

# Cley Breeding Bird Report 2014

## Introduction

Once more we have attempted to document the breeding species on Cley Marshes. The area covered is Norfolk Wildlife Trust's (NWT) Cley Marshes between West Bank and East Bank, the area between East Bank and Iron Road (which includes Pope's Marsh, the new land that has been purchased by the NWT) and Snipe's Marsh. We have also noted any breeding activity in areas due south of the A149 including North Foreland wood but, apart from specific species, these were not watched thoroughly.

As in previous years most areas were visited frequently during spring and summer 2014. We took notes of nesting birds and youngsters seen, and tried to follow the progress of each family. This year the NWT wanted to do full surveying of Pope's Marsh to enable them to see the effect their habitat improvements would make over future years, so in addition to our normal monitoring we agreed to do a few fixed format transect type walks that could be repeated in future years. These were done between late April and early July and results were given to NWT in their preferred format. To do these fully we were given permission to go onto Pope's Marsh and walk along the tracks to monitor the pools and the reedbeds in more detail, otherwise all sightings were from the hides and public footpaths around the reserve. We have always covered Pope's in our reports but not usually spending as much time there as on the rest of the reserve, this year it was about equal.

Since last year's breeding season there have been changes to the habitat at Cley which could have had an impact on the breeding birds. In early December 2013 there was a surge tide which completely flooded the reserve inundating it with salt water. This also re-profiled the shingle ridge causing large swathes of shingle to spread into the brackish lagoons along the north side. Much of the fence along the northern edge was buried or destroyed. The shingle bank behind Arnold's Marsh remained but further east and west it was flattened creating a large area of raised shingle with little vegetation. The reed around Snipe's Marsh was also flattened and what remained of the pool had a lot of rubbish in it which turned putrid. The salt water was soon drained off the main reserve but further inundations at Salthouse due to two major breaches in the shingle bank meant that the eastern section was flooding on many tides and it was not possible to flush the reserve with fresh water for a couple of months so we were afraid that most of the invertebrates would have been killed and there would be little food for the birds in the spring.

Also in late 2013 Pope's Marsh was formally purchased making way for improvements to the habitat there. In mid-March work started on digging out the two old shooters pools. These are freshwater pools which lie north of the Main Drain (New Cut) to the south of Sea Pool. This work created pools with shallow edges and bare earth islands more suitable for waders and other wildlife. In early April a replacement fence was built along the northern edge of the reserve. This fenced in large areas of shingle which we hoped would make good breeding sites for Oystercatchers and Ringed Plovers and stop people from approaching the pools too closely.

To show the different breeding on both parts of the extended reserve we have, where possible, split breeding records for the Western (Beach Rd, Cley to E Bank – including Snipes Marsh) and Eastern (E Bank to Iron Rd) areas in this report.

The following species notes give our interpretation of this year's sightings together with our best estimates of the total numbers breeding and young that fledged.

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## Summary

These first two tables list birds that bred, or attempted to, in our area this year with counts where known.

| Species              | Minimum Pairs |           | Min. young fledged |     | Earliest chicks seen |          |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------|--------------------|-----|----------------------|----------|
|                      | W             | E         | W                  | E   | W                    | E        |
| Mute Swan            | 2             | 1         | 2                  | 0   | 23 July              |          |
| Greylag Goose        | 40            |           | ?                  | ?   | 18 April             | 1 May    |
| Canada Goose         | 2             | 1         | 0                  | 4   |                      | 25 May   |
| Shelduck             | 4             | 6         | 3                  | 23  | 27 June              | 21 May   |
| Gadwall              | 5             | 3         | 11                 | 8   | 9 June               | 3 July   |
| Mallard              | 29            | 6         | 19                 | 4   | 26 April             | 3 May    |
| Garganey             | 0             | 0         |                    |     |                      |          |
| Shoveler             | 2             | 2         | 0                  | 0   | 16 May               | 30 June  |
| Pochard              | 0             | 0         |                    |     |                      |          |
| Tufted Duck          | 0             | 0         |                    |     |                      |          |
| Little Grebe         | 0             | 0         |                    |     |                      |          |
| Little Egret         | 8             |           | ?                  |     |                      |          |
| Grey Heron           | 3             |           | ?                  |     |                      |          |
| Marsh Harrier        | 1             | 2 (nests) | 3                  | 4   | 3 July               | 7 July   |
| Water Rail           | 1             | 1         | ?                  | ?   |                      |          |
| Moorhen              | 8             | 1         | 5                  | ?   | 30 May               | 30 May   |
| Coot                 | 13            | 3         | 11                 | 2   | 4 May                | 19 July  |
| Oystercatcher        | 9             | 6         | 0                  | 0   |                      | 14 July  |
| Avocet               | 29            | 51        | 0                  | 14  | 2 June               | 26 May   |
| Little Ringed Plover | 5             | 1         | 2                  | ?   | 9 June               | 22 July  |
| Ringed Plover        | 2             | 2         | 1                  | 0   | 7 July               |          |
| Lapwing              | 30            | 21        | 11                 | 8   | 20 April             | 27 April |
| Redshank             | 12            | 8         | ?                  | ?   | 25 May               | 30 May   |
| Black-headed Gull    | 24            | 97        | 0                  | 50? |                      | 1 June   |
| Little Tern          |               | 2         |                    |     |                      |          |

## Passerines

| Species         | Min. Pairs/ singing males |      | Species       | Min. Pairs/ singing males |      |
|-----------------|---------------------------|------|---------------|---------------------------|------|
|                 | West                      | East |               | West                      | East |
| Skylark         | 10                        | 8    | Sedge Warbler | 32                        | 14   |
| Swallow         | 3                         | 0    | Reed Warbler  | 45                        | 16   |
| Meadow Pipit    | 9                         | 6-7  | Bearded Tit   | 9                         | 3    |
| Wren            | 1                         | 0    | Linnet        | 2                         | 0    |
| Cetti's Warbler | 3                         | 0    | Reed Bunting  | 14                        | 7-8  |

The following species also bred either on the reserve or near-by, but numbers are unknown/unconfirmed:

House Martin (houses along  
Coast Rd)

Pied Wagtail  
Duncock

Whitethroat  
Goldfinch

The following may have bred in nearby fields/woods but we have no evidence:

Sparrowhawk  
Common Pheasant

Red-legged Partridge  
Kestrel

Wood Pigeon  
Tawny Owl (N Foreland)

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Long-tailed Tit

Greenfinch

## Comparisons with previous years

| Species              | Minimum Pairs breeding |      |      |      |  | Minimum Young fledged |      |      |      |
|----------------------|------------------------|------|------|------|--|-----------------------|------|------|------|
|                      | 2014                   | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |  | 2014                  | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |
| Mute Swan            | 3                      | 3    | 4    | 1    |  | 2                     | 11   | 10   | 0    |
| Greylag              | 40                     | 35   | 40   | 44   |  | ?                     | ?    | ?    | ?    |
| Canada Goose         | 3                      | 1    | 3    | 2    |  | 4                     | 4    | 7    | 8    |
| Shelduck             | 10                     | 14   | 13   | 17   |  | 26                    | 54   | 64   | 34   |
| Gadwall              | 8                      | 17   | 9    | 13   |  | 19                    | 48   | 16   | 24   |
| Teal                 | 0                      | 0    | 0    | 1    |  | 0                     |      |      | ?    |
| Mallard              | 35                     | 30   | 31   | 46   |  | 23                    | 65   | 64   | 52   |
| Garganey             | 0                      | 1    | 0    | 1    |  | 0                     |      |      |      |
| Shoveler             | 4                      | 9    | 10   | 7    |  | 0                     | 26   | 8    | 4    |
| Pochard              | 0                      | 8    | 1    | 4    |  |                       | 2    | 7    | 3    |
| Tufted Duck          | 0                      | 2    | 4    | 2    |  |                       | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| Little Grebe         | 0                      | 2    | 1    | 1    |  |                       | 3    | 2    | 1    |
| Little Egret         | 8                      | 2    | 7    | 3    |  | ?                     | ?    | 6?   | 4    |
| Grey Heron           | 3                      | 1    | 3    | 4    |  | ?                     | ?    | 4    | 7    |
| Marsh Harrier        | 3 (nests)              | 2    | 4    | 5    |  | 7                     | 6    | 9    | 12   |
| Water Rail           | 2                      |      |      |      |  | ?                     |      |      |      |
| Moorhen              | 9                      | 16   | 19   | 14   |  | 5                     | 12   | 20   | 7    |
| Coot                 | 16                     | 9    | 18   | 8    |  | 13                    | 9    | 17   | 8    |
| Oystercatcher        | 15                     | 15   | 10   | 10   |  | 0                     | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| Avocet               | 80                     | 100  | 80   | 70   |  | 14                    | 37   | 55   | 9    |
| Little Ringed Plover | 6                      | 2    | 2    | 1    |  | 2                     | 5    | 1    | 0    |
| Ringed Plover        | 4                      | 5    | 1    | 1    |  | 1                     | 2    | 3    | 0    |
| Lapwing              | 51                     | 47   | 77   | 30   |  | 19                    | 14   | 58   | 17   |
| Common Snipe         | 0                      | 0    | 0    | 0    |  |                       |      |      |      |
| Redshank             | 20                     | 22   | 25   | 20   |  | ?                     | 6    | 13   | 7    |
| Black-headed Gull    | 121                    | 32   | 40   | 31   |  | 50+                   | 3    | 0    | 0    |
| Little Tern          | 2                      |      |      |      |  | 0                     |      |      |      |
| Skylark              | 18                     | ?    | 16   | 12   |  | ?                     | ?    |      |      |
| Swallow              | 3                      | 5    | 4    | 7    |  | 0                     | 9    | 26   | 10   |
| Meadow Pipit         | 15-16                  | ?    | 17   | 16   |  |                       |      |      |      |
| Wren                 | 1                      | 3    | ?    | ?    |  |                       |      |      |      |
| Stonechat            | 0                      | 0    | 1    | 0    |  |                       |      | 9    |      |
| Cetti's Warbler      | 3                      | 4    | 6    | 1    |  |                       |      | 9    | 1    |
| Grasshopper Warbler  | 0                      | 0?   | 1    | ?    |  |                       |      | 2    |      |
| Sedge Warbler *      | 46                     | 60   | 25   | 69   |  |                       |      |      |      |
| Reed Warbler *       | 61                     | 44   | 47   | 48   |  |                       |      |      |      |
| Bearded Tit          | 12                     | 6    | 12   | 3    |  |                       |      |      |      |
| Linnet               | 2                      | 2    | 2    |      |  |                       |      |      |      |
| Reed Bunting *       | 21-22                  | 22   | 15   | 12   |  |                       |      |      |      |

For many species the level of coverage of the eastern area has varied over the last four years with greater coverage this year. However for the species marked with an \* detailed surveys have not been done of the interior of Pope's Marsh except in 2013 when they were surveyed by Reg Land whose figures are included.

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## Species Details

### Mute Swan

*3 pairs, 2 cygnets, (2) fledged.*

|              | No. Pairs | No. Broods | Earliest Chicks Seen | No. Chicks Seen | No. Fledged  |
|--------------|-----------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| West         | 2         | 1          | 23 July              | 2               | ( 2 )        |
| East         | 1         | 0          | -                    | -               | -            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>3</b>  | <b>1</b>   |                      | <b>2</b>        | <b>( 2 )</b> |

After the success of 2013, this year was poor for Mute Swans with just 2 cygnets produced.

#### Western area

A pair was seen nest-building by the Catchwater Drain near East Bank car park from 9th April but they did not settle, moving between this area and a site further west along the drain (which has been used with varying success in previous years, although not 2013). Eventually the pair settled on the western site and incubation may have commenced by early May. However, on 30th May neither adult was present and a single undamaged egg was lying at the front of the nest. A female thought to be the one from here was alone near East Bank. The male was not seen again and there was no further activity at the nest site.

On 23rd July two cygnets, 2-3 weeks old, were on Pat's Pool with their parents; we do not know where the nest was located. They continued to be seen occasionally around the scrapes and in the Catchwater Drain and could fledge by early November.

#### Eastern area

Presumably the same pair as in previous years was back at their nest site on Pope's Marsh by 16th April and incubation had probably commenced by 2nd May. However, by 16th May the nest had been deserted.

#### Salthouse area

The only sightings at Salthouse were of a brood of 3 opposite the Dun Cow pub on 26th July and presumably the same brood by the duck pond on 26 August. These are not included in our figures.

### Greylag Goose

*c.40 pairs bred, up to 59 goslings seen, number fledged unknown*

|              | No. Pairs | Earliest Chicks Seen | No. Chicks Seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| West         |           | 18 April             | 45              | ?           |
| East         |           | 1 May                | 14              | ?           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>40</b> |                      | <b>59</b>       | <b>?</b>    |

A count of Greylag's around the whole area on 16th March gave 40 distinct pairs which excluded flocks and singletons. The WeBS on 31st March showed 261 birds. The first nests were seen on 28<sup>th</sup> March on Richardson's Scrape and on the small reedbed pool just south of the Main Drain by East Bank. 12 nests were seen but only 2 of these lasted the full term.

The first young were seen on 18<sup>th</sup> April, a brood of 3 on Pat's Pool. In all there were noticeably less goslings around this year compared with all previous years with no large crèches seen. The largest brood of recently hatched young was 6 on E Bank on 1<sup>st</sup> May but most broods only contained 2 or 3 young. The largest crèche seen was of 12 mixed sized goslings and the largest count in any one day was of 17. If we sum the broods seen in each area we get to 59 goslings hatched but this probably includes duplication as the families constantly move around so the actual figure was probably much smaller than this.

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## Canada Goose

3 pairs, 4 goslings, 4 fledged.

|              | No. Pairs | No. Broods | Earliest Chicks Seen | No. Chicks Seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| West         | 2         | 0          | -                    | -               | -           |
| East         | 1         | 1          | 25 May               | 4               | 4           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>3</b>  | <b>1</b>   |                      | <b>4</b>        | <b>4</b>    |

### Western area

The first nest was found on Billy's Wash on 5<sup>th</sup> April but was deserted by about 23<sup>rd</sup> April. A second nest on Billy's Wash was found on 9<sup>th</sup> April but by 29<sup>th</sup> April this, too, had been deserted.

### Eastern area

The only successful nest was on Pope's Marsh (Shooters' Pools) from at least 28<sup>th</sup> April. The nest was empty by the third week of May but a pair with 4 goslings on Wigeon Marsh on 25<sup>th</sup> May was assumed to be this brood. The family group remained together (being joined by a third adult from 16th June, which stayed with the group) and the young fledged by mid-July.

## Egyptian Goose

Did not breed again this year.

## Shelduck

10 pairs, 49 ducklings, 26 fledged

|              | No. Broods Seen | Earliest ducklings seen | No. Ducklings seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| West         | 4               | 26 June                 | 10                 | 3           |
| East         | 6               | 21 May                  | 39                 | 23          |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>10</b>       |                         | <b>49</b>          | <b>26</b>   |

As usual no nests were seen on the main reserve or Pope's Marsh so we don't know if any pairs actually nested on the marshes or if all nested in nearby areas and then brought their young to the marshes.

This year the first duckling, unusually a single, was seen with its parents on 21<sup>st</sup> May on Wigeon Marsh. In total we saw very few pairs with small ducklings, 4 broods (10 ducklings) in the western area and 6 broods (39 ducklings) in the east. Also most broods contained fewer ducklings than we normally see with only 1 brood of 12 which were on the Pope's.

By mid-July we were seeing a lot of large or fledged young around but many of these will have come in from elsewhere. Of the small ducklings we had seen in the area we think 26 fledged.

## Gadwall

8 pairs bred, 58 ducklings seen, 19 fledged

|              | No. Broods Seen | Earliest ducklings seen | No. ducklings seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| West         | 5               | 9 June                  | 33                 | 11          |
| East         | 3               | 3 July                  | 25                 | 8           |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>8</b>        |                         | <b>58</b>          | <b>19</b>   |

Few broods of Gadwall were seen this year. This may have been due to increased reed in the drains making them less visible but we think there were actually less around. As is usual for ducks we rarely find any nests.

This year the first brood of 7 small ducklings was seen on Billy's Wash on 9<sup>th</sup> June and in total 8 different broods were seen, 5 in the west and 3 in the east with a total of 58 ducklings.

As is usual by late July adult Gadwall start to moult and sit around in large groups. It then becomes very difficult to tell broods of large ducklings from these eclipse adults so we lose track of the broods. However we think at least 19 fledged but there could have been more.

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## Mallard

*35 pairs bred, 199 ducklings seen, 23 fledged*

|              | No. Broods Seen | Earliest ducklings seen | No. ducklings seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| West         | 29              | 26 April                | 152                | 19          |
| East         | 6               | 3 May                   | 47                 | 4           |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>35</b>       |                         | <b>199</b>         | <b>23</b>   |

### Western area

We rarely find Mallard nests but this year two were found near Daukes Hide in early June. Another (vacated) nest was found in the NW corner of Snipes Marsh when the wardens were clearing the rubbish. This contained the remnants of 2 hatched and 1 unhatched egg but we never saw any young from this.

The first ducklings were seen in front of Daukes Hide on 26<sup>th</sup> April, a brood of 7. We saw a total of 29 different broods (152 ducklings). As usual we had difficulty following the progress of these broods especially in late July when they were well grown and got mixed in with flocks of non-breeders but we believe that at least 19 fledged but it could have been many more.

### Eastern area

A probable nest was noted in the Catchwater Drain between the entrance to Pope's Marsh and Iron Rd in late May. There were far fewer broods/ducklings seen in the eastern area but this could have been because it is much more difficult to see into the network of drains here. The first to be seen were a brood of 10 in the Main Drain by the Iron Rd on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. The brood was seen on and off in the area for a few weeks but the number of duckling reduced. In total only 6 broods (47 ducklings) were seen here and we only have evidence of 4 fledging.

## Garganey

*No evidence of breeding this year*

Single pairs were seen on the central scrapes on 30<sup>th</sup> May and 10<sup>th</sup> June and single males were seen on other dates until mid-June. There were then no further sightings till mid-July when 3 were seen on 15<sup>th</sup> but these were not aged. On 10<sup>th</sup> August 3 juveniles were seen but these could have flown in from elsewhere.

## Shoveler

*4 pairs, 17 ducklings seen, 0 fledged*

|              | No. Broods Seen | Earliest ducklings seen | No. ducklings seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| West         | 2               | 16 May                  | 11                 | 0           |
| East         | 2               | 30 June                 | 6                  | 0           |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>4</b>        |                         | <b>17</b>          | <b>0</b>    |

This was a very poor year for Shoveler. Only 4 broods were seen and of these, only one, a brood of 8 first seen on Pat's Pool on 16<sup>th</sup> May, was seen on more than two occasions. This brood was seen regularly but ducklings were lost and by early June only 2 were left; they were last seen on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

## Pochard

*No evidence of breeding*

As usual Pochard began to return to the reserve in early March with a maximum of 12 (9 males and 3 females) seen on 7<sup>th</sup> April. This number was much lower than we have had in the last few years. We never see the birds nesting but usually note a reduction in the females in mid-April as they settle on nests. This year this did not happen and we never saw any ducklings

## Tufted Duck

*No evidence of breeding*

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Tufted Ducks began to return in April with a maximum count of 13 on 16<sup>th</sup> May. We saw no more than 4 females. Tufted Ducks are late breeders with the first ducklings usually being seen in July, but none have been this year seen so we must assume they did not breed.

## Red-legged Partridge

*No evidence of breeding on the reserve this year, but many in neighbouring fields*

## Common Pheasant

*No evidence of breeding on reserve*

## Little Grebe

*No evidence of breeding this year*

There were a few sightings of Little Grebe around the reserve but no suggestion of breeding this year. We have recorded Little Grebe breeding on Snipes Marsh since 2004; this year single adults were seen early in the season but did not linger, probably due to the poor water quality following the December surge.

## Bittern

*Did not breed again this year*

There were only two sightings of single birds during the breeding season on the 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> March which must have been just passing through.

## Little Egret

*8 pairs nested, no. of young unknown.*

Egrets were reported flying over and into North Foreland wood from mid-March. Visits were made to the wood on four occasions between 13<sup>th</sup> April and mid-June during which 8 occupied nests were seen. Four adults were seen flying into the wood with bulging crops on 16<sup>th</sup> April which may indicate young had hatched. The first fledged juveniles were seen in the area on 16<sup>th</sup> June but adults continued to be seen flying into the wood with full crops until late July. Plenty of juvenile birds were seen in the area throughout June and July but these may not have all come from this colony so no count of fledged birds was possible.

## Grey Heron

*3 pairs nested, no. of young unknown.*

The first birds were noted flying into North Foreland wood on 18<sup>th</sup> February and then seen there regularly after that. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2 pairs were seen perched up in the wood. Visits were made to the wood on four occasions between 13<sup>th</sup> April and mid-June during which 3 nests were seen. Adults were seen flying into the wood with bulging crops from 10<sup>th</sup> April so it is likely that young had hatched from at least one nest by then. The first fledged juveniles were seen in the area from 12<sup>th</sup> May and what looked like newly fledged birds were still being seen in mid to late June. There appeared to be a lot of juveniles in the area this year but, of course, they may not all have been from this colony; however it looks likely that young fledged from all three nests.

## Marsh Harrier

*3 females (2 males), 3 broods, 7 fledged.*

|       | No. nests | No. Fledged |
|-------|-----------|-------------|
| West  | 1         | 3           |
| East  | 2         | 4           |
| TOTAL | 3         | 7           |

The annual early-breeding season confusion as to how many Marsh Harriers could be paired, due to the polygamous nature of the species, was even more confusing this year. Marsh Harriers have long been considered sexually dimorphic but a paper published in British Birds in 2013 suggests that some populations in Western Europe are strongly polymorphic and the debate surrounding sexing/ageing some of the birds on view early in the 2014 breeding season seemed to bear out this suggestion.

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## Western area

By the third week in March, an adult bird given the name Blondie was established as the alpha female in the main reed bed area and was seen in mutual display with males variously described as dark adult or 1st-summer. Blondie was eventually seen taking nest material into reed beds NE of Pat's Pool on 27<sup>th</sup> March accompanied by a dark adult male and taking food down into the nest area after a food pass from 18th April onward. On 3 July, 2 newly-fledged juveniles were perched in bushes in the main reed bed with a third juvenile appearing on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Although other females may have been present at times in the main reed bed area during the breeding season, only the alpha female is believed to have successfully fledged young.

## Eastern area

If at all possible, the task of identifying paired birds was even more complex on Pope's Marsh. By 1<sup>st</sup> April, a 'classic' adult male Marsh Harrier was established as the alpha male having successfully defended his territory against both a 1<sup>st</sup> summer male and another 'classic' adult male. The young male may have been the bird seen with Blondie over the main reed bed on occasions while the 'classic' male proved likely to be the male breeding on Blakeney Freshes. Male harriers are notoriously polygamous and can range considerable distances to find a receptive female. By 3<sup>rd</sup> April, the alpha male had acquired 2 females, one a fairly light-coloured bird which was given the name Fleck and the other a much darker bird overall. In mid-April, both females were seen taking nest material in the reed beds and from 12<sup>th</sup> May onward, the alpha male was provisioning both females at their respective nest sites. However, significant changes in behaviour at the start of June indicated that Fleck's nesting attempt may have failed at the egg stage and most intriguingly, the dark female appeared to have been replaced by an even darker bird with an overall rufous hue and with wing moult at a different stage to that of the former dark bird. Throughout the rest of June, the male combined provisioning a dark female who was clearly feeding young in a nest in the eastern half of the reed beds and mating with the other female, Fleck. While there may be some doubt as to their parentage, the 2 juveniles seen in flight over the reed beds on 7<sup>th</sup> July and along with a third juvenile seen on 13<sup>th</sup> July, were considered to have fledged from the nest in the eastern half of the reed beds.

Indications that Fleck may have laid and hatched a repeat clutch were confirmed when on 14<sup>th</sup> July she was first noticed taking food into the western half of the reed beds and continued to do so throughout the rest of the month but on her own latterly as the male bird was not reported to be in the area after 20<sup>th</sup> July. The female persisted with the task of being the sole provider for the young harriers and eventually, the first fledged juvenile was seen perched in a bush some distance from the nest on 14<sup>th</sup> August. What was likely to be the second juvenile to fledge from this nest was first seen on 27<sup>th</sup> August.

## **Sparrowhawk**

*No evidence of breeding*

Birds were seen hunting over the reserve from early July, taking prey into North Foreland. It is thought that they may have bred but there was no definite proof.

## **Common Buzzard**

*Did not breed*

Two birds were seen fairly regularly going in and out of North Foreland wood from mid-March to mid-April but not after that. It is thought they may have bred outside our area just south of Cley.

## **Kestrel**

*Did not breed in our area but probably bred in the wood behind Hilltop*

## **Water Rail**

*At least 2 pairs (probably 6+), 2 broods, 11 chicks seen*

|              | Potential Pairs | Broods (chicks) seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|
| West         | 4               | 1 (3)                | ?           |
| East         | 2               | 1 (8)                | ?           |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>6</b>        | <b>2 (11)</b>        | <b>?</b>    |

Each year we believe that Water Rails breed on the reserve but rarely get any evidence to prove it, but this year we had sightings of 2 broods.



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## Western area

During the spring single adult birds were reported from E Bank, Richardson's Scrape/Bishop's Hide, the boardwalk and the drain in front of Daukes Hide.

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 3 black fluffy chicks, that were no more than a week old, were being fed by their parents at the back of Simmond's Scrape but they were not seen again so we will never know if they survived.

## Eastern area

A single adult bird was reported from the Arnold's Marsh/Main Drain area in early spring. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July workers who were cutting reed on Pope's prior to the digging of the new pool there saw a pair with 8 chicks. This is a good sized brood but they can have clutch sizes of 6-11 so 8 are quite reasonable for a single brood. They were not seen again so we don't know how many fledged.

## Moorhen

*9 pairs, 12 broods, 31 chicks, 5 fledged*

|              | No. Pairs | No. Broods | Earliest Chicks Seen | No. Chicks Seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| West         | 8         | 10         | 30 May               | 24              | 5           |
| East         | 1         | 2          | 30 May               | 7               | ?           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>9</b>  | <b>12</b>  |                      | <b>31</b>       | <b>5</b>    |

This was a very poor year for this species. Low numbers of adults were seen throughout the breeding season but this may have been because drains around the reserve were overgrown and viewing was impossible along many stretches. Only a few pairs were seen carrying nesting material and most of the early nesting attempts were unsuccessful. Most chicks were first located by listening for their contact calls. The first chicks were seen on 30<sup>th</sup> May, almost a month earlier than in 2013 (28<sup>th</sup> June) and the last chicks hatched around 7<sup>th</sup> September (end of August in 2013), but throughout the season we saw very few young chicks and most were lost within a short time. One small chick was killed by an adult Coot. Two pairs had two broods each, with one and two chicks fledging from their first broods. These juveniles remained with their parents, helping to rear the next brood. A small number of other juveniles were seen, mostly on the central scrapes, but their origin is unknown. The few chicks that we were able to follow seemed to grow rather slowly, which might suggest a problem with food availability

## Eastern area

Just one pair was known to nest in the Catchwater Drain on Pope's Marsh, they produced two broods. Their first brood of six chicks hatched around 30<sup>th</sup> May and was probably reduced to two chicks by 21<sup>st</sup> June when they were last seen. A half-grown chick was seen here on 3<sup>rd</sup> September; it must have hatched around mid-August. This was only seen once and no other chicks were found here. They may have moved out of view and some could have fledged but we have no proof of this.

## Western area

There were two pairs on Pat's Pool (2+1 chicks) but they did not survive. Four pairs nested along the Catchwater Drain (15 chicks); two of these broods did not survive, the third brood was last seen when about half-grown. The fourth pair fledged one from their first brood and this juvenile stayed with its parents, assisting with feeding a second brood of five chicks; increasing vegetation in the drain meant we lost track of this family before the chicks were due to fledge.

Another pair twice attempted nest-building in the Catchwater Drain but no chicks were ever seen.

Adult Moorhens were occasionally seen on Snipes' Marsh but no chicks were found until 8<sup>th</sup> September when two juveniles were assisting two adults in feeding four newly-hatched chicks. Two of these chicks survived and fledged at the end of October. We assume the first brood had hatched and been raised in the reeds and channels around Snipes' Marsh which are not visible to us from the road or Walsey Hill.

## Coot

*At least 16 pairs, 9 broods, 21 chicks, 13 fledged*

|              | Pairs     | Nests seen                      | Broods seen | Chicks seen | fledged   |
|--------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| West         | 13        | 10 (2 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempts) | 8           | 17          | 11        |
| East         | 3         | 2                               | 1           | 4           | 2         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>10</b>                       | <b>9</b>    | <b>21</b>   | <b>13</b> |

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Coot nests are not easy to find unless they are near one of the scrapes or easily visible drains. The network of drains on Pope's Marsh with few ponds meant they are more likely to have been missed so the figures for the eastern area are probably less accurate.

## Western area

This year in the western area we found 10 nests, 2 of which were 2<sup>nd</sup> attempts following failures, 2 failed before the eggs could hatch and 2 others probably did hatch young but we didn't see them. The first 2 chicks were seen on Snipe's Marsh on 4<sup>th</sup> May where they were happily swimming around and being fed despite the putrid vegetation and rubbish that was still there from the flood. Eventually young were seen from 3 of the nests and in addition 4 broods of young were seen that did not come from any of the known nests. 11 chicks fledged.

## Eastern area

In the eastern area two nesting attempts were seen, both in the Catchwater Drain, but both failed. Chicks (maximum of 4) were seen on Wigeon Marsh from 19<sup>th</sup> July; we hadn't seen a nest here but it could easily have been at the back of the marsh which is difficult to see. At least 2 of these chicks survived to fledging. For the reasons stated above we could have easily missed nests and/or other broods in this area.

## Oystercatcher

*15 pairs attempted to breed, 1 brood of 2 hatched, none fledged*

|              | Pairs     | Nesting attempts | Successful nests | Chicks hatched | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------|------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------|
| <b>West</b>  | 9         | 9                | 0                | 0              | 0           |
| <b>East</b>  | 6         | 9                | 1                | 2              | 0           |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>18</b>        | <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b>       | <b>0</b>    |

As always Oystercatchers were noisily displaying in spring and soon birds were appearing to be sitting on eggs.

## Western area

Four pairs were seen in the western meadows including Eye Field and the central scrapes. The first confirmed nest (i.e. sat for more than a couple of days in the same place or eggs seen) was 10<sup>th</sup> May on Eye Field and this lasted for 18 days (incubation period is 24-27 days) but the rest for less than a week. Many of them tried again but were not successful.

Another 5 pairs nested on the extended area of shingle behind North Scrape and the Brackish Pools which was created as a result of the tidal surge. Some of the nests were inside the new fence and some outside. One pair, on the large shingle spit between the helicopter crash site and East Bank were on the nest for 15 days but no others managed more than 8 days.

## Eastern area

Six pairs nested here. One pair which eventually settled in the meadow by the Coast Road just west of Iron Rd sat on the nest for the full term and 2 newly hatched chicks were seen on 14<sup>th</sup> July in the middle of the meadow being fed by both parents. They could not be found there the next day but eventually a single chick with 1 adult was seen in the next meadow to the west. They were not seen again. Elsewhere, birds nested around Arnold's Marsh and Sea Pool again with some inside the fencing and some outside. One pair at the eastern end of Sea Pool appeared to be sitting on the nest for c.34 days before they gave up, the adults were seen the following day but there was no sign of any chicks. One other nest on the shingle just inside the fence behind Sea Pool was occupied for 15 days but the rest were lost within a week.

## Avocet

*80 pairs, 116 chicks seen, at least 14 fledged*

|              | No. pairs | No. Broods | Earliest Hatching Date | No. Chicks seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------|------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>West</b>  | 29        | 3          | 2 June                 | 5               | 0           |
| <b>East</b>  | 51        | 48         | 26 May                 | c.111           | 14+         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>80</b> | <b>25</b>  |                        | <b>116</b>      | <b>14+</b>  |

Overall allowing for birds whose nest had failed relaying we think there were 80 pairs that attempted to breed.

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## Western area

By early April the number of Avocets on the central scrapes had built up to nearly 200 and by 15<sup>th</sup> five birds were on eggs on Pat's Pool. On the 26<sup>th</sup> all nests had gone and the number of birds on the central scrapes had reduced to c.25; we presume there had been some form of predation. These early breeders have not been included in the totals as it is assumed they all moved elsewhere, either on the reserve or further afield, to try again. During May some birds returned to Pat's Pool with 21 nests there on the 26<sup>th</sup>. In early June, 3 broods (1, 1 & 3 chicks seen) hatched there but these were soon lost, presumably to the local Marsh Harrier, although Mediterranean Gulls had been seen to take Avocet eggs. All other nests were abandoned by 5<sup>th</sup> June. Elsewhere there were only a few nesting attempts with none lasting more than a week and noticeably no nests on North Scrape this year.

## Eastern area

At the end of April a number of Avocets were prospecting the recently renovated Shooter's Pools on Pope's Marsh where the new muddy islands were proving attractive to them. It was soon obvious that most of the nesting activity this year was on here but initially, to minimise any possible disturbance, we were only visiting these pools about once a week. By 7<sup>th</sup> May there were 23 nests there with a maximum of 43 on 26<sup>th</sup> May.

The first chicks seen here were on 26<sup>th</sup> May when they were only 1-2 days old. Once hatching commenced our visits increased to every 2 or 3 days. On 31<sup>st</sup> May, 4 broods (8 chicks) were on the Shooter's Pools and another 5 broods (18 chicks) were seen on the other pools around Pope's Marsh which must also have hatched from the Shooter's Pools. We soon realised that chicks were being moved from the Shooter's Pools within 1-2 days of hatching; we are not sure of the reason for this but can only think it was because there was inadequate food there for the chicks. Throughout the period from then till 21<sup>st</sup> June, 34 broods were counted on the pools with a total of 99 chicks. However as the chicks were being moved so quickly we know we missed some which hatched and moved off between our visits. We are therefore assuming that all nests were successful as we have no reason to believe that this was not the case, and that would mean that 48 broods would have hatched. During the period that followed it became obvious that chicks were being moved further away, presumably looking for food, and not staying in one place for long. A lot were seen on the other pools around Pope's but gradually moved further afield some being seen as far away as North and Simmond's Scrapes to the west and the pools to the east of the Iron Road. As many of the broods seen further away only had 1 or 2 chicks it is believed many were lost in this migration either due to predation or getting stuck in drains etc. It has been difficult to determine how many different chicks were actually seen as we found it impossible to follow these broods so don't know how many of our counts will have included duplication.

In addition to the nests on the Shooter's Pools there were several nesting attempts on other pools but none of these lasted full term.

Fledged birds began to be seen on the whole reserve from 3<sup>rd</sup> July but we cannot be certain that these were birds that had hatched locally. A total of 14 chicks were seen for a period when they were quite large and it is thought that these fledged, that was 1 on Simmond's Scrape, 9 on North Scrape, 3 on Arnold's and 1 on Wigeon Marsh. More may have fledged east of Iron Road.

## Other

In addition to all of this at least 3 broods (8 chicks) were seen crossing east over Beach Road to Eye Field, some of them getting assistance from the wardens as they tried to navigate the car park. It is presumed that these were from nests on Blakeney Point/Fresh Marsh. None survived for more than a few days.

## **Little Ringed Plover**

*6 pairs, 10 chicks seen, at least 2 fledged*

|              | <b>Pairs</b> | <b>No. Chicks seen</b> | <b>No. Chicks fledged</b> |
|--------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>West</b>  | 5            | 8                      | 2                         |
| <b>East</b>  | 1            | 2                      | ?                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>6</b>     | <b>10</b>              | <b>2</b>                  |

## Western area

On Pat's Pool 2 pairs were seen displaying and mating during April and early May. By 18<sup>th</sup> May one of these pairs was incubating a nest on the bare soil east of the visitor centre that had been set aside for the building work on the Simon Aspinall centre. The off duty mate appeared to be feeding on Pat's. Having caused a slight delay to the building work, 4 chicks hatched on 9<sup>th</sup> June. They remained feeding in the area for a couple of days but when the builders moved in they moved off into the field. A single chick was seen again on 14<sup>th</sup> June and the activities of a pair of adults made us believe there were still some chicks until 21<sup>st</sup> June but they weren't seen again. There was also a report of a possible second nest here but we could not confirm this.

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Back on Pat's Pool the other pair started sitting on one of the central islands from 8<sup>th</sup> June. This nest was flooded out by high water levels on 28<sup>th</sup> June a few days before they were due to hatch.

Two broods were seen on Simmond's Scrape. The first was on the long thin island on the NW side of the scrape where 2 chicks were first seen on 11<sup>th</sup> July, neither survived to fledging. Although no nest had been seen here 1 had been suspected behind the reeds and vegetation. In late June, a pair was seen on the long thin spit in the SE corner of Simmond's Scrape. They were scraping in low vegetation which was difficult to see from the hides. Further sightings in early July led us to believe they were nesting there. On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2 tiny chicks were seen. They were often difficult to find as they moved into the long grass but were seen on and off till 15<sup>th</sup> August. An adult with 2 large chicks seen there again on the 21<sup>st</sup> was thought to be these and it is assumed the chicks will have fledged a day or so after this.

On 7<sup>th</sup> May a nest was found on the shingle near the entrance to the site of the old north hide. It was close to, but outside, the fence near the path of people walking from Beach car park to view North Scrape. The sitting bird got up every time people walked by. It was considered whether it could be fenced off but because of an Oystercatcher nest nearby it meant a very large area would have needed to be enclosed and any diversions could have caused more problems. The nest lasted till 18<sup>th</sup> May when they gave up. The pair continued to be seen in the area throughout June often displaying. On 30<sup>th</sup> June a nest was found inside the fenced off area west of the site of the old North Hide, this may have been present for a while. This continued to be seen until 8<sup>th</sup> July after which neither the adults nor any chicks were seen.

## Eastern area

During June, single adults were seen on the Shooters Pools on Pope's Marsh, but there was no sign of pairs or displaying. On 22<sup>nd</sup> July an adult was seen with 2 small chicks in the Samphire at the NW end of Arnold's Marsh. We have no idea where the nest had been other than it must have been somewhere on Pope's. This family was never seen again.

## Ringed Plover

*4 pairs, 2 chicks, 1 fledged*

|               | Pairs    | No. Chicks Seen | No. Chicks Fledged |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|--------------------|
| West          | 2        | 2               | 1                  |
| East          | 2        | 0               | 0                  |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>2</b>        | <b>1</b>           |

From early March pairs were present and beginning to set territories and with the extra areas of fenced off shingle this year we had great hopes for them.

## Western area

A pair was frequenting Pat's and Simmond's scrapes and were seen mating on 31<sup>st</sup> May. One appeared to be on a nest on Simmond's on 19<sup>th</sup> June but this didn't last and no more attempts were seen.

Another pair was frequenting the shingle behind North Scrape and the Brackish Pools and were seen displaying regularly between mid-May and early June. On 7<sup>th</sup> June a nest was found on the shingle inside the fenced off area between the pools and watched until 11<sup>th</sup> June. After that coverage of this area was low and the nest wasn't definitely checked again. However on 7<sup>th</sup> July a pair with 2 small chicks were found on the Brackish Pools which it is thought came from this nest. 1 of these chicks was lost within a few days but the other survived to fledge.

## Eastern area.

A pair was seen around Arnold's Marsh from mid-March. A few times it looked as if they were nesting but the site couldn't be found. On 7<sup>th</sup> May a nest was found on the flat shingly area between Arnold's and the shingle bank close to the path where people walked. This nest lasted for 6 days before it was either predated or disturbed. They stayed in the area, often being seen displaying, until at least mid-July but no further nests were found.

Another pair was on the shingle behind Sea Pool throughout the season. They were seen displaying and mating on several occasions. On 18<sup>th</sup> May they were sitting on eggs on the shingle behind Sea Pool outside the fence but after 3 or 4 days the nest had gone. They often looked as if they may have had further nests but none were found and no chicks were seen.

## Lapwing

*51 nests, 64 chicks, 19 fledged.*

The following table summarises nests which we were able to follow through from incubation to fledging:

|      | No. Nests | No. Nests Hatched | Earliest Chicks Seen | No. Chicks Seen | No. Fledged |
|------|-----------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| West | 30        | 15                | 20 April             | 36              | 11          |

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|              |           |           |          |           |           |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>East</b>  | 21        | 10        | 27 April | 28        | 8         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>25</b> |          | <b>64</b> | <b>19</b> |

This was a better than average breeding season for Lapwing which started well with males in territorial flight and nest-scraping from the beginning of March. Few females were present at this stage, spending much of their time feeding on adjacent farmland. By 12<sup>th</sup> March more females were on the marshes and meadows, although often rather unobtrusive, standing quietly and watching displaying males. The first serious nesting attempts began around 13<sup>th</sup> March, nearly 5 weeks earlier than in 2013.

The first nest found was on Keeper's Marsh. The pair had been watched for a few days and the nest site was confirmed on 16<sup>th</sup> March. Incubation commenced by about 25<sup>th</sup> March and 2 chicks hatched on 20<sup>th</sup> April, almost a month earlier than in 2013 (17<sup>th</sup> May). The female became a familiar sight as she took to foraging around the Visitor Centre car park and roadside. The two chicks fledged by the end of May.

As the season developed, many nests, eggs and broods were lost for unknown reasons but new nests continued to be found; the last known chicks hatched around 10<sup>th</sup> July (12 days later than in 2013), fledging by mid-August. In the first half of the season we frequently noted females leaving their nest and flying south of the reserve across farmland, possibly needing to find feeding areas beyond the meadows that had been severely flooded in December. This behaviour was less apparent at later nests. In previous years females generally foraged closer to the nest site throughout the season. Chicks appeared to find enough small prey items, often close to the nest site, but frequently the female would fly further away, sometimes with the male remaining near the chicks but at other times chicks were left unattended. Some broods, more than in previous years, soon moved away from the nest area which may suggest a lack of suitable food.

Nests and chicks can become hidden from view as vegetation grows and our figures for chicks hatched per nest and fledged young are probably under-estimated.

Of the 51 nests located, 15 were known to fail before hatching and 11 became obscured from view and we do not know whether they were successful. 25 nests produced chicks. A total of 19 chicks were known to fledge from 9 of the nests. 7 nests produced chicks that were all lost before fledging and 9 nests produced chicks but we do not know their fate.

### Common Snipe

*No evidence of breeding*

### Redshank

*20 pairs, 21 chicks, unknown number fledged.*

|              | No. Pairs | No. Nests Seen | No. Broods | Earliest Chicks Seen | No. Chicks Seen | No. Fledged |
|--------------|-----------|----------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>West</b>  | 12        | 3              | 7          | 25 May               | 12              | ?           |
| <b>East</b>  | 8         | 3              | 5          | 30 May               | 9               | ?           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>6</b>       | <b>12</b>  |                      | <b>21</b>       | <b>?</b>    |

Displaying pairs were seen from early March and at times it seemed as if the reserve was "full" of Redshank. We saw 6 nests, one of which was probably predated, but we do not know the outcome of the others. Only 21 chicks were seen but many more were suspected. Redshank chicks tend to spend much of their time in reeds and long grass and it is often difficult to determine how many pairs nest and how many chicks are produced. This year it was even more difficult as we were unable to follow broods for more than a few days, even those found in fairly open areas, before they moved away; we assume that, as with other species, they needed to search for better feeding areas. We do not know how many chicks fledged. Although several fledged juveniles were seen around the reserve from the end of June we do not know whether they originated from local nests or further afield.

### Black-headed Gull

*121 pairs, at least 70 chicks, number fledged unknown*

|              | Pairs      | No. chicks seen | No. fledged |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>West</b>  | 24         | 0               | 0           |
| <b>East</b>  | 97         | 70              | 50+         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>121</b> | <b>70</b>       |             |

#### Western area

There was a build-up of gulls on Pat's Pool during May with a maximum of 15 nests there on the 17<sup>th</sup>. However many were lost in the first few days of June with none remaining on the 6<sup>th</sup>. This pattern of build-up and loss was the same as

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occurred to the Avocets here so we suspect some form of predation in the first few days of June. Mediterranean Gulls had been seen regularly on the scrape and had been seen to take Avocet eggs but we don't think that was the full story.

Elsewhere on the western meadows 2-3 nests were seen on Cricket Marsh, 3 on Billy's Wash and up to 3 on the tussocks at the eastern end of the Brackish Pools where they had nested in previous years. None of these nests lasted more than a few days.

## Eastern area

While Avocets numbers were building up on the eastern Shooters Pool, Black-headed Gulls were settling in, mainly on the western pool. The first nests were seen on 4<sup>th</sup> May and by 3<sup>rd</sup> June there were 91 nests still active with 5 broods of chicks also present making a minimum of 96 pairs. We couldn't follow all the broods but the maximum seen here was 68 chicks (35 broods) on 30<sup>th</sup> June. Unlike the Avocets the chicks were not moved, presumably because food was brought in by the adults. The first fledged bird was seen on Arnold's Marsh on 26<sup>th</sup> June and after this there were large numbers being fed in the nearby pools. The maximum count of fledged birds on the eastern pools was 52 on the 17<sup>th</sup> July with a further 19 on the western pools, but this doesn't really tell us anything as some could have flown off from our area and others could have flown in but we think a high number of the chicks seen, probably at least 50, will have fledged, the highest number in our area since 2006.

On Arnold's Marsh 1 bird nested on the stony island at the west end on 7<sup>th</sup> May. This has been a traditional site for gulls but the nests often get washed off after heavy rain or high tides and the same happened again on 26<sup>th</sup> June. 4-5 pairs attempted to nest on Wigeon Marsh but apart from 1 nest that lasted for 14 days all attempts failed within a couple of days. Later, in early June, 2 chicks were seen on a nest in the pool on Wigeon Marsh; we had not seen the nest before this and are not sure whether these chicks hatched there or had moved in from nearby.

## **Herring Gull**

*No birds attempted to breed this year*

## **Common Tern**

*No birds attempted to breed this year*

## **Little Tern**

*2 pairs attempted to breed, nests failed*

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2 birds were resting together on the new long shingle spit that protrudes into the middle of Sea Pool but they were not on a nest. Later a flock of 35 Herring Gulls mainly immatures flew in from the east and landed nearby, this put the terns off. On 9<sup>th</sup> June a bird was sitting on the large shingle spit at the east end of Sea Pool. Its mate brought in and fed it a fish. Later the mate came in and they swapped over. It was still there on the 12<sup>th</sup> when a second nest was seen a few metres to the south. At least 1 nest was still there the next day. By 18<sup>th</sup> no nests could be found. Presumably they had been predated.

## **Wood Pigeon**

*No evidence of breeding on the reserve*

No nests were seen in the bushes on the reserve this year.

## **Tawny Owl**

*Possibly bred in N Foreland*

## **Skylark**

*18 singing males (10 West, 8 East), no young seen*

Skylarks were the first birds to sing on the reserve this year. They were quick to return to their usual fields and numbers were higher than the last count, in 2012. A few areas were damaged with shingle spread across the grass north of the Eye Field and east of the now gone North Hide where 2 males had previously held territory.

## Western area

The Eye Field held 5 singing males from early March, one of which visited the beach. A pair was seen visiting a nest on the Eye Field on June 1<sup>st</sup> and a bird with material was seen the same day at the east end of the field.

Now that the habitat north of North Scrape has changed only one sang here, south of North Pool.

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2 males sang from the two fields of Bull Marsh.

On Cricket Marsh, 1 sang near the Whitwell Scrape in April. The grass grew too tall for skylarks after this.

One sang from South Pool in April and June.

## Eastern area

Most of the meadows around Pope's Marsh were each occupied by a single pair.

2 males sang from the Serpentine & meadows just east of E Bank all season and were often feeding on East Bank early on in the year, a third male was occasionally seen.

One male sang in the Arnold's/Wigeon Marsh area occasionally and could be the third male seen on the Serpentine.

Each the meadows east of Walsey Hills beside the A149 had a single male. There were also single males in the meadows beside the Iron Road. Birds also use the cropland to the south and marshes to the east.

Breeding success was not observed but a pair was very agitated in the field at the southern end of Iron Rd. on May 10th when cattle came too close.

## Swallow

*At least 3 pairs, no chicks fledged.*

This was a very poor year for Swallows on the reserve. The shelter at the beach car park attracted perhaps 2 pairs only, with 4 nests being built over the season, all of which failed. One of these nests had 3 eggs but they were soon abandoned, another nest produced 5 chicks but all died over a period of 10 days. At the pillbox at least one pair made two nesting attempts but they did not appear to succeed. Activity around Beach Road sluice suggested breeding attempts but we have no proof of success. There were no nests on the hides this year.

## House Martin

*Did not breed on the reserve*

They nested on houses along the Coast Road including on the Warden's House. Overall numbers are unknown.

## Meadow Pipit

*15-16 singing males (9 West, 6-7 East), fledged young seen*

The pipits chose all the same breeding areas on the saltmarsh that were used in previous seasons with one singing over South Pool and the main hides for the first time.

### Western area

One male was singing on South Pool from May onwards. Juveniles were seen from late July.

3 males were singing along Beach Road and using both sides of West Bank for food, probably nesting on the Blakeney side. 2 males close to the sluice on the Main Drain. Juveniles were seen in late July and an adult with food on the west side of the bank. The third was opposite Cricket Marsh.

One pair used the rough overflow area by Beach car park. An adult saw off a swallow in July while its mate called anxiously from the fence.

One singing towards the east end of Eye Field was also seen on the beach where some grass remains.

One sang just south of North Pool at the same time as a second one that sang from the NE corner of North Scrape

One male was singing next to the fenced off crash site.

### Eastern area

One pair nested near the bank by the Serpentine. A family group was seen in July. One male sang at the west end of Arnold's from March onward into July.

1-2 males were between Arnold's Marsh and Sea Pool.

One male in the northern most field beside Iron Rd. The field just south of this had 2 pairs in it, one of which sang by the SW corner and the other by Iron Road. A juvenile was seen here on the cattle bridge on July 13<sup>th</sup>.

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## Pied Wagtail

*Probably bred, numbers unknown*

As usual a lot of young wagtails were seen on the reserve, but we have not found any nest sites and do not know how many, if any, bred in our area and how many came in from outside.



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## Wren

*One pair, juveniles seen*

A male sang from early March at the northern end of the boardwalk and built a nest near Dauke's Hide. One was even seen trying to enter the hide where lots of bits of reed had been pulled out of the roof. The young fledged and were calling loudly outside the hides in early July.

## Dunnock

*Possibly bred*

## Stonechat

*Did not breed*

## Cetti's Warbler

*3 males singing, probably bred*

Difficult to observe in the best of seasons, Cetti's Warblers have been especially tricky this year. Many of the bramble thickets and other bushes along the Catchwater Drain were slow to grow after heavy deposits of salty reed debris were dumped on top of them by the tidal surge.

### Snipe's Marsh

The male here fared better. He was observed, after being ringed at the end of March, using the bushes along the southern edge of Snipe's Marsh and within the Norfolk Ornithologist's Association's (NOA) reserve. The ringers heard contact calls at the end of July which were consistent with those heard from fledged young on other NOA reserves so it is thought he bred. Song was heard again on August 4<sup>th</sup>.

### Opposite the Visitor Centre

Several times in April one was heard singing on the north side of the Catchwater Drain moving between the bridge near Old Woman's Lane and Bishop's Hide. An adult was seen feeding a juvenile by the bridge on July 6<sup>th</sup>. A male was singing again here in mid-July and early August.

### Watcher's Cottage to the Saltpans

A third male was heard here several times during early April and regularly through the season from the Saltpans area although it could have been nesting further east.

## Grasshopper Warbler

*Present but no evidence of breeding*

Two males were heard this year early in the season by NWT staff. The first was seen on April 24<sup>th</sup> northeast of Bishop's Hide. This one, or another in the same area, was heard again on May 20<sup>th</sup>. The second male was heard along the Catchwater Drain opposite Walsey on April 25<sup>th</sup>. It did not stay.

## Sedge Warbler

*46 singing males (32 West, 14 East), fledged young seen*

### Western area

The first Sedge Warbler was recorded on April 6<sup>th</sup>. More were seen from April 15<sup>th</sup> and a mass arrival took place overnight on April 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup>. On 23<sup>rd</sup> and the following day 32 singing males were recorded on the perimeter of the western Marshes. Some probably moved territory or were replaced by others but a count on May 13<sup>th</sup> recorded 31 singing males.

The differing arrival times of the adults were reflected in when the juveniles appeared. On May 23<sup>rd</sup> some birds were feeding juveniles in a nest by the Catchwater Drain while a later arriving pair was building a nest by East Bank sluice. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 12 days later, 3 fledglings from another nest sat in a row on a bramble, being fed by their parents. Later still, on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 3 juveniles were being fed near the bridge over the Catchwater Drain near Old Woman's Lane and an adult was seen with food on July 25<sup>th</sup> by the cattle pen round the corner.

# Cley Breeding Bird Report 2014

Eastern area (only partial count this year)

Sedge Warblers on Pope's were recorded by the whole team. 14 singing males were found between May 3<sup>rd</sup> and July 2<sup>nd</sup>. 2 were beside East Bank, 2 beside the Iron Road, 4 on the edges of the roadside fields and 6 in the reedbeds. Juveniles were seen in the reedbed east of the entrance track on July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

## Reed Warbler

*61 singing males (45 West, 16 East), fledged young seen*

Western area

Reed Warblers arrived late this year and to start with there were far fewer than usual. 3 were recorded on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and by May 13<sup>th</sup> numbers had only risen to 24. These were not evenly distributed and there were large sections with none singing. On May 13<sup>th</sup> there were 3 males beside East Bank, 6 along the Skirts, 3 by Bishop's Hide path, 4 along the boardwalk and Keeper's Marsh and one in the Borrow Pit beside Beach Road.

In the second half of May more arrived. The reeds were growing very slowly and reached a shorter height than usual due to the salt levels. Fresh winds interrupted surveying but by May 23<sup>rd</sup> 45 males were counted singing round the perimeter of the western Marshes. The new arrivals filled up spaces along East Bank, the Skirts and the boardwalk. It was thought that some moved on from the Skirts but another count here on July 26<sup>th</sup> found them quietly singing still. A bird was seen with nesting material on May 18<sup>th</sup> and by June 20<sup>th</sup> young were heard near Swan Bridge where food was being taken in. Many were removing faecal sacs and delivering food along East Bank on June 26<sup>th</sup>. A small juvenile was seen from West Bank on July 1<sup>st</sup> and 2 more from East Bank the same day. Further juveniles were seen on July 1<sup>st</sup> in the Catchwater Drain and a second brood recorded on August 30<sup>th</sup>, also in the Catchwater Drain near the Visitor Centre.

Eastern area (only partial count this year)

16 males were recorded by the team, chiefly along the Iron Road, Catchwater Drain and the 3 main reedbeds.

## Whitethroat

*No survey – probably bred*

These usually favour the scrub along the A149 and, prior to the tidal surge, bred on the reserve. This year they were seen almost exclusively south of the reserve in hedges between Walsey and the Salt pans. On June 5<sup>th</sup> one was seen with food entering a bramble bush opposite Old Woman's Lane. No juveniles were recorded.

## Great Tit

*Did not breed on reserve, but probably did in N Foreland woods*

## Long-tailed Tit

*Did not breed on reserve, but probably did in N Foreland woods*

## Bearded Tit

*12 pairs (9 West, 3 East), juveniles seen*

January and February were mild and when the reserve re-opened after the helicopter crash Bearded Tits were seen in the usual places. The warden, Bernard Bishop, saw a flock of 17 while reed cutting.

Western area

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> a pair was seen behind the Billy Bishop seat, near the central hides, looking at the site where they later nested. On March 29<sup>th</sup> a group of 7 was seen along the boardwalk which was joined by another 5. On April 5<sup>th</sup> a group of 6, 4 males and 2 females, was seen at the north end of East Bank and a separate male was seen flying east to Pope's. On other days birds were seen flying across Beach Road to the reedbeds on the Blakeney side of West Bank. A lot more movement round the reedbeds takes place than is generally appreciated.

The first food carrying was noticed by James McCallum from East Bank on April 26<sup>th</sup> and a photographer reported seeing an early brood from East Bank on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

From mid-May birds were watched taking food to four places in the main reedbed north of the McMeekin seat west of Bishop's Hide. Another pair was going back and forth across the boardwalk to the central hides and there was some activity in the western area of reeds by Keeper's Marsh. 2-3 pairs were seen from East Bank. It was thought there were 9 pairs in the western area.

# Cley Breeding Bird Report 2014

The first well seen family emerged from the reeds by the Billy Bishop seat on May 25<sup>th</sup> and were photographed by many visitors on May 26<sup>th</sup>. Four small chicks were seen. Further views of adults with juveniles in tow were seen on June 26<sup>th</sup> when there were 6 adults and 7 juveniles beside East Bank at the same time as a pair was feeding young north of the McMeekin seat and an adult with a large juvenile and a further pair were flying across the path to Bishop's Hide. A flock of 13 juveniles was seen from East Bank on July 28<sup>th</sup>.

## Eastern area

Special visits for Bearded Tits started on April 28<sup>th</sup> when 2 females were seen feeding alongside the Main Drain east of the entrance track and calls were coming from the adjacent reedbed. Access was limited to avoid upsetting the breeding waders and harriers, so the only other way to view the western reedbeds was from Walsey Hills. On April 5<sup>th</sup> 5 or 6 birds were seen flitting through the reeds east of Pope's Pool. Adults were seen on every visit along the central track, crossing between the two parts of the reedbed.

The first family party was seen on May 15<sup>th</sup>. A further visit on July 1<sup>st</sup> found 2 females carrying food into the reedbed west of the track while a male was feeding 2 large juveniles to the east. The limited information from Pope's supports an estimate of 2, probably 3 pairs breeding in the reeds each side of the track. The reedbed south of Wigeon Marsh was where Bearded Tits first landed after crossing the Serpentine from East Bank. On June 1<sup>st</sup> a pair was seen, from Walsey, flying from the east to this area. It is quite possible they breed here also.

## **Greenfinch**

*Did not breed on the reserve but probably close by on the south side of the A149.*

## **Goldfinch**

*At least 1 pair, juveniles seen*

Several pairs were present on the reserve but few were thought to have bred on it. A bird displaying by East Bank on May 5<sup>th</sup> nested elsewhere. Birds were singing from the bushes along the boardwalk and young were recorded there from May 30<sup>th</sup>. The willows and elders struggled to grow after the surge so when a pair was seen nest building at the northern end of the boardwalk on June 6<sup>th</sup> it was easy to follow their progress as the nest was very exposed. They chose a position within feet of passing visitors but still successfully raised three chicks. The last one left on July 13<sup>th</sup>. More juveniles were seen on June 21<sup>st</sup>.

## **Linnet**

*2 pairs, juveniles seen*

Once again Linnets started singing from the bushes by the old North Hide area. Despite the gorse looking very dead they stayed to breed there and on July 4<sup>th</sup> two juveniles were calling loudly. One of the females was holding nest material while birders were trying out the screen which replaced the hide. Others bred on Walsey Hills and west of West Bank and fed on the reserve.

## **Reed Bunting**

*21-22 (14 West, 7-8 East) singing males, juveniles seen*

### Western area

3 males were singing from wires by Beach Road but only 2 of them may have bred on the Cley side of West Bank. These were seen visiting the Borrow Pit and Cricket Marsh reeds.

A fourth male was singing in the Keeper's Marsh reeds, west of the boardwalk, early in the season.

One was seen regularly on the bushes midway up the boardwalk.

3 males sang near Bishop's Hide; one either side of the path to the hide and the third on the east side of Pat's Pool near the tracks into the reedbed.

4 males held territories west of East Bank; one near the dead willow, 2 in the mid-section and one near the Main Drain.

One male held a territory next to the crash site and a second slightly east of the old North Hide.

Juveniles were seen being fed along the Skirts on June 14<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Later on others were seen outside the central hides and on Pope's.

# Cley Breeding Bird Report 2014

Eastern area (only partial count this year)

A thorough survey was not carried out this year, but adding what was seen from outside Pope's to short visits to the middle of the reedbeds, there were 7-8 singing males. There were at least 2 males in each of the three reedbeds south of the Main Drain and one in the reedbed east of the Shooters' Pools north of the Drain. A pair here was behaving as if near a nest on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

From Walsey a male in the western part of the reedbeds was observed with food on May 30<sup>th</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup>.

Reed Buntings were also seen visiting the reeds to the north of the Shooters' Pools and were seen with juveniles along the Iron Road near the Main Drain and cattle bridge.

## Notes:

Once more we would like to thank the wardens, Bernard Bishop, Adam Pimble and Carl Brooker, and all local birders who told us of their sightings of nests and young birds around the reserve thus helping to complete the picture.

Our team this year was made up of Kath & Mick Claydon, Noel Elms, Mike Harcup, Sue & Peter Morrison and Pat & David Wileman.

Each year we try to cover more species in depth and this year gave greater coverage to Pope's, but to continue to improve our results we need more people. We would so much like to spend more time on some species. So if you think you could help next year we would love to hear from you now. You don't have to be an expert (but we don't mind if you are!); we weren't when we started and still aren't now but have learnt a lot, and continue to do so. You will just need enthusiasm and some time to spare, then we are sure you will find it rewarding.

Copies of this report are sent to the County Recorder, the NWT and the BTO and are made available to Cley Bird Club members to download via the website. A summary is published in the Cley Bird Club newsletter.

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