

Rostherne Mere Quarterly Newsletter Jan-Mar 2022

Welcome to the first Rostherne Mere Newsletter of 2022. Prior to COVID restrictions, I used to write a quarterly review which was intended to keep permit holders updated with wildlife news on the Reserve but it also gave me an opportunity to share some of the superb photos sent to me by contributors. This year I've decided to revamp newsletter, hoping for an uninterrupted period in which we can all enjoy the rich ecological diversity at Rostherne. Furthermore, I would like to welcome any new permit holders and I hope to meet you all in due course. Thank you to everyone who has provided records and photos during the first three months of 2022.

A total of 89 bird species were recorded from Jan to Mar with the majority of them visible from the A W Boyd Observatory.

One of the most evocative sights and sounds at Rostherne is the passage of large numbers of wintering geese and swans flying over the Mere. Two skeins totalling 232 Pink-footed Geese and a flock of 18 Whooper Swans flew over in Jan. Other waterfowl species use the water as



Little Grebe, photo Tony Tyler

a winter refuge with Wigeon peaking at 230 in Jan and Teal at 122 in Feb. The Goldeneye and Pochard high was 14 while up to 21 Shoveler, 14 Goosanders and seven Mandarin Ducks flew into roost during Jan evenings. Egyptian Goose, Shelduck, Gadwall and Tufted Duck were all recorded. Up to 22 Great Crested Grebes and four Little Grebes were seen in Jan.

The Cormorant colony at Rostherne is the largest inland breeding colony in the region. Nest building started on 23rd Jan with 184 birds and 102 nests recorded by late Mar. Up to four Water Rails were squealing in the reed beds surrounding the Mere in Feb and there was an amazing view of a Bittern flying in front of the Observatory in late Mar.

Waders included 150 Lapwing rising from the fields north of Gale Bog. Single Curlews and Oystercatchers were very vocal flying around the Mere in Feb and Mar. There were up to five Snipe at the foot of Long Pasture and Woodcock were occasionally flushed from Wood Bongs and Brook Meadow.

Buzzards, Sparrowhawks and Kestrels were seen frequently with Kestrels mating in the trees near the edge of the Mere. A Peregrine was seen hunting over the Mere in Mar.

There were around 1000 Black-headed Gulls, up to 80 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and several Herring Gulls roosting on the water in Jan. Two Great Black-backed Gulls and a Yellow-legged Gull were also recorded.

One of the highlights of the quarter were the wonderful views of a pair of Barn Owls hunting over Mere Field, Mere Meadow and Old Meadow. Both Tawny Owl and Little Owl were also recorded.



Barn Owl, photo Tony Tyler

The bird table in front of the Observatory provided the ideal location to watch many common birds at close quarters. Up to five Bullfinches visited in Feb and Siskins, Long-tailed Tits and a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were often seen.

Around 100 Fieldfare and 40 Redwing were feeding in the fields around the Reserve in Jan. Large numbers of Collared Doves (peak 24) were often on the overhead wires near Marsh Lane. In Feb, up to 20 Meadow Pipits and 75 Linnets were seen in Mere

Meadow and Old Meadow respectively. Grey Wagtails were often viewed on the newly created wetland below Wood Bongs and in Mere Field. Brambling, Lesser Redpoll, Skylark and Tree Sparrow were all welcome additions to the year list while pairs of noisy Ring-Necked Parakeets were recorded on two dates and maybe less welcome if numbers increase.



Long-tailed Tit, photo John Hancock

Up to three Cetti's Warblers were singing in Jan and Malcolm Calvert caught two females during the quarter. One was a retrapped bird which was originally ringed on 9th Apr 2021 and subsequently photographed by Steve Collins carrying nesting material near the Bittern Hide a few weeks later. It was good to see that it had survived the winter!



Female Cetti's Warbler on 7th Mar, photo Malcolm Calvert

Tony Tyler managed to capture the wonderful scene of Goldcrests displaying in front of the Observatory in Feb.



Goldcrest, photo Tony Tyler



Grey Wagtail, photo John Hancock

for Barn Owls and Kestrels. A Bank Vole was often seen visiting the Bird Table near the Bittern Hide. Brown Hares was observed daily in Mere Field and Mere Meadow and a trailcam revealed exciting nocturnal footage of Otter, Badger, Red Fox and American Mink crossing Blackburn's Bridge in Feb.



Brown Hare, photo Gunnar Menzel

The quarter ended with summer migrants returning to the Reserve. These included the first Chiffchaff on 14th Mar and the first Swallow on 17th Mar, a new earliest date for Rostherne.

Rostherne provides a mixture of habitat for a rich diversity of mammals. The Short-tailed Field Vole population thrived on the rough pasture around the Reserve, providing abundant food

Insect activity increased as the temperature began to rise during the early spring. The first butterfly of the year was a Comma seen near the Bittern Hide on 1st Mar. Hoverflies on the Reserve are surveyed by Pete Kelly. This fascinating group of insects is often overlooked and a big thanks to Pete for his records and photos. Pete's first of the year of was a male Red Horned Spring *Cheilosia*.

It is an exciting time at Rostherne as large areas of habitat in the Reserve have been improved for conservation through Natural England's programme of wetland management with the creation of scrapes, ponds, leaky dams and wet margins as fence lines have been pushed back to allow significant land to rewild. The practical volunteer group have been busy removing many of the old fences but we also had time to put up a new Barn Owl Box in Brook Meadow. Wishing you all the best!

Bill Bellamy



Comma on 1st Mar, photo John Hancock



Male Cheilosia albipila Hoverfly, photo Pete Kelly



New Wetland Habitat in Old Meadow, photo Bill Bellamy



New Barn Owl Box in Brook Meadow, photo Bill Bellamy