

Woolston Eyes Newsletter Spring 2015

Reserve Closure - Opening Times

Sadly, one of our big news items this period is not about our wildlife but the fact that June saw not one, but two break-ins on the Reserve on successive nights during the first week. Property was damaged and a number of items were stolen, some subsequently recovered. This has necessitated us to take additional security measures, the principle being defined closure hours for the Reserve. Immediately after the events we began to operate a 20:00 – 08:00 hrs closure of the Reserve. This was facilitated by the use of a different padlock which was fitted to the entrance. No permit holder key operates the new lock thus access to the site can be controlled.

Regretfully, the WECG has decided to maintain this restricted access mechanism to deter repeat events. The exact timing of closure and opening will vary through the seasons and will be prominently displayed on the website homepage and on notices at the Reserve entrance.

We ask all our visitors to make themselves aware of the new closure time when entering the Reserve and allow sufficient time to vacate the site prior to the noted time. Please note, it will not be possible to check the Reserve each night and exiting on time will be down to each visitor.

In addition to the timed closing of the Reserve our wardens will check permits on a regular basis. Always carry your permit with you on a visit to the Reserve and please do not be offended when asked to show it by a WECG representative.

Full time Reserve Warden

Starting in the summer, a full-time warden, John Langley, will be resident on the Reserve to facilitate management work to meet our Higher Level Stewardship commitments and general Reserve tasks. Further details will be provided in the summer newsletter.

Nearly a Mega-Twitch

May started with a mega-rarity located on the Reserve, a female Bufflehead on the 2nd. An opportunity to put into practice the 'rare bird policy' we had deliberated over in 2014. The principle objective; to put the word out to the birding world and provide access for viewing.



Bufflehead (female) No.3 bed - photo by Ian Greenwood

We are pleased to say this policy worked exceeding well. The Reserve barriers were manned and opened to allow unrestricted access, a small charge was requested from non-permit holders for the Reserve management fund, around an hour and a half after identification. Unfortunately news returned late morning, from the ring ID it was wearing, that it was an escapee.

WECG would like to thank the Wardens who worked this policy through, those who made it possible on the day and to all the visitors who attended, for their consideration, general comments and generosity. **Here's to the next one!**

Mediterranean Gulls

A number of these neat Gulls, individuals and pairs, were noted in March, throughout April, and into May. The long staying pair of 2nd summer birds, as pictured,



Mediterranean Gull, No.3 Bed - photo by Stephen Ellis

recorded on numerous dates through April, were noted mating on a nest amongst the Black-headed Gull colony on the 5th and 6th May. Breeding however did not proceed and the species remains absent from our breeding bird list.

Cetti's Warbler

An autumn visitor to Woolston Eyes these last few years but, 2015 produced a complete turnaround with at least two, possibly three or



Cetti's Warbler No.3 bed photo by Dave Bowman

four spring males setting up territories across the Reserve which have been resident since the first exploded into song on No.3 bed in early March. This was followed by territory singing on the south bank of No.3 bed, the north bank of No.2 - Weir basin and No.1 bed

in early April.

The male caught by the ringers on No.1 bed was a bird originally ringed at Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve in 2014.

As spring birds staking territories we hoped for possible breeding? Unlike the Mediterranean Gulls, this secretive warbler was confirmed as a new breeding species on the Reserve on the 25th May Bank Holiday. Wardens, Darren and Mike Lloyd discovered the nest with four distinctive coloured eggs during one of their nesting surveys.

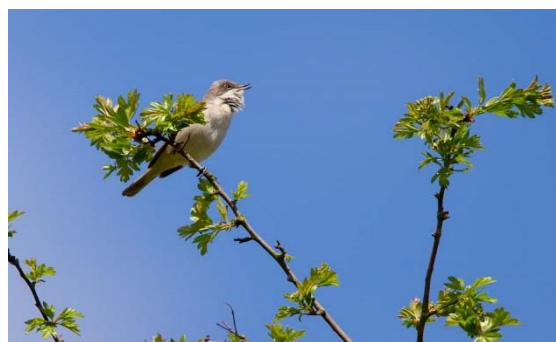
Cetti's Warbler are a Schedule 1 protected breeding species. After making contact with the resident ringing team, Professor David Norman, the Chair of Merseyside Ringing Group, who for many years ringed birds at Woolston Eyes and holds a valid Schedule 1 license for Cetti's Warbler, agreed to monitor the nest for the BTO nest recording scheme

The breeding outcome was that two chicks were subsequently ringed on 10th June and nest condition on 25th June suggested successful fledging. These were the first Cetti's Warbler nestlings to be ringed in Cheshire, other known prior nesting attempts having all failed at the egg stage.

Site fidelity in Cetti's Warbler is quite high in breeding adults so we look forward to the 2016 season with anticipation!

Lesser Whitethroat

Was thought to have bred but the suspected nest location was close to the Cetti's Warbler



The 2013 weir Lesser Whitethroat photo by Brian Burnett

nest and no attempt to locate it was made to prevent disturbance to the latter species breeding.

Another male was recorded singing on a number of occasions on the north bank of No.2 bed overlooking the weir basin which is a typical habitat for the species.

Peregrine Falcon

The pair on the traditional nest site on the viaduct successfully bred and two chicks fledged in June.



One of the juvenile Peregrines, photo by Dave Bowman

Note the heavy dark vertical barring on the juvenile, adults have light horizontal barring.

Black-necked Grebes

2015 has been an average year, although slightly down on the 2014 success, for our breeding celebrity, the Black-necked Grebe.



Black-necked Grebe with young, photo by Roy Peacock

Early spring numbers built to similar numbers to 2014 with 17 reported.

It is always difficult to count the grebes and the young but subsequent monitoring records suggest we had at least seven successful broods and at least seven young survived to independence.

Willow Tit

Mike Lloyd provided an interesting nest record of a Willow Tit which had the nest hole opened



Willow Tit, photo by Roy Peacock

out by a Greater Spotted Woodpecker in a predation attempt, an all too often occurrence for this specialist breeding species.



Predation attempt on Willow Tit nest - photo Mike Lloyd

Luckily, or unluckily, dependent in whose corner you stand, the woodpecker was disturbed before any further damage to nest or the ten eggs. Mike, an obvious Willow Tit fan, decided to intervene and not let nature take its course. With the aid of a few handfuls of mud and some admirable DIY skills he repaired the nest cavity as illustrated.



Can you see the joint? Nest repair & photo by Mike Lloyd

It would perhaps satisfy our compassionate side if we could conclude this account with the news the Tit family overcame their near disaster and ultimately raised their young successfully?

Well....., Mike and Alan Rustell, who has monitored our nesting Willow Tits for a number of years, did visit the nest site when the young tits would have fledged and the bark cover was still in place, undamaged and all indications were the eggs had hatched and young fledged.

Lapwing One could not visit the John Morgan Hide from late April without noticing the Lapwing nesting just a few metres away on the scrape. The first egg had arrived by 30th April and by the 4th May the female had laid five eggs. Three were in the nest and two noted a couple of feet away. Perhaps the two strays were a result of earlier predation attempts but

out of the nest they did not survive long and had disappeared by the end of the morning.

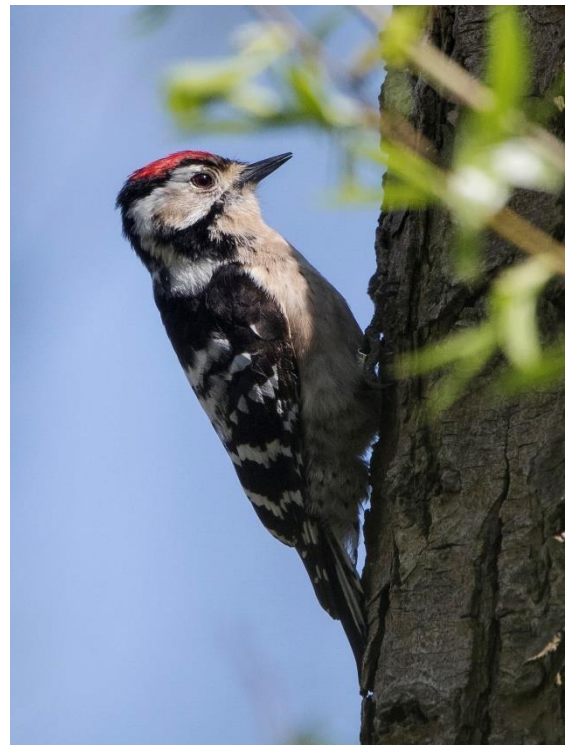


Lapwing - 1st egg photo by Dave Bowman

Events did not improve for the pair, as, on the 6th May only two eggs remained and unfortunately those did not survive being predated some days later. Pairs on the Loop of No.4 Bed however did fledge young.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

This delightful small woodpecker made a welcome return to Woolston – it is recorded



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker photo by Mike Roberts

Infrequently, but usually annually. The bird was actually one that had been ringed at Woolston Eyes on No.3 bed some years previous. The photo quality of Mike's shots was so good the ring (right leg) number sequence could be determined.

Loop of No.4 Bed

The new hide on the Loop of No.4 bed has been open for a while now, providing excellent views of the pools created from our HLS grant.



View from the new hide early March - Douglas Buchanan

Sadly for our wildlife, the area has also become an attraction to local people for the wrong reasons. On a number of occasions we have had to speak with dog walkers allowing their charges to swim in the water and general disturbance by others.

Despite the short time since opening the hide lock has also been vandalised, to gain access. Remedial work will attempt to deter this happening again and a steel screen has been fixed to the front of the hide to prevent disturbance of the wildfowl on the approach, which was a problem. The islands will also be sprayed to restrict vegetation to allow loafing opportunities for the birds as intended.

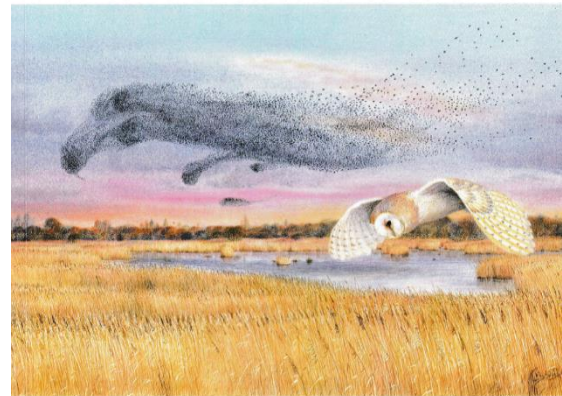
2014 Annual Report

The 2014 Report was published in this period and the format preference from the Report applications strongly favoured an electronic version.

This media option provided many more coloured photographs illustrating various species within the content than the printed copy could economically warrant. Comments

have been very positive and electronic versions are here to stay.

The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group



Annual Report 2014

The cover page illustrated by renowned artist Colin Woolf www.wildart.co.uk

Azolla Issue

In the Winter Newsletter we identified the first appearance of this invasive water weed on beds 3 and 4. So far this spring we have found



Azolla filiculoides habitas.org.uk

no presence of the plant in the prior locations. It is too early to suggest the plant could have been eliminated by the cold winter and early

spring weather (the plant does not survive well in prolonged cold conditions) but we will continue to monitor signs for this alien species.

Balsam Pulling



Himalayan Balsam, No.3 Bed

Please note, there will be a Balsam pulling work party every Thursday from 16th June to 30th July inclusive. If you would like to assist in this important work we meet in the John Morgan Hide at 09:30 hrs with the intention to work until lunchtime, gloves will be provided but we recommend long sleeves – nettles are abundant.

If you wish to enjoy some birdwatching prior to the work meet in the car park at 07:00 hrs.

Otter

The Otter, first recorded in September 2014 has been reported sporadically during the spring, in the centre body of water on No.3 bed. The last web posting was on 4th May.

If you are lucky enough to see this individual please add the sighting in the log book or white board for our records.

No.3 Bed Survey Hide

A new hide was erected on the east bank of No.3 bed earlier in the year. This hide is purely

there for the use of survey teams for the monitoring of our breeding water birds, Black-necked Grebes in particular, and is not for general use. Access to the hide will create disturbance along the east bank and we ask you to respect the restricted access and designated use for the hide.

Summer Weather Forecast

The long range forecast for the summer period courtesy of netweather;

July

Changeable start, generally quiet second half and a hot thundery end to the month

Due to a hot end to the period, mean temperatures for our region are forecast to be 0.5 to 1C average. Temperatures are expected to mostly be close to or a little below normal prior to the last week of the month.

Rainfall totals in our western region are expected to be close to the seasonal average. Sunshine totals are expected to be slightly above average in most parts of the UK but it is not expected to be outstandingly sunny.

August

Pressure is expected to be slightly higher than average across the bulk of the British Isles, along with a good deal of Europe during August. This is likely to lead to a warmer than average month across our region with rainfall close to normal.

September

By September, pressure is expected to be close to average over the British Isles, with higher than average anomalies out in the Atlantic and also into Eastern Europe. In our region generally another warmer than average month is currently forecast, with rainfall also near to the seasonal norm.



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