

BIRD NEWS FROM CARR VALE NATURE RESERVE

April 2013

April was an excellent month during which a number of records were smashed by a considerable margin. A total of 122 species was logged during the month, beating the previous April best of 108 and the previous best ever monthly total of 110 set in September last year. Needless to say this had a massive impact on the year list which finished up at 134 by the end of the month, beating the previous best end of April count of 129. Included amongst this massive total were a first and a second for the site. The record for the number of species recorded on a single day was also broken 81 species were logged on both the 24th and 25th. Anti-social acts included a job on a motor cycle riding his machine along the path by the screens and several railings pulled out down the steps by the bridge which goes over the river by the reserve pond, two of which haven't been recovered and necessitating new hand rails to be put in place by the volunteers.

Grey Lag Geese were present on 18 dates with a maximum count of nine on the 13th whilst the peak count for **Canada Geese** was 53 on the 28th. A pair of **Shelduck** was present on 21 dates with two pairs on five dates and a male **Mandarin Duck** flew north on the 25th. This is a scarce bird at Carr Vale. **Wigeon** numbers remained high given the time of year with a maximum count of 125 on the 5th and pair was still present on the 30th, which proved to be their last date. **Gadwall** peaked at 21 on the 22nd and the highest count of **Teal** was 46 on the 6th which is also a high April count with five still present on 30th. **Mallard** numbers are always low in spring so the maximum count of 18 on the 5th was about all that could be expected. The pair of **Garganey** that had been present from the 26th March remained until the 24th whilst **Shoveler** peaked at three on the 9th. Two **Pochard** were seen on the 5th and 6th with a lone male on three other dates and the maximum count of **Tufted Duck** was 12 on the 9th and 15th. What looked like being bird of the month (until the events of the 29th) was the male **Red-breasted Merganser** that was present for less than two hours on 12th. This was just the second record for the site, 20 years after the first one that was present for just one morning when I was at work and which then spent a week at Poolsbrook CP.

Up to three pairs of **Red-legged Partridge** were seen most days during the month but conversely just a single pair of **Grey Partridge** was seen on the 15th and 24th which shows just how scarce this once common Carr Vale bird is becoming. **Cormorants** were seen on 23 dates with a maximum count of four on the 8th, 9th, 12th and 13th but **Heron**s could only muster two on 14 dates with singles on 13 more dates. A **Little Grebe** was seen daily between the 10th and 14th and **Great-crested Grebes** were present daily with a peak count of four on the 9th, 10th, 12th and 13th.

It was a good month for raptors starting with **Red Kite** with one seen flying over the reserve on the 7th and another, which flew north at 0650 on the 27th. **Sparrowhawks** were recorded on at least 20 dates with a max count of three on the 30th and **Common Buzzards** were logged on at least 25 dates with a max count from the mound of 20 on the 6th. An **Osprey** (the second of the year) flew north at 1645hrs on the 8th. **Kestrels** were recorded on at least 24 dates, the first **Hobby** of the year was seen on the 24th with another on the 28th and single **Peregrines** were logged on 11 dates although two birds at east were involved, an immature male and an adult.

Water Rails were recorded on 26 dates with a maximum count of four on the 5th and towards the end of the month the birds were very vocal. The first two broods of **Coot** were seen on the 27th whilst the resident pair of **Oystercatchers** was on eggs by the end of the month. They were joined by a third individual on the 5th and 23rd. **Little Ringed Plovers** peaked at six on the 24th.-MAB whilst at Sutton Scarsdale Flash the maximum count was four on the 18th. **Ringed Plover** have proved to be very scarce so far this year with just a single bird on the 25th and 26th plus one north and another late evening on the 29th. Demoting the Red-breasted Merganser down to second place were the star birds of the month, a flock of seven **Dotterel** including at least three females. They flew in from the south at 0714 on the 29th, stayed 15 minutes but flew off north at 1929. The first for Carr Vale, they had earlier been at Pleasley Hill from where they departed at 0700. **Golden Plover** were logged on a seven dates but it took until the last day of the month for the largest flock to be recorded, on this

date a flock of 30 was present. **Lapwings** however remained in very low numbers with a peak count of 26 on the 25th. **Dunlin** like Ringed Plovers were also very scarce and the only records were one on the 17th and 26th with four on the 25th. A **Ruff** was a nice surprise on the 8th when one appeared on Middle Flash mid-morning, only the second April record for Carr Vale the bird was also seen briefly at Sutton Scarsdale Flash the same day. Single **Jack Snipe** were seen on the 3rd and 15th whilst **Common Snipe** were seen on 24 dates with a maximum count of four on the 4th, 6th and 8th. More surprising were single **Woodcock** on the 3rd, 10th and 19th, these being the latest ever spring records for the area. Two **Whimbrel** were down on the 22nd but were soon flushed by the dreaded dog-walkers and flew north at 0700 and it was a good month for **Curlew** with the following records; two flew east on the 6th, one was seen on the 7th, one flew south on the 15th, two left north on the 17th, two were seen on the 21st and one left north on the 24th. This was a good month by Carr Vale standards. One or two **Common Sandpipers** were present between the 24th and 30th but the highest count was five on the 29th. A party of four **Greenshank** dropped in for five minutes on 26th but then flew north at 0620 whilst the maximum count for **Redshank** was four (usually two pairs) on five dates. A good month for waders with 16 species recorded.

Gulls also put in a good performance starting with two adult **Kittiwakes** that were present briefly but then flew east on the 6th, earlier these had been at Ogston and one was present for over an hour on the 16th. Several species of gull were present in exceptional numbers for April, no doubt held up by the cold spring. **Black-headed Gull** peaked at 250 on the 6th and by the end of the month several pairs were looking to settle down and breed. A cracking second summer **Mediterranean Gull** was present for five minutes before it flew off south-east on the 29th whilst a count of 23 **Common Gulls** was an impressive one for Carr Vale and the last three of the month were seen on the 20th. An interesting second winter **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was seen on the 22nd. It was 'normal' except that it had pure white primaries on both wings (equal in proportion). In every respect it looked like a LBBG so I suspect albinism rather than a hybrid with Iceland Gull. It certainly looked interesting in flight. **Herring Gulls** were also present in unusual numbers for April with max count of 60 on the 6th, 10th and 11th. A third winter **Iceland Gull** was seen on the 5th, 6th and 8th but was replaced by a second winter on 9th, which equalled the latest ever county bird, which coincidentally was also seen at Carr Vale. However the third winter reappeared on the 17th hopefully putting the record beyond reach for a while. It's thought by those that saw the third winter that it was the same bird that was present here late March. Two **Yellow-legged Gulls** were seen during the month, a second winter was present on the 18th and a different second winter was seen on the 24th and 25th (much brighter bare parts than the first one). Finally amongst the gulls amazing numbers (for the time of year) of **Great Black-backed Gull** were present with a maximum count of 160 on the 10th. 35 were still present on the 30th. It's no wonder that with all these big gulls about have we managed to pull out the above site rarities.

A **Black Tern** was another record equaller. This time a bird on the 17th, which was present for just five minutes equalled the second earliest date for the county but then it flew north. A few minutes earlier it had been at Pleasley Pit. Another good record concerned an **Arctic Tern** that was present on the 19th and proved to be the second earliest ever at Carr Vale, another flew north on the 30th. The first **Common Tern**, seen on the 20th was our third tern of the year after which we had a single bird until the 29th apart from on the 22nd but four were present on the 30th.

Woodpigeons peaked at 1000 on the 12th, one or two **Little Owls** were seen from the mound around Deepdale Farm on 11 dates and a pair of **Tawny Owls** had two chicks in a nest box on the 27th. Two adults were seen in different areas on 30th. The first **Swifts** for the year were four on the 25th, a single **Kingfisher** was seen on ten dates as was a single **Green Woodpecker** and a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** was seen early in the month (date not provided). A distant **Raven** flew south on the 8th, **Willow Tits** were regularly seen and two males were singing on the 7th and one was nest building on the 18th.

The first **Sand Martins** of the year were two that flew north on the 10th, only 22 days later than our average arrival date and our latest ever arrival date by 13 days! But two days later on the 12th 72 flew north in three hours during the afternoon following a morning of fog and 27 flew north on the 30th. The first **Swallow** followed the next day, ten days later than average and the latest arrival date since 1998. On the 12th 24 flew north in 3 hours and 40 were present on the 26th. Continuing the theme, the first **House Martin** was one on the

15th, which is the latest arrival date since 1995. They were still very scarce at the end of the month. The long-staying **Cetti's Warbler** was heard calling on the 5th and 6th but that was it, nothing since and the bird is presumed to have left or pegged out in the cold. Nine singing **Chiffchaffs** was the highest count for the month but I noticed that song for all the migrant warblers was reduced compared with previous years and I can only assume that birds were struggling to find food and are therefore spending more time feeding and less singing. Wonder if anyone else has noticed or thinks along these lines. The first **Willow Warbler** for the year were two singing on 13th, 11 days later than the average arrival date indeed latest ever arrival date. **Blackcaps** can normally be relied on in late March but not this year, the first were two silent males seen on 13th, the latest arrival date since 1996 and 19 days later than the average arrival date but then the maximum count was ten on the 21st and 30th, which was about average for the end of April. The first **Lesser Whitethroat** was one on the 23rd that remained until the 27th. This bucks the trend in that it was five days earlier than the average arrival date and bucking the trend for this spring **Common Whitethroats** were bang on average when the first three arrived on the 21st, though perhaps the maximum count of four by the end of the month was a bit low. The first **Grasshopper Warbler** was heard reeling on the 22nd, 25th, 26th, 28th and 30th and you guessed it, they were later than normal yet **Sedge Warblers** were also bang on average when they arrived on the 17th and the highest count of singing birds was five on the 25th and 26th. Similarly **Reed Warblers** arrived exactly on time with a singing bird on the 22nd and a peak count of four on the 25th.

The last **Fieldfares** of the winter were seven that flew south-west on the 15th and the last date for **Redwing** was on the 13th when two were seen although the highest count was 50 on the 9th. **Redstarts** are always a difficult bird to score at Carr Vale so a female on the 23rd was very welcome and **Whinchats** like the above a difficult bird to see at Carr Vale. However a pair present on 26th and 27th was unusual in that it was a multiple arrival, can't remember when I last saw two birds on the patch. **Wheatears** again produced a good showing after the first on the 12th with birds logged on 11 dates and a peak count of four on the 19th. There was also an excellent showing of **Yellow Wagtails** with the first four being seen on the 15th, seven days later than the average arrival date. We then logged birds daily with notable counts of 11 on the 21st, 14 on the 25th and 12 on the 26th. One of the best birds of the month was a cracking male **Blue-headed Wagtail** that was present on the 26th and which represented the fifth record for Carr Vale and the first since 2006 and it was a proper one, none of your Channel Wagtail rubbish here. (Channel Wagtail is a cross between Yellow and Blue-headed Wagtail, that breeds along the channel coast of France). Unusually a **Grey Wagtail** flew south on the 18th, unusual as this species is mainly a winter visitor at Carr Vale albeit that the first autumn migrants are back by late June. Continuing the wagtail theme it was also an excellent month for **White Wagtails**. After two on the 13th birds were seen daily between the 16th and 30th with peak counts of eight on the 19th, six on the 26th and ten on the 27th. Ten is a record count for the site. Single **Tree Pipits** on the 15th and 17th were unusual in that they were only the fifth and sixth spring records for Carr Vale and the first since 2001. 181 **Meadow Pipits** flew north over ten dates between the 3rd and 18th with notable counts of 46 north on the 6th and 31 north on 12th but it was a poor spring passage for this species this year.

One or two **Siskins** were noted on nine dates between the 9th and 25th and there was a light northerly passage of **Lesser Redpoll** later in the month with a maximum count of maximum count six on the 17th. **Bullfinches** are ever present at Carr Vale but numbers were much reduced with a peak count of four on the 17th and 25th.

Finally during the month the first butterflies appeared starting with a **Small Tortoiseshell** on the 9th followed by singles on five more dates. Next up was a **Peacock** on the 16th followed by two on the 18th and 20th and four on the 24th with singles on three more dates. A **Small White** was seen on the 20th along with two **Brimstones** with one of the latter on the 22nd. Admittedly not a lot but it's a start. **Hares** became far more active with sightings on 19 dates including seven on the 8th and eight on the 20th as did **Roe Deer** with four on the 12th and singles on four other dates. A **Fox** was seen on the 3rd and the first (two) **Grass Snakes** were seen on the 17th.

I think you'll agree April was an excellent month, probably the best month ever and unlikely to ever be beaten at least in terms of species total. Wonder what May will bring.

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