

The Breeding Birds of Blakeney Freshes 2012



Redshank (J Cockram 2012)

Chris Everitt
Seasonal Ranger

2012 INTRODUCTION

Blakeney Freshes forms part of the Blakeney National Nature Reserve in North Norfolk. The area is contained within a seawall and consists of grazing marsh, reed beds, ponds and dykes; it is bordered on its southern side by Friary Hills an area of grassland and gorse scrub.

The aim of this report is to highlight the 2012 key breeding bird species, which include Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Lapwing, Avocet, Redshank and Bearded Reedling. Other species have also been included.

Licence

In order to undertake survey work for Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Avocet and Bearded Reedling, the appropriate Natural England License was held by Victoria Frances (National Trust, Countryside Manager) and persons which the licensee appoints to undertake survey work.

Interpretation

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Single flushed on three occasions during March from dyke systems around and within fields 11 and 9, on all occasions it was seen to resettle at the western end of the Great Barnett reed bed. A male was heard booming from within the Gt Barnett reed bed on two occasions in mid-April, a single was flushed on the 20th April from near the sluice between Fields 8 and 11 once again settling back in the Gt Barnett reed bed. In late August a Bitten was spotted at the base of Friary

Hills, it is not known if this was a resident bird or one that had been blown into the area as a result of some severe gales recorded just previous to the sighting

Breeding, unknown.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

One nest was recorded in woodland adjacent to the freshes.

Number fledged unknown.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Maximum count for the freshes was 7 adult pairs plus a further possible 3 pairs made up of immature birds. Two nests were found, the nest in F11 failed in the early stages of incubation, the one in F36 was incubated for a longer period, possibly to the point of hatching but no young were seen.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

56 individuals recorded but only 4 nests found with 3 broods noted with a total of 18 young.

Canada Goose *Branta Canadensis*

3prs present, with upto 7 other birds present including the usual Canada/Greylag hybrids, 7 young seen.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A maximum count of 20 prs were noted across the freshes and Friary Hills with the usual rabbit holes showing signs of being investigated.

The presence of a family of cats may have discouraged adults from nesting on Friary Hills.

Once again no young were recorded on site, first young seen in the adjacent River Glaven was on the 15th of June.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Early in the season one pair were recorded on the reserve. As with last year no young recorded.

Mallard *Anas platyhyncho*

Peak count of loafing males was 47 on the 30th April. High possibility of nests being washed out early in the season; broods widely spaced throughout the season with no peak hatching period

discernible. Ducklings present in March to mid-August. Estimated number of young fledged, 25+

Gadwall *Anas streper*

Peak count of loafing males was 13 on the 30th April
5 broods noted, estimated fledging success 9+.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

No record

Shoveler *Anas chipeata*

Peak count of loafing males was 13 on the 9th May.
Two broods seen.
Number fledged: unknown.

Pochard *Aythya farina*

Peak count of loafing males 3 on the 16 April.
2 young pochard seen on the 15th June, well grown but still unfledged (Field 36)

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Peak count of loafing males 11 on the 9th May.
No young seen.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Two females in association with one male nested in the Great Barnett reed bed.
Two young from one nest were seen on the 11th July, these were quickly followed two days later by a single from the other nest.
This giving a total of 2 + 1 young fledged from the nests within the Gt Barnett reed bed.

A male and female were seen at the Wivton end reed bed.

From previous experience, pairs associated with this site are often very secretive and although nesting material was collected and taken to the reed bed, no young were seen, breeding remains uncertain at this location.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

No breeding on site, hunting individuals were seen on an almost daily basis throughout the season.

Red-Legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Infrequent sightings of a pair around fields 20, 26, 27, 28, 35.

No young seen.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

One pair noted on fields 1, 2 and 4 in the early part of the season but no further sightings.

Breeding thought unlikely.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Nine + males holding territory across the Freshes, three broods noted, with 13 young seen to reach the poult stage, in addition to this a late brood of a further of 6, two week olds were seen on the 28th August thus the total of fledged young may have been as high as 19.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A minimum of 9 pairs were recorded, of these the majority were present within the southern half of the freshes, 6 broods were noted over the season.

Fledgling numbers unknown.

Coot *Fulica atra*

10+ pairs, of which only two pairs were seen in northern half of the freshes.

7 broods seen.

Fledgling numbers unknown.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Peak count of 16 pairs on the 30 April, these were wide spread across the freshes, 11 nests found with more suspected.

Adult behaviour indicated that at least some eggs successfully hatched but no fledglings seen.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Peak count of 9 pairs, 9th May.

Young suspected on Fields 24 and field 10 but no fledglings seen.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Breeding pairs estimated to be 37, with 44+ nests spread across 16 fields. The most popular fields being F10 with a peak count of 7 nests and F32 with a peak count of 5 nests recorded.

A difficult year to estimate fledgling success, with good grass growth obscuring visibility, this coupled with uneven nesting patterns, some fields had territorial pairs, incubating birds, day old chicks and fledged birds all being present at the same time.

Fledgling numbers estimated at 15-20.

Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

Peak count of pairs was 23 on the 30th April,

All the appearances of a very good year, with young seen on five fields; 1, 6, 10, 13, and 24.

Possibly due to a combination of the freshes being wet throughout the season (plentiful feeding areas) and good grass growth (cover for chicks from predators) instances of parents leading young over the bank to the saltings appeared somewhat less this year with only two instances noted.

It is estimated that 15+ young survived to the fledgling stage.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Small numbers present across the freshes at the beginning of the season, this number decreasing to only one or two individuals in early May with none being recorded after this date.

Black-Headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Small numbers present along the dyke edges on field 32 and field 24, no breeding attempts noted.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Cuckoos were only heard on two or three occasions calling from the surrounding areas, only one sighting recorded.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

No survey undertaken this year, but casual observation suggests that numbers are reasonably stable, as usual most sightings recorded North of the main drain.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

No survey undertaken this year, but casual observation suggests that numbers are reasonable stable, as with Skylarks most territories were north of the main drain.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Present from the 11th of April.

No survey undertaken this year, casual observation did raise some concerns, singing males seemed somewhat scarce and subdued with many areas appearing to hold lower numbers than expected.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella neevia*

No records this year.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Three singing males encountered; these were along the hedge bordering Friary Hills, around Desmond's pond/Marsh Lane area and at the entrance from the Wiveton bank.

No young seen.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

No survey undertaken this year, but casual observation suggests numbers approximate to those of recent years.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

Bearded Reedlings were present on Blakeney freshes throughout the survey period. Three to four territories were established all of these were in the main drains west of Field 10 and in the Gt Barnett reed bed. Fledged young were noted from late May onwards.

10 juveniles were seen at the western end of the Gt Barnett in late July although this may have been two broods together.

It is thought that upto 15 young fledged.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniculus*

Once again 7 territories were noted, of these, two were situated just outside the sea wall and five across the freshes. Number of fledged unknown .

No detailed surveys were carried out for the following species; but all were recorded on the freshes during this season.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Breeding.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

Breeding.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Breeding.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Breeding.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Breeding.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Breeding, unknown.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Breeding, unknown but thought likely.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Breeding, unknown.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Breeding.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*

Breeding.

Cole tit *Parus ater*

Breeding

Long-Tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Breeding.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Present, but not breeding on site

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Breeding.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Breeding.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Breeding unknown

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Breeding unknown.

Discussion

Grazing/grass management

Unlike previous drought years, cattle on the freshes struggled to keep up with the continuous growth of grass, and although this gave a mix of grass lengths providing good cover for chicks, it did make the collection of accurate breeding data almost impossible.

Two Fields were left for hay making, Field 10 and 5.

Thistles were weed-wiped in Fields 9 and 13 some other fields were topped, notably the western ends of Field 1 and 5 and along the northern edge of Field 10.

With due consideration to water courses and terrain, fields 1 and 5 should be considered for spraying next season. The effects of weed wiping in fields 9 and 13 should be assessed early next season with follow up spraying considered if necessary.

Ragwort pulling was undertaken by National Trust staff and volunteers, this proved to be effective on the majority of the freshes, however later in the season Fields 2 and 3 were in places a sea of yellow. As a consequence, after consultation with the grazier, it was decided that with plenty of grass growth elsewhere it would be possible to mow these areas, with the cattle being kept off until the dead vegetation disintegrated.

Water levels – With continuous rainfall during much of the season water levels were high and a constant adjustment of sluices was necessary to prevent flooding, levels only dropping during late July, early August.

With previous dry summers in mind, the solar pump was deployed at the end of April. This along with the continued rainfall kept the scrape on field 2 full to the brim. As with last year the pump malfunctioned after 5 to 6 weeks of use, it may be worth investigating the feasibility of using a much larger capacity pump, which could be run intermittently or for shorter daily

periods rather than continuously, but still capable of moving the same volume of water in a 24hr period

Water quality -Normal reed cutting operations were suspended during the winter period with the reed cutter reporting that the reeds were no longer of a commercial quality. It is noticeable that reeds across the freshes generally, appear in poor condition, main drains also suffer with blanket-weed, it is possible that water quality/quantity may be an issue. With this in mind it might be worthwhile investigating nitrogen/phosphate levels at some time in the future.

Existing scrapes -Scrapes on fields 2, 6 and 13 were dug out in Feb 2009. After three years it would seem a good time to review their impact.

The scrape in field 2 holds water throughout the spring, however even with the use of the Solar pump, it struggles to hold any significant amount of water after the end of April. Possible remedies might include deepening and dividing the existing scrape into three, with water control pipes between scrapes. This along with the continued use of the solar pump might allow for one or two of the scrapes to remain full with any surplus water being diverted into the third scrape.

Field 6 scrape. This scrape would also benefit from partial deepening. There exists the possibility that water could be dyke fed if the water levels in the adjacent dyke system were considered high enough.

Field 13 scrape. This scrape may benefit from being enlarged, there also might be an opportunity to pipe feed water in from the adjacent dyke systems if water levels allow.

There is a small damp area at the Eastern end of Field 3 which could be developed into a further scrape. Should this be successful in providing feeding areas for even a small numbers of waders, there is the added attraction of this area being overlooked by the sea wall thus giving a good viewing platform for members of the public.

Chris Everitt - National Trust Blakeney Freshes Summer Ranger

APPENDIX 1

Non-breeding birds recorded on Blakeney Freshes, March-September 2010

Little Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Teal *Anas crecca*

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Sparrow Hawk *Accipiter nisus*

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava/thunbergis*

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

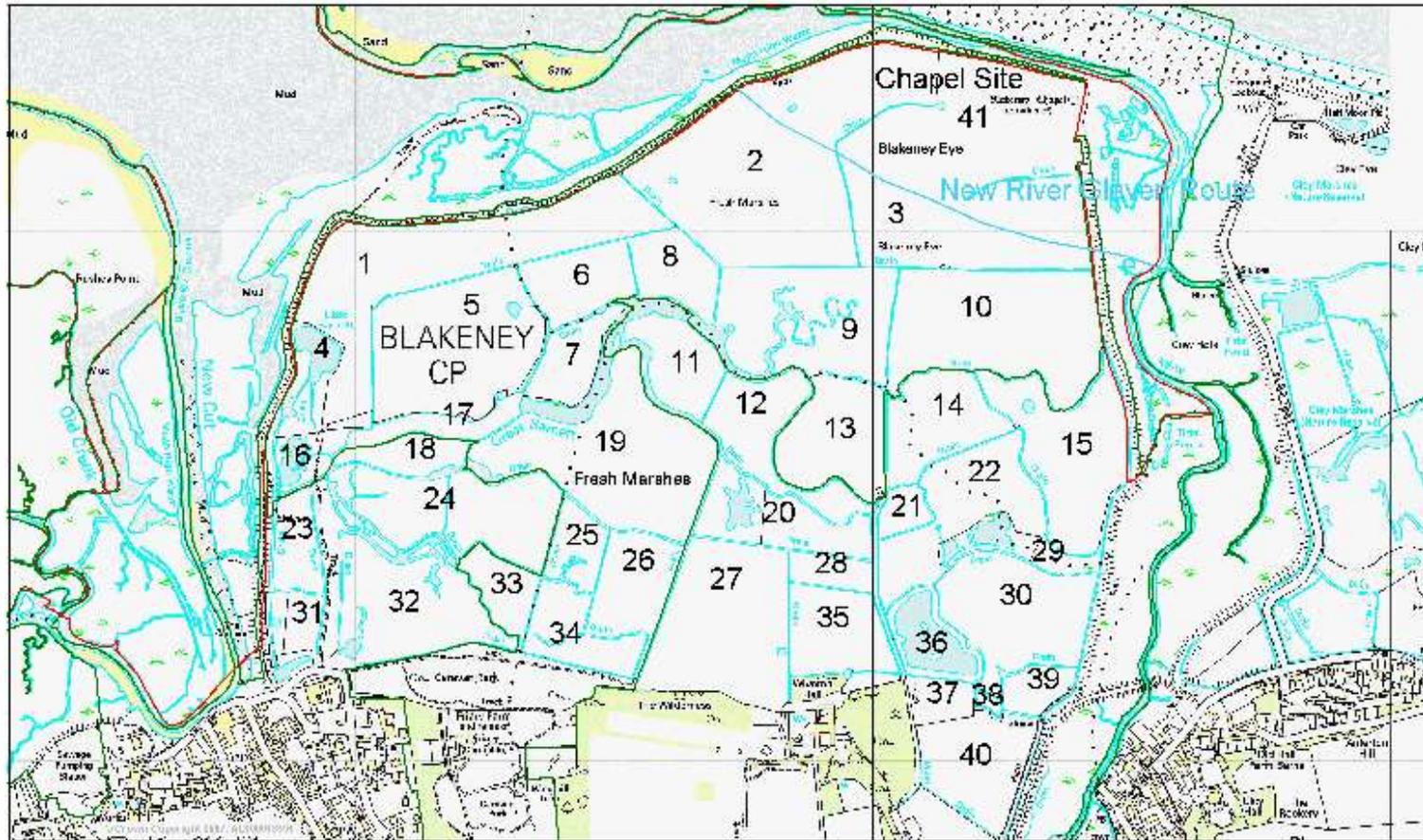
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Otter *Lutra lutra* An adult caught on camera, set on the edge of the Great Barnett reed bed.

Mink *Mustela vison* Adult caught in tunnel trap in August: Great Barnett reed bed.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all those involved in the making of this report including the various landowners of Blakeney Freshes for allowing me access to their land. Thanks also to the Blakeney National Trust team, John Sizer, Victoria Francis, Graham and Marilyn Lubbock, George Baldock, Iain Wolfeand Barry Slegg for their support and sightings, and to all others who gave information regarding wildlife sightings on the freshes.




THE NATIONAL TRUST
 EAST OF ENGLAND
 REGION

Title: Blakeney Freshes
 Field No. Map

Scale 1/10000
 Date 9/12/2008
 Centre = 603711 E 344635 N



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey, © Crown
 Copyright and database right 2008. All rights reserved.
 Ordnance Survey Licence number AL100018591

