

The Breeding Birds of Blakeney Freshes 2013



Redshank (J Cockram 2012)

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Seasonal Ranger

2013 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 2013 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*

Sightings of single birds during February, March and April, early sightings were around the Marsh Lane area and later sightings from the Gt. Barnett reed bed possible two different birds being seen. No Booming heard or feeding flights noted
Breeding, thought unlikely.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

No nests recorded in the near by Heronry and few sightings on the Freshes
Number fledged nil.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Maximum count for the Freshes was 5 adult pairs plus a further a maximum count of 12 over yearned juveniles.

Three nests were found.

Field 36 containing 5 eggs later deserted and left with 3 eggs.

Field 5/6 clutch size unknown but 3 young seen in the immediate area

Field 18/19 clutch size unknown but 2 young seen in the immediate area

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Low numbers recorded 10 > 3 young seen.

Canada Goose *Branta Canadensis*

3prs present, 2 young seen.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

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

A pair with 8 young was recorded during mid June in the drain bordering Fields 12 and 20 this is the first young recorded on the freshes for a number of years.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Once again only one pair recorded during the breeding season on the reserve. As with last year no young recorded.

Mallard *Anas platyryncho*

Peak count of loafing males was 27 on the 13th April. 11 broods seen, with young ducklings still present in late August.

Number fledged: unknown

Gadwall *Anas streper*

Peak count of loafing males was 7 on the 13th April

4 broods noted, Number fledged: unknown.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

No record

Shoveler *Anas chipeata*

Peak count of loafing males was 8 on the 3rd May.

No broods seen.

Number fledged: unknown.

Pochard *Aythya farina*

Peak count of loafing males was 2 on the 3 May. No broods seen .

Number fledged: unknown

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Peak count of loafing males was 11 on the 9th May.

No young seen.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Two females in association with one male nested in a small area of reed bed (between Fields 9 and 11) to the east of the Great Barnett reed bed, a further pair nested in the Wivton end reed bed (Field 29)

Three young were seen on Field 11 in mid July and Two more a week later on Field 19

This giving a total of 2+2 young fledged, no young were seen at the Wivton reed bed although amale was seen carring food towards the reedbed in early august ?.

Fledging and dispersal was very quick this year.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

No breeding on site, but a pair bred in woodland near Wivton and were seen hunting on an almost daily basis throughout the season.

Red-Legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

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

No young seen.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

One pair frequently noted on fields 1, 6 and 5. Two pairs present in late August early September.

Breeding: unknown.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Eleven + males holding territories. Two brood seen, six young poults were seen near the cattle crush at the cart track in early August along with five 2/3 day olds seen on field 2 in late August.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A minimum of 8 pairs were recorded, of these the majority were present within the southern half of the freshes, 7 broods were noted over the season, the last of which was a brood of four seen on the 14th of August.

Fledgling numbers: unknown.

Coot *Fulica atra*

As last year 10+ pairs seen with 8 broods noted.

Fledgling numbers: unknown.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Peak count of 16 pairs on the 13th of May, these were wide spread across the Freshes, 7 nests found with more suspected.

Poor hatching success noted, but 4 fledged seen (Three on Field 14 and One on Field 27).

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Nine pairs were present with 8 nests recorded. Some were late nesters, probable relaying pairs from other sites.

A nest on Field 8 was made on the dried out slubbings from the previous winters dyke clearance, this was predated at the egg stage.

Judging by the behaviour of the adult birds it is thought that the nests in Fields 10 and 15 produced young but their fate is unknown.

The nests on Fields 20 and 24 were thought to of hatched successfully with the young migrating to a wet area on Field 27 where adults were seen to drive off hunting Marsh Harriers on more than one occasion.

Fledging numbers: unknown.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Highest count of breeding pairs was 32 on the 13th May, spread across 17 different fields.

True to form pairs favoured fields with short grass at the beginning of the season.

Once again fledging success was difficult to gauge, with grass growth obscuring visibility.

Fledgling numbers estimated at minimum of 10.

Similar to Redshank, it is thought that Lapwing nesting in the North East corner of the freshes often move their chicks over the sea wall to the mud flats bordering the river Glaven.

Fledgling numbers estimated at 10 but may have been more when the moving of young is taken into account.

Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

Peak count of pairs was 22 on the 13th May.

Good hatches across the Freshes with good numbers of chicks seen.

Field 6 had three nests with 8 chicks present on the 4th of May, however a stoat was seen moving young into the area shortly afterwards and the fate of these chicks is unknown.

Chicks were also seen on Fields 5, 20, 24, 27

There were the usual instances of parents leading young over the bank to the saltings.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Very small numbers present across the freshes in April, this number decreasing to nil by mid May.

Black-Headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Small numbers present through out the season mainly along the deeper dykes in Fields 24 and 32, no breeding attempts noted.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Cuckoos were very scarce on the Freshes with only one being seen and heard.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

No survey undertaken this year, but casual observation suggests that numbers are reasonably stable; once again the majority of territories held were 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 21st April.

No survey undertaken this year, casual observation suggests that after two poor summers for singing males numbers were nearer to those expected in recent years for the freshes.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella neevia*

No records this year.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Two singing males encountered; these were along the hedge bordering Friary Hills, and around Desmond's pond/Marsh Lane area.

No young seen.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Present from 21st April. No survey undertaken this year, but casual observation suggests numbers approximate to those of recent years.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

Possibly due to the hard and prolonged winter only one territory noted, this being centred in the reed beds around fields 9,11 and 12. Three Fledged young were noted during late June.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniculus*

Once again seven territories were noted, of these, three were inside the sea wall and four outside. 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

Grass growth was reasonable through out the season this coupled with a late start to the season for most of the ground nesting species meant it was virtually impossible to get accurate fledgling numbers within the time allowed.

Fields 5 and 10 were bailed in early September for silage.

Thistles

Some topping of thistles was undertaken this year but no weed wiping.

If we are to effectively control thistles on the Freshes we may have to step up our weed wiping program, this may mean that we may have to wipe thistles every year even if there are only small areas to be done, also now that we are clearing more dykes through the winter period we may need to consider weed wipe the 'slubbings' as a matter of course, as these un-vegetated areas seem to act as a magnet to thistles.

An estimated 15 man hours were spent topping the Freshes and Friary hills this year.

Ragwort pulling was undertaken by National Trust staff, Working Holidays, National Trust volunteers and corporate volunteer groups. As last year the majority of fields were cleared, but once again fields 2 and 3 were a sea of yellow. The larger groups of volunteers were concentrated in these fields and did great work clearing large areas but it still proved impossible to clear the field of ragwort.

After consultation with the grazier, it was decided to mow fields 2 &3, this was completed by early September, the cattle being kept off until the dead vegetation disintegrated.

On the Freshes and Friary Hills, a total of 171 man hours were spent ragwort pulling, with a further 8 hours mowing.

Water levels/quality Water levels were adequate at the beginning of the season however it wasn't long before levels dropped away and for long periods the flow through the freshes was almost non-existent, dykes quickly stagnated and became covered with blanket weed. When the flow was restored the water quality improved dramatically, this was highlighted by the clarity of the water and the invigorating effect that it had on the fish fry populations.

Re-establishing a flow through the freshes has to be seen as a priority as this will influence both water quality and levels.

Natural England confirmed that in their opinion water management issues were having a detrimental effect on designation qualifying features.

Meetings were held with the Environment Agency where discussion centred on the problems of low water levels and lack of flow through the freshes.

- 1) The feeder dyke to the Freshes was silted and needed cleaning. A land registry search was undertaken to establish ownership of land adjacent to the feeder drain this

confirmed that Environment Agency were in fact the owners and that they would undertake to dredge the drain during the winter of 2013/14

- 2) During the summer the door on the Glaven river outfall needs to be positioned lower to ensure water was diverted into the feeder dyke and through the bramble flap. At our request the door on the Glaven was lowered (Top of the counter balance showing approximately 30cms above the parapet of the road bridge wall) The effects of this were monitored: Water levels fluctuated between 5.5 and 8.5 on the scale board fixed to the wall next to the Glaven outfall gate, At the current time it needs a minimum height of 5.5 to achieve a flow through the freshes. The freshes system did cope adequately with the higher 8.5 reading, flooding was experienced to the East of Marsh lane but this was thought to be down to a blocked culvert. It was noted that water did back up the Glaven to the Wiveton road bridge during this period however it was thought that this hadn't caused any issues and neither NT or EA received any comments from the wider public regarding this.
- 3) It was thought that there may be a problem with the bramble flap not sealing. Investigation by Environment agency revealed that the flap had at some stage been tied open, the string was removed and the flap now operates satisfactorily
- 4) It was thought that the designated river route through the freshes was blocked and that this was causing high water levels east of Marsh lane with the main flow being forced to find a different route, leading to some gate ways overtopping. There were correspondingly low water levels at the East end of the freshes.
NT and EA staff met to deposit dye into the freshes dyke systems this confirmed that a blockage existed in the culvert under Marsh lane. We are now waiting to see if the EA are responsible for clearing the blockage as the culvert is part of the designated river system. As EA are proposing to redirect river flow through the freshes while they renew the seals on the seaward side of the Glaven outfall it would seem prudent to clear this culvert prior to these works to avoid flooding at the eastern end of the freshes
- 5) Problems with evacuating water during the winter /spring periods, there are two outfall sluices into Blakeney harbour but only one is currently working. According to local knowledge (Graham) one of the sea wall flaps failed to seal approximately 10 years ago,

the inner sluice gates were screwed right down but this still failed to prevent sea water from being pushed into the freshes, finally a wooden dam was incorporated into the inner sluice.

A new larger capacity pump was connected to the solar powered system, this was set to come on for 2hr periods through out the day light hours, this worked well, with its larger capacity it was able to pump more water onto the splashes despite being run for less hours.

It also ran for the whole season where previous pumps had malfunctioned during the season.

Predator control. Once again control of predators played its part in any success enjoyed. Waders moved their young around the freshes to small areas where good conditions for chick rearing existed, this was beneficial in so far as aerial predators could be driven off by a massed assault of adult birds unfortunately on one occasion a stoat was seen moving its young into such an area with devastating results- no chicks present after further 2 days. This must enforce the rational to continue predator control but also the need for more chick friendly habitat. (water!!)

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*

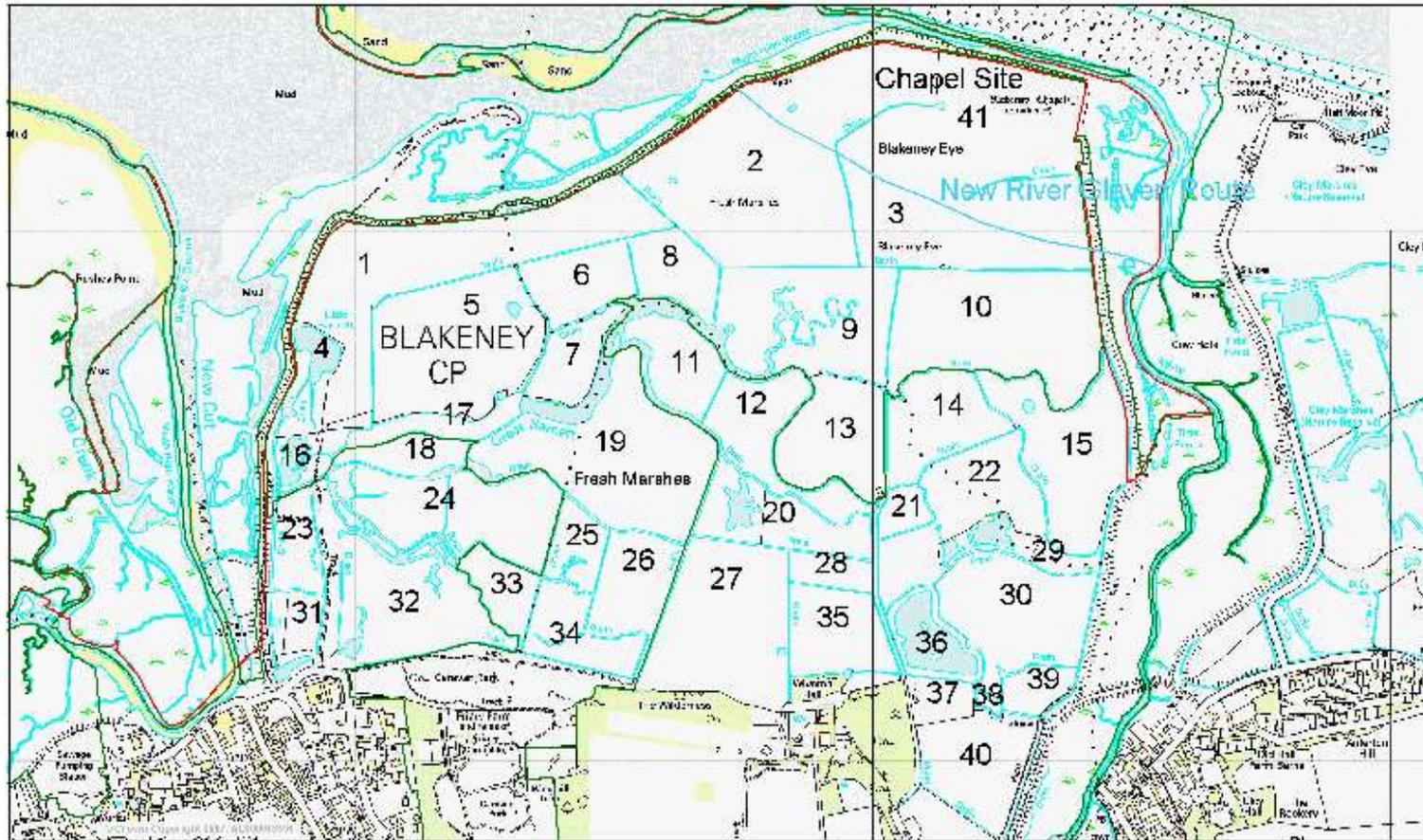
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Otter *Lutra lutra* bed. Spraints noted at the NE corner of field 36, through out the season

Mink *Mustela vison* A raft was placed in the dyke bordering fields 19, 24 and 25 during July, August and September, no tracks were noted

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 <p>THE NATIONAL TRUST EAST OF ENGLAND REGION</p>	<p>Title: Blakeney Freshes Field No. Map</p>	<p>Scale 1/10000 Date 9/12/2008 Centre = 603711 E 344635 N</p>  <p>Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey, © Crown Copyright and database right 2008. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AL100018591</p>
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