

NWR update from Tom Dalrymple

Birds It has been a dry autumn and it seems as though most wildfowl have been slower than usual to find the flooded areas of the reserve. We often see lots of Shoveler in autumn often as early as September. In 2015 the peak count was 184, so far this autumn it's only 74. Teal numbers are also quite low. Strangely it has been a very good time for Wigeon. The autumn peak count is 1266 – this is only about 100 birds off the peak count for the 2015/16 year. Richard Clarke and Kevin have been monitoring Water Rail with a tape lure; so far the peak count is 59 which is about typical for the time of year. There have been a

number of unusual sightings this autumn including

Scaup

in the

reedbed

ponds and two

Bewick's

Swans at

Goldcliff

, the first for several years. A Ring Ouzel and a Wryneck at

Uskmouth

, Spotted Crake, Great White Egret and Pectoral Sandpiper at

Goldcliff

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Management

Every year we aim to create some flooding in the fields in September for the early winter migrants. This is usually achieved by letting water from the reedbeds

into the grassland ditches via a large pipe. Water is then pumped from the ditches onto the fields. This year because of the dry weather water was initially fed by gravity using the new pipe from

reedbed

11 as well. A lot of this water was just absorbed by the dry soil so we compensated for this by attaching a pump to the

reedbed

11 pipe and drawing the water faster. By October we had still had no rain so resorted to pumping water onto another field block. Finally in November the heavens opened and all the fields are now flooded.

Salinities

were low in the lagoons in September, so we winched

open the tidal flap to let the sea in for three weeks. We have drastically reduced the amount of sea water we allow on the lagoons because of the huge volume of silt that is left behind.

In August Jamie Williams won a contract to cut bale and remove rush from 62 hectares of grassland. During September he came back and mowed the whole area again - hopefully this will knock it back. Rush-mowing is an annual job – we will monitor to see how effective cutting twice a year proves to be.

Most hedges are cut on a rotation to try and ensure that there are always plenty of flowers and fruit in the hedgerows. In any year there are usually about 10km

of hedgerow to trim. I prefer to cut hedges at the end of the winter but logistically this isn't possible. Hedges in the wetter fields have to be cut in early autumn; our colleagues from Operations Delivery spent three weeks this autumn hedge-trimming.

Kevin

organised

a contract to hay cut and remove vegetation from 12 km of reedbed

paths and 1.4ha in two separate areas of the wider reedbed

area. The main reason for this is that it helps promote the flower-rich habitat necessary to sustain shrill carder bees which are now a SSSI

feature of the site. Cutting the paths back also helps to act as a fire break should we ever experience a fire in the reedbed again.

Encouraged by the obvious rudd

population and the booming Bittern last spring, we have cut more reed than ever before. The idea is to try to encourage fish deeper into the reedbed

and create secluded areas where Bittern can feed. We have cut 2.3 ha in total in reedbeds

4, 5 and 6. These cut areas will hopefully benefit wildfowl as well as Bittern.

This winter in addition to our WeBS counts and our own high tide counts we are assisting the BTO low tide counts of the reserve and estuary. We wouldn't be able to do all this monitoring without the help of our volunteers.