

## April 2011 Sightings at Wormwood Scrubs



**Bar-tailed Godwit (Russell F Spencer)**

### **Can it get any better??**

If you just come out birding at The Scrubs just for one month a year then you could do no worse than to experience spring migration during April. We are not saying that the skies and bushes are thick with birds but history dictates that if you give The Scrubs regular coverage then there will be surprises in store.

As ever there were plenty of records broken and created most notably the incidence of two separate singing **Nightingales** that were positively long stayers compared to what we normally expect. Interestingly, the last time a Nightingale graced our wondrous patch in April 2008 a pair of flyby **Shelduck** heralded it. On the same day our first singer was discovered this month we also had a fly past Shelduck – it too being the first one since the last Nightingale. Should the Shelduck be renamed the Nightingale's Mate?

A host of other good birds were seen including a **Shoveler**, a couple of **Common Buzzards**, **Peregrines**, a party of **Bar-tailed Godwits**, two **Turtle Doves**, a scattering of possibly six **Common Redstarts** and **Northern Wheatears**, **Whinchats**, an unprecedented three to four **Ring Ouzels** and an exceptionally early **Garden Warbler**. The best of the rest included **Common Lizards** in Chats Paddock and a **Peacock Butterfly** on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

We are already on 78 species for the year (remember, we finished on 98 in 2010) so what will be the next surprise around the corner?

**Contributors: Rob Ayers, Mathew Bournat, Frank Clark, Charlie Farrell, Nick Gibson, Penny Hayhurst, David Jeffreys, David Lindo, Des McKenzie, Roy Nuttall, Anders Price, Neville Smith, Bob Stills, Paul Thomas et al.**

**Cormorant**

The usual low numbers were recorded during April usually to be seen heading between east and west compass points. Six on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12 on the 20<sup>th</sup> were the highest counts.

### **Grey Heron**

A singleton headed west on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and other singles drifted in from the north on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>.

### **Greylag**

Our regular sightings continued with local birds no doubt commuting between their favourite parks. No more than three were seen on any day.

### **Canada Goose**

Small numbers were noticed during the month.

### **Shelduck**

A pair flew east along Lester's Embankment on the 13<sup>th</sup> and was our first since April 2008.

### **Mallard**

Rather fewer were noted this month than in previous April's and four on three separate dates were the largest counts.

### **Shoveler**

This unique looking dabbling duck is a very rarely observed member of the Scrubs bird list so an individual watched flying south over Martin Bells Wood on the 3<sup>rd</sup> was a much welcomed sight. It was our third record ever.

It pays to give every duck that passes over The Scrubs a second look as you may never know.....

### **Common Buzzard**

A thermalling bird was watched overhead on the 11<sup>th</sup> following hot on the heels of the pair seen last month. Then on the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> an incredibly high soaring bird was watched drifting southeast in the company of a Peregrine.

### **Sparrowhawk**

The pair noticed sporadically throughout the month was probably our locally breeding birds.

### **Kestrel**

A female was discovered hunting over the grassland on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and another unsexed bird was seen on the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup>. This endearing falcon is a rare sight indeed these days.

### **Peregrine**

One was watched chasing pigeons over the prison on the 11<sup>th</sup> and another accompanied a soaring Common Buzzard on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Bar-tailed Godwit**

Nine flying east over Chats Paddock at 0722 on the 29<sup>th</sup> were a totally unexpected addition to The Scrubs year list truly proving that anything can turn up anywhere. The birds were part of a mass movement that occurred across southern England involving thousands of birds. They were also only our second record since the 35 or so seen flying over on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004.

### **Herring Gull**

This large noisy gull is a daily occurrence down at The Scrubs. At least 15 were reported on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 20 were noticed on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **Lesser Black-back**

Never as frequent as its paler above-mentioned cousin around eight was the peak count on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

### **Common Tern**

In recent years this graceful maritime migrant has normally made its presence known to us during June or July so it was nice to record a spring bird on the 29<sup>th</sup>. It was our first April bird since 2008.

### **Stock Dove**

A few local birds headed to and fro during the course of the month with a peak count of four being made on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wood Pigeon**

At least 60 were at large in April.

### **Collared Dove**

Up to three birds were seen sporadically during the course of the month.

### **Turtle Dove**

A bird seen heading west over Acton on the 26<sup>th</sup> was the first record of this nationally scarce migrant since May 2008. Intriguingly, another individual was discovered feeding on the football pitches alongside two Stock Doves the following day. That bird was the first ever to be observed on the ground at Wormwood Scrubs and both birds constituted our first multiple spring record.

### **Rose-ringed Parakeet**

Over 600 were recorded leaving their roost on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

### **Great Spotted Woodpecker**

The first bird of the month was noticed on the 13<sup>th</sup> as our population was probably tied up with domestic duties brought on by nesting activity. Few birds were reported for the remainder of the month.

### **Swallow**

Our modest passage continued from the 5<sup>th</sup> with a lone bird. By the end of the month only around 30 migrating birds were sighted – similar numbers to April 2010. You have to go back to 2007 for any decent counts indeed, on some days we had more passage than the entire April 2011 total.

### **House Martin**

The 10 birds seen migrating fairly high overhead on the 11<sup>th</sup> was unusually early for us. To be precise, they were our earliest reported yet.

### **Pipit sp**

A lucky observer standing at the Pipit Sign watchpoint caught overhead what he presumed to be a low flying pipit flying north with a strong though undulating flight. It gave a single call, a bit like a nuzzled chirp before it headed away and high northeastwards. He barely got any plumage detail other than a silhouette. It's tantalizing to think that we could have visited by our 4<sup>th</sup> ever Richard's Pipit.

### **Meadow Pipit**

At least 16 were counted on the 7<sup>th</sup> and around 18 on the 13<sup>th</sup>. No doubt this aggregation consisted of a number of migrant birds.

### **Pied Wagtail**

A couple was seen on the 4<sup>th</sup>, single on the 20<sup>th</sup> and one was on the concrete path leading into the western end of Martin Bell's Wood on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Yellow Wagtail**

The two males on the ground on the 9<sup>th</sup> constituted our first spring records plus our earliest ever. A bird also headed over on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Grey Wagtail**

A single birds went over on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wren**

At least 10 were noted on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Dunnock**

Six were counted on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. A gross underestimate to say the least. More counts of this engaging species would be gratefully received.

### **Robin**

At least 10 birds including singers were noticed on the 13<sup>th</sup> and a fledgling Robin was discovered by the Linford Christie Stadium on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

### **Nightingale**

2011 will forever go down as the year that the sweet song of the Nightingale filled the air down at The Scrubs for not one moment on a solitary morning but for five whole days! The amazing chain of events started on the 13<sup>th</sup> when a singing male was both seen and heard in Chats Paddock. Furthermore, a possible second bird was heard uttering a curious croaking call just yards away from the singing male. A female? Could they have been a prospecting pair?

Nightingales are uncommon summer visitors mostly to southeastern England. The British population is decreasing and they were formally widespread as a breeder in London. Now you have to travel to the Lee Valley in the east for the nearest colony. Naturally, we started to panic and became consumed with the desire to protect our potential pair from disturbance. Our concern was unwarranted as the singing ceased on the 16<sup>th</sup> some three days after its initial discovery. Not even a played back recording of a song roused any response. Our birds had flown.

End of the story? Not quite. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> a second male was heard singing from Chats Paddock. This bird's song was subtly different from our earlier bird being less musical and containing several harsher notes. Unfortunately, we were only graced by his presence for two short days. Nonetheless, it was still amazing to hear the mesmeric song of a Nightingale in the middle of urbanity.

These records were the first since our last, a briefly singing bird in Chats Paddock on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008.

### **Common Redstart**

A beautiful male was found on Lester's Embankment on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and was the first of the spring season. It preceded a run of records unparalleled since spring 2006. On the 4<sup>th</sup> two males were at large with one by Heron Copse (near the northeast corner of Scrubs Lane Wood) and another (possibly the bird initially reported on the 3<sup>rd</sup>) on Lester's Embankment.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> a male materialised in the grassland and another male joined it the following day. This was a good spring.

### **Northern Wheatear**

Last month's successful run of records continued unabated with a male discovered late on the 6<sup>th</sup>. In total we recorded a further 19 birds totaling some 25 birds since the beginning of spring. So far, this has been best spring for this adorable bird since 2006 when over 40 turn up.

### **Whinchat**

On the 7<sup>th</sup>, whilst Scrubbers were hunting for the elusive pair of male Common Redstarts, a couple of males and a female were noticed in the grassland. These birds were believed to be the earliest reported in the London area this year. More importantly, they were also our earliest birds ever with the previous distinction going to a male that appeared on the grassland on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2006.

Our second record for the spring was a female found in the grassland on the 13<sup>th</sup> that lingered until the 14<sup>th</sup>.

### **Stonechat**

Our second bird of the spring appeared briefly on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was a female that was preceded by the pair seen just as briefly last month.

### **Song Thrush**

Around 12 birds were singing on the 13<sup>th</sup> increasing to at least 16 on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

### **Redwing**

There were just three reports of birds heading back to their northern breeding grounds. A couple of birds flew north on the 10<sup>th</sup>, one headed east on the 13<sup>th</sup> another northeast on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

### **Fieldfare**

A singleton circuted Chats Paddock, Central Copse and Lester's Embankment on the 10<sup>th</sup>. A few days later on the 14<sup>th</sup> one was discovered on the ground before flying off north over Lester's Embankment.

### **Blackbird**

At least 18 were encountered on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 20 on several subsequent dates.

### **Ring Ouzel**

Our annual visitation by this incredible migrant montane bird continued for its 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year when a well-marked female/1<sup>st</sup> summer male showed amazingly well around Central Copse on the 9<sup>th</sup>. It was also our earliest 'Rouzel' recorded.

As if that wasn't enough, a female appeared out of nowhere on the 13<sup>th</sup> and landed on a tree in Chats Paddock before heading northeast. She may have been the same bird briefly reported the following day heading low from the grassland before swooping up over Lester's Embankment. Then a pristine-looking male stepped out onto the 'Forbidden Path' in the grassland, surprising a gleeful Scrubber on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Garden Warbler**

Our earliest bird ever sang and showed itself briefly in the northwest corner of Lester's Embankment on the 5<sup>th</sup>. They are usually late migrants at The Scrubs typically appearing during the latter end of May, although there have been two previous April records including an early date of the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2009.

### **Blackcap**

At least 15 singing males were counted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> increasing to around 17 on the 9<sup>th</sup>. By the 10<sup>th</sup> at least 21 birds were either seen or heard and on the 17<sup>th</sup> a noted 23 birds was almost certainly an undercount.

### **Lesser Whitethroat**

Our first bird of the spring was heard singing from Lester's Embankment on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The next day there were at least three singing males present.

### **Common Whitethroat**

This delightful summer visiting scrub warbler has a habit of suddenly appearing on our patch as if they had never been away. Just as the script dictated, one minute there was none then next there was at least 10 birds present on the 8<sup>th</sup> – the very same day as our 1<sup>st</sup> arrival last year.

The following day only one bird could be found the others having spirited away to destinations unknown. The real immigration started on the 13<sup>th</sup> when at least two birds were seen and singing was heard. By the end of the month at least 18 birds were present mostly distributed around Lester's Embankment and the grassland.

### **Sedge Warbler**

A quietly singing male in Chats Paddock on the 15<sup>th</sup> was our first of the season.

**Willow Warbler**

Our 1<sup>st</sup> records for the spring concerned six singing birds heard on the 4<sup>th</sup> dropping to three for the next few days. From the 9<sup>th</sup> until the month's end only one singer could be traced apart from the 17<sup>th</sup> when two were found.

**Chiffchaff**

Around eight singers were encountered on the 3<sup>rd</sup> rising to 10 birds the following day and for the remainder of the month.

**Willow/Chiff**

A singing bird whose song shared the characteristics of both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff was heard in Scrubs Lane Wood on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The same bird was heard again on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Tit**

A count of 12 birds was made on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Blue Tit**

At least 19 were counted on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Long-tailed Tit**

Only one pair that frequented Lester's Embankment was encountered during the month.

**Magpie**

The usual 20 or so birds were seen during the month.

**Jay**

A single bird was seen on the 4<sup>th</sup> and a pair was seen the following day. They were seen fairly regularly throughout the course of the month.

**Jackdaw**

Birds were seen on a few dates across April with peak being four on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Carrion Crow**

An average of around 100 birds were seen throughout April.

**Starling**

Around 40 birds were around early during the month. The peak count was of 100 birds on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

**House Sparrow**



The small thriving colony along Braybrook Street and environs were frequently seen and heard. Towards the end of the month when birds had chicks in the nest several individuals took to foraging in the grassland with the Starlings. On the 29<sup>th</sup> at least 30 commuted between Braybrook Street and The Scrubs hinterland.

### **Chaffinch**

At least three singing males were heard during the month.

### **Linnet**

At least 10 were around Lester's Embankment all month. Louie the leucistic Linnet was not reported at all during April.

### **Redpoll sp**

Four birds were watched on the 3<sup>rd</sup> erratically flying around Chats Paddock before heading northeast.

### **Lesser Redpoll**

Two feeding on the catkins in Chats Paddock on the 9<sup>th</sup> were an unusual find. This species is normally associated with the winter here at The Scrubs.

### **Goldfinch**

Very small numbers were reported all month. The maximum count was of 12 on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Greenfinch**

At least 18 birds were counted mostly along Lester's Embankment during the month. There has been a definite fall in numbers during recent years with double the number recorded during April 2009.

### **Reed Bunting**

A couple was seen on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and a male and female were positively identified on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Our usual male held territory in the grassland close to the site of last year's nest. It was rarely seen however and on the 29<sup>th</sup> was noticed making a beeline for a thicket in Central Copse. Did they have a nest there? On the 13<sup>th</sup> two males were reported singing from the grassland.

## **2011 Year List**

- 1. Cormorant**
- 2. Grey Heron**
- 3. Mute Swan**

4. Greylag
5. Canada Goose
6. Egyptian Goose
7. **Shelduck**
8. Mallard
9. **Shoveler**
10. Teal
11. Common Buzzard
12. Sparrowhawk
13. Kestrel
14. Peregrine
15. Lapwing
16. **Bar-tailed Godwit**
17. Woodcock
18. Snipe
19. Black-headed Gull
20. Common Gull
21. Mediterranean Gull
22. Herring Gull
23. Lesser Black-back
24. Great Black-back
25. **Common Tern**
26. Feral Pigeon
27. Stock Dove
28. Woodpigeon
29. Collared Dove
30. **Turtle Dove**
31. Rose-ringed Parakeet

32. Green Woodpecker
33. Great Spotted Woodpecker
34. Skylark
35. Swallow
36. House Martin
37. Meadow Pipit
38. Pied Wagtail
39. Yellow Wagtail
40. Grey Wagtail
41. Wren
42. Dunnock
43. Robin
44. Nightingale
45. Common Redstart
46. Northern Wheatear
47. Whinchat
48. Stonechat
49. Song Thrush
50. Redwing
51. Fieldfare
52. Mistle Thrush
53. Blackbird
54. Ring Ouzel
55. Garden Warbler
56. Blackcap
57. Lesser Whitethroat
58. Common Whitethroat
59. Sedge Warbler

**60. Willow Warbler**

**61. Chiffchaff**

**62. Great Tit**

**63. Blue Tit**

**64. Long-tailed Tit**

**65. Jay**

**66. Magpie**

**67. Jackdaw**

**68. Carrion Crow**

**69. Starling**

**70. House Sparrow**

**71. Chaffinch**

**72. Brambling**

**73. Linnet**

**74. Lesser Redpoll**

**75. Goldfinch**

**76. Greenfinch**

**77. Yellowhammer**

**78. Reed Bunting**

**78 species for the year thus far**

**(68 species in April 2010 & 67 in April 2009)**