

## Rostherne Mere Newsletter Jul-Sep 2024

Welcome to the third newsletter of 2024.

It has been an interesting quarter with some noteworthy bird sightings. However, a question that I heard repeatedly during the summer was “Where have all the insects gone?”. I will return to this topic later.

Two Great White Egrets arrived in Jul and one remained until the end of Aug, previously they have only been day trippers. Little Egrets were also frequent visitors during this period. A Bittern was spotted in Jul, the first record for the year.

High numbers of Great Crested Grebes were seen in Aug peaking at 100. They had a good breeding year with four broods recorded. During Sep, single, Black-necked Grebes visited. Goosanders started to return with four noted while Water Rails were heard calling from several locations.



*Hobby on 9<sup>th</sup> Jul ©Bill Bellamy*

Tufted Ducks bred for the third consecutive year after a break of 25 years. There were 57 Mandarin Ducks roosting in Jul. Wintering ducks including Shoveler, Wigeon, Teal and

Pochard started to return during Sep and the first returning Pink-footed Geese flocks of around 200 birds were seen flying over.

Waders included Lapwing, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper and Redshank. A very rare sight was that of two Spoonbills descending low over the Mere during Sep.

Gull numbers started to build with over 250 Black-headed Gulls, 160 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and a first winter Mediterranean Gull seen in the evening roost during late Sep. A single Great Black-backed Gull was a common visitor, and a Yellow-legged Gull was recorded in Aug.

It was an excellent time to see raptors. There were fantastic views of Hobbies feeding on dragonflies around the shoreline. They were seen daily from early Aug with four in Sep. A Peregrine hunted over the Mere and woodland on several dates. Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel all bred. A Red Kite and Marsh Harrier were recorded, and an Osprey dropped in briefly during a Sep evening.

It was a good breeding season for Great Spotted Woodpecker with several nests recorded while a Green Woodpecker was seen in Sep and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Aug. However, there was a marked increase in Ring-necked Parakeet sightings during Sep, peaking at five. They are now established in Dunham Massey and are becoming prevalent in Tatton Park, 20 the recent maximum there! They appear to be having a detrimental impact on woodpeckers, especially Green Woodpeckers, at both sites!

Around 200 Sand Martins descended to feed over the Mere after heavy rainfall in early Jul. There were frequent sightings of House Martins and Swifts both peaking at 40 but Swallow numbers were generally low and recorded in single figures. However, once again, they bred at Briddonweir Farm.

There were wonderful views of Kingfishers feeding near the Bittern Hide. Ravens bred locally with a family party of seven seen on several dates. A single Spotted Flycatcher in a mixed flock was recorded in Shaw Green. Around 130 Rooks roosted in Mere Covert and up to 1000 Starlings started to roost in the reed beds in late Aug. A total of 21 Mistle Thrushes were seen on passage in Wood Bongs during Sep.

Malcolm Calvert and John Adshead worked very hard with their mist nets and ringing pliers with an amazing total of 634 birds covering 25 species ringed for the year by the time of writing. This included 179 Reed Warblers, 95 Chiffchaffs, 93 Blue Tits, 17 Sedge Warblers and 14 Cetti's Warblers. John trapped on many extra days and was rewarded by some great catches including a male Kingfisher, Meadow Pipits and Grey Wagtails.

The low numbers of many groups of insects, particularly butterflies, hoverflies, bees and wasps provided a talking point throughout the quarter. A recent article in the British Trust of Ornithology (BTO) Bird Table magazine indicated that the reasons are complex but to summarise a spring that came on too fast after a winter too warm pulled many insects out of

their overwintering states too early but habitat loss (97% of the UK's wildflower meadows have vanished since the 1930s) and pesticides, particularly neonicotinoids all have a part to play.

Essex Skippers were recorded for the first time by Pete Kelly in Jul. Emerald and Small Red-eyed Damselflies were seen again as was Ruddy Darter. Several species of insect which have ever expanding northward ranges were recorded for the first time. These included the Wasp Plumehorn Hoverfly (*Volucella inanis*), Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederæ*) and Roesel's Bush Cricket (*Roeseliana roeseii*).

Finally, the new Natural England Reserve Manager (Steve Ormerod) has restarted the practical volunteer group, colloquially known as the "Eager Beavers". We meet on most Thursdays and please contact Steve on [Stephen.Ormerod@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Stephen.Ormerod@naturalengland.org.uk) if you're interested in getting involved as you would be most welcome.

Happy Wildlife Watching.

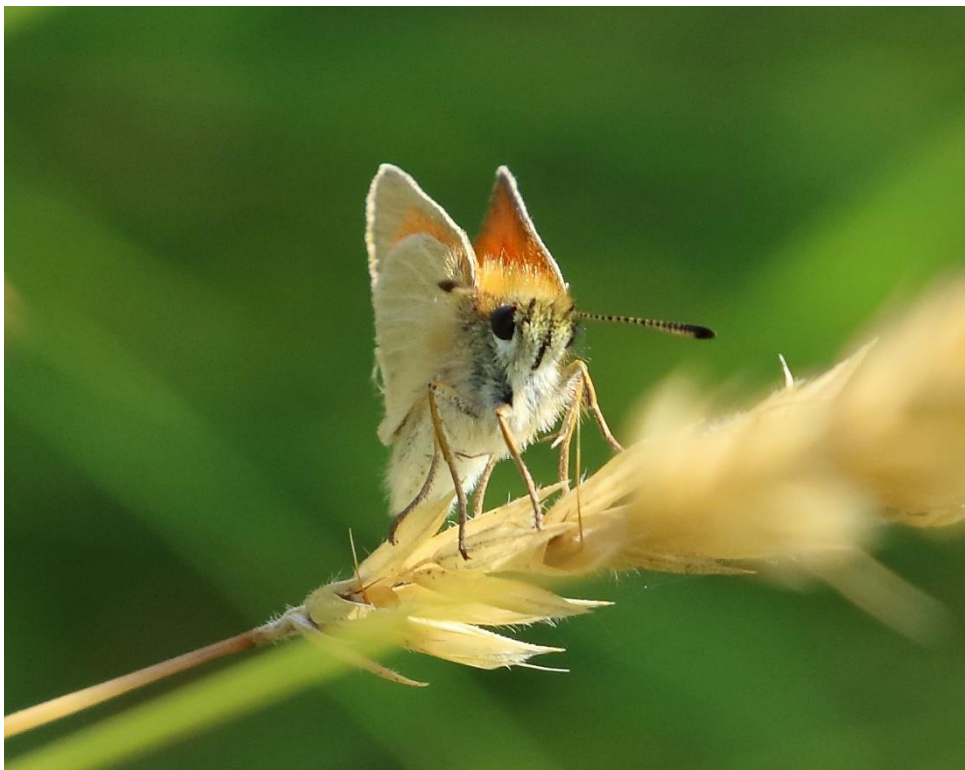
## Bill Bellamy



*Kingfisher with a Perch on 13<sup>th</sup> Aug ©John Hancock*



*Grey Wagtail on 24<sup>th</sup> Sep ©John Adshead*



*Essex Skipper on 31<sup>st</sup> Jul ©Pete Kelly*



*Painted Lady on 23<sup>rd</sup> Jul ©Pete Kelly*



*Ruddy Darter on 31<sup>st</sup> Jul ©Sheelagh Halsey*



*Emerald Damselfly on 26<sup>th</sup> Jul ©Pete Kelly*



*Roesel's Bush Cricket on 6<sup>th</sup> Sep ©Ian McCulloch*