

Lavell's Wetland Trust (LWT) Bird Review 2020

Merry Christmas from all at LWT, wishing a safe and Happy New Year to all our members, here is the 2020 bird review. As before, to make us more easily found online, please search Lavell's Wetland Trust and please keep visiting our Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1662435990723770/>

Key : Bold Purple : Mega, Bold Red: Very Rare, Red : Rare, Bold Black : Very uncommon

January – 1st resulted in an impressive 76 species, featuring **Woodcock**, Barn & Tawny Owls at dawn, Raven, Peregrine, Stonechat and the usual Bittern at dusk. 3rd Green Sandpiper and following from the December 9th & 30th records, a **Marsh Harrier** 4th (RNM), Shelduck 8th, **Goosander** flew West somewhat North of Lea Farm Lake 18th, Skylark on the landfill, Blackcap around 'The Moors' 18th and Kestrel marked 86th Species.

February – Oystercatcher 5th (RNM) BSL and **Mediterranean Gull** (FJC), 2 Raven 11th (RNM), **Linnet** 4/21st (NK), the 1 wintering Stonechat became 3/26th & 29th, 3-4 Skylark on the landfill.....it was a quiet month

March – As Lock Down became enforced, records quickly dwindled, very uncommon these days, a **Kestrel** was seen 1st, 3 **Stonechat** again 6th, singing Chiffchaff from 8th, 12th & 13th a **Great White Egret** was seen briefly (GSE), 2 **Mediterranean Gull** 14th over (FJC), 6 Little Grebe took up residence at the Balancing Pond, 3 Mandarin Teal scrape 10th (CM), Our earliest Sand Martin ever 17th (FJC), an amazingly early Willow Warbler 19th (FJC) at Sandford, 4 Goldeneye 27th, the first Redshank 28th LFL (FJC), Green Sandpiper 29th, another Kestrel same day.

April – After many attempts my search for distant **Golden Plover** was finally rewarded with 60+/1st heading East away from landfill (FJC), same day another **Great White Egret** also flew East over landfill (FJC), last Fieldfare 3rd, Swallow from 4th, 1 Wheatear 5th landfill, 5th a lone Common Tern went through LFL, no others until 17th, last Redwing 6th, last Meadow Pipit 7th, Whitethroat 9th (TGJ), Green Sandpiper 8th, last Snipe 9th, Little-ringed Plover from 11th, Cuckoo from 12th, House Martin from 13th, (E Dawson), Sedge Warbler & Common Sandpiper 15th, a **Sandwich Tern** drifted silently in the fog 7th nearly landed on a buoy, but flew off instead. 17th Reed Warbler & Lesser Whitethroat 17th, male Yellow Wagtail over 18th, Garden Warbler 19th, Swift 19th (FJC & BTB), a rather early Hobby flew through Sandford Copse 20th (FJC), Black Tern 21st, 2 **Cattle Egret** flew low North over LFL @ 06:20 and amazingly did the same 25th, meaning they had roosted somewhere on DP, Mark Laurie took the chance to check the Shetland Pony field adjacent to Hurst Green Pit and found them amidst the ponies, but they quickly flew off and were never seen again (3rd Park Record). Oystercatchers bred successfully on BSL's big island raising one chick.



Cattle Egret – Mark Laurie



Marsh Harrier - FJC

May – 1st, 3 Common Sandpiper, 2 Dunlin LFL, 16 Common Tern sitting by 2nd, 3rd a **Curlew** heard call twice (BTB), 2 Shelduck BSL and 1 Shoveler, very unusual for May 1 Pochard 10th, possibly the biggest surprise was a Hawfinch 17th calling and flying West over Sandford Lane (FJC), 1 pair Teal lingered all month, also very unusually an adult **Common Gull** 24th (BTB).

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June – Our earliest returning Green Sandpiper 2nd, Gadwall and 1 duckling 3rd Lavell's, Shoveler 1-3 birds all month, Little-ringed Plover showing interest in breeding 14th, but then nothing, another Green Sandpiper 8th, then 1/11th, another **Mediterranean Gull** 11th Sandford (FJC & BTB) until 06:30 only, also **31 Gadwall** there, with over 20 at The Moors, so a surprising 50+ birds in total mid summer. 3 pairs of Little Grebe confirmed at 2 sites, **3 Green Sandpiper** from 18th and a new high of **4/20th**, then further new highs **5/26th**, **4/27th**, **6/28th**. 22+ pairs of Common Terns sitting, which produced a minimum of 23 chicks by 27th. 2+ pairs of Skylark landfill. As the month progressed a flock of Herring & Lesser Black-backed Gulls began gathering on LFL's shingle island, growing to 200 Herring and 20+ LBB, but quickly dissipated in July probably due to preparations for the Network Rail project. It certainly had a negative impact on Great Crested Grebe nesting attempts and it is possible we lost up to 5 Common Tern chicks.

July – 1 Common Sandpiper 1st and good numbers of Green Sandpiper with **5/1st**, **6/3rd** which in turn no doubt brought in a fine **Wood Sandpiper** 3rd, which stayed 3 days. Another **Great White Egret** over 4th, the count of **6 Green Sandpiper** was repeated **14th**, **17th**, **19th**, then hit another new high of **8/24th**. The Common Tern colony continued to grow to 27 chicks by 5th, some of which may have perished, but another 5 late chicks hatched 23rd, Passage families of Little-ringed Plover 3/8th, 3/9th, the only Black-tailed Godwit of the year 10th, Dunlin 19th, Redshank 10th, 19th & 21st, 3 Common Sandpiper 19th & 21st, Water Rail seen SW corner LFL 19th & 21st, a rather unusual sighting of **Red-legged Partridge** only came about when a Buzzard dropped in the long grass of the landfill and flushed one across the NE bay. Shoveler and Teal stayed around but the Gadwall numbers swelled to proportions never seen in any Summer - **43/5th** all Sandford, **61/9th** all Sandford, **c80/24th** - 69 Sandford, the Mandarin family shared their time between the green bridge area and SW corner of LFL. 2 Lesser Whitethroat in the car park field from 28th were assumed to be local breeders.



Wood Sandpiper LFL – FJC



Common Tern chick LFL – FJC



Mandarin juvenile LFL – FJC



Mediterranean Gull Adult Sandford – FJC

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August – The first Greenshank of the year heard 06:30 1st LFL, 1 Common & 5 Green Sandpiper there too, 7/3rd, immature Water Rail 5th Tern scrape, heard 7th, reports of 12 Little Egret from The Moors all the first week. A juvenile **Black-crowned Night Heron** flew past Ron's hide 06:13 on the 8th towards Dinton (see separate report), but not seen again, another **Greenshank** 9th on the North spit of LFL again for just 25 minutes, then same day our first ever summer record of **Golden Plover** (NR, FJC & CM), flew North over LFL, later that morning the first returning Snipe (RNM & GF), a month peak of Common Sandpiper of 6/10th, 4/12th, Green Sandpiper peaking 7/19th & 7/22nd, another **Mediterranean Gull** at Sandford same day (R Gilham), but the next big surprise was found by those pursuing a claim of the Night Heron East of the park, amazingly a **Short-eared Owl** was seen flying SE at dusk 10th (Dave Rimes, PBT and Nick Kightley). Another Dunlin at LFL 13th to 15th, the first autumn **Wheatear** same day, 16th the first **Spotted Flycatcher** of the year (J Cox) and then at lunchtime things began to get very exciting with another **Cattle Egret** sat on the old tern island at Sandford (RHS), it only stuck around till about 15:00, to the frustration of many. Roger stuck around and then noticed the **Night Heron** perched on a post by the North reed bed, where it sat for over 2 hours, allowing many to come from some distance to enjoy and tick the first in Berkshire since 1987, those who had missed the Cattle Egret earlier returned and were rather pleased to see this instead.



Night Heron – 16th Roger Stansfield



Cattle Egret – 16th FJC



Short-eared Owl – PBT



Redstart – Roger Stansfield

19th a **Ringed Plover** stayed until it was joined by another 23rd, both then staying until 26th, another Dunlin also appeared 20th and stayed until 26th, 22nd a **Wood Warbler** was seen by visiting birder (Tim Murphy), at close quarters in the car park field, he also reported a flock of **Golden Plover** over that day. The last Oystercatcher flew over 23rd, Spotted Flycatcher Lavell's, Common Sandpiper peaks were 4/12th, 13th & 25th, which was also the last sighting of Common Tern. 6 **Yellow Wagtail** over 24th and off patch the same day 2 **Redstart** were seen in the hedgerow running

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parallel with the access track into the landfill (no public access), 1+ was seen here till 26th, same day **3 Whinchat** were discovered late afternoon perching on the marker pegs along our eastern boundary at LFL (FJC et al). **1 Redstart** was finally seen in the car park field 27th, **Spotted Flycatcher** Sandford (both RNM), 28th, 29th, 2/30th (FJC & EN), Lesser Whitethroat 27th car park field, another **Whinchat** was on pegs 28th (RRi), as were **3 Wheatear** (GSE).

September – 1 Wigeon Sandford 1st, **1 Spotted Flycatcher** (ARy), 21 Teal LFL, 5 Shoveler LFL, 2 Mandarin 2nd LFL, 6 Common Sandpiper (BTB), **Wheatear** 4th landfill (ARy), male **Redstart** 5th car park field briefly (FJC), **3 Tree Pipit** low over car park field 6th (FJC), **7 Yellow Wagtail** South (FJC), 7th began with **Greenshank** LFL East shore 06:25, but left 5 mins later, last Hobby, **Ringed Plover** overhead calling and off East mid morning, **2 Whinchat** on landfill hedgerow, 1 **Wheatear**, 3 Meadow Pipit over calling, Shoveler numbers jumped due to the digging work, 29/8th, 45/11th, 50/12th. 50 Mallard also roosting. Stonechat 8th landfill till 11th, Common Sandpiper stayed until 13th.

10th marked the first big Meadow Pipit visible migration day (VisMig) 65+ went through in 2 hours, the only **Pintail** of the year flew around LFL in the mist, landed briefly (FJC & KM), then left but was relocated at Sandford later (TGJ). 11th Roger was out again and due to his tenacity in the afternoon he yet again found another great bird - a **Great White Egret** which stayed in the open on Sandford for around an hour, then flew off North, but 2 minutes later returned with 2 more, all 3 flying slowly South, but sadly never seen again.



Great White Egret – FJC



Pintail – Roger Stansfield

The warm weather hung on much longer than most Septembers, an early morning bonus was a **Merlin** dashing through South before sun up 19th, despite little finch passage go on - 5+ Chaffinch 19th & 20th, 1 Siskin 20th, but the biggest surprise that day was hearing a **Whimbrel** call once over Sandford late morning. 23rd brought 1 Stonechat, then an unprecedented new high count, **5/27th** late afternoon, rising to **7** by 17:00, **5/28th** and **4/28th**. The BSL Ring-necked Parakeet roost was 25+/26th, another Dunlin LFL, the last **Wheatear** 26th & 27th, a late **Whinchat** that day too (TAG & FJC), but **15 Lesser Redpoll** 29th were the first of the year (PBT), 7 Skylark and a late Reed Warbler that day too.

October – **Teal** : 25/1st LFL, 1 Stonechat LFL NE corner, then 1-2 till 7th, 3/8th, Meadow Pipit : 5-10/1st, 1 Green Sandpiper 1st > 3rd, 10 Swallow and 10 House Martin West 1st, House Martin : 4-10/4th, 50+/5th (NK), 24 Swallow 4th (6,13, 3 + 2) South, **4 Green Sandpiper** 4th on East shore - first time since Network Rail diggings, 4 Swallow 7th, 4/9th, 2/10th, very late **Sedge Warbler** 5th (AJ), landfill, **Common Gull** 1/10th, 1/11th LFL, Snipe : 10/4th, LFL East shore, Peregrine : 1/11th, landfill low East 07:42 (FJC), 1/13th landfill, low East 07:47 (FJC), **Mallard** roosting numbers spiked for about a week with **190+/4th** LFL as lake water level was rising fast (FJC), **Teal** : **81/3rd** after rain added 4" of water to SW corner (FJC). Redwing : 4/10th along Loddon South over landfill (FJC), 5/11th North over aviation museum marsh, 150+/12th West in 20 mins, 5 Little Egret 12th BSL South Bay, 150 Redwing 13th in 45 mins West, **14 Little Egret** 13th BSL South Bay (Mike Hubbard), 350+ Redwing 15th NW over landfill and Lavell's in 1 hour (FJC), Fieldfare : 3/11th Lea Farm Landfill (RRi), 7/13th, landfill West 3+4 (FJC), 36/15th, 9+27 NW over Lavell's and landfill, Little Egret : 2/10th along Loddon, 5/12th BSL, in South bay, 14/13th (Mike Hubbard). Chaffinch : c50/10th West over landfill in 1.75 hours (FJC), c40/11th West over landfill 1.5 hours, 60+/13th West in 45 mins, **Brambling** : 1/15th, male North over landfill with 7 Redwing (FJC), **Linnet** : 17/10th South over landfill, groups of 9 & 5 seen from

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Ron's likely the same (FJC), 7/12th over Lavell's South (FJC), c15/15th, 8+7 South over landfill (FJC), Lesser Redpoll : 2/10th landed on wires near old Oak, then dropped could even have been Mealy (FJC), 6/11th North, 1/13th North. Meadow Pipit : c10/13th Goldeneye : 3/17th, females LFL off South spit (FJC), earliest arrival ever, again 18th, 1/19th, **Ring Ouzel** : 1/18th, male flew over Lavell's car park with 1 Redwing, dropping over mansion grounds but not re-found (FJC)., **Great White Egret** 1/31st LFL SW corner then flew towards Teal Scrape (Paul Strong)

November – 2 Lesser Redpoll 1st, **18 Little Egret** 4th (S Bartlam) BSL South Bay, **3 Woodcock** 20th over 10ft apart over Teal meadow tree height 16:41 (FJC), c7 Snipe around Tern Scrape, 12 Pochard 7th BSL, Green Sandpiper on and off around LFL, 7th, 12th 14th, 2-4 Skylark first half of the month, then 7/17th, 10+ Meadow Pipit wintering on the landfill, 4 Little Grebe Lavell's 12th, 3 BSL, 20+ Fieldfare over landfill 14th, a Chiffchaff around Sandford 8th (BTB) & 15th (FJC), 1000 Starlings roosting on Lavell's, but Sparrowhawk attacks moved the roost site around. 28th 122 Gadwall, 63 Mallard, 7 Shoveler, 71 Wigeon, 132 Tufted Duck, 15 Pochard.

December – 50+ Ring-necked Parakeet 4th, Peregrine 5th, first Bittern of winter 11th WSL (FJC), then 14th and 17th, 10 Siskins 17th (Ann Cronin), low numbers of wildfowl, 30+ Redwing in general area, 1-2 Fieldfare. Further sightings of **Bittern** at WSL 23rd it was not conclusive it was the original bird. The wildfowl numbers grew slightly 150+ Gadwall, 60+ Wigeon, 100+ Tufted Duck all on BSL, 50+ Teal all on Lavell's, 20-30 Pochard either on BSL or Sandford.

2020 didn't set any records, but from a month total species perspective **July** had a new **3rd highest** count of 92, beating 2015 by one, **August** followed suit with **3rd highest of 101**, beating 2016 by one and **September** went one better, with **102**, beating 2019 by 2.

Black-crowned Night Heron – The first in Berkshire since 1987 : Fraser Cottingham

On August 8th at 06:13 a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron (Night Heron) flew low and slowly South over Lea Farm Lake, I was the only person present to watch it go by. A brief search of Sandford, Heron's Water and White Swan Lake failed to relocate it and underlined the difficulty it would present trying to do so.

On the 10th I was talking to a business client whose home backs on to 'The Moors', I had previously told them on a visit in late July that the low water level made it highly attractive to herons and egrets and they should keep an eye out for Great White Egrets, saying "if we were in Asia, we would see Pond Heron". Back on the 10th August call I told them of my exciting find, to which he then said they had seen a funny heron that his wife had also managed to photograph, from his description it sounded very like it was my bird, but thought it too coincidental and only said it might be nice to see the pictures. Within an hour he called me back asking me what I thought, but I hadn't seen them yet, staying on the call I opened the email and 3 attachments, immediately recognising the juvenile Night Heron, I began laughing, saying "what were the odds....when were these taken?" Phil replied "mid evening last Thursday, the 6th!" I said "OMG so that was 2 days before me, we've had the first Night Heron in Berks since 1987 and no one knew, did it return?" Phil "no sign since".



Night Heron – The Moors 6th Aug : Mary & Phil Ede

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Still on the 10th late morning Dave Noble reported a small heron flying SE away from DP at 8pm the night before and this set hearts racing, with 3 regulars out that dusk, all of which converged at the same farm entrance for a dusk recky. No Night Heron, but somewhat remarkable anyway was a Short-eared Owl flying high South (Dave Rimes, Paul-Bright Thomas and Nick Kightley), our first ever summer record.

Days went by and the hope was fading, when on the 16th Roger Stansfield was having one of his longer stays on site and found a Cattle Egret on the old Tern islands at Sandford around 12:50, it was still present at 14:44, but no sign by 15:16, much to the disappointment of some late arriving locals. Roger stayed on around 16:40 he called me to say "I've got the Night Heron, it's on Sandford, sat on a post near the North reed bed, viewed from the gap in the hedge on the West side. And there it stayed for at least 2 two hours, before flying over into nearby Willows. Later on some folks got glimpses in flight around 20:00.

Having missed the 1987 Thatcham bird I was treble elated, 1. To self find a Berkshire mega on my patch 2. to 'get one back' for the county list, 3. I predicted it back in May on my blog



Roger Stansfield



FJC

Then we had to wait 3 more days until the 19th, when yet again Roger found it on Sandford again, this time in rainy weather which worked out well for many who couldn't get over on the 16th. At 12:37 it flew to reeds near hide then sat in a tree in rain until nearly dark, then 20th it flew in at 20:00 (Linda Miller), 22nd (Tim Murphy), 23rd WSL (Simon Bartlam), the last record was of it in flight over Lea Farm Lake heading towards DP 26th (GSE) 10:40.

My closing thoughts

2020 will be looked back upon as a horrible year for society, but I would like to say that despite all this LWT was still able to deliver our largest ever conservation project ever and this will lead to only positive impacts for the birds and of course all our visitors, for the rest of our lives and generations to come.

On top of this, I thank the many of you who have already given generously towards GoFundMe fund raiser to pay for our next wonderful subscription hide. When built it will offer unparalleled views of the new reed beds and marsh, not forgetting the long grass area and brand new boundary fence – the views of the birds are going to be amazing.

I will go ahead with the hide planning application in the coming weeks, aiming for completion by October 2021, I cannot wait to share this hide with all of you and enjoy all the wonderful birds that will no doubt grace our wonderful nature reserve. For those who still want to donate, the GoFundMe link is here

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/fraser039s-campaign-for-lavell039s-wetland-trust>