



# Idle Valley Nature Sightings

**November 2024**

## **What's On - December 2024**

**Every Tuesday each month – Wellbeing Walk** (Bellmoor Lake area) from the Idle Valley Visitor Centre Cafe at 10:30am. Volunteer led walk sponsored by Co-op Lincolnshire.

**Every Wednesday each month – Wellbeing Walk** (Bellmoor Lake) from the Idle Valley Visitor Centre Café at the new time of 1:00pm. Volunteer led walk sponsored by Co-op Lincolnshire.

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December (First Thursday in each month) – Idle Adventure Walk** (min 8 miles) Meeting Point is the Idle Valley Visitor Centre Café at 10:30am until 3:30pm. Volunteer led walk.

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December – Idle Valley Wildlife Watch: Natural Christmas** Seasonal wildlife activities for 7 to 12 year olds, with a walk in the reserve. Meeting Point is Idle Valley Visitor Centre at 10:30am until 12:30pm. £2.00 per child. Leader is Ros Schwarz. Contact email: [idlewatch@nottswt.co.uk](mailto:idlewatch@nottswt.co.uk)

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December – Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)** Organised by Lound Bird Club in conjunction with the BTO Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). If you can help, please contact Phil Cadman at [philip.cadman@sky.com](mailto:philip.cadman@sky.com)

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> December – Gary's 'Wildlife & Birdwatching' Walk Idle Valley NR.** Meet at Chainbridge Lane by the Chainbridge Scrape East viewpoint at 9:00am-midday. General birdwatching from Chainbridge Scrape East and nearby areas. Leader is Gary Hobson. Contact email: [ghlbc@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ghlbc@hotmail.co.uk) or Mobile: 07464964879

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## **Reserve News**

### **Alex Morley - Reserves Manager North.**

Work is now complete on removing shoreline scrub on the western side of Neatholme Fen, reclaiming wet grassland and removing cover for predators. The rangers and volunteers have cleared around 0.8ha of land, chipping the waste for removal, and resetting around 340m of shoreline. This work is only made possible thanks to funding from Countryside Stewardship to help cover costs. We shall be bringing in a machine to remove the worst of the stumps and create patches of bare mud and remove *Crassula helmsii* from certain patches. A combination of livestock grazing and ongoing machine intervention will be needed to suppress regrowth. Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November saw the start of a project to create two new scrapes: the larger one in Big Willow Field (Alan's Meadow) and a second one in Little Willow Field. This will generate a sizeable amount of soil which we shall be spreading thinly and filling in ruts as part of a plan to improve the long-term management of the fields. In total the area will be around 0.5ha, and again the work is only possible thanks to funding from Countryside Stewardship.

Elsewhere, the Young Rangers – our 11-18yo conservation team – have started a project near the Centre to enhance our Den Building woodland. This small block of trees tends to flood, and as a legacy of post-quarrying landscaping, has a fairly even age structure. The team have surveyed the trees to determine density/square metre and have collected data on tree girth as an indication of age range. We are planning to relocate the den building area to a slightly higher & drier location and subject to licencing, undertake woodland operations which encourage new tree growth, improve ground flora & the shrub layer, whilst retaining finer examples of longer-lived trees. We have also undertaken work on the various pools dotted around the Centre thanks to funding from the North Nottinghamshire Local Group, the Water Vole Project, and NWT memberships. Operations have removed large tree roots from the boardwalk wetland & allowed us to experiment at flooding this patch in a bid to prevent tree seedlings from establishing; a new pond, especially for the WATCH group to use has been excavated; whilst we have also removed significant patches of reed and *Crassula helmsii* in order to create more shallow water to benefit amphibians.



(Above left) - Map showing area cleared at Neatholme Fen (©A.Morley). (Above right) - Contractor in the Boardwalk Wetland removing tree roots and creating new pools (©A.Morley). (Below) - Young Rangers receiving leaf litter invertebrate ID training from NWT's Imogen Wilde (©D.Fenton).



## **Birds News for October 2024**

October, like most years, is a time when we cross over from the autumn migration to the arrival of wintering birds. It often also brings a few rare and scarce birds from afar. The month began with sighting by Dave Richardson of a juvenile **Gannet** which was seen just north of Clayworth village heading east at 5:00pm on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Just outside the usual recording area but certainly worthy of inclusion here. **Great Crested Grebe** can often be present in low numbers, so it was nice to see counts of 9 on Chainbridge Pit, with a further single was on Bellmoor Lake on the 13<sup>th</sup>, with a count of 18 birds across the reserve on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Just a single report of **Little Grebe** with 5 birds on Neatholme Scrape on the 5<sup>th</sup>. **Cormorant** numbers seemed above average with three counts of 16 at Chainbridge Pit on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 32 there on the 13<sup>th</sup> and a peak of 46 on the 20<sup>th</sup>. At least one **Bittern** remained at the reserve with sightings of one flying into



reeds at Chainbridge NR Scrape (West) on the 11<sup>th</sup>, one showing well at the edge of Bellmoor Lake on the 16<sup>th</sup> and one flying over the Parish Park on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Egret species were once again very obvious across the reserve with increased numbers of all three species, in particularly the **Cattle Egret**, which peaked at 15 birds. The following table shows all recorded birds, and the photo below was taken at Chainbridge NR Scrape (West) on the 13<sup>th</sup> (©G.Hobson):-

Area/Date	4th	11th	13th	15th	16th	18th	20th	23rd	24th	25th	26th	28th	29th	31st
<b>Sheep Fields</b>	3	10		9	13	13	14	10	11	15	15	11	11	9
<b>C Scrape (W)</b>			9											
<b>Clayworth Com</b>				4										

**Great White Egret** numbers are often very difficult to accurately count because of constant cross site movements of birds. Five birds were together on Chainbridge Pit on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5 were noted again on the 20<sup>th</sup> and there could have been up to 7 birds across the reserve on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The following table shows all recorded birds:-

Area/Date	2nd	4th	6th	11th	13th	14th	19th	20th	23rd	24th	25th	26th	29th	31st
<b>Chainbridge Pit</b>	2	5	3	2	2	3		3		2				2
<b>Cross L Fishery</b>	1												1	
<b>C Scrape (W &amp; E)</b>		1		2	2								1	
<b>Bellmoor Lake</b>					1	1								
<b>Neatholme Fen</b>							2						1	
<b>Neat Scrape</b>											2		1	
<b>Neatholme Pit</b>													3	
<b>Location Unk'n</b>								2	4			3		

**Little Egret** numbers are often even more difficult to monitor because they tend to wander away from the main pits into nearby ditches to feed. Chainbridge Pit held the majority of birds throughout with 2-4 seen usually, except for a gathering of 14 birds there on the 6<sup>th</sup>. A couple were noted at Bellmoor Lake on the 12<sup>th</sup> with a single at Neatholme Fen on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Finally, the WeBS count on the 20<sup>th</sup> recorded 10 birds. Having wrote about the low numbers of **Grey Heron** in August and September, numbers seemed to increase slightly this month but again it's difficult to monitor numbers accurately. Up to 5 birds were across the reserve on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> with up to 7 present on the 20<sup>th</sup>. A single adult **Whooper Swan** was found resting but alert on Chainbridge Pit on the 13<sup>th</sup>, this bird, photo below, spent much time moving around the pit from 12:55pm until it finally flew off North over Chainbridge NR Scrape (East) at 13:40pm (©G.Hobson). Further reports of **Whooper Swan** included an undetermined number in a herd at the southern end of Clayworth Common on the 23<sup>rd</sup> with 8 (including 1 juvenile) birds noted again on Clayworth Common just east of the Conservation Lake on the 24<sup>th</sup> and finally 2 flew north over Neatholme Scrape on the 29<sup>th</sup>.



The number of wintering **Pink-footed Geese** locally seemed to have increased in recent years and more birds are now being reported and not just the more usual overhead skeins. A count of 60 birds were noted at Blaco Pits on the 11<sup>th</sup>, a flock of 16 birds flew into Alan's Meadow and joined the other local geese on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 40 birds flew south over Clayworth Common on the 18<sup>th</sup>, 55 flew north over the Windsurf Pools on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 72 were noted on the 20<sup>th</sup>, 6 were in the Neatholme area on the 26<sup>th</sup> and finally 40 flew north over Neatholme Scrape on the 29<sup>th</sup>. **Egyptian Geese** numbers were steady with just 8 birds on Chainbridge Pit on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Reports of 3 **Shelduck** on Bellmoor Lake on the 14<sup>th</sup> with two present there on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. An incredible count of 528 **Mallard** present across the reserve during the WeBS count on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and particularly the small pool by Walters Farm is often awash with Mallard. **Wigeon** numbers continued to increase across the reserve with 409 birds noted as present during the WeBS count on the 20<sup>th</sup> (©G.Hobson). Many reports of **Pintail** this month with Neatholme Fen recording 4 on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 6 on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 4 on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 8 on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 3 on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Just one other report of a single briefly on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Just two reports of **Red-**

**crested Pochard** including 17 at Chainbridge NR Scrape (West) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and another 4 males were noted on the Windsurf Pools on the 28<sup>th</sup>. **Goldeneye** reports were noted from the 2<sup>nd</sup> when 2 were seen on Neatholme Pit, 2 were at Neatholme Scrape on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 4 were on Chainbridge Pit on the 24<sup>th</sup> and a total of 10 were at Neatholme Scrape on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The first **Goosander** reports were 4 at Bellmoor Pit on the 14<sup>th</sup>, 7 'redhead' birds were on the river at Tiln Wood on the 15<sup>th</sup> and a single bird was at Neatholme Pit on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Just a single report of Red Kite on the 22<sup>nd</sup> with a single observed from Chainbridge Bridge. A total of 9 reports of **Marsh Harrier** were noted including single females at Chainbridge NR Scrape (East) on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> with a 2<sup>nd</sup>-summer male there on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Three females were along Eel Pool Lane, near Mattersey Priory, and at the northern edge of the Recording area on the 6<sup>th</sup>, a single female/immature was over Clayworth Common on the 18<sup>th</sup>, single male birds were noted at Chainbridge Pit on the 20<sup>th</sup> and Neatholme Fen on the 25<sup>th</sup>, a female was at Tiln North on the 24<sup>th</sup> and finally a single unsexed bird was at Neatholme Fen on the 26<sup>th</sup>.



A popular first-winter male **Kestrel** continues to hunt alongside the riverbank in the Bellmoor area throughout, the giveaway to its ageing is the single grey adult tail feather that you can see in the image above (©G.Hobson). There was just a single report of a **Merlin** when a male was viewable from Chainbridge NR Scrape (East) viewpoint at 4:00pm on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Just two reports of **Water Rail** were noted with a single calling at Bellmoor Pits on the 14<sup>th</sup> and a single calling at Tiln North on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Neatholme Fen continues to be the place to see waders with **Lapwing** being the most commonly seen species. Amongst the varying numbers of Lapwings, a nice selection of other wader species could be found. **Golden Plover** with numbers rising from 18 birds on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 250+ on the 28<sup>th</sup>, 330+ on the 29<sup>th</sup> to around 400-500 birds on the 31<sup>st</sup>. **Ruff** were noted regularly at Neatholme Fen with 4 birds on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> rising to 6 birds on the 19<sup>th</sup> and up to 8 were present on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Elsewhere, five were noted on Neatholme Scrape on the 4<sup>th</sup> and singles were at Chainbridge Pit on the 6<sup>th</sup> and at Chainbridge NR Scrape (East) on the 11<sup>th</sup>. **Snipe** numbers were steady with 10 at Neatholme Fen on the 4<sup>th</sup> with 5 there on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Elsewhere, 8-10 birds were at Bellmoor Lake on the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> and a single was at Chainbridge NR Scrape (East) on the 4<sup>th</sup>. A single **Redshank** was noted at Neatholme Fen on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Single **Green Sandpiper** were noted at Neatholme Scrape on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> plus other singles were noted at Chainbridge NR Scrape (East) on the 4<sup>th</sup> and Chainbridge Pit on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The only notable gull species was the two 2<sup>nd</sup>-winter **Caspian Gull** that were first noted at Alan's Meadow on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the same two birds were then present at Chainbridge Pit on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> (both images ©P.Hobson)



The only Owl species reported was a single **Barn Owl** noted near Neatholme Footbridge on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Only two **Green Woodpecker** were noted across the reserve with singles at Neatholme Pit on the 5<sup>th</sup>, at Neatholme

Fen on the 29<sup>th</sup> and just a single **Great Spotted Woodpecker** was noted near the Windsurf Pool on the 29<sup>th</sup>. A very much under recorded species is the **Skylark**, but a couple of records were noted, 20 were in stubble on Clayworth Common on the 5<sup>th</sup> and a total of 34 flew south over Tiln North/Chainbridge Pit area on the 13<sup>th</sup>. A late record of a single juvenile **Yellow Wagtail** with 8 **Pied Wagtail** on Neatholme Fen on the 4<sup>th</sup>. Just a couple of **Grey Wagtail** reports with singles over Bellmoor Pits on the 14<sup>th</sup> and over Neatholme Lane on the 29<sup>th</sup>. **Stonechat** were noted from three areas, typically always bordering or near to the River Idle. A male was at Eel Pool Lane near Mattersey (on the very northern recording boundary) on the 6<sup>th</sup>, a pair were then noted at Tiln North on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, a different female was seen from the café at Bellmoor Lake on the 18<sup>th</sup> and a single female was at Tiln North on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The first **Redwing** for the autumn was noted from the 15<sup>th</sup> with a single at Tiln Wood and this was followed by 25 flying west over Neatholme Scrape on the 18<sup>th</sup>. In what has been a very likely record breaking autumn for the arrival of **Yellow-browed Warbler**, a single was heard calling near the Bailey Bridge at Bellmoor Pits on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> noted independently by two observers. Still a rare bird for the Idle Valley NR, but nationally it is now being seen more often inland year on year, some midland sites recording several different birds this autumn. **Chiffchaff** were typically scarce with just a single noted in The Willows (Clayworth Copse) on the 5<sup>th</sup>. **Goldcrest** are usually found in good numbers during the autumn and winter across the reserve, but a notable sighting was of a male which was watched displaying to another 4 **Goldcrest** at the edge of Chainbridge Wood on the 13<sup>th</sup>. A single **Treecreeper** was noted near Chainbridge Pit on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Just a single **Raven** was noted this month with a bird at Neatholme Scrape on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The first **Starling** 'murmuration' of this coming winter was noted at Tiln North on the 31<sup>st</sup>, numbers were not estimated but just noted as a large number being present. Typically, these **Starling** murmuration's occur at various locations across the reserve late afternoon or just before dusk and can last for quite some time or what is often the case, the **Starling** arrive and go straight into the reedbeds to roost. Most birds leave the roost before daylight to go back to their own neighbourhoods. Both **Brambling** and **Lesser Redpoll** were noted along Neatholme Lane on the 23<sup>rd</sup> but no detail on their number was received. **Siskin** were seen in small numbers, with just 2 birds at Chainbridge Pit on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 28 birds noted at Walters Farm on the 14<sup>th</sup> and/or 15<sup>th</sup>.

A.Merrick, B.Hopkinson, P.Palmer, R.Scott, K.Fisher, M.Newman, W.Hirst, S.Harrison, K.Smith, T.Tomlinson, G.Hobson, D.Housman, T.Crook, M.B.Vickers, D.Richardson, A.Pykett, S.Davenport, S.Hughes, V.Giles, P.Cadman, P.Hobson, I.Hunt, I.Cowgill, Lound Bird Club (Website), Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers (Website), Idle Valley Bird Sightings (Facebook), Lound & Idle Valley Bird News (What's App), Notts Bird News (What's App), Notts Rare & Scarce (What's App) plus Idle Valley Walks (What's App). Please submit bird sightings to the above groups/pages or email to [ghlbc@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ghlbc@hotmail.co.uk)

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## **Additional Nature Sightings for October 2024**

The 4<sup>th</sup> produced sightings of a **Brown Argus** butterfly, the first reported this year, as well as up to five **Willow Emerald Damselfly** and a **Southern Hawker** dragonfly at the Windsurf Pool. An interesting insect was seen on the 5<sup>th</sup>, a **Black Slip Wasp** *Pimpla rufipes* was photographed in the northern end of the reserve (below left ©V.Bell). Mike Vickers commented:- "this is one of the 'Ichneumon' wasp species, parasitic on other insects but harmless to humans. Widespread in Africa, Asia and parts of Europe." Also noted on the 5<sup>th</sup> were a male **Willow Emerald Damselfly** at Neatholme Lane (below ©V.Bell) plus a further two at Bellmoor Lake alongside a single **Migrant Hawker**. Two counts of **Common Darter** produced 73 in the central parts of the reserve on the 5<sup>th</sup> and an impressive 179 in the northern parts of the reserve on the 7<sup>th</sup>.



The 7<sup>th</sup> produce a nice larvae of the **Coxcomb Prominent** *Ptilodon capucina* moth at Linghurst Lakes, having briefly hitched a ride on a rucksack. (Below right ©P.Cadman).





The 7<sup>th</sup> also produced a good few records of Leaf Mines, including three specimens of **4.0550 *Stigmella hemargyrella* (Beech Dot)** (below left ©P.Cadman), a confirmed new addition to the reserve list. Also to note was the recent confirmation of the vacated leaf mine of **4.0580 *Stigmella basiguttella* (Shoulder-spot Dot)** (below right ©P.Cadman), another recent confirmed new addition to the reserve list.



Another single male **Southern Hawker** was noted at Bellmoor Lake on the 14<sup>th</sup>. A single **Common Blue Damselfly** was at Chainbridge NR Scrape (West) on the 21<sup>st</sup>. A single **November Moth** was on the viewing screen at Neatholme Scrape on the 24<sup>th</sup>. The 27<sup>th</sup> saw a single late **Comma** at Linghurst Lakes, three **Red Admiral** in a Lound village garden and a single **Speckled Wood** at Neatholme Scrape. The 28<sup>th</sup> saw a single larvae of **The Drinker** moth crawling over the screen at Neatholme Pit.

P.Freeman, M.Vickers, G.Hobson, P.Hobson, S.Davenport, V.Bell, M.Newman, P.Cadman, I.Hunt, V.Giles, T.Tomlinson, S.Harrison, members of Lound Bird Club, members of all Idle Valley Wellness/Wildlife/Walking Groups & finally T.Pendleton at [www.eakingbirds.com](http://www.eakingbirds.com) for help with identifications.

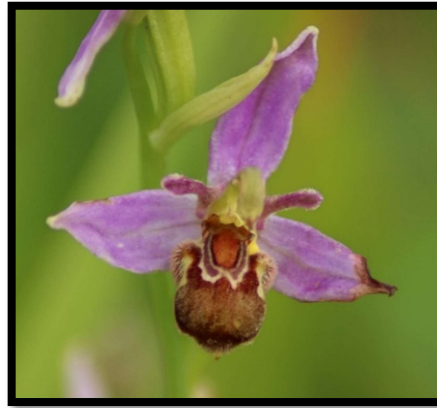
## **Common 'Purple' and 'Lilac' Flowers found at Idle Valley Nature Reserve**

The following gallery of photos are just a selection of the many species of 'Purple' and 'Lilac' flowers that have been found over the Idle Valley NR over the past year so far. All participants of the various walking/wildlife groups are now taking time to record and photograph the wide variety of flowers which can be found throughout the year. It is great to learn from each other and learn to use a growing selection of online applications (Apps) as tools to help with flower identification. Books do still come in very handy because these AI applications are not perfect and can often throw incorrect identifications when trying to identify species. It is going to be 'Pink' flowers for next month so please send your images.









(Top left to right) – **Southern Marsh Orchid** at Neatholme Scrape, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (©G.Hobson). **Marsh Thistle** at Bellmoor Lake, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 (©G.Hobson) and **Musk Mallow** at IVNR, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024 (©K.Beaumont).

(Second row left to right) – **Common Knapweed** at IVNR, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2024 (©S.Hughes). **Common Vetch** at Bellmoor Pits, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (©M.Barley) and **Marsh Woundwort** at Chainbridge Wood, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (©G.Hobson).

(Third row left to right) - **Foxglove** at Bellmoor Pits, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 (©G.Hobson). **Buddleia** at Bellmoor Pits, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 (©G.Hobson) and **Purple Loosestrife** at Bellmoor Lake on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2024 (©M.McCallum).

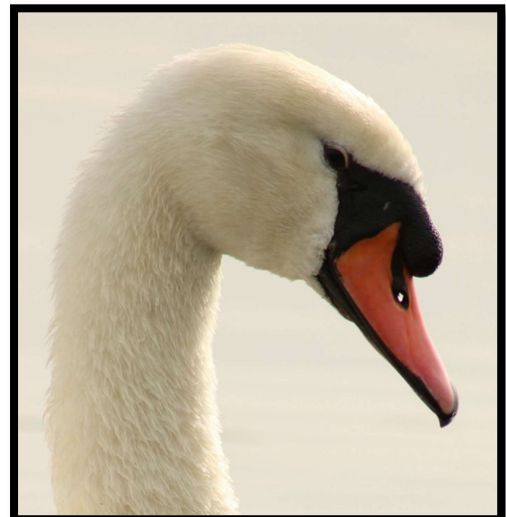
(Fourth row left to right) – **Rosebay Willowherb** at Bellmoor Pits, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 (©G.Hobson). **Northern Bog Aster** at Chainbridge Meadows, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2024 (©S.Hughes) and **Teasel** at Bellmoor Pits 20<sup>th</sup> July 2024 (©G.Hobson).

(Bottom left to right) – **Water Mint** at IVNR, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2024 (©G.Hobson). **Bee Orchid** at IVNR, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2024 (©G.Hobson) and **Redstem Storks-bill** at Bellmoor Pits 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024 (©G.Hobson).

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## **The Mute Swan *Cygnus Olor* at the Idle Valley NR.**

The Mute Swan *Cygnus Olor* is without doubt one of the most recognisable bird species to be found here in the UK, in fact the world over. They can easily be found on most large water bodies, rivers and canals and at times are even present on saltwater estuaries. Their pure white plumage, their long and slender neck, their grace and movements on water, their gentle and alluring nature, yet with such a powerful presence, all goes to form what we perceive to be a very beautiful and much loved bird. To others however, they sometimes appear as a frightening and scary bird that will attack you, your pet or your children! That's as maybe, but they are only generally just being protective of themselves, their young or are just trying to get to the food when the bread loafs come out at the local park. For hundreds of years the rich landed gentry and the royal families ate this species, with many hundreds of birds collected for the table at banquets and ceremonies. Thankfully that is now a thing of the past and it now managers to live a 'free to roam' lifestyle, with many traditional 'Swanneries' actively promoting the conservation of the species. We now see our once deemed the 'royal swan' as bold, approachable, sometimes friendly and easy on the eye with many budding or professional photographer looking to get that 'heart shaped' neck shot of a pair in courtship display.





## **Identification**

The male Mute Swan (above images) also known as the 'Cob', is a large bird. It holds its wings high, puffed out, away from its body and can appear much larger than a female, known as the 'Pen'. This alert appearance is especially seen in spring when it is busy defending its partner, its territory and its newly fledged cygnets, and they often do look and sound menacing. Many people ask how can you age or sex a Mute Swan? Well, the answer lies in their overall size and shape, the colour of the bill and the size and shape of the fleshy dark 'knob' on the bill. Mute Swan take three to four years to reach breeding maturity, and for the most part it can be difficult to sex a swan until it has reached maturity.

(Below left to right) - Adult male (Cob), adult female (Pen) and immature Mute Swan head and neck profile. Variation in the size of the bulbous 'knob' above the beak is typically largest in males, smaller in females and tiny in immatures.



(Bottom) – An obvious male Mute Swan, note the large 'knob' on the beak. This bird is landing onto Chainbridge Scrape (East) and about to touch down. Speed brakes are out (its big feet), flaps are down its (flight feathers) and is stabilised (tail), this heavy bird gently skids onto the water, stopping in a very short distance.



## Population

A species that was almost wiped out here in Great Britain many years ago, but has since made a big comeback, yet despite further setbacks with poisoning and illegal hunting in more modern times the population is now fairly stable. The use of some now banned pesticides on farmland in the 1960's, 70's and even in the 80's had a hugely negative effect on this species because Mute Swan will forage on farmland for food in winter, much as we see Whooper Swan and Bewick's Swan do in wintertime. Here at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve, formerly known as Sutton & Lound Gravel Pits SSSI, there has been a 'herd' of Mute Swan, mainly consisting of juvenile and immature birds, present annually since the late 1960's and early 1970's when counting wildfowl and swans was first begun here and is still done to this day with the British Trust for Ornithology's Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) monitoring scheme. The following table is every monthly maximum count (both from WeBS & just general counting) of Mute Swan from 1990 (the inception year of the Lound Bird Club) to present:-

Year/Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>1990</b>	14	11	7					<b>120</b>	97	95		
<b>1991</b>							<b>105</b>					
<b>1992</b>					80		<b>112</b>	88		93	50	41
<b>1993</b>	53	39	82					95		<b>112</b>		
<b>1994</b>							130	<b>140</b>		107	105	94
<b>1995</b>	66	51	62	36	72	120	155	174	<b>178</b>	128	133	120
<b>1996</b>	66	62	37	56	54	123	174	<b>193</b>	172	140	107	99
<b>1997</b>	97	155	87	107	118	156	168	<b>180</b>	163	165	134	119
<b>1998</b>	58	86	145		106	134	151	<b>203</b>	161	128	109	111
<b>1999</b>	118	122	130	40	87	120	85	<b>133</b>	119	89	128	129
<b>2000</b>	137	164	<b>189</b>	131	121	135	65	154	118	148	150	101
<b>2001</b>	118	130	<b>157</b>						86	95	99	91
<b>2002</b>	106	155	149	143	99	148	165	<b>198</b>				
<b>2003</b>												
<b>2004</b>		101	<b>165</b>		104	118			124		135	
<b>2005</b>		<b>196</b>										
<b>2006</b>												<b>241</b>
<b>2007</b>	200	<b>216</b>	100	156	66				92			
<b>2008</b>	<b>237</b>	103	228		146		178	152			115	230
<b>2009</b>	<b>217</b>	164	154	76	177	173	192	145	171	121	190	40
<b>2010</b>	<b>276</b>	215	250	241	194	159	205	190	126	133	130	114
<b>2011</b>	122	151	176	144	99		121	84	<b>185</b>	169	108	171
<b>2012</b>	192	203	<b>241</b>	202	134	149	166	169	76	155	157	159
<b>2013</b>	<b>253</b>	207	188	101	185	72	153	130	162	180	169	215
<b>2014</b>	224	<b>235</b>	218	90	105	99	116	163	169	107	155	50
<b>2015</b>	130	189	168	178	88	143	191		156	161	119	<b>245</b>
<b>2016</b>	230	<b>244</b>	197	84	94	178	190	230	234	138	138	144
<b>2017</b>	27	186	<b>227</b>	152	164	131	226	224	219	165	132	153
<b>2018</b>	185	<b>205</b>		122	104	133	177	185	198	173	178	176
<b>2019</b>	119		98		120	131	179		<b>203</b>	190	132	
<b>2020</b>			62		76		138	152	150	145	<b>207</b>	152
<b>2021</b>				130	55	121	148	<b>187</b>	84		133	
<b>2022</b>	76	108	80	45	83	103		186	<b>199</b>	174	133	113
<b>2023</b>	35	34	33	101	118	<b>160</b>	129	133		102	91	
<b>2024</b>		9	23	<b>69</b>	65	56	41	49	38	25		

From the above data we can see that, firstly a large number of Mute Swan can be encountered when the whole site is monitored. We count fledged juveniles, all resident breeding birds and the non-breeding 'herd' of immature birds. They can often be found loafing on the fields during the daytime and roosting on the pits overnight. The highest single count (highlighted in yellow) was in January 2010 when an amazing 276 birds were counted across the recording area. Other large counts (in bold type) were 253 in January 2013, 245 in December 2015 and 244 in February 2016. The local mainly non-breeding 'herd' roams around the recording area but traditionally the key count sites have been Clayworth



Common (anywhere), Hayton Common (east of Tilm North), Mattersey Common (anywhere between Clayworth village and Mattersey) and the fields around Blaco Pits and Mattersey Priory ruins. Regular nighttime roosts are usually to be found on Chainbridge Pit, Chainbridge Scrape, Neatholme Scrape, Pit and Fen. The population moves around other local areas mainly along the lower reaches of the River Idle valley often in the Bawtry/Newington/Misson areas and just like the Idle Valley birds, the 'herd' there, can also be encountered on local adjoining farmland.

(Below) - A typical 'herd' flock on Clayworth Common from the riverbank.



### **Mortality**

There have been many instances of 'die-offs' locally, where multiple birds have been found dead on open land or in water. In the past it has been suspected that pesticide dressing on arable farmland was the main cause but in more recent years avian flu also seems to have killed birds, though this is mainly seen nationally, the local birds have so far seemingly weathered that problem well. The use of lead weights in course fishing tackle in the 1970's and 80's also didn't help the swans with many lead poisoning instances across the country. Thankfully, since the ban on small sizes of lead fishing weights in 1986, this is now a much rarer event. Similarly, the use of lead shot in gun cartridges used over wetland sites was banned in the UK in 1999, this will also now have a more positive effect in recovering populations. Occasionally sick or injured birds can be found, and we have sought rehabilitation where possible in the past. An opportunistic Fox can kill swans, especially ill, immature or very old birds, but this isn't a common occurrence either. Fox are mainly scavengers locally; they have eaten dead birds but usually have plenty of other food to find. In the 1980's and throughout the 1990's the power generating companies added visible 'deflectors' to most of the overhead power lines, and especially so along Chainbridge and Walters Lanes to prevent swan deaths and these have worked well. Maybe they need to replace the old, and now mostly lost or damaged ones. There has, in recent years, been one instance where a Mute Swan feeding on Clayworth Common was sadly attacked and killed by an 'off-lead' uncontrolled dog.

### **Breeding**

Mute Swan breeding has occurred here at the current Idle Valley Nature Reserve and at other former Gravel Pit sites from Hallcroft right through to Blaco Pits for many years. Breeding birds were and still are found on the larger pits and scrapes and it's not unusual for several pairs to breed on the same water body. Nesting season is typically March to July sometime into August. Nests are typically very large, well-built with heaped reeds, pond weed, and rushes and the eggs are brooded usually well up and away from the water level. The number of eggs can vary widely from different pairs, but 4-10 eggs can be laid, the female will then brood for 36 days before the cygnet start to hatch.



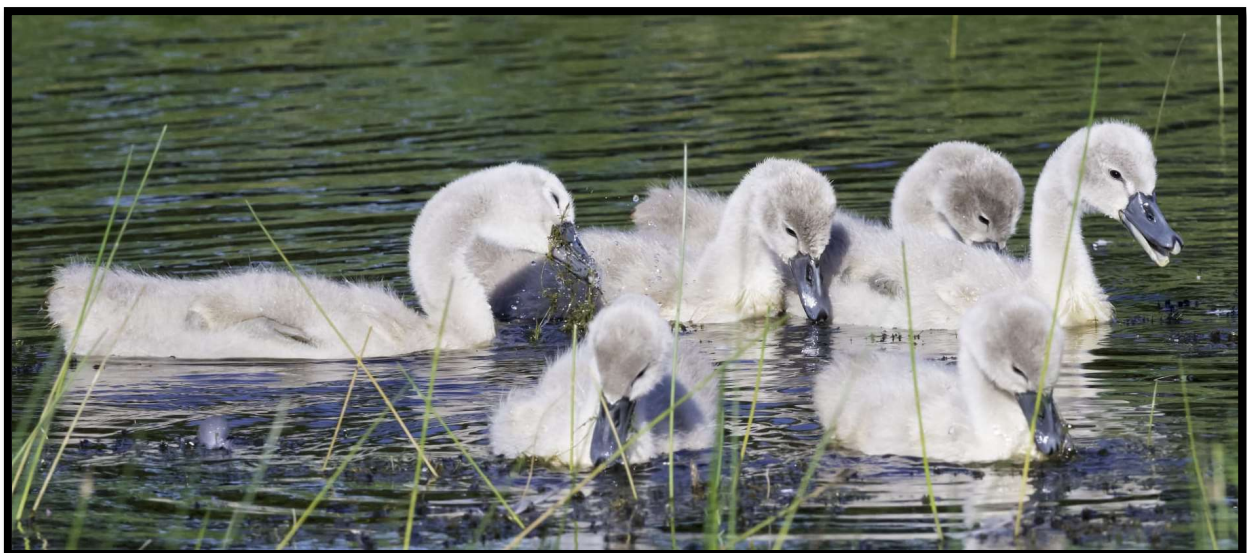
(above left & right) - Adult female Mute Swan on her nest and adult with recently hatched young fresh out of the nest.

The cygnets are vulnerable from predation from the day they leave the nest, from above (bird predation) and below the water (fish predation), but the parent birds usually do a great job at protecting their young which can be 130-150 days before they can fly themselves. Through local monitoring, successful breeding of Mute Swan has seen a mixed bag of results, with 2009 being the standout year when 17 pairs raised and exceptional 40 cygnets over the reserve and recording area. I must add here that several local birders have done excellent work in monitoring breeding birds, Victor Giles being the one who has been exemplary in this field locally.



(Above) – A pair of adult Mute Swan in their typical 'courtship dance' creating this amazing 'heart' shape with their head and necks. A charming thing to witness and something never to be forgotten, but even more amazing if you can capture the moment like Christine Booth has done here. (©C.Booth)

(Below) – a group of six cygnets learning to feed for themselves, something that swans do from hatching, obviously with a little help and protection from their parents. (©M.Vickers)







(Above) – Six different cygnets on the River Idle, their more adult shape and 'pinning' flight feathers are just visible.



(Above) – These cygnets, now a good few weeks older than the ones above, were on the nearby Chesterfield Canal.

(Below) – A fully fledged juvenile Mute Swan trying to stop the traffic along Chainbridge Lane in December 2022.



## Movements & Ringing Data

The movements of Mute Swan across the country is fairly well documented, these large birds have plenty of energy and wings that can take them far afield. Both ringing and recovery data from local ringing groups, the BTO's national ringing scheme, various colour-ring schemes and from the public's recording produces an accurate picture of their movements. UK birds can also be found to move across the English Channel into nearby European counties. Local ringing groups such as North Notts Ringing Group do occasionally get the chance to ring both adult birds and broods of cygnets and there are also many 'colour-ringed' Mute Swan seen locally, and very often birds with colour-rings can even be seen at Bellmoor Lake. The oldest known Mute Swan is given below from the BTO's longevity website data:-

Z24971	First-year	12-09-1980	Abbotsbury: 50°39'N 2°36'W (Dorset)
	Caught by ringer	23-10-2009	Abbotsbury Swannery: 50°38'N 2°36'W (Dorset) 2km 29y 1m 11d

This 29+ year old bird may have remained at Abbotsbury, Dorset for possibly its entire life and does back up the point that most UK Mute Swans are sedentary and do not move far. However, proven movement away from Nottinghamshire has been noted. An adult female ringed at Clumber Park in July 1981 was seen at Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway in February 1988, but was back at Mansfield Woodhouse in February 1994. Similarly, a female ringed at Caerlaverock in November 1989 was seen at Attenborough in April 1991. A further bird, ringed at Attenborough in 1985 was again taken into care in the county in October 1988, had recovered enough to be found at Castle Douglas, Dumfries & Galloway ten years later in 1998.

(Below) – Two examples of different colour-rings seen locally. Yellow with black alpha numeric coding and Red with White reversed alpha numeric code. Both birds also carry their standard BTO metal ring with the BTO ring number.



## Credits

I would like to thank the following for their help with this article:- To both Phil Cadman and Victor Giles for providing me with the Idle Valley NR WeBS/Count data, to Mike Vickers and Christine Booth for the use of some of their images and to the BTO, BTO WeBS, Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers and to Nottinghamshire Wildlife trust for their excellent online information and publications.

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## Next month's issue

**What's on - January 2025 Events + Reserve News + Bird News for November 2024 + Additional Nature Sightings for November 2024 + Common 'Pink' Flowers + Roe Deer on the Reserve.**

Submissions for inclusion in this publication can be sent to Gary Hobson via his email at [ghlbc@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ghlbc@hotmail.co.uk) Please state (species/observer/location/date) for all images. In the case of regular bird and wildlife sightings, please submit sightings via the relevant **Wellness/Birdwatching/Photo 'WhatsApp' & 'Facebook' groups** linked to Idle Valley NR. Submit all Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) plus Dragonfly & Damselfly sightings to [philip.cadman@sky.com](mailto:philip.cadman@sky.com)