

May 2011 Sightings at Wormwood Scrubs



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Common Quail (Lior Kislev)

The Holy Quail

April was pretty amazing with some special birds being found and added to our rapidly increasing year list. However, nothing could have prepared us for the discovery of a singing male **Quail** this month. As if it wasn't surprising enough that the bird stayed all day (a feat in itself when you think of the amount of errant dogs running through the grassland) it or another was heard singing a full two weeks later. That second report raised a lot of questions, not least, whether there were one or two birds involved. We now know that there were record numbers of this diminutive game bird in Britain (although there were very few reported in the London area) so maybe two birds could have been involved. We may never know, but it was an incredible record nonetheless.

Other highlights from this superb month included more **Shelduck**, our second ever **Red Kite** record, **Common Buzzards** and a **Hobby**, a good sprinkling of spring migrants like **Northern Wheatear**, **Yellow Wagtail**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and a slew of warblers. Phew! Birding at The Scrubs can be such an exciting thing!

Nearby, a pair of **Red-crested Pochard** was found along the Grand Union Canal on the 12th and a **Common Pochard** on the 16th. Other interesting taxa on The Scrubs itself included a **Common**

Lizard in Chats Paddock on the 30th along with an **Emperor Dragonfly** in the same venue.

Tune in for more surprises next month!

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Cormorant

At least six were sighted on the 1st with smaller numbers during the rest of the month.

Grey Heron

The usual scenario was played with the odd bird being seen. Our pesky crows mobbed one bird as it flew over on the 1st.

Greylag

Now quite a regular visitor, a pair headed east on the 1st and two went south on the 4th with another couple sighted on the 31st.

Canada Goose

Small numbers were noted during the month.

Shelduck

After last month's continuation of The Legend of the Shelduck, we decided to rename this duck the 'Nightingale's Mate' due to their predilection for turning up just before we discover that we had Nightingales on site. However, that spooky association was shattered this month when every time they were seen resulted in zero Nightingales, despite much searching!

A pair headed west on the 4th, our second record for the year. The association with that famous songster took a further hit after three were watched heading west on the 18th to the sound of no serenading Nightingale.

Mallard

A couple of birds were seen on the 1st and three on the 4th.

Red Kite

Our second ever example was seen circling The Scrubs by a couple of visiting birders on the 28th, just over a year after our first. It was seen in the early afternoon drifting northwest being mobbed by a crow.

Common Buzzard

Our groundsmen witnessed a thermaling bird high over the sports pitches on the 31st. Classically; crows were mobbing it.

Sparrowhawk

Our local nesting pair made occasional forays into our airspace during the month. Interestingly, on the 4th, a female was watched flying west low through Braybrook Wood and into the playground of the school. It seemed to be heading at full pelt into a brick wall as it chased after a sparrow. All the while she employed a strange undulating flight pattern like an enormous finch. The hunt was unsuccessful and she landed on a wire fence appearing to momentarily pump her tail before taking off with a crow in hot pursuit.

Kestrel

This scarcely seen falcon was sporadically recorded in May with single birds seen on the 2nd. On the 4th, a female landed in a tall tree situated in Central Copse before chasing after an unseen passerine along Lester's Embankment. It or another was seen on the 31st.

Hobby

A fine adult was watched for around 10 minutes cruising at around 100ft above the grassland and Braybrook Wood at 0630 on the 4th. It finally drifted off southeast. It was our first spring record, our first May bird since 2009 and our earliest since 2006 when one appeared on the 2nd.

Quail

Perhaps the sensational discovery of the year was the singing bird heard and eventually seen in the grassland on the early morning of the 17th.

Seasoned Scrubber Neville Smith's account of his find is as follows: 'Whilst making my way up to Chats Paddock I heard a strange repeated scolding sound coming from the long grass. It appeared to be a few yards in front of me, low down in the long grass. At first I almost dismissed it as toy as I was not sure if it was even a bird. It sounded like someone was playing a recording of a fast heartbeat. A bewildering 30 odd seconds past before it suddenly hit me: '*wet-me-lips, wet-me-lips, wet-me-lips*. Then panic set in as I realised that it could only be a singing **QUAIL!!**'

It was heard singing for the remainder of the day. An amazing record made even more fantastic when a bird was heard singing from the grassland on the 31st a full two weeks after the discovery of our first bird. Was it the same bird or were two involved?

Black-headed Gull

At least six headed north on the 1st.

Herring Gull

Around 20 were noted on the 1st.

Lesser Black-back

The usual low numbers were seen in May.

Stock Dove

The usual few local birds were to be seen during the month. A larger than usual flock of 16 was seen feeding on the football pitches on the 16th and 15 were noted on the 19th.

Wood Pigeon

At least 60 were knocking about on most days.

Collared Dove

A single bird was noted on the 1st.

Swift

Our first bird of the year swung over Martin Bell's Wood on the 1st at 0520. This bird was one of our latest spring records as they are normally noticed during the last week of April.

We began to see these harbingers of summer in earnest from then on with a peak of around 60 on the 6th. A pair was watched copulating in mid-air over the grassland on the 11th.

Rose-ringed Parakeet

The usual swarms were noted with at least 1,000 birds leaving their Central Copse roost every morning.

Green Woodpecker

A single bird was seen on the 6th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Our usual couple of pairs was glimpsed during the month.

Sand Martin

The lone bird that crossed the grassland on the 3rd was our first record for this spring. It was also our first spring bird since 2009.

Swallow

Spring migration continued with at least 65 recorded during the month. The biggest day total was the 26 that passed through on the

1st. In total we have recorded since April we have seen at least 95 birds which is nearly double the total for the same period in 2010 by only half as much as 2009.

Meadow Pipit

At least 10 birds were noted on the 1st although we suspect that only three pairs may have bred this year.

Pied Wagtail

Our first Pied Wagtail for the month was reported on the 11th when a male was identified. A couple more were seen during the course of the month and two juveniles were on the short grass by the hospital on the 31st.

Yellow Wagtail

Five came through on the 1st with one landing in the grassland. An additional bird came through heading west on the 9th. Nine birds recorded by the end of the May was pretty impressive especially considering that our last May bird occurred in 2006!

Wren

At least eight birds were heard singing on the 1st.

Duncock

These unobtrusive birds were poorly recorded this month with a miserly three birds noticed on Lester's Embankment on the 1st being the only submitted count.

Robin

As many as 10 birds revealed themselves to us on the 1st.

Northern Wheatear

A probable female 'leucorhoa', or 'Greenland' Wheatear was seen on the cut grass between Central Copse and Chats Paddock on the 3rd. It was described as being much browner and buffer all over than the nominate race, but the positive identification of the larger brighter Greenland race is always a contentious issue as there are so many potential plumage pitfalls. Another possible 'leucorhoa' occurred on the 18th when a striking female was seen and was described as having a 'nearly robin orange breast, tall and beefy'.

A nominate male was also seen on the cut grass between Central Copse and Chats Paddock on the 4th. This month's haul of birds brought our spring total to around 28 birds.

Song Thrush

At least 10 were noticed during the early days of May.

Blackbird

Around 30 including juveniles were counted on the 1st.

Garden Warbler

Following the exceptionally early bird at the beginning of April, a singing male took up temporary residence on the 9th near Heron Copse in the northeastern limits of Scrubs Lane Wood. It was last reported on the 12th and will still go down as an early record because most of our singing birds occur during June.

Blackcap

Twelve singing males plus up to four females were observed on the 1st. Good numbers were seen throughout the month.

Lesser Whitethroat

At least four territories were located during the month with multiple sightings of this handsome warbler reported.

Common Whitethroat

Upwards of 20 singing males were counted throughout the month.

Sedge Warbler

A singleton was discovered singing in Martin Bell's Wood on the 1st and remained for the following day. It or another was heard singing from Chats Paddock in the north on the 4th.

Reed Warbler

Our first spring migrant for the year was an early singing male on the 17th heard from within a Buddleia clump along Lester's Embankment. It was heard singing there for the next two days.

Willow Warbler

Last month's usual singer was at large deep within Scrubs Lane Wood early in the month.

Chiffchaff

At least eight were heard singing on the 1st.

Spotted Flycatcher

Our first spring bird appeared by the exercise area next to Lynford Christie Stadium on the 30th. It turned out that we were experiencing a fall of these scarce flycatchers that day as three more were found in Martin Bell's Wood. These birds were our first May records for two years.

There was still a bird present on the last day of the month by the exercise area this time, nearer Martin Bell's Wood.

Great Tit

A minimum count of 10 birds was seen on the 1st.

Blue Tit

Up to 18 birds with the majority being juveniles were noticed on the 1st.

Jay

The occasional bird was encountered during the month and a pair was recorded on the 4th and 31st.

Magpie

At 20 were at large during the month.

Jackdaw

A single birds or pairs were variously seen on various dates during the month. The peak count was of 15 birds on the 4th.

Carrion Crow

The usual crowd was present during May with a peak of around 260 on the 16th - our highest total for some time.

Starling

At least 100 birds were swilling around the grassland during the month. Most of the individuals were the local juveniles enjoying their traditional summer gatherings. The groupings were larger than last May's when we registered no more than 50 birds and indeed were the largest May flocks since 2007.

House Sparrow

Around 20 birds was noted early in the month by their Braybrook Street stronghold and several nest sites were found mostly in holes in the eaves of buildings. One male was seen leaving a nestbox situated on the school wall.

Chaffinch

At least two males were heard singing early on in May

Linnet

It looks like this nationally amber listed finch had a good early start to the breeding season. At least five fledglings were seen on the 14th. Louie, the errant leucistic male, was briefly seen in the grassland on the 18th. It was the first time that he had been sighted since March.

Goldfinch

Due to most of our local population breeding outside of The Scrubs we don't get to see many straying into our area at this time of the month.

Greenfinch

Our breeding population had settled in during the month and was estimated at being around nine pairs – still a significant drop on previous years.

Reed Bunting

The sporadically singing male in the grassland still had us guessing as to the potential location of its nest all during the month. A female was glimpsed in the same location on the 19th.

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. Red Kite
12. Common Buzzard
13. Sparrowhawk
14. Kestrel
15. Hobby
16. Peregrine
17. Quail

18. Lapwing
19. Bar-tailed Godwit
20. Woodcock
21. Snipe
22. Black-headed Gull
23. Common Gull
24. Mediterranean Gull
25. Herring Gull
26. Lesser Black-back
27. Great Black-back
28. Common Tern
29. Feral Pigeon
30. Stock Dove
31. Woodpigeon
32. Collared Dove
33. Turtle Dove
- 34. Swift**
35. Rose-ringed Parakeet
36. Green Woodpecker
37. Great Spotted Woodpecker
38. Skylark
- 39. Sand Martin**
40. Swallow
41. House Martin
42. Meadow Pipit
43. Pied Wagtail
44. Yellow Wagtail
45. Grey Wagtail

46. Wren
47. Dunnock
48. Robin
49. Nightingale
50. Common Redstart
51. Northern Wheatear
52. Whinchat
53. Stonechat
54. Song Thrush
55. Redwing
56. Fieldfare
57. Mistle Thrush
58. Blackbird
59. Ring Ouzel
60. Garden Warbler
61. Blackcap
62. Lesser Whitethroat
63. Common Whitethroat
64. Sedge Warbler
65. Reed Warbler
66. Willow Warbler
67. Chiffchaff
68. Spotted Flycatcher
69. Great Tit
70. Blue Tit
71. Long-tailed Tit
72. Jay
73. Magpie

74. Jackdaw

75. Carrion Crow

76. Starling

77. House Sparrow

78. Chaffinch

79. Brambling

80. Linnet

81. Lesser Redpoll

82. Goldfinch

83. Greenfinch

84. Yellowhammer

85. Reed Bunting

85 species for the year thus far

(74 species in May 2010 & 76 in April 2009)