

BIRDING IN THE SHEFFIELD AREA

What to look out for in..... JANUARY and FEBRUARY

Birding in the area is often concentrated on the lowlands to the east. Waterfowl are the main target at this time, although recent mild winters on the continent have meant that numbers often do not build up as much as in former years.

The traditional hotspots of Rother Valley Country Park and Carr Vale NR have been joined in the last decade by Orgreave Lakes, which has been the best site for **SMEW** in recent years. Sites such as Catcliffe Flash and Thrybergh CP are worth a visit, with the latter having a particularly good track record for **SCAUP**. Good numbers of **GOOSANDER** can also be seen at various sites in the valley of the River Rother, whereas sightings in the more traditional areas to the west are much reduced. In contrast, sites to the west remain best for **MANDARIN**; they can be seen all along the valley of the River Derwent, often given away when overhead by the distinctive “hwik” flight call. The best site for the species, however, is Linacre Reservoirs, with numbers of sufficient national importance to be included in the recent BTO Atlas.

This is also the best time of year to see three reedbed specialities. Up to ten years ago, **BITTERN** was a great rarity in the area, but mirroring the national trend there have been increased sightings in recent years. Pit House West and Carr Vale NR remain the best bets, but prolonged spells of hard weather have seen sightings at Poolsbrook Marsh, Treeton Dyke and Bolehill Flash. The latter site can be particularly good for **WATER RAIL**, with up to six present in early 2010. Finally, after first appearing in the area in late 2009, **CETTI's WARBLER** is now an annual visitor, often giving itself away with its distinctive call. Pit house West, Poolsbrook Marsh and Carr Vale NR are best for this species

Gull watchers will be scanning the hundreds of birds at landfill sites and reservoir roosts for the rarer gulls. Changes in tipping practices have meant that local landfill sites are reduced in number and less productive than in the past. The best is now Shirecliffe Tip, with birds from this site often viewable on factory roofs in the Neepsend area, and usually roosting at Broomhead Reservoir to the west. **GLAUCOUS** and **ICELAND** gulls were the main attraction until recently. However, the former is now an extreme rarity, managing barely a single record each year, with the latter only slightly more common, particularly in years with a national influx. In contrast records of **MEDITERRANEAN GULL** have increased in number, with Orgreave Lakes a good spot, as well as the well watched roost at Broomhead. Finally, **CASPIAN GULL** is now a distinct possibility for the careful gull sifter, the distinctive first winter being an especially attractive bird.

The early months of the year are usually best for seeing **WAXWING** in the area. Familiarity with the distinctive “trilling” contact call of the flocks is a great help in locating birds. The areas around the General Cemetery and Crosspool seem to hold a particular attraction for these birds. In addition, in recent years it has been found that many of the birds fly west at dusk to roost in conifers in the Redmires area

The trend to mild, wet winters means that we have not had a “big freeze” for some time. If we do get severe weather driving in, particularly from the east, then any areas of open water are a magnet for waterbirds, particularly for diving duck. The larger water bodies such as Orgreave, Rother Valley CP and Thrybergh CP are the best bet for the rare

DIVERS and **GREBES**. However, even the rivers through the town centres are worth a look for waterfowl frozen out of their usual haunts, with the odd **GOLDENEYE** or **POCHARD** occasionally turning up.

Finally, remember to look out for unusual birds in your garden. Who would have thought that a **COMMON ROSEFINCH** would be found at feeders in a Meadowhead garden backing on to Graves Park in January 2006, whilst January 1997 saw hundreds of birders peering into a suburban Chesterfield garden for views of a **BLACK THROATED THRUSH**.