A detailed painting of a vast flock of birds, likely swans or geese, flying over a wetland landscape at sunset. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and purple. The birds are scattered across the sky, some in flight and others resting on the water. The foreground shows a body of water with reeds and a large number of birds gathered on the shore.

The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group

Annual Report
2020

Colin Woolf Fine Art



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Colin Woolf has a gift for portraying birds and animals in their natural habitat. His paintings reveal the rich colour and detail of plumage as well as the ever-changing light of the landscape

The cover of this report is from an original watercolour painting

Please contact Colin for more details

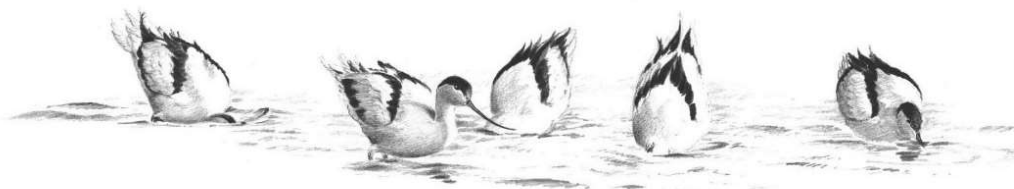


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WOOLSTON EYES CONSERVATION GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

When I wrote last year's Report the country was in lockdown and sadly, we had to temporarily close the Reserve. Since then, we have been able to re-open so hopefully that will remain the case, and we ask that permit holders continue to follow all the government regulations and guidance when visiting.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued support and understanding of the problems we have faced: we are all volunteers who run the Reserve, so your support and continued renewal of permits is very encouraging for us.

The progress with the development of No.4 bed is going ahead at a remarkable rate despite some awful ground conditions encountered during the very wet winter. I cannot praise our contractor Steve Fletcher enough for his perseverance, professionalism and exceptional hard work. Also, a big thank you must go to Peel Holdings for their co-operation in this mammoth task, together with the RSPB, Natural England and the Carbon Landscape: without all their help and advice we would not be in a position to undertake such a large project.

For the first time in late 2020, we had ca 3,000 Pink-footed Geese roosting on the Reserve after feeding on stubble in nearby fields. This event is depicted on the front cover of this report by the nationally renowned wildlife artist Colin Woolf, who supports us every year with his outstanding drawings. The original is for sale along with other wonderful artworks, so if you would like to contact him, his details are on the inside front cover. As always, this professionally produced report is down to our editorial team headed by David Bowman, who should all be congratulated on their hard work, dedication and attention to detail.

I have had many offers from people wanting to volunteer for working parties, but with the on-going Covid situation there will be no working parties in the near future. However, I am taking names of interested people for future reference. If you send an email to info@woolstoneeyes.com to say you are interested I will add your name to the list and will contact you when things are back to normal.

The position regarding the poor state of the track alongside the Ship Canal is that Peel Holdings own the land, including the track. I have made requests to Peel asking if they can undertake some repairs and they have said they will look at it, but I am afraid that is as much as we can do at the present time.

We now have a new Assistant Warden, Elizabeth Hill, who started with us on May 10th. If you would like to make yourself known to her she will be only too pleased to help you in any way she can and answer any questions you may have. I am sure she will be a fantastic addition to our team and we hope she has a happy and rewarding future with us. She will be assisted by a part-time Estate Worker, Gerrard Lloyd, who will, I'm sure be a real asset.

Hopefully, this year will see life getting back to some sort of normality for us all.

Brian Ankers

ORNITHOLOGICAL SUMMARY

2020 was a remarkable year, with the impact of Covid-19 and the two lockdowns impacting on our management of the Reserve in so many ways. We did, however, manage to keep a minimal presence on site throughout the year for the purposes of security and species monitoring. As a result, the sightings received were much reduced and the ringing activities equally curtailed, making between year comparisons difficult. On a more positive note, great progress was made with the construction of the large new wetland on No.4 bed, which quickly started to attract a wide range of species, including some, like Jack Snipe, which had almost disappeared as a regular winter visitor due to the lack of suitable habitat.

Overall, it was an above average year for species variety, with 145 species recorded, including two Reserve firsts – Cattle Egret and Tundra Bean Goose, bringing the Reserve List to an impressive 244. Weather-wise the spring was generally dry and warm and the rest of the year both wet and cool. While not necessarily connected to the weather conditions, the spring species variety was as good as the autumn's was poor.

The year started well when a ring-tailed Hen Harrier was observed hunting at a Starling roost on No.1 bed in early January. Towards the end of the month a Tundra Bean Goose arrived on No.3 bed with two Greylag Geese, with three more reported flying over later the same day – a Reserve first. Spring brought a steady flow of activity, starting with two Bearded Tits present in the eastern reed-bed on No.3 bed on several dates in March. Passage then gained pace in April, with highlights of: Common Cranes, Bittern, Osprey, Black Tern, Little Gulls, Kittiwakes, Cuckoos and Red Kites. Hirundine passage, though, was poor with few of the large feeding flocks we have come to expect.

It was a solid breeding season for our scarce breeding wildfowl, with ten pairs of Black-necked Grebes raising a minimum of 18 young and at least 14 pairs of Pochard with broods. For the thirteenth successive year our resident Peregrine pair fledged young and three pairs of Little Ringed Plovers were also successful. It was also good to see the possible return of two breeding species we thought we had lost, with five Skylarks in song in suitable habitat on No.1 bed and a suspicion that Cuckoos might have bred at the eastern end of the Reserve. On the debit side, Willow Tits had a poor season both locally and nationally. There has been a reduction in suitable habitat in some areas of the Reserve and plans are now in train to develop some large areas of woodland and scrub as Willow Tit breeding habitat.

While the autumn was relatively quiet, it did bring some spectacular and for us, unprecedented, events. Osprey and Crossbill passed over in September, while the two Cattle Egrets which flew west in October were a long-overdue addition to the Reserve list. The Yellow-browed Warbler which was encountered in No.3 bed on two dates in October would once have been considered a rarity but is now expected annually. In early November, in ideal conditions for migration, 14,200 Woodpigeons flew south over the morning, our highest ever count. A Red Kite then drifted through and three more Tundra Bean Geese arrived. It was best for last, though, when early December saw a flock of Pink-footed Geese arrive to roost on No.3 bed, something we have never experienced before. The roost peaked at a minimum of 3,000 by mid-month, with up to 4,500 feeding on stubble fields in the arable land which surrounds the eastern end of The Eyes. A spectacular eastwards movement of around 12,500 at around the same time was also a Reserve record count and a great way to see out this strange year.

David Bowman Editor

The Weather 2020

This year will be long-remembered for the Covid-19 epidemic and the myriad of problems associated with it. The weather did little to help, with a dry and at times warm spell in spring the only respite from persistent rain that fell in most months in the second half of the year. This is now becoming a regular pattern. The only snow of note was in the final week of December, with temperatures in both winter periods rarely falling below zero. It was also a windy year, with eight named storms, particularly in the later months, resulting in flooding in many parts of the country. Despite this, in the three dry spring months sunshine levels were above average, and water shortages were an issue for a time. The annual rainfall total of 1129mm was slightly down on the previous year but continues the recent upward trend.

January had an average rainfall total of 68mm. The first week was largely dry and mild with temperatures of 10° C on the 10th. Heavy rain overnight on the 8th brought the first precipitation (11mm), with a fresh westerly wind. This was followed by further heavy rain and strong winds on the 11th and 12th associated with Storm Brendan, the first named storm of the year, and this added a further 21mm to the total. A succession of depressions arrived from the Atlantic on an active Jet Stream until the 17th, when an intense anti-cyclone settled over the country blocking the depressions. The pressure continued to rise, reaching 1050 millibars on the 20th, the highest recorded atmospheric pressure in the U.K. since 1957. The High dominated until the 25th, with several frosty nights. These were followed by cloudy, misty conditions, but with little in the way of precipitation. That came on the final day of the month when the temperature rose to a balmy 13°C and it felt more like April.

February with 166mm was the second wettest month of the year. It was also stormy, with several named storms. February 1st was very wet, but the following week was largely dry with some overnight frosts. The 8th began dry and mild, but soon went downhill with the approach of Storm Ciara. The 9th was a particularly wet day, with a succession of intense squalls that led to widespread flooding and the Ship Canal in full spate. The temperature fell to 7°C after the wind became north-westerly and brought in frequent hail showers, lightning and a very raw feeling. The cold and windy conditions continued as two more named storms, Dennis and Jorge, came in from the Atlantic on the 15th and 29th respectively. Virtually every day was described as windy and wet, with notable rainfall totals of 20mm on the 23rd, 14mm on the 24th and 20mm on the 29th. The Meteorological Office reported that it was the wettest February in the United Kingdom since 1862, and at Woolston it was the wettest of any month since August 2004, when 168mm was recorded.

March and the following two months could not have been more different, with low rainfall totals. The 1st was cold, windy and dry; this did not change until the 9th when almost half of the rain recorded in the month fell. The only other wet day of note was the 17th, with 8mm. With a large anti-cyclone covering most of the Atlantic and the United Kingdom it was hardly surprising that the last 12 days of March were completely dry. Overall, it was a cool month, with windy spells in the first two weeks. The first sign of spring was from the 13th to the 17th during which the wind eased and temperatures began to rise. With the wind from the south the first Black-necked Grebes returned, as did some Sand Martins and Chiffchaffs. The high pressure led to cold nights and sunny warm days which tempted the first butterflies to appear. Warm days were interspersed with cold ones, especially during the final week when the wind was from an easterly direction. The rainfall total was 41mm.

April was an exceptionally dry month, with just 14mm of rain, all but one millimetre occurring in the last two days. The first four days were cool but by the 5th the wind was from the south and the temperature rose to 18°C. The warm sunny conditions continued to the 12th, when a cold front brought

several nights of frost. The 16th was much warmer, with many butterflies on the wing, but this was soon replaced by a cool east wind which persisted until the 20th. Temperatures rose again on the 22nd and continued to rise to 21°C on the 24th and 25th. The month ended cool once again with the first substantial rain, accompanied by hail, on the 30th. April was the second driest month of 2020, and reported by the Meteorological Office to be the sunniest April since 1929.

May was even drier than April, with rain recorded on just three days. The total of 10mm was the lowest of any month since weather reports were first published for the Eyes in 2004. This inevitably resulted in drought-like conditions and talk of water rationing in many parts of the country. With continued sunshine and increasing temperatures that peaked at 25°C on the 25th the soil was very dry and water levels low in the Reserve. A short cold snap from the 10th -14th saw a low of 3°C on the 14th, apparently the coldest May night for over 40 years.

June The weather changed dramatically this month, although the first few days were warm and sunny. However, on the 3rd increasing cloud from the north introduced cooler air and the first substantial rain for over two months, with 22mm from the 3rd to the 5th. A short dry spell from the 12th-15th was followed by very heavy thundery rain totalling 56mm over the next five days that left everywhere awash. The 24th-26th saw the arrival of very hot air from southern Europe, with temperatures of 26°C the following day. Thundery showers late on the 26th resulted in much cooler weather and a further 16mm of rain in the final three days, making a total of 114mm for the month.

July The wet June set the scene for the remainder of 2020, with 107mm of rain recorded in July. The first ten days were dominated by low pressure and much rainfall. It was windy at times, with an unseasonable 50mph recorded on the 5th, and also cool, notably on the 7th when the maximum temperature was only 14°C. The next day was very wet, (26mm) and more unsettled weather followed. A drier interlude in mid-month recorded a rise in temperature on the 12th, but this was soon replaced by more unsettled weather until the 22nd when warm summer weather finally arrived. Temperatures rose to 27°C on the 30th and to the year's high of 30°C on the 31st. Even so, there were also a number of wet days which took the monthly total over 100mm for the second successive month.

August was even wetter, with a rainfall total of 143mm. It began, though, with the continuation of the very warm late-July weather. This lasted for just two days before several wet days on the 4th and 5th. Despite this it remained warm, with a peak of 28°C on the 11th. A total of 29mm was recorded on the 16th and 17th and was the beginning of a very wet period courtesy of two named storms, Ellen and the more disruptive Francis. On 24th and 25th they added 50mm to the August total and were accompanied by very strong winds. Further heavy rain on the 27th left the Reserve awash and high water levels. Between the 17th and 28th an amazing 111mm of rainfall was recorded. The last three days, however, were dry and cool.

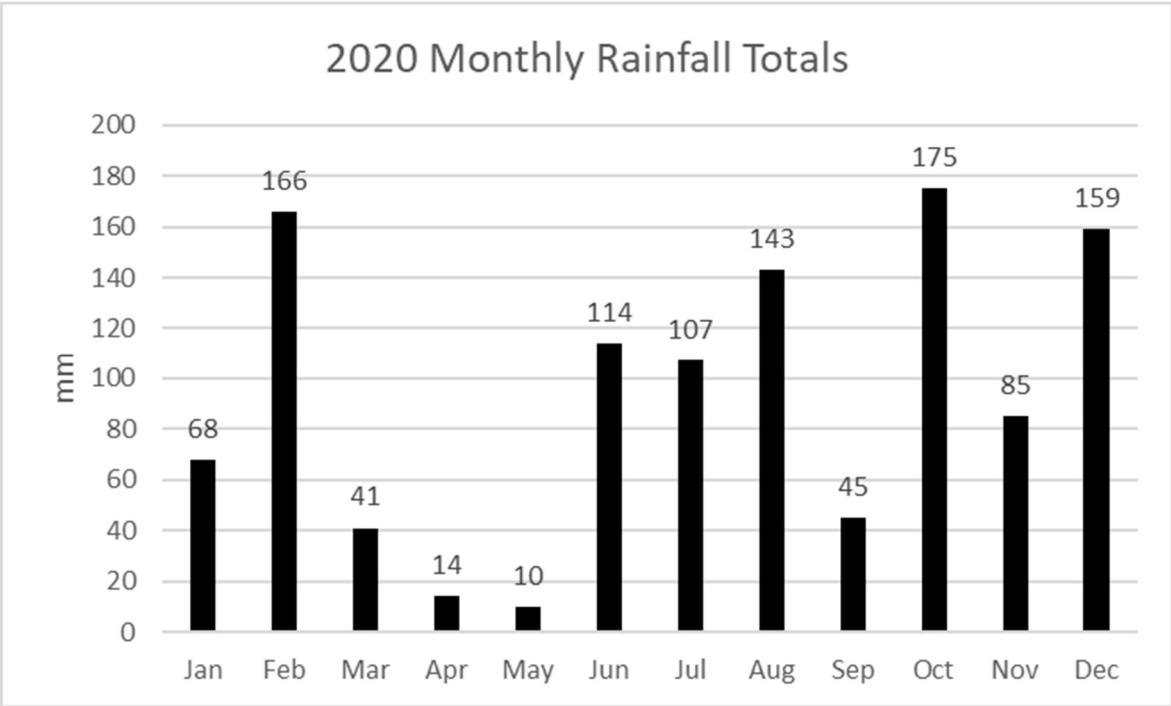
September was the only dry month in the second half of 2020, with 45mm of rain, 30mm of which fell on just two days, the 2nd and the 30th. High pressure dominated, with a warm spell from the 12th to the 20th thanks to a southerly airstream from southern Europe. A cold front on the 25th introduced cooler weather, with near freezing temperatures on the morning of the 26th. Apart from the wet 30th the final few days were dry and warmer.

October was the wettest month of the year, and the 175mm recorded was the highest monthly total since the late autumn of 2000 when over 200mm fell in both October and November of that year. The month began with Storm Alex that deposited 54mm on the 3rd, a record daily total. The Meteorological

Office described the 3rd as the wettest day since their records began in 1891! October was also a dull, cool month, apart from the 20th which was warm. An active Jet Stream which seemed to be a fixture in the second half of the year, delivered another storm, Aiden, on the 31st, with yet more heavy rain and strong winds.

November with 85mm was wetter than average, but not overly so. It was also cloudy and cool, with frosts on the 4th and 7th. It was dull for most of the month with only three sunny and mild days, but it ended frosty and raw.

December brought a return to yet more heavy rain and with 159mm was the third wettest month of the year; there were only three days when it did not rain. The 3rd to the 5th was particularly wet with 23mm recorded, while a deep depression on the 8th produced waves of rain, including 10mm in 30 minutes during the morning. Water levels were high not least on the new wetland being developed on No.4 bed. There were a few mild days in mid-month before Storm Bella swept in on Boxing Day, bringing strong winds and further heavy rain which added 38mm to an already high total. Christmas to New Year's Eve was cold with heavy frosts and some snow.



Brian Martin

BIRDS: SYSTEMATIC LIST

Red-Legged Partridge

Alectoris rufa

Red listed

There was just one record this year. On 11th August one was near the Rotary Hide on No.3 bed, the first sighting since 2017.

Grey Partridge

Perdix perdix

Red listed

This species has been declining for some years and a single sighting, of one on No.1 bed on 7th August, this year was evidence of this. This compares with four sightings in 2019 and three in 2018.

Pheasant

Phasianus colchicus

What proved to be a good year for this resident species began with five on No.4 bed on 14th January. Three were on No.1 bed on 5th March and four on No.3 bed three days later. A breeding bird survey on 21st May found two pairs on No.3 bed and two days later a pair was on No.2 bed. However, there was no proof of breeding and no young were seen. Autumn saw large numbers in the new wetland area of No.4 bed with 25 and 21 flushed from there on 9th September and 6th October respectively. December produced counts of four and three from Nos. 4 and 3 beds. It would appear that a minimum of thirty was present across the Reserve, which represents a welcome upturn in the fortunes of this species.

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

There were large flocks present, notably at the end of the year, and many pairs bred.

Numbers varied from day to day with most of the sightings being on Beds 3 and 4. The new wetland on No.4 bed was particularly favoured in the final months of the year. In the first three months there were peak counts of 55 on 11th January WeBS count (Wetland Bird Survey), 74 on 27th February and 64 present across the Reserve on 7th March.

By April breeding pairs were established, with four sitting birds on No.3 bed on the 20th and four pairs on the Loop of No.4 bed. Two broods, of three and eight young, were found on No.3 bed on 2nd May, while three days later another two broods were seen there. On 8th May on the Loop of No.4 bed two pairs were found, with three and eight young respectively. The only other breeding information submitted was of three broods of small young on No.3 bed on 9th May. It is believed that more pairs almost certainly bred, but after lockdown and the closure of the Reserve the number of records received was considerably reduced. This applied to all species of wildfowl.

As always, the highest counts were made in the autumn and the second winter period, with peaks counts of 303 on 3rd September on No.3 bed and 220 on the new wetland on No.4 bed, attracted by rising water levels. Numbers of Canada Geese continued to increase there, with 350 present on 5th November. By then, with restrictions having eased more people began visiting Woolston, resulting in an increase in records. The count of 602 on 19th November was the highest ever at the Eyes, with 400 on the Ship Canal at Bollin Point and the others on No.3 bed. By then large numbers began to fly in to roost on No.3 bed and the new wetland on No.4 bed. Other notable counts at the end of the year were 504 on 25th November and 405 on 9th December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
55	74	64	11	24	105	88	77	303	265	602	405

Barnacle Goose

Branta leucopsis

The only record submitted was of one flying south with a small flock of Canada Geese on 1st June.

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Amber listed

The increase in numbers reported in the 2019 Report continued with record counts in the last two months of the year, when many flew in from the east to roost on No.3 bed with Canada Geese. Breeding was confirmed on No.3 bed, the Loop of No. 4 bed and on No.1 bed. With the caveat of greatly reduced coverage the impression was of a below-average number of breeding pairs in 2020.

In January there was a roost on No.3 bed which peaked at 58 on the 11th, and after a count of 55 flying in on the evening of the 24th the roost broke up. On many dates during the next three months only single-figure numbers were present.

The first indication of breeding was on No. 4 bed on 15th April, when two pairs were present, one on the new wetland and the other on one of the Loop islands, where on 24th April a bird was on a nest. A pair with six small young was on No.3 bed on 18th April, but only three had survived three days later. On 20th April one observer reported five pairs on No.3 bed, where a second brood of four very small young appeared on the 25th. Attention then turned to No.1 bed, east of the Thelwall Viaduct, where a pair with six small young was discovered on one of the pools. Finally, a pair with three small young was reported on No. 3 bed on 9th May. After this date there were no reports of any of the young, as so often happens at Woolston. It is tempting to blame predation by Lesser Black-backed Gulls, that breed in increasing numbers less than a mile to the north. They certainly do take the young of waterfowl, but from years of observation at Woolston it is clear that Greylag Geese are not the best of parents at protecting their young. A minimum of eight pairs was present, but it is unlikely that any young survived on No.3 bed. The fate of the brood on No.1 bed is not known.

After April there were few reported sightings until mid-August, when numbers increased dramatically, with maxima on No.3 bed of 112 on the 18th and 114 on the 9th September. By November more arrived with Canada Geese. On 5th November 230 were on the new wetland on No.4 bed, while a Reserve record count of 480 was recorded on 11th November, 400 of which were at Bollin Point at the east end of No.1 bed. In the final weeks of the year, they regularly roosted on No.3 bed with Canada

Geese, and also with up to 3000 Pink-footed Geese in December, making a spectacular sight for those who were lucky enough to witness them flying into the bed.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
58	8	9	10	8	8	3	112	114	90	480	210

Pink-footed Goose

Anser brachyrhynchus

Amber listed

This was undoubtedly one of the species highlights of 2020 at The Eyes. Almost exclusively recorded in over-flying skeins in the late autumn and winter, as they were this year, the numbers seen however were well above average. In addition, and for the first time ever, several thousand Pink-footed Geese roosted on No.3 bed in November and December.

All but one of the first winter sightings were in January with many skeins seen, the majority flying east or south-east. Multiple reports were submitted in the first two weeks and in the last week, with peaks of 119 in two skeins on 3rd January, and 200 on the 15th. A large movement was noted by four observers on the 27th. On No.1 bed 190 were seen in two skeins while another Warden reported 300 flying south in the same area and 468 were seen throughout that morning passing over No.3 bed. Inevitably, some of the skeins would have been recorded more than once, but 27th January was a special day for Pink-footed Goose numbers. Seven going east on 11th February was the final report from early in the year.

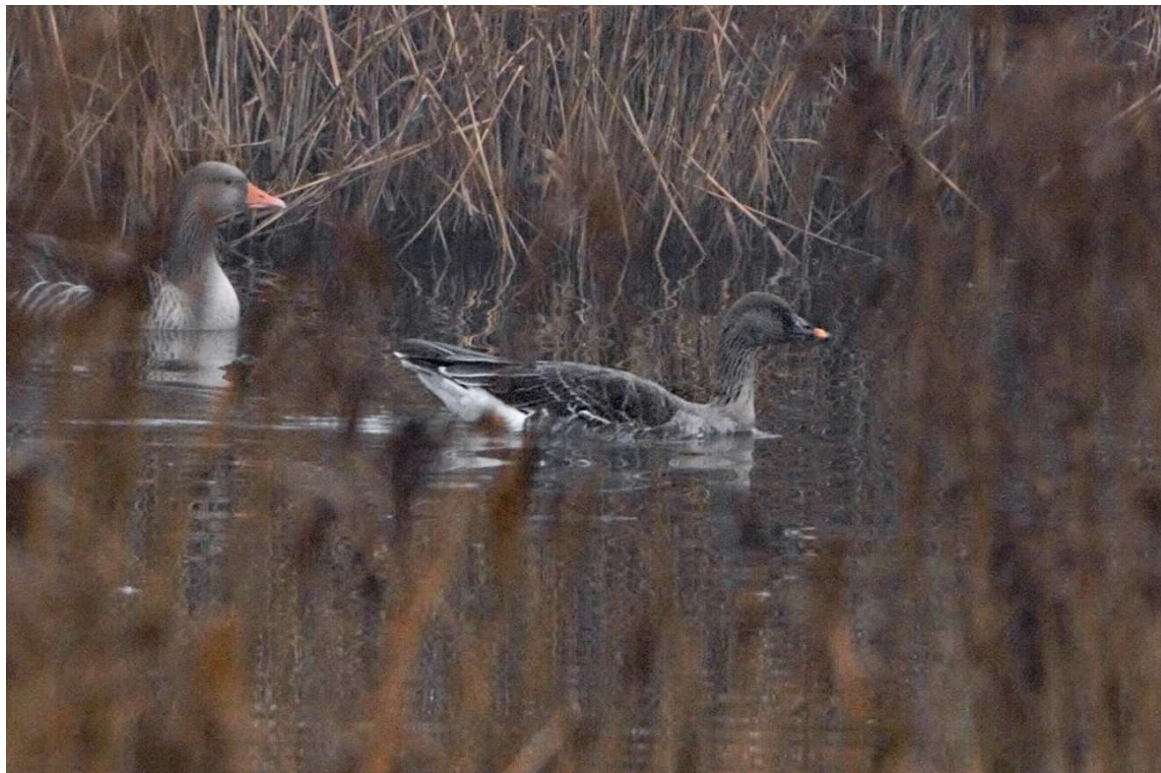
Impressive though the January movements were they were completely overshadowed by the exceptional numbers recorded in the second winter period.

The first birds reported were two on No.3 bed on 24th September, one of which may have been a juvenile which associated with a flock of Greylag Geese into December. It was early October when the large numbers began to appear, with 448 in three skeins flying south-east over No.1 bed on the 5th, 235 on the 17th and 350 in two skeins on the 28th. In November there were almost daily reports, notably on the 3rd when one observer saw 650 flying north and a second saw an amazing total of 5100 moving east during a morning of clear skies – a record for Woolston. Three-figure counts were made on many dates, including 380 in four skeins on the 19th November, while the 264 reported by two other Wardens on the same date may well have been part of the same movement. Two days later another 275 flew east.

If the above numbers were good, what took place in December was exceptional. The over-flying flocks continued in the first three days, with a peak of 450 in five skeins on the 3rd. On the 5th, however, a flock of 250 was found at dawn roosting on No.3 bed, the first time this has happened in the 40 years of recording at Woolston. They left to the east, followed later by a total of 575 also flying east. In the following week the roost continued to grow, reaching 1500 on the 7th and a minimum of 2500 on the 8th and 9th. These birds all flew east, and on the 10th 2000 were found feeding on stubble fields to the east of the River Bollin. Another observer located a total of 4200 Pink-footed Geese feeding in the area on the same date, including the River Bollin flock, with 1000 on stubble at Reddish Lane, Lymm and 1700 on Holcroft Moss. The roost at Woolston peaked at 3000 on the morning of the 12th, though a huge movement, of an estimated 12,500, which passed eastwards over No.1 bed

during the Migration Watch on 19th December, may have included many from the No.3 bed roost. Of the numerous skeins involved at least 4,500 spread out to land on stubble fields to the south of the Ship Canal, while the remainder continued onwards, high to the south-east. The last report was of 250 leaving No.3 bed on 21st December. This exceptional year ended on the 30th with 200 attempting to land on the frozen new wetland on No. 4 bed before continuing westwards.

An added bonus from the high numbers present in December was a bird wearing a neck collar with the letters VPP. It was on fields to the south of No. 1 bed where it was seen by Dan Gornall on 10th December, among one of the big feeding flocks. The collar had been fitted on 20th July 2017 in Iceland. It was next reported in Norfolk on 11th January 2019 before being seen near Lymm.



Bean Goose

Daniel Owen

Tundra Bean Goose

Anser serrirostris

To complete a memorable year for geese a Tundra Bean Goose flew on to No.3 bed with two Greylag Geese on 23rd January and is a first record for the Reserve. It was seen by three observers (Dan Owen Dan Gornall and David Spencer) before it flew off to the south 30 minutes later. Dan Gornall and Dan Owen also believe that three other Tundra Bean Geese flew south that day, although in misty conditions they could not make definitive identifications. Their description and field notes, however, suggest a high probability that the birds were of this species.

On 30th November Dan Gornall, our Warden, and Dan Owen also believe that three geese that landed on No.3 bed with the Greylag flock were also Tundra Bean Geese after hearing their trisyllabic call and observing the plumage features at close range.

Apparently there were other sightings in Cheshire in 2020 of this scarce winter visitor from high Arctic Russia. In most winters an average of only 300 visit the United Kingdom.

Mute Swan

Cygnus olor

Amber listed

Another good year with high numbers present throughout the year and a minimum of four broods reported. One observer, who regularly carries out Reserve-wide counts of Mute Swans, recorded peaks of 49 on 11th January, 46 on 5th February and 49 on 19th March.

In the spring two pairs established territories on No.3 bed, one of which was incubating eggs on a nest in the undisturbed north-east corner of the bed on 9th April. On 15th April one adult was present on the Loop of No.4 bed, where breeding has taken place in the past, but due to lockdown it is not known whether breeding was even attempted there this year. In addition, in late April a bird was on a nest on a regularly favoured pontoon at Latchford Locks and may have produced young as a brood of two cygnets was seen on the Ship Canal not too far away in early June.

Meanwhile, a brood of three was at Woolston Weir Pool on 18th May, all of which almost certainly fledged. What happened on No.3 bed is not entirely clear for it appears that the two pairs there did produce young, as broods of four and seven were seen. The latter was slowly reduced but three young probably fledged from this brood. The fate of the other brood on No.3 bed, however, is not known. With another brood reported on the River Mersey east of the Thelwall Viaduct it is certain that four pairs bred, and possibly a fifth at Latchford Locks.

Later in the year over 40 were present on a number of dates, with a peak of 52 on 11th November. Several Mute Swans wearing Darvic rings were reported on No.3 bed during the year, including blue coloured 4CLS on 18th February and 40BB on 19th March, when three birds with green Darvics were also present: CNV8, CNV2 and CNT7.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
49	46	49	14	36	30	n\c	23	33	38	52	44

Bewick's Swan

Cygnus columbianus

On 20th November three experienced observers saw a flock of six wild swans flying low to the east over No.3 bed, calling. From their size and call it is believed that they were probably of this species. One of the observers saw the birds independently of the other two and came to the same conclusion that they were Bewick's Swans. A rare visitor to the Eyes, this sighting is the first for the Reserve since December 1995.

Whooper Swan

Cygnus cygnus

Amber listed

An irregular visitor which has however been recorded on the Eyes in each of the last three years. One was present on the Mersey adjacent to No.1 bed on 18th April. It was wearing a yellow Darvic ring (V9J) which was fitted on 21st April 2019 when the bird was caught on the Middlewich Canal.

In the autumn there were three sightings. On 22nd October a flock of 14 flew high to the south-east over No.3 bed calling; what were almost certainly the same birds dropped on to Rostherne Mere shortly after. A further eight flew in the same direction on 3rd November, while a juvenile flew north-west low over No.3 bed on 25th November.

Addendum. A late report has been received of nine on No.3 bed on 28th December 2019.

Egyptian Goose

Alopochen aegyptiaca

The only record submitted was of two flying south-east over No.3 bed on 15th December. Once regarded as a rare visitor to the Eyes there have been sightings in each of the last four years.

Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

Amber listed

Although over 100 records were submitted it was a disappointing year, with smaller numbers than usual seen and only one pair was proved to have bred.

The January maximum was eight on the 4th and 23rd, with the year's peak count of 15 on 5th February (c.f. 24th March and 15th June maxima of 23 in 2019, 19 in 2018 and 40 in 2017). Shelduck were present almost daily in the first six months, but mostly in small numbers.

From late March display was seen on several days on No.3 bed and six were on the new wetland in April. On 16th May ten were displaying near much favoured rabbit warrens on the south bank of No.2 bed and there again a week later. The only evidence of confirmed breeding, however, was a pair with one very small young on No.3 bed on 2nd June; they were never seen again. From 9th June, apart from three on 18th July, there were no further records until October, when no more than four were present on many dates. The annual influx at the end of the year saw 12 on 26th November and 13 on 10th December WeBS.

Mandarin Duck

Aix galericulata

From being a rare visitor to Woolston sightings have increased in recent years and for the first time breeding was proved in 2020.

The east end of the Reserve is their favoured area and the majority of the seven records received were from there. In the spring a drake flew over Butchersfield on 18th April, to be followed on 8th June by a brood of four young on the River Mersey. David Spencer, who had been monitoring this species during the year had suspected that breeding was taking place, with a lone male lingering near Rixton Bridge for some time before the female with four young was seen. Two adult females were noted on

24th June and single females on 29th June and 3rd September. There were no further sightings until 10th December WeBS count when three drakes and a female were found on the Mersey near Bollin Point, and what were presumably the same birds there on 12th December.

Garganey
Amber listed

Spatula querquedula

This species bred at Woolston in 2019 but there was no repeat of this in 2020. In fact, in the spring there was just one bird, a drake, seen on No.3 bed on 14th May and again on the 18th. There were no further reports until August when an adult female was present on No.3 bed on the 15th, the 27th and on 1st September. The final record for the year was what may have been the same female on 14th September.



Shoveler

David Bowman

Shoveler
Amber listed

Spatula clypeata

Woolston is an important site for this duck, notably on spring and autumn passage. The increase in numbers in recent years was maintained. A few pairs summer, but breeding is only occasionally proved.

During the first two months there were peak counts of 63 on 11th January and 67 across the Reserve on 8th February WeBS count. On 6th March 48 were still present on No.3 bed alone, 40 of which were drakes. Most soon moved on, but even during the lockdown there were many reports of up to five pairs in April, while a guarding male was present in the undisturbed north-east pool of No.3 bed on

many dates in May and June. This usually suggests an incubating female nearby but no brood was ever seen. Also in June two other pairs were present in the same area, and display was noted.

By late August migrant birds began to return with 105 on No.3 bed on the 25th. Numbers remained high into early September, with 135 on the 2nd increasing to the year's maximum of 155 on the 3rd which is the highest count at Woolston since 160 were present in September 2011.

Significant counts were made throughout October, including 81 on the 17th and 125 on the 31st. On 14th November 75 were on the new wetland on No.4 bed, 43 were found across the Reserve on 2nd December and there was a late peak of 97 on 10th December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
63	67	48	16	5	5	12	127	155	125	75	97

Gadwall

Mareca strepera

Amber listed

After the amazing showing in 2019 this year was disappointing despite a high count in the regular mid-summer build up. An important factor in this was the Covid-19 epidemic which prevented one of our Wardens from visiting the Eyes during the spring and much of the summer to carry out his meticulous recording of broods, as well as the evening peak counts from June to early September.

The year began with average numbers present and maxima of 59 on 22nd January and 64 on 7th March. During April and May there was much evidence of breeding, with pairs observed on all four beds, and display noted on many dates. Despite this only three broods were reported, one of ten large young by Woolston Weir on 31st May and a brood of six small ducklings on No.3 bed on 10th June. A third brood of two young was on the east pool of No.1 bed, one of which may well have fledged.

The annual build-up of Gadwall began earlier than usual, with 120 on No.3 bed in mid-May rising to 185 on the 26th and 250 on 4th June. The year's maximum of 340 on 25th June occurred when they were flushed from cover on No.3 bed by a low-flying Buzzard. It is possible that larger numbers could have been present as others were known to be on No.4 bed, and there were no late evening counts which have all produced the nationally and internationally important numbers present in the past decade.

Other significant counts were of 188 on 11th July, 110 on 5th September and 100 on the WeBS count of 19th September. Ninety-three were found on the October WeBS, 70 on 11th November and 74 on 10th December WeBS.

Two Gadwall were ringed in 2020, a female on 14th March that had hatched in 2019, and an adult male on 2nd April. Both were caught in the duck trap.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
59	53	64	16	185	340	217	65	110	93	70	74

Wigeon*Mareca penelope**Amber listed*

This species remains a regular visitor to the Eyes in small numbers, with the vast majority of records in the final four months of the year.

There were seven records in January, with the maximum being nine on No.3 bed on the 2nd. None were seen in the remainder of the first six months apart from six (three drakes) on 2nd April.

The next sighting was a flock of nine on 15th September. Others were reported in September, with nine seen on the 19th. October was the peak month for sightings, with up to four seen on a number of dates. Six reports were received in November with a maximum of five on the 9th, and 12 records in December including the only double-figure count, 12, on the 29th.

Mallard*Anas platyrhynchos**Amber listed*

This was a fairly good year with numbers much higher than in 2019, particularly in the last four months. Despite the reduced coverage many broods were seen.

In mild weather on 2nd January a pair was seen mating on No.3 bed and on the 9th one observer reported 17 drakes displaying to females on the same water. Large numbers of Mallard were on the Reserve at this time, including 112 on 22nd January. By March fewer were present, with birds establishing territories.

The first brood (of at least seven small young) was on the Loop of No.4 bed on 15th April, with others following throughout the spring and summer. In all, a total of 13 broods was reported, but there were likely to have been more, given the limited coverage of the River Mersey and the Ship Canal where many broods are seen most years.

From September to the end of the year large numbers were present, including 153 on 19th September, 198 on 17th October, 123 on 23rd November and a huge total of 263 on 10th December, the highest count at Woolston since February 2012.

Three were caught and ringed this year, a female on 7th March and an adult male and female on 8th March. In addition, four were re-trapped from 2019.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
112	65	63	23	11	20	9	67	153	198	123	263

Pintail*Anas crecca**Amber listed*

A once numerous winter visitor to the Eyes, Pintail are now scarce birds at Woolston since the large population that used to winter on the Mersey moved to the Dee estuary many years ago.

There were just two sightings in the first winter, both in January. A drake and a female flew south over No.3 bed on the 13th while four (two drakes and two females) were found on the same bed on the 23rd. It was then over eight months until the next record, a female, which was present for at least three days in mid-September. What may have been the same bird was seen again on 15th October. There were many reports of between one and three Pintail during November, and the five present on No.3 bed on 2nd December was the highest count of the year. Two drakes were noted from the 3rd to 7th December, followed by a lone drake last reported on 21st December.



Male Pintail

David Bowman

Teal

Anas crecca

Amber listed

The numbers of wintering Teal continue to be relatively low compared with the levels of only three or four years ago, when four-figure counts were usual. It is encouraging, however, that high numbers were present late in 2020.

Typically, WeBS counts reveal how many Teal, which usually keep in cover, are present on the Reserve. This was the case this year, with 475 on 11th January and 380 on 8th February the peak numbers in the first winter period. The last report of over 100 Teal was of 148 on 7th March.

After this most birds departed to breeding sites in eastern Europe and Russia, but as usual small numbers summered on the Reserve. On 16th April eight pairs were flushed out of reeds by a Marsh Harrier and one or two pairs were noted on several dates in May. In June ten (eight drakes) were on No.3 bed on the 10th, three pairs the next day and a pair was seen skulking in cover near the south

screen on the 13th. This may suggest possible breeding, but it is many years since a brood was seen at Woolston.

Only small numbers were reported in July and August and it was September before returning birds began to be seen. Fifty-three on the 2nd increased to 80 on the new wetland on No.4 bed on the 5th, 162 on the WeBS on the 19th and an amazing 320 on the No.4 wetland on 6th October. On 31st October there was a Reserve total of 450. The November peak was 500 on the 21st before 1457 were present on 12th December, the highest count of Teal at Woolston since February 2017. They were part of the second largest WeBS count ever at the Eyes, when 5806 birds of 29 species were recorded.

The Ringing team on No.3 bed had another successful year of duck trapping, with 181 new Teal ringed during the year, despite a long period when the Reserve was closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, they re-trapped 24 Teal ringed in 2019, three from 2018, five from 2017 and one each from 2016 and 2015.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
475	380	148	24	4	10	8	28	190	450	500	1457



Teal mating

David Bowman



Female Pochard

David Bowman

Pochard

Red listed

Aythya ferina

Another good breeding season for this duck, but wintering numbers remain low with no repeat of the three-figure count in 2019.

Many records were submitted for the first three months. Few were present in early January, with 15 on the 6th the first double-figure count. As always, numbers of Pochard began to increase in the second half of January with 29 on the Reserve on the 22nd. More continued to arrive in early February, which traditionally sees the highest numbers at Woolston, with 45 on the 5th increasing to the year's maximum of 66 on the 9th. Up to 56 were noted during the following week, and 63 on 11th March. Drakes dominate the flocks, as several observers discovered. On 10th February the 49 Pochard counted included 35 drakes, and three days later 34 drakes and 18 females were on No.3 bed. By mid-March numbers slowly declined and by April birds had paired up and display was noted.

The first brood was reported on the Loop of No.4 bed on 8th May (five small young) but all subsequent broods were found on No.3 bed. In total 13 broods were recorded on the bed between 9th May and 11th June. Given the limited number of observers at that time the 14 broods is an excellent total. It should be regarded as an absolute minimum as the No.1 bed pools often support at least one breeding pair. Some large young were reported into August and were likely to have fledged, but it was apparent that many of the broods were soon lost.

Only very small numbers were seen in the final four months.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
29	66	63	15	12	22	22	7	2	n/c	3	9

Tufted Duck

Aythya fuligula

There were 133 records submitted for Tufted Duck, more than for any other wildfowl species. The high numbers in late 2019 continued into January and despite the much reduced coverage during the breeding season many broods were reported.

The first ten days of January were mild, which are not the conditions that usually result in large counts of Tufted Duck. Even so 310 were on the Reserve on the 4th, increasing to 532 on the WeBS count carried out on the 11th. These numbers were dwarfed, however, with 950 on the 22nd, 427 of which were on No.3 bed. This is the highest count of Tufted Duck on the Eyes since February 2012. We are grateful to David Hackett for his regular Reserve-wide wildfowl counts which show the important numbers that Woolston supports, particularly in winter. He found 508 Tufted Duck still present on 5th February and 283 on 19th March, after which there was a significant decline.

The first broods (four) were seen on No.3 bed on 9th June, with others following regularly in June and July. In all, it is thought that at least 12 pairs bred on No.3 bed and one on the Oxbow around No.3 bed. With no coverage of No.4 bed or the Mersey around No.1 bed, where pairs breed most years, the 13 known broods is likely to be a minimum figure.

It was not until October that numbers began to increase again, with 161 present on the WeBS of the 17th and 233 on 14th November. The peak at the end of the year was 269 on 2nd December.

Monthly maxima:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
950	508	283	40	11	19	9	15	26	161	233	269

Goldeneye

Bucephala clangula

Amber listed

A winter visitor in small numbers. At the beginning of the year many reports were submitted in January and February, with peak counts of five on 1st January at Bollin Point and six on 22nd January. The last record in the early months was of three at the favoured Bollin Point on 20th March.

For the third year in succession there was a summer sighting when a female was present near the junction of the Ship Canal and the Mersey on 29th June and 6th July. Six were in the same area on 1st September and single birds were seen into October and early November. Most reports were in November of birds on the Woolston Weir Pool or beds 2 and 3, but no more than four were seen. The final record was two on the Weir Pool on 17th December.

Goosander

Mergus merganser

A scarce annual visitor, with just 15 records submitted this year. Singles were seen on two dates in early January and three dates in March. Two landed briefly on No.3 bed on 26th March. There were no further sightings until 30th July when ten flew south over No.3 bed.

There were two records in October involving one and two birds, while in December Goosanders were seen on four dates, the maximum being five heading for the Ship Canal when No.3 bed was completely frozen over.

Cuckoo

Cuculus canorus

Red listed

The Cuckoo's call is one of the most welcome sounds of spring and this year the first was heard on No.3 bed on 27th April. What was presumed to be the same bird was calling on the bed on several dates throughout May. The only other spring records were of a bird calling on No.2 bed in May, date unknown and another calling on No.4 bed on 12th May. In the summer there was a single record of one flying over the south end of No.3 bed on the late date of 27th August. Interestingly, a juvenile bird was seen in a garden on Thelwall New Road on 21st July and could well have originated from the Reserve.



Cuckoo

David Bowman

Swift*Apus apus**Amber listed*

Swifts are one of the last summer migrants to arrive and this year the first was seen on 25th April when one flew north over No.3 bed. There were no further sightings until 30th April when 13 arrived on No.3 bed. Numbers increased rapidly in early May with 33 on the 2nd, 50 on the 5th and a minimum count of 200 on the 12th. For the remainder of spring and early summer there were regular counts of 100 plus birds with the largest counts of 280 on 2nd July and 340 on 18th July.

It is believed they had a generally poor season mainly because of the endless rain in June and July when insects were in short supply. This may account for the numbers of birds which were seen moving south throughout July. Possibly these birds were looking for better feeding or had given up their breeding attempts. The fact that there were record breaking numbers, 45,000, moving past Spurn in one day in late June confirms the difficulties that Swifts were facing in finding food at that time.

Despite the apparent early movement south they were still regularly observed throughout August with a peak count of 220 on the 6th. The last sighting was of one on 12th September over No.1 bed.

Feral Pigeon*Columba livia*

Feral Pigeons breed around Latchford Locks and were regularly seen throughout the year over-flying the Reserve. The highest count at the locks was 55 on 19th December. Small numbers are thought to be still breeding on the Thelwall Viaduct despite the attention of the local Peregrines. The maximum count on the Viaduct was five on 2nd May.

Stock Dove*Columba oenas**Amber listed*

This small attractive dove can be easily overlooked but is thought to breed in small numbers on all four beds. This year, however, there were no records from No.2 bed but this is likely due to lack of coverage during the lockdown rather than the absence of birds. During a Common Bird Census eight were observed on No.1 in suitable breeding habitat and on 10th March 18 were observed in fields opposite Butchersfield Tip. On No.3 bed there were records in all months of the year. Most records were of one or two birds and the maximum count was seven on 3rd February. On No.4 bed the maximum count was of just two on 12th March. Not surprisingly the highest count of the year, 58, was recorded on 12th September during a Migration Watch on No.1 bed where birds could be observed moving over adjacent farmland.

Woodpigeon*Columba palumbus*

The year started with some large overnight roosts on No.2 bed in January. Seven hundred were seen leaving the roost on the morning of the 4th, 480 on the 9th and 850 on the 11th. In spring the Common Bird Census recorded the following: nine on No.1 bed in suitable breeding habitat and on No.2 bed 30 were observed with nine in song. On No.3 bed seven pairs were noted with two in song and three occupied nests, while on No.4 bed 15 were present with six in song.

In the late autumn there were some spectacular movements of birds. On the 31st October 850 flew south during the morning but this was eclipsed on 3rd November. Conditions on this day were perfect for migratory movements over No.3 bed, with clear skies and a light south-easterly breeze; 14,200 were counted moving south in large waves between dawn and mid-morning. This is the largest count for this species on the Reserve, the previous being 10,000 in 1995.

The year finished as it started with some large dawn movements from local roosts. Fifteen hundred were seen flying north in an hour after dawn on 1st December and 800 left No.2 bed at dawn on the 17th. On the 19th 4546 were counted during a Migration Watch on No.1 bed.

Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto

Although Collared Doves breed in the local housing estates surrounding the Reserve, they have not been proved to be breeding on the Reserve since 2004. It is notable, therefore, that a pair was seen nest building on the west bank of No.4 bed on 8th May, although it is not known if breeding was successful. All other records were of over-flying birds but most sightings were of one or two birds with a maximum count of three.

Water Rail

Rallus aquaticus

The population of this secretive and elusive species appears to be stable and there were reports throughout the year, mostly from Nos.1 and 3 beds. One or two were reported during January and February, with an increase in March. On the 6th of that month two were on No.1 bed and four on No.3 bed. A pair was then found in the north-east corner of No.3 bed on 31st March and on 25th May, five were heard calling in the eastern reed beds on No.1 bed. The first proof of breeding came on 29th May when young were heard calling on No.1 bed. It would appear that at least two pairs bred on No.3 bed, as there were reports of juveniles from the Tower Hide and the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide. On 29th September two adults were seen in territorial dispute near the Sybil Hogg Hide when a juvenile was also present. Sightings of significance during the autumn months included five on No.3 bed on 6th October and five on No.1 bed on 9th November. There were a few reports from No.4 bed and it appears that this species is continuing to colonise this area of the Reserve. One was seen there on 2nd January and another was calling on the Loop during the Wildfowl Count on 10th December. Breeding overall was probably similar to recent years.

The team on No.3 bed ringed five during the year, two in January and the remainder from September onwards.

Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

This common resident is recorded throughout the year and its population appears to be stable. The first months of the year saw maxima of 21 in January and 32 on the March WeBS count. A pair was on a nest on No.3 bed on 14th April and the following day an adult was seen feeding a week-old chick in the new wetland area of No.4 bed. Breeding took place on Nos.3 and 4 beds and a minimum of eight broods was recorded in these areas together with a further three on the River Mersey. A brood of six very small young on 23rd June was noteworthy. One chick fell victim to a Lesser Black-backed

Gull but overall breeding success was similar to the previous two years with a minimum of eleven broods. Numbers increased after the breeding season and the monthly WeBS counts recorded 45 in October, 52 in November and a year maximum of 55 in December, which represents a slight increase over the past two years.

The 27 handled by the ringing team on No.3 bed included 18 newly ringed. This would imply that the numbers recorded by observers were almost certainly an underestimate.

Coot

Fulica atra

Numbers were considerably lower than in 2019, with a maximum of 87 on 8th February compared with about 350 the previous year. Breeding was also reduced and a minimum of 19 broods was much lower than in recent years. The highest totals occurred in the first few months, when over 70 were regularly recorded. A pair was in the north east corner of No.3 bed on 14th April and on the 23rd a pair was seen with one young. The following day, five pairs were on the Loop of No.4 bed, of which one pair was feeding four tiny young and two other pairs were nest-building. Broods were distributed as follows: 12 on No.3 bed, three on the Loop of No.4 bed, three on No.1 bed and one on the Weir Pool. The usual post-breeding build-up on No.3 bed did not occur and the highest totals for this period were in the 30's, with a December count of 58. The year ended with a report of 41 on a small area of unfrozen water on the new wetland on 30th December.

The ringing team on No.3 bed had a record year with five caught in the duck trap during February and March.

Common Crane

Grus grus

On 16th April Dan Owen saw four flying west just to the north of Butchersfield on No.1 bed. This is the third record for the Reserve, the other two also being in April, in 2005 and 2012.

Little Grebe

Tachybaptus ruficollis

Woolston remains the most important breeding site in Cheshire for this grebe and despite reduced coverage the breeding population was similar to the past few years.

A maximum of five was present in January with trilling heard on the east pool of No.1 bed on the 8th and trilling and display on No.3 bed on 3rd February. Five days later a total of 19 was on the Eyes. Sixteen were counted on 7th March and 11 on the 19th. A week later three Little Grebes were calling on the No.1 bed pools, while in April six pairs were present on No.3 bed on the 9th and two pairs on the Loop of No.4 bed on the 15th. The first brood, (2 young), appeared on No.3 bed on 23rd May, the same day that an adult was trilling on No.2 bed during a Breeding Bird Survey. Breeding was proved there on 29th May when two well grown young were seen. A few days earlier three broods were on No.3 bed.

From the records submitted it is clear that a minimum of nine pairs bred: five on No.3 bed, two on No.1 bed and single pairs on No.2 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed. With many large young reported fledging success seems to have been good.

Later in the year 19 were found on 19th September WeBS, 16 on 14th November and a maximum of eight in December. By this time most had moved away from the breeding pools on to the Mersey Oxbow surrounding No.3 bed.

An interesting record was of one trilling on No.1 bed on 2nd December.



Little Grebe

David Bowman

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

A disappointing year despite many pairs being present during the breeding season.

Few Great Crested Grebes winter at Woolston and five on two dates in January was typical. Birds began to return to the breeding waters in February with 14 present on the 5th and 18 on the 8th, which was, in fact, the highest count of the year. Fifteen were noted on 9th March and 11 on the 11th.

Most records were from No.3 bed, where four pairs settled in the breeding season, and on 24th March three pairs were displaying there. On 6th May four pairs and one young were observed, and two pairs, one of which was feeding a very small chick, were seen on the 9th. Another pair was feeding young on No.3 bed on 22nd May. Breeding is attempted in most years on a very small patch of reeds on Woolston Weir. This nest is frequently submerged when river levels rise, but the pair there was nothing if not determined to re-lay and hatched one young at their fourth or fifth attempt, and this eventually fledged. The only other young that fledged was one on No.3 bed that frequented the north-west pool for many weeks feeding well. A pair was seen on the Ship Canal on several dates in April, but it is not known if they bred. This was a poor outcome from five or six pairs.

After the breeding season only single-figure records were received, with maxima of nine on 19th September and five in October and December.

Black-necked Grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

Amber listed

Another good year for this Woolston speciality, with a minimum of ten pairs breeding successfully.

The first returning birds were back on 14th March – an average date – and were a pair in summer plumage and one still in partial winter plumage. Numbers continued to increase in March, with four on the 16th, five on the 17th and 18th, nine on the 19th, ten on the 22nd, 14 on the 25th and 16 on the 28th. Eighteen on 2nd April were followed by 20 on the 16th and the year's maximum of 27 on the 20th. This is one more than in 2019, and the highest number of adults since 2014 when 31 were present on No.3 bed. Counts then decreased as birds began to nest, but 17 were still showing on 6th May. The only count away from the favoured No.3 bed was of an adult on the Loop of No.4 bed on 16th May.

We are grateful to David Bowman for his careful monitoring of broods during the lockdown when the Reserve was closed. The first confirmed breeding was on 19th May when one small young was being fed by a pair, followed by many others in June. On 2nd June 14 adults and eight young were recorded, increasing steadily to 17 adults and 15 young by the 11th. Thirteen adults and 18 young of various ages were present on the 20th, including a new brood considered to be the tenth of the year. At this time a number of independent young were seen making low flights across the water, as they exercised their flight muscles in preparation for departure.

The last adults were reported on 11th July and the last juvenile on 16th July, when it was fully grown. The fledging rate is believed to have been good and the Black-necked Grebes had clearly benefitted from the dry spring, particularly the warm May and early June. Soon afterwards the weather changed dramatically with high rainfall totals in the second half of June and most of July.

An interesting observation on 26th May was of three adults associating with adult Pochards and Tufted Ducks for about half an hour and diving with the ducks at the same time. It is possible that the ducks were disturbing food that the grebes were able to exploit.

Black-necked Grebes first successfully bred at Woolston in 1987, and apart from a few years in the early 1990s when No.3 bed was drained, they have bred annually since. The latest Rare Breeding Bird Panel Report (2018) states that Woolston, a wetland in Yorkshire and one in Nottinghamshire together support 75% of the Black-necked Grebe population in the United Kingdom.

Oystercatcher

Haematopus ostralegus

Amber listed

Three February sightings on No.3 bed included a pair mating on the scrape on the 20th and present again two days later. More were reported over-flying during March, including five on the 19th. One or two were seen on the John Morgan Hide scrape in April and May but the main interest was on No.1 bed where the newly created pools attracted a pair, plus a single, on 18th April. A pair was still present

on 2nd May and seemed settled, raising the possibility of breeding for the second successive year. Unfortunately, there were no further records of this pair and it remains uncertain whether breeding took place. A number of sightings of birds in flight over No.1 bed during June and July could have related to these possible breeders but, either way, the availability of suitable breeding habitat bodes well for the future. Occasional sightings continued on No.3 bed until the final report of the year, on 18th August.



Lapwing

David Bowman

Lapwing

Red listed

Vanellus vanellus

A flock of about 400 flew north on 16th January and on 5th February 50 were on the ground in the area of the new wetland on No.4 bed, obviously attracted to the bare mud uncovered by the contractors. Three were on the rafts on No.3 bed on 14th February and a male was present on the scrape on 20th and 22nd of that month. Early March saw a pair in front of the John Morgan Hide, one of which was on a nest scrape. Display was observed on No.1 bed on 21st March, whilst back on No.3 bed, two pairs were displaying on 4th April. Further reports included a pair in the new wetland area and three on the Loop, one of which was making a nest scrape (15th April). At least three pairs were looking settled near the newly created pools on No.1 bed. Two were on nests on the Loop islands on 24th April, and on 9th May, while six were on No.3 bed. Three days later a female was on three eggs in front of the John Morgan Hide and a fourth egg was seen on 12th May. Three newly hatched young were noted there on 9th June but two days later only two were seen. These were seen regularly until 28th June, with just one remaining on the 30th. On 6th June, an almost fully grown young was seen by the

elevated pools on No.1 bed. The last surviving juvenile on No.3 bed was seen in flight on 21st July. It seems that only two pairs definitely bred but the total could have been as high as six if the pairs on No.1 bed and the Loop of No.4 bed were successful.

Post breeding gatherings normally occur from July onwards and the first evidence of this was a report of 65 in the new wetland area of No.4 bed, on 16th July. On No.3 bed 90 were present on 25th August with up to 60 in September and 39 were on the new No.4 bed wetland on 6th October. These numbers are significantly lower than in the past couple of years. Most subsequent records were of over-flying flocks, notably on 20th October when 1100 flew south with 85 Golden Plover. Other counts of note were 800 on 22nd October and 700 on 10th November. The final sighting was of 18 during the December WeBS count.

Golden Plover

Pluvialis apricaria

There were three sightings, all of birds over-flying the Reserve. One flew north over No.3 bed calling on 9th May. No less than 85 were with a flock of Lapwing on 20th October, the highest count for many years. The final sighting was of eight, again with Lapwings, on 3rd November.

Ringed Plover

Charadrius hiaticula

Red listed

There were some interesting sightings of this red listed species, which is an infrequent visitor at Woolston. After a blank year in 2019 there were five reports. Three flew west over No.3 bed on 17th March and on the 21st of that month a pair appeared to be on territory on bare stony ground near the Elevated Pools on No.1 bed. On the same day a pair was reported from No.4 bed but it is not known if these were the same birds. On 7th April, no less than three were on No.1 bed. One was near the east pool when two others came "spiralling out of the sky, calling and circled repeatedly". These were smaller and darker than the first bird and were thought to be of the "tundrae" subspecies (*Charadrius hiaticula tundrae*). The final report was of one flying west over No.3 bed on 30th July.

Little Ringed Plover

Charadrius dubius

In recent years this species has bred at Woolston in small numbers and this pattern continued this year. The first sighting was of a pair at the eastern end of No.1 bed on 24th March and two pairs were "looking settled" near the Elevated Pools on the same bed, on 18th April. What were presumably the same birds were reported again on 2nd May. Two flew west over No.3 bed on 9th May and two were on the scrape in front of the John Morgan Hide on 19th May. Four days later a pair was present on the horse paddocks to the north of No.2 bed. Display was observed on No.1 bed on 4th June and two days later no less than eight were on No.1 bed, including three pairs, two of which had one young and the third was showing distraction behaviour. On 7th June two were in the centre of No.2 bed where new pools had been created and what may have been the same pair flew past the Tower Hide on No.3 bed the same day. Back on No.2 bed two were seen chasing off a third bird on 9th June with two still there the following day. On 13th June 12 were found on No.1 bed, three pairs each with two young. The final sightings of the year were on 8th August, when three pairs and one fully grown young were on

No.1 bed and two on No.3 bed. It is certain that three pairs bred successfully which is about average for the past few years. Four pulli were ringed on No.1 bed.

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

Red listed

There was just one sighting of this infrequent visitor when three flew west calling over No.3 bed on 30th April.

Curlew

Numenius arquata

Red listed

A total of six reports was about average for a species which is normally seen in flight over the Reserve on spring and autumn passage. The first was on 16th March, when one flew round the south end of No.3 bed calling and, landed briefly on one of the rafts before being chased off by Black-headed Gulls. All records were from No.3 bed and included two flying west on 12th May and one south on 13th June. Singles were seen on two dates in July, including one which flew in from the north, circled low but did not land. The final report was of a single on 1st September.



Curlew

Daniel Owen

Black-tailed Godwit*Limosa limosa**Red listed*

There was a series of records of this attractive wader between March and September, all from No.3 bed. One flew south on 14th March and two circled the bed but did not land on the 23rd. There were no further reports until 28th and 30th June when two and three respectively were seen. Ten flew west on 9th July and two days later three in summer plumage were on the Morgan Hide scrape. Up to six were then seen there regularly, until the end of August. Sightings of singles continued until 19th September but as in 2019, there was no repeat of the large numbers that have been present in recent years.

*Black-tailed Godwit**David Bowman***Dunlin***Calidris alpina**Amber listed*

This was a fairly average year, with seven records submitted, all of birds flying over No.3 bed. The only spring sighting was of two flying west on 19th May. The next report was of five flying south on 13th August, while September saw a single on the 26th. On 21st November three flew west and another south. The most intriguing sighting occurred on 24th November when D. Lloyd filmed a flock of thirty small waders flying low over the water, again on No.3 bed. Although the consensus of opinion was that they were Dunlin the evidence was thought to be inconclusive.

Woodcock
Red listed

Scolopax rusticola

There were 23 records, and these were, typically, from the first and last quarters of the year. Nearly all sightings were from Nos.1 and 3 beds with a spring maximum of six on the WeBS count of 7th March. The next report was on 19th October when one entered the ringers' net on No.1 bed but escaped before it could be processed. From mid-November there were regular reports of up to three on Nos.1 and 3 beds and five were recorded by the migration watchers on 28th November. The year ended with a sighting of two from the mostly frozen new wetland area on 30th December. This was the only record from this area of the Reserve and is further evidence of the potential of this newly created wetland.

Jack Snipe

Lymnocyptes minimus

This proved to be an excellent year for what is normally an uncommon species at Woolston, with 18 records compared with two in 2019 and none in 2018. The two spring sightings were of one on No.1 bed on 7th February and one in front of the John Morgan Hide on 21st April. The first autumn report was on 7th September when one dropped into No.3 bed with a group of Common Snipe. The new wetland area held up to three from October to the year end and the WeBS count on 14th November found a Reserve-wide total of four. Singles were reported from Nos.1 and 3 beds during the last three months of the year. As this species can be extremely elusive and is often seen only when flushed at close range these figures are almost certainly an under-estimate.

Snipe
Amber listed

Gallinago gallinago

Records were submitted for every month except June which is typical. The year began with high numbers on the Loop of No.4 bed, with 26 flushed off one of the islands on 8th January and 25 on the 18th. Most reports were from No.3 bed, however, and small numbers were present during the winter and spring, the highest counts being six on 18th January and twelve on 6th February. No more than three were recorded from then until the last spring sighting on 19th May. The next report was of one on No.3 bed on 23rd July. Although there were regular sightings numbers remained low during August with a maximum of six on No.3 bed on the 13th. By early September the new wetland area began to attract good numbers, and twenty on 6th October and eleven on 26th November were the highest counts. Significant records from other areas were 16 on No.1 bed on 12th November and eleven on No.3 bed on 30th November. This year's records were more widespread than usual and an increase in sightings from Nos.1 and 4 beds was encouraging.

Common Sandpiper
Amber listed

Actitis hypoleucos

Only seven records were received, compared with 46 in 2019, which was a particularly good year. The first was on 30th June when three landed on one of the rafts in front of the Tower Hide. There were further reports of singles from No.3 bed in July and August. The new wetland area of No.4 bed

attracted one on 11th August which may have been the same bird seen on No.3 bed the same day. A disappointing year concluded with two on No.3 bed on 13th August.



Common Sandpiper

David Bowman

Green Sandpiper

Amber listed

Tringa ochropus

Evidence of over-wintering were three early records, one on No.3 bed on 15th January and 10th February and one at Bollin Point on 8th February. The next report was of one, again at Bollin Point, on 20th March. The only other spring sighting was of a single on No.3 bed on 18th April. Return passage was first noted on 20th June when one was on No.3 bed, but the majority of records were from mid-July onwards. Most sightings were on No.3 bed with a maximum of five present on 6th August. There were however a number of records from the new wetland area of No.4 bed, and these became more frequent as the year progressed and water levels rose. There was a single report from No.1 bed at this time. with one noted there on 4th September. Small numbers remained until the end of the year and over-wintering birds were reported from Nos.3 and 4 beds during December.

Eight were ringed on No.3 bed between 2nd and 23rd August, just one fewer than in 2019. Interestingly, one of the newly ringed birds was subsequently seen at Glasson, Lancashire.

Redshank*Tringa totanus**Amber listed*

There were just five records, the same as in 2019. All were from No.3 bed and related to single birds except for 23rd May when two were displaying in front of the John Morgan Hide. The four spring sightings were on 16th March, 4th April and 23rd May. The single report of autumn passage was on 2nd July.

Greenshank*Tringa nebularia**Amber listed*

An infrequent though annual visitor to Woolston, there were just three reports of this elegant wader. All were of singles on No.3 bed; one flew north west on 11th June, and the remaining sightings were on 18th July and 4th August.

Kittiwake*Rissa tridactyla**Red listed*

Two records of this coastal wanderer is a fair showing for an inland site. Firstly, on 18th April, an adult spent five minutes on No.3 bed before flying off to the south. On the slightly less-typical date of 7th June a flock of at least eight passed over No.3 bed low to the north-west. This is a minimum count due to trees obscuring the observer's view and is a record count for the Reserve.

Black-headed Gull*Chroicocephalus ridibundus**Amber listed*

The year started in typical fashion with Black-headed Gull numbers on the Reserve remaining low, however a count of 1,072 birds moving west down the Manchester Ship Canal on 22nd January was most welcome and by far the highest total of the month. The work on No.4 bed saw some flocks gathering at the beginning of February to feed on earthworms churned up by the machinery. Numbers peaked there at 400 on 6th January. Mid-February saw the first major return to the breeding colony, and 265 displayed around No.3 bed on the 18th. Numbers on No.3 bed fluctuated around this mark for the next week or so before peaking at 700 on the 29th. An interesting record on the 16th involved a Polish-ringed bird (yellow darvic 'TT5X') which was briefly on the Morgan Hide scrape. It was not seen again, perhaps indicating that it was just passing through maybe heading back to its continental breeding grounds. As the breeding season progressed, it was estimated that more than 500 were regularly at the No.3 bed breeding colony. The following breakdown was recorded on 30th April : 200 in the Northern Reedbed, 100 in the Eastern Reedbed, 70 around the north-west corner rafts, 50 on the Morgan Hide scrape and 120 around Centre Pool rafts.

The first chicks of the year appeared on 14th May, although this might not be as accurate as in previous years due to the lack of daily observation. This was quickly followed by a run of hatching chicks on various parts of No.3 bed. The 10th June saw the first fledglings, when 18 juveniles appeared on the Morgan Hide scrape. This increased to 45 fledged juveniles on the 25th, while at least 40 adults were still sitting on nests at this point. More juvenile counts, of 28 on 7th July, and 17 on 28th July probably

involved some additional fledglings, but totals were probably still slightly lower than the peak count of 93 fully grown juveniles in 2019. Overall, it seemed a good breeding season, with all available nesting areas packed with nests. Productivity as always, is hard to accurately monitor with birds fledging at different times, some of which are likely to quickly depart the Reserve, as shown by ringing recoveries elsewhere. No successful breeding took place on No.4 bed, although birds were showing interest in the new wetland islands and we will surely not have to wait long to see a colony established on this part of the Reserve.

August and September saw numbers on No.3 bed start to drop below the 100 mark, as breeding birds moved on. As the country sees a large influx of wintering birds, numbers touching down on the Reserve remain low, although some nice overhead movements can be observed, most notably when 1,816 flew east during the Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip on 28th November and 1,400 moved east over the Reserve at dawn on 23rd December.

Little Gull

Hydrocoloeus minutus

There were two reports of this diminutive passage visitor, slightly bettering the previous three years' single reports. Three on No.3 bed on 18th April involved two adults and a second-summer, one adult sporting full summer plumage complete with a strong pink blush to its breast. Three days later on the 21st, another adult and a second-summer graced No.3 bed.



Little Gull

David Bowman

Mediterranean Gull

Ichthyaetus melanocephalus

Amber listed

All records were between March and June, a typical time frame for this species as birds are pulled in by the large Black-headed Gull breeding colony on No.3 bed during the spring and summer months. An adult briefly landing on the No.3 bed scrape on 10th March kicked off the season's run of sightings. This was quickly followed by an adult on the 12th and then a second summer on the 14th. The remainder of sightings consisted of probably the same pair of adults, sporadically making appearances throughout April. In May they decided to settle down on one of the nesting rafts on No.3 bed and were seen sitting on a nest between the 5th and 21st May, quite a long period and perhaps indicating that they were incubating. Unfortunately, nothing came of this and we still await our first confirmed breeding record. Next year perhaps? Less expected were sightings of a pair of adults flying over No.1 bed on the 2nd and 27th May, an area of the Reserve where this species is not often recorded. Aside from this pair of adults last seen on 28th June, a second-summer individual was on No.3 bed on 13th June. It seems it was a poor year for numbers of individual Mediterranean Gulls using the Reserve, although this is perhaps overshadowed by the near breeding attempt.



Mediterranean Gull

Dan Gornall

Common Gull

Larus canus

Amber listed

In a typical year for this species, 41 records were submitted. Most were of small counts during the day, with slightly higher numbers moving over in the evening to roost, with a peak count of 14 over No.3 bed on 22nd January. The new workings on No.4 bed offered a handful of records and could provide larger numbers in future reports.

Great Black-backed Gull

Larus marinus

Amber listed

Another increase in records this year compared with 2019, as this species becomes a more regular visitor to the Reserve. Sightings were still dominated by overflying birds, moving to and from inland feeding sites. A couple of refuse tips around Manchester remain in operation, and offer attractive feeding for wintering gulls, so it is not surprising to see so many passing over the Reserve during the winter months. January started the year off with just six records, before sightings doubled in February, all but two of which were from No.3 bed. The other records were of pairs at Latchford Locks on the 5th and No.4 bed on the 27th. As always, a major drop-off in records occurred between March and September, with the only notable sighting being an adult seen carrying a goose egg on No.3 bed on 18th April, reminding us how opportunistic these birds can be and a first-winter, also on No.3 bed, on 29th September. December saw almost daily sightings, mostly at dawn or dusk moving east and west respectively. Peak counts included 10 heading west over No.3 bed on 7th December and nine west over No.4 bed on the 15th. Singles were also present at Latchford Locks on the 2nd and 22nd December.

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

As expected, a major peak in records occurred over the winter months, mainly involving over-flying birds moving to and from inland feeding sites from overnight roosts. There were just 20 sightings reported between January and March all involving relatively low counts from No.3 bed. However, two adults and a 1st-winter were at Latchford Locks on 5th February and two birds dropped into the new No.4 bed wetlands on 11th February. It was slim pickings for this species over the summer months with just a handful of birds dropping onto No.3 bed and the Weir Basin amongst the larger numbers of locally breeding Lesser black-backed Gulls. This latter species has a breeding range that extends much further inland than Herring Gull and which accounts for the difference in prevalence of these two large gulls at this time of year. The bulk of the records, however, came from the early winter period between November and December, when varying numbers flew west over No.3 bed at dusk. The peak counts were of 69 flying east during the Migration Watch on 28th November, 30 west over No.3 bed on 7th December and 40 again flying east during the Migration Watch on 19th December.

Lesser Black-backed Gull*Larus fuscus**Amber listed*

The year began at a steady pace, with the first double-figure count on 22nd January, when 38 flew west over No.3 bed to roost. Numbers remained low, in typical winter fashion, but began to build as birds returned to breed on nearby factory roofs and 52 were back by 27th April. Numbers usually swell in midsummer due to numerous newly fledged young making the short hop across the Mersey, although 235 (197 juveniles) on No.3 bed on 23rd July was a huge count. Triple-figures remained until 4th August, but numbers quickly tailed off with low double-figures remaining typical as the local breeding population gradually moved off. As ever, there were regular inland movements to tip sites most mornings during the late autumn/winter, with the Migration Watches producing totals of 106 on 12th September, 22 on 10th October, 32 on 28th November and 30 on 19th December.

Common Tern*Sterna hirundo**Amber listed*

There were just two records of Common Tern during 2020, another significant drop after 10 records in 2019, potentially due to reduced observer coverage during peak times. The first sighting of the year involved one flying west over No.3 bed on 25th April. In similar fashion the last of the year was a pair flying west over No.3 bed on 9th June. Both were brief encounters of fly-through birds which is typical of this species at Woolston. Perhaps not so typical was the complete lack of post breeding, late summer records.

Arctic Tern*Sterna paradisaea**Amber listed*

Arctic Tern is never an easy species to catch-up with at Woolston, so a single record of a fly-through flock is typical. However, the number involved was rather less-so with a flock of 25 flying east along the north bank of No.3 bed on 21st April.

Black Tern*Chlidonias niger*

A south-easterly breeze in late April often produces a smattering of Black Tern records in the country and it was pleasing for Woolston to get in on the action for a consecutive year. One paid a brief visit to No.3 bed on 25th April before continuing eastwards.

Cormorant*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Records were submitted for every month except April, July and August. Most were of single-figure numbers except for some over-flying birds and a roost on the Mersey Oxbow, below the east bank of No.3 bed where there were peak counts of 32 on 9th January and 39 on 20th October. The WeBS counts recorded 15 across the Reserve in January and February, 29 in September, 15 in October and 31 in November.

Bittern

Amber listed

Botaurus stellaris

The only record this year was of one seen flying on to No.3 bed at dusk on 3rd April.

Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

Two which flew west above the north bank of No.3 bed on 6th October was the first-ever record for Woolston.

Grey Heron

Ardea cinerea

Recorded in small numbers throughout the year, with a maximum of nine on 15th September. Birds which breed in nearby Parr's Wood in Grappenhall regularly feed at the Eyes.

On 6th June one observer reported a Heron killing a fully grown Coot chick which it then attempted to swallow.



Great White Egret

David Bowman

Great White Egret

Ardea alba

Four records were received: one was seen on 21st January, four flew off No.3 bed on 18th August and one attempted to land on No.1 bed the following day before continuing to the south. Finally, on 1st October, one was photographed catching small fish in front of the Morgan Hide.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Remains a scarce visitor to Woolston, with singles reported in May, August, September and November.



Little Egret

David Bowman

Osprey

Amber listed

Pandion haliaetus

There were two sightings of what has become an annual but infrequent visitor, usually seen on passage. On 29th April one was reported flying towards the Reserve from the west and, on 1st September, one flew south over No.3 bed "at great height".

Sparrowhawk

Accipiter nisus

This common resident was reported throughout the year with most records relating to one or two individuals. Although most sightings were from No.3 bed, there were records from all areas of the Reserve. On 3rd January two were seen hunting the Starling roost on No.3 bed and there were also several sightings at or near the feeders, no doubt on the lookout for an easy meal. Display was observed on No.4 bed on 6th February and over the north bank of No.3 bed on 24th March. Breeding was not confirmed but it is possible that a pair bred on the north bank of No.3 bed. A juvenile was seen on 2nd and 9th September and on the latter date it was perched on the John Morgan Hide feeders.

The Migration Watch on 12th September produced a total of 11 but some of these would have been at a distance from the Reserve itself. Three were present on 17th September whilst, on 31st October, a male and two females were on No.3 bed. Three were also on No.3 bed on 10th November; two males and a female which nearly caught a Grey Wagtail on the scrape. The year ended with one on the new wetland area on 26th November and a juvenile male on No.3 bed on 17th December.

The ringing teams reported a poor year. No new birds were ringed on No.1 bed, the only capture being a second-year male on 6th January. On No.3 bed two were ringed (both males), one on 17th October and the second on 9th November.

Marsh Harrier

Circus aeruginosus

Amber listed

This regular visitor always adds extra excitement to a visit to the Reserve. This year there were 85 sightings, from January to April and from August to the year end. The first was on No.3 bed on 10th January and a female and an immature bird were present on the 18th. Regular reports followed until the end of April with up to two seen and variously described as two females or a female and an immature bird. The next record was on 22nd August and a female or a juvenile were regular until 2nd September when two were on No.3 bed. There was then a gap until 29th September from when a female was reported regularly until 19th October. From 24th November to 24th December a female was regular, again on No.3 bed. Whilst most records were from No.3 bed there were four sightings from No.1 bed and two from No.4 bed, including one over the new wetland area on 25th August. All the records were, typically, of females or juveniles.

Hen Harrier

Circus cyaneus

Red listed

There was just one record of this now endangered species when a "ringtail" was seen hunting the Starling roost on No.3 bed on 3rd January.

Red Kite

Milvus milvus

As this species continues to expand its range, we would expect to receive more reports and this was the case this year with a record five sightings, all but two from No.3 bed. One passed over at great height on 16th April and there were two May records. One flew in from the north-east on the 12th and carried on westwards, and on the 18th one flew low to the north over No.2 bed. On 23rd July one was seen soaring in front of the John Morgan Hide before leaving to the west. The last report was of one over No.1 bed on 10th November.

Buzzard

Buteo buteo

With well over a hundred reports submitted this was the most recorded raptor at Woolston. Although present throughout the year, they were scarcer in June with just two sightings. The year began with two calling loudly over No.4 bed on 3rd January. Display was noted on 29th January and 12th February over No.1 bed and a Reserve-wide total of ten on 8th February was the highest count during the first

two months of the year. Further display was observed over No.4 bed on 26th February and over No.3 bed on 3rd March. Later that month 15 were seen moving south in small groups over No.1 bed. No less than three pairs were seen displaying on 26th March, and on 16th April one was seen carrying prey into suitable nesting habitat on the north bank of No.3 bed. A nest was found on No.4 bed, but no concrete evidence of successful breeding was submitted. The usual reduction in sightings during May and June was followed by an upturn from mid-July onwards. Autumn saw counts of eight over No.1 bed on 2nd September and 7th October, while four were over No.3 bed and five over No.1 bed later that month. A total of 15 was seen during the Migration Watch on 12th September. No more than two were reported during November and December. It seems likely that at least one pair bred, but a lack of confirmation was unusual.



Buzzard

David Bowman

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

In both winter periods one was observed on No.3 bed usually at dawn when it could be seen roosting under the John Morgan hide. The only sighting away from No.3 bed was of one on 5th March on No.1 bed. Barn Owls have bred on No.1 bed in recent years but there was no evidence of breeding this year.

Tawny Owl*Strix aluco**Amber listed*

Tawny Owls were regularly heard calling on No.3 bed throughout the year and a pair bred in a Kestrel nest box raising one young. A single bird was regularly heard calling on No.1 bed from September onwards although there was no evidence of breeding on this bed. No records were received from No.2 and 4 beds although this may be due to the lack of coverage.

Two were ringed during the year both on No.3 bed. There have only ever been 16 ringed previously at Woolston so these two were very welcome. The first was an adult male (hatched in 2018) in early January and the second, on 21st May, was the fluffy youngster whose parents had occupied the Kestrel box.

Long-eared Owl*Asio otus*

Although there is no evidence of Long-eared Owls breeding on the Reserve it is encouraging that they were heard calling from south of the Ship Canal by No.2 bed in spring and may well have bred in that area. On at least one occasion an adult was observed flying over the Canal onto No.2 bed. No other records were received.

Kingfisher*Alcedo atthis**Amber listed*

There were almost daily sightings of Kingfishers from No.3 bed, mainly from the footbridge over the Oxbow and in the summer months from the John Morgan hide where they used the electric fence posts as fishing perches. Although Kingfishers do not breed on the beds, they do breed on the adjacent Ship Canal and River Mersey. This year an adult was seen sitting next to a suitable nest hole on the Canal bank by No.1 bed. There were also thought to be two pairs breeding along the River Mersey upstream of Woolston Weir, one on the bank of No.2 bed and another by Butchersfield Tip.

On No.1 bed only two were ringed the lowest total since 2015, both juveniles, on 14th August and 21st September.

Five were caught on No.3 bed in the usual net set for Green Sandpipers. They were all juveniles ringed between 26th July and 8th August.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker*Dryobates minor**Red listed*

Although always a scarce bird on the Reserve, in most years there are usually several sightings, and it is thought there must be a small breeding population in the Lymm area. Disappointingly, this year there were no sightings. Hopefully, this is due to lack of observer coverage due to COVID restrictions, rather than a total absence in the surrounding area.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos major

Great Spotted Woodpeckers are a common sight and sound on the Reserve and are frequent visitors to the John Morgan Hide feeders on No.3 bed. They were observed throughout the year with a maximum count of four on both No.3 and 4 beds. Display and drumming were noted on No.3 and 4 beds and it is thought likely breeding occurs on all four beds.

The ringing team on No.1 bed had an average year for this species with five ringed, the first adult on 5th February and the first juvenile on 15th June. Just one was retrapped from the previous year and none were caught in breeding condition.

On No.3 bed 13 were ringed during the year. One was a female hatched in 2019, all the others were juvenile birds. This is the same total as last year and slightly above the average of 10.4 new birds per year. Five were retrapped from 2019.

Green Woodpecker

Picus viridis

Green Woodpeckers favour the eastern end of the Reserve and are thought to breed in the surrounding areas of Rixton and Lymm. Fifteen sightings, spread throughout the year, of singles were received from No.1 Bed/ Bollin Point. The only other record was of one flying across the north meadow of No.3 bed on 27th August.

Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Amber listed

It was encouraging to receive records for every month of the year for a species that has declined in recent years at Woolston, possibly due to changes in habitat. At least one pair was resident and a female was seen in a nest box on No.3 bed on 29th February. Both birds were seen nearby on 24th March. There were also reports from Nos.1 and 4 beds with one or two seen on a number of occasions throughout the year. On 26th May a male was seen carrying prey onto No.2 bed and on the 30th a pair with two young was in a nest box on No.2 bed. The young fledged successfully and were observed with the adults perched near the nest site on 27th June. During July a female and two juveniles were seen over No.3 bed. It is uncertain whether these were the birds originating from the No.2 bed nest site or those which may have nested on No.3 bed. It could well be that two pairs bred which would be the best outcome since 2011. Two were on No.4 bed on 25th July and from then until the year end no more than two were seen apart from the migration watch on 12th September when three were present.



Kestrel

David Bowman

Merlin

Falco columbarius

Red listed

This small falcon has been reported more frequently in recent years and nine records were received from both winter periods. The three early sightings were of singles on No.3 bed on 21st, 22nd January and 8th February. The next record was on 13th October when a female disturbed a flock of Meadow Pipits in the new wetland area of No.4 bed. One was on No.3 bed on 19th October and five days later an adult male scattered Greenfinches near the John Morgan Hide before leaving to the south. The three remaining sightings were a female on the new wetland on 5th November, one flying low over No.3 bed on 19th November and one flying north at dusk over No.1 bed on 7th December.

Hobby

Falco subbuteo

This summer visitor was recorded from the end of April to September, mostly from No.3 bed but with some sightings on Nos.1 and 4 beds. There was one April record and two in May, but the majority of the 29 reports were from July to September. Three sightings involved birds hunting Swifts, with one successful catch on 2nd July. Most records were of singles but two were present on five occasions. One attacked a Kestrel on 1st August! The final sighting of a fairly typical year was on 25th September.



Hobby

David Bowman



Juvenile Peregrine with Moorhen

David Bowman

Peregrine*Falco peregrinus*

For the thirteenth successive year a pair bred on the Thelwall Viaduct, producing two young. Peregrines were present throughout the year with most records from Nos.1 and 2 beds, although the juveniles were often seen hunting on No.3 bed. The resident pair was seen at the nest site as early as 11th January and the male was observed hunting on No.3 bed in March and May. On 16th May the female was brooding young and two large chicks were seen in the nest on 6th June. The young were described as "almost fully grown" on 10th June and by July were free flying. On 14th July a juvenile caught a Black-headed Gull in front of the John Morgan Hide. Potential victims included Lapwing, Wood Pigeon and Moorhen, one of the latter species having a remarkable escape after being attacked by a juvenile. Having captured the Moorhen, the Peregrine was mobbed by a Buzzard and a Sparrowhawk, and whilst it left its victim to fend off these attackers the Moorhen miraculously recovered and made its escape. On other occasions birds were seen chasing Feral Pigeons under the Viaduct and taking Starlings from a roost on No.3 bed.

Jay*Garrulus glandarius*

Small numbers are resident on all four beds. Maximum counts were one on No.1 and No.2 beds, eight on No.3 bed and four on No.4 bed. There was no noticeable arrival of birds in the autumn as is the case in some years.

The ringers on No.1 bed ringed four, a typical total; the first of the year was a juvenile on 29th July and none were caught in breeding condition.

On No.3 bed just one was ringed during the year. This is the lowest total since 2005 when also one was ringed. The average is 9.9 new birds per year. This year's bird was a juvenile ringed on 12th September.

Magpie*Pica pica*

A common species on all four beds. Maximum counts were 31 on the new No.4 bed wetland on 21st December and 25 on the north bank of No.3 bed on 5th November. The Common Bird Census recorded five on No.1 bed, four on No.2 bed and eight on No.4 bed, all in suitable breeding habitat.

On No.3 bed five were ringed during the year, four of which were juveniles. The last was an adult ringed in November that was caught in a trap set for Moorhens.

Jackdaw*Corvus monedula*

Jackdaws do not breed on the Eyes but are frequently seen over-flying and on the surrounding farmland at the eastern end of the Reserve. Maximum counts included 300 seen during a Migration Watch on No.1 bed on 28th November, 212 in fields to the south of Butchersfield Tip on 11th November, 36 over-flying No.1 bed on 28th October and 30 flying east over No.3 bed on 31st October.

Rook*Corvus frugilegus*

Rooks do not breed on the Reserve and are a relatively uncommon sight with only nine reports this year, all over-flying No.1 or No.3 beds. The highest count was of three overflying No.3 bed on 29th February. All other reports were of singles.

Carrion Crow*Corvus corone*

A common resident breeding species which is thought to breed on all four beds. During the Common Bird Surveys, four were noted on No.1 bed, two on No.2 bed and 21 on No.4 bed (the latter count included birds along the Canal track. As is typical the largest numbers were observed during the autumn and winter months with 40 on the new wetland area on No.4 bed on 14th January, 96 on No.1 bed on 12th September and 50 at Butchersfield Tip on 14th October.

Raven*Corvus corax*

Once an uncommon species, Ravens are now regularly seen over-flying the Reserve. Most sightings are of one or two and the maximum counts were four over-flying No.1 bed on 1st June, four over No.4 bed on 7th July and nine seen during a Migration Watch from No.1 bed on 12th September. They are known to breed on the nearby Woolston Park and this breeding pair and their young probably account for most sightings on No.3 and No.4 beds. In addition, regular sightings on No.1 bed suggest the presence of other local breeding pairs.

Coal Tit*Periparus ater*

In the autumn and winter periods, Coal Tits are a frequent sight and sound particularly along the south bank of No.3 bed and at the Sybil Hogg feeding station. The maximum count was three at these feeders on 29th September. In the spring and early summer periods, however, they are much scarcer and on No.3 bed there were no reported sightings. Although they breed in surrounding areas the only area on the Reserve where they are thought to breed is Butchersfield Tip.

For the ringers on No.1 bed, it was the fifth best year since 1995 with 15 ringed, a further three overwintering birds were caught in the early part of the year, with a new one also caught on 27th January. Juveniles were caught from 17th June and are probably locally bred, possibly from Butchersfield. After 27th June none were caught until 11th September, possibly dispersing young from further afield, the last of the year was on 4th November.

On No.3 bed it was also an above average year with eight ringed, compared with an average of just 3.3, one of which was an adult. The first juvenile was ringed on 13th August, which is typical as we then get dispersal from other sites, rather than those that are breeding on the bed.



Willow Tit

David Bowman

Willow Tit

Red listed

Poecile montanus

Willow Tit holds the title for the UK's fastest declining resident species and their population has suffered a catastrophic decline of 94% since 1970. They are, therefore, seen as one of the key species on the Reserve. It is disappointing, therefore, that they appear to have had a poor year at Woolston.

Despite the lockdown restrictions we were fortunate that Allan Rustell and Mike Lloyd still managed to continue their studies of Willow Tit on the Reserve. A full account of their findings is included towards the end of this Report. In summary Mike found twelve nest sites: two were abandoned, four predated and six presumed successful. The high number of predated nests still gives cause for concern. It is interesting to note that the same territories are used, and often the same nest tree, every year or within a couple of years. Despite the provision of boxes throughout the Reserve, the take-up is low; this year a nest box was successfully used for only the second time.

The population for the Reserve is estimated to be 20-23 pairs. This compares to estimates in previous years of approximately 30 pairs.

The downturn in numbers was also reflected in playback surveys and by the ringing team. As in 2019 the Reserve took part in the BTO Willow Tit survey. It was only possible to do a single survey of

Nos.1, 3 and 4 bed with no return survey. However, the results were disappointing; the number of singing males were: one on No.4 bed, three on No.3 bed and two on No.1 bed.

On No.1 bed the ringing team had the worst year since 1995 when the current ringing programme started, with only six new ringed, with the first juveniles on 22nd June. A further seven were processed that had been ringed in previous years, the oldest was from 23rd June 2014, one was from 2016, one from 2017 with the remainder 2019 juveniles. As with the other tits, none were caught in breeding condition.

On No.3 bed there was a worryingly low total of eight ringed during the year compared with an average of 17. This is the lowest total ever for the ringing team on this bed. One new bird was an adult female that had just finished breeding and the first juvenile was ringed on 24th June. This is not a particularly late date for this species, however, it is three weeks later than in 2019. Seven of those ringed were recently fledged. There were only three different retraps during the year, all of which were originally ringed in 2019.

Let us hope that this year's results are one off and they do not reflect a downturn in the fortune of this important population.

Blue Tit

Cyanistes caeruleus

A common resident on all four beds. The Common Bird Surveys recorded 11 on No.1 bed, 7 on No.3 bed and four on No.4 bed (there was no survey on No.2).

On No.1 bed only 142 were ringed, the lowest number since 2013. As a result of the Reserve closure, however, no nest boxes were checked and hence no pullus ringed. A further 81 individuals were processed, either from previous years, from No.3 bed or from elsewhere in the UK. The oldest of these was from 18th July 2014, others were from 2015 (4), 2016 (4), 2017 (11) and 2018 (13) and the remainder were from 2019. Due to missing the nesting season only three birds were found in breeding condition, all females.

The ringers on No.3 bed fared better and had an above average year with 260 ringed against an average is 193. Out of the 260 ringed 49 were raised in the nest boxes, 150 were juveniles, 81 of these had recently fledged and were therefore very likely to have been hatched locally, in natural sites on or around the bed. There were retraps from the following years: 2019 (39), 2018 (16), 2017 (3), 2015 (1) and 2014 (2).

Great Tit

Parus major

Similar to Blue Tit, this species is a common breeding resident. The Common Bird Survey recorded eight on No.1 bed and three on No.3 bed, all in suitable breeding habitat.

Only 64 were ringed on No.1 bed. As with Blue Tit, no nest boxes were checked during the spring because of Reserve closure. A further 78 were caught that were already ringed, the oldest was from 24th November 2012. Others were from 2014 (2), 2017 (7) and 2018 (17) with the remainder from 2019. None were caught in breeding condition.

On No.3 bed it was an above average year with 236 ringed. The average is 191.5. Out of the 236 ringed 85 were ringed in the nest boxes, 197 were juveniles, 62 of these recently fledged and therefore very likely to have been hatched locally in natural sites on or around the bed. There were retraps from the following years: 2019 (42), 2018 (8), 2017 (3), 2016 (3), and 2015 (2).

Bearded Tit

Panurus biarmicus

Two were heard in the reedbed alongside the north bank of No.3 bed on 6th March and again from the east bank on the 16th and 20th. Whether these were the same ones that were present on the bed in October 2019 is unknown. Unfortunately, there were no further sightings after 20th March and breeding would not appear to have been attempted.

Skylark

Alauda arvensis

Red listed

It is pleasing that Skylarks appear to have re-established themselves as a breeding species on the Reserve. Five singing males were seen over No.1 bed on 5th March and thereafter two birds were regularly singing in the area over the spring and summer.

In the autumn small numbers were regularly seen over-flying No.1 and No.3 beds. The highest counts were from No.1 bed in October with 40 on the 19th, 30 on the 21st and 20 on the 28th; all counts of birds flying south.

Sand Martin

Riparia riparia

The first spring arrivals were on 16th March, a typical date, when a party of three followed by two singles flew through No.3 bed. During the remainder of March there were regular sightings, but numbers remained in single figures. It was not until early April that numbers began to increase; 21 moved through No.3 on the 4th, 70 on the 18th and on the 28th 220 arrived in groups over the morning, feeding briefly before carrying on northwards. On the 30th, 50 were seen leaving a dawn roost and 460 more flew through during the morning. Double figure counts were regular in May and early June but by mid-June numbers reduced and the maximum count over the summer months was 17 on 7th July. Sand Martins traditionally breed in the sandy banks of the Ship Canal but numbers in these colonies have fallen in recent years. In 2020 only three were seen around a probable breeding site on the Ship Canal bank alongside No.1 bed.

In the autumn there were no large counts, the maximum was 10 on 29th August feeding over No.3 bed with up to 40 House Martins. The final sighting was two over No.1 bed on 11th September.

None were ringed on No.1 bed and on No.3 bed just two were ringed during the summer.

Swallow

Hirundo rustica

The first record was on 28th March with two on No.3 bed. For the remainder of March and early April birds continued to arrive in small numbers. The first significant count was of 30 on 18th April on No.3 bed and the maximum count during the spring was on 28th April when 57 passed through No.3 bed in small numbers over the morning.

In the summer pairs were seen around the New Pumphouse by No.2 bed and the Thelwall Viaduct. Breeding is presumed to have occurred at these traditional nesting sites.

Return passage started in mid-August. Peak counts were 80 flying south on 19th August and 109 on 2nd September. Small numbers continued to pass through in mid-September and October. The final sighting was on the fairly late date of 26th October when one moved through No.3 bed.

On No.1 bed for the second successive year, no roost formed on the bed, consequently, it was the first year since 1995 that none were ringed.

On No.3 bed only 7 new birds were ringed during the year. The average is 181. There were very few birds roosting on the bed hence the small number ringed. Most of those were caught leaving the reedbed in the mornings, between 29th July and 30th August.

House Martin

Delichon urbicum

Amber listed

The first sighting of the spring was from No.1 bed where two were seen on 7th April. However, there were no further sightings until 14th April when six were on No.3 bed. The first significant numbers were on 18th April when 42 passed through No.3 bed and the maximum count in April was 65 on the 30th. They continued to arrive throughout May and early June with a peak count of 70 on the 6th June.

Breeding colonies on the surrounding housing estates have declined in recent years and this is reflected in most counts over the summer period on No.3 bed being in single figures. On No.4 bed, however, 60 were feeding low above a big area of Giant Hogweed on 9th July and it is thought that there may be a colony around the industrial estates north of this bed.

Return passage appeared to start early; thirty were seen flying south over No.3 bed on 30th July and in August double-figure counts were regular, with 60 on 4th August, 22 on the 25th and 25 on the 30th. In September, peak counts were 162 passing over No.1 bed on the 4th, 100 feeding over the new wetland on No.4 bed on the 5th and 150 flying south over No.1 bed on the 11th. The last sighting was of 30 over the No.4 wetland on 6th September.

Cetti's Warbler

Cettia cetti

This resident warbler is present across all four beds. From January, singing males were regularly recorded on Nos.3 and 4 beds and the first breeding bird survey of the year on 7th March produced a count of 12 males on territory on Nos.2, 3 and 4 beds. Further double-digit counts followed in March, April, May and October with the highest, a count of 13, on No.3 bed on 11th April. Unfortunately,

there was little evidence of presence on the eastern side of the Reserve. On No.1 bed only three sightings, probably of the same male, were reported from January to September.

The ringing records portrayed a similar contrast in numbers. No.3 bed had a record year with 27 ringed, an encouraging total given that the number ringed on the whole Reserve was 28 in 2019. No.1 bed, however, had the lowest annual number ringed, since the bed was colonised in 2014, with just two ringed and two recaptured, both of which originated from No.3 bed. These four captures occurred between 9th September and 14th October representing birds moving through and not, as expected residents. The first juveniles were ringed on 1st July on No.3 bed. On that date, six from two broods were ringed and a total of 17 of the 27 ringed were juveniles. Two were recaptured from previous years, one from 2017 and one from 2014.



Cetti's Warbler

David Bowman

Long-tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus

A resident which is widespread on the Reserve. Gregarious outside of the breeding season, encounters with feeding flocks result in higher survey counts. The highest counts were of 20 on two dates in September on No.3 bed and 14 on 28th September and 11th December on No.1 bed. The Migration Watches from Butchersfield recorded seven on 10th October and 13 on 28th November.

The ringers processed 153 individuals this year, 108 ringed and 45 recaptured from previous years ringing. The recaptures were from the following original ringing years: one from 2013, two from 2014, one from 2015, three from 2016, three from 2017, eight from 2018 and 27 from 2019. The first juvenile was ringed on 25th May on No.3 bed, one of only 13 juveniles caught on the bed, a low number for the species. This coupled with just 34 ringed was roughly half the ten-year average and may indicate the species had a poor year on No.3 bed. A ringing total of 74 represented an average year for No.1 bed.

Yellow-browed Warbler

Phylloscopus inornatus

A scarce autumn migrant to the Reserve, one was reported calling around the centre of No.3 bed on 19th October. This encounter followed one being caught and ringed in the reed-bed on the same bed on 11th October. This was the second to be ringed on the bed, with the first coming on a similar date, 21st October, in 2018.

Willow Warbler

Phylloscopus trochilus

Amber listed

A common breeding summer migrant. The first spring record of seven singing males, came on 7th April from No.1 bed. The same bed recorded the highest count of the year with 31 on 18th April, a conservative number as many were moving through but silent in rainy conditions. May records included 12 on No.1 bed, seven of which were singing males, on the 2nd and 12 singing males on No.4 bed on the 25th. These were the second highest ever counts from breeding Bird Surveys on the respective beds. The last sighting was of a one on No.3 bed on 12th September.

It was a mixed year for the ringing teams. A total of 102 ringed and three recaptured birds on No.1 bed was about average but just 24 ringed on No.3 bed was the lowest annual total for 14 years. The cessation of ringing, during the Covid lockdown, in the prime arrival period had an impact on numbers, more heavily on No.3 bed. Of the 23 caught in breeding condition on No.1 bed, 15 were females and eight males, with the first juvenile ringed on the early date of 8th June. In contrast, the first Willow Warbler on No.3 bed was not ringed until 17th July, with the first juvenile two days later, almost six weeks after No.1 bed's. The final capture of the year was on 12th September.

Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus collybita

A common breeding summer migrant which occasionally overwinters. There were five reports in January and two in February, on the 7th and the 18th. The first probable returning migrant was a singing male on No.4 bed on 8th March. Eleven days later on the 19th a Reserve-wide count of 48 was made. On 18th April a survey of No.1 bed identified a recent fall of birds with 83 singing or calling. Multiple trees held small flocks, including silent birds so the recorded total was almost certainly an undercount of the actual number present. Breeding Bird Surveys for singing males in May produced counts of 32 on No.1 on the 2nd, 30 on No.4 on the 8th, 18 on No.3 on the 21st and 15 on No.2 on the 23rd. The last migrant was noted on 13th October but five reports of singles, all from No.3 bed, were received after this date from 23rd November to 7th December, either the same bird or different individuals which were probably overwintering.

A total of 494 Chiffchaffs was ringed during the year, an average 278 on No.1 bed and an above average 216 on No.3 bed. A further ten were recaptured from previous years ringing, the oldest on 28th September 2016. The recapture number was lower than average, a reflection of the stoppage of ringing in the spring arrival and passage period. The first juvenile was ringed on 26th May, the earliest recorded date on No.3 bed and 1st June on No.1 bed. Over three quarters of the juveniles ringed on No.3 bed were recently fledged, which suggest they hatched locally. Both beds processed overwintering birds in December.



Chiffchaff

David Bowman



Sedge Warbler

David Bowman

Sedge Warbler

Acrocephalus schoenobaenus

A relatively common breeding summer migrant in suitable habitat. The first spring arrivals were reported on 18th April on both Nos.1 and 3 beds. Only low digit numbers were recorded through the remaining season to mid-September with the peak count of four on No.3 bed on 7th July. The final sightings were from No.3 bed on the 5th, 12th and 10th September.

A Reserve total of 94 Sedge Warbler was ringed. Nine was the poorest total for 25 years on No.1 bed. while an above average 85 were ringed on No.3 bed. The first captures were not until the late date of 1st June after ringing recommenced in late May. Almost 90% of the birds ringed on No.3 bed were juveniles, the first on 2nd July, resulting in just eight adults captured. The last one ringed was on 19th September on No.3 bed.



Reed Warbler

David Bowman

Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus scirpaceus

A common breeding summer migrant on all four beds. The first report was of a singing male on No.3 bed on 11th April. Maximum counts were recorded in the May Breeding Bird Surveys of singing males: seven on No.1 bed on the 2nd, 30 on No.3 bed on the 21st and ten on No.4 bed on the 26th. The last sightings were in September with 15 on both the 15th and 19th and two on the 29th.

A total of 456 was ringed, an average annual number, with 146 on No.1 bed and 310 on No.3 bed. Forty-four of the No.1 bed captures were in breeding condition, 19 females and 25 males. The first

juvenile was ringed on 16th June on No.3 bed, the earliest date for five years. Just over 90% (285) of the No.3 bed ringed birds were juveniles of which, just under 80% (225) were recently fledged and therefore likely to be locally hatched. The final captures of the year were, typically, in September, on the 18th on No.1 bed and the 26th on No.3 bed.

Grasshopper Warbler

Locustella naevia

Red listed

A scarce breeding summer migrant, erratic in both numbers and distribution across the Reserve. Fifteen records were received this year, compared with just four in 2019. All the reports were from No.3 bed and all of males ‘reeling’ from 8th June to 18th July. Five of these related to a reeling male close to the centre path or centre of the bed. Ten of the records submitted did not report the location on the bed so it is uncertain how many individuals might have been present.

After the blank year in 2019 four birds were ringed, again all on No.3 bed. The first two were adult males on the 8th and 16th June. Two adults were caught together in the reed-bed on 23rd August but it was not possible to determine the sex of either.

Blackcap

Sylvia atricapilla

A common breeding summer migrant which occasionally winters across the Reserve. Two overwintering individuals were seen on No.3 bed on 21st January but the first returning migrants were two singing males, on 26th March. The highest count of the year was on No.1 bed on 18th April with 51 recorded, most being concentrated on Butchersfield’s bramble slopes and in the willow scrub adjacent to Thelwall Viaduct. Breeding Bird Surveys of singing males in May recorded: 17 on No.1 bed on the 2nd, 23 on No.3 bed on the 21st, 29 on No.2 bed on the 23rd, 43 on No.4 bed, including the Canal track, on the 26th and ten at Bollin Point on the 30th. The last sighting was of 25 feeding on Elderberries around No.3 bed on 3rd September.

A total of 575 was ringed and 11 were recaptured from previous years, six from 2018 and five from 2019. The first juvenile was caught on 2nd June, a typical date. Just over 63% (213) of those ringed on No.3 bed were recently fledged juveniles suggesting they were locally hatched. No.1 bed caught 22 in breeding condition, 14 females and eight males. The last capture was on 7th October.

Garden Warbler

Sylvia borin

A breeding summer migrant, relatively uncommon and secretive. There were 15 records from May to July from all four beds and from the extreme eastern end of the Reserve at Bollin Point. The first sightings were on 2nd May on No.3 bed, with a male in song on the west bank and five, three of which were feeding in brambles, on Butchersfield Tip. Four singing males were observed on No.4 bed on 8th May, with another four on No.2 bed on 23rd May and three on No.1 bed on 6th June. One or two males in song continued to be reported in June and July until the last sighting, a juvenile on the Canal track, on 31st July.

It was a close to average year for the number ringed on the Reserve with a total of 34. The first was ringed on 8th June on No.1 bed, one of 21 ringed on that bed. Only three of that number were caught in breeding condition, two males and a female. All 13 ringed on No.3 bed were juveniles, eight of which were recently fledged and probably locally hatched. The last captures were made in August, on the 19th and the 23rd on Nos.1 and 3 beds respectively.

Lesser Whitethroat

Sylvia curruca

A scarce breeding summer migrant. There were records from three of the four beds and additionally from the eastern extremity at Bollin Point. The first, a singing male, was from the bank of Butchersfield Tip on 2nd May. Six days later the second, third and fourth records followed from No.4 bed of two males in song on the north bank and of one on the west bank on 8th May. Another was in song on the Canal track on 9th May and reported again on a breeding bird survey on 26th May, when a single male was also on No.4 bed. No.3 bed turned up its own singing male on 27th May and the Bollin Point male was reported again on 30th May and 9th June, which was the last sighting of the year.

Three Lesser Whitethroat were ringed this year, an average number for the Reserve. An adult female with a brood patch on No.1 bed on 17th July and two juveniles on the 10th and 20th July on No.3 bed.

Whitethroat

Sylvia communis

A common breeding summer migrant across the whole Reserve. The first arrival was reported on 11th April on No.3 bed with two males in song. Breeding Bird Surveys in May provided the highest counts of the year: six on No.1 bed on the 2nd, 27 on No.4 bed on the 8th, six on No.3 bed on the 18th and six on No.2 bed on the 23rd. A second survey of No.4 bed and the Canal track on 26th May reported 35, the highest count of the year. The last sighting was of ten on No.3 bed on 7th July.

A total of 93 Whitethroats was ringed. Just seven of these were from No.1 bed, the lowest number for 25 years, compared with the bed's highest total of 130 ringed in 2006. In contrast, the 86 ringed on No.3 bed was close to 30% above their ten-year average number. The first juvenile was ringed on 16th June and the last of the year on 30th August. Only one was recaptured from previous years and it had been ringed in 2018.

Goldcrest

Regulus regulus

A common species, present throughout the year but seldom seen in numbers. From the first record on 3rd January throughout the remaining first winter period just singles were reported except for eight dates when two were sighted. Spring started with a singing male on 23rd March on No.3 bed. Song was also noted on No.1 bed and Butchersfield Tip in April and May and at Bollin Point on 30th May. Numbers recorded also increased slightly over the summer and autumn with five reported on No.3 bed on 12th September and three on Nos.2 and 3 beds in November. Throughout December counts of two, three and four were reported on multiple dates.

A total of 164 was ringed on the Reserve, 127 on No.1 bed and 37 on No.3 bed. The ten-year capture average for No.3 bed is 44 birds. Whilst the No.1 bed total may appear high, it was a comparatively

poor year with the lowest annual total since 2015, though still the sixth highest since 1995. Historically the ringers have not concentrated on catching Goldcrests during the summer months. This strategy has changed recently, since it has been noticed that numbers of juveniles pass through the Reserve during this period. Juveniles started to pass through No.1 bed from 17th June and from 1st July on No.3 bed. Of the 37 ringed on No.3 bed 25 were juveniles, of which ten were recently fledged indicating local breeding. A second, heavier passage occurs from September. It has always been assumed that Goldcrests move quickly through the Reserve but on No.1 bed three stayed for at least two months. The last one of the year was caught on 11th December.

Wren

Troglodytes troglodytes

A common resident across the Reserve. Typically, the highest counts occur for singing males during the breeding Bird Surveys in the spring. This year these were: 14 on No.1 bed on the 5th March, 32 on No.3 bed on 21st May, 28 on No.2 bed on 23rd May, 69 on No.4 bed and the Canal track on 26th May and 18 at Bollin Point on 30th May. The autumn Migration Watch from the top of Butchersfield recorded 21 over the morning of 28th November.

In total 127 Wrens were ringed on the Reserve, 32 on No.1 bed (the lowest number since 1995) and 95 on No.3 bed, an average annual total. Additionally, 20 were recaptured from previous years as follows: one from 2015, one from 2016, three from 2017, five from 2018 and ten from 2019. The first juvenile was ringed on the typical date of 9th June. A fraction over 87% of the 95 ringed on No.3 bed were juveniles and 86% (72 in total) were recently fledged and therefore judged likely to have been hatched locally.



Wren

David Bowman

Nuthatch*Sitta europaea*

A regular breeding species to the north and south of the Reserve but an infrequently recorded visitor on the Reserve. There were 16 records this year, nine in the winter months as the birds took advantage of the feeding stations and five over the summer period. All reports were of singles except on the 6th and 22nd January when two were observed on No.1 and No.3 beds respectively. Four sightings over the summer were all from No.3 bed, on the 8th and 9th June, 30th August and 12th September.

A single Nuthatch was ringed this year on No.1 bed, the twelfth for the bed, a juvenile caught on 8th June.

Treecreeper*Certhia familiaris*

A resident species in the surrounding district and regularly reported on the Reserve. Twenty-four records were received, all from No.3 bed except for a single male in song on No.1 bed on 7th April. The majority of sightings were of singles however, there were four reports of two, one in September and three in December.

Nineteen were ringed in the year, 12 on No.1 bed and seven on No.3 bed, both close to average annual totals. An adult male was ringed on No.3 bed in breeding condition on 8th June and a female in breeding condition was recaptured, originally ringed in 2019, on No.1 bed. A second individual ringed in 2019 was recaptured on No.3 bed. Seventeen of the 19 ringed were juveniles, the first on 22nd June.

Starling*Sturnus vulgaris**Red listed*

The year started with a significant roost of 100,000 birds seen leaving No.1 bed on the morning of 3rd January. Observation of the formation and murmuration of the roost on the evening of the 7th reported the number present as 50,000. There were no further reports of a roost on No.1 bed thereafter but 8,000 were seen leaving No.3 bed on the morning of the 16th. This roost increased to ca. 20,000 birds on the 17th but had dropped to ca. 10,000 by the 24th. Apart from a small roost of 3,000 observed leaving No.3 bed on 8th February all remaining records up to the autumn consisted of small low digit groups over-flying the Reserve. A small roost started in October on No.3 bed and was generally maintained but did not exceed a high of 600 birds, recorded on 17th December. The Migration Watches from Butchersfield Tip recorded 175 during the morning of 28th November and 1,145 over the morning of 19th December. A smaller roost of 200 birds was also observed leaving No.4 bed on the morning of 23rd December.

Blackbird*Turdus merula*

A very common resident species. Significant records include: ten on No.1 bed, one singing male and nine in suitable breeding habitat on 5th March, 16 on No.3 bed on 19th March, 13 on No.2 bed, four singing males, three pairs and three carrying food on 23rd May, 34 on No.4 bed and the Canal track on

26th May, 25 in song and nine in suitable breeding habitat. The highest count of the year was of 50 on No.3 bed on 27th October, indicative of a noticeable arrival of migrant birds.

It was a below average annual total for both ringing teams with just 54 new ringed and 13 recaptured from previous years. The oldest recapture was originally ringed in 2014. The first juveniles were ringed on 25th May on No.1 bed and 7th July on No.3 bed. Five were caught in breeding condition on No.1 bed, three males and two females. No.3 bed had nine recently fledged juveniles, considered locally hatched, the last on 11th October, which is considered a late date.

Fieldfare

Turdus pilaris

Red listed

A common widespread winter migrant. The high counts at the start of the year in January were an estimated 200 recorded on No.4 bed on 29th January and 80 on No.1 bed on 21st March. Only two more reports were received after this date, both of nine on No.3 bed on the 24th and the last on 29th March. The first autumn migrants were two on No.3 bed and three on No.1 bed on 13th October. By mid-October numbers had increased with high counts of 50 and 86, followed by the highest count of the year, 245, on 27th October. Numbers continued to be reported with the most significant being 100 on 3rd November and 115 on 21st November. Thereafter, flock sizes reduced and generally low digit numbers were reported until the last of the year when 85 were counted on No.4 bed on 20th December.

Redwing

Turdus iliacus

Red listed

A common winter migrant on the Reserve.. The first winter period started with a report of 170 on 2nd January followed by the highest winter count of 300 on the following day. From then on, with the exception of 150 reported on 3rd March, numbers remained below 100 until the last sightings of 15 on 26th March on No.3 bed. The first autumn arrivals were reported on 29th September with 15 on No.3 bed. The number of sightings and flock sizes then quickly grew in October with 110 on the 13th, 500 on the 14th and 320 on 20th October. In addition, a further four flocks of around 100 moved through between 13th October and 7th November. Thereafter, flock sizes reduced from a maximum of 70 down to singles until the end of the year.

A total of 66 Redwings was ringed this year, 23 on No.1 bed and 43 on No.3 bed. The No.1 bed total was the lowest since the new lures were introduced in 2013, whereas the highest annual catch prior to that year was just six. The last capture of the first the winter period was two on 27th January and the first capture in the autumn was on 14th October.

Song Thrush

Turdus philomelos

Red listed

A common resident species. Many single digit counts were made throughout the year. Of note were totals of 20 on the 5th and 15 on 27th February for the whole Reserve, and of ten on No.4 bed on 14th February. Breeding Bird Surveys produced the following counts of singing males: six on No.1 bed on 5th March, six on No.3 bed on 11th March, four on No.2 bed on 23rd May and five at Bollin Point on

30th May. Eleven were noted on the west bank of No.3 bed on 27th October, a possible arrival of migrants.

A disappointing ringing year with just 25 ringed and three recaptured from previous years. The five ringed on No.1 bed was the lowest annual total since 1997. No.3 bed team fared better with only a 20% reduction from their ten-year average. The first juvenile was ringed on 29th May, the only one caught on No.1 bed, and 7th June on No.3 bed.

Mistle Thrush

Turdus viscivorus

Red listed

Relatively uncommon on the Reserve but resident in the surrounding countryside. Eleven records were submitted, the first from Bollin Point of three on 11th January. Two singing males were reported in February, one from the centre of No.3 bed and one on the paddocks across the River north of No.4 bed. There were three sightings of one by the No.3 bed car park on the 16th and 19th March, with a male singing there on the 19th. Two were watched flying north over the eastern end of No.1 bed on 16th March and another on 2nd May, flying south. The Migration Watch from Butchersfield Tip recorded five over the morning of 12th September. There were no further reports until late autumn with one on No.3 bed on 5th November and the last one at Bollin Point on 7th December.

Robin

Erithacus rubecula

One of those species which are so common they tend to be under-reported but are included on our common and Breeding Bird Surveys. Twelve records were received, starting on 8th January when 42 were reported as a Reserve total. On 22nd January 121 were counted across the Reserve, with the majority being singing males. Breeding Bird Surveys produced the following counts of singing males: 19 on No.1 bed on 5th March, 22 on No.3 bed on 19th March, 16 on No.2 bed on 23rd May and 35 on No.4 bed and the Canal track on 26th May. The Migration Watch from Butchersfield noted a total of 21 during the morning of 28th November.

A total of 132 Robins was ringed with a further 33 recaptured from previous years. These are below average numbers, due to the enforced lockdowns and resultant reduced ringing effort. The first juveniles were ringed on 26th and 27th May on Nos.3 and 1 beds respectively, which are typical dates. Eight were caught in breeding condition on No.1 bed, while on No.3 bed 47 of the 69 juveniles ringed were sufficiently recently fledged to suggest local hatching. The 33 recaptured Robins were originally ringed as follows: two from 2015, one from 2016, six from 2017, four from 2018 and 18 from 2019.

Stonechat

Saxicola rubicola

A spring and autumn passage visitor with low numbers occurring in most years. There were eleven sightings, although these probably related to seven or eight individuals. The first report was of a male and female on No.4 bed on 26th February. A solitary male was recorded on the same bed on 17th March and another male was located on No.3 bed on the 19th. The last spring visitor was a male on No.3 bed on 2nd April.

Autumn birds started with a male on No.3 bed on 22nd October which was joined by a female on the same day. Reports on the 27th and 31st October were probably repeat sightings of the pair seen on the 22nd.



Stonechat

David Bowman



Wheatear

Daniel Owen

Wheatear

Oenanthe oenanthe

An annual spring and autumn passage visitor in small numbers. There were three sightings this year, two from the spring and a one from the autumn, all of which were considered to be of the Greenland subspecies *leucorhoa*. The first was from No.1 bed on 18th April, with two males on the landfill workings, one of which was in song. A second individual, this time a female, was seen in the same area on 2nd May. The autumn bird was on the cleared area of No.4 bed on 10th September on the new wetland workings.

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus

Red listed

House Sparrows were once abundant but have suffered a worrying decline in recent years. They are a very sedentary species, rarely moving more than a couple of miles from their breeding sites but do wander onto the Reserve occasionally from the housing estates immediately to the north and south. Three were on the south bank of No.3 bed on 4th January, four on No.4 bed on 2nd February and three flew south from No.3 bed the following day. The highest counts from the first quarter of the year came when 10 were on No.2 bed on 12th February and 17 were by the Weir on No.2 bed on 19th March. Six were then by the No.3 bed car park on 26th May. The dense cover by the gate into No.4 bed sometimes holds a small roost and seven were there, also on 26th May. It is unusual to see House Sparrows venturing as far as the centre of No.3 bed, so the sight of singles visiting the Morgan Hide feeders on 23rd June and 11th July was noteworthy. Highest counts from the second half of the year included 12 on No.4 bed on 5th July, with a similar number on the same bed on 13th August, 10 were then by the entrance to No.3 bed on 22nd December and, finally, 12 by the entrance barrier on 29th December.

Dunnock

Prunella modularis

Amber listed

A common widespread resident across all four beds. Ten records were received, most notably from the Breeding Bird Surveys. Fourteen singing males were on No.3 bed on 19th March and 15 on No.2 bed on 23rd May, comprising five singing males, four pairs and two carrying food. Additionally, 14 were reported around No.4 bed on 30th December.

It was a mixed year for the ringing teams despite the joint total of 110 ringed. The 19 ringed on No.1 bed was the lowest annual total since 2013 but the 91 ringed on No.3 bed was 20% above the bed ten-year average. A further 16 were recaptured from previous years, one from 2014, one from 2016, two from 2017, two from 2018 and ten from 2019. Five were caught on No.1 bed in breeding condition, four males and a female. The first juvenile was ringed on 22nd May on No.3 bed, but it was six weeks before No.1 bed also caught one, on 1st July. In total, 88% of the No.3 bed captures were juveniles with over three quarters of those judged to be hatched locally.

Yellow Wagtail*Motacilla flava**Red listed*

This declining migrant wagtail breeds in small numbers on adjacent farmland but remains a scarce visitor to the Reserve. There were no sightings this year.

Grey Wagtail*Motacilla cinerea**Red listed*

This smart wagtail can be seen throughout the year, breeds in small numbers and also occurs on autumn passage. No more than three were seen in the first winter period. Unusually, two were seen leaving a roost with Pied Wagtails in No.3 bed on 15th February. Breeding was suggested by a male in song near Rixton Bridge on 7th April, with a pair there in May and by a pair in suitable habitat under the No.3 bed footbridge, also in May. This latter pair was confirmed as breeding when the adults were observed feeding three young there on 6th June. No more than four were then reported until seven dropped onto the Morgan Hide scrape on 3rd October. Four on No.3 bed on 20th October was the highest count through to year end.

In recent years, the ringing teams have been successfully using tape lures to attract Grey wagtails on autumn passage, though the 13 ringed was the lowest total since 2015. On No.1 bed it was the lowest total since 2013 with four ringed, all were juveniles and were ringed between 31st August and 7th October. On No.3 bed nine juveniles were ringed between 23rd August and 11th October, with many more observed passing over but not responding to the lure.

Pied Wagtail*Motacilla alba*

This, the commonest of our wagtails, is present all year round, breeds occasionally and sometimes forms winter roosts. The ground clearance as part of the construction of the new No.4 bed wetland provided good feeding for the species, with 35 there on 28th January. Ten left a small roost on No.3 bed on 15th February and on 5th March a male was in song on No.1 bed, which was the only early suggestion of breeding. During May a female brought two recently fledged young onto the Morgan Hide scrape, where she was actively feeding them on several dates. It seems likely that they were hatched nearby. The Migration Watches from No.1 bed saw counts of: eight on 12th September, 12 on 10th October and 16 on 28th November, while 19 were feeding on the cleared area of No.4 bed on 21st December.

Meadow Pipit*Anthus pratensis**Amber listed*

Meadow Pipit is a widespread and common breeder, with the densest populations in the northern hills of the UK. A very occasional breeder on the Reserve, it winters in small numbers and a sizeable southward passage in autumn is a regular feature. There were several single-figure counts from the first winter period and the first sign of spring passage was 32 flying north over No.3 bed on 16th March, with 19 also moving north over No.1 bed on the 20th. The Elevated Pools on No.1 bed held 32, on 21st March, feeding in the surrounding seed-rich vegetation. This area also looks promising as

a potential future breeding site. Small numbers continued to pass north over No.1 bed in April, with 14 on the 7th and 11 on the 8th.

Ten, which were feeding around the Elevated Pools on No.1 bed on 11th July, were the first of the autumn, while 290 were counted flying south during the morning's Migration Watch from the same bed on the 12th. The second half of September saw regular southward movements over No.1 bed, with 150 on the 16th, 400 on the 18th and 60 on the 28th. Southerly movements from No.1 bed in October included 100 on the 2nd, 150 on the 5th and 170 during the Migration Watch on the 10th. In addition, the seed rich margins of the new wetland on No.4 bed could be guaranteed to regularly hold smaller numbers with, for example, 15 flushed by a hunting Merlin on 13th October. Passage tailed off in November, with few sightings, until 86 were counted during the Migration Watch from No.1 bed on 19th December and 16 were flushed from the seed crop in No.3 bed on 29th of the month.

September is the peak month for ringing Meadow Pipits and it was deemed a reasonable year, with 49 ringed. The first of 44 was caught on No.1 bed on 4th September and, as usual, the majority moved through in that month. Just four were caught in October, the last being on the 7th. Five juveniles was a better than average total for No.3 bed. All were caught between 5th and 22nd September, which is typical.

Tree Pipit
Red Listed

Anthus trivialis

All records of this declining, migratory pipit came from the two ringing teams. On No.1 bed, after last year's nil return, two juveniles were caught on 14th and 31st August. A single juvenile was also ringed on No.3 bed on 20th August, while another flew from near the same net a few days earlier.

Chaffinch

Fringilla coelebs

Chaffinches are a common, resident breeder, which tend to be sedentary, though our native population is swelled each winter by an influx of visitors from Fennoscandia. There were few records from the first winter period, for obvious reasons, with a maximum of 10 on No.3 bed on 28th January. The only evidence of breeding came from singing males in May, with two on No.3 bed and one on No.2 bed. As a ground-feeding species, dependant on small seeds, they are attracted, in sometimes large flocks, to good feeding sites. On the Reserve this has usually meant the various feeding stations, particularly on No.3 bed and the seed crop on the same bed. This year an additional food source was available, with large amounts of seed-bearing *Persicaria* growing around the margins of the new No.4 bed wetland. Notable counts from the autumn/winter included 40 on No.3 bed on 24th October, with 160 there on 3rd November, declining to 100 by 1st December and then 80 by the 17th of the month. Fifty were also feeding on *Persicaria* seeds on No.4 bed on 26th November, rising to 70 by 21st December.

The 234 ringed was below average. The total from No.1 bed was also slightly below average with 72 ringed, and a further six retrapped from the previous year. The oldest of these was from 7th December 2013, with another from 2015. None was caught in breeding condition and the first juvenile was ringed on 22nd June. On No.3 bed it was also a below average year, with just 155 compared with the average of 185. The first juvenile was ringed on 24th June, a little later than the previous year. In addition, just thirty-eight recently fledged juveniles were ringed during the summer.

Brambling

Fringilla montifringilla

Bramblings are winter visitors, with peak numbers occurring when the Beech mast crop fails in Scandinavia and they are often seen in association with Chaffinches. In recent years they have learned to take advantage of seeds available at feeding stations and, in good years, flocks approaching 100 can be seen visiting the Morgan Hide feeders on No.3 bed. Peak numbers are usually observed in March, as they start to move back to the breeding grounds. Generally, it was a poor year for the species, with just six singles in January, all from No.3 bed. Return passage was first observed on 19th October, when three arrived on No.3 bed. There were 17 more low, single figure counts through to year end, all but one from No.3 bed, the exception being one which was at Bollin Point on 22nd October. The year closed with the year's highest count, of four on No.3 bed on 29th December.

While the curtailment of ringing during lockdown makes comparisons with previous years difficult, the reduction from the 112 ringed in 2019, to just one in the current year, seems to confirm the low numbers present. The one which was ringed was caught on No.1 bed on 17th December and was an adult female. It was the first to be ringed there since 2018.

Bullfinch

Pyrrhula pyrrhula

Amber listed

This most colourful of our native finches is a regular breeder across all four beds and is present in higher numbers than its skulking behaviour would lead you to believe. Although they are sedentary by nature, there is a post-breeding movement towards good feeding areas, including feeding stations. Maxima from the first winter period were all from No.3 bed and included six on 2nd January, 13 on 30th January and eight on 5th February. During the breeding season two were present on No.1 bed, two pairs were on No.2 bed and six pairs around the perimeter of No.3 bed. There was no count from No.4 bed. There were many single-figure counts from the second half of the year, with a maximum of 11 on 1st December.

It was a relatively poor year for ringing, with the 156 being a long way short of the record 442 in 2017. On No.1 bed it was the poorest year since 2004, with just 31 ringed and a further three retrapped, all from the previous two years. Seven were caught in breeding condition, six males and one female, while the first juvenile was ringed on 11th July. On No.3 bed it was a return to near average numbers, with 125 ringed against an average of 120. The first juvenile was ringed on 2nd June, a fairly normal date. Out of the 125 ringed 86 were juveniles, of which 71 had recently fledged and were likely to have been hatched locally.

Greenfinch

Chloris chloris

Despite a recent national decline in numbers, thought to be linked to the spread of the disease trichomonosis, which prevents them from feeding properly, Greenfinch is still the commonest finch on the Reserve. They breed on all four beds and form large flocks in the autumn/winter, attracted to the various feeding stations. Maxima from the first winter period, all from No.3 bed, were: 100 on 2nd January, 60 on 6th February and 80 on the 29th of the month. In addition, 40 were feeding on No.4 bed on 4th January. A limited breeding bird survey found two males in song on No.1 bed and seven on No.4 bed. The usual post-breeding build up was first noted when 30 were at the Morgan Hide feeding

station on 30th June, rising to 110 by 6th August. More than 100 were then present on an almost daily basis, through to year end, with maxima of: 110 on 6th October, 150 on 24th October and 145 on 29th December. A more realistic feel for the numbers passing through the Reserve can be gained via the ringing data, with more than a thousand ringed in some years.

Ringing, this year, however, was somewhat curtailed for obvious reasons. The 617 ringed was the lowest total since 2015 and on No.1 bed it was the worst year since 1995 with only 78 ringed. This was the first time that Chaffinch has outnumbered Greenfinch, in terms of numbers ringed on the bed. A further 10 were caught that had previously been ringed, nine of which were from No.3 bed and one was from elsewhere in the UK. Remarkably, none was retrapped having been previously ringed on the bed. Just one female was caught in breeding condition and the first juveniles were ringed on 17th June. Similarly, on No.3 bed, 529 was the lowest total since 2016, though still above the average of 351. The first juvenile was ringed on 22nd May which is about the usual date. Interestingly, out of the 539 ringed 486 were juveniles, 395 of which were recently fledged and therefore very likely to have been hatched locally.

Linnet

Linaria cannabina

Red listed

Linnets are residents which breed in small numbers across the Reserve, usually in the larger stands of Gorse. The peak count from the first winter period was of 20 on No.3 bed on 7th January. During the breeding season 15 were on No.1 bed on 7th April, while among the 10 noted there on 18th April were several singing males. A breeding pair was present on No.4 bed on 3rd May, with five there on the 8th of the month. A stand of Gorse on No.2 bed then held three nesting pairs on 23rd May. The first post-breeding flock was of 20 on No.3 bed on 15th September, with all subsequent counts of note coming from No.4 bed. The developing wetland on No.4 bed held large amounts of seed-bearing *Persicaria*, which is highly attractive to finches and buntings. Counts from this area started with 30 on 6th October, peaked at 90 on 29th of the month, reducing to 50 by 5th November and 25 by 21st December. As ever, some of the highest counts of the year came during the Migration Watches from No.1 bed, with 43 on 12th September, 263 on 10th October, 77 on 28th November and 100 on 19th December.

Just three were ringed over the year, which was the same as in 2019. One was from No.1 bed, an adult male in breeding condition caught on 3rd August. For No.3 bed it was an average year with two ringed, both adult females. The first caught on 20th June had just finished breeding and the second on the 1st December.

Lesser Redpoll

Acanthis cabaret

Red listed

It is a long time now since these agile little finches bred on the Reserve, though we remain hopeful that they will return one day. As it is, they are passage migrants and winter visitors with the highest numbers usually noted in autumn. No more than three were recorded on ten dates through to the end of March, mainly from No.3 bed. Redpolls were heard singing on several March dates, which is common but a male which was singing from pines on the south bank of Butchersfield Tip on 2nd May was more intriguing. Return passage was first noted on 12th September, with 21 counted during the Migration Watch from No.1 bed. On 19th September three were feeding on No.3 bed, with 10 there on

the 26th and 18 on the 29th of the month. Twenty were then on No.1 bed on 13th October and 50 on the same bed on the 21st. Counts from the final two months of the year included 22 on 25th November, 15 on 7th December and 9 on 23rd December, all from No.3 bed.

Overall, it was an above average year for ringing with 116 newly ringed across the two beds. On No.1 bed it was an average year, with 35 ringed. Another two were retrapped, one from No.3 bed and one from elsewhere in the UK. Only one was caught in breeding condition, a male, and the first juvenile was ringed on 31st August. All were caught in the late summer/autumn period with the first of the year on 14th August. In comparison, No.3 bed experienced a record year, with 81 ringed, compared with an average of 29. There was just one, an adult male, caught in the first winter period, on the 8th March. The first autumn bird was ringed on 19th September. The majority of those caught were juveniles and there were regular captures until the end of November. Just two were ringed in December.



Lesser Redpoll

David Bowman

Common Crossbill

Loxia curvirostra

This irruptive species is a scarce and occasional visitor, usually during the autumn passage. The only record was of one which flew north over No.3 bed, not long after dawn on 5th September.

Goldfinch

Carduelis carduelis

Goldfinches are resident breeders in small numbers and can be seen across all four beds, forming sizeable autumn/winter flocks and often seen feeding on Thistle seeds. Peak counts from the first winter period were of 10 on No.4 bed on 14th February and 30 on the same bed on the 27th of the month. Limited breeding bird surveys located 18 possible territories, with: four in song on No.2 bed, one present on No.3 bed and 13 in song on No.4 bed, including the adjacent length of Ship Canal track. Notable counts from the autumn/winter included 50 on No.1 bed on 11th and 12th September, 40 on No.4 bed on 12th September, 190 on No.1 bed during the Migration watch on 10th October, 80 on No.4 bed on 13th October and 75 on No.3 bed on 29th December.

Though it was an above average year for ringing, fortunes differed across the two beds. On No.1 bed it was a very poor year with just two ringed, the lowest total since a blank year in 2004. Both were caught on the same day, 6th March. It was, however, another good year on No.3 bed with 59 newly ringed, compared with an average of just 14. The ringing team purchased a couple of bags of sunflower hearts for the feeding station and Goldfinches certainly favoured these over black sunflower seeds. The first juvenile was ringed on 27th June, about a fortnight later than in 2019. Out of the 59 ringed, 32 were juveniles, three of which had recently fledged and were therefore very likely to have been hatched locally.



Goldfinch

David Bowman

Siskin

Spinus spinus

This small, colourful finch is a passage migrant and winter visitor, usually in small numbers. It tends to be seen either flying over or feeding high up in Alders. During the first quarter of the year there were nine sightings of one or two, all but one from No.3 bed. The highest count was of six on No.3 bed on 21st March, with the last sighting of one, from the same bed, on the 23rd of the month. Return passage was first observed on the early date of 1st July, when 17 flew south-west over No.1 bed. with three on No.3 bed the following day. Small numbers were then recorded on many dates, until 15 arrived on No.1 bed on 31st August, with 22 at a roost on the same bed on 4th September. There were then 17 further single-figure counts through to the end of the year.

Four were ringed during the year, a typical number, all from No.1 bed between 31st July and 4th September and all were birds of the year.

Yellowhammer

Emberiza citrinella

Red listed

There were eight sightings of this attractive bunting, all from the eastern end of the Reserve, which is typical. The first of the year were two males on 20th March, with one at Bollin Point and another to the south of No.1 bed. Three were then across the Ship Canal from No.1 bed on 7th April, with another three present on No.1 bed on the 18th of the month. On 30th May a male was in song from a small Hawthorn near Bollin Point, providing the only suggestion of possible breeding. Singles were then at Bollin Point on 29th June and 7th December, with two flying over No.1 bed during the Migration Watch on 19th of the month.

From a ringing perspective, it was the first blank year since 2015, probably as a result of the reduced ringing effort on No.1 bed.



Yellowhammer

David Bowman

Reed Bunting

Amber listed

Emberiza schoeniclus

Reed Buntings are typically birds of wet margins, though recently they have adapted well to farmland habitats. After a sharp decline in the 1970s they have recovered slightly over the past decade, a situation mirrored on the Reserve. There were many single-figure counts from the first two months of the year, mainly from No.3 bed, with a maximum of 10 on 14th February. Breeding Bird Surveys were completed on three of the four beds, with 24 singing males noted as follows: six on No.1 bed, 11 on No.3 bed and seven on No.4 bed. Other indications of successful breeding came from No.3 bed, with a female carrying food into a suitable nest site in front of the Morgan Hide on 13th June and two males each feeding fledged young, in the same place, on 30th June. Peak counts from later in the year came from No.4 bed, with 10 around the new wetland on 1st October and No.3 bed, with 20 around the winter feed crop on 1st December and 13 there on 29th December.

Despite the reduced ringing effort, it proved to be a fairly average year, with 157 ringed. On No.1 bed 105 were ringed and a further 18 retrapped from previous years. The oldest of these was from 3rd February 2016 and two were from sites elsewhere in the UK. Only three were in breeding condition when caught, two males and a female, with the first juvenile being ringed on 14th July. On No.3 bed it was a slightly below average year with 52 ringed, compared with an average of 55. The first juvenile was ringed on 7th July, a couple of weeks earlier than in 2019. Just three recently fledged juveniles were ringed during the breeding season. The peak catching was from October to year end, with many feeding in the seed crop on the North Meadow. Retraps came from the following years: 2019 (13), 2018 (6) and, 2016 (2).



Reed Bunting

David Bowman

WeBS COUNTS 2020

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is organised jointly by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). WECG has been contributing data to this survey since 1978. Counts from over five hundred sites are analysed by the BTO and used to assess species' trends and to aid in habitat conservation. The WeBS counts were critical in establishing the Reserve's status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Owing to Covid 19 restrictions, and as advised by the BTO, there was no WeBS Count in April.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Little Grebe	1	19	16		19	11	16	5
Great Crested Grebe	5	18	15		9	5	2	1
Cormorant	8	15	15	N	29	15	31	13
Little Egret	0	0	0	O	1	0	0	0
Grey Heron	5	4	1		4	5	5	6
Mute Swan	49	34	28	C	25	35	40	44
Shelduck	2	14	11	O	0	1	4	13
Pink-footed Goose	0	0	0	U	0	0	1	3000
Greylag Goose	58	4	5	N	0	28	120	120
Canada Goose	55	57	64	T	12	70	241	320
Wigeon	0	0	0		9	0	0	0
Gadwall	54	53	69		100	93	70	74
Teal	475	380	148		162	315	185	1457
Mallard	75	64	63		153	198	106	263
Pintail	0	0	0		0	0	3	1
Shoveler	63	67	33	N	81	81	75	97
Pochard	9	47	31	O	0	0	1	9
Tufted Duck	532	405	278		28	198	233	124
Goldeneye	3	0	0	C	1	0	1	4
Goosander	1	0	0	O	0	0	0	0
Mandarin	0	0	0	U	0	0	0	4
Water Rail	0	0	3	N	2	2	2	1
Moorhen	21	24	32	T	20	45	52	55
Coot	49	87	71		37	39	33	58
Kingfisher	0	0	0		1	2	1	3
Oystercatcher	0	0	1		0	0	0	0
Lapwing	0	0	2		60	1	0	18
Woodcock	3	0	6		0	0	0	0
Jack Snipe	0	0	0	N	0	0	4	2
Snipe	0	1	0	O	7	1	20	6
Black-tailed Godwit	0	0	0		1	0	0	0
Green Sandpiper	0	1	0	C	1	0	0	2
Black-tailed Godwit	0	0	0	O	1	0	0	0
Black-headed Gull	50	352	320	U	61	59	172	102
Common Gull	0	0	0	N	0	1	3	0
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	1	1	T	1	1	1	1
Great Black-backed Gull	0	2	0		4	1	0	3

WOOLSTON EYES RINGING REPORT 2020

Ringling operations in 2020 were carried out in two areas of the Reserve: the east end of No.1 Bed and the centre of No.3 Bed. In common with every other aspect of life, ringling activity was impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic and no ringling took place between 21st March and 16th May.

The year ended with 5,137 birds ringed of 55 species. This represents a reduction of 27% when compared with 7,003 birds of 59 species ringed in 2019 and is the lowest ringling total since the very poor breeding season of 2015. The enforced pause brought about by the first national lockdown can only account for a part of this reduction in numbers as, in the equivalent period in 2019, only 605 birds were ringed across the Reserve. Other significant contributing factors include the absence of any material hirundine roosts in autumn and apparent poor productivity amongst the resident tits. These factors are expanded on in the text below. It was inevitable that there would be a reduction in ringling effort. On No.1 Bed ringling took place on 80 days compared with 115 days in 2019 and on No.3 Bed the reduction was slightly less with ringling on 86 days compared with 111 days in 2019.

In the first winter period water levels were conducive to operation of the fixed Duck Trap on No.3 Bed and the lockdown had little effect, as most Teal had left the bed by late March. Water levels in the second winter period did not then rise sufficiently to allow operation of the trap until December 12th. This year's total of 181 Teal ringed is a record after 148 in 2017. Although this represents a significant proportion of the Teal ringed in the U.K. the particular value of the trap is the subsequent recapture of previously ringed birds. There were 214 of these in 2020 involving 89 different individuals, of which 34 were from previous years. It is from such recaptures that survival estimates can be calculated. Our longest returner is EG88194 a male returning for the seventh winter and trapped in five of those seven years. Our most "faithful" bird remains EZ69576, ringed as a second-year male on 4th February 2017 and handled 20 times. Eight Woolston Teal were reported elsewhere in 2020. Predictably five of these were shot, one locally, three in Denmark and two in Russia. The three Mallards that found their way into the trap was an average figure. The two Gadwalls caught, one in the Duck Trap and one in the seasonal net set for Green Sandpipers, were just the eighth and ninth ringed at Woolston. A combination of the Duck Trap and the opportunistic deployment of Potter Traps accounted for five Water Rails, eighteen Moorhens and five Coots. These numbers are at the top end of the recent range and five Coots is the highest annual total, albeit only by one.

The only raptors ringed in 2020 were two Sparrowhawks, both male and both on No.3 Bed. This is the lowest figure since 2013 and the ten-year average is 5.7. Just a single male was re-trapped on No.1 Bed. At the risk of repeating myself, it does appear that this species is declining at Woolston.

On No.3 Bed, the seasonal net across the channel by the Duck Trap was deployed on seven occasions making 21 captures including eight Green Sandpipers and five Kingfishers. Nine different species were captured over the channel including Teal, Gadwall and Swallow. Every year there is one capture of a species that seems well out of place over a channel through the reed bed and this year it was a juvenile female Bullfinch. Colour ringling of Green Sandpipers began in 2014 and 46 have now been so ringed. This year two Woolston-ringed birds were re-encountered in coastal locations in Lancashire, the first Woolston birds to be re-sighted away from the Reserve. Four young Little Ringed Plovers were ringed on No.1 Bed. These are the first birds of this species to be ringed at Woolston.

No Woodpigeons were ringed in 2020, the first blank year since 2011 and the single Stock Dove is the lowest number since 2015. However, these species are not targeted and catches are opportunistic. Additionally, the most favoured net for these species on No.3 Bed was used very rarely in 2020. The two Tawny Owls ringed on No.3 Bed were just the 17th and 18th ringed at Woolston.

The seven Kingfishers ringed across the Reserve is the lowest total since 2015 and half the average catch for the four years to 2019. Catches are overwhelmingly of juveniles, so the lockdown hiatus is not a factor. Whilst all seven were juveniles, indicating some local breeding success, it would seem that this species was not as successful as in recent years. Great Spotted Woodpeckers appear to have stabilised their population and 18 ringed is close to the average of the years since the population crash in 2015, which is 22. Of these 18, all but two were juveniles. Five Magpies were ringed, a typical figure, but the five Jays represent about half the recent average. This reduction relates entirely to No.3 Bed, where lack of use of the net already referred to in respect of Woodpigeons, may be a factor.

In recent years the number of Goldcrests ringed at Woolston has increased greatly as a result of sampling the autumn influx of continental birds, principally on No.1 bed. The 164 Goldcrests ringed in 2020 was a significant reduction from 270 in the previous year. Whilst the normal pattern was observed, whereby presumed British bred juveniles appear from June onwards and then a second wave, assumed to be of continental origin, appears from September into early winter, both of these movements were weaker than has been the case in the previous four years.

After two very successful years both Blue Tits and Great Tits had a more modest breeding season in the nest boxes on the Reserve, with 134 chicks ringed on No.3 Bed (2019-173, 2018-163). One brood was too large to ring when ringing restarted so 142 chicks fledged from the boxes, a 15 per cent reduction on the average of the previous two years. It was not possible to check the boxes on No.1 Bed. In terms of numbers ringed it was an above average year on No.3 Bed but a very poor one on No.1 Bed, so discerning a trend is difficult. Overall, totals for these two species combined were 36 per cent below the average of the previous three years, so it seems probable that it was a mediocre breeding season at best. As I write this the BTO has just published a preliminary assessment of the 2020 breeding season. For Blue Tits and Great Tits this reports an increase in adult abundance reflecting the good breeding season in 2019, but a very large fall in productivity (55 per cent in the case of Blue Tit and 39% in the case of Great Tit), so Woolston reflects the national picture but perhaps fared better than the average. One of the most disappointing features of a difficult year was that only 14 Willow Tits were ringed. This is the lowest total since 1994. Just ten individuals were re-trapped meaning only 24 different Willow Tits were handled during the year. The equivalent figure for 2019 was 50 and for 2018 it was 54. The BTO assessment referred to above reports a 60 per cent reduction in adult abundance. Given that the 2019 breeding season was a good one at Woolston, this implies that poor adult survival in the winter 2019/2020 may be a factor.

In 2020 no significant hirundine roost formed on either bed. The seven Swallows and two Sand Martins ringed is the lowest total since 1992. The five-year average up to 2019 was 551. Long-tailed Tits were caught in their lowest numbers since the very poor breeding season of 2015. The 106 ringed compares with a four-year average, up to 2019, of 165. This reduction was concentrated on No.3 Bed with a notable scarcity of post fledging family parties.

A total of 1,906 warblers of eleven species was ringed in 2020, compared with 1,943 of nine species in 2019. For the rapidly spreading Cetti's Warbler the BTO preliminary assessment (BPA) quotes a whopping 169% increase in adult abundance and a modest 20% decline in productivity. It may be that

this species is reaching “density dependence” where competition between nesting attempts is reducing breeding success. I say “nesting attempts” rather than “pairs” because males are polygamous and may be paired with more than one female. At Woolston it was a record year on No.3 Bed and the worst since 2014 on No.1 Bed, for reasons that are unclear. The two “extra species” when compared with 2019 were a Yellow-browed Warbler, ringed on No.3 Bed on the typical date of 11th October and just the eighth to be ringed at Woolston and, happily, four Grasshopper Warblers, all ringed on No.3 Bed and all adults. There was no evidence of successful breeding. In the case of *Sylvia* warblers, the BPA shows modest increases in adult abundance and modest declines in both productivity and post fledging survival. The 575 Blackcaps ringed was a little below the ten year average of 632, while the 34 Garden Warblers was an improvement on the very poor total of 24 in 2019 and more in keeping with the ten year average of 40. Common Whitethroats recovered from the poor year in 2019 and the 91 ringed was above the five year average of 82. However the ten year average is 120, so a longer term decline is evident. Lesser Whitethroats are birds of hedgerows and not common on the areas of the Reserve where ringing takes place. With just three ringed, 2020 was a below average year. For *Acrocephalus* Warblers the BPA shows no significant change from 2019 and such was the case at Woolston. The 456 Reed Warblers ringed was essentially the same as the 449 ringed in 2019, below the ten year average but within the range of normal variation. In the case of Sedge Warblers the 91 birds ringed improves on 71 in 2019 but is still below the ten year average of 115.

It is the same story for *Phyloscopus* warblers with no strong trends apparent in the BPA. It appears that they had another reasonable breeding season with 494 Chiffchaffs ringed compared with 454 in 2019 and slightly above the ten year average. The 126 Willow Warblers ringed was in line with 129 in 2019, although these two years are well below the ten-year average of 183. It was a particularly poor year on No.3 Bed, where adults are caught in spring as they arrive but where there is little suitable breeding habitat. The spring arrival was lost in lockdown.

The following comments, concerning first juvenile dates, are drawn from the combined experience on the two beds.

The following first ringing dates for juvenile birds indicate that for resident species the timing of their breeding season was at the early end of the normal range. Ringing only restarted on 16th May and it is possible in the case of Robin that an earlier first juvenile date would have been recorded if ringing had been continuous.

Ringling date of first juvenile

	2020	2019	2018	2017
Robin	25-May	07-May	26-May	28-May
Wren	09-Jun	09-Jun	22-Jun	11-Jun
Dunnoek	22-May	11-Jun	08-Jun	06-May
Bullfinch	07-Jun	23-May	29-Jun	11-Jun

In the case of our migrant warblers the following table of “first juvenile” dates indicates that the timing of the breeding season for Chiffchaff was early whilst the dates for Blackcap, Whitethroat and Reed Warbler are more typical.

Ringing date of first juvenile

	2020	2019	2018	2017
Chiffchaff	26-May	31-May	13-Jun	03-Jun
Blackcap	07-Jun	09-Jun	02-Jun	03-Jun
Whitethroat	16-Jun	09-Jun	23-Jun	17-Jun
Reed Warbler	16-Jun	22-Jun	23-Jun	02-Jul

Amongst the resident species, Wrens, Robins and Dunnocks were all ringed in below average numbers on No.1 Bed and ringing effort may be a factor. On No.3 Bed the picture was more mixed with Dunnocks above average, Wrens in line and Robins below. The BPA has no strong trends for these three species although all of them show a modest positive trend in post-fledging survival. For several years Treecreepers have been increasing on the Reserve, if ringing records are any guide. In 2020, a total of 19 was ringed, the lowest number since 2016. The BPA shows a 25% decline in productivity for this species. Just a single Nuthatch was ringed on No.1 Bed, while an adult male, originally ringed in 2019, was re-trapped twice on No.3 Bed.

The total 54 Blackbirds ringed was well below the total of 100 in 2019 and below the ten year average of 81. It was the same picture for Song Thrush, with the equivalent figures being 2020-25, 2019-49 and a ten year average of 41. The BPA shows a negative productivity trend for both these species. Redwings are an irruptive species with numbers arriving varying from autumn to autumn. It was the worst year since 2013, with just 66 ringed, down from 297 in 2019.

A juvenile female Stonechat, ringed on No.3 Bed on 26th September, was the first for the bed, the first since 2009 and just the sixth for Woolston. The apparent two-year cycle in Meadow Pipit passage continued and the 49 ringed was an uptick from 35 in 2019. All were caught on autumn passage. After a blank year in 2019 three Tree Pipits were caught on passage in August. The 13 Grey Wagtails ringed compares with an annual average of 19 for the years since we started using the new audio lure.

Of the eight species of finch that appear regularly in the ringing report, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch were all caught in lower numbers than 2019 and were below their respective ten year averages. In part this may relate to reduced ringing effort. In the case of Goldfinches there was no repeat of the exceptional crop of thistles that was present on No.3 Bed in 2019. Siskins are never caught in numbers and the four caught on No.1 Bed was a typical total. It was the best year for Lesser Redpoll since 2010 and the 116 ringed compared with a ten-year average of 81. This is another irruptive species and appeared to arrive in good numbers, particularly on No.3 Bed. It was a blank year for Yellowhammers, the first since 2015. It was another reasonable year for Reed Buntings with 157 ringed, the ten-year average being 149. Of the 52 birds ringed on No.3 Bed, 24 were ringed in the second winter period, in the sacrificial crop area. For the second year running this was the only species to turn up with any regularity in the crop area.

It was a modest year for individual species milestones. In descending order these were the 13,000th Reed Warbler, 8,000th Great Tit, 4,000th Bullfinch and 3,000th Blackbird. Amongst the comparative scarcities, we ringed our 150th Kingfisher, 150th Magpie and 100th Water Rail. The addition of Little Ringed Plover takes the number of different species ringed at Woolston to 112.

All birds are ringed by members of Merseyside Ringing Group, licensed under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 by the [BTO](#) (British Trust for Ornithology). Ringing in Britain is supported by the [JNCC](#) (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) on behalf of the government's nature conservation agencies including Natural England. Data on all birds ringed and retrapped are computerised and submitted to the BTO for incorporation into the national database and large-scale analyses. Readers wanting to know more of the technical aspects of ageing and sexing birds can find many photographic examples of Woolston birds on the Merseyside Ringing Group website [www.merseysiderg.org.uk].

Michael Miles on behalf of the ringing team (John Blundell, George Dunbar, Kieran Foster, Phil Guest, Rebecca Jones, Dan Owen, Margaret Rawlins and David Riley)

RINGING TOTALS 2020

			Reserve Total	Grand Total
SPECIES	No.1	No.3	2020	1980-2020
Gadwall		2	2	9
Teal		181	181	868
Mallard		3	3	96
Sparrowhawk		2	2	139
Water Rail		5	5	102
Moorhen		18	18	330
Coot		5	5	38
Little Ringed Plover	4		4	4
Green Sandpiper		8	8	49
Stock Dove		1	1	81
Tawny Owl		2	2	18
Kingfisher	2	5	7	150
Great Spotted				
Woodpecker	5	13	18	394
Magpie		5	5	151
Jay	4	1	5	376
Goldcrest	127	37	164	3593
Blue Tit	142	259	401	12463
Great Tit	64	236	300	8185
Coal Tit	15	8	23	277
Willow Tit	6	8	14	902
Sand Martin		2	2	1308
Swallow		7	7	14640
Cetti's Warbler	2	27	29	148
Long-tailed Tit	72	34	106	4425
Chiffchaff	278	216	494	9850
Willow Warbler	102	24	126	8587
Yellow-browed Warbler		1	1	8
Blackcap	196	379	575	13610
Garden Warbler	21	13	34	1068
Lesser Whitethroat	1	2	3	278
Whitethroat	7	84	91	5362
Grasshopper Warbler		4	4	206
Sedge Warbler	9	84	93	5690
Reed Warbler	146	310	456	13034
Nuthatch	1		1	23
Treecreeper	12	7	19	322
Wren	32	95	127	6547
Blackbird	21	33	54	3001
Song Thrush	5	20	25	1392
Redwing	23	43	66	1699
Robin	53	79	132	5222
Stonechat		1	1	6

Dunnock	19	90	109	4280
Grey Wagtail	4	9	13	137
Tree Pipit	2	1	3	50
Meadow Pipit	44	5	49	1117
Chaffinch	79	155	234	6648
Brambling	1		1	922
Greenfinch	78	539	617	17695
Goldfinch	2	59	61	944
Siskin	4		4	90
Linnet	1	2	3	1134
Lesser Redpoll	35	81	116	2325
Bullfinch	31	125	156	4093
Reed Bunting	105	52	157	7677
Others (57 species).				2156
Totals	1755	3382	5137	173919

SELECTED RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS

This section lists some of the Woolston-ringed birds that were reported from elsewhere ('recoveries') and birds caught at Woolston already wearing rings ('controls'). In addition to these birds, numerous birds ringed at Woolston were caught again ('re-trapped') on the Reserve this year, some of them having undertaken long journeys in between ringing and recapture, and these all add to our knowledge of migration, survival/ mortality and longevity, habitat use and so on.

The age when ringed and method of finding are coded as follows:

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Pullus (nestling or chick) |
| 1J | Fledged, but flying so weakly that it is obviously incapable of having flown far from nest. |
| 2 | Fully grown – year of hatching unknown |
| 3 | Definitely hatched during the calendar year of ringing |
| 3J | Definitely hatched during the calendar year of ringing and still completely or partially in juvenile body plumage |
| 4 | Hatched before calendar year of ringing – exact year unknown |
| 5 | Definitely hatched during previous calendar year |
| 6 | Hatched before last calendar year – exact year unknown |

Sex, when determined at time of ringing or finding:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| M | Male |
| F | Female |

Circumstances of finding:

- | | |
|----|--|
| R | Caught and released by a ringer |
| B | Breeding |
| RR | Alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field by ringer |
| VV | Alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field by non-ringer |
| SR | Sick or injured – released with ring |
| S | Sick or injured – not known to have been released |
| X | Found dead |
| XF | Found freshly dead or dying |
| // | Circumstances of finding unknown |
| +F | Shot |

Teal

EA68513 6M 01/02/2020 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588

XF 15/10/2020 Bogense, Fyn, Denmark 850KM 74°

Teal

EZ69599 5M 13/02/2017 No 3 Bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6588

XF 05/01/2020 Thelwall, Warrington, SJ6487 3KM 211°

Here are two rare examples of Woolston Teal that met their end other than by being shot. The circumstances of these bird's deaths were not recorded.

Teal

EA32319 5M 02/03/2019 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 11/01/2020 Lymm, near Warrington, SJ6887 4KM 120°

Teal

EZ03571 5M 07/03/2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 04/04/2020 Loknya, Pskov Oblast, Russian Federation 2108KM 80°
The Pskov Oblast is in western Russia, on the borders of Estonia and Latvia.

Teal

EZ90886 6M 10/03/2018 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 21/05/2020 Moshyuga, Izhemskiy District, Komi Republic, Russian Federation 3420KM 69°
The Izhemskiy District lies 970KM north-east of Moscow and this becomes our furthest recovery and our third from Russia.

Teal

EA32328 5M 13/02/2017 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 05/09/2020 Store Fuglede, Kalundborg, Vestsjælland, Denmark 921KM 75°

Teal

EZ03530 5M 28/02/2015 No.3 bed Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6588
+F 06/09/2020 Nakkebølle, Faaborg, Fyn, Denmark 857KM 78°

Green Sandpiper

NW30016 3 04/08.2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588
VV 14/08/2020 Conder Green, Lancashire, SD4656 70KM 344°

Green Sandpiper

NV38190 4 07/08/2018 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588
VV 03/08/2020 Aldcliffe, Lancaster, Lancashire, SD4560 74KM 344°
These are the first two Woolston-ringed Green Sandpipers to be re-sighted away from the Reserve.

Blue Tit

AYH3629 3 25/09/19 No1 Bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 01/01/2020 Weaver Valley SBI, Cheshire, SJ6568 20KM 186°

Great Tit

TW78283 3M 02/08/2019 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside, SD5201
R=F 14/02/2020 Woolston Eyes No 1 Bed, Warrington, SJ6788 21KM 131°
Here are two examples of dispersing juvenile tits travelling above average distances for their species.

Great Tit

NZ34786 3J 20/06/2018 Woolston Eyes No 1 Bed, Warrington, SJ6688
XF 20/03/2020 Lymm, Warrington, SJ6786 3KM 150°

Goldcrest

JRL111 3M 14/09/2019 South Walney, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria,
R 05/10/2020 Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6788 87KM 147°

Cetti's Warbler

AKC5872 3 24/09/2018 Leighton Moss, near Silverdale, Lancashire, SD4875

R (=M) 08/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 87KM 169°

Leighton Moss is one of the sites from which dispersing juvenile Cetti's Warblers have colonised Woolston.

Cetti's Warbler

ATD0248 3J 18/08/2018 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588

R (=F) 19/07/2020 Llyn Ystumllyn, Gwynedd, SH5238 122KM 245°

In turn Woolston bred birds disperse to expand other populations.

Chiffchaff

LBH097 3J 24/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588

R 31/08/2020 Knutsford Moor (RS), Cheshire, SJ7578 14KM 133°

This Chiffchaff was making a very leisurely start to autumn migration.

Chiffchaff

LBH545 3J 24/07/2020 Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6788

R 28/09/2020 Lancing College, Lancing, West Sussex, TQ1906 321KM 153°

Blackcap

AEF2860 3JF 21/08/2019 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6587

XF 13/05/2020 Crewe, Cheshire, SJ6853 36KM 175°

Blackcap

ALK2075 3J 13/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588

XF 09/08/2020 Warrington, UK, SJ6486 3KM 211°

It is unusual for Blackcaps to be reported as found dead. This first of this unfortunate pair was taken by a cat and the second flew into a patio door.

Blackcap

AXC0250 3J 29/06/2018 Woolston Eyes, No 3 bed Warrington, SJ6488 AXC0250

R=F 21/5/2020 Twentys Syndicate, Wincham, Cheshire, SJ6775 13KM 166°

Blackcap

ANA7981 3JM 08/09/2019 Treswell Wood, Nottinghamshire, UK, SK7679

R 02/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6488 111KM 275°

Blackcap

3KA34970 3F 08/11/2019 Rio Manzanares, Madrid, Spain

R 15/09/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 1449KM 4°

This Blackcap, whilst probably a British breeder, was ringed in its wintering area in central Spain.

Sedge Warbler

S668785 3 18/08/2019 Stanford Reservoir, Northamptonshire, SP6080

R=M 16/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 145KM 320°

This Woolston breeder was ringed in Northamptonshire on its first autumn migration.

Sedge Warbler

AXC0830 3 02/08/2018 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588

R=F 15/06/2020 Pickmere, Knutsford, Cheshire, SJ6777 12KM 169°

Sedge Warbler

8660306 3 15/08/2018 Mars-Ouest, Sant-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu, Loire-Atlantique, France

R=M 18/05/2019 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 699KM 356°

R=M 08/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 699KM 356°

R=M 22/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 699KM 356°

Sedge Warbler

8779162 4 07/08/2019 Tour aux Moutons, Donges, Loire-Atlantique, France

R 29/07/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 675KM 358°

Here are two examples of the well-established link between Woolston and the west coast of France.

Reed Warbler

AEF2439 3J 03/08/2019 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588

R=4 07/06/2020 Rostherne Mere, Knutsford, Cheshire, SJ7483 11KM 111°

Reed Warbler

AZD0616 4 29/06/2019 Scotman's Flash, Wigan, Greater Manchester, SD5803

R=M 08/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 17KM 153°

Reed Warbler

ALK8311 4M 08/06/2020 Pickmere, Knutsford, Cheshire, SJ6777

R 16/06/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 12KM 349°

These three Reed Warblers demonstrate the interplay between local reed bed sites.

Reed Warbler

B951948 3 22/08/2013 Fish Lake Meadows, Romsey, Hampshire, SU3521

R 02/07/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 276KM 346°

R 01/08/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 276KM 346°

R 02/08/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588 276KM 346°

This Reed Warbler has crossed the Sahara Desert fourteen times.

Reed Warbler

AYH9075 3J 14/07/2020 Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6788

R 14/08/2020 Squire's Down, Dorset, ST7418 269KM 179°

Robin

AEJ5189 3 03/09/2019 Billinge Hill, near Billinge, Merseyside, SD5201
R 06/11/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6488 19KM 135°

Chaffinch

AYH5674 4F 29/11/2019 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, SJ6488
XF 31/03/2020 Sandbargkoppel, Owschlag, Germany, 799KM 83°

A considerable proportion of the Chaffinches ringed at Woolston in the winter period are continental in origin and, in many cases, this can be inferred from their biometrics, these birds being larger and longer winged than British breeders. It is unusual to have this inference borne out by a subsequent re-capture. This is the first recovery of a Woolston ringed Chaffinch in Germany.

Greenfinch

NF72526 3M 21/10/2019 Woolston Eyes No 1 Bed, Warrington, SJ6788
R 01/03/2020 Great Warford (RS), Cheshire, SJ8077 18KM 130°

Greenfinch

TW04582 3J F 23/08/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588
XF 26/09/2020 Lymm, Warrington, SJ6786 3KM 130°

Greenfinch

TY15594 3M 06/11/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6488
XF 06/12/2020 Reddish Vale, Stockport, Greater Manchester, SJ9093 25KM 82°

Greenfinch

NZ56200 3M 12/10/2017 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6588
XF 17/06/2020 Hillcliffe, Warrington, SJ6185 6KM 231°

The second and third of these three casualties were taken by cats.

Lesser Redpoll

AXE1081 6M 13/03/2020 Petre Crescent, Rishton, Lancashire, SD7329
R 14/08/2020 Woolston Eyes No 1 Bed, Warrington, SJ6788 42KM 188°

Lesser Redpoll

ALK4287 3 26/09/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6488
R 22/10/2020 Sandwich Bay Estate, Kent, TR3557 354KM 132°
This Lesser Redpoll may well have been heading for a wintering area in continental Europe.

Reed Bunting

ATD3317 5M 17/05/2019 No.1 Bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 03/01/2020 Nr Partington, Greater Manchester, SJ7089 4KM 91°

Reed Bunting

ATD3235 5M 18/02/2019 No.1 Bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 03/01/2020 Nr Partington, Greater Manchester, SJ7089 4KM 91°

Reed Bunting

AXC4879 3F 17/10/2018 No1 Bed, Woolston Eyes, Warrington SJ6788
R 05/02/2020 Nr Partington, Greater Manchester, SJ7089 4KM 91°

Reed Bunting

ALK7302 5F 23/01/2020 Moss Brow farm, Warburton, Greater Manchester, SJ7089
R 06/11/2020 Woolston Eyes, Warrington, SJ6788 4KM 270°

Reed Bunting

APJ7681 3M 17/10/2019 Pickmere, Knutsford, Cheshire, SJ6777
R 01/12/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6488 12KM 349°

Reed Bunting

V611737 3M 22/09/2020 Pickmere, Knutsford, Cheshire, SJ6777
R 06/11/2020 Woolston Eyes No 3 Bed, Warrington, SJ6488 12KM 349°

The exchange of Reed Buntings with sites to the south and east of Woolston operated by South Manchester Ringing Group has become a standard feature of winter ringing.

Michael Miles on behalf of the ringing team (John Blundell, George Dunbar, Kieran Foster, Phil Guest, Rebecca Jones, Dan Owen, Margaret Rawlins and David Riley)

MIGRATION WATCH 2020

Visit 1

Participants David Bowman, Dave Steel, Helen Wynn and Brian Baird

Date 12/09/2020 **Time** 0630-1200

Weather Bright dry and blessed with a cold SSW wind.

Highlights The inaugural session from the elevated centre of No1 Bed with a Great White Egret invited to the opening ceremony (a first for this species on our decades-old Migration Watch listing).

Total 1,863

Visit 2

Participants David Bowman, Dave Steel, Helen Wynn and Al Warford

Date 10/10/2020 **Time** 0700-1145

Weather Rain/Westerly to North Westerly Blows/Rainbows

Highlights A new edition to our Migration Watch List...a Jack Snipe. The grim determination of today's team to see this 'watch' out...in truth a great morning in which the birds were, as ever, the true stoics...

Total 1,539.

Visit 3

Participants David Bowman, Dave Steel and Helen Wynn

Date 28/11/2020 **Time** 0715-1200

Weather Grey and cool with a steady flow of rain for most of the visit

Highlights Discovering our ability to combine our count with mud-sliding agility...the site still not having a settled surface and offering nothing but mud! The easterly movement of Black-Headed Gulls giving half of today's count.

Total 3,588

Visit 4

Participants David Bowman, Dave Steel and Helen Wynn

Date 19/12/20 **Time** 0730-1200

Weather Cool fresh, clear skies, southerly breeze, bright and a bit of rain

Highlights The mostly bright and breezy weather conditions, the vast and in our experience, unprecedented movement of Pink-Footed Geese, the off-piste wander about this newly emerging wildlife wonderland which today, as it is still a work-in-progress, gave mud skating its place in the role of honour of difficult terrains experienced in the lives of the Voluntary Wardens of the Woolston Eyes Nature Reserve!

Total 19,881

Migration Watches 2020

	Date	12/09/20	10/10/20	28/11/20	19/12/20
	Time	0630-1200	0700-1200	0640-1200	0730-1200
	Species				
1	Mute Swan	2	2	0	0
2	Pink-footed Goose	25	90	0	12462
3	Greylag Goose	18	0	125	192
4	Canada Goose	78	19	111	121
5	Gadwall	0	4	0	0
6	Teal	1	0	2	3
7	Mallard	93	44	8	7
8	Goosander	0	0	0	1
9	Pheasant	1	1	1	3
10	Cormorant	39	9	4	8
11	Great White Egret	1	0	0	0
12	Grey Heron	3	0	0	0
13	Sparrowhawk	11	1	0	0
14	Common Buzzard	15	7	1	7
15	Kestrel	3	0	1	4
16	Merlin	0	0	0	0
17	Hobby	1	0	0	0
18	Peregrine Falcon	2	2	0	2
19	Water Rail	0	0	3	0
20	Moorhen	0	0	1	0
21	Golden Plover	0	2	0	1
22	Lapwing	0	225	0	111
23	Common Snipe	2	1	5	42
24	Jack Snipe	0	1	0	0
25	Woodcock	0	0	5	0
26	Green Sandpiper	2	0	0	0
27	Black Headed Gull	2	99	1816	316
28	Common Gull	0	0	0	1
29	Lesser Black-backed Gull	106	22	32	30
30	Herring Gull	0	0	69	40
31	Great Black-backed Gull	2	0	5	1
32	Feral Pigeon	10	4	0	0
33	Stock Dove	58	7	3	3
34	Woodpigeon	164	229	590	4546
35	Collared Dove	2	0	0	0
36	Tawny Owl	0	0	1	0
37	Swift	1	0	0	0
38	Kingfisher	0	0	1	0

39	Great Spotted Woodpecker	4	0	0	0
40	Skylark	26	0	1	5
41	Swallow	460	4	0	0
42	House Martin	118	0	0	0
43	Meadow Pipit	286	166	6	86
44	Grey Wagtail	2	3	3	1
45	White/Pied Wagtail	8	12	16	1
46	Wren	2	0	21	0
47	Dunnock	0	4	3	2
48	Robin	8	9	21	7
49	Blackbird	1	8	10	16
50	Fieldfare	0	0	30	11
51	Song Thrush	0	4	0	2
52	Redwing	0	0	43	4
53	Mistle Thrush	5	0	0	0
54	Blackcap	1	0	0	0
55	Chiffchaff	7	0	0	0
56	Long Tailed Tit	0	7	13	0
57	Blue Tit	0	1	7	2
58	Great Tit	2	0	7	2
59	Jay	3	1	2	0
60	Magpie	8	3	6	2
61	Jackdaw	27	1	300	230
62	Carrion Crow	96	81	31	82
63	Raven	9	2	0	5
64	Starling	7	10	175	1415
65	Chaffinch	25	0	19	1
66	Goldfinch	49	190	8	2
67	Siskin	0	1	0	1
68	Linnet	43	263	77	100
69	Lesser Redpoll	21	0	0	0
70	Bullfinch	2	0	5	0
71	Yellowhammer	0	0	0	2
72	Reed Bunting	1	0	0	1
	Totals	1863	1539	3588	19881

Dave Steel

2020 REPORT ON WILLOW TITS BREEDING AT WOOLSTON EYES

The season was not as successful for nest location as in 2019, but twelve nest sites were found in the general area of the Reserve.

No.1 Bed

Nest 1

11th April. A shallow boring was found in the same stump that was used in 2018. On 4th May the female was sitting and, on 10th May, had at least four eggs. 23rd May, the nest had been predated and the stump was smashed open down to the base of the nest chamber. This heavy damage could possibly have been caused by a Badger.

Nest 2

15th April. Birds were lining a cavity, less than a metre high, in a stump in standing water, to the east of the west pool. 10th May, the nest held seven small chicks. 1st June the nest was empty and intact and a brood was heard in the vicinity.

Nest 3

15th April. A fresh, deep cavity was found about 3 metres high in a willow at the east of the Bed. 4th May, there was no lining and the site appeared deserted. Follow up visits confirmed this. This was in an area where several nests have been found over the years.

No.2 Bed

Nest 4

30th March. A nest cavity was found in a thin willow stump to the west of the centre of the bed. Blue Tits were watched trying to take moss into the site but were repelled by the Willow Tits. 23rd April, the female was incubating nine eggs. 4th May, the nest was intact and the pair was scolding in the vicinity with one bird carrying food. The site was almost engulfed by Hogweed. 22nd June, the nest was empty and intact which proved a successful fledge.

Nest 5

One of several, specially designed nest boxes, erected on the Reserve, was attached to a willow stump at the south of the Bed. On 8th April the filling had been dug out to almost full depth. On 1st May the nest held eight eggs and on 5th still had eggs, but no birds were in the vicinity. 23rd May, both adults were feeding large feathered young and on 1st June the nest was empty and intact, indicating a successful fledge. This is the second known instance of a nest box being used on the Reserve.

No.3 Bed

Nest 6

17th May. A nest was found in willow scrub, choked with brambles and vegetation, to the south-west of the Bed. It contained at least six feathered chicks, around half-grown, which were being fed by the parents. It was empty and intact when inspected on 3rd June showing a successful fledge.

Nest 7

13th June. A deep cavity was found in mature woodland at the west of the bed. It was empty and therefore possible that it was not used. Previously, no birds had been heard in this vicinity.

No.4 Bed

Nest 8

A cavity was found on 8th March near the centre track. Its depth had increased by the 31st and it was lined with an egg showing on 21st April. This was in the same nest stump that was used in 2018 and 2019, which had been cut down lower each winter. On 24th April the female was incubating nine eggs. On 4th May there was a large piercing level with the nest and it appeared the nest was deserted, with some eggs missing and one broken. On 5th May the cavity was completely smashed open and empty.

Nest 9

10th April. An excavation was found, in the centre of the bed, in a decrepit willow stump on the edge of willow scrub, in emerging Giant Hogweed. On 7th May the adult was brooding at least five chicks plus one egg. 13th May, it held small chicks with feathers emerging, but unable to count, successfully. 7th June, nest empty, intact and presumed successful. Site was almost entirely engulfed by Hogweed.

Nest 10

13th April. A new cavity was found, around 8cm deep, about 90 metres from the centre track. The WTs were scolding and a pair of Blue Tits were also nearby. On 2nd May the nest had been hacked open by a woodpecker. There was no evidence of a nest, so it may have been attacked before it was lined.

Nest 11

17th April. A nest was found in scrub at the south bank. It was lined, possibly containing one egg, or the eggs were covered. 27th April, the nest had been predated by a woodpecker, broken into at the front and rear. Two intact eggs remained in the nest plus a broken egg.

Nest 12

6th May. A nest was found outside the western boundary of the Reserve with the female brooding eight or nine naked chicks. It was in the same stump as a nest found in 2017, which had been cut down to a smaller size. On 13th May the chicks were coming 'into pin'. Pair with food, in the vicinity. On 7th June the nest was empty and intact, so a successful fledge.

SUMMARY

This Report would not have been possible but for the tireless efforts of Mike Lloyd, under difficult conditions. Due to mobility problems, I was unable to help with the fieldwork. The Covid-19 restrictions prevented exhaustive surveys to be made and the continuing and considerable menace of Giant Hogweed hindered extensive searches and follow up. Under these circumstances the number of nests found is admirable.

Of the twelve nest sites found, two were abandoned, four predated and six presumed successful. The high number of predated nests still gives cause for concern. It is interesting to note that the same territories are used, and often the same nest tree, every year or within a couple of years. It is gratifying

that a nest box was successfully used for only the second occasion, and despite the provision of boxes throughout the Reserve, the take-up is low.

No.1 Bed: despite only two nests being located there was evidence of other territories. Probably two pairs at the Viaduct Pools; birds were heard regularly in the centre of the bed and near the Ship Canal and trial borings found in nest boxes. A pair almost certainly bred at the east of the Reserve and two fledged broods were heard towards the end of the season. The northern edge of the bed was not visited. The landfill site continues to restrict suitable habitat, but an estimate of 5-6 pairs is not unreasonable.

No.2 Bed: This continues to be a difficult bed to monitor, mainly because of the development work needed to resume pumping operations and the continuing scourge of the Hogweed. However, in addition to the two nests located there is still scope for 3-4 pairs.

No.3 Bed: in addition to the nests found, singers were heard in areas to the west and south-west of the bed and around the centre copse. The whole bed was not monitored thoroughly, but David Bowman heard birds in pollard willows on the northern bank, a previous territory. 4-5 pairs is therefore a feasible estimate.

No.4 Bed: the largest bed and still the most difficult to monitor thoroughly, because of development work and parts being almost inaccessible due to the Hogweed. However, in addition to the nests found, birds were heard and trial borings found in several other areas. It was also felt that the area adjacent to the western boundary holds two pairs. It was disappointing that no territories were located around the Loop or along the north bank. Overall, an estimate of 8 pairs is still reasonable.

To reiterate, because of the limitations caused by the pandemic, time restraints and difficulty in accessing certain parts of the Reserve, a more thorough survey couldn't be undertaken. Slopes of bunds and riverbanks were again not visited. As in 2019 the Reserve took part in the BTO Willow Tit survey. It is gratifying to note that the territories identified during these surveys closely matched the known territories that Mike Lloyd and myself have found over the past ten years. Therefore, based upon limited fieldwork, my estimate for this year is a disappointing 20-23 pairs. Nevertheless, I feel this is a conservative view. I always emphasise the notoriety of silence this species can have during the breeding season. Although the bird nests in a hole that can be obvious to the trained eye, nests can often be exceedingly difficult to locate, particularly in emergent foliage. Therefore, it would be no surprise if the population for the general area was still around 30 pairs.

It will be interesting to note if the changes to the Reserve, such as landfill, renewed pumping operations, wetland development and scrub clearance will affect the future breeding population.

Allan Rustell

BUTTERFLY REPORT

It would be an understatement to say that this was an unusual year, with the spring lockdown limiting butterfly recording at Woolston as elsewhere. In consequence, there was no systematic monitoring of the site until July. Nevertheless, there were some excellent sightings with pride of place going to the first report of Small Heath since 2003.

The first butterflies of the year were seen in early March and both Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell were reported on the 6th. No other species were recorded until lockdown was imposed later that month. The first Orange Tips appeared on 8th April and two Brimstones were in the wood to the north of the river the following day. The excellent spring weather was favourable to early butterflies and the indications are that numbers were at or above average. The first Speckled Wood was found on 14th April but given the lack of observer coverage, emergence may well have been earlier than this. It was a major surprise when a Small Heath was found on Butchersfield Tip on 31st May. Further bonuses were a probable Dark Green Fritillary in mid-June and three sightings of Ringlet in July. None of these three species were recorded in 2019.

By the time restrictions were lifted sufficiently for systematic recording to resume, the weather had reverted to more normal conditions. From July onwards it was unsettled, and warm sunny weather was at a premium. The result was that most of our species were seen in reduced numbers. Common Blues fared particularly badly and very few were seen. The butterflies of high summer, Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown, had a poor year but there were some sightings of Purple Hairstreak.

Autumn was fairly uneventful although good numbers of Red Admiral were reported. The year ended with a sighting of two Commas on No.3 bed on 4th November.

The Butterfly Transect was not monitored during April, May and June but in spite of often inclement weather, surveys were undertaken weekly from the beginning of July to the end of September.

The records on which this Report is based are much fewer than normal and, as regards spring butterflies such as Orange Tip, insufficient to provide any meaningful information. As always, information from the Cheshire and Wirral Branch of Butterfly Conservation provides a context in which to consider the Woolston Eyes records and I am grateful to Rupert Adams for his help. In spite of the reduced number of records submitted I hope that the following will provide some insight into what proved to be a poor year for most of our common species.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Small Skipper

Thymelicus sylvestris

Very few records were received, these being of singles on 21st June, 12th July and 7th August. No doubt more were present during June.

Large Skipper

Ochlodes sylvanus

As with the previous species only three records were submitted, the first a single on 30th May, the earliest ever sighting at Woolston. One was on No.4 bed on 21st June, followed by five on No.3 bed on the 23rd. This species is never plentiful on the Reserve, so this probably indicates an above-average year.



Large Skipper

David Bowman

Brimstone

Gonepteryx rhamni

There were just two spring records; on 9th April two were found in the woods to the north of No.1 bed and on the same day one was on the Canal Track. What may have been the same butterfly was seen near the ferry on 15th April. The only record of a summer brood was of one on No.3 bed on 16th June.

Large White

Pieris brassicae

There were a series of records from late June onwards, with a maximum of three on 23rd June. July saw four sightings and there was one August record. The final reports were of singles on 9th and 13th September. The indications are of a below average year.

Small White

Pieris rapae

The first significant count was of 21 on 19th July. Up to 30 were present during August and the highest total of the year was 38 on 17th September. There were three October sightings ending with one in the centre of No.4 bed on 20th October. This year's maximum is slightly below average for this often-overlooked species.

Green-veined White

Pieris napi

Mid-July saw a total of 18 recorded and numbers peaked in early August, when 55 were counted on the 7th. Over 20 were still present in early September and the final record was on 19th September, a late date for this species. Interestingly, Green-veined White performed better than Small White which was probably due to the generally damp conditions from which it benefits. Numbers were about average.

Orange Tip

Anthocharis cardamines

Due to lack of observer coverage during its flight period of April to early June very little information is available. About twenty were present on 8th April but no other records of significance were received. It is suspected however that numbers were above average which would be consistent with the excellent weather conditions throughout spring.



Orange Tip

David Bowman

Purple Hairstreak*Favonius quercus*

With generally unsuitable conditions during July and August it was encouraging to have a number of records of this often-elusive species. The first was noted on 21st July and on the 31st a minimum of three were found near the entrance to No.3 bed. A further sighting on the Canal Track on 3rd August was the last of the year. A probable total of six was a reasonable outcome for a species that appears to be confined to Oak Trees along the Canal Track and the south bank of No.3 bed.

Small Copper*Lycaena phlaeas*

This was a poor year and there was only one sighting. A single was found on the northern section of No.1 bed on 26th July.

Common Blue*Polyommatus icarus*

This was one of the worst years on record for this species, which has become very common in recent years. There were no records of the first brood which normally appears towards the end of May. The first sighting was of one on No.2 bed on 7th August. Five were found on the northern section of No.1 bed on 9th August and a further five on the 12th. A total of eleven was the highest of the year and all records were from the eastern end of the Reserve. The changing habitat on the northern section of No.1 bed was probably a factor but not sufficient to account for such a dramatic decline. This species fared badly across Cheshire with very few double-figure counts and a county maximum of only 17.

Holly Blue*Celastrina argiolus*

Although no records were received this was probably due to lack of monitoring rather than an actual absence of this species. In support of this opinion were a number of sightings from areas close to the Reserve including local gardens.

Red Admiral*Vanessa atalanta*

The first sighting was of one on No.4 bed on 21st June. Maximum numbers occurred between 9th and 13th September when 35 were counted on Nos.1,2 and 3 beds. Of these 16 were on the northern section of No.1 bed. As no surveys of No.4 bed were carried out at this time, it seems likely that this is a bare minimum. The counts made constitute an excellent year for this attractive migrant species and Woolston recorded the highest total in Cheshire, the next largest being 30 at a site in Delamere.

Painted Lady*Vanessa cardui*

After last year's record numbers, very few were present and only four sightings were submitted. Singles were found on 13th and 23rd June and there were two August reports. One was seen on the 20th and two were on the butterfly transect on the 26th.

Small Tortoiseshell

Aglais urticae

The first was found on 6th March and further singles were reported until the beginning of lockdown later that month. When monitoring was resumed good numbers were present. On 21st June 23 were on No.4 bed alone and a further ten were reported from No.3 bed two days later. There were also unconfirmed reports of large numbers to the north of the Reserve around this time. The only other significant count was of 13 on 20th August and the last record of an above average year was on 2nd September.



Peacock

David Bowman

Peacock

Aglais io

March saw an excellent early count of 24 on No.1 bed on the 6th and a Reserve-wide March total of 32. There were no further records until the end of June. The second brood was seen in good numbers and by the end of July about 150 were present across the Reserve. Whilst this is a lower total than in 2019 it was, nevertheless, an above average year for this attractive and often common species. Woolston recorded the highest total in Cheshire in 2020. Only small numbers were seen in August and counts of six on 2nd and 9th September were the only autumn counts of significance. The last sighting was of one flying in and out of the Sybil Hogg Hide on 2nd October, no doubt searching for a suitable place to hibernate.

Comma*Polygonia c-album*

Only small numbers were reported until 21st July when nine were on No.3 bed. Between 9th and 13th September a total of 20 was found. This proved to be the highest count of the year and is above average for a species that appears to have become more prevalent at Woolston in recent years. There were two October records, including two on the 1st. A late sighting of two on No.3 bed on 4th November, a mild, sunny day, concluded a successful year.

Dark Green Fritillary*Argynnis aglaja*

On 16th June, Sue Haddock reported what was almost certainly a butterfly of this species on No.3 bed. There have been an increasing number of sightings of this species in lowland Cheshire in recent years including Woolston records in 2013 and 2018. In the rest of the county there were very few records this year.

Speckled Wood*Parage aegeria*

The first record was on 14th April but there were no further spring sightings. On 19th July a total of 14 was recorded on No.3 bed and numbers increased towards the end of the month. A total of 53 on the 29th was the highest of the year and similar counts were made during August with 44 on the 7th and 49 on 2nd September. A week later 32 were still present and reducing to 12 by 17th September. The final sighting was on 14th October. Maximum totals were down compared with 2019.

Gatekeeper*Pyronia tithonus*

The flight season was as usual limited to July and August and the first record was on 5th July. Numbers peaked at 135 on 29th July, which represents another poor year for a species which has declined significantly on the Reserve in recent years. Nevertheless, this was the highest total in Cheshire this year, narrowly exceeding a count of 132 at Gowey Meadows near Ellesmere Port. The last sighting was on 26th August, a fairly typical date.

Meadow Brown*Maniola jurtina*

Although the first record was not until 21st June, it is highly likely that butterflies were present before that date. Nevertheless, it was a very poor year for this species, due in part, no doubt, to the unsuitable conditions during its flight season, combined with reduced monitoring. The highest count was a mere 32 on 29th July, and August saw counts of between 20 and 30. The final report was on 9th September.

Ringlet*Aphantopus hyperantus*

After two blank years it was encouraging to have three records this year. On 1st July one was found on the river to the north of No.1 bed with a second on No.3 bed. On 14th July there was a further sighting from the river bank which may well have been the same butterfly reported two weeks earlier.

Small Heath*Coenonympha pamphilus*

This species had not been seen at Woolston since 2003 and it was a major surprise when David Spencer found one at the eastern end of the Reserve on 31st May. A photograph was taken which enabled identity to be confirmed. Small Heath has declined significantly in lowland Cheshire in recent years and its return to the Reserve is an exciting development.

Dave Hackett

DRAGONFLY REPORT

As you will appreciate, the various restrictions imposed from March onwards due to the Covid-19 pandemic inevitably resulted in fewer dragonfly sightings being recorded during the 2020 season. However, even though the Reserve was closed during the spring and early summer months, thanks to the commitment of the Vice-Chairman several of his records were reported via the Group website during this period and throughout the rest of the season. My first visit after the easing of restrictions was on 11th July and although further visits and records were made after this date, just two surveys were completed for the Carbon Landscape Project, along the Dragonfly Transect on No.3 bed. Unfortunately, the other Transect around the large pool on No.1 bed had become practically inaccessible, due to the tall growth of the surrounding vegetation and rushes. Although no structured surveys were undertaken at this pool, it was encouraging to see that the series of smaller pools recently created on No.1 bed, had already been colonised by a number of species. Breeding activity was also observed at these pools on a few occasions. In spite of the restrictions a total of sixteen species was recorded during the season, between late April and mid-September, which is similar to the recent average.

Dragonflies begin to emerge from their larval state from the spring onwards when the temperature starts to increase. On the Reserve the first sightings usually occur from around mid-May, although there have been isolated records at the end of April in the past. The first record this year, however, was on 23rd April, when two newly-emerged Large Red Damselflies were reported. This appears to be the earliest documented Odonata record since recording began in 1986 and was probably due to the exceptionally warm and sunny weather during the spring. On 9th May the first Broad-bodied Chaser was reported followed by singles of Banded Demoiselle and Southern Hawker on 30th May. There was a spate of first sightings in June, when both Azure and Common Blue Damselflies and a single Brown Hawker were reported on 11th. Four more species were recorded at the new pools on No.1 bed on 13th June, namely, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Four-spotted Chaser, Black-tailed Skimmer and Emperor Dragonfly. On 23rd June both Red-eyed Damselfly and Ruddy Darter were reported on No.3 bed. The first Common Darter of the year was also found on No.3 bed, on 28th July. Remarkably, when the pools on No.1 bed were visited a few days later on 1st August, more than 300 newly-emerged Common Darters were counted. The only Emerald Damselfly sighting was also recorded on 1st August. The final addition to this year's species list was Migrant Hawker, which was first recorded on 7th August, about two weeks later than usual.

Overall, the total number of records was less than average, due to the reduced recording activity, especially during the spring and early summer months. For instance, Large Red, Red-eyed and Emerald Damselflies and Four-spotted Chaser were recorded once only. There were two records each of Banded Demoiselle and Ruddy Darter and three of Emperor Dragonfly. Over the season there was only a handful of records of Azure, Common Blue and Blue-tailed Damselflies, as well as Black-tailed Skimmers. Although there were slightly more sightings of Southern Hawker this year both Migrant and Brown Hawker records were well below average. It does seem likely, however, that these last two species were attracting the attention of the visiting Hobbies to No.3 bed, in the early autumn period. On a more positive note, the exceptional numbers of Common Darters recorded at the new pools on No.1 bed during August, together with those reported on No.4 bed in mid-September have reversed the recent decline of this species across the Reserve. The dragonfly season which began in late April, finally came to a close earlier than usual, with a Migrant Hawker record, on 26th September.

In conclusion, it was reassuring to note that the regular sixteen species were all still present this year. It was also good to see that the new pools on No.1 bed had already been colonised by several species, especially Common Darters. Hopefully, as these pools mature they will lead to an increase in numbers of our resident species and possibly attract new species, such as Small Red-eyed Damselfly. This recent colonist, first discovered in Essex in 1999, is now established in Cheshire and has also been recorded lately in Greater Manchester and South Lancashire. The Group website contains identification tips for the various species recorded on the Reserve and as usual I have included brief descriptions in the individual species accounts. For those who may wish to further their knowledge of these fascinating insects, I can recommend both the British Dragonfly Society website and the Cheshire Dragonflies blog, run by the County Recordors.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to David Bowman for posting his records, photographs, videos and reports on the Group website and social media platforms, without which this report would have been incomplete.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS



Emerald Damselfly

David Bowman

Emerald Damselfly

Lestes sponsa

A widespread species associated with shallow pools and lake margins where there is emergent vegetation, such as rushes. Males are metallic green but develop a pale blue colouration on the thorax and abdomen. Females are duller green above and pale brown underneath. They usually perch on upright vegetation with their wings part spread, but are often difficult to spot. The species appears to

have declined at Woolston over a number of years and very few have been recorded lately. There was just one record this year on 1st August, when one was discovered on No.1 bed and photographed for the website report.

Banded Demoiselle

Calopteryx splendens

This large metallic blue or green damselfly favours slow flowing streams and rivers with muddy sediment and emergent vegetation. Males are blue with a dark blue band on the wings which gives them a conspicuous fluttering flight action. Females are metallic green with pale green wings but only visit the breeding habitat when mature to mate and oviposit eggs. Immature individuals of both sexes are occasionally encountered away from water. Locally, a small colony occurs along the south-facing bank of the River Mersey, at the Weir basin. There were two records during the early summer period, both of which were reported on the website. The first was a female which was photographed on 30th May. On No.1 bed a male and two females were recorded on 13th June, and a female was photographed and captured on video.



Female Banded Demoiselle

David Bowman

Azure Damselfly

Coenagrion puella

A very common damselfly, found at a wide range of still water habitats, including ditches and garden ponds. Males are blue with black markings and have a black U shaped mark at the top of the abdomen. Females appear black and green. Emergence is from late spring and early summer. The

damselflies reported basking in sunshine on 11th June on No.3 bed, probably included this species. Two days later on 13th June good numbers were reported at the pools on No.1 bed and also on the 23rd on No.3 bed. Following this date just two were noted on my first visit to No.3 bed on 11th July, with a similar number on the 22nd. The last record was on 7th August, when five were present along the south bank of No.3 bed.

Common Blue Damselfly

Enallagma cyathigerum

Another widely distributed species which breeds in both still and slow flowing waters but not usually in small ponds or garden ponds. Mature males are blue with black markings and have a black lollipop type mark at the upper end of the abdomen. Females are either blue or dull green with black rocket marks on the abdomen. Both sexes have broad blue or green stripes on the thorax. They fly further out over the water's surface than the other blue damselflies and tend to rest on floating vegetation away from the edge. There were seven records this year beginning on 11th June, when several were reported basking in the sunshine with other damselflies on No. 3 bed. On No.1 bed on 13th June, good numbers were present around the new pools. The report dated 23rd June mentioned "scores" being present on No.3 bed, mixed with Azure and Blue-tailed damselflies. There were just two records of singles on No.3 bed in July, including a male on the 11th and a female on the 22nd. Meanwhile on No.1 bed, 15 were reported on 1st August, including pairs in tandem. Finally, on 7th August, 19 were recorded during a survey along the south bank of No.3 bed.

Red-eyed Damselfly

Erythromma najas

This more robust dark-coloured damselfly is largely confined to the southern half of the country. Breeding habitats include large ponds, lakes, canals and slow-moving rivers with water-lilies, floating vegetation and algae. Males have blood-red eyes, a dark bronze top to the thorax and a blue band at the end of the abdomen. Females lack the blue band on the abdomen and have duller red eyes. The small colony on the Reserve occurs mostly on the stretch of river along the south bank of No.3 bed. It is here that males are likely to be found resting on floating vegetation or algae. The only record this year was on 23rd June, when three were reported.

Blue-tailed Damselfly

Ishnura elegans

A very common species found in a wide range of habitats, including ponds and slow-moving rivers. Both sexes are mostly black with a bright blue band at the bottom end of the abdomen. Males have blue sides on the thorax and narrow blue shoulder stripes, whereas females occur in five colour forms depending on maturity. The species is often active in cooler conditions. Small numbers were recorded during the season beginning with three on 13th June, on No.1 bed. The report on 23rd June also mentioned this species being present on No.3 bed. Three were noted on the bed on 11th July, whilst two were present on No.1 bed. Two were found along the south bank of No.3 bed on 18th July and this number increased to nine on 22nd July. The maximum count was on 1st August, when 12 were reported on No.1 bed. Two were recorded during a survey along the south bank of No.3 bed on 7th August. The last record was on 8th August, when five were reported on No.1 bed and a single was present on No.3 bed.

Large Red Damselfly

Pyrrhosoma nymphula

This is another common damselfly which breeds in a wide range of ponds, ditches and canals and is often the first to appear in the spring. Males are red with black marks on the abdomen. Females have various colour forms but normally occur as red, with more black on the abdomen. In recent years a small number have been recorded on No.1 bed. There was just one record of this distinctive damselfly but it was significant. On 23rd April, David Bowman spotted two teneral or freshly emerged insects, whilst on his early morning walk along the public footpath towards the Weir basin, on the west bank of No.2 bed. They were evidently resting in the sunshine following their maiden flight and would not have attained their full red colouration at this stage. From past records it appears that this is the earliest recorded date at Woolston, since dragonfly recording began in the late eighties.

Southern Hawker

Aeshna cyanea

A large and colourful solitary dragonfly which is associated with shaded shallow ponds, lakes and woodland glades. Males have pale green and blue marks on an otherwise dark abdomen. Females are brown and green and both sexes have broad pale green marks on the thorax. Individuals hawk around tree tops and perch on trees and bushes. Territorial males often hover around head height close to observers. There were seven records during the summer beginning with a single on 30th May, on No.3 bed. On 13th June, three were reported at the new pools on No.1 bed. Along the south bank of No.3 bed singles were recorded on 22nd and 25th July. Two were hawking along the Canal track by No.1 bed, on 1st August. Two males were recorded on the south bank of No.3 bed during a survey on the 7th August. Finally, a single male was seen in flight around the tree canopy near the footbridge on to No.3 bed on 8th August.

Brown Hawker

Aeshna grandis

This easily identified large brown dragonfly with amber wings is always recorded in relatively good numbers on the Reserve. Both sexes are basically brown with coloured wings and two prominent yellowish stripes on the side of the thorax. Males have blue on the eyes and blue dots along the abdomen whilst females have yellow-tinted eyes and pale yellow marks on the abdomen. As usual the majority of records were from No.3 bed, beginning with reports of a single on 11th June followed by two on 23rd June. A single was patrolling along the south bank of the bed on 22nd July and five were reported here on the 28th July, including one photographed for the website. Numbers peaked in August, when 11 were noted along the south bank of No.3 bed on the 7th, with one by the Car Park. On 8th August, nine were present on the bed and one was reported and photographed here on the 13th. On 31st August, two were hawking over a pool on No.1 bed. The final sighting was on 14th September, when four were recorded during the last survey on No.3 bed.

Common Hawker

Aeshna juncea

There were no records of this large dark coloured species which is usually associated with acidic ponds and moorland bog pools. It has now become a rare visitor to the Reserve and was last recorded in 2014.

Migrant Hawker

Aeshna mixta

This medium-sized dragonfly which appears from late summer onwards breeds in non-acidic ponds, lakes and slow-moving waters. Males are dark with prominent blue spots on the abdomen. Females are brown with smaller yellow marks. Both sexes have a diagnostic narrow yellow triangle at the base of the abdomen which is visible when the insects remain perched on low vegetation. The first records were on 7th and 8th August, when singles were present on the south bank of No.3 bed. Also on No.3 bed, a single was reported on 2nd September and two were noted on the 3rd. In warm and sunny conditions on 14th September, eight were present along the south bank of No.3 bed and one was photographed on No.1 bed on the 15th. On 17th September, three were reported on No.4 bed. The last sighting was on 26th September, when a male was observed flying low over the river, below the footbridge to No.3 bed.



Migrant Hawker

David Bowman

Emperor Dragonfly

Anax imperator

The large size and bright colours of this species make it easier to identify than the other hawkers. Males have a sky blue abdomen whereas females are generally green and both sexes have a pale green thorax. Breeding habitats include open well-vegetated ponds, lakes and slow-flowing rivers. Males patrol for long periods, fairly high above the water's surface. All three records were on No.1 bed, beginning with four at the new pools on 13th June. In the same area on 1st August two were spotted,

including an ovipositing female which was captured on video. On 8th August, seven were present and another egg-laying female was photographed. Hopefully, the eggs hatched and with luck adult dragonflies will eventually emerge from their larval state.

Broad-bodied Chaser

Libellula depressa

A medium-sized bulky dragonfly, which appears early in the season, and is often found at newly created ponds and shallow lakes with bare edges. Both sexes have a brown thorax, brown patches at the base of the wings and a short flattened abdomen. Mature males have a pale blue abdomen with yellow marks on the sides. Females and immature males are yellowish brown. There were just two reports from the spring, beginning with one on 9th May on No.3 bed. On 13th June two males were noted, when the pools on No.1 bed were surveyed.

Four-spotted Chaser

Libellula quadrimaculata

This common and widespread medium-sized species is dull brown and black with yellow marks on the sides of the abdomen. The diagnostic spots appear on the leading edge of the wings and the hind-wing has a dark patch at the base. Males often chase off rivals from a prominent perch on marginal vegetation, usually returning to the same perch to rest. The only record was on 13th June, when two were around the No.1 bed pools.

Black-tailed Skimmer

Orthetrum cancellatum

Yet another active, medium-sized dragonfly which habitually flies low over the water's surface, and often rests on bare ground around the margins of ponds, lakes and clay pits. Mature males have a tapered pale blue abdomen, becoming black towards the bottom and yellow marks on the sides. Females and immature males are yellow, with two black lines along the top of the abdomen. The first report was on 13th June when eight were on No.1 bed, including both copulating and ovipositing pairs. On 23rd June, seven were present on No.3 bed. There were no sightings in July but there were three records of single males in August, beginning with one on No.3 bed on the 7th. The others were on No.1 bed on 8th and 31st August.

Black Darter

Sympetrum danae

Once again there were no reports of this small dragonfly species, which is associated with shallow acidic pools and moorland habitats. A single on No.1 bed in August 2017 remains the last known record.

Ruddy Darter

Sympetrum sanguineum

This small red dragonfly breeds in well-vegetated shallow pools and lakes close to woodland. Males are bright red and have an obvious waisted abdomen, whereas females and immature males are a yellowish colour with black marks on the sides. Both sexes have completely black legs, which is a

diagnostic feature. There were only two sightings this year, beginning with two on No.3 bed on 23rd June, one of which was photographed. The other was a single on 31st August, basking in sunshine on No.1 bed.



Ruddy Darter

David Bowman

Common Darter

Sympetrum striolatum

Slightly larger than the other darters, this very common and widespread dragonfly breeds in a range of habitats including ponds, ditches, lakes and rivers. Males are orange-red with black markings and two pale patches on the side of the thorax. Females are yellowish with black marks and both sexes have a pale thin line down the legs. After noting a decline of this species on the Reserve over several years it is good to report that there was a significant increase in numbers this year, due to the creation of new pools on No.1 bed and the developments on No.4 bed. The first one was seen on 28th July on No.3 bed, which was not unusual. However, when the pools on No.1 bed were visited by several colleagues on 1st August, it was estimated that 340 were present. The majority of these were freshly emerged teneral, which were resting on the surrounding vegetation. On 7th August another single was recorded on No.3 bed. Meanwhile on No.1 bed, a total of 140 were reported on 8th August. By 31st August, 30 or so remained on No.1 bed and two tandem ovipositing pairs were observed. On the same day, four were resting on the ground along the Canal track by No. 2 bed. Finally, on 17th September, 40 were reported on No.4 bed.

Brian Baird

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This report is very much a collaborative effort; permit holders, volunteers, visiting groups, ringers, voluntary wardens and committee members have all contributed to the collection of records. We now have a forty-three year, unbroken history of rigorous wildlife recording at Woolston, starting in 1978/79. As our core group gets older, it is pleasing to report that there are signs of a younger generation coming through, though more active volunteers are always welcome. I would encourage all visitors to record any noteworthy sightings in the logbook in the Morgan Hide. Once again, I have chosen to include in the species accounts, the conservation status of all the birds occurring last year. It is sobering to see that of the 145 species recorded, 25 feature on the Red List of the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) and 44 on the Amber List. This is a salutary reminder of the reason we all work so hard to keep the habitat at Woolston in prime condition, as our local contribution to future species' survival. If you want to read more about the BoCC, go to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) website at <http://www.bto.org/>

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