and the Mike Sheldon Hide this month and a bird was seen on the Scrubland and at the nest box with two on occasions.

Winter thrush activity was limited to the first 11 days of the month. Around 30 Redwings flew north on 7<sup>th</sup> and on the same date a total of 52 Fieldfares were recorded travelling in the same direction. Up to 30 were seen in the Poplars. On 11<sup>th</sup> a total of 109 Fieldfares were logged flying south east and a few came into trees by the Lagoon late in the afternoon. Around 20 Blackbirds were counted on 28<sup>th</sup> including 12 at the Dragonfly Ponds - possible migrants as could have been three Song Thrushes in the same area on the same date. A Song Thrush seen three days earlier on John Ackroyd Meadow was the first sighting since the end of July.

Other sightings this month included a Blackcap on 7<sup>th</sup>, a Coal Tit on 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> (only 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> records this year), a Goldcrest on three dates, a Peregrine Falcon on three dates, a Pied Wagtail in the compound on two dates and a Woodcock on 28<sup>th</sup>. Up to six Grey Partridges were seen in the Bee Garden and the area around the Visitor Centre. Tree Sparrows could often be heard in the hedgerows around the Visitor Centre and on 22<sup>nd</sup> birds were seen going into both nest boxes on the walls of the centre. Disappointingly, there were no reports of possible overwintering Chiffchaffs this month. A Little Egret flying over Tim's Field on 30<sup>th</sup> was the only record of the month.

There were some large gatherings of Jackdaws and two birds of the Nordic race were picked out in one flock of more than 150 on the farmland on 18<sup>th</sup>. Lesser Redpolls were recorded on three dates but a very mobile flock photographed on 7<sup>th</sup> was found to contain 60 birds - possibly brought down by misty conditions at the time.

There were two interesting mammal sightings this month. A Brown Hare seen emerging from Tim's Field on 15<sup>th</sup> was only the fourth record in the Reserve's history and the following day a Harvest Mouse was seen on the Wet Grassland during reed cutting.

## December

Sleet turned to snow for a time on 4<sup>th</sup> but the first three weeks of the month were relatively mild with rain the main feature. Temperatures were in double figures around the middle of the month, reaching 14°C on 18<sup>th</sup>. It came much colder on Christmas Eve and a fine but very cold Christmas Day saw the Duck Marsh, Reedbed and Wet Grassland frozen over but a good deal of the Lagoon remained ice-free. Storm Bella brought heavy rain and strong winds for a few hours late in the day on Boxing Day and there was some heavy rain on 27<sup>th</sup> for a time. Temperatures never got above 3°C for the remainder of the month and there was a thin covering of snow on 29<sup>th</sup>. Part of the Lagoon remained ice-free fortunately but much of the other wetland areas were frozen over.

Goosanders start to gather on the Lagoon late in the day in the winter months for a spot of socialising. Nine birds there on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> included eight females and this was the pattern throughout the month though three males did turn up on 28<sup>th</sup>. On 23<sup>rd</sup> a report of 13 birds included as many as 12 females.

Tufted Ducks finally started to arrive in some numbers with 17 on 17<sup>th</sup> including 14 males. A count of 18 on 23<sup>rd</sup> was the highest number recorded this year and in fact the highest since February 2019. A total of 18 birds were again recorded on 29<sup>th</sup>. Goldeneyes were absent in December last year but there were daily sightings this year, initially just a single male but on 22<sup>nd</sup> four males and a female were present. The following day six birds were counted. Wigeon were rather harder to find with a single male on a few dates and two birds on one date. Gadwall numbers continued to fluctuate from day to day with a best count of 48 on 5<sup>th</sup>. Coot numbers finally reached three on the Lagoon on 29<sup>th</sup>. With more water on the Wet Grassland there was more Teal activity there with 23 on 16<sup>th</sup> the best count of the month.

It was a good month for Water Rails and, unusually, all records came from the Lagoon. Birds were heard or seen here on eight dates. The middle island was always worth checking. On 22<sup>nd</sup> two birds were involved in a brief skirmish here and a possible third bird was seen a few minutes later on the small island to the right.

A Little Egret flew over the Lagoon from up river landing in trees on the bottom island late in the day on 6<sup>th</sup>, possibly intending to roost there but there were no further sightings. The trees here have become a popular gathering place for Cormorants and up to nine were seen here this month.

There were a few reports of Snipe, three of these on the Lagoon with two birds on one occasion. One was seen on the Wet Grassland on 4<sup>th</sup> and three were reported flying over the wetlands on 5<sup>th</sup>. On 25<sup>th</sup> one flew off the marsh area at the Dragonfly Ponds and over the Scrubland. There was little Kingfisher activity on the wetlands with just one sighting on the Wet Grassland and one on the Lagoon. A bird was seen on the river on two dates and on 6<sup>th</sup> one was spotted on a post on Tim's Field close to the Dipping Ponds. A Green Sandpiper was on the Duck Marsh on 16<sup>th</sup> and on the Wet Grassland on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Greylag Geese numbers continued to build on the farmland reaching 171 on 26<sup>th</sup>. Canada Geese numbers suddenly shot up from the middle of the month with 216 on 25<sup>th</sup> the highest ever count in any month. A large broken skein of Pink-footed Geese flying in a north westerly direction on 9<sup>th</sup> contained 349 birds; on 19<sup>th</sup> a skein of 69 were recorded flying west and on 30<sup>th</sup> 250 were counted going in the same direction. At least 14 Lapwings flew onto the farmland on 30<sup>th</sup>, this only the second record in the last six months of the year.

An abundant seed crop on Tim's Field attracted good numbers of small birds with Linnets, Chaffinches, Reed Buntings and Tree Sparrows all recorded. A Linnet flock photographed over the field on 2<sup>nd</sup> was found to include 96 birds. Chaffinch numbers were exceptional with up to 30 recorded and almost certainly winter visitors as this species is usually far from numerous here. Seven Grey Herons flying low over the field at 4.10pm on 20<sup>th</sup> was an interesting record.

There was quite a bit of raptor activity this month. A Peregrine Falcon was seen on the pylon on the farmland behind the Manager's Garden on six dates; Sparrowhawks were reported on six dates, Common Buzzards on seven dates with two on two occasions and Red Kites on seven dates with three together on 26<sup>th</sup>.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December the old Barn Owl box on the Scrubland was taken down and replaced with a new box with a camera installed. The work was carried out by experts in this field. The old box was found to contain a dead chick, broken egg shells and scores of pellets. Just three days later a bird was seen at the new box at 4.50pm which was encouraging. Daytime sightings are few and far between here but at 1.15pm on 26<sup>th</sup> one was watched from the end of the River Path being pursued over the Scrubland by Crows and Magpies.

Watching riverside trees from the bridge can often be productive. Two Goldcrests were seen here on 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, a Chiffchaff on 12<sup>th</sup> and a Coal Tit on 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Other sightings this month included three Lesser Redpolls on two dates, two Grey Wagtails on 30<sup>th</sup> and a Treecreeper on the same date. Single Song Thrushes were recorded on four dates. Tree Sparrows were daily visitors to the feeders in the Bee Garden with as many as seven recorded. A Cetti's Warbler was heard at the edge of the Coppice on 9<sup>th</sup> and in the Reedbed on 12<sup>th</sup>. There was little winter thrush activity this month but another good count of at least 20 Blackbirds on 23<sup>rd</sup> could well have included some winter visitors.

## Introduction to the Systematic List of Birds

The bird's name is followed by the Latin name and a description of its status on the Reserve. In order to do this, each bird has been placed in one of the following categories:

Resident	A species which is found on the Reserve throughout the year.
Common	A species which is present regularly or in large numbers but not necessarily all year.
Uncommon	Occurs most years but only on a few days or in low numbers
Scarce	Has occurred more than 10 times but not on an annual basis.
Rare	Has occurred fewer than 10 times.
Passage	Seen when moving between winter and breeding areas elsewhere.
Migrant	Generally only present for a short time, usually on passage.
Visitor	Usually present for more than a day at any time.
Casual Breeder	Has bred irregularly on the Reserve and is likely to do so again.
Escaped Species	Used where there is a possibility that some (but not necessarily all) records of a species refer to birds that have escaped from captivity.

The observer's initials appear in brackets after some records.

Abbreviations used in the Report:

BTO British Trust for Ornithology

c approximately

*et al* and others

RNR Rodley Nature Reserve

WeBS BTO Wetland Bird Survey

YNU Yorkshire Naturalists Union

## **Systematic List of Birds Recorded**

### **Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* Resident Breeder**

The last three years have been very strange for our resident Mute Swans. In both 2017 and 2019 both the Wet Grassland pair and the Duck Marsh pair were seen on nests but both failed to produce any young. In 2018 the Duck Marsh birds produced six cygnets and the Wet Grassland pair five but, unusually, both families had disappeared within a two week period between 24<sup>th</sup> June and 8<sup>th</sup> July. The Wet Grassland birds did reappear at the beginning of August but now with just three cygnets and one of those subsequently disappeared. Human interference or predators were suspected at the time but never proved. Up to eight adults were on the wetlands at times in the early part of this year and by the end of March both the Wet Grassland pair and the Duck Marsh pair were on nests. There was no activity at the Wet Grassland nest after the middle of May but on 20<sup>th</sup> May the Duck Marsh birds were seen with nine small cygnets (PM/BM). Three days later they were seen on the Lagoon and on 4<sup>th</sup> June they were on the river behind the Wet Grassland but now with just eight cygnets (KMCL). The family was subsequently reported on the Lagoon and Reedbed but by 25<sup>th</sup> June they had lost two more cygnets. By the end of July they were down to four. The family was last seen together on the Lagoon on 26<sup>th</sup> September (JWC *et al*) with two additional adults causing some aggravation. A solitary cygnet was seen on the Duck Marsh on 6<sup>th</sup> October (DW). On 17<sup>th</sup> October Yorkshire Swan Wildlife Rescue Hospital were called to attend to three injured swans, at least two of which were juveniles. One of these birds was found on the river bridge on the Reserve and the other two nearby. With water levels kept low on the other wetlands for habitat management work just two adults were on the Lagoon daily from 20<sup>th</sup> October to the end of the year.

### **Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Passage Visitor**

Birds that have overwintered further south are occasionally recorded in March on their way back to their breeding grounds in Iceland. On 6<sup>th</sup> March this year four were seen flying over the Dragonfly Ponds (PU/DSc) and on 14<sup>th</sup> March 13 flew over in an easterly direction before turning west (JWC *et al*). Autumn sightings are usually less common here but there were two in October last year. There were none this year.

### **Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* Passage Visitor**

Breeding in Spitsbergen, Iceland and Greenland, large numbers spend the winter in Britain and skeins can be seen passing over the Reserve between September and March. Odd birds do turn up on the Reserve and neighbouring farmland on occasions and one was spotted on several



dates between 19<sup>th</sup> January and 2<sup>nd</sup> February this year (JWC *et al*). It was seen on the Lagoon on three dates during this period. On 25<sup>th</sup> January a skein of more than 100 birds flew over the Reserve (PA/AL *et al*). On 4<sup>th</sup> March a skein of 75 birds was reported passing over the Reserve (NK). On 7<sup>th</sup> March one flew over in a westerly direction accompanied by two Canada Geese (JWC). There was a very large movement of birds flying over in a west/north westerly direction on 14<sup>th</sup> March - a total of 793 birds logged in total (JWC). The first small flock of the autumn - 21 birds - passed over in a south easterly direction on 23<sup>rd</sup> September (JWC) and three days later two flew over in the same direction. On 30<sup>th</sup> October around 100 were reported flying east over Rodley and probably over the Reserve (JWC). On 21<sup>st</sup> November 18 birds flew over the Reserve in a westerly direction (JWC). Several hundred geese in five large skeins that passed high over the Reserve in a westerly direction on 30<sup>th</sup> November (DS/JSK) were almost certainly this species. A broken skein photographed flying north west on 9<sup>th</sup> December totalled 349 birds (JWC). Further skeins passed over the Reserve in the latter part of the month - 69 on 19<sup>th</sup> and 250+ on 30<sup>th</sup> (JWC).

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser* Resident Breeder/ Winter Visitor**

Despite a goose cull on local farmland in the latter part of 2019 a report of 196 there on 22<sup>nd</sup> January (DC/EC) was the second highest ever count for that month (c200 in January 2019). With the cull continuing into the spring this year numbers dropped dramatically after this with a best count of just 26 in February. A few birds were seen on the wetlands some days with 23 on the Lagoon on 15<sup>th</sup> March (DC/EC) the best count there. A few did remain throughout the spring and summer and on 8<sup>th</sup> April single birds were on nests on two of the islands on the Lagoon. On 27<sup>th</sup> April an adult was seen with two goslings there and on 29<sup>th</sup> May two adults were seen with one tiny gosling coming out of the Lagoon near the Duck Marsh hide (PM/BM). On 25<sup>th</sup> June two adults were on the Lagoon with four large juveniles (PM/BM). Numbers started to build on the farmland again in November reaching 110 on 21<sup>st</sup> of that month (JWC) and 171 on 26<sup>th</sup> December (JWC) thanks to the absence of any further culling. Monthly maxima are shown below (adults only).

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
196	26	25	21	18	2	5	-	6	45	110	171

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* Resident Breeder/Winter Vis.**

Despite the continuation of culling on nearby farmland there were some substantial counts in the early part of the year - 133 on the farmland on

12<sup>th</sup> January (WeBS) and 136 on 18<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC) being the highest that month. Other days produced no more than 20 or 30 birds. Storm Ciara brought extensive flooding on 9<sup>th</sup> February and the Reserve had to close but 170 birds assembled on the Lagoon that day (PM/BM). At least 140 were on the flooded farmland on 12<sup>th</sup> and 178 on 16<sup>th</sup> February (DC/EC et al). Numbers started to fall in March but up to 80 birds were still present up until the middle of the month. A few remained throughout the spring and early summer and birds were seen on nests on all three islands on the Lagoon. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April one was also reported on a nest on the Duck Marsh . An adult and four goslings were in the bridge car park on 2<sup>nd</sup> May (GJB) and on 6<sup>th</sup> May an adult and two goslings were seen on the middle island on the Lagoon but there was no other evidence of successful nesting. Numbers on the farmland started to build from August last year but local culling kept birds on the move. This year there were sightings on only a few dates throughout the autumn with no more than four birds recorded. However, there was a big increase in numbers from the middle of December with around 90 birds on the farmland on 15<sup>th</sup> ,192 there on 23<sup>rd</sup> (JWC) and a record count of 216 on 25<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM). Monthly maxima are shown below (adults only).

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
136	178	80	22	14	11	11	1	2	4	4	216

**Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucosis* **Rare Visitor / Escaped Sp.**

There were again no records this year. A single bird seen on the farmland during an early morning WeBS visit on 18th April 2010 was the first record since 26th April 2003 and only the second for the Reserve.

**Dark-bellied Brent Goose** *Branta bernicla* **Rare Visitor**

This was a new bird for the Reserve in 2016 - a single bird found on the farmland with other geese on 13<sup>th</sup> November. There have been no sightings since this date.

**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiaca* **Rare Visitor**

Feral populations of this species occur in parts of Britain and on the Continent. It was a new bird for the Reserve in 2018 - a single bird picked out among the Greylag Geese on the farmland on 4<sup>th</sup> March. There have been no further sightings.

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* **Scarce Visitor**

There was just one record this year - a single bird on the farmland on 7<sup>th</sup> February (AB). Last year produced two sightings - on 20<sup>th</sup> January a

female was on the Lagoon briefly and on 16<sup>th</sup> February two flew over the farmland.

**Mandarin *Aix galericulata* Rare Visitor**

There were no sightings this year. First recorded here in 2009, there was one sighting in 2014, four in 2017, one in 2018 and one last year on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. All earlier sightings had been in March or April. There is a substantial feral population at Harewood Park.

**Wigeon *Anas penelope* Winter Visitor**

January 2018 produced a best count of 22 and in January 2019 we recorded 10. This year no more than two birds were seen on the Lagoon in either January or February. A male on 19<sup>th</sup> February was the last of the winter. A male and female on the Lagoon on 16<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM) were a real surprise and on 20<sup>th</sup> June a male and two females were recorded there (JWC). A male and one female were still present on 23<sup>rd</sup> June (BM). The first two birds of the autumn arrived on the early date of 2<sup>nd</sup> September (JWC) but typically only stayed a few days. On 23<sup>rd</sup> September two were again present. Numbers reached five on 3<sup>rd</sup> October (JWC) and seven on 18<sup>th</sup> October (PM/BM) but then dropped back to two or three throughout the remainder of that month, November and into December. Just a single male was present some days from 6<sup>th</sup> December to the end of the year. With no double figure counts it was a disappointing year. Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2	2	-	-	-	3	-	-	3	7	3	2

**Gadwall *Anas strepera* Resident Breeder**

This is by far the commonest duck to be seen on the Reserve throughout the year. However, numbers do fluctuate considerably. Counts in January last year were the lowest for that month since 2010. January this year was very different with a best count of 46 on the Lagoon on 15<sup>th</sup> (DC/EC) the second highest ever for January. Numbers increased steadily in February reaching 96 on 22<sup>nd</sup> (JSc), this the highest ever February count. They started to drop back in March but a report of 70 late in the day on 1<sup>st</sup> March (PM/JB) proved to be the highest ever for that month too. The first family of five ducklings appeared on the Lagoon on 25<sup>th</sup> May, just four days earlier than last year. At least three further families of up to seven ducklings could be seen on the Lagoon over the next five weeks and on 1<sup>st</sup> July a family of eight tiny ducklings was reported there. September 2019 produced an all time record count of 142. Numbers reached

nowhere near this figure this year , 84 on the Lagoon on 2<sup>nd</sup> September (JWC) being the best. Numbers on the Lagoon fluctuated greatly from day to day with only 24 on 14<sup>th</sup> October and 112 just two days later (PM/BM). November produced a best count of 62 on 6<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM) and the best in December was 48 on 5<sup>th</sup> (DC/EC). Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
46	96	70	36	25	44	50	54	84	112	62	48

### **Pintail *Anas acuta* Rare Visitor**

A male in eclipse plumage arrived on the Lagoon on a very wet 3<sup>rd</sup> October (JWC). The bird was present until 18<sup>th</sup> October. This species was first recorded in 2011. There were sightings in 2012 and in each of the three years from 2016 to 2018. There were no records last year.

### **Teal *Anas crecca* Winter/Passage Visitor**

Numbers in the early part of the year were up a bit on last year. The Duck Marsh is usually the favourite site for this species and 27 were recorded here on 12<sup>th</sup> January (WeBS). The same area continued to produce double figure counts throughout February but a report of 23 on the Wet Grassland on 24<sup>th</sup> February (JB) proved to be the highest for that month. A count of 25 on 1<sup>st</sup> March also included a few birds on the Wet Grassland (DC/EC) and though numbers fell away after this the Wet Grassland continued to produce sightings up to 23<sup>rd</sup> April. There were no records after this until 16<sup>th</sup> June when a single male was on the Lagoon (PM/BM). Four were on the Duck Marsh on 29<sup>th</sup> July (JWC) but there were then no further sightings until 2<sup>nd</sup> September when five were on the Wet Grassland (JWC). Birds were reported most days from the middle of September, numbers reaching 11 on 20<sup>th</sup> of that month (WeBS). October and November last year produced the lowest ever counts for those months. There was some improvement this year, a count of 19 on 18<sup>th</sup> October (WeBS) being the best for that month. In November, with water levels lowered for habitat management, most sightings were on the Lagoon. A total of 24 were counted here on 8<sup>th</sup> November (JB/MB). With water levels restored the Wet Grassland produced the best December count of 23 on 16<sup>th</sup> (JWC). Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
27	23	25	10	-	1	4	-	11	19	24	23

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* **Resident Breeder**

Numbers in the first three months of the year were rather higher than last year. On 12<sup>th</sup> January a total of 49 were recorded on the wetlands during an early morning WeBS count. Later the same day 46 birds on the Wet Grassland included 44 males and just two females (PM/BM). The Wet Grassland continued to be productive. On 1<sup>st</sup> February a report of 34 birds on the wetlands included 30 here (DC/EC). The first family of five ducklings appeared on the river on 21<sup>st</sup> April (JB/MB), nearly a month earlier than last year. Two days later a family of seven ducklings was also seen on the river (JSK). On 14<sup>th</sup> May a female and two medium sized ducklings were on the Wet Grassland (PM/BM) and on 7<sup>th</sup> June a female and three ducklings were on the Lagoon (WeBS). Maximum counts in April, May and June were the lowest for many years but this was more likely down to lack of observers due to lockdown. Numbers certainly went up considerably in July with a count of 66 on 5<sup>th</sup> (WeBS) by far the highest of the year. They dropped back sharply after this though counts in November and December were generally somewhat higher than last year. Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
49	34	35	7	9	17	66	26	36	35	30	20

**Garganey** *Anas querquedula* **Scarce (Summer) Visitor**

There have been no sightings in the last two years. In 2018 a male bird spent 11 days on the Reserve from 4<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> April. Prior to this the species had only been recorded in 2003, 2006, 2014 and 2015.

**Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* **Winter/Passage Visitor**

A male and female on the Wet Grassland on 12<sup>th</sup> February (DC/EC *et al*) were the first of the year. There were no further sightings until 9<sup>th</sup> May when a male and female were on the Duck Marsh (JWC). A male was still present on 11<sup>th</sup> May but this was the last sighting until 30<sup>th</sup> August when a female appeared on the Reedbed (PM/BM). Three birds were on the Lagoon on 19<sup>th</sup> September and seven on 30<sup>th</sup> September (JWC). Birds were then seen daily throughout October with as many as 10 on 3<sup>rd</sup> (JWC), this the second highest ever count (12 being the highest in October 2016). Numbers thereafter varied daily between three and eight. Birds were again present daily throughout November and much of December with just one or two some days and four or five on others. Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
-	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	7	10	5	5

**Pochard *Aythya ferina* Winter/Passage Visitor**

2019 produced the first double figure counts since 2014 with 10 or 11 birds on a number of dates in January and February. It was very different this year with no more than two in those months. Two males arrived on the Lagoon on 29<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC *et al*) and were present until 2<sup>nd</sup> February. There were no further sightings until 24<sup>th</sup> April when five (4Γ+1E) were recorded on the Lagoon (PM/BM). The birds didn't stay long and a single male and female on 28<sup>th</sup> April (JSK) were the last of the spring. Like last year, the latter part of the year was very disappointing with just a single male on the Lagoon on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> November (JWC *et al*). Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2	2	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* Casual Breeder and Winter Visitor**

The status of this once common bird should perhaps more accurately be described as Former Breeder rather than Casual Breeder as it seems increasingly likely that its breeding days here have ended. Only one pair has nested successfully in the last 11 years and that was in 2015. A report of 16 birds on 26<sup>th</sup> January included 11 on the river (JWC) and proved to be the highest in the first half of the year. Counts in this period were all down on last year and for the second year in succession birds were completely absent in August. Three appeared on the Lagoon for a WeBS count on 20<sup>th</sup> September but that was the only reported sighting of the month. It was a similar picture in October with just a single female on two dates. There were a few more sightings in November, numbers reaching five on 28<sup>th</sup> and more birds started to arrive in December with 17 counted on 17<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM) and 18 on 23<sup>rd</sup> (JWC). With half the Lagoon frozen over 18 were again counted there on 29<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM). Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
16	10	8	9	6	5	4	-	3	1	5	18

**Scaup *Aythya marila* Rare Visitor**

There were no records this year. Last year an immature bird arrived on the Lagoon on 10<sup>th</sup> November and was seen most days until 15<sup>th</sup> December. Prior to that there had been no sightings from 2015 to 2018. In 2014 a female was present on the Lagoon almost daily from 1<sup>st</sup>

February until 9<sup>th</sup> March. There had only been two previous records, both in 2000.

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra* **Rare Visitor**

Large numbers of this species winter around our shores and there is also a very small Scottish and Irish breeding population. A female or immature bird seen on the Lagoon on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016 was the first ever record for the Reserve. There have been no sightings in the last four years.

**Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* **Winter Visitor**

2019 produced the highest ever January and February counts - 8 and 16 respectively. Numbers were much lower this year, particularly so in February. Three males were on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> January (JWC), four males and a female on 12<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM), three males and three females on 19<sup>th</sup> (JSK) and two males and one female on 26<sup>th</sup> (JWC). Birds were present most days in February but no more than three. On 7<sup>th</sup> March six birds (5♂+1♀) flew onto the Lagoon from the west (JWC) and the following day four were recorded flying off the Lagoon during an early morning WeBS count. Over the next few days there were reports of up to three and a single female seen on the river from the River Path on 20<sup>th</sup> March (JSK) was the last of the spring. The first and only record of the autumn came on 10<sup>th</sup> November when a male and two females were on the Lagoon (PM/BM). A single male was on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> December (PM/BM) and there were daily sightings thereafter. A male and female were seen on 12<sup>th</sup> and on 22<sup>nd</sup> December four males and a female were there (PM/BM). The following day three males including one in eclipse plumage and three females were recorded (JWC *et al*). Some of these birds quickly moved on leaving just a single female on 29<sup>th</sup>. Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
6	3	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	6

**Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola* **Rare Visitor**

This North American duck is a rare vagrant to Western Europe. On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017 a female was seen and photographed on the Reedbed. The bird stayed until 14<sup>th</sup> May and was recorded during a WeBS visit that morning. The bird was ringed and had a tag on the other leg but was it a wild bird or an escapee from a collection? There have been no subsequent sightings.

**Goosander *Mergus merganser* Common Visitor**

Late afternoon gatherings on the Lagoon in the winter months are a regular feature but numbers in the first two months of this year were disappointing with the best just 9 birds (5Γ+4E) on 12<sup>th</sup> January (PL/ML). In the same period last year up to 18 were recorded but the highest ever was 41 in January 2010. Up to six were seen on the river in January. With the river in flood early in February five females were on the Lagoon much sooner in the day on 9<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM). Unusually, there were no reports of family parties on the river last year but on 22<sup>nd</sup> April this year a female was seen with 11 young just upstream of the Reserve (SD). On 28<sup>th</sup> April one was reported with seven or eight young just above the river bridge (JSK) and on 9<sup>th</sup> May one was recorded with 15 young in the same area (JWC). It is not known whether the two Goosander boxes in riverside trees were used this year. There were only a handful of records in the next five months, one of these a group of six “redheads” on the Lagoon on 2<sup>nd</sup> August (PM/BM). A single female was recorded on seven dates in October, usually on the river. There were just three records in November with no more than two birds seen. There was a considerable improvement in December with birds starting to gather on the Lagoon towards dusk. Nine on 5<sup>th</sup> included eight females (JWC) and there was a similar count the following afternoon. The best count of the month came on 23<sup>rd</sup> with 13 birds, but again just one male (JWC). On 28<sup>th</sup> a report of eight birds did include three males this time (JSK). The maximum daily count for each month is shown below. With the exception of December, numbers in all months were lower than last year.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
9	8	3	3	1	-	1	6	-	1	2	13

**Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* Now Rare**

The national cull of this species was very successful and there have been no sightings since 16<sup>th</sup> May 2009. Birds bred on the Reserve in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

**Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* Rare Visitor**

There have been no sightings since 24<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* Casual Breeder**

Small releases of birds have been made on the Reserve in the past, the last in 2017. Two further releases were made this year - in July five breeding pairs and at the beginning of October 25 young birds. There had been no sightings on the Reserve since 15<sup>th</sup> February 2019. The new birds appeared to settle in well and on 17<sup>th</sup> July a male and female were seen



at the Dragonfly Ponds (DW/MU). On 23<sup>rd</sup> August one was heard calling on the far Scrubland (PM/BM) and on 30<sup>th</sup> August one was seen at the edge of Tim's Field (JB). Following the release of the juvenile birds in October there were numerous reports of up to eight at the edge of Tim's Field, in the Bee Garden, on John Ackroyd Meadow, on the Willow Path and just outside the Visitor Centre. Birds were rather harder to find in December with just two records, the last on 31<sup>st</sup> when a male flew out of the Bee Garden and two were seen on Tim's Field near the feeding area (JB/MB).

**Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* Resident Breeder**

This species is surprisingly common on the Reserve considering the Fox population. Pheasants are easy to see in the Manager's Garden and Bee Garden where birds gather under the feeders to pick up dropped seed. In the first two months of the year up to eight were seen in the Manager's Garden and five in the Bee Garden. With the hides and Visitor Centre closed due to lockdown from March to the end of the year there were few further records from these popular sites. There was only one record of successful nesting - a female with three young on the path by the Dipping Ponds on 11<sup>th</sup> August (PM/BM). Tim's Field is popular in the autumn and winter months, providing as it does good cover and a plentiful supply of seed. The species was certainly under-reported in the latter part of the year but on 25<sup>th</sup> October six females or juveniles were recorded flying off the field and onto the Wet Grassland (PM/BM).

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Resident**

The Lagoon and the pylon by the Fish Pass have always been the places to look for this species. Birds are present daily throughout the year. Numbers in the first four months of the year were a little higher than last year with up to seven on the Lagoon. Maximum counts in May and June were the same as last year but in July, August and September were somewhat higher. In recent years birds have taken to loafing in trees on the bottom island on the Lagoon and this year there were some particularly high counts on the Lagoon in August and September. A total of 15 were counted here on 12<sup>th</sup> August (JWC), 17 on 20<sup>th</sup> September (DW) and 15 on 22<sup>nd</sup> September (DW). Numbers typically drop in the last two months of the year and most days no more than six were to be seen on the Lagoon. However, nine were counted in trees on the bottom island on 20<sup>th</sup> December at 4.00pm (PM/BM). The highest counts each month are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
9	7	4	7	7	8	9	16	17	10	8	9

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* **Rare Visitor**

One spent several weeks in the Reedbed and on the Duck Marsh from 16<sup>th</sup> January 2016. It was last seen on 26<sup>th</sup> April that year. There have been no sightings since then.

**Great White Egret** (*Ardea alba*) **Rare Visitor**

First recorded as a flyover on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2018, there were a number of sightings last year starting with a bird on one of the tern rafts on 25<sup>th</sup> August. Prior to this there had been a number of reports of a bird a few miles further along the canal. The bird was very mobile, spending much of the time away from the Reserve along the canal and it was last seen on 28<sup>th</sup> October fishing on the canal just beyond the Ring Road. This year one was reported flying west about half a mile further up the valley on 26<sup>th</sup> June (JKi). On 15<sup>th</sup> July what was probably the same bird was seen on the Wet Grassland before eventually flying off in an easterly direction (JWC). Just four days later it was reported on one of the islands on the Lagoon (JB/MB). There were no further sightings.

**Little Egret** (*Egretta garzetta*) **Common Visitor**

In 2018 we had to wait until 2<sup>nd</sup> July for the first sighting. Last year the first bird was seen on 26<sup>th</sup> January. This year the first sighting was reported on 14<sup>th</sup> May - two birds on the Wet Grassland (PM/BM). There were regular sightings from this point, the Wet Grassland being the most popular area. From the middle of July two or three birds were regularly seen in trees on the bottom island on the Lagoon but on 3<sup>rd</sup> August six were counted here (PU). A seventh bird was spotted a little later. Five were reported in the trees on 7<sup>th</sup> August and four on 9<sup>th</sup> August (DW). One or two continued to be seen through the remainder of August, September and much of October. Two were seen in the trees on the bottom island on the Lagoon early in the day on 24<sup>th</sup> October (DW) but there were then no further sightings until 30<sup>th</sup> November when one was reported flying over Tim's Field (DS). The final record of the year came on 6<sup>th</sup> December when a bird flew over the Lagoon from further up river, landing in one of the trees on the island at 3.45pm (PM/BM). In 2019 there were no sightings after 25<sup>th</sup> September.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* **Resident**

The wetlands inevitably produce the most sightings of this bird but gatherings sometimes occur on the farmland and a count of 12 here on 5<sup>th</sup> January (JWC) proved to be the highest of the year. Interestingly, 10 settled here on the same date last year having been disturbed by a helicopter. The Duck Marsh and trees behind are always popular. Six birds were counted here on 2<sup>nd</sup> February with a further three on the Wet

Grassland (DC/EC), this the best count of the month. The Dragonfly Ponds and Dipping Ponds are also popular, particularly early and late in the day when there are few people about. There were numerous sightings at both places. Tim's Field seems an unlikely place to find Grey Herons but eight gathered here on 16<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM), this the highest count that month. Nine were recorded during an early morning WeBS count on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, seven of these in trees behind the Duck Marsh. A count of eight birds on 20<sup>th</sup> December included seven flying together low over Tim's Field late in the afternoon (PM/BM). The highest counts each month are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
12	9	5	3	5	8	4	9	5	7	6	8

### **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* **Resident Breeder**

Birds can be hard to find on the wetlands in the early part of the year, seemingly preferring the river when water levels are suitable. Having said this, three were recorded on the Lagoon on 26<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC). From the latter part of February there were sighting on all four main wetland areas with five on the Lagoon on 11<sup>th</sup> March (MG/PG). Successful nesting was first noted on 8<sup>th</sup> June - an adult and one chick on the Duck Marsh (PM/BM). On 30<sup>th</sup> June an adult and single chick were also seen on the Wet Grassland (PM/BM). Four large juveniles seen on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> July (PM/BM) were evidence of much earlier nesting but, like last year, the number of pairs breeding successfully was disappointing. The highest counts typically came between August and October with 12 on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, eight of these on the Lagoon during an early morning WeBS visit the best. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 10 were counted on the Lagoon (PM/BM) and nine were recorded there on 8<sup>th</sup> November (JB/MB) but numbers started to fall in the second half of that month and no more than one bird was seen after 12<sup>th</sup> December. Monthly maxima are shown below (adults only).

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
3	4	5	6	3	4	3	12	6	10	9	4

### **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* **Summer Visitor/ Breeder**

The first bird arrived on the Lagoon this year on 8<sup>th</sup> February, nearly two weeks earlier than last year, but there were no further sightings until 2<sup>nd</sup> March when a single bird was again reported. On 4<sup>th</sup> March a second bird arrived and the two were observed displaying (DC/EC). As in previous years a nest was built at the back of the middle island and on 2<sup>nd</sup> May two chicks were seen on the back of one of the adults (PM/BM). A third chick

was seen subsequently. Only two young were to be seen after 4<sup>th</sup> June and one adult disappeared in the first week of July. The other adult disappeared the following week but both juveniles continued to be seen until 5<sup>th</sup> August. The pattern of arrival in February and departure around August was fairly typical of most years.

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* **Common Visitor**

Recorded in all months except June this year, the two most productive months for sightings were January and February but this is now such a common bird that many sightings almost certainly go unreported. Most reports were of one or two birds but three were seen on occasions and five on 29<sup>th</sup> February (JSc). Grass cutting on the farmland is guaranteed to bring them in but with the Reserve closed from late March to early July this year there were only a few reports of single birds during this period.

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* **Rare Visitor**

There were three records between 4<sup>th</sup> August and 21<sup>st</sup> September 2018 - these the first for the Reserve but all flyovers. There have been no reported sightings in 2019 or 2020.

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* **Casual Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve and there was a good range of sightings throughout the year with plenty of evidence of successful hunts. A male bird visited the Bee Garden on several dates hoping to catch birds at the feeders, the first on 15<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC). On 8<sup>th</sup> February three were seen over the Scrubland (JWC). Females are capable of taking much larger prey and on 16<sup>th</sup> February one flushed five Snipe on the Duck Marsh (JWC). On 7<sup>th</sup> March two were reported displaying over the Coppice (JWC). On 8<sup>th</sup> April a walk round the Reserve revealed evidence of at least six pigeon kills, the work of either a female Sparrowhawk or a Peregrine. On 19<sup>th</sup> June one was observed pursuing a Swallow (probably unsuccessfully) over the Dragonfly Ponds (PU). The second half of September and October were particularly productive with regular sightings of both male and female birds. In November a male and female were seen over the Lagoon on 5<sup>th</sup> (DW) and on 19<sup>th</sup> a juvenile male was observed hovering almost Kestrel-like over Tim's Field, attempting to flush small birds (PM/BM). A juvenile male, adult male and female were all reported in December with a burst of activity around the middle of the month.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* **Common Visitor and Casual Breeder**

Who would have thought this species would ever be classed as a Common Visitor let alone a Casual Breeder. Sightings were reported on

a record 111 days this year with as many as seven birds in the air together. There were again sightings in every month. On 8<sup>th</sup> February five were seen together over the Scrubland (JWC) and on 18<sup>th</sup> March four were recorded high over the Coppice (PM/BM). Last year birds were very active in woodland just across the river and nesting almost certainly took place though with what result is unknown. This year there was again a lot of activity in this area with birds seen and heard and on 2<sup>nd</sup> August a very noisy juvenile was observed making several ungainly attempts to land in trees there (PM/BM). Two noisy birds there two days later may both well have been juveniles (BM). On 19<sup>th</sup> August a juvenile was seen perched on the Coppice gate across the path from the Lagoon Hide (PM/BM). There were daily sightings throughout August. On 17<sup>th</sup> September five birds over the Scrubland (PM/BM) may well have been a family party and on 29<sup>th</sup> September a total of seven birds were reported over the same area (JB/MB). There were regular sightings throughout the last three months of the year with often just single birds but as many as four on one occasion on 4<sup>th</sup> November (JWC). Birds continued to be seen near the nest site to the end of the year.

**Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* **Rare Visitor**

A new bird for the Reserve in 2012, one was photographed high over the Dragonfly Ponds on 13<sup>th</sup> June that year. There have been no records since then.

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* **Scarce (Summer) Visitor**

Birds very occasionally pass over the Reserve in spring or late summer. There was just one reported sighting this year but it was a little way from the Reserve - a single bird recorded in Rodley flying north over Bramley on 3<sup>rd</sup> April (JWC).

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus* **Resident Breeder and Winter Visitor**

A bird was recorded on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> January (JWC) but there were no further actual sightings until 1<sup>st</sup> March when one was spotted by the Sand Martin nesting bank (JWC). In between these dates birds were heard on the Wet Grassland, Reedbed and Duck Marsh but they proved typically elusive. There was a further sighting on the Lagoon on 8<sup>th</sup> March (WeBS/AL) and on 15<sup>th</sup> March one was photographed from the Reedbed Hide (JC). There were no further records until 29<sup>th</sup> July when one was seen on the Wet Grassland (KMCL). In August a bird was heard on the Wet Grassland on two dates (JWC) and two were heard here on 20<sup>th</sup> September during an early morning WeBS visit. There were no reports of juveniles last year but on 30<sup>th</sup> September this year an adult and juvenile were photographed on the Wet Grassland (KMCL). The Wet Grassland

was again productive in October with birds recorded on four dates and two seen here on 21<sup>st</sup> (JWC). During the same period one was heard on the Lagoon on two dates. November and December proved to be the best month for records. In November birds were reported on seven dates and on all four wetland areas. On 14<sup>th</sup> November one crossed the path from Tim's Field and went up the banking to the Wet Grassland (JWC). In December there were reports on eight dates but this time all on the Lagoon. On 22<sup>nd</sup> two met at the edge of the middle island and a brief skirmish ensued. A few minutes later what may have been a third bird was seen on the small island to the right (PM/BM).

**Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* Rare Visitor**

There have been just two records of this elusive bird. In 2005 one spent five days on the Wet Grassland from 1<sup>st</sup> October. In 2018 one again appeared on the Wet Grassland on 25<sup>th</sup> August and was recorded most days in the same area up to 2<sup>nd</sup> September, although it was typically hard to spot. There was one further sighting that year on 14<sup>th</sup> September.

**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Resident Breeder**

Numbers most months were similar to last year with only a few months producing double figure counts. Birds were recorded on all four main wetland areas and some days on the Dragonfly Ponds, though it is not clear whether a pair nested at this site this year. The first family of young (two chicks) was seen on the Reedbed on 20<sup>th</sup> April (JWC), a month earlier than last year's first family on the Lagoon. What was possibly the same family, but this time with three chicks, was seen in the same area two days later (PM/BM). Two birds were seen on the Dipping Ponds on 5<sup>th</sup> July (WeBS) and there were further sightings of a single bird here over the next two weeks. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August an adult was seen on the Wet Grassland with one chick (BM). It is likely that at least one other pair nested successfully as several juveniles were reported on the Lagoon in September and October. Monthly maxima (adults only) are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
11	13	7	7	5	5	6	12	6	15	9	9

**Coot *Fulica atra* Resident Breeder and Winter Visitor**

Maximum counts in five of the first six months of this year were a bit higher than last year but declining numbers generally continue to give rise for concern. No more than two birds were on the wetlands in August and just one in September, these the lowest counts since 2000 and 2001. Birds were totally absent in October - the first month in the Reserve's history

that this has happened. It would be interesting to know why and where they are going in these months. Despite the low numbers there was again some breeding success. The first two chicks were seen on the Lagoon on 11<sup>th</sup> May (JB), just a week later than last year. Three days later on 14<sup>th</sup> May a family of three chicks was recorded on the Duck Marsh (PM/BM). A family of four chicks was on the Lagoon the next day (PM/BM). Further families would appear on the Lagoon, Reedbed and Wet Grassland over the next few weeks. Seven adults were on the Lagoon on 31<sup>st</sup> July but after this no more than two were seen in the following four months. A single bird was present for much of December and on 29<sup>th</sup> three were counted on a partially frozen Lagoon (PM/BM). Coots have been susceptible to predation by American Mink here in the past but no Mink activity was recorded in this period. Monthly maxima (adults only) are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
17	26	24	10	13	12	9	2	1	-	1	3

**Common Crane *Grus grus* Rare Visitor**

This was new bird for the Reserve in 2018 when two were seen standing on the farmland on 13<sup>th</sup> April. Just over a week later one was seen circling very high over the Reserve. There have been no sightings in the last two years.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* Summer Visitor/ Breeder**

The first bird arrived on the Lagoon on 29<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC *et al*), just four days earlier than last year. It was joined by a ringed bird on 1<sup>st</sup> February. A third bird arrived the next day but was promptly seen off. Another ringed bird FJ02763, which had been ringed at Llanfairfechan, Conwy, Wales on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2017, was found dead on 10<sup>th</sup> February (JWC), having hit overhead power lines. Other birds did appear and four flew over Tim's Field on 4<sup>th</sup> March (MB). On 6<sup>th</sup> March six were on the Duck Marsh (JWC) and there were further reports of four and five. On 27<sup>th</sup> April two birds were seen on the bottom island on the Lagoon and two on the middle island with one chick. Three chicks were seen there two days later but just one on 2<sup>nd</sup> May and none subsequently. Predation by Lesser Black-backed Gulls could well have been the cause. Adult birds continued to be seen most days and three were on the middle island on 4<sup>th</sup> June. There were no further sightings on the Lagoon after 13<sup>th</sup> June but three were recorded flying over on 5<sup>th</sup> July (WeBS).

**Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* **Rare (Summer) Visitor**

There have been no sightings in the last two years. This was a new bird for the Reserve in 2018 when two birds arrived on the Duck Marsh on 27<sup>th</sup> June. The birds spent much of the day there and were seen by many birdwatchers. There was just one other brief sighting of one on the far side of the Lagoon on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. It can only be a matter of time before we have another visit as birds are nesting not very far away.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* **Rare Visitor**

There have been no records in the last four years. A single bird that flew over the Reserve on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016 was the first and only record for the Reserve.

**Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* **Scarce Visitor**

There were just two records last year, both of birds flying over in a westerly direction - 19 on 26<sup>th</sup> May and four on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. There was just one this year - a group of 11 flying over on 7<sup>th</sup> February (JB).

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* **Winter Visitor and Casual Breeder**

The large winter numbers of a few years ago are no more and a flock of 33 over the Lagoon and flooded farmland on 23<sup>rd</sup> February (JWC) was the biggest of the year. The first bird of the year arrived on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> February (JSc) but there were no further sightings on the wetlands until 23<sup>rd</sup> February when single birds were on the Lagoon and Wet Grassland (DC/EC). One or two were seen on the wetlands most days from the first week in March but five were on the Lagoon on 14<sup>th</sup> March (JWC). One or two were on Tim's Field from early April where birds have attempted to nest most years, often unsuccessfully. Six flew onto the field on 25<sup>th</sup> April (JWC) but most days between two and four were present. One pair did nest on the middle island on the Lagoon, thanks to some good cover there and one small chick was seen on 23<sup>rd</sup> May (JSK). A bird was sitting on a nest on Tim's Field on 8<sup>th</sup> June but there were no subsequent reports of young. Six flew onto the field on 25<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM) but there were no sightings after this date. One pair did nest successfully somewhere on the Reserve last year as two juveniles were seen on the Duck Marsh in the latter part of June that year. A single bird flying south on 7<sup>th</sup> November (JWC) was the first sighting for more than four months. There was just one further record on 30<sup>th</sup> December - a total of at least 14 birds on the farmland (JWC). Maximum counts each month are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
-	35	6	13	6	6	-	-	-	-	1	14



**Little (Ringed) Plover** *Charadrius dubius* **Summer Visitor**

The decline in the number of sightings continued this year and there was just one record - a single bird on Tim's Field on 7<sup>th</sup> April (DW). Last year produced sightings on three dates.

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* **Rare Visitor**

There have been no records in the last 13 years. There were just two sightings in 2007.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* **Scarce (Summer) Visitor**

There have been no records since 2012.

**Curlew** *Numenius arquata* **Passage Visitor**

Sightings are few these days and most are of one or two birds flying over the Reserve, usually between February and April. However, on 23<sup>rd</sup> February seven were reported around the flooded farmland before flying off in a north easterly direction (PA/JWC *et al*). There were just three other sightings. On 19<sup>th</sup> February one flew east over the Scrubland (JWC); on 14<sup>th</sup> April two were calling over the farmland (DAN) and on 16<sup>th</sup> June one flew south over the Reserve calling (GJB).

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* **Rare Visitor**

There were no sightings this year. Last year there was just one - a single bird on the Duck Marsh on 26<sup>th</sup> June. Prior to that there had been just four records, the last on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* **Rare Visitor**

This species was recorded for the first and only time on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2006 when a single bird was found on the Duck Marsh.

**Knot** *Calidris canutus* **Rare Visitor**

A bird on the Duck Marsh on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2006 was the first and only record for the Reserve.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* **Scarce Visitor**

There have been no sightings in the last eight years. A single bird seen on the Duck Marsh on 1st February 2012 was the first record since May 2006.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* **Passage Visitor**

Sightings of this species have been going down every year and there were reports on just four dates last year. There were none this year but this was

certainly not helped by the fact that the Reserve was closed from 24<sup>th</sup> March to 11<sup>th</sup> July - the period when these birds are most likely to be passing through.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* **Passage Visitor**

In the six years prior to 2108 there had only been one record of this species here but there has been a distinct improvement in the last three years. In 2018 there were sightings from 25<sup>th</sup> August to the end of the year, usually just a single bird but two on occasions. Last year there were sightings of a single bird on the Wet Grassland from 5<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> January with further records in April, August and September. From 12<sup>th</sup> October there were sightings most days until 27<sup>th</sup> November and then on two dates in December. This year the first reported sighting was on 2<sup>nd</sup> February - a bird flying over the Wet Grassland calling (JSc). On 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> February one was seen on the Duck March (JWC). There were no further records until 29<sup>th</sup> July when one was again seen flying and calling over the Wet Grassland (JWC). There were sightings on five dates in October, three on the Wet Grassland, the first on 5<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM) and two on the Duck Marsh on 17<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. In November there were sightings on seven dates in three different areas - the Wet Grassland, back Reedbed and Duck Marsh with two birds reported on 8<sup>th</sup> (JB/MB) and 15<sup>th</sup> (WeBS). With water levels lowered for habitat management work the back Reedbed proved particularly popular during this period. There were just two records in December. On 16<sup>th</sup> a bird was seen on the Duck Marsh (JHar) and on 23<sup>rd</sup> one was on the Wet Grassland (JH/DC/EC).

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* **Rare Visitor**

There have been no sightings since 2006 when a single bird was seen on the Duck Marsh, this the first and only record for the Reserve.

**Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* **Scarce Passage Visitor**

There were no records this year or last year. A bird on the Wet Grassland on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2018 was the last. This bird was present until 2<sup>nd</sup> September that year. Prior to this there had been no records since 28<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* **Scarce Passage Visitor**

This species is becoming increasingly hard to find here these days with just three records in the last four years, the last on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019 when two birds were on the flooded farmland. There were no records this year.

**Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus* **Passage/Winter Visitor**

Nearly all sightings of this secretive species in recent years have been on the Wet Grassland where it can very easily be missed among the many large patches of Yellow Flag Iris and reed. In 2018 there were sightings on nine dates, seven of these on the Wet Grassland, but last year there were just two, both again on the Wet Grassland. There were no sightings reported this year.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* **Passage/Winter Visitor**

The Duck Marsh is usually the most productive place for sightings and particularly from the Willow Path Hide but with the hides closed from March to the end of the year due to Coronavirus lockdown there were very few records here. There was only one in January - a single bird on the Duck Marsh on 4<sup>th</sup> (JWC *et al*). There were a few more sightings in February. On 16<sup>th</sup> five were flushed by a female Sparrowhawk, again in the Duck Marsh (JWC). Birds are also sometimes accidentally flushed by volunteers working on habitat management. This happened on 23<sup>rd</sup> March when three were put up at the edge of the Lagoon (JB) and on 14<sup>th</sup> April when a total of six were disturbed on the Lagoon and Wet Grassland (DAN), this the last record of the spring. The first autumn record came on 26<sup>th</sup> September - a single bird flying over towards the Lagoon (JWC). There were no further records until 14<sup>th</sup> November when one was seen on the Wet Grassland (JWC). There were several further sightings in the second half of November. On 23<sup>rd</sup> five were flushed on the Wet Grassland during habitat management work (JH) and on 28<sup>th</sup> four were seen on the Lagoon (JWC). Three birds were seen flying around the wetlands on 5<sup>th</sup> December (JWC) and there were further reports of one or two birds on the Lagoon and Wet Grassland up to the end of the year. On 25<sup>th</sup> one flew off the marshy area at the Dragonfly Ponds (PM/BM). Maximum monthly counts are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1	5	3	6	-	-	-	-	1	-	5	3

**Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* **Uncommon (Winter) Visitor**

There were records on five dates last year and three dates this year. One or two birds roost in the Coppice most winters and standing on the road near the Lagoon Hide just before closing time probably offers the best chance of seeing one. A bird was seen here on 9<sup>th</sup> January (DW) and on 25<sup>th</sup> January one was spotted flying over the farmland late in the day (PA *et al*). At the other end of the year one was seen over the farmland and Poplar Field on 28<sup>th</sup> November, again late in the day (JWC).

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

Last year, for the first time in the Reserve's history, there were no sightings in either April or May. It was the same again this year but lack of observers due to the Reserve being closed and the rafts not being launched didn't help. There were no sightings until 17<sup>th</sup> July when an adult and juvenile were spotted perched on two of the buoys on the Lagoon (PM/BM). The birds stayed for several days and on 19<sup>th</sup> July the adult was observed bringing in a fish for the juvenile. A second adult also arrived on 19<sup>th</sup>. The birds were present until 30<sup>th</sup> July, an adult frequently bringing fish in from the river for the juvenile. A pair last nested successfully on one of the rafts on the Lagoon in 2017.

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* **Rare Visitor**

This was a new bird for the Reserve in 2011. There have been no sightings since 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

**Black-headed Gull**

*Chroicocephalus ridibundus* **Common Visitor/Casual Breeder**

Large numbers congregate on the Lagoon and farmland in the winter months. However, a gathering of around 500 on the Lagoon on 5<sup>th</sup> January last year was exceptional. This year an even larger count was reported on 29<sup>th</sup> February, this time on the flooded farmland - more than 600 birds (JWC). Numbers dropped sharply after this with c150 on the farmland on 8<sup>th</sup> March the only three figure count that month (DC/EC). A few birds were seen throughout the summer but there were no nesting attempts this year. Numbers started to build from July with the presence of a few juvenile birds but there were no three figure counts until 4<sup>th</sup> November when 122 were on the Lagoon (JWC), this in fact the only three figure report until 10<sup>th</sup> December when 170 were counted there (PM/BM). On 16<sup>th</sup> December more than 200 birds were on the Lagoon (JWC). Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
128	600+	150	17	25	15	49	67	70	57	122	200+

**Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus* **Rare Visitor**

This was a new species for the Reserve in 2018 when an adult bird paid a brief visit to the Lagoon on 7<sup>th</sup> April. There have been no sightings since then.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* **Rare Visitor**

There have been no sightings in the last five years. An adult in full winter plumage on the Lagoon on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2015 was the first and only record for the Reserve.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus* **Common Visitor**

Numbers reported in the early part of last year were unusually low with no more than two birds recorded in January. It was very different this year, a count of 230 on the farmland on 1<sup>st</sup> January (PM/BM) being by far the highest of the year. There was a report of 80+ there on 4<sup>th</sup> January (MG/PG) but the next highest in the remainder of the year was just 17. April, May and June rarely produce more than one or two records but thanks to lockdown there were none this year. 2019 produced the highest ever July count of 235 on the farmland. In July this year just a single bird was recorded on four dates. Numbers throughout the second half of the year were low with a best count of just 17 on the farmland on 16<sup>th</sup> December (JWC). Monthly maxima are shown below.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
230	15	1	-	-	-	1	2	4	12	10	17

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* **Common Visitor**

This is a fairly frequent visitor to the Lagoon and Duck Marsh, though usually no more than two or three birds. There were sightings this year in all months except September. October and December and numbers were rather higher than usual in May. On 8<sup>th</sup> May seven adults were recorded - 4 on the Lagoon and three on the Duck Marsh (PM/BM); on 11<sup>th</sup> May 10 were on the Lagoon (JB) and there were further reports of up to 10 often very noisy birds over the next two weeks. Numbers dropped thereafter and there were no reports of more than four birds from the beginning of June. Two adults and an immature were on the Lagoon on 11<sup>th</sup> August (PM/BM) but there were then just two further records on the wetlands in the last four months of the year, both of single birds.

**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus* **Common Visitor**

One or two were often to be seen on the Lagoon in January and February but on 1<sup>st</sup> January 19 were counted on the farmland including 16 immature birds (PM/BM). One or two continued to be seen throughout the spring and early summer and on 27<sup>th</sup> April four adults were watched pursuing a Common Buzzard over Mike Fisk Meadow (PM/BM). On 4<sup>th</sup> June two adults and six immatures were on Tim's Field (PM/BM). There were no reported sightings after 8<sup>th</sup> July until 4<sup>th</sup> November when two were on the

Lagoon. Two or three and occasionally four were seen there most days from 21<sup>st</sup> November but on 23<sup>rd</sup> December nine were reported on the farmland (JWC).

**Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinnans* **Rare Visitor**

Formally split from Herring Gull in 2007, this large gull can easily be missed by all but the most experienced observers. It is still a scarce bird locally but it is now starting to turn up more often and it is always worth checking the large gulls on the Lagoon or farmland carefully. A near adult was picked out on the flooded farmland on 24<sup>th</sup> February last year (JWC) - a new bird for the Reserve. This year there were sightings on three dates. A first winter bird was on the farmland on 4<sup>th</sup> January (JWC); a sub adult was on the flooded farmland on 29<sup>th</sup> February (JWC) and what was almost certainly the same bird was seen in the same area the next day - 1<sup>st</sup> March (RB).

**Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus* **Uncommon Visitor**

Almost all records relate to birds flying over the Reserve. There were just two last year and one this year. On 14<sup>th</sup> November two adults were reported flying over in a south westerly direction (JWC).

**Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucoides* **Rare Visitor**

Two 1<sup>st</sup> winter birds that flew over the Willow Path on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2009 were the first and only record for the Reserve.

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia domest* **Common Visitor?**

Almost certainly under recorded, there were just three reported sightings this year, two of these during early morning WeBS visits. On 5<sup>th</sup> January two were seen under the feeders in the Bee Garden (DC/EC) and on 12<sup>th</sup> January 14 were counted in trees on the far riverbank (WeBS). On 23<sup>rd</sup> August around 50 flew over the Reserve from woodland across the river (WeBS). The underside of the river bridge has been a popular roosting and possibly nesting site in the past and birds could regularly be heard here this year.

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* **Resident (probable) Breeder**

Numbers have declined over recent years and we no longer get the 100+ counts that we used to do. Last year the best was just 34 birds (in December). This year the best was 40, 25 of these in the Manager's Garden on 1<sup>st</sup> March (JSc). The Manager's Garden, Tim's Field and farmland have always been the most productive sites for this species but with the Manager's Garden hide closed from March there were far fewer records than normal. The second highest count this year came on 21<sup>st</sup>

November - a total of 28 birds flying off Tim's Field (JWC). The seed crop on Tim's Field continued to attract birds to the end of the year and 13 were seen flying off the field on 26<sup>th</sup> December (JWC).

### **Wood Pigeon**

*Columba palumbus* **Resident Breeder and Winter Visitor**

Large flocks occur some winters but there was only one three figure count reported in the early part of the year - 150+ on the farmland on 15<sup>th</sup> February (JWC). Small flocks of up to 35 birds could often be seen on Mike Fisk Meadow during the same period. There were two big counts at the other end of the year. On 16<sup>th</sup> September more than 200 flew off the farmland (JWC) and on 18<sup>th</sup> October a total of 143 were recorded during an early morning WeBS visit. Tim's Field can be very productive in the autumn and winter months with birds visiting for seed. More than 200 were seen here in December last year but there were no reports this year, surprisingly, despite a very good seed crop. Several pairs again bred on the Reserve this year.

### **Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* **Uncommon Visitor**

Although classed as an Uncommon Visitor on the Reserve this species was far from uncommon in the area. It used to be seen more often than not on the entry road between the main gates and the river bridge. However, sightings have declined dramatically in the last couple of years. Last year it was recorded on just two dates and this year again on just two dates. A single bird was reported over the farmland on 14<sup>th</sup> March (JSc) and on 30<sup>th</sup> December one flew from the Visitor Centre over Tim's Field (JWC). Garden birdwatchers in other parts of West Leeds are reporting similar declines. The BTO Garden Birdwatch reports that their presence in gardens has declined steadily since 2005. The most likely cause for this decline is said to be the spread of trichomonosis which this species is sensitive to.

### **Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* **Scarce (Summer) Visitor**

There had only been three records of this declining species in the previous five years. There were no reported sightings this year.

### **Barn Owl** *Tyto alba* **Resident Breeder**

Like last year, there was activity at the nest box from the beginning of the year and there were sightings in every month, nearly all of them very early in the morning and towards dusk. Thanks to one dedicated volunteer we have records on more than 90 dates this year. The majority of sightings involved single birds but two were seen on a number of occasions, the first as early as 20<sup>th</sup> January, one owl leaving the box at 7.30am and the

second ten minutes later (DW). On 27<sup>th</sup> January the ledge of the box had to be checked for possible damage and two birds promptly flew out (DAN). Sadly, there were no sightings of young this year. Birds first used this box in 2016 and two young fledged successfully. In 2017 there was no evidence of young, in 2018 at least two young and in 2019 two again. On 14<sup>th</sup> September two birds left the box during a check to consider installation of a camera there (DAN). As in previous years birds regularly used the thatched gazebo for roosting from October onwards, large amounts of droppings and numerous pellets being found here. The open-ended Mike Sheldon hide overlooking the Lagoon was another popular roosting site in November and December. On 17<sup>th</sup> December the nest box was replaced with a new box incorporating a camera. When the old box was checked prior to removal one bird came out and flew low across the river (DAN *et al*). Among the pellets and other items found in the box were broken egg shells and one dead chick. A bird was seen at the new box at dusk on 22<sup>nd</sup> December (DW) and on 26<sup>th</sup> there was a rare daytime sighting from the end of the River Path at 1.15pm - a bird being pursued over the Scrubland by Crows and Magpies (BH/EH). A bird was again seen at dusk on 31<sup>st</sup> in the same area (JSK/KMcL).

#### **Little Owl *Athene noctua* Resident Breeder**

With the hides closed for much of the year due to the pandemic it was not possible to monitor activity at the nest box site in the Manager's Garden and as a result there were few sightings to report. A bird was seen at the side of the Manager's Garden on 1<sup>st</sup> January (PA) and on 4<sup>th</sup> March one was photographed by the nest box (KW). There were further sightings of a single bird in the Manager's Garden on 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> March but the hide was closed shortly after and there was just one further sighting on 6<sup>th</sup> April. There were no further records until 4<sup>th</sup> June when one was reported at the back of Poplar Field (KMCL). The end of the gutter on the small building in the compound has proved popular in the past and a bird was spotted here on 19<sup>th</sup> July (JB/MB) and 16<sup>th</sup> September (JH). In between there were two records in August, one of these in the Poplars close to the Manager's Garden on 26<sup>th</sup> (JWC). A bird was again seen in the compound on 17<sup>th</sup> October (PA) but there were no records after this date. The nest box in the Manager's Garden was used successfully last year, two young fledging, but this year's outcome is unknown.

#### **Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* Uncommon Visitor**

There were three records this year. On 6<sup>th</sup> January one flew out of riverside trees on the River Path near the Dragonfly Ponds at 7.50 am (DW). On 11<sup>th</sup> September one flew over the Willow Path at 9.00pm during a Rodley Robins Bat Night walk (BM) and the following evening a bird was



calling in woodland across the river about the same time during the second Robins walk (PM/BM).

**Swift** *Apus apus* **Summer Visitor**

A single bird over the Lagoon with around 40 Sand Martins on 20<sup>th</sup> April (JWC) was the first of the year, more than two weeks earlier than last year and only one day later than the earliest ever sighting (19<sup>th</sup> April 2015). There were no further sightings until 2<sup>nd</sup> May when two were seen high over the river bridge (JWC). Most records were of no more than a handful of birds but more than 50 were reported over the entry road in windy, showery conditions on 6<sup>th</sup> June (JB/MB); 20 were over the Lagoon on 24<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM) and a similar number were over the Winter Walk on 19<sup>th</sup> July (DW). Five over the Reserve on 12<sup>th</sup> August looked like being the last of the year but there was then a late sighting of a single bird over the Visitor Centre on 7<sup>th</sup> September (JSK) - six days later than last year. Boxes in the Swift Tower in the Reedbed again failed to attract any nesters.

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* **Resident Breeder**

It was inevitable that the number of records would be well down this year due to lockdown but even so the frequency of sightings was somewhat disappointing. There were, nevertheless, sightings in all months with March, April and November the most productive. A bird on the Lagoon on 1<sup>st</sup> January (DW) was a good start and there were sightings on two further dates here in January and one on the Reedbed. Two birds were seen on the Reedbed on 14<sup>th</sup> March (DC/EC), two on the river from the River Path on 21<sup>st</sup> March (JWC) and two under the river bridge on 15<sup>th</sup> April (JWC). Last year birds excavated a nest hole in the Sand Martin bank on the Lagoon in March and April but didn't pursue their interest once the Sand Martins arrived in force. There was no interest here this year or at the new purpose-built Kingfisher nesting bank on the Duck Marsh. However, birds did nest not too far away and an adult and juvenile were very active around the Sand Martin bank on 8<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM), the adult frequently hovering at the nest holes. High river levels, particularly in October, might have been expected to produce more sightings on the wetlands but there were just three. There was more activity in November with birds seen on the river, on the Wet Grassland on two dates and Lagoon on three dates. Birds do occasionally visit the Dipping Ponds near the Visitor Centre and on 6<sup>th</sup> December one was seen on Tim's Field perched on a post supporting bird feeders close to the ponds (BM). A breakdown of sightings this year is shown below.

Lagoon	Duck Marsh	Reedbed	Wet Grassland	Dipping Ponds	Other Ponds	River
17	1	9	9	1	-	11

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis* **Uncommon Visitor**

This is a very occasional visitor to the Reserve. There were just two records in 2018, one in 2019 and none this year.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* **Resident Breeder**

Recorded in all months except July this year, the majority of sightings were in the first six months. In 2018 a pair used a new nest hole in a tree at the edge of the Coppice close to the Willow Path. It is not clear whether the birds used the same site in 2019 and this year but the Coppice and Willow Path continued to be productive for sightings and a number of nest boxes there showed signs of woodpecker damage. Most sightings involved single birds but a male and female were reported on the Willow Path on 5<sup>th</sup> February (DC/EC). The Manager's Garden produced a number of sightings in the latter part of February and early March. Two birds were again seen on the Willow Path on 17<sup>th</sup> May (JSK). There were no sightings in the period from 26<sup>th</sup> June to 22<sup>nd</sup> August and there were no reports of juveniles this year. There were sightings on seven dates in September, just one in October, two in November and two in December.

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* **Resident Breeder**

The east facing Barn Owl box in the compound has proved a successful nesting site in recent years. In the last three years alone a total of nine young have been raised here. Birds are usually seen in the area from early in the year and this year both birds were reported around the box on 5<sup>th</sup> January. There were regular sightings from this point but on 8<sup>th</sup> March the birds were seen at both their box and on the Barn Owl box on the Scrubland (which was occupied by Barn Owls at the time!). On 9<sup>th</sup> June the male was seen taking prey to the box in the compound (DS/PS). On 18<sup>th</sup> June a juvenile was photographed on the ground in the compound by a Yorkshire Water official on duty there and on 20<sup>th</sup> June three juveniles were seen on the ledge of the box as the male flew in with prey (PM/BM). Two juveniles were on the ledge of the box on 23<sup>rd</sup> June (BM) but there were no sightings here after this date. Three birds were reported over Tim's Field during an early morning WeBS visit on 5<sup>th</sup> July but most subsequent records were of single birds and in September there was just one reported sighting. However, there was a spell of activity during the first three weeks of October with sightings of both a male and female, on several occasions hovering over Tim's Field. There were no further records for the next five weeks but on 29<sup>th</sup> November one was seen on the Scrubland and the next day over Tim's Field (DW), this the last sighting of the year.

**Merlin *Falco columbarius* Scarce (Winter) Visitor**

There was just one record in each of the last three years. This year there were sightings on two dates. On 8<sup>th</sup> January a male was reported in the John Ackroyd Meadow hedgerow (DW) and on the same date what was almost certainly the same bird was seen on the farmland (DC/EC). On 6<sup>th</sup> March one was seen flying over the compound (AB/SF).

**Hobby *Falco subbuteo* Uncommon (Summer) Visitor**

This species had been recorded in each of the five years from 2015 to 2019, 2015 being the best so far as regards number of sightings. Last year there were sightings on four dates between 23<sup>rd</sup> June and 14<sup>th</sup> September. Sadly, there were none to report this year. A bird was seen not too far away in the valley. On 26<sup>th</sup> June one was reported trailing a movement of Swifts about half a mile upstream (JKi).

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Uncommon Visitor**

There were sightings on 22 dates this year, inevitably well down on the previous three years due to lockdown.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of days recorded</u>
2017	42
2018	26
2019	29
2020	18

The pylon behind the Manager's Garden is always worth checking as birds can sometimes be seen here. One was spotted here this year as early as 5<sup>th</sup> January (JWC). On 19<sup>th</sup> January a male and female were seen on a pylon on the far riverbank (KMCL *et al*). When the birds flew a food pass was observed and one of them was clearly ringed. There was just one sighting in February - a bird flying east over the Lagoon on 15<sup>th</sup> (JWC) - and two in March. There were then no further records until 11<sup>th</sup> July when one flew over the Reserve twice (JWC). On 18<sup>th</sup> July one was reported over the Scrubland (JWC). There was just one record in August and two in September. On 10<sup>th</sup> October two birds were watched pursuing Wood Pigeons over the farmland (JWC). On 15<sup>th</sup> October one was again spotted on the pylon behind the Manager's Garden (AW *et al*) and there were further sightings here three days later and on several dates from 15<sup>th</sup> November. In December a bird was seen on the pylon on six dates.

**Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* Escaped Species or Scarce Visitor from feral population**

There were no sightings reported this year. It was first recorded here in 2001 but there were then no further sightings until 2015 when a single bird

was seen on six dates. There were no sightings in the three years from 2016 to 2018 but there was one last year - a bird flying over Tim's Field and John Ackroyd Meadow on 17<sup>th</sup> November.

**Magpie** *Pica pica* **Resident Breeder**

This is a very common bird on the Reserve and several pairs certainly nested again, one pair constructing a new nest in a small tree in the hedgerow at the back of the Bee Garden early in the year. This is a very gregarious species and substantial gatherings can often occur, particularly in the autumn and winter months. On 18<sup>th</sup> November 26 were counted together on the farmland (JWC) and on 17<sup>th</sup> December 16 assembled in trees between the Scrubland and farmland (PM/BM).

**Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* **Resident Breeder**

This bird can be seen throughout the year and the Willow Path is usually a good place to see them. However, it is at its most numerous in late summer and autumn with noisy family parties and birds crossing the Reserve on their hazelnut and acorn forays. Groups of up to 14 were recorded last year but this year no observers reported more than five in any one group. Five were seen at the Fish Pass during an early morning WeBS visit on 23<sup>rd</sup> August and five were seen together in the Coppice on 16<sup>th</sup> September (JWC). There were no actual reports of juveniles this year but successful nesting almost certainly took place.

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* **Resident Breeder**

This is a very common bird on the Reserve and large gatherings occur in the winter months. Around 150 were reported over woodland on the far riverbank on 5<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC) and more than 200 were on the farmland on 1<sup>st</sup> February (JWC). Birds showing characteristics of "Nordic Jackdaw" *Corvus monedula* were picked out on several occasions, the first two on the farmland on 4<sup>th</sup> January (JWC). First noted in December 2016 and recorded each year since, these birds have a pale nape and sides of the neck, a dark throat and a light grey partial collar. Numbers are at their highest in the winter months but sizeable flocks can still be seen at other times of the year. A total of 65 were counted on Tim's Field on 29<sup>th</sup> May (PM/BM). There were several reports of between 100 and 150 birds on the farmland in October and November. Large numbers gather at two roost sites later in the day in the winter months - in woodland across the river from the Wet Grassland and in trees behind the Lagoon. Several hundred very noisy birds could be seen coming in to roost towards dusk in December.

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* **Uncommon Visitor**

More often than not the few records received are of birds flying over the Reserve. Last year there were just 10 records, the majority flyovers. Records would inevitably be fewer this year due to lockdown but there was in fact just one - a single bird flying over in a southerly direction on 14<sup>th</sup> March (JWC).

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone* **Resident (Probable Breeder)**

This is a very common bird on the Reserve, large numbers congregating in the winter months. A total of 63 were counted round the flooded farmland on 7<sup>th</sup> March (JWC) and around half of a total of 130 corvids on Tim's Field on 25<sup>th</sup> March were this species (PM/BM). Up to 50 birds were seen in the compound car park on a number of occasions. Mike Fisk Meadow was another popular gathering site. On 22<sup>nd</sup> December more than 60 very noisy birds flew across Tim's Field in a steady stream to assemble in trees at the end of the Butterfly Bank (PM/BM). Large gatherings also occur at roost sites in trees on the far bank of the river towards dusk in the winter months but no counts were received this year.

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix* **Rare Visitor**

This species is closely related to the Carrion Crow. It is mainly a bird of North and West Scotland where it replaces that species. It is also a winter visitor from Scandinavia. There have been no sightings in the last two years. One seen briefly over the farmland on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018 was the first record for the Reserve.

**Raven** *Corvus corax* **Rare Visitor**

This species bred in the Leeds area for the first time in 2017 and would seem to be expanding its range. It is most likely to be recorded as a flyover and can often be picked up from its distinctive call. Last year there were four reports of a bird flying over the Reserve - on 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February, 11<sup>th</sup> May and 14<sup>th</sup> September. There were no records this year.

**Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus* **Scarce (Winter) Visitor**

There have been no records in the last three years. This species was last seen on the Reserve on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* **Uncommon Visitor**

This has never been a common bird here but there has been an increase in the number of sightings in recent years and there were nine in 2019, mainly in the autumn and winter months. There were seven records this year, six of these between the last week in September and the end of the year. On 1<sup>st</sup> January two were seen near the river bridge (JWC) but we

then had to wait until 26<sup>th</sup> September for the next reported sighting - a single bird in the Bee Garden (JWC). Single birds were subsequently reported in the Manager's Garden on 31<sup>st</sup> October, at the Dragonfly Ponds on 7<sup>th</sup> November and in trees by the river bridge on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 12<sup>th</sup> December and 19<sup>th</sup> December (JWC).

**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* **Resident Breeder**

Feeders in the Bee Garden, Manager's Garden and along the Willow Path are popular throughout the year and numbers were fairly similar to last year in January and February. Due to lockdown there was no access to the Manager's Garden Hide from early March to the end of the year. The species readily takes to nest boxes and of the 38 boxes that it was possible to monitor and check this year 10 were used by Blue Tits - one more than last year. It is thought all young may have fledged successfully in as many as nine of these. See Nest Box Report for further details. Last year a bird was seen coming out of one of the boxes on the Swift nesting tower on 24<sup>th</sup> May. This year one was seen going into one of the boxes there on 25<sup>th</sup> May (PM/BM) but, as last year, we can only assume it was probably looking for something to eat. Good numbers can occur in mixed feeding parties in the autumn months but there was only one such report this year - c15 in a party that crossed the Willow Path on 9<sup>th</sup> October (PM/BM).

**Great Tit** *Parus major* **Resident Breeder**

Like the Blue Tit, this is another daily visitor to the feeders in the Bee Garden, Manager's Garden and along the Willow Path. Also like the Blue Tit it is the other main user of nest boxes on the Reserve, though this year only seven of the 38 boxes checked were used by them. See Nest Box Report for further details. The east facing nest box on the wall of the Visitor Centre has been used by Great Tits with considerable success in each of the last three years but this year it was taken over by Tree Sparrows. Numbers at the feeders in the Bee Garden in late summer and autumn were certainly down a bit on last year but it remains a very common bird on the Reserve.

**Willow Tit** *Poecile montanus* **Rare Visitor (former Breeder)**

The 2020 State of the UK's Birds Report shows that the UK population has dropped by 94% since 1970. Last reported on the Reserve on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2013, there have been no sightings of this declining species in the last seven years.

**Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris* **Rare Visitor**

Birds were recorded on the Reserve in 2002 and 2004. There have been no sightings since then.

**Woodlark** *Lullula arborea* **Rare Visitor**

This was a new species for the Reserve last year, one being recorded flying south over Tim's Field on 23<sup>rd</sup> March (JWC). There were no records this year.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* **Passage Visitor**

Typically, most sightings were of birds passing over the Reserve and seldom dropping in. Sightings were reported on four dates between 19<sup>th</sup> February and 11<sup>th</sup> March, none involving more than three birds. On 19<sup>th</sup> February one flew west over the farmland (JWC). On 7<sup>th</sup> March one flew over in the same direction and two flew off Tim's Field (JWC). The following day two were reported over the farmland and one on 11<sup>th</sup> March (JSc). There were no further records until 26<sup>th</sup> September when a single bird was seen flying over (JWC).

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

The first bird was seen over the Lagoon on the early date of 15<sup>th</sup> March (JWC), five days earlier than last year. On 21<sup>st</sup> March there was a further sighting of a single bird around the river bridge (JWC). There were no further records until 5<sup>th</sup> April when 10 were seen over the Lagoon and the first holes were being excavated in the nesting bank (JB). Numbers increased rapidly from this point. By the middle of April 60 nesting holes could be counted. On 8<sup>th</sup> May a further count revealed 121 holes. The final count on 5<sup>th</sup> July totalled 142, down somewhat on last year but nevertheless a decent total.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of nest holes</u>
2015	167
2016	186
2017	145
2018	88
2019	180
2020	142

Low numbers in 2018 were thought to have been caused by hostile weather conditions in March and a very wet April which probably made many African migrants stop short in mainland Europe. Good numbers of birds were still to be seen at the beginning of September and it appeared to have been a good breeding season despite a poor summer. Numbers started to fall away through September and three over the Lagoon and Coppice on 26<sup>th</sup> September (PM/BM) were the last of the year, some three

and a half weeks later than last year and the joint latest ever date (with 26<sup>th</sup> September 2007).

**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

One over the Lagoon on 6<sup>th</sup> April (JWC) was the first of the year, almost two weeks later than last year's earliest ever date (24<sup>th</sup> March). One or two were seen most days from that point, overhead wires by the Visitor Centre proving popular. The dumper truck shed attracts one or two nesters every year and the first two birds were reported flying out of it on 9<sup>th</sup> May (JSK). On 16<sup>th</sup> June one flew into the Visitor Centre and out again (PM/BM) - probably not a good place for nesting! On 19<sup>th</sup> August 18 were counted on the overhead wires (JSK) but late summer counts were again generally disappointing. Two birds were reported flying into the dumper truck shed as late as 9<sup>th</sup> September (DS/PS). Two nests were later found on the platforms provided for this purpose. Around 20 were seen over the Reserve on 12<sup>th</sup> September (JWC) and 17 were counted over the Lagoon and Duck Marsh during an early morning WeBS visit on 20<sup>th</sup> September. Five birds flying east over the Reserve on 30<sup>th</sup> September (JWC) were the last of the year, almost two weeks earlier than last year's latest ever date of 13<sup>th</sup> October.

**House Martin** *Delichon urbica* **Summer Visitor**

Two over the Lagoon on 15<sup>th</sup> April (JWC) were the first of the year but this proved to be the only sighting reported until 29<sup>th</sup> July when one was seen over the Wet Grassland. The fact that the Reserve was closed to the public throughout April, May and June clearly didn't help but the species is certainly declining locally. There were a couple of decent counts in August. Eighteen were counted on overhead wires near the Visitor Centre on 19<sup>th</sup> (JSK/DC/EC) and on 26<sup>th</sup> a gathering of more than 50 hirundines over the Reserve were said to be mainly this species (JWC). In September 10 were reported over the river on 5<sup>th</sup> and seven were high over the Lagoon on 26<sup>th</sup> (JWC). A group of 11 over the Lagoon on 30<sup>th</sup> September (JWC) were the last of the year, just six days earlier than last year.

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* **Uncommon Visitor**

First recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2014, it has been seen each year since then though sightings do tend to be spasmodic. Last year there were a number of reports in the first three months of the year but then none until 26<sup>th</sup> October. There were several further sightings up to 26<sup>th</sup> December. This year one was seen on the Wet Grassland on 18<sup>th</sup> January (JWC). In February one was calling in scrub by the Reedbed Hide on 8<sup>th</sup> (JSc) and on 16<sup>th</sup> one was seen on the large tree stump on the Duck Marsh side of



the Willow Path (JWC). There was then a gap of five months until the next record. However, it should be borne in mind that the Reserve was closed for much of this period. On 20<sup>th</sup> July one was seen in trees behind the Education Pond close to the Wet Grassland (JHa). It was three months before the next record - a bird photographed in a willow at the edge of the Wet Grassland on 24<sup>th</sup> October (JWC). In November a very vocal bird was heard on the Wet Grassland on 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> (JWC). On 9<sup>th</sup> December one was calling at the edge of the Coppice opposite the Mike Sheldon Hide and on 12<sup>th</sup> one was heard in the Reedbed (JWC).

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus* **Resident Breeder**

Small parties were seen regularly in January and February but reports of eight and 10 by the river bridge on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February (JSc) were particularly high for the time of year as this is an early nester. Last year a nest had been constructed in a thick bramble patch on the roadside by 5<sup>th</sup> March. On 25<sup>th</sup> March this year a pair were seen nest building in the hedgerow at the Dragonfly Ponds (JB) and on 8<sup>th</sup> April birds were reported visiting nests in two bramble patches on the roadside (PM/BM). Six birds seen in the Coppice on 27<sup>th</sup> May included juveniles (PM/BM) as did a party of 10 near the Manager's Garden on 4<sup>th</sup> June (KMCL). Large feeding parties are seen frequently in the autumn months. A party of 12 was reported on the path to the Manager's Garden on 21<sup>st</sup> September (PM/BM) and a similar sized party seen near the Visitor Centre on 30<sup>th</sup> September was accompanied by seven Chiffchaffs (JWC). There were numerous sightings of more than 10 birds in October and November, the highest numbers being 16 on 21<sup>st</sup> October (JWC), 15 on 25<sup>th</sup> October (DW) and 15 again on 14<sup>th</sup> November (JWC).

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

Overwintering birds are frequently reported these days and there were sightings on three dates in January this year, on 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> near the river bridge and on 18<sup>th</sup> in the Coppice (JWC). There were no further sightings until 7<sup>th</sup> March when one was again seen near the river bridge (JWC). The first singing birds were reported on 14<sup>th</sup> March on the River Path and again near the bridge (JWC). As many as six could be heard round the Reserve in April. It appears to have been a good breeding season. Later in the year in August the contact calls of *Phylloscopus* warblers could be heard all round the Reserve with many young birds on the wing, one observer reporting 20+ on 26<sup>th</sup> August (JWC). Chiffchaffs were also reported in mixed feeding parties. On 30<sup>th</sup> September seven were counted in one mixed feeding party with Long-tailed Tits near the Visitor Centre (JWC). There were several sightings in October with up to three birds recorded

but none in November and just one in December - a bird in trees near the river bridge on 12<sup>th</sup> (JWC).

### **Siberian Chiffchaff**

*Phylloscopus collybita tristis* **Rare (Winter) Visitor**

A bird showing all the features of Siberian Chiffchaff was seen on four dates in December 2018 and on one occasion responded to the call being played. There have been no records in the last two years. These birds breed in coniferous taiga forest from the Ural regions eastwards and they winter mainly in India, though a few stray to Western Europe annually in autumn.

### **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* **Summer Visitor/ Breeder**

A bird on Poplar Carr and one near the Visitor Centre on 6<sup>th</sup> April (JWC) were the first of the year, 11 days earlier than last year. The Willow Coppice is usually the best place to hear their distinctive song but birds were unusually quiet here throughout much of April and May. Subsequently there were no reports of more than two singing here which was disappointing. The contact calls of *Phylloscopus* warblers could be heard all round the Reserve in August and there were reports of juveniles but generally it was a disappointing year for this species. Several *Phylloscopus* warblers in a mixed feeding party at the edge of the Lagoon on 30<sup>th</sup> August (PM/BM) probably included at least one Willow Warbler but there were no sightings after this date. The last sighting in 2019 was on 25<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

Overwintering birds are quite common now but sightings on the Reserve during this period are few and far between. The BTO tell us that initial reports from colour ringing have shown that these birds breed right across Europe from Spain to Poland. A female on John Ackroyd Meadow on 3<sup>rd</sup> November last year was almost certainly overwintering but there were no further reports until 23<sup>rd</sup> February this year when a male was recorded on the Willow Path (DC/EC) - again almost certainly overwintering. There were no further records until 6<sup>th</sup> April when a male was reported singing by the bridge (JWC). Birds could be heard almost daily from this point with as many as five males counted round the Reserve on 22<sup>nd</sup> April (PM/BM). The Willow Path and Coppice were, as usual, the most productive sites with two and often three singing here most days. Most birds had probably gone by the end of August. A male and female were picked out in a mixed feeding party at the edge of the Lagoon on 30<sup>th</sup> August (PM/BM) but there were only a handful of sightings after this date. A female on the ramp to the Butterfly Bank on 23<sup>rd</sup> September (DS) looked like being the last until

there was a late record of what was hopefully an overwintering bird moving into the Manager's Garden on 7<sup>th</sup> November (JWC). The bird was calling and seen briefly but not sexed. There were no sightings after this date.

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

A bird singing in the John Ackroyd Meadow hedge by the Rodley Robins garden on 16<sup>th</sup> April (PM/BM) was the first of the year, 12 days earlier than last year and the earliest since 2009. One was heard singing in the Coppice on three dates in May and on 27<sup>th</sup> May one was also heard in roadside trees by the Lagoon (PM/BM), a productive spot for this species in previous years. On 4<sup>th</sup> June a bird was singing in trees on the Duck Marsh side of the Willow Path (PM/BM). One seen on the Willow Path on 31<sup>st</sup> July (PM/BM) was the last of the year, very much earlier than last year's final sighting on 8<sup>th</sup> September. Last dates have fluctuated considerably in recent years from 12<sup>th</sup> July to 24<sup>th</sup> September. However, the bird is never numerous and can easily be overlooked.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

This species is only ever present in very low numbers here and most years produce just a handful of records. There were eight last year but only two this time, though there were, of course, far fewer observers on site for much of the time due to lockdown. Roadside trees by the Lagoon have been popular in the past and the first bird was heard giving its rattling song here on 2<sup>nd</sup> May (JWC), just five days later than last year. On 24<sup>th</sup> June one was reported calling near the compound car park and later near the Mammal Hotel by the roadside (JWC).

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* **Summer Visitor/ Breeder**

Very much more common here than its cousin the Lesser Whitethroat, numbers have nevertheless declined in recent years. First sightings can almost be guaranteed between 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April and this year was no exception, the first bird being recorded on 16<sup>th</sup> - a short snatch of song and then a sighting at the edge of the Scrubland near the Dragonfly Ponds (PM/BM). On 24<sup>th</sup> April two were singing at the edge of the Scrubland by the beehives (PM/BM) and the following day birds were recorded at five different sites round the Reserve (JWC). Large bramble patches provide ideal nesting sites and four birds were counted in a large patch on Poplar Field on 8<sup>th</sup> May (PM/BM). There were few reports of juveniles but a family party was seen in an Elder by the path to the Manager's Garden on 18<sup>th</sup> July (RB). Birds were hard to find in August with singles reported on just two dates but five were recorded on the River Path on 2<sup>nd</sup> September (JWC) and one in the same area on 5<sup>th</sup> September (JWC) was the last of

the year, 10 days later than last year's early date of 26<sup>th</sup> August. Birds have been recorded as late as 11<sup>th</sup> October in the past (and as late as 26<sup>th</sup> September in recent years).

### **Grasshopper Warbler**

*Locustella naevia* **Uncommon Summer Visitor and Casual Breeder**

Never numerous, this skulking species can be easier to hear than see with its loud "reeling" song. Most years produce records in April but last year there was only one report and that was on 5<sup>th</sup> August - a bird "reeling" in brambles at the back of the Lagoon. There were no records this year. However, one wasn't too far away. A bird was reported "reeling" about half a mile further up the valley on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> April (JKi).

### **Sedge Warbler**

*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

A bird singing on the Wet Grassland on 20<sup>th</sup> April (JWC) was the first of the year, exactly the same date as last year. Two days later birds were also singing on the Lagoon and Reedbed. An area of reed at the Dragonfly Ponds attracts at least one pair every year and the first bird was reported singing here on 2<sup>nd</sup> May (PM/BM). On 9<sup>th</sup> May one observer reported "lots of Sedge Warblers all over" which was encouraging after a fairly disappointing year in 2019. Single birds were recorded still singing on the Wet Grassland and Reedbed on 19<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM). Two juveniles were seen at the Dragonfly Ponds on 8<sup>th</sup> August (JWC) but, rather surprisingly, this was the last reported sighting of the year, almost two weeks earlier than last year and the earliest last date since 2001.

### **Reed Warbler**

*Acrocephalus scirpaceus* **Summer Visitor and Breeder**

Single birds on the Wet Grassland and Reedbed on 15<sup>th</sup> April (JWC) were the first of the spring and the earliest ever first date (previously 16<sup>th</sup> April 2016). Interestingly, the three earliest ever dates have been in the last five years. The large majority of sightings subsequently were on the same two wetland areas but numbers generally did appear to be lower than last year, though there was one good count - a report of 10+ birds including juveniles on the Wet Grassland and Reedbed on 20<sup>th</sup> June (JWC). An adult and two juveniles on the Wet Grassland on 8<sup>th</sup> August (JWC) was the last sighting of the year, a month earlier than last year and the earliest last date since 2011.

**Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapillus* **Rare Visitor**

First recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2017, there were further sightings on several dates to the end of that year. What was probably the same bird

was seen on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and on several dates up to 28<sup>th</sup> February. Last year a bird was reported in the car park by the bridge on 14<sup>th</sup> December and it was seen in roadside trees in the same area to the end of the year. The bird was then seen on 1<sup>st</sup> January this year (JWC) and on seven further dates, the last on 1<sup>st</sup> February (JWC). There were no sightings in the latter part of the year.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* **Winter Visitor**

Breeding mainly in coniferous woodland, this is very much an autumn and winter visitor to the Reserve. The area around the river bridge is always one of the best places to see this species and there were sightings here most days from the beginning of January to 8<sup>th</sup> March with up to three birds reported. On 12<sup>th</sup> January three were also seen on the River Path during an early morning WeBS visit. On 19<sup>th</sup> January two were again seen on the River Path with two near the bridge (KMclL). One near the Lagoon on 18<sup>th</sup> March looked like being the last of the spring but there was then a late spring report of one singing on the River Path on 9<sup>th</sup> May (JWC). The first bird of the autumn was seen at the Dragonfly Ponds on 23<sup>rd</sup> September (JWC) but numbers were disappointing in the last three months of the year with no more than two reported. On 4<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November one was seen on John Ackroyd Meadow (JWC) and on 21<sup>st</sup> November one was recorded near the river bridge (DC/EC *et al*). Two birds were seen near the river bridge on 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December (JWC). On 24<sup>th</sup> November last year as many as eight were counted round the Reserve with five in December.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* **Resident Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve and it can be found in every habitat, which was the case on 19<sup>th</sup> February when a total of 14 were recorded including six at the end of the River Path (PU/DSc). In both 2018 and 2019 a pair nested in the left wing of the Manager's Garden Hide but whether they tried again this year is unknown as the hide was closed due to lockdown from March onwards. Two juveniles were recorded at the side of the Lagoon on 11<sup>th</sup> May (PM/BM) and a family of at least four was seen on the Willow Path on 13<sup>th</sup> June (KMclL). In August an adult was reported feeding a juvenile on the Willow Path on 8<sup>th</sup> and four days later two juveniles were being fed in the same area (JWC). On 29<sup>th</sup> September two birds were observed closely following the progress of a Weasel as it crossed the path by the Wet Grassland gate before disappearing into thick vegetation (PM/BM).

### **Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* **Scarce Visitor**

There were three records last year, albeit two of these only heard. Prior to this there had been just one record in 2018 and none in the preceding five years. This year there were five, all in the first six months of the year. On 5<sup>th</sup> January one was seen in the Manager's Garden (NB) and on 22<sup>nd</sup> January one flew over the Willow Path Hide and Coppice (JWC). On 5<sup>th</sup> February one was recorded on John Ackroyd Meadow. The other two reports were of a bird calling in woodland across the river - on 14<sup>th</sup> March (JSc) and on 13<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM).

### **Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* **Casual breeder**

The area around the river bridge and particularly the large Alder on the riverbank there can be very productive and this year was no exception, particularly so in January and February. Most sightings involved single birds, the first on 4<sup>th</sup> January, but two were spotted in the Alder on 25<sup>th</sup> January (JScr) and two were seen close by in the bridge car park the next day (JWC). There were no records after 8<sup>th</sup> March until 20<sup>th</sup> June (mainly due to lockdown) when a juvenile was seen on the Willow Path (JWC). There was another sighting on the Willow Path on 15<sup>th</sup> July and in willows on the River Path on 29<sup>th</sup> August (JWC). In September there were sightings on the Willow Path on 2<sup>nd</sup> (JWC) and 16<sup>th</sup> (MG/PG). On 14<sup>th</sup> November one was recorded in trees by the Lagoon (JWC). There was just one other sighting after this - a bird in trees across the river on 30<sup>th</sup> December (JWC).

### **Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* **Casual Breeder and Winter Visitor**

This species is probably under-recorded and particularly so this year but there has, nevertheless, been a significant decline in numbers in recent years. This is not just a local problem as the UK breeding population is now red-listed. The decline appears to have started in the UK in the 1980s but numbers are also declining across Northern Europe. There were only six sightings reported in the first six months of this year and the highest count was just 25 birds flying very high in an easterly direction on 15<sup>th</sup> March (JWC). Twelve in the Manager's Garden on 12<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC) was the best count actually on the Reserve. Sightings were even fewer in the second half of the year though a flock of more than 300 was seen not far away on farmland by the Ring Road on 20<sup>th</sup> October (PM/BM). Eight birds flying over the farmland on 19<sup>th</sup> December (JWC) was the last record of the year, one of only three records in the last seven months of the year.

### **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus* **Rare (Passage) Visitor**

This is our only summer visiting thrush. It breeds in the uplands and numbers are declining. It was a new bird for the Reserve in 2017 when

there were two records - on 6<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> November - the last one photographed on Mike Fisk Meadow. There have been no sightings since then.

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula* **Resident Breeder and Winter Visitor**

We perhaps do not think of Blackbirds as winter visitors but large influxes of Continental birds do occur some winters. On 19<sup>th</sup> February a count of 19 during an early morning WeBS visit may well have included migrants. While the hedgerows and Coppice provide plenty of good nesting sites reports of young birds are infrequent. However, on 12<sup>th</sup> August one recently fledged youngster was seen being fed by an adult on the Willow Path (JWC). On 18<sup>th</sup> October a count of 19 birds during another WeBS visit probably included some migrants as did a report of around 20 which included 12 at the Dragonfly Ponds on 28<sup>th</sup> November (JWC). There was a further count of at least 20 birds on 23<sup>rd</sup> December (JWC).

**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* **Winter Visitor**

Numbers of birds in the early part of the year were disappointing. There were several sightings in January but none involving more than three birds. There were none at all in February. On 8<sup>th</sup> March four were on the farmland and on 15<sup>th</sup> March c50 were recorded flying east over the Reserve (JWC) - this the last sighting of the spring. The first birds of the autumn were recorded on 18<sup>th</sup> October during an early morning WeBS visit - three in trees near the Lagoon, what might have been the same three birds by the Fish Pass and nine flying over the Scrubland. Three days later c40 flew over the Reserve in a southerly direction (JWC). In November up to 30 were seen in the Poplars on 7<sup>th</sup> and around 50 were seen flying north on the same day (JWC). On 11<sup>th</sup> several groups were recorded flying in a south easterly direction - a total of 109 birds - and 14 dropped off into trees near the Lagoon at 3.45pm, probably intending to roost there (JWC). There was just one further record after this - two birds on Poplar Field on 16<sup>th</sup> December (DC/EC).

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* **Winter Visitor**

Small numbers of birds were seen most days in January and February but most reports were of no more than 15. There were a couple of bigger groups recorded. Around 30 flew over the river bridge on 11<sup>th</sup> January (JWC) and more than 60 flew over the Reserve in a westerly direction on 15<sup>th</sup> February (JWC). A single bird over Poplar Carr on 21<sup>st</sup> March (JWC) was the last of the spring. Usually arriving a bit earlier than the Fieldfares, five birds flying in a south easterly direction on 30<sup>th</sup> September were the first of the autumn (JWC). Small parties were reported on several dates from 10<sup>th</sup> October but there were no large movements of birds passing

over the Reserve. A flock of 22 was seen around the bridge car park on 24<sup>th</sup> October (JWC). There were just three records in the last two months of the year. Around 30 were seen flying north on 7<sup>th</sup> November, a few lingering in the Poplars (JWC). On 2<sup>nd</sup> December a total of 49 birds flew in from upriver and over the Lagoon at 3.30pm, presumably to roost in trees on the Reserve (JWC) and on 19<sup>th</sup> December 10 were seen near the river bridge (JWC).

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* **Resident Breeder**

The Willow Coppice is always a good place to look and listen for Song Thrushes from the beginning of the year. Birds were singing here from the first week in January and up to four were reported in this area from the beginning of February. The old Barker's site, Manager's Garden, Butterfly Bank, Poplar Carr and riverbank also produced singing birds in the first few months of the year. The last singing bird was recorded by the Lagoon on 31<sup>st</sup> July (PM/BM) but, typically, sightings then dried up and there were none throughout August, September and October. This is the pattern most years and while many species can be hard to spot as they go through their post breeding moult Song Thrushes seem to disappear completely for months on end. Birds started to be seen again from the last week in November. One was on John Ackroyd Meadow on 25<sup>th</sup> (DC/EC) and three were recorded at the Dragonfly Ponds on 28<sup>th</sup> (JWC). Single birds were reported on four dates in December. There were again no reports of young but several pairs almost certainly nested on the Reserve.

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* **Uncommon Visitor**

Birds were recorded on just 14 dates and 12 of these were in the first three months of the year which is fairly typical of recent years. One was singing in trees in the Manager's Garden on 1<sup>st</sup> January (DC/EC) and on 15<sup>th</sup> January three were seen here (DC/EC). Single birds were recorded on the farmland on three dates in January. There were sightings on four dates in February, none involving more than two birds but on 20<sup>th</sup> March four were reported on the farmland (JSK). There were no further records until 29<sup>th</sup> August when four were again seen on the farmland (JWC). On 16<sup>th</sup> September six flew over the Visitor Centre (JWC). There were no sightings after this date.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* **Uncommon Passage Visitor**

This is a far from common visitor but for the first time since 2013 there were no sightings. There was only one record in 2019 but both 2017 and 2018 produced sightings on six dates.



**Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca* **Rare Visitor**

A juvenile, which was ringed, was photographed on the Willow Path on 1<sup>st</sup> August (JWC). This was a new species for the Reserve.

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* **Resident Breeder and Winter Visitor**

Numbers sometimes increase in the autumn and winter months with the arrival of birds from Continental Europe. There were no records to suggest this occurred this year but the species is almost certainly under-reported being such a common and usually confiding bird. Most records typically came from the Willow Path, Bee Garden and Manager's Garden but with the closure of the hides from March to the end of the year the number of sightings reported were rather fewer than usual. The first juvenile was seen, appropriately, in the Rodley Robins' garden on 28<sup>th</sup> May (DS) and on 13<sup>th</sup> June one was photographed on the gate to the garden (KMCL). A total of 14 seen or heard during an early morning WeBS visit on 18<sup>th</sup> October may possibly have included some migrants but there were no subsequent reports of more than seven.

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* **Rare Visitor**

A female in the hedgerow opposite the workshop on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2008 was only the second record for the Reserve. There have been no sightings since then.

**Common Redstart**

*Phoenicurus phoenicurus* **Uncommon Passage Visitor**

There were no sightings reported for the first time since 2014. There was just one record in in 2018 on 25<sup>th</sup> August and one in 2019 on 26<sup>th</sup> August.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* **Uncommon Passage Visitor**

For the first time since 2010 there were no sightings reported. Last year there were no spring records and just one autumn one on Tim's Field on 7<sup>th</sup> September.

**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* **Uncommon Passage Visitor**

After a disappointing year in 2019 this year was much better with autumn passage particularly good. Last year produced just a single bird on three dates. Tim's Field is the best place to look for this species though two of the first birds of the year on 7<sup>th</sup> March were seen on the wall on the farmland (JWC). On the same date a female was on Tim's Field (JWC). A female was seen there again the next day. On 18<sup>th</sup> March a male was reported on the Wet Grassland fence (JWC). The first bird of the autumn, a female, was spotted on a post on the Scrubland on 16<sup>th</sup> September (JWC). A good crop of Quinoa on Tim's Field this year provided ideal

perches and three were seen here on 23<sup>rd</sup> September (JWC). Five on 26<sup>th</sup> September included four males and one female (JWC *et al*) and five there on 29<sup>th</sup> included three males and two immatures or females (PM/BM). Birds continued to pass through for the next three weeks with as many as five on several dates. A male and female on 21<sup>st</sup> October (JWC) were the last of the year.

**Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* **Uncommon Passage Visitor**

There were no sightings reported this year. Last year produced one spring record on 20<sup>th</sup> April and one autumn record on 15<sup>th</sup> September, both involving single birds.

**Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* **Uncommon Visitor**

After a spate of records in 2013 sightings have been few and far between in recent years. There was just one one record in 2018, one in 2019 and none this year. On 15<sup>th</sup> September one was reported away from the Reserve, but not too far upstream, on a rock in the river before it flew off up Red Beck on the Horsforth/Rawdon boundary (JKi). On the Reserve the streamy water downstream of the weir would appear to be an ideal area for this species but sadly not viewable from the paths or hides.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* **Uncommon Visitor**

This species has suffered a nationwide decline in recent years and numbers have certainly plummeted locally. These days it rarely ventures much beyond the main gates by the canal tow path and consequently very few records are received. A report of eight in bushes by the gates on 1<sup>st</sup> January (JWC) was a decent count but one of only two records received this year. Two were reported in the same area on 6<sup>th</sup> April (JWC). There was only one reported sighting in both 2018 and 2019.

**Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* **Casual Breeder**

In 2019 there were no sightings at all in the first nine months of the year. Then on 5<sup>th</sup> October two turned up on the feeders in the Bee Garden. There were daily sightings from this point to the end of the year, mainly in the Bee Garden. Numbers varied with 11 on one date but often just two or three. This year there were daily sightings of between two and four birds from the beginning of January. From late January feeders in the Manager's Garden proved to be more popular than the Bee Garden with five here on 1<sup>st</sup> February (DC/EC *et al*) and six on 29<sup>th</sup> February (JSc). On 5<sup>th</sup> March a bird was seen going into the camera nest box on the east facing side of the Visitor Centre (GJB) and on 16<sup>th</sup> March one was reported taking in nesting material. Two and possibly three broods of young eventually fledged from this nest. On 15<sup>th</sup> May a bird was also seen taking

nesting material into the sparrow terrace box on the north facing wall of the Visitor Centre and on 6<sup>th</sup> June one was seen taking food into the box (MB/JB). With the Visitor Centre closed due to lockdown and only limited views of the feeders in the Bee Garden there were no records from 11<sup>th</sup> July until 16<sup>th</sup> September when eight were reported flying south east over the Dragonfly Ponds (JWC). There were rather more records again from the end of September with up to seven seen at the feeders in the Bee Garden and their calls could be heard daily in the hedgerows round the Centre. Tree Sparrows were certainly among the many birds visiting Tim's Field for seed in the latter part of the year and there were several reports of birds flying off the field in December.

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis* **Resident Breeder**

Almost certainly under-reported, this is a very common bird on the Reserve, the hedgerows providing ideal nesting sites for them. Several are always to be found in the Bee Garden but nine here on 10<sup>th</sup> February (PM/BM) was a particularly good count. On 19<sup>th</sup> February 26 were counted round the Reserve (PU/DSc) and on 8<sup>th</sup> March 25. Up to five were recorded in the Bee Garden in the latter part of the year. There were no reports of young this year but a number of pairs almost certainly nested successfully.

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* **Scarce (Summer) Visitor**

There were no records this year. This has always been a very infrequent visitor here and there were no sightings at all between 2005 and 2015. Last year there were sightings on four dates, one of these involving two birds.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* **Common Visitor/Casual Breeder**

Last year birds were reported in all months except June. Records were inevitably well down this year due to lockdown. Of the 20 submitted exactly half were flyovers. There were one or two sightings in each of the first five months this year with two birds on one occasion. Autumn was the most productive period with birds seen on the Wet Grassland on five dates between 29<sup>th</sup> September and 24<sup>th</sup> October. Two were recorded here on 7<sup>th</sup> October (JWC). There were no sightings in November but in December one flew over Tim's Field on 2<sup>nd</sup>; one was seen in the compound on 30<sup>th</sup> and two flew onto the farmland on the same date (JWC). This species has nested in the wall of the canal by the swing bridge in the past but there were no reports of young this year.

**Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* **Common Visitor/Casual Breeder**

Typically, the majority of sightings were in the compound and on the farmland but they were inevitably well down on previous years. A bird on Poplar Field on 12<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC) was the first of the year and the only sighting reported that month. There were just two records in February - both in the compound on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> with two birds on the latter date (JSc). In March the flooded farmland produced two birds on three dates (JWC) and there were several sightings in the compound with two there on 8<sup>th</sup> (JSc). There were sightings on just one date in April, July, August and September - a single bird in each case. In November one was recorded in the compound on 15<sup>th</sup> (WeBS) and 21<sup>st</sup> (JWC). There was just one record in December - three birds flying into the compound on 26<sup>th</sup> (JWC). There was no evidence of birds nesting in the compound this year as they have on occasions in the past.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba* **Scarce Passage Migrant**

The Continental White Wagtail is much more likely to be spotted in spring than autumn so any black and white wagtails seen in March or April are worth checking carefully. There were no confirmed sightings last year but there was one this year - two birds on Tim's Field on 6<sup>th</sup> April (JWC).

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* **Passage Migrant**

Like last year there were only a handful of records in the first part of the year and none involving more than three birds. Typically, all except one involved birds flying over the Reserve. On 15<sup>th</sup> March three flew over in a northerly direction and one three days later (JWC). On 21<sup>st</sup> March a bird was spotted flying off Tim's Field and two were recorded flying north (JWC). On 6<sup>th</sup> April one flew over the farmland going west (JWC). The first three birds of the autumn were seen flying south on 12<sup>th</sup> September with two more four days later (JWC). Disappointingly, there were only two further records. On 26<sup>th</sup> September one was seen flying north and on 4<sup>th</sup> November one was reported flying south (JWC).

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* **Rare Passage Visitor**

A bird that flew over the Visitor Centre calling on 25<sup>th</sup> August last year was only the fourth record for the Reserve. There were no sightings this year.

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* **Resident and Winter Visitor**

This species is only ever numerous here during the winter months when the population is swelled by an influx of migrants, probably from Northern Europe. The seed crop on Tim's Field is what almost certainly attracts them. Trees by the Education Pond are often a popular assembly point for birds visiting the field and at the end of December last year at least 20

were counted here. In January last year up to 34 birds were counted flying off the field. It was very different in January this year with only a handful seen here. A few birds were daily visitors to the feeders in the Manager's Garden with six on 26<sup>th</sup> January (DC/EC) the best count. Thanks to lockdown and the closure of the hides there were very few records after the middle of March until the beginning of November when a few birds started to be seen visiting Tim's Field for seed. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November at least 10 flew off the field and on 28<sup>th</sup> November 11 were counted there (JWC). On 6<sup>th</sup> December c20 gathered in a large willow by the Education Pond, frequently dropping down into the field for seed (PM/BM). This was a regular event throughout December with numbers ranging between 20 and 30 birds.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* **Scarce (Winter) Visitor**

This species winters south of its breeding range and in varying numbers depending on the availability of beech mast. In the absence of beech trees on the Reserve it is, not surprisingly, a very infrequent visitor here. There were no sightings in 2015, 2016 or 2017, three in 2018 and two in 2019, all involving just single birds. This year there was just one record - a single bird seen in the Coppice on 23<sup>rd</sup> January (JB).

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* **Resident Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve and a daily visitor to the feeders in the Manager's Garden and Bee Garden for much of the year. This year the majority of records came in the early part of the year before the Visitor Centre and hides had to close due to lockdown. Up to eight were recorded in the Manager's Garden in the same period last year. Numbers were a bit lower this year with six the best count on 1<sup>st</sup> February (JSc) and five on 15<sup>th</sup> March (DC/EC). Up to four were seen at the feeders in the Bee Garden. A count of nine round the Reserve on 29<sup>th</sup> February included four in the Manager's Garden (DC/EC). There were no reports of young this year but several pairs almost certainly nested. In the latter part of the year up to three were seen in the Bee Garden but views were inevitably limited with the Visitor Centre remaining closed. Seven were counted on the Willow Path on 26<sup>th</sup> December (JWC).

**Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris* **Resident Breeder**

Numbers at the feeders in the Manager's Garden and Bee Garden were again low as outbreaks of the disease trichomonosis continue to affect this species adversely. No more than two were seen in the Bee Garden in the first three months of the year and then only on less than a handful of dates. Birds could be seen at the feeders in the Manager's Garden most days but usually no more than three with four on a couple of occasions

and five on one date. With the Visitor Centre and hides closed from the middle of March there were few reported sightings from this point and only one record of juveniles - an adult feeding two on overhead wires by the workshop on 4<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM). Numbers remained low and there were no reports of more than six birds in the last six months of the year.

**Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris* **Rare (Winter) Visitor**

There have been no sightings since 2017 when a single bird was seen on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> November, on each occasion associating with Linnets. Prior to this there had been just two records - in 2000 and 2003.

**Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina* **Casual Breeder and Winter Visitor**

A ripe seed crop on Tim's Field is the attraction for this species here but the last two years have been disappointing compared to earlier years with a best count of just 59 last year (on 6<sup>th</sup> January). Most years prior to 2018 produced three figure counts. The best in the latter part of 2019 was c50 and there was no improvement in the first three months of this year with c30 on 12<sup>th</sup> January the best (MG/PG). However, a small flock hung on into April after the field had been ploughed and 32 were counted here on 5<sup>th</sup> April (JB). There were no reports after 11<sup>th</sup> April until 3<sup>rd</sup> September when three were recorded on the field (JWC). Numbers slowly built up over the following weeks reaching around 40 by the end of October. A flock photographed on 11<sup>th</sup> November was found to contain 46 birds (JWC), this disappointingly the best count of the autumn. Numbers fluctuated throughout December. On 2<sup>nd</sup> a flock photographed over Tim's Field contained 96 birds (JWC) but most days less than half this number were seen. On 28<sup>th</sup> December a flock of 62 birds flew off the field into trees by the Reedbed Hide, a photograph again providing an accurate count (PM/BM).

**Lesser Redpoll** *Carduelis cabaret* **Passage and Winter Visitor**

Last year the first three months of the year produced plenty of sightings. This year sightings were reported on just three dates in this period and it was the latter part of the year that was most productive. On 12<sup>th</sup> January two were reported in trees by the Reserve entrance (NT *et al*). On 18<sup>th</sup> January one was seen in the area around the river bridge and on 29<sup>th</sup> February one was spotted flying over the bridge car park (JWC). The first two sightings of the autumn were in trees at the Dragonfly Ponds - one on 16<sup>th</sup> September and three on 19<sup>th</sup> September (JWC). One or two were reported flying over in October but on 7<sup>th</sup> November a very mobile flock photographed over the Reserve was found to contain 60 birds (JWC) - this an exceptional count for here. On 11<sup>th</sup> November between 10 and 12 were seen at the top of an Ash tree by the Manager's Garden (RB) and

on 21<sup>st</sup> November two were recorded by the river bridge (JWC). There were two reports of three birds on 12<sup>th</sup> December near the river bridge and on 16<sup>th</sup> December on the Willow Path (JWC).

**Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra* **Rare Visitor**

There were no sightings this year or last year. This was a new bird for the Reserve in 2018, though only as a “flyover”. Eight were recorded on 29<sup>th</sup> September and nine on 17<sup>th</sup> October that year, on both occasions calling.

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* **Resident Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve and a daily visitor to the feeders in the Bee Garden throughout the year but there were few records after the middle of March due to lockdown and the closure of the Visitor Centre. Numbers were low with no more than four birds counted on the feeders in the early part of the year. Mike Fisk Meadow always produces good numbers of birds feeding on seed heads in the summer months with many juveniles on the wing. Around 120 were recorded on the field in August last year. Unusually, there were no reports from this area this year but this was most likely due to lack of recording rather than lack of birds. Small flocks were recorded feeding on thistle seed heads on Tim’s Field in August, September and October but no more than 16 birds.

**Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* **Passage and Winter Visitor**

Roadside Alders by the Lagoon and around the river bridge are always worth checking in the winter months with birds visiting these for seed. More than twenty were seen here on 10<sup>th</sup> February (JWC *et al*) and 25 were counted in the same area just six days later (JSc). On 8<sup>th</sup> March 12 were recorded flying north over the Coppice (JWC). A bird flying over the Dragonfly Ponds on 11<sup>th</sup> July (JWC) was an unusual record for the time of year. Autumn records were mainly of one or two birds flying over, the first on 5<sup>th</sup> September (JWC), but eight were seen around the bridge car park on 19<sup>th</sup> September (JWC). On 21<sup>st</sup> November one was recorded at the edge of John Ackroyd Meadow and on 25<sup>th</sup> November four were spotted flying over the Dipping Ponds in an easterly direction (JWC), this the last record of the year.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citronella* **Rare Visitor**

This is a very scarce bird in the area. There was just one record in 2018, none in 2019 and none again this year.

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* **Resident Breeder**

Birds can be seen at the feeders in the Manager’s Garden and Bee Garden for much of the year, though it is very much a bird of the wetlands.

Up to six were seen at the feeders in the Manager's Garden in the first part of the year and up to four in the Bee Garden. Birds have nested in the reedy area of the Dragonfly Ponds in the past and two were seen here on 5<sup>th</sup> April. On 13<sup>th</sup> June four birds were recorded here and a male and female were watched catching Azure Damselflies on Bruce's and Chadwick Ponds before taking them to a nest in the reeds (PM/BM). There were sightings on all four main wetland areas with the Wet Grassland the most productive site, though there were typically very few sightings in late summer and early autumn with birds going through their post breeding moult. From the latter part of September birds could be seen most days visiting Tim's Field to feed on the abundant seed crop there. There was a lot of activity there and in the adjacent hedgerows throughout December. Around 10 were reported here on 30<sup>th</sup> December (JWC).

## **ESCAPED SPECIES**

### **Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* Escaped Species**

First recorded in 2013, two birds were on the wetlands and farmland for a lengthy period in 2016. There were no sightings in 2017 or 2018 but last year one turned up on the Lagoon on 26<sup>th</sup> December and was present to the end of the year, spending time on the Wet Grassland, farmland and canal. The bird was reported flying from the farmland onto the wetlands on 5<sup>th</sup> January this year and from 26<sup>th</sup> January there were regular sightings, mainly on the Lagoon and occasionally on the farmland. The bird was last seen on the Lagoon on 8<sup>th</sup> March (WeBS).

### **Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* Escaped Species**

Previously recorded in 2009, 2010 and 2011, one was seen on the Lagoon on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2018. There were no sightings last year or this year.

### **Chestnut Teal *Anas castanea* Escaped Species**

There have been no records in the last three years. Recorded for the first time in 2016, a male was seen on the Lagoon during an early morning WeBS count on 18<sup>th</sup> December that year. There was again one sighting in 2017 - a male on the Lagoon on 19<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus* Escaped Species**

One flew over the farmland to the river on 2<sup>nd</sup> March last year. This was the first record of this species.



**Zebra Finch *Taeniopygia guttata* Escaped Species**

One flew over the Visitor Centre on 5<sup>th</sup> August in 2018, landing briefly on the radio mast.

**Other species that have been recorded on the Reserve in previous years:**

Corn Bunting  
Grey Phalarope  
Marbled Duck (Probable escape)  
Red-crested Pochard (Probable escape)  
Ringed Teal (Escape)  
Sandwich Tern  
Short-eared Owl

**FIRST AND LAST DATES FOR WINTER VISITORS**  
**2020**

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>LAST</b>	<b>FIRST</b>
Whooper Swan	14 <sup>th</sup> March	-
Wigeon	23 <sup>rd</sup> June	2 <sup>nd</sup> September
Goldeneye	20 <sup>th</sup> March	10 <sup>th</sup> November
Waxwing	-	-
Fieldfare	15 <sup>th</sup> March	18 <sup>th</sup> October
Redwing	21 <sup>st</sup> March	30 <sup>th</sup> September
Brambling	23 <sup>rd</sup> January	-

**FIRST AND LAST DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS**  
**2020**

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>FIRST</b>	<b>LAST</b>
Garganey	-	-
Hobby	-	-
Osprey	-	-
Marsh Harrier	-	-
Avocet	-	-
Little (Ringed) Plover	7 <sup>th</sup> April	7 <sup>th</sup> April
Whimbrel	-	-
Black-tailed Godwit	-	-
Greenshank	-	-
Common Sandpiper	-	-
Common Tern	17 <sup>th</sup> July	30 <sup>th</sup> July
Arctic Tern	-	-
Cuckoo	-	-
Swift	20 <sup>th</sup> April	7 <sup>th</sup> September
Sand Martin	20 <sup>th</sup> March	26 <sup>th</sup> September
Swallow	6 <sup>th</sup> April	30 <sup>th</sup> September
House Martin	15 <sup>th</sup> April	30 <sup>th</sup> September
Yellow Wagtail	-	-
Common Redstart	-	-
Whinchat	-	-
Wheatear	-	-
Ring Ouzel	-	-
Grasshopper Warbler	-	-
Sedge Warbler	20 <sup>th</sup> April	8 <sup>th</sup> August
Reed Warbler	15 <sup>th</sup> April	8 <sup>th</sup> August
Garden Warbler	16 <sup>th</sup> April	31 <sup>st</sup> July
Common Whitethroat	16 <sup>th</sup> April	5 <sup>th</sup> September
Lesser Whitethroat	2 <sup>nd</sup> May	24 <sup>th</sup> June
Willow Warbler	6 <sup>th</sup> April	30 <sup>th</sup> August
Spotted Flycatcher	-	-
Pied Flycatcher	1 <sup>st</sup> August	1 <sup>st</sup> August

In view of the number of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs now over-wintering in the area it is not possible to give accurate arrival and departure dates for actual migrants.

## **Nest Box Report**

The large nest boxes on the Reserve inevitably create the most interest though some of the nesting results were somewhat unclear this year thanks to lockdown. Barn Owls were in residence at the box on the Scrubland throughout the year and monitoring was carried out by volunteers as often as was possible but there were no reports of young at the time. However, on 17<sup>th</sup> December when the old box was taken down and replaced with a new box with a camera installed it was found to contain broken egg shells and a dead chick, evidence at least of a breeding attempt. With the Manager's Garden Hide closed for much of the year monitoring of the Little Owl box there was particularly difficult. A bird was photographed by the box on 4<sup>th</sup> March just prior to lockdown but whether successful nesting subsequently took place is not known.

What we can be sure about, however, are the Kestrels. A pair again nested in the east facing Barn Owl box in the Yorkshire Water compound and three young fledged successfully. Two young fledged from this box in 2019.

Of the 38 small boxes monitored along the Willow Path and at the Visitor Centre 10 were used by Bluetits, one more than last year and it is thought that all young may have fledged successfully in as many as nine of these. One dead juvenile was found in one box and one was piled to the very top with acorns when checked in November- almost certainly the work of a very enterprising Woodmouse after the box's original inhabitant had gone. Great Tits used seven boxes, three less than last year and all young fledged successfully in four of these. Two contained dead chicks and one a single egg.

Many other boxes are impossible to access these days due to the height of the vegetation and various trip hazards such as wild bramble runners. Fortunately, the boxes on the Visitor Centre don't come into this category and both were closely monitored. Great Tits used the box on the east facing wall of the centre in 2017 raising eight young, in 2018 nine young and nine again last year. This year it was the turn of a pair of Tree Sparrows, the birds successfully raising three families of young here. Live action from this box is relayed to a screen in the Visitor Centre - such a shame that there were no visitors to see them due to lockdown. The sparrow terrace box on the north facing wall of the centre was also used by a pair of Tree Sparrows though it is not clear whether they produced more than one brood here.

Other inhabitants used some of the boxes. Wasps' nests were found in two boxes, Woodmice nests in two and one contained both an old bees' nest and a single Woodmouse! Several boxes again showed signs of Great Spotted Woodpecker damage and will need to be replaced.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Boxes Used</b>	<b>All Fledged</b>	<b>Unhatched Eggs/Dead Chicks</b>
Blue Tit	10	9	1
Great Tit	7	4	3
Tree Sparrow	2	2	-
Robin	-	-	-
Wren	-	-	-

It was not possible to check either of the two Goosander nest boxes in riverside trees this year but there was no sign of activity.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Boxes Used</b>	<b>No. of Young Fledged</b>
Kestrel	1	3
Little Owl	1	?
Barn Owl	1	?
Goosander	?	?

## MAMMALS

### **Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*

In 2019 there was a lot of activity from the beginning of the year with 16 reported sightings in January alone. This year we had to wait until 7<sup>th</sup> March for the first sighting - one on the farmland (SO). There were no further records until 16<sup>th</sup> April when a male was seen on the road by the Mike Fisk Meadow (PM/BM). At least two and possibly three pairs bred on the Reserve last year and there was again evidence of successful breeding this time, two young being spotted in the Coppice near the eastern gate on 23<sup>rd</sup> April (JSK). On 15<sup>th</sup> May a juvenile was photographed on the Willow Path (PM/BM). A female and juvenile were seen in the same area five days later (KMcl) and a female and juvenile were there again on 1<sup>st</sup> June (PM/BM). There were further reports of a

single juvenile on the road on 2<sup>nd</sup> June (PM/BM) and by the Wet Grassland gate on 31<sup>st</sup> July (DW). Last year activity slowed considerably from the end of June but this year August and September were the most productive months and there were plenty of signs of their presence too with droppings found all around the Visitor Centre. There were further sightings in October, November and December, the last on Mike Fisk Meadow on 31<sup>st</sup> December (JB/MB).



### **Otter** *Lutra lutra*

Finding signs of Otters in the form of spraint or footprints is usually easier than spotting the animals themselves. However, there are now very few places on the riverbank where it is safe enough to carry out such surveys these days. Daytime sightings are quite rare but last year there were a number of reliable records. This year there were three reported sightings but all on the same day and presumably of the same animal. On 5<sup>th</sup> February one was seen upstream of the river bridge (NT) and it was photographed on the riverbank in the same area feeding on a dead Mallard (TK). An Otter was also photographed on the Lagoon the same day (AH). There was only one other record this year and that in the form of spraint at the bottom of the steps to the water inlet on the riverbank on 19<sup>th</sup> July (JB/MB).



**American Mink** *Neovison vison*

There were 21 records in 2018, 16 last year and just eight this year which is encouraging. One spotted under the river bridge on 5<sup>th</sup> January (JWC) was the first of the year. There were further sightings in the same area on 26<sup>th</sup> January and 7<sup>th</sup> February. There were sightings on four dates in March, two of these on the river by the River Path (JB). There was just one record on the wetlands - one swimming on the Wet Grassland on 18<sup>th</sup> July (RB). There were no reports of juveniles this year.



**Weasel** *Mustela nivalis*

This is quite a common small mammal here and last year there were records in all months except May with sightings on nine dates in March alone. This year there were sightings on just seven dates in total, though this wasn't helped by lockdown. One was seen in the compound as early as 1<sup>st</sup> January (DC/EC) and on 22<sup>nd</sup> February one was in the Bee Garden (DC/EC). There were no further records until 9<sup>th</sup> June when one was spotted crossing the road by the Visitor Centre (BM), this usually a productive area. On 1<sup>st</sup> August one was seen on the entry road (DW). On 29<sup>th</sup> September one was on the ramp to the Reedbed Hide before crossing the path by the Wet Grassland gate where its progress was closely watched by two Wrens (PM/BM). On 18<sup>th</sup> October one was seen on the River Path during an early morning WeBS visit. The last record came on 17<sup>th</sup> December - an animal seen crossing the path just below the Visitor Centre (GJB).



**Stoat** *Mustela erminea*

This species is much less likely to be seen on the Reserve than its small cousin the Weasel. There were reliable sightings on just five dates in both 2016 and 2017 but none in the last three years. Like the Weasel, they will take rodents such as voles and mice but their favoured prey is undoubtedly Rabbits even though they can be more than five times the size of the Stoat. The fact that Rabbits are so scarce on the Reserve may be the reason for the Stoat's absence.

**Roe deer** *Capreolus capreolus*

Recorded in all months, the number of sightings was, nevertheless, well down on last year when there were 100 reported and up to nine animals seen. There were sightings on the farmland on four dates in January with a male and female on two dates and a male and two females on one date (DC/EC). For a large animal they are very adept at squeezing through the fence into the Coppice as was proved in November last year. On 27<sup>th</sup> January two were seen in the Coppice. In February five were photographed on the Duck Marsh on 15<sup>th</sup> (SH) and there were several reports of up to three. On 7<sup>th</sup> March four were seen on the Scrubland (JWC). On 24<sup>th</sup> April a tiny fawn was spotted in the Coppice (JB) and on 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May a single animal was also seen there (LS/KMcL). On 13<sup>th</sup> June a female and fawn were photographed on the John Ackroyd Meadow (KMcL). Most reports from this point were of single animals but on 10<sup>th</sup> October a female and two juveniles were recorded in the Coppice (DS/PS). The following day what may have been the same three animals were seen on Tim's Field (JB/MB). A female on the Duck Marsh close to the Willow Path Hide late in the day on 20<sup>th</sup> December was the last record of the year (JSK *et al*).



**Mole** *Talpa europaea*

There was again plenty of evidence of their presence in the form of molehills all around the Reserve. Sightings of live Moles, however, are rare and most of those found are dead ones left by a predator. One dead Mole was found at the end of the River Path on 23<sup>rd</sup> August (PM/BM). There were no other records. However, there was an abundance of fresh molehills at the side of the road throughout the latter part of the year and much of December.

**Common Shrew** *Sorex araneus*

This species is rarely seen except when it turns up in Longworth traps, which one or two do most years - but, most unusually, not last year. In the absence of any surveys there were no records this year. Dead animals are found most years as larger mammals such as Foxes will kill them but rarely eat them because of the foul tasting liquid produced from glands on the skin - but none were found last year or this year.



**Pygmy Shrew** *Sorex minutus*

There have been no records in the last four years. The remains of this tiny mammal have been found in Barn Owl pellets in the past but there had been no reports of a live one on site until 2016 when one was caught in a Longworth trap on the Willow Path during a small mammal survey in June that year.

**Water Shrew** *Neomys fodiens*

There were again no records this year. Survey work done in the Reedbed some years ago showed this species to be present there and it is almost certainly present on the other wetland areas too. However, it is a very difficult mammal to spot and the last recorded sighting was on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2017 when one was seen on the Wet Grassland.

**Harvest Mouse** *Micromys minutus*

The Harvest Mouse breeding project started in 2012 and since 2014 mice have been introduced behind the Reedbed, Duck Marsh, on the Scrubland and more recently at a site close to the Lagoon. Five further releases were made this year between 3<sup>rd</sup> May and the beginning of October, the first four of these at the Lagoon site. The last release was made on the Scrubland. A total of 267 mice were released, some of these from Pudsey Park's breeding programme. There were two sightings this year. On 16<sup>th</sup> November one was disturbed during reed cutting on the Wet Grassland and on 28<sup>th</sup> December one was seen on Tim's Field near the Dipping Ponds (JB/MB). The location of these sightings shows just how much the population has spread out from the release sites. One was also disturbed on the Wet Grassland in December last year.

**Wood Mouse** *Apodemus sylvaticus*

This very common species regularly turns up in Longworth traps during small mammal surveys and, being an excellent climber, in nest boxes along the Willow Path. In the absence of any surveys this year there were far fewer records than normal and just two in the first nine months. On 14<sup>th</sup> February one was seen on the Willow Path (DW) and on 6<sup>th</sup> March an adult and three young were found in one of the metal storage containers by Tim's Field (JSK). During a nest box check in October one was found to contain both a honeycomb plus one Wood Mouse and another was full to the very top with acorns (PM/BM) - the work of a Wood Mouse expecting a long, hard winter! On 26<sup>th</sup> October six or seven emerged when the lid of one of the small mammal homes was lifted on the Willow Path (DS) and on 16<sup>th</sup> November a similar number were found under one of the corrugated iron sheets in the Rodley Robins' garden (DS).



**Bank Vole** *Clethrionomys glareolus*

Like the Wood Mouse, this species regularly turns up in Longworth traps during small mammal surveys but, unlike the Wood Mouse, it is not really a climber and is never found in bird nest boxes. There was only one reported sighting this year, one being seen crossing the path and going into the buddleia bed outside the Visitor Centre on 1<sup>st</sup> September (PM/JSK). Some years they can be seen under the feeders on the Willow Path but not this year or last year.

**Field or Short-tailed Vole** *Microtus agrestis*

Being a lover of rough grassland full of tussocks this species is at its most numerous on the Scrubland where it features highly in the diet of the Barn Owls and Kestrels. In the absence of any surveys there were no records this year.

**Water Vole** *Arvicola amphibius*

Loss of habitat and predation by American Mink have been major factors in the dramatic decline of this species and it is now a rare mammal here. In 2015 one was seen on three dates between 5<sup>th</sup> August and 4<sup>th</sup> October on the Dragonfly Ponds and Education Pond but there had been no sightings in 2016 or 2017. Tracks found on the riverbank in January 2018 may have been this species and there was a reported sighting of one by the river bridge on 23<sup>rd</sup> January that year. There have been no records in the last two years.

**Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus*

Sightings are few and far between considering the Reserve's proximity to the river. There was just one in 2018 and two in 2019. This year one was seen behind the Sand Martin nesting bank on the Lagoon during habitat management work on 11<sup>th</sup> June (JB). Last year one was seen in the Bee Garden in June. This year two were spotted there feeding on spilled seed under the feeders on 10<sup>th</sup> December and four including one juvenile on 22<sup>nd</sup> (PM/BM). There were further sightings over the next few days.

**Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis*

Most sightings go unreported but this species is certainly visiting the Reserve much more often than it used to do. It is frequently to be seen on the entry road between the main gates and the Lagoon Hide but this year there were also sightings on the Willow Path, on the path to the Reedbed Hide, on Bentley's Path and at the edge of the John Ackroyd Meadow. Acorns and hazelnuts are inevitably a big attraction in the autumn months. One or two are now breeding here and at least one drey could be seen in the Coppice this year.

**Rabbit** *Oryctogalus cuniculus*

This is a rare visitor to the Reserve and prior to this year there had been no sightings since 27<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Prior to 2016 there had been no sightings since 2011. Surprisingly, there were two records this year. On 22<sup>nd</sup> July one was seen running from the Education Pond onto Bentley's Path (PS/DS) and on 25<sup>th</sup> October one was spotted by the Dipping Ponds before it ran under the hedge and into John Ackroyd Meadow (PM/BM).

**Brown Hare** *Lepus capensis*

Almost as rare a visitor to the Reserve as the Rabbit, there had only been three records in 20 years, the last two as recently as 2018 and 2019. There was another sighting this year. On 15<sup>th</sup> November one was seen coming out of Tim's Field and running off between the metal containers onto John Ackroyd Meadow (JSK).

**Hedgehog** *Erinaceus europaeus*

Surveys suggest that Hedgehog numbers have fallen by around 50% since the turn of the century and they appear to be disappearing more rapidly in the countryside as hedgerows and field margins are lost. Due to the Reserve's location, surrounded by the river on three sides and improved grassland on the other, they have always been rare here and there have only been three records since we opened in July 2000. The last of these just about qualified as a Reserve record - a Hedgehog on the road just under the main gates during the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> July last year.

**Common Pipistrelle Bat** *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Pipistrelles are the commonest bats to be found on the Reserve. There were no public Bat Night events this year due to the need for strict social distancing. However, several members of the Rodley Robins' children's club were able to visit on the evenings of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> September and good numbers of bats were recorded. Common Pipistrelles were again very numerous, particularly good areas being the path between the Dragonfly Ponds and the Wet Grassland and the Willow Path.

**Soprano Pipistrelle Bat** *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

Using bat detectors and based on the frequency of echolocation calls alone, this species again appeared to be present in good numbers in the two areas referred to above for Common Pipistrelles during the two visits in September. The Soprano Pipistrelle has only been a separate species since 1999 when the Common Pipistrelle was split into two species on the basis of different frequency echolocation calls. Usually found in wetland habitats, the Soprano Pipistrelle is undoubtedly particularly suited to the areas mentioned above.

**Noctule Bat** *Nyctalus noctula*

Unlike the other bats this large species can often be seen flying just before sunset and occasionally during the day. Two were seen over Tim's Field at 9.30pm on 24<sup>th</sup> July (KMCL *et al*). A number were recorded during the two Rodley Robins visits in September.

**Daubenton's Bat** *Myotis daubentoni*

This medium-sized bat is often associated with water and seen flying low over lakes, ponds and canals just as dark is falling. There were no confirmed records this year but it is almost certainly still present here.

## **SMALL MAMMAL SURVEYS**

No surveys were carried out this year.

## **AMPHIBIANS**

**Smooth Newt** *Triturus vulgaris*

Smooth Newts emerge from hibernation from late February onwards and head for the ponds where they breed. During the spring they can be found in good numbers in the Dragonfly Ponds, Dipping Ponds and Poplar Ponds. Later in the year they can often be found under logs and debris from where they emerge to feed on invertebrates. Good numbers were found under the corrugated iron sheets and logs in the Rodley Robins children's club area again this year.

**Palmate Newt** *Triturus helveticus*

This is the smallest of our three native newt species. Its preference is for shallow pools on acidic soils such as heathland and moorland - places that Smooth Newts shun. It was first recorded in 2010 and again in 2011. In the absence of any subsequent detailed surveys there have been no further confirmed records since 2011.

**Common Frog** *Rana temporaria*

Large numbers appear at the Dragonfly Ponds to spawn in early spring. The first individual this year was spotted on the River Path close to the ponds on 8<sup>th</sup> March during an early morning WeBS visit. Around 60 adults and spawn were noted at the edge of the Duck Marsh on 11<sup>th</sup> March (KH)

but the Reserve was closed shortly afterwards due to the pandemic and there were no further records until 20<sup>th</sup> June when numerous tiny frogs were reported in grass by the Wet Grassland viewing point (PM/BM). Good numbers are seen most years on the Willow Path in June and July but there were no sightings reported this year with the Reserve closed for much of the time. Frogs of all sizes are certainly preyed on by Grey Herons but numbers remain high each year.

**Common Toad** *Bufo bufo*

Large numbers arrive in spring at the Dragonfly Ponds from the Scrubland where they have spent the winter. They usually breed a little later than Frogs but with the Reserve closed from March there were no records this year until September when several were found on the Winter Walk and Willow Path during the Rodley Robins children's club visits on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. On 16<sup>th</sup> November two were found under logs in the Rodley Robins' garden (DS).

## **REPTILES**

**Red-eared Terrapin** *Trachemys scripta elegans*

Native to the southern United States and northern Mexico, it is a popular pet in this country and, unfortunately, is often released into the wild. The species was first recorded on the Reserve in 2013 and there were sightings in 2014 and 2017. Fortunately, there have been none since.

**Grass Snake** *Natrix natrix*

Surveys were carried out a number of years ago to establish whether this species was present on the Reserve but no evidence was found. This year there was a report of a three foot long specimen in the margins of the river just upstream of the Reserve on 22<sup>nd</sup> April (SD). An atypical population is known to have been present within and around the Esholt sewage treatment facility since 1990. These snakes were suspected of originating from southern or eastern Europe. Being good swimmers it is not impossible that some may have reached Rodley via the river.

## **BUTTERFLIES**

Before starting on the records themselves, it has to be said that in 2020 there were far fewer records than usual due the Covid pandemic. Because of Covid the Reserve was closed during the spring and early summer and thereafter the hours of opening to the public were only about a third of normal. Before the re-opening of the Reserve observations were only made during essential security patrolling. After the Reserve re-opened there was less volunteer activity due to the required 'social spacing' and members of the public were unable to record observations in the Visitor Centre; all this reduced the number of reporters and thus reports. The vast majority of reports were made by 3 or 4 observers and based on a smaller number of days than is usual.

The overall reduced recording is likely to have led to an underestimate of 'occurrence' and of numbers. It is therefore difficult to know how reliable these records are as an indicator of the current status of any species at Rodley.

As always weather will have affected actual butterfly numbers. The warm spring and early summer will have got some species off to a flying start. For five species (Large Skipper, Meadow Brown, Small Copper, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock) the dates of the first sightings of the year at Rodley were the earliest on record. Orange Tip, Brimstone and Small Tortoiseshell all seemed to benefit from the early warm weather. However, as the summer proceeded there was a severe lack of rain which eventually reached near drought levels. This adversely affected the flowering of a lot of plants and probably restricted nectar availability as well. Certainly it became clear later in the summer that the seed-set of some flowers, notably Yellow Rattle, was decreased. Once the drought broke the weather turned cool, wet and windy – again not ideal for butterflies.

After the excitement of 3 new species (Essex Skipper, Brown Argus and Dark Green Fritillary) being added to the Reserve list last year, 2020 was disappointing in that not only were there no new species but some 'regulars' were not reported at all. The absence of Painted Ladies was perhaps not too surprising as the occurrence and numbers of this migratory species are always very variable. However, this was only the 6<sup>th</sup> year out of the last 20 that not a single specimen was reported. Another missing species was the Holly Blue; although never numerous this was only the third year since 2004 that it has not been reported.

In recent years there has been a decline in the numbers of Small Tortoiseshells and to a lesser extent Peacocks. Peacocks did well in 2019 and quite well this year too. A recovery may now be underway for Small Tortoiseshells too as numbers markedly increased relative to 2019, despite the lower level of recording which may have led to underestimation. Encouragingly the numbers of the second generation adults, seen in late summer and autumn, were strong (which hasn't been the case in recent years). Hopefully this will translate into higher numbers emerging in spring to give rise to the first generation in 2021. Interestingly the season appeared to both start and finish early for this species; the early start may have been beneficial for it.

The top six most frequently recorded butterflies at Rodley in 2020 are shown below.

Ranking 2020 (2019)	Species and number of days seen on
1 (1)	Small Tortoiseshell – 41
2 (5)	Peacock – 28
3 (3)	Comma - 22
4 (6)	Small White - 21
5 (7)	Speckled Wood - 17
6	Brimstone – 16

Brimstone appears to have done quite well at Rodley in recent years, but so far we haven't had proof of breeding on the Reserve. The larval food plants are shrubby trees in the Buckthorn family and we now have good numbers of both Alder Buckthorn and Purging Buckthorns notably on the Butterfly Bank, Poplar Field and the Scrubland tree plantation.

Numbers of all the Lycaenidae which have been seen at Rodley, namely Small Copper, Holly Blue, Common Blue and the Hairstreaks, remain low and reports are irregular. Records of any of these will be particularly valuable. Hopefully the new wildflower area on Poplar Field will prove to be a good locale for butterfly recording. 2020 was the first year since this area was re-seeded/planted and it showed much promise despite the dry weather in mid-summer which impaired establishment of some of the plants.

Jerry Knapp

## HESPERIDAE

### **Essex Skipper** (*Thymelicus lineola*)

There were no records this year after the first for the Reserve on the River Path on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019 (JWC). This species is gradually spreading its way northwards, reaching the southern edges of Yorkshire around 1996. However it is easily overlooked, being very similar to the Small Skipper, identification requiring close examination of the antennae.

### **Small Skipper** (*Thymelicus sylvestris*)

Probably under-recorded, this species has, nevertheless, never been particularly numerous here at Rodley. It was only reported on 4 days, with no more than 2 individuals seen. The first was a single butterfly on the River Path on 23<sup>rd</sup> June (PM/BM). Two were present on the 11<sup>th</sup> (JWC) and 12<sup>th</sup> July on the River Path and Poplar Field (PM/BM). The final sighting for the year was of one on the Butterfly Bank on 19<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM).

### **Large Skipper** (*Ochlodes venatus*)

Only recorded on 7 dates this year, generally with low numbers. The first of the year was seen on 1<sup>st</sup> June, 5 being sighted on the Butterfly Bank, John Ackroyd Meadow and the River Path (PM/BM); this is the earliest record for the Reserve. After this good start most reports were of 1 or 2 individuals, the most being of 3 scattered across the Reserve on 22<sup>nd</sup> June (JSK). The last of the year was a single on 12<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM)

## PIERIDAE

### **Orange Tip** (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

Orange Tips were very prominent this year. The first sighting was of 2 males on the Butterfly Bank and at the Fish Pass on 14<sup>th</sup> April (JSK). Twos and threes were then regularly seen across the Reserve until early June, especially on the Butterfly Bank, the Willow Path and on flowers around the Mike Sheldon Hide. The highest counts were in April with 10 on 22<sup>nd</sup> (PM/BM) and 14 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> (JSK). They were seen throughout May in small numbers but with 7 on 9<sup>th</sup> and 6 on 25<sup>th</sup>. The last sighting was of a single female on the Butterfly Bank on 2<sup>nd</sup> June (JSK).

### **Large White** (*Pieris brassicae*)

For a large, very visible and easily identified butterfly there were surprisingly few records of Large Whites. They were reported on only 7 days with low counts. This follows a poor year for this species in 2019. The maximum daily counts were of 3 on 23<sup>rd</sup> April across the Reserve

(JSK) and 29<sup>th</sup> July on the Butterfly Bank (SC). The first of the year was a single on 22<sup>nd</sup> April on the Butterfly Bank (PM/BM) and the last on 18<sup>th</sup> September. The relative scarcity of this species compared to the Small Whites (which were seen on more days and in larger numbers) may be surprising given the large amount of *Brassica* species found on the Reserve; however, Large White is reported to have a preference for cultivated *Brassica* species while its Small cousin uses a wider range of crucifers.

### **Small White** (*Artogeia rapae*)

The first Small White of the year appeared pretty much on schedule on 8<sup>th</sup> April with 2 seen on the Butterfly Bank (PM/BM). Small numbers were seen throughout April and early May. After this numbers increased with 6 across the Reserve on 9<sup>th</sup> May and 'lots' on 20<sup>th</sup> May. More than a dozen were on Tim's Field on 25<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM). Tim's Field remained a hot spot with ca.10 on 31<sup>st</sup> July and 15<sup>th</sup> September and 20+ on 17<sup>th</sup> September (PM/BM). After this numbers declined; singles were seen on several days and 6 on the 7<sup>th</sup> October (JWC). Three on the 11<sup>th</sup> October were the last of the year.

### **Green-veined White** (*Artogeia napi*)

It was a disappointing year with sightings on only 7 days, mostly of single butterflies. The first of the year was on the Butterfly Bank on 16<sup>th</sup> April (PM/BM), this the 2<sup>nd</sup> earliest date for this species. The final record was of a mating pair on the Winter Walk on 24<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM), the earliest date for last sighting of the year for this species, which is normally in late August or September.

### **Brimstone** (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)

The first sighting near the river bridge on 25<sup>th</sup> March (JB) was early, the 2<sup>nd</sup> earliest date for the Reserve (and the same date for the first Brimstones of 2017 and 2018) - 20<sup>th</sup> March last year being the earliest. Brimstones were seen on 16 dates; although this is less days than in the last 3 years (17, 20, 30) the decrease is probably due to lack of recording. Most sightings (10 out of 16) were of singles but 3 were seen on three dates. The largest counts were 6 on 23<sup>rd</sup> April (JSK) and 5+ on 9<sup>th</sup> May (JWC). The last sightings were of one seen on *Buddleia* in the YW compound on 9<sup>th</sup> September (TP) and a male on the Butterfly Bank on 14<sup>th</sup> September (JSK).



## **NYPHALIDAE**

### **Wall** (*Lasiommata megera*)

Although seen annually until 2012, there were again no reports of Wall butterflies this year. The last Rodley sighting was in August 2017 with only 4 sightings from 2012 to 2017. This butterfly is a lover of dry, unfertilized places with an abundance of bare patches where it can bask which, of course, is not typical of the habitat here.

### **Speckled Wood** (*Pararge aegeria*)

Speckled Wood were reported on 17 dates with the first seen by the Lagoon on 14<sup>th</sup> April (JSK). Most sightings were of single butterflies and, as usual, the Willow Path was the best place to find them, with several sightings also by the Lagoon. They were seen every month from April to September. The highest counts were 4 on 23<sup>rd</sup> April and 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 7 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August (5 of these on the Willow Path) (PM/BM) and a final flourish with 5 on 15<sup>th</sup> September (PM/BM) being last of the year.

### **Small Heath** (*Coenonympha pamphilus*)

First recorded on the Reserve in 2005, there have been no confirmed sightings since then.

### **Ringlet** (*Aphantopus hyperantus*)

The first of the year was on 20<sup>th</sup> June (JWC), which is very much on time as first appearance at Rodley is always between 14<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Ringlets were seen on 8 dates, mostly in small numbers but with 10 on Mike Fisk Meadow on 25<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM) and 30+ mostly on the two wildflower meadows on 12<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM). The last report was of 3 on 5<sup>th</sup> August (JSK).

### **Meadow Brown** (*Maniola jurtina*)

The first of the year was seen flying up the main drive on 2<sup>nd</sup> June (JSK), this the earliest date for Meadow Brown on the Reserve. After this butterflies were recorded on 14 days, numbers steadily rising to 48+ on 25<sup>th</sup> June and 30+ on 12<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM). Most were seen on the two wildflower meadows, the Butterfly Bank and Poplar Field. Numbers then steadily decreased until the last was seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> September (JWC).

### **Gatekeeper** (*Pyronia tithonus*)

The first of the year was a single on the Butterfly Bank on 10<sup>th</sup> July (DM). The next was a pair on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 22<sup>nd</sup> July (DS). After this they were seen regularly in small numbers on 8 days until the final sighting of a single on Mike Fisk Meadow on 30<sup>th</sup> August. The highest

count of the year was 6 on 24<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM). Gatekeepers were seen on various parts of the Reserve but the Butterfly Bank was the most reliable site. 2020 was certainly disappointing compared with the previous two years, both of which gave some counts in double figures.

**Dark Green Fritillary** (*Argynnis aglaja*)

Sadly this species was not seen in 2020 after its debut at Rodley the previous year. It is unlikely that it will ever be more than 'accidental' here given the absence of its larval food plant Common Dog Violet at Rodley and its scarcity in the local area.

**Red Admiral** (*Vanessa atalanta*)

Red Admirals are always rather sporadic in appearance. The first ones appeared rather late, being recorded on the Willow Path on 20<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM/JWC). They were seen on a further 14 days, mostly in ones or twos. Early sightings were across the Reserve but later on most were around the Visitor Centre, probably attracted by the *Buddleia*. The highest count was of 4 on 11<sup>th</sup> July (JWC). The last specimens of the year were seen on 7<sup>th</sup> October (DS/JWC).

**Painted Lady** (*Vanessa cardui*)

2019 was a wonderful year for Painted Ladies with reports of 20 to 30 at a time often feeding near the Visitor Centre. 2020 however was the exact opposite with no reports at all. As a long-distance migrant, occurrence and numbers are always highly variable, but this was only the fourth year since 2003 that none were seen.

**Peacock** (*Aglais io*)

The season started very early for Peacock with one seen on the Poplar Field (MG/DG) on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. This is the earliest ever sighting for this species by a long way as previously the earliest was on 9<sup>th</sup> March. Furthermore, it is the earliest record for any of the vanessids at Rodley. Before this year the earliest vanessid sightings were in mid-February (16<sup>th</sup> Feb for Small Tortoiseshell in 2013 and 2019 and 17<sup>th</sup> Feb 2007 for Red Admiral). This presaged a good year as Peacocks were seen on 28 days during the year making it the second most frequently reported butterfly of the year, although numbers were never massive. The next sighting was near the containers on 7<sup>th</sup> March (JWC) – which would have been the earliest ever! There were then regular sightings of small numbers during March with a maximum of 5 along the riverbank on 25<sup>th</sup> March (JB). The spring peak was on 8<sup>th</sup> April when 11 were seen across the Reserve (PM/BM) and 14<sup>th</sup> April with 9 (JSK). Thereafter 4 or 5 were often seen through spring and early summer. Peacock caterpillars were then

observed from 19<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June (JSK) with groups seen on nettles initially in several areas in the Poplar Field and then on the edge of the Scrubland, round the Dragonfly Ponds and near the furlong on the River Path. Freshly emerged specimens of the second generation were seen on the River Path and the Butterfly Bank on 19<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM). Good numbers were seen throughout July with a maximum of 7 on the Butterfly Bank on 29<sup>th</sup> July (SC). Small numbers were seen in August and September – although nothing to compare with the 20 to 40 seen in August 2019. The final sighting of the year was of one basking in the sunshine on the Reedbed Hide on 13<sup>th</sup> November (JSK). In summary, although the number of days Peacocks were seen on was relatively high the numbers of butterflies was not as high as in 2019.

### **Small Tortoiseshell** (*Aglais urticae*)

Small Tortoiseshell is a butterfly that has declined a lot in recent years; although there are signs of some improvement nationally, this hasn't been the case at Rodley. 2018 was a poor year and 2019 was no better with maximum counts of 12 and 11 respectively, nothing compared to the 20 to 30 that were seen daily in previous times. In 2020 the season started early with a single on the 'meadows' on 2<sup>nd</sup> February (LJo), this the earliest first sighting of the year at Rodley, the previous earliest date being 16<sup>th</sup> February. After this numbers increased steadily with several double figure counts in April, with 16 across the Reserve on 14<sup>th</sup> and on 24<sup>th</sup> April (JSK). Numbers then declined, ranging from 1 to 6 (but normally 2 or 3) until 4<sup>th</sup> June. However, caterpillars began to appear in early May (9<sup>th</sup> near the Education Pond). On 17<sup>th</sup> May colonies of caterpillars were found on nettles on Poplar Field, the Scrubland, the Dragonfly Ponds, near the Education Pond and close to the Reedbed Hide. Caterpillars were also found in July and August, notably around the Dragonfly Ponds and on Tim's Field. The new adult generation begin to appear in good numbers in mid-June with 22 pristine specimens all across the Reserve on 16<sup>th</sup> June. Good numbers were seen across the Reserve in July with double figure numbers on 7 days and a maximum of 24 on 25<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM). Numbers declined in August but with a late flourish of 17 across the Reserve on 2<sup>nd</sup> September (JSK). These turned out to be the last of the year, a relatively early date – the 2<sup>nd</sup> earliest last sighting date of the year since 2003. Overall Small Tortoiseshells were seen on 41 days with the 'season' starting and finishing early and much better maximum daily counts (the best since 2015). So are Small Tortoiseshells making a comeback? Let's hope so.

### **Comma** (*Polygonum c-album*)

The first sighting of the year was of 2 near the river bridge on 25<sup>th</sup> March (JB). Although Commas were seen on 22 days, all over the Reserve, the numbers were always low with maximum daily counts of 3 on 24<sup>th</sup> July (JSK) and 19<sup>th</sup> September (JWC). The last of the year was a single on the Visitor Centre *Buddleia* on 5<sup>th</sup> October (JSK).

## **LYCAENIDAE**

### **Small Copper** (*Lycaena phlaeas*)

The year started well with 3 along the river bank on 25<sup>th</sup> March (JB). However, after that they were only seen on 3 further days in ones or twos in July and August. The final sighting of the year of a single butterfly was on 8<sup>th</sup> August, very early for a species that is often still around in October.

### **Purple Hairstreak** (*Quercusia quercus*)

There was just one sighting this year on 8<sup>th</sup> August on Oak trees on the Willow Path (JWC). Purple Hairstreak has only been seen at Rodley since 2016 and never more than a few sightings a year. Its habit of feeding high in Oak trees doesn't make it easy to spot and so it is almost certainly under recorded. The planting of more Oaks on the Reserve in recent years should help this delightful little butterfly. We are also trying to encourage growth of volunteer oaks in the Coppice (those that have grown on their own from acorns) by reducing competition around them.

### **White-letter Hairstreak** (*Satyrium w-album*)

There were again no sightings in 2020. Usually associated with Wych Elms these days, this is a scarce butterfly on the Reserve with just four records. There are no elms on the Reserve but scrubby elms are quite frequent among trees along the canal, so presumably the butterflies found at Rodley have come across the river for occasional visits.

### **Holly Blue** (*Celastrina argiolus*)

There were no sightings of Holly Blue in 2020, despite 2019 being better than most for records. This has always been a scarce butterfly on the Reserve although it has been reported in 14 of the last 20 years. However, Holly Blue is noted for marked seasonal variations in its abundance which is thought to be associated with the level of parasitism.

### **Brown Argus** (*Aricia agestis*)

There were no records for 2020. Brown Argus was a new species for the Reserve in 2019, with sightings in May and June in the region of the

Butterfly Bank and John Ackroyd Meadow. Rodley is towards the north western edge of its known range, however its larvae can feed on Storksills and Cranesbills, which are both found on the Reserve, so it may be able to colonise in the future – one to look out for.

**Common Blue** (*Polyommatus icarus*)

There were only two sightings of single Common Blues in 2020, both in the John Ackroyd Meadow on 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> August (JWC). This has never been a common butterfly here although it has been recorded in all but one year since 2009, with John Ackroyd Meadow being the favoured location.

**First and Last Dates - 2020**

<b>Species</b>	<b>First date</b>	<b>Last date</b>
Essex Skipper	-	-
Small Skipper	23 <sup>th</sup> June	19 <sup>th</sup> July
Large Skipper *	1 <sup>st</sup> June	12 <sup>th</sup> July
Orange Tip	14 <sup>th</sup> April	2 <sup>nd</sup> June
Large White	22 <sup>nd</sup> April	18 <sup>th</sup> September
Small White	8 <sup>th</sup> April	11 <sup>th</sup> October
Green-veined White	16 <sup>th</sup> April	24 <sup>th</sup> July
Clouded Yellow	-	-
Brimstone	25 <sup>th</sup> March	14 <sup>th</sup> September
Wall	-	-
Speckled Wood	14 <sup>th</sup> April	15 <sup>th</sup> September
Small Heath	-	-
Ringlet	20 <sup>th</sup> June	5 <sup>th</sup> August
Meadow Brown *	2 <sup>nd</sup> June	2 <sup>nd</sup> September
Gatekeeper	10 <sup>th</sup> July	30 <sup>th</sup> August
Dark Green Fritillary	-	-
Red Admiral	20 <sup>th</sup> June	7 <sup>th</sup> October
Painted Lady	-	-
Peacock *	22 <sup>nd</sup> January	13 <sup>th</sup> November
Small Tortoiseshell *	2 <sup>nd</sup> February	2 <sup>nd</sup> September
Comma	25 <sup>th</sup> March	5 <sup>th</sup> October
Small Copper *	25 <sup>th</sup> March	8 <sup>th</sup> August
Purple Hairstreak	8 <sup>th</sup> August	8 <sup>th</sup> August
White-letter Hairstreak	-	-

Holly Blue	-	-
Brown Argus	-	-
Common Blue	8 <sup>th</sup> August	12 <sup>th</sup> August

- \* Large Skipper - Earliest ever first date at Rodley
- \* Meadow Brown - Earliest ever first date at Rodley
- \* Peacock - Earliest ever first date at Rodley
- \* Small Copper - Earliest ever first date at Rodley
- \* Small Tortoiseshell - Earliest ever first date at Rodley

#### Recorders

John Brook JB

John Cooper JWC

Peter and Barbara Murphy PM/BM

T Powell TP

Sally Curtis SC

Dave Nesham DAN

Mark Unsworth MU

Denese Swann DS

Madge Gibson MG

David Green DG

David Marsden DM

Lee Jones LJo

Jerry Knapp JSK

## MOTHS

Like most activities nothing was seriously disrupted by the pandemic and it was not possible to undertake any of the six planned public trapping events during 2020. It was possible, however, to hold a single closed trap event on 29<sup>th</sup> July. Nevertheless our "eagle eyed" visitors did manage to submit 24 moth records during their visits to the Reserve including three species new to Rodley.

**The Reserve list now stands at 421 species - 232 macro moths and 189 micros.**

On March 17th the micro *Mompha jurassicella* was recorded by the Visitor Centre (JWC). This species is nationally scarce with very few Yorkshire records and requires verification to confirm identification. This record is a first for the Reserve.

A second new species, a Currant Clearwing *Synanthedon tipuliformis*, was seen on the bramble by "Patchett's Patch" on 22nd June (JSK). True to its habits this macro was enjoying the sun resting on leaves. As the name suggests its larval food plant is the currant family (black and red) and whilst the moth is now relatively widespread in England, there have been apparent declines in some areas possibly due to improved control on commercial crops together with fewer garden crops.

The third new moth for the Reserve this year was *Argyresthia albistria* which was spotted in the John Ackroyd Meadow on 5th September (JWC). Again this moth holds a national status of common, with Yorkshire Moths listing it as fairly common and a local resident.

May is usually a productive month for sightings and despite covid restrictions several records were submitted - *Pyrausta aurata* (Mint Moth) was spotted on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 8th May (BM) and a day later a Small Yellow Underwing was also recorded on the meadow (JWC). Whilst the *P. aurata* has been recorded regularly since first reported in 2013 the Small Yellow Underwing is relatively new to the Reserve being first recorded in 2019 and is listed as scarce in Yorkshire but now becoming more widespread. A micro *Grapholita jungiella* was spotted on the Butterfly Bank on 9th May (JWC). Whilst holding the national status of common this spring flying moth is regarded as a rare and local resident in Yorkshire. On the same day c8 *Dichrorampha sedatana* were counted on the Tansy Bank opposite the garage/toilet block (JWC). This micro is also designated as rare and a local resident with Tansy as its food plant.

On 20th May a Silver-ground Carpet was recorded on the path to the Manager's Garden (PM) together with the attractive micro Small Magpie on the Dragonfly Ponds area (PM)

There were two records of the Indian Meal Moth this year on 22nd June (DAN) and on 22nd September (PM) which, not surprisingly, were in the Visitor Centre as this micro probably arrives via the stored bags of bird seed. Customers purchasing our seed should keep an eye out for it - it can be regarded as a pest in food warehouses. This moth is seen regularly in the Visitor Centre which suggests under recording.

July produced only 3 records - on 10th a Silver Y was spotted on the Riverside Walk (MS) whilst a Dingy Footman and Mother of Pearl were recorded in the Dragonfly Ponds Area on 24th (MS).

During August several day flying species were recorded - a Blood-vein was spotted on Poplar Field on 22nd (DAN) along with 6 Straw Dot in the grass on the John Ackroyd Meadow (DAN). Both these species are recorded regularly on the Reserve and, coincidentally, a recent survey involving Blood-vein and Straw Dot has found significant increases in larval mortality when host plants were given nitrogen fertilizer at rates typically applied in agriculture. (Kurze, Heinken & Flatmann 2018). The Reserve can confirm that no such crop fertilizer is ever used anywhere on its habitats. August also recorded a Silver Y nectaring on Purple Loosestrife on 30th (PM) together with a *Udea lutealis* (PM) both seen at the back of the Lagoon.

September proved to be the best month of the year for individual sightings. An Old Lady was found in the Reed Beds on 4th whilst carrying out routine maintenance work (DSc) and prompted the usual wise cracks at tea break. On 5th c20 *Anthophila fabriciana* (Nettle Tap Moth) were recorded at various spots around the Reserve (JWC) and on the same day a Common Marbled Carpet and a Vapourer were recorded on the Willow Path (JWC). On the evening of 11th September a dismembered Red Underwing was spotted on the access road (PM), possibly the result of bird/bat predation and only the third record for the Reserve.

Just a single record was submitted in October - on 31st a late *Acleris emargana* was spotted on the John Ackroyd Meadow (JWC). This micro is fairly common if thinly distributed in Yorkshire.



The light trap event held on 29<sup>th</sup> July involved two traps set on the Butterfly Bank and in the Bee Garden. In total 51 macro species were recorded along with 16 micro moths.

Of interest was a Scalloped Hook-tip which, although enjoying a national status of common, was only the second ever record for the Reserve, the first being back in July 2010.

Dingy Footman was first seen in 2019 and encouragingly has appeared for the second year running. With the one being recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> July in the Dragonfly Ponds area a further seven came to the light traps on 29<sup>th</sup>. This moth was once largely confined to the south and east of England but has spread rapidly across Wales, central and northern England.

Also of note from the trap was a Double Square-spot which is a very common and widespread moth but is rare at Rodley having been recorded only four times since first spotted back in 2013. A Fen Wainscot also came to light, the third record since July 2018, and suggests that this species may now, hopefully, have found a home at the Reserve. It is mainly a reed bed species but is known to wander into neighbouring habitats.

A number of Cinnabar caterpillars were recorded on the Duck Marsh Ragwort during August (BBu), but alas there were no reported moth sightings this year. A late stage Grey Dagger caterpillar was seen on the Lagoon Hide ramp on 30<sup>th</sup> August (PM) and an early stage Grey Dagger caterpillar on the hedge to the John Ackroyd Meadow on 5<sup>th</sup> September (JWC).

Because of our restricted activities It would not be a fair analysis to look back at previous years records for comparison purposes - just another casualty of the coronavirus albeit only a small one in the overall scheme of things. Let's hope we get the chance to run our public trap events during 2021 and share the excitement and wonders of trapping at Rodley.

Dave Nesham  
January 2021

#### Contributors

DAN - Dave Nesham  
JWC - John Cooper  
PM - Peter Murphy  
BM - Barbara Murphy

JSK - Jerry Knapp  
MS - Meg Stone  
DSc - Dave Scroggins  
BBu - Bruce Budd

## **DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES**

After a wet March there was a warm spell followed by a hot summer, ideal for dragonflies. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic meant that visits to the Reserve were restricted. In spite of this a considerable number of recordings were made. Four species were recorded at their earliest ever date and a fifth equalled its previous earliest date, while two were recorded at their latest ever dates. However, only 15 of the 19 species recorded at the Reserve were seen this year, and some, such as the Emerald Damselfly and the Small Red-eyed Damselfly were only seen once, while the Emperor Dragonfly and Broad-bodied Chaser were only seen twice.

Peter Mill

### **Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*)**

It was a good year for this species. The first record was of a male in the Poplar Field on 22<sup>nd</sup> April (PM/BM), which equalled the earliest date, also recorded in 2015, 2017 and 2019. The largest number recorded on any one day was about 30 at the Dragonfly Ponds on 9<sup>th</sup> May (JWC), including about eight tandem pairs. Otherwise numbers were low - between one and five. Oviposition was recorded on 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> May in the ditch at the Dragonfly Ponds and on 29<sup>th</sup> May in Woodhead Pond (PM/BM) and a pair was observed in the wheel position at Chadwick Pond on 1<sup>st</sup> June (PM/BM). The Large Red Damselfly was also recorded at the Dipping Ponds on a couple of occasions (PM/BM & PJM). The last record was at the Robins' Pond on 25<sup>th</sup> June (PS/DS)).

### **Azure Damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*)**

The first records were of a male and a female (JSK) and a count of over a dozen individuals, with some in tandem (JWC), on 9<sup>th</sup> May at the Dragonfly Ponds. Numbers increased during May and June, with many tandem pairs recorded. The maximum record was of over 66 individuals, with at least 10 ovipositing pairs, at the Dragonfly Ponds on 13<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM) (Table 1). Thereafter numbers decreased. However, oviposition was also observed at the Dragonfly Ponds on 22<sup>nd</sup> June (PJM) and at the Dipping Ponds on 6<sup>th</sup> August (PM/BM). The last record was at the Dipping Ponds on 10<sup>th</sup> August (PJM). Overall, it was a good year but the peak numbers recorded were not as high as last year.

Date	Total	Male	Female	Pairs in Wheel	Pairs in Tandem	Ovipositing
Dragonfly Ponds (including the Education Pond)						
9 <sup>th</sup> May	c 12	1	1		some	
20 <sup>th</sup> May	13				2	
25 <sup>th</sup> May	>18				9	
1 <sup>st</sup> June	16				5	
13 <sup>th</sup> June	>66	>33	>33		>23	>10
22 <sup>nd</sup> June	11	8	2			1
Dipping Ponds						
20 <sup>th</sup> May	c 15				2	
22 <sup>nd</sup> June	7	4	3		1	

Table 1. Numbers of Azure Damselflies at the height of the season.

### **Common Blue Damselfly** (*Enallagma cyathigerum*)

This is a species that is almost certainly being under-recorded. It prefers large bodies of water and hence is more likely to be found near the Lagoon, Duck Marsh or Wet Grassland rather than at the Dragonfly Ponds. There were only three sightings this year, the first of which was of a singleton at the Dragonfly Ponds on 9<sup>th</sup> May (JWC), which turned out to be the earliest record for the Reserve. The previous earliest date (12<sup>th</sup> May) was in 2019. On 15<sup>th</sup> May four teneral were recorded at the Lagoon (PM/BM). We then had to wait until 30<sup>th</sup> August for the next (and final) sighting of an individual at the Lagoon (PM/BM).

### **Blue-tailed Damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*)

As with the Common Blue Damselfly, the numbers are almost certainly under-recorded on the Reserve but for a different reason. The Blue-tailed Damselfly tends to fly low among the reeds and is less obvious than the Azure Damselfly. The first record was of a single teneral near the Visitor Centre on 25<sup>th</sup> April (JWC/PC) and this is the earliest ever record for the Reserve. The last earliest record (2<sup>nd</sup> May) was in 2007. The most recorded on any one date was six – at the Dragonfly Ponds on 9<sup>th</sup> May (JWC) and on the River Path on 25<sup>th</sup> June (PM/BM). It was seen regularly throughout June, July and early August. The last record of the season was of two individuals on the Dragonfly Ponds on 17<sup>th</sup> August (PJM). It would be interesting to have records of the different female colour forms in future years. There is an andromorph (f. *typica*) that looks like the male and two gynomorphs. In one of the latter (f. *infuscans*) the blue on the thorax is olive-green; in the other (f. *infuscans-obsolata*) it is pale brown. In both the blue 'tail light' has turned brown. In young females of *typica* and

*infuscans* the thoracic markings are violet/lilac (f. *violacea*); in *infuscans-obsolata* they are orange-pink (f. *rufescens*).

### **Emerald Damselfly** (*Lestes sponsa*)

It was a disappointing year for this species as it was only recorded once - at Mabgate Pond on 8<sup>th</sup> August (JWC). This is in contrast to 2019 when small numbers were seen at the Dragonfly Ponds throughout most of August.

### **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma viridulum*)

This was a new species for the Reserve in 2019. There was only one sighting this year – on Mabgate Pond - on 29<sup>th</sup> July (JWC), which was earlier than that recorded last year (3<sup>rd</sup> August). It is a species that is steadily extending its range northwards and it is hoped that 2021 will see an increase in numbers at the Reserve.

### **Banded Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx splendens*)

Another good year for this species. The first record was of two teneral males near the Fish Pass on 15<sup>th</sup> May (PM/BM). The most recorded on any one day was of 18 males and one female on 25<sup>th</sup> May at a range of sites – near the River Bridge (JSK), at the Dragonfly Ponds, the River Path and the edge of Tim's Field (PM/BM) and at the back of the Lagoon (JB). Until the middle of July counts of between four and nine were recorded on a number of days. There were few records after this and the last sighting was of a female on Mabgate Pond on 1<sup>st</sup> September (BM). Not quite as many were recorded as in 2019, almost certainly a result of the 'lockdown'.

### **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*)

This species was not observed this year. It is a rare visitor as the Reserve is some distance away from its normal haunts of moorland and heathland. It was recorded last year but, before that, we have to go back to 2016.

### **Migrant Hawker** (*Aeshna mixta*)

The first record was of a male on Mabgate Pond on 31<sup>st</sup> July (PM/BM) but the next sighting was not until 1<sup>st</sup> September when one was sighted at the back of the Lagoon (BM). Small numbers were seen throughout September and into early October at a variety of places, including the Dragonfly and Dipping Ponds, the Lagoon and on the Willow and River Paths. There was then a gap of a couple of weeks before the last sighting on 21<sup>st</sup> October over the Wet Grassland ((JWC). A pair was seen in the wheel formation on 14<sup>th</sup> September on the hedge by the Dipping Ponds (PJM) so there is hope that breeding took place.

### **Southern Hawker** (*Aeshna cyanea*)

The first record of the Southern Hawker was on 24<sup>th</sup> July on the Lagoon. There was then a gap of about six weeks before it was recorded on Chadwick Pond and on the Dipping Ponds on 14<sup>th</sup> September (PJM). There were two further sightings at the Dragonfly Ponds, the last being on 28<sup>th</sup> September when a female was observed ovipositing in Scarborough Pond, both at the edge and in the grass above the water-line (PJM).

### **Brown Hawker** (*Aeshna grandis*)

As usual, this was one of the most frequently recorded dragonflies on the Reserve. It was first seen by the River Bridge on 25<sup>th</sup> June (PS/DS) and was recorded regularly throughout July, August, September and into early October. The highest daily records were on 6<sup>th</sup> August when 10 were seen at the Dragonfly Ponds, six of which were ovipositing females, and two on the Dipping Ponds (PM/BM). Oviposition was regularly seen from 19<sup>th</sup> July through to 24<sup>th</sup> August (PJM). These were all at the Dragonfly Ponds (including one on the Education Pond). The last record of this species was of a female ovipositing in the Dipping Ponds on 7<sup>th</sup> October (JWC).

### **Emperor Dragonfly** (*Anax imperator*)

It was poor year for the Emperor Dragonfly with only two records this year. The first was of a male on 1<sup>st</sup> June (PM/BM), the last of a female on 11<sup>th</sup> July ((JLW/JWC).

### **Four-spotted Chaser** (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)

The number of sightings (6) was disappointing. The Four-spotted Chaser was first seen on the path between the Dragonfly Ponds and the Education Pond on 9<sup>th</sup> May (JWC). This was the earliest record for the Reserve by three days (12<sup>th</sup> May 2018). It was recorded twice in May and twice in June at the Dragonfly Ponds (PM/BM). There was then a gap of two months before the final recording, also at the Dragonfly Ponds, on 12<sup>th</sup> August (JWC). This was the latest date recorded for the Reserve, the previous latest date being 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2008.

### **Broad-bodied Chaser** (*Libellula depressa*)

It was a very poor year for the Broad-bodied Chaser with just two records, both on Chadwick Pond. The first was on 27<sup>th</sup> May (PM/BM), the last on 1<sup>st</sup> June (PM/BM). This contrasts with 2019 when there were many sightings, including oviposition in Bruce's Pond.

### **Common Darter** (*Sympetrum striolatum*)

It was a very good year for the Common Darter. The first record was at the Dipping Ponds on 24<sup>th</sup> July (PM/BM). More than five individuals were seen on seven occasions from 6<sup>th</sup> August to 17<sup>th</sup> September (Table 2). After this numbers decreased and in October there were only two sightings, the last of a male by Bruce's Pond on 20<sup>th</sup> (PM/BM). The majority of sightings were at the Dragonfly Ponds but it was also seen at the Education Pond, the Dipping Ponds, the Reedbed, the River Path, the Willow Path and at the edge of Tim's Field. Oviposition was recorded at the Dragonfly Ponds (at least six different ponds), the Education Pond and the Dipping Ponds, so its future at the Reserve looks to be well assured

Date	Total	Male	Fem	Pairs in Wheel	Pairs in Tandem	Ovip	Observer
6 <sup>th</sup> Aug.	12	7	5			1	PM/BM
10 <sup>th</sup> Aug.	14	5	2	1		1	PJM
17 <sup>th</sup> Aug.	6	2					PJM
24 <sup>th</sup> Aug.	7	5	1		1		PJM
30 <sup>th</sup> Aug.	14	11	3		1	2	PM/BM
14 <sup>th</sup> Sept.	12	2	2			2	PJM
17 <sup>th</sup> Sept.	21	12	9			3	PM/BM

Table 2. Dates when more than five Common Darters were seen.

### **Ruddy Darter** (*Sympetrum sanguineum*)

After six records in 2019 it was disappointing that no sightings were made this year.

### **Black Darter** (*Sympetrum danae*)

There were no records of this species in 2020. It is a rare visitor, with records in only four years – 2013, 2014, 2018 and 2019. As with the Common Hawker, the Reserve is a long way from its normal habitat of heathland and moorland.

### **Black-tailed Skimmer** (*Orthetrum cancellatum*)

There were records on only three days this year – an individual on the Wet Grassland on 1<sup>st</sup> August (JWC), two males and a female, also on the Wet Grassland on 8<sup>th</sup> August (JWC) and, finally, a single individual on the Poplar Field Path on 26<sup>th</sup> August (JWC). This is the latest record for the Reserve, the previous latest record being 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2010

### **Keeled Skimmer** (*Orthetrum coerulescens*)

There were no sightings of the Keeled Skimmer this year. It is a species that is not common in Yorkshire and prefers a habitat of acidic wet

heathland. It has only been recorded on one occasion (2015) at the Reserve.

## Terminology

Exuvia - The shed larval skeleton. Plural: exuviae

Ovipositing - The act of egg-laying

Teneral - A newly emerged adult dragonfly without the full coloration of the mature adult. Strictly speaking before its maiden flight.

### Dragonflies and Damselflies First and Last Dates (in order of first date seen) - 2020

Species	First Date	Last date
Large Red Damselfly	22 <sup>nd</sup> April =	25 <sup>th</sup> June
Blue-tailed Damselfly	25 <sup>th</sup> April *	17 <sup>th</sup> August
Azure Damselfly	9 <sup>th</sup> May	10 <sup>th</sup> August
Common Blue Damselfly	9 <sup>th</sup> May *	17 <sup>th</sup> August
Four-spotted Chaser	9 <sup>th</sup> May *	12 <sup>th</sup> August **
Banded Demoiselle	15 <sup>th</sup> May	1 <sup>st</sup> September
Broad-bodied Chaser	27 <sup>th</sup> May	25 <sup>th</sup> June
Emperor Dragonfly	1 <sup>st</sup> June	11 <sup>th</sup> July
Brown Hawker	25 <sup>th</sup> June	11 <sup>th</sup> October
Common Darter	24 <sup>th</sup> July	20 <sup>th</sup> October
Southern Hawker	24 <sup>th</sup> July	28 <sup>th</sup> September
Small Red-eyed Damselfly	29 <sup>th</sup> July *	29 <sup>th</sup> July
Migrant Hawker	31 <sup>st</sup> July	21 <sup>st</sup> October
Black-tailed Skimmer	1 <sup>st</sup> August	26 <sup>th</sup> August **
Emerald Damselfly	8 <sup>th</sup> August	8 <sup>th</sup> August
Common Hawker	-	-
Ruddy Darter	-	-
Black Darter	-	-
Keeled Skimmer	-	-

= Equals earliest ever record

\* Earliest ever record

\*\* Latest ever record

## FUNGUS REPORT

Another wet but mainly mild autumn was ideal for fungi but, sadly, we were unable to run the usual Fungus Forays this year. However, our expert Andy Woodall was kind enough to visit the Reserve on 16<sup>th</sup> October to carry out a short survey for us. A list of the species found together with a few additional species reported subsequently is shown in the following table.

<i>Auricularia auricula-judae</i>	Jelly Ear	Path to Manager's Garden + Coppice
<i>Bisporella citrina</i>	Lemon Disco	Coppice
<i>Chondrostereum purpureum</i>	Silver-leaf Fungus	On tree stump near path to Manager's Garden
<i>Claviceps purpurea</i>	Ergot	Various
<i>Clavulina rugosa</i>	Wrinkled Club	Coppice
<i>Coprinellus micaceus</i>	Glistening Ink Cap	Willow Path
<i>Coprinopsis lagopus</i>	Hare'sfoot Inkcap	Coppice
<i>Coprinus comatus</i>	Shaggy Inkcap	Various
<i>Cortinarius hemitrichus.</i>	Frosty Webcap *	Coppice
<i>Dacrymyces stillatus</i>	Orange Jellyspot	Coppice
<i>Daedaleopsis confragosa</i>	Blushing Bracket	Coppice and Willow Path
<i>Daldinia concentrica</i>	King Alfred's Cakes	On ash tree at top of Fish Pass
<i>Deconica horizontalis</i>	Wood Oysterling *	Coppice
<i>Exidia thuretiana</i>	White Brain	Willow Path
<i>Flammulina velutipes</i>	Velvetshank	Willow Path
<i>Galerina sp.</i>		Coppice
<i>Ganoderma australe</i>	Southern Bracket	Coppice and Willow Path
<i>Hebeloma crustuliniforme</i>	Poisonpie	Near Manager's Garden
<i>Hebeloma leucosarx</i>	Pale Poisonpie *	Coppice
<i>Hyphodontia sambuci</i>	Elder Whitewash	Coppice



<i>Inocybe rimosa</i>	Split Fibrecap *	Coppice
<i>Inonotus hispidus</i>	Hairy Bracket	On ash at top of Fish Pass
<i>Lepista sordida</i>	Wood Blewit	Coppice
<i>Mycena arcangeliana</i>	Angel's Bonnet	Coppice
<i>Mycena corynephora</i>	*	On moss on tree in Coppice
<i>Peniophora quercina</i>	*	On Oak by Path to Manager's Garden
<i>Pholiota squarrosa</i>	Shaggy Scalycap	Coppice
<i>Phragmidium violaceum</i>	Violet Bramble Rust	Roadside
<i>Polyporus badius</i>	Bay Polypore *	Willow Path
<i>Polyporus leptcephalus (= varius)</i>	Blackfoot Polypore	Willow Path
<i>Psathyrella corrugis</i>	Red-edged Brittlestem	Coppice
<i>Stereum hirsutum</i>	Hairy Curtain Crust	Willow Path
<i>Stereum rugosum</i>	Bleeding Curtain Crust	Coppice
<i>Tarzetta catinus</i>	Greater Toothed Cup *	Coppice
<i>Trametes versicolor</i>	Turkeytails	Coppice and Willow Path
<i>Tremella mesenterica</i>	Yellow Brain	Willow Path and Coppice
<i>Tubaria furfuracea</i>	Scurfy Twiglet	Coppice
<i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i>	Candlesnuff Fungus	Coppice and Willow Path

\* New species added to the Reserve list this year

*Peniophora quercina* was one of the new species found this year. Photographed on an Oak tree near the path to the Manager's Garden in October (JWC), this is a species of wood decay fungus. It produces fruit bodies that vary in appearance depending on whether they are wet or dry. This particular one took the form of a pinkish crust on the branches of the Oak tree. Although primarily growing on dead wood, especially Oak, it is also capable of growing on still living wood.

There were some very nice fungi to be found along the Willow Path throughout December. The striking orange-brown Velvetshank *Flammulina velutipes* was hard to miss. This is a stump-rotting fungus

which also occurs on standing dead wood. Other species to be found here included Blushing Bracket *Daedaleopsis confragosa* and Yellow Brain *Tremella mesenterica*.

The big rotting tree stump just over the fence on the Duck Marsh side of the Willow Path provided just the right conditions for two species, the Bay Polypore *Polyporus badius* and the Hairy Curtain Crust *Stereum hirsutum*, the former a new species for the Reserve list this year.

It is difficult to see the huge Southern Bracket *Ganoderma australe* at the edge of the Coppice now as the old tree they were on has collapsed. However, some very nice younger examples could easily be seen on a tree just by the Willow Path Hide.

The attractive Silver-leaf Fungus *Chondrostereum purpureum* was found on a tree stump near the path to the Manager's Garden in December. This is normally confined to *Prunus* species but has apparently been particularly abundant this year on a range of trees.

## **Photograph Credits**

We are grateful to the following for allowing us to use their images.

Bay Polypore by Barbara Murphy  
Broad-bodied Chaser by Barbara Murphy  
Currant Clearwing by Jerry Knapp  
Fox juvenile by Barbara Murphy  
Grey Partridges by Barbara Murphy  
Large Skipper by Jerry Knapp  
Migrant Hawker by Barbara Murphy  
Orange Tip by Barbara Murphy  
*Peniophora quercina* by John Cooper  
Pied Flycatcher juvenile by John Cooper  
Pintail by Barbara Murphy  
Roe deer and fawn by Kirsty McLeod  
Ruby Tiger by Dave Nesham  
Stonechat by Barbara Murphy  
Tree Sparrow by Barbara Murphy  
Water Rail by Kirsty McLeod