

Hatton's Hey Report. 2022.

The year began unseasonably warm with temperatures as high as 15°C but cooling to 5 or 6 later in January though still warm enough to ensure the lagoon remained ice free for the Mallard and Coot and to keep the Cetti's Warbler calling in the reedbed. In the woodlands a variety of passerines were active and at least one Woodcock was present although it's likely there were more. The surrounding fields held feeding Redwing with a few Blackbirds and Mistle Thrushes but unusually no Fieldfares with them.

By late February the resident Tawny Owl was occasionally calling from the trees behind the hide and the Water Rails was making noises in the reedbed. On the lagoon the variety of duck increased with Shelduck, Teal, Mallard and even a drake Mandarin joining the Tufted Duck as did a very vocal pair of Little Grebe.

In late March as temperatures rose, up to 17°C at times, the first migrants arrived in the form of calling Chiffchaffs while the Tawny Owl continued to proclaim its territory. A pair of Kingfishers also became regular visitors to fish on the lagoon although they presumably nest somewhere along the river, certainly not on the reserve.

The first half of April saw a single Blackcap and Reed Warbler return and by the end of the month their numbers increased and they were joined by Willow Warbler, Chiffchaffs and the occasional Whitethroat. The resident birds were also busy with Blue and Great Tits taking possession of the nest boxes and a pair of Treecreepers building behind one of the planks in the hide. The woodland flowers were also playing their part with the Bluebells in particular putting on a good show.

Although one Swallow does not a Summer make it certainly felt that way when a single bird hawked across the lagoon in early May; the warblers were in full song, Long-tailed Tits were foraging in front of the hide and the Treecreepers were feeding young in their nest. The Blue and Great Tits were also busy in the nest boxes but had mixed fortunes with several pairs failing to fledge any chicks and others only raising small numbers. The two pairs of Nuthatch however fared better managing to raise eight youngsters between them. With farmland birds becoming more scarce it was a pleasure to record a singing male Yellowhammer on the hedge close to the car park on Ball Lane and a Brown Hare in the adjacent field was another good sighting on the same day.

While the male Mallard on the lagoon were already moulting into eclipse plumage by mid-June the Coot and Little Grebe were both actively caring for chicks or even building new nests. By High Summer the bird activity had quietened down with just the odd ones calling or occasionally singing from the dense foliage in the woods, the Kingfishers did however continue to visit regularly to brighten up the day for those fortunate to catch up with them. The prolonged hot and dry weather at the end of the Summer shrank the size of the lagoon where a single Mute Swan, no longer a breeding species here, joined the twenty plus eclipse plumaged Mallards and a few Coots while on the track from the far a flock of almost thirty Goldfinches made up of adults and juveniles was feeding along the hedge rows. It looks like it has been a good year for these lovely finches.

Passage waders are something of a rarity at Hatton's Hey so the presence of two Common Sandpipers in September feeding on the muddy fringes of the lagoon was a real treat and a first for the reserve. Elsewhere things were quiet except for Wood Pigeons which appeared in good numbers with some even carrying nesting material to continue their breeding season.

As Autumn moved into Winter there was a variety of duck on the lagoon and the weather was nothing if not variable. In Mid-December there was a prolonged period of sub-zero temperatures reaching as low as -8.5°C at times, so bad that it proved impossible to access the reserve as the track from the farm was completely frozen and too treacherous to walk on. This had changed by the end of the month and the year finished as it had begun with temperatures in the mid-teens, perhaps these wide ranging weather conditions are the new normal. We shall see.