

March 2011 Sightings at Wormwood Scrubs



A male Brambling (Anthony McGeehan)

Winter meets spring!

Our good birding fortunes continued into March at The Scrubs with a fresh influx of birds including some long awaited, much missed – not to mentioned loved – returning spring migrants. As ever, we registered yet more first, second and earliest records for the Wormwood Scrubs record books.

We saw more **Greylag Geese** this month than in any other and we had a couple of early **Common Buzzards**, a bird of prey that we normally don't see - if at all - until June. Whilst these days Common Buzzards are being sighted more frequently over our patch another once common raptor's fortunes has completely gone the other way. **Kestrels** appear to be inexplicably dying out with fewer and fewer sightings each month.

Four **Northern Wheatears** brought a much-needed splash of colour just as our first **Swallows**, **Blackcaps** and **Chiffchaffs** made it back. We also recorded our first ever **Teal** and our second ever **Brambling** lounged in a Braybrook Street garden unbeknown to The Scrubs faithful.

The prospect of April migrants fills us with excitement!

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Cormorant

At least four were encountered on the 24th with singletons or duos reported most days.

Grey Heron

A few singles flapped over ponderously during the month.

Mute Swan

There were reports of occasional local birds flying over during the month.

Greylag

We had multiple records this month of this erstwhile scarce visitor, possibly a reflection of their breeding successes at nearby sites like Hyde Park/Kensington Gardens. Birds were seen on four occasions with a peak of four that flew over from the north on the 24th.

Canada Goose

At least four were seen on the 24th.

Egyptian Goose

A pair of these exotic geese headed east on the 14th and were our 2nd record for 2011. But like buses, it seemed that we were destined to encounter more of these colourful goose-ducks and that we did when a lone bird went east, low over the southern edge of the site on the 22nd.

Mallard

These common ducks become incredibly visible during the spring as they indulge in courtship chasing and general flapping around. A couple was seen most days with six on the 27th being the most.

Teal

Incredibly, a pair swiftly flew fairly low over Braybrook Street heading west on the early misty morning on the 16th and became our first ever record of this small dabbling duck.

We have had an excellent eight months for waterfowl at The Scrubs adding no less than five new birds to our site list plus a further four species were recorded again for the first time in several years. Not bad for a site with no standing water. To be fair though, we are surrounded by several watercourses, not least the Thames, so it would only be a matter of time before we would have caught sight of commuting birds. There are not that many regular waterfowl species to look out for now as we are in the realms of expecting a scarce species like a Goldeneye or Pintail to fly over.

Perhaps the most likely scarce duck to appear next will be a Red-crested Pochard as there is a pair that have been lingering for some time on the Grand Union Canal literally a quarter of a mile away.

Common Buzzard

This nationally common raptor is now becoming a far more frequently seen member of The Scrubs predatory avifauna. The two birds watched displaying

and drifting north on the afternoon of the 19th constituted our earliest spring records.

Sparrowhawk

This aggressive hawk was surprisingly scarce this month with the first report, of a female, made on the 27th. Conditions were calm and warm on that day, ideal for raptor passage and we were rewarded with a pair of Sparrowhawks soaring on the thermals.

Kestrel

Our first bird for the month was watched soaring on the 27th. Very few, if any sightings, were reported from the remainder of the month.

Peregrine

One was seen from Acton heading towards The Scrubs on the 30th.

Woodcock

One was flushed from the pitch on the southern side of the grassland on the 24th. It headed east low over Central Copse and could not be relocated thereafter.

Snipe

One landed in the northwest corner on the 27th after coming in from the south. It was our first record for 2011.

Black-headed Gull

Reasonable numbers were still lingering at the beginning of the month with over 150 on the pitches on the 2nd. By the 10th numbers were fizzling out. The final hoorah occurred on the 14th when over 150 birds were present. Our birds departed to their breeding grounds a lot earlier this year than in previous years and there were far lower numbers present on the pitches than what we would have usually expected.

Plenty of birds were migrating overhead though throughout the remainder of March with a maximum of over 200 on the morning of the 20th. By the month's end we were hard pressed to find more than 10 birds.

Common Gull

Around 25 were counted on the 2nd and 30 on the 14th. By the 16th there were 50 birds on the pitches easily outnumbering their more common Black-headed cousins. By the 27th only five remained with most of their brethren already migrated to their northern breeding grounds.

Mediterranean Gull

A pale winged second-winter bird flew east over Scrubs Lane Wood on the 24th with a group of Black-headed Gulls.

Herring Gull

Fairly good numbers were in the area during the month even though our figures were fairly paltry compared to other London sites. At least 45 were around on the 18th and 24th with around 40 overhead on the 20th.

Lesser Black-back

The usual low numbers drifted over with 10 on the 20th and the 24th being the most.

Stock Dove

A lone bird was seen on the 9th and a further three appeared on the 18th.

Wood Pigeon

At least 50 were on site during the month with nesting activity observed from several sectors of The Scrubs.

Collared Dove

This is a scarce dove at The Scrubs with only a singleton passing overhead on the 15th.

Rose-ringed Parakeet

At least 600 were noticed flying out of their Central Copse roost. The numbers was dropping during the month as the females were beginning to spend their nights away from the main roosts in the nest holes.

Green Woodpecker

A single bird was noted on the 7th and another was heard distantly on the 24th and 27th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Birds were seen throughout the month with up to five on the 24th including a displaying pair watched near the northeast corner.

Skylark

A single bird was discovered on the 10th and seen again the following day. By the 14th there were three around including a pair on the football pitches with the gulls. We had a slight fright on the 25th when one male half-heartedly sang in a display flight over the grassland but our hopes of another breeding attempt were quickly dashed when any further nesting activity promptly ceased despite the presence of two birds the following day.

The other records for March included singles seen on the 19th and 28th.

Swallow

Our first bird of 2011 breezed through on the 27th. It was our earliest since 2005 when a handful sailed through on 19th March.

Meadow Pipit

We suspect that there may be 4 pairs breeding which is a drop from last year's five. Our breeding population was augmented by what we assumed to be passage birds because we saw as many as 20 on the 18th and the 24th.

Pied Wagtail

The odd one or two were seen throughout the month and a few were watched purposefully heading north over the site.

Grey Wagtail

Our first record for the year flew over on the 25th.

Wren

At least seven birds were heard singing on the 27th.

Dunnock

Around 10 birds were counted on the 27th.

Robin

At least 10 singers were encountered on the 20th.

Northern Wheatear

Our long awaited first bird of the season finally materialised on the 15th. It was a handsome male in the grassland. Three other males followed on the 24th, 27th and 29th plus a pair of females were in the Chats Paddock area on the 28th.

Stonechat

Since our tiny wintering population was wiped out by the snow and bitter cold during the winter of 2009/2010, this endearing chat is sadly now just a rare passage migrant. A pair was briefly seen in the grassland on the 9th the expected date to see these migrant chats.

Song Thrush

The month started with at least five singing birds located. By the 22nd at least eight males were found singing.

Redwing

A few birds moved through during March with at least 26 counted on the 6th

Fieldfare

At least three flew over on the 6th and singles headed south on the 22nd and east on the 24th.

Mistle Thrush

A singleton was observed on the 6th and a pair was seen for the couple of days thereafter.

Blackbird

Around 20 were noticed on the 20th and 22nd.

Blackcap

Our first returning birds were two singing males on the 26th that were earlier than last year's April birds. They were also three days shy of our earliest returners ever who appeared on 23rd March 2009.

Chiffchaff

At least two birds were discovered in Scrubs Lane Wood on the 14th including one singing bird. They were the vanguard for the return of this common summer breeder. These first birds of the spring appeared on exactly the same date as the first birds of 2010. Our earliest ever returner appeared on 1st March 2009. Numbers steadily built up during the month.

Great Tit

At least 20 birds were counted on the 20th.

Blue Tit

Up to 24 birds were watched on the 24th and displaying birds, curiously in groups of three, were noticed throughout March.

Long-tailed Tit

A couple of pairs were noticed along Lester's Embankment on the 20th.

Magpie

The usual 20 or so were at large during the month.

Jay

A pair was seen during the month normally in the western end.

Jackdaw

Small numbers were seen throughout the month with 12 on the 14th and at least 15 on the 19th being the most.

Carrion Crow

Around 110 on the 20th was the highest count for the month.

Starling

A reasonable count of 250 birds was made on the 6th and 100 were noted on the 10th rising to around 120 on the 18th.

House Sparrow

At least 16 birds were seen in full on display mode at their stronghold along Braybrook Street on the 20th.

Chaffinch

Small feeding flocks were still present during the early part of the month. On the 14th at least 10 birds were counted including a minimum of three singing males.

Brambling

This winter visiting northern close relative of the Chaffinch is a species that none of the existing Scrubbers have ever identified on or over Wormwood

Scrubs soil. Indeed, the only record was of a flyover submitted by a visiting birder during the winter of 1999. Belated news of a winter-plumaged bird feeding in a Braybrook Street garden was met with by surprise, however it made sense given the number being reported in London during late February and early March.

Several flocks of unidentified Fringillidae (the family to which Chaffinches and Bramblings belong) headed over from the west on the 18th, no doubt containing Bramblings.

Linnet

Birds were taking up territory along the embankment including Louie the leucistic. At least 11 were counted on the 15th.

Goldfinch

Small numbers were noticed throughout the month.

Greenfinch

Around 12 birds were counted on the 14th. That number also included the first displaying males to be seen.

Reed Bunting

Our regular male took up territory on the grassland from right at the beginning of the month. The rarely seen female was noted on the 10th. Interestingly, four birds were seen on the 19th consisting of no less than three singing males and a female. The following day saw one male and three females in the grassland and on the 25th there were two males and a female present. Perhaps this indicates that there may have had been an influx of unattached birds over the previous few days.

2011 Year List

- 1. Cormorant**
- 2. Grey Heron**
- 3. Mute Swan**
- 4. Greylag**
- 5. Canada Goose**
- 6. Egyptian Goose**
- 7. Mallard**
- 8. Teal**
- 9. Common Buzzard**

10. Sparrowhawk
11. Kestrel
12. Peregrine
13. Lapwing
14. Woodcock
15. Snipe
16. Black-headed Gull
17. Common Gull
18. Mediterranean Gull
19. Herring Gull
20. Lesser Black-back
21. Great Black-back
22. Feral Pigeon
23. Stock Dove
24. Woodpigeon
25. Collared Dove
26. Rose-ringed Parakeet
27. Green Woodpecker
28. Great Spotted Woodpecker
29. Skylark
30. Swallow
31. Meadow Pipit
32. Pied Wagtail
33. Grey Wagtail
34. Wren
35. Dunnock
36. Robin
37. Northern Wheatear

38. Stonechat

39. Song Thrush

40. Redwing

41. Fieldfare

42. Mistle Thrush

43. Blackbird

44. Blackcap

45. Chiffchaff

46. Great Tit

47. Blue Tit

48. Long-tailed Tit

49. Jay

50. Magpie

51. Jackdaw

52. Carrion Crow

53. Starling

54. House Sparrow

55. Chaffinch

56. Brambling

57. Linnet

58. Lesser Redpoll

59. Goldfinch

60. Greenfinch

61. Yellowhammer

62. Reed Bunting

62 species for the year thus far

(56 species in March 2010 & 55 in March 2009)

