

# The Birds of Whitlingham & Thorpe 2020



Compiled by James Emerson

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## Get in touch

I would welcome any comments, corrections or constructive criticisms about this report. These can be sent to me, along with any sightings for inclusion in the 2021 report, by emailing: [whitlinghambirds@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:whitlinghambirds@yahoo.co.uk).

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All photos are attributed to the photographer and copyrighted to him/her. I am particularly grateful to Gary White for providing a large amount of photos from Whitlingham for use in this report, and also to the other photographers who have allowed their pictures to be used (a full list can be found in the acknowledgements).

## Introduction

This is the ninth annual report of the bird species reported from the Whitlingham area (including Thorpe Marshes NWT reserve), covering sightings from 2020. It should be noted that this bird report is independent from any of the organisations that manages these sites, notably Whitlingham Charitable Trust, Norfolk Wildlife Trust and South Norfolk Council. A map of the recording area covered by this report can be found on page 5. Within this area most of the sightings come from Whitlingham C.P. (particularly Whitlingham Great Broad) and Thorpe Marshes.

During 2020 the management of Whitlingham Country Park by the Broads Authority came to an end after 25 years, reverting to the responsibility of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust. A series of gales and strong winds caused the closure of paths on at least five occasions throughout the year, whilst in late December Trowse Meadows and Thorpe Marshes were impassable due to large-scale flooding. However the year will clearly be remembered for the restrictions put in place by the government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and these are evaluated in the context of the effect that they had on wildlife and wildlife recording in the first article in this report.

Despite (or in some cases because of) the restrictions, many bird species were reported this year. Articles cover the first local rarities committee-accepted records of White-tailed Eagle and Corncrake, whilst a singing Savi's Warbler was well documented and should sail through the national British Birds Rarities Committee. Several other notable records of local scarcities are dealt with in the systematic list, including Red-breasted Merganser and Iceland Gull.

A large number of records in this report have been supplied by other local birders, to whom I am grateful. I have included the majority of sightings that have been sent to me directly or reported online, however I reserve the right to decide what sightings make the final report. Many of the sightings included in this report have not been seen by me personally (more so than in previous years), and some may relate to birds that were only seen flying over or were 'heard only' records. As a result for formal recording purposes the sightings in this report should be treated as unverified records, i.e. sightings should not be taken directly from the report to be used for any 'official' purposes unless accompanied by a photo – observers are encouraged to submit their records to the county recorder and/or BTO directly.

For the first time this report also has an accompanying film, put together by Gary White and featuring video footage of many of the bird species seen at Whitlingham this year. This video can be viewed on YouTube using the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGwzAYjaGHA>

In general when considering what records and details to include in the main systematic list I have adopted the following categorisation:

**Resident species and regular migrants** – reports have been used to write a general summary for the species, with records only omitted if they were particularly unusual, for example very early or late records. High counts or unusual records may be attributed to the observer.

**Species recorded annually in low numbers at Whitlingham** – species that occur in most years are dealt with as above but with more detail regarding the sightings

**Species seldom recorded at Whitlingham or particularly scarce locally** – records included in the report with \* before the species name. As much detail as possible is included with each of these records, in particular it is mentioned if the species recorded was photographed, if it was seen by more than one individual, if there were any other sightings nearby etc. These records also have the initials of the person who reported the sighting. Note that this won't necessarily be the person who first found the species in the case of multi-observed records.

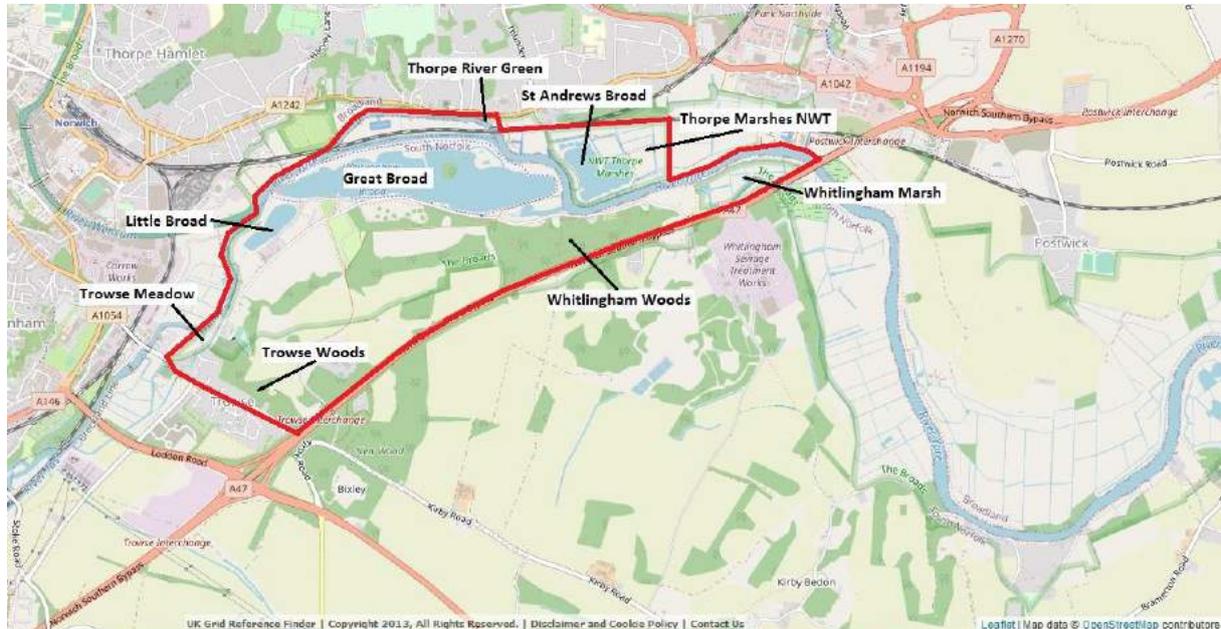
**County or national rarities** – included solely at the editor's discretion. Details of the record included as with local scarcities, but with an additional note as to whether the record has been submitted to and/or accepted by the relevant rarities committee, based on the latest WIP (work-in-progress) files.

Birds covered by the above process form the main systematic species list. The presence of a number of recently reintroduced species in Norfolk has necessitated a new appendix, whilst the more thorough than normal recording of birds around Norwich also meant increased records from nearby, a few of which I have chosen to mention. The updated appendices of the report for 2020 are now as follows:

- Appendix A – Recorded species linked to reintroduction schemes
- Appendix B – Recorded birds thought to be escapes or of dubious origin
- Appendix C – Birds reported from the area but not accepted onto the main list
- Appendix D – Hybrid birds
- Appendix E – Unrecorded but likely species (seen in at least 3 of the past 5 years)
- Appendix F – Selected additional bird sightings from the Norwich area

## The Whitlingham Recording Area covered by this report

Where possible distinctive features make up the boundaries, for example the railway line along part of the north of the area and the A47 to the south.



The key sites that make up the recording area are:

- Whitlingham Country Park (including Whitlingham Little Broad and Great Broad)
- Trowse Meadow
- Trowse Woods
- Thorpe Marshes NWT (including St Andrew's Broad)
- Thorpe River Green
- Whitlingham Woods
- Whitlingham Marsh LNR

Crown Point Estate land north of the A47 is currently included, although as most of it has no public access there are seldom any sightings from this area. Whilst Thorpe St Andrew sits just outside of the recording area, I have adjusted the boundaries on the map above from previous years to take in Thorpe River Green. This area, which sits adjacent to the old course of the River Yare just north of the railway line is now the primary part of the area for reading colour rings on gulls, and was previously covered by this report despite nominally being just outside the area.

# The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on local wildlife and recording

## Part 1 - Introduction

During the spring of 2020 the United Kingdom faced an unprecedented situation, with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in a government-imposed lockdown. Households were told to stay at home unless activity fell into four exempted categories. This was slightly less strict than similar lockdowns in some other European countries, but still resulted in dramatic changes to behaviour. Additional restrictions continued for the rest of the year (including a second nationwide lockdown in the autumn lasting four weeks), but these generally allowed birders to visit the countryside and are considered beyond the scope of this article, which discusses the effects that the government response to the pandemic had on wildlife, and more specifically the recording of birds within the area covered by this report. It is important to stress that the author is in no way seeking to either downplay the seriousness of the outbreak and its impact on the lives of many people, nor does this article seek to criticise either the government response or the behaviour of individuals.

The article is composed of multiple sections, covering the wider conservation issues that might have resulted from the lockdown, a timetable of important events, milestones and policy changes, discussion about the impacts that these had (particularly focussing on the 'exercise exemption', which ultimately meant that local naturalists could still choose to visit sites close to their homes) and also an analysis of 2020 spring migrant reported dates in comparison to previous years.

## Part 2 - Effects of the coronavirus lockdown on wildlife and habitats

During the coronavirus lockdown there were a number of 'good news' stories suggesting that reduced visitor numbers to nature reserves and countryside was having a beneficial effect on the wildlife of those areas. Whilst these stories were typically illustrated in terms of mammals being seen in urban areas (e.g. the Feral Goats in Llandudno)\*<sup>1</sup>, the actual benefit was probably most evident for places like beaches where human and canine disturbance can have a large impact on ground-nesting species such as waders and terns. The benefits of vastly lower numbers of visitors would be largest for relatively early breeding species, i.e. those that had managed to rear young before the lockdown was relaxed in mid-May. This seems to be supported by data from the Little Tern colony at Blakeney Point, which returned the highest number of chicks fledged in 26 years \*<sup>2</sup>, although it is important to note that in addition to the reduced visitor numbers the success of the colony will be in part to the efforts of the

warden team who were able to remain on site, along with techniques such as using decoys to attract the terns to suitable breeding areas and diversionary feeding of predators.

This period of global reduced human mobility has been dubbed the “anthropause”<sup>\*3</sup> and data from this period is being studied to gain further insight into how human activity affects wildlife.

Unfortunately there were also a number of downsides posited too. These included increased illegal persecution of raptors due to the much reduced chances of being observed committing a crime<sup>\*4</sup> and the increased risk of predation or effects caused by the reduction in day-to-day management of sites, such as unsuitable water levels<sup>\*5</sup>. Perhaps most worryingly, cutbacks caused by the loss of revenue to conservation charities as a result of closing reserves, cafes and visitors centres are likely to have a long-term effect on engagement with young people<sup>\*6</sup> and the ability to purchase and manage additional land. It has also been suggested that some species adapted to urban living that might have become dependent on scavenging food left by humans might have suffered from scarcity of food<sup>\*3</sup>.

It is likely that none of these issues overly affected the Whitlingham area, although there was increased footfall (and the accompanying disturbance this brought) at Thorpe Marshes due to it being an easily accessible local walking area for the people of Thorpe St Andrew, and sadly three cygnets present along a path-side dyke were attacked and killed by dogs<sup>\*7</sup>. Management of Whitlingham C.P. transferred from the Broads Authority to the Whitlingham Charitable Trust on 1<sup>st</sup> April, a week into lockdown, but it is not known if this process was hampered in any way by the restrictions.

### **Part 3 - A timetable of relevant coronavirus measures and announcements**

Whilst varying parts of the English response to the coronavirus pandemic had the potential to impact on wildlife recording, the key issue centred around what could be considered to be ‘the exercise clause’. Some countries announced a strict form of lockdown where people were only allowed out for key work, food or medicine, however many acknowledged the mental and physical health benefits of allowing people out to exercise, provided that they practised social distancing from other people whilst out. Ireland adopted a policy of allowing local exercise but initially only up to 2km from home (later relaxed to 5km<sup>\*8</sup>). The UK equivalent ended up appearing much more muddled, and it is necessary to explain the contrasting statements in order to explain why people continued to visit Whitlingham and report birds during the lockdown.

**Late January** – First cases observed in the UK

**28<sup>th</sup> February** – Person to person transmission noted in the UK

**11<sup>th</sup> March** – World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak to be a pandemic

**12<sup>th</sup> March** – Government recommends self-isolation for those with symptoms

**16<sup>th</sup> March** – Social distancing recommended for everyone and non-essential travel to stop

**20<sup>th</sup> March** – Schools closed following government announcement earlier in the week

**23<sup>rd</sup> March** – Lockdown announced (“Stay home. Protect the NHS, save lives”)

- *Boris Johnson announced the lockdown with the words “you must stay at home” \*9*

**24<sup>th</sup> March** – Lockdown begins

**26<sup>th</sup> March** – Lockdown law passed

- *“no person may leave the place where they live without a reasonable excuse.” \*10*

**29<sup>th</sup> March** – Michael Gove made a statement on the Andrew Marr show regarding exercise:

- *“I would have thought that for most people a walk of up to an hour or a run of 30 minutes or a cycle ride, depending on their level of fitness is appropriate.”*

**6<sup>th</sup> April** – Whitlingham car parks closed in response to government advice

**16<sup>th</sup> April** – CPS guidelines made public. Shows advice to the police that people may travel in a car to a place to exercise, provided that the length of time spent exercising exceeds the time spent travelling \*11

**17<sup>th</sup> April** – initial three week lockdown extended

**23<sup>rd</sup> April** – Whitlingham Barn car park re-opened in light of CPS advice

**28<sup>th</sup> April** – Whitlingham Barn car park closed again on police advice as it was getting busy

**30<sup>th</sup> April** – Boris Johnson announced we had passed the peak but the lockdown must continue

**7<sup>th</sup> May** – second lockdown review

**10<sup>th</sup> May** – Boris Johnson made an address, changing the message from “stay home” to “stay alert”, telling non-essential workers who could not work from home to return to work and announcing unlimited outdoor time from 13<sup>th</sup> May.

**13<sup>th</sup> May** – People still told to stay at home when possible, but allowed to go outside for unlimited time, for recreation not just exercise and to meet one other person outside if observing ‘social distancing’, i.e. staying 2 metres apart \*12.

## Part 4 - Exercise during lockdown – the difference between statements, law and interpretation

The purpose of the lockdown was to restrict contact between individuals as much as possible and in doing so reduce the infection rate. When restrictions were first announced by the government, the now familiar slogan “Stay home, protect the NHS, save lives” was repeated at every opportunity. The statement made by the Prime Minister when announcing the lockdown was “From this evening I must give the British people a very simple instruction - **you must stay at home**”. This seemingly unequivocal statement was immediately accompanied by a list of acceptable reasons for leaving home – to work if your job was deemed essential, to get food, for medical purposes and to take some exercise once a day. The initial phrasing was to **only leave home for essential purposes** – so you could go for one walk a day if you decided that it was essential for you to do so – a rather high bar. The police immediately began enforcing the government rules, in some areas carrying out spot checks and using drones to monitor visits to national parks <sup>\*13</sup>.

The law relating to these rules was only brought in several days later, so in fact it was arguable that in many cases the police acted beyond their powers in the first few days. Moreover, the law introduced was actually different to the government statement. There was no mention of only exercising once a day, no time limit on exercise and technically no rule against travelling to exercise away from your place of residence, although this could potentially be covered by the rule against non-essential travel. Importantly the wording actually stated that **you should not leave home without a reasonable excuse**, a much lower bar than “unless essential”. These nuances, in contrast to government statements, were not widely understood until the CPS issued guidelines to all police forces on how to enforce the regulations – necessary due to some police forces taking a much harder line than others. The release/leak of the CPS advice to police in mid-April, explicitly stating that driving somewhere for a walk was not in itself illegal undoubtedly influenced the choice of location for exercise, and resulted in the temporary re-opening of one of the Whitlingham car parks (closed again soon after on police advice).

Prior to the release of the CPS advice Michael Gove had been interviewed by Andrew Marr and asked what constituted reasonable exercise. He replied that it depended on individual fitness, but he thought an hour walk or 30 minute bike ride would be reasonable. This probably off-the-cuff remark led to a belief amongst some people that they were (only) permitted an hour walk a day, commencing from the home and therefore ruling out visits to anywhere outside the immediate area.

Considering all of this information together, the intention of the government appears to have been to allow individuals to leave their home once a day for a short walk or bike ride close to their home if the individual felt they really needed to do so. The law actually allowed people to go out whenever they wanted, for as long as they wanted, provided that what they were doing would class as exercise and they could justify the journey. Whether birdwatching comes into this category is perhaps an interesting point (at least one birder was sent back home having been seen by police officers standing still watching Peregrines), but as long as they were predominantly moving (i.e. not in a hide or regularly stopping and scanning with a telescope) then it would appear that this would have been within at least the letter of the guidelines.

## **Part 5 - Effects of different coronavirus measures and considerations on local wildlife recording**

A paper published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health concluded that in general the COVID-19 pandemic had influenced the behaviour of birders, although it also noted that the level of influence varied depending on individual circumstances \*<sup>14</sup>. For example birders who spent most of their time birding on a local patch close to their house or who spent most of his/her time birding alone would have been much less affected by the limits on exercising or social distancing than those regularly birding further from home. Below are some of the measures brought in, along with their suggested impact on local birding.

### **Risk of infection**

Regardless of government restrictions, the risk of catching a novel and potentially fatal illness was clearly a deterrent to spending time in busy places. It was apparent fairly early on that certain groups (particularly the elderly, those with serious existing health problems and ethnic minorities) were at greater risk than the general population of serious illness or death from COVID-19, but even those not in these categories had a real risk of both catching the virus and of passing it on to more vulnerable people. It was natural therefore that a number of local observers chose to either avoid the area completely or at least visit less regularly.

### **Shielding**

Around 2.2 million members of the public deemed to be clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) were identified by the government as being at greatest risk should they catch COVID-19 and were advised to follow enhanced lockdown procedures, known colloquially as shielding, for an initial period of 12 weeks. In order to minimise contact with others, things like priority online food shopping slots or food parcel deliveries were made. Anyone shielding would have most likely avoided Whitlingham and Thorpe, but based on submitted sightings this does not appear to have had a noticeable effect on local recording.

### **Enforcement of lockdown restrictions**

Whilst Norfolk police were not as over-zealous as some police forces, early on in the lockdown period there were checks on people travelling and those deemed not to be out for a valid reason were sent home, which would have been a deterrent to those visiting the area. This continued to be the case for the first three weeks or so, after which the leaked CPS advice would have given people more encouragement in taking their exercise further afield.

### **Home working**

Government advice stated that people should work from home where possible. There was at least one direct recording benefit to this, with Stuart White able to see over Thorpe Marshes from his home, which resulted in several sightings including a White-tailed Eagle. More

generally for some people home working meant more flexibility, so in some cases birders could go for walks in the mornings or in favourable weather conditions and catch up on work later.

### **Furlough Scheme/people unable to work**

Given that a number of birders who would otherwise have been at work now were at home much more, there was an increase in time spent birding. Interestingly although the exercise exemption was intended to be “if needed”, many people interpreted it as a right that needed to be utilised daily, for example phrases such as “my daily government sanctioned exercise” became common, even amongst people who would not have previously gone for a daily walk.

### **Emphasis on local exercise**

Despite the later clarification that some travel was allowed, most people did choose to go out locally. Apple mobility data showed that in mid-April, the number of journeys made by car or public transport was down by 81% against a baseline set in January 2020 \*<sup>15</sup>. For some people increased local trips meant visiting Whitlingham more regularly than usual, whilst for others it meant visiting as part of a variety of different routes.

### **Comradery of local birders**

During several nights of nocturnal duck migration it became apparent on social media that a group of friends were using a Whatsapp group to communicate interesting local sightings in real time. Over time this group expanded and allowed further sightings to be discussed. In addition to increased reporting, particularly of species that would normally be considered too common to mention on Twitter, the number of people at home meant that individual birds were often tracked and corroborated across the city. Members of the group saw or heard a large range of species around Norwich during the lockdown period, some of which are covered in this report.

### **Withholding of scarce sightings to prevent breaking of lockdown rules**

During April the virus was at its peak, meeting people from outside your household was banned and a rule requiring a minimum distance of 2m from other people was in force. All of these things meant a large twitch would risk both infecting people and breaking the law, so it would have been understandable for those finding rare birds not to report them. So far there is no indication that this happened in Norwich, but by definition it cannot be ruled out.

## Part 6 - Reporting of breeding summer migrants

These species are annual summer migrants that either breed or over-summer in the area. This means that they were likely to be recorded at some point regardless of changes in visitor numbers, but the first arrival dates are analysed against the past five yearly range to see if the different observer behaviour appears to have made a difference. Species are listed in the order that they were first reported this year. To allow the best comparison to be made some particularly early records have been omitted from the analysis if the bird was not heard in the following days (i.e. if it passed through rather than took up territory). These examples are noted in the text.

### **Chiffchaff (2015-2019 range 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March)**

2020 first singing bird reported 8<sup>th</sup> March (**EARLY**) – note that this species was found singing before the national lockdown took effect. Determining which birds are migrants and which have overwintered is not straight forward around this time.

### **Blackcap (2015-2019 range 28<sup>th</sup> March – 7<sup>th</sup> April)**

2020 first singing bird reported 19<sup>th</sup> March (**EARLY**) – note that this species was also found singing before the national lockdown took effect. As with Chiffchaffs, determining which birds are migrants and which have overwintered is somewhat down to judgement on behaviour and is perhaps best judged by the simultaneous appearance of singing birds elsewhere.

### **Sedge Warbler (2015-2019 range 28<sup>th</sup> March – 10<sup>th</sup> April)**

2020 first singing bird reported 5<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**)

### **Willow Warbler (2015-2019 range 31<sup>st</sup> March – 11<sup>th</sup> April)**

2020 first singing bird reported 5<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**)

### **Whitethroat (2015-2019 range 8<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> April)**

2020 first singing bird reported 6<sup>th</sup> April (**EARLY**). This species has typically arrived about mid-month at Whitlingham, but in 2017 and 2018 birds were present on the 8<sup>th</sup> April so it appears to be arriving slightly earlier or late.

### **Grasshopper Warbler (2015-2019 range 9<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> April)**

2020 first singing bird reported 6<sup>th</sup> April (**EARLY**). About a week earlier than normal, however this bird was also heard reeling on the following day so there are no doubts about the record.

### **Common Tern (2015-2019 range 30<sup>th</sup> March to 24<sup>th</sup> April)**

This species doesn't breed at Whitlingham but usually over-summer, with birds present from April until July. In 2020 first bird reported 9<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**)

**Reed Warbler** (2015-2019 range 10<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> April)

2020 first singing bird reported 14<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**)

**Cuckoo** (2015-2019 range 20<sup>th</sup> April – 3<sup>rd</sup> May)

2020 first singing bird was reported on 18<sup>th</sup> April (**EARLY**), and again more regularly from 22<sup>nd</sup> April, a typical date. For reference the earliest area record is 16<sup>th</sup> April.

**Garden Warbler** (2015-2019 range 17<sup>th</sup> April – 3<sup>rd</sup> May)

There was a report of a single bird at Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> April, which would be early, however nobody else recorded it on the following days, suggesting that it was just passing through. The next singing bird reported 19<sup>th</sup> April was recorded on consecutive days afterwards (**NORMAL RANGE**)

**Lesser Whitethroat** (2015-2019 range 16<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> April)

2020 first singing bird reported 20<sup>th</sup> April, with the main arrival on 24<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**)

## **Part 7 - Reporting of spring passage migrants**

These species are recorded annually or near-annually at Whitlingham, but typically only on passage migration. This means that they were more likely to be missed or only seen late on if coverage was lower than usual.

**Sand Martin** (2015-2019 range 24<sup>th</sup> March – 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

2020 first bird reported 24<sup>th</sup> March (**NORMAL RANGE**). Whilst on the early edge of the recent dates, Sand Martins are usually the first hirundines to appear and have been recorded on earlier dates than this.

**Little Gull** (2015-2019 range 28<sup>th</sup> March – 9<sup>th</sup> April)

2020 first birds were seen and photographed on 26<sup>th</sup> March (**EARLY**). This appears to be the earliest spring record of this species for the area.

**Swallow** (2015-2019 range 27<sup>th</sup> March to 2<sup>nd</sup> April)

2020 first bird reported 5<sup>th</sup> April (**SLIGHTLY LATE**). The fact that Swallows are relatively easy to see and identify, and that observers were present during the usual range period (with Sand Martins seen) suggests that the absence of Swallows until 5<sup>th</sup> April was genuine. Figure 1 (below) showing % of complete BirdTrack lists also adds weight to the slightly later than normal arrival in Norfolk in 2020.

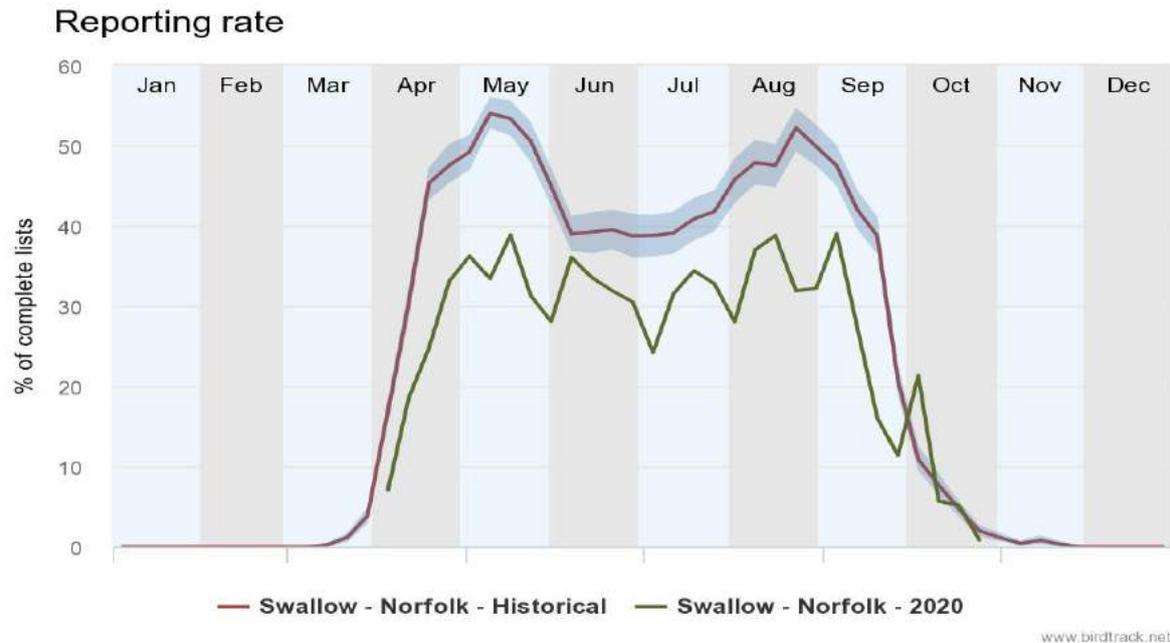


Figure 1 – Reporting Rate of Swallows in Norfolk in 2020 vs the historical rate. Reproduced from [www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net) with permission of BTO.

**House Martin** (2015-2019 range 1<sup>st</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> April)

2020 first bird reported 13<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**)

**Arctic Tern** (2015-2019 range 12<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> April)

2020 first bird reported 17<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**)

**Swift** (2015-2019 range 21<sup>st</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> April)

2020 first bird reported 20<sup>th</sup> April (**EARLY**). Whilst earlier than the five year range dates it is only by a day, and both 2016 and 2018 saw arrivals on 21<sup>st</sup> April, so this is quite in keeping with usual dates.

**Common Sandpiper** (2015-2019 range 7<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> April)

2020 first bird reported 20<sup>th</sup> April (**NORMAL RANGE**). Comfortably within range, and the same date as in 2016 and 2017.

**Green Sandpiper** (2015-2019 range 26<sup>th</sup> March – 12<sup>th</sup> April)

2020 first bird reported 22<sup>nd</sup> April (**LATE**). Discounting wintering birds seen in January or February, Green Sandpipers have most recently been seen on passage in 26<sup>th</sup> March (2017), 27<sup>th</sup> March (2018) and 5<sup>th</sup> April (2019) so this date does seem noticeably later than expected. Again comparing this against the Norfolk picture using BirdTrack data (Figure 2) there are

interesting parallels with the wider county picture – the graph for 2020 shows a peak in mid-late April, but most notably there appear to be no March sightings this year before numbers pick up in early April. Whilst the effects of the lockdown could be partly responsible, that would not explain the lack of sightings from beforehand (i.e. early March) and the usual number of sightings in early April, when the conditions of lockdown were the same as late March.

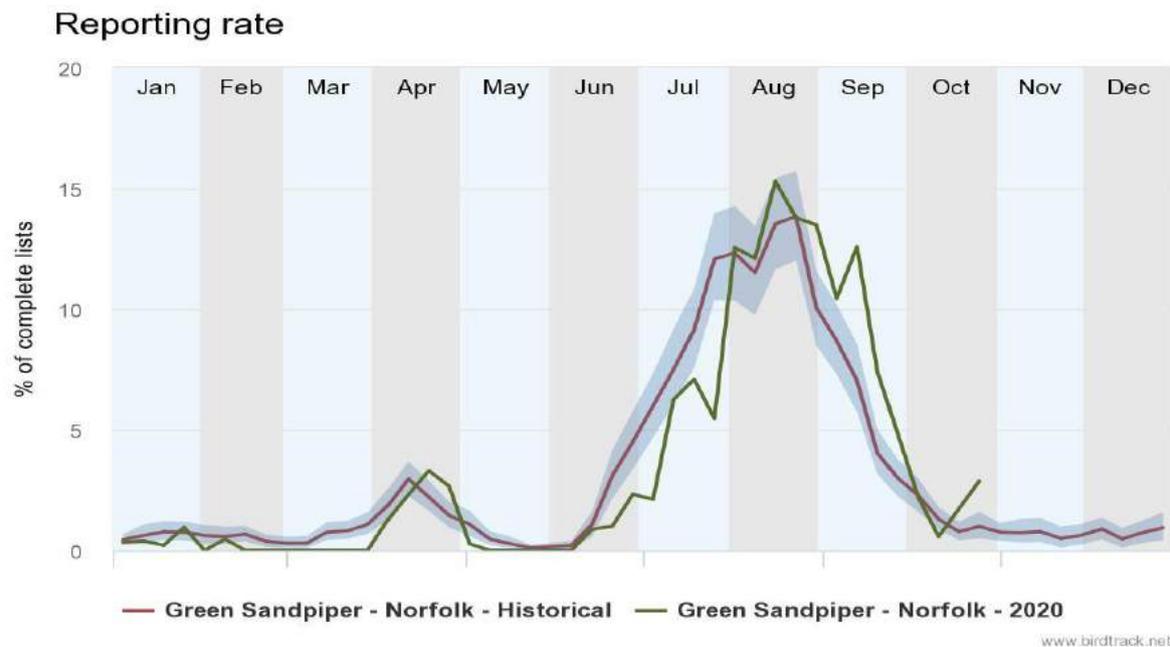


Figure 2 – Reporting rate for Green Sandpipers in Norfolk for 2020 against the historical rate. Reproduced from [www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net) with permission of BTO.

## Part 8 - Conclusions

Contrary to initial thoughts at the start of lockdown, bird life in the Whitlingham area appears to have been recorded well enough to give a dataset comparable to recent years, and indeed the data received from Thorpe Marshes is probably more detailed than usual thanks to daily visits during the first part of lockdown and large numbers of visiting birders later on during the time when the Corncrake and Savi’s Warbler were present. Analysis of the first noted arrival dates of both breeding/summering species and spring migrants shows that most of the earliest dates were either in keeping with that of recent years or slightly early, with the two later returning species seemingly exhibiting the same pattern as the wider Norfolk picture.

It has been suggested in some quarters that the large number of people spending more time at home or around their local area will lead to a long-term increase in people birding locally. The number of birders on social media who appeared to resume their previous birding behaviours upon the relaxation of restrictions suggests that this might not be the case, but only time will tell whether a large number of people have been converted to spending more time birding in their local area.

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<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/press-office/press-releases/brand-new-natural-history-museum-infographics-demonstrate-the-im.html>

## New to the Whitlingham area: White-tailed Eagle

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 Stuart White was at home in Thorpe St Andrew when he noticed a juvenile White-tailed Eagle flying west, apparently just south of Thorpe Marshes and flying along the River Yare towards Norwich. He was able to follow the bird distantly with his telescope, before alerting other Norwich birders. This sighting happened at 13:32, and birders in Trowse and Norwich city centre went outside to try to see the bird as it flew past. Whilst no-one within the city was able to see the eagle from their vantage points (at least four of which are marked on Figure 1 in blue circles to give an indication of coverage), it was then found at Colney by Will Soar at 14:08, 36 minutes after the first sighting. It seems likely that rather than flying directly across the city centre, the White-tailed Eagle had instead flown around the southern edge, following either the course of the river Yare or the A47, either of which would bring the bird out in the Colney/Bawburgh area (see the purple lines on Figure 1).

It is worth noting that on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2017 a White-tailed Eagle was reported by a motorist driving east along the A47 level with Whitlingham (see Appendix A of the Whitlingham Bird Report 2017). This record was not included in the main part of the list for two reasons:

- 1) At least two birders were present around the Great Broad at the time and didn't see the eagle (or hear birds mobbing it) suggesting that it continued to skirt around the edge of the recording area rather than actually flying into it
- 2) The sighting was never submitted to the county rarities committee (ideally all site firsts would be photographed or accepted by the relevant rarity committee, particular for locally or nationally scarce species).

The location of the reported 2017 sighting was close to the 2020 one, adding weight to the idea of migrant raptors using the A47 as a flightpath, something which has also been noted during spring with Common Buzzards and occasionally Red Kites.



Figure 1 – map of Norwich sightings with possible routes from Whitlingham to Colney

## Recent status of White-tailed Eagles in Norfolk

White-tailed Eagles are described in the most recent Norfolk Bird & Mammal Reports as rare visitors to the county, a description given to species that occur only annually or near annually. Records accepted by the Norfolk Rarities Committee over the past 20 years are shown below in Table 1. Between 2000 and 2009 there were only five records, four of which were immature birds, all in autumn or winter. By contrast for the period 2010 to 2019 there were eleven records (eight immatures) with a clear peak of spring records (nine records/six immatures). This increase is presumably related to the rapidly increasing numbers on the near continent – for example a single pair of White-tailed Eagles bred in the Netherlands in 2006 and by 2018 this had increased to 14 pairs.

Year	First winter period	Spring	Autumn	Second winter period
2000	One immature (from Dec 1999) One adult (first adult in Norfolk since 1945)			
2001	No records			
2002	No records			
2003			One immature	
2004				One immature
2005	One immature (from Dec 2004)			
2006	No records			
2007	No records			
2008	No records			
2009	No records			
2010	No records			
2011		One immature		
2012	One immature			
2013	No records			
2014	No records			
2015		Two immatures One adult		
2016	No records			
2017		One immatures One adult		
2018			One immature	
2019		Two immatures One adult		

Table 1 – Accepted records of White-tailed Eagle in Norfolk since 2000

## **Establishing an origin for the Norwich eagle sighting**

As is the case with a several species now, when assessing White-tailed Eagle records it is necessary to consider the possibility of recently reintroduced birds as well as wandering birds from continental Europe (admittedly some of the young White-tailed Eagles that reach East Anglia in spring might be descended from European reintroductions themselves). White-tailed Eagles have been successfully reintroduced to Scotland, but a more recent proposal to reintroduce them into East Anglia was abandoned in 2010 with Natural England citing a lack of funding for the £600,000 project.

Following more research, a feasibility study and opinion surveys of local people, attention switched to the Isle of White, where White-tailed Eagles last bred in 1780. A collaborative project between Forestry England and The Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation was established, and permission was granted to release up to 60 eagles on the Isle of Wight over a five year period. The first six of these were taken under licence from nests in Scotland and released in 2019. White-tailed Eagles do not usually breed until they reach five years old, so it will be a while before it is known whether these releases will lead to the creation of a viable population. The six birds from the initial release were all fitted with GPS radio tags to enable them to be tracked. Of these six, four persisted into 2020 (one was known to have died, whilst another went missing when the GPS tracker stopped working).

Whilst the positions of most GPS tracked reintroduced birds are not shown in real time, the White-tailed Eagle scheme has a regularly updated blog that shows the movements of each bird. Of the four remaining tagged birds, the map of G324 for late March and early April (Figure 2) clearly shows it flying over Norwich, and this could have seen Stuart's bird consigned to the appendices as a released bird. Fortunately the blog provides a more detailed overview of the timings at specific locations. It emerged that G324 had actually been on the Isle of Wight on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, flying 152 miles NE to Lakenheath Fen on 4<sup>th</sup> April, another 40 miles to north Norfolk on 5<sup>th</sup> April then setting off southwards the following day. It passed Norwich sometime after 13:00 and before 16:00 (when it was seen near Bungay). This accurate timeline (along with that of the other three tagged Eagles, which were nowhere near Norfolk), allows us to be confident that the Whitlingham eagle was a continental migrant.

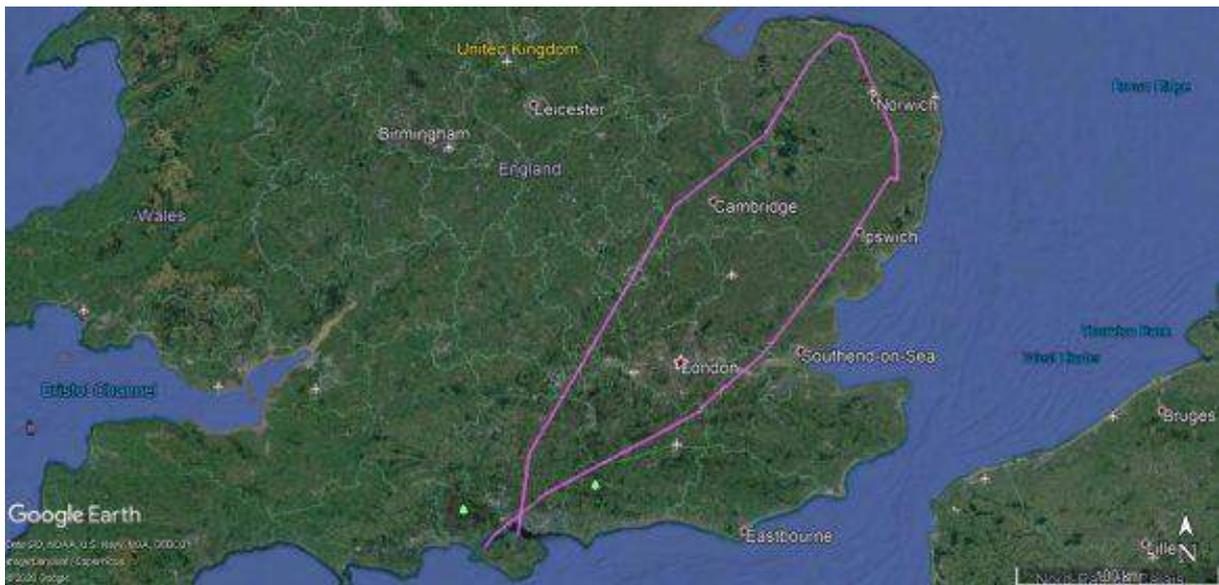


Figure 2: Map of the route taken by White-tailed Eagle G324 in early April, taken from <http://www.roydennis.org/2020/04/16/eagle-wanderlust/>  
Map credit: Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation/Forestry England

The author continued to check the blog in case any of the other eagles flew over the Norwich area later in the season. As it happened one other bird, G393, did visit Norfolk, however it took a different route to G324, flying west into Marham on 14<sup>th</sup> April. The following day it flew east, heading just north of Dereham then turning south-east over Wymondham and roosting near Needham Market in Suffolk (see Figure 3 for a map of the movements of this bird). The project requested that the public report all sightings of White-tailed Eagles during spring, especially those with photographs, to attempt to work out how many sightings didn't refer to the Isle of Wight birds. Based on the responses the suggestion was that during this spring in addition to the reintroduced birds, there was a further four or five continental White-tailed Eagles in England.

This project is still ongoing, and any observers who see a White-tailed Eagle in England are asked to report the details, including photos if possible, using the form here: <https://www.roydennis.org/report-white-tailed-eagle-sighting/>

Given the evidence that the Isle of Wight reintroduced birds were not responsible for this sighting, the record was accepted by the Norfolk Rarities Committee.





Figure 3 – Map showing the movements of tagged White-tailed Eagle G393 taken from <http://www.roydennis.org/2020/06/04/staying-local-2/>  
 Map credit: Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation/Forestry England

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Stuart White and Will Soar for reporting their sightings, and to other members of the Norwich Lockdown Birding Whatsapp group who attempted to intercept the bird between sightings. Thanks also to the Roy Dennis Foundation and Forestry England for posting regular updates on their tracked eagles and for allowing two of these maps to be used in this article.

## References

Information relating to the current reintroduction scheme all comes from the series of blogs published on <http://www.roydennis.org>

You can read more about the project (and donate towards the costs of operating the GPS tags) on the website here: <http://www.roydennis.org/category/sea-eagle/isle-of-wight-sea-eagles/>

## New to the Whitlingham area: Savi's Warbler

In a spring that featured an exceptional number of UK Blyth's Reed Warbler records there was always a hope that the area would turn up a rare warbler, but it was still rather a surprise when news of a reeling Savi's Warbler was broadcast early on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June. This was swiftly corroborated by a photograph of the bird on Twitter, and several local birders were soon present on site. The Savi's Warbler was still reeling intermittently, with two reeling Grasshopper Warblers provided a useful contrast. The Savi's Warbler favoured an area of sedges out on the area of marsh between the central path and the broad, and when it did show, it was initially rather distant (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Savi's Warbler at Thorpe Marshes. Photo taken by James Lowen.*

It later emerged via Twitter that this individual had first been heard on the evening of Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June (due to a number of local birders regularly walking the area it was confirmed that the Savi's Warbler had not been heard at dawn earlier that day, nor on previous days). Another birder who visited after 21:00 on that Thursday didn't hear the Savi's Warbler reeling despite good listening conditions, perhaps suggesting that it had only just arrived and was not in regular song yet. Given that Savi's Warblers have bred in Norfolk in the past and are afforded extra protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the decision not to release news on the Thursday was an understandable one – fortunately there were no reports of irresponsible behaviour by visiting birders during the bird's stay.

The Savi's Warbler continued to be heard regularly until 20<sup>th</sup> June (a stay of ten days from the initial report), as expected being most vocal at dawn and dusk during calm weather, but also reeling at various points throughout the day. James Lowen has uploaded a sound recording to his blog here: <https://soundcloud.com/james-lowen-wildlife/savis-warbler-thorpe-marshes-norfolk-14-june-2020>.

Views seemed to be best in the mornings, when at times it showed particularly well (Figure 2). It could sometimes be found reeling from willow scrub (Figure 3) or brambles (Figure 4). Several mornings in the first week were particularly misty, which served to temporarily obscure views, but did add to the atmospheric nature of the experience, as demonstrated by Mike Hoit's photo (Figure 5).



*Figure 2: Savi's Warbler at Thorpe Marshes. Photo taken by Nick Watmough.*



*Figure 3: Savi's Warbler at Thorpe Marshes. Photo taken by Nick Watmough.*



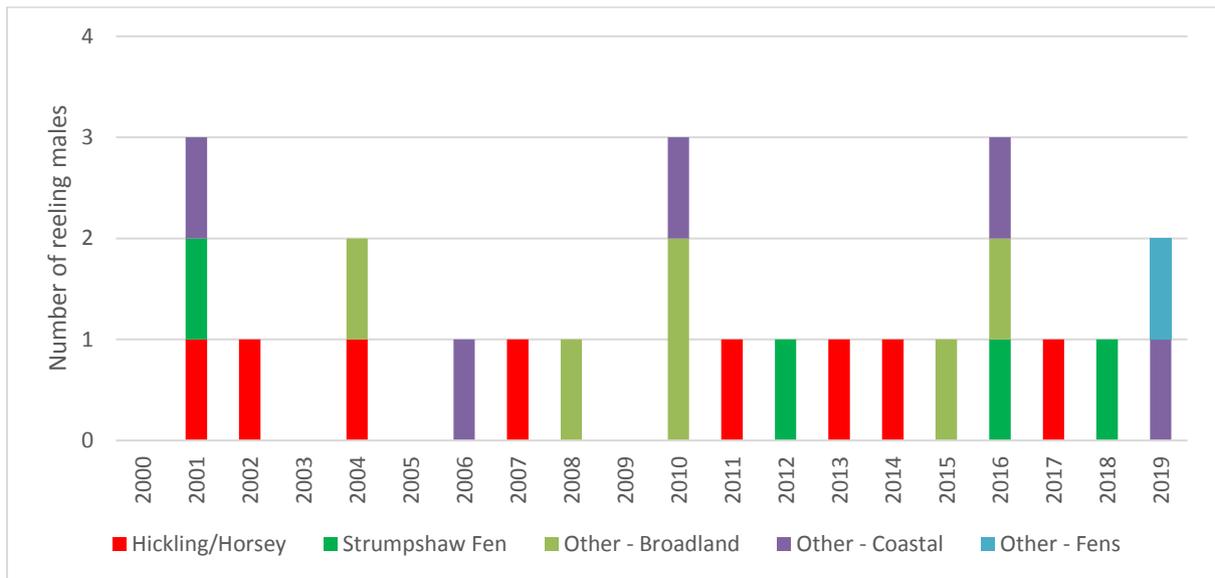
*Figure 4: Savi's Warbler at Thorpe Marshes. Photo taken by Sue Bryan.*



*Figure 5: Savi's Warbler in the mist at Thorpe Marshes. Photo taken by Mike Hoit.*

Savi's Warblers are somewhat unusual insofar as being a national rarity assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC), yet having over 100 county records (indeed Norfolk was responsible for the first UK record of this species back in 1819, and has the most records of any county for this species). The apparent discrepancy is largely the result of an attempted colonisation, which included multiple singing birds at a range of sites during the 1980s, however unlike the Cetti's Warbler, the Norfolk population of Savi's Warblers petered out and the species now occurs slightly less than annually.

The colonisation attempt began with an increase in singing birds in the late 1970s, and by 1979 a pair successfully reared young at Hickling. In the next few years up to six pairs were present around the Hickling/Horsey/Marham area, which remains the most regular place for the species to turn up. There were also smaller numbers elsewhere, mostly in the Broads. The pattern of 1-2 singing birds at multiple sites each year continued into the early 1990s. After then records became more sporadic, with occasional summering birds but no confirmed breeding recorded. The Yare Valley has continued to host occasional birds, most often at Strumpshaw Fen but also at Rockland Broad and Surlingham Church Marsh, the latter site only around five miles from Whitlingham. There are 24 accepted records for Norfolk in the past 20 years, eight of which were from the Hickling area and four from Strumpshaw Fen (Figure 6).



*Figure 6: Number and location of reeling Savi's Warblers in Norfolk between 2000-2019 (accepted records only)*

Further analyses of these records shows a wide range of arrival/first singing times, comprising April - 3; May - 12; June - 8 and July - 1. The length of stay varied from single day birds to one present for 93 days (May to August), with a mean stay length of 20 days (17 days if adjusted to remove the 93-day bird). Obviously in some cases the birds would have been present for longer but just not heard or reported, which could particularly be the case for long-staying birds and any that found a mate and therefore had less need to reel. In addition to the Thorpe Marshes bird, a further two other Savi's Warblers were reported in Norfolk during 2020, both at Hickling Broad.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to everyone who reported sightings of this bird during its stay, and particularly those who allowed their photographs to be included here.

## New to the Whitlingham area: Corncrake

On the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> May, Stuart White heard what sounded like the call of a Corncrake coming from an area of vegetation at Thorpe Marshes. Having only heard it briefly he returned later the same evening, by which time another birder had also heard it and called the news into the bird news services. The Corncrake was calling clearly around 21:00, but then became silent and only resumed calling around 22:30. There was a second-hand report that the bird had actually been first heard three days earlier (16<sup>th</sup> May), however without any more information (and taking into account that the area was being visited daily by several local birders at this point) it seems reasonable to record the first date as the 19<sup>th</sup>.

Understandably this bird, which appears to be the first confirmed Norwich area record (at least during the period where county bird reports have been produced – 1954 onwards), attracted attention from county birders, and a steady stream of people visited to hear it. Several observers were lucky enough to see the Corncrake as well as hear it. It apparently showed fairly well albeit briefly on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> (see Figures 1 and 2) and again more briefly in the evening that day, whilst a couple of people also obtained flight views later in its stay. The Corncrake continued to be regularly heard late at night and around dawn, with bursts of song at random points during the day, including calls between 15:00-16:30 on several days. In early June it was heard less frequently, and despite the increased visitor numbers (swollen by the loosening of lockdown restrictions and later the presence of the Savi's Warbler) it was last reported singing on 14<sup>th</sup> June.



*Figure 1 – Corncrake at Thorpe Marshes. Photo taken by Dave Farrow*



*Figure 2: Corncrake at Thorpe Marshes. Photo taken by Bob Farndon.*

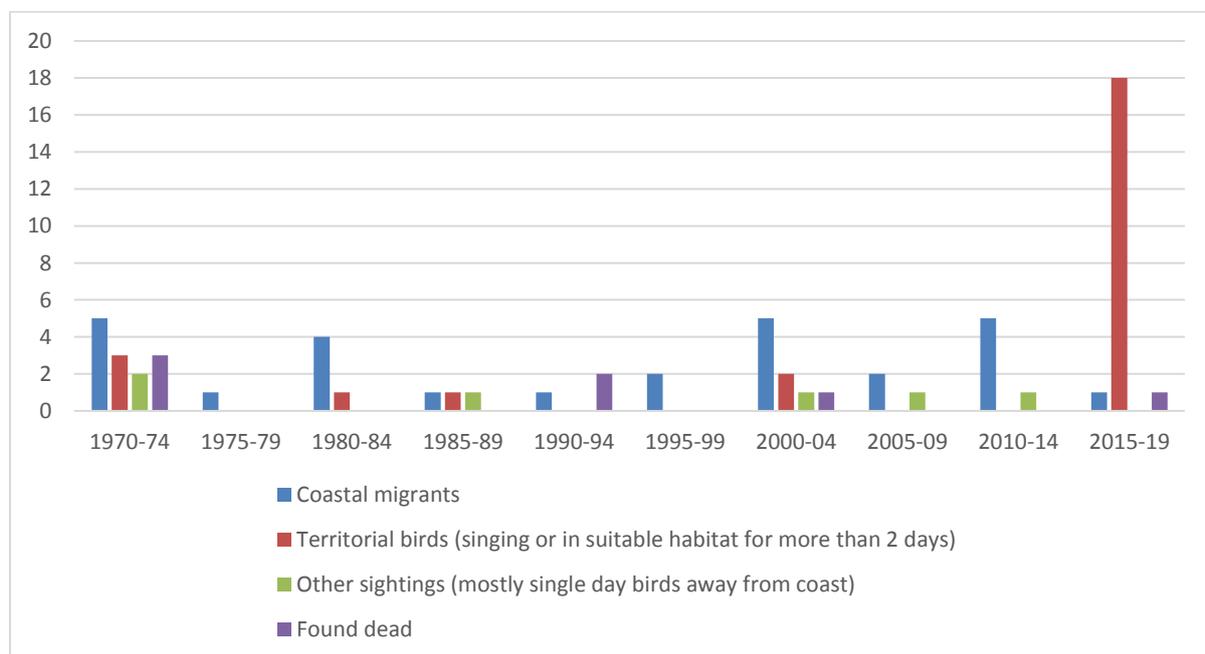
Clearly the presence of a Corncrake locally was of great interest, and completed a nocturnal-calling bird double for several fortunate locals who had also heard a Quail at Earlham Marshes a few nights beforehand. However, the overwhelmingly likely origin of this bird was from the Corncrake reintroduction scheme coordinated by the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust, either as a bird directly released, or if not then a direct descendant of one of the released birds. This scheme, which previously helped provide birds for a reintroduction project in the Ouse Washes, has been releasing large numbers of Corncrakes into the Wensum Valley since 2016. The author contacted representatives of the scheme, who confirmed that they were working on the assumption that this was one of their birds. Given the unlikelihood of coloured rings being read in the field for these usually elusive birds, reintroduced birds are only fitted with metal BTO rings, so the apparent absence of rings when seen in flight should not be read into. This was also the opinion of the Norfolk Records Committee, who accepted the record on the basis that it was likely to originate from a reintroduction project.



## A brief history of the Corncrake in Norfolk

The authors of *Birds New to Norfolk* traced the earliest mention of the Corncrake in Norfolk to the naturalist and polymath Sir Thomas Browne, who at some point in the 1600s made the remark that the “Ralla” was rather tasty\*. The tastiness of the Corncrake is also referenced by Thomas Southwell in his *Birds of Norfolk*, noting that the number of shot specimens presented cannot reliably be used to estimate the population size - “The reputation however of this bird as a delicacy for the table renders the number thus preserved a poor criterion as to the amount actually killed”. Despite the references to their culinary worth, the Corncrake is not thought to have been eaten into local extinction, with changes in land use and management the primary driver of its decline.

The decline of the Corncrake in Norfolk appeared to accelerate in the early twentieth century, with Riviere only noting three pairs and a further singing male between 1901 and 1930. Eight or nine pairs were found breeding in the area around Brancaster Staithe in 1939, but this event was exceptional and not repeated, with the only other time that breeding was proved before the end of the century being in July 1965 when an adult and seven chicks were seen at Wrampingham. Several other singing birds have been noted in spring – a summary of records from the past fifty years can be found in Figure 3.



*Figure 3 – Accepted Norfolk Corncrake records from 1970-2019 grouped by category. Data taken from Norfolk Bird & Mammal Reports.*

*\* Note that the 2015-19 count of territorial birds is an undercount, with information from the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust suggesting several other presumed reintroduced calling birds not submitted to the county recorder.*

Due to the relatively low frequency of Corncrake records I have grouped sightings into five year blocks – there were no accepted Corncrake records in 22 of the 50 years covered. Until 2015 the most likely way to record a Corncrake in Norfolk was as a migrant, and of the 27 birds recorded as apparent coastal migrants, 20 (74%) were found in autumn. Seven were found dead, with causes where noted including flying into telegraph wires, a collision with a window and being brought in by a cat. The six sightings referred to as ‘other’ were likely to be migrants passing through inland areas, with the exception of a presumed overwintering one at Coldham Hall on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2003. It is very clear that in the last five years there has been a massive increase in calling birds, and these can be directly related to two reintroduction schemes – birds spreading from the Nene Washes scheme across the border to Welney Washes, and the Wensum Valley reintroduction project.

*\* “...the Ralla or Rayle wee haue counted a dayntie dish.” Note that Ralla was taken to refer to Corncrake (later authors refer to it as the Land Rail), as opposed to the Water Rail, which was referred to as “Ralla aquatica” or “Water Rayle”. *Crex crex* and *Rallus aquaticus* only formally became the standard scientific names when Linnaeus embarked on his classification in 1758.*

## **Reintroduction of the Corncrake to East Anglia**

The British Corncrake population declined steadily throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and by the year 2000 was largely restricted to a selection of Scottish islands. Even here there have been signs of decline, with changes to mowing times, the lack of subsidies for sympathetic management, destruction of wintering habitat and hunting along their migration routes all implicated. In order to boost Corncrake numbers, a joint project between Natural England, RSPB and the Zoological Society London started captive rearing Corncrakes for release onto the RSPB’s Nene Washes reserve in Cambridgeshire. Wild breeding occurred for the first time in 2004, and of a sample of 11 birds caught and checked between then and 2008, 2 were unringed and presumed to be wild-bred offspring of the release birds. A nationwide Corncrake survey of Britain in 2009 revealed a total of 1164 singing males, composed of 1130 in Scotland, 23 at the Nene Washes reintroduction site and 11 in Northern England.

In Norfolk a singing Corncrake was heard at Welney Washes WWT reserve in June 2016. It was caught and as expected found to be a bird reared at Whipsnade and released as part of the Nene Washes reintroduction scheme. The following year two more singing birds were found at Welney, which were also caught and found to be from the reintroduction project. At least two singing birds have also been present at Welney in 2018 and 2019, although so far no definitive evidence of breeding has been released.

Pensthorpe Conservation Trust joined the Nene Washes reintroduction project from 2006 onwards, and following the last release of Corncrakes at the Nene Washes in 2016 instigated a five year release project in the Wensum Valley. In addition to rearing and releasing young Corncrakes, the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust also worked with local landowners to make areas of their land more attractive to Corncrakes to encourage them to return to the area. Requests were put out on social media for birders and locals to listen out for singing Corncrakes and to report them to the project. During the first year of the Wensum Valley project (2016), 69 Corncrakes (32 males) were released into the Wensum Valley. In the summer of 2017 four singing males were confirmed to be returning birds from the 2016 release, whilst several other Corncrakes were reported but could not be captured and confirmed as released birds.

Between 60 and 102 male Corncrakes were released annually over the next four years (see Table 1 for a complete breakdown) along with similar number of females. There are several videos featuring the release programme on Youtube, including this one from the 2018 season (<https://youtu.be/HK36kw1HuXo>).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Annual Total</b>
2016	32	37	69
2017	68	86	154
2018	102	64	166
2019	77	67	144
2020	60	55	115
<b>Project total</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>648</b>

*Table 1 – Numbers of Corncrakes released into the Wensum Valley by Pensthorpe Conservation Trust*

As the Wensum Valley reintroduction project progressed it became evident that the Corncrakes were returning to a wider area in Norfolk than the area local to the release site and land being managed for them, so from 2021 attention will shift from releases to the monitoring of reported singing birds, with hope remaining that the Corncrake will be able to re-establish a breeding population within the county.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks go to everyone who reported the Corncrake during its stay, but particularly to Stuart White and Chris Durdin. Thanks also to Dave Farrow and Bob Farndon for allowing their photos to be used here, and to Chrissie Kelley and Gary Elton for information about the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust’s Corncrake reintroduction scheme.

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## An influx of Crossbills over Norwich

Common Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) are known to be an irruptive species, with large numbers arriving in the UK at periodic intervals. These movements are typically linked to a combination of good breeding years followed by a failing Norway Spruce cone crop \*<sup>1</sup>. Crossbills are early breeders, so south-westerly movements away from breeding areas usually begin in early summer and arrivals in the UK can occur anytime between June and November.

Although flocks of Crossbills are seen most years in the area of conifer plantations to the north of Norwich (Horsford Woods/St Faith's Common), there are usually few sightings in the Norwich area itself. In terms of the Whitlingham area Common Crossbill is a very rare species, with no records in the archives for the period 2000-2013 and the only ones received by the author since then being three over Whitlingham Marshes/STW on 24<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015, one briefly perched up in trees at Whitlingham on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and three Crossbill sp. over Thorpe Marshes on 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018 (the observer thought at the time they might possibly have been Parrot Crossbills).

Given this lack of records, eight sightings from the area received from six different observers (plus further sighting of birds close by) during 2020 represents a remarkable return. These sightings are detailed in Table 1. In addition to sightings within the area, other observers based around the city reported a further 28 sightings for the period July to November, most of them in the autumn. Details of eight of these from Thorpe St Andrew, close to the recording area, are included in Table 2. Of course 2020 has not been a typical year, with the month of November being another 'lockdown month' where people were encouraged to stay locally, and the use of a local Whatsapp birding group allowed sightings that would otherwise have not appeared in public to be recorded, but nevertheless this clearly appears to have been a sizeable Crossbill event.

Date	Location	Count	Direction of flight (if noted)	Time of day	Observer
06/10/20	Whitlingham C.P.	1	West	13:25	JL
13/10/20	Whitlingham C.P.	7	North-west	12.45	JL
16/10/20	Thorpe Marshes	9	?	?	MC
18/10/20	Whitlingham C.P.	1	West	09:00	JE
18/10/20	Whitlingham C.P.	1	West	10:25	JE
25/10/20	Whitlingham C.P.	7	Circled then North-west		GW
16/11/20	Thorpe Marshes	1	South	?	per Twitter
16/11/20	Thorpe Marshes	4	?	?	CD

*Table 1 – Details of the Common Crossbill sightings from within the Whitlingham Recording Area during 2020*

Date	Location	Count	Direction of flight (if noted)	Time of day	Observer
11/07/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	1	North	09:47	SW
12/07/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	3	?	19:30	SW
13/07/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	4	?	?	SW
24/07/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	6	South-west	10:33	SW
02/08/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	4	North	11:58	SW
06/10/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	1	NNE	10:06	SW
07/10/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	2	West	07:59	SW
15/10/20	Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew	2	NNE	07:23	SW

Table 2 – Details of Common Crossbill records from Thorpe St Andrew during 2020

To check if the anecdotally large number of Crossbill records was being replicated more widely across the county I checked the BirdTrack reporting rate for 2020 and also compared it against the long term average reporting rate. The result is shown below in Figure 1, and as suspected the 2020 reporting rate during both July and Oct/Nov is much higher than usual.

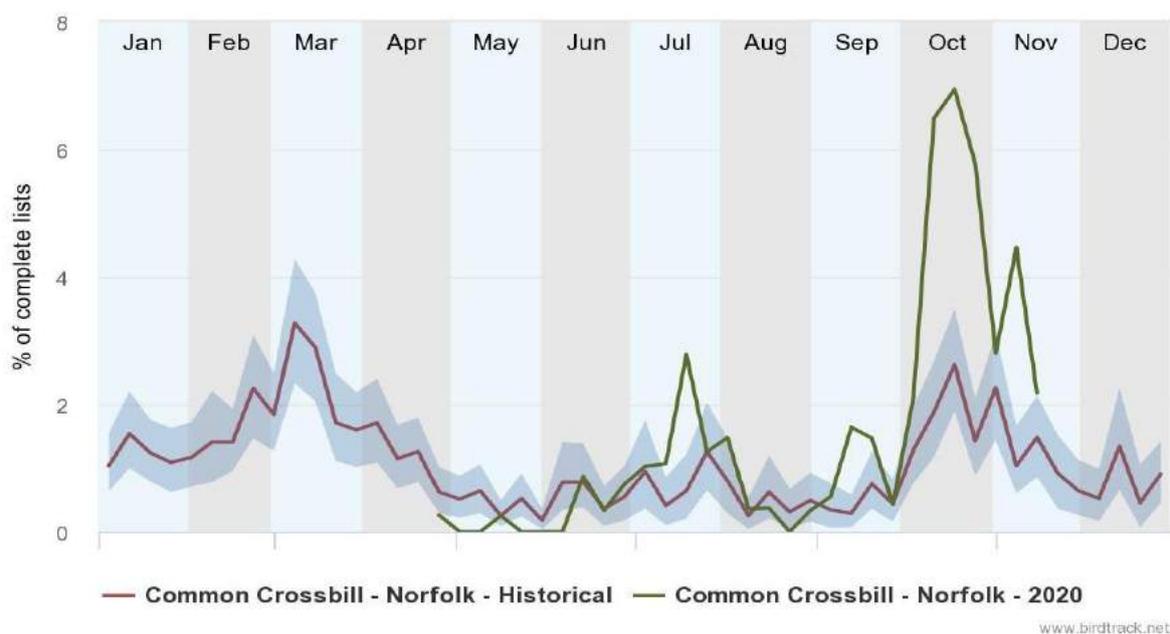


Figure 1 – Reporting rate of Common Crossbills in Norfolk during 2020 in comparison with the historical rate for the county. Reproduced from [www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net) with permission of BTO.

Having established that the number of Crossbills being observed during 2020 was much higher than that seen during a typical year, I then compared it to the last notable irruption year, which for Norfolk was 2013. This comparison can be seen in Figure 2. The sightings peaks in the autumn show a similar pattern and magnitude between 2013 and 2020, peaking in mid-October and with a second smaller peak in early or mid-November. The July peak is much higher in 2013, but this can at least in part be explained by the knowledge that in that year the Crossbill flock at Lynford Arboretum was accompanied by several Two-barred Crossbills that were widely twitched, artificially inflating the reporting rate of both Crossbill species.

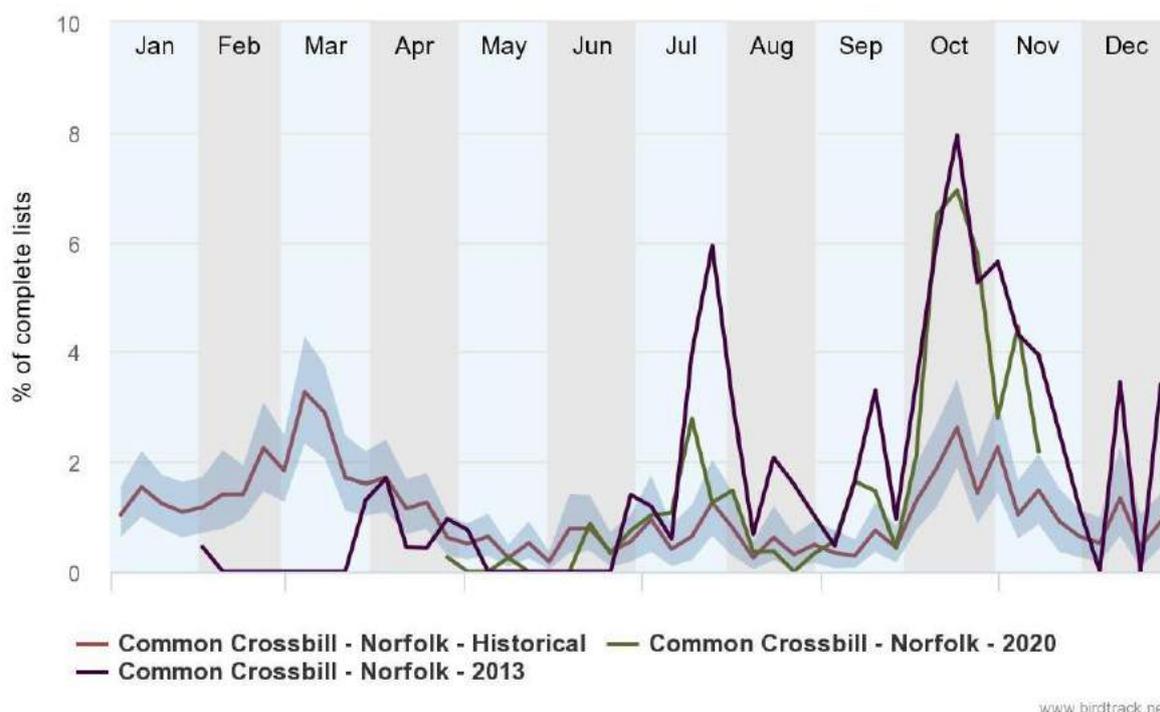


Figure 2 – Common Crossbill reporting rate during 2020 compared against the reporting rate for 2013. Reproduced from [www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net) with permission of BTO

I attempted to analyse both the Whitlingham and Thorpe St Andrew sightings and the wider Norwich area ones in terms of the sighting times and direction of flight, to see if some could be explained by commuting birds regularly moving between different city sites. Unfortunately this proved impossible – for example many of the sightings were early morning, but this is likely to relate to the behaviour of the observers. Even at the same locations birds were often noted flying in multiple directions, although most of the Whitlingham area birds were flying west, which would fit with birds migrating from the continent and following the river.

## References

1. **Newton, Ian** (2006) Movement patterns of Common Crossbills, *Loxia curvirostra* in Europe. *Ibis*, Vol. 148, pages 782-788.

## Norwich Mute Swan colour-ringing project

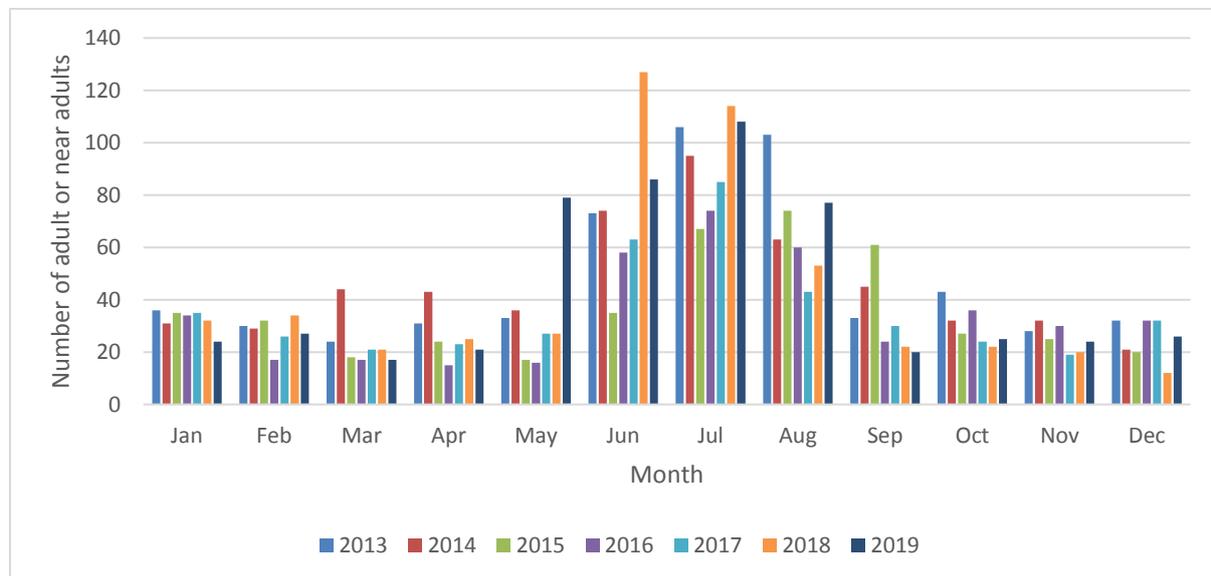


*Figure 1 – Colour-ringed Mute Swans at Whitlingham C.P. (Photo: James Emerson)*

The UEA ringing group have been metal-ringing Mute Swans at Whitlingham for over a decade, however as these rings can only be read when close up, they tend to be of more use for assessing longevity in the birds rather than tracking their movements. This year the group gained permission to join the Mute Swan colour ringing scheme run by Mike Reed and the East Anglian Swan Group, and from June 2020 onwards over 120 Mute Swans have been colour ringed around the city. Of these, 94 were ringed at Whitlingham or Thorpe River Green – 61 that had not been ringed before and an additional 33 that had colour rings added to their existing metal rings.

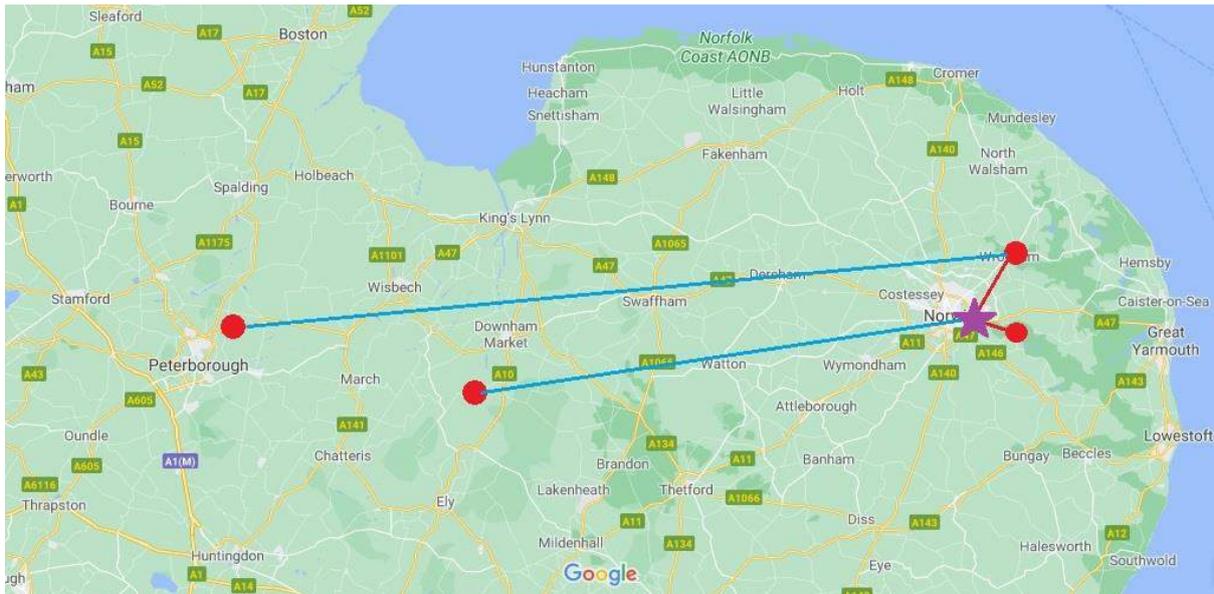
These birds can easily be identified as being from the scheme by their orange rings with a four digit black alphanumeric code. So far most of the ringed birds that have been reported have remained around Norwich, although one bird has been seen further east along the River Yare at Surlingham. During the year 96 individual birds were recorded by the UEA Ringing Group from the area, including 75 individuals from Whitlingham C.P. and 27 individuals from Thorpe River Green (some swans were recorded from both sites so the site tallies do not add up to 96).

Figure 2 shows the monthly numbers of Mute Swans in the Whitlingham area, taken from the author's WeBS counts since 2013, illustrating a clear summer peak. Hopefully many of the additional (i.e. non-resident) birds present during the summer months will now have rings on and it will be possible to identify where these birds winter, and therefore start to more accurately define the local swan catchment area.



*Figure 2 – Monthly Mute Swan WeBS counts from Whitlingham & Thorpe between 2013 and 2019*

Prior to this ringing effort five colour-ringed Mute Swans had been reported within the Whitlingham area, four of which were part of Mike Reed's project and were ringed at Hoveton/Wroxham in 2016. The fifth, green ringed JN9, was ringed by the RSPCA at Bank Farm near Welney in 2008 before being seen at Thorpe St Andrews in 2016 by Adam Manvell. This was an interesting movement, but would only be the second longest distance travelled, as one of the orange colour-ringed birds from Wroxham had originally been metal-ringed at Eye Green near Peterborough by the RSPCA. This bird was apparently therefore at Eye in January 2016, Wroxham Bridge on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 and Thorpe St Andrew on 16th April 2016. These movements, along with the more recent Surlingham bird, are shown below on Figure 3. The fact that both of the long-distance records relate to birds ringed by the RSPCA perhaps raises the question of whether they were taken into care and released in different places to where they were found, but it seems implausible that they would be transported all the way from Eye Green and Welney to Wroxham or Norwich.



*Figure 3 – map of known (red) and assumed (blue) movements of colour-ringed Mute Swans seen at Whitlingham C.P. or Thorpe St Andrew so far.*

Birders and members of the public are encouraged to report the codes and locations of any orange-ringed Mute Swans that they see, either to Mike Reed (see <http://www.crbirding.org/node/1413> for contact details) or via the Norwich Swan Ringing social media accounts ([https://twitter.com/swan\\_norwich](https://twitter.com/swan_norwich) and [https://www.facebook.com/NorwichSwanProject/?view\\_public\\_for=100635121759111](https://www.facebook.com/NorwichSwanProject/?view_public_for=100635121759111)).

## Acknowledgements

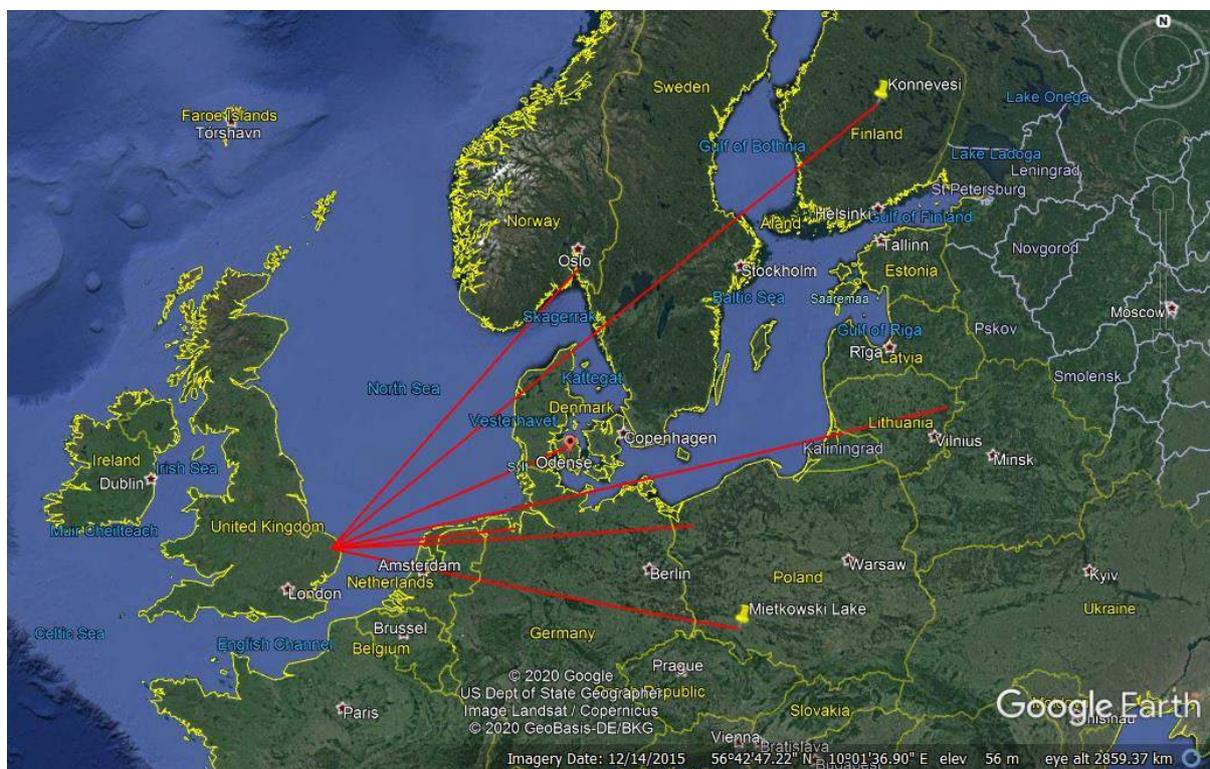
The Norwich Swan Project is run by the UEA Ringing Group and the author is particularly grateful to Stephen Vickers from the group, who provided an update in November 2020 here: <http://uearg.blogspot.com/2020/11/norwich-swan-project-6-months-in.html> and also provided more specific local data via email.

Thanks also to Mike Reed for providing histories of the reported birds, and to Adam Manvell who was responsible for most of the sightings of the colour-ringed birds from Thorpe St Andrew.

# Ringed Black-headed Gulls at Whitlingham part viii

James Emerson

This brief report is the eighth in a series of annual articles documenting the ringed Black-headed Gulls that have been reported from Whitlingham or across the river at Thorpe River Green. During the period that there has been a bird report for the area foreign-ringed Black-headed Gulls have been noted from nine different countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden). In 2020 there were sightings of eight individuals from six countries; Denmark, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Norway and Poland, which are displayed on Figure 1 below. Note that two of the birds (both from Lithuania) were ringed at the same location, so there are only seven lines on the map.



*Figure 1 – Ringing locations of Black-headed Gulls noted at Whitlingham or Thorpe River Green in 2020, data displayed using Google Earth. Note that the lines are visual representations of the distance between the ringing location and the sighting location, but are unlikely to represent the actual migratory paths of the gulls.*



*Figure 2 – A Black-headed Gull caught by UEA ringing group. Photo: Stephen Vickers.*

In addition to the foreign ringed birds, a small number of Black-headed Gulls have also been ringed at Whitlingham by the UEA Ringing Group. Previously this only involved the fitting of BTO metal rings, however this year 13 Black-headed Gulls (two at Whitlingham, 11 at Thorpe River Green) were fitted with blue coloured rings with white four-digit alphanumeric codes beginning with 2K (see Figure 2). Given the relatively low number of colour-ringed gulls seen in the area this has the potential to provide significant additional data about the movements of the local wintering population. For details of how to report sightings of these birds (and any other colour ringed birds you see), refer to the relevant page of the [www.cr-birding.org](http://www.cr-birding.org), in this case <http://www.cr-birding.org/node/627>

## Black-headed Gull sightings from January to March 2020

During the first winter period an impressive eight rings were read, of which the two colour-ringed birds were both returning birds seen at Thorpe River Green (one Norwegian and one Polish ringed bird). Of the remaining birds, two had been metal-ringed at Whitlingham the previous year. There were first sightings of metal ringed individuals from Lithuania, Germany and Denmark, with the final bird being another Lithuanian-ringed gull, this time one that was first noted earlier in the winter (November 2019). Full details can be found in Table 1.

Ring number	Date first seen	Place ringed	Date ringed	Distance travelled / Km	Seen previously?
Metal-ringed EAXXXX6 *	01/01/20	Whitlingham C.P.	23/01/19	0	Ringed here in 2019
Metal-ringed HA50-955	26/01/20	Kretuona, LITHUANIA	15/06/19	1636	First seen in Nov 2019
Metal-ringed EAXXXX4 *	26/01/20	Whitlingham C.P.	16/01/19	0	Ringed here in 2019
Metal-ringed HA50-337	26/01/20	Kretuona, LITHUANIA	15/06/19	1636	NEW
Metal-ringed 5424377	26/01/20	Augustgroden, GERMANY	23/06/18	477	NEW
<b>J6U2</b>	08/02/20	Langøyskjæret, Råde, Østfold, NORWAY	18/06/06	954	Yes (Dec 2016 on)
Metal-ringed 6241523	08/02/20	Odense, DENMARK	26/11/10	666	NEW
<b>TEX7</b>	03/03/20	Mietkowski, POLAND	24/06/19	1063	First seen in Nov 2019

*Table 1 – Ringed Black-headed Gulls seen in the first winter period (Jan-Mar) 2020*

*\* I have redacted part of the codes of metal ringed birds as they are from a local project*

## Black-headed Gull sightings from October to December 2020

Whilst eight ringed gulls were also reported during the second winter period, five of these were recently ringed in situ! The three other birds were all returnees, with metal-ringed ST305.473 a Finnish bird back for its third year, and Polish-ringed birds TEX7 and T2X8 back for their second and fourth winters respectively. The details for these birds are in Table 2.

Ring number	Date first seen	Place ringed	Date ringed	Distance travelled / Km	Seen previously?
Metal ringed ST305.473	22/10/20	Keski-Suomi, Konnevesi, FINLAND	10/06/18	1841	Yes (Nov 2018 on)
<b>TEX7</b>	11/11/20	Mietkowski, POLAND	24/06/19	1063	Yes (Nov 2019 on)
<b>T2X8</b>	12/11/20	Zachodniopomorskie, POLAND	20/05/17	868	Yes (Nov 2017 on)
<b>2K59</b>	03/12/20	Thorpe River Green	Nov 2020	0	NEW (Ringed here)
<b>2K60</b>	03/12/20	Thorpe River Green	Nov 2020	0	NEW (Ringed here)
<b>2K61</b>	03/12/20	Thorpe River Green	Nov 2020	0	NEW (Ringed here)
<b>2K62</b>	03/12/20	Thorpe River Green	Nov 2020	0	NEW (Ringed here)
<b>2K64</b>	03/12/20	Thorpe River Green	Nov 2020	0	NEW (Ringed here)

*Table 2 – Ringed Black-headed Gulls seen in the second winter period (Oct-Dec) 2020*

Also of note was the German ringed bird A341, which had been recorded from Whitlingham in the winters of 2014/15, 2017/18 and 2018/19 but this year was seen close by, near Carrow Bridge on the Norwich riverside area.

Ring number	Site & Date observed	Place ringed	Date ringed	Distance travelled / Km	Details of Whitlingham sighting
<b>A341</b>	Carrow Bridge 27/10/20	Neumunster, GERMANY	16/12/12	c600	Multiple winters from 2014 on

*Table 3 – Ringed Black-headed Gulls reported from Whitlingham/Thorpe in previous years but recorded elsewhere in Norwich this year.*

## Case study – An unexpected summer sighting of T2X8



*Figure 3 – Black-headed Gull T2X8 seen in Cromer. Photo by Andy Hale.*

The Polish colour-ringed bird T2X8 has been seen at Thorpe River Green in each of the past three winters, each time arriving in November. It would therefore be reasonable to assume that it spent the summer in Poland, before migrating westwards in autumn until it reaches wintering grounds around Norwich. However this summer it was seen in full adult summer plumage at Cromer in north Norfolk on 15<sup>th</sup> July! A look through the recent sighting history showed that it had also returned to Norfolk in July last year, being seen at Hunstanton on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019. Unfortunately there were no further sightings between the Cromer sighting and first Thorpe St Andrew sighting, but it seems quite possible that much of that time was spent elsewhere in Norfolk! It is clear that there is still much more to learn about the lives of the gulls spending the winter in the Whitlingham area.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to Max Hellicar, Justin Lansdell, Barry Madden, @NorfolkPuffin and Stephen Vickers for supplying much of the 2020 information. Particular thanks to Stephen and Max for providing details about the activities of the UEA ringing group this year, as well as the various other ringers involved in gull ringing projects and to the anyone else who reported sightings of these birds. Thanks also to Andy Hale for allowing me to use the photo from the Cromer sighting.

## Whitlingham Wildfowl Survey

The monthly wildfowl counts here are based on the combined counts for Whitlingham Little Broad and Great Broad using WeBS methodology, with St Andrews Broad also counted where possible (this is more important in winter, when large amounts of ducks commute between the two sites). Counts were carried out on the same day unless otherwise indicated. WeBS was cancelled in April, but counts from another local observer have been used for that month. The counts are not necessarily high counts for the month – ad hoc and high counts are described in the individual species accounts. Unlike the systematic list the species order has not been updated to that included in the latest IOC checklist to better allow comparison between this year and the data included in the previous bird reports.

Species	Jan *	Feb	Mar *	Apr \$	May \$	Jun \$	Jul \$	Aug \$	Sep \$	Oct \$	Nov *	Dec
Mute Swan	23	28	26	21	55	117	84	17	19	15	17	18
Greylag Goose	4	10	4	53	27	179	186	1	6	13	5	7
Barnacle Goose	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Canada Goose	63	18	10	14	14	118	137	14	1	1	1	0
Egyptian Goose	0	4	2	2	14	17	25	17	9	4	1	8
Mandarin	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Shoveler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gadwall	208	70	41	5	0	0	0	0	8	16	45	99
Wigeon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Mallard	40	58	26	11	21	21	68	76	55	68	71	90
Teal	11	8	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	11
Pochard	18	26	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	23
Tufted Duck	427	239	167	89	0	0	0	0	0	72	165	218
Goldeneye	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	7
Goosander	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cormorant	54	29	45	9	3	2	5	28	42	30	47	24
Grey Heron	4	1	1	6	5	0	0	3	1	3	8	6
Little Egret	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5
Little Grebe	10	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	10	9
Great Crested Grebe	2	5	0	11	6	3	0	5	9	9	7	2
Water Rail	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
Moorhen	5	4	8	5	1	2	0	0	0	2	2	7
Coot	88	94	23	7	0	1	8	12	14	58	105	104
Oystercatcher	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Snipe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Black-headed Gull	433	184	408	9	2	1	5	34	33	75	182	207
Common Gull	8	7	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	3
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	1	6	13	20	15	7	69	4	1	2	2
Herring Gull	94	47	34	18	12	7	0	0	1	5	26	33
Common Tern	0	0	0	1	1	3	3	0	0	0	0	0
Kingfisher	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2

\* counts at Whitlingham and Thorpe conducted on different days

\$ No WeBS count carried out at Thorpe this month.

## Whitlingham and Thorpe Classified List

The systematic list in this bird report follows the latest taxonomical order used by the British Ornithologists Union (BOU) and based on decisions made by the International Ornithologists Congress (IOC) world list. For a guide to the recent changes in taxonomic order see table included in the 2019 Whitlingham Bird Report. The most recent list adjustment (IOC 10.2) only involves several changes of ordering within families and the renaming of Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat from *Sylvia* to the newly created genus *Curruca*.

The description on the right refers to the chances of encountering a species if visiting at the appropriate time of year (common/scarce/rare) along with whether it is resident, a migrant, usually seen as a flyover or if it is only an occasional visitor.

Sightings of birds that are locally scarce or rare, particularly early or late reports or unusually high counts have initials after them – these relate to observers, a list of which can be found at the end of the classified list.

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### \* **Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*

*Occasional visitor*



Only two records this year, two at Whitlingham C.P. on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and one on 10<sup>th</sup> May (both GW).

**Photo: Gary White**

### **Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

*Fairly common resident*



Noted throughout the area all year in low numbers, with the exception of 13 seen/heard on a walk around Whitlingham C.P. on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*

*Common summer visitor*



One resident bird again at the start of the year and throughout, although absent on several dates in December. A family with three goslings was first noted on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, whilst a second family with one gosling was also present on 27<sup>th</sup>. Numbers peaked in June, with notably high counts of 155 on 7<sup>th</sup>, 179 on 14<sup>th</sup> (GW) and 162 on 17<sup>th</sup> June, whilst 149 on 12<sup>th</sup> July was also of note.

**Photo: James Emerson**

**Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis*

*Occasional visitor*



The tame bird first noticed around the slipway during August 2019 was present throughout the year, sporting a metal BTO ring fitted at Whitlingham by UEA Ringing Group.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*

*Common resident*



A much better breeding year than 2019. Goslings were first observed on 19<sup>th</sup> April and by 9<sup>th</sup> May there were around 50 young. This species tends to creche the goslings, making it hard to be sure of brood sizes, but based on the adults there appeared to be 10 pairs.

Three figure counts included 110 on 22<sup>nd</sup> Apr, 167 on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 220 on 7<sup>th</sup> June, 298 on 14<sup>th</sup> June (down to 146 on 16<sup>th</sup> June), 186 on 5<sup>th</sup> July and 276 on 12<sup>th</sup> July.

There was also a very interesting movement reported, with a metal-ringed bird present at Whitlingham C.P. on 3<sup>rd</sup> April being traced back to the Isle of Man, where it was ringed in July 2012. [Editor's note: the ring code of this bird is only a single digit out from a bird ringed at Whitlingham by UEA Ringing Group, however it is not a digit that is likely to be confused in the field (the Whitlingham bird ends 226, the Isle of Man bird 266) so this is probably a coincidence. However out of curiosity I would be grateful to hear from anyone that manages to read either of those rings at Whitlingham in spring 2021].

**Photo: James Emerson**

**Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus*

*Occasional flyover*



Skeins totalling 165 birds flew over Whitlingham C.P. on 19<sup>th</sup> Jan, the only record in the first winter period.

There were numerous records in autumn into winter, starting with 80 over on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct and continuing through November and December. This species flies over Norwich regularly and is under-recorded here.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*

*Common resident*



This species was subject to a colour-ringing scheme (see article on pages 37-39), which will hopefully increase our knowledge about the movements of Mute Swans in the area over the next few years.

The highest count of the year was 139 on 16<sup>th</sup> June, similar to the 2019 maximum count (131). Two broods were noted, one at Whitlingham and one at Thorpe Marshes, where sadly three of the cygnets were reported to have been killed following attacks by dogs.

**Photo: James Emerson**

**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

*Common resident.*



Present in relatively low numbers throughout the year, with high counts of 33 on 12<sup>th</sup> July and 40 on 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug. A pair was seen with two goslings on 27<sup>th</sup> April and there was reports of a second brood too (no further details).

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

*Scarce spring visitor*



Four sightings this year - four flew over Whitlingham on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan (GW), one at Thorpe Marshes on 26<sup>th</sup> Mar (CD), one east over St Andrew Broad on 10<sup>th</sup> Apr (SW) and three flew over Thorpe Marshes on 4<sup>th</sup> May (MC).

**Photo: Stuart White**

\* **Mandarin** *Aix galericulata*

*Scarce visitor*



A drake, presumably the bird seen on many occasions during 2019, was present throughout January and February although often missing during the day before returning to roost. It was seen intermittently in the area until 23<sup>rd</sup> May, before returning from 1<sup>st</sup> Oct onwards, again usually around dusk or early morning. It presumably spent the summer further along the Yare Valley.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*

*Regular winter visitor*



A similar pattern to 2019, with 1-4 birds present across the area from January into April, with the last bird of spring one at Thorpe Marshes on 24<sup>th</sup> Apr. First seen back on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct when four present on the Great Broad, with mostly low numbers again except for five on St Andrews Broad 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov (three still there on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov) and seven on Great Broad on 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Gadwall** *Mareca strepera*

*Common winter visitor*



Numbers well down on 2019, with a high count of 208 on 18<sup>th</sup> Jan (185 Whitlingham, 23 St Andrews Broad). Birds seen at Whitlingham in every month of the year (maximums: 8 April, 7 May, 9 June, 2 July, 5 August) but no breeding confirmed.

Three on 6<sup>th</sup> September might have been the over-summering birds, but 17 on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct represented new arrivals. Numbers in the area reached 113 by 7<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Wigeon** *Mareca penelope*

*Scarce winter visitor*



Three present on the Great Broad on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan and again on St Andrews Broad on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan. There were no further records from the first winter period, although a big migration was noted over Norwich in early April and had observers been present would have undoubtedly been recorded. First noted again from 18<sup>th</sup> Oct when three present. A flock of 36 that circled the Great Broad (and also seen from Thorpe Marshes) on 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec was of note.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

*Common resident.*



Relatively low numbers seen throughout the year, with the usual summer peak. The maximum count this year was 146 on 12<sup>th</sup> July, with three-figure counts also noted on 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug (113) and 9<sup>th</sup> Feb (102). Several broods were raised including 10 ducklings first seen on 19<sup>th</sup> April, but details of further broods not noted.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\*Pintail** *Anas acuta*

*Local scarcity*

Two small flocks noted flying over Thorpe Marshes, three on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct and six on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct (both MC). The latter flock was also noted independently flying over south Norwich shortly afterwards.

**Teal** *Anas crecca*

*Common winter visitor.*



Very low numbers reported this year, with a maximum count of 16 noted during January. Low numbers reported until 22<sup>nd</sup> April. With the exception of seven on 12<sup>th</sup> July there was no more sightings until 10<sup>th</sup> Oct, with winter numbers also peaking at 16.

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*

*Scarce winter visitor*



A purple patch for this species in the first two weeks of the year, firstly two drakes on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan (JL), followed by a lone female 4<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Jan (GW) and then a pair on 13<sup>th</sup> Jan (CS), all on Whitlingham Great Broad.

**Photo: Justin Lansdell**

**Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

*Common winter visitor*



Only six at the start of the year (2 at Thorpe, 4 on the Great Broad), but increasing to a peak of 30 (29 drakes/1 female) by 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. Two remained through April and until 9<sup>th</sup> May. A returnee back on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct but generally low counts with the exception of 23 on St Andrew's Broad on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov and again on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec (14 Great Broad/9 St Andrews Broad)

**Photo: Gary White**

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

*Common winter visitor*



Around 300 at the turn of the year and throughout January, similar to numbers in 2019. A temporary influx gave a year high count of 423 across both sides of the river on 11<sup>th</sup> Jan (138 St Andrews Broad/285 Great Broad). Numbers still high at the end of March, with 206 on 29<sup>th</sup>, declining to 22 by 26<sup>th</sup> Apr. Sightings from every month of the year, with 11 on 12<sup>th</sup> July the summer peak. Numbers breached a hundred on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct when 101 on

the Great Broad, and the year ended with around 220 present, alternating between St Andrew's Broad and Great Broad.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

*Scarce winter visitor*



A female and a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter drake present in the area initially, reported intermittently throughout Jan-Mar and lastly on 5<sup>th</sup> April. It was a different story in autumn, with record-breaking numbers. First seen from 6<sup>th</sup> Oct, the previous highest site count of eight was equalled at St Andrews Broad on 13<sup>th</sup> Nov then surpassed on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov when a combined count of St Andrews Broad and Great Broad found nine were present (JL/SW), composed of

three adult drakes, one eclipse drake and five females. This also meant that at least 10

individuals were present in the area, as previously six females had been noted. This count was then beaten again later in the year, when 13 were recorded on St Andrew's Broad on 14<sup>th</sup> Dec (via eBird). **Photo: Gary White**

**\* Goosander** *Mergus merganser*

*Scarce winter visitor*



Another poor year for records of this species. A drake was present on the Great Broad on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan (JE), and present again the following day (CS). The nationwide lockdown during late March/April might have restricted opportunities for seeing migrating birds during early spring, but there was also no records from the second winter period. **Photo: James Emerson**

**\* Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator*

*Rare winter visitor*



A drake found on St Andrews Broad late afternoon on 28<sup>th</sup> Nov (SW) was only the fourth local record (previously recorded at Thorpe on 21<sup>st</sup> Feb 1994 and at Whitlingham on 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2004 and 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2012). This individual was only present for a few hours before dusk and there was no sign of it the following day.

**Photo: Stuart White**

**Swift** *Apus apus*

*Common spring visitor*



The first sighting of spring was on 20<sup>th</sup> April, a relatively early date, when multiple observers saw birds over both Thorpe Marshes and the Great Broad. Large numbers were noted during May, including c250 on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, with 150 also seen on 4<sup>th</sup> June and 200 over St Andrews Broad on 6<sup>th</sup> June. There were no autumn sightings this year.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

*Scarce spring migrant*



The first record of the year was on 18<sup>th</sup> Apr, an early date, with near-daily sightings from 22<sup>nd</sup> Apr onwards. Two birds were heard calling on several dates during May and on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, whilst two were also seen together on 13<sup>th</sup> June.

**Photo: David Ratcliffe**

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia*

*Common resident*



A scattering of records, mostly in flight when looking towards Trowse or Thorpe St Andrew.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas*

*Scarce resident*



Between 1 and 5 noted throughout the year at Thorpe Marshes and Whitlingham C.P. with the exception of six along Whitlingham Lane on 26<sup>th</sup> Apr.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Woodpigeon** *Columba palumbus*

*Common resident*



Ubiquitous, but only one large count this year, of 248 flying over during the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

*Scarce – resident nearby*



Occasionally noted on Whitlingham Lane, with one or two noted fairly regularly between January and April but less frequently afterwards.

**Photo: James Emerson**

**[Corncrake** *Crex crex*

*Vagrant/reintroduced species]*

*One present during spring – a new species for the area but thought to be from a reintroduction scheme – see Appendix A and the article on pages 28-33 for details*

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

*Secretive resident/winter visitor*

Up to three heard at Whitlingham, almost certainly an under-count, last recorded on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar. At Thorpe Marshes birds present all year round, with juvenile begging calls heard on 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June followed by a chick seen on 6<sup>th</sup> July.

In the second winter period recorded at Whitlingham from 26<sup>th</sup> Sept, whilst at Thorpe varying numbers of calling birds were recorded during late autumn and winter.

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

*Common resident*



Resident, with typical numbers reported between 1-8 at Whitlingham and up to three at Thorpe Marshes. Highest counts were in spring, with 17 on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar (the same high count as in 2019) and 12 on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr. Breeding probably occurred but wasn't specifically noted.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Coot** *Fulica atra*

*Resident/Common winter visitor*



The highest count during January was 166 on the Great Broad, well down on the same period in 2019. A steep drop off in numbers during spring, with no double-figure counts after 16<sup>th</sup> Mar (22) until 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug (13). Numbers reached 125 on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov and c150 were estimated on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Crane** *Grus grus*

*Scarce spring flyover*



Two seen flying over Thorpe Marshes and west over Whitlingham C.P. at 08:23 on 24<sup>th</sup> April (MC), then independently seen over the city centre at 08:40 (WW). What might have been the same 'touring' pair were then seen and photographed flying west over Thorpe Marshes on 1<sup>st</sup> May (SW), this time in the afternoon. Additionally one flew WSW nearby over Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct (SW). **Photo: Stuart White**

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

*Common winter visitor*

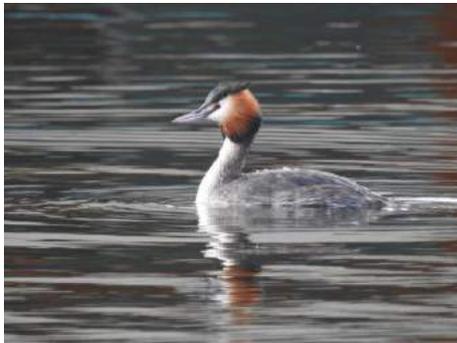


Twelve individuals had been present in late 2019 and remained in the area, with multiple counts of 11 and all 12 being counted on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. Last settled birds noted at Whitlingham on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar and Thorpe on 9<sup>th</sup> Apr, (although some nocturnal flyover records after this). In autumn seen back from 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, with 12 on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov and 16 on 26<sup>th</sup> Dec (JL), which was the highest local count since these reports began in 2012.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

*Resident*



Present in low numbers throughout the year on the Great Broad, with occasional sightings of two on St Andrews Broad. The highest count of the year was 11, on 13<sup>th</sup> Apr and 17<sup>th</sup> May. Courtship display was noted on the Great Broad (see video linked in the report introduction) and a nest on the Great Broad was noted on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

*Regular spring visitor*



First noted at Thorpe Marshes on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb, then 1 or 2 seen regularly at either Thorpe or Whitlingham all the way through until 19<sup>th</sup> July. This was much later than 2019, when there were no sightings after the end of April. Five at Thorpe Marshes on 6<sup>th</sup> July was unusual.

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

*Scarce spring migrant*

A report of one heard flying onto Thorpe Marshes after dark on 7<sup>th</sup> Apr (MC) and two reported from Thorpe Marshes on 7<sup>th</sup> June (RMc).

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

*Common winter visitor*

Once again few records received – a flock of 100 over Thorpe Marshes on 11<sup>th</sup> Jan was the only flock of note. Two seen at Thorpe Marshes on a range of dates from mid-April to late May but no nesting attempt noted.

\* **Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* *Rare occasional migrant*

One was seen to circle over the Great Broad on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept (GW), whilst just off-patch one was heard flying over Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew on 22<sup>nd</sup> Apr (SW).

\* **Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* *Scarce spring visitor*

Only one sighting of a grounded bird this year, at Thorpe Marshes early morning on 19<sup>th</sup> July (GW). There were however a series of nocturnal records from Thorpe Marshes – singles on 12<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May, 9<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June and 6<sup>th</sup> July, plus two on 11<sup>th</sup> June (all MC).

\* **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* *Occasional flyover*

One record from within the recording area, one flew over Thorpe Marshes after dark on 12<sup>th</sup> May (MC). Additionally just outside the area one flew over Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, on the morning of 23<sup>rd</sup> Apr (SW).

\* **Curlew** *Numenius arquata* *Occasional flyover*

One heard calling as it flew along the river valley at night on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct (SW).

\* **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* *Rare occasional migrant*

Four on the edge of St Andrews Broad (including one brick-red male) early morning on 20<sup>th</sup> April might have roosted there (MC). This sighting coincided with a large concentration of Bar-tailed Godwits at Breydon Water.

\* **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* *Scarce passage migrant*

The only report received was of two flying over Thorpe Marshes after dark on 12<sup>th</sup> May (MC), the same evening as the Little Ringed Plover and Whimbrel records.

\* **Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* *Scarce winter visitor*

One flushed up from Thorpe Marshes near the railway bridge on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb (GW) and one in flight at dusk at Thorpe Marshes on 24<sup>th</sup> Nov (MC).

\* **Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyrtus minimus* *Scarce winter visitor*

Four records this year, all from Thorpe Marshes. Three of them were flushed from wet paths and the other seen at dusk. Dates were 19<sup>th</sup> Jan (GW), 25<sup>th</sup> Mar, 1<sup>st</sup> Apr and 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct (all MC).

**Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

*Common winter visitor*



Low numbers reported from Thorpe Marshes until 24<sup>th</sup> Apr (maximum count of 11 on 19<sup>th</sup> Jan), although many will have gone uncounted out on the marsh. Dusk counts in October and November varied between 11 and 26 birds. The only record from Whitlingham Great Broad was two on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

*Spring migrant*



First seen on the Great Broad on 20<sup>th</sup> Apr and several reports until 27<sup>th</sup> Apr. One on the river on 6<sup>th</sup> May then a six at Thorpe on 8<sup>th</sup> May, with presumably the same birds also seen on the Great Broad where six noted on 8<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> May. One was still present at Thorpe on 25<sup>th</sup> May.

[Editors note: anecdotally a birder canoeing from Thorpe Island to Woods End recorded c20 Common Sandpipers along that stretch of river on or around 8<sup>th</sup> May]

Autumn passage was more fragmented, with one bird at Whitlingham on 12<sup>th</sup> July, five along the river on 9<sup>th</sup> Aug and one at Whitlingham on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

*Spring migrant*

No overwintering birds noted in the first winter period. Only two spring records, one at Whitlingham on 22<sup>nd</sup> Apr and one over Thorpe Marshes on 1<sup>st</sup> May. After that one was present at Thorpe Marshes on 17<sup>th</sup> June and heard there again on 24<sup>th</sup> June, one at Whitlingham C.P. on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug, one circled over Thorpe Marshes on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept and finally one flew over Thorpe Marshes on 21<sup>st</sup> Nov.

\* **Redshank** *Tringa totanus*

*Scarce spring migrant*

Reports of birds heard after dark on 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Apr (both MC) plus one on 14<sup>th</sup> June (RMc), all at Thorpe Marshes.

\* **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

*Rare spring migrant*

A report of one heard flying over Thorpe Marshes on 6<sup>th</sup> July (MC).

\* **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

*Very rare spring migrant*

A report of one heard flying over Thorpe Marshes on 16<sup>th</sup> July (MC).

\* **Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

*Scarce spring migrant*

None seen this year, but one heard seemingly calling from St Andrew's Broad after dark on 1<sup>st</sup> May (MC).

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

*Common resident*



For details of a new colour-ringing project and sightings of foreign ringed birds see the article on pages 40-44.

Up to 400 birds typically present in the first winter period, with an influx on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb taking the number up to 633. Numbers mostly lower in the second winter period, with around 180 on the Great Broad in Nov and Dec, however spells of squally weather brought high numbers on occasion, with 600 noted on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct and 590 on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct. **Photo: Gary White**

\* **Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

*Scarce spring migrant*



Three seen and photographed at Thorpe Marshes on 26<sup>th</sup> Mar (SW) are a new earliest local record (previously 28<sup>th</sup> March). Main passage happened on 17<sup>th</sup> April with a flock of nine (six adults) seen at Whitlingham (SW), with two also reported from Thorpe. One adult was also seen at Thorpe Marshes on 25<sup>th</sup> Apr (SW).

**Photo: Stuart White**

\* **Mediterranean Gull** *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*

*Scarce spring visitor*



One flew over the Great Broad on 25<sup>th</sup> Apr (NW), a typical early spring record. During July unprecedented numbers of Mediterranean Gulls were seen over Norwich city centre, seemingly attracted by the emergence of flying ants. It is likely that many of these flew over the area, and indeed eight were seen just to the north flying over Thunder Lane on 12<sup>th</sup> July with five there again catching flying ants on 31<sup>st</sup> July. The only record received during

that period was of one heard calling from the direction of Whitlingham STW on 16<sup>th</sup> July (MC). Finally a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter was present briefly over the Great Broad with c600 Black-headed Gulls on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct (JL). **Photo: Stuart White**

**Common Gull** *Larus canus*

*Common winter visitor*



Mostly single figure counts, with a high count of 68 coming on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb, the same day as the large Black-headed Gull peak. Last bird of spring noted on 22<sup>nd</sup> Apr. In autumn birds were noted again from 5<sup>th</sup> Oct onwards.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\* Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus*

*Occasional visitor*



After a blank 2019, many records received this year. An unusual record of six adults on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan that flew onto the Great Broad and appeared to roost (JL). Other sightings this year were birds 19<sup>th</sup> Jan (adult flew over Thorpe Marshes - SW), 25<sup>th</sup> Jan on the Great Broad (MH), adult flew over Thorpe Marshes on 26<sup>th</sup> Mar (SW), one on Great Broad on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct (GW) with three (1 adult, 2 juvs) east over Thorpe Marshes on the same date (SW), and

an adult on/over the Great Broad on three dates in December - 10<sup>th</sup> (ME), 13<sup>th</sup> (CR) and 28<sup>th</sup> (MH).

**Photo: Justin Lansdell**

**\* Iceland Gull** *Larus glaucoides*

*Local vagrant*



A 1<sup>st</sup>-winter bird was seen on the Great Broad just before dusk on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov, only the second record for the area following a 3<sup>rd</sup>-winter seen between 26<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> May 1997. Interestingly what appears to be the same individual (based on the distinctive bill and head pattern) was then seen at Winterton on 24<sup>th</sup> Nov and remained there until the year end.

**Photo: Roger Parker**

**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus*

*Common winter visitor*



Noted in every month of the year although in low numbers between June-Aug. Counts of this species are sometimes difficult to interpret as large numbers may drop in to pre-roost, but 94 recorded on the January WeBS count and 79 noted on the gull influx day of 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. No colour-ringed birds noted this year.

**Photo: Gary White**

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

*Common summer visitor*



One or two present all year round, with numbers increasing in late March and with up to 28 recorded over late spring and summer, with several similar counts in October as well. One notable count, of 69 on 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\* Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis*

*Rare passage migrant*

Two reported flying NW over Whitlingham C.P. (viewed from Thorpe Marshes) early morning on 27<sup>th</sup> Apr (MC). Note that two had been seen the previous morning on the other side of Norwich at Colney.

**\* Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons*

*Very rare spring migrant*

A flock of five were seen over the Great Broad on 3<sup>rd</sup> May (DW).

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

*Common spring migrant*



First of the year seen at both Thorpe Marshes and Whitlingham C.P. on 9<sup>th</sup> Apr, with peak passage movement occurring on 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> Apr with 13 at Thorpe Marshes and 16 at Whitlingham C.P. Otherwise 1-6 birds seen until 24<sup>th</sup> July with the exception of 8 on 28<sup>th</sup> Apr.

Four were present on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept (along with 2 Arctic Terns) and 2 remained the following day, becoming the latest site record.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea*

*Scarce spring migrant*



First of the spring were two noted flying east over both the Great Broad and Thorpe Marshes on 17<sup>th</sup> Apr. Two were also reported to the bird news services at Whitlingham C.P. on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr, with the only other spring record one on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. For the first time there were also autumn records – following several days of gales 2 were seen and photographed at Whitlingham on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept, with one remaining on 27<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Photo: Gary White**

[“Commic” Terns *Sterna hirundo*/*Sterna paradisaea*]

[A flock of 19 terns flying in a tight flock were seen flying eastwards along the river from Whitlingham C.P. on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr – the observer thought that they were most likely Arctic Terns.]

\* **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

*Scarce passage migrant*

One was reported from Whitlingham C.P. to the bird news services on the evening of 26<sup>th</sup> Apr (no further details).

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

*Common winter visitor*



Fluctuating numbers, with winter counts of between 30-50 during the day (numbers increase later in the afternoon as birds arrive to roost) and low numbers throughout summer. Roost counts of 75 on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan and 85 on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, followed by 106 on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb (an early morning count so will relate to the birds that roosted overnight). In October roost counts of 48 on 1<sup>st</sup>, c60 on 6<sup>th</sup>, 65 on 9<sup>th</sup> and 98 on 10<sup>th</sup>. One other large count received, 78 on 29<sup>th</sup> Dec. For comparison the highest roost count received in 2019 was 87. **Photo: Gary White**

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*

*Scarce but annual winter visitor*



The only sighting received in the first winter period was a possible, seen briefly landing on Thorpe Marshes at dusk on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb.

In the second winter period one seen at Whitlingham on one of the paths (see photo) on 9<sup>th</sup> Dec and again on the Great Broad on 10<sup>th</sup> Dec. **Photo: Chris Durdin**

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

*Common resident*



Once again high numbers present around the Great Broad during January, with 11 on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan possibly a new site record count and 9 present on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan.

In autumn the highest count was seven on the Great Broad on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Photo: James Emerson**

**\* Great White Egret *Ardea alba***

*Rare flyover*

Despite now breeding in Norfolk and increasing throughout the county, this species is still less than annual at Whitlingham and there is the possibility of confusion with Little Egrets by inexperienced observers. One accepted record this year, two flew in from the east over the Great Broad and continued southwards on 30<sup>th</sup> Dec (SB). There was also a report of one at Whitlingham C.P. on 18<sup>th</sup> Jan (per Bird News Services) but it was not seen by other observers present on site and without further detail is treated here as unconfirmed.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

*Regular winter visitor*



The Little Egret roost documented in the past two reports is now well established. Typically up to five birds seen roosting on the Little Broad until late March, peaking at seven on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. A few sightings of flyover birds over the summer, but the roost re-established in October, typically again up to five, however six on 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Oct, seven on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov and a new record high of 10 on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec (CR).

**Photo: Gary White**

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

*Resident*



Sporadic sightings, mostly from Thorpe Marshes. All of single birds with the exception of four on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr and three on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. One over Thorpe Marshes on 26<sup>th</sup> Apr was noted as being in display flight.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

*Fairly regular flyover*



No spring peak to records this year, with sightings from nine months of the year. All refer to singles with the exception of pairs over Thorpe Marshes on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan and 5<sup>th</sup> Apr. Where sex was specified for the single individuals all birds were male, although one regular observer noted that at least two different birds were involved in the sightings (mostly adults but a juvenile male on 19<sup>th</sup> Jan).

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

*Scarce flyovers*

First sighting of the year was a bird flying over Thorpe Marshes on 11<sup>th</sup> Jan (SW). After this there was a series of sightings during April that might suggest a bird temporarily taking up a territory nearby, but if so it moved on as there were no further sightings. The April records, were on 3<sup>rd</sup> (flying west over Thorpe Marshes, also seen over Trowse), 6<sup>th</sup> (Thorpe Marshes), 21<sup>st</sup> (Trowse) and 25<sup>th</sup> (Thorpe Marshes). All raptors that pass through or venture to the edges of the area are likely to be under-recorded, but given the increase in this species in Norfolk, Red Kites remain disappointingly scarce here.

\* **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla*

*County rarity*

One seen flying westwards along the river past Thorpe Marshes on 3<sup>rd</sup> April (SW) was later seen near Colney and has been accepted by the county rarities committee, making it the first accepted area record. For further details of this sighting see the article on pages 18-22.

**Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

*Resident nearby*



A fairly common sight in the area on sunny days, when seen soaring in the distance. An exception to this was on 15<sup>th</sup> Nov, when one was flying low over the Great Broad in a Marsh Harrier-type way. Two double-figure counts, likely representing a mixture of local and migrant birds – 10 on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr and 11 on 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Barn Owl** *Tyto alba*

*Scarce resident*



Regular sightings from Whitlingham Lane early in the year, at one point involving a pair. In the spring regular reports received from Thorpe Marshes late evening by one observer. In autumn only two reports, from Whitlingham Lane on 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov and Thorpe Marshes 24<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco*

*Scarce resident*

Regular reports from Thorpe Marshes, although the birds heard sometimes referring to individuals present across the river in Whitlingham Woods or out of the area north of the railway line. As always the number of reports correlates to the presence of observers being present after dark rather than directly to abundance. There was a report of recently fledged young heard from Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> May

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*

*Scarce resident*



As usual regular records from Whitlingham Little Broad, Great Broad and along the river, with a maximum of five seen on 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> March. Pleasingly breeding was confirmed on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept when two recently fledged young were seen being fed by an adult along the river edge at Thorpe.

**Photo: Gary White.**

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus major*

*Resident*



Sightings from Whitlingham C.P. and Thorpe Marshes, throughout the year, all 1 or 2 birds. First drumming bird reported on 31<sup>st</sup> Mar, a few days later than in 2019 (but note that the week before was the start of lockdown).

**Photo: Gary White**

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*

*Resident*



Regularly seen around the recording area, with a maximum of six recorded, on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

*Resident*



Regular sightings of single birds in the first half of the year, but the only records after June were a cluster in mid-October and early November.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*

*Scarce spring migrant*



First seen on 30<sup>th</sup> Apr, a week earlier than in 2019. This bird probably accounted for a further six sightings in May and seven sightings in June, lastly on 22<sup>nd</sup>. There were no sightings during July, but there were further sightings on 1<sup>st</sup> Aug, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Sept and 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, all from Thorpe Marshes.

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus*

*Scarce flyovers*



Breeding again successful nearby at Norwich cathedral, with four young fledging. As in recent years only a small number of sightings within the area, with one over Thorpe on 12<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Apr, a juvenile over Whitlingham on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct, one over Whitlingham on 28<sup>th</sup> Oct and two over Thorpe Marshes on 18<sup>th</sup> Dec. In addition several records just outside the recording area over Thorpe St Andrew during June and July. **Photo: Stuart White**

**Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

*Common resident*

Resident in small numbers. The maximum count this year was 11 (highest count in 2018 and 2019 was seven), counted at Whitlingham C.P. on 10<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Magpie** *Pica pica*

*Common resident*



Present throughout the recording area. Only four roost counts received this year – 56 on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan (noted as an undercount), 137 on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, 47+ on 1<sup>st</sup> Mar (noted as an undercount) and 50 on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Jackdaw** *Coloeus monedula*

*Common resident*



Once again several sizeable roost counts. In the first winter period roost counts included 1090 on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1110 on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, 660 on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb and 1050 on 1<sup>st</sup> Mar. In the second winter period there were counts of 890 on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, 900 on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1370 on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov (a new site record – 30 higher than the previous one set last year) and c700 on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*

*Resident nearby but rare flyover here*



Seven records this year, one over Whitlingham on 11<sup>th</sup> Mar (GW) and 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar (ME), one over Thorpe Marshes on 6<sup>th</sup> Apr (SW), four over Whitlingham on 19<sup>th</sup> Apr (GW), birds over Thorpe Marshes on 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May (both RMc) and another over Whitlingham on 6<sup>th</sup> Dec (ME).

**Photo: Gary White**

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone*

*Common resident*



Common and easily seen all around Whitlingham C.P. A high count of 21 seen on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater*

*Scarce resident*

A scattering of records from Whitlingham this year of between 1-5 birds. No records for Thorpe Marshes this year.

**Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris*

*Scarce resident*



A similar pattern of records to that in 2019, with quite a few records between Jan-Apr but then only one more record, in September. Most records from Whitlingham, but recorded from Thorpe Marshes on 12<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Mar, plus 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Apr.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus*

*Common resident*



Common throughout the recording area.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

*Common resident*



Common throughout the recording area.

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Bearded Tit** *Panurus biarmicus*

*Rare winter visitor*

Two records from Thorpe Marshes, probably referring to the same birds. Firstly one seen there on 8<sup>th</sup> Nov (RMc), and then at least two there on 29<sup>th</sup> Nov (ME). Even when present Bearded Tits seem to be quite elusive here.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*

*Scarce flyovers*

One heard singing distantly on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr with possibly the same on 17<sup>th</sup> May. Otherwise flyovers on 10<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Oct and also one over Thorpe Marshes on 6<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

*Common spring visitor*



First of the year at Thorpe Marshes on 24<sup>th</sup> Mar, a week earlier than in 2019. The main influx occurred in late April and early May, with 150 at Whitlingham on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr, 200 on 30<sup>th</sup> Apr and 100 on 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> May. The last sighting of the year was on 8<sup>th</sup> June – there were no late summer/autumn gatherings noted this year.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

*Common summer visitor*



First seen on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr, a week later than 2019. Larger arrivals on the same dates as the Sand Martin influx, with c100 noted on 20<sup>th</sup> Apr, 29<sup>th</sup> Apr and 10<sup>th</sup> May.

There were some autumn records this year, firstly on 6<sup>th</sup> Sept, but then also on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct, 64 on 5<sup>th</sup> Oct and then one photographed on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct (GW), which appears to be the latest ever record here.

**Photo: Gary White**

**House Martin** *Delichon urbicum*

*Common spring visitor*



Despite being seen at Colney (west Norwich) from 5<sup>th</sup> Apr, no area sightings until 13<sup>th</sup> Apr this year. Influxes matched the other hirundines, with up to 200 on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr and 220 on 11<sup>th</sup> May. Eight were still present on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

Several records during September, with 18 present over the Great Broad on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct and c10 still on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct (CD), followed by an influx of 356 birds on 5<sup>th</sup> Oct, becoming the latest record for the area.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

*Common resident*



Still doing well on both sides of the river, with up to 12 singing birds recorded in the area encompassing Whitlingham C.P. along to Whitlingham Marsh, and at least nine also recorded from Thorpe Marshes (with several more present just outside the recording area).

**Photo: David Ratcliffe**

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus*

*Common resident*



Common throughout the recording area. A pair were seen feeding recently fledged young at Whitlingham on 9<sup>th</sup> May.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

*Declining summer visitor*



Noted back at Whitlingham on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr and Thorpe Marshes on 6<sup>th</sup> Apr, similar dates to 2019. Seemingly a slight upturn in numbers on recent years, with up to ten present across the area, loosely 3 at Whitlingham C.P, 4 near Whitlingham Woods and Marshes and another 3 at Thorpe Marshes, but with possibility of some overlap between sites.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

*Common summer visitor*



No overwintering birds reported at the start of the year. Birds heard singing at both Thorpe Marshes and Whitlingham on 8<sup>th</sup> Mar were probably the first arrivals. Counts varied throughout spring, but typically 15-20 singing birds around the Great Broad. Five heard singing on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, and at least one bird present at Thorpe Marshes throughout November and December.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\* Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

*Rare autumn migrant*

This species has increased in recent years and is turning up inland more often, but remains rare here and despite several previous records has only been recorded by a single observer. This year one reported calling as it flew low over Thorpe Marshes on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct (MC).

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

*Common summer visitor*



First of the year at both Thorpe Marshes and Whitlingham C.P. on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr, two days earlier than in 2019. Eight regularly reported from Whitlingham C.P. but Thorpe Marshes remains the core part of the area for this species. Counts of singing birds there vary greatly between observers. Last noted on 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug (although likely to be present but quiet and un-noticed for a while after that).

**Photo: David Ratcliffe**

**Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

*Common summer visitor*



One noted back at Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> Apr (MC), a week earlier than the first area 2019 records but roughly in keeping with the return to mid-Yare sites this year. At Whitlingham first noted from 19<sup>th</sup> Apr, a similar date to 2019. As with Sedge Warblers there was a large variance in suggested counts of singing birds between observers at Thorpe Marshes, with up to 20 singing birds at Whitlingham C.P. on 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides*

*National rarity*



A new species for the area. A reeling bird was apparently present at Thorpe Marshes from the 11<sup>th</sup> June (finder unknown) but seemingly kept quiet as a potentially breeding Schedule 1 species until news was released on 13<sup>th</sup> June. It remained until 20<sup>th</sup> June. For full details and more pictures see the article on pages 23-27.

**Photo: Sue Bryan**

**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*

*Scarce summer visitor*



First reeling bird at Thorpe Marshes on 6<sup>th</sup> Apr, 9 days earlier than 2019 but was also heard reeling on the following days so was a genuinely early returning bird rather than just passing through. A good year numbers wise, with at least six at Thorpe Marshes (possibly 1-2 more audible from Griffin Fen) and up to four at Whitlingham Marsh.

**Photo: David Ratcliffe**

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

*Common summer visitor*



No overwintering birds during January or February, but a singing bird on 19<sup>th</sup> Mar was earlier than usual. Maximum counts of singing birds around Whitlingham C.P. consistently between 25-28 during late April and May. A bird seen at Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Oct but not after that.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*

*Scarce summer visitor*



One reported from Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> Apr (MC), a very early date and possibly just a migrant as there were no further records until 19<sup>th</sup> Apr at Whitlingham and 20<sup>th</sup> Apr at Thorpe. Seemingly another good year, typically 6 or 7 singing birds noted from Whitlingham but one count 9 singing birds (3<sup>rd</sup> May) and 11 in total including the area around the woods and marsh on 9<sup>th</sup> May.

**Photo: Stuart White**

**\* Lesser Whitethroat** *Curruca curruca*

*Scarce summer visitor*



As often the case, the scarcest of the regular migratory warblers here. One reported from Thorpe Marshes/Thorpe Common area on 20<sup>th</sup> Apr, with a local arrival of birds including ones at Thorpe Marshes and Whitlingham C.P. on 24<sup>th</sup> Apr. A second Whitlingham bird was seen on 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May, with no sightings after 12<sup>th</sup> May.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Whitethroat** *Curruca communis*

*Common summer visitor*



Several very early reports this year, from 6<sup>th</sup> Apr at Thorpe Marshes (MC) and from 10<sup>th</sup> Apr at Whitlingham. Sightings more frequent from 20<sup>th</sup> Apr following an arrival a few days previously. Counts from south of the river included 12 at the C.P. on 7<sup>th</sup> June and 18 across the C.P. down to Whitlingham Marsh on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. Last noted at Whitlingham on 6<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\* Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapilla*

*Rare spring migrant*

This species has increased its range in Norfolk and seems to occur near-annually now, but so far only seems to be recorded for a day passing through rather than taking up territories. One record this year, of a bird in scrub along the riverbank north of the Great Broad on 9<sup>th</sup> Mar (ME).

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

*Common resident*



Recorded in small numbers throughout the year, mostly at Whitlingham but a few records from Thorpe Marshes too. A maximum of 13 on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

*Common resident*



Widespread and common throughout the recording area.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*

*Scarce resident*

A scattering of records received this year, all from the first half of the year.

**Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

*Common resident*



Recorded in low numbers throughout the year at Whitlingham. Several reports also received from Thorpe Marshes, although it is unclear if these relate to birds actually present at Thorpe or heard calling from the wooded areas across the river.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

*Common resident*

Records early in the year typically low numbers of flocks seen distantly. In autumn several large flocks seen flying over at dusk, including 600 on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct, c1000 on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct and interestingly about 2000 roosted at Thorpe Marshes on 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. Some years see large Starling roosts in the mid-Yare, but in this area any large dusk flocks are usually only pre-roost gatherings.

**\* Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*

*Rare passage migrant*



Three records this year. Firstly a female reported calling from scrub at Thorpe Marshes on 6<sup>th</sup> Apr (MC), secondly a male seen and photographed singing from trees at Thorpe Marshes on 13<sup>th</sup> Mar (SW) and finally two flying south over Thorpe Marshes on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct (MC).

**Photo: Stuart White**

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

*Common resident*



Common throughout the recording area. Newly fledged young noted at Whitlingham on 9<sup>th</sup> May.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*

*Common winter visitor*



A scattering of migrant records. One on 16<sup>th</sup> Mar, followed by up to 20 on several dates between 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Apr. In autumn several flocks noted from both Whitlingham and Thorpe Marshes between 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Photo: James Emerson**

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*

*Common winter visitor*



A fairly similar pattern to the Fieldfares, with a couple of large flocks (40 and 45) during the first half of March but otherwise small numbers flying over during late March and early April, last noted on 15<sup>th</sup> Apr. In autumn seen again from 26<sup>th</sup> Sept with around 300 over on several dates in October, mostly in small groups just after dawn.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*

*Common resident*



Present throughout the recording area in low numbers.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*

*Scarce resident*



Resident but under-recorded. A scattering of sightings, all relating to single birds except for two on 25<sup>th</sup> Jan.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Robin** *Erithacus rubicula*

*Common resident*



Common throughout the recording area.

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

*Scarce spring migrant/breeder*

For the second year running no singing birds returned to the former stronghold of scrub in the Whitlingham C.P. conservation area. There were two records of single-day passage birds, one sound-recorded singing from along Whitlingham Lane on 19<sup>th</sup> Apr (per JL) and another reported from Thorpe Marshes on 4<sup>th</sup> May (MC).

**Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola*

*Scarce winter migrant*



The pair overwintering from September 2020 were present at Thorpe Marshes until at least 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb, with an additional female also present on that date. One still present at Thorpe Marshes on 8<sup>th</sup> Mar and a there was a record from Whitlingham C.P. on 18<sup>th</sup> Mar.

In the autumn the pair were again seen from 29<sup>th</sup> Sept until the year end, with an additional pair on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct (RC) and an additional female on multiple dates in late November. **Photo: Gary White**

\* **Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

*Scarce spring passage migrant*



Two records this year, one at Whitlingham in fields near Whitlingham Hall on 17<sup>th</sup> Apr (HE) and another bird seen and photographed at Thorpe Marshes on 28<sup>th</sup> Apr (SW).

**Photo: Stuart White**

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*

*Common resident*



Common throughout the recording area.

**Photo: Stuart White**

\* **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

*Scarce spring flyover*

Two flyover records this year, one over Thorpe Marshes on 12<sup>th</sup> May (DA) and one over Whitlingham Marsh on 14<sup>th</sup> May (WW).

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

*Scarce resident*

One or two reported from around the recording area during the year. Several records relating to birds probably roosting at Thorpe Marshes in autumn, including two west towards Thorpe on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct, one into roost at the edge of St Andrews Broad on 13<sup>th</sup> and six flew into the roost from the west at dusk.

**Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

*Common resident*



Resident and seen regularly throughout the year. A nest was found on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr, and recently fledged birds around the slipway at Whitlingham later in the spring indicated successful breeding nearby.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

*Passage migrant/winter visitor*



Recorded at Thorpe Marshes in the first winter period until at least 27<sup>th</sup> Mar, with a roost gathering of 28 on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb the only count of note during that period. Recorded again from 6<sup>th</sup> Sept, with two exceptionally high roost counts reported in November – 164 on 21<sup>st</sup> and 191 on 24<sup>th</sup> (both MC).

**Photo: Gary White**

\* **Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta*

*Scarce winter visitor*

A selection of records, all associated with the Meadow Pipit roost at Thorpe Marshes. In the first winter period at least one (possibly two) with a large group of Meadow Pipits at dusk at Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb (GW). Record shots were taken but would not reproduce well at the usual photo size used here! One apparently flew up out of roost early morning on 6<sup>th</sup> Apr (MC). In the autumn singles were reported in to roost on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct and 24<sup>th</sup> Nov, whilst one flew over the roost on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct and 2 over on 21<sup>st</sup> Nov (all MC). There was one other report from Thorpe Marshes, on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov (per Twitter). These sightings are in keeping with those reported in previous reports – clearly this species does not roost at Thorpe every evening over winter (as mentioned in the past most local birders have not yet seen this species here), but seems to occur periodically (and of course it worth noting that most evenings no observers are present, so the exact frequency is unknown).

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

*Common resident*



Widely seen throughout the recording area.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

*Scarce winter visitor*



A few records from the first winter period, all of between 1-4, the last of which was on 31<sup>st</sup> Mar.

In autumn eight recorded at Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct and 12 on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct with further flyovers noted on several dates in late Oct until mid -November.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

*Scarce resident*



Fairly regularly seen in low numbers, with most sightings occurring between mid-March and late June.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*

*Fairly common resident*



Single figure counts received from Whitlingham on a few occasions, plus 18 reported from Whitlingham on 12<sup>th</sup> July and the same number reported from Thorpe Marshes on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct. Probably under-recorded but does seem to be less frequent than it used to be here.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Linnet** *Linaria cannabina*

*Scarce resident*



Single figure counts from both Whitlingham and Thorpe Marshes, with three males in song at Thorpe on 27<sup>th</sup> Mar. A flock of 50 were seen at Thorpe Marshes on 17<sup>th</sup> Nov and 37 flew over on 24<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\* Common (=Mealy) Redpoll** *Acanthis flammea*

*Scarce winter visitor*



Only two sightings this year of a bird with a flock of Lesser Redpolls, probably both referring to the same bird, on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb and 16<sup>th</sup> Mar (both GW).

**Photo: Gary White**

**Lesser Redpoll** *Acanthis cannabina*

*Fairly scarce winter visitor*



Between 1 and 10 present at Whitlingham until 20<sup>th</sup> Mar. In autumn several birds heard flying around at Whitlingham on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct might have been migrants or the first birds back – 27 were present on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct and around 30 on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec, although only seen periodically between those two dates. At Thorpe mostly records of singles but 10 on 13<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\* Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*

*Rare occasional flyovers*

An unprecedented number of sightings of this less-than-annual species, with seven records within the recording area and a similar number just outside it. These are discussed in more detail in the article on page 34-36, but all relate to flyovers during the autumn: 1 west on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct and 7 flew NW on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct (both JL), followed by 9 over Thorpe Marshes on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct (MC), two singles west over Whitlingham on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct (JE), 7 NW over Whitlingham on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct (GW) and two sightings over Thorpe Marshes on 16<sup>th</sup> Nov, when 1 flew south (per Twitter) and another four flew over later (CD).

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

*Common resident*



A common bird here but not one that tends to get reported unless observers are attempting complete sighting lists.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Siskin** *Spinus spinus*

*Common winter visitor*



Present until at least 5<sup>th</sup> Apr with a highest first winter period count of 56 on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan.

In autumn back from 20<sup>th</sup> September, lower numbers at Whitlingham although 63 reported from Thorpe Marshes on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct and 50 there on 18<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Photo: Gary White**

**\* Yellowhammer**

*Scarce flyover*

Two records this year, one flew over Whitlingham C.P. on 11<sup>th</sup> Mar (GW) and another over Thorpe Marshes on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct (MC).

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

*Common summer visitor*



Present at Whitlingham and Thorpe Marshes all throughout the year, making it unclear when the first singing birds of the year were.

**Photo: Gary White**

**Total: 144 species (not including Corncrake)**

## **Appendix A – Recorded species linked to reintroduction schemes**

Species listed here are those that would otherwise have appeared in the main species list but are either known or suspected to have originated from reintroduction schemes rather than self-sustaining natural populations. In addition to Corncrake, detailed here, there is a large reintroduction of White Storks from Knepp that have reached the Yare Valley and multiple White-tailed Eagles from the Isle of Wight that have spent time in Norfolk, both of which are likely to be observed in the area at some point.

\* **Corncrake** *Crex crex*

*County rarity/current reintroduction scheme*



This species had not been recorded in the area before until one was heard calling at Thorpe Marshes from 19<sup>th</sup> May and into June – see article on pages 28-33 for details. Although the origin of this individual was not confirmed by trapping and checking for rings, representatives of the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust have stated that they believe this record relates to one of their reintroduced birds. **Photo: Dave Farrow**

## **Appendix B – Recorded birds thought to be escapes or of dubious origin**

Note that species on Category C of the British List (for example Barnacle Goose and Mandarin) without captive-type rings are typically given the benefit of the doubt and included in the main systematic list, so this category typically covers things like Black Swan, Muscovy Duck, Ruddy Shelduck etc.

**None this year**

## **Appendix C – Birds reported from the area but not accepted onto the main list**

Species listed here are those that have been reported but not included on the main species list. This will typically be national or county rarities, species not previously recorded in the area (or species that have been reported second-hand with insufficient detail) that have not been photographed or seen by multiple observers.

\* **Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* *National rarity (no previous records)*

A report of one heard calling several times at night over Thorpe Marshes on 22<sup>nd</sup> June. This species is a national rarity with only three confirmed Norfolk records in the past 10 years and no previous Whitlingham records.

\* **Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* *Scarce spring migrant*

Apparently one seen by an observer during the spring whilst twitching the Corncrake, but this information is second-hand and although plausible there is no date or first-hand detail on which to base the record. It would also appear that none of the other birders who visited during this period saw it.

\* **Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* *Local rarity (no previous records)*

One reported flying over Thorpe Marshes during the autumn. This species is rare in east Norfolk, and although a handful of records of birds are reported moving along the coast in most years, there does not seem to be any recent history of movements in the Norwich area and to the author's knowledge this species has not been recorded here previously.

## **Appendix D – Hybrid birds**

### **Canada x Greylag Goose**

*Occasional visitor*



The most common naturally occurring goose hybrid, so records do not necessarily refer to the same individuals each year. Singles noted on 25<sup>th</sup> Jan and 8<sup>th</sup> Mar and a group of five visited on 16<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Photo: Gary White**

### **Greylag x Chinese Goose (aka domestic Swan Goose)**

*Resident*



Long-staying bird, once again present all year, mostly around the slipway.

**Photo: James Emerson**

### **White-cheeked Pintail x Mallard**

*Regular hybrid first seen in 2018*



Seen on 1<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, but then not again until 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, followed by further sightings on 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Oct, then finally on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov. In previous years this bird spent the summer in the mid-Yare valley, but I am unaware of any reports of it there this year.

**Photo: Gary White**

### **Carrion Crow x Hooded Crow**

*No previous local records*

There are several long-staying Carrion x Hooded Crow hybrids on the Norfolk coast, mostly on the east coast but also at least one in the West Runton area. One of these birds might possibly be the origin of this sighting, which involved one flying north over Thorpe Marshes on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct (MC).

## **Appendix E – Species notably unrecorded in 2020**

These species are birds that are seen frequently (defined as at least three of the previous five years) but were not reported during 2020

\* **Scaup** *Aythya marila*

*Scarce winter visitor*

Scaup turn up at Whitlingham roughly every other year, usually in winter but there has also been a recent summer record too. None reported in the Norwich area during 2020.

\* **Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

*Scarce passage migrant*

In recent years this species has been recorded near annually in spring (with other records in August and December), but there were no records received this year. Birds were heard flying over the city during April, but typically after midnight so more likely to be picked up by nocturnal microphones than live observers.

\* **Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*

*Scarce visitor*

A fairly regular visitor to Whitlingham but no records this year – possibly a genuine absence but also a reflection of the lack of passion for large gull ID amongst local birders. Elsewhere a confident 2<sup>nd</sup> winter did spend some time at Wensum Park in central Norwich during December.

## **Appendix F – Selected additional bird sightings from the Norwich area**

These species not seen within the Whitlingham Recording Area, but were seen elsewhere around the Norwich area. Details are included here for general interest and in some cases it might help to establish future patterns of occurrence within the area.

### \* **Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*

One calling from Earlham Marshes on 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> May was particularly unusual, with a second bird a bit further out at Thorpe Marriott throughout July.

### \* **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*



One flew along Yarmouth Road and then north over Thunder Lane, just outside the recording area on 7<sup>th</sup> May. This bird was accepted by the county rarities committee.

**Photo: Stuart White**



### \* **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

One flew over Costessey and then Colney on 4<sup>th</sup> May, followed by another high over Earlham Cemetery on 8<sup>th</sup> May.

### \* **Raven** *Corvus corax*

This species is increasing in the county and has bred in recent years, but one over Charter Wood (Bowthorpe) on 8<sup>th</sup> Dec was still an excellent Norwich record.

### \* **Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus*

One heard flying over Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct (SW).

### \* **Rose-coloured Starling** *Pastor roseus*

One in gardens in Sprowston from 10<sup>th</sup> June was the second Norwich area record in recent memory, following one at a housing estate near Costessey in October 2018.

### \* **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

One or two birds regularly heard singing again in the city centre from 23<sup>th</sup> April onwards, with a suggestion that up to four were on territory during May.

## Acknowledgements & initials for scarce/rare species

I am grateful to everyone who has reported birds from the Whitlingham area this year, be it directly to myself, to the bird news services, via Whatsapp groups or by posted sightings on Twitter. I am also grateful to members of the UEA Ringing Group who have provided additional information and answered queries about their work. I would particularly like to thank the following for providing records, information or photos:

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Where a name was not given for a sighting (for example posted as a Twitter handle) or a sighting was passed on second or third hand, I have listed it as per the source, e.g. 'per Twitter' or 'per JL'. For completeness I have also tried to review any additional sightings from blogs, forums and recording sites such as eBird, however I have only included sightings from these sources if they fit an established pattern of occurrence.

Photographers of pictures used in the report are: Chris Durdin, James Emerson, Dave Farrow, Alan Hale, Mike Hoit, Chris Lansdell, Justin Lansdell, James Lowen, Roger Parker, David Ratcliffe, Stephen Vickers, Nick Watmough, Gary White and Stuart White.

## Local information

Increasingly local birding information is discussed on Twitter or private Whatsapp groups, but the following websites regularly contain sightings from the Whitlingham area:

<https://jamesbirdsandbeer.blogspot.co.uk/> (The author's blog, containing updates from Whitlingham & Thorpe, and a site guide and a site bird list)

<http://www.honeyguide.co.uk/thorpemarshes.htm> (Thorpe Marshes NWT unofficial site)

<http://yarevalleywildlife.synthasite.com/> (Yare Valley Birding website)

## Bird information services

Several sightings and dates relate to sightings reported to the bird information services. If you are fortunate enough to find a rare or locally scarce bird, please report it to one of them. Contact websites and phone numbers of the main providers can be found below.

Rare Bird Alert (0207 0382820), BirdGuides (0333 5772473) or BirdLine East Anglia (07941 333970).