

# **The Birds of Whitlingham & Thorpe 2012**



Compiled by James Emerson

## **Contents**

Page 2 – Contents & contact details

Page 3 – Introduction & site map

Page 4 – Article: A brief history of Whitlingham

Page 5-7 – Review of the year

Page 8 – Article: Ring-necked Duck.

Page 9-19 – Whitlingham & Thorpe classified species list

Page 20 – Appendix A – Expected species not recorded this year

Page 20 – Appendix B – Escaped and released birds

Page 21 – Appendix C – Hybrids & domestic wildfowl

Page 22 – Acknowledgements & Further reading

## **Get in touch**

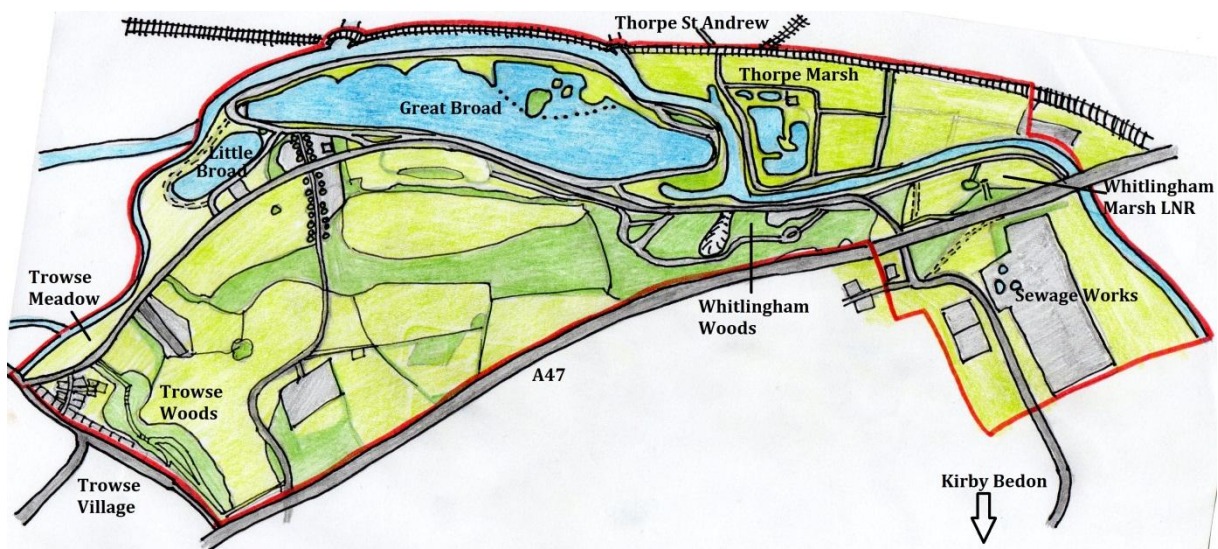
I would welcome any comments, corrections or constructive criticisms about this report. These can be sent to me, along with any sightings for inclusion in the 2013 report, by emailing: [whitlinghambirds@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:whitlinghambirds@yahoo.co.uk).

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## Introduction

This is a record of the bird species reported from the Whitlingham area, (including Thorpe Marshes NWT) during 2012. Despite Whitlingham and Thorpe being separated by the River Yare, the landscapes of both were heavily influenced by quarrying and there is a sizeable interchange in birds between the two sites. In addition, Thorpe Marsh can be viewed from several points on the Whitlingham side. For these reasons, Whitlingham birders have traditionally included birds seen at or over Thorpe Marsh on their patch lists, although some Thorpe birders only list on their side of the river. It should be noted that this bird report is independent from any of the organisations that manages these sites, notably the Broads Authority, Whitlingham Charitable Trust, Norfolk Wildlife Trust and South Norfolk Council.

A map of the Whitlingham recording area can be found below. The majority of the sightings have been made by the author or by other local observers, however sightings reported through the internet or bird news providers have been included for completeness. Therefore all sightings are reported 'as is'. Where a scarce species has been photographed or seen by several observers this is noted in the text. Species that are county rarities should be assessed by the [Norfolk Records Committee](#), and their verdict will be included in the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report 2012, to be published in autumn 2013.



**The Whitlingham Recording area, composing of Whitlingham C.P, Trowse Meadows, Trowse Woods, Whitlingham Marsh, Whitlingham Sewage Works, Thorpe Marsh NWT and Crown Point Estate land north of the A47.**

## **A brief history of Whitlingham**

Whitlingham Country Park is sited on land owned by the Crown Point Estate and managed jointly by Whitlingham Charitable Trust and the Broads Authority. Gravel extraction began on the Great Broad area in 1990, with work starting on the Little Broad in 1995. The work ultimately resulted in the creation of two 'broads', which were allowed to flood and were landscaped into a country park. Work finished in 2005, and in the same year the county council opened the Whitlingham Outdoor Education Centre at the west end of the Great Broad. The visitors centre was opened in the flint barn in 2006, serving as both an information point and café.

More gravel extraction took place across the river at Thorpe, finishing in 2008. The flooded gravel-workings on the Thorpe side were not taken over by the Whitlingham Charitable Trust, and the lease for the broad and adjacent marsh (formerly Thorpe Station Marsh) was taken up in 2011 by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Now known as Thorpe Marsh NWT, the area was heralded in the local media as the NWTs first 'urban nature reserve'. When looking at bird sightings online it is important to realise that the name 'Thorpe Marsh' is predominantly used to describe the area further east at Thorpe-next-Haddiscoe.

In spring 2012 the Broads Authority moved their solar boat, Ra, to Whitlingham from Malthouse Broad and began offering regular boat trips on the Great Broad. This year proposals were also made to extend the facilities at Whitlingham to include accommodation and additional visitor attractions. Three proposals were put to consultation in summer 2012, and work on the chosen plan is due to begin (subject to further consultations) in late 2013.

Despite increasing visitor numbers and the disturbance on the Great Broad caused by boats, Whitlingham remains a popular destination for Norwich-based birders, particularly in winter and spring. The site list is around 185, (including Norfolk's second Black-and-white Warbler and several county rarities), which is matched only by the UEA area locally.

### Further reading

#### **1. Whitlingham Quarrying Project**

Whitlingham Country Park newsletter number 17, Summer/autumn 2011, pages 8-10.  
([http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/broads/live/visiting/tourist-information-centres/WCP\\_newsletter\\_summer\\_2011\\_final.pdf](http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/broads/live/visiting/tourist-information-centres/WCP_newsletter_summer_2011_final.pdf))

#### **2. Introducing Thorpe Marshes: A tranquil oasis in the heart of Norwich**

(<http://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/Home/News/Introducing-Thorpe-Marshes--A-tranquil-oasis-in-th.aspx>)

#### **3. Broads Authority's Solar Powered Boat Moves To Whitlingham**

(<http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/news/press-releases/2012/broads-authority-s-solar-powered-boat-moves-to-whitlingham.html>)

## Review of the Year

### January

The year started with an *argentatus*-race Herring Gull in the conservation area, dwarfing the other gulls. Teal numbers began to increase steadily, whilst thousands of Common Gulls gathered for a pre-roost mid-month. At Thorpe an unprecedented flock of 28 Ruff were seen on the scrape on the 11<sup>th</sup>. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter drake Ferruginous Duck was found on the Great Broad. It stayed for several days, before giving its wild credentials a boost by leaving and not being reported elsewhere in the county.

### February

February began with an unusual sighting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of a Knot on the grass near the Watersports centre. A cold spell then brought in a spate of good birds, including two Scaup, a Dunlin and another Ruff. A Red-breasted Merganser was a particularly rare local bird, and was later seen further along the Yare at Strumpshaw. Whilst looking for the merganser a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Dark-bellied Brent Goose was found, no doubt having been split from the group of 400+ that arrived around the same time at Breydon Water. More typical of February was a redhead Smew, which was joined by two others by mid-month, and a couple of Goosanders. A Great White Egret was seen briefly at Whitlingham C.P. and was later seen at UEA and Colney G.Ps before settling at Marlingford. Two Pintail and a Mealy Redpoll completed an excellent month.

### March

There was a lull at the start of March until the first Chiffchaff of the year was seen at Thorpe on the 12<sup>th</sup>, followed by the only Avocet to be reported this year on the next day. The wader theme continued on the 15<sup>th</sup> with a Black-tailed Godwit and a recent site-record 12 Dunlin. The first Little Ringed Plover returned on the 21<sup>st</sup>, but was sometimes elusive. On the last day of the month a Caspian Gull was in the conservation area bay, a new Norwich tick for several local birders.

### April

Migrants continued to arrive, with Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Sand Martin appearing by mid-month. Two Cuckoos arrived at Thorpe and continued to be seen through the spring. Around this time a Bewick's Swan took up temporary residence on the River Wensum in the city and a Pied Flycatcher was found at Earlham Cemetery, but unfortunately despite searching neither was later seen at Whitlingham. The 24<sup>th</sup> saw migration kick into gear, with large numbers of Arctic Terns being seen across the country. At least four passed through Whitlingham, along with 11 Little Gulls, and a Swift mixed in with a large flock of hirundines. Towards the end of the month Common Sandpipers, Grasshopper Warbler and Hobby were all seen.

## **May**

A dawn chorus walk on the 3<sup>rd</sup> recorded most of the migrants not recorded in April, such as Lesser Whitethroat and Garden Warbler. The outstanding bird of the month was a singing Nightingale. It later became apparent that there were in fact two birds, which could be heard singing throughout the day, mostly from deep within the scrub, but occasionally showing well out in the open. Several Yellow Wagtails were reported, whilst a day of heavy raptor passage included a Red Kite, five Hobbies and four Marsh Harriers. Towards the end of the month Common Sandpiper numbers peaked at seven.

## **June**

At the start of the month a Barn Owl could be seen hunting over Thorpe Marsh in the evenings, joined by a second bird on one occasion. A Grasshopper Warbler was also reeling in the evenings and showing fairly frequently. Four Cuckoos were seen mid-month at Whitlingham, and a Wood Sandpiper briefly fed on the scrape at Thorpe Marsh on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

## **July**

July was a quiet month in the area, with two sightings of a Red Kite being the most interesting sightings, as they suggested that a bird was over-summering nearby. On the 17<sup>th</sup> a mobile Caspian Tern was found at Strumpshaw, which covered the ground between Strumpshaw and Breydon with ease. Given this movement it is entirely possible that it made its way up to Whitlingham at some point during its three day stay, but there were no confirmed sightings west of Strumpshaw.

## **August**

A drake Common Scoter at Whitlingham on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> was an unusual mid-summer record, whilst three Common Sandpipers and three Green Sandpipers were seen at Thorpe throughout the month. A Mallard was on the river with a brood of seven newly fledged ducklings on the 16<sup>th</sup>, presumably a second or maybe even third brood. Lesser Black-backed Gull numbers grew to over 300 towards the end of the month, and a Yellow-legged Gull was amongst them on the 24<sup>th</sup>, whilst a lone Swift on the same date was the last sighting of the year.

## **September**

September was a quiet month, with few ducks or waders. Two Chiffchaffs were still present on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, including one in song at Trowse Meadows. Several visits looking for an Osprey present nearby at Strumpshaw unfortunately failed to yield any sightings.

## October

The start of the month saw a second Caspian Gull of the year on the Great Broad, with a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter present along with two Yellow-legged Gulls. Near the end of the month Snipe numbers began to build up at Thorpe, whilst the first Redwings and Fieldfares of the autumn were seen overhead. A single Wigeon was on the Little Broad on the 21<sup>st</sup>, and three Water Rails were heard. A mass arrival of thrushes at the coast finally filtered inland on the 26<sup>th</sup>, with both Ring Ouzel and Black Redstart being seen in Norwich city centre. Unfortunately neither species was reported from the Whitlingham recording area, but both remain possible future patch birds as spring and autumn migrants. On the 31<sup>st</sup> a lone Waxwing was reported flying over the sewage works, ahead of the main Norfolk arrival in early November.

## November

Duck numbers were slow to build, with a Goldeneye on the Great Broad on the 10<sup>th</sup>, and 30 Teal on the 25<sup>th</sup>. On the 11<sup>th</sup> a flock of around a dozen Lesser Redpolls was seen at Thorpe, and lower numbers were present nearby for the rest of November. On the 18<sup>th</sup> a Little Egret flew over Thorpe Marsh and appeared to land nearby. Given the spread of this species in recent times it is perhaps surprising that there isn't already a resident bird here. Two potentially good local birds were seen flying west from Strumpshaw but sadly not seen at Whitlingham, a Gannet (18<sup>th</sup>) and three Lapland Buntings (28<sup>th</sup>).

## December

A cold spell at the start of the month brought in the birds, with 100 Bewick's Swans seen flying west over Whitlingham Lane and a whopping 60+ Snipe at Thorpe Marsh. A large influx of ducks on the 9<sup>th</sup> included a female Ring-necked Duck, the 5<sup>th</sup> *Aythya* species of the year, and a Common Scoter was also unusual. The Ring-necked Duck was present until the 13<sup>th</sup>, whilst the Scoter stayed until the 17<sup>th</sup>. A Slavonian Grebe at Thorpe Broad was the first one in the area since spring 2010, and at least two Goosanders were seen several times throughout the month. After Christmas the only wildfowl highlights were 19 Wigeon and three Goldeneye on the 30<sup>th</sup>.



## **Records of Ring-necked Duck at Whitlingham**

In December a female Ring-necked Duck was found whilst counting wildfowl on the Great Broad. The preceding week had been cold, and this weather appeared to have caused a large movement of birds from continental Europe into eastern England. Numbers of regular winter species such as Tufted Ducks, Pochard, Gadwall and Teal showed large increases in numbers, whilst several Wigeon & Shoveler has also arrived, along with a Common Scoter.

The first record of a Ring-necked Duck at Whitlingham was from November 2008, and followed a large arrival of the species to the Britain and Ireland, including 15 at Inishmore the previous month. This bird was present for around a week and a half. Later in the winter it was found at Hoveton Little Broad, a private broad linked to the River Bure. In 2009/10 the Ring-necked Duck was again seen in the Bure Valley, this time at Wroxham Broad, appearing at Whitlingham again between 29<sup>th</sup> January and 18<sup>th</sup> February. In the winters of 2010/11 and 2011/12 this bird was again present, spending time at Ranworth and Malthouse Broads.

It would be natural to assume that the bird found this year is the same bird, as *Aythya* ducks are known to often return to the same sites year on year. However, photographs of the 2012 bird appear to show less white on the bill and a slightly different head pattern to pictures of the original bird, raising the possibility that this is a different individual. Having compared pictures of this bird with photos taken earlier in the year at Ranworth, it is my opinion and that of several other local birders that this is indeed likely to be a different bird.



Photograph courtesy of Carl Chapman (13/12/12) © 2012



## **Whitlingham and Thorpe Classified List**

**Mute Swan** – Common resident, with a maximum count of 103 at the start of June. At least three pairs bred this year, two at the country park and one on the river nearby.

**Bewick's Swan** – A flock of 100 (as groups of 40 and 60) were seen flying over Whitlingham Lane, then continued west over the city on 6<sup>th</sup> December. Nearby in the city a Bewick's Swan stayed for over a week in April on the River Wensum.

**Whooper Swan** – A small flock was seen flying over Whitlingham C.P. on 4<sup>th</sup> February, and 60+ were seen flying over on March 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Pink-footed Goose** – An under-recorded species, likely to fly over either on arrival in autumn or when flocks move between the North and East of the county later in the winter period. The only report this year was a flock of 130 seen flying over in early October.

**Greylag Goose** – A common resident and winter visitor. The post-breeding flock reached 140+ in July, whilst at least two pairs bred, hatching six and seven goslings. The families then gathered together into a crèche to look after the young. Two white domestic Greylags ('farmyard geese') were present all year.

**Canada Goose** – Resident, numbers up to around 35 in summer. One pair bred, hatching seven goslings.



**Brent Goose** – A first-winter Dark-bellied Brent Goose was found at Whitlingham C.P. on 9<sup>th</sup> February and stayed until at least 26<sup>th</sup> February. This coincided with a large flock arriving at Breydon Water. This is the second area record, following one at Thorpe in 2009.

**Egyptian Goose** – A common (and noisy!) resident. Two pairs bred this year. The first pair hatched eight goslings on 31<sup>st</sup> March and a second had seven goslings around the 6<sup>th</sup> April.

**Shelduck** – Several records from Thorpe Marshes. Shelducks have bred in the area in the past, but are now only seen occasionally, most often in spring.

**Wigeon** – Several seen during the first winter period, with 10 on 4<sup>th</sup> February. Four were seen on 9<sup>th</sup> December, and a decent local count of 19 was made on 30<sup>th</sup> December.

**Gadwall** – Several birds resident, with up to 250 in first winter period. Two pairs were seen in the ditches at Thorpe during May, and it is possible that they may breed out of sight, but no ducklings were seen.

**Teal** – There were exceptionally large numbers in Jan/Feb 2012, with around 350 on the Great Broad in late January (due to the numbers in inlets and sleeping on the island this was almost certainly an undercount). There is a large exchange between birds on the Great Broad and Thorpe Broad depending on disturbance. The highest count on Thorpe Broad was 253 on 11<sup>th</sup> February.

**Mallard** – Common resident. Several pairs bred, hatching up to eight ducklings. A late brood of recently-fledged ducklings was on the river between Whitlingham and Thorpe on 16<sup>th</sup> August. At least one of the broods was of ‘domestic-types’ involving dark birds with white fronts. Numbers reached 190 in mid-August, which perhaps surprisingly is one of the highest counts noted here.



**Pintail** – A scarce bird at Whitlingham, despite regularly occurring further down the Yare Valley at Hardley Flood. There were two records this year, both in February involving female birds.

**Shoveler** – Low numbers present throughout the first winter period. Four on 9<sup>th</sup> December were the first of the second winter period.



**Pochard** – A common winter visitor. A count of 140 in mid-February is close to the site record (143). Several birds stayed into the spring. In December one individual provided an added pitfall for those looking for the Ring-necked Duck, as it had a superficially similar face pattern (the right hand bird, seen here with a more typical female).



**Ring-necked Duck** – A female Ring-necked Duck was found amongst a mixed flock of ducks on the Great Broad on 9<sup>th</sup> December and remained until 13<sup>th</sup>. This bird may well be the returning broadland bird first seen in November 2008. For a better picture see the article on page 8. The record has been submitted to the county records committee.



**Ferruginous Duck** – A 1<sup>st</sup>-winter drake was found in the conservation area bay on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012. It remained until the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and has been submitted to the county rarities committee. This is the first apparently genuine record for Whitlingham, following a colour-ringed escape in 2007 and several hybrids.

**Tufted Duck** – Seen in every month of the year, but much more numerous in winter. Numbers reached around 450 in the first winter period and around 150 in the second.

**Scaup** – Two reported in the first winter period, neither staying for longer than a day.



**Common Scoter** – A drake was found on the Great Broad on the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> August 2012, and remained until dusk the next day. This is the first sighting since 2009 and possibly the first August record for the area. There was also a female-type bird on the Great Broad on 9<sup>th</sup> December, which unusually for this species stayed for over a week.

**Goldeneye** – Small numbers in the first winter period, with a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter drake lingering at Thorpe Broad into April. Two redheads were present in mid-December following a cold spell.



**Smew** – One redhead was first seen on 8<sup>th</sup> February, and was joined by a second between the 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>. A third bird briefly joined the other two during the afternoon of 15<sup>th</sup> February, but departed on the same day.



**Goosander** – A redhead was in the area for a while during February, whilst a drake was also seen and photographed on the Great Broad. In December two were seen flying upriver past Thorpe Broad, with a female present on the broad on the 16<sup>th</sup> and a male on the broad on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-breasted Merganser** – One in February for a single day was the first record since 2004. What may have been the same bird was seen downstream on the river at Strumpshaw in March.



**Pheasant** – Common resident in low numbers. Most of these are typical ring-necked birds, however two un-ringed males were present on 28<sup>th</sup> January and a *tenebrosus*-variant female was at Whitlingham on 3<sup>rd</sup> April and remained in the general area until at least September (see photo).

**Cormorant** – Common winter visitor, a few birds resident. Up to 40 birds roosted in the trees on the island in the first winter period. Most of the birds are of the race *carbo*, but several *sinensis* race birds ('Continental Cormorant') were also present.

**Bittern** – Seen for the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive winter. This year's record was typical, with a bird seen along the North shore of the Great Broad opposite the Visitor's Centre at dusk in January. Interestingly a bird was seen in a similar place on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011, although presumably it had moved to somewhere close by rather than staying in the rather sparse area of reeds along the broad edge for several days.

**Little Egret** – Several records of birds in flight, usually in the evening. There is a resident bird along the river at Old Lakenham, which has been seen flying towards Trowse and may account for the Whitlingham records.

**Great White Egret** – One seen on 10<sup>th</sup> February flying along the river past the Great Broad and dropped out of sight on the Thorpe side of the river. This was presumably the bird later seen west of Norwich before settling at Marlingford. Although increasingly seen in the county in recent years, Great White Egret is still a county rarity, and this bird has been submitted to the county rarities committee. This was the second area record.

**Grey Heron** – Resident, with up to four seen on occasions. Another bird can be regularly found beneath the electricity pylon opposite the May Gurney offices.

**Little Grebe** – Winter visitor. Up to six birds, were present, often spending time on the river.

**Great Crested Grebe** – Resident, only one pair bred this year, with one large juvenile on the river in early August.

**Red Kite** - One seen over Thorpe on two consecutive days in May and several other sightings in late spring. In addition one was seen over Whitlingham Lane on August. Red Kites are increasing in number in Norfolk and sightings are expected to become more regular.

**Marsh Harrier** – A pale male bird hunted over Thorpe Marsh regularly in May & June. A darker male and a female were also reported, with an unprecedented four birds being seen on one day in May.

**Sparrowhawk** – Resident and possibly breeding in the area.

**Buzzard** – A bird that presumably has a territory south of Norwich is seen infrequently over the country park. In early August two Buzzards were seen circling together from Thorpe Marshes along with an unidentified large raptor sp.

**Osprey** – There were long-staying birds further upriver at Strumpshaw in both spring and autumn. The spring bird was seen twice over Whitlingham marsh before flying east over the A47, whilst the autumn bird was also seen nearby and probably spent some time in the same area.

**Kestrel** – Resident and probably breeding in the area.

**Hobby** – One summered in the area and was seen frequently from May onwards. A record count of five individuals were seen on one day in May, presumably on passage.

**Peregrine** – Several sightings. A pair bred successfully in Norwich city centre, raising two young, so Peregrines should become a more common sight over the next few years. The Cathedral spire is just visible from the top of the Lime tree avenue.

**Water Rail** – Present at Whitlingham and Thorpe, but only seen and heard in winter, therefore whether birds are present all year round or just winter in the area is unknown. Three were calling at Whitlingham in October (two from near the Little Broad and one from the Great Broad).

**Moorhen** – Resident breeder, with several broods raised this year.

**Coot** – Resident breeder, numbers swelled in winter to 350+

**Oystercatcher** – Seen at Thorpe Station Marsh, and often a pair at the sewage works. Six flew over from the sewage works towards Thorpe in July.

**Avocet** – Only one record this year, typically in early spring, at Thorpe Marsh on 14<sup>th</sup> March.

**Little Ringed Plover** – Spring visitor to Thorpe Marsh, first arriving on the 21<sup>st</sup> March and four on 31<sup>st</sup> March. After a large gap birds were seen again in late spring.

**Grey Plover** – One seen by several observers at Thorpe Station Marsh in February during a cold spell is the second Whitlingham area record.

**Lapwing** – Resident, large numbers in winter (120+ in January). Numbers began to increase in July, including many juveniles.

**Knot** – A rare bird at Whitlingham, one was seen near the Watersports Centre on 2<sup>nd</sup> February.

**Dunlin** – One at Thorpe Marsh was seen several times during February, then a record count of 12 on 15<sup>th</sup> March. A summer-plumaged bird was seen on the scrape in April.

**Ruff** - Rare locally, a flock of 28 seen and photographed at Thorpe Marsh on 11th January was exceptional. One was also seen there on 5<sup>th</sup> February.

**Snipe** – Winter visitor, up to 13 seen at Thorpe in the first winter period although this was almost certainly an undercount. At least 60 birds were seen at Thorpe in December following a cold spell. At Whitlingham two birds were seen regularly on the north shore of the main island during January.

**Black-tailed Godwit** – One seen and photographed at Thorpe Marsh on the shingle spit on 15<sup>th</sup> March, several other flyover sightings.

**Common Sandpiper** – Annual passage migrant, with several seen moving between Thorpe and Whitlingham in April and May. At Whitlingham one of the birds could be regularly found perched on a moored boat for several days. Seven at Thorpe Marsh on 26<sup>th</sup> May was a good local count.

**Green Sandpiper** – A passage migrant, seen mainly at Thorpe. An unusually early bird was seen February, with most sightings in March and April. A bird was on a wooden platform on the Great Broad in May, and return passage began in early August, with up to four birds seen on the scrape at Thorpe. There was a record of presumably an over-wintering bird at Thorpe on 13/12/12. This bird may be one of several also seen at Cantley Beet Factory during December.



**Redshank** – One was seen and photographed on the scrape at Thorpe on 26<sup>th</sup> May.

**Wood Sandpiper** – One was seen at Thorpe Marsh on 24<sup>th</sup> June and another 5<sup>th</sup> July.

**Black-headed Gull** – Resident, with numbers reaching 500+ in winter. Large numbers fly over in the evenings as the gulls head to Breydon Water to roost.



**Little Gull** – The only record this year was of a flock of 11 at Thorpe Marsh on the same day as the Arctic Tern passage (24<sup>th</sup> April).

**Common Gull** – Fairly common in winter. An amazing count of c2000 was reported in January.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** – A few present all year round, although most common in summer. Large groups from nearby farmland congregate in the evening before flying to roost.

**Herring Gull** – Fairly common, especially in autumn/winter. Most of these were of the race *argenteus*, but one particularly large bird on 1<sup>st</sup> January was of the race *argentatus*.

**Yellow-legged Gull** – Several records from the first winter period on the Great Broad, an adult with Lesser Black-backed Gulls on 24<sup>th</sup> August and two on 6<sup>th</sup> October.



**Caspian Gull** – A near-adult seen and photographed on the 31<sup>st</sup> March was the third confirmed record for Whitlingham. Another bird, this time a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter, was reported on 6<sup>th</sup> October. As of 2013 this species is a description species in Norfolk, and any reports should be sent to the Norfolk Rarities Committee for assessment.

**Great Black-backed Gull** – Occasional records throughout the year.

**Common Tern** – Up to nine seen in late April and early May. A pair was observed mating on a post on the Great Broad on 1<sup>st</sup> June, but no juveniles were seen.



**Arctic Tern** – At least four passed through on April 24<sup>th</sup>, with several single birds in the two weeks after. This coincided with a very large movement of Arctic Terns, with many reservoirs in England hosting large numbers.

**Feral Pigeon** – Flocks from Norwich and Thorpe seen in flight throughout the year. Nearby at Trowse a flock roosts on a roof between the railway and May Gurney building.

**Stock Dove** – Resident at Thorpe Marshes, occasionally seen elsewhere. A pair was present in an old tree on the meadow south of Whitlingham Lane in spring.



**Woodpigeon** – Common resident and breeder. In autumn and winter large numbers seen moving overhead.

**Collared Dove** – Small numbers present, mostly in gardens along Whitlingham Lane.

**Cuckoo** – Summer visitor. Up to four individuals present on 16<sup>th</sup> June, including a pair at Thorpe Marsh and calling males on the island and eastern plantation at Whitlingham.

**Barn Owl** – One seen on several evenings at Thorpe Marsh, with two seen on one occasion after heavy rain. These birds may have bred at the sewage works nearby, where there used to be a number of pairs.

**Swift** – Common summer visitor, the first of the year was seen on 24<sup>th</sup> April, around a week earlier than normal. The last sighting was one flying south on the 24<sup>th</sup> August.

**Kingfisher** – Resident, but easier to see in winter. There is a pair at Trowse Meadows and several along the Yare that can be seen from the Thorpe side.

**Green Woodpecker** – Resident. A juvenile bird on Whitlingham Meadow in the autumn was presumably born nearby.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** – Resident and presumed breeder.

**Skylark** – A singing bird at Thorpe Marsh in July was unusual. Skylarks are common on the farmland east of Whitlingham Sewage Works.

**Sand Martin** – A common spring visitor that formerly bred in part of the quarry, but so far haven't returned since landscaping took place. They were later than normal returning this year, first seen 8<sup>th</sup> April but large numbers not seen until 21<sup>st</sup> April.

**Swallow** – Common summer visitor, first seen on 21<sup>st</sup> April. Despite sightings from around the county (including nearby at Strumpshaw) into November, no particularly late sightings were made at Whitlingham.

**House Martin** – Common summer visitor, first seen on 21<sup>st</sup> April.

**Meadow Pipit** – A small flock was seen at Thorpe Marsh in spring, and then again in autumn.

**Yellow Wagtail** – One on 6<sup>th</sup> May and at least two more heard passing overhead in mid-May (not seen to land). Yellow Wagtails are scarce here, so three records represents a good year for this species.

**Grey Wagtail** – One seen at Thorpe Marsh in first winter period and one heard on the river near the sewage works in late spring. Several pairs bred successfully in the city, so it is hoped that they will recolonize the river near Whitlingham in the near future.

**Pied Wagtail** – Resident often seen around the main car park and slipway. At least one brood was raised this year.

**Waxwing** – One seen flying west over the sewage works on 31<sup>st</sup> October.

**Wren** – Common resident and presumed breeder

**Dunnock** – Resident and presumed breeder.

**Robin** – Common resident and breeder.

**Nightingale** – Two singing males at Whitlingham CP (one first reported on 3<sup>rd</sup> May) were the first to be recorded here since 2007 and stayed until at least 13<sup>th</sup> May. 2012 saw a BTO Nightingale Survey and these sightings were reported to that project.

**Whinchat** – One reported from Thorpe Marsh on 15<sup>th</sup> May. There are several previous records of Whinchat at Thorpe, but this may be the first spring record as the others have been from return migration in August.

**Blackbird** – Common resident and breeder

**Fieldfare** – Winter visitor, most sightings were from flocks flying over in the first winter period.

**Song Thrush** – A scarce resident, most often encountered in the scrub between Whitlingham Lane and the Little Broad.

**Redwing** – Common winter visitor, mostly flocks flying over but also seen in scrub along the riverbank near Whitlingham Woods.

**Mistle Thrush** – Resident, but scarce this year. A post-breeding flock of five was on the meadows south of Whitlingham Lane in early August.

**Cetti's Warbler** – Common resident and presumed breeder.

**Blackcap** – Common summer visitor, first seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2012. There were no wintering records this year.

**Garden Warbler** – Scarce summer visitor, first seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. A pair presumably bred at Thorpe Marsh, whilst there were several at Whitlingham C.P, with a maximum of four on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

**Lesser Whitethroat** – Scarce migrant, also first seen 3<sup>rd</sup> May (2). No sign of breeding at Whitlingham this year, it is likely that the birds seen in early May were commuting between the C.P. and Carey's Meadow, north of the river.

**Whitethroat** – Common summer visitor and breeder, first seen 3<sup>rd</sup> May. Note that there was an organised dawn chorus walk on this date, the birds first seen on the 3<sup>rd</sup> may have arrived after the weekend and already been present for several days.

**Grasshopper Warbler** – At least two birds reeling at Thorpe Marsh from 20<sup>th</sup> April onwards. One of these was heard reeling into July and early August, which is unusual.

**Sedge Warbler** – Summer visitor and breeder, first seen 7<sup>th</sup> April.

**Reed Warbler** – Summer visitor, late this year, first heard at Thorpe on 29<sup>th</sup> April, with birds at Whitlingham by 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

**Chiffchaff** – Common summer visitor, the first record of spring was at Thorpe Marsh on the 12<sup>th</sup> March. During the autumn several Chiffchaffs could be found with a flock of Long-tailed Tits, with the last report in October. The last singing bird was at Trowse Meadows on 22<sup>nd</sup> September.

**Willow Warbler** – Common summer visitor, first record on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2012, which is about usual for first arrivals.

**Goldcrest** – Resident in Whitlingham Woods, where they may breed. One had joined a roaming tit flock in the Little Broad Alders in September, and two were in hawthorn bushes along the riverbank in November.

**Firecrest** – Two reported in Whitlingham Woods 03/04/12.

**Long-tailed Tit** – Common resident and probable breeder.

**Blue Tit** – Common resident and breeder.

**Great Tit** – Common resident and breeder.

**Coal Tit** – Scarce resident, the least common tit species here.

**Marsh Tit** – Scarce resident in Whitlingham Woods and along the riverbank.

**Nuthatch** – Uncommon resident. At least two birds held territory this year, one in Whitlingham Woods and one in Trowse Woods.

**Treecreeper** – Scarce resident. Possibly as a result of tree cutting and scrub clearance there were no sightings from the Little Broad alders in the first winter period, but several are still present in Whitlingham Woods.

**Jay** – Common resident. Quite a few were seen during the autumn, but there was no evidence that these were continental birds.

**Magpie** – Common resident. In some years there is a large roost near the bird screen track, but no double-figure counts noted this year.

**Jackdaw** – Common resident, often seen on Whitlingham Meadows or over the trees nearby. This flock are particularly useful in warning of passing large raptors!

**Rook** – Uncommon, preferring more rural environments. Most sightings were from around the sewage works or in flight.

**Carrion Crow** – Common resident, often found around the edge of the Great Broad.

**Starling** – Mostly seen in flight, but seen several times feeding on Whitlingham meadows.

**Chaffinch** – Common resident, often seen feeding on the slipway near the car park.

**Greenfinch** – Formerly common, but now only seen occasionally.

**Goldfinch** – Common resident, small flocks seen throughout the year.

**Siskin** – A common winter visitor, Siskins could often be heard flying around the area in small groups. Sightings resumed from October for the second winter period, with numbers building into December.

**Linnet** – Occasional sightings from Thorpe Marsh, including a pair. They may breed on land at the sewage works.

**Lesser Redpoll** – Present throughout winter, with up to 15 seen during February. The first report of the autumn was of two seen at Thorpe Marsh on 8<sup>th</sup> November.

**Mealy Redpoll** – One sighting on 23<sup>rd</sup> February with Lesser Redpolls.

**Bullfinch** – A secretive resident and possible breeder. A pair was seen in Whitlingham Woods in the spring, whilst there were many sightings of birds along the riverbank in the first winter period. A pair were also seen and heard throughout the year at Thorpe Marsh.

**Reed Bunting** – Spring visitor and probable breeder. The first singing males were at Thorpe in February and Whitlingham by the end of March. Reed Buntings usually move to nearby farmland in the winter, but this year two were seen feeding on the path at Thorpe Marsh in mid-December.

**Total: 131**

## **Appendix A – Unrecorded but likely species**

These species are birds that are either seen in most years but not reported during 2012, or birds that were seen very close to Whitlingham and/or flying in the direction of the Whitlingham without being actually observed there.

**Red-legged Partridge** – Present in low numbers on nearby farmland but none reported from the Whitlingham recording area this year.

**Woodcock** – Several seen flying over the A47 nearby at dusk. It is likely that some wintered in the private bits of woodland covered by the Whitlingham recording area.

**Jack Snipe** – Jack Snipe are seen at Thorpe most winters, but due to the fact that they don't flush easily it is possible that some were present but not seen on the marsh at Thorpe this year.

**Whimbrel** – One reported flying south-east over Sherbourne Place in Norwich on 21<sup>st</sup> August probably tracked the river, in which case it would have flown over Whitlingham C.P.

**Tawny Owl** – A pair were seen in 2011, and the species remains a likely breeder. There are several owl boxes in the woods, but these look unused and in many cases derelict. The lack of reports is presumably due to the lack of night visits.

### **Note:**

You may be surprised by the omission of House Sparrow from this list, however this is correct. House Sparrows are present at the northern end of Bungalow Lane, Thorpe St Andrews, but they are very scarce at Whitlingham and none were reported from the recording area during 2012. I would be interested to hear of any sightings of House Sparrow from the area.

## **Appendix B – Escapes and birds of dubious origin**

**Black Swan** – A single bird has been present in the area for many years, moving between Whitlingham C.P. and Thorpe Green.

**Ruddy Shelduck** – A photograph on Archants 'iWitness' website taken at Whitlingham in late spring appears to show this species.

## **Appendix C – Hybrid wildfowl**



**Chinese Swan x Domestic Greylag Goose** – A family of large domestic geese with Swan Goose genes can regularly be found at Whitlingham, where they are the most aggressive geese. The three largest birds all have orange bills, but there is another bird with a black beak (pictured).



**Lesser White-fronted x Ross' Goose** – The long-staying small hybrid goose thought to be the offspring of Lesser White-fronted and Ross' Geese was again present with Greylag Geese for most of the year, often roosting near the main slipway in the evenings.



**Tufted Duck x Pochard** – A male 'Lesser Scaup' type bird was seen with other *Aythya* ducks during February's cold snap. Its back was a mid-grey, but lacking the vermiculations of either Scaup species.



**Pochard x Tufted Duck** – A female Pochard-type bird, thought to be a Pochard x Tufted Duck hybrid (seen here on the left) was seen in January. This bird resembled a female Pochard, but had a darker head with an extensive pale area around the bill base.



**Gadwall x Wigeon** – This bird was first seen in 2011. It basically looks like a drake Wigeon seen through a grey filter.

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## Local information

The following websites regularly contain sightings from the Whitlingham area:

<http://jamesbirdsandbeer.blogspot.co.uk/> (The author's blog, containing updates from Whitlingham & Thorpe, and a site guide and a site bird list)

<http://www.honeyguide.co.uk/thorpemarshes.htm> (Thorpe Marsh NWT unofficial site)

<http://yarevalleywildlife.synthasite.com/bird-notes-2012.php> (Yare Valley Birding website)

<http://shakysbirdingblog.blogspot.co.uk/> (Ricky Cleverley's Blog containing updates from Thorpe Marsh)

## Bird information services

Several sightings and dates have been taken from the bird information services. If you are fortunate enough to find a rare or locally scarce bird, please report it to one of them. Contact websites and phone numbers of the main providers can be found below.

[Rare Bird Alert](#) (0207 0382820), [BirdGuides](#) (0333 5772473), [BirdNet](#) (0115 8712888) or [BirdLine East Anglia](#) (07941 333970).