



Friends of Hambrook Marshes

September 2015

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Bird Report



Just for a change, I thought I'd start off this bird report with a furry mammal! Ros Rootes, one of our members, was recently lucky enough to see a water vole (left) in the river alongside the reserve. There are plenty of water vole holes in the river bank between the Canterbury East railway bridge and the park-and-ride footbridge, but I haven't yet been fortunate enough to see one at Hambrook (discounting the wooden one swimming across the surface of the picnic table!). Though shy, they are extremely short-sighted, so it is sometimes possible to watch an oblivious animal for lengthy periods, provided you can keep still.

September is very much a month of comings and goings for the avian community, as summer migrants that have bred here trickle southwards and winter visitors move in from the north and east. This has been another year with very few house martins or swallows feeding over the Marshes, but good numbers of chiffchaffs and blackcaps passed through Hambrook this month, and another spotted flycatcher was present on 19th. Three common sandpipers, which may have been nesting alongside a Scottish loch or river just a few weeks ago, were present on a flooded field next to the reserve on 1st, bobbing their way amongst a veritable host of 72 mallard which evidently found that particular bit of pasture very much to their liking. Goldcrests, although resident in England, are strictly winter visitors to Hambrook, and the first few duly arrived this month, tiny birds that would be largely overlooked were it not for their high-pitched



calls. Most little egret (above) records at Hambrook occur during the period November to March, so it was pleasing to see a single bird in September. Siskins (left), which are delightful little greenish finches (far more elegant than the rather lumbering greenfinch) have been much in evidence this autumn, following a summer when they appear to have nested in a number of sites locally. A flock of 18 was present on 6th, and 25 were counted on 28th. These flocks may have simply moved southwards in

Britain, or could have made the far more hazardous journey across the North Sea.

A single mute swan on 1st was a welcome sight, now that this graceful bird has become a rather rare visitor to the reserve, and a Cetti's warbler the same day joined a scattering of other records this spring and summer. This extremely secretive, uniformly brown bird could pass its entire life undetected were it not for its explosive utterance of a jumble of loud, seesawing notes which are what passes for its song. Cetti's warbler is a remarkable species from southern Europe that hadn't been recorded in the UK until 1961, yet now, barely fifty years later, it has an estimated population in Kent of up to 2000, mostly on the North and East Kent marshes, Romney Marsh, and along the Stour valley. Being insectivorous, it is extremely susceptible to harsh winters, and indeed nearly became extinct again in the late 1970s when the weather turned against it. So, while it is potentially a beneficiary of global warming, it is a species that could easily be wiped out if the vagaries of climate change result in occasional severe winters.