

THE BIRDS OF WANSTEAD 2009



*The spirit of Wanstead Flats.
Skylark by Jonathan Lethbridge.*

THE BIRDS OF WANSTEAD 2009

TIME LINE

January

Pochard numbers peak. Water Rail and roving parties of Siskins in the Park.

April

Many displaying Skylarks. A pair of Garganey and three Ring Ouzels pass through.

May

Nightjar briefly in Park. Red Kite over Lake House estate.

August

Seven Little Egrets in Park. Wood and Green Sandpipers at Alexandra Lake. Tree Pipits, Yellow Wagtails, Redstarts, Whinchats, and Wheatears pass through.

September

Spotted Flycatchers peak at 10.

October

Male Dartford Warbler on the Flats for several days.

November

Firecrests in Reservoir Wood.

December

Cold weather brings Lapwings and Snipe.

Pallas's Sandgrouse on Wanstead Flats, a trip of 14 Dotterel at Forest Gate, a massive Rookery in Wanstead Park and several Grey Phalaropes. Sadly none of these were seen in 2009 but they should remind us of the great avian history the Wanstead area has.

At the start of the year the Wren Group did not plan to produce a bird report, although this is nothing new: back in the day, it was once produced annually. However, as the months passed and more and more fascinating sightings were reported from Wanstead Park, Wanstead Flats, and Bush Wood by a whole host of keen amateur naturalists, the embryo of an idea began to form. Then, after the August bank holiday weekend, when we seemed to be almost falling over migrant birds, it was time to act: this had to be recorded for posterity.

Those of us who can step out of our front doors and walk into the Park or across the Flats are a privileged bunch because there is *always* something of interest to look at, whatever the season. Where else can we get better views of Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, or be so surrounded by the exuberant song of Skylarks proclaiming their territories? The varied mix of habitats—rough grassland, broom, gorse, hawthorn scrub, mown turf, deciduous woodland,

carr, open water, sedges and reeds, and even churchyard yews—ensures an interesting variety of breeding species, temporary cover during times of migration, and good feeding in the winter months. And for anyone who doubts the ability of wildlife to survive in the midst of frenetic human activity, a cursory inspection of Wanstead Flats should provide confirmation: dozens of football pitches, dog-walkers, joggers, and model aircraft enthusiasts have not driven away the Skylarks, Reed Buntings, Meadow Pipits, or Little Owls. OK, there are problems and room for improvement, but the best way to protect what we have is to find out more about it—and tell local people what they have on their doorsteps.

It would be good to produce this report on an annual basis, possibly including other aspects of the area's flora and fauna, the invertebrates, mammals, plants, and fungi. In the meantime, I hope you all enjoy this summary and look back with fond memories on a fantastic year.

Tim Harris

This report would not have been possible without the thousands of hours of effort put in by many observers. So, thanks to Neil Anderson, Nick Croft, Daniel Ericsson-Hull (Redbridge Birdwatching Blog), Paul Ferris, Stuart Fisher, Tim Harris, Kathy Hartnett, Jonathan Lethbridge, Pete and Valerie Saunders, Wanstead Wildlife, and the Wren Group. Jonathan, Stuart, Kathy, and Sharon Payne also deserve a special mention for their fantastic photos, which illuminate the pages of this report. Additionally, Alan Paul (Upminster Weather Station) provided valuable meteorological data relating to 28-29 August. (Apologies to anyone I've forgotten!)

THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Mute Swan

Resident, breeding in small numbers

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

18/1: 9
15/2: 5
15/3: 4
8/11: 8
20/11: 22
20/12: 18

Greylag Goose

Scarce visitor

In the early part of the year some consorted with Canada Geese on the Flats, with a maximum of 11 on 22/3; after 5 there on 18/5 they seemed to disappear. 'Some' flew over Windsor Rd on 23/4.

Canada Goose

Resident, breeding in small numbers

Coordinated waterbird counts on ponds and lakes produced the following totals:

18/1: 230
15/2: 8
15/3: 52
20/11: 228
20/12: 217

Largest count: 324 on the Flats on 8/9

Barnacle Goose

1

Rare visitor

1 at Alexander Lake from 12-18/6 at least. Presumed from a feral population.

Egyptian Goose

3

Very scarce visitor

A juvenile was by Heronry Pond, 24/1; a pair was near Alexander Lake from 4/4 to 18/5 at least.

Shelduck

Rare visitor

One over Wanstead Flats at around 07:45 on 17/5 circled the area but did not land.

Gadwall

Resident, numbers increasing significantly in winter

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

18/1: 40
15/2: 34
15/3: 4
8/11: 79
20/11: 84
20/12: 111

Also of note: 54 on The Basin on 24/11 and 58 on Ornamental Waters on 20/12.

Who says Wanstead Flats isn't beautiful? Shrouded in mist on a chilly autumn morning it can be a quite magical place.



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Teal

Scarce winter visitor

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

- 18/1: 2
- 15/2: 0
- 15/3: 16
- 8/11: 2 (Park only)
- 20/11: 4
- 20/12: 0

The first to return to Alexandra Lake in autumn was seen on 4/9; thereafter there were regularly up to 6 there. Also, 5 on Heronry Pond on 6/9.

Mallard

Resident, breeding in small numbers

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

- 18/1: 71
- 15/2: 119
- 15/3: 68
- 8/11: 67
- 20/11: 147
- 20/12: 126

Garganey

Very scarce passage migrant

In spring a pair was on Heronry on 23/4. In autumn a female was there on 6/9.

Shoveler

Fairly common winter visitor

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

- 18/1: 9
- 15/2: 22
- 15/3: 13
- 8/11: 2
- 20/11: 12
- 20/12: 7

Largest count: 34 on 3/1

Red-crested Pochard

Rare visitor

A pair on Heronry Pond on 9/1 remained until 12/2 at least.

3

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Pochard

Fairly common winter visitor

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

- 18/1: 44
- 15/2: 30
- 15/3: 2
- 8/11: 5
- 20/11: 5
- 20/12: 28

Largest count: 70 on Heronry on 12/1

Tufted Duck

Resident, with numbers increasing significantly in winter

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

- 18/1: 118
- 15/2: 59
- 15/3: 24

Productive fishing means that the Grey Heron is a familiar sight on most of the Park's ponds.

8/11: 53
 20/11: 76
 20/12: 47

A female was found dead in Belgrave Road on 24/2.

18/1: 9
 15/2: 10
 15/3: 9
 8/11: 10
 20/11: 15
 20/12: 11

Common Goldeneye

Rare winter visitor

A female appeared on Heronry Pond on 14/11, during wild, stormy weather, and was still there on 20/12. Apparently, this was the first record locally since 1985.

1 Largest counts: 20 on 2/11 (16 of these were on The Basin); also, 12 in Wanstead Park (excluding The Basin) on 31/1. Breeding: at least 2 pairs raised young on Alexandra Lake.

Goosander

Rare visitor

A drake was seen flying NW over the Flats on 20/12 during a freeze-up.

1 *Winter visitor in small numbers*

In early part of year up to 3 on Heronry Pond, reducing to a single bird on last date of 24/5. Then there were no further records until 4 on The Basin, 2/11; 3 there on 14/11. None seen in December.

Pheasant

Rare visitor

A male was heard calling from City of London Cemetery near the River Roding on 13/4 and 2/5.

1

Cormorant

Regular visitor

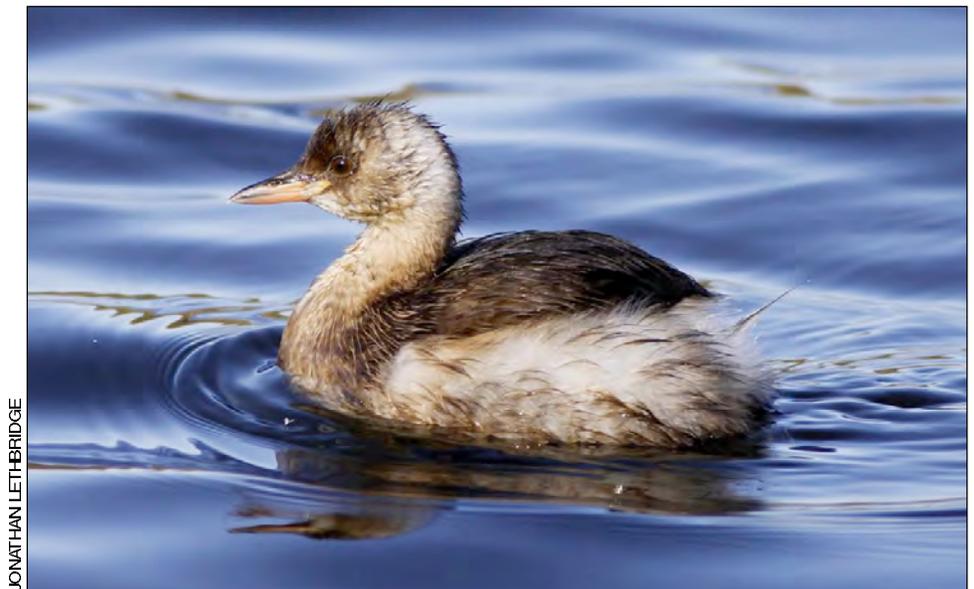
A regular visitor in small numbers to Wanstead Park; and a daily fly-over, probably commuting between the Thames and Walthamstow Reservoirs. Numbers on Park ponds generally small: 4 in WP on 8/11 and 4 on Eagle Pond on 20/11.

Little Grebe

Resident, breeding in small numbers

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

The Basin sometimes holds the greatest numbers of Little Grebes. Two pairs are known to have bred successfully on Alexandra Lake in 2009, but was breeding successful elsewhere?



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Observers who kept their eyes on the skies were rewarded with overflying Common Buzzards in spring and autumn. This bird was over the Lake House Estate.



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Hobby was seen regularly between late April and mid-September, with local breeding suspected.

Little Egret

Increasingly frequent visitor
 Singletons were feeding on a bend on the River Roding on 13/4, in Wanstead Park on 18/6, by the River Roding on 8/7 and again on 5/9. Further upstream, another was on the River Roding near Redbridge underground station on 27/4. There was 1 on Heronry Pond on 9/7. Then, as water levels dropped very low in this pond, numbers increased in the first week of

August, with 3 there on 5th and a peak count of 7 on 3/8. There were 3 by the Ornamental Waters on 14/9.

Grey Heron

Regular visitor; formerly bred
 Regularly feed on ponds in Wanstead Park in small numbers and probably a daily fly-over.

Red Kite

1

Rare visitor
 1 flew N behind Belgrave Rd and over Bush Wood on 31/5 (at 14:15).

Sparrowhawk

Scarce resident
 Ones and twos are regularly seen, especially over Wanstead Flats. The species bred successfully in City of London Cemetery and in Bush Wood.



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Common Buzzard

Passage migrant in spring and autumn
 Singles passed over the Flats on 15/3, 5/4 (over Manor Park), 19/9 and 20/9 (over City of London Cemetery). There were also 2 sightings over Windsor Rd in 'late

WANSTEAD'S SKYLARKS

In his comprehensive appraisal of the birds of the Wanstead area (www.wansteadwildlife.org.uk) Paul Ferris refers to the “well-known population on Wanstead Flats” and cites breeding successes and failures. For example, “In 1976 it was reported that on Wanstead Flats there were ‘several nests ... but most of these failed because of fires’.” With such a valuable Skylark population on our doorstep, the Wren Group decided to conduct some survey work on the Flats in 2009 in an attempt to quantify the population. It is something definitely worth supporting.

At the end of April some reconnaissance work was carried out to find out where the Skylarks were. It became obvious that there were a few to the west of Centre Road (although there were none in some quite large areas), at least one

singing male near Alexandra Lake, and a very dense concentration in the unmown area east of Centre Road, between Long Wood and Capel Road. Subsequent transect work confirmed these initial findings. While birds were clearly using the unmown areas in which to nest (though no nests were found), they also used mown areas, such as the model aircraft strip and various football pitches, for feeding. The mix of these two habitat types may be an important factor in the birds’ continued success.

Skylarks are notoriously difficult to survey, but it is likely that in early May there were at least 16 territories, two or three west of Centre Road, one near Alexandra Pond, and 13 or 14 south of Long Wood. On 25 May there were 40 birds in the last area, including a few young. And on 4 July 29 were counted in this area, with 11 singing males, presumably. Things then quietened down and there was hardly a lark to be seen, presumably with birds on second broods, before counts of more than 40 during October suggested a successful season ... or a topping-up of the breeding population with migrants or wintering birds. Clearly there is a great deal still to learn about these birds and their habits, and the Wren Group fully intends to put in more effort in 2010.

The City of London Corporation has a Skylark-friendly mowing regime and have been very supportive of the Wren Group’s activities.

Survey work told us more about the status of Skylarks on the Flats, but there is still much that is not understood. For example, how many of the breeding population remain throughout the year, and how many young are raised?



JONATHAN LETHERIDGE

JONATHAN LETHBRIDGE



A common breeding species on all Park ponds, Moorhen numbers peaked late in the year, presumably as a result of breeding success and the addition of wintering birds. There was also a peak in March: were these passage migrants?

summer'. One flew N along the line of the River Roding (near the old sewage works) on 5/12 with another over the Park on 6/12.

Kestrel

Scarce resident
Regularly seen, especially over Wanstead Flats. Local breeding is presumed but not confirmed.

Hobby

Summer visitor
The first of spring was hunting around Alexandra Lake on the evening of 29/4. A pair was over The Grove on 14/5. During the spring, summer and early autumn there were regular sightings over Bush Wood, Wanstead Park, Wanstead Flats and both the Lake House and Aldersbrook Estates, dates including 8/5, 6/7, 8/8, 24/8, 7/9, and 8/9, with 2 over the Flats on 13/9 and the last of the year over The Grove on 14/9. Local breeding is suspected.

Peregrine Falcon

Very scarce visitor
1 flew E over Wanstead Park on 5/4 (at 08:30); 1 over Windsor Rd on 22/4.

Water Rail

1

Rare winter visitor
A wintering bird remained from 2008 at the west end of Perch Pond, remaining until 2/2 at least.

Moorhen

Common resident
Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:
18/1: 20
15/2: 25
15/3: 40
8/11: 16
20/11: 47 (including 15 on Alexandra Lake alone)
20/12: 40

Coot

Very common resident
Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:
18/1: 213
15/2: 103
15/3: 97
8/11: 152
20/11: 207 (51 on Eagle Pond)
20/12: 177

Little Ringed Plover

1

Rare visitor
One calling in flight, heading N over the large playing field on Wanstead Flats on 25/4 (at 09:30) may have taken off from the edge of Alexandra Lake.

Lapwing

Scarce visitor in cold weather
3 were on the large playing field on Wanstead Flats on 10/1 (at 07:30), during a very cold spell. During the late-year freeze, on 19/12 a total of 12 flew NW over the Park with another over Windsor Rd; at dawn on 20/12 a dog disturbed 2 birds by Jubilee Pond, which flew NW; then 3 more flew over; a sixth bird was by Alexandra Lake. 1 flew SE on 22/12.

Common Snipe 7

Very scarce visitor

1 by Lake House Road on 11/4. 1 feeding on eastern edge of Alexandra Lake on 3/11 (at around 07:45) until flushed by a jogger; another in fairground area on 14/11, around 10:30. 1 entered a house in Cookes Close, Leytonstone, on the morning of 1/12 and was later released unharmed on Wanstead Flats. Singles were flushed from The Plain on 19/12; from the banks of the River Roding, by the old sewage works, on 20/12; and from the Flats on 22/12.

Two Little Owls on Wanstead Flats delighted local residents for much of the year. Some people reported seeing them trying to catch bats on dusk hunting sorties. At other times—often in broad daylight—they fed on the short turf.

Woodcock 4

Rare visitor

1 flushed along small path through broom in Wanstead Park (not far from Perch Pond), on 9/11 (at 16:45). Other singletons were near Jubilee Pond early on the morning of 15/11 and 16/11; and 1 pitched down by Long Wood on 22/12.

Common Sandpiper 2

Very scarce passage migrant

1 on edge of Alexandra Lake and another along River Roding (between golf course and City of London Cemetery) on the morning of 5/9. Was it a poor year, or was this species under-reported?

Lapwings were seen in cold snaps in January and December. This bird was by Alexandra Lake on 20/12, briefly settling on a football pitch.



STUART FISHER

Green Sandpiper 3

Very scarce passage migrant

Singles by Alexandra Lake on 2/8, 9/8 and 16/8; all were seen between 07:00-09:00 and seen flying off from the pond edge.

Wood Sandpiper 1

Rare visitor

1 flushed from the margins of Alexandra Lake on 11/8 (at 05:50).

Black-headed Gull

Resident, with numbers increasing in winter

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:

- 18/1: 71
- 15/2: 119
- 15/3: 68
- 8/11: 143
- 20/11: 449 (230 on Flats)
- 20/12: 352

A coordinated gull count on the Flats on the morning of 17/11 produced 253 and there were 300+ on 29/11.

Common Gull

Winter visitor

Coordinated waterbird counts produced the following totals:



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18/1: 118
 15/2: 4
 15/3: 93
 20/11: 400 (all on Flats)
 20/12: 387

The biggest numbers are found on the playing fields of Wanstead Flats. The largest count was of 480 there on 13/1, surely a site-record count? A coordinated gull count there on the morning of 17/11 produced 294 and there were 400+ on 29/11.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Regular visitor in small numbers
 28+ on Flats on 10/10, only 24 on 17/11 and c90 there on 29/11.



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Several male Meadow Pipits could be seen song-fighting on the Flats during the spring and summer. In London terms the breeding population is an important one.

Herring Gull

Regular visitor in very small numbers
 35 on Flats on 10/10 and 6/11, only 4 there on 17/11 and 17 on 29/11.

Yellow-legged Gull

Rare visitor
 An adult was on the Flats on 10/10 (07:45).

Great Black-backed Gull

Rare visitor
 1 on the Flats on 1/11; 2 there on 15/11.

Common Tern

Scarce visitor
 A very poor year. The only records were of 5 over Heronry Pond on 5/6 and 2 over Wanstead Park on 20/7.

Feral Rock Dove

Common resident

Stock Dove

Resident breeder
 Largest count: 17 flew W over the Flats on 17/10 between flocks of Woodpigeons.

Woodpigeon

Abundant resident and autumn passage migrant
 Autumn passage was marked on a few days, including 625 S over the Flats between 07:15-07:35 on 2/11, then 479 S between 07:40-08:10 on 26/11.

Collared Dove

Resident breeder

Turtle Dove

Rare passage migrant
 1 flew N over the Flats on 9/5 (around 09:00). In autumn 1 juv on the Flats on 3/9 then flew NE.

Ring-necked Parakeet

Status has increased dramatically in 12 months from scarce visitor to (apparent) resident
 From scarce visitor to apparently fairly common resident, there was a dramatic change in status during 2009. Time will tell whether this becomes a local breeder. Largest counts: 30 N over Wanstead Park on 24/10; and 27 (in two groups) over the Flats on 1/11.

1

3

Cuckoo

Very scarce passage migrant
 One flew low N over Wanstead Park on

2

3

8/5 (at 08:30) and another (or the same) flew W on the same day (at 18:00), into a strong wind, past Cann Hall Road. On 26/7 1 flew S near Cann Hall Road (at 09:00).

Little Owl

Resident breeder?

1 or 2 were seen on Wanstead Flats on various dates from 22/3. Breeding not confirmed.

Tawny Owl

Scarce resident

Heard on several dates in Wanstead Park, Bush Wood (including immediately behind Belgrave Rd gardens) and on Wanstead Flats. A roosting bird, which was being mobbed by Jays, was in an ivy-covered tree near the Ornamental Waters on 20/12.

European Nightjar

Rare visitor

Probably 1 of this species flushed from The Plain 'in May' (observer not experienced but description sounded good).

Common Swift

Common summer visitor

The first of spring were 9 over the Flats on 25/4. 30 were flying in tight formation over Bush Wood on 27/7; the latest was 1 over Belgrave Rd on 3/8.

Kingfisher

Regular visitor and former breeder

Singles were seen regularly in Wanstead Park and along the River Roding. 2 on the Ornamental Waters on 6/8; 2 on Perch Pond on 12/9.

Green Woodpecker

Resident breeder

Seen—and often heard!—in all areas of Wanstead Park, Bush Wood and on Wanstead Flats.

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Great Spotted Woodpecker

Resident breeder

Seen in Wanstead Park, Bush Wood and on Wanstead Flats.

This male Common Redstart, seen just south of Lake House Road in late August, was the first of an incredible autumn for the species. A minimum of five birds (and probably more) were seen, the last on 20 September.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

4

Very scarce visitor and former breeder

Seen irregularly in Wanstead Park: 1 there on 28/2; a pair at The Glade on 9/4 (one was recorded calling <http://www.xeno-canto.org/>); 1 heard calling on 27/9 (at 09:00).

Skylark

Resident breeder on Wanstead Flats, and passage migrant

40, including fledged young, east of Centre Rd, 25/5; on 4/7 there were 29 east of Centre Rd, including 11 singing males, but a search on 16/8 produced no sightings; numbers then built again and there were 40+ in the same area on 12/10. 2 seen flying W on 18/10 were migrants. 7 were by Jubilee Pond at dawn on 17/11. There were between 29-36 on the Flats on 20/12, 15 by Jubilee Pond and 14-21 east of Centre Road.

Breeding: There were probably at least 16 territories on Wanstead Flats, mostly east of Centre Rd, but the species did not breed in Wanstead Park (see separate panel).



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Sand Martin

Scarce summer visitor

The first of the spring was seen over Heronry Pond on 27/3; 1 N over Boating Pond on 9/5; 1 over Wanstead Park on 14/5; 2 around Boating Pond on 29/8.

Swallow

Passage migrant

The first of the spring were 2 on 13/4 and 38 passed through on 8/5. 24 flew over Wanstead Flats on 12/9 and the 500+ flew E in the two-day period 19-20/9, including 420+ E on the morning of 19/9.

House Martin

Uncommon summer visitor

The first of the spring was over the Park on 1/5. Up to 7 were seen regularly near Aldersbrook Rd during the summer months. 80 passed E over Wanstead Flats during heavy hirundine passage on 19-20/9. 3 late birds were seen on 12/10. Probably breeds on Aldersbrook Road.

martin sp.

50 N on 24/9. 100 over the Flats on 9/10.

Whinchats arrived at the end of August —and decided that they liked the Flats! There were two peaks of 11 birds and 27 bird-days in August, then another 26 bird-days in September. Loose parties fed in the fairground area and south of Long Wood.

Tree Pipit

Scarce passage migrant in spring and, especially, autumn

In spring 1 on Wanstead Flats on 25/4. In autumn singles on the Flats on 16/8, 23/8, 26/8, 2/9, 12/9, 13/9, 19/9. In the astonishing fall of 29/8, 2 east of Alexandra Lake, and a further 6 near Jubilee Pond were probably of this species although they were not heard.

Red-throated Pipit

1

Rare visitor

A probable flew over Bush Wood on 27/10. Its call sounded good for the species, but it did not land.

Meadow Pipit

Resident breeder and passage migrant

The biggest spring count was 33 on 11/4. Summer counts included 13 on 4/7. In autumn numbers were supplemented by passage birds, giving peak counts on the Flats of 55 on 19/9, 48 on 27/9 and 36+ on 12/10. Still 15 on 26/11 and small numbers at the end of the year. Breeding: at least 7 territories in the unmown grass-land to the east of Centre Road.

Yellow Wagtail

Scarce passage migrant in spring and, especially, autumn

In spring 1 over Wanstead Flats on 18/4; 1 on northern playing field early on the morning of 2/5. In autumn 1 perched on elder east of Alexandra Lake on 23/8; 2 S on 29/8; 8 over on morning of 5/9; 2 over on 13/9; 3 E on 19-20/9.

Grey Wagtail

Resident, with increased numbers in winter

Regularly reported from margins of ponds in Wanstead Park and on Wanstead Flats. One carrying food flew S from Alexandra Lake towards Capel Rd on 29/4.



KATHY HARTNETT

Pied Wagtail

Uncommon resident

Wren

Abundant resident

Dunnock

Common resident and passage migrant

Robin

Abundant resident and passage migrant

Common Redstart

Passage migrant in autumn

A male was seen in hawthorns by Lake House Rd on 25/8; 3 birds were present on the Flats (inc. 2 males) on 29/8 with a female or first-winter bird west of Centre Rd on 31/8. There were a further 4 bird-days in early September with the last on 20/9.

Whinchat

Passage migrant in spring and autumn

In spring 1 was on the Flats on 25/4, and a pair was in the broom area of the Flats on 9/5. On 23/8 the first bird of the

The value of the broom and unmown grass on the Flats was once again confirmed by the presence of several wintering Stonechats (above) at both ends of the year.

Willow Warbler is relatively scarce on spring and autumn passage in the local area. One male held territory in Wanstead Park during the summer but breeding was not proven. The peak count in September (four) was probably an underestimate as non-singing birds are often overlooked.



JONATHAN LETHBRIDGE

autumn started an extraordinary sequence of records that meant birds were present continuously for more than a month. On 29/8 there was an astonishing total of 12 birds, with loose parties east of Centre Rd and south of Lake House Rd. Intriguingly, the unmown grassland and scrub in these areas managed to hold the birds: there were 11 on 31/8, 5 on 5/9, 3 on 7/9, 2 on 12/9, 6 on 18/9, 3 on 20/9, 2 on 23/9 and 2 on 27/9. There were 26 bird-days in September.



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This male Dartford Warbler, found by Stuart Fisher, briefly took up residence in broom south of Long Wood. It drew a number of admirers during its stay, though it could be a real skulker at times. This is believed to be the first record of the species for the Wanstead area.

Stonechat

Winter visitor

The last bird of the early winter period was a male on the Flats on 18/4. In autumn 1 flew from the wood near the Boating Lake on the early morning of 18/9. 2 were in the broom area of the Flats on 27/9, and birds remained through the autumn. On 6/11 there were 3 (2 males) east of Centre Rd, and on 10/11 there were 5 (3 males).

Northern Wheatear

Passage migrant in spring and autumn

Spring birds were seen on the Flats as follows: 2 on 15/3; 3 on 16/4; 1 on 17/4; 2 on 18/4; 1 on 19/4; 2 on 25/4; 1 on 26/4; and 2 on 8/5. Autumn passage was even more impressive, peaking at 8 on

29/8 and continuing with 4+ on 5/9, 1 on 27/9, and the last individual was a female on 13/10.

Ring Ouzel

3

Very scarce passage migrant

A male was on the small playing field on Wanstead Flats on 14/4 (at 18:00) and again the following day; there was a female, feeding with Blackbirds and a Mistle Thrush, in long grass between the Boating Lake and Centre Rd on 15/4 (at 17:00); and a male was near the Esso garage on Aldersbrook Rd on 19/4. There were no autumn birds.

Blackbird

Common resident and passage migrant

Fieldfare

Passage migrant in autumn

Visible migration over the Flats: 1 over on 11/10; 31 W on 17/10; 6 over on 31/10; 10 over on 28/10; 1 NW on 6/11. On 8/11 there were 8 in the old sewage works area, where Blackbirds, Redwings, and Song Thrushes were feeding on berries. On the early morning of 15/11 c100 flew E over Flats; two days later a mobile mixed party of 51 winter thrushes included about 40 of this species; and on 26/11 a flock of 20 flew S from Long Wood soon after dawn.

Song Thrush

Resident breeder

Redwing

Passage migrant in autumn

Large numbers were logged flying over the Flats early in the morning on a number of dates in October and November: 118 W on 10/10; 45 on 11/10; 530 W on 17/10; 250 on 28/10; 60 on 31/10; and 6 W on 6/11. On 8/11 20 were feeding on berries in the overgrown hedge in the old sewage works area, along with other

THE GREAT FALL OF 29 AUGUST

Three Common Redstarts, 11 Whinchats, eight Northern Wheatears, and two Spotted Flycatchers, not to mention a variety of warblers. Dungeness or Portland Bill at the end of August? No, our very own Wanstead Flats on the morning of 29 August. I'm sure those naturalists who've been watching the area for years will have had similar experiences, but this was completely unprecedented for many newer observers, myself included.

So what was going on? The previous day was one of showers and sunny intervals across England. Some of the showers were heavy and were associated with strong gusts of wind from the west or west-south-west (a maximum gust of 32.7 mph was recorded at the Upminster weather station). And one more persistent band of rain swept across South-East England from the south-west. In our part of London this rain started a little before 20:00 and finished some time before mid-

night. Of course, no-one will ever know exactly what happened, but my guess is that the aforementioned nocturnal migrants set off soon after dusk from somewhere to the north of us on one stage of their long migration to Africa. Conditions would have been relatively fine, but not long after heading off they encountered the rain and a strengthening headwind, perhaps somewhere to the north of London. At first they may have soldiered on, but as the rain persisted some of them pitched down in areas with limited disturbance ... one of which was Wanstead Flats.

Some may have moved on again when the rain eased up, but others—perhaps those that had made a longer flight the previous evening—stayed put and rested. Finding plenty of food on the Flats the following morning they used the opportunity to put on some fat. And the end product was the most exciting morning's birding some of us have ever had locally.

thrushes. On 17/11 a mobile mixed party of 51 winter thrushes included about 10 of this species; 30 flew over The Basin on 20/11; and 15 flew over Long Wood on 3/12. On 20/12 about 40 were noted in different areas of the Flats and Park.

Mistle Thrush

Resident breeder

Largest counts: 11 on 27/8, 12 on 19/9, and 10 on 12/10 (often on the small playing field on Wanstead Flats). Territorial aggression and song noted by Long Wood on 3/12.

Reed Warbler

Rare passage migrant

A male sang for about 5 minutes from hawthorns by the River Roding, east of the City of London Cemetery, on 9/5 (at 07:50).

Blackcap

Common summer breeder and scarce winter visitor

1 singing male in Wanstead Park on 17/3; 2 singing males there on 27/3; first singing male in Bush Wood on 1/4.

Wintering birds included 2 in old sewage works area on 8/11 and a female in a Windsor Road garden on 4/12.

Breeding: many pairs in Wanstead Park, several in Bush Wood and a feeding party (parents feeding c3 juveniles) seen near Long Wood.

Garden Warbler

1 *Scarce summer visitor*

The first singing male was in Bush Wood on 3/5, followed by other near the River Roding on 8/5 and on Wanstead Flats on 9/5. In autumn, single birds on the Flats on 16/8, 23/8, 6/9 and 12/9.

Lesser Whitethroat

Passage migrant (and possible local breeder?)

The first of spring was a singing male by Alexandra Lake on 29/4; on 10/5 2 males were singing on the Flats and 3 more birds were seen in Wanstead Park.

Autumn passage: birds present from the start of August, with 3 on Flats on 10/8 and then regular sightings there until 3 there on 21/9. Breeding: 2 males singing on territory on Wanstead Flats throughout the summer.

Common Whitethroat

Common summer visitor

First of spring 2 on the Flats 18/4. Near Lake House Rd, up to 20 on 25/8 and 15+ (including young) on 30/8 but numbers then declined to mid-September (1 on 13/9). Breeding: on Wanstead Flats south of Lake House Rd and east of Alexandra Lake and in the old sewage works area.

Dartford Warbler

1

Rare visitor

A male in the area of broom near the model aircraft strip from 31/10 to 6/11 (not seen 3-5/11) was the first local record. During this period it gave some song and subsong and often associated with 1 or more of the Stonechats.

One of the three Firecrests which took up residence in Reservoir Wood late in the year.

Chiffchaff

Common summer visitor; some overwinter

First of year on 3/2. In the Park; 7 singing males in Park, 27/3. Local birds probably joined by passage migrants in autumn, so 8+ in a relatively small area of Flats on 17/9. Wintering birds were on Wanstead Flats on 10/11 and in Wanstead Park on 29/11 (one) and 6/12 (two). Breeding: probable in Wanstead Park and Bush Wood.

Willow Warbler

Passage migrant in spring and autumn

1 singing in Bush Wood on 5/3; 3 in Wanstead Park on 15/4; 1 on the Flats, 19/4; 1 singing in Bush Wood, 21/4. In autumn, largest count 4 on 6/9 (all areas covered). Breeding: a male on territory in Wanstead Park but breeding not proven.

Goldcrest

Localised resident

Maximum of 5 on 10/1. During the summer mostly seen or heard in City of London Cemetery. 1 in full song in Bush Wood on 5/6. Breeding: presumed in City of London Cemetery.

Firecrest

3

Rare visitor

1 in Reservoir Wood with a large tit flock on 1/11; 2 there on 15/11 and 21/11; then 3 on 5-6/12; and at least 1 still on 12/12.

Spotted Flycatcher

Autumn passage migrant

On the Flats, after the first two autumn birds on 29/8, there was an impressive passage in the first half of September (at least 23 bird-days), and including a peak of 10 on 5/9 (2 near Jubilee Pond, 5 on the sunny, southern side of Long Wood, and 3 east of Alexandra Lake); also, 4 on 12/9. The last was a single on 19/9.



JONATHAN LETHERIDGE

Long-tailed Tit

Abundant resident

Largest count: 100+ counted in Wanstead Park on 8/11.

Blue Tit

Abundant resident

Great Tit

Abundant resident

Coal Tit

Scarce resident

Most commonly seen in the City of London Cemetery. 3 in a Belgrave Rd garden, where the species is very scarce, on 16/3. During autumn, a single bird seen with Long-tailed Tits on several dates in Reservoir Wood. Breeding: a pair with a nest-hole was seen in City of London Cemetery on 11/4.

Nuthatch

Scarce visitor and former breeder

1 in St Mary's churchyard on 9/1, with 2 there on 16/1, 1 on 18/1 and 2 again on 29/1; 1 heard in Reservoir Wood on 31/1. In second winter period, 1 heard close to St Mary's churchyard on 20/12.

Treecreeper

1

Rare visitor; former breeding species
1 in Reservoir Wood 2/11 and 8/11.

Jay

Common resident

Magpie

Common resident

Jackdaw

Increasing resident

Carrion Crow

Common resident

A large night-time roost forms on the golf course outside the breeding season.



JONATHAN LETHBRIDGE

There were probably 10 different Spotted Flycatchers on the Flats on 5 September, including five quite close together in Long Wood.

Starling

Common resident and passage migrant, numbers increasing in winter
1000 over the Flats on 18/10 and 500 on the Flats on 1/11.

House Sparrow

Resident, much reduced in numbers

Chaffinch

Resident, breeding in small numbers; numbers build in autumn
Biggest count c40 in old sewage works area on 8/11. The first singing male was heard in the Park on 14/2.

Greenfinch

Common resident
Biggest counts: c40 in old sewage works area on 8/11; 40 in sycamores east of Alexandra Lake on 31/10; 36 in conifers near Empress Drive on 26/9.

Goldfinch

Quite scarce visitor
5 in old sewage works area on 8/11. Mixed party of this species and Siskins in The Dell, 12/12.

Siskin

Winter visitor

Largest flocks: 52 in Wanstead Park on 3/1; 15 near the Temple on 11/3; last was a female by the Ornamentals, 27/3.

Visible migration in autumn produced 10 N on 10/10. In the second winter period, 12 in Wanstead Park on 21/11, 20+ in The Dell area on 22/11.

Linnet

Quite scarce visitor

Fly-over singles on several dates. Largest number: 7 in old sewage works area on 15/1; 5 on Wanstead Flats on 11/4; and 12 W on 11/10.

Lesser Redpoll

Winter visitor and passage migrant

One over Wanstead Flats on 10/1; 3 flew SW over Bush Wood on 15/1; 3 observed going to roost in blackthorn hedge near River Roding (in the old sewage works area) on 6/4, then 2 there on 7/4 and 1 on 8/4. 25+ near The Glade on 29/11. 15-16 in trees between Windsor Rd and Belgrave Rd on 16-17/12.

Redpoll sp.

Singles over Flats on 20/4 and 11/10.

Common Crossbill

2

Rare visitor

2 juveniles flew fairly low W over Wanstead Flats, calling (as if taking off from City of London Cemetery?) on 9/8 (at 09:00).

Bullfinch

Scarce visitor

The area of the old sewage works is most favoured. All spring records were between 5/4-2/5: a male on 5/4, 6/4 and 19/4; a pair there on 22/4 and 26/4; and a male again on 2/5. In autumn a male flew over, towards City of London Cemetery, on 8/11.

Yellowhammer

1

Rare visitor

The year's only record was a juvenile female (with 2 Reed Buntings) east of Centre Rd on 13/9 (at 08:30).

Reed Bunting

Scarce resident breeder; probably 2 pairs bred

Present on Wanstead Flats throughout the year. Largest counts: 6 on 19/9 and 5 on 18/10. Breeding: evidence of two territories, one either side of Centre Road.

Early spring sunshine illuminates the Ornamental Waters, Wanstead Park.



SHARON PAYNE