

DEESIDE NATURALISTS SOCIETY BIRD REPORT, 2014

COVERING THE CONNAH'S QUAY NATURE RESERVE
AND THE RSPB RESERVE AT OAKENHOLT MARSH.

By: Glenn Morris, March, 2015.

With Butterfly Report by Christine Hamer.



Cattle Egret (Photo: Joe d'Arcy)

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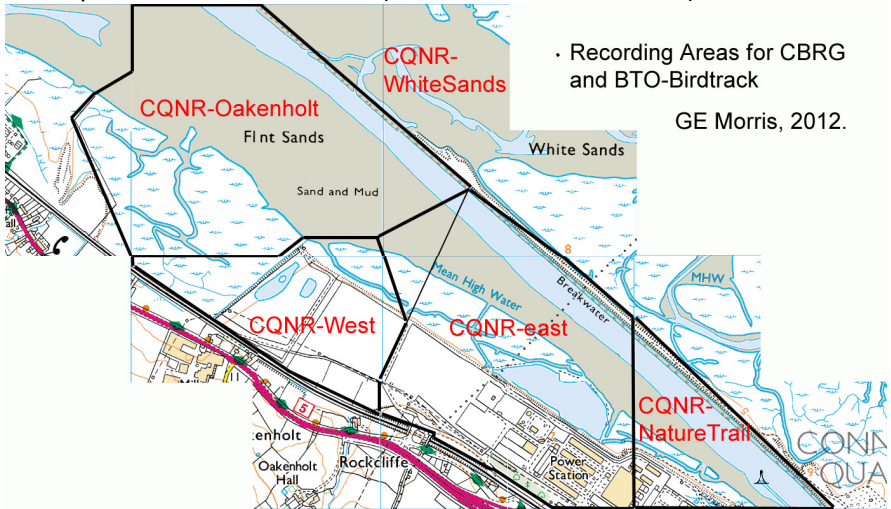
The bird species list for the Connah's Quay Reserve (inc. RSPB Oakenholt Marsh) has now reached 227 in its 36-year history of bird recording, although this total does include about 16 that are likely or definite escapes from captivity.

This year alone 140 species were recorded: **Two new species were Honey Buzzard, Chilean Flamingo and Cattle Egret.** Other species seen this year, but only on very few previous occasions, were **Water Rail, Bar-headed and Snow Goose, Common Scoter, Red-throated Diver and Woodcock.**

In these days of cheap (relatively) lightweight high-zoom cameras, there is little excuse for birders not making photographic records of unusual sightings for ID purposes. This report generally takes logbook records at face value, even with little or no supporting evidence for unusual species, provided there is a legible "signature" to indicate who is taking responsibility for the record.

Please note: records described as 4th or 5th, etc., for the Reserve may have to be revised at a later date, especially passerines. This is because no complete CQNR bird reports were published in 1990-91 and 1997-2008, when they were replaced by the Clwyd Monitoring High and Low Water Counts (almost exclusively wildfowl and wader counts). Logbook records have "gone missing" pre-2002 (West Hide) and pre-2005 (bundled pool hides), hopefully temporarily, but it is possible that many passerine and some wildfowl/wader records have not been taken into account. Other sources (Clwyd Bird Reports and local birding websites) have been taken into account. Past CQNR bird reports are available on the DNS website (members only).

Starting in 2012, we have been entering all DNS records into BTO's BirdTrack. This system is based on 1x1km squares, but these don't translate easily into obvious landscape features on the Reserve. The divisions shown below are a compromise between the exact km square boundaries and what are generally perceived as different areas of the estuary. Counts in the text are the sum of all four Reserve areas. Divisions are arbitrary since birds move with the changing tides and the south part of Oakenholt Marsh (within CQNR-west below) has few birds.



CQNR-Oakenholt includes all the “birdy” areas of Oakenholt Marsh as far back as the rows of fence posts and most of the mudflats visible from the West Hide as far as the revetment. **CQNR-West** includes the fly ash lagoon area, the papermill stream and its banks, the grazing fields west of the helipad road and the area of marsh just below and to the rear of the West Hide. **CQNR-East** includes the bunded pool area, the river between the helipad and the Field Study centre, the grazing field east of helipad road, the Rockcliffe woods and the most of the Power Station. **CQNR-Nature Trail** includes all the area east of the Field Study Centre, including the river around the wooden piles used by Cormorants and any activity above and beyond the revetment. West Hide records for across the river on Parkgate marshes are recorded under **CQNR-White Sands**.

THE SPECIES LIST FOR 2014.

Birds seen in less than 5 previous years on the Reserve are shown in **bold** face. Birds that nested this year as shown as **(B)**.

The tables show the **maximum count** for each month, except for raptors where the **total sightings** per month is shown.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) **(B)**

A nesting pair on the fly ash lagoon produced 5 well-grown young by May 29th, but they decreased to 4 by June 16th, 3 by July 11th, 2 by Aug 4th and there was only one juvenile left by Aug 28th. A flock of 20-22 birds appeared during Mar 31st-Apr 3rd (KJ/BH, P&SH).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	7	4	20	22	7	7	5	9	3	3	3	1

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)

A single bird was seen on the fly ash lagoon on March 31st (KJ/BH). Only recorded in four previous years: 2001, 2008, 2009 and 2013.

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

A substantial flock winters across the river, often hidden behind the revetment. Some of them occasionally visit the Reserve, often on the river's edge at low tide. The highest count of 30 was on Feb 8th (P&SH), Seven of the 8 birds seen on Dec 28th were across the river on Burton Marsh (P&SH)

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	8

Tundra (Bewick's) Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

The only record is of 3 birds on the river with a single Whooper on Dec 28th (P&SH).

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

This species is continuing to increase in numbers on the Dee estuary and they started using Oakenholt Marsh regularly in Nov/Dec this year (recorded 11 times and >700 birds on 5 occasions). There were 800 on

Oakenholt Marsh on Feb 2nd, 2014 (P&SH), but the highest logbook count was 2000 on Dec 26th (P&SH/TL). A estimate of 5000+ was submitted to www.deeestuary.co.uk for Dec 16th.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	0	800	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1000	5000

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) (B)

At least 2 pairs nested successfully again in the fly ash lagoon area this year. Fledged young (3) were first seen on May 9th (JH) and a 2nd set of chicks on May 29th (KJ/BH). Canada Geese can be seen on Oakenholt Marsh or the fly ash lagoon during most of the year. The highest count of 3,900 was on Sep 7th (RB).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	2800	2000	170	36	55	250	600	141	3900	450	1450	2000

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Mostly occasional singles this year on Apr 23rd, June 16th, Jul 13th, Sep 7th and Nov 13th but 3 were present on Nov 9th and 2 on Dec 7th.

Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*)

A blue-phase bird was present on June 15th (P&SH) and 16th (GEM), shown below with 3 Canada Geese. A likely escape, previously recorded only in 1987, 2004 and 2009.



(Photo: GEM)

Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*)

This escapee was recorded twice, on Jan 9th (KJ/BH) and 17th (RB)

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

Singles were recorded on Sep 8th (P&SH), Oct 22nd and 26th (RB) and Dec 3rd and 18th (P&SH), but the highest count was 11 on Nov 16th (PDS).

Some birds on the Dee are known to be escapees, but there is no reason why wild birds should not also appear.

Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) (B)

Successful nesting again this year with 3 chicks on Oakenholt Marsh on May 26th (JH) and parents with 2 chicks resident near the bunded pools from July 28th onwards (GEM). The highest count of 843 was made during the summer moult on June 16th (GEM), most of them on Oakenholt Marsh.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	145	50	97	67	69	843	150	79	183	90	65	50

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

A winter visitor to grassland around the fly ash lagoon and bunded pools. Numbers this year are fairly low, compared with earlier years; high counts usually occur during hard winters. The highest count of 460 was on Feb 21st (GEM).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	350	460	138	2	2	3	2	3	50	80	385	446

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

Between Mar 16th and May 15th 2-3 birds were recorded 14 times on the fly ash lagoon, including a pair, but there was no evidence of breeding. These numbers are quite low, compared with earlier annual maxima of 10-20. One turned up again on Nov 16th (GR) and Dec 10th (P&SH).

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

These frequent the mudflats, lagoon and bunded pools for most of the year. The highest count of 3,000 on Oakenholt Marsh was on Oct 9th (GR).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	356	173	180	14	0	0	12	216	800	3000	667	164

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) (B)

A female with 9/10 ducklings was seen in the lagoon area on Jun 16th (GEM) and 22nd (P&SH). The highest numbers usually arrive for the summer moult, like the Shelduck, but the highest count this year was 820 on Aug 3rd (GEM).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	61	44	28	23	128	253	350	820	350	120	160	72

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

This sporadic winter visitor is usually seen on the river from West Hide, sometimes in very large numbers, but rarely staying long. The 500 on Jan 16th (KJ/BH) were across the river, but two counts of 520 on Aug 16th and Sep 16th (GEM) were from this side. There was a male on the bunded pool on Dec 31st (GP).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	500	6	13	1	2	0	0	520	520	440	0	1

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

The count of 38 birds on the fly ash lagoon on Oct 21st (GEM) beat last year's record of 30.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	19	14	4	2	0	0	0	0	4	38	10	20

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

The only record was of 2 birds on the fly ash lagoon on Apr 22nd (GP).

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

All records are from the fly ash lagoon. No evidence of successful breeding. The highest count of 12 was on March 16th (P&SH).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	3	3	12	10	7	8	2	4	2	8	3	3

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

There were 4 records of a bird brought up river by high tides between Feb 17th and Mar 23rd (KJ/BH, JP, GP, P&SH) and another late record on May 11th (P&SH, JP). Recorded in only 3 previous years (88, 90 and 92).

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

A good year with 2 present on Jan 6th and 9 further records of singles (both male and female) between Jan 9th and April 3rd. They re-appeared on Nov 6th with a high count of 3 on Nov 23rd (PDS) and 24th (KJ/BH), plus several records of a pair on the bunded pool in early Dec.



(Photo: GEM)

Redbreasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

There were 7 records of a single male on the bunded pool between Feb 20th and Mar 20th and a further single on Aug 28th and two females on Nov 16th (P&SH) and Dec 3rd (PDS).

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

The only records were of two on the river on Mar 8th (HS), a single male on June 15th (P&SH) and a female on Nov 18th (JdA).

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

There were six records: three of single birds (Feb 20th, Mar 16th and Nov 19th) and there were 6 records of up to 7 birds in November. The latter are almost certainly due to local releases for sport.

Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*)

A single on the high tide of May 11th was the 6th reserve record (P&SH).

Chilean flamingo (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*) **NEW BIRD**

An escaped juvenile was photographed on the marsh on Nov 28th 2014 (DY). This is a new bird for the Reserve, the previous Flamingo record in 1988 being of a Lesser Flamingo from Africa.



Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Non-breeders are present for most of the year. They usually frequent the river edge and the Nature Trail groynes, but also fish regularly on the bunded pools. The highest count this year was 60 on Oct 21st. A young bird photographed from the West Hide on Aug 27th (GEM) had been ringed on Denny Island in the Bristol Channel on June 8th the same year.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	46	52	40	3	4	20	20	20	52	60	45	50

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

A new bird for the Reserve, it was seen and photographed on the bunded pools on Sep 5th (JdA). (See Cover Photo). This species had been seen regularly across the river at Burton Mere.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

This species nests at Burton across the estuary and can be found throughout the year on Oakenholt Marsh and the bunded pools, where sizeable post-breeding numbers congregate in autumn.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	2	4	5	3	9	30	32	36	31	8	6	5

Great White Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Five records this year, singles on Jan 6th, Nov 8th and Dec 28th (P&SH) and two on Nov 23rd (PDS) were of birds across the river on Burton Marsh or White Sands, where they are found regularly, but a bird was finally recorded on Oakenholt Marsh itself on Dec 7th (P&SH).

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Like the Little Egret, this species is also found all year round and often side-by-side with Egrets.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	1	3	4	6	2	6	11	8	7	4	7	5

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) **(B)**

Two broods may have been raised on the fly ash lagoon this year; 3 chicks were first seen on May 11th and another 2 chicks on Aug 16th

(P&SH). The last record from the lagoon was on Oct 15th, but then numbers on the bunded pools built up to a maximum of 11 on Nov 14th (P&SH). This preference for the bunded pools during Oct-Dec has been seen in some previous years. There were also 11 on the lagoon on Aug 10th (P&SH).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	4	5	2	3	5	5	3	11	4	6	11	9

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Numbers have recovered somewhat this year with a maximum of 13 on Oct 26th (JH) and 24 records throughout the year. They are almost invariably brought up the river by high tides.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	1	0	1	0	7	2	0	3	2	13	12	5

Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)

A bird that flew across the bunded pools chased by terns and egrets on July 16th (SS) was a new species for the Reserve.

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

December was excellent for this species, with 1-2 juveniles seen three times over the fly ash lagoon between Dec 7th and 15th (P&SH, DP). On Dec 15th, one of them took a recently-caught teal from a peregrine on Oakenholt Marsh. The second harrier then tried to steal it from the first and a buzzard joined in the fun. Most remarkably of all, the teal escaped (P&SH).

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

A better year for this species; there were 7 records, including one of 2 birds, although many of the records were from across the river, either on White Sands/Burton Marsh or above the revetment. A ringtail was seen over Oakenholt Marsh on Feb 8th (P&SH) and again at the east of the Reserve on Feb 9th (DP). There was a further record from the Reserve on Mar 14th (JF) and one seen across the river on Sep 30th (SS).

Also across the river, 2 were seen on Dec 7th (P&SH, TL) and a single on Dec 26th (P&SH).

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Absent during the breeding season, but a female took up residence near the West Hide in early winter and this boosted the annual number of records to the highest for over 25 years (25: but most are due to one bird).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Sightings	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	10	2	2	3

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

The maximum count was of 4 on Mar 27th (KJ/BH) and a pair were displaying on Apr 12th (P&SH), but few summer records. The total of 62 sightings is respectable. One had caught a bird on Apr 12th and another a rat on Oct 6th (P&SH). One was found dead under the power lines on Nov 7th (RB), not for the first time.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Sightings	2	2	7	14	4	2	1	12	8	4	3	2

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

One was spotted flying over the Reserve in a SE direction on Aug 16th (P&SH). Possibly the same bird was seen again chased by a peregrine the following day (illegible signature). This was only the third record for the Reserve.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

A fairly frequent visitor towards the end of the year. One was discovered roosting on a window ledge of the west hide just after dawn on Dec 4th (PDS), which may explain both the frequency of sightings and the pellets found on the same ledge a few days earlier.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Sightings	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	7	2	3	7

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

The only record this year was of a bird on the marsh on Dec 8th (GR).

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

The only record was of a bird perched on a fence near the West Hide for 30 minutes on Aug 16th (P&SH).

Peregrine (Falco peregrinus) (B)



(Photo: GEM)

The adult above took off from its usual perch on the pylons, caught a teal on the river channel and proceeded to eat it on the edge of the marsh on Sep 26th (GEM). Sadly, the whole peregrine family in the Power Station nestbox was found dead, as a result of deliberate poisoning (IS), a crime that is still being investigated by the authorities. The resilience of this species on the Dee is shown by the fact that there was little effect on the number of sightings in the autumn.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Sightings	10	9	3	5	4	5	7	10	10	11	5	2

Water Rail (Rallus aquaticus)

A bird at the foot of the reeds on the fly ash lagoon on Nov 9th (P&SH et al) was only the 5th Reserve record and, even more remarkably, was the first record since 1986. This species, of course, can be very unobtrusive.

Moorhen (Gallinula chloropus) (B)

Nested successfully on the fly ash lagoon, where adults feeding young were first seen on May 26th (JH). The May count was boosted by chicks but 24 adults in November was also a Reserve record.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
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Count	10	4	6	4	28	2	5	10	12	15	24	15
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Coot (*Fulica atra*) (B)

Always present on the fly ash lagoon, with larger numbers in winter. There was a record count of 86 on the Dec 7th WeBS count, with 36 on the lagoon and 50 on the marsh (P&SH). An adult with 3 young was first seen on May 9th (JH), but more than one pair nested.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	45	30	24	16	12	30	47	42	30	34	36	86

Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

A single bird was on Oakenholt Marsh on Aug 10th (P&SH) and 13th (DR). A surprisingly uncommon sight, considering the breeding colony across the river at Burton Mere.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) (B)

At least 2 pairs appear to have nested successfully, one on the lagoon and one on the Marsh, and raised 2 chicks each. Chicks were first seen on the lagoon on May 29th (KJ/BH) and on June 16th on the Marsh (GEM), the latter being already well-grown. The highest count of 3400 is from the WeBS count of Oct 11th (P&SH).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	160	62	204	156	102	12	133	1000	2000	3400	400	200

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Present sporadically in small numbers, mainly on passage. Two spring records of single birds on May 11th (P&SH) and 12th (KJ/BH). Autumn record of 2 birds on Aug 10th and 12 on Aug 25th (P&SH), followed by a single on Oct 22nd (RB/SS) and 3 on Oct 23rd (PDS).

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

Once again there were 15 records of 1-2 birds on the fly ash lagoon throughout the nesting season between Apr 10th and July 28th, but no evidence of attempted breeding. The birds usually show well from the West Hide, walking along the water's edge.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

The first record was a single bird on Sep 22nd (KJ/BH), followed by another on Dec 13th (P&SH), 2 on Dec 15th (GR) and then 6 birds on Dec 21st (P&SH) and 22nd (JP).

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

There were single birds on Oakenholt marsh on Aug 25th (P&SH), Oct 23rd (PDS) and Dec 22nd (JP).

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

No evidence of nesting, but large numbers on the mudflats and (sometimes) the grazing fields in winter. Higher numbers this year than the previous two years.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	1000	680	3	0	0	29	114	220	180	820	2000	1000

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

The fall in Black-tailed Godwit numbers has been accompanied by even larger falls in Knot, which often flock with them, for the second year in a row. A summer plumage bird was on the bunded pools on Aug 2nd (SS).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	2	0	12	20

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

Rather irregular in winter, but when present, numbers can be very large. The highest counts were 8,000, Dec 7th (P&SH) and 10,000, Dec 8th (GR). The latter equals previous counts of 10,000 in 2000 and 2010.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	1000	100	11	0	10	0	35	100	300	400	2000	10,000

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Seven spring records of 1-2 birds between Apr 23rd and May 15th (GEM, P&SH, IF, JP and KJ) but only one autumn record of a single on Aug 4th (P&SH).

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Present throughout the year and throughout the Reserve, including the grazing fields. There always seems to be one single bird on the bunded pools.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	105	168	34	84	2	3	24	40	120	100	109	85

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

This Reserve speciality is hardly ever absent except for a brief period of mid-May to late June. On passage in August, they can be seen at close range on the mudflats and bunded pool, but the large winter flocks (Sep onwards) are best seen as they come to Oakenholt Marsh to roost with Oystercatcher at high tide. Hardly any birds were present during 2013/14 winter, possibly because they had chosen an alternative area of the estuary, but roosting numbers were improving for the 2014/15 winter, though still not at "normal" levels. A bird seen on Nov 9th (RB, P&SH) had been ringed earlier this year (Sep 13th) at Terrington on the Wash, while two others on Nov 25th (RB) had both been ringed in Iceland in July, 2010 and June 2013. A bird ringed in Iceland in July, 2007 was seen here, for the first time in the UK, on Aug 8th (P&SH), the only two previous sightings being in Portugal (2008) and Holland (2011).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	12	6	6	15	28	0	5	120	460	600	1200	500

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

Only five spring records starting with 3 on Apr 22nd (GP), with a maximum of 10 on May 24th (JP)

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

There were 3 on Aug 10th (P&SH), 2 on Aug 19th (EC) and 4 on Aug 23rd (P&SH).

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

A single on the bunded pools on Aug 15th (P&SH) was the only passage record, but two wintering birds were seen on Oakenholt Marsh on Dec 22nd (JP).

Curlew Sandpiper

A single bird was present on the bunded pools on Sep 9th (GEM) and 10th (P&SH).

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

On passage, there were 6 spring singles between Apr 20th and May 15th and a healthy 20 records of 1-3 birds between Jul 11th and Sep 10th.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)

This is one of the specialities of the Reserve with significant numbers both on autumn passage and overwintering. Numbers were a little better than average this year, with a maximum count of 17 on Nov 2nd (P&SH). Winter numbers were also better than usual with 10 birds still present on Dec 7th (P&SH). They are best seen on the bunded pools at high tide but can also be seen near the West Hide. They sometimes form small groups that feed frantically in deeper water than common redshanks, but they can be overlooked when roosting among redshanks with their heads buried. The first autumn migrants often include one or two in all-black breeding plumage.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	3	4	2	1	0	0	7	10	11	13	17	10

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

Another Reserve speciality, which frequents the bunded pools like the previous species. Autumn numbers were lower this year than the recent average, but up to 8 birds were present in winter. They tend to keep separate from other waders and form small groups.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	4	4	5	1	0	1	8	13	8	14	12	8

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

Redshank numbers increase from late July onwards with the largest passage numbers gathering on the bunded pools at high tide. The highest count was 2,835 on Oct 9th (GR).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	275	220	370	36	4	60	1230	1800	2100	2835	691	940

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

A bird seen on the Rockcliffe path (“gardener’s compound”) on Dec 24th (R&RS) was only the third record for the Reserve, previous records being in 1982 and 1989.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

After only 2 singles in the early part of the year (Jan 6th and Apr 11th), they were regular records of 1-4 birds around the reeds of the fly-ash lagoon from Aug 7th until the end of the year, especially from Oct 6th onwards, building up to 6 on Dec 28th (P&SH). Three appeared on the bunded pools on Dec 13th (RR) and there were 6 there on Dec 15th (GR, P&SH).

Guillemot (*Uria aalge*)

One photographed on the high tide of Feb 16th (P&SH et al) was the only record.

Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*)

A flock of 10 on May 11th was the only record (P&SH). Although frequent in the 1980s, this was the first record since 2003 and only the 2nd record in the last 20 years.

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*)

Two over the river near the Field Study Centre on Jul 11th (GEM) and two from the West Hide on Aug 10th (P&SH) were the only records.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

The first record was on Apr 15th (R&RS) and the last on Aug 30th (MF). The highest count was 100 on June 11th (GR).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	0	0	0	4	18	100	40	50	0	0	0	0

Blackheaded Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)

Counts are not made systematically, except on WeBS counts, but there is a distinct post-breeding peak in July/Aug with numbers dwindling slowly thereafter. The high count of 3000 was made in the stormy afternoon of Feb 21st when many gulls were returning to roost (GEM).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	24	3000	36	37	24	152	1007	300	200	30	100	70

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

The high count of 400 was also made on Feb 21st (GEM), when birds were arriving to roost with the previous species. There were only 5 other records of 1-5 birds.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

The most common of the larger gulls on the Reserve and present all year. One seems especially fond of feeding on crabs from the bunded pools.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	46	28	43	13	40	50	12	100	90	60	70	70

Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*)

Records from Oakenholt Marsh on Sep 17th and 22nd (P&SH).

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Less common than Lesser Black-backed among roosting flocks, though it may be equally common flying over.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	4	20	2	6	0	1	1	8	6	9	24	10

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Non-breeding adults are present for most of the year.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	4	7	10	9	2	20	8	19	30	6	120	13

Feral Pigeon

Only one record of a single bird on Aug 3rd (GEM). The scarcity appears to be genuine.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

The highest count was 11 on Dec 17th (P&SH) and there were 11 records altogether, mainly in late summer. They frequent the bird feeders, the grazing fields and the banks of the fly ash lagoon.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Present all year with a maximum count of 13 on Nov 7th (GEM). No proof of breeding, likely though it is.

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

A single bird on Apr 23rd (GEM) and a likely pair near the railway on Mar 10th and Apr 28th (KJ/BH).

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Recorded regularly between May 7th and Aug 23rd, the maximum count was only 8 on May 11th (P&SH) and 12th (KJ/BH).

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

These reserve favourites returned to their breeding grounds after Feb 9th and then came back on Aug 25th, after which they were recorded on no less than 58 occasions. Its favourite haunts are the papermill stream, the first sluice of the bunded pools, the concrete slabs of the middle pool and the Field Study Centre pool. Two birds together were seen six times. A minimum of 4 was suggested for Nov 14th on www.deeestuary.co.uk

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Recorded in all months from June onwards, 15 records altogether of 1-2 birds, both adults and juveniles, mainly from Rockcliffe and the feeders.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

There were records on Apr 20th (2), Sep 26th (3), Oct 11th (1), Nov 8th (2) and 19th (1) and Dec 12th (1), mainly from the Rockcliffe area near the Reserve entrance.

Magpie (*Pica pica*) (B)

The highest count was an extraordinary 59 on the WeBS count of Mar 16th (P&SH), nearly 3x the previous Reserve record. Fledged young on June 16th (GEM) suggests successful breeding.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Recorded in most months with a high count of 28 on May 14th. Attracted to the grazing fields in summer, they are also found with crows on the marsh.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	0	35	0	23	28	0	2	1	0	12	20	0

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Only 3 records of 1-2 birds on Apr 27th, June 1st and Oct 24th.

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Numerous on marsh, mudflats and grazing fields with peak numbers in the summer.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	14	34	50	25	30	48	23	25	9	20	16	18

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Only 8 records of 1-2 birds this year (Apr, May, July, Aug and Nov) and no evidence of breeding.

Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) (B)

The main occupant of Reserve nest-boxes, the highest count was of 14 on Nov 9th (P&SH). First fledglings noted on June 16th (GEM).

Great Tit (*Parus major*) (B)

Another common nesting species with a maximum count of 20 on March 16th (P&SH).

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)

A single in the Rockcliffe woodland on Oct 2nd (KJ/BH) was only the 6th Reserve record.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

This species is becoming more frequently reported. 1-2 were seen four times between Feb 6th and Mar 27th. There was then a summer record on Jun 9th (KJ/BH), suggesting potential breeding. There were 11 records of 1-3 birds from Oct 20th onwards (DP, P&SH, KJ/BH, GEM).



(Photo: GEM)

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Remarkably, there were no logbook records of singing males this year (except possibly 1 on Mar 16th); all other records were outside the breeding season. The highest count was of 5 birds on Oct 31st (GEM), one

of the lowest maxima ever. This species was once an “abundant” nesting species on the Reserve.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

There were 9 spring records of this passage migrant on the fly ash lagoon, the first on Mar 24th (SS) until a late duo on June 16th (GEM) but the highest count was of 35 on the last date of Aug 27th (GEM).

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

The highest counts this year were 20 on May 5th and 80 on Aug 10th. First and last dates were March 27th (KJ/BH) and Sep 20th (P&SH).

House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)

The highest count on passage was of 250 birds on Aug 25th (P&SH), a record high for the Reserve. First and last dates were Apr 17th and Aug 27th.

Longtailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

There were 12 records from Mar, Apr, June, Oct, Nov and Dec, with high counts of 20 on June 6th/Oct 24th/Nov 14th, and 21 on Oct 11th(P&SH).

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) **(B)**

The first record was on Mar 15th (EN) and the last on Oct 24th (P&SH). An adult with one young was seen on Jul 11th (GEM). The highest count was 4 on May 5th.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

After three singles in April (KJ/BH), there were 3 on the Nature Trail on May 18th (P&SH) and a single returning bird on Aug 16th (P&SH).

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) **(B)**

The 1st record was on Apr 3rd (KJ/BH). Breeding was proven again this year with records of family parties on Aug 3rd (GEM) and 9th (JP). The highest count was 12 on Aug 15th (P&SH), another Reserve record.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

There was a records of two singing males on April 23rd (GEM) and 3 further records of 1-2 birds during Aug 9th-16th (JP, P&SH), mainly in the hedgerows near the Reserve entrance.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) **(B)**

The maximum counts of 6 on July 28th and Aug 9th each included newly-fledged young (JP, GEM) and it is likely that 2-3 pairs nested. First and last dates were Apr 15th (R&RS) and Sep 29th (unusually late: KJ/BH).

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

There were three records on passage, one of a singing male on Apr 23rd (GEM) and singles on Jul 28th and Aug 10th (P&SH, KJ) all from the fly ash lagoon area.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

Two winter records of a single bird in the Rockcliffe woods on Jan 16th and Nov 10th (both KJ/BH).

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) **(B)**

A common resident. Breeding was proven this year when a family party of 6 was seen on Jul 28th (GEM).

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

They are often seen on grazing fields with outside the breeding season. The high count of 2000 was recorded on Sep 2nd (P&SH).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	102	180	3	30	7	300	520	1	2000	600	160	120

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

No evidence of successful breeding was recorded in the logbooks this year, although it seems inconceivable that it didn't occur. The highest count was 25 on Feb 16th (P&SH).

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

There were 6 birds near the Meadow Hide on Mar 7th (GEM) and there were 7 further records from Nov 2nd to the end of year. The highest count was 20 on Dec 13th (P&SH).

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

The highest count was of 20 birds on Feb 16th (GEM). Also recorded 7 times from Nov 6th (also 20 birds: P&SH) to the end of year.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

No evidence of breeding this year, not even a persistent spring songster. The highest counts were of 6 birds on Oct 11th, 24th and Nov 19th. It seems that an unusually large flock uses the Rockcliffe woods in early winter.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

There was a record high count of 21 birds in a single flock on Power Station structures on Aug 10th (GEM, P&SH), but no direct evidence of breeding.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

After last year's welcome return of this species, we had an autumn record this year from near the Field Study Centre on Aug 31st (EN).

Robin (**B?**) (*Erithacus rubecula*)

A common resident. Recorded throughout the year, there was a high count of 14 on Mar 16th. No evidence of breeding in the logbooks.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

There was a male near the entrance on Aug 15th (EN) and 16th (P&SH), the only record this year.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Two birds, possibly the same two, were seen three times near the West Hide between May 3rd and 15th (MH, KJ/BH).

Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*)

There was a male on Feb 24th (KJ/BH), one near the West hide on Oct 11th (P&SH) and a female on Oakenholt Marsh on Nov 14th (PDS).

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

The first record was a single on Mar 22nd (ED) and the highest spring count was 18 on Apr 24th (KJ/BH). In autumn, the highest count was only 3 on Sep 7th (P&SH) (last record Sep 18th KJ/BH).

Dunnock (**B?**) (*Prunella modularis*)

A common resident. Most often recorded when in song from late Feb to July. The high count was 6 on 3 dates: Aug 10th, Oct 11th and 24th.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

This species is usually seen along the hedgerows or on the feeders. The highest count was 20 around the feeders on Aug 10th (P&SH).

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava flavissima*)

Two records of singles on passage on Sep 3rd (GR) and Sep 26th (P&SH).

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

A ringed bird (right: steel, red; left: orange, pink) was first seen on Oct 6th (P&SH) and recorded 7 times subsequently until Nov 19th (JdA, KJ/BH, RB). It had been ringed at Middleton Reserve (Heysham, Lancaster) on Sep 16th this year. The last bird seen on Dec 31st was not ringed (RB).

Pied Wagtail (**B**) (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Breeding was confirmed on Jun 15th (WB) and Jul 11th (GEM). There was a high count of 28 near the West Hide on Feb 17th (KJ/BH).

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

The highest count was 20 birds on Apr 3rd (KJ/BH). There were then 14 records of 1-6 birds between Aug 16th and Nov 19th. No evidence of attempted breeding.

Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus*)

This species is usually recorded on the rocks around the West Hide in winter. This year there were records of 2 on Jan 6th (P&SH) and then 6 records of 1-3 birds between Oct 22nd and Dec 22nd (P&SH, RB/SS, PDS, JP, GR).

Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*)

One record from the West Hide on Mar 24th (SS).

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

The largest winter flock was only 30 birds on Feb 21st (GEM). There was no evidence of breeding, apart from singing males.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

The only record this year was of a bird outside the Dee hide on Dec 15th (P&SH).

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) **(B)**

Recorded in most months, mainly in the Rockcliffe area, the highest count was of 8 birds on Dec 17th (P&SH). Breeding was confirmed by fledged young, seen on Jul 28th (JP) and Aug 9th (GEM).

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*) **(B)**

The largest flocks was of 12 birds on Dec 17th (P&SH). Breeding was suggested by a family party of 6 on Jul 11th (GEM). They are usually seen on the feeders or near the entrance.

Linnet **(B)** (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Evidence of nesting was an adult with young on July 28th (GEM). The largest post-breeding flock was of 182 birds on Oct 15th (P&SH), but there were also 100 around the bunded pools on Dec 11th (KJ/BH).

Twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*)

A very successful programme of observation and ringing in support of the Welsh Twite Recovery Project is continuing on the Reserve (RB, IS). “Recoveries” so far include two birds ringed at the Machrihanish Seabird Observatory in SW Kintyre, a first for Wales and the Dee estuary. A winter flock of up to 90 birds was present around the West Hide daily until Mar 26th. One was reported singing on Apr. 8th (www.deeestuary.co.uk). Two birds returned on Oct 2nd (P&SH) and the flock had built up to over 100 by Nov 8th (RB). A flock of 185 on Dec 6th were “mostly” twite (with linnets) (RB).

Lesser Redpoll (*Acanthis cabaret*)
 Singles on Mar 27th (KJ/BH) and Nov 14th (PDS)

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)
 The largest post-breeding flock was of 50 birds on Aug 27th (GEM).

Siskin (*Spinus spinus*)
 The only record was of 3 birds in flight at Rockcliffe on Mar 7th (GEM)

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)
 The maximum count of 11 was on Nov 18th (RB). No evidence of breeding.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Count	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	3	11	0



Photo: GEM

Redbreasted Merganser on the Bunded Pool on Feb 21st.

Contributors

This report is based mainly on logbook records from the five hides on the Reserve, but other sources of information include RSPB counts for Oakenholt Marsh, WeBS high tide wildfowl and wader counts, BTO BirdTrack surveys and website for “Dee Estuary Birding”.

All logbook records with a legible observer name are valuable and are submitted to BTO Birdtrack with the observer name. The names below are given to show who takes responsibility for some for the more unusual counts or sightings, so that queries can be directed to them.

Joe d’Arcy (JdA)
Richard Beckett (RB)
Wendy Browning (WB)
E Cocker (EC)
I Fraser (IF)
John Francis (JF)
M Francis (MF)
Peter & Sue Haslem (P&SH)
M Hayes (MH)
Joan Hotchkiss (JH)
Keith Lloyd-Jones & Bob Hayes (KJ, BH)
T Lovatt (TL)
Glenn Morris (GEM)
E Nixon (EN)
D Peate (DP)
Giles Pepler (GP)
J Platt (JP)
R Riley (RR)
D Robinson (DR)
Geoff Robinson (GR)
R&R Schofield (R&RS)
PD Shenton (PDS)
S Skelton (SS)
Ian Spence (IS) Doug Yates (DY)

(Special thanks again this year to **P&SH**, **KJ/BH** and **PDS** for especially numerous logbook records)

DNS Butterfly Report 2014 by Christine Hamer.

This year has seen more extensive work being carried out by National Grid on the Nature trail. This has meant that some of the areas have been inaccessible, at times, for counting the butterflies. However, the recorders have carried out counts where able, and the butterflies have generally been there in good numbers. April this year started warm compared with the last two years and Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells were on both the Nature Trail and the Wetland Meadow areas. In all, 21 species have been recorded this year including a Wall Butterfly which is the first recording of this species on the reserve since these records were started in 2011. Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers were recorded in great numbers on the Wetland Meadow particularly in July.

Species	YEAR 2011-2014				Wetland Meadow Counts	2011-2014
	11	12	13	14		
Dingy skipper	0	0	0	0		
Brimstone	0	0	1	1		
Large white	39	37	35	37		
Small white	16	74	118	80		
Green veined white	1	27	29	30		
Common blue	2	17	28	36		
Holly blue	0	1	0	0		
Red admiral	4	4	0	16		
Small tortoiseshell	29	49	107	219		
Comma	0	7	5	13		
Meadow brown	43	518	226	382		
Gatekeeper	0	314	94	190		
Orange tip	1	3	14	5		
Small copper	1	2	1	1		
Speckled wood	3	8	11	40		
Wall	0	0	0	0		
Grayling	0	0	0	0		
Ringlet	0	0	0	0		
Small Heath	0	1	0	0		
Small skipper	0	42	0	23		
Large skipper	9	9	7	31		
Peacock	2	13	37	50		
Dark green fritillary	0	0	0	1		
Painted lady	16	0	1	2		

Large White numbers have fallen this year but during June and July the Small and Large Skippers were recorded regularly which has been an improvement from last year. During August and September there were also good numbers of Speckled Wood. On the Nature Trail the Common Blue was recorded regularly during May, June and September. Since the surveys started in 2011 there have been 24 species of butterfly recorded across the Nature Trail and the Wetland Meadow areas. The numbers and species over the last four years have been collated to show the fluctuations over that time. The figures illustrate the total numbers recorded of each species over those four years.

Species	YEAR 2011-2014			
	11	12	13	14
Dingy skipper	1	1	0	3
Brimstone	0	0	1	0
Large white	39	19	34	10
Small white	15	47	65	75
Green veined white	18	15	15	39
Common blue	30	54	56	56
Holly blue	0	0	13	7
Red admiral	8	1	1	11
Small tortoiseshell	15	50	95	104
Comma	5	0	5	4
Meadow brown	24	249	124	94
Gatekeeper	21	45	36	52
Orange tip	0	2	1	1
Small copper	0	1	1	9
Speckled wood	0	0	1	3
Wall	0	0	0	2
Grayling	0	4	0	0
Ringlet	0	1	0	0
Small Heath	0	1	0	0
Small skipper	0	37	0	0
Large skipper	0	1	2	4
Peacock	11	17	32	33
Dark green fritillary	0	0	1	0
Painted lady	3	0	0	1

Nature Trail Counts 2011-2014

Twite: star attraction at the Reserve.



Twite feeding in the car park (photo: Richard Beckett).



Twite being trapped for ringing (photo: Richard Beckett).