

# Potteric Carr NR survey of breeding birds occupying Huxter Well Year 6 – 2009

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## **Introduction**

This is the sixth year that annual surveys have been carried out on Huxter Well's breeding birds, the results of which have been published each year since 2004 and these should be read in combination with the present paper. In 2009 fieldwork was carried out between early April and late June, with added observations of later broods of young up to 18th July. Similar study techniques were used as in earlier surveys (Bird, Carroll and Scott, 2004).

Wetland habitats within the study plot are progressing, with reedbeds increasing in size across each cell. The grasslands will need some form of management, either grazing or cutting and the cuttings removed. The area known as Rossington Carr Fields needs cutting and possibly treating as it was of very poor quality for breeding birds and flora in 2009. Due to favourable water levels, West Scrape, designed to attract feeding/resting wading birds (Figure 1), was visited by many of Huxter Well's breeding population of waders, as well as those on passage migration.

St. Catherine's Field was cut in late February and early March and parts of Central Grassland cut for nesting Lapwings. A new hide was constructed on 21st April overlooking West Scrape and took that name. Volunteers built a tern-raft which was floated out on to cell 1a on 28th April. An owl box was put in one of the large oak trees adjoining the stilling pond.



*Figure 1. West Scrape from the new hide on 12th July 2009. ©Helen Womack*

The aquatic alien plant *Crassula helmsii* was found in the Lagoon and several measures were taken to control and eradicate this problematic species.

Predation was a severe problem in 2009 with many young and eggs being taken by Carrion Crows. Ridge tiles were put on the Central Grassland to provide shelter from the corvids for small young waders, but still they suffered heavy losses.



Figure 2. Predated eggs found on the eastern side of the Huxter Well study plot.  
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Figure 3. Map of YWT Potteric Carr showing the extent of Huxter Well (within the black triangle) in relation to the rest of the nature reserve. © YWT.

| SPECIES              | 2008   | 2009  | CHANGE 2008–9 (pairs) | CHANGE 2004–9 (pairs) |
|----------------------|--|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Little Grebe         | 12 pairs (10 broods; 33 young; second attempts)                            | 15 pairs (9 broods; 32 young)   | +3                    | +15                   |
| Great Crested Grebe  | 3 pairs (4 nests; 3 broods; 7 young)                                       | 5 pairs (10 young)  | +2                    | +5                    |
| Black-necked Grebe   | 1 pair (nest; 2 young)   | absent as breeder   | -1                    | =                     |
| Mute Swan            | 1 pair (nest; 6 eggs failed)   | 2 pairs (12 cygnets)  | +1                    | +2                    |
| Greylag Goose        | 4 pairs (21 young)   | 4 pairs (22 young)  | =                     | +4                    |
| Canada Goose         | 5 pairs (18 young)   | 10 pairs (46 young)   | +5                    | +10                   |
| Shelduck             | 2 pairs (display)  | 2–5 pairs (8 young)   | +0–3                  | +2–5                  |
| Gadwall              | 7 pairs (2 broods; 18 young)   | 5 pairs (broods of 6 and 9 young)                                       | -2                    | +5                    |
| Mallard              | 11 pairs (6 broods; 29 young)  | 11 pairs (55 young)   | =                     | +11                   |
| Shoveler             | 1 pair (1 brood 4 young)   | 2 pairs (1 brood, 4 young)  | +1                    | +2                    |
| Pochard              | 3 pairs (3 broods; 16 young)   | 7 pairs (7 broods; 32 young)  | +4                    | +7                    |
| Tufted Duck          | 8 pairs (five broods; 35 young)  | 12 pairs (11 broods; 88 young)  | +4                    | +12                   |
| Ruddy Duck           | 3 pairs (2 broods; 6 young)  | data withheld   | ?                     | ?                     |
| Grey Partridge       | absent   | absent  | =                     | -5                    |
| Red-legged Partridge | 1 pair (registrations)   | absent  | -1                    | =                     |
| Pheasant             | 5 pairs (registrations; predated eggs)                                     | 4 pairs (registrations; predated eggs)                                  | -1                    | -1                    |
| Sparrowhawk          | part of 1 territory (registrations)  | absent  | -1                    | -1                    |
| Kestrel              | 1 pair (part territory)  | 2 pairs (part territories)  | +1                    | +1                    |
| Moorhen              | 8 pairs (3 nests; 12 young)  | 8 pairs (6 broods; 20 young)  | =                     | +8                    |
| Coot                 | 15 pairs (nests; 54 young)   | 25 pairs (97 young)   | +10                   | +25                   |
| Avocet               | 3 pairs (3 nests; 7+ young)  | 4 pairs (4 nests; 3+ young)   | +1                    | +4                    |
| Oystercatcher        | 1 pair (registrations; nest; 3 young 28th May)                             | 1 pair (nest, incubating)   | =                     | +1                    |
| Little Ringed Plover | 3 pairs (2 nests; 2 young)   | 5 pairs (nests; 4 young)  | +2                    | +5                    |
| Ringed Plover        | 4 pairs (registrations; 4 nests; 7 young)                                  | 3–4 pairs (registrations; nests; 6 young)                               | -0–1                  | +3–4                  |
| Redshank             | 2 pairs (1 young)  | 4 pairs (8 young)   | +2                    | +4                    |
| Lapwing              | 17 pairs (registrations; nests; 34 young; plus one second attempt 4 young) | 13 pairs (registrations; nests; predated eggs; several broods of young) | -4                    | +2                    |

| SPECIES            | 2008  | 2009   | CHANGE 2008–9 (pairs) | CHANGE 2004–9 (pairs) |
|--------------------|---|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Black-headed Gull  | c.250 pairs (nests; many young)   | c.250 pairs (nests; many young)                    | =                     | +c.250                |
| Common Tern        | absent  | absent as breeder                                  | =                     | =                     |
| Wood Pigeon        | 1+ pair (registrations)   | 1 pair (registrations)                             | =                     | =                     |
| Skylark            | 3 pairs (registrations; food carrying; 2 young)                               | 4 pairs (registrations; food carrying)             | +1                    | -12                   |
| Meadow Pipit       | absent  | absent   | =                     | -1                    |
| Pied Wagtail       | absent  | 1 part territory (carrying nest material; 6 young) | +1                    | +1                    |
| Yellow Wagtail     | absent  | absent   | =                     | -4                    |
| Wren               | 2 territories (registrations)   | 1 territory (registrations)                        | -1                    | -1                    |
| Dunnock            | 1 territory (registrations)   | 3 territories (registrations)                      | +2                    | +2                    |
| Robin              | 2 territories (registrations)   | 1 territory (registrations)                        | -1                    | -1                    |
| Mistle Thrush      | absent  | absent   | =                     | =                     |
| Reed Warbler       | 4 spring territories (registrations; plus some relocated territories in July) | 20 territories (registrations)                     | +16                   | +20                   |
| Lesser Whitethroat | 1 part territory (registrations)  | 1 plus 1 part territory (registrations)            | +1                    | +2                    |
| Common Whitethroat | 2 pairs plus 1 part territories (registrations; nest; food carrying)          | 4 territories (registrations; 4 young)             | +1                    | -2                    |
| Garden Warbler     | absent  | absent   | =                     | =                     |
| Blackcap           | 1 part territory (registrations; family party)                                | absent   | -1                    | =                     |
| Chiffchaff         | absent  | absent   | =                     | =                     |
| Long-tailed Tit    | absent  | absent   | =                     | =                     |
| Blue Tit           | 3 pairs (registrations; nest)   | 2 pairs (registrations)                            | -1                    | =                     |
| Great Tit          | 1 pair (registrations)  | absent   | -1                    | -1                    |
| Carrion Crow       | 1 pair (nest; 1 young) plus 1 part territory                                  | 1 pair (nest) plus 3 part territories              | +2                    | +4                    |
| Magpie             | 1 pair (nest; not occupied)   | absent   | -1                    | -1                    |
| Chaffinch          | 1 territory (registrations)   | 1 territory (registrations)                        | =                     | =                     |
| Yellowhammer       | 1 territory (registrations)   | absent   | -1                    | -4                    |
| Reed Bunting       | 4 territories (registrations)   | 7 territory (registrations)                        | +3                    | +6                    |

*Table 1. Summary of breeding birds inhabiting Potteric Carr nature reserve's 75ha extension land in 2008 and 2009.*

Explanation of selected breeding status terms used in Table 1: Absent – absent as a breeding bird (though may have been recorded); Registration – at least three records (registrations) from the same locality over a requisite period of time. Evidence of what stage nesting had reached towards successful breeding is stated where known. Huxter Well = Reserve extension land = study plot = formerly, Huxter Well Fields/Huxter Well Marsh & Rossington Carr Fields. NB: The number of young given in the table is the number seen; more could easily have gone undetected by the survey team.

## Results of the study

The 2009 survey results are presented under species headings in the form of a systematic list, with accounts given for each breeding species. Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) in the red and amber lists are indicated (Eaton, M. A, 2009). The British Ornithologists' Union's *The British List: A Checklist of Birds of Britain* (7th Edition, 2006) nomenclature has been used with full English names engaged when placed with the scientific name. Elsewhere in the text, vernacular bird names have been used.

### MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Two pairs nested this year and were successful. A pair on cell 4 had five young and on cell 3a had seven young.

### LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis* BCC amber list.

An increase to 15 pairs, but productivity in the early season was very poor with only four fledged young by the end of June. In the first half of July eight broods totalling 28 were noted.

### GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

An increase to five pairs with single pairs on cells 2b, 3a, 3b and two pairs on 1b. These pairs produced two, four, one and three young.

### BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis* Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. BCC amber list.

Although two different pairs were present on several occasions, no breeding took place.

### GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*

Four pairs were thought to have nested and produced 22 young. Once again adults and young came to graze from other parts of the reserve.

### GREATER CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

Ten pairs produced 46 young. Perhaps some of these pairs were adults and young from elsewhere on the reserve as it is much more difficult to see the nest sites now that vegetation is more established.

### COMMON SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna* BCC amber list.

Up to five pairs were present early in the breeding season but eventually a single pair produced eight young.

### GADWALL *Anas strepera* BCC amber list.

A reduction to five pairs present, and two broods of six and nine young were noted. There was however a large flock of moulting males present for most of the season.

### MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos* BCC amber list.

Eleven pairs were present and produced 55 young.

### NORTHERN SHOVELER *Anas clypeata* BCC amber list.

Two pairs occupied the plot and a female was seen with four large young on 19th June.

### COMMON POCHARD *Aythya ferina* BCC amber list.

An excellent year with an increase to seven pairs, and seven broods of young totalling 32.

### TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula* BCC amber list.

An increase to 12 pairs. Eleven broods produced 88 young.

RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Present, but data withheld. The on-site eradication program continues.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix* BCC red list.

A pair occupied the central grassland in late March but were not thought to have bred.

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE *Alectoris rufa*

No evidence of study plot occupation this year.

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

An estimated four pairs were present mainly on Rossington Carr Fields and along Mother Drain south embankment.

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus* BCC amber list.

Two territories overlapped the plot with birds hunting over Central Grassland/Rossington Carr Fields and St. Catherine's Fields.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*

Eight pairs were present and six broods were counted totalling 20. As the reedbeds grow larger it is much more difficult to observe this species.

COOT *Fulica atra*

A large increase from 15 to 25 pairs and nesting on every area of water. The 25 pairs produced 97 young.

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus* BCC amber list.

A pair settled on cell 1b and had been sitting for ten days when a pair of Avocets decided they wanted the same island to nest on, so evicted the Oystercatchers. They tried again on cell 4 without success and finally for a third time on a different island on cell 1b, but a Carrion Crow was seen to take the eggs.

AVOCET *Recurvirostra avosetta* Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. BCC amber list.

Four pairs nested but occupied an island in cell 1b this year. The first young (three) hatched on 16th May and moved on to West Scrape the next day. One young was still present on 19th but by the 20th May, that too was absent. An egg was taken by a Carrion Crow on the latter date and all nests were abandoned, presumably predated soon afterwards. On 23rd May only one adult was present, indicating total failure.



Figure 4. Avocet feeding in West Scrape, seen here with a small fish on 9th May 2009.

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LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius* Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

Five pairs were present all through the breeding season and breeding behaviour was seen over much of the study plot, but only one proven record of young (four), on East Scrape, that reached full-grown size.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula* BCC amber list.

Three to four pairs were present on the whole plot but struggled to produce young on the Central Grassland. Although two young were seen regularly on the Grassy Knoll and reached full-grown size. Extracts from Steve Furbers observations: A pair nested on Central Grassland near the little ponds, the first attempt failed but the second produced four young on 17th May, though not seen after that date. The area of Central Grassland near to East Scrape had four different nests from 11th April to the end of June, none of which produced any young.

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus* BCC amber list.

An increase to four pairs this season with three pairs producing young, the best productivity since the surveys began. Two pairs nested on Central Grassland producing four and two young and a pair on cell 3b also had two young. Four full-grown young were on East Scrape on 28th June.

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus* BCC red list.

Thirteen pairs have had a terrible season due to predation, mainly by Carrion Crows. Central Grassland, the main breeding area, was constantly visited, with eggs and young being taken. No full-grown young were recorded over the whole study plot in 2009.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus* BCC amber list.

The colony size remains at approximately 250 pairs. Several pairs nested on cell 2b for the first time this year. A large number of young were produced.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo* BCC amber list

On 9th June a pair prospected the tern-raft on cell 1a but, unfortunately, a pair of Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* evicted them. They returned on several other occasions to be moved on by Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus graellsii*. On 3rd July a pair displayed and copulated on West Scrape, though only remained for a few days.

COMMON WOOD PIGEON *Columba palumbus*

A pair nested in the hedgerow in St. Catherine's Field.

SKY LARK *Alauda arvensis* BCC red list.

Three pairs nested on the Central Grassland and a single pair on Grassy Knoll. Adults were carrying food from early May, indicative of feeding their young.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla yarrelli*

A territory south of the study plot overlapped Central Grassland. A pair displayed and a female was seen to collect nesting material. Six young were feeding on West Scrape in June. The first breeding record for this species since the study began.

WINTER WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A single territory was held this season.

HEDGE ACCENTOR *Prunella modularis* BCC amber list.

An increase to three territories with a partial territory between cell 4 and Seven Arches Carr.

EUROPEAN ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

A single territory in 2009.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

A substantial increase in this species, which should continue as the reedbeds increase in size. Twenty territories were established by mid-June.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

A male sang in the Big Hedge from 13th April to the end of June. A second male sang in Seven Arches Carr and on the study plot at the start of the Big Hedge. Therefore, two territories were registered.

COMMON WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis* BCC amber list.

Four pairs were breeding within the study plot and four young were seen on 10th June.

BLUE TIT *Cyanistes caeruleus*

A pair nested in a dead Elder *Sambucus nigra* in the Big Hedge and fledged four young. A pair also held territory in the hedge in St. Catherine's field.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Four nest sites were located in and around the study plot. A pair in the mature English Oak *Quercus robur* near the Stilling Pond, a pair in Seven Arches Carr, a pair in the motorway hedgerow near Central Grassland, with the fourth pair on Hawthorn Bank near St. Catherine's Field. This species was seen to predate wader chicks and eggs on Huxter Well.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

As in the previous year, one territory was held in 2009.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus* BCC amber list.

An increase to seven territories, the most recorded in a season so far. Young were being fed from late May.

### References

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