



Reserve Opening Times:

Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday  
9am - 5pm (4pm Nov - end of Feb)

Visitor Centre

10am - 4pm

Trustees:

Penny Smith - Treasurer  
David Nesham  
John Brook  
Graham Barlow  
Ian Willoughby  
Jerry Knapp

Company Secretary - Peter Murphy

Report Editor: Peter Murphy

## CONTENTS

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 3   | Introduction  |
| 8   | Monthly Roundup 2015                                |
| 29  | Introduction to the Systematic List of Birds        |
| 31  | Systematic List of Birds Recorded                   |
| 82  | First and Last Dates for Winter Visitors 2015       |
| 83  | First and Last Dates for Summer Visitors 2015       |
| 84  | Nest Box Report                                     |
| 87  | Mammals   |
| 94  | Small Mammal Surveys                                |
| 95  | Amphibians  |
| 96  | Reptiles  |
| 97  | Butterflies   |
| 106 | Butterflies - First/Last Dates 2015                 |
| 107 | Moths   |
| 110 | Lunar Hornet Clearwing Moths                        |
| 113 | Ladybirds   |
| 115 | Other Insects                                       |
| 121 | Dragonflies and Damselflies                         |
| 129 | Dragonflies and Damselflies – First/Last Dates 2015 |
| 130 | Rodley's Pond Life in 2015                          |
| 137 | Survey of Algae in 2015                             |
| 138 | Fungus Report                                       |
| 139 | Photograph Credits                                  |
| 140 | Acknowledgements                                    |

Reserve Map at back of Report

Photographs:

Front Cover: Cetti's Warbler by Nathian Brook

Back Cover: Roedeer and triplets by Barbara Murphy

See page 139 for other Photograph Credits

## **Introduction**

The events of another busy year were overshadowed somewhat by the disastrous floods that affected the north of England over the 2015 Christmas period. Following a month's rain in 24 hours on already sodden ground the River Aire burst its banks on Boxing Day, covering the car park to a depth of four feet, flooding the whole of Tim's Field, the Dragonfly Ponds and the Scrubland. Dead hedges were ripped out by the force of water and picnic tables and benches were uprooted but, sadly, the Dragonfly Ponds and the Education Pond bore the brunt of the damage. Thanks to the power of Social Media the response from the public was amazing when clean up operations were organised for Thursday 31st December and Sunday 3rd January. Whole families turned up to help, many who had never been to the Reserve before. Well in excess of 100 volunteers worked over the two days, usually in thick mud and water, but the amount achieved was incredible. As a result of their superb efforts the Reserve was able to re-open on 6th January 2016.

Turning to the rest of the year, there were several large projects for our volunteers to work on. In March two new areas of land were added to our lease - the field to the right of the path to the Manager's Garden and the adjacent "Sludge Lagoon". We have renamed these areas the Poplar Field and Poplar Carr respectively. A viewing point was constructed overlooking the Poplar Carr at the top end of the John Ackroyd Meadow and work started on the development of the Poplar Field in the autumn. In 2016 a path across the field will allow visitors access to two large ponds on a raised mound there. Tree and shrub planting got under way on the field in the autumn. The development has been made possible thanks to a grant from Wade's Charity and a generous donation from one of our supporters.

Also in March, an area at the western end of the Scrubland was planted with young trees. We already have large areas of willow on the Reserve but this area will include various broad-leaved species which will all help to improve the biodiversity on the site in years to come.

Visitors will also have noticed a change on Tim's Field this year. To combat the spread of the weed Redshank on the western end of the

field it was not seeded with the rest of the field in spring. Instead, a "stale seedbed" approach was adopted which required the area to be continually treated as weeds emerged during the spring and summer. In September the area was sown with a wild bird seed mix which will provide cover during summer 2016 and a seed crop for winter 2016/17.

Last year we reported on the spread of the aggressive alien water plant *Crassula helmsii* - New Zealand Pygmy Weed - on three of the ponds including one of the public dipping ponds. To prevent the spread it was necessary to drain, dry out and treat the affected areas. Unfortunately, a major infestation was found in another dragonfly pond this year and we were in the throes of draining this but the Christmas flooding rather put paid to this. One of the affected ponds was declared *Crassula* free earlier in the year and it had been relined and refilled but the flooding will certainly not have helped this. The smaller of the two public dipping ponds was also declared *Crassula* free this year and the opportunity was taken to make it rather bigger before a new liner was laid. This, fortunately, escaped the effects of the flooding.

The Harvest Mouse Breeding Programme continued this year, following the release of 496 mice on the Reserve last year. A further 104 were released in August this year but the flooding will almost certainly have had a disastrous effect on them and we will need to monitor the area once the land dries out to see if there are any survivors. Very sad considering the huge amount of work that has gone into this project. The permanent Harvest Mouse displays in the Visitor Centre continue to delight adults and children alike.

In the autumn we learned that our grant application to the Biffa Awards Panel for two new hides had been successful. The old metal container hides at the Lagoon and Reedbed had given trusty service for around 15 years but were well past their best and had no facilities for wheelchair users. The new ones will be purpose-built steel hides with wheelchair access, similar to the Willow Path and Duck Marsh Hides. Work started on clearing the area around the Lagoon Hide in December and it is hoped this, the first of the new hides, will be in place by the beginning of March 2016.

We also extended our opening hours this year, opening at 9.00am instead of 10.00am, which was much appreciated by the birdwatchers, and closing at 5.00pm instead of 4.00pm from 1st March to 31st October. The Visitor Centre continues to be open from 10.00am to 4.00pm throughout the year. People do still ask why we are only open three days each week - Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. What is not always appreciated is that we have volunteers working on habitat management on Mondays and Fridays throughout the year and our education team entertaining primary schools on Tuesdays and Thursdays between March and October.

In autumn 2013 work started on an ambitious project to construct an artificial sand martin bank on the Lagoon. Completed in February 2014 it turned out to be a major success in its first year with around 80 nesting holes and large numbers of juvenile sand martins on the wing in the summer months. The big question was how do we repeat it in 2015? Advice was sought and it was decided to clean out the nesting holes and repack them with fresh sand in the winter. It certainly worked a treat with 167 nesting holes this year and bumper numbers of young birds fledged.

There were some other notable records for the Reserve this year.

- Bittern, Raven and Mediterranean Gull were all new birds for the Reserve, but, sadly, all seen by less than a handful of birdwatchers.
- A pair of Barn Owls bred for the first time, raising two young though, sadly, one of these was electrocuted on power lines.
- Little Owls nested successfully in a new box in the Manager's Garden.
- It was an excellent year for raptors with Hobby, Peregrine Falcon and Common Buzzard all having their best year ever, the latter virtually resident for the last two months of the year. Kestrels again bred, though only one chick fledged this year.
- Water Rails bred for the fourth year running.
- A pair of Tufted Ducks nested successfully for the first time since 2009 thanks to much reduced mink activity.
- Common Terns successfully raised six young on two rafts on the Lagoon.
- At least one Cetti's Warbler was present throughout the year.

- A Water Vole was recorded on three dates - the first record to our knowledge on this site since 1993.
- A new butterfly, the Clouded Yellow, was recorded as was a new dragonfly, the Keeled Skimmer.

We again ran a full programme of events at the Reserve this year, starting with the Easter Egg Hunt on Sunday 5th April. This was again organised by Aireborough Rotary Club and was blessed with a day of beautiful weather. The event helped to raise valuable funds for several good causes as well as the Reserve and was enjoyed by lots of families.

There were the usual Bird Walks in May and September, Bat Nights in July and August, a Small Mammal Survey in August and during the school summer holidays weekly Moth Trapping Events were held on Wednesday mornings, designed to try and interest children in the natural world, no charge being made for any of these events.

Visits to the Fish Pass took place to the end of October on the last Sunday in each month and these continued to attract new visitors to the Reserve. Away from the reserve we again had a stand at the Science Fair in Leeds City Museum on Saturday 14th March.

Every event, of course, is in the hands of the weather and we always have to keep our fingers crossed. The June Wildlife Event on Saturday 20th June included a full day of wildlife activities and was again well supported thanks to some reasonable weather after early drizzle. The Summer Fair, held on Saturday 22nd August, also had a grey, damp start but it developed into a lovely warm day with temperatures reaching 24°C. The Pie and Peas Event took place on Saturday 24th October and was followed by the annual Fungus Foray. A wet morning did not auger well but it brightened up just in time for the foray which attracted its usual enthusiastic following.

Our education team of volunteers had another very busy year entertaining a record 30 primary schools, 910 children enjoying the Rodley experience. Following the success of the calendar competition last year it was decided to run it again this year and the lucky winner was Jemima Dutton, aged 6, of Calverley Parkside Primary School. Jemima's colourful drawing of a Kingfisher is

featured in our 2016 calendar for the month of February. There were also 13 evening visits from uniformed organisations and several visits from classes of secondary school children.

Two of our long-standing volunteers retired this year. Barbara Thompson had fulfilled many roles including that of trustee during her 15 years as a volunteer and Robin McDermott had been a valuable member of our habitat management team for many years. We were also saddened to learn of the sudden death of Roy Clark, another regular member of our outdoor team, in September.

Maintaining and running the Reserve requires a huge amount of work from our different teams of volunteers and a big thank you goes to them all and to the Friends of Rodley Nature Reserve who not only raise valuable funds for the Reserve but also look after the manning of the Visitor Centre. One only needs to read the comments in the Visitors Book to see how much all their efforts are appreciated by the public. A big thank you too to Natural England for all their help and support, to Yorkshire Water plc for giving us the opportunity to create this wonderful reserve for the public and to the many groups who have worked on the Reserve this year.

Our wildlife and green spaces are under threat like never before. Despite the wildlife successes referred to earlier many species are in serious decline and we are seeing the effects of this locally. The Aire Valley is a valuable wildlife corridor enabling wildlife to move freely from area to area but it is under threat from major development. Rodley Nature Reserve is a wonderful place for wildlife and is enjoyed by thousands of people every year but we must ensure it doesn't become a wildlife oasis surrounded by development. Green spaces have been proved to be good for our wellbeing as well as wildlife. Long may we continue to have them.

Editor

## Rodley Nature Reserve - Monthly Roundup for 2015

### January

Most of the wetlands had been frozen over for the last four days of 2014 but a mild and very windy start to January saw them ice-free from 1st. The mild spell was short-lived, however, and by 4th only a small area of the Lagoon was free of ice. The very strong winds returned again on the 7th, reaching gale force at times from 9th with rain at times. When the winds did die down there were frosty nights and some cold days with snow showers at times leaving only 10% of the Lagoon ice-free on 18th and 19th. The temperature was showing -3°C when the first WeBS count of the year started at 8.00am on 18th. It remained very cold with daytime temperatures around 2°C or 3°C at best and a day of snow on 21st left a good covering on the valley sides. Strong to gale force westerly winds brought horizontal blizzards for the hardy few who braved the elements on 28th and there were further blizzards on 29th - but this didn't stop the volunteers annual lunch and there was little sign of lying snow on the Reserve by 30th.

Despite the cold conditions there were no easterly winds to bring in wildfowl and numbers generally were disappointing with Gadwall numbers particularly low. Tufted Ducks were a little up on last January but still low and Teal numbers were well down on the same period last year. Coot numbers showed no signs of increasing and were the lowest since 2002. Goosander numbers too were disappointing with no more than 15 on the Lagoon at dusk.

On the plus side, 28 Snipe on the Wet Grassland on 21st was a record count for the Reserve and there were double figure counts on two other dates. The excellent run of Kingfisher sightings continued with daily reports and the Lagoon and Kingfisher Pool proving particularly productive. Goldeneye numbers on the Lagoon reached seven on 24th. Water Rails were generally hard to find but there were sightings on the Lagoon on 18th and 24th and on the Reedbed on 25th.

Other sightings this month included a Chiffchaff near the Lagoon Hide on 4th, a Common Buzzard on 5th, a Treecreeper on 13th, a

Goldcrest on 14th and 25th, a Dipper on the river on 18th, a Grey Wagtail on three dates, Red Kites on four dates and a Little Owl on the farmland on four dates between 2nd and 7th. A Green Woodpecker was heard on 31st. Nine Grey Herons were on the Duck Marsh on 6th. Lapwings had been thin on the ground this winter but around 100 flew over Tim's Field on 21st and 35 were on the farmland on the same date. Linnet numbers on Tim's Field fluctuated daily but reached around 150 on 21st with 130 on 29th.

An excellent day for raptors on 18th produced a Peregrine Falcon hunting over the farmland, a male Merlin, several sightings of Kestrels and a Sparrowhawk chasing a Kingfisher at the Kingfisher Pool. A Merlin was seen again by two observers on 24th. Kestrel activity was intense throughout the month with daily sightings of both male and female birds. A Barn Owl continued to roost in the thatched gazebo throughout the month and a new nest box was erected on a post on the Scrubland to encourage it to stay.

As regards the winter thrushes, Redwings are usually much less numerous on the Reserve and farmland than Fieldfares but a flock of more than 600 birds on the farmland on 23rd included at least 400 Redwings - an exceptional number. Fourteen Mistle Thrushes were also on the farmland on 4th. The farmland also produced a record count of more than 400 Common Gulls in snowy conditions on 21st - almost double the previous record set in 2009. Greylag Geese were on the farmland daily with counts of up to 99 reported. Canada Geese were somewhat less numerous with a best count of 61. There were several reports of Pink-footed Geese flying over in a westerly direction with 300 on 3rd, 200 on 4th and 60+ on 17th.

On the habitat management front volunteers continued willow coppicing and rebuilding dead hedges on the Willow Path and in the latter part of the month the islands on the Lagoon were cleared of vegetation in readiness for the return of the Oystercatchers.

## **February**

It turned out to be quite a dry month and the sunniest winter since records began in 1929. The first Oystercatcher duly arrived on 10th, six days earlier than last year, and it was joined by a second bird the

next day. Four were seen over the Wet Grassland on 15th but just the two stayed, spending much of their time on the farmland.

February can be quite a good month here for Goldeneyes and this month was no exception with ten on 8th, eight on 24th and five on several dates. Up to eight Pochard were seen on the Lagoon and there was at last some improvement in Coot numbers with 12 on the Lagoon on 6th - but still the lowest count for this month since 2002. Tufted Duck were again disappointing but were a little up on the last two Februarys with a best count of 21. Teal numbers reached 22 on 8th but most days produced only half that number. Shovelers were conspicuous by their absence and Gadwall numbers most days were in single figures.

The highlights on the wetlands this month were again the number of sightings of Kingfishers and Snipe. Kingfishers were reported daily with the Lagoon the most productive site. In January the Wet Grassland was the place to see Snipe but this month all the action was on the Duck Marsh with double figure counts on several dates and 15 on 25th the best. Water Rails were again elusive with just two sightings but a Whooper Swan on the Lagoon on 2nd and two on the river on 14th were a bonus as was a Bittern that provided excellent views for two observers in the Reedbed Hide as it stalked across the main water body - a first for the reserve.

There was plenty of activity on the farmland with Greylag and Canada Geese there daily and careful monitoring of the flock produced two Pink-footed Geese among them on 8th. Three were on the farmland daily from 11th. Redwings and Fieldfares were there most days but with no more than 40 of the former and c80 of the latter. A Little Owl on the dry stone wall on the farmland on 7th was the first record for a month but there were sightings daily thereafter with two on occasions from 14th and mating observed on 28th.

Other sightings this month included a Common Buzzard on four dates, Red Kites on five dates, Goldcrests on five dates with four on 7th, Treecreepers on four dates, Grey Wagtails on four dates with three in the compound on 25th, a Peregrine Falcon on the farmland on 21st, a Green Woodpecker on the Willow Path on the same date and a singing Chiffchaff by the roadside on 23rd. There was again

daily Kestrel activity with birds seen at both nest boxes in the compound. Linnet numbers on Tim's Field fell away somewhat this month with a best count of 60 birds but at least 300 Wood Pigeons descended on the remaining seed crop most days. The Barn Owl proved elusive this month.

Volunteers continued willow coppicing and dead hedge rebuilding throughout the month and last year's nesting holes in the Sand Martin bank were cleaned out and refilled in readiness for this year's arrivals.

### **March**

March came in like a lion with stiff cold winds and wintry showers but it also went out like a lion with strong to gale force winds and blizzard conditions at times. The winds were a feature of the month generally but there were a few very pleasant days in between though night temperatures remained low throughout. A partial eclipse of the sun on 20th, leaving just a small crescent showing, was enjoyed by volunteers.

It was an excellent month for birdwatchers with two birds in particular playing starring roles. Despite an intriguing report of a Cetti's Warbler on the Wet Grassland last December there had been no subsequent records in the first two months of 2015. However on 8th March one was heard in a thick bank of bramble near the Lagoon Hide during an early morning WeBS count and there were regular reports thereafter throughout the month in the same area, on the Duck Marsh and on the Wet Grassland though few observers caught more than a glimpse of this elusive bird.

The run of Kingfisher sightings continued with birds easy to see on the Lagoon, Duck Marsh and Reedbed. However the best was yet to come when one pair excavated a nesting tunnel in the Sand Martin bank on the Lagoon, providing excellent views as they flew in and out. The first Sand Martin was seen over the Duck Marsh on 22nd, the same date as last year, but hopefully the Kingfishers would have a head start before the mass arrival.

Goldeneye were seen on the Lagoon most days up to 22nd with as many as nine birds reported and a pair of Shoveler, present from 4th, alternated between the Lagoon and the Duck Marsh. Tufted Duck numbers were a little disappointing with a best count of just 15 birds. Gadwall numbers too were a bit disappointing with a best count of 17 but Teal numbers were up with as many as 33 reported. A Great Crested Grebe paid a fleeting visit on 14th and 21 Whooper Swans flew west over the Lagoon on the same date. A Redshank was on the Lagoon on 15th and 23rd and two Shelduck were present from 25th.

It was another good month for Snipe sightings and the Duck Marsh was again the place to see them with several double figure reports and a best of 22. Water Rails were seen on the Lagoon on two dates, on the Duck Marsh on two dates and the Wet Grassland on one date. A Mute Swan was on a nest at the eastern end of the Wet Grassland from 30th.

Other sightings this month included a Peregrine Falcon over the farmland on 8th, Red Kites on eight dates, a Treecreeper on two dates, Goldcrests on four dates, a female Yellowhammer in the Manager's Garden on 15th ( a rare event these days), a female Blackcap on 21st and a Stonechat on four dates. Tree Sparrows were hard to find from the middle of the month with just two in the Manager's Garden on 28th. Three Curlews over the farmland on 18th were the first of the year and a Raven flying east over the Duck Marsh on 21st was the first ever record for the Reserve. Little Owls were less obvious this month with sightings on just two dates. There were a number of reports of Chiffchaffs from the middle of the month. Two House Martins over Tim's Field on 30th were exceptionally early and the earliest ever record for the Reserve.

Among the early nesters, Long-tailed Tits were building in thick banks of bramble at the edge of the Lagoon and across the road from the Lagoon Hide this month. Linnets were present in good numbers to the end of the month with c100 reported on 29th. It was an exceptional month for sightings of Common Buzzard with single birds over the reserve on 10 dates. Up to seven Goosander were seen on the river and up to three Pink-footed Geese were on the farmland to the middle of the month. A flock of 320 Starlings on the farmland on

9th was the only three figure count so far this year. A few Redwing were present until 22nd and the last Fieldfares (29) were reported on 26th.

It was a slow start for butterflies but a Small Tortoiseshell on the roadside on 19th in lovely sunny conditions was the first of the year and there were a few subsequent sightings.

On the habitat management front volunteers planted a new area of mixed woodland trees at the western end of the Scrubland at the beginning of the month and work started on the construction of a viewing screen overlooking the Poplar Carr (formerly known as the Sludge Lagoon) at the top end of the John Ackroyd Meadow. Tim's Field was rotavated on 23rd in readiness for replanting later in the spring.

## **April**

A beautiful, warm, sunny day for the Easter Egg Hunt on Sunday 5th heralded a spell of very settled weather, bringing out lots of visitors and plenty of Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies. April, in fact, was the 5th sunniest on record across the UK and proved to be an excellent month for butterflies. It was also much drier than usual with above average temperatures.

April is one of the best months for the birdwatcher with migrants arriving in numbers from the middle of the month but it's always helpful to know the different songs. The first Willow Warblers were singing in the Coppice on 10th with as many as 10 singing by 19th - well up on last year. A Common Whitethroat singing on the banking across the road from the Lagoon Hide on 14th was the joint earliest ever record for this species. Blackcaps were singing from the same date, the first Sedge Warbler and Garden Warbler on 22nd and the first Reed Warbler on 25th. Unusually, there were no records of Grasshopper Warbler last year but this year birds were "reeling" from 15th - the earliest ever date - with one in roadside brambles almost daily from 23rd. A Lesser Whitethroat was reported on the canal bank near the Reserve gates on 25th and one was seen on the Willow Path on 29th.

A male Common Redstart in the Mike Fisk Meadow hedge on 19th was the first record since 1st September 2012 and this was followed by a report of a female in the same area on 25th. Another uncommon visitor was a *White Wagtail ssp. alba*, a passage migrant in Britain, which gave good views on the Duck Marsh on 29th. However, it was the Cetti's Warbler that most visitors wanted to see, singing throughout the month just to the right of the Lagoon Hide and providing brief views for the lucky few.

As always, the most eagerly awaited of the summer visitors was the Common Tern. The first two arrived on the Lagoon on 17th - two days earlier than last year - with three some days, four on 26th and six on 29th. Sand Martin numbers over the Lagoon built rapidly this month with the first birds inspecting the nesting bank as early as 6th. Twenty-one nesting holes had been excavated by 19th and 63 by 27th but, disappointingly, there was little sign of the Kingfishers still being in residence. The first Swallow was seen over the Lagoon on 5th and up to 30 could be seen towards the end of the month. House Martins were much harder to find with no more than two reported. Single Swifts were seen on 19th and 25th.

A Great Crested Grebe was on the Lagoon from the beginning of the month with two daily from 4th. Up to nine Snipe were seen on the Duck Marsh in the first week of the month with up to four most days thereafter. Two Shelduck were on the Reedbed on 4th and there were several subsequent sightings over the following week. On 26th two were reported on the Duck Marsh. A female Goldeneye was still present up to 4th but there were no sightings thereafter.

Other species recorded included a Green Woodpecker heard on the river walk on 1st, a peregrine Falcon on 7th and 27th, a Curlew on three dates and two on one date, a Red Kite on five dates, Water Rail on seven dates (four of these on the Wet Grassland), two Grey Wagtails on 10th and one on 20th, a Treecreeper on 18th, a Little Ringed Plover on the Wet Grassland on 22nd and a Common Sandpiper on the Lagoon on 24th. It was another excellent month for sightings of Common Buzzard with one bird on eight dates and two birds on one date. Around eighty Linnets were still on Tim's Field at the beginning of the month, numbers falling away in the third week to around a dozen birds.

There was a considerable increase in Little Owl activity from 9th with a bird seen in the Manager's Garden on several dates with two there on 22nd. On 15th one lucky observer photographed one there with a Bank Vole in its beak. It was a month of intense and noisy Kestrel activity with birds in residence at the new Barn Owl box in the compound and, in the latter part of the month, at the new box on the Scrubland.

The results of some early nesting attempts were seen this month. One Oystercatcher chick made its first appearance on the middle island on the Lagoon on 24th and on the same date a female Goosander was seen on the Fish Pass with eight tiny ducklings. A beautifully constructed Long-tailed Tit nest in brambles by the Lagoon was less fortunate, being destroyed by a predator, probably a feral cat.

The 5th and several days thereafter saw large numbers of Toads heading towards the Dragonfly Ponds from their winter hibernation on the Scrubland though, surprisingly, Toad spawn was hard to find.

On the work front, construction of the new viewing screen overlooking the Poplar Carr continued this month and a section of the ramp to the Wet Grassland Hide had to be relayed.

## **May**

May proved to be a real letdown after a beautiful April. It was wetter than average, cooler than average and with less sunshine. It was also a very windy month - certainly not a month for butterflies and dragonflies though a few did venture out on the few sunny and calmer days.

On the Lagoon activity at the Sand Martin bank was intense with more than 140 nesting holes by the end of the month and the first juveniles on the wing on 30th. And, interestingly, the Kingfisher was back in residence. Up to seven Common Terns were seen with birds on all three rafts some days and a possible Arctic Tern on one date. There were no reports of the two Great Crested Grebes after 6th but a single bird was seen on the Lagoon from 22nd. A Pink-footed

Goose was on the Lagoon with Grey Lags and Canadas on 3rd and 4th.

On 16th seven mute Swan cygnets made their first appearance on the Wet Grassland but by the following day only four remained and by the end of the month just one. The Duck Marsh pair showed off their single cygnet for the first time on 23rd. The first two Mallard ducklings were seen on the Wet Grassland on 6th and the first Coot family (4) appeared on the Kingfisher Pool on 20th. Cetti's Warbler was seen or more often heard daily with a possible report of two by the water inlet on the Lagoon on 7th.

Wader passage was poor with a Little Ringed Plover on just two dates and a Common Sandpiper on two dates. Lapwing activity was disappointing with only one record after 9th but the Oystercatcher family was still present at the end of the month, all three birds feeding on Tim's Field in the latter part.

There was again plenty of Little Owl activity, a bird being seen on 11 dates, often in the Manager's Garden or poplars. However, the real highlight of the month was the discovery that a pair of Barn Owls was nesting in the box on the small building in the Yorkshire Water compound, a box occupied by Kestrels last year. A bird was seen leaving the box at 7.55pm on 20th and there were subsequent sightings over the following evenings with two seen on 28th. On 29th one was disturbed in the thatched gazebo at 9.00am.

Other sightings this month included a Grey Wagtail on the river on four dates, a Common Buzzard on five dates, Red Kites on 11 dates with up to three birds seen, a Water Rail on one date, two Wheatears on Tim's Field on 9th, two Shelduck on 10th, a Little Egret over the farmland on 17th and a Spotted Flycatcher on the Scrubland on 30th. A Grasshopper Warbler continued to "reel" in roadside brambles until 10th but there were no records after this date. A female Roedeer on the Duck Marsh with two tiny fawns on 30th was a nice record for one or two observers. Two Goosander families were seen on the river this month. A female was seen with around 10 ducklings above the weir on 5th and one was seen with three ducklings further downstream on 25th.

Swallow numbers were encouraging but House Martins were again hard to find with just one report of three birds on 24th. Swift numbers were disappointing with circa 20 on one date but otherwise no more than seven.

Tim's Field was ploughed on 4th and seeded on 13th and work started on improvements to the entrance to the Dragonfly Ponds. A Blackbird was nest building on the new viewing screen overlooking the Poplar Carr before work had even been completed.

## **June**

The month started on a wet and very windy note with 40 to 50 mph gusts but it finished with the hottest day of the year so far. In between the weather was very average with only a few hints of summer.

There were a number of highlights with a Hobby taking centre stage. This has been a scarce bird at Rodley with only two records in 16 years. First seen over Tim's Field on 21st the bird made several appearances over the following days, even delaying the start to the monthly Fish Pass walk on 28th as it put on a fabulous flying display, hotly pursued by a Common Tern over trees across the river.

Barn Owl activity continued throughout the month with a bird seen on the ledge of the nest box at 2.00pm on 10th and one leaving the thatched gazebo again early in the day on 24th. Unfortunately, most of the activity took place late in the evening. A Little Owl was seen in the poplars on several dates but an adult and juvenile were reported in the Manager's Garden on 27th and on 28th two adults were seen there. An adult and juvenile again put in an appearance on 29th. Kestrel activity was much reduced this month but there were signs that birds were still in residence in the two boxes in the compound and on the Scrubland.

On the wetlands a pair of Garganey were on the Wet Grassland on 6th and there were further sightings on 10th and 12th. A Little Ringed Plover was also seen there on 14th in what had been a poor wader year so far. However, most eyes were on the Lagoon where two Common Tern chicks made their first appearance on one of the rafts on 6th with three seen on each of two rafts subsequently. In the last few days of the month some of the youngsters took to the water but

they didn't have to contend with the thick algae growth which proved fatal last year and all were still present on 30th. Sand Martin activity was intense this month with 160 holes counted in the nesting bank on 15th and many juveniles on the wing.

Ducklings started to appear in numbers this month with the first family of Gadwall (3) on the Duck Marsh on 17th and three further broods over the following week. The first Little Grebe chicks (3) were on the Duck Marsh on 28th. The Wet Grassland Mute Swan pair still had their one remaining cygnet on 14th but there were no sightings of any of the three birds after this date. On a more positive note the Duck Marsh pair still had their solitary cygnet at the end of the month.

Away from the wetlands Common Whitethroats could be heard all around the Reserve with large bramble patches particularly popular and the first family party seen on 7th. Bullfinches seem to go from strength to strength here with the first family party seen on 5th and several birds on the feeders in the Bee Garden and Manager's Garden daily. Song Thrushes too appeared to be particularly numerous this year with birds singing all round the Reserve throughout the month.

Other sightings this month included a Peregrine Falcon on 13th and 24th, a Red Kite on five dates, a Common Buzzard on three dates, a Grasshopper Warbler on four dates, a Grey Wagtail on 14th, a Water Rail in the Reedbed on 26th and a solitary Tree Sparrow in the Manager's Garden on three dates. Rooks are infrequent visitors here and two on John Ackroyd Meadow on 14th were the first of the year. A female Roedeer was again seen on the Duck Marsh with two fawns on 14th.

The two wildflower meadows were a blaze of colour this month as volunteers worked to remove ragwort prior to cutting later in July. A new "small mammal hotel" constructed from logs on the path to the Manager's Garden was ready for its first residents by the end of the month.

## July

It was a disappointing month weather-wise, cool and often wet with below average temperatures and invariably a stiff wind. It certainly started on a positive note with a temperature of 35°C recorded at the Reserve on 1st and an explosion of freshly emerged Small Tortoiseshells but things went downhill thereafter and the month ended with a nighttime temperature as low as 3.5°C in parts of Yorkshire. Fortunately the first Bat Night on the evening of 18th enjoyed a rare pleasant, calm evening after what had been a very windy day.

All eyes were on the three Barn Owl boxes this month but windy conditions were not conducive to successful hunting and concerns mounted with limited activity at the two Kestrel sites, the pole box on the Scrubland being particularly quiet. However, there was a report of one juvenile here on 18th and on 31st a single juvenile was seen exercising its wings on the ledge of the compound box. Barn Owl activity was intense at the other box in the compound in the early part of the month with seven rodents brought to the box in the space of an hour during the evening on 3rd. However, birds became much harder to see from the middle of the month. The Little Owls were far less elusive with sightings most days, either in the poplars, the Manager's Garden or on the farmland and up to three birds seen.

Thanks to an absence of mink and no thick algae growth on the Lagoon this year all six juvenile Common Terns fledged successfully and a pair of Tufted Ducks produced 10 ducklings for the first time since 2009. A new family of Gadwall (7) appeared on the Wet Grassland on 15th. The Wet Grassland pair of Mute Swans and their solitary cygnet returned again on 29th after an absence of more than six weeks. The Black Swan returned to the wetlands on 24th after an absence of three months.

Juvenile birds were everywhere this month and a flock of around 40 Goldfinches included many young birds. Bullfinches too appeared to have had a particularly good breeding season with regular sightings of juveniles.

Other species recorded this month included a Grasshopper Warbler on 1st and 10th, a Peregrine Falcon on 4th and 9th, a Tree Sparrow on 4th and two on 12th, two Common Sandpipers on the Lagoon on 6th, an unseasonal Snipe on the Wet Grassland on 8th, two Lapwings on 18th and seven on 26th, a Common Buzzard on five dates and a Red Kite on seven dates with two on one date. A Hobby was reported again on seven dates. A count of 120 Common Gulls on the farmland on 30th was exceptional for the time of year but even more unusual was the sight of 26 Blackbirds flying from woodland across the river over the Scrubland during an early morning WeBS count on 19th. A female Roedeer with triplets was a bonus during the evening on 11th and on 29th all four were on Tim's Field at 11.00am on what was a very busy morning visitor-wise.

Continuing declines were apparent with a couple of our migrant species. House Martins were reported on just one date this month with only five birds seen. Swift numbers too were very low with no interest at all in the Swift Tower. A count of 35 over the bridge on 26th was by far the highest of the year and these were birds probably gathering before flying south. Fortunately, Sand Martins saved the day with intense activity at the nesting bank and over the Lagoon throughout the month.

The unsettled weather was hardly perfect for dragonflies but one observer recorded and photographed a new and unexpected species for the Reserve on 1st - a Keeled Skimmer, a dragonfly more usually associated with acidic pools on moorland and heathland. The somewhat similar looking Black-tailed Skimmer has been hard to find here over recent years but there were records on four dates this month.

With Ragwort removal on the meadows complete volunteers turned their attention to the equally arduous Himalayan Balsam removal towards the end of the month.

## **August**

Things typically quieten down in August with most birds having completed nesting and going into post breeding moult. The absence of bird song is particularly noticeable but the contact calls of

Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, Common Whitethroats and Blackcaps could be heard all round the Reserve this month even if the birds themselves were hard to find. The Sand Martins were an exception with intense activity at the nesting bank throughout the month and many birds on their second or even third broods. Swallows too were still feeding young in the dumper truck shed at the end of the month but there were no reports at all of House Martins. There were some early signs of summer visitors on the move with three Whinchats on Tim's Field on 1st, a Common Redstart on the farmland on 12th and a Spotted Flycatcher on the river path on 23rd. Swifts have usually left us by the end of the month with just single birds seen on 27th and 28th.

Like last year, the weather was unsettled for much of the month but the second Bat Night on 8th enjoyed a pleasant, warm evening and the Summer Fair on 22nd was a great success thanks to a rare calm, dry day. Only one of the Wednesday Moth Trapping Events had to be cancelled due to rain.

A juvenile Barn Owl made its first appearance at the box in the compound on 8th and on 11th two juveniles were seen on the ledge of the box around 9.00pm. An adult was disturbed in the thatched gazebo by a visitor early in the day on 15th but birds were otherwise hard to find during the day. Sadly, on 20th one juvenile was found dead under power lines by the dry stone wall. Little Owls were seen daily, often by the dry stone wall on the farmland. A Hobby was reported on four dates.

On the wetlands Gadwall numbers reached 35 on 23rd thanks to a good breeding season. A Little Egret was on the Wet Grassland on 6th with three there on 8th. One was also seen flying downriver on 24th. A few Teal returned from 19th with 12 on the Wet Grassland on 26th. A Snipe was seen on the Duck Marsh on three dates from 23rd. Water Rails had proved hard to find this summer but an adult and well grown juvenile provided good views on the Duck Marsh from 29th. Kingfishers were seen most days, the Lagoon and river proving most productive. A new family of Little Grebes (3) appeared on the Wet Grassland on 9th but only two chicks were seen subsequently.

Other sightings this month included a Common Buzzard on four dates, Red Kites on four dates with up to three birds seen, a single Tree Sparrow on 7th and 8th, a Treecreeper on the riverbank on 16th and on the Willow Path on 31st and Grey Wagtail on two dates with two in the compound on 16th. The Goldfinch flock grew to between 60 and 70 birds this month. A Ring-necked Parakeet on the Willow Path on 29th was an unexpected sighting. Mammal-wise, the Roedeer family of triplets was on John Ackroyd Meadow on 6th but perhaps the most interesting record of the month was that of a Water Vole swimming across one of the Dragonfly Ponds on 5th - the first site record since 1993. A further introduction of Harvest Mice took place on 14th - 104 going into temporary pens behind the Duck Marsh for two weeks prior to release.

On the habitat management front the western end of Tim's Field was ploughed this month in readiness for an autumn sowing and the two wildflower meadows were cut on 3rd. Himalayan Balsam bashing was in full swing with volunteers tackling the Fish Pass and Coppice.

## **September**

Pleasant sunny days provided a good deal of dragonfly activity at the ponds this month but it was a butterfly that stole the limelight. A Clouded Yellow found by one lucky observer on the Butterfly Bank was a first for the Reserve of this immigrant butterfly. With high pressure dominating there were some chilly nights and foggy starts in the last few days of the month but they blossomed into beautiful, warm, sunny days, attracting a number of Small Tortoiseshells and Red Admirals to a late flowering Buddleia outside the Visitor Centre.

September is always an interesting month for the birdwatcher even if some of the usually common birds are proving elusive. Passage migrants are on the move and the first winter visitors can start turning up. Tim's Field is always worth checking out this month for Wheatears, Whinchats and Stonechats and the keen eyed observers were not disappointed, particularly in the latter part of the month. A Stonechat was reported on 23rd with three there on 25th. A juvenile Whinchat was present from 27th to 30th and three Wheatears were spotted on 30th. As the Fodder Radish seed starts to ripen on the

field Linnets appear as if by magic, numbers reaching 100+ in the last few days of the month.

Summer visitors started to drift away this month. The last four House Martins were seen over the Lagoon on 13th and the last two Sand Martins on 20th. Two Swallows over the Willow Path on 27th were the last of the year. There were no reports of Sedge Warblers and Reed Warblers and the last Garden Warbler was seen in the Manager's Garden on 2nd, some three weeks earlier than last year.

On the wetlands Gadwall numbers continued to grow, reaching 69 on the Lagoon on 25th, the second highest ever September count. Tufted Ducks were typically thin on the ground and 14 on 25th was an unusually good count these days for the time of year. One or two Shoveler were present some days and a female Wigeon arrived on 30th. Up to 14 Teal were reported, usually on the Wet Grassland or Duck Marsh. Snipe were seen most days on the same two water bodies but no more than three. A Water Rail and juvenile made another appearance on the Duck Marsh on 2nd and an adult was seen there on 23rd with one on the Wet Grassland on 25th. A Little Egret was on the Duck Marsh briefly on 19th.

Other sightings this month included a Spotted Flycatcher in the Coppice on 6th, a Meadow Pipit on the Scrubland on 16th - surprisingly the first record of the year, a Treecreeper on the Willow Path on three dates, a Tree Sparrow in the Bee Garden on 23rd, two Grey Wagtails on the Lagoon on 26th and one by the weir on 27th and a Dipper on the Fish Pass on 27th - only the second record of the year. Two Coal Tits on the feeders outside the Visitor Centre on 27th was a nice record - this is a scarce bird on the Reserve. A Cettis's Warbler on the Wet Grassland and Duck Marsh on 27th was the first record for more than two months. Jays were everywhere this month on their acorn and hazelnut forays.

A Red Kite was reported on just two dates but Common Buzzards were seen on six dates in what has been their best ever year on the reserve. On 29th one was pursued by up to 25 corvids over Tim's Field and on 30th what was almost certainly the same bird was seen perched on the Coppice fence early in the day. Little Owls were seen most days on the farmland with two birds on several dates. Following

last month's sighting there was a further report of a Water Vole on one of the Dragonfly Ponds on 30th.

Habitat-wise, the western end of Tim's Field was seeded on 3rd and by the end of the month it was showing a good caste of green growth. Water levels on the Wet Grassland and back Duck Marsh were also lowered this month in readiness for autumn cutting.

## **October**

A very pleasant start to the month with warm sunshine saw temperatures reach 18°C. There was a brief blip with some very heavy thundery rain on 6th but with high pressure in charge much of the month was very settled with light breezes and plenty of sunny days. Foggy starts were a problem in the latter part of the month. The warm sunshine resulted in a good deal of dragonfly and butterfly activity throughout the month. Autumn colours along the river were spectacular this month.

However, the arrival of the first winter thrushes on 11th showed that winter was not far off. Eighteen Redwings and sixty Fieldfares were seen flying over in a westerly direction. Around 150 Redwings flew over on 14th and there were subsequent sightings of smaller flocks throughout the month. The first skein of 64 Pink-footed Geese flew over in a south easterly direction on 11th and Whooper Swans were reported on three dates, 19 flying south east on 28th being the best count.

On the wetlands Gadwall had another excellent month with up to 70 counted on the Lagoon. Teal numbers were about average for the time of year with no more than 18 birds reported. Wigeon numbers were slow to build with six on one date but usually just one or two. Tufted Ducks too were thin on the ground with no more than four recorded. Snipe, however, built up rapidly this month with 13 seen on the Duck Marsh on 28th and 17 there on 31st with a further five on the Wet Grassland. It was an excellent month for Water Rail sightings with birds reported on 13 dates and on all four water bodies. Grey Heron numbers started to build in the latter part of the month with up to 11 seen on the Duck Marsh.

With gull numbers building up at this time of year it's worth checking the flocks on the Lagoon for more uncommon species and this paid off for three observers on 7th when they recorded the first ever Mediterranean Gull for the reserve.

Other sightings this month included a Little Owl on three dates, a Grey Wagtail on four dates, a Chiffchaff on three dates, a Cetti's Warbler on three dates, male Blackcaps on 7th and 31st, six Meadow Pipits flying east on 14th, two Goldcrests on 14th and one on 17th, a Tawny Owl on the Willow Path on 24th, the first Siskin of the year on 31st and a Rose-ringed Parakeet on five dates! Lapwings typically start to appear in the autumn, 13 flying over on 24th and 32 on 28th. There were no sightings of Barn Owls this month but a pellet was found in the thatched gazebo. There was also a third sighting of a Water Vole- this time on the Education Pond on 4th.

It was an excellent month for raptors. Red Kites were seen on five dates with three birds on one date but Common Buzzards were reported almost daily with two on several dates, one bird almost certainly a juvenile. Kestrels too were seen most days, a male frequently hunting over Tim's Field. Sparrowhawks were reported on 10 dates.

On the work front the Wet Grassland, back Duck Marsh and part of the Reedbed were cut this month and water levels restored by the end of the month. Willow coppicing started in the latter part of the month as did work on reinstating the old Dipping Pond. The two wild flower meadows also had their last cut on 16th. At the Dragonfly Ponds work started on removing excess vegetation from some of the ponds and Woodhead Pond was relined and refilled.

## **November**

After a foggy start the first day of the month blossomed into a beautiful, calm, sunny day with temperatures reaching 16°C. However, things went rapidly downhill thereafter with grey skies, fog and rain followed by strong to gale force westerly winds from 9th. It did though remain mainly very mild with temperatures hovering around 16°/17°C some days - the third mildest and wettest November on record.

Heavy rain saw the river rise rapidly on 15th, breaking its banks and flooding the farmland and Dragonfly Ponds. At its peak the Fish Pass and Reedbed formed one large water body with water surging past the Reedbed Hide and onto the Wet Grassland. Large concentrations of gulls gathered on the flooded farmland with up to 500 Black-headed Gulls counted. The water levels had dropped back somewhat by the following day but the river remained very high until the end of the month. There was the briefest hint of winter overnight on 20th with some heavy snow showers and feeling very cold in a strong northerly wind but it was short-lived.

There were some notable records this month. A count of 119 Greylag Geese on the farmland on 15th was the highest ever for the Reserve and 78 Canada Geese there on 29th was the highest November count since 2003. Thirty Tufted Ducks on the Lagoon on 22nd was the highest ever November total and c150 Stock Doves on the Mike Fisk Meadow on 29th was an exceptional number. On a less positive note, the best Coot count of just three birds was the joint lowest ever November count for the Reserve.

On the wetlands Gadwall numbers dropped back somewhat but Teal numbers reached 30 on 29th. Two Goldeneyes arrived on the Lagoon on 7th and birds were seen daily thereafter with up to four reported. Pochard were recorded on the Lagoon on seven dates with up to four seen but there was just one sighting of a male Shoveler on 21st. Six Wigeon were on the Lagoon on one date but otherwise no more than two birds were reported. Up to four Goosanders were seen on the Lagoon during the day but there were no reports of dusk gatherings. Grey Heron numbers on the Duck Marsh reached 13 on 1st but dropped back in the latter part of the month. Kingfishers were reported on eight dates. There were numerous reports of Snipe on the Wet Grassland and Duck Marsh with a best count of 17 at the latter site on 4th. It was a disappointing month for Water Rails with birds reported on just two dates.

Other sightings this month included a Siskin on 1st, a Cetti's Warbler near the Lagoon Hide on 4th, a Treecreeper on 7th and 28th, a Goldcrest on 14th and two on 17th, 12 Lapwings on 16th, a Grey Wagtail on six dates, a Red Kite on three dates and a Little Owl on six dates. A flock of more than 80 Pink-footed Geese flew over on

22nd. Up to 21 Goldfinches visited the feeders in the Bee Garden and up to six Bullfinches visited the Manager's Garden. Linnet numbers on Tim's Field reached 70 on 21st. It was another excellent month for Common Buzzard sightings with a bird seen on 10 dates. There was again a lot of Kestrel and Sparrowhawk activity.

It was a miserable month for our volunteers with hardly any dry days but willow coppicing continued in full swing, dead hedges were repaired and the old dipping pond was enlarged, relined and filled. The long hedgerow at the bottom end of the Mike Fisk Meadow was cut back to promote some denser growth and at the end of the month work started on cleaning out and refilling the holes in the Sand Martin bank.

## **December**

The month can perhaps be best described as very wet and very windy and on the few calm days we were enveloped in fog. It turned out to be the wettest and warmest December since records began in 1910. Unfortunately, that was only half the story.

With a month's rainfall in 24 hours the river burst its banks again on Boxing Day for the second time this month and the Reserve had to close at lunchtime. However, this time the flooding was extensive with much of the Reserve under water including Tim's Field. Dead hedges were uprooted and tables and benches swept away but the Dragonfly Ponds and Education Pond bore the brunt of the damage. Thanks to the power of Social Media there was an amazing response from the public and over 100 volunteers turned out to help on two swiftly arranged clean up days, clearing a huge amount of rubbish and debris from paths and hedgerows.

Before and after the floods the anticipated dusk gathering of Goosanders on the Lagoon failed to materialise but there was one excellent lunchtime count of 11 there on 28th which included nine males. Goldeneye were present daily with up to five birds reported. Wigeon though had a very poor month with sightings on just three dates with no more than three birds. A male Pochard was present on six dates accompanied by a female on one occasion. Teal numbers were disappointing, a best count of 20 being the lowest for December since 2010. Mallard numbers too were very low apart from one

exceptional count of 67 on 30th, 56 of these on the Wet Grassland - the highest count of the year. Coot had another dreadful month with usually just a single bird on the wetlands with two on a couple of dates - the lowest December count since 2001.

With so much flooded ground this month Snipe were probably well spread and were hard to see on the wetlands, though nine were flushed on the Duck Marsh on 28th during clean up operations. Water Rails also proved hard to find, being heard on the Reedbed on two dates but only seen once. A group of ten Cormorants on the pylon by the Fish Pass on 19th was the only double figure count of the year. Ten Grey Herons on the Duck Marsh on 16th was a nice record.

Away from the wetlands it was yet another excellent month for Common Buzzard sightings, a bird practically resident on the Scrubland throughout the month, despite the flooding. There were no Barn Owl sightings but a bird roosted in the thatched gazebo most nights, leaving plenty of pellets for dissection. A male Kestrel was present throughout the month. Linnet numbers on Tim's Field hovered around the 40 mark much of the time with a best count of 51 on 6th. We can only hope some of the seed crop survived the Christmas flooding.

Other sightings this month included a Peregrine Falcon over the flooded farmland on 13th, a Cetti's Warbler on the Wet Grassland on the same date and a Grey Wagtail also on the same date. A Redshank was a surprise visitor to the flooded farmland on 14th and 20th. A Merlin was reported on two dates; a Red Kite was seen on two dates with two on one date; a Woodcock was flushed in the Coppice on 14th; a Treecreeper was on the Willow Path on 16th; Goldcrests were reported on four dates and a Chiffchaff on two dates. A count of 15 Greenfinches in the Manager's Garden on 13th was the highest of the year. Winter thrushes were almost non-existent with no more than two Fieldfares on two dates. Redwings were reported on just three dates with c20 on the farmland on 9th by far and away the best count.

There was a movement of Pink-footed Geese in the latter part of the month with c170 flying over on 21st and c200 flying west on 28th.

Lapwings had been few and far between so far this winter so a flock of around 150 over the farmland on 23rd was a nice record.

It was another miserable month for our regular Monday and Friday volunteers, the worst of the rain seemingly reserved for those days. Work on cleaning out and refilling the Sand Martin nest holes was completed; there was tree planting on the Poplar Field; dead hedges were repaired or rebuilt and contractors were brought in to take down trees and shrubs by the Lagoon Hide in readiness for the arrival of a new hide in the new year.

### **Introduction to the Systematic List of Birds**

The bird's name is followed by the Latin name and a description of its status on the reserve. In order to do this, each bird has been placed in one of the following categories:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Resident         | A species which is found on the reserve throughout the year but has not yet been proved to have bred on the reserve.   |
| Resident Breeder | All or part of the local population is present throughout the year and breeds on the reserve.  |
| Migrant Breeder  | Breeds on the reserve but all or most of the breeding population departs in autumn or winter.  |
| Casual Breeder   | Has bred irregularly on the reserve and is likely to do so again.  |
| Winter Visitor   | All or part of the population breeds away from the reserve but either spends the winter here or has visited the reserve on at least 25 occasions in the winter months. |

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Migrant Visitor    | A species which is found on the reserve in spring and/or summer but has not yet been proved to have bred on the reserve. Most or all depart in autumn and/or winter. |
| Passage Visitor    | Has occurred on 25 or more occasions as a passage migrant in spring and/or winter.   |
| Frequent Visitor   | A species which visits the reserve throughout the year or a good part of the year but does not breed on the reserve.   |
| Infrequent Visitor | Has occurred on more than 10 but fewer than 25 occasions as either a passage or a winter visitor.  |
| Scarce Visitor     | Has occurred on the reserve on only 10 occasions or less   |
| Escaped Species    | Used where there is a possibility that some (but not necessarily all) records of a species refer to birds that have escaped from captivity.                          |

The observer's initials appear in brackets after some records.

Abbreviations used in the Report:

|              |                               |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| BTO          | British Trust for Ornithology |
| c            | approximately                 |
| <i>et al</i> | and others                    |
| RNR          | Rodley Nature Reserve         |
| WeBS         | BTO Wetland Bird Survey       |
| YNU          | Yorkshire Naturalists Union   |

## **Systematic List of Birds Recorded**

### **Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* Resident Breeder**

The Wet Grassland pair's two remaining young from last year were still present at the start of this year but on 12th January the remains of one of them were found at the edge of the Lagoon. Two pairs of adults were present most days with a third pair on 29th and 30th March (DC/EC). The Wet Grassland pair resumed nesting here and the female was seen on the nest for the first time on 30th March. Eight adults were reported on the wetlands on 12th April (DC/EC) but the additional birds soon moved on. On 17th April a female was also sitting on a nest at the western end of the Duck Marsh. Nine adults were present on the wetlands on 1st May (PM/BM) and again on 16th May (DC/EC). On 16th May the Wet Grassland pair were seen with seven tiny cygnets but by 20th May only one remained! On 23rd May the Duck Marsh pair showed off their solitary cygnet for the first time and the family remained here until 9th August when they moved onto the Duck Marsh. The Wet Grassland family disappeared after 14th June but reappeared briefly on 29th July. It is thought that they resorted to the river in the intervening period. On 23rd October two adults and six juveniles flew over the Reserve (JHa) and on 26th October an adult and five juveniles flew low over the wetlands (PM/BM). On 15th November a bird with a yellow ring no. 232 was seen on the Lagoon. This bird, an adult female, was found to have been ringed at Yeadon Tarn on 12th February this year. Two adults and a juvenile were seen on the Wet Grassland on 15th November but there were then no further sightings of a juvenile until 23rd December when one was seen with two adults on the river. What were probably the same birds were seen back on the Wet Grassland on 30th December, probably forced off the river by the very high water levels.

### **Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Scarce (Winter) Visitor**

These birds are most likely to be seen on their journey to and from their breeding grounds in Iceland, March and October being the best months. More often than not they will just be flyovers but on occasions birds do drop in to refuel and rest. There were sightings on six dates this year. One was seen on the Lagoon on the early date of 2nd February (JK et al) and two were seen on the river on 13th February, a Mute swan harassing them (JB). On 21st March 21 flew

over the Lagoon in a westerly direction (JS/JH). There were three records in October. Three flew over the Lagoon on 18th during an early morning WeBS count; eight flew over the Reserve on 26th (JB) and 19 flew over in a south easterly direction on 28th (PA).

### **Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus* **Passage Visitor**

In 2013 and 2014 there was a large movement of birds flying over the Reserve in a westerly direction in the early part of January. It was the same again this year. On 3rd January more than 300 flew over in a westerly direction at 4.13pm (PS/PC). At 4.02pm the birds had been tracked flying over Swillington Ings, though at that stage the flock numbered around 200. On 4th January 200 flew over the Reserve in a westerly direction (PA) and on 17th January a smaller group of around 60 birds came through (PA). From 8th February to 15th March two or three birds could be seen on the farmland and on 3rd and 4th May a single bird was reported on the Lagoon (DC/EC et al). On 11th October 64 flew over the Visitor Centre in a south easterly direction (MP) and on 22nd November 80+ were reported flying over the Reserve (MB). There were two records in December. On 21st c170 flew over the Reserve (JWC) and on 28th c200 flew over in a westerly direction (MB).

### **Greylag Goose** *Anser anser* **Casual Breeder**

Numbers on the farmland in November and December last year were the highest ever recorded. They remained high at the beginning of this year with several 90+ counts on the farmland with a best of 99 during an early morning WeBS count on 18th January. Numbers dropped back a bit in February but there were still reports of up to 67 birds. A few birds started to come onto the Lagoon from early March as numbers declined rapidly on the farmland due to shooting. Nevertheless, counts in each of the first four months of the year were the highest ever for those months. On 20th May a family of four goslings appeared on the Lagoon but only three were seen subsequently. There were no other reports of young. There were only a handful of records between 1st June and the second week in October but birds then started to gather on the farmland again, numbers reaching 58 in October and peaking at an all time record 119 during a WeBS count on 15th November. We tend to think these are all "local" birds but one with an orange neck collar with the letters PVX on the farmland on 7th November had been ringed on Lake

Windermere on 27th June as a four year old. Birds were on the farmland daily throughout December with a best count of 92 on 12th (DC/EC). Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J | J  | A | S | O  | N   | D  |
|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|---|---|----|-----|----|
| 99 | 67 | 52 | 38 | 17 | 7 | 12 | 7 | - | 58 | 119 | 92 |

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* Resident Breeder**

Numbers are at their highest from December to February with the highest ever count being 206 in February 2010. Winter counts have reduced somewhat since then, probably mainly due to culling on local farmland and there have been no three figure counts since January 2013. Birds were on the farmland from the beginning of the year, often coming onto the wetlands later in the day towards dusk. Up to 64 were reported on the farmland in the first two months of the year with a best count of 63 on the Lagoon in the same period (DC/EC) though most days produced much lower numbers. There was a gradual reduction in numbers in March but 55 were counted on the farmland on 11th (PM) and 34 were reported on the Lagoon on 29th (DC/EC). Several pairs stayed to nest on the middle island on the Lagoon in April - one nest containing 15 eggs! There were, however, no reports of young until 17th June when a pair was seen with five goslings on the Lagoon (DC/EC). There were only a handful of sightings on the Lagoon from the beginning of July to the end of October but a few birds could be found on the farmland most days from the beginning of November, numbers rising throughout the month and peaking at 78 on 28th (DC/EC) - the highest November count since 2003. Birds were on the farmland daily throughout December, a count of 81 there on 16th (DC/EC) being the highest of the month and the highest December count since 2010. Monthly maxima are shown below (adults only).

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J  | J | A  | S | O  | N  | D  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|---|----|----|----|
| 61 | 74 | 55 | 33 | 33 | 11 | 5 | 19 | 7 | 16 | 78 | 81 |

**Barnacle Goose *Branta leucosis* Winter Visitor / Escaped Sp.**

It is always worth just checking the Canada Goose flock but there were again no records this year. A single bird seen on the farmland

during an early morning WeBS count on 18th April 2010 was the first record since 26th April 2003 and only the second record for the reserve.

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* **Passage Visitor**

This is very much a spring visitor to the Reserve and the number of sightings have increased somewhat in the last two years. This was the case again this year with two birds arriving on the Lagoon on 25th March (DC/EC) with regular sightings thereafter until 12th April, the majority of these on the Reedbed. Two birds were seen again on 26th April (DC/EC) - this time on the Duck Marsh - and two flew over the road on 10th May (JB/MB).

**Mandarin** *Aix galericulata* **Scarce Visitor/Possible Escape**

First recorded on 4th April 2009, there have been just a handful of sightings since, all in March or April. There was just one sighting last year and none this year.

**Wigeon** *Anas penelope* **Winter Visitor**

Numbers were disappointing at both ends of the year. A report of 10 birds on 3rd January (DC/EC) was to be the only double figure count of the year with most days in January and February producing between three and seven. There were no sightings after 21st February. The first birds of the autumn usually arrive by the middle of September but there were no sightings this year until 30th September when a single female arrived on the Lagoon (JH). One or two birds were present daily thereafter with six on 9th October (JB) and six again on 22nd November (DC/EC) the best counts. With very mild conditions throughout the last three months of the year there was little prospect of any improvement and December produced sightings on just three dates, the best just three birds on 30th (PM/BM). Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J  | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | 7 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 6 | 6 | 3 |

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera* **Resident Breeder**

This is the commonest duck on the Reserve these days. Numbers had reached 40 on the wetlands in December 2014 but a best count

of just 17 in January this year was disappointing, albeit most of the wetlands were frozen over for a time. Unusually, there were very few sightings on the Lagoon in the first three months of the year, nearly all sightings in this period being on the Duck Marsh and Reedbed. Numbers remained very similar throughout the spring. Successful nesting was confirmed for the fifth year running when a female appeared on the Duck Marsh with three small ducklings on 17th June and four on 21st June (DC/EC). On 23rd June families of five, seven and eight ducklings were reported on the Lagoon, Wet Grassland and Duck Marsh respectively (PM/BM). Numbers of birds started to build up again in September reaching 69 on 25th. They remained high throughout October, dropping back a bit in November but a count of 55 on 28th was still the highest November count since 2012. Numbers fluctuated throughout December but a count of 51 on 13th (DC/EC), 32 of these on the flooded farmland, was still the highest for that month since 2011. Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J | J  | A  | S  | O  | N  | D  |
|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 17 | 16 | 17 | 16 | 15 | 6 | 13 | 35 | 69 | 70 | 55 | 51 |

**Pintail *Anas acuta* Scarce Visitor**

This was a new bird for the reserve in 2011, a male being seen on the Lagoon on 12th February. In 2012 there were sightings on two dates with a male on the Lagoon on 11th February and a female on the Duck Marsh on 26th September. There have been no sightings in the last three years.

**Teal *Anas crecca* Winter/Passage Visitor**

The highest January count of 23 was the lowest for that month since 2005, though the fact that most of the wetlands were frozen over for a time certainly didn't help. Numbers were very similar in February but March did produce a decent count of 33 on 10th, 22 of these on the Wet Grassland (PM/BM). Numbers typically tail off in April but a report of 28 on 8th (PM/BM) was the highest ever for that month - the previous best being 25 in 2013. May, June and July rarely produce more than two or three birds and this year was no exception. Birds started to arrive again from 19th August with four on the Duck Marsh (JWC) rising to 12 on 26th August (PA/SE). Numbers in September and October were very similar to last year but a count of 30 on 29th

November (DC/EC) was the highest for that month since 2011. Numbers dropped back somewhat in December, a best count of 20 on three dates being the lowest for that month since 2010. Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M | J | J | A  | S  | O  | N  | D  |
|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 23 | 22 | 33 | 28 | 1 | 3 | - | 12 | 14 | 18 | 30 | 20 |

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* **Resident Breeder**

Numbers on the wetlands were disappointing throughout 2014 and there was no improvement this year. Numbers were in fact lower in most months. A cold snap in January can potentially bring in good numbers of birds but with 90% ice cover on the Lagoon at times this was not going to happen and the maximum count was just 19 with nine of these on the river. The first two ducklings were seen on the Wet Grassland on 6th May (DC/EC), some two and a half weeks later than last year. There was no further evidence of successful nesting until 3rd June when a female was seen on the Duck Marsh with five ducklings (PM/BM). On 14th June a female with eight ducklings appeared on the Wet Grassland (DC/EC) and over the next two weeks further families were seen on the Lagoon, Duck Marsh and Wet Grassland. Numbers of adults were very low for most of the autumn but flooding on the farmland in the middle of November brought in more birds and a count of 64 on 15th during an early morning WeBS count, 36 of these on the farmland, was to prove the second highest count of the year. Numbers in December were disappointingly low most days but, as the waters receded following severe flooding on Boxing Day, a count of 67 on 30th included 56 on the Wet Grassland (PM/BM) - this the highest count of the year. Monthly maxima, adults only, are shown below.

| J  | F  | M | A  | M  | J  | J  | A  | S  | O  | N  | D  |
|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 19 | 16 | 9 | 12 | 15 | 26 | 31 | 19 | 13 | 11 | 64 | 67 |

**Garganey** *Anas querquedula* **Scarce (Summer) Visitor**

Last year there were sightings of a single male on the Duck Marsh on 28th April and 4th May and a female or eclipse male on the Wet Grassland on 14th September. Prior to this there had been no

sightings since 2006. This year a male and female were seen on the Wet Grassland on 6th June (PC), 10th June (PA) and 12th June (JB).

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Winter/Passage Visitor**

Though normally considered a winter visitor here, birds can turn up at any time of the year but they are never numerous. Most sightings are on the Lagoon and Duck Marsh. Birds were recorded on just four dates in January, four being the best count on 11th (DC/EC). There were no sightings in February but two or three birds were recorded on 13 dates in March and on 10 dates in April. There was then just one sighting between 20th April and 14th August - a pair of birds on the Lagoon on 24th May. There were then sightings on three dates in August, six in September and four in October with between one and three birds recorded. November and December were very disappointing with a single male on one date and two dates respectively. Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | - | 3 | 2 | 2 | - | - | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

**Pochard *Aythya ferina* Winter/Passage Visitor**

Although primarily a winter visitor birds can turn up at any time of year. One or two males were on the Lagoon daily from the beginning of the year but on 7th February seven males and a female were present (DC/EC et al) with six males on 11th (PA) and eight birds again on 15th (DC/EC). One or two were then seen daily until 20th March. There were no further sightings until 6th June when a single male was on the Lagoon for one day (DC/EC). A male was seen again on 4th July (DC/EC). We had to wait until 7th October for the next record when a female arrived on the Lagoon, again staying just one day (AB et al). Two males and two females arrived on 4th November (DC/EC) and between one and four birds were then present daily until 22nd November. There were no further records until 16th December when a male and female were seen on the Lagoon (DC/EC) and a single male was seen on five dates subsequently. Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 8 | 2 | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | 1 | 4 | 2 |

**Scaup** *Aythya marila* **Scarce Visitor**

There were no records this year. Last year a female arrived on the Lagoon on 1st February and was present almost daily until 9th March. Prior to this there had been just two records in 2000.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* **Resident Breeder**

Numbers in January and February were a bit higher than last year but still well short of previous years. With only a small area of the Lagoon ice-free a count of 22 there at dusk on 4th January (JB/PM) was to prove the best count in the first 10 months of the year. Numbers in March and April were down a bit on last year but were then a little higher in the period from May to September, possibly helped by an absence of mink activity. Almost certainly due to mink predation there had been no successful nesting since 2009 so it was nice to see a female with 10 tiny ducklings on the Lagoon on 10th July (JK et al). At least eight of these were still present a month later. Numbers fell away in October, a best count of just four on the Lagoon being the joint lowest ever for that month. With very mild conditions throughout the autumn there seemed little prospect of much improvement but numbers started to build from 7th November reaching 30 at dusk on 22nd (JB) - the highest ever November count. Numbers fell away again in December with no more than two birds reported some days and a best count of just 11 (PM/JB). Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J  | F  | M  | A  | M  | J  | J | A | S  | O | N  | D  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|----|---|----|----|
| 22 | 21 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 14 | 4 | 30 | 11 |

**Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* **Winter Visitor**

It was an excellent year for this species. A single female on the river on 5th January was the first of the year but from 15th January birds could be seen on the Lagoon most days up to 22nd March. A report of seven (2♂ + 5♀) on 24th January (PA/DC/EC) was the highest ever January count. February produced counts of 10 on 8th (WeBS), five

of these on the river, and eight (4♂+4♀) on 24th (PM/BM). In March nine (2♂+7♀) were on the Lagoon on 4th (PA), six (2♂+4♀) on 14th (DC/EC) and six again (1♂+5♀) on 22nd (PA). A single female on the river on 4th April was the last of the spring. A male and female on the Lagoon on 7th November were the first of the autumn (DC/EC). One or two birds were present daily thereafter with four (2♂+2♀) on 17th November (LJ). Three or four were present daily thereafter with five (1♂+4♀) on 8th December and five again (2♂+3♀) on 26th (PM/BM). Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J | F  | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 10 | 9 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | 5 |

### **Goosander *Mergus merganser* Frequent Visitor**

From late November to February birds come on to the Lagoon at dusk to socialise before flying off after dark but counts have dropped over recent years. In December last year the best count was nine and in January this year a count of 15 (7♂ + 8♀) on 4th was to prove the best of the year (PM/JB), only a small area of the Lagoon being ice-free at the time. Apart from a report of 10 on 25th January (PM/JB) there were no other double figure counts that month. Fourteen were recorded on 7th February (PC/PS) but numbers dropped off sharply after this date. Birds, however, continued to be seen regularly on the river and in March seven were reported upstream of the bridge on 15th and 19th. On 24th April a female and eight small ducklings were seen in the Fish Pass (JK) and what was probably the same family was seen on the river two days later (JPi) and again on 5th May (POG). A female and one small duckling were seen on the river below the weir on 20th June (BM). Five "redheads" on the river on 16th August and five flying over the Dragonfly Ponds on 24th August (PM/BM) almost certainly included juveniles, as did a group of six on the river near the bridge on 24th (DW). One or two birds could be seen on the Lagoon most days from the second week in November with four on two occasions but dusk counts were almost non-existent until late December when a count of six at 4.00pm on 27th included five males (PM/BM). However, the best December count came in the middle of the day on 28th, eleven birds including nine males

(PM/BM). The maximum daily count for each month is shown below (adults only).

|    |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| J  | F  | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D  |
| 15 | 14 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 1 | - | 6 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 11 |

**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis* **Casual Breeder**

Not unexpectedly, there were again no sightings this year. The countrywide DEFRA cull proved very successful. This species bred on the reserve in 2004, 2005 and 2006 and was last seen here on 16th May 2009.

**Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa* **Scarce Visitor**

A single bird at the edge of the Willow Coppice on 24th April 2012 was the first sighting since 1st April 2010. There have been no sightings since this date.

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* **Casual Breeder**

A number of birds were released on the Reserve in 2010 and 2013 and these appeared to settle in well but sightings have gradually dwindled and last year there were just three records. This year there were no sightings.

**Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus* **Resident Breeder**

It is surprising how well this species does on the Reserve with such a healthy fox population. Having said this, there was only one double figure count this year and only limited evidence of successful nesting. There were in fact no reports of young until 29th September when eight well grown juveniles were seen at the edge of Tim's Field (PM/BM). Up to six birds were recorded on Tim's Field in the early part of the year and a Reserve count of nine on 8th March (PM) was the highest in the first six months. Birds were daily visitors to the feeders in the Bee Garden with a best count of nine here on 21st December including three males and six females and juveniles (BM). The only double figure count came just four days later on 25th when a total of 11 birds could be seen from the Visitor Centre - four males on the Mike Fisk Meadow and a male and six females and juveniles under the feeders in the Bee Garden (PM/BM).

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* **Resident Breeder**

Numbers on the wetlands in the early part of the year are always low and this year was no exception. No more than one bird was seen on the Lagoon and Duck Marsh in January and February but up to four were reported on the river in the bridge area. Numbers increased in March with up to seven on the wetlands but dropped back somewhat in April and May with a maximum of just four, females being well hidden on their nests. Last year the first young were seen on the Duck Marsh on 22nd May, the same date as in 2013, but this year we had to wait until 28th June for the first three chicks there (NB). The first family appeared on the Lagoon on 1st July (two chicks) and a further family was seen on the Duck Marsh (three chicks) on 9th July (PM/BM). On 9th August a further family of three chicks was seen on the Wet Grassland (DC/EC). Counts in August and September last year reached 18 and 22 respectively but numbers were considerably lower in the same periods this year - just nine and six. Like last year, birds became much harder to find on the wetlands towards the end of the year and the best count in November was just two. It is unlikely that birds were on the river in this period as it was a raging torrent with floodwater for much of the time so where do they go? Both the Lagoon and Wet Grassland produced single birds in December with three at the latter site on 19th (DC/EC) being the best count of the month. Monthly maxima are shown below (adults only).

| J | F | M | A | M | J | J  | A | S | O | N | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 3 |

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* **Casual Breeder**

This species continues to frustrate from a breeding point of view. A pair did nest on the Lagoon last year close to one of the tern rafts and two eggs were laid. For some reason the nest failed and there were hopes for a better outcome this year. A single bird was on the Lagoon briefly on 14th March (DC/EC). On 1st April a bird again arrived on the Lagoon (PA) and there were daily sightings thereafter. A second bird arrived on 6th and on 23rd April the birds were observed displaying and two days later mating (DC/EC). There were no further sightings after 6th May until 22nd May when a single bird was seen. There were daily sightings thereafter until 17th June but only of a

single bird and hopes that a second bird might be on a nest proved unfounded. There were no records after 17th June.

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Resident**

Previously classed as a Frequent Visitor, it is probably appropriate to now regard this species as Resident as it is present daily throughout the year but probably roosts elsewhere at night. The majority of records come from the pylon by the Fish Pass with birds seen here daily but they are also regular visitors to the Lagoon, either fishing here or loafing on the middle island. In March six birds on the island on 19th and 29th included two in full breeding plumage (PM/BM). Numbers fell away after this date but rose again from July with a count of nine on the pylon on 23rd August (JW). The highest counts tend to come from August onwards and while last year produced frequent reports of 10 or 11 birds in the latter part of August and September there was just one double figure count this year - 10 on the pylon on 19th December (DC/EC). The highest counts each month are shown below.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D  |
| 6 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 10 |

**Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* Scarce Visitor**

The Reedbed might not be big enough to accommodate a Marsh Harrier but it could certainly home a Bittern, if only for a day or so. With Bitterns now doing much better nationally and locally it was only going to be a question of time before one put in an appearance and it duly did on 22nd February, two observers being lucky enough to see one walk straight across the waterway on the front Reedbed (JWo/SD). Despite a lot of subsequent searching there were no further sightings.

**Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) Infrequent Visitor**

First recorded in 2004 there were no further sightings until 2010 when birds were reported on three dates with two on one date. There were further sightings in 2011 and 2012, none in 2013 but 2014 proved to be the best to date with birds seen on seven dates. This year there were sightings on five dates. One flew over the farmland on 17th May; one was on the Wet Grassland on 6th August (LE/PM) and

three were there for a time on 8th August (JH et al) including one ringed bird. On 24th August one was reported flying down river (PM/BM) and on 19th September one was on the Duck Marsh briefly (PC).

| Year | No. of Dates | Max number of Birds | First Date | Last Date |
|------|--------------|---------------------|------------|-----------|
| 2004 | 1            | 1 fly over          | 8th June   | 8th June  |
| 2010 | 3            | 2                   | 29th May   | 1st June  |
| 2011 | 5            | 3                   | 7th July   | 22nd Sept |
| 2112 | 2            | 1                   | 23rd July  | 22nd Sept |
| 2013 | -            | -                   | -          | -         |
| 2014 | 7            | 2                   | 2nd May    | 11th Oct  |
| 2015 | 5            | 3                   | 17th May   | 19th Sept |

### **Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Resident**

Recorded in all months, this is a common bird on the Reserve though, unusually, there were no double figure counts until October this year. The Duck Marsh usually holds the most birds and up to nine were recorded here in January. Over recent years numbers have dropped back somewhat in February and this was the case again this year with no more than five to be seen. A count of eight on 23rd March (PM/BM) was the highest ever for that month. May and June produced the lowest counts - a maximum of four in each case. Early and late in the day birds visit the Dragonfly Ponds and Dipping Pond and can sometimes be seen in the Yorkshire Water compound. Small ducklings are undoubtedly a prey item in the spring and summer months but on 27th September one was reported killing a large juvenile Coot (PA). Numbers on the Duck Marsh built up considerably in the latter part of October with 11 there on 31st and a further two on the farmland (MG/PG) making it the highest ever count for October. The Duck Marsh continued to produce some good counts in the early part of November with 13 on 1st the best (PA). Numbers did fall back a bit in the second half of the month but there was a count of 10 on the Duck Marsh on 16th December (DC/EC). The highest counts each month are shown below.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O  | N  | D  |
| 9 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 13 | 13 | 10 |

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus* **Frequent Visitor**

First recorded over the Reserve on 26th July 2006, there have been sightings every year since and it is now a common bird in the area. Sightings were reported on 64 dates this year and in all months though many more visits almost certainly went unrecorded. Most sightings involved one or two birds but three were reported on several dates. Grass cutting and ploughing is almost guaranteed to bring birds in and this year was no exception, two birds visiting during meadow cutting operations on 3rd August and another during baling on 7th August, this one only feet above the ground, presumably seeking rodents. The following table shows the number of dates that birds were reported each month.

|   |   |   |   |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J | F | M | A | M  | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
| 4 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 |

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* **Resident Breeder**

There were sightings most days from the beginning of the year. On 18th January what was probably a male was reported chasing a Kingfisher across the Kingfisher Pool (GS). The rather larger females prefer Stock Doves and Wood Pigeons and there was plenty of evidence of successful hunts around the Reserve throughout the year. There were less than a handful of records in May and June but from the beginning of August there were daily sightings to the end of the year. On 10th July a female circling over the Lagoon was chased off by two very brave or foolhardy Common Terns (PM/BM). On 30th September a male flew into the Visitor Centre window while chasing small birds but was apparently unharmed (PA). There were no reports of juveniles but nesting almost certainly took place again in woodland across the river. On 9th December two females were seen on the River Path "arguing" over a pigeon kill at the far end of the path (JLW/PW et al).

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* **Frequent Visitor**

Records of this species have increased considerably over the last three years with sightings on 18 dates in 2012, 21 dates in 2013 and 26 dates in 2014. This year there were an incredible 102 records on 84 dates. The most productive months were March with sightings on 10 dates, April - nine dates, October - 14 dates, November - 10 dates and December - 12 dates. Most sightings involved single birds but two were seen on the River Path on 6th April (DC/EC). The large majority of records were of birds flying over but on 8th July a bird was seen on the ground at the roadside by the Lagoon Hide at 8.15pm (PM/BM). On 29th September what may well have been a juvenile was pursued by corvids over Tim's Field, later flying into the Coppice and landing there (PM/BM). On 2nd October one was seen on a post on the farmland (GJB et al). Two birds were reported on several dates in October. On 21st October one was seen on the ground on the Poplar Field and shortly after on the Poplar Carr fence (PA). Throughout November and December nearly all sightings were on or over the Scrubland with two birds there on 19th December (DC/EC) and 20th (PA). Many of these sightings were believed to be of a juvenile bird which was frequently seen on the ground or very low in bushes. Following the sighting of a family party of six over Tim's Field last year it now seems likely that birds may be nesting not too far away, possibly in the valley itself.

**Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* **Scarce Visitor**

A new bird for the reserve in 2012, one was photographed high over the Dragonfly Ponds on 13th June that year. The record was subsequently accepted by YNU. There have been no subsequent records.

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* **Scarce Visitor**

There were no sightings this year. One that flew over the Reserve on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2008 was the first and only record.

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* **Resident Breeder**

Prior to 2014 a pair had successfully nested in a Barn Owl box in the Yorkshire Water compound (east facing) in five out of the previous six years. A second box in the compound (north facing) had been unused but in 2014 birds nested in both boxes raising a total of five young. There was a lot of Kestrel activity from the beginning of the

year and birds were seen at the east facing box as early as 10th January (DC/EC). Over the following weeks birds were seen at both compound boxes and at a new Barn Owl box on the Scrubland. In April mating was observed at the east facing box and at the Scrubland box. Looking back it now seems that the birds had been ousted from the north facing box by a pair of Barn Owls and subsequently took up residence in the Scrubland box. The first evidence of successful nesting came on 1st July when a bird was observed bringing a rodent to the east facing box in the compound (PW). There was intense activity at this box over the following days, often late into the evening. On 18th July a juvenile was reported at the Scrubland box (EC/PS) after a period of inactivity at this site and on 31st July a single juvenile was seen at the east facing box with an adult female (PM/BM). Birds continued to visit the east facing box but there was no further activity at the Scrubland box and it seems likely that successful nesting only took place at the former site and one juvenile only fledged - not surprising in what had been a poor year for Kestrels countrywide with adverse weather conditions affecting hunting. Birds continued to be seen daily until the end of the year, the large majority of sightings involving a male bird.

**Hobby *Falco subbuteo* Scarce Visitor**

Prior to this year there had been just two records of this smart little raptor - one in 2005 and one in 2012 just off the reserve. This year produced a spate of sightings with one over Tim's Field on 21st June the first (SJM). On 27th June what was probably the same bird was seen over the trees on the far riverbank (JW) and on 28th June the monthly Fish Pass Walk was delayed while participants watched the bird for some time over the far woodland as it was harassed by a Common Tern. The bird was also seen perched on the pylon by the Fish Pass on several occasions including that day. It was last seen on 24th August hunting dragonflies low over the Wet Grassland (PM/BM).

**Merlin *Falco columbarius* Infrequent (Winter) Visitor**

There were six records this year, three of these on one date. On 18th January a bird was seen on the Poplar Carr fence (MB). On 24th January what was almost certainly the same bird was seen flying over the Duck Marsh (NK), perched in the Coppice (JS) and on a fence post at the edge of the Coppice (DC/EC). There were two

records in the latter part of the year. One was seen in the Reedbed on 6th December (ST) and on 20th December one was seen on the entry road.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* **Infrequent Visitor**

Sightings were reported on ten dates this year, five more than last year. Most sightings were on the farmland where the birds hunt Wood Pigeons and Stock Doves but there were some good records on the Reserve itself this year. On 7th April one flew low over Tim's Field giving excellent views (PM/BM); on 24th June one was reported flying over the John Ackroyd Meadow (PA/AB) and on 13th December one flew low over the flooded farmland behind the car park causing panic among the large number of gulls gathered there (PC). With Peregrines now resident in the city centre we should be able to look forward to many more visits from this impressive raptor in the future.

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus* **Resident Breeder and Winter Visitor**

Numbers are certainly at their highest in the winter months but a few birds are now staying throughout the year and breeding on the Reserve. However, just like last year, birds were hard to find in the early part of the year with just three records in January and two in February, sightings being reported on the Lagoon, Wet Grassland and Reedbed. There was rather more activity in March and April with sightings on all four main water bodies but birds were again elusive in May with just one sighting in the Reedbed on 3rd. June too produced just one record - a bird squealing in the same area on 26th. There were no reported sightings in July, a single bird on 2nd August and then a long wait until 29th August when an adult and juvenile were recorded on the Duck Marsh (SO et al). It does show how elusive these birds can be when they are nesting. There were several more sightings of an adult and juvenile on the Duck Marsh over the following few days. This is the fourth year running that breeding has been confirmed. October proved to be by far the best month for sightings with 18 records on 13 dates, the Wet Grassland proving the most productive site with nine records here. A very wet and wild November produced just two sightings in the Reedbed and on the Lagoon. A similarly wet and wild December gave us three records before the floods came - all in the Reedbed.

**Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* **Scarce Visitor**

There has only been one record of this elusive bird. An adult was present on the Wet Grassland for five days from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2005.

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* **Resident Breeder**

The highest counts in the early part of the year typically come from the farmland close to the river bank and this year was no exception. Up to 16 were recorded there in January (JB), 15 in February (WeBS) and eight in March (DC/EC). Last year the first young were seen on the Duck Marsh on 2nd May. This year the first chicks (2) were not seen until 14th June, this time at the Dragonfly Ponds during an early morning WeBS count. Three more families appeared on 27th June - on the Wet Grassland - 3 chicks, on the Reedbed - 4 chicks and on the Duck Marsh - one chick (DC/EC). Further families were reported on the Duck Marsh and Reedbed in July but with no more than two chicks. Numbers of birds on the wetlands in the latter part of the year were a little higher than last year. Monthly maxima (adults only) are shown below.

|    |    |    |   |   |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |
|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|----|----|
| J  | F  | M  | A | M | J | J | A  | S | O | N  | D  |
| 16 | 20 | 13 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 11 | 10 |

**Coot** *Fulica atra* **Resident Breeder**

After a very poor year last year the best January count of eight was the lowest for that month since 2002 and it continued in the same vein with numbers most months even lower than last year. Despite the low numbers there were some breeding successes, the first family of four chicks appearing on the Kingfisher Pool on 20th May (JB). However, a dead chick had been found on the back Reedbed some 10 days earlier (JB). Two birds were observed on nests on the Lagoon on 22nd May and two chicks were seen on the Wet Grassland the same day (PM/BM). On 24th May a family of three chicks was seen on the Duck Marsh (PM/JB). New families appeared on the Lagoon, Wet Grassland and Duck Marsh in June but despite this the number of birds recorded on the wetlands in the autumn was very low. Predation by Grey Herons may be a factor in juvenile survival as one was observed killing a large juvenile on the Duck Marsh on 27th September (PA). Maximum numbers in each of the last five months of the year were the lowest since 2001, December

producing a best count of just two birds. Monthly maxima (adults only) are shown below.

|   |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |
|---|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|---|---|---|
| J | F  | M  | A  | M  | J | J  | A  | S  | O | N | D |
| 8 | 12 | 18 | 17 | 11 | 7 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 2 |

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* **Migrant Breeder**

The first bird arrived on the Lagoon on 10th February (GJB), just two days later than last year. A second bird arrived the following day and four flew over on 15th (PA). There were then daily sightings throughout the rest of February and March on the middle island on the Lagoon and on the farmland but of no more than two birds. Three flew over the Mike Fisk Meadow on 10th April (PM/BM). On 17th April two eggs were noted in a nest on the middle island (JB) and on 24th April one chick was seen there (PM/BM). From 27th May both adults and juvenile were daily visitors to Tim's Field and on 23rd June four birds were seen there. The Wet Grassland also produced numerous sightings from the same date. Two birds were there on 14th July and later in the day four flew over the Dragonfly Ponds (PM/BM). There were no sightings after this date.

**Little (Ringed) Plover** *Charadrius dubius* **Migrant Visitor**

It was another very disappointing year with sightings reported on just four dates - just the same as last year. All sightings involved single birds. One was on the Wet Grassland on 22nd April (PA/JB); one was seen on the riverbank by the bridge on 7th May (JB/MB); one on the Wet Grassland on 17th May (DC/EC) and one was seen in the same area on 14th June (WeBS).

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* **Migrant Visitor**

There have been no records in the last eight years. There were just two sightings in 2007.

**Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria* **Scarce Visitor**

There have been no records in the last seven years.

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* **Casual Breeder**

As in the previous two years, one of the best count came in January - c100 birds flying over Tim's Field on 21st (JB/MB et al). Sadly, there

were no other counts vaguely approaching this until December and it turned out to be another disappointing year. Apart from a flock of 30 over the Reserve on 15th February (NT) all other records in the first half of the year were of between one and three birds. Up to three were seen on the middle island on the Lagoon and on the Duck Marsh in March and April and an odd one lingered on until 10th May but there was no evidence of nesting this year. Seven birds were on the farmland on 26th July (PA) but there were then no other records until 24th October when 13 flew over the Manager's Garden (DC/EC). A flock of 32 flew over the farmland on 28th October (PA) and 12 were on the flooded farmland behind the car park on 16th November (PM/BM). There were just two records in December, one of them the best count of the year. Seven flew over the farmland on 20th and c150 flew over the same area on 23rd (DC/EC). Maximum numbers seen each month are shown below.

| J    | F  | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O  | N  | D    |
|------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|------|
| c100 | 30 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 7 | - | - | 32 | 12 | c150 |

**Knot** *Calidris canutus* **Scarce Visitor**

There were again no sightings this year. A bird on the Duck Marsh on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2006 was the first and only record for the reserve.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* **Infrequent Visitor**

A single bird seen on the Duck Marsh on 1st February 2012 was the first record since May 2006. There have been no sightings in the last three years.

**Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus* **Passage/Winter Visitor**

This has always been a difficult bird to find, the years 2012 to 2014 each producing just three records. This year there were no reported sightings.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* **Passage/Winter Visitor**

It was probably the best year so far as regards the number of sightings and the number of birds reported. In January the large majority of records came from the Wet Grassland with several double figure counts and a best of 28 on 17th (PA). From the beginning of February nearly all sightings were on the Duck Marsh with more

double figure reports including 15 on 25th February (PA), 22 on 8th March (SE) and 18 on 10th March (PM/BM). Numbers typically started to fall away in April with nine on 1st the best (MG/PG). There were no sightings after 27th April until 8th July when a single bird was seen on the Wet Grassland (PW/JLW). There were no further records until 22nd August when one was seen on the Duck Marsh (PA). One or two birds were seen most days thereafter on the Wet Grassland and Duck Marsh but numbers only started to build from the latter part of October reaching 22 on 31st, 17 of these on the Duck Marsh and five on the Wet Grassland (PA). There were sightings throughout November on both the Wet Grassland and Duck Marsh but birds were unusually hard to find for much of December, probably due to the huge choice of wet habitat available to them elsewhere following the deluge of rain. However, following the severe flooding on Boxing Day there were several sightings. One was on the flooded entry road on 27th December (JB); one was flushed on the Winter Walk on the same date and nine were flushed on the Duck Marsh on 28th during a flood damage check (JB/MB et al). Two flew off the Wet Grassland on 30th (BM). The numbers of dates that birds were recorded in the various habitats are shown below. Last year's figures are shown in brackets for comparison.

| Lagoon   | Duck Marsh | Reedbed  | Wet Grassland | Other    |
|----------|------------|----------|---------------|----------|
| 5<br>(2) | 94<br>(66) | 4<br>(5) | 50<br>(18)    | 6<br>(6) |

Maximum monthly counts are shown below.

| J  | F  | M  | A | M | J | J | A | S | O  | N  | D |
|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|---|
| 28 | 15 | 22 | 9 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 3 | 22 | 17 | 9 |

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* **Scarce Visitor**

There were no sightings this year. This species has only been recorded on the Reserve on three occasions.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* **Scarce Visitor**

There were no sightings this year. This species was recorded for the first and only time on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2006 when a single bird was found on the Duck Marsh.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* **Scarce Visitor**

2012 produced just one report of a single bird but there have been no records since then.

**Curlew** *Numenius arquata* **Migrant Visitor**

The Curlew is one of our most rapidly declining breeding bird species showing a 46% decline across the UK from 1994-2010. Not surprisingly, it was another poor year here. Last year produced records on seven dates - this year just five. Three flew over the farmland on 18th March (PA); one was heard on the wetlands on 4th and 7th April (PM/BM); one flew over the reserve on 8th April (JWC) and two were on the farmland on 20th April (DAN).

**Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* **Infrequent (Winter) Visitor**

This winter visitor is most likely to be encountered in the Coppice during willow cutting where it is occasionally flushed accidentally. There was just one record this year - a bird flushed in the Coppice on 14th December (JK).

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* **Infrequent Visitor**

Sightings have declined over recent years. 2013 produced just four records; there were two records in 2014 and this year four. A bird was seen on the Lagoon on 15th March (PA/DC/EC) and one was on the middle island there on 23rd March (PM/BM). There were then two very late records on 14th (PM/BM) and 20th December (SW) - a single bird on flooded farmland behind the car park.

**Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* **Infrequent Visitor**

There have been no sightings in the last five years. In 2010 two birds were reported on two dates. These were the first records since 28th March 2002.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* **Infrequent Visitor**

This species is predominantly a passage bird in Britain with a few staying throughout the winter. There have been no records in the last four years. The last sighting was on 3rd May 2011.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* **Scarce Visitor**

There have been no sightings in the last nine years. This species was recorded for the first time in 2006 when a single bird was seen on the Duck Marsh.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* **Passage Visitor**

It was a very poor year for this species with sightings reported on just four dates - three less than last year. One was on the Lagoon on 24th April (JHa); one was seen on the riverbank by the bridge on 4th May ((JLW/PW); one was on the Lagoon on 8th May (JB) and two were seen on the middle island on the Lagoon on 6th July (PM/BM).

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* **Frequent Visitor**

There were some reasonable counts on the Lagoon in January with much of it ice-bound, 259 on 18th (WeBS) being the best. There was also a report of 250 on the farmland on 14th (PM). Numbers dropped away sharply in February with a best count of just 72 on 8th. Several dead birds were found on the Lagoon in February and March which gave cause for concern. Fifty birds were on the Wet Grassland on 16th March (PM/BM) but there were no counts of more than 20 after this. A few birds were present throughout the rest of the spring but no more than 10. More birds started to return in July with 50 on the Lagoon on 10th (PM/BM) but there were no higher counts until 18th October when 70 were on the Lagoon (WeBS). A count of 162 on 31st October included 120 on the farmland (DC/EC). A report of 202 on 4th November included 150 on the Lagoon but the highest count of the year came on 16th November when c500 gathered on flooded farmland behind the car park (PM/BM). The flooded farmland continued to attract good numbers throughout December with several reports of more than 200 birds but the best count of the month - 350 - was on the flooded Mike Fisk Meadow on 27th (PM/BM). Monthly maxima are shown below.

| J   | F  | M  | A | M  | J | J  | A  | S  | O   | N    | D   |
|-----|----|----|---|----|---|----|----|----|-----|------|-----|
| 259 | 72 | 50 | 2 | 10 | 7 | 50 | 32 | 40 | 162 | c500 | 350 |

**Common Gull** *Larus canus* **Frequent Visitor**

Numbers last year were quite disappointing but there was a considerable improvement this year with several very high counts reported on the farmland. Numbers there in the first three weeks of January had failed to exceed 30 but on 21st January more than 400 were counted (PM), the highest number ever recorded, the previous record being 210 in July 2009. Unfortunately, the birds didn't stay for long and the remainder of January and February failed to produce more than 38 birds. Sightings are always few and far between in April, May and June but 44 on Tim's Field on 31st May (PM/BM) was a rare exception with both adults and immature birds present. Most of July too was very quiet with just odd birds reported but on 30th July 120 were counted on the farmland (PM). August and September produced just a handful of records of no more than four birds but 80 were on the farmland on 18th October (PM/BM), 400+ on 1st November (PM) and 260 on 4th November (PM). Numbers on the wetlands in November and December were often in single figures but flooding on the farmland produced a big count of 370 there on 14th December and 210 on 28th December (PM/BM). Monthly maxima are shown below.

|      |   |    |   |    |   |     |   |   |    |      |     |
|------|---|----|---|----|---|-----|---|---|----|------|-----|
| J    | F | M  | A | M  | J | J   | A | S | O  | N    | D   |
| 400+ | 7 | 35 | - | 44 | 3 | 120 | 4 | 3 | 80 | 400+ | 370 |

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* **Scarce Visitor**

It is always worth checking the Black-headed Gulls on the Lagoon for a possible Mediterranean Gull and it finally paid off for some regular birders on 7th October when an adult in full winter plumage was seen on the Lagoon, the bird flying in from the east (AB/DC/EC/MP). This is a new bird for the Reserve.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus* **Frequent Visitor**

Odd birds can often be found among groups of other gulls on the farmland or Lagoon and these often turn out to be immature birds. Surprisingly, there were no records until 23rd March this year. There were a couple of decent counts. On 31st May four adults and five immatures were on Tim's Field (DC/EC) and on 14th June 13 adults and five immatures were on the farmland (WeBS). One or two birds were seen on the Lagoon or farmland monthly thereafter with the

exception of September. On 16th December there was a report of five immature birds on the farmland and four on 19th (DC/EC).

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* Infrequent Visitor**

Most likely to be seen flying over towards dusk, there were again just two reports of birds on the Reserve this year. One was on the Lagoon on 15th November (WeBS) and one was seen on the farmland on 21st November (DC/EC). Large V-formations of gulls flying east during the late afternoon in December were probably this species.

**Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* Scarce Visitor**

Records are limited to the occasional fly over. There were no reported sightings this year.

**Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides* Scarce Visitor**

There were no reports this year. Two 1<sup>st</sup> winter birds that flew over the Willow Path on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2009 were the first and only record for the reserve.

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Migrant Breeder**

The three tern rafts on the Lagoon were further adapted this year to try and prevent chicks jumping into the water prematurely. All nine chicks took this action last year and drowned in thick algae which had formed around the rafts. The first two birds arrived on the Lagoon on 17th April (DAN et al), two days earlier than last year. Up to six were present some days from 29th April with seven on 22nd May. An exceptional number of very windy days resulted in all three rafts dragging their anchors and finishing up quite close to the eastern shore of the Lagoon but two pairs stayed to nest and the first two chicks were seen on one raft on 6th June (PC/PS), just one day later than last year. On 25th June a chick was seen in the water near the rafts but thanks to an absence of thick algae this year it was able to get back onto a raft safely. Both nests produced three chicks and all six could be seen in the last week of June. On 1st July one youngster had reached the middle island on the Lagoon and all six had fledged successfully by the end of the first week of July. Two adults and three juveniles were seen on one raft on 22nd July but birds were by now spending more time away from the Lagoon and a single juvenile on a raft on 26th July was the last sighting of the year (PM/BM).

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* **Scarce Visitor**

This was a new bird for the Reserve in 2011 and there was an unconfirmed sighting in 2012. There were no records in 2013 or 2014 but there were two reported sightings this year, both on the same date and almost certainly involving the same bird. On 24th May one was seen on the Lagoon (DC/EC) and on the Duck Marsh (ST).

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia domest* **Frequent Visitor**

Almost certainly under-recorded, sightings were reported on eight dates this year. Twenty-five were seen on the old Barkers site near the main gates on 19th April during an early morning bird survey. One or two were on Tim's Field in May and in August up to 10 visited the freshly cut Mike Fisk Meadow.

**Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* **Resident**

It was an excellent year for this species with numbers reported very much higher than last year. In January 144 were recorded on the farmland on 2nd (PM/BM), nearly twice as many as the highest count last year. Other good counts in January included 130 on the farmland on 5th (PM/BM), 110 on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 21st (JB/PM) and 150+ flushed by two Sparrowhawks on 31st (GP). Numbers fell away somewhat in February but birds were daily visitors to the Manager's Garden throughout the year with up to 15 seen here (DC/EC). On 6th May 56 on the freshly ploughed Tim's Field (PM) was a good spring count. There were some big counts in the latter part of the year. Around 110 were on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 10th November (PM/BM); c150 were on the Mike Fisk Meadow on 29th November (DC/EC) and well over 100 were seen in a mixed flock of Stock Doves and Wood Pigeons on Tim's Field on several occasions.

**Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus* **Resident Breeder**

Numbers in the early part of the year were particularly high this year with several 200+ counts on Tim's Field. Around 300 were reported there on 23rd January (PM/JB), c400 on 1st February (PM/JB) and c300 on 22nd February and 1st March (PM/BM). Numbers fell away through March but around 100 were still present as late as 19th April. Quite a few pairs nest on the Reserve and it is only in autumn when the leaves fall that their basic twiggy nests become obvious. Another good elderberry crop drew good numbers of birds into the eastern

end of the Coppice in the autumn and up to 200 were in mixed flocks with Stock Doves on Tim's Field in November and December.

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* **Frequent Visitor**

This species seems to prefer built up areas and rarely ventures beyond the river bridge or car park so, despite its status as a Frequent Visitor, few sightings are reported. There were in fact just three this year, all near the bridge and all involving single birds - on 22nd May, 1st July and 31st October.

**Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* **Scarce (Summer) Visitor**

This declining species is becoming increasingly hard to find in the valley. A juvenile spent a week on the Reserve in July 2012 but there were no sightings in 2013 and just three in 2014 between 9th July and 6th August, again juveniles. There were no reported sightings this year.

**Barn Owl** *Tyto alba* **Casual Breeder**

First recorded on the Reserve in 2008, there was one record in 2010 and one in 2012. In 2013 there were a number of sightings and in 2014 a bird roosted in the newly constructed thatched gazebo for much of December. The bird continued to roost there in January this year, leaving plenty of pellets for analysis. However, there were no records after 21st January until 20th May when a bird was observed peering out of the north facing nest box in the Yorkshire Water compound at 7.55pm (PM/BM). Later the same evening the bird was seen hunting over the Scrubland, returning to the box with a rodent. Over subsequent evenings a bird was seen quartering the Poplar Field and the Scrubland, the latter site proving most productive for rodents. On 28th May two birds were seen for the first time around 9.00pm, one quartering the Poplar Field and a second bird peering out of the box (PM/BM). On 3rd July seven rodents were brought to the box in the space of an hour between 9.00pm and 10.00pm (JB/MB). Unfortunately, there were few daytime sightings. A bird was disturbed in the thatched gazebo on a couple of occasions and one flew across Tim's Field at 10.30am on 14th July during a school visit (PH/JS). On 8th August a juvenile was seen at the box for the first time (JB). On 11th August two juveniles were seen on the ledge of the box at 8.55pm, remaining there for almost half an hour (PM/BM). There were further sightings over the following evenings but on 20th

August one of the juveniles was found dead under power lines by the dry stone wall having been electrocuted. Another bird peered out of the box later the same morning but there were no subsequent sightings. However, pellets were found in the thatched gazebo in October, November and throughout December showing that a bird was roosting there regularly.

### **Little Owl *Athene noctua* Casual Breeder**

In 2012 a pair bred on the Reserve for the first time, raising at least three juveniles. Sadly, the adult female was found dead on 5th May 2013 with a partially ejected egg. Nevertheless sightings of a single bird continued into the autumn of that year. In 2014 there were regular sightings with two birds on occasions but whether successful nesting took place is not known. This year there were a total of 127 records with sightings from as early as 2nd January. In the first three months of the year practically all sightings were on the farmland on or around the old dry stone wall with two birds on several dates. On 28th February the birds were observed mating on the wall (DS). A new nest box was put up in the Manager's Garden this year and on 15th April a bird was seen near the box carrying a vole. There were numerous sightings in the Manager's Garden from this point with birds also seen in the poplars regularly and in the Yorkshire Water compound. On 27th June an adult and juvenile were seen in the garden near the nest box (JWo/SD) and again on 29th June (PM/BM). On 8th July an adult and juvenile were seen on the dry stone wall on the farmland (SO) and there were daily sightings thereafter with three birds there on 18th July (PA). Throughout August and September all sightings were on the farmland. October was a quiet month with sightings reported on just three dates and in November there were a number of sightings in the compound. In December nearly all records were of a single bird in bushes between the Manager's Garden and the poplars but on 16th December one was also seen on the Willow Path (PW/JLW).

### **Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* Infrequent Visitor**

2013 and 2014 each produced three records and it was the same again this year. At 9.00pm on 23rd April one was calling in riverside trees (JB); two were heard at 10.00pm during the first Bat Night on 18th July (PA) and one was seen on the Willow Path on 24th October (DC/EC).

**Swift** *Apus apus* **Migrant Visitor**

Over the last nine years arrival dates have always been between 25th and 29th April. This year a bird over the car park on 19th April (PA) was the earliest ever record for the Reserve. Numbers in May were disappointing with only one double figure count - 20+ over the Coppice on 9th (JB/MB). There was no real improvement in June with just two double figure counts - 20+ over the Poplar Carr late in the evening on 15th and 12 over the far riverbank on 16th (PM/BM). Most observers were reporting no more than four birds. Up to 17 were seen over the Lagoon in July and August but a count of c35 over the bridge on 26th July was the highest of the year (GJB). A single bird over the road by the Lagoon on 28th August was the last of the year (BM), six days later than last year. Sadly, there was again no interest in the Swift Nesting Tower in the Reedbed.

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* **Resident Breeder**

It was another excellent year with sightings most days throughout the year. On 5th January a female caught three sticklebacks in a matter of minutes on the Kingfisher Pool with only a small area of water ice-free (PM). This was again probably the best place to watch birds fishing and many visitors were treated to this experience, particularly in the early and latter part of the year. On 18th January one was pursued by a Sparrowhawk across the same pool (GS). On 22nd March two birds were observed excavating a nest hole in the Sand Martin Bank. The birds continued to visit the site until 13th April despite the subsequent mass arrival of the Sand Martins. However, there were then no further sightings there until 22nd May when a bird was watched coming in and out of the hole (PM/BM). There were plenty of subsequent sightings on the Lagoon but little activity at the nest hole to suggest successful nesting. A breakdown of sightings is shown below. Interestingly, sightings on the Duck Marsh were well down on last year but there was a big increase in sightings on the Lagoon.

| Lagoon | Duck Marsh | Reedbed Inc KFP | Wet Grassland | Education Pond | Other Ponds | River |
|--------|------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|-------|
| 96     | 32         | 48              | 9             | 3              | 2           | 30    |

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis* **Infrequent Visitor**

Ants are quite scarce on the Reserve and, as a result, sightings of Green Woodpeckers are few and far between. There were no records in 2012 or 2013 and just one in 2014. This year there were three records. One was heard on the farmland on 31st January (GP): one was seen on the Willow Path on 21st February (JH) and one was heard on the River Path on 1st April (PA).

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* **Resident Breeder**

This is a regular visitor to the Manager's Garden and the majority of records again came from here and the Willow Path. Although it is seen in all months there were only a handful of records in February, March and April this year. On 19th May a male was observed hammering on one of the nest boxes on the Willow Path which contained Blue Tit chicks at the time. Just a few days later the box had been broken open and the chicks gone. Interestingly, May was the most productive month of the year with sightings on 14 dates, 10 of these on the Willow Path. The first juvenile was seen on the Willow Path on 23rd June (PL/ML) and the next day a female and juvenile were recorded in the Manager's Garden (DC/EC). Juveniles were subsequently seen on a number of occasions at both sites. The Butterfly Bank proved popular in October with several records here and a male and female on one date.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* **Infrequent Visitor**

This species is barely hanging on in this part of the valley, almost certainly due to lack of suitable breeding habitat. After a blank year in 2013 there were sightings on seven dates in 2014 but there were again no records this year.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* **Migrant Breeder**

It was another excellent year for this species. The new man-made nesting bank on the Lagoon was an outstanding success in its first year in 2014 with between 70 and 80 nesting pairs producing two or even three broods and some exceptional counts of up to 500 birds over the Reserve. This year a single bird over the Duck Marsh on 22nd March was the first of the spring (SO), exactly the same date as last year. Over the next two weeks no more than three birds were seen with the first two birds at the nesting bank on 6th April (PA). By 9th April more than 60 birds were over the Lagoon and on 14th April

up to 10 were observed excavating nesting holes. By 24th April 55 nesting holes had been excavated, 80 by 3rd May and 139 by 23rd May. The first two juveniles were being fed on one of the "goal posts" on the Lagoon on 30th May (DC/EC). A total of 167 nesting holes were counted on 14th June. Like last year, throughout June good numbers of birds were often to be seen on the road surface by the Coppice and along the Coppice fence. Adults were still feeding young in the nest holes at the end of August but numbers started to fall away at the end of the first week of September and two over the Lagoon on 20th September were the last of the year (MG/PG), 10 days later than last year.

**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* **Migrant Breeder**

A single bird over the Lagoon on 5th April was the first of the year (JC), five days later than last year. Around 20 were over the Lagoon on 15th April (DC/EC) with up to 30 in the second half of the month - nearly twice as many as in the same period last year, though numbers in the late summer were to prove much lower than in recent years. The dumper truck shed again proved a popular nesting site, several pairs nesting here. A total of 23 on overhead wires by the Visitor Centre on 24th August included several juveniles (JB) and birds were still feeding young in the shed the following day. Up to 32 were counted on overhead wires on 9th September (DC/EC). Numbers tailed off after this date and two over the Willow Path on 27th September were the last of the year (PM/BM), four days earlier than last year.

**House Martin** *Delichon urbica* **Migrant Visitor**

This species is declining at an alarming rate here. Two over Tim's Field on 30th March was the earliest ever record for this species (JB) but the decline continued and no more than two birds were reported throughout April. May produced just one record - three over the Poplar Field on 24th (GJB). June also produced just one record - two over the Lagoon on 4th (PM/BM) -and so did July - five over the Lagoon on 22nd (DC/EC). There were no sightings reported in August but there were four in September, albeit of no more than four birds. Four over the Lagoon on 13th September (DC/EC) were the last of a very poor year, nearly a month earlier than last year.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis* **Passage Visitor**

It was another very poor year with sightings reported on just two dates. One was seen on the Scrubland on 16th September (MH) and six flew over the Reserve in an easterly direction on 14th October (MP).

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* **Infrequent Visitor**

There were again no sightings this year. There has now only been one confirmed sighting of this species in the last thirteen years.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* **Casual Breeder**

There were rather fewer records this year, probably due to the disappearance of the manure heap on the farmland! Nevertheless, there were sightings in all months except March and July, the Yorkshire Water compound and Fish Pass/Weir area providing a number of these. Most records involved single birds but three were reported in the compound on 25th February (DC/EC) and two were seen at the weir on 10th April (JB). There were further reports of two birds in the compound on 16th August (WeBS) and on the Lagoon on 26th September (DC/EC). Unfortunately, there was no evidence of successful nesting this year.

**Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* **Resident Breeder**

The absence of a visible manure heap on the farmland this year certainly reduced the number of records but there were still plenty of sightings around the Visitor Centre and Yorkshire Water compound. Birds can be very hard to find here in August and September and it was the same again this year with no records at all in this period or the first three weeks of October. A pair almost certainly nested in the compound last year and in previous years but there were no reports of juveniles this time.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba* **Scarce Visitor**

Breeding in Continental Europe, the White Wagtail is most likely to turn up here in March or April on passage. Pied Wagtails are infrequent visitors to the wetlands at Rodley for some reason so a black and white wagtail seen there at this time is always worth checking very carefully. This was the case this year when one turned up on the Duck Marsh on 29th April (BH). There were no other records.

**Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus* **Infrequent Visitor**

After a spate of sightings in 2013 it looked as though the Fish Pass would prove to be a popular site for this species. However, there were then only four records in 2014 and just two this year. On 18th January a bird was seen from the River Path flying upstream (WeBS) and on 27th September one was seen on the Fish Pass (AL et al).

**Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus* **Scarce (Winter) Visitor**

First recorded on the Reserve in November 2010, there was one sighting in 2011, one in 2012 and five in 2013 with up to 37 birds recorded. Unfortunately, these attractive winter visitors are conspicuous by their absence some years and this was the case in both 2014 and 2015.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* **Resident Breeder**

Wrens can be found in every habitat on the Reserve and are a very common bird here. As an example, nine were counted round the Reserve during an early morning WeBS count on 8th February. A pair had nested in the Manager's Garden Hide in each of the last four years but there was no attempt to nest there this year. However, a pair did use a tit nest box in the Manager's Garden and all young fledged successfully. No other nest boxes were used but there are plenty of natural sites on the Reserve and dead hedges also provide good nesting opportunities. There were no other reports of juveniles or family parties but there is no reason to suggest that it was not a successful breeding season.

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis* **Resident Breeder**

This is a very common bird on the Reserve and can be found in most habitats though most records come from the Willow Path, Manager's Garden and Bee Garden. Most of the hedgerows are now thick enough to provide ideal nesting habitat as does the Coppice. The first juvenile this year was seen in the Manager's Garden on 23rd May (DC/EC). Birds are daily visitors to the feeders on the Willow Path and in the Manager's Garden and Bee Garden with often up to six at each site but nine in the Bee Garden on 25th December was the highest count of the year (MB).

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* **Resident Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve, the large majority of records coming from the Willow Path and Manager's Garden. Up to four were seen on the Willow Path in the first three months of the year and nine were recorded round the Reserve during an early morning WeBS count on 8th February. Only one open-fronted nest box was used this year but whether it was successfully used by Robins is debatable. From the large amount of varied nesting material it appears it may have been used by Robins and subsequently Woodmice. However, birds are clearly finding plenty of natural nest sites these days and it appears to have been a successful breeding season. The first juvenile was seen in the Manager's Garden on 24th May (DC/EC), just a week later than last year. Further juveniles were seen on the Poplar Carr in June and July, on the Willow Path throughout July and August and in the Bee Garden in August.

**Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* **Scarce Visitor**

First recorded on the Reserve in 2006, there had been no further sightings until 2012 when a female was seen on the Scrubland on 1st September. There were no records in 2013 or 2014. This year there were three records. A male was seen in the Mike Fisk Meadow hedgerow from the Visitor Centre on 19th April (MJ et al); on 25th April a female was reported at the far end of the John Ackroyd Meadow (VK) and on 12th August a male was seen on the farmland (JH et al).

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* **Scarce Visitor**

There were again no sightings this year. A female in the hedgerow opposite the workshop on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2008 was only the second record for the reserve.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* **Passage Visitor**

September is proving to be the best time to spot this declining passage migrant on Tim's Field as it drifts south on its way back to Africa. However, sightings are by no means guaranteed with just two records last year and four this year. Three on Tim's Field on 1st August was a particularly early record (DC/EC) but in September a single female was reported on 27th (PA et al), 28th and 30th (JLW/PW et al). It is worth remembering that although there were

only two records last year one of these involved a total of six birds on Tim's Field on 20th September.

**Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* **Passage Visitor**

After several poor years there was some improvement last year with sightings on seven dates in September and October. There were sightings on just six dates this year but it was nice to see some spring records. On 8th March one was seen on the Coppice fence (PC/PS) and what was probably the same bird was seen on the farmland fence on 9th and 10th March (PM/BM). On 15th March one was reported at the Dragonfly Ponds (KS). There were two autumn records. A male was on Tim's Field on 23rd September (PA et al) and on 25th September three birds were seen there (PM/BM).

**Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* **Passage Visitor**

This passage migrant is becoming as hard to find at Rodley as the Whinchat. Last year produced just two spring records of single birds. This year there was one spring record and two autumn ones. A male and female were on Tim's Field on 9th May (SO et al); one was reported on the farmland 23rd September (JLW/PW et al) and three were on Tim's Field on 30th September (EC et al).

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula* **Resident Breeder**

This is a common bird all round the Reserve but the majority of records nevertheless come from the Willow Path and Manager's Garden. In January several observers were reporting up to a dozen birds on a walk around the Reserve. In May a nest was built in the new Poplar Carr Hide but was not subsequently used. On 24th June a female with a beak full of worms on Bentley's Path was obviously nesting close by (PM/BM). The first juvenile was reported on the Poplar Carr on 1st July (MG/PG) and single juveniles were seen subsequently in the Bee Garden and Manager's Garden. Perhaps the most interesting record of the year involved a total of 26 birds that flew low across the river from the far woodland and across the Scrubland in a long stream during an early morning WeBS count on 19th July. Another WeBS count on 16th August produced 12 adults, seven of these in the Manager's Garden. Birds were hard to find throughout September and October with just one or two the norm. Numbers did improve somewhat thereafter but with very mild

conditions throughout November and December there was little prospect of any influx.

**Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris* **Winter Visitor**

There were daily sightings from the beginning of the year to 26th March but with only one report of more than 100 birds. Most sightings were on the farmland and in the poplars. A large influx of winter thrushes on 23rd January included more than 200 Fieldfares on the farmland (PM/BM). Among other decent counts, c80 flew over the poplars on 2nd February (JK); c70 were seen on the farmland on 8th March (MB); c60 flew over the compound on 11th March (PM/JB) and c70 flew over the farmland on 15th March (JB/JK). Twenty-nine birds on the farmland on 26th March (JB) were the last of the spring, just four days earlier than last year. The first birds of the autumn were recorded on 11th October - 60+ flying in a westerly direction (MP) - three weeks earlier than last year. There were no further records until 28th October when 20 were counted in the poplars (PM/JB). Fifty plus were on the farmland on 31st October (JWC). There were a number of sightings in November but none involved more than 40 birds and more often than not just one or two. The Reserve was virtually devoid of Fieldfares in December with sightings on just two dates and of no more than two birds.

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos* **Resident Breeder**

Numbers appear to be increasing but it is interesting how a species which can be so hard to find here in late summer and autumn suddenly becomes so easy to see from January onwards. There were sightings from 2nd January this year with the first singing bird reported on 25th January (PM) despite very cold, icy conditions. The Coppice and Willow Path are always the main strongholds for this species and there were regular sightings here from early February with up to four birds reported. Singing birds were also reported from the Lagoon margins, river bank and entry road. Four birds were recorded on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 12th April (JB/MB). In May birds were also singing on the river bank below the bridge, on the far river bank and on the Scrubland. Juveniles are not often reported but one was seen outside the Willow Path Hide on 24th July (PM/BM). Sightings typically tailed off at the end of July, August producing just three records, September none, just two in October and none in November. There was a bit more activity in December with five

records received of up to two birds and on 27th a bird was singing in woodland across the river (PM/BM).

**Redwing** *Turdus iliacus* **Winter Visitor**

A few birds were on the farmland from the beginning of the year but no more than 20. However, there was a huge influx of winter thrushes on 23rd January, a mixed flock on the farmland including more than 400 Redwings (PM/BM). More than 300 were reported just off the Reserve on 31st January (GP) but these birds soon moved on and numbers fell away in February with a best count of just 40 in the poplars on 15th (NT). A few birds continued to be seen up to 22nd March but there were no sightings after this date. Eighteen birds flying in a westerly direction on 11th October (MP) were the first of the autumn, nearly three weeks earlier than last year. Around 150 were recorded on 14th October (MP), also flying in a westerly direction. A few birds were seen most days thereafter but usually only a handful. With strong to gale force westerly winds and no easterlies there were no sightings between 12th November and 8th December but 20 were on the farmland on 9th (DC/EC), single birds were reported on 13th and three were in bushes in the Bee Garden on 25th (PM/BM et al).

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* **Frequent Visitor**

This species has just been added to the Red List in the Fourth Birds of Conservation Concern Report. There were sightings in every month of the year though more than half of the total number of records came in January and February. Most reports involved no more than three birds but 14 were on the farmland on 4th January (PA/JB); seven were there on 8th February (JB) and eight were seen on a pylon across the river on 22nd July. The best counts came in October last year but the second half of this year was particularly disappointing with just six records in the period from July to November. There was some improvement in December with records on five dates though none involved more than three birds.

**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*  
**Migrant Breeder**

With as many as four "reeling" birds in 2013 a blank year in 2014 was unusual and very disappointing. This year a bird reeling at the far end of the river walk on 15th April was the first of the year (JLW/PW). On

19th April one was reeling in long vegetation at the back of the Lagoon during and early morning WeBS count and one was photographed here on 24th April (MG). Between 23rd April and 10th May a bird was heard and seen on several occasions in brambles on the roadside banking and there were two reports from the Duck Marsh on 10th and 15th June. On 23rd June one was reeling at the back of the Lagoon at 10.00pm (PM/BM). A bird was again heard in roadside brambles on 1st July (PA) and one reeling between the Duck Marsh and Reedbed on 10th July was the last record of the year (JB/MB). At least one pair almost certainly nested but with what result is unknown.

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*  
**Migrant Breeder**

This is a common bird on the wetlands from late April but it is almost certainly under-recorded, being much easier to hear than see. However, based on reported sightings numbers were possibly down a bit on last year. Last year produced a report of an exceptionally early singing bird on 8th March. This year one singing between the Wet Grassland and the Reedbed on the more usual date of 22nd April was the first of the year (PW). By 24th April up to four were singing in the Reedbed (PM/BM). There were then regular records from all four wetland areas but, disappointingly, none from the Dragonfly Ponds until 1st July, this being a regular nesting site. Sightings were typically few and far between in August with a single bird at the back of the Duck Marsh on 17th August the last of the year (MB), six weeks earlier than last year, very unsettled weather perhaps encouraging birds to leave sooner. Unusually, there were no reports of juveniles this year.

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti* **Resident?**

A bird calling at the eastern end of the Wet Grassland on 17th December last year was the first ever record for the Reserve - not entirely unexpected as this species is pushing northwards and birds were known to be in residence not far away at Swillington Ings. We had to wait until 8th March this year for the second record - a bird singing in a thick bramble patch near the Lagoon Hide during an early morning WeBS count. Two days later what was probably the same bird was singing by the Education Pond (JK). There were daily reports thereafter throughout March, April, May and June. Most

records were in the vicinity of the Lagoon Hide but there were a number of reports from the Duck Marsh, typically the bird more often heard than seen. There were only two records in July and none in August but on 27th September one was heard both on the Wet Grassland and the Duck Marsh (PA) but whether this was the same bird or two different ones is debatable. On 14th October one was heard and then seen well at the western end of the Wet Grassland near the Reedbed Hide (JLW/PW). There were further reports of one on the Wet Grassland on 17th and 18th October and on 1st November one was heard and seen just by the Lagoon Hide (PSv). One was again seen and photographed at the western end of the Wet Grassland on 13th December (PA et al), this the last record of the year.

**Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*  
**Migrant Breeder**

Usually arriving in late April or early May, Reed Warblers can be quite numerous on the wetlands. A bird seen in the Reedbed on 25th April was the first of the year (VK), just three days later than last year. There were regular sightings thereafter, mainly in the Reedbed and at the eastern end of the Wet Grassland where there is a good stand of reed. A pair nesting at the side of the Kingfisher Pool provided particularly good views. Records from the Lagoon margins were few and far between this year but three in the reedy fringes here on 10th July almost certainly included juveniles (PM/BM). Typically, there were less than a handful of sightings in August and a bird in the Reedbed on 19th August was the last of the year (DC/EC), nearly three weeks earlier than last year.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla* **Migrant Breeder**

There were no reports of overwintering birds in the last three months of 2014 or the first two months of this year so was a female at the edge of the John Ackroyd Meadow on 21st March (DC/EC) an overwintered bird or an early migrant? There were no further records until 14th April when a male was heard singing at the edge of the Coppice (PM/BM). Birds were recorded daily thereafter with males singing by the Lagoon Hide, on the river bank, on the Willow Path and in the Coppice. Overwintering birds will often visit nut, seed and fat feeders in the winter but it was unusual to see a male feeding on fat balls on the Willow Path on 6th May (PA). Last year up to three

birds were holding territory in the Coppice but no more than one was reported singing in this area this year, though two were singing in trees by the Lagoon in June. The first two juveniles were seen in this area on 15th July (PA). In September birds were recorded in the Manager's Garden and on the Willow Path and there were two October records - a male on the Willow Path on 7th (MP) and a male at the Dragonfly Ponds on 31st (DC/EC).

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin* **Migrant Breeder**

A bird on the Willow Path on 22nd April was the first of the year (JJI), six days earlier than last year. There were further sightings on the river path on 25th April (VK) and on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 4th May (PWa). Birds were subsequently seen in the Manager's Garden, on the Willow Path, on the John Ackroyd Meadow, on the Poplar Carr and close to the Lagoon but the number of records was disappointing. An adult and two juveniles were seen near the bridge on 4th July (PC) and three birds on the Willow Path on 8th July probably included at least one juvenile (DC/EC). Last year there were almost daily sightings of a bird feeding on elderberries in the Manager's Garden from 23rd August to 13th September and there was a late sighting of one there on 24th September. This year the last sighting was of a single bird in the Manager's Garden on 2nd September (DC/EC).

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* **Migrant Breeder**

Much harder to find here than its cousin the Common Whitethroat, the first sighting this year was on the canal bank close to the Reserve gates on 25th April (VK). On 29th April one was reported on the Willow Path (JH) and over the next three weeks there were sightings in the Manager's Garden, on the Duck Marsh, on the John Ackroyd Meadow, on the riverside path, by the bridge and near the dumper truck shed, but there was no evidence of breeding this year. On 13th June one was seen on the Scrubland and on 25th July two were reported there (DC/EC). There were no subsequent records.

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* **Migrant Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve in the spring and summer months. One singing in the large bramble patch across the road from the Lagoon Hide on 14th April was the first record of the year (PM/BM) and the joint earliest ever record for the Reserve.

Interestingly, the first record last year was in the same bramble patch just two days later. There were daily sightings thereafter all around the Reserve and usually in the vicinity of bramble patches. The first juveniles were reported on the Mike Fisk Meadow on 7th June (HL) and there were subsequent sightings in June at the edge of the Scrubland and near the Mike Sheldon Hide. On 28th June an adult was observed feeding two juveniles in the dead hedge just outside the patio doors at the Visitor Centre (JB/MB et al). On 8th July birds were feeding young at a nest in a thick bramble patch by the path to the Manager's Garden (PM/BM), this always a popular nesting site. Birds continued to be seen daily until the end of August, some of the last sightings in the Bee Garden, a single bird here on 5th September being the last of the year (MW), six days later than last year. Overall numbers were probably similar to last year with an estimated 15 to 20 pairs on territory in May.

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* **Migrant Breeder**

There were reports of an overwintering bird on 6th and 13th December last year and there was a further sighting in front of the Lagoon Hide on 4th January this year (JK). On 23rd February one was seen in a bush at the roadside (JH). There were then regular reports from 14th March, the riverbank near the bridge being particularly productive. At least four could be heard around the Reserve by 7th April with five singing birds reported on 20th April (PM/BM) and seven on 25th April (VK). Typically, contact calls could be heard all round the Reserve in August and there were regular sightings on the Willow Path with four reported there on 16th September (DC/EC). There were a few late records. One was singing in the Coppice on 2nd October (PM/BM); one was seen on a feeder on the Willow Path on 11th October (MW) and one was reported on the Butterfly Bank on 14th October (DC/EC). There were then no further sightings until 23rd December when one was reported near the Dragonfly Ponds (JWC) and on 26th December one was seen in the Coppice (PA).

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* **Migrant Breeder**

Numbers of singing birds did seem to be well down last year but there was a considerable improvement this year. Two singing in the Coppice on 10th April were the first of the year (PM/BM) and on 17th April at least eight were singing round the Reserve - five in the

Coppice, two on the riverbank and one at the back of the Wet Grassland (PM/BM). By way of comparison, last year no more than one bird was reported singing in the Coppice. On 19th April 10 singing birds were recorded during an early morning WeBS count. A bird was still singing in the Poplar Carr as late as 14th July. There were only a few reports of juveniles this year and most birds had left the Reserve by the end of what was a very unsettled August but there is no reason to suggest it was not a successful breeding season. There were just two records in September - a single bird on the Willow Path on 5th and two there on 16th(DC/EC), the latter just five days earlier than last year.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* **Frequent Visitor**

Despite its status as a Frequent Visitor this species might best be described as a Winter Visitor as sightings tend to be in the first three months of the year and the last three months. It was the same again this year with sightings on 11 dates between January and March and eight dates from October onwards. Most sightings involved single birds but four were seen along the riverbank on 7th February (VK); two were in bushes on the River Path on 15th March (PA) and 18th March (NT); two were seen at the Dragonfly Ponds on 14th October (JLW); two were on the River Path on 17th November (PA) and two were seen on the Poplar Carr on 19th December (JH). Interestingly, nine of the 19 records came from the River Path which is clearly a popular area.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* **Infrequent Visitor**

This passage migrant has always been hard to find at Rodley but last year there were a number of sightings of two birds between 24th and 31st August. Prior to this there had been no records since 2010. This year there was a rare spring sighting of a single bird on the Scrubland on 30th May (PC/PS/SO). On 23rd August one was reported on the River Path (MG/PG) and on 6th September one was seen in the Coppice (DC/EC).

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus* **Resident Breeder**

Small parties of up to eight birds were seen in the early part of the year, often visiting the feeders on the Willow Path. These birds are early nesters and while one pair was observed building in a thick bank of bramble at the edge of the Lagoon on 10th March another

pair was starting in the bramble bank across the road from the Lagoon Hide. On 30th March a bird was also seen with nesting material at the top of the Fish Pass (PM/BM). Sadly the nest by the Lagoon had been destroyed, probably by a feral cat, when it was checked on 10th April. Birds were seen most days on the Willow Path but there were no reports of juveniles until 8th July when three were seen there (MW). There were numerous reports of family parties thereafter but no double figure counts until 14th October when c20 were seen on the Willow Path (BH/GA). Ten were seen in the same area on 4th November (DC/EC). Between nine and 11 birds were seen on the Willow Path on a number of occasions in December and on 27th 12 were recorded on the Poplar Carr (DAN).

**Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris* **Scarce Visitor**

There were again no sightings this year. Birds were recorded on the reserve in 2002 and 2004.

**Willow Tit** *Poecile montanus* **Casual Breeder**

After a promising start to 2012 sightings came to a sudden halt after 17th March and there were no further records that year. 2013 was looking like a blank but there was one reported sighting on the Willow Path on 13th November. However, there have been no sightings in the last two years of this declining species.

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* **Infrequent Visitor**

Much more a species of coniferous woodland, Coal Tits have always been a scarce bird here. As in 2014, there were just two records this year. On 20th June one was seen on the feeders in the Bee Garden (JB) and on 27th September two were on the feeders by the Visitor Centre patio doors (PM/BM).

**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus* **Resident Breeder**

A common bird on the Reserve and in surrounding woodland, the majority of records come from the Manager's Garden, Bee Garden and Willow Path, the latter site being particularly productive in the early part of the year. A bird spent some time checking out the nest box on the side of the Visitor Centre in February but interest soon waned. However, 20 other boxes round the reserve were used, all young apparently fledging successfully in 11 of these. Unfortunately, nine boxes contained some unhatched eggs and/or dead chicks, a

very windy and often wet May almost certainly not helping birds find food - see separate Nest Box Report for further details. There were very few reports of mixed feeding parties in the summer months, possibly because they often tend to follow the riverbank but numbers on the Willow Path and at the feeders were also on the low side in the second half of the year, suggesting perhaps a fairly poor breeding season generally.

**Great Tit** *Parus major* **Resident Breeder**

Another common bird on the Reserve and, as with the Blue Tit, the majority of records come from the Willow Path, Manager's Garden and Bee Garden. Only eight nest boxes were used last year. There was a slight improvement this year with ten boxes used but this was still disappointing. All young appeared to fledge successfully in six of these but four nests contained single infertile eggs or dead chicks. The nest box on the back of the Mike Sheldon Hide was again used successfully. The first juveniles (three) were seen on the Winter Walk during an early morning WeBS count on 14th June and on 5th July four juveniles were seen at the feeders in the Bee Garden (PM/BM). There were also reports of juveniles visiting the feeders in the Manager's Garden on a number of occasions subsequently.

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* **Scarce Visitor**

This is a very occasional visitor from woodland across the river. After four blank years there were sightings on two dates in 2011 and one date in 2012. There have been no reported sightings in the last three years.

**Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* **Casual breeder**

A pair nested in the stonework on the side of the river bridge in 2012 and in both 2013 and 2014 the majority of sightings were in this area. This year there were sightings on 16 dates, twice as many as last year. There were again several sightings by the bridge in the first three months of the year and one on the River Path in April. There were no further records until 16th August when one was again seen near the bridge during a WeBS count. The Willow Path has never been a productive area for this species but a bird was seen here on six dates between 31st August and 16th December. There was one other sighting near the Reedbed Hide on 28th November.

**Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* **Resident Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve throughout the year but with activity particularly intense in September and October when birds go on their acorn and hazelnut forays. Frequently seen in small groups, four were reported on the Scrubland on 7th April (PM/BM) and five were seen there on 13th April (JK). These birds are very shy and seldom come to the feeders but one was seen on the fat feeder in the Bee Garden on 1st June (PM/BM). A pair almost certainly nested in the Coppice last year and it is likely breeding occurred there again this year. Observers reported birds "everywhere" from late September and throughout October. Activity died down somewhat in November but birds continued to be seen daily to the end of the year.

**Magpie** *Pica pica* **Resident Breeder**

This is a very common bird on the Reserve and there were numerous double figure counts throughout the year. However, a count of 30 on the farmland on 23rd June was exceptional (JP). Birds often gather to mob raptors and 10 were reported harassing a Sparrowhawk on the Duck Marsh on 30th August (MW). Other big counts included 19 around the compost heap on 24th September (JB) and 21 around the Reserve on 21st October (DC/EC). One or two pairs almost certainly bred on the Reserve again this year and two juveniles were seen on the Willow Path on 7th June with one in the Bee Garden on 19th July (DC/EC).

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula* **Resident Breeder**

A very common bird on the farmland, it is also a daily visitor to the Manager's Garden (up to 21 reported there) where it became a bit of a problem this year, emptying the feeders as soon as they had been filled. In the early part of the year 99 were counted on the farmland on 17th January (DC/EC) and 90 just a few days later on 21st January (PM). Some of the biggest gatherings occur towards dusk as birds go to roost in trees on the far riverbank. Around 200 were seen towards dusk on 17th March (PM/BM). Other big counts included c100 over the Visitor Centre on 29th March (PM), c150 over the farmland on 6th May (PM/JB) and 90 on Tim's Field during the evening on 20th May (PM/BM). A total of 111 were counted on the farmland on 19th July (DC/EC). In the latter part of the year 150 were reported on the farmland on 16th November (PM/BM) and c100 were seen there on 29th November (DC/EC).

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* **Infrequent Visitor**

This has always been a scarce bird on the Reserve. After a blank year in 2013 there were four records in 2014 and this year there were three. Two birds were seen on overhead wires on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 14th June during an early morning WeBS count. On 9th September one was seen flying over the farmland (MG/PG) and on 1st November one was again seen on the farmland (DC/EC).

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone* **Resident (Probable Breeder)**

This is a very common bird on the Reserve and adjacent farmland but almost certainly under-recorded. In the latter part of the year the Mike Fisk Meadow was a popular gathering area later in the afternoon but even here there were no reports of more than 50 birds this year.

**Raven** *Corvus corax* **Scarce Visitor**

This species has extended its range eastwards across the country over recent years and there have been records in the Leeds area so it was only going to be a question of time before one was reported here. On 21st March one was seen flying over the Reserve in an easterly direction (AJ).

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* **Casual Breeder**

Numbers on the farmland in January and February were considerably lower than last year with a best count of just 60 there on 31st January (GP). In March numbers varied between 50 and 80 generally but there was one excellent count of 320 on 9th March (PM/BM). A few years ago this sort of number would have been commonplace but sadly no longer. A few birds were present throughout April and May and there was one decent count of c70 over the farmland on 24th May (JB) . There were no sightings in June, July and most of August - 57 on overhead wires by the dry stone wall on 30th August (JB) being the first summer record. There were only a handful of sightings in September and October, producing a best count of just 63 and there were no reports at all in what was a very mild, wet November. An equally mild and wet December produced just two records, c30 on the Mike Fisk Meadow on 25th December (JB) being the best.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* **Casual Breeder**

This species is only likely to be seen around the main gates to the Reserve and, as a result, it tends to be under-recorded. There were just three reported sightings this year, all in this area. Two were recorded on 31st January (GP), four on 8th December (BM) and six on 14th December (PM/BM).

**Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* **Casual Breeder**

This species has been somewhat erratic in its appearances on the Reserve over the last few years. At times numbers have built up to double figures and one pair did breed in 2012 but in 2013 no more than three birds were seen. Last year there were many months with no sightings but towards the end of the year numbers built up to six visiting the feeders in the Bee Garden. This year one or two were seen daily in the Bee Garden from the beginning of January with the occasional bird in the Manager's Garden. Sightings tailed off at the end of March with just one record of a single bird in each of April and May. There were a few more sightings from 20th June to 8th August, both in the Manager's Garden and the Bee Garden, but no observers reported more than two. There was one further report of a single bird in the Bee Garden on 23rd September.

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* **Frequent Visitor**

Never numerous on the Reserve but seen throughout most of the year, sightings tend to be limited to the entry road, Bee Garden and Manager's Garden. Birds were seen daily in the Manager's Garden from the beginning of the year but no observers reported more than five there and one or two was the norm in April, May, June and July. Numbers picked up a bit in August with up to two juveniles at the feeders in the Manager's Garden and an early morning WeBS visit on 16th August produced seven there. Seven were also recorded there on 29th October (JB). Numbers remained low throughout November with no more than four reported in the Manager's Garden but there was some improvement in December with six on two dates and seven on one date. No more than two birds were reported at the feeders in the Bee Garden until 25th December when six turned up there (PM/BM et al).

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* **Winter Visitor**

This is a very infrequent winter visitor to the Reserve. There had been just one reported sighting in each of the last three years but there were none this year.

**Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris* **Resident Breeder**

This is a common visitor to the feeders in the Manager's Garden but numbers do fluctuate thanks to periodic outbreaks of trichomonosis. Disappointingly, there was just one double figure count in the first six months of the year - 13 in trees in the Manager's Garden on 15th March (DC/EC) - most days producing no more than four birds. Birds also started to visit the feeders in the Bee Garden from April but there were no reports of more than two here at any one time until 23rd August when four were seen (DC/EC). The first juveniles were seen at the edge of the Coppice on 23rd June (PL/ML). Numbers were certainly down on last year and the anticipated increase in numbers in the autumn failed to materialise with just one double figure count of 12 at the feeders in the Manager's Garden on 26th September (DC/EC). There was some improvement in December, a count of 15 in the Manager's Garden on 13th being the highest of the year (DC/EC).

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* **Resident Breeder**

This is a daily visitor to the feeders in the Bee Garden but for some reason it rarely visits the feeders in the Manager's Garden. Numbers at the feeders in the early part of the year never exceeded eight, alders by the roadside near the Lagoon proving a bigger attraction with up to 25 feeding on seed here. The first juveniles were seen at the feeders in the Bee Garden on 17th June (DC/EC), nearly two weeks later than last year. With plenty of young birds on the wing there were some reasonable counts in July and August. A flock of forty flew over the Visitor Centre on 19th July during an early morning WeBS count; c30 flew over the Willow path on 25th July (DC/EC); c40 flew over the Mike Fisk Meadow on 2nd August (PM/BM) and between 60 and 70 were on overhead wires by the dry stone wall on 6th August (PM/BM). On 16th August c40 were feeding on thistle seed heads by the Lagoon (WeBS). On 24th August 60 were counted feeding on thistle seed heads close to the farmland (JB). On 9th September 40 were on overhead wires by the Visitor Centre (DAN). Numbers visiting the feeders in the Bee Garden reached 18 at the

end of September and through October, peaking at 21 on 29th November and 12th December (DC/EC).

**Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* **Infrequent (Winter) Visitor**

Roadside alders by the Lagoon usually produce a few sightings between January and March most years as birds visit for seed. However, this year was very disappointing with no records at all in this period. Unusually, the only sightings came in the summer and autumn. On 7th July three birds at the feeders in the Manager's Garden included two probable juveniles (POG). On 31st October there was a report of one flying over the Reserve (JWC) and on 1st November a juvenile was seen near the Lagoon Hide (PC).

**Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina* **Casual Breeder**

This is a common bird on the Reserve between October and April, the main attraction being the seed crop of fodder radish on Tim's Field. Numbers reached nearly 600 in February 2012. It can be hard to find in the summer months but one or two pairs have stayed to nest some years. Numbers reached c200 at the end of last year but dropped back somewhat at the beginning of this year with a best count of 58 in the first half of January. Numbers started to build again in the second half of the month with c150 in the Mike Fisk Meadow hedgerow on 21st January (JB/MB et al) and 130 on 29th January in the John Ackroyd Meadow hedge (PM/BM). Numbers fell away considerably in February with a best count of 60 on 13th. There was some increase again in March with c100 on Tim's Field on 29th (ST) and around 80 were still visiting the field as late as 12th April. A few birds were still being reported as late as 16th May but whether any stayed to nest is unknown. There were only two summer sightings - a single bird on the Willow Path on 3rd June (LJ) and three were on Tim's Field on 29th August (DC/EC). A few birds started to visit Tim's Field again in the latter part September and there was one count of 100+ on 29th (PM/BM) but there were no other reports of more than 40 in October, possibly due to the very mild conditions. Numbers remained very similar throughout November with most observers reporting between 20 and 50 with 70 on 22nd the best (JB). It was the same again in December with numbers hovering between 20 and 50.

**Lesser Redpoll** *Carduelis cabaret* **Infrequent (Winter) Visitor**

This bird is very much a winter visitor to the Reserve, usually in the new year. There were just three records last year and none this year.

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* **Resident Breeder**

This striking species continues to go from strength to strength here with sightings almost guaranteed at the feeders in the Manager's Garden and Bee Garden. Reports of five or six together at both sites were commonplace from the beginning of the year. Counts of six in the Bee Garden included as many as five females on one occasion in January (DC/EC) and up to three males. Thirteen were recorded during an early morning WeBS visit on 8th February - seven of these in the Manager's Garden and five on the Willow Path. A count of 11 round the Reserve on 22nd February included four in the Manager's Garden (DC/EC). On 9th March a female with a bad fungal infection on both feet was among four at the feeders in the Bee Garden (BM). This is a fairly common problem with this species. Five birds in the Manager's Garden on 25th May included four males (DC/EC). A family party of five at the side of the road on 5th June included three juveniles (JB/MB) - the first of the year. There were numerous reports of juveniles subsequently including three in the Manager's Garden on 25th July (DC/EC). There was the usual quiet spell in September but even then up to three birds were seen some days. Activity picked up again from the middle of October with six in the Manager's Garden on 15th November including four males (DC/EC). On 16th December six males were recorded in the Manager's Garden (PW/JLW et al).

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citronella* **Scarce Visitor**

This remains a very scarce bird in the area. In 2010 there were three February records and in 2011 one February record and one March record - all in the Manager's Garden. There had been no sightings in the last three years. This year a female was seen in the Manager's Garden on 15th March (DC/EC/JHay).

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* **Resident Breeder**

Nearly all sightings in the winter months are in the Manager's Garden and Bee Garden where birds are daily visitors to the feeders. Numbers in the early part of the year were very similar to recent years with up to eight recorded in the Manager's Garden in January, six in February and seven in March. Up to four visited the feeders in

the Bee Garden in the same period. Numbers typically started to fall away at the feeders from mid-April and birds became more obvious on all four main wetland areas. On 27th April a female flew into the Visitor Centre window and was killed. On 23rd June a male was seen taking food to a nest on the Duck Marsh (PM/BM) and juveniles were seen on the Willow Path on several dates in July and August. One or two pairs nest in long vegetation at the Dragonfly Ponds most years and this year was no exception, one pair almost certainly nesting at the edge of Chadwick Pond. A few birds did continue to visit the feeders in the Manager's Garden and Bee Garden throughout the summer but activity increased from October, though numbers were low at both sites with no more than three in the Manager's Garden and two in the Bee Garden - very similar to last year. It was a similar story in November and December with no more than four birds at the feeders at either site.

## **ESCAPED SPECIES SEEN THIS YEAR**

### **Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* Escaped Species**

There have been a few sightings over the years but in 2013 a bird arrived on the Lagoon in September and was present on and off to the end of the year. What was almost certainly the same bird spent several spells on the wetlands last year and this year it was present from 10th January until 19th April, mainly on the Lagoon and Duck Marsh. It re-appeared again on 24th July, staying until 23rd September. There were no sightings after this date.

### **Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* Escaped Species**

The main strongholds of this species are in Greater London and the Isle of Thanet, Kent but there was breeding evidence in 91 10km squares during the Bird Atlas 2007-11. There are now estimated to be around 30,000 individuals in the country. It was recorded on the Reserve in 2001 but there had been no sightings since. This year there were sightings on six dates between 29th August and 11th October, all of a single bird. On 29th August the bird was seen on the Willow Path (SE et al). There were no further sightings until 4th October when what was probably the same one was seen on the feeders outside the patio doors at the Visitor Centre (DC/EC). There

were further sightings on 7th, 9th, 10th and 11th October all round the Reserve, the last one on the Butterfly Bank (SR).

**Other species that have been recorded on the reserve in previous years:**

- Bar-headed Goose (Escape)
- Corn Bunting
- Grey Phalarope
- Marbled Duck (Probable escape)
- Red-crested Pochard (Probable escape)
- Ringed Teal (Escape)
- Sandwich Tern
- Short-eared Owl
- Twite

**FIRST AND LAST DATES FOR WINTER VISITORS**  
**2015**

| <b>SPECIES</b> | <b>LAST</b>   | <b>FIRST</b>   |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Wigeon         | 21st February | 30th September |
| Goldeneye      | 4th April     | 7th November   |
| Waxwing        | -             | -              |
| Fieldfare      | 26th March    | 11th October   |
| Redwing        | 22nd March    | 11th October   |
| Brambling      | -             | -              |

**FIRST AND LAST DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS**  
**2015**

| SPECIES                | FIRST      | LAST           |
|------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Garganey               | 6th June   | 12th June      |
| Hobby                  | 21st June  | 24th August    |
| Honey Buzzard          | -          | -              |
| Osprey                 | -          | -              |
| Ringed Plover          | -          | -              |
| Little (Ringed) Plover | 22nd April | 14th June      |
| Whimbrel               | -          | -              |
| Common Sandpiper       | 24th April | 6th July       |
| Common Tern            | 17th April | 26th July      |
| Arctic Tern            | 24th May   | 24th May       |
| Cuckoo                 | -          | -              |
| Swift                  | 19th April | 28th August    |
| Sand Martin            | 22nd March | 20th September |
| Swallow                | 5th April  | 27th September |
| House Martin           | 30th March | 13th September |
| Yellow Wagtail         | -          | -              |
| Whinchat               | 1st August | 30th September |
| Wheatear               | 9th May    | 30th September |
| Grasshopper Warbler    | 15th April | 10th July      |
| Sedge Warbler          | 22nd April | 17th August    |
| Reed Warbler           | 25th April | 19th August    |
| Garden Warbler         | 22nd April | 2nd September  |
| Common Whitethroat     | 14th April | 5th September  |
| Lesser Whitethroat     | 25th April | 25th July      |
| Willow Warbler         | 10th April | 16th September |
| Spotted Flycatcher     | 30th May   | 6th September  |
| Common Redstart        | 19th April | 12th August    |

In view of the number of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs now overwintering in the area it is not possible to give accurate arrival and departure dates for actual migrants.

## Nest Box Report

There are currently just over 100 nest boxes sited round the Reserve but checking some of these has become very difficult these days thanks to the height of the nettles and almost impenetrable banks of brambles. Surely, the nettles never used to grow this high (seven feet plus in places)! Nevertheless, our hardy volunteers managed to get to around 90 of them and the results are shown below.

| <b>Species</b> | <b>Boxes Used</b> | <b>All Fledged</b> | <b>Unhatched Eggs/Dead Chicks</b> |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Bluetit        | 20                | 11                 | 9                                 |
| Great Tit      | 10                | 6                  | 4                                 |
| Robin          | 1?                | 1?                 | -                                 |
| Wren           | 1                 | 1                  | -                                 |
| Kestrel        | 1                 | 1                  | -                                 |
| Little Owl     | 1                 | 1                  | -                                 |
| Barn Owl       | 1                 | 1                  | -                                 |

Boxes not used = 55

While the number of boxes used by Bluetits and Great Tits was slightly up on last year, 100% fledging was achieved in rather fewer boxes. Countrywide the 2015 season was a difficult one for tits with adverse weather conditions at crucial times and many reports of failing nests. As can be seen below, nine Bluetit nests experienced some problems in this respect, six more than last year. (Great Tits faired less badly in this respect with only single eggs and dead chicks which is not unusual).

| Bluetit Nest | Unhatched Eggs | Dead Chicks                             |
|--------------|----------------|---|
| 1            | 6              |   |
| 2            | 5              |   |
| 3            |                | Demolished by Woodpecker - chicks taken |
| 4            | 3              |   |

| Bluetit Nest | Unhatched Eggs | Dead Chicks |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| 5            | 2              |             |
| 6            | 1              |             |
| 7            |                | 2           |
| 8            |                | 2           |
| 9            |                | 2           |

The tit box on the side of the Visitor Centre was not used for the second year running, despite some early interest, so we had no images to relay to the television in the Centre. The box on the side of the Mike Sheldon Hide was again used by Great Tits and all young fledged successfully. The three sparrow terrace boxes on the side of the workshop contained one Great Tit nest and one Bluetit nest but when checked in early December were also found to contain four hibernating Small Tortoiseshell butterflies.

All the used Bluetit and Great Tit nests were collected this year, placed in sealed plastic bags and passed to Leeds Microscopical Society who are looking at the species of flea present in the nests. Only two species of flea are commonly associated with these birds so it will be interesting to see if any new species are found.

Of the 16 Tree Sparrow boxes - eight at the edge of the Coppice and eight close to the Reedbed Hide - just two were used by Bluetits, the Tree Sparrows remaining elusive.

Wrens didn't nest in the Manager's Garden Hide this year but they did use a tit box in the garden, all young fledging successfully. Only one open-fronted Robin box was used - a box on the Duck Marsh side of the Willow Path - but whether it was used by Robins or not is debatable. The box was packed with dead leaves and moss and the thought is it may have been used by Robins and later by Woodmice. Both Robins and Wrens do have many more nesting options on the Reserve these days, the dead hedges in particular providing ideal nesting sites.

Woodmice were found to be in residence in four boxes. It is always a bit of a surprise when one jumps out onto your shoulder, particularly if you are up a ladder at the time. Wasps nests were found in several

boxes and one box on the Willow Path was occupied by wild bees and was full of honeycomb.

There were three Barn Owl boxes in operation this year - two in the Yorkshire Water compound and one on a post on the Scrubland. For the first time ever Barn Owls nested on the Reserve using the north facing box in the compound after ousting a pair of Kestrels and raising two young, though sadly one was electrocuted on power lines by the dry stone wall. The long-standing pair of Kestrels again used the east facing box in the compound, raising just one youngster this time. The second pair of Kestrels opted for the Scrubland box but it appears without success. A new Little Owl box in the Manager's Garden had instant success, a pair raising at least one youngster.

We also now have two Goosander boxes in trees on the river bank. Unfortunately, it was not possible to check these due to high water levels and very muddy banks but we will continue to monitor them in the future.

We are indebted to John and Maxine Brook and Barbara Murphy for checking and clearing out the boxes and to Alan Brook for providing a whole range of replacement boxes for us.

## MAMMALS

### **Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*



A common mammal on the Reserve, there were sightings in all months and plenty of other signs of their presence. In January there were sightings on the Duck Marsh on three dates, on the Scrubland, by the Lagoon and in the Coppice. Most records involved single animals but two were seen on the Scrubland on 6th and 13th February (JK) and on 14th July two males were involved in a very noisy fight at the edge of the Scrubland late in the evening, both animals up on their hind legs and "boxing" at one point (PM/BM). There was again certainly one den on the Reserve and the first juvenile was seen on the road near the car park on 31st July (SF). The following day a juvenile was found dead in the Manager's Garden

with a shoulder wound (GJB). Sightings tailed off somewhat in the latter part of the year with only one in October, two in November and two in December but there were plenty of footprints to show a continued presence.

### **Otter** *Lutra lutra*

It was another disappointing year with only limited signs of activity. Daytime sightings are rare here so tracks and signs are the best indication of their presence. Unfortunately, there were long spells with no signs at all. In January there was spraint on stonework near the bridge on 23rd (JB) and fresh tracks under the bridge on 26th (PM/BM). There were further tracks here on 6th March (PM). On 7th April tracks were found in soft mud on the riverbank near the Dragonfly Ponds (JB). On 17th May and again on 20th July spraint was found at the water inlet on the riverbank behind the Lagoon (JB) and on 20th August fresh tracks were found on the riverbank by the River Path (JB). Despite regular monitoring there was no further activity until 19th October when fresh tracks were seen on the sandbank at the downstream end of the Fish Pass. On 26th October tracks of a smaller otter were found on the same sandbank (PM/BM).



Unfortunately, very wet conditions brought river levels up sharply shortly afterwards, causing some flooding and rather putting paid to any further chances of monitoring in November or December. However, severe flooding over the Christmas period left large deposits of sand at the downstream end of the Fish Pass and this produced some fresh tracks on 30th December (PM/BM).

**American Mink** *Neovison vison*

Thankfully, there were surprisingly few records on the Reserve this year - just 12 in fact - and there only a few other signs of its presence. There were sightings on the riverbank near the bridge on 18th January, 25th February, 18th March and 26th March. On 19th April one was seen on the island below the weir and on 30th April one was on the Fish Pass. There were sightings on the Lagoon on 3rd May and 26th July, at the Dragonfly Ponds on 29th June and in the Reedbed on 29th July and 2nd August. There were no sightings after this date and only limited evidence of their presence until 23rd December when one was seen in front of the Duck Marsh Hide (SBe).



**Weasel** *Mustela nivalis*

Reported in all months except July this year, this is still a common mammal on the Reserve. A lot of sightings occur around the Visitor Centre and on 5th January one was observed on the raised bed in the Bee Garden where it had apparently excavated a hole (PM/BM). On 22nd March one was seen carrying a frog outside the Reedbed Hide (PW) and on 9th April one was reported dragging a dead Wood Mouse through a small hole under the Visitor Centre (JB). On 8th August one was even seen to take on a Magpie on the River Path (JC). Most records involved single animals but two were seen at the Dragonfly Ponds on 6th September (IH).

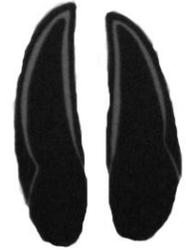


**Stoat** *Mustela erminea*

This species is much less common on the Reserve than its smaller relative, the Weasel. There was just one record this year. One was seen on the road near the Dipping Pond on 9th April (MB).

### **Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus*

While this is still a common mammal along the valley, there were rather fewer sightings on the Reserve this year. Last year sightings were reported on 65 dates - this year just 45. Most records were of between one and three animals but four were reported on the Scrubland on 3rd January (AT); four were on the farmland and two on the far riverbank on 18th January during a WeBS count; four females were at the back of the Wet Grassland on 23rd January (PM/BM) and five were on the Scrubland on 11th March (AB). On 6th April four were seen on the farmland and three on the John Ackroyd Meadow (DC/EC). Roedeer usually give birth to twins and a female with two fawns were seen on the Duck Marsh on 30th May (SB) and 14th June (DC/EC). Single fawns were subsequently reported on the wetlands on 23rd June (BM), 26th June (JD) and 8th July (PA). On 11th July a female was seen with triplets at the roadside and later on Tim's Field during the evening (JK). The following day the family was again seen at the roadside late in the evening (PM/BM). On 29th July the family came onto Tim's Field during a busy morning and panicked. The female and two juveniles jumped over the dead hedge and into the Reedbed but the other juvenile launched itself at the Coppice deer fence and somehow struggled through. The Coppice gate was left open to give it an easier escape route and on 6th August the whole family was seen reunited on the John Ackroyd Meadow (PM/BM). After all the excitement sightings tailed off somewhat after the middle of August and there were none in September. Single animals were seen on three dates in October and in November three females or juveniles were reported on the Duck Marsh on 7th (DC/EC) and two were seen on the road by the Lagoon at dusk on 15th (BM). There were just two records in December. On 7th a female was seen at the side of the entry road (JHa) and on 31st three were seen on the farmland (MB).



### **Mole** *Talpa europaea*

A common mammal on the Reserve, there was again ample evidence of its presence in the form of mole hills. They seem to delight in creating large mounds on the freshly mowed turf at the Dragonfly Ponds! Most records tend to involve dead animals. There were three this year. On 6th July one was found dead at the side of the Lagoon (DAN); on 13th December one was found on the path at the side of

Tim's Field during a WeBS survey and on 31st December one was recorded in the same area, probably a victim of the Christmas floods.

### **Common Shrew** *Sorex araneus*

There were just two records this year. One was found dead on 29th March (ST) and one was caught in a Longworth trap during a small mammal survey on 1st August (JB/MB). Despite the fact that only one was caught in the course of three surveys this year it is almost certainly still a common mammal on the Reserve.



### **Water Shrew** *Neomys fodiens*

Survey work has shown this species to be present in the Reedbed but actual sightings have been few and far between. Last year one was seen at the edge of the Lagoon on 28th May and one was reported close to the Fish Pass on 7th September. There were no reported sightings this year.

### **Harvest Mouse** *Micromys minutus*

Despite detailed surveys Britain's smallest rodent had never been found on the Reserve prior to 2014. Since then a total of 600 have been released here behind the Reedbed and Duck Marsh as part of an introduction programme and initial surveys showed they were breeding successfully. However, it is feared that the disastrous flooding at Christmas will almost certainly have decimated the population.

### **House Mouse** *Mus musculus*

There were again no records this year. Mice found in the workshop or seed store always turn out to be Wood Mice.

### **Wood Mouse** *Apodemus sylvaticus*

This is a very common mammal on the Reserve and is regularly caught in Longworth traps during small mammal surveys- see separate report for details. It is also a common resident in the workshop and seed store in the winter months. It is also a capable tree climber and its nests are frequently found in bird boxes in the autumn and winter. With much of the Reserve under floodwater around Christmas, five were found in the mini-beast dens on a dryer section of the Willow Path on 27th December (MB).

**Bank Vole** *Clethrionomys glareolus*

This is another very common mammal on the Reserve. There were regular sightings under the feeders on the Willow Path from the beginning of the year with up to three animals seen but, interestingly, there were no sightings here after 26th September. Unlike last year there were only a few sightings in the Manager's Garden and these all in the period from 15th March to 29th April. This was almost certainly due to a considerable increase in Brown Rat activity under the feeders. Along with the Wood Mouse it was the commonest small mammal caught in Longworth traps during surveys - see separate report for details.

**Field or Short-tailed Vole** *Microtus agrestis*

This species is rarely caught in Longworth traps so it is difficult to assess how common it really is on the Reserve. However, from examination of Barn Owl pellets it has been shown to figure in their diet and no doubt in that of the resident Kestrels. The Scrubland probably provides the best habitat for them here and the disastrous flooding around Christmas this year may well have caused a high mortality.

**Water Vole** *Arvicola amphibius*

The Water Vole is our fastest declining mammal, numbers having plummeted by around 95% from their pre-1960 levels. Loss of habitat and mink predation have undoubtedly been major factors in the decline and, to our knowledge, there had been no records on the river here since 1993. It came as a bit of a surprise then when one was photographed swimming across Coop Pond on 5th August (RP). On 30th September one was again seen on Coop Pond (AB) and on 4th October one was recorded on the Education Pond (DC/EC). With much reduced mink activity this year let us hope that this or these animals survive and there are more sightings next year.

**Brown Rat** *Rattus norvegicus*

There have been surprisingly few records of this species - just two on a camera trap last year - but it all changed this year. There were signs of activity in the Manager's Garden from 15th March but it wasn't until 20th May that one was seen under the feeders there (DC/EC). There were no further sightings until 13th June but thereafter between one and three were seen daily with five on 4th

July including three juveniles (DC/EC). From 28th October there were also sightings under the feeders in the Bee Garden with three from 8th November and six on 21st November including several juveniles (GJB/DC/EC). One or two continued to be seen in both gardens to the end of the year with up to four in the Bee Garden on occasions.

**Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis*

A visitor from nearby woodland, there were sightings in all months except March, the large majority in the second half of the year. Most sightings were in the Manager's Garden but there were also records on the Willow Path, entry road and Butterfly Bank where animals visited for hazelnuts in September and October. Most sightings involved single animals but three were reported in the Manager's Garden on 4th July, one going into the Little Owl box (PA). On 25th October one was also observed taking leaves into the box (AL). On 23rd December one even paid a brief visit to the feeders in the Bee Garden (PM/BM).

**Rabbit** *Oryctogalus cuniculus*

This has always been a scarce mammal on the Reserve and there have been no sightings since 28th October 2011.

**Brown Hare** *Lepus capensis*

This is an uncommon mammal in this part of the valley and there had been no records on the Reserve or adjacent farmland until 2014 when one put in a surprise appearance on the Willow Path of all places on 26th June. There have been no sightings since then.

**Hedgehog** *Erinaceus europaeus*

There have been no reported sightings of this rapidly declining species in the last seven years. One on the bridge on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2008 was, amazingly, only the second ever record for the Reserve.

**Common Pipistrelle Bat** *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

The commonest bat on the Reserve, it was again recorded in good numbers along the Willow Path during the July and August public Bat Nights. The entry road and Manager's Garden were also productive sites.

**Soprano Pipistrelle Bat** *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

In 1999 the Common Pipistrelle was split into two species on the basis of different frequency echolocation calls. Usually found in wetland habitats, the Soprano Pipistrelle was recorded in good numbers along the Willow Path during the two public Bat Nights in July and August using bat detectors.

**Noctule Bat** *Nyctalus noctula*

Emerging rather earlier in the evening than the Pipistrelles, several were recorded during the two public Bat Nights this year. One or two larger bats over the Visitor Centre at 7.15pm on 1st October (JB) were almost certainly this species. There were no other records.

**Daubenton's Bat** *Myotis daubentoni*

This species has not been recorded since 2007 but is almost certainly still present in the area.

## **SMALL MAMMAL SURVEYS**

Surveys were carried out on three dates this year, two of these for public participation. The results are shown below.

### **Date of Survey: 24th April 2015**

27 Longworth traps set at the back of the Reedbed and at the western end of the Duck Marsh - 13 of these successful.

| <b>Species</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Remarks</b> |
|----------------|----------|----------|--------------|----------------|
| Bank Vole      | -        | 4        | 4            |                |
| Woodmouse      | 5        | 4        | 9            |                |
| Common Shrew   | -        | -        | -            |                |
| Harvest Mouse  | -        | -        | -            |                |
| <b>Totals</b>  | <b>5</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>13</b>    |                |

### **Date of Survey: 14th June 2015 - June Wildlife Event**

25 Longworth traps set - 18 of these successful.

| <b>Species</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Remarks</b>      |
|----------------|----------|----------|--------------|---------------------|
| Bank Vole      | 2        | 5        | 7            |                     |
| Woodmouse      | 7        | 4        | 11           | One juvenile female |
| Common Shrew   | -        | -        | -            |                     |
| <b>Totals</b>  | <b>9</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>18</b>    |                     |

### **Date of Survey: 1st August 2015 - Public Event**

26 Longworth traps set - 21 of these successful.

| <b>Species</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>F</b>  | <b>Total</b> | <b>Remarks</b> |
|----------------|----------|-----------|--------------|----------------|
| Bank Vole      | 5        | 9         | 14           |                |
| Woodmouse      | 3        | 3         | 6            |                |
| Common Shrew   | 1        | -         | 1            |                |
| <b>Totals</b>  | <b>9</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>21</b>    |                |

## **AMPHIBIANS**

### **Smooth Newt** *Triturus vulgaris*

A common species on the Reserve and usually easy to see at the Dragonfly Ponds in the spring, there were surprisingly few records this year. Four in the Long Ditch and one in Coop Pond on 6th April were the first of the year (RS). At the other end of the year one was found in one of the mini-beast dens on the Willow Path on 20th December (JLW).

### **Palmate Newt**

Present in very small numbers, this species can only be reliably identified during detailed amphibian surveys at the ponds. It was first recorded in 2010 and again in 2011. In the absence of any subsequent detailed surveys there have been no further confirmed records since 2011.

### **Common Frog** *Rana temporaria*

Present in good numbers in the Dragonfly Ponds during the breeding season and in the ditches on the Wet Grassland, the first spawn this year appeared in Coop Pond on 9th March, just five days later than last year. The following day 25 balls of spawn were counted there (PM/BM). Over the next few days spawn was recorded in Bruce's Pond, Mabgate Pond and the Education Pond. The first young frogs were reported on the Willow Path on 21st June - exactly the same date as last year. On 9th November around 50 adults were found huddled together under a pond liner at the Dragonfly Ponds during repair work. We can only hope that the severe flooding over the Christmas period did not result in a high mortality of hibernating frogs.

### **Common Toad** *Bufo bufo*

From the direction that toads approach the Dragonfly Ponds during the breeding season it is obvious that large numbers spend the winter on the Scrubland in hibernation. This was evidenced during tree planting work there on 6th March when several were found. On 5th April there was a mass exodus from the Scrubland across Bentley's Path and onto the Dragonfly Ponds in very warm, sunny conditions, a number of pairs already in tandem (PM/BM). On 7th April scores were reported at the ponds with many more calling on the Scrubland, some even dropping their spawn before they reached the ponds

(MB). On 8th April a count of 178 at the ponds included 102 in the Long Ditch and 34 in the Pebble Beach Pond (PJM). After this period of intense activity the toads disappeared as suddenly as they arrived and there few subsequent records. With the Scrubland under water during the Christmas floods it will be interesting to see next spring what effect this has had on numbers. Certainly several were found alive in the hedge bottoms during clean up operations at the end of December.

## **REPTILES**

### **Red-eared Terrapin** *Trachemys scripta elegans*

Native to the southern United States and northern Mexico, this species is a popular pet in this country and, unfortunately, is often released into the wild. It now figures on the list of the world's 100 most invasive species. There were two records in 2013 and three in 2014 - two on the Duck Marsh and one on the Wet Grassland. Fortunately, there were no records this year.

## **BUTTERFLIES**

There was little chance of many early records of overwintered butterflies this year as March came in like a lion with cold winds and wintry showers and it went out like a lion with strong to gale force winds and blizzard conditions at times. In between it was invariably windy. There were a few pleasant days but only two of them produced single Commas, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. In sharp contrast, April provided above average temperatures with plenty of sunshine and butterflies responded in good numbers, though numbers of emerging Orange Tips were down a bit on last year.

There were a few notable highlights this year. Common Blues had their best year so far, though numbers remain very low with no more than five butterflies reported. Encouragingly, however, there were sightings over a lengthy period from 29th May to 19th September. Brimstones had their best year ever with sightings on 20 dates this year. Large Skippers too had a good year with numbers considerably higher than last year, though their cousins the Small Skippers had another very poor year.

As regards the white butterflies, Green-veined White and Large White again had poor years and Small White numbers were somewhat down on last year despite another excellent flowering of fodder radish on Tim's Field.

Among the Satyridae both Speckled Wood and Meadow Brown numbers were disappointing though Ringlets enjoyed a rather better year with some decent counts reported. Gatekeeper numbers remain low though there were plenty of sightings.

Looking at the immigrants, after a blank year in 2014 Painted Ladies did put in an appearance this year though most records involved just single butterflies. Red Admirals enjoyed another reasonable year with plenty of sightings though numbers remain low, a late flowering buddleia outside the Visitor Centre providing plenty of records in September. However, perhaps the most exciting immigrant this year was the Clouded Yellow which put in a brief appearance on the

Butterfly Bank on 16th September much to the delight of one observer, this a new species for the Reserve.

Despite a decent emergence of Small Tortoiseshells at the beginning of July unsettled weather for much of the rest of the month and throughout August resulted in low numbers being reported. Peacocks in particular suffered badly. There were plenty of caterpillars reported on nettles throughout July but the number of emerging butterflies was very disappointing.

The most frequently recorded butterflies this year were as follows:

- 1st. Small Tortoiseshell
- 2nd. Small White
- 3rd. Peacock
- 4th. Speckled Wood
- 5th. Comma

## **HESPERIDAE**

### **Small Skipper** (*Thymelicus sylvestris*)

Following two rather better years in 2012 and 2013 last year was very disappointing with just seven records submitted and this year was only marginally better with eight records, all but one of these being of single butterflies. One in the John Ackroyd Meadow on 15th July was the first of the year (DC/EC), nearly two weeks later than last year. There were no further sightings until 31st July when two were seen in the same meadow (RS). Subsequent sightings were reported at the Fish Pass, on the Butterfly Bank and at the Dragonfly Ponds and one on the Butterfly Bank on 9th August was the last of the year (PM/BM), some two and a half weeks later than last year.

### **Large Skipper** (*Ochlodes venatus*)

Unlike its cousin this species enjoyed a very good year with numbers considerably higher than last year. One on the River Path on 20th June was the first of the year (PA), nine days later than last year. The first double figure count came just a few days later on 28th June with

ten recorded on the John Ackroyd Meadow (RS). On 1st July up to 15 were reported on the River Path with at least six on the John Ackroyd Meadow (JS). A walk round the Reserve on 3rd July produced a total of 21, 11 of these on the River Path (PM/BM), clearly a favourite site for this species. Seven were counted round the edge of the Lagoon on 6th July (JB) and 12 on 9th July included four on the path to the Fish Pass (PM/BM). Numbers started to fall away after this date and one on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 9th August was the last of the year (DC/EC), some two and a half weeks later than last year.

## **PIERIDAE**

### **Brimstone** (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)

Records of this species are certainly increasing with sightings on five dates in 2013, 12 dates in 2014 and 20 dates this year. A female on the Duck Marsh and John Ackroyd Meadow on 6th April was the first of the year (JS/JLW et al), two and a half weeks earlier than last year. A male was reported on the river bank the next day (PM/BM). There were subsequent sightings at the Dragonfly Ponds, on the Scrubland, in the Bee Garden, on the Willow Path, on John Ackroyd Meadow and on the Butterfly Bank - the last two sites producing most records, which is interesting as one of the main larval food plants, Alder Buckthorn, is now doing very well here. A male on the buddleia on the Butterfly Bank on 6th September was the last sighting of the year (JH), just over two weeks earlier than last year.

### **Large White** (*Pieris brassicae*)

It was another poor year for this species with no records until 14th June when one was seen in the Bee Garden (PM/BM), a month later than the first sighting last year. Sightings were reported on just four dates in July, four on 29th being the best count of the year (DC/EC). There were sightings on four dates in August and eight dates in September but none involving more than two butterflies. One on Tim's Field on 27th September was the last of the year (DC/EC), five days later than last year.

### **Small White** (*Artogeia rapae*)

This species is always at its most numerous on Tim's Field when the fodder radish is in flower. The first sightings this year were reported

on 6th April on Tim's Field, the John Ackroyd Meadow and by the Lagoon - just a week earlier than last year. There were no further records until 20th April. Numbers in May and June were well down on last year but started to build in July and August with 100+ reported on Tim's Field feeding on fodder radish flowers on 24th August (PM/BM) - still somewhat lower than counts at the same time last year when several hundred were estimated. Numbers started to tail off in September and one in the Bee Garden on 31st October was the last of the year (DC/EC), two weeks later than last year.

### **Green-veined White** (*Artogeia napi*)

Over recent years the number of sightings and the number of butterflies involved have steadily gone down and there was no improvement this year with sightings reported on just sixteen dates. One by the Visitor Centre on 25th April was the first of the year (JG), nine days later than last year. There were no further sightings until 20th May when a single butterfly was seen on John Ackroyd Meadow (JS). There were sightings on just two dates in June, three at the edge of Tim's Field on 15th June being the best count of the year (PM/BM). August proved the most productive month with sightings on seven dates though no observers reported more than two butterflies. A single butterfly on Tim's Field on 19th September was the last of the year (JH), five days earlier than last year.

### **Orange Tip** (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

It was a reasonable year with plenty of records but numbers were certainly down on last year. A male outside the Duck Marsh Hide on 17th April was the first of the year (JB), just four days later than last year. There were some double figure counts by the end of April in 2014 but no observers reported more than seven this year. The most productive site was the Butterfly Bank with up to four males seen here. A single female on John Ackroyd Meadow on 28th June was the last reported sighting (JS), two and a half weeks later than last year.

## **LYCAENIDAE**

### **White-letter Hairstreak** (*Satyrium w-album*)

A scarce butterfly on the Reserve, there have been just two records on 19th July 2006 and 23rd July 2014.

### **Small Copper** (*Lycaena phlaeas*)

After an excellent year in 2012 the last two years had been disappointing with records on just 15 dates in 2014. Sightings were reported on 25 dates this year but, as in 2014, no observers reported more than two butterflies. One on the roadside banking near the Lagoon Hide on 24th April was the first of the year (JB/MB) and there were further reports of single butterflies on 27th April, 20th May and 24th May. Last year there were no records until 10th June. John Ackroyd Meadow and the adjacent Butterfly Bank produced the majority of sightings and two were observed mating here on 7th June (JH). August and September were the most productive months with sightings on six and nine dates respectively. A single butterfly on John Ackroyd Meadow on 2nd October was the last of the year (BM), eight days earlier than last year.

### **Common Blue** (*Polyommatus icarus*)

There are certainly signs of improvement with this species. The years 2009 to 2013 each produced one record. Last year there were sightings on five dates but all just of single butterflies and in a short period from 13th June to 6th July. This year sightings were reported on 17 dates, the first on 29th May (MG/RS) and the last on 19th September (JH). All sightings were on the Butterfly Bank and John Ackroyd Meadow and while many involved single butterflies there were a number of reports of up to five. Two males and a female were seen on the Butterfly Bank on 24th and 26th August (PM/BM); five were reported on 28th August (RS) and two males and a female on 29th August (RS). A single female on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 19th September was the last reported sighting of the year (JH).

### **Holly Blue** (*Celastrina argiolus*)

This is a scarce butterfly on the Reserve, the last six years having produced just nine records, four of these last year. There were again sightings on four dates this year. One was in the Manager's Garden on 3rd June (DC/EC); one was reported on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 10th June (JS); one was seen at the Dragonfly Ponds on 8th August (JLW/JS) and two were in the Manager's Garden on 9th August (GA).

## **NYPHALIDAE**

### **Red Admiral**

This species may well now be overwintering in small numbers but there were no records until 28th June when one was seen by the Duck Marsh (BM), some two and a half weeks later than last year. There were regular sightings from 3rd July to 8th August though no observers reported more than four butterflies. There were no further sightings throughout the rest of August but a late flowering buddleia outside the Visitor Centre produced almost daily sightings in September with four there on 19th and 28th (PM/BM). A single butterfly near the Visitor Centre on 14th October was the last of the year ((PM), nearly three weeks earlier than last year.

### **Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*)**

After a blank year in 2014 there was some improvement this year although most records involved just single butterflies. One on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 7th June was the first of the year (JB). There were further sightings on 23rd June on the far bank of the Lagoon, on 20th July on the John Ackroyd Meadow again and on 23rd August on the river bank. There were then sightings on five dates in September on buddleias outside the Visitor Centre, two being seen here on 16th (GJB/JB). A single butterfly on the buddleias on 17th September was the last record of the year (JK).

### **Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*)**

Overwintered butterflies were slow to emerge thanks to very unsettled weather conditions in March and there was only one record in the whole month - a single butterfly by the roadside on 19th (PM/BM), nine days later than last year. However, some beautiful warm, sunny days in April produced counts of between 20 and 30, numbers dropping back somewhat in May. Sightings continued throughout June with up to five seen on the John Ackroyd Meadow (though June last year was still producing 20+ counts). The first freshly emerged butterfly was reported in the Bee Garden on 1st July (PM), just one day later than last year. Warm sunshine at the beginning of July produced some good counts with 27 on 3rd including 19 on the Winter Walk (PM/BM). Unfortunately, the rest of the month was cool and often wet and counts were generally disappointing. With unsettled weather for much of August counts

were again on the low side with just six the best. A late flowering buddleia outside the Visitor Centre produced a few more in September but 15 on 16th September included a number of freshly emerged butterflies (JB).

A single butterfly in the buddleia on 2nd October looked like being the last of the year but a beautiful warm, sunny day on 1st November tempted one out on Tim's Field (MG), almost six weeks later than last year. Four hibernating butterflies were found in nest boxes on the side of the workshop during a nest box check on 7th December.

### **Peacock** (*Aglais io*)

This species hibernates over the winter and usually emerges in March or April. There was just one record in March this year - a single butterfly in the Reedbed on 22nd (PA), nearly two weeks later than the first record last year. Warm sunny conditions in April produced some reasonable counts into double figures with blackthorn blossom proving a popular food source. There were plenty of records subsequently but no observers reported more than four. The last two overwintered butterflies were noted on John Ackroyd Meadow on 7th June (DC/EC). Good numbers of caterpillars were reported on nettles in July and early August but the number of emerging butterflies was very disappointing, one on the Butterfly Bank on 29th July being the first (DC/EC). Buddleias by the Mike Sheldon Hide and outside the Visitor Centre proved attractive in August and September but the best counts were just eight (PM/BM) and 7 (JB) respectively. A single butterfly on buddleias outside the Visitor Centre on 19th September (DC/EC) was the last of the year.

### **Comma** (*Polygonum c-album*)

This species hibernates over the winter months and usually emerges from early March onwards weather permitting. This year a very unsettled March produced just one record - a single butterfly in the Reedbed on 22nd (PA). There were sightings on five dates in April, all of single butterflies, but none in May or June. The first freshly emerged butterflies (2) were seen in the Coppice on 9th July (PM/BM), more than two weeks later than last year. There were regular sightings thereafter with up to five reported in July. Buddleias outside the Visitor Centre proved attractive in August though all reports were of just single butterflies. Disappointingly, there were sightings on just three dates in September and one date in October.

However, a beautiful warm, sunny day on 1st November produced a good late record on Tim's Field (JS/JLW).

## **SATYRIDAE**

### **Speckled Wood** (*Pararge aegeria*)

A spell of very settled weather with plenty of sunshine produced several sightings in April, albeit of single butterflies. One by the Visitor Centre on 8th was the first of the year (JWC), 10 days earlier than last year. There were no reports of more than two butterflies until 29th June when five were recorded, three of these on the Willow Path (RS). Late August and September produced the best counts last year but the best this year were just six on 19th September (DC/EC), seven on 28th September and seven again on 2nd October (PM/BM). Single butterflies were seen on the Willow Path, John Ackroyd Meadow and in the Manager's Garden on 14th October but there were no records after this date until 31st October when one was seen on the John Ackroyd Meadow (DC/EC), this the last record of the year just three days later than last year.

### **Wall Brown** (*Lasiommata megera*)

This species has suffered a drastic decline in the Leeds area in recent times and there has only been one sighting on the Reserve in the last seven years - a single butterfly on the river path on 5th September 2012.

### **Gatekeeper** (*Pyronia tithonus*)

There were plenty of sightings but numbers were low with no observers reporting more than four butterflies. One at the edge of the Butterfly Bank on 12th July was the first of the year (JK), six days later than last year. The Butterfly Bank and John Ackroyd Meadow again produced most sightings with a scattering of records from the Fish Pass, Willow Path, Bee Garden and buddleias outside the Visitor Centre. A single butterfly on the Butterfly Bank on 25th August was the last sighting of the year (JG), some 16 days later than last year.

### **Meadow Brown** (*Maniola jurtina*)

A single butterfly on the Mike Fisk Meadow on 15th June was the first of the year (JB), just a day later than last year's first sighting. The John Ackroyd Meadow and Butterfly Bank were the most productive

sites but, based on records submitted, numbers were generally down on last year with a best count of just 13 here on 9th July and a best Reserve count of just 18 on the same date (2013 produced 40 and 50+ counts). A single butterfly on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 29th August was the last sighting of the year (DC/EC), 16 days later than last year.

**Ringlet** (*Aphantopus hyperantus*)

This species can be very numerous during its relatively short flight period but numbers last year were disappointing with no counts of more than 20 butterflies. There was a considerable improvement this year with several decent counts. One on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 24th June was the first of the year (JH), just three days later than last year. This meadow again proved to be one of the most productive sites with c30 reported on 5th July (BM) the best count here. A walk round the Reserve on 9th July produced a count of 38, 15 of these on the John Ackroyd Meadow (PM/BM). However, the best count of the year came from the Lagoon margins on 10th July with 40 in total recorded (PM/BM). A single butterfly on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 19th August was the last sighting of the year (DC/EC).

**Small Heath** (*Coenonympha pamphilus*)

First recorded on the Reserve in 2005, there have been no confirmed sightings since then.

## **BUTTERFLIES**

### **First and Last Dates - 2015**

| <b>Species</b>          | <b>First date</b> | <b>Last date</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Small Skipper           | 15th July         | 9th August       |
| Large Skipper           | 20th June         | 9th August       |
| Large White             | 15th June         | 27th September   |
| Small White             | 6th April         | 31st October     |
| Green-veined White      | 25th April        | 19th September   |
| Orange Tip              | 17th April        | 28th June        |
| Brimstone               | 6th April         | 6th September    |
| Clouded Yellow          | 16th September    | 16th September   |
| Small Tortoiseshell     | 19th March        | 1st November     |
| Comma                   | 22nd March        | 1st November     |
| Painted Lady            | 7th June          | 17th September   |
| Red Admiral             | 28th June         | 14th October     |
| Peacock                 | 22nd March        | 19th September   |
| Meadow Brown            | 15th June         | 29th August      |
| Gatekeeper              | 12th July         | 25th August      |
| Ringlet                 | 24th June         | 19th August      |
| Small Heath             | -                 | -                |
| Speckled Wood           | 8th April         | 31st October     |
| Wall Brown              | -                 | -                |
| White-letter Hairstreak | -                 | -                |
| Small Copper            | 24th April        | 2nd October      |
| Holly Blue              | 3rd June          | 9th August       |
| Common Blue             | 29th May          | 19th September   |

## MOTHS

Light traps were run on just eight dates this year thanks to some very indifferent weather. However, five of these were done for public events on Wednesday mornings during the main school holidays to try and interest children in the world of moths. No spring trapping and little autumn trapping resulted in just 104 macro species being recorded this year and, while there were no new ones to add to the Reserve list, it was nice to see some scarcer species turning up. Broad-barred White, for example, shows a preference for chalky grassland but for some reason it likes Rodley and six were recorded here in June, four of these in two traps on 15th. There were no records at all in VC64 last year.

Twin-spotted Wainscot is a reedbed specialist and one or two turn up in moth traps here most years. One was caught on 26th August. Last year it was only recorded from three sites in VC64, one of these being Rodley. Silky Wainscot is another reedbed specialist and a scarce and local resident in Yorkshire. One was caught in a light trap on 5th August.

Day-flying moths, of course, rarely turn up in light traps so it is a question of searching the Reserve for these. Perhaps the scarcest day-flying macro moth here is the Small Yellow Underwing, a moth of flower-rich grassland. First recorded on the Reserve last year, there were numerous sightings in May this year on the Butterfly Bank with up to six reported (RS). This is still a scarce moth in Yorkshire and ours were the only records in VC64 last year.

Among the other day-flying macro moths the Cinnabar Moth had a dreadful year with just one sighting in the Coppice and only a handful of caterpillars found on Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), the larval food plant. The Chimneysweeper continues to maintain a small population on the John Ackroyd Meadow, five in total being reported between 17th June and 28th June. The larval food plant is Pignut (*Conopodium majus*). There were again no reports of the two Burnet Moths, Six-spot Burnet and Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet, but the main larval food plants, Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) and Birdsfoot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) are here and the Mike Fisk Meadow is the most likely place to find these moths.

Among the 72 micro moth species recorded 11 were new for the Reserve. The new species were:

*Acrolepia autumnitella*

*Argyresthia pruniella* (Cherry Fruit Moth)

*Catoptria margaritella*

*Crassa unitella*

*Dichrorampha flavidorsana*

*Dichrorampha petiverella*

*Elachista apicipunctella*

*Eucosma hohenwartiana*

*Incurvaria masculella*

*Nematopogan schwarziellus*

*Nematopogan swammerdamella*

*Acrolepia autumnitella* can be found in any month of the year, the adults hibernating. The larvae mine the leaves of Bittersweet (*Solanum dulcamara*) and occasionally Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*). A single specimen was found on 16th August (RS). This is classed as a rare and very local resident in Yorkshire.

*Catoptria margaritella* is usually found on boggy heaths and moors in upland situations so it was a surprise to find one turning up in a light trap behind the Visitor Centre on 19th August. This species is classed as scarce and thinly distributed in Yorkshire.

Most *Dichrorampha* species feed on the roots of various related plants and *Dichrorampha flavidorsana* is no exception, the larvae feeding on the rootstocks of Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) which is now abundant at Rodley. This moth was recorded on three dates in July on Tansy (RS). It is classed as a very rare and local resident in Yorkshire.

*Dichrorampha petiverella* is another species associated with Tansy but the larvae also feed on the roots of Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*) and Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). One was photographed on the Reserve on 16th August (RS).

The larvae of *Elachista* species are leaf miners on grasses or sedges and *Elachista apicipunctella* is not even illustrated in the Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland. In Yorkshire it is classed as

a scarce and local resident. One was photographed on 16th August (RS).

*Incurvaria masculella* flies in sunshine in late April and May and the larval food plant is Hawthorn. Classed as common nationally, it is scarce and thinly distributed in Yorkshire. Four were recorded in the hedgerow between the John Ackroyd Meadow and the Poplar Carr between 2nd and 17th May (RS/MG).

Two Longhorn Moths were among the new species recorded this year - *Nematopogan schwarziellus* and *Nematopogan swammerdamella* (RS). The antennae are two and a half times the length of the forewing in the male of the latter and a little less in the male of the former. Both species fly by day between late April and June and are best looked for in tall hedgerows such as the one between the John Ackroyd Meadow and the Poplar Carr.

Not new for the Reserve, but nationally scarce and a rare and very local resident in Yorkshire, the Tansy Plume Moth (*Gillmeria ochrodactyla*) was first recorded here in 2012. As its name implies, the larval food plant is again Tansy. There was just one confirmed record this year - one on Tansy by the ramp to the Butterfly Bank on 24th July (RS).

It is interesting to note that only one of the new micro moths was caught in a light trap. The rest were found by methodically checking plants and hedgerows around the Reserve and special thanks must go to volunteers Rob Simpson (RS) and Madge Gibson (MG) who found the majority of the new species this year. Most of the moths found are quite scarce in Yorkshire and it is interesting to speculate what else might be out there waiting to be discovered.

The Reserve moth list now stands at 361 species - 204 macro species and 157 micros.

Peter Murphy

## LUNAR HORNET CLEARWING MOTHS

Scarcely a day goes by as a volunteer at Rodley NR when one doesn't see something new, intriguing or beautiful, and often you hit the jackpot and see something that is all three. One such find is discussed here. Nature can often surprise us and things are not always what they seem. On a bright July morning in 2013 I was helping with a junior school visit. We were looking out over the Lagoon from the Michael Sheldon Hide when one of the kids spotted a large wasp. She backed off quickly with accompanied squeals. One of the school helpers saw it and moved the other kids away from 'the threat'. Sitting on some Goose Grass by the dead hedge, it certainly was an impressive and scary beast, about 25 to 30mm long and possibly 4 to 5 mm wide, with a wingspan of about 35mm. It was, of course, fitted out with the correct bold black and yellow warning stripes and with a pointed tail where a sting might be found, it looked very waspish indeed. Could it be a Queen Wasp or maybe an even scarier Hornet? However something about it didn't look quite right. Its antennae were quite long and black but looked rather hooked or bent at the tips. The body was black and yellow striped but it looked rather 'furry' whereas wasps usually have smooth and shiny abdomens. The wings were a similar length to a wasp's but were a slightly different shape – a bit scimitar-shaped and with a pale brown edging all the way round, again not quite right for a wasp. This insect was certainly new to me, and after some consideration it was carefully photographed and returned to the dead hedge.

Books at the visitor centre soon allowed us to identify our new friend as a Lunar Hornet Clearwing Moth (*Sesia bembeciformis*). We were able to share this news with the school party and explain to them why the insect initially had us fooled – *i.e.* because it was meant to! This moth is a mimic species that has evolved to look like a wasp or hornet complete with warning stripes which give out the message – “Danger I'm a wasp carrying a sting – don't mess with me!” Most moths fly at night but this one, like a wasp, is a day-flyer. Apparently it also makes a humming sound while flying – but we didn't see it flying and so we missed that. This is called Batesian Mimicry. The large harmless soft bodied and vulnerable moth gives out the warning message and most enemies leave it well alone to get on with its life.

It was great to be able to give out such an interesting lesson in biology to our young visitors.

Apparently this moth is nationally common but locally, in Yorkshire, it is scarce and thinly distributed with few recent records - our observation was the first at Rodley NR. Common though it might be, books say it is only rarely found and it is usually seen in early mornings sitting low down on the trunks of its larva's food plant - Willow or Sallow.

Moving forward two years to 2015 on a pleasant mid-June evening this year a group of cubs was approaching the Michael Sheldon Hide when someone spotted a large scary black and yellow insect sitting on the dead hedge. This time we were prepared for it and no panic ensued! As it was found only about 20 yards from the previous find one wonders if Rodley NR is a hot spot for this insect? Well we are certainly not short of its food plant. We have a whole coppice full of willow and it is very common across the rest of the reserve making it useful for constructing our dead hedges. So were our moths laying eggs on the willow?

In November the story developed further. We were cutting some large willows in the coppice for dead hedge construction and noticed that quite a lot of the trunks had brown/black tunnels in the timber, something that had been seen previously but not investigated. If you looked at a cross section of a trunk or branch there might be just one tunnel or as many as four or five of them. The tunnels were a bit sticky, were about 5 to 7 mm wide and contained what looked like sawdust. Some of the tunnels were near the centre of the trunk, others were near the edge and some reached the bark on the outside and ended in a small hole in the bark. It didn't take long to find the cause. Splitting the wood sometimes revealed a large beige caterpillar about 25 mm long and 5mm wide, its mandibles crunching away at the timber. Reference books and websites such as [ukmoths.org.uk](http://ukmoths.org.uk) confirmed that these were Lunar Hornet Moth larvae. It seems that the Lunar Hornets lay their eggs on willow trunks, the eggs hatch and the tiny caterpillar emerges and burrows into the trunk. It then spends two years feeding, pupating near the end of its tunnel before emerging on a mid-summer morning and starting the whole story again. The adult Lunar Hornet Moths we saw may have

been visiting willows to lay their eggs or may have just emerged from their tunnel having continued to grow and develop in the dead hedge stakes - we don't know. However, examination of timber in old dead hedges reveals lots of 'exit holes' for wood boring insects, some very small but some large enough to allow a Lunar Hornet Moth to escape. Also some of the wood in the dead hedges shows chiselled holes probably produced by woodpeckers searching for prey, possibly our Lunar Hornet larvae; certainly Great Spotted Woodpeckers are regular visitors to the coppice and the Willow Path.

The numbers of tunnels in the willow trunks we were cutting this year does suggest that Lunar Hornet Clearwing Moths are probably much commoner at Rodley NR than is suggested by the two sightings of adult moths that have been made to date. There are several types (species or hybrids) of willow trees on the reserve but so far I have only observed the tunnels made by Lunar Hornet Moth larvae in the live trees in the coppice and in dead hedges made from these trees (which are, I think, a rapidly growing hybrid variety). It is not clear whether the moth has a preference for these willows or the observation is simply because this is the most frequently cut type of willow. However we certainly aren't short of their food.

In conclusion, if you are walking on the Willow Path in June or July and see a large black and yellow insect give it a careful look before you panic. You may be in for a treat as it is a beautiful insect. Please let us know if you see one.

Jerry Knapp

## LADYBIRDS AT RODLEY NATURE RESERVE

While the Harlequin Ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*) was again the most frequently reported ladybird this year the native 7-spot Ladybird (*Coccinella 7-punctata*) also appears to have had a good year, on some occasions outnumbering Harlequins. The Tansy Bank proved to be an ideal place to compare numbers, both Harlequins and 7-spots being drawn to the Tansy, presumably for the number of aphids found there. Counts of both species on several dates in the summer are shown below.

| Date      | Harlequin Ladybird | 7-spot Ladybird |
|-----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 28th June | 14                 | 4               |
| 3rd July  | 2                  | 14              |
| 6th July  | 7                  | 16              |
| 15th July | 7                  | 23              |
| 2nd Aug   | 8                  | 9               |

Said to be the most invasive ladybird in the world, the Harlequin arrived in the UK in 2004 and can now be found almost everywhere. It was first seen on the Reserve in 2009 and has been recorded every year since. It is known here as the Harlequin Ladybird because it occurs in numerous colour forms. The two most common forms in the UK are orange with 15 to 21 black spots and black with two or four orange or red spots. It can be difficult to tell apart from some of our native species but it is considerably bigger. Among some of the bigger counts this year were 25 around the big Sycamore outside the Manager's Garden on 29th June (this a popular site last year); 15 at the Dragonfly Ponds on 6th July and 21 on Hemlock by the compost heap on 20th July.

In addition to Harlequins and 7-spots the Tansy Bank also attracted other species of ladybirds including 2-spot Ladybird (*Adalia bipunctata*), 14-spot Ladybird (*Propylea quattuordecimpunctata*), 22-spot Ladybird (*Psyllobora vigintiduopunctata*) and Adonis Ladybird (*Hippodamia variegata*), the last one a new species for the Reserve. There were rather more records of 2-spot Ladybirds this year but this may be because they are being more actively sought now. It was also interesting to see the black melanic form of this species which can be confused with Pine Ladybird.

Cream-spot Ladybirds (*Calvia quattuordecimguttata*) were recorded in the John Ackroyd Meadow Hedge where it overlooks the Poplar Carr and in the hedge at the Dragonfly Ponds. In addition to the Tansy Bank, 22-spot Ladybirds were also recorded on the Butterfly Bank, at the Dragonfly Ponds, on Bentley's Path and in the John Ackroyd Meadow Hedge. On 20th June a 10-spot Ladybird (*Adalia decempunctata*), another new species for the Reserve, was recorded in the Manager's Garden.

Following the first record of the Water Ladybird (*Anisosticta novemdecimpunctata*) on 29th September last year there was a further record this year with 12 counted at the back of the Reedbed during a Wharfedale Naturalists Society Visit on 23rd June. It appears this species may be much more common here than originally thought.

Peter Murphy

## **OTHER INSECTS**

This account includes the adults of all those orders of insects for which species have been recorded at Rodley NR with the exception of the Lepidoptera (Butterflies and Moths) and the Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies), which are both covered elsewhere.

Rodley is an amazing site providing the perfect habitats for a wide variety of insects. Recently it was decided to create a photographic record of the insects found around the reserve to supplement the original records that have been gathered and maintained by Peter and Barbara (PM and BM) since the reserve opened. Initially I thought this would be a relatively straightforward task. How wrong could I be? The more insects I saw and the more research I did, the more it seemed to be endless. Luckily others have also become fascinated, creating a team which strives to identify at least 1,000 species...don't hold your breath though as some insects can take weeks to identify and then only to family level not the actual species. The list currently stands at 281 with 46 of these added in 2015.

If you are interested in helping record Rodley's insects please get in touch you will be very welcome.

The disastrous December flooding has ended a year of poor weather with many weeks being windy, wet or both which are the worst possible conditions for finding and recording insects but occasionally there has been a spell of warm sunny calm weather suitable for photography. Hopefully the flooding of the reserve in December will not have an adverse effect on next year's insects. Only time will tell but drowned caterpillars have been found so it would seem likely eggs and other larvae may have suffered the same fate. Some insects are still out and about. The honey bees were a rare sight in December as they need an outdoor temperature of 10C to venture forth from the hive but they were in evidence even at the height of the flooding. Midges also seem to be thriving as they appear whenever the sun momentarily puts in an appearance ~ even in December. Let's hope the weather is kinder over the winter months allowing the insects to recover.

## COLEOPTERA

These are Beetles which vary in size from 1mm to 75mm and come in numerous colours and patterns.

**Weevils** are a favourite of mine and 12 types have been recorded on the reserve, this year but sadly I didn't get a good picture of the Nut Weevil. Look carefully at the Hazelnut trees from May to August and hopefully you will be lucky enough to see one. They are quite large 6mm to 8.5mm. The Gorse Seed Weevil 2mm to 3mm is much more common but being so tiny is not so easy to photograph. Look for these on the Gorse bushes near the visitor centre.

**Soldier Beetles** are common and hundreds can be counted on sunny days at Rodley. Eleven species have been recorded to date. They get their name from one of the first types recorded having a red coat colour pattern similar to early British soldiers.

**Click Beetles** are interesting and amazingly athletic though in colour quite dull grey, brown or black. They make the click noise with a spine on the prosternum that can be snapped into a corresponding notch on the mesosternum bouncing the beetle into the air. This mechanism is used primarily to escape predators but is also useful to right the beetle if stranded on its back. It can be seen in large numbers on long grasses in the John Ackroyd Meadow during May and June.

| Order      | Family        | Latin Name                     | Common Name        | Recorder |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Coleoptera | Brentidae     | <i>Exapion ulicis</i>          | Gorse Seed Weevil  | RS 05/15 |
| Coleoptera | Cantharidae   | <i>Cantharis rufa</i>          | Soldier Beetle     | RS 05/15 |
| Coleoptera | Cantharidae   | <i>Rhagonycha translucida</i>  | Soldier Beetle     | RS 06/15 |
| Coleoptera | Chrysomelidae | <i>Crepidodera fulvicornis</i> | Willow Flea Beetle | RS 05/15 |
| Coleoptera | Chrysomelidae | <i>Chrysolina oricalcia</i>    | Cow Parsley Beetle | RS 05/15 |
| Coleoptera | Chrysomelidae | <i>Chrysolina polita</i>       | Mint Leaf Beetle   | RS 05/15 |

|            |               |                        |                    |          |
|------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Coleoptera | Curculionidae | <i>Curculio nucum</i>  | Nut Weevil         | RS 01/15 |
| Coleoptera | Curculionidae | <i>Phyllobius pyri</i> | Common Leaf Weevil | RS 05/15 |
| Coleoptera | Elateridae    | <i>Althous bicolor</i> | Click Beetle       | RS 05/15 |
| Coleoptera | Elateridae    | <i>Kibunea minuta</i>  | Click Beetle       | RS 05/15 |

## DIPTERA

The Diptera are the true flies and sizes vary tremendously from a tiny midge to large crane flies and many are very colourful.

**Bee-flies** The Dark-edged Bee-fly is Britain's only common Bee-fly and the only one you are likely to see at Rodley.

**Picture-winged Flies** are worth close scrutiny as the wing patterns vary considerably. They can often be seen waving their wings to impress females or in a challenge with other males.

|         |                |                                   |                    |          |
|---------|----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Diptera | Bombyliidae    | <i>Bombylius major</i>            | Dark-edged Bee-fly | RS 05/15 |
| Diptera | Conopidae      | <i>Sicus ferrugineus</i>          | Thick Headed Fly   | MG 07/15 |
| Diptera | Dolichopodidae | <i>Poecilobothrus nobilitatus</i> | Long-legged Fly    | RS 07/15 |
| Diptera | Empididae      | <i>Empis tessellata</i>           | Dance Fly          | RS 05/15 |
| Diptera | Hybotidae      | <i>Hilara interstincta</i>        | Dance Fly          | RS 05/15 |
| Diptera | Muscidae       | <i>Stomoxys calcitrans</i>        | Stable Fly         | RS 05/15 |
| Diptera | Sepsidae       | <i>Nemopoda nitidula</i>          | Black Scavenger    | RS 05/15 |
| Diptera | Tachinidae     | <i>Trixa conspersa</i>            | Parasitic Fly      | RS 06/15 |
| Diptera | Tephritidae    | <i>Euleia heraclei</i>            | Picture Wing       | RS 05/15 |
| Diptera | Tipulidae      | <i>Tipula varipennis</i>          | Crane Fly          | RS 05/15 |

## HEMIPTERA

Almost everyone refers to insects as bugs. Well the Hemiptera are true bugs and cover a huge variety of shapes and sizes. All gardeners have experience of Rose Aphids and these can be found at Rodley on the wild roses in the hedges. The other Aphid which is common at Rodley is the Tansy Aphid and this can be seen on the Tansy plants near the visitor centre.

**Shield Bugs** are aptly named as their bodies look like miniature shields. They are quite common at Rodley and large numbers of Gorse Shield Bugs have been recorded in 2015 on the Gorse bushes near the visitor centre picnic tables.

|           |               |   |                                  |             |
|-----------|---------------|---|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Hemiptera | Aphididae     | <i>Brackycaudus klugkistis or lychnidis</i> | Campion Aphid                    | RS<br>05/15 |
| Hemiptera | Aphididae     | <i>Macrosiphum rosae</i>                    | Rose Aphid                       | RS<br>06/15 |
| Hemiptera | Aphididae     | <i>Macrosiphoniella tanacetaria</i>         | Tansy Aphid                      | RS<br>06/15 |
| Hemiptera | Aphrophoridae | <i>Aphrophora alni</i>                      | Alder Spittlebug<br>- Froghopper | RS<br>07/15 |
| Hemiptera | Aphrophoridae | <i>Neophilaenus lineatus</i>                | Frog hopper                      | RS<br>07/15 |
| Hemiptera | Cicadellidae  | <i>Oncopsis flavicollis</i>                 | Leafhopper                       | RS<br>07/15 |
| Hemiptera | Delphacidae   | <i>Stenocranus.sp (major ?)</i>             | Planthopper                      | MG<br>03/15 |
| Hemiptera | Miridae       | <i>Campyloneura virgula</i>                 | Plant/Capsid<br>Bug              | RS<br>08/15 |
| Hemiptera | Pentatomidae  | <i>Piezodorus lituratus</i>                 | Gorse Shield<br>Bug              | RS<br>05/15 |
| Hemiptera | Pentatomidae  | <i>Zicrona caerulea</i>                     | Blue Shield Bug                  | RS<br>08/15 |
| Hemiptera | Rhopalidae    | <i>Rhopalus subrufus</i>                    | St John's-worts<br>Bug           | MG<br>05/15 |
| Hemiptera | Tingidae      | <i>Tingis cardui</i>                        | Spear Thistle<br>Lacebug         | RS<br>05/15 |

|           |          |                              |                     |             |
|-----------|----------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Hemiptera | Veliidae | <i>Microvelia reticulata</i> | Micro Water Cricket | MG<br>04/15 |
|-----------|----------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|

## HYMENOPTERA

This order includes ants, bees, wasps and relatives.

Sawflies differ from all other hymenopterans in that they do not have a "waist". They derive their name from their ovipositor which, in most species, is shaped like a saw.

**Ichneumon wasps** vary in size and colour and many are parasitoids of Lepidoptera larvae and pupae, living in the host. Other hosts used are sawflies but they appear to use almost any insect.

|             |                |                                 |                |             |
|-------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Hymenoptera | Ichneumonidae  | <i>Asthenolabus scutellatus</i> | Ichneumon Wasp | RS<br>07/15 |
| Hymenoptera | Tenthredinidae | <i>Rhogogaster punctulata</i>   | Sawfly         | RS<br>05/15 |
| Hymenoptera | Tenthredinidae | <i>Tenthredo maculata</i>       | Sawfly         | RS<br>05/15 |

## ORTHOPTERA

The Orthoptera includes bush crickets, crickets and grasshoppers.

**Grasshoppers** have proved to be elusive though the reserve provides the perfect habitats for some of the species. One reason they remain hidden is as we get older our hearing doesn't detect the noise they emit by rubbing a row of pegs on the hind femurs against the edges of the forewings (stridulation). Look carefully as you walk around the meadows and you may observe grasshoppers jumping. A bat detector set to 35-40 kHz will detect them.

**Groundhoppers** prefer clear areas and at Rodley they are found in sandy areas near to water. Unlike grasshoppers they do not sing. Numbers may have been seriously affected by the flooding in

December. The Orthoptera group was only first recorded in 2014 but have probably always been abundant.

|            |            |                             |                          |          |
|------------|------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Orthoptera | Acrididae  | <i>Chorthippus brunneus</i> | Field Grasshopper        | RS 08/15 |
| Orthoptera | Acrididae  | <i>Omocestus viridulus</i>  | Common Green Grasshopper | RS 07/15 |
| Orthoptera | Tetrigidae | <i>Tetrix subulata</i>      | Slender Ground-hopper    | RS 09/14 |
| Orthoptera | Tetrigidae | <i>Tetrix undulata</i>      | Common Ground-hopper     | MG 08/15 |

The above is a small selection of Rodley's insect population, but I hope it has captured your interest and will entice you to peer closely at flower heads, tree leaves, grass stems and in fact almost anywhere searching for these amazing creatures.

Rob Simpson

## **DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES**

2015 was another good year for dragonflies on the reserve. The highlights of the season were the first ever sighting of a male Keeled Skimmer and the consolidation of the numbers of Emerald Damselfly. Other positives include encouraging numbers of Migrant and Southern Hawkers, Black-tailed Skimmer and the Four-spotted and Broad-bodied Chasers, with oviposition observed for the first three. The number of Large Red Damselflies has been steadily increasing and, although the number of adults reported this year was not high, next year should provide a significant increase, as good numbers of larvae are present in Chadwick (see the report on Rodley's Pond Life). The three commonest species are still Azure Damselfly, Brown Hawker and Common Darter. The first of these was clearly under-recorded, probably as it is taken for granted. The Blue-tailed Damselfly remains low in numbers but could well be overlooked due to the large number of male Azure Damselflies. In 2016 it would be useful if observers could record the commoner species as well as the less common ones. Also, as noted in last year's report, detailed searching for exuviae on the emergent vegetation and the grasses immediately surrounding the ponds would be extremely useful for confirming which species are breeding successfully on the reserve.

Peter Mill

### **Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*)**

Sightings of this damselfly have been on the increase over the last two years but the number of records submitted this year was disappointing with only one observer reporting more than three. A male and teneral on the Long Ditch on 22nd April were the first of the year (JLW) - the earliest ever record on the reserve and beating last year's earliest ever date by five days. Apart from three records on the River Path and one on the Wet Grassland all reports came from the Dragonfly Ponds. There was just one exceptional count - a total of 30 at the ponds on 13th May (JLW). Surprisingly, breeding activity was only reported on one date - a pair in wheel on the Long Ditch on 24th June (BM). A single male at the ponds on 4th July was the last record of the year (JS/JLW), 11 days later than last year.

### **Azure Damselfly** (*Coenagrion puella*)

This is by far the commonest of the damselfly species on the Reserve, most sightings coming from the Dragonfly Ponds. Because of this it tends to be overlooked by many observers and the number of records submitted was disappointing. Two on 11th May were the first of the year (RS), six days earlier than last year. Breeding activity was first reported on 3rd July (PM/BM), a female ovipositing in the Long Ditch. The best counts of the year were made in July and can best be summarised as follows:

| Site | Date | Total | M   | F   | Wheel (pairs) | Tandem (pairs) | Ovip. (pairs) | Observer |
|------|------|-------|-----|-----|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------|
| DFP  | 1/7  | 67    | 65  | 2   | 1             | -              | 1             | PJM      |
| DFP  | 5/7  | 100+  | 50+ | 50+ | -             | -              | 50+           | BM       |
| DFP  | 15/7 | 31    | 27  | 4   | 1             | 1              | 2             | PJM      |
| DFP  | 20/7 | c32   | c28 | c4  | 1             | 1              | 2             | PJM      |

There were no other reports of large numbers though this was almost certainly due to under-recording. Ovipositing was last recorded on 6th August, a single female on the Pebble Beach Pond (PM/BM). On 17th August a count of six on the Pebble Beach Pond included a pair in tandem (PJM) and on the same date two were seen on both the Long Ditch and Bruce's Pond. We had to wait until 30th September for the next and last sighting of the year - a single female at the ponds (JLW). This is the latest ever record for the Reserve by more than three weeks.

### **Common Blue Damselfly** (*Enallagma cyathigerum*)

This species is much more likely to be found around the larger water bodies, the Lagoon being the most reliable site. Unfortunately, this area is out of bounds to the public and there were just two records received this year. Four were seen at the edge of the Lagoon on 23rd June (PM/BM) and one was recorded there on 25th August (JG).

### **Blue-tailed Damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*)

Numbers of this species have always been low at Rodley, the highest count last year being just 11. However, counts this year fell well short of this number. One on Mabgate Pond on 13th May was the first of the year (JLW), just one day earlier than last year. There was only one other May record and it proved to be the best of the year - a count of six on the riverbank on 24th (JB). June and July also

produced few reported sightings. On 15th June an example of the female colour form *violacea* was found on the Winter Walk (BM) and on 23rd June one of the colour form *rufescens* was recorded by the Lagoon (MG). August proved to be the most productive month with sightings reported on eight dates though no observers reported more than three. One seen at the Dragonfly Ponds on 19th September was the last of the year (JLW), 12 days later than last year. Like last year, there were no reports of breeding activity.

### **Emerald Damselfly** (*Lestes sponsa*)

Prior to 2014, sightings of this species had been few and far between. However, there were records on 18 dates in 2014 and on 19 dates this year. A single male on Chadwick Pond on 11th July was the first of the year (JS/JLW), nine days later than last year. On 15th July four were seen on Coop Pond (RM) and on the same date single males were recorded on Coop, Mabgate and Chadwick Ponds (PJM), all holding territories. On 5th August there was a report of five (4♂ + 1♀) at the ponds (JLW). The best count of the year came on 8th August when 10 were recorded there including nine males (JLW). No more than five were reported subsequently, all records coming from the Dragonfly Ponds. Unlike last year, surprisingly, there were no reports of breeding activity. A single male on Coop Pond on 2nd October was the last of the year (PM/BM), three and a half weeks later than last year and the latest ever record for the Reserve.

### **Banded Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx splendens*)

After a disappointing year in 2013 there was a considerable improvement in 2014 and this was maintained this year. A male at the Dragonfly Ponds on 27th May was the first of the year (JLW/JS), eight days earlier than last year. There were some good counts in June, with 10 on the River Path on 5th (JB), eight on the Lagoon on 23rd (PM/BM) and 11 on the River Path on 24th (JB). Like last year, the highest count came from the Fish Pass, with between 30 and 40 there on 3rd July (JB/MB). Numbers fell away somewhat thereafter with most observers reporting no more than two but five males were recorded on the River Path on 10th August (JB). A single male at the Dragonfly Ponds on 16th August was the last of the year (JS), 10 days later than last year. There were no reports of breeding activity.

### **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*)

This species shows a preference for acidic upland areas but there have been confirmed sightings here in the past. There were three reported sightings at the ponds in July last year but none could be verified. This year there were two confirmed sightings. A female was observed ovipositing on Chadwick Pond on 2nd August (JLW) and a female was again seen at the ponds on 2nd September (JLW/JS).

### **Migrant Hawker** (*Aeshna mixta*)

The first Migrant Hawkers were seen last year on the second earliest ever date of 11th July. Thanks to a cool and often wet July there were no early records this year and we had to wait until 12th August for the first sightings - five at the Dragonfly Ponds and one on the John Ackroyd Meadow (JS). There were no further records until 23rd August when one was seen on the Education Pond (JLW). Subsequent records came from the Wet Grassland, Winter Walk, Fish Pass, Reedbeds and Lagoon Margins but the most productive site was the Dragonfly Ponds with up to five seen here. Breeding activity was first noted on 27th September - a pair in wheel at the ponds (JLW). On 4th October a female was observed ovipositing on Chadwick Pond (JLW et al) and on 14th October one was seen ovipositing on the Wet Grassland (JLW). Single dragonflies on Chadwick Pond and on the Duck Marsh on 1st November were the last records of the year (JS/JLW), just three days later than last year.

### **Southern Hawker** (*Aeshna cyanea*)

Last year was possibly the best year to date for this species. This year too provided plenty of sightings, though the first record was nearly two months later - a single female on Bruce's Pond on 8th August (JLW). This was followed by a further sighting of a female on the Long Ditch the next day (JLW/JS). Breeding activity was first noted on 15th August, just nine days later than last year - a single female ovipositing on Coop Pond (JLW). A count of four at the ponds on 23rd August included three ovipositing females (JLW). Breeding activity was last reported on Bruce's Pond on 25th August - a single female (JG). There were few sightings away from the Dragonfly Ponds - just one on the public Dipping Pond and two on the Wet Grassland. Just like last year, a very pleasant, mild October produced sightings on a number of dates, a single male on the Wet Grassland

on 21st October being the last of the year (JS/JLW), 10 days earlier than last year's latest ever record.

**Brown Hawker** (*Aeshna grandis*)

A single dragonfly rescued from the Education Pond on 26th June was the first of the year (JK), six days later than last year. There were regular sightings from 1st July on all the wetland areas but no double figure counts until 5th August. Breeding activity was first noted on 20th July - 11 days later than last year - a single female ovipositing on Co-op Pond (PM/BM), interestingly on the same pond as last year. The next day one was observed ovipositing on the Education Pond (JK). Breeding activity at the Dragonfly Ponds increased considerably from 17th August with six noted ovipositing on 17th (PJM), seven on 19th (JLW) and 13 on 23rd (JLW). Breeding activity was last noted here on 19th September (JLW), 12 days later than last year. A single dragonfly on Chadwick Pond on 2nd October was the last of the year (PM/BM). In 2014 the last record of the year came on 19th October - the latest ever on the Reserve.

**Emperor Dragonfly** (*Anax imperator*)

The previous five years have each produced between two and four records. This year sightings were reported on five dates. A single male on the Wet Grassland on 8th June was the first of the year (JB), nearly a month earlier than last year. There were further reports of males on Chadwick Pond on 24th June (JLW) and Coop Pond on 11th July (JLW). On 20th July one was seen on the Wet Grassland (PJM) and on 29th July a female was reported on the Dipping Pond by a visitor. Last year ovipositing females were recorded on two dates but there were no such reports this year.

**Four-spotted Chaser** (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)

After two poor years in 2012 and 2013 with just three and four records respectively there was some improvement in 2014 with nine records, though all were of just single dragonflies. There were again just nine records submitted this year but there was a considerable increase in the number of dragonflies involved. A teneral on the River Path on 23rd May was the first of the year (JLW), a week later than last year. A single female was recorded on the John Ackroyd Meadow on 7th June (JH). There were no further sightings until 24th June when five males and a female were counted at the Dragonfly

Ponds with three males and a female on 28th (JLW). A count of nine at the ponds on 3rd July included four on Chadwick Pond (PM/BM). Five at the ponds the following day included three males and two females (JS/JLW). A single dragonfly on Coop Pond on 15th July was the last record of the year (RM), exactly the same date as last year.

**Broad-bodied Chaser** (*Libellula depressa*)

The last two years have been very disappointing, with sightings in each case on just seven dates. There was some improvement this year, with sightings reported on 12 dates but the majority of reports were of single dragonflies. A female between the Lagoon and Duck Marsh on 5th June was the first of the year (JB), just five days later than last year. There were subsequent reports of single dragonflies at the ponds and on the John Ackroyd Meadow in June. In July there were sightings at the edge of Tim's Field, on the Wet Grassland and on the Dipping Pond, a male and female being recorded at the latter site on 4th July (JS/JLW). However, the best count of the year was five at the Dragonfly Ponds on 11th July (CFG). A single male at the ponds on 9th August was the last sighting of the year (JS/JLW), some three and a half weeks later than last year and the joint latest ever record (2007). There were again no reports of breeding activity.

**Common Darter** (*Sympetrum striolatum*)

A single female on tansy by the dry stone wall on 19th July was the first of the year (PM), nearly three weeks later than last year and the latest ever first record. There were regular sightings at the Dragonfly Ponds from 20th July with seven (5♂ + 2♀) there on 29th July (JS/JLW). Breeding activity was first noted on 12th August, two weeks later than last year, with two females ovipositing on Chadwick Pond and one on Mabgate Pond (PM/BM). Some of the best counts came in August and were very similar to the last three years.

| Site   | Date | Total | M  | F | Ten. | Wheel | Tandem | Ovip | Observer |
|--------|------|-------|----|---|------|-------|--------|------|----------|
| DFP    | 12/8 | 9     | 6  | 3 |      |       |        | 3    | PM/BM    |
| DFP    | 15/8 | 8     | 6  | 2 |      | 1     |        |      | JLW      |
| DFP    | 17/8 | 14    | 10 | 3 | 1    |       |        |      | PM/BM    |
| DFP    | 19/8 | 8     | 6  | 2 |      |       |        | 2    | JLW      |
| DFP    | 23/8 | 11    | 5  | 6 |      |       |        | 3    | JLW      |
| Lagoon | 25/8 | 8     |    |   |      |       |        |      | JG       |

There were some decent counts in late September, October and the first few days of November thanks to some warm days with plenty of sunshine.

| Site           | Date  | Total | M  | F | Ten | Wheel | Tandem | Ovip | Observer |
|----------------|-------|-------|----|---|-----|-------|--------|------|----------|
| DFP            | 27/9  | 8     | 6  | 2 |     | 2     |        |      | JLW      |
| DFP & Wet G    | 28/9  | 9     | 6  | 3 |     |       |        | 2    | PM/BM    |
| Site           | Date  | Total | M  | F | Ten | Wheel | Tandem | Ovip | Observer |
| Fish Pass      | 29/9  | 8     | 7  | 1 |     |       |        |      | PM/BM    |
| DFP and Lagoon | 2/10  | 10    | 6  | 4 |     |       | 1      | 2    | PM/BM    |
| DFP            | 31/10 | 9     | 8  | 1 |     |       |        | 1    | JLW      |
| DFP & Wet G    | 1/11  | 14    | 10 | 4 |     |       |        | 1    | JLW/JS   |
| DFP            | 7/11  | 9     | 7  | 2 |     |       | 2      |      | JLW      |

The nine at the ponds on 7th November proved to be the last record of the year and two days later than last year - the joint latest ever record with 2005.

**Ruddy Darter** (*Sympetrum sanguineum*)

This species has not been recorded on the reserve since 2009 but there was one unconfirmed sighting of a male on Chadwick Pond on 6th September this year.

**Black Darter** (*Sympetrum danae*)

Although this species is more at home on acidic, nutrient poor pools on heathland and moorland there were sightings on one date in both 2013 and 2014. Unfortunately, there were no records this year.

**Black-tailed Skimmer** (*Orthetrum cancellatum*)

The years 2011 - 2014 produced a total of just two records - a single female in each of 2013 and 2014. There was a considerable improvement this year with sightings on five dates and involving up to five dragonflies. The Winter Walk was the most productive site with a

single male here on 1st July and two males on 4th July (JS/JLW). On 11th July three males and two females were recorded, with one female ovipositing on the Wet Grassland (JS/JLW). On 15th July two males and a female were reported on the Winter Walk (JLW). A single male at the Dragonfly Ponds on 5th August was the last record of the year (JLW).

**Keeled Skimmer** (*Orthetrum coerulescens*)

A dragonfly described as "locally common in acid, boggy regions of south and south-west Britain and also found at several locations in northern England and Scotland" was hardly one we would have expected to turn up at Rodley Nature reserve but one keen-eyed observer found and photographed one here on Chadwick Pond on 1st July (JLW). Mature male Keeled Skimmers such as this one could perhaps be confused with the Black-tailed Skimmer but the latter has a black tip to the abdomen and it lacks the yellow pterostigma (the coloured spot near the tip of the wing) of the male Keeled Skimmer.

## **Terminology**

Exuvia - The shed larval skeleton. Plural: exuviae

Ovipositing - The act of egg-laying

Teneral - A newly emerged adult dragonfly without the full coloration of the mature adult. Strictly speaking before its maiden flight.

**Dragonflies and Damselflies**  
**First and Last Dates - 2015**

| <b>Species</b>        | <b>First Date</b> | <b>Last date</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Large Red Damselfly   | 22nd April *      | 4th July         |
| Azure Damselfly       | 11th May          | 30th September * |
| Common Blue Damselfly | 23rd June         | 25th August      |
| Blue-tailed Damselfly | 13th May          | 19th September   |
| Emerald Damselfly     | 11th July         | 2nd October *    |
| Banded Demoiselle     | 27th May          | 16th August      |
| Common Hawker         | 2nd August        | 2nd September    |
| Migrant Hawker        | 12th August       | 1st November     |
| Southern Hawker       | 8th August        | 21st October     |
| Brown Hawker          | 26th June         | 2nd October      |
| Emperor Dragonfly     | 8th June          | 29th July        |
| Four-spotted Chaser   | 23rd May          | 15th July        |
| Broad-bodied chaser   | 5th June          | 9th August **    |
| Common Darter         | 19th July ***     | 7th November **  |
| Ruddy Darter          | -                 | -                |
| Black Darter          | -                 | -                |
| Black-tailed Skimmer  | 1st July          | 5th August       |
| Keeled Skimmer        | 1st July          | 1st July         |

\* Earliest ever first record/latest ever last record

\*\* Join latest ever record

\*\*\* Latest ever first record

## RODLEY'S POND LIFE IN 2015

It has been another excellent year for pond dipping with several new records for the reserve. Unfortunately three of the ponds in the dragonfly area and one of the children's dipping ponds were found to have large amounts of a non-native, invasive species (*Crassula helmsii*), variously called New Zealand Pigmyweed or Australian Swamp-stonecrop. To control this invader these ponds needed to be drained and then treated with herbicide before burying all of the vegetation. Two of them have now been treated, re-lined and filled with water; the other two should be back to normal in 2016. Very early identification of *C. helmsii* is important as it should be possible to remove it successfully by hand if found early enough. However, care is needed, as it only requires a few millimetres of stem with a leaf node for it to be able to grow. If it becomes established removal by hand is impossible and in fact counterproductive as it can help its spread. So far we have surveyed the Wet Grassland, the Duck Marsh and Lagoon and not found any *Crassula*; we have to hope this continues to be the case.

The sampling in 2016 was almost entirely from the Dragonfly Ponds but samples were taken from the Lagoon early in the year. Also samples were obtained from the Poplar Ponds. The latter are being overtaken by Bulrush *Typha latifolia* and some clearance of this will need to be carried out. No samples were taken from the River Aire but larvae of the mayfly *Baetis* sp. were found in the Fish Pass.

At the end of December there was serious flooding of the river, involving a strong current that swept through the Dragonfly Pond area, causing considerable damage. For example, the decking around the Education Pond was completely destroyed and the heavy box containing the dipping equipment was moved about 20 metres! Some of the vegetation in the Dragonfly Ponds was scoured out by the current and debris piled some couple of metres high into the surrounding hedge. Pond dipping in 2016 will reveal the extent of any loss of the species present in the ponds.

## Aquatic Insects

Large numbers of mayfly larvae belonging to the Pond Olive *Cloëon dipterum* have been found in almost every pond, including the Lagoon and Near Poplar, and larvae of *Caenis* sp. have been recorded from the Education Pond; in fact *Caenis* larvae appear to have been notably more common this year. *Caenis* larvae are very small, as are the adults, and it is probably the small size of the latter that gives them the name of Anglers' Curse – i.e. providing too much food for the fish and being difficult to mimic as a fisherman's fly. The larvae of only two species of damselfly – Azure (*Coenagrion puella*) and Large Red (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*) – and three of dragonfly – Brown Hawker (*Aeshna grandis*), Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) and Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*) have turned up in samples this year and the last of these only from the Poplar Ponds. The Common Darter larvae were more common in the Education Pond than in previous years. The large numbers of Large Red Damselfly larvae found in Chadwick is very encouraging as the number of adults of this species has been increasing recently and this year has seen more larvae than ever before. Interestingly no larvae of the Large Red Damselfly were found in 2014, although there was a record of a single exuvia.

As in previous years there has been a rich variety of hemipterans (true bugs). The Water Boatman *Notonecta glauca*, the Pigmy Back Swimmer *Plea leachi* and the Saucer Bug *Ilyocoris cimicoides* have been particularly numerous and there have also been good numbers of the Water Skater *Gerris* sp. Lesser Water Boatmen were also very common and we have several species present. Thus *Hesperocorixa linnaei* was recorded from the Dragonfly and Poplar Ponds, *Corixa punctata* from Near Poplar and possibly two species of *Sigara* (*S. lateralis* and *S. falleni*) from the Lagoon. The only Water Scorpion *Nepa cinerea* found this year was an immature specimen in the Education Pond. A first for this pond, and only the second for the reserve, was a specimen of the Water Measurer *Hydrometra stagnorum*. Also found in the Lagoon were some very small larvae, probably belonging to the Micro Water Cricket *Microvelia reticulata*, although they could have been very young larvae of the Water Cricket *Velia* sp. Hopefully we will find some more in 2016. Sadly no

specimen of the Water Stick Insect *Ranatra linearis* was found this year.

As always, Phantom Midge (*Chaoborus* sp.) larvae were abundant, with their fore and aft adjustable air sacs giving them neutral buoyancy. The strange larvae of the non-biting midge *Psectrocladius obVIOUS* (chironomid) were again found. They have a mucilaginous case which includes some filaments of algae and, sometimes, some silt. They occasionally leave their case completely for a short while. Also found were the larvae of other midges, including the red, haemoglobin-containing chironomids, commonly known as Blood Worms. Mosquito larvae belonging to the genus *Anopheles* were present in Chadwick. These larvae respire by laying horizontally at the surface of the water and taking in oxygen directly into their spiracles. This differs from the method used by *Culex* larvae (found in New Poplar), which have a breathing tube at their rear end and, when they come to the surface to breathe, they hang obliquely downwards from this tube.

Several types of caddisfly larvae were present, mostly belonging to limnephilids. In most cases these are not easy to identify to species level. Two types that use vegetation to construct their cases are being reared in the visitor centre to try and find out to which species they belong. Two of the most likely candidates are *Limnephilus flavicornis* and *L. lunatus*, adults of both of which have been found on the reserve. In the Education Pond this year limnephilid caddis larvae appeared to be more common than usual whereas the swimming caddis larvae of *Tranodes bicolor* were found less frequently. Beetles were well represented in most samples and include the chrysomelid leaf beetle *Donacia versicolorea*, the dytiscid *Colymbetes fuscus* and, of course, Whirligig Beetles (*Gerris* sp.). Screech Beetles (*Hygrobia hermanni*) were found regularly in the Education Pond especially in late summer and early autumn. Also plenty of beetle larvae were found, mostly of the dytiscid type.

A new type of beetle larva (for the reserve) was also found. These are members of the family Scirtidae (sometime called Helodidae) but it was not possible to identify them to species level. They are notable for having long antennae and looking a bit like aquatic wood lice. Also

interesting is that the adult beetles are terrestrial, living in damp places or on bankside vegetation, while the larvae are aquatic.

### Table 1. Aquatic Insects

- Ephemeroptera
  - Baetidae
    - Baetis* sp.
    - Cloëon dipterum* (Pond Olive)
    - Caenis* sp. (probably. *C. horaria*)
- Odonata
  - Zygoptera
    - Coenagrionidae
      - Coenagrion puella* (Azure Damselfly)
      - Pyrrhosoma nymphula* (Large Red Damselfly)
  - Anisoptera
    - Aeshnidae
      - Aeshna grandis* (Brown Hawker)
    - Libellulidae
      - Libellula depressa* (Broad-bodied Chaser)
      - Sympetrum striolatum* (Common Darter)
- Hemiptera
  - Heteroptera
    - Corixidae
      - Corixa punctata* (Lesser Water Boatman)
      - Hesperocoxa linnaei* (Lesser Water Boatman)
      - Sigara lateralis* (Lesser Water Boatman)
      - Sigara falleni* (Lesser Water Boatman)
    - Gerridae
      - Gerris* sp. (Pond Skater)
    - Hydrometridae
      - Hydrometra stagnorum* (Water Measurer)
    - Naucoridae
      - Ilyocoris cimicoides* (Saucer Bug)
    - Nepidae
      - Nepa cinerea* (Water Scorpion)
    - Notonectidae
      - Notonecta glauca* (Water Boatman - Back Swimmer)

- Pleidae
  - Plea minutissima (leachi)* (Pigmy Back Swimmer)
- Veliidae
  - Microvelia reticulata* or *Velia* sp. (Water Crickets)
- Diptera
  - Nematocera
    - Chaoboridae
      - Chaoborus* sp. (Phantom Midge larva)
    - Chironomidae
      - Chironomus* sp.
      - Psectrocladius obvius* (Non-biting Midge larva)
    - Culicidae
      - Anopheles* (Mosquito)
      - Culex* (Mosquito)
- Lepidoptera
  - Pyralidae
    - Elophila nympheata* (Brown China-mark Moth)
- Trichoptera
  - Leptoceridae
    - Triaenodes bicolor*
  - Limnephilidae
    - Limnephilus* sp. (probably *L. flavicornis*)
    - Limnephilus* sp. (probably *L. vittata*)
- Coleoptera
  - Chrysomelidae
    - Donacia versicolorea*
  - Dytiscidae
    - Colymbetes fuscus*
    - Dytiscid larva
  - Gyrinidae
    - Gyrinus* sp. Whirligig Beetle

### **Other Aquatic Invertebrates**

The most common flatworm was *Polycelis tenuis* with its numerous eyes arranged around the front of its head. Its sister species *P. nigra*

may also be present but confirmation of this is needed. The lugubrious looking *Schmidtea lugubris* was also found. A first for the reserve was the discovery of *Lumbriculus variegatus*, a relative of earthworms. It was first found in Scarborough but has since been recorded from Chadwick. Another first for the reserve is the leach *Helobdella stagnalis*, also from Chadwick. This species is easily identifiable by a small hard, oval disc on its upper surface close to the front end, the function of which is unknown. The leach *Erpobdella testacea* was extremely common. Apart from its usual method of movement, using its suckers, it is a good swimmer. It does not suck blood but eats its prey (small invertebrates) whole.

Mites were found in the Dragonfly Ponds, mostly belonging to the genus *Arrenurus*. However, in the Lagoon, three species were recorded, each belonging to a different family, i.e. *Arrenurus* sp., *Hygrobates* sp. and *Limnesia* sp. The last of these is a new record for the reserve. The crustaceans *Crangonyx pseudogracilis* (a freshwater shrimp), and *Asellus aquaticus* (the Water Slater) were, as usual, abundant, along with the small *Daphnia* and *Cyclops* species. *Cyclops* has, as the name implies, a single eye and can often be seen trailing a pair of egg sacs. Another crustacean, *Diaptomus* sp., has been recorded from the Education Pond. The usual four gastropod molluscs (all dextral, i.e. with right-handed coiling of the shells) were abundant, as well as another first for the reserve, the sinistral (left-handed coiling of the shell) gastropod *Physa fontinalis* (the Bladder Snail), which was found in Near Poplar; also recorded (from Chadwick) was a small bivalve, probably a species of Freshwater Cockle, *Sphaerium* sp.

## Table 2. Other Aquatic Invertebrates

|                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| Platyhelminthes                     |
| Tricladida                          |
| Dugesiidae                          |
| <i>Schmidtea (Dugesia) lugubris</i> |
| Planariidae                         |
| <i>Polycelis tenuis</i>             |
|                                     |
| Annelida                            |
| Oligochaeta                         |

*Lumbriculus variegatus*  
 Hirudinea  
   Erpobdellidae  
     *Erpobdella testacea*  
   Glossiphonidae  
     *Helobdella stagnalis*

Arachnida  
   Acari  
     Arrenuriidae  
       *Arrenurus* sp.  
     Hygrobatidae  
       *Hygrobates* sp.  
     Limnesiidae  
       *Limnesia* sp.

Crustacea - Malacostraca  
   Amphipoda  
     *Crangonyx pseudogracilis* (Freshwater Shrimp)  
   Isopoda  
     *Asellus aquaticus* (Water Slater)  
   Cladocera  
     *Daphnia* sp. (Water Flea)  
   Copepoda  
     *Cyclops* sp. (Water Flea)  
     *Diaptomus* sp. (Water Flea)

Mollusca  
   Gastropoda  
     Lymnaeidae  
       *Radix balthica*  
       *Lymnea stagnalis* (Great Pond Snail)  
     Physidae  
       *Physa fontinalis* (Bladder Snail)  
     Planorbidae  
       *Planorbarius corneus* (Great Ramshorn Snail)  
       *Planorbis carinata* (Keeled Ramshorn Snail)  
   Bivalvia  
     Sphaeridae  
       *Sphaerium* sp. (Orb Mussel).

We should like to thank Liz, Pam, Jill, Brian and Bal of the education group; also Madge, Rob and Bee, who all helped in catching and identifying much of our pondlife.

Jerry Knapp & Peter Mill.

### **SURVEY OF ALGAE IN 2015**

Due to a restricted pond dipping and collecting period this year the number of species identified may be slightly reduced; however, seventy genera/species were recorded between February and August. Less usual algae included *Bulbochaete*, *Cylindrocystis*, *Eremospheria*, the diatom *Nedium* and the cyanophyte *Simploca muralis*.

Some more usual algae paid only a fleeting visit - Diatoms *Craticula*, *Cosmioneis*, *Eunotia*, *Cymatopleura*, *Frustulia*, *Nedium* appeared only once as did *Tetrachlorella alternans*. Many species only appear late in the summer so were not seen. However, the striking *Volvox* and *Uroglena* were recorded.

It is hoped in future years to be able to find old friends and species new to us as the ponds are restored to full working conditions.

John Hey  
Algae Recorder

## FUNGUS REPORT - 2015

The annual fungus foray took place on Saturday 24th October this year and attracted its usual enthusiastic following of adults and children. After a damp start the weather improved considerably for the 2.00pm start and a good range of species was found.

|                                   |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Auricularia auricula-judae</i> | Jelly-ear                       |
| <i>Bjerkandera adusta</i>         | Smoky Bracket                   |
| <i>Bjerkandera fumosa</i>         | Big Smoky Bracket               |
| <i>Calvatia excipuliformis</i>    | Pestle Puffball                 |
| <i>Claviceps purpurea</i>         | Ergot                           |
| <i>Clitocybe nebularis</i>        | Clouded Funnel                  |
| <i>Coprinellus micaceus</i>       | Glistening Inkcap               |
| <i>Cortinarius sp.</i>            | a Webcap                        |
| <i>Daedaleopsis confragosa</i>    | Blushing Bracket                |
| <i>Diatrype stigma</i>            | Beech Barkspot                  |
| <i>Entoloma rhodopolium</i>       | Shield/Wood Pinkgill            |
| <i>Gymnopilus penetrans</i>       | Common Rustgill                 |
| <i>Hebeloma crustuliniforme</i>   | Poisonpie                       |
| <i>Hygrocybe conica</i>           | Blackening Waxcap               |
| <i>Hygrocybe virginea</i>         | Snowy Waxcap                    |
| <i>Lepista sordida</i>            | Wood Blewit                     |
| <i>Lepista flaccida</i>           | Tawny Funnel                    |
| <i>Nectria cinnabarina</i>        | Coral Spot                      |
| <i>Paxillus involutus</i>         | Brown Roll-rim                  |
| <i>Pleurotus ostreatus</i>        | Oyster Mushroom                 |
| <i>Russula atropurpurea</i>       | Purple Brittlelegill/Crumblecap |
| <i>Stereum hirsutum</i>           | Hairy Curtaincrust              |
| <i>Taphrina alni</i>              | Alder Tongue                    |
| <i>Tubaria furfuracea</i>         | Scurfy Twiglet                  |
| <i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i>          | Candlesnuff fungus              |

We are grateful to Mary Larner for leading another very enjoyable foray and to fellow expert Andrew Woodall.

## Photograph Credits

We are grateful to the following for allowing us to use their images.

Barn Owl images by Barbara Murphy  
Blue Shieldbug (*Zicrona caerulea*) by Madge Gibson  
Caddis fly larvae by Madge Gibson  
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|               |         |                |       |              |     |
|---------------|---------|----------------|-------|--------------|-----|
| P Allan       | PA      | A Hardy        | AH    | J Quirk      | JQ  |
| C Allen       | CA      | J Hayes        | JHay  | S Ramsay     | SR  |
| S Allen       | SA      | J Hayley       | JHa   | B Reeder     | BR  |
| G Ashton      | GA      | J Hayter       | JH    | D Royston    | DR  |
| B Austin      | BA      | S Henderson    | She   | P Shires     | PSH |
| A Barber      | AB      | B Hewitt       | BH    | R Simpson    | RS  |
| G J Barlow    | GJB     | J Hey          | JHe   | D Smith      | DS  |
| R Barnes      | RB      | G Hipkin       | GH    | D Smith      | DSm |
| S Beach       | SB      | M Hooper       | MH    | T Smollett   | TS  |
| A Blackwell   | Abl     | J Illingworth  | Jl    | R Spencer    | RSp |
| D Briggs      | DB      | P Jefferson    | PJ    | A Stancliffe | AS  |
| R Brock       | RBr     | L Jeffreys     | LJe   | A Storcliffe | ASt |
| A Brook       | ABr     | L Jenkinson    | LJ    | J Stratford  | JSt |
| J Brook       | JB      | B Johnson      | BJ    | P Strickland | PS  |
| M Brook       | MB      | J Kilner       | JKi   | J Sykes      | JS  |
| D Cebb        | DCe     | J Knapp        | JK    | S Tetlow     | ST  |
| P Colley      | PC      | M Larner       | ML    | A Thompson   | AT  |
| J Conlin      | JC      | P Larner       | PLa   | B Thompson   | BMT |
| T R Cook      | TRC     | J Lee          | JL    | G Thompson   | GT  |
| D&E Cowan     | DC/EC   | M Leeming      | MLe   | N Tonge      | NT  |
| M Dickinson   | MD      | K Limb         | KL    | P Unia       | PU  |
| A Dodds       | AD      | P Limb         | PL    | D Walker     | DW  |
| C Ducker      | CD      | J Longhorn     | JLo   | JL Walker    | JLW |
| J Ellwood     | JE      | Mick & Pauline | M&P   | Liz Walley   | LW  |
| S Excell      | SE      | P J Mill       | PJM   | P Wardley    | PWa |
| S Fairclough  | SF      | P&B Murphy     | PM/BM | M Wilkinson  | MW  |
| M George      | MGe     | R Musgrave     | RM    | I Willoughby | IW  |
| M Gibson      | MG      | D Nesham       | DAN   | P Willoughby | PW  |
| R Graham      | RG      | S Oxley        | SO    | A Woodall    | AW  |
| P&M Greenwood | PGr/MGr | G Phillips     | GP    |              |     |
| D Gregory     | DG      | J Pickard      | JP    |              |     |
| P Griffin     | PG      | C Pottle       | CP    |              |     |

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|--|--------|
| Bradford Environmental Education Service | BEES   |
| Pudsey Ornithological Group              | POG    |
| Leeds RSPB Group                         | LRSPBG |
| Wharfedale Naturalists Society           | WNS    |

