



Thorpe Marshes Wildlife Report 2017

This is the sixth annual wildlife report for Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Thorpe St Andrew Marshes nature reserve – NWT Thorpe Marshes for short in this report and elsewhere. It summarises some of the observations of wildlife during 2017, including records from the monthly wildlife walks, observations made by the author or provided by other naturalists (see acknowledgements).

The previous reports have been detailed partly to put Thorpe Marshes 'on the map'. Now the reserve is well-established there is less need for that and this report is less comprehensive than in some previous years.

As usual, plants are largely excluded, partly for reasons of space, and partly as they vary less from year to year. There is only a short section on birds this year as reports have been included in James Emerson's *Whitlingham Bird Report 2017*. The group covered most thoroughly is Odonata, and the butterflies are probably fairly complete. Mammals, reptiles and amphibians are some casual records; other invertebrate records are ad hoc.

It's possible that other visitors to Thorpe Marshes have seen additional species, or what are noted as 'new' here have been seen by others before. We'll be glad to have additional records, to chris@honeyguide.co.uk. We hope this report may encourage more recording, especially of under-recorded groups.

Chris Durdin, January 2018



Common carder bee, 3rd April; juvenile kingfisher 12th July; Brown Hawker, 17th July.

Acknowledgements

Records from Mike Burrows, Mark Chipperfield, Ricky Cleverley, Chris Durdin, James Emerson, Ian Holmes, Derek Longe and Susan Weeks, plus others via the *Whitlingham Bird Report*. Photos and records by Chris Durdin if they are not otherwise attributed.

Initials used in this report:

BDS: British Dragonfly Society. BESL: Broadland Environmental Services Ltd. BTO: British Trust for Ornithology. CP: Country Park (Whitlingham). NWT: Norfolk Wildlife Trust. RSPB: The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. UEA: University of East Anglia.

Websites for NWT Thorpe Marshes

NWT: www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-in-norfolk/nature-reserves/reserves/thorpe-marshes
www.honeyguide.co.uk/thorpemarshes.htm from where there are links to photos on Facebook, and previous Thorpe Marshes wildlife reports.

References

Steve Cham, Brian Nelson, Adrian Parr, Steve Prentice, Dave Smallshire and Pam Taylor (2014). *Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland*.
Durdin, Chris (January 2013-2017). *Thorpe Marshes Wildlife Reports 2012-2016*.
Emerson, James (January 2014-2017). *Whitlingham Bird Reports 2013-2016*.

Key habitats and access

Key habitats at NWT Thorpe Marshes are the **gravel pit**, known as St Andrew's Broad, **grazed marshes** grading into grazed fen, **ungrazed marsh** of ranker vegetation and scrub around the broad, and **ditches**. One marsh has the '**flood**', originally created by subsidence during gravel extraction but extended and deepened by management. These are described in more detail in previous reports.

Access: the reserve briefly went under water in January having not done so at all last year. That didn't happen again, though there was some over-topping of the river banks on several occasions in the autumn. The main path through the marshes remains in good condition, though the riverside footpath remains prone to being muddy in winter. The railway bridge was open all year.



Reserve under water, 14th January, from the footbridge and from just over the footbridge looking along the path towards the mooring basin. August bank holiday Monday: a crowd gathers on the railway bridge to see the Tornado steam train replica on its way to Great Yarmouth.

Management and wildlife's response

There was major management work in the autumn/winter of 2015/2016 (detailed in the 2016 report, including the funding sources) and rather less in 2017. Scrub was removed from the eastern edge of the Broad.

The perimeter ditch was extended to stop access to the shingle spit, having been closed and fenced last year. That ditch was later deepened. The lack of access at this western end of the Broad continued to encourage the area's use by birds, with ducks and gulls regularly loafing at this western end of the Broad plus a regular flock of lapwings in late summer and early autumn. In previous autumns there had sometimes been a conspicuous absence of ducks on the Broad but not so this year: 100+ tufted ducks, gadwalls, pochards and a regular group of shovelers were there through all of the last quarter of the year.



A regular pattern in 2017 on St Andrews Broad: gulls on 'west bank' and ducks near the former shingle spit.

It proved difficult to find a local grazer but an excellent solution arrived on 5th September in the shape of five British White cattle, part of NWT's own livestock resource. Perhaps it was their size but they seemed to be very effective grazers as they were moved around different marshes until 20th November, 11 weeks of grazing. There was just one early marsh orchid (last year three), reflecting the low level of grazing intensity in 2016.

The dry spring led to the flood drying out. Consequently there were no notable breeding birds on the flood unlike last year (namely tufted ducks, gadwalls and water rails).

There was no ditch management this year. Ditches still looked in good condition following previous years' work.



British White cattle, here by the bramble patch which is often a good place to see linnet (right), reed bunting or, in winter, stonechat.

Guided walks, activities and publicity

Monthly NWT guided walks were led by Chris Durdin. These were promoted mainly through NWT events leaflets, the two websites and newspaper 'what's ons'. There were also five additional walks, for NWT Ranworth Volunteers, Suffolk Wildlife Trust Redgrave Group, Norwich RSPB Local Group, UEA Environmental Science graduates and RSPB Strumpshaw Fen volunteers, the last welcomed on site but led by the RSPB's Tim Strudwick.

The 17 walks attracted 254 people through the year (191 in 2016, 145 in 2015, 177 in 2014, 104 in 2013, 90 in 2012) giving a running total of 960 people on walks over six years. An encouraging aspect of the monthly guided walks was that they continued to attract new people almost every time, as well many regulars.

A new initiative was regular public pond-dipping sessions, based on the pond-dipping platform by the first pond behind the education area gate. These attracted a total of 33 people, a mix of adults and children, on the last Sundays of the month from May to July: an event planned for August was cancelled when there was an outbreak of toxic blue-green algae.

Media work about the reserve's wildlife included a major article in September in the Eastern Evening News by NWT's Head of Nature Reserves Kevin Hart. As in previous years, there were articles in the Broads Society's *Harnser*, appearing in January, April, July and October. There were four pieces about Thorpe Marshes on the NWT's Blog, one of which was by Derek Longe. New for this year: 12 monthly articles in Thorpe St Andrew's *Parish Life* magazine.



Guided walk scenes, February and October; the October group is looking at scars created by egg-laying Willow Emerald damselflies (DL).

Review of the year

The reserve went completely under water on 14 **January** when high tides overtopped or threatened sea defences elsewhere. The water cleared quickly and there was no damage done. Most of St Andrews Broad was covered in ice in a cold snap in the third week of January. Birdwatchers in **February** visited to see a black-necked grebe, as well as the over-wintering stonechats, which moved on in early March.

Spring flowers started early with lesser celandine, coltsfoot and lady's smock in **March**, as well as the first singing chiffchaffs near the month's end. Low rainfall was a feature of the winter and especially an exceptionally dry **April**. Lingering pairs of shovelers raised hopes that they might stay to breed, but they didn't; the dried out flood area meant there were no broods of tufted ducks or gadwalls here this year. Six species of damselflies were on the wing in late **May** and it was the start of a good year for Four-spotted Chasers.

A single early marsh orchid on 31st May couldn't be re-found in the often hot **June**: the limited grazing last year may be a factor, though a grasshopper warbler, seen well on June's guided walk, liked the expanding sedge beds on the marsh. In an eventful **July**, a single black-tailed godwit with the now regular lapwing flock on 7th and a juvenile redstart on 17th were unusual birds, and good views of an immature kingfisher showed they had bred. A count of 53 Norfolk Hawkers was a record for the survey route – there are others off-route – and there were two early emerging Willow Emeralds on the guided walk on the evening of 19th July. A single Small Red-eyed Damselfly on 4th **August** was on the same date as the single record last year.



19th July: a Willow Emerald Damselfly lands on Derek Longe's paper in *Atropos* about egg-laying choices for Willow Emeralds (DL).

September started well with a whinchat on the 1st. Warm weather that ran into the first half of October meant many sightings of Common Darters, Migrant Hawkers and Willow Emeralds, the last especially around the newly excavated perimeter ditch now isolating the former shingle spit. A male stonechat – the same one as last winter? – reappeared on 15th **October** and remained for the rest of the year. Duck numbers have been low in recent autumns but regular groups of tufted ducks, gadwalls and sometimes shovelers were a feature. These were mostly around the western end of the Broad, probably on count of reduced disturbance since access to the shingle spit was cut off.

That pattern continued into **November** and beyond, also with many pochards present. Active Common Hawkers in early November are usual, but a Willow Emerald in 'ivy corner' on 6th is our latest ever. Records of a bearded tit in the reedbed by the railway line started from 17th November and continued through **December**. The last month of the year brought some cold snaps, but not prolonged, encouraging a build up in teal numbers and a scattering of winter birds including siskins on 13th and a male goosander on 16th.



Black-tailed godwit with lawings, 7th July; juvenile common redstart, 17th July (David Porter).

Birds

Bird records for Thorpe Marshes were all available for and included in James Emerson's *Whitlingham Bird Report 2017* covering Whitlingham CP, NWT Thorpe Marshes and adjacent areas. This 52-page report is online at www.honeyguide.co.uk/documents/WhitlinghamBirdReport2017.pdf and via <http://jamesbirdsandbeer.blogspot.co.uk/>. Records in this report include wildfowl counts for the BTO's Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) based on combined counts for Whitlingham Little Broad, Great Broad and St Andrews Broad.

Birds noted as seen at or over Thorpe Marshes in the *Whitlingham Bird Report 2017* that have not featured in previous Thorpe Marshes Wildlife Reports are:

Bewick's swan (c.50 flying over, 20 February), garganey (a drake flew west over St Andrews Broad on 21st April), black-necked grebe (27th Jan – 14th Feb), bar-tailed godwit (reports on 31st Mar and 20th April), sanderling 7th May (Stuart White), little gull (30th April, M Eldridge), woodlark flying over on 26th Oct, spotted flycatcher 15th May & 18th September. [Unless otherwise noted, records from Mark Chipperfield.]

Amphibians, reptiles, fish

Common frog 1 on 4th Aug, guided walk.

A lean year with no records of newts, common lizards or grass snakes in 2017.

3-spined stickleback: 25th March (JE).

Mammals

A few casual records. During the autumn and winter BESL has been monitoring water voles by placing a series of platforms in ditches; one of these had droppings on it that were the right shape for water voles. There was no bat monitoring or event this year, so far as I know.

Otter	Reports of otters (MB, September) and of otter signs (TS, December).
Fox	Glimpsed on 23 rd August (DL).
Water vole	Guided walk, 28 th April; one scampered across frogbit 28 th Aug; droppings on a platform.
Mole	Molehills in rough grass, especially on the riverbank footpath.
Common shrew	Found dead, guided walk 4 th August.
Chinese water deer	Seen less frequently this year than last year e.g. one on guided walk, 16 th January. It's likely they are often present and out of sight.



Water vole 'platform'; water vole, 28th April (DL); Chinese water deer, 16th January (DL).

Butterflies

Orange-tip surveys: transect-style counts of orange-tips were undertaken for a third year, with seven surveys from 9th April to 1st June (the last a nil return). Highest count was 8 (6 males, 2 females) on 10th May, fewer than peak counts of 13 in 2016 and 27 in 2015. This decline is certainly weather-related this year, with many cool days in orange-tip season of April-May. That said, the butterflies probably seized good weather when they could, evidenced by 31 orange-tips eggs on lady's smock on 10th May in one survey section alone.



Orange-tip butterfly eggs on lady's smock, 10th May.

Poor weather in spring meant a slow start for other butterflies this year, but there were plenty around in a hot June and often balmy summer and early autumn weather gave an impression of a good late season.

Two Essex skippers on 7th July (DL) are a new species for the reserve list, perhaps overlooked in the past. Not recorded this year: brown argus. Species recorded:

Essex skipper
Small skipper
Large skipper
Large white
Small white
Green-veined white
Orange-tip

Brimstone
Small tortoiseshell
Comma
Painted lady
Red admiral
Peacock
Meadow brown

Gatekeeper
Ringlet
Speckled wood
Holly blue
Small copper
Common blue



Peacock, 3rd April; small skipper, 2nd July; comma on ivy, 1st November.

Moths

Records from Derek Longe and James Emerson (JE)

13/05/2017	Flame Shoulder	<i>Ochroleura plecta</i>
22/05/2017 (JE)	Meadow Longhorn Moth	<i>Cauchas rufimitrella</i>
22/05/2017 (JE)	Cocksfoot Moth	<i>Glyphipterix simplicicella</i>
01/06/2017	Small China Mark	<i>Cataclysta lemnata</i>
20/06/2017	Cinnabar Moth	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>
22/06/2017	Clouded Border	<i>Lomaspilis marginata</i>
22/06/2017	Light Brown Apple Moth	<i>Epiphyas postuittana</i>
22/06/2017	Small China Mark	<i>Cataclysta lemnata</i>
07/07/2017	Cinnabar Moth	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>
19/07/2017	Small China Mark	<i>Cataclysta lemnata</i>
23/08/2017	Buff Tip	<i>Phalera bucephala</i>
23/08/2017	Small China Mark	<i>Cataclysta lemnata</i>
22/06/2017	<i>Oleuthreutes lacunana</i> (micromoth)	<i>Oleuthreutes (Now Celypha) lacunana</i>
19/07/2017	Common Grass Veneer	<i>Agriphila tristella</i>
19/07/2017	Cinnabar Moth	<i>Tyria jacobaeae</i>



Cinnabar moth caterpillars, 2nd July; they were very obvious on ragwort this year, and one caterpillar was found on marsh ragwort. Buff-tip moth caterpillars on willow, 23 August (DL). Ruby Tiger caterpillar, 16th October.

20/06/2017	Nettle Tap	<i>Anthrophila fabriciana</i>
15/09/2017, 22/05/17 (JE)	Drinker Moth (caterpillar)	<i>Philudoria potatoria</i>
19/07/2017	Common Grass Veneer	<i>Agriphila tristella</i>

16/10/2017
18/11/2017

Ruby Tiger
Apple leaf miner *
* vacated leaf mines on crab apple

Phragmatobia fuliginosa
Lyonetia clerkella

Damselflies and Dragonflies

There are no additions to the reserve list this year.

Norfolk Hawker surveys: transect-style counts of Norfolk Hawkets were run for a third year with nine surveys in June and July. There were two counts above 50: 51 on 2nd July (CD) and 53 on 7th July (DL). It certainly felt like every short stretch of ditch had a patrolling Norfolk Hawker and it was an increase on last year's peak count of 40 on 28th June. This may have missed perched dragonflies and, as before, is not a full count of the reserve as our regular route on the main paths omits some ditches and the new ponds.

We had had just one record of **Broad-bodied Chaser** this year, probably as the bare pitches they prefer now had vegetation. A female on 4th June was at the recently excavated ditch between the riverside path and the former shingle spit.

There was also one record only of **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**, on the mooring basin so strictly speaking just off the reserve. Remarkably it was on the same date as the single record in 2016, namely 4th August.

There were no records of **Emerald Damselfly** or **Southern Hawker** this year. Both are in relatively small numbers at Thorpe and our best guess is that they were overlooked, so for the time being remain in the lists below.

The **Willow Emerald Damselfly** (Western Willow Spreadwing in Europe) had another excellent year. Derek Longe's peak count was 27 on 23rd August. They also had a long season: the first was on a guided walk on the evening of 19th July; the last was on 6th November, which was the latest in the year noted in the online BDS records. A paper by Derek Longe about Willow Emeralds egg-laying into bramble at Thorpe was published in *Atropos* and it was a highlight of the year when a recently-emerged Willow Emerald landing on a copy of the paper on 19th July.



Ruddy darter, 4th August; Small Red-eyed Damselfly, 4th August (DL); female Willow Emerald on ivy, 6th November.

The 'missing' Odonata species at Thorpe, compared with the RSPB's Mid Yare Reserves (excluding vagrants) remain as Variable Damselfly and Scarce Chaser. Another species to look out for at Thorpe is Lesser Emperor, seen at Whitlingham CP in June.

Confirmed or probably breeding (18 species) in list below.

No breeding evidence (2 species): Broad-bodied Chaser, Small Red-eyed Damselfly.

(This report follows the British Dragonfly Society's house style with capital letters for English species names.)

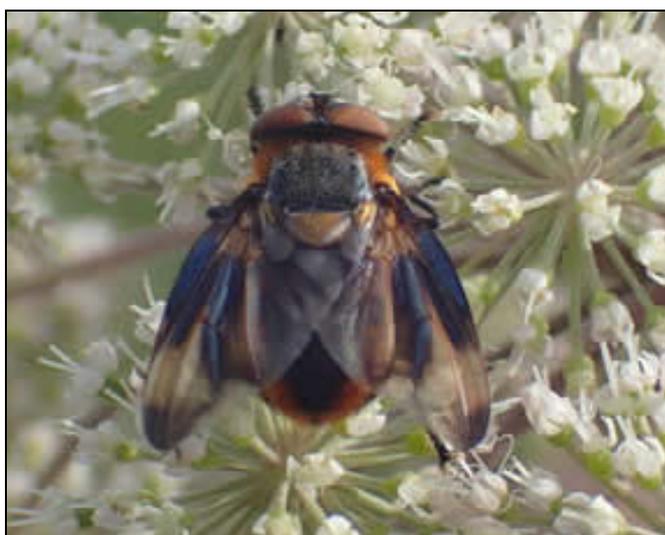
Willow Emerald Damselfly	<i>Chalcolestes sponsa</i>	19 th July – 6 th November. Visible in many areas, including from the railway bridge and ditches around the former shingle spit.
Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	no records this year.
Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	May-July, often near and over the river
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	May-September, abundant
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	May-July
Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma najas</i>	May-August; on the reserve in several places as well as the lily pads on the river.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma viridulum</i>	1 on 4 th August.
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	June-August.
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	May-June.
Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	no records this year.
Brown Hawker	<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	July-August; usually high-flying but one perched and approachable on 17 th July (photo, pg 1).
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	very common Aug-Oct.
Norfolk Hawker	<i>Aeshna isosceles</i>	June-July; see survey notes above.
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>	June-July.
Hairy Dragonfly	<i>Brachytron pratense</i>	May-June.
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	May-June. A good year: at least six on 21 st June.
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>	female on 4 th June.
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>	July-August
Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>	July-October; 11 th October last record
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	June-November

Other invertebrates

Aquatic invertebrates: an NWT survey confirmed the continuing presence of shining ramshorn snail *Segmentina nitida*, which is listed as 'Endangered' on the GB Red List (RDB1) due to historical declines and a restricted distribution.

Two flies not noted in previous years.



Left: Tachinid fly *Phasia hemiptera* - a parasite, usually on bugs - on angelica, 14th August. Photo and ID by James Emerson.

Right: Noon fly *Mesembrina meridiana*, soaking up the autumn sun on a gate, 3rd Nov 2017. The eggs are laid in cow dung.

Lichens and liverwort; fungi

All recorded by James Emerson, 25/02/17

Lichen		<i>Melanelixia subaurifera</i>
Lichen	Oak Moss	<i>Evernia prunastri</i>
Lichen		<i>Parmelia saxatilis</i>
Lichen		<i>Parmelia sulcata</i>
Lichen		<i>Xanthoria parietina</i>
Liverwort	Forked Veilwort	<i>Metzgeria furcata</i>

Fungi, only modest recording: the following were all noted by James Emerson, 25th February.

Alder Goblet	<i>Ciboria caucus</i>	Growing on decaying Alder catkins
Blushing Bracket	<i>Daedaleopsis confragosa</i>	
Silverleaf Fungus	<i>Chondrostereum purpureum</i>	
Tar Spot	<i>Rhytisma acerinum</i>	
Turkeytail	<i>Trametes versicolor</i>	

Velvet Shank
Violet Bramble Rust
Willow Barkspot
Yellow Brain

Flammulina velutipes
Phragmidium violaceum
Diatrype bullata
Tremella mesenterica

Telospores checked

Additional fungi seen in 2017:

A dead tree beyond the fence at the dog-leg corner had Small Stag's Horn *Calocera cornea* and Common Jellyspot *Dacrymyces stillatus* in the autumn and winter.

Triphragmium ulmariae, orange rust on meadowsweet.

Angel's Bonnets *Mycena arcangeliana* (JE, 21st December, right) "growing on a fallen ash trunk near the riverbank. Once dried they have a strong smell of iodine."



Velvet Shank: on the woodland edge on the guided walk on 17th Feb;
Alder Goblets, on alder seeds in the palm of a hand, 25th Feb.

For more information about NWT Thorpe Marshes, including details of guided walks, please visit the websites noted on page 1. As a local charity committed to saving Norfolk's wildlife, NWT relies on membership and other public support.