

Lytchett Bay 2014

Shaun Robson



I doubt anyone ever imagined that Lytchett Bay would have habitat and birds like this. 2014 was a year like no other. Pic – I.Ballam

The Bay was visited on 342 days as set out below. This is definitely a new record. Ian Ballam takes the honors as an almost “ever present” this year. In the process he set a new individual Bay year list record of 150.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
29	22	26	29	31	29	31	31	30	30	29	25

2013 had proven to be a record year but it had taken a lot of effort and the last 4 months had been rather unproductive. Very poor weather greeted the beginning of 2014 and Bay’s 3rd Smew was found on only the third day. On the fourth our 5th Kittiwake was found. 2 birds missed in 2013. We could not ask for anymore encouragement.

12 months later and we finished on 157 species, another record. I doubt we will remember the total. It will be the quality that will never be forgotten. This was the year where a patch that always produced some enjoyable birding, occasionally great spectacles and even more occasionally rare birds, produced one good bird after another and one record count after another. The “Funny Little Place” came of age as a genuine birders site.

The highlights were many and could be ranked in many different ways. In simple terms the year looked like this. 1st Black-winged Stilts and Temminck’s Stint. The site list now stands at 219. 2nd Pectoral Sandpiper, Yellow-browed Warbler, Great White Egret and Arctic Tern. 3rd Spotted Crake and Smew, 4th Blue-headed Wagtail, Black Redstart and Garganey (plus 5th and 6th), 5th Turnstone and Kittiwake. 6th Aquatic Warbler.

The first successful breeding of Redshank on the fields for more than 20 years was a

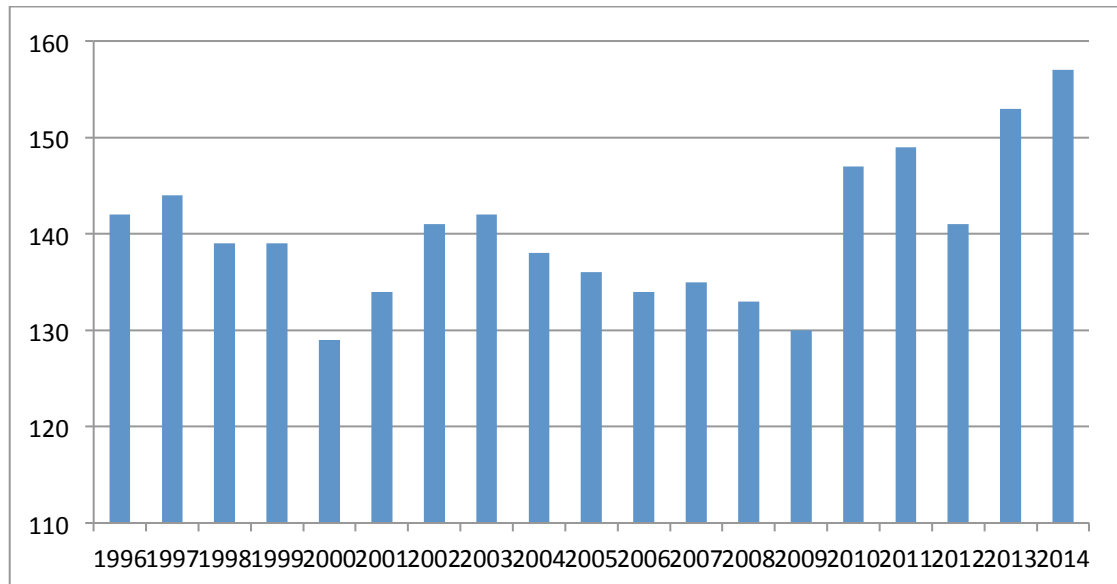
thrill. Gadwall (and Coot!) also bred for the first time.

No less than 23 species occurred in either greater numbers or greater frequency than ever before. Firecrest, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Hen Harrier, Little Ringed Plover, Ringed Plover, Ruff, Common Sandpiper, Jack Snipe, Yellow Wagtail, Wheatear, Mediterranean Gull, Marsh Harrier, Peregrine, Teal, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler, Shoveler, Little Egret, Greylag Goose and Canada Goose.

Increased interest was shown in other wildlife and I am very grateful to Nick Hull for his extensive checklist of mammals, amphibians, reptiles and insects which is included for the first time. See page 51.

On a personal note my own patch list increased to 199. My next new bird will be a landmark. Will I reach the threshold in 2015?

No of bird species seen annually at Lytchett Bay 1995 - 2014



Lytchett Bay – people and wildlife

In future years we might look back at 2014 as a watershed year in the protection of Lytchett Bay for wildlife and as a game changer in terms of people's access and enjoyment of the site.

Interest in the area has been growing for many years. Poole Council (BoP) has shown interest in the conservation value and access of the south shore at Turlin Moor since 1990. Holton Lee has been creating opportunity for people with a disability (and their carers) to watch wildlife and enjoy the natural environment since the early 90's. Lytchett Heath and parts of Lytchett Way were leased from the Lord Wimborne Estate by the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC). More recently the RSPB have leased fields from the Lees Estate to the north of the Sherford since 2002. Lytchett Minster and Upton Town Council (L&UTC) have improved access at Lytchett Bay View, a 3.8 hectare Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) off Border Drive and supported this with interpretive information and wildlife friendly grassland management since 2010. These actions were all very positive but each was independent and consequently could have been considered fragile.

In early 2014 the Dorset Wildlife Trust in partnership with a wide range of partners including ARC and BoP secured £4.7M of Heritage Lottery and match funding to buy 10 parcels of land across SE Dorset. The project is branded as “The Great Heath Living Landscape”. The project is not just a land ownership project. In equal proportion it is a community access and engagement project. One of the key sites included within it is a large part of the north shore of Lytchett Bay, including the sites previously leased to ARC. On one side the land is bordered by that managed by L&UTC and on the other it gets very close to that leased to the RSPB. Importantly it also includes approximately 50% of the mudflats in the Bay. From a landscape and habitat protection perspective the benefit of the Great Heath Living Landscape does not end there. Not far away the project has also enabled Poole Harbour Commissioners to buy the mudflats and saltmarsh of Holes Bay and funding derived from new housing developments in Poole is enabling BoP to extend the accessible area of Upton Country Park creating a new area of natural greenspace (SANG).

The Great Heath is not the final piece in the jigsaw, but it might be the most important. Virtually all of the hinterland of Lytchett Bay is now in some form of sympathetic ownership or management via lease.

The Great Heath is off to a great start at Lytchett Bay. To date there have been improvements to footpaths, volunteer work parties which have cleared storm blown plastics from the shore and carried out conservation works. In partnership with Stour Ringing Group, a successful bird ringing demonstration attracted 30 people in September. A series of “meet the birds” events are planned for early 2015 which aim to share the Bay’s wonderful array of wintering and migrant waterfowl and waders with the local community. Work is currently underway to design signage and interpretive information and it is intended to install this in 2015.



Stour Ringing Group members demonstrate bird ringing at Lytchett Heath to 30 members of the public at a Great Heath event. (Pic – P.Morton)

It's not just the Great Heath that has been making good progress. There has been some change and improvement in each part of the Bay.

At Turlin Moor, the long standing "bird screen" had started to fall in to disrepair. Due to the growth and succession of the reed bed adjacent to it, any view of the bay had long since gone. Consideration was given to dismantling the screen. However in an attempt to increase interest in the Turlin LNR, the reeds have been cleared and the view opened once more. Observations during the autumn suggested that disturbance had not increased and the birds were showing tolerance to the more visible presence of humans. This will be informally monitored during the coming months to inform any future decision.



Lytchett Bay from the Turlin bird screen (Pic - S.Robson)

Also at Turlin, an area of 4.9 hectares of amenity grassland was left uncut during the summer and early autumn to improve bio-diversity in the area. This was managed with a cut and collect harvest in the autumn. Hopefully this regime can be continued in future years to improve the diversity of the meadow.

At Lytchett Bay View the ambitions to improve the site continued. Thanks to funding provided by Viridor landfill tax credits, BoP and generous private donations, a new boardwalk was commissioned between the site and Turlin Moor Recreation Ground. This will create a circular walk linking the two sites. This is under construction as I write. Habitat management is also being carried out to improve the diversity of the site. Links with The Great Heath Project were made and volunteer work parties will help with site management in 2015.

At the French's Farm RSPB reserve habitat changes continue helped by natural forces. Tidal inundation continues to create superbly attractive wet grassland and brackish marsh behind the seawall. Mowing of the site very early in the autumn migration season ensured that it was in great condition. Read the wader and waterfowl sections of the bird report to understand the beneficial impact that this has had for wildlife. Access for birders was arranged on an informal basis when the rarities occurred. Thanks to work between the RSPB and the Birds of Poole Harbour

charity, work is currently underway to test how more formal access might work, enabling birders access to a new viewpoint over “Lytchett Fields”. The RSPB is keen to see if improved access can be created without causing unacceptable disturbance to wildlife. We welcome feedback on how this new access works for visitors (positive or negative). It is hoped that this will be open before spring 2015.



Lytchett Fields in February 2015. The trial access will give birders wonderful views of birds on this developing wetland. (Pic - T.Amundsen, Biotope)

In September a view point was created to “The Pool” on Slough Lane. The scrape here was refreshed too. The long established headland in the arable field was extended this year.

Finally, there was a change in ownership at Holton Lee. It is still very early days in terms of this change but the new owners, Liveability, are a large national charity with plans to invest in the future of this special site.

An on-going planning application for house building of Policeman’s Lane is still under consideration. This application contains an exciting opportunity to open up another SANG to the west of Slough Lane.

There is still much to do and many negotiations to complete but there is no doubting the progress made. These are exciting times with significant potential.

On a personal note I’d like to thank everyone from the organisations mentioned for their passion, commitment and support.

Bird Ringing 2014

1871 birds were ringed at Lytchett Bay. Most of these were ringed in a concentrated period between 12th July and 6th Sept where our efforts were again concentrated around the banks of the Sherford. However there was plenty of training activity at Sandy Close Pond where 304 birds were ringed or processed. We also conducted some excellent sessions and the ringing demo at Lytchett Heath where 485 birds were processed.

The year will be remembered for wave after wave of Sedge Warblers. 892 birds were ringed in total, easily a record for the site. Having never ringed more than 100 in a morning we caught 191 on the 1st Aug and 200 on 8th Aug. These have already produced a good series of controls and recoveries.

Our main target remained the “red listed” Aquatic Warbler. July was blessed with

encouraging weather but it was just too early. Or was it? Read the report to find out.

Optimism that these conditions would continue into August was soon vanquished. The month was again dominated by westerly winds. There were no days of winds from the desired and required direction, between east and south.

Colour-ring reading produced plenty of highlights and interesting information about our visiting waders. Black-tailed Godwits, Avocet and Spoonbill starred. Frustratingly we have so far been unable to trace a colour ringed Common Sandpiper and Redshank.

19,898 birds of 81 species have been ringed since 1983.

The full details, controls, recoveries and interesting re-traps are in the systematic list. Appendix 2 details the individual species totals and is included at the end of the report.

Acknowledgements

Stour Ringing Group would like to thank Wessex Water, The RSPB and the landowner, the Lees Estate, for their kind permission to ring at Lytchett Bay. The Dorset Wildlife Trust gave permission to ring on land around Lytchett Heath and we are very grateful for this.

Thanks are due to the RSPB, DWT and The Birds of Poole Harbour Charity for their support in relation to various matters associated with their site and we look forward to working with them in 2015.

I'd like to add additional thanks to all observers who submitted records this year. In particular Ian Ballam and Paul Morton who found so many good birds. Nick & Jacqui Hull who put considerable effort in to collating a checklist of other wildlife.

Systematic List 2014

3505 records were collated during the year and all of these have been submitted to the [BTO's Birdtrack database](#). This has enabled some data for regularly occurring species to be presented using graphs. These show the weekly maxima throughout the year. The interpretation of these requires some caution as not all common species are counted every week; this can lead to gaps in the data. Where necessary this is clarified in the text.

Species names are followed by up to 3 numbers. The first is the maximum known count recorded at the Bay. This now includes historical counts by observers going back to 1975. The middle figure (when necessary) is the max count in the period since 1992. The final figure is the number of years in which the species has been recorded since 1992. This is the year in which the current spell of comprehensive coverage began.

The symbol which follows each species name shows the direction of travel of the species status at Lytchett Bay over the last 5 years. I think these are quite intuitive; strongly increasing, increasing, stable, declining and strongly declining. Hopefully this feature will enable others to compare the data from this site with experiences at their own site and engender some debate and understanding.

Mute Swan: (58 – 23) ↘

Common winter visitor, present in small numbers throughout the year. Bred between 2002 and 2007. A pair built a nest of the Far Fields but failed to hatch any young.

After a significant increase from 2003 onwards numbers of this species visiting the Bay started to decline in 2012. The amount of macro algal matt has decreased in recent summers. Both Wigeon and Mute Swan numbers peaked when this weed was most abundant.

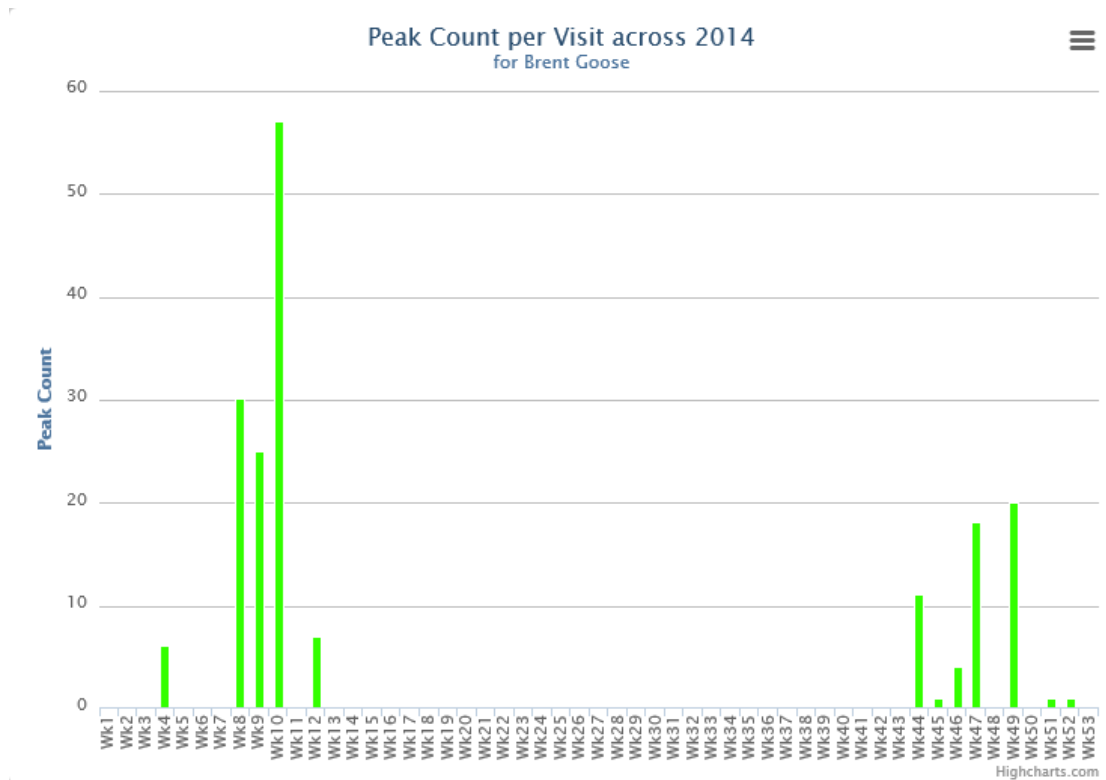
JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2	2	2	9	19	17	14	12	n.c.	n.c.	6	2

Greylag Goose: (32 – 15) ↔

Scarce feral wanderer. A record year both in terms of frequency and numbers. Seen on 23 dates throughout the year. 32 on Far Fields on 17th Dec was a record count.

Dark-bellied Brent Goose: (88 – 15) ↗

Scarce visitor. Another decent year. Birds were present from 1st Jan until 23rd Mar. Max 57 on 7th Mar. The first returning birds were on 1st Nov and the species was recorded frequently until the end of the year.



Barnacle Goose: (42 – 8)

Rare visitor. 2 presumably feral birds were in the stubble with Canada Geese on 22nd Aug. They were seen again on 4th and 11th Oct.

Canada Goose: (209 – 23) ↗

Increasingly frequent visitor. 209 in stubble on 25th Aug was a record count. Regular large flocks roosted in autumn.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
0	2	4	4	20	n.c.	73	209	n.c.	200	n.c.	n.c.

Shelduck: (645 – 548 – 23) ↘

Occasional breeder and winter visitor. None bred this year. No 3 figure counts were

disappointing. However the presence of a non-breeding flock loafing on the Far Fields was interesting.

Bay monthly max:

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
60	42	55	94	85	55	28	12	10	34	29	32

Wigeon: (671 – 23) ↔

Common winter visitor. Another decline following years of increase. As stated in the last report, the increase in Wigeon seems to have encouraged an increase in wildfowling. In the second winter period this occurred several times per week. Could this disturbance be responsible for the decline or is it the reduction in macro algal mat which seemed to provide an attractive food source? Absent from 28th Feb until 26th Aug.

Bay monthly max:

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
125	141	0	0	0	0	0	6	35	42	144	166

Gadwall: (73 – 18) ↗

Increasingly frequent visitor. Birds arrived on the Far Fields in Jan and were present until early Aug. As predicted in the last report, breeding occurred for the first time. 3 chicks were seen on 6th Jul. However they were not seen again so it is unknown whether they successfully fledged.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
7	11	4	12	34	16	4	2	5	0	0	9

Teal: (917 – 23) ↗

Winter visitor and passage migrant. No records between 9th Apr and 1st Jun. After which a phenomenal influx occurred. Numbers reached 105 by 10th Aug and climbed to an amazing record of 917 on 24th Sep. This is almost double the previous best of 504, present in Sep 2013. The habitat on the Far Fields is clearly to this species liking.

Numbers remained very high until the end of the year.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
60	170	103	40	0	22	38	210	917	649	500	459

Garganey: (3 - 4)

Rare visitor. After records in 1992, 1993 and 1994, the first 3 years of coverage during the current recording period, it might have been fair to conclude that our only summer visiting duck might be a write in to the annual report. We reached this year, the 20th in succession without another sighting!

However like many species, this year has been very different. A fine male graced the Far Fields on 3rd June (IB et al). A female was there on 16th & 17th June (IB et al). Then our latest ever record at the Bay. A juv with 100's of Teal on 5th Oct (ML).



Female Garganey with drake Teal. The fields became more even more interesting as spring moved to summer. Pic – I.Ballam

Mallard: (106 – 23) ↔

Breeds at several sites around the recording area. First brood noted on 3rd Apr. Very regular on Sandy Close Pond.

Bay monthly max:

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
4	n.c.	Br	Br	Br	51	15	59	n.c.	n.c.	16	n.c.

Northern Pintail: (21 - 15) ↔

Scarce visitor. Seen on 7 dates. After 2 in the Bay on 16th Jan all other records were from the Far Fields. 1 on 21st Apr, 1 on 16th and 2 on 17th Jun, 2 on 12th Sep, 3 on 4th Oct and 4 on 17th Oct.

Shoveler: (7 – 22) ↔

Scarce visitor, which can occur at any time. Another exceptional year with records on 20 dates in 8 months. Max of 6 on 14th Jul. All records were either in the Bay or on the Far Fields.

Tufted Duck: (20 – 11) ↔

Scarce visitor. 3 records. 2 on 4th Jan, 1 on 14th Mar and 1 on 2nd Sep.

Goldeneye: (12 – 22) ↘

Declining winter visitor. As in 2013 the species was only recorded in the first winter period. Seen on 9 dates between 4th Jan and 9th Feb. Max 3 on first date.

Smew: (3 – 3)

3rd record in the period since 1992. A redhead was found on 3rd Jan and remained faithful to the extremely flooded Far Fields until 22nd Jan (IB et al).



The first record of Smew since 2001 showed well for almost 3 weeks in Jan (Pic - I.Ballam)

Red-breasted Merganser: (73 – 23) ⇄

Winter visitor. Recorded on at least 45 dates, considerably more frequent than in recent years. Present until 2nd Apr and from 3rd Nov. Max 18 on 26th Nov.

Bay monthly max:

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
14	14	9	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	12

Pheasant: ↑

Increasingly common resident. Established in all parts of the recording area.

Little Grebe: (12 - 23) ⇄

Winter visitor. Recorded until 15th Mar and from 15th Sep. Max 8 on 10th Dec.

Great Crested Grebe: (4 - 20) ↗

Increasingly frequent visitor. Recorded on 26 dates between 26th Mar and 20th Nov. Max 2 on several dates.

Cormorant: (203 – 23) ↗

Regular visitor. No significant counts were logged though typically feeding flocks were seen in the autumn.

Great Bittern: (1 – 5)

7th and 8th records. 1 was seen over Far Fields on 13th Jan (IB, PM). Another was in reeds on the Turlin Shore on 7th Mar (IB).

Little Egret: (32 – 22) ⇄

Common visitor. At last the site record count was broken. 32 were on the Far Fields on 29th Dec. The previous record of 29 had stood since 2010.

Bay monthly max:

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
5	5	22	n.c.	n.c.	6	9	14	20	19	23	32

Great White Egret: (1 – 2)

2nd Record. Despite this species dramatic change in status in Southern Britain it remains a very rare bird in Poole Harbour. In early autumn 2 birds took up residence

in the southern harbour and on the 6th Oct one visited the Far Fields for a little over 30 minutes (IB, SR). A long awaited and eagerly anticipated addition to the latter's patch list.



*It lingered just long enough. Surely a species that will become a frequent visitor in the years ahead?
(Pic - I.Ballam)*

Grey Heron: (10 – 23) ↔

Recorded frequently throughout the year. Max 5 on several dates.

Spoonbill: (15 – 5)

Increasing winter visitor. Not quite as prevalent as 2013 but not far short. Recorded on 24 dates. No records between 20th Apr and 31st Aug. Sightings spread evenly between the Far Fields and Bay. Max 6 on 28th Dec.

A colour ringed bird marked GYfl + RGB was present on 30th Dec.



Our second Dutch ringed Spoonbill (P.Morton)

It was ringed at Markiezaat, The Netherlands on 2nd Jun 2014 as a nestling. By the 12th Nov it had only moved 43km and was still in The Netherlands at Grevelingen.

Many thanks to Petra de Goeij and Otto Overdijk for supplying this information.

Red Kite: (2 – 9) ↗

Scarce migrant. Only 2 records this year but our first multiple occurrence.

1 over Bay on 16th Mar (MoP)

2 over Far Fields on 3rd Dec (IB) were Ian's 150th patch species for the year.

Marsh Harrier: (6 – 22) ↗

Increasingly regular visitor. Noted on an exceptional 75 dates. Recorded in every month except Apr and almost certainly present daily during both winter periods. The roost established in previous winters was again only recorded in use on 1 date.

The maximum day count was 4 on 25th Nov.

This increase is not surprising given that Poole Harbour now has 2 breeding pairs and attracted at least 12 wintering birds during December.

Hen Harrier: (2 – 22) ↔

Irregular Visitor. This species became a flagship for the English conservation cause during 2014. It even had a day of protest and awareness dedicated to it on 12th Aug. It is therefore very appropriate but somewhat ironic that the Bay should have its best year in the period since 1992. Birds were recorded on 20 dates (11 was the previous best in 2013).

At least 3 individuals made up regular sightings between the 3rd Jan and 8th Mar. 2 “grey males” and 1 “ringtail”.

At least 2 individuals a “grey male” and a “ringtail” were seen on 6 dates from 1st Nov.



Jon Worthington took this superb shot of an immature male feeding at the Bay on 2nd Feb and we are very grateful that he has allowed us to include it in this year's report.

Sparrowhawk: (3 – 23) ↔

Uncommon visitor. Recorded on 55 dates and in every month. Like 2013, almost double the average number of annual sightings (57 in 2013, 24.9 p.a. 1992-2011).

Common Buzzard: (15 – 23) ↔

The commonest raptor of the area. Breeds widely in the vicinity.

Osprey: (4 – 22) ↗

Annual passage migrant. The poorest year since 2003. No spring records and only seen on 5 dates in autumn. All singles between 21st Aug and 4th Sep. This is the first year since 1992 that I have not seen this species at the Bay.

Kestrel: (3 – 23) ↘

Declining resident. Only logged on 5 dates until end Jun. A young male took up residence in early Sep and was present until the 7th Dec.