

May 2009 Sightings at Wormwood Scrubs



Little Egret (D. Lindo)

There's always next month.....

As May's go, this was a quiet one. It was a continuation from last month in that a lot of our staple scarcer migrants were just not evident. The weather wasn't exactly amazing either. Although there were some sunny days, the month was largely cloudy and surprisingly nippy. Those dull days had an obvious effect not only on the birds but on the Scrubs birders too.

But as ever there were a few highlights. Two **Common Buzzard** records were pretty good, scarcities like **Tufted Duck**, **Great Black-back** and **House Martin** helped to elevate our low spirits. The Dawn Chorus and London Natural History Society walks that were both held on the 24th, yielded nearly 50 participants and scrumptious delights like our first spring **Spotted Flycatcher** and perhaps the surprise of the month – 4 passing **Little Egrets**.

We are behind in the number of species recorded in 2008, our record year at Wormwood Scrubs. The next couple of months will probably result in few new species for the list, but we will all now be living for mid-August onwards when the autumn passage starts to kick in and we will have the chance to see some of the birds that we missed out on this time round. We hope.

Contributors: Rob Ayers, Mathew Bournat, Kim Dixon, David Jeffreys, David Lindo, Roy Nuttall, Mark Patterson, Justin Quail et al.

If you have details of any sightings or observations of unusual behaviour please sent them on no matter how trivial they may seem to: theurbanbirder@theurbanbirder.com

Cormorant

At least 7 were seen on the 3rd and included a group of 5 performing gentle aerobatics high over Lester's Embankment. Smaller numbers were seen daily throughout the month.

Grey Heron

A few birds were seen during the month.

Little Egret

On the 24th during the Dawn Chorus Walk, a party of 4 birds flew over, much to the delight of the assembled walkers. These birds were our 4th ever record.

Canada Goose

The usual small gaggles were heard from The Scrubs.

Mallard

The normal couple of birds were noted commuting overhead every now and again.

Tufted Duck

A distant flock of 4 birds were observed head south over the prison. A rare bird here, these birds were probably our 5th record.

Common Buzzard

An observer watched this nationally common raptor heading over Central Copse on the 6th being mobbed by crows. It landed in the north east corner of Braybrook Woods where it remained for some time. Our 2nd record for the month drifted high heading south east against the clear blue sky on the 24th.

Hobby

A superb adult drifted over Scrubs Lane car park on the 29th. It spent at least 5 minutes majestically coasting after the local Swifts before heading off east. This was our first bird of the spring but was way later than our previous spring birds.

Kestrel

The usual birds were seen hunting over the park.

Herring Gull

Our numbers fell away this month, probably due to the adults being at their breeding sites. Around 10 being the average daily count but 20 birds were seen on the 24th.

Lesser Black-back

Low numbers were reported during the month with 12 on the 24th being the most.

Great Black-back

A single bird headed over on the 8th making it the latest ever seen here as this massive maritime gull is ordinarily a winter visitor.

Stock Dove

A few were picked up during the month as they headed over The Scrubs.

Woodpigeon

It was business as usual for our local population with around 50 birds seen daily. Things will change next month when the fledglings begin to appear.

Collared Dove

A singleton was recorded on the 8th and 4 were seen flying over together on the 24th.

Swift

A steady passage of about 30 birds occurred on the 4th. By mid-month we had a settled number of residents that numbered up to 40 birds.

Rose-ringed Parakeet

No serious counts were conducted this month nor were there any pre-dawn visits to ascertain the size of the Braybrook Street roost. Around 30 birds were casually noticed on the 24th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

A bird was heard calling from the western end on the 14th and 2 adults were seen at both ends of the Scrubs the following day. The same birds were probably noted on the 24th.

Sand Martin

At least 7 headed north over Lester's Embankment on the 8th. Although being quiet late, they were our first spring record for this year.

Swallow

A steady trickle occurred during the month involving over 100 birds including at least 50 on the 10th and 2 birds that hung around on the 17th to feed around Martin Bell's Wood.

House Martin

This swallow is particularly scarce around our parts. Last year there were only two records for the whole of the spring. This year was no different with 2 seen heading north over Chats Paddock on the 3rd and a lone bird high north over Lester's Embankment on the 20th.

Meadow Pipit

There still seems to be 5 pairs established on the grassland area. Birds were seen with caterpillars in their mouths heading to feed unseen nestlings on the 14th. At least 2 pairs carrying food had to run the gauntlet of 4 marauding

Magpies on the 17th. Interestingly, a couple of males continued to sing until the month's end.

Grey Wagtail

A female was feeding with a Pied Wagtail on the concrete patch (Tent City) at the western end on the 8th.

Pied Wagtail

A few were seen during the course of the month.

Wren

We suspect that there are upwards of 10 broods being raised throughout the park

Dunnock

This time of year is always a difficult one for trying to gauge the numbers of broods knocking around. The situation is further complicated by the polygamous nature of the males. At least 6 birds were seen 24th.

Robin

Most self-respecting Robins were keeping their heads down as they raised their young. The first of these youngsters were seen on the 17th.

Northern Wheatear

A distant flighty buffy bird with a very white rump and tail was glimpsed over the grassland on the 8th. It may have been an example of the larger Greenland race '*leucorhoa*'. This bird brought our total spring records to a respectable 14 birds.

Whinchat

A couple of females were found in the grassland on the 4th and a remaining female (or possibly a new bird) found on the 8th and seen again on the 10th.

Song Thrush

These highly vocal thrushes were very busy this month perhaps having their best year on record in terms of breeding pairs.

Mistle Thrush

An adult was watched feeding around the rugby posts on the 15th.

Blackbird

Our reasonably sized population of perhaps 20 pairs were doing well during the month with many fledglings and older juveniles at large.

Garden Warbler

Another of these inconspicuous warblers was heard singing in and around Chats Paddock on the 2nd and 3rd.

Blackcap

There seems to be more territories held this year than last with around 10 singing males counted (compared to around 8 in 2008).

Lesser Whitethroat

As per last year, our birds began to slip under the radar as their chicks were being reared. A couple of males continued to sing during the month.

Common Whitethroat

Around 11 birds were counted on the 3rd. We estimate that there were probably 13 territories around the site with the bulk on Lester's Embankment and adjacent grassland. Our breeding population is definitely down on previous years.

Sedge Warbler

A singer was discovered in the Southern Copse on the 3rd and another was heard on the 10th emanating from Central Copse. On the 14th a bird was heard singing in Chats Paddock whilst on the following day another was belting out its song from Scrubs Lane Wood. It begs the question; were these birds all separate individuals passing through or was it a single roving male?

Willow Warbler

The month opened with a couple of singers including the long staying Martin Bell's Wood male. Although breeding has never been proved the chances are that we could have a pair in Martin Bell's Wood. Male Willow Warblers do not involve themselves in incubation in a big way and apparently leave the lion share of the rearing of the young to the females. This leaves them more time for singing.

Perhaps we should spend more time during June and July closely inspecting the leaf warblers that we come across in case we discover a Willow Warbler family.

Chiffchaff

At least 6 birds were noticed on the 3rd but birds were seen and heard everyday.

Spotted Flycatcher

Our first bird of the spring showed up on the 24th on the poplars along Lester's Embankment. This was our first spring record of this late migrant since 2007.

Great Tit

Around 15 birds were counted with fledglings on the 24th.

Blue Tit

At least 30 including fledglings were about on the 24th.

Long-tailed Tit

Several families were noted including a pair with 4 fledglings in Martin Bell's Wood on the 3rd.

Magpie

The usual underestimate of around 20 birds was around during the month. At least 25 birds including youngsters were encountered on the 24th.

Jay

One or two were seen on most days largely in the western end. These birds were probably the breeding pair in Chats Paddock.

Jackdaw

The usual spattering of sightings occurred throughout the month with the highest count being the 5 that flew over together on the 20th.

Carrion Crow

With most birds nesting now the numbers physically on The Scrubs dropped as most nests were outside of the area. Up to 250 were noted on the 24th.

Starling

Around 50 birds were present on the 3rd. The first juveniles of the year were seen shortly after that date. At least 60 including screeching juveniles were in the grassland and Lester's Embankment on the 24th.

House Sparrow

Up to 30 birds were commuting between Braybrook Street and Central Copse and the trees adjacent to Chats Paddock. Many more were seen in the Braybrook Street area.

Chaffinch

At least 3 males were still singing around the park during May. We are looking forward to seeing our first youngsters.

Linnet

Our healthy breeding population of around 12 pairs continued to prosper.

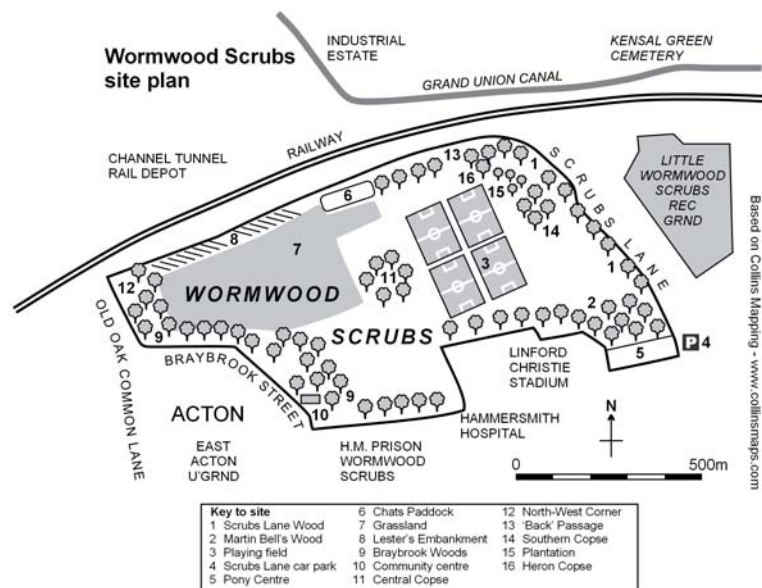
Greenfinch

At least 30 birds were noted on the 3rd.

Goldfinch

Low numbers were encountered during the month, largely due to the majority of the local population breeding in large mature trees outside of the park in the surrounding large gardens.

Compartments within Wormwood Scrubs



Martin Bell's Wood – formally known as the Southern Paddock is situated on the south eastern corner close to Scrubs Lane.

Scrubs Lane Wood – the strip of woodland on the eastern edge of the site running the length of Scrubs Lane to the east and along the northern edge to Chats Paddock in the west.

Chats Paddock - will also be known as the main lizard habitat.

Lester's Embankment – marks the north western border of the Scrubs and is also referred to as 'the embankment'. Now named after Lester Holloway who in the 80's unsuccessfully campaigned to stop British Rail developing on the Scrubs.

North West Corner – the western edge of the Scrubs.

Braybrook Woods – the woodland strip running along the southern edge from Braybrook Street up to and including outside the prison along the southern parameter.

2009 Year List

Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Mute Swan, Greylag, Canada Goose, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Common Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Hobby, Kestrel, Red-legged Partridge, Lapwing, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-back, Great Black-back, Feral Pigeon, Woodpigeon, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Short-eared Owl, Swift, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Swallow, Sand Martin, House Martin, Rock Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock,

Robin, Northern Wheatear, Whinchat, Stonechat, Black Redstart, Song Thrush, Redwing, Fieldfare, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Dartford Warbler, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Jay, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting

75 species thus far (81 species in May 2008 & 73 in May 2007)