

**MARBURY and WITTON FLASHES  
BIRD REPORT  
2019**



First winter male Siberian Stonechat, © Mark Nightingale

# INTRODUCTION

Following the positive response received to the 2018 report, I thought it would be worthwhile producing another on the birds recorded at Marbury and Witton Flashes, this time for 2019. Hopefully, and assuming the ongoing presence of interesting birdlife and the reporting of sightings, this can become an annual publication.

For the purposes of this report, the Marbury and Witton Flashes birding patch (also herein referred to as M&WF or just 'the patch') consists of five major areas: Marbury Country Park, the Witton Flashes, Anderton Nature Park, Carey Park and Higher Marston. Included within Marbury Country Park is the prime site of Budworth Mere along with the main woodlands of Big Wood and Hopyards Wood. Budworth Mere itself also hosts the Coward Reedbed plus Kid Brook Spit on its northern shoreline and the associated Kid Brook Fields. Witton Flashes are the reclaimed lime beds north of Northwich, and include Neumann's Flash plus Ashton's Flash, Haydn's Pool, Witton Mill Meadows and Dairy House Meadows. The other areas are more standalone; Carey Park is the site of the former Witton landfill, Anderton Nature Park is the country park west of Haydn's Pool, and Higher Marston encompasses the fields and housing estate north and east of the Trent & Mersey Canal, and including Marston Pools along Ollershaw Lane. A map is included on Page 2, and the patch generally assumes the same boundaries as the area also known as the Northwich Woodlands.

Most of the habitats here are reasonably robust, although it has been sad to see the ongoing demise of Haydn's Pool during 2019. It has always been an awkward site to manage, with willow encroachment being a natural progression. A combination of funding cutbacks and lack of resources however has allowed this takeover to accelerate, and in the medium term at least one of the patch's top birding sites seems to have been lost.

Although deluged by water from early spring, there was still much of birding interest to report across M&WF in 2019, albeit not up to the heady standards of 2018. Accessing all of these reports is not always easy as birder's visiting the patch record their sightings through a number of methods. I have accessed those methods as much as possible to gather data for this report, most specifically the local patch WhatsApp group. The information submitted to this group and other social media platforms, plus data entered onto BirdTrack and eBird is much appreciated, and without which this report would not be possible. I would also like thank the various photographers who have permitted use of their images to enhance the report's overall production.

Greg Baker



## Map of Marbury & Witton Flashes (also known as Northwich Woodlands)

# THE 2019 BIRDING YEAR

This was not a vintage year, affected significantly by high rainfall that elevated water levels across all the main wetland sites throughout 2019. This had a serious effect on wader passage in particular, and was a major reason for this year's total number of recorded species being 141, well down on the excellent count of 156 in 2018. That said, the year ended on a notable high with Cheshire and Wirral's first ever Siberian Stonechat found on Ashton's Flash by local birder David Bedford. Although other highlights included a one day Greater White-fronted Goose, two separate Great Egrets, the first Short-eared Owl since 2009, and a Ring-necked Parakeet, none of these were available to the majority of patch birders, making the lingering stonechat that extra bit special.

## Month by month review of notable records

Early **JANUARY** produced a record count of 50 **Goosanders** on 2nd on Budworth Mere, along with up to 2 **Little Egrets** also at the mere, a few **Jack Snipe** and early evidence of the **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** being back on territory in Marbury Country Park. The regular **Eurasian Bittern** in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere was joined by a second individual from 12th-28th. On 19th a lucky dog walker flushed a **Short-eared Owl** from Dairy House Meadows, a major patch rarity these days. At the end of the month, the **Tree Sparrows** were relocated at Higher Marston, with reports continuing through to March.



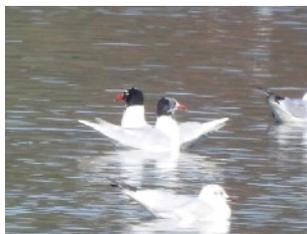
Greater White-fronted Goose, Budworth Mere. © Malc Curtin

The relatively slow pace of January continued into early **FEBRUARY**, although a **Ruff** at Budworth Mere was an interesting record on 3rd. There were only two sightings of Ruff for the entire year, the other also being at Budworth Mere in the same month on 18th. A goose at Budworth Mere on 11th initially divided opinion but photographs show it to be a juvenile **Greater White-fronted Goose** and not one of the hybrids also present at that time. The 18th saw the year's first **Mandarin Duck** appear on Budworth Mere, and on 23rd a **Great White Egret** made a brief appearance on Kid Brook Spit. Also on 23rd, 2 **Red Crossbills** were noted flying over the mere, the only records

for the year. Finally in February, a pair of **Mediterranean Gulls** moulting into breeding plumage began a series of occasional appearances on Budworth Mere from 26th.



Great White Egret, Budworth Mere. © Chris Reiki



Mediterranean Gulls, Budworth Mere. © Malc Curtin

With no particularly cold weather systems prevailing in late winter, it seemed that the **Eurasian Bitterns** may be tempted to make an early departure, but 2 were seen again on 2nd **MARCH** with at least 1 remaining until 8th. Also in the month, the year's only **Barnacle Goose** was found amongst the regular goose flock at Budworth Mere on 18th and an early **Pied Avocet** was on Kid Brook Spit at the mere on 24th.

**APRIL** is when spring passage swings into motion at M&WF, so it was somewhat surprising that the month kicked off with what is usually an uncommon winter visitor, a young **Whooper Swan**. Found at Neumann's Flash on 1st, it transpired that it was the same individual that had been released from care and subsequently wintered along the canal at Middlewich. It was last seen on 10th but then another, also an immature that had been released from care, arrived on 23rd for a lengthy stay. With water levels high, waders passage was poor, although **Whimbrels** managed to find a few places to rest up from 9th onwards and **Pied Avocet** numbers built up to 9 on 18th at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes. On 17th, 5 **Little Gulls** were a fine sight over Budworth Mere. A striking male **Whinchat** at Dairy House Meadows was only available to a lone photographer on 20th, and a **Common Cuckoo** was seen fairly well around the Witton Flashes on 23rd-24th. The first **Eurasian Hobby** of the year was seen over Budworth Mere on 28th and a female **Marsh Harrier** at Neumann's Flash on 30th.



Whooper Swan, Neumann's Flash. © Greg Baker

An arrival of 75 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Neumann's Flash on 5th suggested an improvement on the wader front during **MAY**, but they soon moved on. Rain and an easterly wind on 8th looked good for terns, and so it proved with 2 **Black Terns**, 2 **Arctic Terns** and up to 17 **Common Terns** at Budworth Mere. Also at the mere, a beautiful pair of breeding plumaged



Black Tern, Budworth Mere. © Greg Baker



Sanderling, Budworth Mere. © Greg Baker

**Black-necked Grebes** spent most of the day at the east end on 12th. The female **Marsh Harrier** appeared again on 17th and **Pied Avocets** returned again to Neumann's Flash with 3 present from 21st-23rd. 2 **Sanderlings** were a good discovery on Neumann's Flash on 27th and then on

30th another in rather confusing transitional plumage was at Budworth Mere alongside a drake **Garganey**, itself in surprisingly well advanced eclipse plumage.

**JUNE** saw the long staying immature **Whooper Swan** being last seen at Neumann's Flash on 2nd from where it moved on to Leicestershire. The year's only **Spotted Flycatcher** sighting was from Marbury Country Park on 5th. A **Ring-necked Parakeet** at Marbury Country Park on 7th was expected to be the harbinger of more to come, especially as it had possibly been present for a week, but there were surprisingly no further reports. On the 18th, the first post-breeding **Little Egret** arrived at Neumann's Flash. More **Common Cuckoo** records mid month were welcome, as was the **Willow Tit** at Anderton Nature Park on 30th, with more sighting of the latter from July to mid October.

Compared to the glut of excellent late summer records in 2018, **JULY** was disappointing. 4 more **Pied Avocets** turned up at Neumann's Flash on 14th but the only other noteworthy record was of a juvenile **Black-necked Grebe** found at Budworth Mere on 29th and still present the next day.



Juv. Black-necked Grebe, Budworth Mere. © Greg

If anything, **AUGUST** was even tougher going than July, with the best sightings being confined to the 30th when both a juvenile **Black Tern** and a first winter **Yellow-legged Gull** were found on Budworth Mere. High water levels meant that wader passage was generally pitiful.

The presence of a breeding pair of **Hobbys** somewhere to the west of Marbury Country Park no doubt accounted for a series of records (mainly over Budworth Mere) during **SEPTEMBER** with 4 seen on 2nd. A trio of **Egyptian Geese** were around Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere from 2nd-7th, with a juvenile **Garganey** in the same general area on 3rd. Possibly the same individual as seen in the spring, a female **Marsh Harrier** was briefly at Neumann's Flash on 22nd.



Egyptian Geese, Budworth Mere. © Trevor Davies

**OCTOBER** began with 2 pairs of **Mandarin Duck** on the north shoreline of Budworth Mere on 3rd, unusual as most records here are of singletons. A pair of **European Stonechats** were on Ashton's Flash on 6th with a single bird seen later in the month on 20th, the only sightings of the year, of this form at least! Another **Great White Egret** made another brief foray onto Kid Brook Spit on 10th, and also at Budworth Mere, an **Eurasian Bittern** was seen in flight on the 11th, possibly a migrant rather than a returning wintering bird.

The final months of the year seemed initially to be petering out into insignificance. The only relatively scarce species recorded in **NOVEMBER** were **Little Egrets**, with one on 10th increasing to 3 by 26th, and an **Eurasian Bittern** that became a regular sight in the Coward Reedbed from 26th.

Some excellent counts of waterbirds were keeping local birders a little more entertained into **DECEMBER**, prior to one of the year's more unexpected sightings of a **Pied Avocet** on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 16th. And finally, the entire year seemed to be resurrected with David Bedford's discovery of a first winter male 'Eastern' Stonechat on Ashton's Flash on 24th. Initially it could not be identified to specific form but early in 2020 confirmation was received from DNA analysis that it was a **Siberian Stonechat**, not only a first at M&WF but also the first for Cheshire and The Wirral.



Siberian Stonechat, Ashton's Flash. © Mark Nightingale



Siberian Stonechat twitch, Ashton's Flash. © Chris Reiki

## General summary

Diverse as the habitats may be across Marbury & Witton Flashes, the wetland sites are probably the most dominant feature. When water levels are right, these attract wildfowl, waders and other riparian species alike. This year though there was just too much water. Not an issue for some wildfowl which reached record or near record levels but unappealing to others, and certainly not very inviting to mud loving waders.

This year an attempt was made to coordinate counts of commoner non-passerine wetland species across the patch. The results can be found in Table 1 below. Amongst these, wildfowl certainly fared best in 2019. Two notable record counts were achieved: 90 **Mute Swans** on 31st May and 50 **Goosanders** on 2nd Jan. Furthermore, **Common Pochard** reached numbers

unprecedented in recent years, and they as well as **Common Goldeneye** were recorded for the first time on Ashton's Flash towards the end of the year. **Eurasian Wigeon** and **Gadwall** also fared well in the latter months, although interestingly **Common Teal** numbers were low during this same period as they prefer shallower habitats. There were typically few **Northern Pintail** records, all confined to the autumn and second winter period. **Tufted Duck** numbers reached a total of 161 in late November, whilst **Eurasian Coot** peaked at 403 during the middle of the same month. Although a couple of **Water Rails** were showy early in the year, unlike last year they were hard to see from spring onwards.

**Mallard** and **Eurasian Coot** seemed to be the only wetland species that enjoyed a good breeding season, with plenty of broods of both seen during the spring. As in 2018, only 2 pairs of **Mute Swans** raised young (although the brood sizes were higher). 4 pairs of **Little Grebe** and 2 of **Great Crested Grebe** bred successfully, although again none of the latter prospered at Budworth Mere. Despite another poor breeding season, **Great Crested Grebes** congregated in large numbers at Budworth Mere in the autumn reaching a peak of 92 on 13th Nov. The colony of **Grey Herons** on the the north shore of Budworth Mere held an estimated 47 nests this year, down 26% from last year's census. Although **Little Egrets** can best be described now as uncommon at Budworth Mere none have yet been attracted to join the heronry.

With up to 1100 **Northern Lapwing** and 155 **Eurasian Curlew** present early in the year, anyone would have been forgiven for looking forward to another good wader year. It was not to be however. Although some species such as **Pied Avocet**, **Common** and **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Common** and **Green Sandpipers** and even **Whimbrel** kept to the script others were either scarce or entirely absent. Records for **Dunlin**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Common Redshank** and **Common Snipe** were all well below par. There was only one record for **European Golden Plover**, 2 for **Ruff** (both in February), and 3 for **Common Greenshank**. Of the usual scarcer species, only **Sanderling** put in an appearance. Although **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Common Redshank** all attempted to breed, none succeeded, with predation yet again the most likely cause.

As with waders, it was an unremarkable year for gulls. **Little Gulls** were typically on show for one day only, there was an average turnout of **Mediterranean Gulls** and just a single **Yellow-legged Gull** sighting. There were noticeably few gull roosts during peak passage periods, and even species such as **Great Black-backed Gull** can now be deemed uncommon.

**Common Buzzard** remains the commonest raptor on patch, with **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** seemingly holding its own. **Peregrine Falcon** can still be seen most days perched on hunting lookouts, but probably no longer breeds at one of its regular territories, whereas **Common Kestrel** is uncommon nowadays. Thanks to a breeding pair nearby, **Eurasian Hobbys** put in a reasonable appearance, particularly in the autumn.

Logging arrival and departure dates of migrants usually throws up some interesting records. Of those heading north, the last spring sighting for **Fieldfare** was on 15th Mar and of **Redwing** on 16th Apr. Most spring migrants were a little earlier than in 2018. This year **Common Chiffchaffs** were the first early arrivals on 22nd Feb, followed not surprisingly by **Sand Martins** on 3rd Mar, and also in March, **Eurasian Blackcap** on 25th, **Barn Swallow** and **House Martin** on 26th, and **Little Ringed Plover** on 27th. Into April, the first **Northern Wheatear** appeared on

1st, **Willow Warbler** on 2nd, **Eurasian Reed Warbler** on 6th, **Common Sandpiper** on 11th, **Western Yellow Wagtail** on 13th, **Garden Warbler** and **Whimbrel** on 18th, **Sedge Warbler** and **Common Whitethroat** on 19th, **Whinchat** on 20th, **Common Cuckoo** on 23rd and **Eurasian Hobby** on 28th. The only commoner migrant not to achieve this end of April deadline was **Common Swift** which first appeared on 1st May.

The majority of migrants left early. For example the last records for **Garden Warbler** and **Sedge Warbler** were 10th and 26th July respectively. **Common Swift** on 16th and **Common Sandpiper** on 25th made it into August. Departure dates in September included **Eurasian Reed Warbler** and **Common Whitethroat** on 2nd, **Sand Martin** on the early date of 8th, **Little Ringed Plover** on 12th, **Willow Warbler** surprisingly late on 18th, and **Eurasian Hobby** on 20th. Typical later leavers in October were **House Martin** on 8th, **Barn Swallow** and **Common Chiffchaff** on 12th and finally **Eurasian Blackcap** on 19th. Moving back in for the winter, the first autumn **Redwings** were seen on 28th Sept and **Fieldfares** on 22nd Oct.

Although there were some impressive flocks present in the spring, it was generally another poor year for hirundines with **House Martins** again seeming to cope best. **Barn Swallow** numbers were particularly low aside from some impressive passage flocks and **Sand Martins** no longer breed on the patch. Some good counts of **Common Swifts** suggested at least some stability around the local breeding colonies. Amongst others, a good scattering of **Common Cuckoo** records through to early summer was encouraging and **Green Woodpeckers** seem to be stable, but **Common Tern** reports were low and the early disappearance of **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers** and only one sighting of a **Spotted Flycatcher** was rather worrying.

There were two surveys of M&WFs commoner breeding species this year based on the number of occupied territories. The first covered residents (see Table 2 below) from early March to early April and the second surveyed summer breeding warblers from mid April to the end of May (see Table 3 below). The residents survey showed, not surprisingly that **European Robin** is the commonest species, closely followed by **Eurasian Wren**. The only other species to achieve a three figures territory count was **Common Blackbird**. The warbler survey threw up some interesting data given that a similar survey was conducted in 2016. **Cetti's Warblers** have not surprisingly seen the biggest increase up from 2 territories in 2016 to 8 this year (+300%). The other big winner is **Eurasian Blackcap** with over double the 2016 figure (up 103%), followed by **Sedge Warbler** up 50%, **Eurasian Reed Warbler** up 37%, **Common Chiffchaff** up 36%, **Willow Warbler** up 20%, and **Garden Warbler** up 13%. Just one **Common Grasshopper Warbler** territory was the same as in 2016, but the real losers are the whitethroats with **Common Whitethroat** down 65% and no **Lesser Whitethroats** compared to at least one and possibly three in 2016.

**Common Starlings** returned to form at the end of the year with large roosts at both Budworth Mere and Neumann's Flash and an estimated peak of 80,000. However, as has been the case in recent years murmurations were often short and sweet with the largest numbers flying directly into roost. This behaviour is certainly worthy of further analysis. Meanwhile, finches continue on a downward trend at M&WF. There were some good single day counts of **European Goldfinch** and **Common Linnets** but they masked a wider decline. **Eurasian Siskins** and **Lesser Redpolls** remained relatively scarce compared to a few years ago and there were no Bramblings recorded at all the year,

**TABLE 1****Monthly maxima for selected wetland species in 2019**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
Canada Goose	650	450	117	68	54	20	235	510	173	720	759	350
Greylag Goose	30	36	13	5	7	18	22	44	0	78	169	68
Mute Swan	24	19	22	51	90	59	37	27	30	35	28	26
Shelduck	6	6	12	16	20	2	0	0	0	0	2	8
Shoveler	48	48	41	18	2	1	1	22	24	21	4	19
Gadwall	12	4	5	9	4	11	11	5	43	60	76	56
Wigeon	98	45	4	1	0	0	0	0	5	74	222	280
Mallard	94	82	52	54	86	78	218	177	124	78	90	121
Pintail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4
Teal	535	342	74	13	3	1	5	27	50	52	85	44
Pochard	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	8	3	23
Tufted Duck	47	62	88	70	22	12	30	45	70	108	169	151
Goldeneye	4	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	5
Goosander	50	15	7	1	0	0	5	0	0	3	5	6
Little Grebe	1	1	6	2	1	1	8	12	14	18	5	4
Gt. Crested Grebe	20	13	15	16	12	17	21	51	39	81	92	73
Grey Heron	18	17	6	5	23	5	5	5	4	5	4	4
Cormorant	22	13	7	6	4	2	3	2	5	12	31	20
Water Rail	5	7	6	2	1	1	3	2	4	9	5	4
Moorhen	10	13	15	6	7	5	9	12	14	12	8	14
Coot	277	245	172	54	65	134	256	323	311	318	403	368
Lapwing	1100	250	20	9	8	13	329	387	300	96	120	350
Curlew	155	148	144	77	1	0	80	68	19	120	74	46
Common Snipe	37	2	4	2	1	1	2	26	48	10	6	7
Black-headed Gull	330	530	470	310	17	10	156	250	500	310	165	720

The above counts relate to all Marbury & Witton Flashes sites

**TABLE 2****Survey of common bird territories from  
early March to early April 2019**

<b>Species</b>	<b>MCP</b>	<b>NF</b>	<b>AF</b>	<b>DHM</b>	<b>WMM</b>	<b>HP</b>	<b>ANP</b>	<b>CP</b>	<b>HM</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Gt Sp Woodpecker	9	0	0	1	2	2	2	1	0	<b>17</b>
Blue Tit	20	0	0	6	1	5	8	4	2	<b>46</b>
Great Tit	33	2	2	4	1	1	10	5	1	<b>59</b>
Long-tailed Tit	3	0	2	0	0	1	3	1	0	<b>10</b>
Wren	73	3	7	20	6	13	26	15	0	<b>164</b>
Nuthatch	18	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	<b>25</b>
Blackbird	53	2	2	12	1	9	25	14	2	<b>120</b>
Song Thrush	25	2	1	5	3	6	7	7	0	<b>56</b>
Mistle Thrush	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
Robin	62	10	8	22	7	13	28	20	2	<b>172</b>
Dunnock	11	5	1	5	2	1	10	5	1	<b>41</b>
Chaffinch	6	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	<b>11</b>
Bullfinch	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	<b>5</b>
Greenfinch	3	1	0	2	0	0	3	1	0	<b>10</b>
Goldfinch	7	0	1	2	2	0	8	1	2	<b>23</b>
Reed Bunting	5	4	3	1	3	2	0	0	0	<b>18</b>

**Method:**

The survey took place from 5th March to 1st April. Territories were based on either a male singing or other territorial behaviour being evident on at least three occasions over a two week period or at least twice at the same site during the whole survey period.

**Site key:**

MCP = Marbury Country Park including Big Wood, Hopyards Wood and Budworth Mere and its surrounds.

NF = Neumann's Flash

AF = Ashton's Flash

DHM = Dairy House Meadows, including Forge Wood and along the Trent & Mersey canal

WMM = Witton Mill Meadows

HP = Haydn's Pool

ANP= Anderton Nature Park

CP = Carey Park

HM = Higher Marston

**TABLE 3****Warbler territory survey from mid April to end May 2019**

<b>Species</b>	<b>MCP</b>	<b>WF</b>	<b>HP</b>	<b>ANP</b>	<b>CP</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Cetti's Warbler	0	5	2	1	0	<b>8</b>
Willow Warbler	0**	22	0	0	2	<b>24</b>
Chiffchaff	7	17	7	4	3	<b>38</b>
Sedge Warbler	2	5	2	0	0	<b>9</b>
Reed Warbler	10	32	7	9	5	<b>63</b>
Grasshopper Warbler	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Blackcap	34	37	11	16	6	<b>104</b>
Garden Warbler	4	10	2	1	0	<b>17</b>
Common Whitethroat	0	14	2	4	3	<b>23</b>

\*\* Willow Warblers were present here on passage up to the end of April but not in May and therefore presumed not to have been holding breeding territories.

**Method:**

The survey took place from 11th April to 31st May. Territories were based on either a male singing or other territorial behaviour being evident on at least three occasions over a two week period or at least twice at the same site during the whole survey period. As in 2016, there was no count from Higher Marston (where there is minimal warbler habitat).

**Site key:**

MCP = Marbury Country Park including Big Wood and Hopyards Wood and also covering Budworth Mere and its surrounds.

WF is Witton Flashes, incorporating Neumann's Flash, Ashton's Flash, Witton Mill Meadows, and Dairy House Meadows (inc Trent & Mersey) canal

HP = Haydn's Pool

ANP= Anderton Nature Park

CP = Carey Park

For information the 2016 counts were as follows: Cetti's Warbler 2, Willow Warbler 20, Common Chiffchaff 28, Sedge Warbler 6, Eurasian Reed Warbler 46, Common Grasshopper Warbler 1, Eurasian Blackcap 51, Garden Warbler 15, Common Whitethroat 38, Lesser Whitethroat 1 to 3 (2 territories did not fully meet the method criteria).

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS

The taxonomy of these species accounts follows version 7.3 of the IOC World Bird List (Gill and Donsker 2017) as adopted by the British Ornithological Union (BOU). The list of species includes Barnacle Goose, Egyptian Goose, and Feral Pigeon, all of which may or may not be of feral origin. Without any direct evidence of them being escapes however they are included here as they are within the annual Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society (CAWOS) reports.

### **CANADA GOOSE**    *Branta canadensis*

A resident throughout the year, with the largest counts associated with post-breeding and wintering flocks. At the start of the year 650 were on Budworth Mere on 14th Jan, feeding as usual on the fields behind the north shoreline. This was the largest count during this period, with 450 there on 4th Feb, decreasing to 117 by 9th Mar.

Territories were being established on both Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes by 1st Mar. Nesting pairs were at both these sites as well as on one of the pontoons by the sailing club at Budworth Mere but despite the fact that juveniles were seen from early summer onwards, no goslings were reported and presumably all breeding attempts failed.

The first evidence of any significant post-breeding flocks were 235 around Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 30th July, increasing to 440 by 12th Aug. 289 were at Neumann's Flash on 16th Aug, up to 510 on 28th, and were assumed to be the same flocks also seen at the mere. The main flock then appeared to disperse, with a high count in Sept of just 173 around the patch on 23rd, although overnight roosts at the flashes may have been missed during this period. A dawn count of 610 at Ashton's Flash on 8th Oct would appear to bear this out. This same roost peaked at 720 on 14th Oct, with most of the flock then spending the day feeding on fields at Higher Marston. By Nov, the year's highest count across the patch was 759 including 459 moving between Neumann's Flash and Higher Marston and a further 300 on Kid Brook Fields at Budworth Mere. Towards the end of the year numbers declined (presumably due to reduced feeding opportunities at Higher Marston) with the flocks again favouring Budworth Mere where the highest counts were 350 on 4th Dec and 332 on 30th Dec.

### **BARNACLE GOOSE**    *Branta leucopsis*

There was only one record this year, of an individual amongst the Canada Goose flock at Budworth Mere on 18th Mar (MC).

### **GREYLAG GOOSE**    *Anser anser*

Resident throughout the year, and again there was no evidence of successful breeding in 2019. Up to 30 were regularly feeding on Kid Brook Fields during Jan and 36 there on 4th Feb down to 20 on 20th Feb and 13 on 27th Mar. A pair attempted to breed on Ashton's Flash but no young were seen.

The next double figure count was not until 18 were at Budworth Mere on 4th June and numbers slowly increased over the rest of the summer with 44 were present on 4th Aug. This flock then reduced and disappeared from the patch for the whole of Sept until 21 were back at Budworth Mere on 3rd Oct. Overnight roosts with the Canada Geese at Ashton's Flash were first reported at dawn on 14th Oct when 35 were present, then 78 on 22nd Oct. 68 were on Kid Brook Fields at Budworth Mere on 13th Nov, with a materially high count of 169 there on 19th Nov. Most of these were either on passage or had been disturbed from elsewhere as there were no other similar counts, with 68 on 4th Dec and 55 on 17th Dec being the only other significant totals recorded.

## **PINK-FOOTED GOOSE**    *Anser brachyrhynchus*

One of the individuals that regularly joins the Canada Goose flock on Kid Brook Fields at Budworth Mere was present from 12th Jan to 12th Feb. At the end of the year, 2 were present there from 30th Nov to 7th Dec and 3 roosted on Neumann's Flash on 15th Dec, then being seen at Budworth Mere on 18th Dec, after which there were no further reports.

The only passage flocks seen in the early part of the year were 80 heading west on 1st Jan and 50 overhead on 11th Jan, both flocks being over Budworth Mere. Autumn passage commenced with c200 over Dairy House Meadows on 10th Oct, followed by 110 over Ashton's Flash on 20th Oct, 48 over Budworth Mere on 22nd Oct, 100+ over Carey Park on 10th Nov, and finally 72 over Budworth Mere on 23rd Dec.

## **GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE**    *Anser albifrons*

A second calendar year still in juvenile plumage of the European race (*A.a.albifrons*) was seen at Budworth Mere on 11th Feb (MJ).

## **MUTE SWAN**    *Cygnus olor*

Present throughout the year, with large numbers again summering on Neumann's Flash and 2 out of 4 breeding attempts being successful.

Early in the year the resident pair on Budworth Mere still had their 4 juveniles from the previous summer in tow, and were last seen together on 22nd Feb. Meanwhile, up to 20 congregated around the fields near Marston Pools until the end of March.

Nesting took place at four sites: as usual in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere, at the Confluence Pools below Haydn's Pool, on Marston Pools and at Anderton Nature Park. A brief attempt at nest building was also made in front of Pod's Hide on Neumann's Flash in April and it is possible that a pair also attempted to nest on Ashton's Flash. The pair at Marston Pools did not lay any eggs and nothing was seen of the Confluence Pools' pair after mid May. The pair at Budworth Mere hatched and raised 5 cygnets, all of which fledged. This year however the family only stayed together until mid Oct. The pair at Anderton N.P. raised 9 cygnets (2 of

which soon disappeared) and they ranged widely up and down the Trent & Mersey Canal and adjacent River Weaver through to the autumn.

The first sign of numbers accumulating on Neumann's Flash was when 49 were counted on 6th Apr with up to 53 being regular there from the end of Apr until the end of May when 84 were counted on 23rd and 74 on 31st (when a total of 90 were present across the patch). This was the peak count and numbers were down to 55 by 7th June and 24 by mid July, which remained fairly consistent through to the autumn. 33 present on 6th Oct probably represented an arrival of some new wintering individuals. The largest count at the end of the year was of 18 on Neumann's Flash on 30th Dec. Finally, from mid Oct to the end of the year, a pair with 3 juveniles set up residence on Marston Pools, and may possibly have been the family from Budworth Mere.

## **WHOOPER SWAN** *Cygnus cygnus*

All records for 2019 related to two separate second calendar year immatures which had been rescued and released at Middlewich and then made their way to Neumann's Flash. The first, which had over wintered on Middlewich's canal first arrived on 1st Apr and was last seen on 10th Apr (during which time it also visited Marston Pools). The second individual had been taken into care at Stapeley Grange before being released at Middlewich, and was first seen flying onto Neumann's Flash with Mute Swans on 23rd Apr. It remained until 2nd June and was subsequently seen at Groby Pool near Leicester on 7th June and again at Rutland Water on 8th July.



Immature 2CY Whooper Swan, Neumann's Flash, 1st April 2019 © Greg Baker

## **EGYPTIAN GOOSE** *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

A party of 3 arrived onto Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 2nd Sept (MJ) and remained there until 7th Sept.

## **COMMON SHELDUCK** *Tadorna tadorna*

The year began with 2 on Neumann's Flash and 1 on Budworth Mere on 1st Jan building up to 6 at the mere from 6th Jan to the early March, increasing to 9 on 5th Mar when there were also 3 on Neumann's Flash. On 23rd Apr, 11 were on Budworth Mere with a further 5 on Neumann's Flash, with year's highest count being 20, all on Neumann's Flash, on 4th May. A rapid decline followed with just 2 at the flash on 5th June, following which there were no further records for the summer or autumn. This absence was probably at least partially due to a lack of any apparent breeding success, unlike 2018. A pair probably nested to the east of Budworth Mere but no young were subsequently seen.

The first winter sighting later in the year was 1 on Neumann's Flash on 18th Nov, following which 1 or 2 were present until the end of Dec with an increase to 5 on 23rd and a peak of 8 on 30th. 1 at Budworth Mere on 11th Dec was presumed to be the same as had been seen at Neumann's Flash.

## **MANDARIN DUCK** *Aix galericulata*

Again, the only records this year were all from Budworth Mere. A female was present on 18th Feb and then a male on 3rd Mar, but there were no further sightings until an eclipse male was seen on 2nd Sept, and finally 2 males and 2 females were along the northern shoreline on 3rd Oct.

## **GARGANEY** *Anas querquedula*

A poor year for this species with only two records - an oddly plumaged eclipse male on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 30th May (MJ) and a female or juvenile also on Budworth Mere on 3rd Sept (GB).



Eclipse male Garganey, Budworth Mere, 30th May 2019, © Greg Baker

## **NORTHERN SHOVELER** *Anas clypeata*

The unprecedented numbers on Budworth Mere at the end of 2018 were still present at the beginning of the year and reached an impressive 44 on 14th Jan with 42 on 4th Feb. Small numbers were also at Neumann's Flash during this period (generally between 6 and 8) but by early March the main flock had moved to here with 35 counted on 1st Mar, up to 41 on 23rd Mar (interestingly of which only 5 were females). There then followed the usual decline as birds moved back to breeding territories and only 18 were present on 17th Apr and the last spring records were of 2 on Neumann's Flash on 27th May and finally 1 on 8th June.

The first returning individual was a female at Budworth Mere from 22nd July, followed by 3 at Ashton's Flash and 2 at Neumann's Flash on 3rd Aug. 22 were at Neumann's Flash by 22nd Aug, whilst up to 3 were on Budworth Mere by the end Aug. From autumn through to the end of the year most frequented the Witton Flashes and there was nothing like the numbers present on Budworth Mere as there had been at the end of 2018, the highest counts being 3 females from 22nd-25th Oct and 3 males on 23rd Dec. High counts from the flashes included 22 on 30th Sept, 18 on 22nd Oct, and 12 all on Ashton's Flash on 13th Dec.

## **GADWALL** *Anas strepera*

Following the low numbers present at the end of 2018, 12 at Marston Pools on 4th Jan (for one day only) was the largest and only double figure count in the first half of 2019. Surprisingly, counts at Budworth Mere often exceeded those at Witton Flashes with 2 pairs seen infrequently from 22nd Feb to 28th Mar. 9 at Neumann's Flash on 28th April were all males.

Up to 11 were at Witton Flashes (usually Neumann's Flash) from 10th June to the end of July, signifying a return to more usual numbers. There were however no double figure counts throughout Aug, although a flush of migrants brought 34 to Witton Flashes on 20th Sept increasing to 43 at Neumann's Flash on 26th Sept. Higher water levels seem to favour this species at M&WF, and further increases revealed 60 at Neumann's Flash on 14th Oct, a peak of up to 76 across Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes from 1st-21st Nov, but then fewer towards the end of the year down to 56 at Neumann's Flash on 23rd Dec. The only records from Budworth Mere during autumn and winter were a male there on 30th Nov and 2 on 17th Dec.

## **EURASIAN WIGEON** *Anas penelope*

Large, mobile flocks were again often present but just as often absent from Neumann's Flash during both winter periods. 98 were counted on 1st Jan but just 25 there on 4th Jan. Numbers continued to fluctuate and the next highest count was 45 on 20th Feb, although only 3 were present by 20th Mar. A lone male remained at Neumann's Flash from 27th Mar and was last seen 28th Apr. At Budworth Mere, 4 were seen on 4th Jan, with up to 2 from 14th-17th Jan, then 4 on 1st Mar.

There were no late spring or summer records this year, the first returning migrants being 4 on Neumann's Flash on 10th Sept. A gradual increase saw 17 present on Neumann's Flash by 17th

Oct following which bigger flocks began to arrive (often flying in from the north-east during the afternoon) with 74 on 30th Oct, 104 on 18th Nov, 222 on 30th Nov, 239 sitting on ice on 18th Dec and finally the year's highest count of 280 on 27th Dec. During these influxes, a male was on Ashton's Flash from 13th-18th Dec, where they are rarely seen.

The only records from Budworth Mere during the second half of the year were 2 from 29th-30th Nov and then 9 on 29th Dec.

## **MALLARD** *Anas platyrhynchos*

Despite relatively successful breeding seasons over the past few years, this species seems to be in decline at M&WF. There were for example no counts of more than 20 at the Witton Flashes until 22 were recorded on 19th Mar. There were also lower than usual numbers at Budworth Mere, although 74 were counted on 6th Feb. Between March and June there were generally between 50-100 present across the patch. At least 5 broods were reported from Witton Flashes and 3 at Budworth Mere, which would suggest a moderate breeding season.

As usual, peak numbers were present during the summer and autumn when adults arrive to moult and juveniles are much in evidence. The highest count across the patch was on 8th July, when 168 were at Budworth Mere and a further 50 at Witton Flashes. This total of 218 is well below the peak counts of recent years. The mere flocks seemed to remain fairly constant as 167 were counted there on 6th Aug. From Sept onwards the only individual site three figure counts were 116 at Budworth Mere on 26th Sept and 113 also on the mere on 13th Dec.

## **NORTHERN PINTAIL** *Anas acuta*

Although recorded annually, this remains an uncommon visitor to M&WF. All records came from the autumn to second winter period and all were from Witton Flashes. The first was a male moulting out of eclipse plumage first seen at Ashton's Flash on 20th Sept and lastly on 25th Oct. A female was then on Neumann's Flash from 1st-4th Nov with another (or possibly same) on 21st Nov. 4 (2 pairs) were at Neumann's Flash briefly on 12th Dec and finally 3 males were at the same site on 28th Dec.

## **COMMON TEAL** *Anas crecca*

Generally a poor year for this species, undoubtedly due to unsuitably high water levels. It began reasonably well however with c500 on Neumann's Flash on 1st Jan up to 535 on 12th Jan, decreasing to 340 across Witton Flashes on 8th Feb. Interestingly, counts during this period generally showed a 50:50 distribution of males and females. 26 were at Haydn's Pool on 6th Mar and a pair were seen copulating there on 30th Mar, however there were no further sightings after 3 were recorded on 6th Apr. On the main flashes few lingered into spring and the last sightings was of a pair on Neumann's Flash on 23rd Apr.

There are usually only single figures at Budworth Mere, and typically 7 were seen on 4th Jan after which 4 were regularly seen until 8 were sighted on 1st Feb. A pair then remained until

early Mar, with 6 seen irregularly from 9th Mar to 15th Apr, and the last of the spring being 3 females on 6th May.

A male at Neumann's Flash from 7th June was presumed to be an early returning migrant, joined by a second individual from 8th through to the end of July. The first sign of any significant late summer arrival was when 27 were at Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on 28th Aug. They remained through Sept and into Oct until 52 were recorded on 31st Oct and then 63 on 6th Nov. There were no three figure counts at the year end, the highest being 85 across Witton Flashes on 21st Nov down to 44 by 27th Dec.

At Budworth Mere, 1 was present from 26th Sept to 4th Oct, 1 on 13th Nov, 7 on 2nd Dec and 4 on 18th Dec.

## **COMMON POCHARD** *Aythya ferina*

Not usually common at M&WF but with high water levels on Witton Flashes, the highest counts in recent times were recorded towards the end of the year.

Records from the early part of the year were limited to a male on Budworth Mere on 9th Jan, another (or possibly same) there on 13th Feb, a female also on Budworth Mere on 25th Feb and finally 2 at Neumann's Flash on 31st Mar.

The first of the late summer / autumn was an eclipse male on Neumann's Flash on 19th July, followed by a juvenile male at Budworth Mere from 20th Aug to 3rd Sept, and then a male seen regularly there from 18th Sept to 18th Oct during which period it was also joined by 7 others on 7th Oct. Presumably the same male was also present on the mere from 11th-20th Nov, with 2 males present on 5th Dec and a lone female on 18th-23rd Dec.

At Witton Flashes, 5 males were present at Neumann's Flash on 20th Sept, 2 on 24th Sept, 1 male on 26th Sept, 5 males again on 14th Oct, 4 males from 17th-19th Oct, and a single male from 25th-30th Oct. The first ever recorded on Ashton's Flash were 2 females on 13th Nov, increasing to 4 females on 6th Dec and then 10 (6 males and 2 females) on 13th Dec. Freezing conditions forced them to move to Neumann's Flash where 11 were seen on 15th Dec. A rapid thaw then saw a peak patch count of 23 on 23rd Dec (1 at the mere, 10 on Ashton's Flash and 12 on Neumann's Flash), and then 15 on Ashton's Flash with 3 more on Neumann's Flash on 30th Dec.

## **TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya fuligula*

This remains by far the commonest diving duck at M&WF and this year numbers in the second half of the year surpassed even the high counts from 2018. However, as in 2018 there was no evidence of any successful breeding.

High counts from Budworth Mere early in the first winter period included 42 on 12th Jan and 61 on 5th Feb, with a high at Neumann's Flash of 12 on 22nd Feb. The usual early spring influx saw 19 on Neumann's Flash on 19th Mar, and by the 30th Mar numbers had built up to 81 on

Budworth Mere. Numbers declined somewhat during Apr, with 42 at Budworth Mere on 11th, most of which presumably accounted for an unusual arrival of 38 onto Neumann's Flash on 18th Apr. Typically numbers were lowest during the late spring and summer months with no more than 22 in May, 12 in June and 30 in July, before 45 were on Budworth Mere on 23rd Aug and 70 there on 28th Sept. Further increases at Budworth Mere saw 96 on 12th Oct, and 102 on 19th Oct (during which time there was also a small flock around Witton Flashes). By Nov the flock at the flashes was also increasing with 30 by 21st Nov and still 26 on 30th Nov when there were also 143 at Budworth Mere, creating the highest patch count of the year and also of recent times. An even higher count on the mere of 151 on 7th Dec was unfortunately not backed up by any count at Witton Flashes. There was an obvious drop in numbers at the mere from the second half of Dec with just 76 there on 24th.

## **COMMON GOLDENEYE** *Bucephala clangula*

As in 2018, regularly seen during the winter months but this year there were records from across the patch and not just Budworth Mere.

The year began with 4 (2 males and 2 females) present at Budworth Mere from the end of 2018 until 11th Jan. From then on, it was often hard to tell how many were present as counts and sex / ages fluctuated on a regular basis. For example, 3 females (but no males) were seen on 30th Jan, a 2CY male on 1st-6th Feb, a total of 6 on 6th Feb and just the 3 females again on 13th Feb. 2 females were still here on 23rd Feb and were last seen on 6th Mar.

The first returning individual was a juvenile at Neumann's Flash on the relatively early date of 6th Oct, following which 4 (including an adult male) were at Budworth Mere on 20th Oct. From the end of Oct it appears that 7 roaming individuals accounted for sightings through to the end of the year: 2 males, 2 1CY males, 2 females and another 1CY, presumed female. For example, the 2 1CY males at the mere on 22nd Oct were presumably the same as seen at Neumann's Flash on 27th Oct. A female and a 1CY immature (not one of the young males) were then also at Neumann's Flash on 30th Oct. On 18th Nov, 4 (2 males and 2 females) were on Budworth Mere with 3 (a male, a female and a 1CY male) there on 20th. On 21st Nov, the 2 females were found on Ashton's Flash, the first Goldeneyes ever recorded there, with one remaining until 29th Nov. There were various sightings of individuals in early Dec with a peak day count of 5 on 4th Dec, with more usually up to 3 seen. Both 2CY males were seen on 30th Dec showing markedly different stages of moult.

## **GOOSANDER** *Mergus merganser*

Continuing the record breaking numbers seen at the end of 2018, a total of 50 were present at Budworth Mere on 2nd Jan, the highest ever count at M&WF. Thereafter there was a reduction, down to 31 on 7th Jan and then just 5 by the end of Jan which were then regularly seen through to the end of Feb. Numbers fluctuated though, and 15 were present on 1st Feb and 12 on 6th Feb. In early Mar, 7 were present from 2nd-3rd, then a single 2CY male on 9 Mar, and then up to 3 from mid to end Mar. The last seen at Budworth Mere during this period was a male on 9th Apr, however the last spring record for the patch was of a female at Neumann's Flash on 19th Apr, the only one seen at Witton Flashes early in the year.

Late summer passage included 3 juveniles at Neumann's Flash on 12th July and then 5 'redheads' on 13th July, but there were no further sightings until a distinctively plumaged 2CY male arrived at Budworth Mere on 21st Oct, remaining until at least 8th Nov. During this time it was also joined by a redhead on 30th Oct, an adult male on 31st Oct, and 4 others on 6th Nov. 2 redheads had also been at Neumann's Flash on 25th Oct. Unlike 2018, there was no spike in numbers towards the end of the year and although individuals were present for most days in Nov and Dec the highest counts were of 3 (a male and 2 females) from 19th-30th Nov, 3 males on 4th Dec, 5 (4 males and a female) on 11th Dec and 6 (5 males and a female) on 30th Dec. A male was on Marston Pools on 17th Dec, the only sighting there of the year.



Second calendar year male Goosander, 8th November 2018, © Trevor Davies

## **COMMON PHEASANT** *Phasianus colchicus*

In 2019, remained as a fairly common resident in areas of farmland around Higher Marston, also regularly seen in the fields north of Budworth Mere and less often at Haydn's Pool and north-east of Neumann's Flash. A female flushed from the bund between Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on 8th Mar was probably the most unusual sighting. There were no counts of more than 2 at any one site.

## **LITTLE GREBE** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Although only seen and heard occasionally, 1 was probably resident on Budworth Mere throughout Jan and Feb but there were no other records from other sites early in the year. The first returning to Neumann's Flash was a singleton on 24th Feb, although it was already holding territory by 1st Mar when there was also a displaying pair on Ashton's Flash. 3 were at Budworth Mere on 6th Mar with 2 on 19th Mar, and 1 on 30th Apr being the last seen there in the spring. 1 at Dairy House Meadows on 15th Apr was unusual here.

This species becomes very hard to locate from the middle of spring, and although probably present there were no reports at all from Witton Flashes between 1st May and 4th June. Sightings were more regular from then on, and 4 on Neumann's Flash from 8th July were finally suggestive of breeding attempts. Individuals could also be heard calling from Ashton's Flash in July. The first sign that breeding has been successful at Neumann's Flash was when 2 young juveniles were seen on 6th Aug (when a total of 9 individuals were present) and it seems that at least 3 pairs fledged young there, as two pairs of chicks were also seen from the relatively late date of 2nd Sept onwards (on which date 11 adults and older juveniles were also present with a further 5 individuals on Budworth Mere). 15 at Neumann's Flash on from 30th Sept to 4th Oct included the two late breeding pairs still feeding juveniles. As birds dispersed from Oct onwards counts decreased, with 9 seen there on 14th Oct and just 4 on 6th Nov with 1 on 13th Nov. None were then seen during colder weather until 1 re-appeared on 23rd Dec.

On Budworth Mere, a pair first seen on 10th July were seen with 2 juveniles from 29th July and presumably bred there. Up to 3 remained on the mere through to the end of the year, although they could often be elusive, with 5 there on 22nd Nov and 4 on 17th Dec.

## **GREAT CRESTED GREBE** *Podiceps cristatus*

The typical decline at the end of Dec at Budworth Mere from 2018 was carried forward into 2019, with only 20 seen on 3rd Jan and only 4 present for a few days at the end of Jan, however 13 were at Budworth Mere from 3rd-16th Feb. A pair were on Marston Pools on 13th Jan and another pair had returned to Neumann's Flash by the 1st Mar, where they were sometimes joined by a third individual until the end of the month. On 23rd Mar, 10 were at Budworth Mere, 3 at Neumann's Flash and a further pair on territory at Marston Pools. There were no exceptional counts anywhere from Apr through to June.

The earliest signs of any breeding activity was one incubating at Marston Pools on 15th May. Two chicks were hatched and fledged here. At Neumann's Flash, the pair present since early Mar finally nested in June and 4 chicks had hatched by 10th July, although one quickly disappeared. All three remaining chicks successfully fledged. The juveniles were left to their own devices by early Sept and the two older juveniles also departed soon afterwards leaving 1 juveniles which was last seen on 30th Oct. At Budworth Mere there were at least two nesting attempts but neither lasted long and for the first time in many years no chicks were hatched.

By the end of Aug, post-breeding flocks had begun to congregate at Budworth Mere with 42 there on 31st (when also 5 still at Neumann's Flash and 4 at Marston Pools). Numbers then remained fairly constant until a substantial influx resulted in 81 counted at Budworth Mere on 19th Oct, increasing 92 on 13th Nov, undoubtedly one of the highest ever counts at M&WF. 80 were still present on 30th Nov, down to 73 on 11th Dec and 60 on 24th Dec but milder weather initiated the usual mid winter reduction and just 20 were seen on 30th Dec. Surprisingly 2 were also at Neumann's Flash on 30th Dec.

### **BLACK-NECKED GREBE** *Podiceps nigricollis*

Rather typically, just two records this year. Firstly a stunning pair in breeding plumage were at the east end of Budworth Mere for the day on 12th May (VL) and then a juvenile was also on Budworth Mere from 29th-30th July (GB).



Black-necked Grebes, Budworth Mere, 12th May 2019 © Malc Curtin

### **EURASIAN BITTERN** *Botaurus stellaris*

Budworth Mere's famous wintering reedbed visitors again performed well at each end of the year. The individual seen at the end of 2018 in the Coward Reedbed was regularly seen from 1st Jan with 2 present from 12th-28th Jan, then just the 1 seen until 7th Feb. There were no further reports until 1 was again on view from 1st-8th Mar, with 2 again reported on 2nd Mar with one rumoured to have been booming.

1 was seen flying into the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere on the surprisingly early date of 11th Oct, and may well have been a migrant rather than a returning wintering bird as there were no further sightings until the more typical date of 26th Nov. From then on sightings were regular from 1st Dec, initially associated with freezing conditions but then more generally although most often only at dusk. 2 were reported here on 31st Dec.



Eurasian Bittern, Budworth Mere, 17th December 2019 © Mark Jarrett

## **GREY HERON** *Ardea cinerea*

Generally common in small numbers throughout the year (most often at Budworth Mere), and numbers seen continue to seem low compared to the numbers of active nests recorded in the heronry. This year the official BTO census reported 47 nests on 14th Apr, down a worryingly 26% on 2018, and the lowest count this decade. Nonetheless, this compares well with the maximum daily counts of 18 seen around the heronry from 12th-18th Jan, 17 at Budworth Mere on 1st Feb and 23 on the northern shoreline of the mere on 23rd May (which included many juveniles). There were no other double figure counts. The first juvenile was seen on 15th May but there were no estimates made of overall breeding success. At Witton Flashes the only count of more than 2 present was of 4 at Neumann's Flash on 27th July, presumably birds dispersing from the heronry.

## **GREAT WHITE EGRET**    *Ardea alba*

With unfavourable water level conditions prevailing, there were only two sightings this year. Firstly, 1 briefly at Neumann's Flash on 23rd Feb (CR) and then another, again briefly, on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 10th Oct (AB).

## **LITTLE EGRET**    *Egretta garzetta*

2 at Budworth Mere on 3rd Jan were presumably the same two seen during Dec 2018. The only other reports from the early part of the year were presumed to be the same individual on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 13th Jan, 27th Jan and finally 26th Mar.

A juvenile visited Neumann's Flash briefly on 18th June and was seen again on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 27th June. It disappeared during July but was back at Kid Brook Spit from 2nd-20th Aug and it also less regularly visited Neumann's Flash from 7th-19th Aug. There were no further sightings until 1 was at Budworth Mere (again most often on Kid Brook Spit) from 10th Oct onwards. 2 were at Neumann's Flash early morning on 18th Oct and 2 were also present at Budworth Mere from 5th-6th Nov with 3 there on 26th Nov, then 2 again from 30th Nov to 8th Dec, and 1 remaining in the area through to the end of the year.

## **GREAT CORMORANT**    *Phalacrocorax carbo*

There was no repeat of the record breaking influx seen in the autumn of 2018, although this period again recorded the highest numbers. The west end of Budworth Mere was again the best place to see them catching and (eventually) consuming large carp and eels.

The spread of records was typical with the highest counts early in the year being 22 at Budworth Mere on 12th Jan and 13 there on 22nd Feb. Although present throughout the spring and summer, there were no further double figure counts until 12 were at Budworth Mere on 17th Oct. 20 on 14th Nov indicated a small influx, and the peak count here was of 31 on 22nd Nov, then down to 20 by 11th Dec and just 6 on 30th Dec. Most seen at Witton Flashes were of overflying birds, with 6 overhead on 29th July and 22nd Oct, with a few individuals fishing briefly at Neumann's Flash or along the river at Anderton Nature Park.

## **EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK**    *Accipiter nisus*

This species's retiring nature when not actively hunting or displaying makes it difficult to monitor across M&WF, although there were as usual probably 2 or 3 pairs breeding on or around the patch.

A total of 4 seen on 8th Mar included a pair on Ashton's Flash, a male on Dairy House Meadows and another individual over Budworth Mere. Individuals were seen displaying over probably territories at Budworth Mere (usually over the northern shoreline), Haydn's Pool (usually over Marshall's Wood) and Carey Park. There were no specific reports of juveniles being

seen, so breeding success was unclear. At the end of the year, one or two were attracted to each of the Common Starling roosts at Witton Flashes and Budworth Mere.

### **WESTERN MARSH HARRIER** *Circus aeruginosus*

A female seen briefly at Neumann's Flash on 30th Apr (SJ) re-appeared on 17th May (SJ) and thankfully stayed a little longer, though mainly hidden in the reedbeds. Another female was again briefly at Neumann's Flash on 22nd Sept (JW) before flying off east.

### **COMMON BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*

This is the commonest raptor at M&WF, although this year it seemed as if only 3 pairs were resident within the patch boundaries or adjacent to them. 2 or 3 could be seen on most days at the start of the year, with 5 over Haydn's Pool on 6th Mar the first indication of spring arrivals, and 13 were counted around the patch on 23rd Mar. The next highest spring count was of 9 on 10th Apr, after which pairs settled down to breed. Active nests were apparent in Big Wood at Marbury Country Park, along the river at Anderton Nature Park and south of Forge Pools. 2 juveniles were in Big Wood on 30th July. 7 over Neumann's Flash included at least 2 juveniles, presumably from the local breeding population. 6 were at Marbury Country Park on 6th Oct. At the end of the year the peak count was of 7 with 4 at Marbury Country Park and 3 over Neumann's Flash on 23rd Dec.



Common Buzzard, Witton Mill Meadows, 18th October 2019 © Greg Baker

## **WATER RAIL** *Rallus aquaticus*

A more typical year for this species after the bumper breeding season of 2018. Early in the year, an individual again showed very well at the small marsh near Wincham Mound by Neumann's Flash from Jan through to early Mar, with 2 there on 17th Jan and 3 together on 3rd Feb. Up to 2 more were generally heard around the Witton Flashes in the first winter period. During this time, one of the 2 or 3 individuals wintering in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere could sometimes be seen near the bird feeders at the hide. The last here was 1 heard squealing from the reedbed on 2nd Apr.

At least 2 pairs appeared to be on territory on Neumann's Flash during the spring but sightings were sporadic, however of 3 seen there on 19th July, 2 were certainly juveniles. There were no records from other sites over the late spring and summer periods. 1 was back at the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere on the relatively early date of 28th Aug (they only usually over winter here). Reports increased during the autumn and a total of 9 were considered to be present by mid Oct, with 3 along the river at Anderton Nature Park, 2 along the river at Witton Mill Meadows, 1 at Neumann's Flash, 1 at Ashton's Flash, and 2 at Budworth Mere. By the end of the year, up to 3 were regularly heard in the Coward Reedbed and one or two were still around Witton Flashes.



Water Rail, Neumann's Flash, 18th January 2019 © Steve Collins

## **COMMON MOORHEN** *Gallinula chloropus*

A resident and breeder across all the wetland sites and undoubtedly much under recorded. Across the patch, 10 were reported on 14th Jan and 13 on 22nd Feb. 11 were at Budworth Mere on 5th Mar and the year's highest count was of 15 on 6th Mar when 8 were at Budworth Mere and 7 at Witton Flashes. At least 3 broods were raised at Neumann's Flash but there were no other reports of breeding success. The next double figure count was of 13 across all sites on 20th Aug, with 14 on 10th Sept, and 12 on 12th Oct. 12 were at Budworth Mere on 18th Dec.

## **EURASIAN COOT** *Fulica atra*

Appears to be an increasingly common resident with numbers buoyed by high breeding success; more young seem to successfully fledge of this species than any other wetland bird at M&WF. The feisty attitude of the adults seems to deter the predators that have such a damaging affect on breeding attempts by other species in similar habitats.

At Budworth Mere, numbers early in the year were consistent with those seen at the end of 2018, but with an impressive peak of 262 on 13th Jan, being the largest single site count of the year. From mid Feb onwards there was a gradual decline, down to 164 by 1st Mar but then a more significant reduction with only 37 by 28th Mar. At Witton Flashes, it took a while for numbers to recover from the low water levels the previous autumn, although 19 were on Neumann's Flash by 17th Jan. Breeding was confirmed at Neumann's Flash, Ashton's Flash, Dairy House Meadows and Budworth Mere, although there was no definitive view on the number of chicks raised.

By the end of June, post breeding flocks (including many juveniles) had begun to congregate, with for example 84 at Budworth Mere on 20th and 46 at Witton Flashes on 27th. By 22nd July, 191 were on Budworth Mere and 72 at Neumann's Flash and there were further increases throughout the late summer, particularly at Budworth Mere with 248 there on 28th Aug. Counts of 318 were made a few times across M&WF in Oct and the highest patch count of the year was 403 on 13th Nov when 225 were on the Witton Flashes. Over 300 were still present at the end of the year.

## **EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER** *Haematopus ostralegus*

A pair had returned to Budworth Mere by 13th Feb, joined by another pair on 16th. One of these pairs then moved to Neumann's Flash on 18th with 3 there on 23rd. By the 17th Mar there were 2 on Neumann's Flash and a further 4 on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere, with 6 at Neumann's Flash on 22nd Mar, these being the largest number seen on a single date. Up to 4 were then seen regularly at Budworth Mere and Witton Flashes during Apr and into early June (although 5 were on Kid Brook Spit on 7th May), during which time individuals also visited Dairy House Meadows and the fields at Higher Marston. The maximum count thereafter was 3 at Budworth Mere on 29th July and the last record of the year for the entire patch was 1 at Budworth Mere on 5th Aug.

Despite at least three nesting attempts at Neumann's Flash and one east of Budworth Mere no chicks were raised, which presumably accounted for the early departure of the adults.

## **PIED AVOCET**    *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A good year for this species with the first being a relatively early arrival on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 24th Mar. 1 was then at Neumann's Flash on 13th Apr with 4 there on 17th Apr, increasing to a patch record of 9 on 18th Apr (when they also flew onto Ashton's Flash). Numbers then fluctuated down to 4 by the 20th Apr then up to 6 on 23rd and down to 2 on 24th, when there were also 2 more at Budworth Mere. The flock then moved on and the next sightings were not until 2 were seen at Budworth Mere on 21st May, followed by 3 at Neumann's Flash on 23rd May. 2 were also seen at Neumann's Flash on 9th June and 4 were on Ashton's Flash on 14th July. To cap off an excellent series of records, 1 was on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 16th Dec (MJ), M&WF's first winter sighting.



Pied Avocets, Neumann's Flash, 18th April 2019 © Greg Baker

## **NORTHERN LAPWING**    *Vanellus vanellus*

Large flocks seen early in the year included 600 at Higher Marston on 17th Jan and 1100 at Budworth Mere on 25th Jan. They soon dispersed however and the biggest flock seen at Budworth Mere in Feb was only 110 on 6th, whilst 250 were in flight over Witton Flashes on 16th. Pairs were back on breeding territory at Ashton's Flash and Haydn's Pool by early Mar but although various nesting attempts were made across Witton Flashes (particularly at

Ashton's Flash where 4 pairs were present), for the first year in recent memory there were no young chicks seen anywhere and all nests appeared to have been predated.

The usual post-breeding flocks reached 329 on Ashton's Flash on 29th July and 360 at Budworth Mere on 6th Aug, but with high water levels most of the larger flocks were only around briefly. From early Sept and on through Nov numbers struggled to reach three figures but with the onset of colder weather in early Dec more returned and there were counts of 320 at Budworth Mere on 6th Dec and 350 over Witton Flashes on 27th Dec.

## **EUROPEAN GOLDEN PLOVER** *Pluvialis apricaria*

With no habitat to hold any autumn migrants, the only record of the year was of 2 flying over Higher Marston on 1st Feb.

## **COMMON RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius hiaticula*

1 was at Neumann's Flash from 1st-3rd May but all other May sightings were from Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere, with 2 on 6th, 1 on 12th and 1 on 30th. The last spring sighting was of 2 late migrants at Neumann's Flash on 3rd June. The only autumn record was 1 over Budworth Mere on 28th Aug.

## **LITTLE RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius dubius*

The first spring arrivals just squeezed into March with 2 on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 27th. The first at Witton Flashes was 1 on Neumann's Flash on 1st Apr when another was on Kid Brook Spit. 5 on Kid Brook Spit on 11th Apr was the highest single count, whilst 3 there on 19th Apr were presumed to be the same as later seen on Neumann's Flash the same day. Ones and twos were then generally seen at Budworth Mere and Witton Flashes through to early May. A pair was regularly seen displaying over Ashton's Flash from mid May and was presumed to be the same pair that settled onto Neumann's Flash towards the end of the month, with 3 there on May 20th. Nesting was attempted on Stilt Island on Neumann's Flash but there was no evidence that any eggs hatched. An adult and a juvenile were on Kid Brook Spit from 1st-4th July but were presumed to have arrived there from outside the patch. Other July records included 1 at Neumann's Flash on 4th and 2 at Ashton's Flash on 5th but there were no further records until 2 were seen in flight at Budworth Mere on 23rd Aug. The last sighting of the year was 1 on Neumann's Flash on 12th Sept.

## **WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

A better year for spring passage (the peak period for this species at M&WF) than in 2018 despite generally unfavourable water levels. 4 were initially on Ashton's Flash before moving to Neumann's Flash on 18th Apr, with 3 again at both sites next day, then 4 on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 20th Apr. 1 at Ashton's Flash on 22nd Apr was presumed to be the same as seen in flight over Dairy House Meadows later the same day. Other Apr records were 2 on fields to the east of Budworth Mere on 23rd, 2 at Ashton's Flash on 24th, 4 at Neumann's Flash

on 28th, and 1 at Ashton's Flash on 29th. There was some lingering passage into early May with 2 on Ashton's Flash and then 1 on Neumann's Flash on 3rd and finally 2 on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 9th. As usual there were no autumn passage reports.



Whimbrel, Budworth Mere, 23rd April 2019 © Greg Baker

## **EURASIAN CURLEW** *Numenius arquata*

Notable counts at the beginning of the year were 68 at Neumann's Flash on 4th Jan followed by 155 there on 12th and then later at Budworth Mere the same day (the year's highest count). 140 were still at Budworth Mere on 25th Jan and three figure counts continued into Feb including 148 across patch on 22nd with 144 at Budworth Mere on 9th Mar. 77 were still at Budworth Mere by 3rd Apr, with the last of the spring flocks being 40 on 17th Apr. They are usually absent in May, so 1 at Neumann's Flash on 16th was presumably a passage migrant.

The first post-breeding returnees were 45 at Ashton's Flash on 5th July and 80 flew over Neumann's Flash from their Ashton's Flash roost on 29th July. Up to 68 were regularly seen at this roost or at Budworth Mere through Aug with fewer in Sept before 120 were on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 14th Oct. Nov's peak counts were 74 on 8th and 14th at Budworth Mere, with 46 being a regular count during Dec.

## **BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa limosa*

As with many waders, this was a disappointing year for this species. The first migrant was with Eurasian Curlew along the northern shoreline of Budworth Mere from 15th-22nd Apr. The biggest flock of the year was a one day arrival and departure of at least 75 at Neumann's Flash on 5th May but there were no further sightings until 31 arrived at the same site on 30th May down to 24 on 31st. Late summer passage was limited to Budworth Mere, with 2 on Kid Brook Spit on 5th Aug increasing to 12 from 6th then down to 1 by the 12th, however 8 more arrived

following heavy rain that same day, with 6 remaining until 14th. The last record was of 1 on Kid Brook Spit on 10th Sept.

## **RUFF** *Calidris pugnax*

The only records this year were of 1 on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 3rd Feb with presumably the same individual seen again there on 18th Feb.

## **DUNLIN** *Calidris alpina*

The first of the year was on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 9th followed by 1 visiting both Ashton's Flash and Neumann's Flash on 17th Apr. Into May, 1 was at Neumann's Flash on 3rd, 2 on Kid Brook Spit on 6th, 3 on Neumann's Flash on 9th which later moved to Kid Brook Spit the same day and where 2 remained on 7th, 1 at Neumann's Flash on 23rd and finally 5 there on 24th. The only late summer / autumn migrants were 1 on Kid Brook Spit on 3rd July and 3 which flew through at Neumann's Flash on 19th Aug.

## **SANDERLING** *Calidris alba*

After a blank year in 2018 there were two records this year: 2 at Neumann's Flash on 27th May (SH, SJ) and then an individual in unusual transitional plumage on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 30th May (MJ).

## **EURASIAN WOODCOCK** *Scolopax rusticola*

There was the usual scattering of records early in the year, with 1 on Dairy House Meadows on 1st Jan, 1 on Ashton's Flash and 2 on Dairy House Meadows on 4th Jan, singles on Carey Park on 2nd and 3rd Feb, and 1 in flight at Marbury Country Park on 12th Feb. 1 flushed from the path to Pod's Hide at Neumann's Flash on 8th Mar was the last of the first winter period. The only record from the second winter period was 1 in flight at dusk at Dairy House Meadows on 28th Oct.

## **JACK SNIFE** *Lymnocyptes minimus*

As usual deemed to be much commoner during the winter months and on passage than records suggest. Records this year were of 1 on Ashton's Flash and 2 near Budworth Mere on 4th Jan, 1 on Ashton's Flash on 14th Jan, 1 again near Budworth Mere on 2nd Feb and finally 1 at Haydn's Pool on 6th Apr. There were no reports in the second half of the year.

## **COMMON SNIFE** *Gallinago gallinago*

The highest count early in the year was of 37 on the marsh at Kid Brook Fields behind Budworth Mere on 4th Jan. 15 on Ashton's Flash on 14th Jan was the best that could be found

there, although undoubtedly more were present. Spring records included 2 at Haydn's Pool on 11th Apr, 2 at Ashton's Flash on 19th Apr, 1 at Neumann's Flash from 22nd-23rd Apr and an interestingly late record of 1 at Neumann's Flash from 31st May to 1st June.

The first presumed returning post-breeders were 2 on Ashton's Flash on 26th July and then 7 at Neumann's Flash on 7th Aug, increasing to 25 there by 22nd Aug and 26 on 28th Aug. The main flock seemed to alternate between Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes building to 48 on 24th Sept. Thereafter no large flocks were seen, with 10 at Ashton's Flash on 22nd Oct, 6 there on 26th Nov, and 7 on Ashton's Flash from 23rd-25th Dec. 2 from 11th-22nd Oct and 1 on 30th Dec at Kid Brook Spit were the only records from the Marbury Country Park area of the patch in the second half of the year.

## **COMMON SANDPIPER** *Actitis hypoleucos*

The first of the spring was on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on the typical date of 11th Apr and was then seen irregularly until 19th Apr, on which date it or another was also on Neumann's Flash. Thereafter, at Neumann's Flash there were 2 on 25th Apr, 1 on 28th Apr, 2 on 7th May, and 1 from 16th-17th May. At Kid Brook Spit there was 1 on 4th May and 1 from 9th-11th May, with 2 on 10th May.

With no records in June, 1 was back at Kid Brook Spit on 4th July with it or another also present from 12th July to 9th Aug. 3 at Neumann's Flash on 19th July were the only late summer and autumn reports from the Witton Flashes. Passage also remained poor at Kid Brook Spit with records of single birds on 9th Aug, 22nd Aug and finally 25th Aug.

## **GREEN SANDPIPER** *Tringa ochropus*

The wintering status of this species at M&WF is hard to determine as individuals appear to be very mobile and seem to prefer secluded sites. This year 1 was at Haydn's Pool on 24th Feb with 2 there from 6th-8th Mar, with possibly the same 2 around Budworth Mere from 28th Mar to 18th Apr. It's possible however that all these were early spring migrants. At the end of the year, 1 around the west end of Budworth Mere from 17th-29th Dec was most certainly a wintering bird.

More typical passage records began with 1 at Haydn's Pool from 30th Mar with 4 there on 11th Apr but just 1 again by 16th Apr. 4 were on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 19th Apr (presumed to include the 2 remaining 'winterers'), with 2 still on the spit and 2 more at Haydn's Pool on 20th Apr, and the last of the spring being 2 on Kid Brook Spit on 23rd Apr.

An early returning migrant was at Haydn's Pool from 9th-10th June and seen intermittently thereafter (depending on water levels), with 5 there on 1st July and 2 on 29th July. 1 was at Neumann's Flash on 5th July and 1 on Ashton's Flash on 1st Aug, with 2 at the latter site on 3rd Aug. There were then no further records until 1 was seen on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 10th Oct, with 2 there on 14th Oct. 1 along Witton Brook by the car park on 31st Oct was subsequently also seen at Neumann's Flash on the same date.

It will be interesting to see how this species' fortunes fare in coming years given the seemingly permanent demise of Haydn's Pool.



Green Sandpiper, Haydn's Pool, 6th April 2019 © Greg Baker

### **COMMON REDSHANK** *Tringa totanus*

The first report of the year was 1 on Neumann's Flash on 17th Mar, followed by 1 at Budworth Mere from 19th Mar irregularly until 28th Mar. 2 were present at Ashton's Flash from at 1st Apr through to at least 13th May (although often seemingly missing for long periods) and may have attempted to breed, although there was no evidence that they were successful. 1 at Neumann's Flash on 17th May was presumably from this pair. 1 was again at Ashton's Flash on 27th June, with 2 at Neumann's Flash on 13th July, singles at Kid Brook Spit on 18th July and 1st Aug, and finally 1 at Neumann's Flash and later Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 28th Aug.

### **COMMON GREENSHANK** *Tringa nebularia*

A paltry year with just three records: 1 briefly on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 29th Apr, 1 calling in flight over Neumann's Flash on 21st July and 1 on Stilt Island at Neumann's Flash on 14th Aug.

## **BLACK-HEADED GULL** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Despite its common status, this is a declining species at M&WF. There were no three figure counts this year and only three of 500 or more.

Up to 250 were regularly seen on or around Budworth Mere early in the year, with the highest counts being 350 on 22nd Feb (when 180 were also at Witton Flashes), 420 on 1st Mar and 440 on 25th Mar, which were mainly hawking for insects over the east end of the mere. As the adults moved back to breeding territories, it was interesting that of 250 at Neumann's Flash on 11th Apr, 236 were immatures. By May, numbers struggled to reach double figures. One pair began nest building on Stilt Island at Neumann's Flash but it was a short lived exercise.

The first dispersing juveniles seen were 2 at Ashton's Flash on 8th July. The first significant count of the autumn was when c500 were on Budworth Mere on 3rd Sept but thereafter large flocks were surprisingly absent until 720 roosted at Budworth Mere on 24th Dec, the largest count of the year.

## **LITTLE GULL** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

A small flock of 5 (3 adults, 1 third calendar year and 1 second calendar year) were at Budworth Mere for much of the day on 17th Apr (MT).



Little Gulls, Budworth Mere, 17th April 2019 © Mark Jarrett

## **MEDITERRANEAN GULL** *Larus melanocephalus*

Another average year, with the first report being of 1 on Budworth Mere on 12th Jan. In Feb, an adult was again on the mere on 19th Feb, with 2 moulting into breeding plumage there on 26th and again on 11th Mar. A second calendar year individual was seen on Neumann's Flash (the only sighting at Witton Flashes all year) and then later on Budworth Mere on 6th Apr. In the second half of the year, a second calendar year in its second winter plumage was at Budworth Mere on 20th Sept. The only other records were of a winter plumaged adult on Budworth Mere on 30th Nov and again on 24th Dec.

## **COMMON GULL**    *Larus canus*

14 on Budworth Mere on 25th Jan and 12 on Neumann's Flash on 26th Jan were the only notable counts at the start of the year. The usual early spring arrival saw 35 at the mere on 20th Feb and then a high count of 75 on 2nd Mar with 22 on Budworth Mere and a flock of 53 on Neumann's Flash. 39 were on Budworth Mere on 8th Mar. None were seen after mid Apr until a second calendar year immature appeared on Budworth Mere on the unexpected date of 30th May. An adult at Budworth Mere on 10th July was the first returning individual, with the first juvenile also at the mere on 28th Aug. There were no double figure counts until 10 were seen at Budworth Mere on 19th Oct, followed by 16 at Neumann's Flash on 6th Nov and finally 20 at Budworth Mere on 24th Dec.

## **GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL**    *Larus marinus*

An adult was at Budworth Mere from 1st Jan through to 3rd Feb but interestingly there were no further sightings until a third calendar year immature was seen on Ashton's Flash on 9th June. The next record was not until an adult was seen at Budworth Mere on 8th Nov, this individual being seen intermittently until 18th Dec. On the basis of these records, this may be becoming a scarce bird on the patch.

## **EUROPEAN HERRING GULL**    *Larus argentatus*

Relatively uncommon, with most seen passing overhead. There were no reports this year in either May or June, and neither more surprisingly in November. The highest counts were of 4 at Neumann's Flash on 14th Jan, at Budworth Mere on 28th Mar, and at Witton Flashes on 21st Apr. Even less common in the second half of the year, with the first being a third calendar year immature at Ashton's Flash on 10th July and thereafter no counts of more than 2 at any one time.

## **YELLOW-LEGGED GULL**    *Larus michahellis*

A first calendar year that had already moulted into first winter plumage was amongst an arrival of Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Budworth Mere on 30th Aug (GB), the only record in 2019.

## **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL**    *Larus fuscus*

As has been the case in recent years, there were neither any significant roosts nor large flocks on passage in 2019. 10 on Neumann's Flash on 14th Jan was the only double figure count in the first winter period. Spring passage peaked at 57 at Budworth Mere on 12th May, undoubtedly attracted by ploughing activity in one of the fields to the north, and 34 passed over the Witton Flashes on 15th May. The only notable count in late summer and autumn was 54 on Budworth Mere on 30th Aug. This and 32 at the mere on 3rd Sept were significantly the only double figure count in the second half of the year.

## **COMMON TERN**    *Sterna hirundo*

The first spring record was 1 at Budworth Mere on 3rd May. 2 at Neumann's Flash on 8th May later moved to Budworth Mere where the flock grew to 17 by the end of the day. There were no further reports until 1 was at Budworth Mere on 6th June, followed by 2 there on 4th July, 1 at Neumann's Flash on 1st Aug, a juvenile at Budworth Mere on 7th Sept and finally an individual there on 30th Sept.

## **ARCTIC TERN**    *Sterna paradisaea*

The only sighting of the year was 2 at Budworth Mere on 8th May (GB).

## **BLACK TERN**    *Chlidonias niger*

After a blank spring in 2018, it was back to a sparse but typical passage this year with an adult at Budworth Mere on 8th May (GB) with 2 there on 10th May (MJ), with one remaining until 11th. The only autumn record was a juvenile at Budworth Mere on 30th Aug (GB).



Juvenile Black Tern, Budworth Mere, 30th August 2019 © Mark Jarrett

## **FERAL PIGEON**    *Columba livia*

Resident all year around the periphery of M&WF (particularly in Northwich, at the Winnington industrial sites and around Higher Marston) but there were no records of any significance this year.

## **STOCK DOVE**    *Columba oenas*

A few were present around Marbury Country Park, Higher Marston and Dairy House Meadows at the start of the year. 6 at Marbury Country Park on 5th Mar included 2 pairs displaying. 10 were around Witton Flashes on 8th Mar and the highest count of the year was 33 at Higher Marston on 23rd Mar, mainly feeding on a recently treated field. 4 territories were established across Marbury Country Park during the spring. It was difficult to establish how many were at Witton Flashes but probably at least 2 pairs were present, often seen around the owl boxes. 11 were at Marbury Country Park on 28th May. The only double figure count in the second half of the year was 10 at Witton Flashes on 10th Sept.

## **COMMON WOOD PIGEON**    *Columba palumbus*

Notable counts early in the year were 170 at Higher Marston on 1st Feb, 100+ at Marbury Country Park on 16th Feb and 40+ at the Budworth Mere heronry on 22nd Feb. 17 territories were considered to be at Marbury Country Park during the spring. There were no structured counts from migration watchpoints this year, although autumn passage did seem relatively low. The only three figure counts were 155 moving south-west over Witton Flashes on 14th Oct, 182 over the same site in the same direction on 18th Oct and 150 again over Witton Flashes on 6th Nov.

## **EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE**    *Streptopelia decaocto*

As usual most records were either from Higher Marston or from the east side of Neumann's Flash adjacent to the breeding pairs at Wincham, where they were present throughout the year. The highest counts were 14 at Higher Marston on 14th Jan and 10 there on 22nd Oct. During July, a pair could often be seen drinking from puddles by the dragonfly pond at Anderton Nature Park. The only records away from these sites were 1 at Marbury Country Park on 11th May and 1 over Witton Mill Meadows on 4th Dec.

## **COMMON CUCKOO**    *Cuculus canorus*

Another year with a scattering of records, beginning with 1 first heard calling at Carey Park on 23rd Apr and then seen at Witton Flashes the same day and still present at Neumann's Flash the next day. 1 was again at Neumann's Flash on 4th May. In June, a lingering individual was first heard calling at Dairy House Meadows and Neumann's Flash on 13th before being seen at Dairy House Meadows on 16th, calling again at Neumann's Flash on 19th and finally (and presumed to be the same) at Witton Mill Meadows on 23rd.

## **WESTERN BARN OWL**    *Tyto alba*

Present in the owl box on Dairy House Meadows from the start of the year and a breeding attempt seemed to be underway, however the box was abandoned in early May, possibly due

to 2019 being a poor vole year. 1 (presumed to be from this pair) was sometimes visible at the owl box on Haydn's Pool from 19th June to early July. At least 1 was then back at the Dairy House Meadows nest box from 26th July through to the end of the year.

## **TAWNY OWL** *Strix aluco*

Present every month, although there were no regular roosting individuals located this year. Early in the year heard calling from Marbury Country Park and Dairy House Meadows. From mid Mar, one could often be heard calling during the middle of the day near Butterfinch Bridge. On 30th May, 1 was seen perched in daylight near to the Ice House at Marbury Country Park. No confirmation of breeding success was reported, although one pair certainly nested in Coward Wood at Marbury Country Park. At the end of the year, 4 could be heard calling around Dairy House Meadows on 28th Oct and 4 were calling around Budworth Mere at dusk on 2nd Nov.

## **SHORT-EARED OWL** *Asio flammeus*

1 was photographed by a dog walker having been flushed from the south side of Dairy House Meadows on 19th Jan, the first record since 2009.

## **COMMON SWIFT** *Apus apus*

The first arrivals were 3 over Neumann's Flash on 1st May followed by at least 1 over Budworth Mere on 2nd May with 16 there by 4th May. There were some excellent counts from the mere this year, with 55 on 9th May increasing to at least 100 the next day. 50 or more were there on 27th May followed by a peak count of 112 on 5th June and still around 50 on 1st July. Meanwhile, 30+ were at Witton Flashes on 8th June. The last sightings of the year were of 9 over Neumann's Flash and Witton Mill on the relatively early date of 16th Aug.

## **COMMON KINGFISHER** *Alcedo atthis*

There were only occasional sightings from Budworth Mere at the start of the year, mainly along the southern shoreline. Although 2 were seen by Coward Wood on 23rd Mar there were again only sporadic sightings thereafter, mainly this time from the east side of the mere and along Forge Brook in Big Wood, becoming more regular from mid April into May. Breeding was assumed to have been attempted around the eastern end of the mere. 1 was also seen at Dairy House Meadows on 19th Apr where they are at best occasional.

There were no reports in June and the next sightings were of 2 along the south side of Budworth Mere on 8th July. 1 at Neumann's Flash on 26th July was the first of the year there and it was seen a few times between then and 6th Aug. There were however no further sightings from here until was seen regularly between 12th Sept and 8th Oct. 1 was seen again at Dairy House Meadows on 3rd Sept. Back at Budworth Mere there were only a few reports during the autumn, however up to 3 were regularly seen there from 22nd Oct through to the end of the year.

## **LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER**    *Dendrocopus minor*

This is a much sought after species on the patch and there is always a concern with regard to releasing news of their presence and managing their overall wellbeing, particularly where nesting is concerned. As usual, all records this year were from Marbury Country Park. 1 was possibly first heard drumming as early as 1st Jan in Big Wood, but the first definite sighting was 1 along Marbury Lane on 15th Jan. Both male and female were then seen regularly here from 1st Feb with the pair seen together on 10th Feb. A pair were seen excavating a nest hole in Big Wood on 2nd Mar but only the female was present on 5th Mar and there were no further sightings after that date. It was presumed that no breeding attempt was made. The only other record for the year was of 1 calling in Hopyards Wood on the unusual date of 3rd Aug.



Male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Marbury Country Park, 1st February 2019 © Greg Baker

## **GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER**    *Dendrocopus major*

Drumming was heard regularly from Marbury Country Park from mid Jan, with 5 drumming here on 20th Feb and again on 5th Mar. Meanwhile, 3 were at Witton Flashes on 6 Feb. By early April there were a total of 9 territories in Marbury Country Park, 4 at Witton Flashes, 3 at Anderton Nature Park and 1 at Carey Park, making 17 in total. The first juvenile was seen at Neumann's Flash on 10th June. Although 3 were around Witton Flashes on 18th Oct, there were notably few records in the second half of the year, when this species is generally less obtrusive.

## EUROPEAN GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

Reasonably common but typically elusive and more often heard than seen. 1 was calling fairly regularly around the Witton Flashes from at least 9th Jan, with 2 heard on 8th Mar and an obvious pair along Marbury Lane on 21st Mar. However, although 1 was reported from Ashton's Flash on 2nd Apr there were no further records at the flashes until mid May. A pair were regularly recorded in Big Wood and Hopyards Wood (presumed to be the same pair) from early March but there were no records from Marbury Country Park from 1st May until 20th June, after which the only reports there were of 1 on three dates in Oct and 1 from 23rd-30th Dec. Records from Anderton Nature Park were singles on 1st May, near the dragonfly pond at Anderton Nature Park on 8th July, and on 11th Aug. Back at Witton Flashes, 2 were often seen along the bund between Neumann's and Ashton's Flash at the end of July and thereafter there were intermittent reports of singletons until 1 became more regular there throughout Dec.

## COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

At best uncommon nowadays across M&WF. A female was seen occasionally to the north and west of Budworth Mere from Jan through to mid Apr but not thereafter. At Witton Flashes the first was not seen until 1 was at Dairy House Meadows on 17th Apr. 1 was seen carrying a vole as it flew over Dairy House Meadows on 14th June and again on 30th July (probably feeding young in the area) and another with a vole was on Carey Park on 11th Aug, on which same date another was at the Anderton Dragonfly Pond. A juvenile male became a regular sight on Ashton's Flash from 20th Sept to 8th Oct. A female was at Neumann's Flash on 14th Oct-17th Oct, possible the same at Carey Park on 18th Oct and finally at Ashton's Flash on 6th Nov.

## EURASIAN HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

The first of the spring was hawking over Budworth Mere on 28th Apr, followed by 1 at Marston Pools on 4th May and 1 again over Budworth Mere on 13th May.



Eurasian Hobby, Budworth Mere, 13th May 2019 © Greg Baker

There was a flush of autumn records this year, most if not all related to a pair that had bred successfully somewhere near Comberbach. 1 was over Dairy House Meadows on 1st Sept and then 4 were seen over Kid Brook Fields north of Budworth Mere on 2nd Sept, with an adult and a juvenile together over the mere on 3rd Sept. Finally, single individuals were seen over Budworth Mere on 14th Sept and 20th Sept.

### **PEREGRINE FALCON** *Falco peregrinus*

At least 1 could regularly be seen perched on the higher buildings at the Winnington works from within the patch from early Jan through to mid Apr and then again from early June to the end of Oct, but interestingly not thereafter. Sightings of 2 here were on 4th Jan, 16th Feb, 19th Mar and 18th Oct. Occasionally they were seen over Witton Flashes, presumably moving between Winnington and Lostock. No juveniles were reported this year and neither were there any records from Marbury Country Park and Budworth Mere.

### **RING-NECKED PARAKEET** *Psittacula krameri*

Having been rumoured to have been present for a week, 1 was seen twice in flight around the ranger's cabins at Marbury Country Park on 7th June (DJ, GB) but surprisingly not thereafter. This is the first record since the early years of this century, despite what would appear to be prime habitat in the area.

### **EURASIAN JAY** *Garrulus glandarius*

1 or 2 were regularly seen at both Marbury Country Park and Witton Flashes in Jan and Feb with 7 across both sites on 8th Mar. Very elusive during the breeding season with ones and twos again reported from the major sites until autumn passage brought 11 to Witton Mill Meadows and the west side of Neumann's Flash on 23rd Sept. Up to 8 were then regularly seen around the Witton Flashes with 9 there on 18th Oct. Just one or two again at the main sites in Nov and Dec.

### **EURASIAN MAGPIE** *Pica pica*

Present all year. The only double figure counts were 15 across the patch on 23rd Mar, 22 at Witton Flashes (mainly Ashton's Flash) on 30th Sept, and 10 at Witton Flashes on 8th Oct and 22nd Oct. The highest counts from Marbury Country Park were 6 in Jan, Mar, Apr and Oct, and 6 were at Anderton Nature Park on 2nd Aug.

### **WESTERN JACKDAW** *Corvus monedula*

Another species ignored by most local and visiting birders and therefore under recorded. Single figure counts were the order in Jan and Feb but at least 25 were at Witton Flashes on 6th Mar and 20+ at Marbury Country Park on 2nd Apr. Pairs were prospecting in Big Wood at Marbury Country Park by mid Feb and 10 or more pairs were estimated to have nested, with juveniles present from early May onwards. Numbers were generally low from July to mid Sept,

until 22 passed over Neumann's Flash on 26th Sept, then 20+ at Witton Flashes on 20th Oct and 20 at Marbury Country Park on 4th Dec.

## **ROOK** *Corvus frugilegus*

30+ were feeding in fields at Higher Marston on 3rd Jan and at least 30 were back at the rookery at Great Budworth (viewable from the patch) by 30th Jan, with 50 there on 23rd Mar and 15th Apr. There were very few records away from the colony or the nearby foraging sites. For example at Witton Flashes the only records were of 1 over Neumann's Flash on 8th Mar and 2 over Dairy House Meadows on 18th Oct. 11 flew over Marbury Country Park on 28th Sept. At the end of the year 50 were at Higher Marston on 4th Dec.

## **CARRION CROW** *Corvus corone*

Common and widespread but usually in small numbers. 12 at Witton Flashes on 6th Feb was a notable count and 32 were counted around the patch on 23rd Mar, mainly at Higher Marston. In November a roost developed in Forge Wood to the north-east of Dairy House Meadows, with 22 on 2nd Nov and 50 by 5th Nov.

## **NORTHERN RAVEN** *Corvus corax*

A pair were often present at Higher Marston in Jan and presumed to be the same also around Marbury Country Park in Jan and Feb, and less frequently in Mar and Apr. Much less common at Witton Flashes early in the year, with the first being 2 over Neumann's Flash on 6th Feb. 1 was tumbling in display flight over Dairy House Meadows on 16th Apr, where 1 flew west overhead carrying food on 6th May. Sightings over Carey Park and Anderton Nature Park in May suggested nesting nearby but not at the regular site at Winnington works. Breeding somewhere nearby was confirmed when 3 fledged juveniles were seen at Anderton Nature Park on 28th May and 2 adults with presumably the same 3 juveniles over Haydn's Pool on 10th June. There were fewer reports in the second half of the year, with the only records of more than 2 being 3 over Neumann's Flash on 16th Aug, 4 around Haydn's Pool on 18th Oct and 3 at Witton Flashes on 6th Nov.

## **COAL TIT** *Periparus ater*

Fairly common around Marbury Country Park (most usually seen around the feeders), less so in mid summer. 7 were there on 7th Feb, of which 5 were singing in Big Wood and 8 were recorded on 22nd Feb. Although 7 were also present on 9th Apr, only 2 territories were maintained through to late spring; 1 near Budworth Mere and 1 in Hopyards Wood. A family party including 2 juveniles were along the south shore of Budworth Mere on 27th May. There were only infrequent sightings in the autumn at Marbury Country Park until 2 became regular at the screen feeders from 19th Nov.

At Witton Flashes, one or two were regularly seen up to mid Apr and again in late summer, with 1 near Butterfinch Bridge on 31st May. 1 was at Witton Mill Meadows on 4th Oct. The last of the year here was 1 at Neumann's Flash on 14th Nov.

### **WILLOW TIT** *Poecile montanus*

Following 1 being found along the River Weaver at Anderton Nature Park on 30th June (HF), the presumed same was seen at the Dragonfly Pond on 7th July (DB, IB) and then intermittently between there and Carden's Ferry Bridge from 11th Aug (SH) to 13th Oct. There were no reports from anywhere else.

### **EURASIAN BLUE TIT** *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Following a count of 13 at the screen feeders at Budworth Mere on 7th Jan, other good spring counts around Marbury Country Park were 20 on 8th Jan, 23 on 20th Feb and 32 on 5th Mar. A survey from early March to mid April revealed a total of 43 territories across M&WF, nearly half being in the Marbury Country Park area. The only double figure count in the second half of the year was of 12 at Neumann's Flash on 6th Oct, the other highest being 8 at Witton Mill Meadows on 2nd Sept and 8 along the south side of Budworth Mere on 29th Nov.

### **GREAT TIT** *Parus major*

Often assumed to be a little less common than Eurasian Blue Tit at M&WF, however spring surveys suggested otherwise. High counts early in the year included 16 at Marbury Country Park on 18th Jan and 20 on 5th Mar. At Witton Flashes the highest counts were 9 on 1st Feb and again on 1st Mar. The survey of territories from early March to mid April revealed a total of 59, 31 of which were in the Marbury Country Park zone. Less obtrusive after the breeding season with the only significant count being 12 at Marbury Country Park on 17th Dec. By 23rd Dec some were already singing around the perimeter of Budworth Mere.

### **EURASIAN SKYLARK** *Alauda arvensis*

The large flock that had been at Higher Marston at the end of 2018 continued into the new year with 42 in fields by Ollershaw Lane on 17th Jan, although only 1 was found on 1st Feb. 9 flew south-east over Neumann's Flash on 6th Feb. At Ashton's Flash, the first was recorded singing on 1st Mar. Although there was no confirmation of breeding, singing individuals remained through to 27th June, with 2 singing on 31st May. At Higher Marston, 2 were back on territory by the end of March. They may have accounted for the lone record of 1 east of Budworth Mere on 12th May.

Autumn passage commenced with 21 moving southwest over Witton Flashes on 23rd Sept, followed by 18 on 8th Oct and a peak of 42 moving in the same direction over the same sites on 14th Oct. 10 were at Higher Marston on 22nd Oct and 32 there by 18th Dec. Late passage

was recorded over Budworth Mere with 1 on 29th Nov and 1 on 4th Dec, both flying purposefully southwest.

## **SAND MARTIN**    *Riparia riparia*

A return to form after a poor year in 2018, at least as far as spring passage was concerned. The earliest were 3 over Budworth Mere on 3rd Mar, increasing to 6 on 6th Mar and 9 on 8th Mar. By 24th Mar a flock of 100 or more over the mere became a regular feature through to mid April, with higher counts during that period of 230 on 27th Mar and an impressive 500 on 2nd and again on 6th Apr, and 300 on 15th Apr. The first seen at Witton Flashes were 9 on 1st Apr, with 15 there on 2nd Apr.

Although 100 were at Budworth Mere on 6th May, spring passage proved to be rather a false dawn as numbers dwindled thereafter. 5 at the mere on 4th June were the first there in nearly three weeks, and they remained scarce during June and July, although 25 were over the mere on 18th July. At Witton Flashes they were even scarcer, with just a scattering of records until the last was seen at Neumann's Flash on 8th July. 30 were at Budworth Mere on 14th Aug increasing to 40 on 29th Aug. The last sightings of the year were 2 over Budworth Mere on the relatively early date of 3rd Sept.

## **BARN SWALLOW**    *Hirundo rustica*

Generally a worryingly poor year despite some high weather driven counts. The first was as usual over Budworth Mere, with 1 on 26th Mar but remained occasional there until an impressive 200 arrived ahead of a rain front on 16th Apr. Other three figure counts at Budworth Mere were 120 on 6th May with at least 100 still present on 8th. The earliest at Witton Flashes was 1 on 2nd Apr with 10 at Marston Pools on 3rd Apr. The highest count at the flashes was 21 over Neumann's Flash on 9th May. Became very scarce at all sites from mid May onwards until 50 were over Budworth Mere on 14th Aug. This and 25 at the mere on 20th Aug were the only double figure count for the second half of the year. The last records were 4 heading south over Witton Flashes on 30th Sept, 2 over Dairy House Meadows on 6th Oct and 1 over Carey Park on 12th Oct.

## **COMMON HOUSE MARTIN**    *Delichon urbicum*

A reasonably early arrival this year with 1 at Budworth Mere on 26th Mar. Numbers then remained low through April until 30 were over Budworth Mere on 9th May, up to 140 on 6th May and then a remarkable 300 on 9th May. The earliest at Witton Flashes were 5 over Neumann's Flash on 1st May. From late May onwards this was the commonest hirundine around the patch, albeit in relatively low numbers, although 200 were at Marbury Country Park (mainly over the mere) on 5th June, when there were also 30 at Neumann's Flash. The highest late summer count was 150 at Budworth Mere on 14th Aug. 50 over Ashton's Flash and 40 over Marbury Country Park on 28th Aug were all obviously moving south. Late records were 20 over Witton Flashes on 26th Sept and 1 over Witton Mill Meadows on 8th Oct.

## **CETTI'S WARBLER** *Cettia cetti*

Already an uncommon resident following the first record on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2015. Furthermore, recorded for the first time at Marbury Country Park where 1 was heard occasionally singing from the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere from at least 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept through to the end of the year. At the start of the year singles were heard from along Witton Brook and by Butterfinch Bridge at Witton Flashes, with another back on territory along Forge Brook between Neumann's Flash and Dairy House Meadows (usually at the Pipebridge) from 13<sup>th</sup> Feb. From 16<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1 was singing from the original find site at the confluence of Forge and Witton Brooks. By the end of April an estimated 8 singing individuals were on territory, with 2 on Ashton's Flash, 2 around Haydn's Pool, 1 at Carden's Ferry Bridge, 1 on the south side of Neumann's Flash, 1 at the Pipebridge, and another new territory by the Trent & Mersey canal bridge at Marston Pools.

As usual, there were fewer reports from mid summer through early autumn but by mid Oct an estimated 11 individuals were present, with the aforementioned single at the Coward Reedbed, 2 on Ashton's Flash, 2 on Neumann's Flash, 4 along Witton Brook, 1 at Haydn's Pool, and 1 along the River Weaver at Carey Park.



Cetti's Warbler, Witton Brook, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2019 © Greg Baker

## **LONG-TAILED TIT** *Aegithalos caudatus*

This species's mobile nature makes monitoring its status difficult. Roving flocks can generally be found across most parts of M&WF throughout the year. Double figure counts were 10 at Marbury Country Park on 25<sup>th</sup> Jan and 5<sup>th</sup> Mar, 10 at Witton Mill Meadows on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept, 18 at Witton Flashes on 18<sup>th</sup> Sept, 13 by Budworth Mere on 28<sup>th</sup> Sept, 17 around Witton Flashes on

18th Oct and the year's highest count of 24 at Marbury Country Park on 11th Dec. There were an estimated 10 territories established across the patch in spring, including one carrying nesting material at Haydn's Pool on 23rd Mar. A family party of 5 were near here on 25th June.

## **WILLOW WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

1 along the bund between Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on 2nd Apr was the first of the year, with 4 at Witton Flashes by 6th Apr. The first at Marbury Country Park was on 11th Apr and although up to 13 were present mid Apr none seemed to linger and no territories were maintained here through the spring. A total of 13 had settled in around Neumann's Flash by 1st May, and this year's warbler survey confirmed Witton Flashes to be the prime area with 22 of the 24 territories mapped being here (the other two being on Carey Park). The total was a slight increase on the 2016 survey but with a far greater concentration around the flashes. For example there were 3 territories at Marbury Country Park in 2016 but none this year.

12 along Witton Brook on 29th July were mostly juveniles, the only indication of probably local breeding success. Late records were 3 along Witton Brook and 1 at Neumann's Flash on 2nd Sept, and 2 along the bund between Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on 18th Sept.

## **COMMON CHIFFCHAFF** *Phylloscopus collybita*

1 along the south side of Budworth Mere on 22nd Feb was presumed to be an early spring arrival rather than an over-wintering individual. There were 2 there from 5th Mar, the same date that 1 was also at Neumann's Flash. There appeared to be a significant influx across the patch from mid Mar, including a good count of 16 at Anderton Nature Park on 25th. A total of 43 were estimated to have been present by the end of March but many of these seemed to be migrants. The warbler survey mapped a total of 38 territories, mostly around the Witton Flashes and up 36% on the 2016 figure.

Autumn passage counts included 20 at Witton Mill Meadows on 2nd Sept, and 30 across the Witton Flashes on 23rd Sept (with 19 at Witton Mill Meadows). The last of the year were 1 at Neumann's Flash on 8th Oct and 1 reported from Witton Flashes on 12th Oct.

## **SEDGE WARBLER** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

A total of 9 different singing individuals through the spring breeding period indicated this was the best year in recent times for this species. Typically Ashton's Flash produced the first record with 1 singing from 19th Apr. 1 was then at Haydn's Pool from 22nd Apr. A well watched individual set up territory at Witton Mill car park from 28th Apr, when 2 were also on nearby Ashton's Flash. 1 was in the south-west corner of Neumann's Flash from 1st May, and the number of territories on Ashton's Flash had increased to 3 by 6th May. The first at Marbury Country Park was on 7th May when 1 was in the Coward Reedbed. The total number of territories occupied by the end of May included 2 at both the Coward Reedbed and Haydn's Pool. There were no particularly late records, with the last sighting being of 1 at Witton Mill on 26th July.

## **EURASIAN REED WARBLER**   *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

The first spring record was 1 singing along Witton Brook from 6th Apr onwards, however the next to arrive was not until 18th Apr when another was at Neumann's Flash. Bigger numbers soon followed and 10 were counted along Witton Brook the next day. The first at Budworth Mere was on 23rd Apr. Numbers at Witton Flashes had reached 28 by 1st May. A total of 63 territories logged during the spring warbler survey was 37% up on the 2016 count, probably due to the ongoing spread of reedbeds, particularly around the Witton Flashes. The first juveniles seen were at Neumann's Flash on 27th June. Most had moved back to winter quarters by the end of Aug and the only Sept records were 5 at Witton Meadows and 2 along the track to Pod's Hide at Neumann's Flash on 2nd.

## **COMMON GRASSHOPPER WARBLER**   *Locustella naevia*

1 was at Witton Mill Meadows from 18th-20th Apr and what appeared to be another first appeared on Haydn's Pool also on 20th Apr through to 30th. Presumably the same individual was reeling again from there on 27th May and after that more occasionally, being last heard on 23rd July.



Grasshopper Warbler, Haydn's Pool, 31st May 2019 © Greg Baker

## **EURASIAN BLACKCAP** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Again no wintering records for this year and as usual Marbury Country Park produced the first of the spring with a male on 25th Mar. The first female was there on 30th Mar, and there were 12 across the whole patch by 1st Apr. By all accounts this was a good year for this species and by the end of May 104 territories had been established across M&WF, more than double the number recorded in 2016. Autumn lingerers included 6 at Witton Mill Meadows on 23rd Sept, 2 at Neumann's Flash on 4th Oct, 2 at Anderton Nature Park on 13th Oct and lastly a male at Witton Mill Meadows on 19th Oct.

## **GARDEN WARBLER** *Sylvia borin*

Marbury Country Park won the race for first of the spring this year with 1 on the relatively early date of 18th Apr, with 1 then at Wincham Mound, Neumann's Flash from 21st Apr. By 1st May, 5 were around the Witton Flashes. The warbler survey revealed a total of 17 territories across the patch, a slight increase on 2016, and fairly evenly spread across the main sites. The only reported sign of breeding activity was 1 seen carrying food to the north of Neumann's Flash on 4th June. Rather surprisingly there were no records later than 1 heard at Budworth Mere on 10th July.



Garden Warbler, Neumann's Flash, 1st May 2019 © Greg Baker

## **LESSER WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia curruca*

Disappointingly only 2 records in 2019, one in spring and one in autumn, with 1 along the east side of Neumann's Flash on 2nd May (DR) and 1 at Witton Mill Meadows on 23rd Sept (GB).

## **COMMON WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia communis*

As in 2018, the earliest arrival this year was 1 singing at Dairy House Meadows on exactly the same date of 19<sup>th</sup> Apr, with 5 around Witton Flashes generally the next day. 23 territories were recorded during the spring warbler survey, a worrying 65% decline from the count in 2016. The biggest decline has been around the Witton Flashes, whether due to habitat change or mortality on wintering grounds is not known. The only autumn records were of 2 on 2nd Sept, 1 along the path to Pod's Hide at Neumann's Flash and 1 along the south side of Dairy House Meadows.

## **GOLDCREST** *Regulus regulus*

Up to 7 were regularly reported from Marbury Country Park in Jan and Feb, mainly in Big Wood with up to 2 also in Hopyards Wood, with 5 still around on 6th Mar. 2 were also at Butterfinch Bridge at the Witton Flashes on 4th Jan. Only one pair seemed to be nesting in Big Wood during the spring surveys. The highest counts are usually in autumn but this year 3 was the maximum; at Neumann's Flash on 6th Oct, and at Marbury Country Park on 12th Oct, 26th Oct and 6th Nov. Up to 2 were present at Marbury Country Park and also at Neumann's Flash at the end of the year.

## **EURASIAN WREN** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Second only to the European Robin in terms of the number of territories across the patch during the early spring survey, with a total of 164 recorded, nearly half of which (73) were at the various Marbury Country Park sites, where it is the commonest resident passerine. 26 territories at Anderton Nature Park were also significant. There were no other significant reports.

## **EURASIAN NUTHATCH** *Sitta europaea*

The woodlands of Marbury Country Park have always been this species's stronghold at M&WF, but in more recent years they have become commoner elsewhere. Of the 24 territories mapped during the spring survey, 18 were at Marbury Country Park but there were also 4 around the Witton Flashes and 2 at Anderton Nature Park. Significant days counts included 11 at Marbury Country Park on 1st Mar and 17 there on 21st Mar. Up to 8 were at Marbury Country Park from 20th Aug to the end of the year.

## **EURASIAN TREECREEPER** *Certhia familiaris*

Up to 3 were in Big and Hopyards Woods at Marbury Country Park early in the year. 3 territories were recorded during the spring survey, 2 in Big Wood and 1 in Hopyards Wood, with 5 individuals seen on 21st Mar. Odd individuals were seen on Dairy House Meadows across the canal from Big Wood in March and again on 3rd Sept but the only sightings truly away from Marbury Country Park were 1 by Haydn's Pool on 26th Mar and 1 at Witton Mill Meadows on 4th Oct.

## **COMMON STARLING** *Sturnus vulgaris*

No murmurations were reported from any of the main sites across the patch at the start of the year. Up to 500 regularly spent the day around Marston Hall Farm from Jan into mid Feb but there were no other significant counts until 300 were seen flying south over Ashton's Flash at dawn on 8th Oct, seemingly having left a roost site. On 25th Oct, 10,000 were seen to depart a roost at Neumann's Flash just after dawn and 8,000 were at a murmuration there on the evening of 28th Oct and again on 1st Nov, with 38,100 on 18th Nov (mainly roosting at the north end of the flash) and 35,000 on 15th-16th Dec. Meanwhile, another roost had begun to develop at Budworth Mere. Although only 700 were present on 5th Nov, this increased to 16,700 on 20th Nov, with 40,000 seen leaving at dawn on 22nd Nov. A slight reduction followed, with 10,000 in early Dec but then increasing again to 60,000 on 7th Dec and the year's highest count of 80,000 on 8th Dec. A short-lived murmuration of 10,000 on 24th Dec seemed to move on and roost elsewhere. As has been the case in the past few years, murmurations at the mere were few and usually short-lived, with most flying straight into roost before and at dusk. Aside from the roosts and murmurations the only other report of note was 70 at Higher Marston on 7th June, the vast majority of which were recently fledged juveniles.



Common Starlings, Neumann's Flash, 28th October 2019 © Greg Baker

## **COMMON BLACKBIRD** *Turdus merula*

Common and obtrusive for most of the year, apart from late summer. 27 were at Marbury Country Park on 20th Feb and 12 at Neumann's Flash on 12th Mar. A total of 120 territories were recorded across M&WF during the early spring survey, 53 of which were at Marbury Country Park and 25 at Anderton Nature Park. 15 were at around the ranger's cabins at Marbury Country Park on 3rd Oct when there had been an obvious autumn arrival of thrushes, with 20 between Wincham Mound and Witton Mill Meadows on 4th Oct. 20 were at Witton Flashes on 18th Oct and 18 at Marbury Country Park on 17th Dec.

## **FIELDFARE** *Turdus pilaris*

12 were in the fields behind the northern shoreline of Budworth Mere on 4th Jan, then 10 at Marbury Country Park from 18th Jan to 1st Feb, and 55 in fields north of Big Wood on 14th-15th Mar which were the last in the first half of the year.

Autumn passage commenced with 1 over Witton Mill Meadows on 22nd Oct and 40 were at Marbury Country Park by 30th Oct. With small numbers present around Neumann's Flash and Dairy House Meadows in early Nov, 83 then passed over Neumann's Flash on 13th Nov, the largest count of the year. 29 flew over Ashton's Flash on 21st Nov. 6 were at Marbury Country Park on 17th Dec, when another was also at Neumann's Flash, and the year ended with 2 at Marbury Country Park on 24th Dec and 3 at Ashton's Flash on 30th Dec.

## **REDWING** *Turdus iliacus*

Small numbers could be seen on most days at either end of the year but more significant counts included 50 in the fields at Marbury Country Park on 15th Jan, 31 in Hopyards Wood on 1st Feb, 40 at Marbury Country Park on 20th Feb, 95 there from 5th-13th Mar, down to 21 on 21st Mar and finally for the spring, 2 over Budworth Mere on 16th Apr. During this period they were noticeably mostly absent from Witton Flashes, with only four reports of up to 4 birds.

The first autumn returnees were 2 by Budworth Mere on 28th Sept. 63 flew over Marbury Country Park on 18th Oct and another 100 over Witton Mill Meadows on 22nd Oct. "Several hundred" were reported from Neumann's Flash at dusk on 31st Oct. 120 were at Witton Flashes on 6th Nov and 200 at Neumann's Flash on 18th Nov, apparently roosting to the north of there. 100 were at Marbury Country Park on 19th Nov. There were no further large flocks reported, although 30-50 remained at Marbury Country Park and Witton Flashes through to the end of Dec.

## **SONG THRUSH** *Turdus philomelos*

Anecdotally this species seemed commoner this year, borne out by a total of 56 territories located across the patch during the early spring survey, the hotspot being Marbury Country Park with 25. 22 were singing there on 21st Mar. The only other notable records were during an obvious autumn influx when a remarkable 60 were at Marbury Country Park on 3rd Oct,

with 19 still present next day when a further 12 were at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes. 16 were at Witton Mill Meadows on 18th Oct.

### **MISTLE THRUSH** *Turdus viscivorus*

1 was singing from the east of Neumann's Flash as early as 4th Jan. Last year's estimate of 3 breeding pairs was not far off, with 5 territories recorded in early spring, with 4 at Marbury Country Park and 1 at Butterfinch Wood by Witton Mill Meadows. As well as the residents, 7 migrants were in fields at Marbury Country Park with Redwings on 5th Mar. A pair flew over Ashton's Flash on 6th Feb and 8th Mar but couldn't be tied down to an on-patch territory.

There were no reports from anywhere in June, the next sightings being a family party of 5 in the middle of Ashton's Flash on 10th July. 12 were at Marbury Country Park on 3rd Oct during the significant arrival of thrushes, with 9 present on 30th Oct, down to 5 on 19th Nov and just 1 in Dec. At Witton Flashes, 1 was at Wincham Mound on 4th Oct and 1 flew over Witton Mill Meadows on 8th Oct, with the last there being 2 at Butterfinch Bridge on 22nd Oct.

### **SPOTTED FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa striata*

Despite extensive searching of all the likely habitats, there was only one sighting this year, 1 in Big Wood at Marbury Country Park on 5th June (GB).



Spotted Flycatcher, Marbury Country Park, 5th June 2019 © Greg Baker

**EUROPEAN ROBIN** *Erithacus rubecula*

Usually appears to be the commonest resident passerine at M&WF, and this was confirmed by this year's early spring survey when a total of 172 territories were plotted, 62 of which were around Marbury Country Park. On 2nd Sept, a count of 56 around the patch indicated an overnight arrival rather than relating to particularly obtrusive resident birds.

**WHINCHAT** *Saxicola rubetra*

The only record this year was of a male photographed along the south side of Dairy House Meadows on 20th April (MD).



Male Whinchat, Dairy House Meadows, 20th April 2019 © Myrfyn Davies

**EUROPEAN STONECHAT** *Saxicola torquata*

A relatively poor year with only 2 reports, both during autumn passage. A pair were on Ashton's Flash on 6th Oct (CR) and then 1 also on Ashton's Flash on 20th Oct (SH)

## **SIBERIAN STONECHAT** *Saxicola maurus*

Having been probably first seen on Ashton's Flash on 23rd, a first winter male was seen well at the same site by David Bedford on 24th Dec and was positively identified as being of one of the forms often referred to as 'Eastern' Stonechat. Plumage analysis showed it to be a first winter male. It remained present through to the end of the year, often showing well along the northern perimeter of the flash. This is the first record for the Cheshire and Wirral recording area.

**Note:** A faecal sample was collected in Jan 2020 and subsequent analysis confirmed that this was a Siberian Stonechat of the nominate western subspecies *maurus* and clearly differentiated from other stonechat taxa.



First winter male Siberian Stonechat, Ashton's Flash, 24th December 2019 © David Bedford

## **NORTHERN WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

2 males were at Higher Marston on 1st Apr, quickly followed by a male at Ashton's Flash on 2nd Apr. Next was a male in the fields north of Budworth Mere on 9th Apr and then 2 in fields east of the mere on 17th and 18th Apr. Also on 18th, 1 was on Ashton's Flash and another on Neumann's Flash. There were no further spring sightings and neither did any appear on autumn passage this year.

## **HOUSE SPARROW** *Passer domesticus*

Only reported from around Wincham Mound at Neumann's Flash, Higher Marston and Anderton Nature Park, in all situations close to housing developments. Up to 40 were at Higher Marston in Jan, down to 20 by the end of Mar. The only other double figure count for the entire year was 14 at Wincham Mound on 6th Aug.

## **TREE SPARROW** *Passer montanus*

Despite having apparently gone missing since the end of 2018, 3 were back at Marston Hall Farm at Higher Marston on 27th Jan, with 1 there on 1st Feb, 2 on 6th Feb and 2 on 21st Mar. Unfortunately there were no further sightings.

## **DUNNOCK** *Prunella modularis*

A total of 40 territories were logged around M&WF during the early spring survey, suggesting this species is only fairly common here despite what would appear to be plenty of suitable habitat. As would be expected, Marbury Country Park (11) and Anderton Nature Park (10) were the main sites. The only double figure day counts were 10 around the Witton Flashes on 8th Mar and 10 at the same site on 29th July which included two family parties of 4.

## **WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL** *Motacilla flava*

A relatively poor year commenced with a male around the north side of Budworth Mere on 13th Apr. 1 then flew over Neumann's Flash on 21st. Another male was in fields to the east of Budworth Mere from 6th-8th May but was often elusive. There were no further records for the remainder of the year.



Male Western Yellow Wagtail, Budworth Mere, 8th May 2019 © Malc Curtin

## **GREY WAGTAIL** *Motacilla cinerea*

A female and an immature could often be seen feeding along Marbury Brook in Hopyards Wood in the early months of the year and less often along Forge Brook in Big Wood and on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere, all within Marbury Country Park. 2 seen along Marbury Brook in Hopyards Wood on 1st May was highly suggestive of a breeding pair and they were also reported on a few occasions in June. A female and a juvenile were at the Dragonfly Pond at Anderton Nature Park on 8th July, with 2 again seen in that area on 11th Aug. 2 were occasionally seen around Witton Mill Meadows from 2nd-23rd Sept, 1 flew north over Neumann's Flash on 30th Sept and 1 was at Witton Mill Meadows again on 8th Oct. 1 was also reported in the Neumann's and Ashton's Flash area on 30th Oct. At Budworth Mere, 1 was by the boathouse on 8th Oct, a first winter was along Forge Brook on 19th Oct, and 1 was around Kid Brook Spit from 22nd-25th Oct. The last sighting was of 1 along Forge Brook in Big Wood on 6th Dec.

## **PIED WAGTAIL** *Motacilla alba yarrelli*

Far more were found wintering around the patch this year than in recent times. On 3rd Jan, 23 were at Higher Marston, with another "large flock" reported from there on 6th Feb. 18 appeared to be roosting at Kid Brook Spit on Budworth Mere on the evening of 22nd Feb and there was a remarkable count of around 100 flying in to roost at the Coward Reedbed on 13th Mar. 7 still at Higher Marston on 21st Mar were considered to be remnants of the wintering flock, however 20 on Kid Brook Spit on 24th Mar and another 20 in fields east of Budworth Mere on 3rd Apr were more likely to be on spring passage. Interestingly, spring passage was virtually non-existent at Witton Flashes. Up to 3 remained around Budworth Mere during April and May, and breeding presumably occurred somewhere, with 2 juveniles seen on 5th June. Furthermore, a visit to Higher Marston on 7th June revealed at least 1 juvenile plus a male carrying food.

There were no records from any site in Aug and Sept, the first autumn sightings being 3 heading south-west over Dairy House Meadows on 8th Oct, the same date 3 were at Budworth Mere. Surprisingly given such a poor autumn, 52 were seen in flight over Neumann's Flash on the evening of 10th Oct, presumably heading to a roost in Northwich. 6 were seen to roost at the edge of Coward Wood by Budworth Mere on 2nd Nov, with 22 at the same roost site on 5th Nov but not thereafter. Only single birds were present around Budworth Mere on occasions in Dec.

**White Wagtails** of the continental race (*Motacilla alba alba*) were positively identified on spring passage as follows: a male at Higher Marston on 28th Mar, 1 on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 12th-13th Apr with 3 there on 15th Apr, 1 east of Budworth Mere on 18th Apr, singles again at Kid Brook Spit on 18th and 22nd Apr, and finally a male at Budworth Mere on 6th May. None were reported on autumn passage.

## **MEADOW PIPIT** *Anthus pratensis*

Rather an unbalanced year, with some good counts during spring passage but a paltry autumn. 6 were at Higher Marston on 3rd Jan and just 1 there on 1st Feb but a visit on 21st Mar revealed 41 present and 52 were there on 28th Mar. 14 were in the fields east of Budworth Mere on 2nd Apr with 16 there on 6th Apr. The last spring record was of 3 on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on 13th Apr.

4 over Witton Flashes on 23rd Sept were the first of a meagre autumn movement, with no other obvious overhead diurnal passage anywhere on the patch. 1 was at Ashton's Flash on 12th Oct and just 1 at Higher Marston on 22nd Oct. A small flock developed on Ashton's Flash from late Nov with 4 on 30th Nov, rising to 11 on 4th Dec and down to 7 on 23rd Dec.

## **COMMON CHAFFINCH** *Fringilla coelebs*

Another declining species at M&WF, with fewer and smaller non-breeding flocks and an apparently reduced breeding population. There were no double figure counts early in the year, with the usually favoured wildflower meadow at Dairy House Meadows only producing a peak count of 8 on 4th Jan. Only 11 pairs could be located across the whole patch during the spring survey. In the second half, 10 were by Budworth Mere on 17th Oct, 11 at Witton Flashes on 18th Oct and 12 at Neumann's Flash on 14th Nov. At the end of the year a small flock developed along the approach road to Witton Mill car park, with a peak of 12 on 13th Dec.

## **EURASIAN BULLFINCH** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Recorded in every month of the year, but never numerous. Up to 8 pairs were estimated to have been nesting across the patch, with the first juvenile seen at Witton Mill Meadows on 29th July, when the peak count of 8 was achieved around Witton Flashes.

## **EUROPEAN GREENFINCH** *Chloris chloris*

16 were at the wildflower meadow at Dairy House Meadows on 4th Jan but from then on there were no further double figure counts in the first half of the year. 10 territories were plotted across the patch during the spring survey, with 3 at both Marbury Country Park and Anderton Nature Park, 2 on Dairy House Meadows, 1 at Neumann's Flash and 1 on Carey Park.

1 was at Neumann's Flash on 27th June but there were then no further reports until 1 flew over Neumann's Flash on 23rd Sept. 1 feeding in yew trees by the swimming pool at Marbury Country Park on 26th Sept was joined by 4 more on 4th Oct, on which date a further 6 were at Dairy House Meadows. This latter flock suddenly increased to 36 on 22nd Oct (when 3 more flew over Ashton's Flash) but they disappeared as quickly as they had arrived. Only a few were reported from any site at the end of the year.

## **COMMON LINNET** *Linaria cannabina*

4 were at Higher Marston on 17th Jan with 2 there on 6th Feb and then 3 seen regularly from end Feb through to mid Apr. The regular breeding pair were back on territory near Wincham Mound at Neumann's Flash from 31st Mar with 2 pairs present during Apr through to at least the middle of June. There were no definite reports of any juveniles this year however.

Interestingly, an obvious pair were at the Anderton Nature Park Dragonfly Pond on 8th July, where a pair had also been seen in 2018. There were no further records until a flock of 30 was located along the east side of Budworth Mere and another flock of 45 at Higher Marston on 22nd Oct. Unfortunately its seemed both flocks quickly dispersed and there were no further reports from either site. At Dairy House Meadows, the wildflower meadow produced 4 on 30th Oct and 3 on 11th Dec.



Common Linnet, Neumann's Flash, 8th April 2019 © Malc Curtin

## **LESSER REDPOLL** *Acanthis cabaret*

A few good flocks were located early in the year but there were very few in the latter months. A flock of 20 was at Marbury Country Park on 15th Jan increasing to 23 by 25th Jan. There were no further reports from here though until 1 was along south side of Budworth Mere on 27th Mar.

Over at Witton Flashes, 11 were along the bund between Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on 17th Jan, with presumably the same flock now up to 12 by Wincham Mound on 19th Jan. 20 were estimated to be along the bund on 1st Feb. Following 5 at Dairy House Meadows on 20th Feb, 2 were around the bund on 5th Mar and 1 was on Ashton's Flash on 8th Mar, then 27 were again along the bund from 1st-3rd Apr, with 19 still present on 6th Apr. The last report of the spring was 1 on Dairy House Meadows on 16th Apr.

In the autumn, 1 was by Wincham Mound on 3rd-4th Oct and singles flew over Neumann's Flash on 14th Oct and Ashton's Flash on 18th Oct. Finally a "flock" was reported from Dairy House Meadows on 3rd Dec and 1 flew over Marbury Country Park on 30th Dec.

### **RED CROSSBILL** *Loxia curvirostra*

2 were reported flying over Budworth Mere on 23rd Feb (ZH), the only record for the year.

### **EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH** *Carduelis carduelis*

Currently it seems, the days of regular three figure flocks of Goldfinches in the autumn and winter have gone. It remains nonetheless the commonest finch on the patch. There were no significant counts early in the year. The early spring survey revealed a total of 23 territories around the patch, Anderton Nature Park with 8 and Marbury Country Park with 7 holding the majority.

28 at Neumann's Flash on 30th Aug and 36 at Witton Mill Meadows on 2nd Sept were the first indications of autumn flocks developing. 30 were also at Marbury Country Park on 26th Sept. 62 were then at Witton Mill Meadows on 8th Oct, down to 38 by 18th Oct and 28 by 4th Nov. A large flock that quickly developed along the east side of Budworth Mere reached at least 100 on 22nd Oct, the only three figure count for the year. The only significant flock at the end of the year was 30 along the approach road to Witton Mill car park on 13th Dec.

### **EURASIAN SISKIN** *Spinus spinus*

Becoming noticeably less common. The alders by the main path alongside Budworth Mere are a favoured site and early in the year up to 20 were there from 12th Jan to 12th Feb, with a few remaining up to 21st Mar. At the end of the year up to 10 could sometimes be seen in the same area from 6th Dec onwards. The only other records early in the year were 1 in Hopyards Wood on 5th Mar, and 6 at the Marbury Old Hall site on 15th Mar (probably same as the mere flock). There were no reports from late March onwards until 2 passed over Haydn's Pool on 14th Oct. These and 4 at Ashton's Flash on 30th Dec were the only two reports from Witton Flashes. 2 also flew over Budworth Mere on 22nd Oct.

### **YELLOWHAMMER** *Emberiza citrinella*

There were no records again this year of this species within the patch boundaries. The only sightings were of a male perched on wires to the west of The Moorings at Anderton Nature Park (so viewable from the patch) on 16th and 17th May.

### **COMMON REED BUNTING** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Fairly common for most of the year but less so in the winter months when the feeders at Budworth Mere and at Witton Mill car park are the most regular sites. A survey of territorial

males revealed 18 across the patch (exactly the same number as recorded in 2016) with 13 of these being around the Witton Flashes. The first juveniles were active around Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on 29th July. 11 at Witton Flashes on 18th Oct indicated a degree of autumn passage but there were no other notable records.

## ESCAPES and HYBRIDS

### **BLACK SWAN** *Cygnus atratus*

1 was seen on Neumann's Flash on 19th June.

### **CANADA x GREYLAG GOOSE** *Branta canadensis x Anser anser*

The usual 2 hybrids, each quite different in plumage, were with the goose flocks at Budworth Mere in Jan and Feb, but not seen again until 1 was at Neumann's Flash on 28th Aug and then often back at Budworth Mere from Oct onwards.

### **POCHARD x TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya ferina x fuligula*

The same male seen in March 2018 was back at Neumann's Flash on 1st Mar and seen again at Budworth Mere from 11th-18th Mar.



Male Pochard x Tufted Duck hybrid, Budworth Mere, 11th March 2019 © Greg Baker

## SOURCES AND CONTRIBUTORS

As last year, this report owes everything to those birders who have contributed their sightings to the various forums and websites linked to the Marbury and Witton Flashes patch. The key sources have been the Marbury Patch Sightings WhatsApp group, the @marburypatch Twitter account, the Marbury Country Park and Neumann's Flash sites on the Manchester Birding website and entries on eBird. In addition Sheelagh Halsey provided access to her bird record spreadsheets, which were a useful supplement to my own patch records, and David Norman provided data on the Grey Heron nesting surveys.

The list below is as complete as I am aware of those who have contributed via the data sources above, and my apologies to anyone who has been inadvertently omitted. Initials after names indicate that the individual was the finder of the particular bird or birds referenced in the species accounts.

Debbie Antrobus	Ruth Elsby	Peter Leicester
Greg Baker (GB)	Howard Fearn (HW)	Vernon Lundy (VL)
Paul Baker	John Gregory	John Mahon
Ian Barber (IB)	Sheelagh Halsey (SH)	David Norman
David Bedford (DB)	Paul Hill	Phil Oddy
Alan Booth (AB)	Zac Hinchcliffe (ZH)	Luke Ozsanlav-Harris
Paul Brewster	David Hughston	Mark Payne
Steve Collins	Stuart Jackson (SJ)	Rebecca Pedler
Malc Curtin (MC)	Dave James (DJ)	Chris Reiki (CR)
Myrfyn Davies (MD)	Mark Jarrett (MJ)	Dave Robinson (DR)
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Peter Dawson	Steve Jones	John Williams (JW)
Phil Dell	Jacque Ledward	Brenda Yates
Patrick Earith		

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