



## Blakeney Point Bird Report, 2011



Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* in main colony (Richard Berridge)

**Edward Stubbings, National Trust Coastal Warden**

### Breeding birds

- Table

Species	Common name	No. of breeding pairs	No. of young fledged	Comments
<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Common Shelduck	32-44		Not fully surveyed but

				thought to be usual numbers
<i>Anas strepera</i>	Gadwall	2		No nests or young found
<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Shoveler	3		No nests or young found
<i>Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard			
<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	Red-legged Partridge			
<i>Perdix perdix</i>	Grey Partridge	3+		45+ birds seen in September
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Common Pheasant			
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher	110		Fledging success thought to be good
<i>Recurvirostra avocetta</i>	Avocet	7		All nests failed
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover	17		Fledging success thought to be moderate
<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Lapwing	?		
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common Redshank	14+		Several nests found but only a few young seen
<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	1807+		Fledging success thought to be good
<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Mediterranean Gull	c.10	c.27	6+ nests found during Sandwich Tern nest count
<i>Larus canus</i>	Common Gull			
<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	Little Tern	160	140	
<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Sandwich Tern	3562	1700-2000	Nest count conducted on the 29 <sup>th</sup> of May
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	92+	c.70	
<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Arctic Tern	7	5	
<i>Columba oenas</i>	Stock Dove	1		
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood pigeon	1+		2 nests failed
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Skylark	32		Some young seen
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	7		
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow pipit	102		2+ broods, many young seen
<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	Pied Wagtail	?		

<i>Troglodytes troglodydes</i>	Wren	15		Some broods seen
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock (Hedge Sparrow)	6+		
<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	Sedge Warbler	?		2 territories (singing males for over 1 week)
<i>Locustella naevia</i>	Grasshopper Warbler	?		1-2 territories (singing males for over 1 week)
<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	Linnet	20+		Not fully surveyed but thought to have been a fairly good breeding season
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed Bunting	16+		Some young seen and heard

- **Summary**

Blakeney Point has long been recognised for its rare habitats and wildlife and is protected under several national and international designations, it is an internationally important breeding area for a number of seabirds; home to 30% of the UK's Sandwich Terns and 8% of the UK's Little Terns. This summer, 3,562 pairs of Sandwich Tern bred on the reserve and fledged up to 2000 young, while 160 pairs of Little Tern produced around 140 young, making the points colonies for both these species the largest in the UK. This should make us proud to live in such a beautiful and relatively undisturbed area. To make the story even more encouraging, it could be said that 2011 was a 'bumper breeding season', not only for the two species mentioned above but for the majority of nesting birds on Blakeney Point. Common and Arctic Terns also produced good numbers of young. The reasons for the high breeding success of the terns was thought to be down to extremely large numbers of clupeids and sandeels in the area, limited disturbance from people and possibly the warm dry spring giving the birds a good start. Also, the beaches were ideal for breeding terns at the start of the season and the colonies did not suffer from the usual tidal inundations during the incubation period.

The breeding waders, including Oystercatcher, Redshank and Ringed Plover all held their own or did exceptionally well. Redshank were up from 10-13 pairs last year to 14+ pairs this year and an unprecedented number of nests were found in the fenced off dunes on far point. This is no time to be complacent however; as our seabirds still need all the help they can get in order to overcome the potential problems posed by increasing human activities and climate change. Ringed Plovers, although up by two pairs on 2010, are also a major cause for concern and have and will be receiving some concentrated and much needed conservation work.

Birds that haven't fared so well are the Lapwings, Avocets and Ringed Plovers that attempt to breed on the site of the old Blakeney chapel, north of the new Glaven. This may be due to the

habitat change and foxes finding the new source of food. This is often the case for birds that colonise, and do very well on, newly created habitat (either naturally or unnaturally) then find their breeding success dropping off as the habitat changes and predators move in.

Most passerines did well and there were even Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers holding territory for prolonged periods during the spring and summer, however, breeding was not proven for either species.

- **Systematic list**

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A 'lek' count in May revealed 64-88 birds in 3-4 different areas. Several crèches of goslings were seen

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

There were three breeding pairs calling in spring and there were some large coveys seen from late summer onwards. There were as many as 47 birds present on the reserve during the autumn.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Good numbers nested, although 8 pairs down on the previous year (110 and 118 respectively). Common gull predation was at a minimal level and many young fledged. A family that bred between the Lifeboat House and the landing ridge raised at least 3 young to fledging. A chick was thought to have been stunned by lightning during a thunderstorm on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June and died the next day.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta*

Seven pairs attempted to nest on the Chapel site but all nests failed before hatching.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

The number of breeding pairs was up by two pairs on 2010 but many nests failed at the egg stage and a disappointing number of young were seen. There was also at least one pair attempting to breed on Stiffkey Meals but breeding outcome is unknown.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

There may have been a pair or two on the chapel site but these were not confirmed. There is an interaction between this site and Blakeney and Cley fresh marshes involving birds that either move nest sites after being predated or bring recently fledged chicks that hatched elsewhere.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

There were 6 nests on far point at one point during the summer and some were found at The Long Hills and Yankee ridge. Several of these were known to hatch but, as Redshanks like to take their newly born young straight into inaccessible saltmarsh creeks, eventual breeding success is hard to judge.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

The colony was first occupied on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, a fairly typical date. Roughly 1800 nested and fledging success was good. There are often a few other much smaller colonies on higher

areas of marsh along the point but this year only 7 nests were situated away from the main colony.

#### Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

As with Black-headed Gull, counting nests amongst the suaeda bushes is more or less impossible and any estimate of breeding pairs is bound to be out by a couple of pairs either way. It was estimated that 10+ pairs bred in the main colony and 6+ nests were found during the Sandwich Tern nest count on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May. A maximum of 27 fledglings were counted at the end July, so breeding success was thought to be good.

#### Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

The first birds were seen on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, but numbers built very slowly. The first displaying birds were seen in the first week of May and the first eggs were laid around the 20<sup>th</sup> of May. The late start that was experienced this year seems to be characteristic of the species so we shouldn't have been too surprised when things did start to pick up and larger numbers of birds arrived and started breeding. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June over 100 incubating birds were counted in one colony alone and it became clear that things were going to be much better than the previous year, when only 81 pairs bred on the whole reserve and only 15 young were raised. The odd rogue pair started laying eggs in outlying areas and at one point there were eight areas fenced off for little terns. Most of the smaller colonies were unsuccessful but a few pairs were successful indicating that predation levels were low. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 120 incubating adults were counted in the main 'beach colony' and there were three or four broods of chicks. The Watch House colonies were not targeted significantly by kestrels and managed to fledge a good number of chicks.

Three visits were made by boat during the breeding season, one on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May to check for birds and fence the nesting area, one on the 21<sup>st</sup>, when 10 pairs were counted and one in late June. The late June visit saw the colony abandoned and dog prints inside the fenced area.

Stiffkey Meals: 10 pairs

Far point: 15+ pairs

Beach colony: 120 pairs

Watch House area: 15 pairs

Total: 160+ pairs

Breeding success: 0.875 per pair (0.93 recurring for Blakeney Point)

An adult little tern was found dead on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July which had been colour ringed as a nestling on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2003 at Winterton.

#### Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

The first birds arrived back to the breeding grounds on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, slightly earlier than previous years. Sandwich Terns can actually be seen in most months of the year off shore including the winter months. Mating was observed in mid April and the first eggs were laid by the end of the month. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May a nest count was conducted. There were three distinct patches of bare ground/short vegetation available for Sandwich Terns to breed on and these were counted separately. The total number of nests was 3562 and there were many nests with two eggs and some even with three. There were also quite a few just hatched chicks still in nest scrapes during the nest count. Chicks started fledging in late June and by July counting them was becoming problematic as some were already moving away from the colony. Therefore, our best count was 1800 but it is thought that at least 2000 fledged as food supply was good and very few dead chicks were found in the colony once the birds had left.

#### Common Tern *Sterna hyrundo*

The first birds were seen on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, a rather late date (most early arriving birds are seen in the broads before they hit the coast). In line with the other terns, Common Terns had a much better breeding season than previous years. Good supplies of clupeids were delivered to chicks in June and there were no Common Gulls breeding in the beach colony this year. 92+ pairs produced c.70 young.

#### Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

The first birds were seen on the reserve on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, the last tern sp t arrive. No young had been raised on The Point since 2008, so the five produced this year was a welcome boost to The Points small breeding population. Arctic terns on the point specialise in foraging around saltmarsh creeks, catching crabs to feed their young.

#### Stock Dove *Columba oenus*

A male was heard singing in the roof of the Lifeboat House (right next to my head as I lay in bed) very early in the morning throughout the season but no young were seen.

#### Wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*

A pair laid two clutches of eggs in the main pine in the plantation but both failed. There was probably the odd pair in random places elsewhere on The Point that went undetected.

#### Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

The Points Skylark population is unfortunately still flagging. Breeding bird surveys were conducted in late April and early May but very few birds were detected on the shingle ridge. This may have been a real decline in birds breeding in this area or birds may just have been missed. Some young were seen but not enough.

#### Barn Swallow *Hyrundo rustica*

Seven pairs bred, mostly around the Lifeboat House, with one pair rearing two broods in the old Tern Hide. A pair started nest building in the 'loo with a view' at the Watch House but despite putting a sign on the door, they were shut out during the building stage and did not return.

#### Meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis*

102 pairs, or birds displaying breeding behaviour, were detected during the breeding bird surveys in late April and early May. Breeding success was thought to be good.

#### Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

A pair was seen around the LBH on a few occasions but surprisingly did not nest this year, so no return of the female White Wagtail that has bred with a male Pied Wagtail for the previous two summers. So, unless nests were missed, there were no nesting Pied wagtails on The Point in 2011.

#### Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

The Points population stays level at 15 pairs. This is incredible considering the severity of the weather in December 2010.

#### Dunnock (Hedge Sparrow) *Prunella modularis*

The number of breeding Hedge Sparrows dropped this year from 10 to 6+.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

There were singing males at the wrecked blue boat in the Marrams and near the Watch House but breeding was not proven. This is at least the second year when singing males have spent prolonged periods singing along the shingle ridge.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

There were singing males in three areas during spring and one stayed at The Hoods for over two weeks. As with the above species, breeding was not proven but it seems a likely coloniser.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Linnets were not counted on this years breeding bird surveys due to their breeding in small discreet colonies and moving around in flocks during the breeding season. Having said this, many nests and young were seen. One nest with eggs in a Lupin was abandoned when an infestation of aphids hit the bush. It is thought that there were over 20 pairs that bred on the point but this is just a rough estimate.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

16+ pairs bred on the point in 2011 and quite a few young were consequently seen. The young have a distinctive high pitched call which is like a weak imitation of the call of their parents and this was heard in several places. The strongholds remain the suaeda along the shingle ridge and both edges of Yankee Ridge.

**Edward Stubbings**

**National Trust Coastal Warden, Blakeney Point**

**National Trust Office, Friary Farm, Cley Rd, Blakeney, NR25 7NW**

**01263 740480/741694 or 07786690062**

**edward.stubbings@nationaltrust.org.uk**