

The Birds of Whitlingham & Thorpe 2016



Compiled by James Emerson

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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 2017 report, by emailing: whitlinghambirds@yahoo.co.uk.

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Introduction

This is the fifth annual report of the bird species reported from the Whitlingham area (including Thorpe Marsh NWT reserve) during 2016. 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 recording area covered by this report can be found on the next page. Within this area most of the sightings come from the area around Whitlingham Great Broad and Thorpe Marsh.

In addition to my monthly counts and other sightings, a large number of records have been supplied by other local birders, to whom I am grateful. This year I have also been able to include records sent to Chris Durdin for his Thorpe Marsh Wildlife Report 2016, which I viewed in draft form before publication.

I have included the majority of sightings that have been sent to me directly or reported online, with only a few being left out of the final report. This does however mean that there are a number of species in the report that I haven't personally seen. As a result I feel that for recording purposes the sightings in this report should be treated as unverified records, i.e. sightings should not be used for any 'official' purposes.

In general when deciding what records and details to include I have adopted the following categorisation:

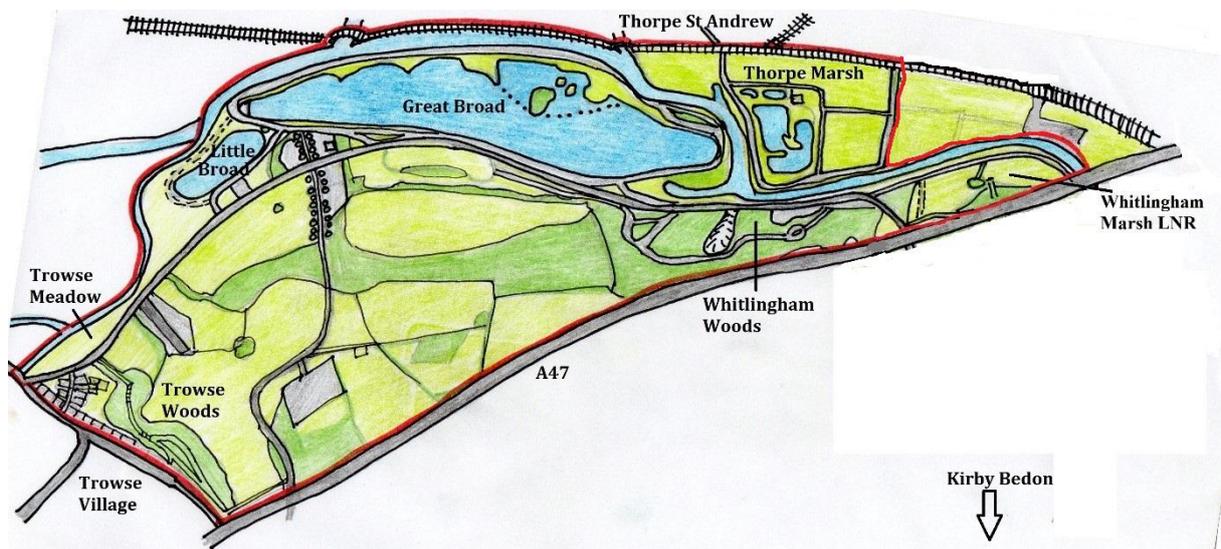
Resident species and regular migrants – reports have been used to write a general summary for the species, with records only omitted if they were particularly unusual, for example very early or late records.

Species recorded annually in low numbers at Whitlingham – species that occur in most years are dealt with as above but with more detail regarding the sightings

Species seldom recorded at Whitlingham or particularly scarce locally – records included in the report with * before the species name. As much detail as possible is included with each of these records, in particular it is mentioned if the species recorded was photographed, if it was seen by more than one individual, if there were any other sightings nearby etc. These records also have the initials of the person who reported the sighting. Note that this won't necessarily be the person who first found the species in the case of multi-observed records.

County or national rarities – included at the editor's discretion. Details of the record included as with local scarcities, but with an additional note as to whether the record has been submitted to and/or accepted by the relevant rarities committee, based on the latest WIP (work-in-progress) files.

Observers are asked to send details of any noteworthy sightings direct to the county recorder, Neil Lawton. Details on how to do this can be found here: <http://norfolkbirds.weebly.com/submitting-records.html>. Any observer lucky enough to find a species at Whitlingham that is a county rarity is asked to send a description to the [Norfolk Records Committee](#), who will publish their verdict in the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report 2016, to be published in autumn 2017.



The Whitlingham Recording area covered by this report. Where possible distinctive features make up the boundaries, for example the railway line along part of the north of the area and the A47 to the south.

The key parts of the recording area are: Whitlingham Country Park, Trowse Meadow, Trowse Woods, Whitlingham Marsh LNR and Thorpe Marsh NWT. Crown Point Estate land north of the A47 is currently included, although as most of it has no public access there are seldom any sightings from this area.

Areas of Thorpe St Andrew, including Thorpe Green, are not within the recording area, however as the boundary is rather arbitrary, details of wildfowl and gulls recorded there have been included where it is likely that the birds involved were also sometimes present at or visible from Whitlingham.

New to Whitlingham: Velvet Scoter

On 7th November a female-type Velvet Scoter was seen at Ranworth Broad, and there were also two found far inland in Buckinghamshire. The day after, Justin Lansdell decided to check Whitlingham C.P, and found a Velvet Scoter (given the scarcity of this species inland, almost certainly the Ranworth individual relocating). With only an hour or so of daylight remaining, a relatively small number of birders managed to see the scoter on the 8th, but fortunately it remained until the 14th, probably in part down to the dull and rainy weather over most of that period.

Whitlingham is one of the best inland Norfolk sites for Common Scoters, something born out further this year with nine individuals recorded in the spring. In contrast, Velvet Scoters as well as being scarcer generally, are also found away from the coast much less often, with only 2 inland records over the past ten years prior to 2016 in Norfolk, at Wroxham Broad on 26/12/09 and Filby Broad (30/10/10 to 28/11/10).

Incidentally the winter so far has been a good one for seaducks around the Norfolk coast, with a large flock of Velvet Scoters and Long-tailed Duck present off Titchwell.



This photo plus those on page 6 are courtesy of Gary White ©2016



Ringed wildfowl – interesting movements in 2016

James Emerson

Introduction

Despite the large numbers of waterbirds present at Whitlingham throughout the year, only a small number can be viewed out of the water, making sightings of colour ringed birds relatively unusual here. A number of swans and geese carry metal rings, most of which have been attached by members of the UEA ringing group at Whitlingham. This year however there were several interesting sightings that have added to our knowledge of the movements of birds seen at Whitlingham, and these sightings are summarised here.

Mute Swans

Two Mute Swans bearing orange leg rings with black print (4CEZ and 4CHY) were observed on the River Yare in late summer. These birds had been ringed earlier in the year at Hoveton by the East Anglia Swan Study Group, and shows movement of birds from the River Bure to the Whitlingham area, something only previously noted when the returning female Ring-necked Duck spent time at Whitlingham and Wroxham, Malthouse Broad etc.

Even more interestingly, 4CEZ already had an RSPCA metal ring on it when it was caught and colour-ringed at Hoveton. Investigations showed that the bird had originally been ringed at Eye Green near Peterborough in Jan 2016! Further evidence of movement from the fens was to follow, with the sighting of lime-green ringed bird JN9, which was also picked up by the RSPCA (this time near Dersingham), and released at Bank Farm near Welney in 2008.



Greylag Goose

Several years ago a neck-collaring project was launched in the Hickling area to monitor the populations of feral geese. The neck collars were orange with black print, and observers had been keeping an eye out for them at Whitlingham, with no success. When an orange neck-collared bird, FKC, was seen at Whitlingham on 22nd June we naturally assumed it was from the Hickling population. However, following submission of the details to the BTO, Lee Barber kindly provided us with the history of the bird, which turned out to have been ringed in July 2015 at the BTO's Nunnery Lakes at Thetford, a seemingly unusual source for wildfowl at Whitlingham.



Tufted Duck

A Tufted Duck seen by Drew Lyness on the Great Broad on 3rd May had a pale blue nasal saddle, marked HAN in black letters. This was traced to a French scheme, but unfortunately despite it being submitted many months ago, no information has of yet been forthcoming from the ringing scheme.



Photo taken by Drew Lyness

Coot

On 1st January I was scanning the slipway at the edge of the Great Broad when a colour-ringed Coot emerged from the water. I began writing down the code, before a Black-headed Gull spooked it back into the broad. It could have been the one that got away, but fortunately it re-emerged and I was able to confirm the code as A164 in white characters on a green ring. I had not seen a colour-ringed Coot here before, so I was particularly pleased to have read the ring, and duly submitted it when I got home. It turned out to be a Norwegian bird, so I was able to submit the record directly to their website, and given that several of the returning Black-headed Gulls nearby are also from Norway it didn't strike me as unusual.

Several months later I received a message from Kane Brides, who co-ordinates Britain's Coot monitoring programme. He wanted permission to use my photos of the Whitlingham Coot, as it turns out that this was the first Norwegian-ringed Coot to be reported from Britain! Several British-ringed birds had been sighted in Norway, so the migration route was known, but it was still a small addition to our knowledge of Coot migration, and a timely reminder that there are always opportunities to add to our understanding of bird populations, regardless of patch location.

Incidentally Kane later informed me that A164 had been sighted back in Norway over the summer. At the time of writing Coot numbers have built up again for the winter at Whitlingham, but there has been no sign of any colour-ringed birds near the slipway so far.



Acknowledgements

Thanks to the ringers involved for supplying information about these birds, to Kane Brides for information about the Coot, Lee Barber for information about the Greylag Goose and to Adam Manvell for the additional Mute Swan sightings.

Even more ringed Black-headed Gulls at Whitlingham

James Emerson

Introduction

In the past three reports I have included information about ringed Black-headed Gulls that have been reported from Whitlingham or across the river at Thorpe River Green, another area where gulls congregate in good numbers. Given that the previous reports discuss the types of rings and difficulties of ring-reading there seems no point in repeating this information, so this brief article simply provides details of the gulls seen this year.

Ringed gull data and discussion

Table 1 – Ringed Black-headed Gulls seen in the first winter period (Jan-Feb) 2016

Ring number	Date first seen	Place ringed	Date ringed	Distance travelled /Km	Seen previously?
White J5JE	17/01/16	Oslo, NORWAY	06/09/12	996	Yes (2013 on)
White A341	17/01/16	Neumunster, GERMANY	16/12/12	600	Yes (2014 on)
White 926	17/01/16	DENMARK	Response not received		No
Metal 6206183	28/01/16	Langøyskjæret, NORWAY	18/06/06	955	Yes (2015)
Metal 245.2xxx	17/01/16	FINLAND?	?	?	No

In the first winter period three colour-ringed Black-headed Gulls were observed from Whitlingham. White A341 and White 926 were present near the slipway and White J5JE was observed on the Little Broad when it froze over in mid-January. A metal-ring was only partially read but we suspect was from Finland from the text, whilst a returning Norwegian metal ringed bird was also at Thorpe.



Table 2 – Ringed Black-headed Gulls seen in the second winter period (Oct-Dec) 2016

Ring number	Date first seen	Place ringed	Date ringed	Distance travelled / Km	Seen previously?
White J0AJ	18/11/16	Akershus, NORWAY	06/05/12	976	Yes (14/15 and 15/16)
White J5JE	08/10/16	Oslo, NORWAY	06/09/12	996	Yes (13/14)
White A341	11/11/16	Neumunster, GERMANY	16/12/12	600	Yes (14&15)
White AF614	11/11/16	Hamburg, GERMANY	23/10/15	590	No



White 926 – a new colour-ringed Black-headed Gull for Whitlingham. It was ringed in Denmark, but no further details have been received.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Justin Lansdell for supplying much of the 2016 information, to the various ringers involved and to the other birds who reported sightings of some of the birds, including Nick Elsey and David Norgate.

Whitlingham Wildfowl Survey

Complete wildfowl counts were made once per month by the author to contribute to the BTOs Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). The data here is based on the combined counts for Whitlingham Little Broad, Great Broad and Thorpe Broad, however some counts differ from the figures submitted to WeBS in that they also include birds seen on nearby land. The counts are not necessarily high counts for the month – ad hoc and high counts are described in the individual species accounts.

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mute Swan	34	17	17	15	16	58*	74	60	24	36	30	32
Greylag Goose	31	58	9	33	35*	133*	20	0	10	15	7	29
Canada Goose	3	8	8	19	15*	36*	40	4	4	4	3	29
Brent Goose	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Egyptian Goose	8	2	0	4*	4*	8	37	21	10	8	5	3
Wigeon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gadwall	213	39	23	2	1	0	0	4	0	25	112	252
Teal	71	12	29	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	45	42
Mallard	87	32	47	28	28*	51	81	98	75	54	64	69
[Muscovy Duck]	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Pintail	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shoveler	20	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	2
Pochard	70	10	6	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	7	31
Tufted Duck	175	164	121	81	10	5	7*	4	7	24	194	387
Scaup	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Goldeneye	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Velvet Scoter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cormorant	26	34	12	4	2	3	8	5	15	48	30	49
Grey Heron	7	0	1	1	0	1	4	4	3	3	6	3
Little Grebe	5	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	11	7
Great-crested Grebe	8	2	5	9	4	4	8	4	7	8	9	2
Water Rail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Moorhen	3	2	4	6	1	1	3	7	5	9	6	10
Coot	205	72	29	2	4	5	28	48	97	163	254	371
Lapwing	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Snipe	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Tern	0	0	0	0	2	2	7	0	0	0	0	0
Arctic Tern	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black-headed Gull	520	393	365	15	2	3	16	7	32	192	98	350
Common Gull	35	7	19	0	0	13	0	0	1	7	0	3
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	2	4	17	104	34	52	10	8	14	2	5
Herring Gull	10	23	27	23	38	0	3	0	0	40	8	11
Kingfisher	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1

*Goslings/ducklings seen but not included in count figures as less than ¾ grown.

Whitlingham and Thorpe Classified List

This list follows the latest taxonomical order taken from the British Ornithologists Union (BOU), available here: <http://www.bou.org.uk/thebritishlist/British-List.pdf>,

The description on the right refers to the chances of encountering a species if visiting at the appropriate time of year (common/scarce/rare) along with whether it is resident, a migrant, usually seen as a flyover or if it is only an occasional visitor.

Where a species is locally scarce or rare it will have initials after it – these relate to observers, a list of which can be found at the end of the classified list.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Common resident



A good year for breeding Mute Swans, with four pairs fledging young, 1 on Little Broad, 4 & 5 on Great Broad and 5 on Thorpe Broad. The highest count was of 119 on 5th July. Seven metal-ringed birds were checked and reported – all of them were ringed at Whitlingham between 2009 and 2014. Colour-ringed birds were also observed – see article on page 7 for details.

The brood of cygnets from Thorpe Broad contained a white ‘Polish’ cygnet, as did another brood nearby at Griffin marina. This unusual sex chromosome-linked genetic mutation gives the affected cygnet white feathers from birth rather than upon moulting to adulthood. It affects female cygnets more than male ones, and leads to increased mortality as adult swans drive them out of their territories at an earlier age. Adult Polish swans can only be recognised by their pinkish-grey feet – something to keep an eye out for in the Whitlingham area. Moss Taylor is currently writing an article on Polish Swans, to be published in British Birds sometime in 2017, and has been informed about these local birds.

* **Bewick’s Swan** *Cygnus columbianus*

Scarce flyover species

A flock of eight were seen and photographed flying over the country park on 10th Nov (RCh). Several flocks flew east over Norwich railway station on 11th Feb and probably crossed the recording area.

* **Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*

Scarce flyover species

Two were present on the Great Broad on 21st Oct, before flying off eastwards over Thorpe Marsh (CT).

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Occasional flyover

Probably flies over regularly, but typically underrecorded here. Flocks of 90, 105 and 42 flew over the Great Broad on 3rd Jan, more over on 20th Oct and a flock over in late December.

*** White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons*

Rare flyover

Seven reported flying over on 12th Dec (MC). Rare here, although present over winter at Buckenham Marshes.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Common resident



Numbers unusually low for much of the year, with birds presumably either on the river or commuting to other locations. The exception to this was the highest count of the year, which was an impressive 310 on 5th July. A minimum of four broods at Whitlingham, where as usual variable brood numbers and creching of goslings prevented a more definitive count. Breeding also noted at Thorpe Broad where two goslings seen in May.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Common resident



Three present at the start of the year and resident throughout. The highest count was 43 on 5th July, along with three Canada x Greylag hybrids. One metal-ringed bird was reported to the BTO, and had been ringed at Whitlingham. A brood of 3 was present on 6th May. Numbers had increased in December, but most were on or around the main island, making counting difficult.

*** Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis*

Occasional visitor



One flew east over Thorpe Marsh on 20th May (DL). There are several feral flocks now in the county, and this bird is likely to be from one of them.

Photo taken by Drew Lyness.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

Rare winter visitor



One present briefly on the Great Broad on 13th Nov was the third area record (GW & JE). What was presumably the same individual was seen flying across the A47 from Whitlingham on 22nd Nov (DB), although it was not seen in between those dates by birders looking for the Velvet Scoter. **Photo taken by Gary White.**

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Common resident.



A typical occurrence pattern, with several resident pairs and a peak in July when c35 on 21st. Two broods noted at Whitlingham, firstly a brood of two, followed by a brood of five seen on 10th April. A pair were also seen with five goslings at Thorpe Broad in late May. Two metal ringed birds were reported to the BTO, both ringed previously at Whitlingham.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Scarce spring visitor



One on the edge of Thorpe Broad on 19th and 20th May, and then seen on several dates later in the same week. What may have been the same bird again at Thorpe on 10th June.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley.

*** Mandarin**

Irregular visitor



A pair were found on the Little Broad on 27th April and remained until 29th April although elusive at times (CB, CS et al).

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Scarce winter visitor

One female present on Thorpe Broad on 3rd Jan, with three on the Great Broad on 23rd Jan. Two still present on 3rd Feb, and seven present for a couple of days in March. In the second winter period three present on 23rd Sep, three flew over on 3rd Nov and one on the Great Broad on 8th Nov. A lone drake was present at Whitlingham during the wildfowl count on 18th Dec, with two at Thorpe Broad on 20th Dec and one still present in the area on 31st Jan.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Common winter visitor



On 1st Jan 226 were present, higher than any count in 2015. Numbers held up through the month, with 213 present on 17th Jan. Two pairs bred at Thorpe, although only seen sporadically. A female with a brood of four young seen on 17th May, with the other brood of two ducklings noted on 13th June. Numbers built steadily during the winter period – the 248 present at

Whitlingham was just two short of the figure of 250 that denotes a WeBS site of national importance for this species, however as there were four at Thorpe Broad on the same day and the sites are classed together for monitoring purposes, the mark was hit! An estimated 290 were present on the final day of the year.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Common winter visitor.



A count of 126 at Whitlingham on 1st Jan, whilst at Thorpe numbers peaked at 73 on 18th Jan. Numbers declined in March, with two still present during April and also reported at Thorpe Marsh on 17th June. In the second winter period recorded from 15th Oct, with around 40 regularly seen around the main island and smaller bays in the conservation area.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common resident.



An early winter peak of 86 were present on 17th Jan, with numbers declining in early spring. The only 100+ count was of 120 on 5th July. A brood of five was noted in late April, and several others later on, including up to four broods at Thorpe in May. One metal-ringed bird was present on the slipway at Whitlingham, however the ring could not be read.

*** Pintail** *Anas acuta*

Rare winter visitor

An elusive female was first seen on the Great Broad on 10th January (JL). What was presumably the same bird was seen at Thorpe on the afternoon of 13th January, and then back on the Great Broad on 17th January. Whilst at Whitlingham the Pintail spent much of the time out of view in the small bays around the main island. On 25th Jan a female Pintail was also seen at UEA Broad, which could relate to the same individual given their scarcity locally.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Scarce winter visitor



Around 20 were reported at dusk on 2nd Jan, with this number present for several weeks, up to a maximum of 22 on 23rd Jan, relatively high counts for the site. Birds were present at Thorpe during Jan and Feb, with eight on 4th Mar. A pair at Thorpe on 10th June was unusual. Four returning birds were present on 23rd Sept, and three drakes were present on the Great Broad on 29th Oct. Numbers again broke 20 during November, with 21 on the 8th, although numbers dropped to single figures during Dec.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Common winter visitor



The year began with 75 present on 1st Jan, and 70 split between Whitlingham and Thorpe on 17th Jan. 51 at Thorpe Broad on 25th Jan is a notable count for that site. A drake was seen on 12th April, with one (sex not noted) on 11th May and a pair on 6th June, the latter sightings at Thorpe Broad. After a blank July, a drake was seen on 8th Aug and birds present until the year end. A female attached itself to the Tufted Duck family

and was seen on several occasions with the female Tufted Duck and grown young. Numbers generally low in the second winter period, peaking at 31 in December. In both periods the flock was sporadically accompanied by a female Ferruginous Duck x Pochard hybrid.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Common winter visitor



In the first winter period 228 were present at Whitlingham on 1st Jan, with almost all of them at Thorpe Broad on 25th Jan, presumably as a result of disturbance at Whitlingham. Over 100 were still present during March. Two broods noted at Thorpe Marsh, one of seven ducklings in June and another of nine ducklings in July. A blue nasal-saddled bird was noted on 3rd May. Numbers climbed to 200 in November, but there was a

large influx in December, with the count of 384 on 18th December convincingly breaking the site record. Numbers then declined slightly - 318 were present on 24th Dec.

*** Scaup** *Aythya marila*

Rare winter visitor



A first-winter drake was found on the Great Broad on 18th Dec along with the large numbers of Tufted Ducks (JE). It remained until the year end, undergoing a moult that meant that meant reduced white around the beak and some pale scapulars had appeared by the end of December.

*** Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

Scarce passage migrant



A drake Common Scoter found on Thorpe Broad on 27th Mar (JL) was the first record here since Dec 2012, and surprisingly also the first March record. On 12th Apr a flock of eight set a new high count for the site (DL). One flew off shortly afterwards, but the other seven remained until dusk and were widely twitched by local birders.

*** Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca*

Very rare inland



The first site record of Velvet Scoter occurred on 8th Nov (JL) and was last seen on 14th Nov. There were several other records of inland Velvet Scoters around the same period, although only one other in Norfolk, which probably involved the same individual. See article on pages 5 & 6 for more photos.

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Scarce winter visitor



Two females present on the Great Broad on 1st Jan, with an extra female also present on 3rd Jan. One present on Thorpe Broad later in January, but then no sightings after 6th Feb until one at Thorpe on 29th Oct and one at Whitlingham on 8th Nov. Several records from Thorpe Broad at the end of November/start of December, although none from Whitlingham around that time.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

Scarce winter visitor

A mild first winter period with only one sighting, of a redhead on 29th Mar, that circled over the Great Broad and appeared to land at the west end. No further sightings until an eclipse drake was seen on the river near the Rushcutters on 10th Nov, with presumably the same bird also seen at Whitlingham later on the same date.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Occasional visitor

Only one sighting within the recording area this year, one flushed from a grassy area of the conservation area at Whitlingham on 29th Mar (JE).

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Fairly common resident

Present all year round at Thorpe Marsh, Whitlingham Woods and the surrounding area, although more often heard than seen. Young were seen at Trowse Meadow, the first proven breeding for some time here.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common winter visitor



Typically between 30-40 present over the winter period, dropping to less than five over the summer. Highest counts were roost counts made at dusk, with a massive 161 counted on 6th Feb and another high count of 93 on 15th Oct. The large numbers mean that Cormorants fill trees on both sides of the island, making counts trickier than they used to be! No concerted attempts to identify birds to race – two birds spot-checked were both

sinensis.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Rare winter visitor



One seen and photographed on the Great Broad on 19th Jan. It was seen again on several dates in mid February, and was probably present but not seen between these dates. In the second winter period one reported flying over Thorpe Marsh and dropping down in to one of the dykes on 29th Oct plus two reports of birds flying over, firstly on 8th Nov and then on 12th Dec.

Photo taken by Justin Lansdell.

*** Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

County rarity

A report of one flight calling over Thorpe Marsh then continuing over Whitlingham Great Broad on 8th Jan (MC). [Editors note: There are currently no accepted records of Night Heron in the Whitlingham area. There were several records of Night Herons in the early 2000s, however these were considered to relate to birds that escaped from Great Witchingham Wildlife Park or their decedents. More recently a bird at Ranworth was accepted by the county rarities committee, so hopefully a well-documented sighting in the future would be accepted as a wild bird]

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Regular flyovers

Sightings of this species are now regular, mostly flying over at dusk, but occasionally hunting for food at Thorpe Marsh. Two flew west on 6th Feb and 22nd Mar, whilst interestingly two roosted in the tall trees on the island on 23rd July. Most Egrets flying over head westwards, probably to roost at Eaton, so one flying over east on 12th April was also of interest.

***Great White Egret** *Casmerodius alba*

County rarity

One reported flying south-east over Thorpe Marsh at dusk on 26th May (MC). This species has increased significantly in recent years, but despite this and a regular returning bird to the west of Norwich, Great White Egret remains a rare species at Whitlingham, with only two accepted records. [Editors note: Great White Egret is a county description species for records until 31st Dec 2016, but is being removed from the list from 1st Jan 2017]

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Common resident



Typically between one and four present on most visits, but higher numbers in winter. Five present on 3rd Jan, seven present on 17th Jan and six present on 18th Dec. A pair nested in trees south of the Yare nearby, and a juvenile was seen with a pair of adult birds at Thorpe Broad on 22nd May.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Common winter visitor



Up to five present on the Great Broad during January, with one at Thorpe Broad on 19th Feb. Three still present at Whitlingham on 13th Mar, but no further sightings in the first winter period. In the autumn one was present on 15th Oct, with a group of eight present on 8th Nov. This group increased to 11 on 13th Nov, the biggest group present here in recent years.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Resident



Present throughout the year, but the only double-figure count was of 10 during January. Courtship display noted on 16th Apr, although as in recent years nesting appeared to take place on the river rather than the Great Broad.

Photo taken by Chris Thornton.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Occasional flyovers

One seen flying over Whitlingham on 13th April and another sighting over Thorpe Marsh on 13th June. Given that this species is now fairly widespread in Norfolk and often encountered within a few miles of the city centre, this is a disappointingly low number of records.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Occasional flyovers

One seen from Whitlingham on 10th Jan, followed by fairly regular sightings of both male and female birds, usually over Thorpe Marsh. Two seen circling over Whitlingham Great Broad on 10th June was of note, whilst three juvenile birds were also seen on one date having presumably fledged relatively close by.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Resident

Seen sporadically at Whitlingham and Thorpe. A first-year bird was found dead along the edge of Whitlingham Woods in early autumn.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Resident nearby



Several pairs are now resident in the area and Buzzards are now an expected sight on warm days. A pale bird seen on several dates during the spring could well explain some of the reports of a Booted Eagle in south Norwich in recent years.

Photo taken by Drew Lyness

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Secretive resident/winter visitor

Present at Whitlingham and Thorpe during both winter periods, as usual more often heard than seen. Two heard at Whitlingham on 26th June were unusual but backed up the assumption that this species is present in low numbers all year round but more noticeable during winter. One fortunate observer also saw young birds at Thorpe in July, the first time in recent years that breeding has been proven.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common resident



Present all year. Typically recorded in single figures, although many more will be present and unrecorded. At least one brood noted from Thorpe Marsh.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Resident/Common winter visitor



The first winter peak count was 287 on 1st Jan, with around 200 present throughout the month. Few records over the summer, however a pair with chicks was seen at Thorpe Broad during May and June. In the second winter period numbers climbed to 163 in mid Oct, 254 in Nov and 371 on 18th Dec, the latter count being the highest total since the hugely productive 2009/10 winter. A colour-ringed bird noted on the slipway of the Great Broad was ringed in Norway – see article for details.

* **Common Crane** *Grus grus*

Rare flyover

Four flew in a southerly direction, east of Thorpe Marsh on 22nd Oct (MC)

* **Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Rare flyover

One reported calling and appearing to land at Thorpe Marsh after dark on 14th Apr (MC)

* **Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Scarce spring migrant

One heard calling at night over Thorpe Marsh on 19th Apr (MC)

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Regular spring visitor



Two, presumably a pair, at Whitlingham on 23rd Feb. Up to five were present on several dates throughout the spring at Thorpe Broad, but there was no sign of breeding – presumably these birds commute back to the sewage works.

Photo taken by Justin Lansdell

* **Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*

Rare passage migrant

A flock of around 100 seen flying over Thorpe Marsh on 11th Jan (MC) and also sightings of singles over on 2nd and 22nd Oct (MC)

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Common winter visitor

Sightings typically either of counts of 1-15 around the edge of Thorpe Broad, or of flocks flying over. The exceptions to this being counts of 161 on 25th Jan, 121 on 21st Jan and 50 on 12th Feb, all at Thorpe Marsh.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Scarce spring visitor

Up to three seen fairly regularly at Thorpe Marsh during mid-April, from 13th onwards. A pair were seen to mate on the shingle edge and settle down later in the spring in an apparent nest scrape, but no young were observed. It is possible that eggs or chicks were lost due to predation, although disturbance to the area caused by trespassing is a concern.

* **Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*

Rare passage migrant

One heard flying over Thorpe Marsh on 3rd May (MC) and one present on the edge of Thorpe Broad on 20th Oct (AP).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Scarce passage migrant

One flew in after a rain shower on 3rd May and landed on the shingle edge of Thorpe Broad, where it remained for around half an hour before flying east. Also reports of birds flying over on 8th, 12th and 21st April, 2nd May and 5th August.

* **Curlew** *Numenius arquata*

Occasional passage migrant

One flew over on 10th June (MC)

* **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

Scarce passage migrant

Four reported flying east over Thorpe Marsh on 19th Sept (MC).

* **Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*

Very rare flyover

One reported flying south-east on 13th Sept (MC). An unusual species this far along the valley, although often recorded in autumn further along the Yare at Cantley BF.

* **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

Scarce passage migrant

One heard flying over on 17th Apr (MC)

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Spring migrant



First of the year were two seen at Thorpe Marsh on 20th Apr, two weeks later than in 2015. 1 or 2 seen for the rest of April and early May, before the unusual sight of at least 10 birds present on 11th May (RM). One still present on 17th May, then a summer gap until 5th July when one present at Whitlingham. Seven appeared to go to roost on the Great Broad on 16th Aug.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Spring migrant



Although mostly seen on passage, at least one wintered nearby at the STW, and presumably this individual seen at Thorpe Marsh on 17th Jan and on several dates throughout winter and early spring. Up to four present in mid April from 12th, with other sightings on 6th May and 15th June. The first bird of autumn passage seen on 5th Aug, with sightings later in Aug and also in Oct.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley.

* **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

Rare flyover

One reported calling as it flew west over Thorpe Broad on 9th May (MC)

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Scarce spring migrant

Seen on several dates in early May from the 2nd onwards, sightings relating to birds flying over with the exception of two on the edge of Thorpe Broad on 5th May.

* **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

Scarce spring migrant

One heard flying over on 22nd Aug (MC)

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Scarce passage migrant

Singles seen at Thorpe Marsh on 12th March (photographed) and 17th April, whilst two were also reported flying over at night on 13th July.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Scarce winter visitor

Reports of one or two individuals at Thorpe Marsh on several occasions in Jan, Feb and lastly on 10th Mar. One also reported from Thorpe Marsh on multiple dates in November and December. As many of the Snipe and Jack Snipe are present in inaccessible areas sightings often refer to birds inadvertently flushed – in 2016 this included disturbance from a Barn Owl, Chinese Water Deer and a dog.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Scarce winter visitor

One flushed from Thorpe Marsh on 20th Jan, and several other records of 1-3 during the first winter period. Five on 21st Jan was unusual. In the autumn one seen at Thorpe Marsh at dusk on 20th Oct, then several sightings afterwards.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Common winter visitor

Numbers difficult to estimate as most birds were out on Thorpe Marsh, and no observations of large flocks flushed by raptors noted this year. Dusk counts conducted by MC revealed up to 44 birds in mid Jan and 47 in Feb, and numbers reaching similar levels in the second winter period. A bird heard drumming on 5th May was of interest. In the second winter period a maximum of 28 were noted in Nov. As usual most records from Thorpe Marsh, however one was flushed from the Great Broad shore on 12th April.

* **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

Scarce passage migrant



A good year for this species, with two present briefly in the evening of 24th April (GD), one reported from Thorpe Marsh early morning on 1st May (MC) and three found at Whitlingham on 10th May (DL). The latter birds were photographed and showed well to observers throughout the evening.

Photo taken by Drew Lyness.

* **Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis*

Rare passage migrant

One reported from Thorpe Broad on 28th Aug (MC).

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*



Common spring migrant

Four present on 24th April, along with 12 Arctic Terns. After that two were seen throughout spring, with larger numbers reported at the start of the summer, including an unusually high count outside of spring passage of 10 on 26th June. During July six present on 5th and five on 21st.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*



Scarce spring migrant

Eight present on 16th Apr, followed by a flock of 13, one of which flew off shortly afterwards (plus four Common Terns) on 24th Apr. Of this latter flock, three still present on 26th, with two on 27th over Thorpe Broad. The only May sighting at Whitlingham was one on the Great Broad on the 10th, although a flock of nine reported flying over Thorpe Broad on 24th.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*



Common resident

Around 520 present during freezing conditions on 17th January, three of which were colour-ringed birds (see article). Other large counts from Thorpe Broad include c250 on 25th Jan, 272 on 17th Mar and 345 16th Dec.

* **Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*



Scarce spring migrant

Three present on 4th Apr, two adults (one with a full hood, the other with a patchy hood) and a 1st-winter (JE). These were photographed (poorly!) and also seen by JL. A report of two more in late April was erroneous, and this sighting was also mistakenly re-broadcast on the pagers on the following day.

*** Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*

Scarce visitor



One seen and photographed on the Great Broad in January (JG). A 2nd calendar year bird was also seen at Thorpe Broad on 31st Mar and 17th Apr (MC).

Photo taken by Jake Gearty

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Common winter visitor



Present in low numbers during both winter periods, with a high count of 35 on Thorpe Broad on 25th Jan.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Common summer visitor



Common during the summer, with one or two present throughout the year. Large numbers drop in to pre-roost gatherings in the early autumn evenings. A pair of birds identified as *L.f. intermedius* noted at Thorpe Broad on 23rd Mar (MC) along with the usual *L.f. graellsii*.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Fairly common migrant

Present all year round but more common in winter. Clearance work on the central shingle spit at Thorpe Broad created a better area for Herring Gulls to roost, which was reflected in several 50+ counts from that site. Birds in the second winter period comprised a mixture of *argentatus* and *argenteus* race birds.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Scarce migrant

One seen at Thorpe Broad on 23rd and 25th Jan and also on 14th March. An adult present at dusk on the Great Broad on 11th April. An adult at Thorpe Broad on 4th Dec was the only record from the second half of the year.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Scarce migrant

No records from the first half of the year. Most records here are of single birds, so three on the Great Broad on 9th Oct was unusual. The only other record was a single on 12th Nov.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Common resident

Occasionally seen flying over, particularly near Trowse and the edge of Thorpe St Andrew.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Scarce resident



Numbers slightly lower than normal at Thorpe during January, with a maximum of three seen, but more obvious during the summer. A high count of 11 on 4th May. Birds also present on the farmland south of Whitlingham Lane, where they presumably breed.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Common resident

Numerous throughout the recording area. Visual migration surveys during early mornings in November revealed some huge movements, in particular on 8th Nov when 587 flew NW and another 214 flew SW, all in less than an hour.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Scarce – resident nearby

Recorded from Whitlingham on 10th Jan, and two seen at Thorpe Marsh on 28th Jan. Genuinely scarce within the recording area, however the paucity of records is almost certainly exacerbated by observers not realising that the species is noteworthy here.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Scarce spring migrant

A poor year for Cuckoos locally with most reports relating to only one singing bird, initially at the east end of the Great Broad on 20th April, and then for a few days in early May. The exception to this was on the 8th May, when two heard, one at the end of the the Great Broad and another present at Whitlingham Marsh.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Scarce resident

Seen hunting over Thorpe Marsh several times at dusk in January and February, and then again on several dates during June when hopefully hunting to provide for young nearby. [I don't know whether Barn Owls still breed at Whitlingham STW can any readers tell me?] Other than the Thorpe sightings one seen perched by the barns south of the CP on 25th Mar and one flew over the Great Broad early morning on 2nd July.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Scarce resident

Several records of birds calling from the woods nearby, including young heard from Whitlingham Woods and nearby in woodland north of the railway line in late spring.

*** Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus*

Very rare

Three reports received of this locally rare species, which was unusual. Firstly of one calling on 22nd Feb, then of one seen flying over Thorpe Marsh on 15th Oct and again on 8th Nov (all MC).

Swift *Apus apus*

Common spring visitor

First recorded on 21st April, a particularly early date, when one flew over Thorpe Broad. An arrival of birds occurred on 24th April, with around 110 present over the Great Broad on 28th April, the same date as large gatherings of hirundines. The last record of the year was of one on 9th Sept, the first September record for several years. Funding has been secured to build a Swift nesting tower near the visitor barn at Whitlingham, and Swift calls will be played at intervals from it over the next three years in the hope of attracting birds to nest there. It will be interesting to see how this project develops – I would appreciate any sightings of birds investigating the new structure, as I'm sure would the Broads Authority.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Scarce resident



At least three pairs present in the area, with regular sightings from both broads at Whitlingham and Thorpe Broad.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Scarce resident

Heard regularly around the recording area. A pair with a first-year bird were seen on the meadow to the west of the Lime Tree Avenue on 9th Oct.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

Scarce resident

Common in the wooded areas around the recording area. Two males watched engaging in a territorial dispute at Thorpe Marsh in mid-February.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Resident

Fairly scarce at Whitlingham this year, but seen on a number of occasions hunting over Thorpe Marsh.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Scarce spring migrant



Sightings from 2nd May then throughout May and June, albeit irregularly. Birds were seen carrying prey away on several occasions during June, raising the possibility that breeding could have taken place nearby.

Photo taken by Drew Lyness.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

Regular flyovers



Still not as many records as you would expect from a species breeding nearby and with a wide hunting range. Mostly seen flying over, but interestingly one seen bathing in the edge of Thorpe Broad on 18th May.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley

Magpie *Pica pica*

Common resident

Winter roost counts of this species at Whitlingham are probably of county importance. In the first winter period 148 roosted on 23rd Feb, whilst a new high count of 204 was made on 27th Nov (JL). A count of 188 on 31st Dec was also of note.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Common resident

Present all year round but more obvious in autumn/winter.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Common resident

Flocks present in the trees opposite the country park and in Whitlingham Woods, occasionally coming down to feed in the meadows along Whitlingham Lane.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Scarce flyover

Present nearby, but seldom seen within the recording area. To this end, two seen flying over Thorpe Marsh on 10th Jan were the first ones noted in the Thorpe Marsh wildlife report since the NWT took over management. Singles on 13th and 20th Apr were the other reports to come from Thorpe this year, whilst at Whitlingham four flew over on 12th Nov.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Common resident



Commonly encountered around the south shore of the Great Broad.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Common resident

At least two present in trees around the second car park on 1st Jan, and resident in Whitlingham Woods. At Thorpe seen along with tit flocks over winter, and there is a breeding population in conifers nearby in Thorpe St Andrew.

* **Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapilla*

Rare visitor



One was seen and photographed at Thorpe Marsh on 3rd Feb (RM). What may have been the same bird was heard singing at the east end of the Great Broad on 28th Mar (HE). One was also reported on 28th Oct along Bungalow Lane (MC). This species is increasing in Norfolk and will hopefully become more regular in the area. **Photo taken by Rich Moores**

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Common resident

Common throughout the recording area.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Common resident

Common throughout the recording area.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Scarce resident

Present throughout the year in wooded areas at Whitlingham but easily overlooked. At Thorpe Marsh two were present with a mixed tit flock in February, and there were also several records from August and September of wandering individuals.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Scarce resident

Present throughout the year at Whitlingham C.P. and woods. At Thorpe the pattern was similar to Coal Tit, with birds noted in late March and then again in Aug/Sept but otherwise only heard calling from across the river.

* **Bearded Tit** *Panurus biarmicus*

Rare irruptive visitor

Despite breeding as close as Strumpshaw Fen, this species is rare within the recording area. At least one was heard calling from the conservation area at Whitlingham on 12th Oct (per JL). What was presumably the same bird was then heard calling from the vegetation between the edge of Thorpe Broad and the riverside path on 15th Oct (MC), with two birds heard (and a fem/juv seen) on several dates until 24th Oct (MC). Despite the prolonged stay they were very elusive, and several observers were unable to locate them despite multiple visits.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Scarce winter visitor

No singing birds at Thorpe this year, with all sightings referring to birds flying over in autumn except one at Thorpe Marsh on 31st Oct.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Common spring visitor

First seen on 31st Mar, with several flocks of 50 present during April at both Thorpe Broad and Whitlingham Great Broad. After the main passage had gone through sightings were thin on the ground, with one at Thorpe on 7th July and three on 16th July.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common summer visitor

Seen just east of the recording area at Postwick on 27th March – these birds would probably have been visible from the footbridge at Thorpe with a telescope! First actually seen within the recording area on 31st Mar. Numbers increased towards the end of April, with a gathering of 150 at Thorpe Broad on 17th Apr and around 300 over the Great Broad on 28th Apr. Small numbers noted over Thorpe Marsh on 21st Sept, and a late bird was seen at Thorpe on 20th Oct.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Common spring visitor

First reported on 4th Apr, an early date for this species. Flocks of 60 on 21st April and 200 on 24th May noted at Thorpe. One seen on 19th Sept was the last of the year.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Common resident



Rarely seen but heard on most visits to both Whitlingham C.P. and Thorpe Marsh, with at least five singing males present at both sites in late March.

Photo taken by Gary White.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Common resident

Common throughout the recording area.

* **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Rare migrant

One reported at Thorpe Marsh accompanying a Long-tailed Tit flock on 20th and 25th October, also commuting across the river to the Whitlingham side (MC). This species occurred in unprecedented numbers across the east coast of England during the autumn. A number of birds were recorded around the Norwich area, although several of them were elusive and only seen by the finder. These records included 2 at UEA, 1 at Eaton Park, 1 on St Benedict's Street and 1 at Earlham Marsh.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Common summer visitor

One present near the bird screen on 1st Jan (two were reported in the area on the 31st Dec 2015). Across the river at Thorpe Marsh two were reported on several occasions during Jan, with three reported on 16th and 18th Feb. The line between overwintering birds and summer migrants was difficult to ascertain, with many singing birds on 3rd April. Six were noted accompanying tit flocks along the south shore of Whitlingham on 26th Sept, and an overwintering one was seen at Thorpe Marsh on 31st Dec.

* **Siberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

County rarity

A Siberian Chiffchaff was reported on 10th March from Griffin Fen, the area east of Bungalow Lane (MC), and then again near Bungalow Lane on 25th Oct and on multiple dates in November and December, suggesting an overwintering bird (all MC). Given the current rarity status of this subspecies hopefully someone can obtain sound recordings of the call, without which acceptance by the rarities committee is probably unlikely.

[Just outside the current Whitlingham recording area boundaries but of relevance here, a Siberian Chiffchaff was reported near the sewage outfall pipe of Whitlingham STW, south of the A47, on 16th Feb. This bird was photographed and has been submitted to the Norfolk County Rarities Committee. In the latest work-in-progress file it is listed as 'pending'. It is quite possible that this bird is the individual reported from Thorpe Marsh in Dec 2015 and several times this year]

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Common summer visitor

The first singing birds noted at Thorpe Marsh on 3rd April, a fairly typical arrival date. An interesting bird present at Whitlingham between the large car park and west end of the Great Broad from 16th April was a "switch singer", able to produce Willow Warbler song, Chiffchaff song and a combination of both (the latter ability known as mixed singing).

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Common summer visitor

At least one overwintering bird at Whitlingham CP, a female seen on 20th Jan. A female was also reported from Thorpe Marsh on 1st and 20th Feb, however as numbers of overwintering birds are increasing around Norwich the Whitlingham and Thorpe birds may have been separate individuals. One seen at Thorpe Marsh on 13th April was a migrant. Records of birds at Thorpe Marsh during October (2nd and 24th) may relate to birds passing through or overwintering.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Scarce summer visitor



First recorded at Whitlingham on 24th April, a week later than 2015 but in line with 2014. At Thorpe Marsh two were recorded singing from scrub along the riverbank on several dates in May.

Photo taken by Gary White.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Scarce summer visitor

Birds present at both Whitlingham and Thorpe from 16th Apr, and heard at the latter throughout May. At Whitlingham one singing north of the Great Broad on 24th April. One singing at Thorpe Marsh along the railway line from 13th June onwards was more unusual, and singles were also reported on 5th and 23rd Aug.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Common summer visitor

The first bird of spring reported back at Thorpe Marsh on 14th Apr, several days earlier than in 2013, 2014 and 2015, with several singing by the 17th. After that heard singing from most areas of suitable habitat (typically areas with thick bramble) throughout the spring.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

Scarce summer visitor



A good year for this species at Thorpe Marsh. One noted reeling from 12th Apr, with three heard reeling on 18th Apr, and up to four reeling birds heard at once during the spring (and at least one more nearby). In addition to the spring birds, reeling was reported on 14th and 30th June, and two birds reeling on 17th July, perhaps suggesting second broods.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Common summer visitor

First reported singing from Thorpe Marsh on 3rd Apr, a week earlier than 2015 and an early date in general. Numbers have seemed low at Whitlingham in recent years, but are holding up well at Thorpe Marsh.

* **Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*

Rare spring migrant

On the afternoon of 13th June an *Acrocephalus* warbler was found at Thorpe Marsh on 13th June giving bursts of song including mimicry from an area of willow scrub. It was generally elusive, but based on the combination of views and song it was identified as a Marsh Warbler by RC and JE. It wasn't heard the next morning, but was reported by two other observers later on during the day on the 14th, after which there were no further reports despite searching. A description and sound recording was submitted to the Norfolk Rarities Committee and was accepted as per the December work-in-progress file. Because this species is a potential rare breeder, this information was not made public at the time.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Common summer visitor

First birds of the spring noted at Thorpe Marsh on 16th Apr, with more birds arriving throughout April. Several newly fledged broods were reported from Thorpe in July. Of interest, a bird present from late April near the Little Broad at Whitlingham appeared to be incorporating Blue Tit and Buzzard calls into its song.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*

Infrequent winter flyovers

Despite Norwich regularly attracting Waxwings, the recording area itself lacks the areas of berries or apples this species likes and therefore sightings are typically limited to flyovers. In this vane, seven seen flying over Thorpe Marsh on 24th Oct, with singles over on 30th Oct and 1st Dec.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Scarce resident

As usual heard calling from Whitlingham Woods and Trowse Woods.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Common resident



Present throughout the year at Whitlingham C.P, sometimes showing well on pathside tree trunks. Four were seen on 28th Mar, including an apparent pair. Roaming birds seen at Thorpe during Jan and Feb.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Common resident

Widespread and common throughout the recording area.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common resident

Occasional sightings of birds from the city, along with large numbers seen during vis-mig sessions in early November, including 234 over northwards in an hour on 8th Nov. A recently fledged juvenile bird was seen on the meadow at Whitlingham on 21st May. Large numbers were also noted flying east over Thorpe Marsh on several November evenings, perhaps going to roost in a reedbed further along the valley.

* **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*

Rare migrant

One reported from Thorpe Marsh on 2nd Oct (MC), and a week later one seen & heard initially flying over Whitlingham Great Broad (GW), and then near the Lime Tree Avenue (JE) on 9th Oct.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Common resident

Common throughout the recording area.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Common winter visitor

Very scarce in the first winter period, and in the second winter period mainly recorded as flyovers only. Flocks of 18 and 23 flew over on 29th March. Seven at Thorpe Marsh on 31st Oct and 100 recorded flying south-west during an early morning visual migration watch on 3rd Nov.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Common resident

Present throughout the recording area, although perhaps lower numbers of singing birds than in recent years.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Common winter visitor

Most records of birds flying over, no large grounded flocks recorded this year, and even November vis-mig surveys turned up low numbers.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Scarce resident

Mostly ones and two noted throughout the year. Territorial behaviour was witnessed in November when a bird singing around the ruins of Trowse Newton Hall was chased by another bird, which then flew across the river towards Carey's Meadow.

* **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*

Scarce migrant and former breeder

One reported in sing from an Ash tree along the riverbank at the east end of the Great Broad (MC) on 6th May.

Robin *Erithacus rubicula*

Common resident

Common throughout the recording area.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Scarce possible breeder

One singing at Whitlingham on 24th April, with two singing birds reported on several dates in late April and early May.

* **Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Rare migrant

A male reported from scrub north-west of the broad at Thorpe on 13th Apr (MC)

* **Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola*

Scarce winter migrant



Following a male seen at Thorpe Marsh on 22nd Oct (CD), a pair were seen on 31st Oct (RC) and were present until the year end, typically being found around an area of large brambles near the centre of the marsh.

Photo taken by Ricky Cleverley.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Common resident



Common throughout the recording area.

* **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

Scarce spring flyover

Three records, from Thorpe Marsh on 1st and 6th May (MC) and one calling as it flew over Trowse towards Whitlingham on 10th May (WW)

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Scarce resident



Birds occasionally noted on the river edges between Whitlingham and Thorpe at low tide. During the evenings up to five birds appeared to be flying in to roost on reedy debris at the edge of Thorpe Broad. A pair bred successfully just outside the recording area near the Rushcutters Inn.

Photo taken by Adam Manvell.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Common resident

Resident and often encountered around the visitors barn. A brood raised around the main slipway provided entertainment as they flew around the Alders like clumsy Long-tailed Tits.

* **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba*

Scarce spring migrant

One reported from Thorpe Broad on 16th May (MC) and presumably the same individual at Whitlingham on 17th May (JG)

* **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*

Rare flyover

One reported flying over Thorpe Marsh on 3rd Apr (MC)

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Passage migrant

Present in low numbers during the winter, with double-figured counts in autumn at dusk when there appeared to be a small roost on Thorpe Marsh on several dates. This roost apparently grew to over 140 at one point in December, also attracting Water Pipits.

* **Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus*

Rare visitor

One reported from the edge of Thorpe Broad on 15th Oct (MC). This species has only been recorded here on one previous occasion, when the broad was still a working gravel pit.

* **Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta*

Rare visitor

Singles reported from Thorpe Marsh on 12th Feb, 14th Mar, 24th Oct and 25th Oct, but then a huge number of records, with between 1 and 3 birds reported on eleven dates in November and ten in December (all MC). [Editors note: I think it important to point out for those not familiar with Thorpe Marsh that this pattern of records is very unusual for the site – I have never seen one in the area, and no Water Pipits were reported to me by anyone in 2012, 2013 or 2014. It could be that they have been overlooked in the past, or that habitat management work has made the area more attractive to them, but despite these 25 records your chance of seeing one on a casual visit is very low. I will be keeping an eye out in 2017, and would welcome details of any sightings]

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Rare winter visitor

One flew over Thorpe Marsh on 13th Jan. In the second winter period there were reports of singles from Thorpe on several dates in October, but of particular interest was a flock of around 100 birds seen at Whitlingham on 12th Nov (GW & JE). Initially it appeared that around ten birds were feeding in willows close to the shore of the Great Broad, but when these flew up they were joined by a huge flock that appeared to come from the area of Beech trees nearby. A flock of 68 were reported from Thorpe Marsh on the following day, whilst several weeks later a flock of around 30 were reported from a similar area.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common resident

Common across the recording area and one of a handful of passerines that are likely to be encountered on most visits, although seemingly scarcest over the summer months

* **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Very rare visitor

Singles were reported from Thorpe Marsh on 2nd Oct, 20th Oct, 26th Nov and 9th Dec (both MC). This species used to be recorded from west Norwich on a fairly regular basis, but in general is rare away from the Brecks, so presumably this suggests an individual wintering locally as it would be highly unlikely for four different individuals to be recorded flying over the site in the same year.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Scarce resident

Recorded at Thorpe Marsh during the winter, most often around Bungalow Lane. Fledged young were seen there in June, welcome breeding evidence of this shy species.

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Fairly common resident

Around 200 roosted between the two broads at Whitlingham on 20th January (DL). As far as I'm aware there have been no previous three-figure counts within the recording area. Otherwise present in low numbers.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Scarce visitor/resident nearby?

One or two seen at Thorpe on numerous occasions. A flock of 17 flying over on 4th Mar was unusual.

Redpoll sp.

Scarce winter visitor

Redpolls flying over, probably relate to Lesser Redpoll but not conclusively identified. Depending on the BOUs chosen new taxonomy we might not be so concerned with Redpoll ID in the future! Birds recorded flying over Thorpe Marsh on 8th Jan, 15th Jan, 22nd Oct and 27th Oct.

Lesser Redpoll *Acanthis cannabina*

Fairly scarce winter visitor

Very scarce this year – the only confirmed records of Lesser Redpolls (as opposed to just Redpoll sp.) were in usual area of the Alders south of the Little Broad, where two present on 12th Nov and at least one still on 13th. A flock of 20 at Thorpe Marsh on 13th Nov was by far the highest count of what was a poor year for Redpolls locally.

Mealy Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*

Scarce winter visitor

One reported with Lesser Redpolls at Thorpe Marsh on 4th and 25th Nov.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Common resident

Small flocks present all year, and also combining with one of the flocks of Siskins during December.

Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Common winter visitor



Several flocks present in January. On 3rd Jan around 80 were seen together as several flocks merged, suggesting around 90 present at Whitlingham in total. At Thorpe low numbers present during Jan and Feb, with two heard singing on 29th Feb. Last seen at Thorpe on 1st May, and seen back on 21st Sept before main Oct arrival.

Photo courtesy of Nick Elsey.

* **Lapland Bunting** *Calcarius lapponicus*

Very rare flyover

One reported flying over with Skylarks on 15th Oct (MC). A seemingly very unusual record, however it is worth noting that there is a previous record here of a bird flying over.

* **Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

Scarce flyover

A male reported in company with Greenfinches on 10th and 14th Mar (MC). Despite wintering in large numbers on farmland nearby this species is rare within the recording area – the author has not seen one in ten years of trying!

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Common summer visitor

Present in low numbers at Thorpe Marsh during the winter, but numbers increasing by late February and singing during April. One flew over on 4th Nov.

Total: 157 species

Appendix A – Unrecorded but likely species

These species are birds that are either seen in most years but not reported during 2016, or birds that were seen very close to Whitlingham and/or flying in the direction of the Whitlingham without being actually observed there.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Fairly regular winter visitor

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Scarce migrant

Appendix B – Escapes and birds of dubious origin

Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata*

Semi-resident at Thorpe Green



This bird spent most of the year at Thorpe Green, but did venture to Whitlingham in July, when it spent some time on the grass near the slipway.

* **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*

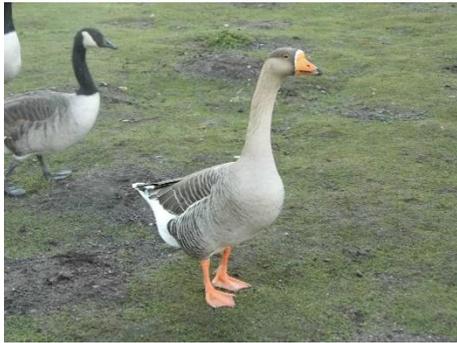
Wanderer from captive collections/county rarity

Two sightings within the recording area, including one seen flying over Thorpe Marsh on 27th April (RC), plus one seen from County Hall that almost certainly also flew through. The presence of free-flying birds from Thrigby Wildlife Park continues to tarnish the credentials of any White Storks recorded in Norfolk, and means that any birds seen in flight, particularly in east Norfolk, are currently assumed to be wandering birds from the collection. The failure of some 'wildlife' parks in Norfolk to secure and clearly ring the birds in their collections is deeply unsatisfactory, and as well as White Storks has also led to Sacred Ibis and (somewhat bizarrely) a Kookaburra exploring the Norfolk countryside in recent years.

Appendix C – Hybrids & domestic wildfowl

Greylag x Swan Goose

Resident



One of these resident and rather aggressive hybrids remains, usually around the slipway or south edge of the Great Broad.

Greylag x Canada Goose

Occasional visitor

Three present with a flock of Canada Geese on 5th July.

Pintail x Mallard

Present from Dec 2015



This interesting and popular hybrid was first seen along the southern shore of the Great Broad in 2016. Since then it has relocated to Thorpe St Andrew river green, where it spends most of the time with the local Mallards. It does on occasion return to Whitlingham, and is pictured here back near its original location on the slipway.

Pochard x Ferruginous Duck



A female Pochard x Ferruginous Duck was present during both winter periods, most commonly on the Great Broad but also seen at Thorpe Broad during February.

Photo taken by Justin Lansdell

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I am grateful to everyone who has reported birds from the Whitlingham area this year, be it directly to myself, to the bird news services or by posted sightings on websites such as [BirdForum](#) or Twitter. In particular I would like to thank the following for providing records or information: D. Andrews, C. Baker (CB), C. & R. Baldock, S. Betts, J. Bradley, D. Bryant (DB), M. Chipperfield (MC), R. Chittenden (RCh), R. Cleverley (RCI), G. Dawson (GD), C. Durdin (CD), M. Eldridge, N. Eley, H. Ewing (HE), J. Gearty (JG), S. Harris, J. Lansdell (JL), D. Lyness (DL), R. Moores (RM), A. Musgrove, A. Pointer (AP), C. Rand, A. Schuetzle, C. Small (CS), C. Thornton (CT), W. Walmsley (WW) S. Weeks, G. White (GW) and P. Woolnough. My thanks also go to the Broads Authority staff at Whitlingham, and the people that I have spoken to whilst in the field.

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/> (Yare Valley Birding website)

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

<http://www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=249220> (The Norwich thread of BirdForum)

Bird information services

Several sightings and dates relate to sightings reported to 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), [Bird Info hotline](#) (0115 8712888) or [BirdLine East Anglia](#) (07941 333970).