

BLAKENEY POINT WARDENS REPORT 2009



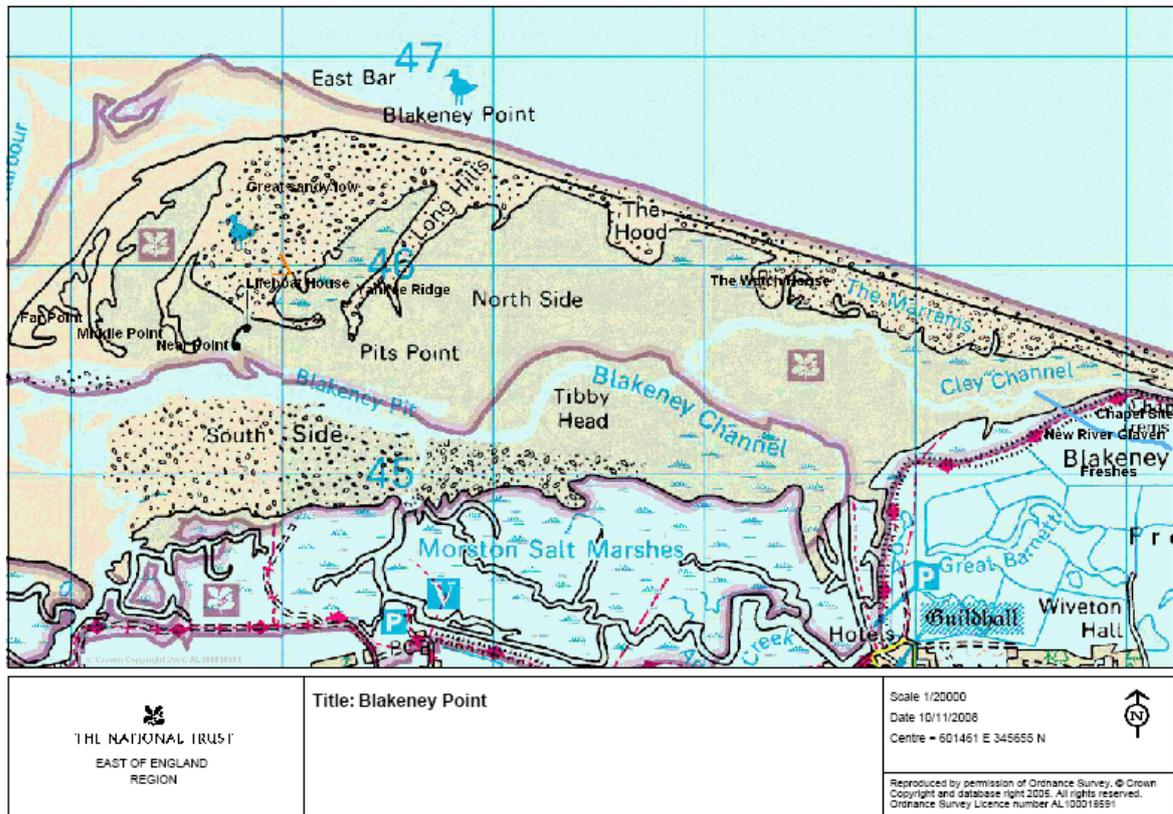
Avocet chick (P. Bishop, 2009)

**BY EDWARD STUBBINGS
COASTAL WARDEN BLAKENEY POINT**

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MAP AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH



(Ordnance Survey/ National Trust, November 2008)



Looking east along Blakeney Point (M. Page, 2006)

BIRDS

INTRODUCTION

The 2009 breeding season turned out to be a good one for most species covered in this report. The weather was warm and settled, resulting in all species (apart from Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*) breeding successfully to some extent, and some were double and triple brooded. There was a female White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba* breeding in the Lifeboat House with a male Pied Wagtail *M. a. yarrellii*, which had two broods. Sandwich Tern *S. sandvicensis* numbers were up on last year from 2400 pairs to 3100 pairs, producing a minimum of 1300 young. Common *S. hirundo* and Arctic Terns didn't fare so well with only 22 young Common Terns produced and no Arctic Tern eggs hatching. Little Terns *Sternula albifrons* did reasonably well with 86 pairs producing 52+ young from two colonies. English Partridges *Perdix perdix* did well and by September some large coveys were being seen. Waders also flourished; there was a twofold increase in the number of breeding Redshank *Tringa totanus*, and Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* produced almost an average of one chick per pair. Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* also did well with lots of chicks reaching the fledging stage.

Bird migration was, however, not so spectacular, possibly due to the mostly settled (high pressure) weather systems in spring and autumn, which allowed birds to migrate over the Point at height. Highlights included Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* in both seasons, two Red-breasted Flycatchers *Ficedula parva* and a Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* on the 11th of September, two Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* and a Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* on the 18th of September, and a large movement of House Martins *Delichon urbica* on the 22nd of September. Despite this seemingly impressive list, no large falls occurred, common migrants were rather few and far between, and there were some glaring omissions from the list of migrants, including Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* and Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*. Of note was a female Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*, which stayed throughout the 2008/09 winter until the 25th of July, a very late date for this species in Norfolk, and looked very funny sitting in Great Sandy Low with Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*.

There were no persistent predation problems, although a Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* did visit a few times in spring when the birds were just settling. On the whole, disturbance was negligible and this may have had something to do with the understanding response to our new dog policy. The fences to protect the tern colonies were erected in early April and taken down in early August.

As the Suaeda *Suaeda maritima* in the colony on Far Point gets taller and thicker, it becomes harder to accurately count the Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and Sandwich Terns, which breed in this area, therefore, this year, we did a nest count. We only counted the Sandwich Tern nests to limit disturbance and, due to my lack of experience in this field, I feel that the count could have been better organised and therefore more accurate. However, I feel that we counted nests that we otherwise would have missed, and came to a fairly satisfactory figure. We counted fledglings in the normal way, as and when they started to walk out of the colonies, and on a

continuous basis. Breeding bird surveys were also conducted for passerines to establish accurate breeding figures for those species.

BREEDING FIGURES TABLE

Species	Common name	No. of breeding pairs	No. of young fledged	Comments
<i>Anser anser</i>	Greylag Goose	1	0	
<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Common Shelduck	c.41	?	Many young seen, including 82 in the harbour on the 11 th of July
<i>Anas strepera</i>	Gadwall	4-5		
<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Shoveler	1	?	
<i>Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	Several	?	Nest of 10 eggs hatched
<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Red-legged Partridge	1	0	
<i>Perdix perdix</i>	Grey Partridge	2-3	28+	Coveys of 20+ and 8 seen in August
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Common Pheasant			3-4 males in spring
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher	c.135	c.55	
<i>Recurvirostra avocetta</i>	Avocet	14	6	
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover	13	13	
<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Lapwing	2+	?	
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common Redshank	14+	2	
<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	1900+	?	Good fledge rate
<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Mediterranean Gull	c.5	7	
<i>Larus canus</i>	Common Gull	2-3	0	
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	Little Tern	c.86	51+	
<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Sandwich Tern	c.3100	1300+	
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	c.81	c.22	
<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Arctic Tern	9	0	
<i>Columba oenas</i>	Stock Dove	1	?	
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood pigeon	2-3	?	1 nest found
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Skylark	39	?	2 small broods

<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	3	10+	2 double brooded and 1 triple (?) brooded
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow pipit	109	?	Many young seen in 2 broods
<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	Pied Wagtail	1+	6+	Double brooded mixed pair (<i>M.a.yarrellii</i> x <i>M.a.alba</i>) plus several in harbour
<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Wren	11	?	Many young seen
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock (Hedge Sparrow)	9	?	Some young seen
<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Linnet	17+	?	Many young seen in 2 or 3 broods
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed Bunting	26+	?	Some young seen

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Status indicators

Abundant	>1000 occurrences per annum
Common	101-1000 occurrences per annum
Uncommon	11-100 occurrences per annum
Scarce	no more than 10 occurrences per annum but more than 20 in total
Very scarce	11-20 occurrences
Rare	6-10 occurrences
Extremely rare	no more than 5 occurrences in total

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

(Uncommon non breeding summer visitor)

Summering flock of up to 63 in harbour, mostly in and around the mouth of the River Stiffkey, accompanied by an escaped Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*.

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*

(Escapee)

One summered in the harbour with Mute Swans.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus Cygnus*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

On the 2nd of December, 13 were seen flying west over the Lifeboat House.

Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

Two flew in from east and roosted on West Sands at low tide on the 22nd of October.

Wild Swan species

Two wild swans were seen on the 16th of December, flying east through the harbour. They were not seen well enough to establish which species they belonged to.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

(Common winter visitor)

A winter visitor, seen from the 4th of September, when seven flew in from the sea. That month's total was 279 on the 23rd. Birds seen in September are still actively migrating, but once the flocks have gathered in north and east Norfolk and their regular feeding and roosting patterns have been established, fewer birds are seen flying over the Point. In foggy or misty weather they can become confused and fly about in large flocks and call a lot. 1100 passed over the Point on the 16th of December on such a day.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

(Local feral populations, rare breeder and scarce migrant)

One pair attempted to breed, unsuccessfully, on Near Point. The highest number seen was 15 on the 20th of June.

(Dark-bellied) Brent Goose *Branta bernicla bernicla*

(Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant)

Numbers noted in the bird log peaked in February with 700+ roosting outside the Lifeboat House. Up to four stayed throughout the summer, and autumn migrants started returning from mid September onwards. There are two roost sites in Blakeney Harbour; one outside the Lifeboat House (outer roost) and one near the Watch House (inner roost), these regularly attract over 3000 geese between them.

This organised count was undertaken on the 3rd of February 2009 and illustrates the importance of the harbour, and indeed of the North Norfolk coast as a wintering site for this species.

Roost location	Count
Thornham Harbour	144
Titchwell Fresh Marsh	106
Brancaster Harbour	315
Overy Harbour	1228
Wells Harbour	380
Warham Flats	188
Stiffkey Pipeline	565
Blakeney Harbour (outer roost)	1450
Blakeney Harbour (inner roost)	2192
Total	6568

(Pale-bellied) Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*

(Very scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

A group seen travelling west on the 8th of October are the only record of this sub species in 2009.

Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*

(Rare winter visitor and passage migrant)

An adult Black Brant was seen with (Dark-bellied) Brent Geese around Pelvetia Marsh (Pinchen's Creek) on the 8th and 9th of May.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

(Common breeder and passage migrant)

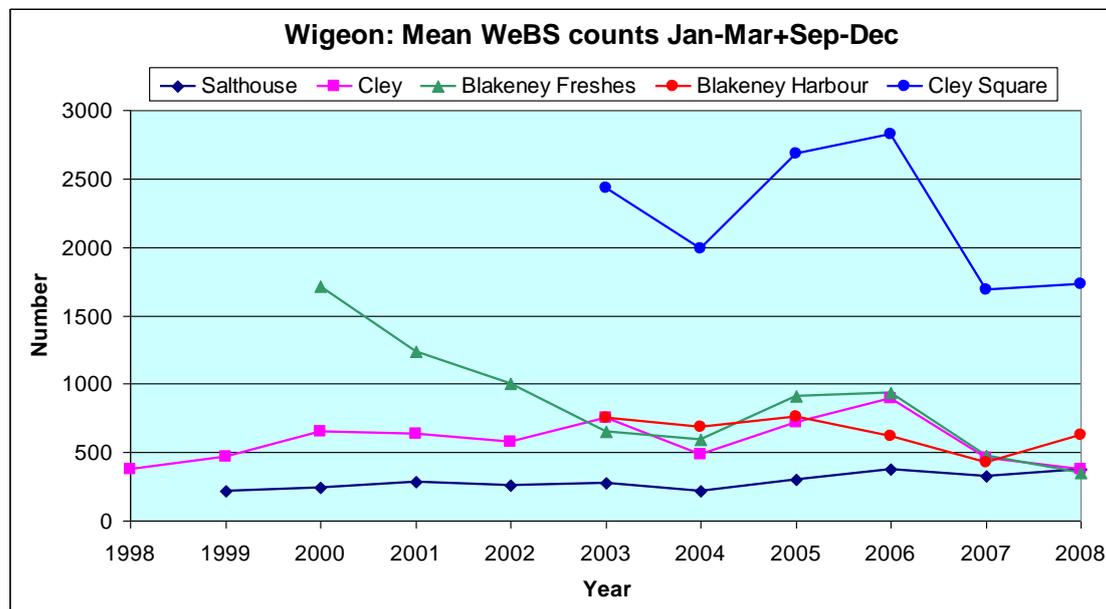
Approximately 41 pairs bred in the dunes. Nest burrows were well spread, but concentrations of birds occurred, in Great Sandy Low in the mornings. Several groups of goslings were seen on their first journeys from the nest from mid June onwards and 82 goslings were seen together in the harbour on the 11th of July. We assume a fairly good recruitment rate.

On the 3rd of July, 28 adults were seen departing to the northeast, to their moulting grounds. Birds were seen returning from the 9th of September.

Wigeon *Anus Penelope*

(Common winter visitor)

Seen in winter from September to April. Numbers reached 800 on the 9th of January. They have been declining locally since 2006 as one can see from this sample taken from the Cley 10km square.



Gadwall *Anus strepera*

(Scarce breeder and passage migrant)

At least 4-5 pairs made breeding efforts, and a nest on Far Point was depredated. No young were seen.

Teal *Anus crecca*

(Common winter visitor.)

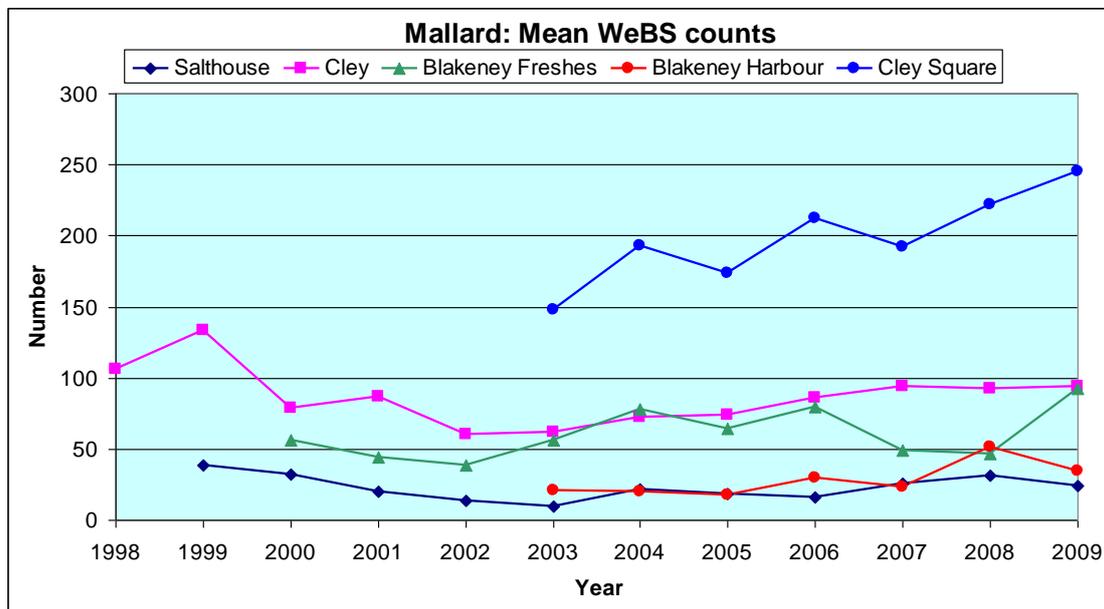
There were 110 on two dates in January. The maximum count for the second winter period was 265 on the 9th of September.

Mallard *Anus platyrhynchos*

(Scarce breeder, common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Birds that attempt to breed on the point in June are thought to be birds from the surrounding wetlands that have failed in their first nesting attempts. Several pairs were present throughout the summer, often in and around the Tern colony, but also in the dunes and along the shingle ridge. A well hidden nest was found on the edge of a healed blow out near the Lifeboat House. The nest contained 10 eggs and subsequently hatched.

This species numbers and fortunes are followed closely via the monthly Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts carried out on the Point.



Pintail *Anus acuta*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Another species monitored more closely by monthly WeBS counts. The highest counts entered into the bird log were 25 on the 3rd of April, 29 on the 30th of September and 35 on the 23rd of November. Larger numbers are present in the harbour as a whole and it is an important wintering population.

Shoveler *Anus clypeata*

(Uncommon breeder, uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant)

A pair probably bred around the creeks at the start of the Point, but limited access and secretive habits made proof of breeding difficult to obtain. Only small numbers are ever seen on the Point, but they can be seen in small numbers during April and September on migration. Four were seen on the 16th of April and five were seen on the 3rd of September.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

(Passage migrant)

September is the best time to see these diving ducks passing, in either direction, over the sea. On the 16th of September 42 were seen.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

Five were seen on the 4th of September, three on the 16th and a male on the 30th.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

(Winter visitor with occasional summering birds)

Seen almost every month, but mostly during late autumn and early winter. Monthly totals: January: 6; February: 11; March: 8; April: 42; May: 20; June: 21; July: none recorded; August: 13; September: 4; October: 40; November: 74; December: 33

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula nigra*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

The female which spent half of the year (from January until the 25th of July) in the harbour, was exceptional. It spent most of its time in the main channel between Stiffkey and the end of the Point, it was often in Pinchen's Creek and sometimes with Shelduck in Great Sandy Low. To see an 'old squaw' sitting on the ground in a dune slack area, with Shelduck, in July, is a very funny sight and we can only speculate as to what it thought it was doing there when it really should have been on a tundra pool with the rest of its kind. The only (unofficial) record of the autumn was, at the slightly more usual time, in October and was not officially reported to the wardening team, so no date is available.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

(Common and occasionally abundant winter visitor and passage migrant)

Very few were seen in the 2008/09 winter period, but passage was noted in May, with 1000 on the 14th and 800 on the 31st. Flocks of up to 49 in number were seen in the summer, and autumn passage began in September. The maximum in that month, and the whole autumn, was 490 seen on the 30th. There were six seen on the 16th of December, one of which was unfortunately killed and eaten by a Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

(Uncommon passage migrant, occasional winter visitor)

Records of singles on the 14th of May and 20th of September show that this was a scarce passage migrant only this year.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

(Uncommon winter visitor, in small numbers, and passage migrant)

The lack of records from the late winter/early spring period probably reflect observer effort rather than complete absence, the last record being seven on the 20th of February. The first returning bird was noted on the 30th of September. The maximum seen during the second winter period was 10. Birds could be seen displaying in late winter in the Pit at low tide.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

(Winter visitor and passage migrant)

Birds were seen throughout the winter period, with a lingering bird seen on the 17th of June. Birds were noted returning in small numbers from the 9th of September. There was a maximum of 16 on the 9th of November.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

A redhead was seen feeding in the surf, around the wreck on Far Point, on the 2nd of December, and was the only record of a migrating bird in 2009.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

(Resident breeder)

One pair were present on the Point, but produced no young.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

(Resident breeder)

Another good year for Grey Partridges after a pair last year produced 14 young. The weather in the vital fledging period of the chicks was benevolent. It is thought that 2-3 pairs bred and coveys of eight and 20+ were seen from August. Also a late nest was found in the plantation, with 10 eggs, on the 7th of July.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

(Very scarce passage migrant)

A bird was seen briefly in the main dunes on the 7th of June is the only record of Quail in 2009.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

(Spring visitor)

Some 3-4 males were making their presence felt in spring, but no females were seen, and there were no more sightings after the 13th of June.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

In the early part of 2009 numbers peaked, in the middle of January, with 21 on the 9th. Passage in the autumn is normally more pronounced, and this peaked on the last day of September and the first of October when 50 and 56 were seen respectively. Only very small numbers were seen throughout November and December.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

(Scarce passage migrant)

The first of the year was on the peak day of red-throat passage, on the 1st of October. There were also three seen on the 15th of the same month.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

A low number of sightings this year, in a year with low numbers of red-throats. The first bird of the autumn was seen on the 30th of September, the next on the 12th of October and the last on the 7th of December.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

(Common migrant)

Seen at almost any time of year, mostly in small numbers. Numbers peaked in spring, with a record of eight on the 15th of March, and there were several days in September and October when two were seen. There were two sightings in December and the last of the year was seen on the 22nd.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

Two records from October, with one on the 12th and one on the 17th. There was a single record from December, on the 10th.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

Two on the 4th of October and a probable, this time a single, flying east with a Great Crested Grebe, on the 5th of October.

Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

(Uncommon passage migrant and wanderer, also breeds nearby)

As per usual, a few birds were seen in spring and early summer doing what *we* call 'prospecting'. Numbers peaked on autumn migration in September with 104 on the 4th and 131 on the 5th.

Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*

(Extremely rare visitor. Two previous records, both dead)

A bird seen flying west on the 1st October has the potential to be the first, live, record of this species in Norfolk. It was seen, accompanied by Manx and Sooty Shearwaters, by the two assistant wardens at the time, Paul Nichols and Richard Berridge. A description was sent to the British Birds Rarity Committee (BBRC), and if accepted will be a first for Norfolk.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

(Uncommon Passage migrant)

The first birds of autumn were 23 seen during a northerly blow on the 13th of September. From then on only smaller numbers were seen, with two on the 16th of September and one on the 20th. Eight were seen on the 1st of October and two on the 4th.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

(Common passage migrant)

Mostly seen in autumn, when northerly winds can blow large numbers of birds in close to the shore. Spring/summer birds were seen, with one on the 11th of May, two on the 7th of June, one on the 23rd of June, one on the 8th of July and nine on the 17th of July. Autumn passage started at the end of August when 22 were seen on the 29th. Peak days in September included 273 on the 3rd and 808 on the 13th. On the 1st of October, 17 were seen, but after this only very small numbers were seen until the 16th, when six were seen. Autumn passage thus peaked in the first half of September when conditions were favourable.

Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*

(Scarce visitor from Balearic Islands in varying numbers)

A good year for this species, with very early occurrence dates and record daily totals. First records were of singles on the 20th and 23rd of June. July's only record was of one on the 19th and there were no reports in August. Records increased in September with one on the 7th, eight on the 13th and singles on the 14th and 29th. There were two seen on the 16th of October and they were the last of the year.

Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

(Scarce Passage migrant, in autumn)

Only recorded in September, with one on the 13th, one on the 15th and three on the 16th.

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

(Abundant passage migrant)

Birds were seen passing on the sea from mid March through to the end of the recording year. Four on the 15th of March were the first of the year. On the 25th of April 18 were notable, as were 110 on the 14th of May. The maximum seen was 152 in July and 72 was the maximum in August. September saw the peak passage for the year, with 500 on the 3rd, 430 on the 4th, 260 on the 5th, 240 on the 14th, 125 on the 15th, 500 on the 16th and 135 on the 28th. The maximum seen in October was 250 on the 16th. The last record in 2009 was of 22 on the 29th of November.

A bird was taken into care on the 19th of September, and was handed over to the RSPCA after having had some thick fishing net removed from its head and wings. There were also at least three dead birds found on the shingle ridge in October.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

(Common summer and winter visitor and passage migrant)

Birds only tend to get recorded when movements are recorded, so true status is known only through monthly WeBS counts. The maximum count for the year was 90 on the 14th of July.

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

(Scarce passage migrant and occasional winter visitor)

A bird seen on the end of Far Point in December 2008 had been ringed as a nestling on the Isle of May in July of the same year and a further bird was seen on the 9th of March 2009. Interestingly, another Shag, ringed as a nestling, on the Isle of May in 2009, was found dead on the point in February 2010.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

(Increasingly common, seen in summer and winter, rarely actively migrating)

Uses saltmarsh and inter tidal mudflats for feeding, sometimes in fairly good numbers. Larger counts include 19 on the 24th of August, 14 on the 14th and the 30th of September, and 20+ on the 14th of October.

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

(Very rare vagrant)

The first record of this species for the Point was, incredibly, of a flock of eight, flying east along the mainland, at 08.30, on the morning of the 14th of October.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

(Breeds nearby and also a passage migrant)

What were probably local breeders roamed around in June and July, including both adult and juvenile birds. Maximum counts were five on the 13th and the 22nd of June, and also five on the 13th of July.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

(Very rare migrant)

Two records, with singles on the 27th of April and the 2nd of May. With both seen flying east at the same time of day (07.30), only five days apart, we tend to think that the same bird was involved on both occasions, but two birds could have been seen.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

(Scarce summer visitor)

The first birds were seen on the 8th of June and numbers peaked at four on the 9th of July. The last two birds of the year were seen on the 13th of August.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

(Very rare, but currently increasing visitor)

Mostly in spring, with two on the 5th of April, and a single bird on the 1st of May. Mostly seen over the mainland.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

(Local breeder and uncommon passage migrant)

Healthy local breeding population. Increasingly staying for winter (mostly female type birds). They can now be seen in any month of the year. Passage birds can be seen, in spring and autumn, going west or arriving from the sea. Four birds were noted on the 9th and 15th of May. In September six were seen on the 6th and five on the 7th. Also a single bird was seen arriving from the sea on the 2nd of November.

There were three nests on Blakeney Fresh Marsh, which involved a polygamous male with two nests at the western end of the reedbed and another pair with a nest at the eastern end. These three nests produced at least five young. The Cley and Salthouse reedbeds produced an incredible 20 young. The first fresh juvenile was seen on the Point on the 11th of July. Six were seen on the 6th of September, including two over the mainland. There were five on the 5th of October, two birds on four dates during November and 3+ on the 22nd of December.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

(Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor)

Only one seen during the late winter period, on the 2nd of March. There were no spring movements detected on the Point, but birds were seen again as early as the 15th of August. Birds could then be seen hunting on the Point in autumn as they arrived from distant breeding grounds, and there were several sightings in September and early October. A bird was seen daily from the 20th to the 23rd of September. There was a single sighting in October on the 5th, none in November, and the last of the year was seen on the 1st of December.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

(Very scarce passage migrant and local breeder)

The only record of this species this year was of a roaming second summer male on the 17th of May (pictured below).



Second summer Montagu's Harrier (R. F. Porter, May 2009)

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

(Local breeder and common passage migrant)

Singles on the 5th and 31st of March. Then up to two birds almost daily in April through to the end of September. With Sparrowhawks being fairly common in wooded areas on the mainland, the summer sightings could have involved breeding birds coming out to the Point to feed, or birds surplus to the breeding population subsisting by hunting on the Point. Females do most of the work on the nest; incubating; dividing up the food brought by the male for chicks, and are thus rarely seen during this time. They will only go out hunting once the chicks are at a certain size and this may coincide with the sighting of several females in June and July. There were several sightings of up to two Sparrowhawks in September, two sightings in October and one in November. One on the 16th of December, seen catching and eating a Blackbird *Turdus merula*, was the last record of the year.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

(Very scarce but increasing local breeder and migrant)

Birds are mostly seen in fine weather, over the mainland, either flying over potential breeding sites or moving along the coast. Up to three were seen over a particular wood from April to September. Numbers increased steeply in September when seven were seen on the 7th, including one over the shingle ridge, and six were seen on the 25th.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

(Scarce passage migrant)

Singles on the 6th and 12th of June, one on the 16th of August, singles on the 11th, 12th and 17th of September. Memorable sightings include one seen catching, and flying

inland with a mullet *Mugilidae* type fish at 18.30 on 12th September and one seen catching a flatfish *Perciform* in the main channel off Far Point on the 17th.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

(Common local breeder and passage migrant)

Seen in all months of the year and almost daily from May until November, peaking in August when up to six juveniles could be seen in the air together.

Up to two were seen through April. Mostly a single bird seen through May. Apart from four on the 1st of June, only one or two were seen throughout that month. By the end of July, 3-4 were being seen. Six were then seen regularly hunting around the main dunes in August. One died on the back step, apparently of starvation, on the 8th of August. A maximum of five were seen in September, on the 7th. Numbers dropped in October when only a few were seen. At least two birds continued to use the reserve in November and October and one started using the Black Pine *Pinus nigra* as a perch or roost site, leaving evidence of its presence in the form of pellets on the floor under the tree. These were collected on the 23rd of October, and analysed by Chris Wheeler:

“A total of 20 pellets examined and the following remains were identified:-

? Pygmy Shrew - 1

Shrew sp - 1

Field Vole - c 6

Insect remains ? Bee sp

Carabid beetle (probably Violet Ground Beetle) - 1

Birds of prey like Kestrels tend to tear prey apart before swallowing so there are less skeletal remains and even these tend to be more broken up.

I feel fairly sure that one of the shrew remains are of Pygmy Shrew but my two references to the dentition of both species seem to conflict.

The Carabid beetle remains (part of the thorax and leg) are a bright shiny blue/green colour which does not seem to fit the more likely *Broscus cephalotes* of the sand dunes.”

No predation upon the Little Terns was noted this year, with birds preferring to hunt around the older dunes for their insects and small mammals.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

(Uncommon winter resident and passage migrant)

Two were seen on the 9th of February and two on the 3rd of March. There were six sightings in April, with two on the 6th. Single birds were seen throughout May. Merlins were absent in June and July but, by the 17th of August, the first southerly movements were detected. There were seven sightings in September. October saw a total of 12 sightings with two on the 19th, 22nd and 26th. There were also two birds present on the 4th and 6th of November, and on the 16th of December.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

(Scarce summer visitor, local breeder and passage migrant)

The first bird of the year was seen on the 8th of May. One was seen on the 13th of June, then again early next morning, near the plantation. An adult was seen disturbing the Sandwich Tern colony on the 22nd of June and the 6th of July. On the 28th and 29th of July, birds were seen with prey in their talons.

On the 23rd of August, a Hobby was seen carrying a small wader in its talons over the saltmarsh outside the Lifeboat House. A juvenile Peregrine was then seen to dive on the Hobby, causing it to drop the wader, which the Peregrine then proceeded to eat on the end of Near Point. After the Peregrine had finished its stolen meal. I found the carcass and identified the wader as a Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. A spectacular kill was observed on Far Point on the 31st of August when a Hobby was seen to kill another small wader on Far Point, probably a Ringed Plover, in full speed flight.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

(Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant, scarce in summer)

Birds were seen hunting over the Point during the winter, and through spring right up until July. There were no records in July, but birds returned as early as the 12th of August. There were four seen on the 7th of September.



Juvenile Peregrine (B. Bueche, November 2009)

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

Records mostly from the late autumn period with four on the 22nd of October and one was seen on the 6th of November.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

(Scarce, mostly a spring wanderer)

As mentioned above, most records relate to birds wandering around in spring and mostly following the ridge on the mainland. There was, however, a record of an apparently ringed escapee on the 1st of September that circled above Yankee Ridge for 15 minutes.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

(Common breeder, and abundant winter visitor and passage migrant)

Approximately 135 pairs bred over the whole reserve, including the area of marsh north of the River Glaven near the Cley end (hereafter referred to as the chapel ground), but not including the fresh marsh. Fledging rate was good and predation upon nests and chicks was lower than normal. Most nests were found and then plotted on a map of the Point to show territories. This helped us to keep track of nests and predation rates. The total number of breeding pairs was discovered by surveying the whole reserve on two occasions, in mid to late spring.

The first chick was seen on the 1st of June, and on the 8th a diary entry reads “lots of Oystercatcher chicks hatching”. Approximately 55 fledged in total, a very good year for this species.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

(Uncommon breeder, scarce on passage)

This is the first year that I have included the chapel ground (mentioned above, under Oystercatcher), in my report because up until 2009 it was included in the fresh marsh report). Therefore this is the first year that I have included Avocet as a breeding bird. This marsh used to be south of the Glaven and was a part of the fresh marsh. The Glaven realignment project, which was completed in 2006, left the area almost devoid of vegetation and instantly became favoured by Avocets, and other waders, as a place to lay eggs. A number of problems face birds that choose to breed here, including a greater risk of predation by Red Foxes, disturbance from people, succession of saltmarsh vegetation and it is also a relatively unwardened part of the reserve. Despite these problems, Avocets breed there in good numbers and do raise some young.

In 2009, 14 apparently incubating adults were counted in June and a total of six young were subsequently seen. This still compares well with the neighbouring reserve at Cley where Grey Herons have been the biggest predator in recent years, causing almost complete failure in some years. The, even closer, Blakeney Fresh Marshes had seven breeding pairs and managed to fledge four young. The picture on the front of this report was taken during the summer on an area of marsh just next to the chapel ground.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

(Scarce passage migrant)

Bred for the first time in 2006, but breeding has not been proven since. The only record in 2009 was of a bird flying and calling near the Lifeboat House on the 6th of May.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

(Uncommon, but formerly more abundant breeder, very common winter visitor and passage migrant)

This summer new dog rules were trialled in the hope that they could help boost the flagging Ringed Plover population. The majority of the Point was therefore dog free, with just two small areas allocated for dog walking (the first few hundred metres at Cley, and from the ferry landing point to just beyond the Lifeboat House). The public were extremely understanding, and few problems arose. Although there was no real increase in the number of breeding pairs, the number of young fledged per pair was the highest since the last century. Breeding success was, therefore, far higher than previous years and we will be looking, with great interest, whether the greater

recruitment rate this season will help to increase the population as a whole over the next few years. Some 13 pairs bred over the whole reserve, including the chapel ground, which means that the overall population was actually down on last year. However, these 13 pairs successfully fledged an incredible 13 young. Nothing is more heart warming than to see 3 or 4 of these fluffy, ping pong balls on sticks sheltering under a parent's wing.

There were not as many migrants seen in 2009 as in some years, but still a few of the smaller, darker 'tundra' Ringed Plovers were seen on the beach along side other 'British birds' and our own breeding birds. Sometimes the resident birds can get quite defensive of their patch of beach, especially in spring, and start chasing the smaller, northern birds around, away from their patch.

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

(Scarce passage migrant)

Dotterel are a fascinating wader. They breed on mountain tops and on the high arctic tundra. They are rarely seen on migration and then mostly on cliff top fields, so they are a rare bird on the Point. When they do appear on the Point, they can be extremely approachable and unafraid of observers if they respect the birds and do not intentionally scare them. Two arrived on the 27th of August but were only seen for half an hour before they flew into Great Sandy Low, not to be seen again. Eight days later, on the 4th of September, three were found in Great Sandy Low and these stayed for two days providing us with up close and intimate views.

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

A wintering flock frequents Blakeney between August and April and can sometimes number up to 3000 birds. Their comings and goings can be observed in both spring and autumn. A fairly un-seasonal bird was seen on the 22nd of June, otherwise birds were seen with greater frequency as July and August progressed.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Roughly 100 are regularly counted in the harbour on high tide WeBS counts in December and January, but this is by several observers at several points throughout the harbour. Peak counts on the Point itself include 90 on the 9th of January, 67 on the 6th of September and 66 on the 1st of October.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

(Scarce, declining local breeder, common winter visitor and passage migrant)

This is another species which I deal with in my report for the first time due to the chapel ground now being included as a part of the Point. On the chapel ground 2-3 pairs attempted to breed, but the outcome was unknown. Young were seen in this area, but matters were confounded by the fact that adults moved relatively young chicks from the fresh marshes into the River Glaven where better feeding conditions existed.

Returning failed breeders were noted from as early as late May.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

(Common non breeding summer visitor, winter visitor and passage migrant)

Failed or non breeding birds can be seen in summer with c.150 on the 8th of June and c.400 on the 12th. There was also a flock of 230+ present on the 19th of August. Birds on active migration are mostly seen in smaller groups, flying west. Numbers can be surprisingly low in winter as most birds winter in The Wash. However, 290 were seen on the 23rd of January. These birds are thought to be mostly of the Greenland and Arctic Canadian form *C. c. islandica*.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

(Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant)

Blakeney Point is an excellent place to see Sanderling. Sanderling can be seen along the shoreline at almost any time of year. Peak counts include 65 on the 25th of April and 80 on the 21st of May, in spring, then 162 on the 29th of July, 307 on the 30th of August and 137 on the 10th of September, in autumn.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

(Scarce and irregular migrant)

The only official record is of one on the 5th of August, outside the Lifeboat House, but a few more were seen in autumn by reliable observers and not officially reported. However, it was a poor year for this species.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

(Scarce and irregular autumn migrant)

The first was seen on the 25th on July. One was seen on the 1st of August and four on the 5th and 6th of August. Singles on the 4th and 19th of September were the last of the year.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

There were sightings of singles on the 7th and the 19th of October.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

(Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant)

There were 155 on two dates during the first winter period, in January. Numbers in May were relatively low with 75+ on the 11th. Numbers really picked up at the end of July, as one would expect, and 570 were counted on the 25th. Some 420 were present on the 5th of August and 500 the next day. Many had passed through by September when 70, on the 23rd, was the highest count. There were 120 on the 7th of October, and 110+ on the 22nd of December was the last count of the year.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

(Scarce passage migrant)

One seen outside Lifeboat House on the 1st of August, another on the 17th.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

(Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant)

Birds are seen in both seasons. They are mostly detected by their distinctive ripping call as they fly overhead, sometimes in groups, traditionally called 'whisps'. Only small amounts, singles and twos, were seen in spring (in early and mid April).

Autumn birds were then seen from the 12th of August onwards, with totals of 12 on the 24th of August, also 18 on the 6th of September, 11 on the 8th and 17 on the 27th. The best count of the year was 30 on the 2nd of October. Five birds were seen on the 22nd of December at a time when many Snipe were moving to the coast to escape the worst effects of the frozen ground further inland. On the 18th of December, just after heavy snow and freezing temperatures, I counted 140+ in 20 minutes on the eye field at Cley, and birds could be seen flying north towards the coast seemingly everywhere one went.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

(Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant, almost exclusively in autumn)

Five on the 30th of October heralded the start of the autumn migration of Woodcock. Not many were seen on the Point this year, but not many years go by without at least one tired bird turning up in the land rover tracks as I or one of the other wardens drive up the Point in autumn to do jobs around the Lifeboat House and Far Point. This year an obviously tired bird was flushed from the wheel ruts on the 4th of November. It only flew a few yards where it was then continuously dive bombed by a Merlin ('out of the frying pan and into the fire' springs to mind). In defence, it threw its tail up into the face of the diving Merlin and displayed the shining white tips of its tail feathers. I had read about this behaviour, but this was the first time I had seen it with my own eyes. It obviously works because, after three attempts, the Merlin flew off and the Woodcock shuffled under a small Suaeda bush.

Conversely the 2009/10 winter actually turned out to be very good for Woodcock. Many would have arrived during the cold snaps around Christmas and new year. The BTO were receiving reports of high numbers and large aggregations via their Birdtrack online facility, and we were having higher than normal counts at dusk as birds flew from their daytime roosts to feed on the marshes after dark. This prompted Richard Porter to organise synchronised dusk counts from vantage points between Cley and Blakeney in 2010.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

(Common passage migrant)

Spring passage, mainly in April with 55 on the 20th. Autumn passage began at the end of June, and 35 were seen on the 4th of July.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Numbers peaked with 280 on the 16th of March (probably because the main roosting flock in the harbour, which is normally situated on the opposite side of the harbour to Far Point, was counted). Highest counts were then 27 on the 7th of August and 28 on the 1st of October. Up to four were seen feeding around Far Point in November and December.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

(Common passage migrant)

Although always scarcer than Curlew, Whimbrel are a common migrant on Blakeney Point. There were 18 on the 30th of April, 26 on the 13th of May, c.40 on the 10th of June and 30 on the 1st of August. The last of the year was seen on the 1st of October.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Present for most of the year, with most records during the migratory periods. Numbers can be high during the summer when birds, already returning from breeding grounds in June and July, gather in roosts around Yankee Ridge. The highest counts were 110 on the 13th of June and 300 on the 25th of July.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

First of year was on the 2nd of May, then just singles throughout the rest of the spring passage period. Autumn passage really began in mid July when groups started to be seen, with two on the 17th and four on the 25th. There were two on the 7th and 10th of August and one on the 15th of October rounded off the year.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

(Scarce passage migrant)

A single on the 1st of August, a pair on the 3rd, four on the 5th, then singles on the 6th, 19th and 26th. One on the 7th of September was the last of the year.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

(Uncommon passage migrant and scarce winter visitor)

Two on the 20th and one on the 29th of April; one on the 7th of May and two on the 10th; three on the 29th June; three on the 4th of July and two on the 3rd, 15th and 20th; 30 in August; 39 in September. There were no winter records.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

(Scarce passage migrant)

The first returning bird was spotted on the 27th of July and there were two further records in August, on the 7th and 24th.

Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

(Scarce breeder, very common winter visitor and passage migrant)

This was a good year for breeding Redshanks on the Point. There were 14 pairs on territory. The highest density was probably on Yankee Ridge, but there were also outlying pairs and plenty of birds along the shingle ridge. Some large groups were also present around the Watch House and blue boat, all giving alarm calls. Two nests and an unfinished scrape were found. A nest in the dunes on Far Point contained four eggs and was thought to have hatched, the outcome of a nest near the blue boat is unknown and an unfinished nest was found on Yankee Ridge. Young were seen on the end of Near Point on the 16th of June. Young were also seen on the chapel ground where two pairs are thought to have nested.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant, regularly over summers in small numbers)

Counts of 200 on the 25th of July and 604 on the 1st of August represent movements of returning birds. The maximum for the second winter period, and also the last count of the year, was 35+ on the 22nd of December.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

(Uncommon, erratic autumn migrant, sometimes into winter, rare in spring)

Birds were seen from the 24th of August onwards, mostly in northerly winds. On the 13th of September there were five, and also on the 1st of October. Other October records were; one on the 2nd; three on the 4th; two on the 16th.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

(Common passage migrant, mostly during onshore winds)

Most records from late summer and autumn, the exception being a light morph adult on the 14th of May. The next record was one on the 21st of June. Singles through July, then 13, in the first good blow of the year, on the 24th of August, and 12 on the 29th, in less favourable conditions. Good numbers can pass by in September and October when the right conditions prevail. Some big counts include 45 on the 4th of September and 23 on the 1st of October. The last of the year was seen on the 9th of November.

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

(Scarce autumn migrant, can be more abundant in some years)

There appears to be only a small window available in the autumn with which to identify one of these graceful skuas. The first was seen on the 9th of September and the last on the 16th of October (juvenile). Other sightings include an adult with long tail on the 16th of September, a juvenile on the 15th of September and two possible sightings on the 13th of September.

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

(Common autumn migrant, mostly during onshore winds, small numbers at other times)

One on the 17th of April was exceptional and it was not until the 3rd of September, when seven were seen, that autumn passage got under way. September then produced 38 on the 13th and 25 on the 16th. In October there were 39 on the 1st and 25 on the 16th. There was one on the 29th of November, and the last of the year was seen on the 22nd of December.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*

(Scarce autumn migrant from the high Arctic)

Singles on the 4th and 13th (juvenile) of September. Also singles on the 1st, 7th (adult) and 16th of October.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

(Common passage migrant, mostly during onshore winds)

One on the 15th May. In June; one on the 3rd, six on the 4th, four on the 7th and three on the 20th. One on the 28th of July, and one on the 18th of August. Numbers pick up during the autumn migration period, in September and October. Peak autumn counts include 850 on the 13th and 145 on the 16th of September, also 56 on the 1st of October. A few birds can sometimes linger industriously around the colony in spring, possibly attracted by all the activity and can even be seen playing around with nesting material and displaying to each other.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

(Abundant breeder, winter visitor and passage migrant)

The colony on Far Point was well in place by April when Richard Berridge, Paul Nichols and myself moved out to the Point to begin our summer wardening posts. This was a good thing because the first Sandwich Terns of the year were also seen on the 31st of March and, as we now know, the presence of a gull colony can be one of the deciding factors when a colony of Sandwich Terns is attempting to settle. The colony was abandoned for 12 hours during the day, on the 6th of April. Then, just as the Sandwich Terns had settled in the colony, a Red Fox started coming up in the night and disturbing all the birds. Also, on the 21st of May, a Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* sat in the colony all day and disturbed the birds. By this point most of the gulls would have been on eggs and undoubtedly some of these eggs were taken by predators such as crows, foxes and other ground predators. This meant that a number of gulls were pushed out of the colony and had to find alternative nesting sites. Three smaller nesting grounds thus emerged, one on the beach on Far Point with the Little and Common Terns, one on a little arm of Middle Point where Arctic Terns also nested and one on the saltmarsh between the blue boat and Watch House.

In all c.1900 pairs of Black-headed Gulls attempted to breed, with 1500 in the main colony and c.100 pairs in each of the other three sites mentioned above. Breeding success was mixed and probably an average of one chick per pair is a fair estimate.

Movements can be noticed, especially in autumn, but normally stay confined to personal notebooks. However, on the 18th of October a large movement of gulls was noted and c.2000 were counted going west.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

(Uncommon non breeding summer visitor and passage migrant)

It was not a great year for this species with few records. One on the 13th of May, one on the 8th of June and one on the 26th of July. Autumn migration began, on the Point, in August when two were seen on the 6th. Although records increased slightly in September the highest count was just of three on the 13th. There was a movement on the 16th of October when 121, moving mostly east, passed the Point in gale force winds from the north.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

(Scarce breeder and passage migrant)

There are still only a handful of pairs some 16 years after they first started breeding on the Point in 1992. The first of the year was seen on the 11th of February. They are rare in winter and this may reflect an early return to breeding grounds. They started to arrive in numbers in March when three were seen on the 11th. From April to late August they become more or less a common sight and peak counts include 11 on the 22nd of May and 13 on the 18th of June. Five pairs are thought to have bred and seven young were raised.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

(Occasional breeder, common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Sometimes they will hang around for the summer, with a few pairs attempting to breed. Otherwise, they are a winter visitor and migrant. A movement was noted on the 18th of October, when c.500 flew west.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

(Formerly abundant, now a scarce breeder and common passage migrant)

Can be seen at high tide, roosting on the beach with Great Black-backed *Larus marinus* and Herring Gulls *L. argentatus*, but in lesser numbers than the aforementioned. They can also be seen in and around the main Tern colony during the breeding season, as were a pair this year. Covered more thoroughly through monthly WeBS counts.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

(Scarce breeder, abundant winter visitor and passage migrant)

Again, covered more thoroughly through monthly WeBS counts. A few pairs attempt to breed on the edge of the main Tern colony most years, but no eggs were laid in 2009. Can be seen in large numbers anywhere on the reserve especially in the evenings when many hundreds of gulls fly west to roost.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

(Scarce winter visitor)

A juvenile was seen on the 9th, 11th and 13th of February.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

(Abundant non breeding resident and passage migrant)

Hundreds are sometimes seen roosting on the beach at Far Point, at high tide, and flying west in the evenings to roost.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvisensis*

(Abundant migrant breeder and passage migrant)

The first birds were seen on the 31st of March when 50+ birds made their presence felt by continuously uttering their shrill cry on Far Point. In the usual fashion birds hung around the colony until they felt empowered enough to enter. This they had done by mid April, but their attempts to settle were then blighted by a Red Fox, which decided to trot up the Point each night. The colony was abandoned for lengthy periods on several occasions during this time but despite this they remained in the area and, once the fox and Crows had left them alone, they settled again and got down to the nitty gritty of egg laying. A nest count was performed on the 2nd of June and 3100 nests were found. By the start of June eggs were hatching and by 11th July the first to lay had already moved their young out of the colony and on to Near Point (some may have moved on to the West Sands and therefore would not be included in our final chick count). The colony was empty by the 24th of July. A minimum of 1300 fledged young were counted, although there were probably more.

Although most will have left the breeding grounds and be heading south to winter in West Africa by October, Sandwich Terns can still be seen well into the winter period and the latest report was of one on the last day of November heading west along the Point.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

(Uncommon migrant breeder and passage migrant)

This year turned out to be pretty good for Little Terns on Blakeney Point. The number of pairs that used the site was down on last year, but the number of young raised was similar to the 2008 total. Although a few nests were depredated, no persistent predator

problems hampered breeding activity. The weather in 2009 was much more settled than the previous two years, and prey seemed moderately available.

The first sighting was of a single bird on the 21st of April. Numbers built up very slowly throughout May and two colonies were established (one on the beach on Far Point and one between the Watch House and the Hood). The first eggs were found on the 26th of May when the fencing was put up around the Hood colony (the Far Point colony having already been fenced off in early April to protect the returning Sandwich Tern colony). An area of shingle east of the Watch House was once again fenced off but not used by Little Terns.

The Far Point colony was on a sand-and-shingle (mostly sand) beach and was well above the high tide line. The colony between the Watch House and the Hood was on the vegetated shingle ridge, with most nests being in and around Sea Sandwort *Honckenia peploides*. The Far Point colony was again the largest, peaking in July with 56 nests. Birds gradually began fledging from this colony in the second week of July and 30 fledged young was our final count. The Hood colony reached a peak of 30 incubating adults and produced 21 fledged young. Again, the Hood colony was more productive than Far Point, but reasons for this are unknown. Both colonies received some disturbances (mostly civilian planes on Far Point, and mostly walkers at the Hood) and a Peregrine was seen hunting over the Far Point colony in June but, as far as we know, only took an adult Common Tern.

Two pairs tried to nest on a high area of marsh at Stiffkey Meals but both nests failed at the egg stage.

The total for the reserve as a whole, including Stiffkey Meals, was c.88 pairs. These produced a minimum of 51 young. Birds drifted away from the breeding grounds in August and very few were seen towards the end of the season.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

(Uncommon passage migrant, occasionally seen in large numbers)

May produced numbers that reminded us of what it must have been like when they were a much more common bird, as a migrant and as a breeding species. On the 13th 55 moved through with Common and Arctic Terns in easterly winds, which had undoubtedly blown them over from the continent. There were also nine seen the next day. Two were seen on the 3rd of June and, also two on the 17th of July. Birds, mostly juveniles, were seen on several dates in August migrating along our shores. There was also a small movement of birds at the beginning of September with one on the 1st, one on the 3rd and three on the 4th.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

(Uncommon migrant breeder and passage migrant)

A season that never really got going for Common Terns. The shingle on the extreme end of Far Point has become unsuitable for nesting terns, limiting nesting space. Some pairs tried, unsuccessfully, to nest here, which only hampered breeding attempts. Last year some birds nested on the edge of the Sandwich Tern colony, but this did not happen this year. This only left the beach colony, where all 81 pairs nested amongst the Little Terns. A juvenile Peregrine (probably a male) was seen to kill and eat an adult Common Tern in the colony on the 22nd of June causing not only the loss of an adult Tern but 20 minutes of panic and unattended nests. Around 22 young were raised ensuring that the season was not a complete flop for those that stuck it out.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

(Scarce summer visitor, common in some years, previously a scarce breeder)

A disappointing year with only one sighting on the 18th of July. This bird was seen flying over the beach colony for half an hour and harassing the other terns present. It is always hoped that Roseate Terns may one day return to the Point as a breeding species.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

(Scarce breeder and passage migrant)

A disappointing year for this species also with only nine pairs attempting to nest and not a single egg hatching. Most eggs would have been depredated by ground predators, and gulls and some were washed out by spring tides.

Guillemot *Uria aalge*

(Winter visitor and passage migrant)

A few records in spring and summer, but most in September and October, and into second winter period. Only small numbers are identified to species because of the difficulty in identifying at sea, hence the number of auk species is much higher. These 'auk species' could refer to Guillemots or Razorbills. No big wrecks were detected this year, although a few dead birds were found on the beach and there was a sick bird on the landward side of the dunes on the 17th of November, which was picked up and found to be emaciated.

Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*

(Extremely Rare)

One was seen flying west past Cley Coast Guards on the 4th of December by James McCallum. It was flying along the breakers in company with three 'Common' Guillemots which allowed James direct comparison. James made field sketches of the birds and has sent a description to the BBRC. It will be a first for Norfolk if accepted.

Razorbill *Alca torda*

(Winter visitor and passage migrant)

Mirrors status of Guillemot quite well with most records in September and October.

Auk species, Guillemot/Razorbill

There was a large movement of auks on the 16th October when groups of birds were seen in a northerly blow, force 5/6. Over 300 were counted from the Point, but this is undoubtedly an underestimate of the true movement past the point that day. The next highest total was of 78 on the 1st of October in a north-northwest wind, force 4.

Little Auk *Alle alle*

(Erratic late autumn/winter migrant, can be common in some years)

Only a single movement past the Point, on the 1st of December, when three were seen.

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

(Scarce passage migrant)

Two seen on the 3rd of May. Then again in autumn with six on the 13th of September, and three on the 16th of October.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Racing or feral pigeons are often seen flying over the Point, sometimes in flocks and sometimes as a steady stream throughout the day.

Stock Dove *Columba oenus*

(Resident breeder, very rare migrant)

A pair attempted to nest in the Lifeboat House again but no chicks were seen.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

(Scarce breeder and uncommon migrant)

Regularly seen on the Point, sometimes in large numbers, but mostly at the Cley end of the reserve. On the 1st of June 34 was a peak count (more were seen, but not recorded). At least two or three pairs attempted to breed, a nest was found along the shingle ridge. A pair frequented the plantation and were often seen displaying over the poplars.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

(Locally common breeder, but scarce on the Point)

Other than three records in May, this remains a rare species on the Point. It is, however, a fairly common breeder in the nearby villages.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

(Very scarce passage migrant)

Only one record, of a bird flying out of the plantation early in the morning in May.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

(Scarce summer visitor)

A male arrived on the 9th of May and was seen almost daily throughout the rest of the month. Records became irregular in June and the last sighting was on the 3rd of July.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

(Local breeder, but rare on the Point, probably under-recorded)

Breeds locally all along the neighbouring coastline and is often seen (through a telescope) hunting the coastal fields around Stiffkey. An interesting record refers to a bird that came out to the Point in late September or early October and was seen roosting in the plantation and in the sheds at the back of the Lifeboat House on several occasions. Some pellets were collected for analysis by Chris Wheeler, and the results are given below:

“Ed - I have now had an opportunity to look at the pellets that you collected at Blakeney Point last year and the results are as follows:-

Barn Owl (Collected from shed 19/11/09)

- (1) Common Shrew - 2
Field Vole - 1
- (2) Common Shrew - 1
Field Vole - 3
- (3) Common Shrew - 1
Mouse (probably Wood Mouse) - 3
- (4) Common shrew - 1
Field Vole - 1

Owls tend to swallow prey whole therefore complete parts of skeletal remains can be found in the pellets.

I was unable to specifically identify the mouse remains. If I can find a reference to the differences in dentition between Wood Mouse and Yellow-necked Mouse I might be able to sort it.”



(R. F. Porter, 2009)

In the autumn of 2009 a Barn Owl started roosting and possibly hunting on the Point. It was seen roosting in the plantation and in a shed by the Lifeboat House. Seven pellets were collected by Richard Porter over the 17th and 18th of December from one of the sheds at the back of the Lifeboat House. Two of the windows are broken; the owl was gaining entry through these gaps and using the shed as a day time roost.



(R. F. Porter, January 2010)

The owl abandoned the site in January 2010. The pellets were dissected and analysed by Blakeney primary school and the National Trust as part of the guardianship scheme, started in 2008 to offer environmental education and to raise awareness of local issues. The seven pellets were dissected by four groups of children. Because of the fact that each group had one to two pellets (depending on size) and mixed up the contents, I have dealt with them in groups:

- Pellet 1 (dissected by Ella, Cameron, Sam, Khloe and Miss. Frier):
Field vole *Microtus agrestis* - 2

- Pellets 2 and 3 (dissected by Reg, Seb, Jez, Ryan and myself):
Field vole *Microtus agrestis* - 6
Bank vole *Myodes glareolus* ?- 1
Common shrew *Sorex araneus* - 2
Pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus* - 1

- Pellets 4 and 5 (dissected by Chloe, Anna and Birgitta):
Field vole *Microtus agrestis* - 3
Pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus* - 1

- Pellets 6 and 7 (dissected by Jasmine, Millie, Emma, Billie and Ajay):
Field vole *Microtus agrestis* - 4
Bank vole *Myodes glareolus* ? - 2
Common shrew *Sorex araneus* - 2
Pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus* - 1
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* ? – 1

- Totals: Field vole *Microtus agrestis* – 15
Bank vole *Myodes glareolus* ? – 3
Common shrew *Sorex araneus* – 4
Pygmy shrew *Sorex minutus* – 3
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* ? – 1

Species with a question mark after their name were thought to be of that species during our initial identification process but have a small possibility of error. What is clear is that field voles are the preferred prey with a few shrews also taken and even the odd small bird (we are pretty sure that the size of the upper mandible found in one of the pellets eliminates everything other than Wren or a crest, but think that Wren is most likely).

Richard Porter also collected ten pellets from the same shed on the 1st of January 2010. These were analysed by his friend Dorothy Casey:

“Hi
Spent all weekend analysing owl pellets
so here are the results

Pellet no.	Contents
1	1 FV
2	2 FV
3	2 FV
4	5 FV

6	4FV
7	4FV
8	2FV
9	1FV
10	1FV

FV = short tailed field vole.

You can see that the diet on Blakeney is exclusively field voles. Interestingly very different from farmland BOs- where field voles still preferred prey but diet is much more varied with good numbers of wood mouse and common shrew and occasional pygmy shrew, bank vole and harvest mouse.”

Short-eared owl *Asio flammeus*

(Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant)

At least two over wintered. These two birds were seen throughout the first winter period up until the 22nd of May. One of these birds was watched at 2030 on the evening of the 8th of April attacking an Oystercatcher, and waders seemed to be prominent in their diets judging by the remains of waders found near plucking and roosting sites and by analysis of the pellets. There was then a break until the 19th of July when a single bird started hunting the Point again. Some studies of the year’s breeding season by BTO field workers suggested that owls had a bad year and some decided not to breed at all. Therefore we may assume that birds left their wintering grounds in May only to find conditions less than ideal for breeding (probably a food shortage caused by the cyclical nature of the small mammal populations, which are their main prey items) and then moved around again in response to food abundance. So it is not clear whether this July bird was a British breeder that had briefly ventured north before deciding that conditions were not good for breeding and returned to hunt the Point instead, or perhaps birds had been around locally all summer, as there were reports of Short-eared Owls from Stiffkey and other North Norfolk locations in the period between the 22nd of May and 19th of July.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

(Rare passage migrant, breeds locally)

A female was seen flying west over the sea on the 14th of May.

Swift *Apus apus*

(Abundant summer migrant)

The first bird of the year was seen on the 27th of April. A few movements were detected in May when 550 were seen on the 7th, 310 on the 8th and 125 on the 18th. Mid summer movements include 812 on the 12th of June and 188 on the 18th. In August 110 on the 7th was the highest count. The last birds were seen on the 8th of September when six went west.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant

Although I have given the status as winter visitor they probably breed nearby. However, records on the point undoubtedly refer to migrants that move to the coast in winter, and birds usually start to arrive in late summer/early autumn. There were two birds seen during a WeBS count on the 24th of August. The next bird was seen on the 12th of September and there were several subsequent records including singles on the 17th and 19th of September and the 5th and 7th of October.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

(Very scarce, but almost annual passage migrant)

Seen in both seasons with one, on the chapel ground, on the 29th and 30th of May, and one by the sea hide in the main dunes on the 10th of October.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

(Uncommon and declining breeder, winter visitor and passage migrant)

Has been steadily declining as a breeding species since 2002. Although the number of territories was up by three on last year, few nests were found and not many young were seen. A total of 39 territories were mapped. Presumed migrants were seen flying west.

Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

(Scarce winter visitor)

Unfortunately there were no records from winter 2008/09. This is one of the very few places where Shore Lark winter in the UK, and to see them return again in autumn was a great relief. The first record was on the 22nd of October when four were seen. This built up to a monthly maximum of seven on the 9th of November. By Christmas the flock had built to 16 and were regularly seen feeding in Great Sandy Low.



Shore Lark feeding around Prickly Saltwort *Salsola kali*



Shore Lark in Great Sandy Low (R. F. Porter, January 2010)

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

(Local breeder and common passage migrant)

Two were seen on the 7th of April, these were the first of the year. Small numbers were then seen throughout May and June, invariably going west with 90 on the 9th and 60 on the 15th of May. Some larger, displacement, movements were seen in July with 137 on the 25th and 250 on the 27th.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

(Migrant breeder and common passage migrant)

The first birds were seen on the fresh marshes on the 30th of March and on the Point the next day when incredibly a female was seen flying into one of the sheds where birds regularly nest in summer. Breeders settled down in April, but only three pairs actually nested. A pair on the Lifeboat House were triple brooded.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

(Local breeder and common passage migrant)

The first birds were seen, again on the fresh marshes on the 30th of March, but not until the 4th of April on the Point. A large autumn movement was seen in September when at least 15000 moved west throughout the day in a front at least a mile wide.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

(Rare local breeder and uncommon passage migrant)

First bird seen on the 6th of April, with further singles on the 13th (singing in plantation) and 16th. There were also singles on the 14th and 25th of May. There were no autumn reports.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

(Common breeder and passage migrant)

Migrants can be seen flying west in spring on fine days with a light westerly wind. At least 35 were seen on the 31st of March, a day of good visible migration. Three were

seen coming in off the sea on the 6th April, 10 were seen flying west on the 8th and eight were seen arriving from the sea on the 10th. There were some big counts at the end of September and beginning of October when birds started gathering along the landward side of the dunes on Far Point, with 100+ on the 22nd of September, 110 on the 27th and 100 on the 10th of October.

A total of 109 pairs bred on the Point and many young were seen in at least two broods.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Wintering birds leave very early in spring and the last were seen on the 11th of March. The first of autumn were seen on the 18th of September. Monthly maximums were: six in January; two in February; six in September; 16 in October; nine in November. Many more than this are undoubtedly present on the Point during peak months, but lack of organised counting confines the counts to whatever is seen by a single person walking along the shingle or dunes (birds are probably present in much higher numbers on the saltmarsh).

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flavissima*

(Rare local breeder, common passage migrant)

Declining numbers and no proven breeding on the fresh marshes in recent years mirrors the national trend for this species. Only small numbers were seen and none of the other races were identified. The first birds were seen on the 4th of April and monthly maximums include: five on the 25th and 27th of April; 21 on the 7th of May; three on the 13th of July; five on the 9th of August.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

Birds usually seen in autumn. Only one seen, on the 1st of October.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

(Breeder and common passage migrant)

Birds of the British race are undoubtedly seen in spring and autumn migrating over the Point, but birds flying overhead are difficult to identify to the sub-species level. Three were seen flying west on the 7th of May. Several pairs stayed to breed, some in boats in the harbour and one pair on the Lifeboat House. A male Pied Wagtail paired with a female White Wagtail *M. a. alba* and successfully reared two broods from a nest in the roof of the Lifeboat House. A fair amount of young were seen.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

(Passage migrant in varying numbers)

Birds were mostly seen in May on the ground on the eye field at Cley. During one of the larger movements of continental birds, a female paired with a male Pied Wagtail on a territory around the Lifeboat House and bred successfully under the tin roof. This pair was double brooded and the female was still present with at least one young at the start of October.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

(Uncommon breeding bird)

Status has fluctuated in accordance with observer effort, but numbers of breeding pairs have been around the four to 10 mark for the last five or so years. In 2009, 11 pairs bred and many young were seen in several different locations.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

(Scarce breeding bird and occasional migrant)

Numbers in the last five or so years have ranged from 4-9 pairs. They breed in the Suaeda, as do the Wrens and Reed Buntings. In 2009, roughly nine pairs bred and a moderate amount of young were seen. It was a fairly good year for most passerine birds on the Point, and Dunnocks probably had an average year. There were no obvious migrant Dunnocks recorded in 2009.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Passage birds started to move through in April with daily totals of just a few birds and 3+ on the 10th. No more birds were seen until August. The first bird was noted on the 1st of August and may have been the same individual seen again on the 6th and 7th. Numbers of migrants increased in the middle of September and 10 were seen on the 17th. Small numbers were again present during October with a monthly maximum of four on the 10th. The last records were of singles on the 6th of November and 1st of December. By these low figures, one can see that no falls occurred.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

(Uncommon early and late passage migrant)

Spring birds occurred on the 1st, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th of April, and two on the 18th. One turned up under the toilet block (the favourite resort of Black Redstarts on the Point) in the middle of summer on the 13th of July, but this was untypical and the next bird was not seen until the 10th of September. Singles were seen on the 14th and 15th of October (possibly the same bird) and on the 9th of November.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

The first bird was seen on the 14th of April and monthly maximums include just two on the 15th of April, only singles in May and six on the 15th of September. Again these counts are very low and mirrors the low numbers of many other passage migrants in 2009.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

First bird seen on the 28th of April when two occurred. Three was the peak count on the 8th of May. A single on the 6th of June was the last of spring. In autumn more birds were seen and a small Whinchat fall even occurred on the 24th of August when six were seen. Ones and twos were then seen until the 18th of October.

Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*

(Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant)

Birds occasionally winter on the Point. There was a bird seen on the 20th of January. Movements of birds began in March with two on the 2nd and 3rd, three on the 5th and singles on the 6th, 11th and 12th. There was also a single bird on the 20th of April. Interestingly, a juvenile (probably locally bred) turned up on the 4th of July and stayed until the 11th. There were quite a few autumn records with several single occurrences and two on the 27th of September and 10th of October. There were also two on the 6th of November and three reports of singles in December.

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

(Common and obvious passage migrant)

The first birds were seen on the 16th of March and monthly totals include: three on the 31st of March; 18+ on the 9th of April; 13 on the 8th of May; singles on the 1st, 11th and 12th of June. Then one on the 31st of July; 15 on the 29th of August including one in off the sea; 24 on the 14th of September. The last bird was seen on the 6th of October, a rather early date.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

There were three migrants on the 24th of April.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

(Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant)

Two on the 6th of January; singles in February; three were spotted on the 31st of March; 4+ on the 4th April. These were rather low spring numbers, but there were 53 on the 22nd of October and 20 on the 6th of November. Again, no significantly big falls.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Influxes were even seen in January, when eight were seen on the 15th. At least 52 were seen on the 12th of April. The next incidence was of two on the 19th of October and there were two more single occurrences that month. There were extremely low numbers of birds in the autumn and, although there were birds seen arriving early in 2010, there was only one more record, of two, on the 6th of November.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

(Common passage migrant)

The first spring bird was seen on the 3rd of April and the month's maximum was 5+ on the 13th. Then going on to autumn, there were 42 on the 15th and 10 on the 19th of September, then 71 on the 10th of October and 77 on the 22nd. There was just one on the 9th of November and the last of the year was on the 2nd of December.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

One on the 3rd and one on the 31st of March were the first of the new year, and 20 on the 12th of April was the maximum spring count. In autumn, four were seen on the 5th of October, 33 on the 30th and three on the 2nd of December.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

(Scarce passage migrant)

After a period of northerlies and north easterlies, two were seen on the 15th of September.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

(Scarce passage migrant)

One on the 12th of April and one on the 13th of May were only birds recorded on the Point.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

(Scarce passage migrant)

Migrants were, again, rather scarce. The same bird was seen on the 14th and 15th of May and one was seen on the 1st of June. In autumn one was seen on the 24th of August.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

(Very rare drift migrant)

A bird was found at the Watch House on the 17th of September and stayed in the suaeda for a minimum of three days. It was identified and seen clearly by a handful of birdwatchers, but was extremely elusive and difficult to see well after that. This constituted just the second record for the Point.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

(Scarce passage migrant)

A bird appeared in the elder *Sambucus nigra* at the start of Yankee Ridge on the 10th of September. It was accompanied by some other, closer breeding, drift migrants, such as Black Redstart and Whinchat, and followed later by birds from further east, like Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* and Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*.



Icterine Warbler (R. F. Porter, September 2009)

Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*

(Very rare vagrant)

A bird was found in low suaeda bushes on the landing stage on the 11th of September and photographed. This is only the second record for the Point.



Booted Warbler (R. F. Porter, September 2009)

Blackcap *Sylvia articapilla*

(Uncommon migrant, can be quite early and late in occurrence)

Early spring birds included three on the 4th of April and two on the 26th and 27th of April. There were a few more in April and one on the 14th of May. In autumn, there were two on the 7th of September and one on the 17th, again two on the 12th of October and singles on the 22nd and 23rd of that month.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

Spring birds were seen on the 14th and 15th of May and the 10th and 11th of June. The first autumn birds were seen on the 24th and 25th of August and one was seen on the 14th of September.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

Spring migrants were seen on the 25th, 26th and 29th of April. There were three, two and three on the 13th, 14th and 15th respectively, and there was one on the 9th of June. In autumn, the first bird was seen on the 9th of August. The next bird was seen on the 12th of October and there was one on the 18th. There was an interesting bird in the National Trust enclosure ('The Lupins') from the 13th to 18th of October, which was thought to be of one of the eastern races, probably *S. c. halimondendri*.



Lesser Whitethroat, thought to be the sub-species *halimondendri* (R. F. Porter, 18th of October 2009)

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

(Common passage migrant)

The first bird was seen on the 20th of April and seven was the year's maximum count, seen on the 15th of May. The first autumn bird was seen on the 11th of August and the last on the 16th of September.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

(Scarce vagrant from Siberia)

The only record was of two seen on the 18th and 19th of September.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

(Common passage migrant, can be quite early and late in occurrence)

There were no records in March, but birds started arriving in April, with 12+ on the 10th. In May there was a maximum of three on a few dates during the middle of the month. Autumn passage began on the 19th of September and peaked with two on the 27th. There were two on the 12th of October and the last bird was seen on the 22nd of October.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

(Common passage migrant)

The first birds of the spring were seen on the 4th of April when five arrived. Six were present on the 10th, including a bird that was probably of the northern or eastern races lumped in the sub species *P. t. acredula*, and eight were recorded the next day. A maximum of 13 were seen on the 8th of May and the last two of spring were seen on the 8th of June. Autumn birds were seen from 4th August and peaked at nine on the 10th of September.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

(Common passage migrant, usually early and late in the year)

Two early returning migrants were seen on the 18th of March and there was a single bird present on the 4th of April. The first bird of autumn was seen on the 16th of September. There was a maximum of four on the 16th of October, and the last bird was seen on the 26th of October.

Firecrest *Phylloscopus ignicapilla*

(Scarce passage migrant, usually early and late)

Unfortunately there was only one record of this charming little bird in 2009, on the 31st of March. Although the British population is said to be increasing, it remains a rare – but always very welcome – migrant on the Point.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

(Uncommon passage migrant, probably declining in line with national trend)

Spring migrants are typically seen in May. The first bird was seen on the 14th. There were two on the 25th and singles on five more dates during May. Autumn migrants started moving through in September, with singles on four dates.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

(Very scarce migrant)

Two on the 11th of September. The delightful bird in the picture was found at the Hood, on the 11th of September, by a Norfolk based ecologist, and a further bird, with duller plumage, was found in the National Trust garden ('The Lupins'), by the wardens.



Red-breasted Flycatcher (R. F. Porter, September 2009)

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

(Uncommon passage migrant, mostly in autumn)

Seeing these energetic little birds on an overcast day in spring or autumn is a real treat, and they are one of my favourite migrant passerines. There was only one migrant seen during spring, on the 1st of June. Autumn birds started arriving from 6th August; there were two on the 19th, three the next day, four on the 23rd and two on the 24th. There was one on the 8th of September and one, three days later, on the same day as the two Red-breasted Flycatchers mentioned above.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

(Uncommon passage migrant, especially in spring)

Singles on the 3rd and 24th of April, two on the 3rd of June and three on the 16th were the spring records.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

(Uncommon passage migrant, mostly in spring)

Singles on the 4th and 24th of April.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

(Local breeder and uncommon passage migrant)

Birds can be seen passing through or using the site in small numbers during almost any month, but there were decided movements on the 10th of April, when 25+ moved through, and on the 9th of May when 26 flew west accompanied by a Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

(Very, increasingly, scarce passage migrant)

Once a common migrant (sometimes seen in hundred-strong flocks), now a rare migrant with only 14 or so records since the 1970's. A full Hooded Crow (by this I mean that it was not a Carrion \times Hooded Crow hybrid) passed through on the 9th of May at a time when there were several seen passing other east coast locations.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

(Local breeder, very common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Mostly seen in late summer, when groups of juveniles gather on the Point, and in autumn and into winter, when birds can be seen arriving in from the sea in flocks. On other days, birds can be observed flying west in large numbers. The spring maximum was 63 on the 3rd of April. The first fledged birds moved on to the Point in June when, incredibly, on the 14th 500+ were seen. Slightly lower numbers through July with 160 on the 20th and 400 on the 23rd. Very few in August with five on the 7th, one on the 8th and no reports in September. Winter migrants started arriving on the 18th of October with 250, there were 206 on the 23rd and an impressive 4400 moved west on the 28th. The last big counts of the year were 390 on the 6th and 300 on the 15th. Further migrants were seen, with three coming in over the waves of the North Sea, on the 2nd of December.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

It is worth noting that, with most of the species mentioned below, migration is much stronger, and birds are seen in higher numbers, over Friary Hills just inland of

Blakeney Point (especially in autumn). This is because birds tend to follow the ridge, and more importantly the woodland belt, on the mainland and are only seen on the Point if that is their first point of contact with the mainland from an over-sea journey, or the last contact with the mainland before heading out to sea. Birds are mostly seen travelling west, in both seasons.

Chaffinches started their northerly migration in April with singles on several dates and two on the 4th. In September they were seen alive on two dates (the 14th and 30th) and one was found dead in the dunes on the 23rd. Peak southerly, or autumn, migration was seen in October when one was seen on 1st; three were seen on the 10th; there were two on the 14th and singles on the 22nd and 23rd. October's totals would probably be higher if the Point was still manned on a daily basis at that time.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

As with the above species, northerly migration of this beautiful finch began in April. Three were seen on the 4th and there were singles on the 10th, 12th, 13th and 14th. Unlike the above species, autumn migration did not start until mid October when one was seen on the 12th. There were also one on the 13th, two on the 14th, two on the 21st and one on the 23rd.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

(Scarce passage migrant)

Not as common as above two species. One was found dead on Far Point in early May. So, unfortunately, the only record of this species in 2009 was of a dead one.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

Regularly seen in spring and in small numbers in autumn. They can be seen on migration later in spring than most finches. In April lone birds were seen passing through on several dates; four were seen on the 8th, 2+ on the 9th and two were seen on the 30th. In May three were seen on the 1st and two on the 15th. The only day of migration in autumn was the 7th of October, when five were seen.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

(Uncommon passage migrant)

There were two on the 11th and 12th of April (probably four different birds) and one on 15th. Then one was seen on the 10th of September.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

(Uncommon breeder and migrant)

Birds are present all year round. Flocks form in winter, but birds start to pair up in April, and the first nests can be found during May (even though they nest colonially and will flock up in summer) when Emperor Moths *Saturnia pavonia* are still flying. Monthly totals and movements include: January: 21; February: 23; March: 17+; April: 30+ (including three west on the 23rd); May: 12 (west); June-August: no records but breeding birds present; September: 74; October: 30; November 11; December: 70.

Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret*

(Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant)

Surprisingly, none were identified in 2009, but birds of this race were undoubtedly involved in the report below, especially in spring.

Redpoll species

This refers to any Redpoll calling overhead, which could not be identified to species level by sight or sound. Often birds are heard and not seen at all, and without intimate knowledge of the calls of the different species and subspecies, I find it is best to lump them all under this general heading. Birds on the Point are mostly fly-overs and identification to species level is extremely difficult thus, for the time being, most birds seen flying over the Point are recorded as 'Redpoll species'.

There was one on the 6th of April, one on the 12th and two on the 13th. There was also one on the 9th of May. One on the 23rd of October and one on the 6th of November were the only records in autumn.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

(Scarce and irruptive visitor)

Irruptive migrant, can arrive during winter, summer or around the normal passage times. One on the 28th of October was the only record for 2009.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*

(Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant)

October was the month for Lapland Buntings, with singles on four dates, three on the 14th and two on the 22nd.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

(Common winter visitor and passage migrant)

Early 2009 records include 60 on the 9th of January; 28 on the 10th of February; one on the 2nd. The last of spring was seen on the 29th of March. Apart from the unseasonal male seen at Cley in the middle of the summer, birds started arriving again in September with the first sighting being of three on the 17th. Monthly totals, from then to the year's end, include: four on the 18th of September; 49 on the 30th of October; 110 on the 17th of November and 140 on the 22nd of December.

Lapland/Snow Bunting

One on the 16th and one on the 19th of October.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

(Local breeder, but scarce migrant on the Point)

On the morning of the 5th of April, a male Yellowhammer was singing in the National Trust enclosure ('The Lupins'), but only stayed for a brief, singing, visit.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

(A once frequent visitor to the Point, but now an increasingly rare drift migrant)

One was found feeding on what we presumed to be marram *ammophila* and other seed, around bare sand and shingle on Far Point at 17.45 on the evening of the 8th of September. It was thought to be a first winter male because of its yellow throat and sub-moustachial stripe. This is the first for a few years, and there have only been a handful this millennium.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

(Uncommon breeder and occasional migrant)

Monthly totals include: January: 2; February: 2; March: 4; April: 7; May: 22; June: no records; July: 1; August: 12; September: 11; October: 20; November: 2; December: 10.

RINGING

Mark Grantham of the BTO visited the Point on the 19th of July to ring some Common Tern chicks as a part of their centenary of ringing activities. Two Common Tern chicks (one a few days old and a nearly flying chick) were fitted with metal BTO rings and the press, in the form of Bird Watching magazine and the Telegraph, were present to document and report upon the event. This was done within the beach colony under supervision from the wardens.

RINGING RECOVERIES AND SIGHTINGS OF RINGED BIRDS

There were two recoveries of rings from dead birds in 2009, and two sightings of live birds where the ring number could be read. A run down of the returned BTO forms are below. A dead Oystercatcher was found by James McCallum at the back of the laboratory on April 9th. Another Oystercatcher was found by Richard Porter in November 2009, which was an incredible 32 years old. Richard was also able to read the rings on a Ringed Plover in late April and I quote him:

“NV81356 (y-y/lb) is back on territory on Blakeney Point. Paired with a female today (27 Feb 2009) on the shingle beach at The Hood: TG018462. It's now 10 years old I believe”.

I found an almost dead Black-headed Gull on Far Point with a metal BTO ring that read EP27879 on 8th May. A few Sandwich Terns were seen wearing rings, but they could not be read.

Species	Common name	Ring number	Date ringed	Age ringed	Place ringed	Date of recovery	Place of recovery	Age at recovery
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher		20/08/82	2 nd year	Wrangle, Boston, Lincolnshire	09/04/09	Found dead on Blakeney Point, TG9946	c.29 years (9729 days)
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull		28/11/87	1 st year	Near Hempsted, Gloucester	08/05/09	Found moribund on Far Point, TF9946	c.21 years (7832 days)
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher		14/08/77	Juvenile	Terrington, The Wash	21/11/09	Found dead on Blakeney Point,	32 years (11787 days)

Oystercatcher Ring FV43665

Ringed as a juvenile at Terrington, The Wash on 14th August 1977.

Found dead at Blakeney Point on 21st November 2009 (on shore of harbour, near Watch House).

Details: time since ringing 11787 days, 51 km (and 69 deg.) from site of ringing.

DISCUSSION

Again, a satisfactory season for our shore birds, predation was low and disturbance was minimal. Apart from initial worries about colony desertion, the Sandwich Terns were resilient and stayed put, eventually breeding well. We also suspect that our chick count was rather low as we only counted 1300+, which from over 3000 pairs is rather disappointing, plus we didn't find an abnormal amount of dead chicks in the colony post breeding. The Suaeda growth in the colony on Far Point also continues to be a problem. Mediterranean Gulls and Little Terns bred well with seven and 52+ chicks fledged respectively.

As mentioned in last year's warden's report, we aimed to experiment with tern shelters in 2009. We put five shelters into the largest Little Tern colony in June to see whether they would be used by this most vulnerable species. Unfortunately, no chicks were ever seen under a shelter and, whichever direction we pointed the tunnels in, they always filled up with sand. This leaves us a little unclear as to how to take this practice forwards. Before spring 2010, I will contact other Little Tern wardens and ask their opinions on tern shelters, such as design and how best to use them.

Ringed Plovers had a much more successful breeding season and produced an amount of young, which may well halt the decline. Cages were used again with no associated problems. As we had had problems in the past with Common Gulls reaching the eggs inside the cages, we were pleasantly surprised to find that this was not repeated in 2009. We will continue to prioritise conservation measures for our Ringed Plover population.

Other points to mention include wind farms and the Point's new dog policy. There is not a great deal to say about the wind farms, which is probably a good thing, but many new sites are proposed and work has started on the Sheringham Shoal farm with associated infrastructure at Wells. This site is due to be fully operational by the end of 2011. The new dog policy was received very well, as previously mentioned, and the wardens had little trouble convincing people that it was in order to halt declines in our much loved shore birds.

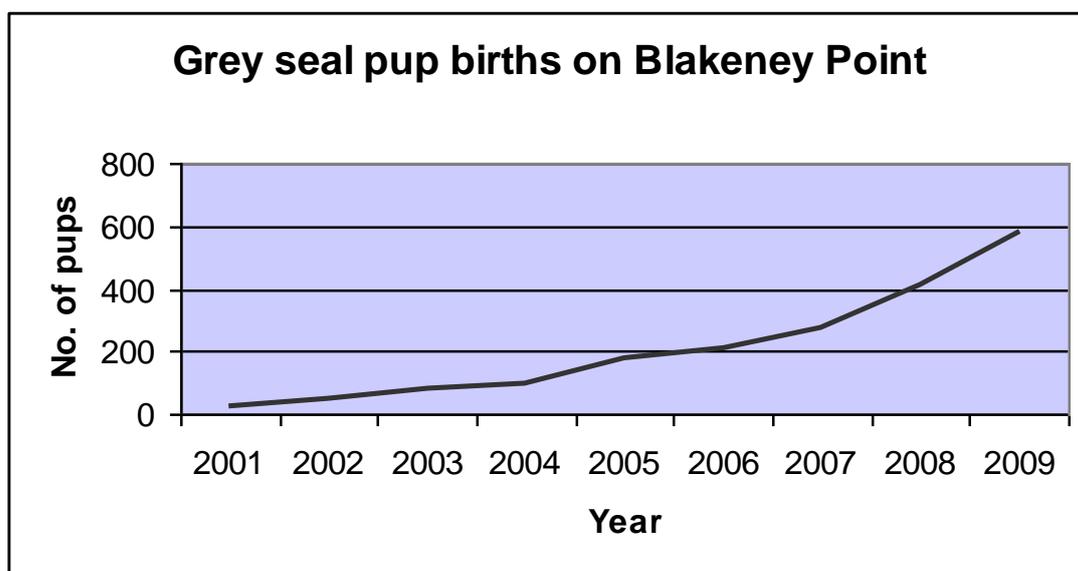
MARINE MAMMALS

SEALS

Breeding

The 2009 Grey Seal breeding season was again incredible and shows an increase in pups born of 166 from 2008.

Date	No.	Comment
26/10/09	1	First of year
28/10/09	1	
04/11/09	4	
06/11/09	8	
17/11/09	102	Also 5 dead
19/11/09	162	Also 5 dead
23/11/09	278	Also 9+ dead
26/11/09	320	Also 8+ dead
01/12/09	410	
10/12/09	531	Also 24 dead
22/12/09	579	Total for 2009



Monitoring

Adult counts were undertaken in all months bar February, September and December. Counts for both species are listed below with any comments.

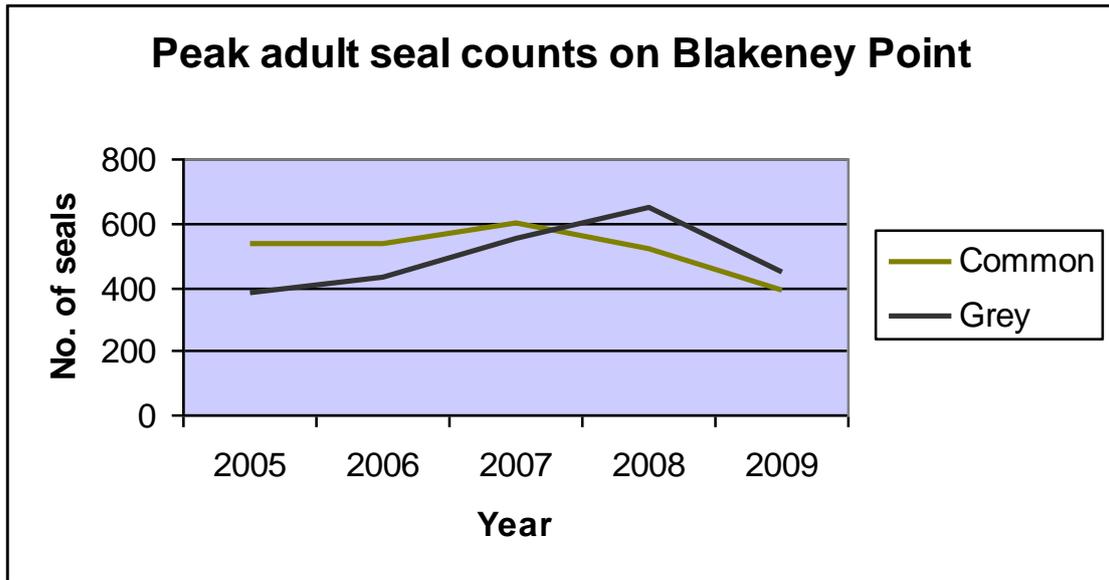
Common Seal *Phoca vitulina*

Date	No.	Comment
09/01/09	1	
11/03/09	7	
12/04/09	11	

10/05/09	52	
22/05/09	120	
28/05/09	121	
05/06/09	134	
20/06/09	202	
06/07/09	348	Including 4 pups
20/07/09	389	
24/07/09	381	
31/08/09	175	
16/10/09	20	
22/10/09	6	
26/10/09	0	
02/11/09	1	
26/11/09	3	

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

Date	No.
09/01/09	200
11/03/09	44
12/04/09	51
10/05/09	99
22/05/09	90
28/05/09	54
05/06/09	111
20/06/09	254
06/07/09	182
20/07/09	243
24/07/09	247
31/08/09	88
22/10/09	60
26/10/09	70
02/11/09	92
04/11/09	108
17/11/09	446



CETACEANS

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

The commonest cetatean seen from the point, seen on the following dates:

Date	No.	Comment
12/03/09	1	Very close to shore
18/03/09	2	
05/09/09	2	
12/09/09	1	
30/09/09	1	
04/10/09	1	
12/10/09	1	
15/10/09	5	Including a possible male basking on surface

Dead animals were found on:

10/12/09	1
31/12/09	1

Sowerby's Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon bidens*

On the 13th of August 2009 an incredible event took place involving the re-floating of a stranded Sowerby's Beaked Whale. This was an unprecedented occurrence in the North Sea and since the event the RSPCA have advised that euthanasia is the most humane way of dealing with strandings of large cetaceans. Below is a full report of the circumstances of the event:

At 1250 on the afternoon of the 13th of August 2009, I received a phone call from Jimbo, of Temple's seal trip boats, saying that some sailors were trying to help a dolphin back into the water on the seaward side of the Point, and that I should get down there quickly.

I was in the middle of a guided walk in conjunction with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust at the time, but was excused in order to go and deal with the situation. I picked up the seal stretcher and jumped on the quad. Richard Berridge (assistant warden on Blakeney Point) and Richard Porter (Blakeney Point regular and photographer) followed on foot. We found six or seven people with a large grey cetacean, which they were keeping wet. They had already tried, without success, to move it back into the water. Apart from blood coming out of two small cuts near the tail fin, the animal appeared to be otherwise uninjured. We quickly decided to try again, this time with the aid of the stretcher.

It was at this point that Richard Berridge and I realised that it was a whale and not a dolphin. Although we did not know what species it was, we decided to get it to safety and try to identify it later from Richard Porter's photographs. We got it onto the seal stretcher, which was far too small (the stretcher is 1.4m in length, 1.8m including the handles, the whale was 3.5m). After about 20 metres, and some extreme effort by eight people, we managed to manhandle it back into the water.

At first it tried to swim back to shore, but we headed it back out to sea, and it eventually swam right out, and apparently crossed the bar out into the open sea*. Some people said that they had seen a second animal jumping just off shore as we were encouraging our animal to head out to sea. Unfortunately, the two Richards and I did not witness this. The whole process, from us arriving to the moment that the whale swam away, took roughly half an hour.

Later we identified it as a Sowerby's Beaked Whale, this being confirmed by Phil Coles. By using the photographs, our memory of the event and Richard Berridge pacing out the pit left by the animal in the sand, we decided that the animal was roughly 3.5m in length and may well have been a juvenile. It did, however, have a long beak and a well developed melon, which, if anything, would indicate a weaned juvenile. The weight was very hard to judge and I would not really like to guess.

Sowerby's Beaked Whales were first described in 1804, they are rarely seen, and little is known about their ecology. Its conservation status is classified as 'Data Deficient' by IUCN and they are mostly known from around 150 strandings (especially around Britain). Their diet is thought to consist mostly of offshore squid and molluscs, but cod have been found in their stomachs. This stranding constitutes the second record for Norfolk, the first being at Happisburgh in 1952.

Any live stranding of cetaceans should be reported to the BDMLR (British Divers Marine Life Rescue) on 01825 765546. They offer expert advice and will attend the scene as necessary.

* Blakeney is a natural harbour with a sand bar protecting and separating it from the North Sea. The whale was a few hundred metres from the end of the Point TF462991 and, although it was on the seaward side of the Point, was inside the bar.





(R. F. Porter, 13th of August 2009)

OTHER MAMMALS

Brown Hares *Lepus europaeus* were seen throughout the year, and young were seen in the summer. The Brown Hare population size is somewhat of a mystery on Blakeney Point, and may be the focus of future studies, but for the time being is uncounted, but thriving. Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* were seen on a few occasions with sightings on the 8th and 19th of September. Rats *Rattus norvegicus* were seen on a few occasions, but were not noted in high numbers. A Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* was present on the Point early in the year until 29th May. The rest of the summer was completely fox-free until the end of September when tracks were once again seen on Far Point, near the tern colony. As well as trapped animals, Stoats *Mustela erminea* were also seen on several occasions. Muntjacs *Muntiacus reevesi* were seen, alive, on the 13th of May and 18th of July, and a few dead animals were washed up on Far Point during the summer.

INVERTEBRATES

BUTTERFLIES

The second year of transect walking butterfly surveys went very well, and butterfly numbers were well up on 2008. A spreadsheet of casual records was filled out each month and sent of to Andy Brazil, the county butterfly recorder. This year was notable for its Painted Lady *Venessa cardui* invasion, which began in May and peaked on the 28th with 18500 passing during the day. Painted Ladies were therefore present throughout the summer. The first scout was seen on the 9th of May, and the last was seen on the 4th of November.

MOTHS

Moth traps were run on a regular basis between April and September (when the generator unfortunately broke down). Spreadsheets were filled out every month that moths were seen, and sent off to Jim Wheeler, the county moth recorder. See spreadsheet or full details.

OTHER INSECTS

In addition to Painted Ladies, there were invasions from two other invertebrate species in 2009: hoverflies and bishy barnabies (ladybirds). The ladybird invasion, which was well publicised locally and nationally, and probably involved billions of individuals. On a couple of dates in July, they were so numerous that one's body would become covered in them, and they began to bite in their desperation for food. There was no doubt that these insects were moving along the coast.

Common name	Scientific name	Number seen	Date seen
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	1	08/06/09
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	1	17/06/09
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	4	14/07/09
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	7	20/07/09
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	Millions	23/07/09
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	Millions	24/07/09
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella 7-punctata</i>	Millions	25/07/09
22-spot Ladybird	<i>Thea 22-punctata</i>	1	12/07/09
Eyed Ladybird	<i>Anatis ocellata</i>	1	13/07/09
Eyed Ladybird	<i>Anatis ocellata</i>	4	20/07/09
Two-spot Ladybird	<i>Adalia 2-punctata</i>	1	14/07/09
Two-spot Ladybird	<i>Adalia 2-punctata</i>	5	20/07/09
Two-spot Ladybird	<i>Adalia 2-punctata</i>	1	24/07/09
Two-spot Ladybird	<i>Adalia 2-punctata</i>	1	25/07/09
Hoverfly	<i>Sericomyia silentis</i>	Millions	23/07/09
Hoverfly	<i>Sericomyia silentis</i>	Millions	25/07/09
Marmalade Hoverfly	<i>Episyrphus balteatus</i>	Thousands	23/07/09
Marmalade Hoverfly	<i>Episyrphus balteatus</i>	Millions	24/07/09
Marmalade Hoverfly	<i>Episyrphus balteatus</i>	Millions	25/07/09

A special mention should also be made about the team of entomologists that visited the Point in September to survey for beetles *Coleoptera* and spiders *Araneae*. Two new species of beetle were recorded: *Phytosus nigriventris* and *Leiodes ciliaris*.

DISTURBANCE

As mentioned on several occasions throughout this report, a new dog policy was implemented on Blakeney Point in 2009. New signs were made and erected in areas where we thought the public would be most likely to see them, and to mark the areas where dog free zones began. The new policy proved to be successful, and

disturbances caused by dogs off leads were very minimal. Other disturbances included low-flying aircraft and jet skiers. As usual, records of disturbance were logged and sent off to Peter Rushmer for use in the EMS disturbance monitoring scheme. This was also the first year that we directly entered the data ourselves, via a website called 'Share with care'. This facility enables wardens from reserves all over the North Norfolk AONB to input the season's disturbance details with as little fuss as possible, and allows data to be viewed much quicker.

PREDATOR CONTROL

There was a fox on the reserve at the start of the season, but the animal mysteriously disappeared. No foxes were shot on the reserve in 2009. A normal routine of pest control was carried out. With not much in the way of aerial predation, effort was concentrated on ground predators: four stoats and two weasels were caught during the time that the wardens were actively trapping (April to October). As in other years, fen traps (Springer No. 4s) were used for this purpose.

SEASONAL WARDENS AND VOLUNTEERS

Paul Nichols came back for his third year in a row, and Jason Moss was replaced by a Farne Islands warden, Richard Berridge (Jason went to the Farnes and completed an eight-month contract). Both proved to be valuable assets to the trust, and worked well with the other trust staff to guarantee a successful summer season. Richard, in particular, spent a lot of time on the Point, including days off, and was always willing to help out during these times. They both made a big contribution to the monitoring of the birds, and other animals, by conducting surveys and entering data.

A special mention must be made of the volunteers who worked with us through the season, and indeed throughout the whole year. Spike Mallin, Ajay Tegala and Toby Skinner all volunteered during the summer, Spike and Ajay as long term volunteers and Toby on a two-week work experience placement from Fakenham College. Thanks also to Chris Everitt, Dave Wood and Graham Lubbock for their help and support from the mainland.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The spring beach clean went ahead again this year and, after three consecutive years, is now becoming such a huge success that it is likely to overtake itself and become futile. I say this because in 2009, with 35+ volunteers, we cleaned up the beach in half the time and some people actually went home disappointed by how little litter they had picked up. One woman in particular made it clear that she wanted more litter to

pick up next year. In all seriousness, the 2009 clean up was a huge success and I'm sure that there will be enough litter to have a go at in 2010.

The guardianship scheme between the National Trust and Blakeney VA Church of England Primary School was continued in 2009. Activities included an introduction to reed cutting, bird-watching on Friary Hills and learning about the life cycle of butterflies. A wonderful learning experience was had by all. Because it is so popular with the kids, and they get to learn and be in the great outdoors, we will continue and even expand this scheme in 2010.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who contributed towards the successful breeding season on Blakeney Point this year. This includes volunteers who helped with general wardening, monitoring and surveys; volunteers and staff members who helped with vermin control; and volunteers who helped with beach cleans and the boardwalk.

Special thanks also to Ajay and the seasonal wardens for informing the public about our new dog policy and enforcing the restrictions. Also for putting in man hours and, in Ajay and also Richard Porter's case, volunteer hours, to inform the public about 'Share with care', and handing out cards.

Thanks to everybody who provided photographs used in this report, especially Richard Porter, and Paul Bishop for the lovely Avocet chick used on the front cover. Thanks to all of the researchers and ecologists who came and worked on the Point and fed data back to me for use in this report. Thanks to Dave and Pat Wileman for compiling graphs from WeBS data and allowing their use in this report. I would also like to thank anyone who has provided sightings of breeding activity and migrants.

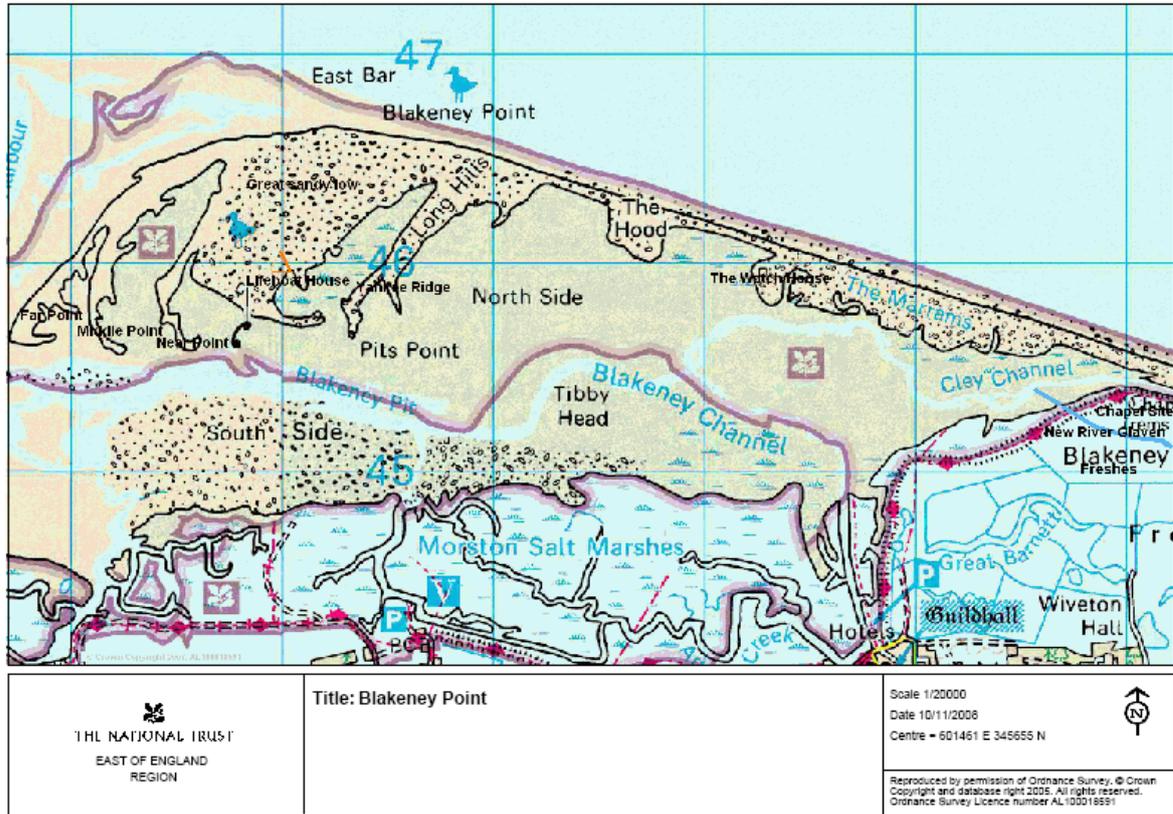
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MAP



(Ordnance Survey/ National Trust, November 2008)