

Hatton's Hey 2021.

The year began with sub-zero temperatures which meant the lagoon was frozen over and remained so until early February. As a result there were no waterfowl on the reserve and the only water birds were a calling Water Rail and a Woodcock which was flushed during maintenance work in front of the hide. There was some activity in the woods, mainly Blue and Great Tits, while the surrounding fields held feeding Redwings and the occasional Pied Wagtail.

By early February the ice on the lagoon had melted allowing Gadwall, Teal and Tufted Duck to move back in only to be forced off again when the water re-froze shortly afterwards. During this time the River Weaver gave refuge to a large flock of Canada Geese and Mallard and the fields held foraging Redwing and Starling plus a single Grey Wagtail. At the end of the month the weather had turned warm, sunny and very Spring-like, at least for a while, and the birds responded. The Gadwall, Mallard and Tufted Duck were all displaying and the Water Rail calling while in the woods Blue and Great Tits, Nuthatch and Great-spotted Woodpeckers were all very vocal. During March a number of Shelduck and Greylags visited the reserve although none remained to breed. The local Tawny Owl became more vocal and by the end of the month the first Chiffchaffs had arrived back and made their presence known.

By April as the days lengthened and the temperatures began to rise the Primroses on the path down to the river put on a good show and a few early Bluebells were showing the promise of things to come. The Chiffchaffs had been joined by a singing Blackcap and there was lots of activity in the woods with Jays, GS Woodpeckers, Nuthatches and Wren joining in with the Blue and Great Tits while on the lagoon the waterfowl were all paired up. There was even a pair of Mute Swans collecting nest material and although they used to be a regular breeding bird here they never did complete or raise young. The now regular Cetti's Warbler(s) was calling and was joined by several Reed Warblers while Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were all singing from the scrub and brambles. On the 28th of April the first Mallard ducklings and Coot chicks appeared on the lagoon. A fine looking male Yellowhammer was singing from the hedgerows and wires near the car park on Ball Lane and a Green Woodpecker was calling near Warburton's Wood while on the fields three Whimbrel were feeding with five Curlew. This was a good record for the area.

Mid-May saw the arrival of a Cuckoo to the area which stayed all month calling regularly and occasionally showing itself while the regular Green Woodpecker always managed to keep out of view. There was plenty of warbler and passerine activity in the woodland and even a pair Wrens nesting in the hide however the Blue and Great Tits using the nest boxes were struggling. The cool and wet weather came at the worst possible time with the parent birds had difficulty finding sufficient food for the now large chicks. As a result there were many casualties and fledging success was very low compared to previous years.

In June it was a pleasure to see two recently fledged Tawny Owls in the woodland, a species more often heard than seen. Apart from the Reed Warblers and Cetti's Warbler there was little birdsong apart from the occasional Blackcap while on the lagoon there were two broods of Tufted Duck (4 & 5).

By late summer the field near the car park played host to two Yellow and several Pied Wagtails and on the lagoon the wildfowl increased with good numbers of eclipse plumage birds. Overhead occasional Ravens flew over calling and Common Buzzard were regular, particularly on warm days. The theme continued into winter with the highlights being a Grey Wagtail which made itself at home in the now very wet field by the reserve entrance and a single Marsh Tit in front of the hide in mid-

November which was joined by a very confiding Goldcrest. In contrast to the sub-zero temperatures and frozen lagoon in January the year ended with temperatures as high a 15°C on New Year's Eve and completely ice free water for the wildfowl.