

## Norfolk Wildlife Trust Cley & Salthouse Marshes Breeding report 2023



© Andrew Bloomfield

### **Introduction**

This report is comprised of data collected across NWT Cley and Salthouse Marshes, between March and August 2023.

Due to lack of resource this year, the area monitored is from the reserve's western boundary, on the saltmarsh, along the edge of the river glaven and Iron Road at Salthouse. Some species were monitored across the whole reserve, which extends beyond Salthouse and down to, but not including, Kelling water meadows.

Highlights of this year include successful breeding of Spoonbills for a second year, warblers fledging good numbers of young and it was another year where bittern bred on the reserve although they failed to fledge. Unfortunately most ground nesting waders suffered badly from predation.

### **Species Summaries**

#### **Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix*

Pairs: 1      Fledged: unknown

Up to five birds seen regularly on Eye Field and western areas in April to June. No breeding activity confirmed.

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*

Pairs: 5      Fledged: 7

Nests were located across the whole reserve. 2 at Cley, 1 on Popes and 2 at Salthouse. A better year regarding productivity, unlike last year, where whole broods of young birds were found dead or sick, possibly due to bird flu.

**Canada Goose**

Pairs: 2      Fledged: 0

Brood of 6 hatched from nest on Brackish on 11<sup>th</sup> May then 5 of them were on N Scrape on 16<sup>th</sup> May but not reported again.

**Egyptian Goose**

Pairs: 1      Fledged: 3

No nest seen but a brood of 3 tiny goslings were on Simmond's Scrape on 30<sup>th</sup> April. They remained on the central scrapes until 7<sup>th</sup> July when fledged.

**Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

Broods: 19      Fledged: 48

As in previous years, no nests were seen – it's likely most birds nest in surrounding areas and bring their broods on to the reserve. The first young were seen on 26<sup>th</sup> May. 19 broods were seen with a minimum of 123 young. The ducklings often merge, joining other families or creches so making their progress difficult to follow.

**Garganey** *Anas querquedula*

Pairs: 0      Fledged: 0

No breeding this year

**Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

Pairs: 0      Fledged: 0

Good numbers of adults were around Cley in March & early April then the numbers reduced in late April/May when they should have been pairing up. No young were seen.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

Pairs: 9      Fledged: 4

9 different broods were seen with a total of 63 chicks. Only 4 large/fledged young were reported but some could have been missed.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

Pairs: 27      Fledged: 71

The first ducklings, a brood of 12, were seen on Bull Marsh on 1<sup>st</sup> May. A total of 27 broods (150 ducklings were reported) but some may have been missed.

**Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

Pairs: 0      Fledged: 0

Pairs were seen on Snipe's Marsh and Don's Pool in April and a pair on Snipe's on 9<sup>th</sup> June. In mid-June, there was a report that there had been a female with a duckling on Don's earlier in the month but this wasn't confirmed or seen again.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

Pairs: 0      Fledged: 0

The first pair was seen on Snipes on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and then pairs were on the 'moat' by Watling Water on 8<sup>th</sup> April and 5<sup>th</sup> May, the Brackish on 17<sup>th</sup> May, Don's Pool on 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> June and in Catchwater Drain west of E Bank on 10<sup>th</sup> June but after that only drakes were seen and no sign of any young. A pair were also seen in the Catchwater Drain at Salthouse on 30<sup>th</sup> May

**WaterRail** *Rallus aquaticus*

Pairs: 4      Fledged: 6 minimum

Vocal from early April. Territories on Snipes (possibly 2 pairs), near Daukes, Bishops, North side of Simmonds Scrape. 4 juveniles seen together on Snipes in July with increasing confidence of fledging as the month progressed; Simmonds had two well grown chicks throughout late July. Fledging success notoriously difficult to ascertain.

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

Pairs: 21    Broods: 20    Chicks: 51    Fledged: 10

With visibility along most drains obscured by dense overhanging reeds we are certain chicks were missed. 21 pairs were recorded, producing 51 chicks. The first breeding record was an active nest on 1<sup>st</sup> April but it was abandoned after c.9 days. The first chicks were seen 16<sup>th</sup> May On Don's Pool.. 51 chicks were produced but many were lost throughout the season and only 10 survived long enough to have fledged.

**Coot** *Fulica atra*

Pairs: 3      Fledged: 5

Possible pairs were seen in the Catchwater Drain west of E Bank, Don's Pool, Skirts Pool, Richardson's Scrape and Watling Water in late March. The first nest was seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> April on Don's Pools

A pair nested on Richardsons Scrape & hatched 3 chicks on 25<sup>th</sup> April; they fed around Bishop's Hide and all 3 fledged in late June. Another pair nested on Don's Pool hatching 5 young on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, numbers reduced and the last was seen on 7<sup>th</sup> June when still only medium sized. The third pair nested on Snipe's Marsh and hatched 4 chicks on 16<sup>th</sup> May, they were seen in reducing numbers until the end of May then not again. A second brood of 4 hatched there on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1 was soon lost and another in early August. We think the last two fledged in mid-September.

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Pairs: 2    Broods: 1    Chicks: 2    Fledged: 2

The only successful breeding observed on the reserve was at Don's Pool where 2 chicks fledged. At the start of the season adults were often seen and heard on Snipe's Marsh and occasionally in the Catchwater Drain but there were no signs of breeding in those areas.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

Pairs: 7      Fledged: 0

At least 7 pairs nested but as usual all nests failed within 15 days. The only young seen were a brood with their parents trying to cross the A149 from the fields south of the road to the reserve. One chick got run-over and the outcome of the others is unknown.

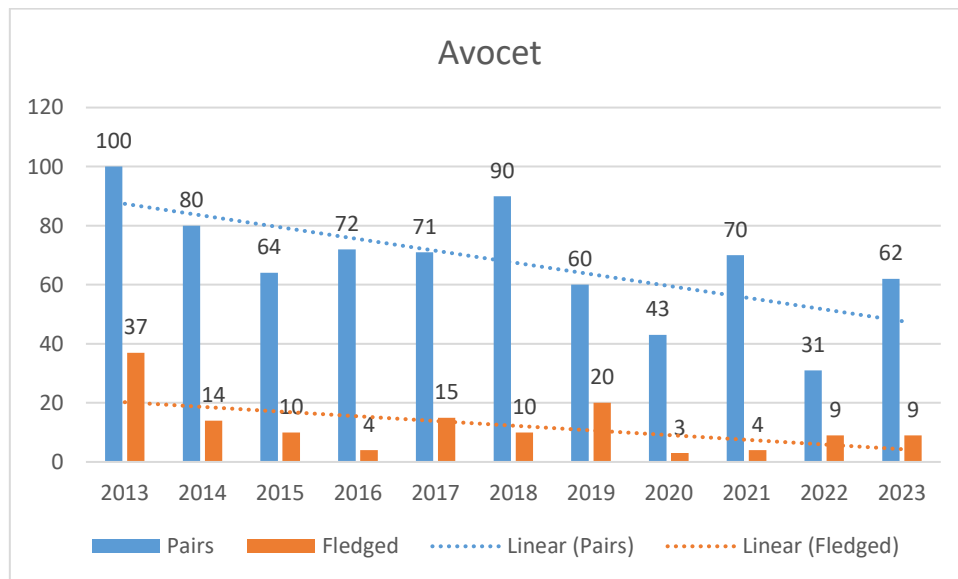
**Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Pairs: 62

Fledged: 9

167 birds were present on the reserve on 24<sup>th</sup> March.

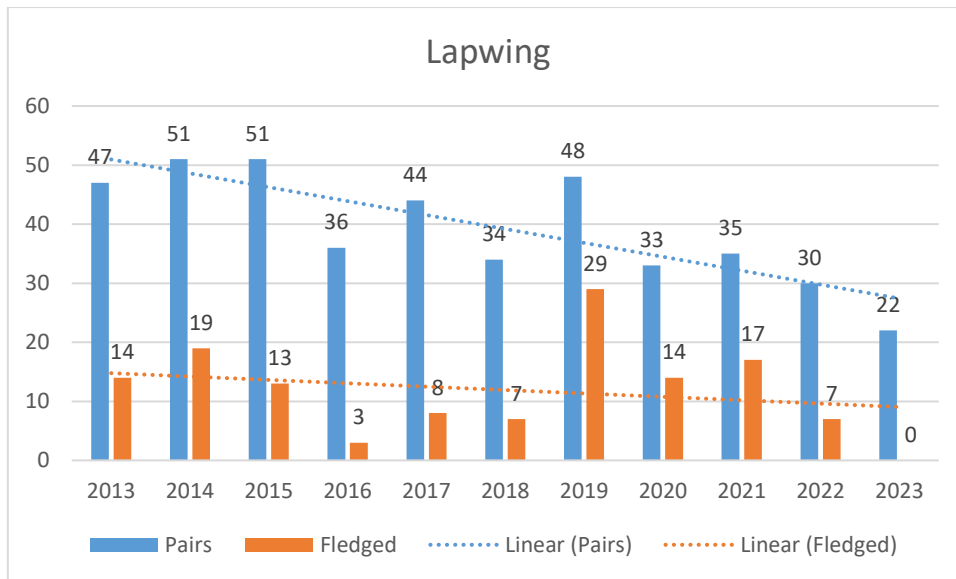
The first nest was seen on 19<sup>th</sup> April on Pat's Pool and the first chicks hatched on 14<sup>th</sup> May. The highest nest count was 58 on 18<sup>th</sup> May, most on Pat's Pool and the highest chick count was 53 on 31<sup>st</sup> May. Many were predated with only 7 chicks remaining on 8<sup>th</sup> June. A few more hatched after that and survived to give a total of 9 fledging across the reserve. Additionally, a few chicks hatched from nests on the Brackish and the beach, these were only seen briefly but may have survived somewhere on the reserve. A pair with 4 tiny chicks were seen around the north end of E Bank and then Arnold's on 16<sup>th</sup> June and then on the Serpentine on the 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> but not again, we don't know where they came from or where they went.



**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Nests: 30 (incl. second attempts) Pairs: c.22 Broods: 10 Chicks: 28 Fledged: 0

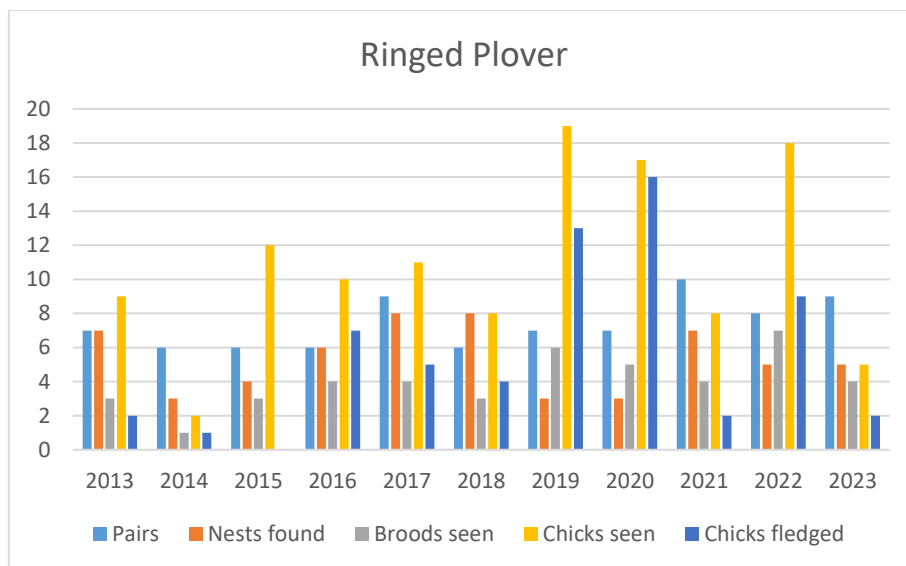
Unfortunately, this year was a total failure for Lapwing with no young fledged. The main nesting areas were Eye Field, Bull Marsh and Pope's Marsh with fewer than usual attempting to nest on the Serpentine off East Bank. The first nest was found on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and more soon followed but 18 of them were lost and 5 nests went full-term but were lost around hatching time. A total of 30 nests were located, many being second attempts after the loss of a first nest, eggs or chicks. 10 nests were known to have hatched but no chicks fledged, young and older chicks being lost presumably to predation.



**Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Pairs: 9      Chicks seen: 5      Fledged: 2 minimum

As in previous years, breeding behaviour, nests and chicks were monitored along the entire shingle ridge between Cley beach road and Kelling and on the grazing marshes. A higher than average count of 9 pairs were recorded, but hatching success of eggs was low, with only 2 confirmed broods seen with a further 2 possible broods assumed from witnessing protective behaviour. The only confirmed fledging was of 2 chicks on NT's land, near Gramborough Hill.



**Little Ringed Plover *Charidrius dubius***

Pairs: 2      Fledged: 10

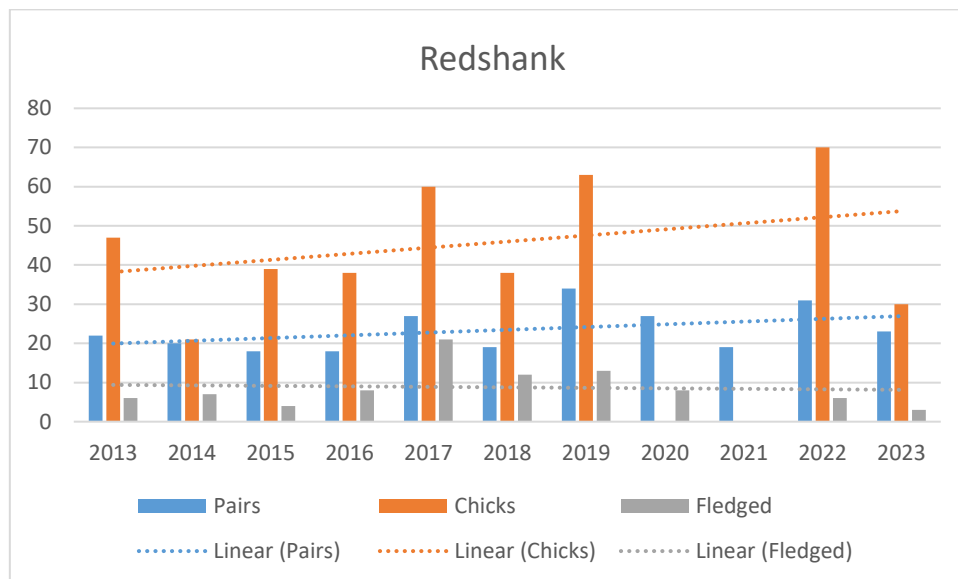
2 pairs nested on Pat's/Simmonds, having 2 broods each. Total 11 chicks of which 10 fledged. Unlike previous years, no activity was noted on the fields behind the visitor centre.

**Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Broods: 23      Chicks: 30      Fledged: 3

The first brood (1 chick) was noted on Simmonds Scrape on 18<sup>th</sup> May but it was not seen again. Five nests were suspected but none of them produced chicks; by early June chicks were being seen

across the reserve but it became apparent that both nests and young chicks were being lost. Numbers of both broods and chicks was considerably lower than last year with 23 pairs producing 30 chicks and just 3 of them surviving long enough to fledge.



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

Pairs: 3 Fledged: 5

15 pairs attempted to nest, mainly on the central scrapes and Brackish Pool from early May. The first chick was seen on the Brackish Tussocks on 30<sup>th</sup> May and the first on Pat's on 27<sup>th</sup> June. A total of 6 chicks from 5 broods were seen on the Brackish pools and elsewhere. A couple of larger chicks were seen on the Brackish but we don't know if any fledged.

### **Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***

Pairs: 2 Fledged: 3

After the first successful year for breeding Spoonbills in 2022, 2023 saw further success in North Foreland woods.

Compared to 2022, the season started off very quiet, with the heronry seemingly inactive until the end of March, when some activity of Grey Herons and Little Egrets were noted.

The first drone survey was carried out on 4<sup>th</sup> April, which showed both species establishing territories but no active nests and no Spoonbills. The following day saw the first Spoonbills moving in and out of the heronry and a second drone survey was carried out on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, which showed a single nest occupied by 2 adults. By this time, it was noted that breeding at Cley was happening much later than at Holkham where birds were already hatching.

Further drone surveys on 17<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> June showed the original nest with 3 near fledged juveniles and a second nest occupied by an adult bird was later found empty and assumed predated.

The following weeks, saw up to 25 Spoonbills, a mix of juveniles and adults, feeding and roosting on the reserve. As in past years, it's understood that most of these are Holkham birds.

### **Bittern *Botaurus stellaris***

Pairs: 1 Fledged: 0

Following a successful year in 2022, this year started promising again with the first sighting on 12<sup>th</sup> March, a bird flying in from Blakeney, settling in the main reedbed. A male was heard booming on 27<sup>th</sup> March, then in flight over reserve. Two birds were seen in flight on 28<sup>th</sup> March, then booming

from near Bittern Pool that evening. Sightings and booming then became more regular with flights between Cley and Blakeney in early April. More booming in early May and several sightings of the female feeding to the west of East Bank out in the open.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May there was protracted activity with a male and female in flight several times over the main reedbeds, dropping into the reeds periodically then back up. Female calling in flight. At the same time another male was occasionally booming from the main reedbed. Booming continued throughout May then quiet with very few sightings noted. It is assumed that young in the nest were predated, soon after hatching.

#### **Grey Heron** *Butorides virescens*

Pairs: 4                      Fledged: 7

Grey Heron nests were recorded and monitored from drone surveys. Nests can be counted easily at the early part of the season, then monitoring progress becomes difficult once trees are in leaf and the chicks move out of the nest before fledging.

#### **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

Pairs: 10-12                  Fledged: unknown

Little Egrets are also recorded and monitored from drone surveys. It is extremely difficult to get an accurate count of pairs, nests and young fledged as nesting occurs in small holes in ivy, underneath the canopy and below heron and spoonbill nests. Pairs are estimated from an overall count earlier on in the season.

#### **Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

Nests: 3                      Fledged: 0

Throughout most of the season, it seemed it was going to be a normal outcome for marsh harriers, with most, or all nests fledging young. Normal breeding activity (displaying, nest building, food passing etc) was recorded from all 3 nests but no young were seen at all 3 nest sites. It is unknown why all 3 nests failed. Potentially predation from otters or avian predators but there's also a risk of birds succumbing to bird flu, as in the past people have recorded adults carrying in sandwich terns, which it is well known have suffered badly from bird flu.

#### **Bearded Tit** *Panurus biarmicus*

Territories: 13                Fledged: 17

Numbers were mostly recorded from public paths. A total of 11 possible territories noted through April. A transect within the main reed bed was undertaken on 16<sup>th</sup> May due to observer absence earlier in the month. Only one adult was seen but was noted to be carrying food.

2 Juveniles were seen from East Bank on 29<sup>th</sup> April and feeding flights to two sections of the Main Reedbed from East Bank noted on 30<sup>th</sup> April. Juvenile seen from Boardwalk on 11<sup>th</sup> May. On 18<sup>th</sup> May two possible nest sites noted between Pats and Richardson's Scrapes – several food carrying forays.

On 4 June an adult was seen feeding four juveniles off East Bank. More feeding activity, adult feeding three young from East Bank. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July a flock of 17 juveniles was seen in the reeds opposite Daukes Hide.

Fledging is likely to be under recorded as access to parts of the reserve around North scrape and Billy's wash in the breeding season is difficult without causing disturbance to the scrapes. On Sunday 8 October a total of 37 birds were seen around East Bank, the majority of which were well-grown juveniles. A flock of 17 then flew west over the reserve.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*

Territories: 17      Fledged: unknown

Early singing activity – March onwards predominantly in Eye Field and fields north of Attenborough Walk. Adult taking food into K3 on 13<sup>th</sup> June

**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Pairs: 5      Fledged: minimum 24

8 Birds were seen regularly around the Central Hides from 8<sup>th</sup> May onwards. Several viewing flaps were secured in the open position to allow access to all three of the Central Hides. From 18<sup>th</sup> May nesting material seen being carried in to hides with mud plastering as well. Nests evident in all three hides in late May with little or no impact from visitors. On 31<sup>st</sup> May adults feeding young in Teal Hide with nest guarding in Avocet Hide.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> May evidence of nest building in Richardson's Hide on East Bank. 11<sup>th</sup> June pair prospecting at Babcock Hide. On 13<sup>th</sup> June two nests now evident in Avocet Hide with young being fed in one. After some delay, possibly due to East wind nesting activity noted in Richardson's Hide and half-built nest in shelter outside Babcock Hide. Feeding activity to both nests in Avocet Hide from 21<sup>st</sup> June. On 13<sup>th</sup> July evidence of at least two fledglings from Richardson's Hide being fed by adults outside the hide. Evidence of nesting activity from Babcock Hide – cup nest – on 24<sup>th</sup> July. 25<sup>th</sup> July nesting activity ongoing in Teal Hide with four chicks seen.

23<sup>rd</sup> August – second brood of four chicks in nest in Richardson's Hide and near to fledging on 28<sup>th</sup> August. Four left the hide/nest between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September.

**Cettis Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

Territories: 10      Fledged: unknown

At least 10 singing birds noted from end of March to mid-May. As usual, territories were located mostly along the Catch-water Drain and along East Bank. One territory again near Salthouse Duckpond, and one near Babcock Hide. Some young are thought to have fledged, but none were recorded. Several juvenile songsters noted (heard only) across the reserve from July.

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Territories: 64      Fledged: 41 minimum

First recorded on 26<sup>th</sup> March, much earlier than in recent years however weather deteriorated, and numbers only noted from mid-April. 29 territories around main reserve from paths and boardwalk and 19 from Main Reedbed survey on 16<sup>th</sup> May with 19. Additional 16 territories along Attenborough Walk to Salthouse/Meadow Lane to Kelling Quags.

Fledglings were noted along the Boardwalk from 4 June (4) and then later in June (4, 4, 3), Iron Road (3, 4), Catchwater Drain (3, 2, 4) and East Bank (8). Second brood evidence – adult carrying food in and faecal sac out from location opposite Daukes Hide on 20 July. Two “begging” juveniles being fed by adult near East Bank Carpark on 21 July.

**Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Territories: 15      Fledged: 11

First recorded on 14<sup>th</sup> April with single bird singing near Don's Pool. Only four territories located from paths/boardwalk but 11 on main reedbed survey on 16<sup>th</sup> May. First juveniles (3) at Junction Bridge on 21<sup>st</sup> June then 4 (Daukes) and 2 (Boardwalk) on 9<sup>th</sup> July. 19<sup>th</sup> July – 2 fledglings East Bank. Further singing around East Bank, Catchwater Drain in July indicating that second broods possible but no fledging evidence.



**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*

Territories: 1 max      Fledged: unknown

Little activity compared with the previous two years. Only notable singing from a male that stayed near the West Bank sluice for 2-3 days from 6 May.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Territories: min 9      Fledged: 9 minimum

A very difficult species to survey and no doubt under-recorded. Singing and territory holding noted at several reedbed and scrub sites through April – main reserve and as far as Babcock Hide. Suspected nest behind Bishops Hide and in vicinity of Teal Hide as 4 fledglings around Central Hides on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. Three fledglings near Bishops Hide on 11<sup>th</sup> June and two juveniles on Attenborough Walk on 24<sup>th</sup> July.

**Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola*

Pairs: 3      Fledged: 6 minimum

Male and female North Scrape screen gorse on 11<sup>th</sup> April and 3 juveniles in area late May. Male and female around boardwalk from late May. Pair near Babcock Hide on several dates from end of April. Three juveniles near Babcock site in late May.

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

Territories: 0      Fledged: 0

Despite an excellent Spring passage of Yellow Wagtails there was no evidence of intent to stay or breed.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

Territories: 16 (21)      Fledged: 7 minimum

Territories assessed in mid-April by number of song-fighting birds, nesting activity noted in only three areas – East Bank (3 pairs), Shingle Ridge/rear of Arnolds Marsh (2 pairs) and Attenborough Walk (11 pairs) and five probables on Eye Field. Food carrying noted periodically. Four juveniles seen together on East Bank, 2 on Eye Field. Possible second broods noted around Iron Road (3) and East Bank.

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Territories: 16      Fledged: 11 minimum

Singing males and breeding behaviour were recorded as territories with the first noted at Watling water on 21<sup>st</sup> March. Thereafter pairs seen regularly across all areas of the reserve, with nest building activity noted at several sites. Juveniles seen along East Bank – 6, Boardwalk, 3 and Watling Water 2. Fledging numbers are a minimum, as some areas are overlooked due to access/disturbance issues.

**Acknowledgments**

Thanks as always to the small team of volunteers, who dedicate a lot of time monitoring breeding activity and also assisted with writing this report, David and Pat Wileman, Kath and Mick Claydon, David Griffiths, Peter and Sue Morrison and Mike Harcup. Thanks also to various birdwatchers who pass on sightings to CBC, which helps to gather data for this report.