

**MARBURY and WITTON FLASHES
BIRD REPORT
2024**



Male Marsh Harrier © Marc Ratcliffe

INTRODUCTION

Birdwatching attracts many people for many reasons. For some it is simply a relaxing pastime, whereas for others it is an absorbing hobby, maybe even addictive, and sometimes escalating to high levels of competitiveness. Some enjoy the science and the statistics, and for some photography is the prime focus. Thanks to the variety of habitats available and their attractiveness to resident and migrant birds alike, our patch of Marbury & Witton Flashes caters for birders whatever their inspiration, and long may it continue.

2024 may not rank as one of the better years for birding here, but 143 species is still a respectable annual total for an inland site. Furthermore, there are always records that are remarkable whatever the rest of the year brings, and often the more surprising the better. An obvious memorable event this year was the wholly unexpected breeding attempt by a pair of Marsh Harriers at Ashton's Flash. They have been increasingly frequent visitors in recent years but have rarely lingered let alone set up territory. The pair were obviously inexperienced, and although the attempt was unsuccessful, we can but hope that they return older and wiser in 2025. Other highlights included the first Little Tern recorded at the Witton Flashes, a visit from a pair of Waxwings, and the first record of a breeding plumaged Cattle Egret. Unfortunately they were all cursory sightings, thankfully however a small flock of Hawfinches that arrived at the end of the year proved somewhat more obliging. Overall it was another year dominated by irregular weather patterns. As a result, it was generally a poor breeding season for wildfowl (other than for the redoubtable Mallards) and wader passage was again worryingly dire. On the plus side, there were multiple sightings of Whooper Swans, Common Scoter and Greater Scaup, and there were record counts of Greylags and Pink-footed Geese as well as of migrant Woodpigeons.

As usual, my sincere thanks go to all those who have contributed sightings, data and photographs for this report. Please continue to do so for 2025.

Greg Baker
March 2025

THE SITE

As with previous reports and for those not acquainted with the area, the Marbury and Witton Flashes birding patch (also herein referred to as M&WF or just 'the patch') consists of five major areas: Marbury Country Park, the Witton Flashes, Anderton Nature Park, Carey Park and Higher Marston. Included within Marbury Country Park is the prime site of Budworth Mere along with the main woodlands of Big Wood, Black Wood and Hopyards Wood. Budworth Mere itself also hosts the Coward Reedbed plus Kid Brook Spit on its northern shoreline and the associated Kid Brook Fields. Witton Flashes are the reclaimed lime beds north of Northwich, and include Neumann's Flash plus Ashton's Flash, Haydn's Pool, Witton Mill Meadows and Dairy House Meadows. The other areas are more standalone; Carey Park is the site of the former Witton landfill, Anderton Nature Park is the country park west of Haydn's Pool, and Higher Marston encompasses the fields and housing estate north and east of the Trent & Mersey Canal, including Marston Flashes along Ollershaw Lane. The patch generally assumes the same boundaries as the area also known as the Northwich Woodlands.



**Map of Marbury & Witton Flashes
(also known as Northwich Woodlands)**

THE 2024 BIRDING YEAR

Month by month highlights review

JANUARY began relatively slowly, although there was an impressive count of 16 **Eurasian Woodcocks** at Dairy House Meadows on the 1st, plus with the years highest count of **Eurasian Wigeon** with 235 on Neumann's Flash. Throughout the month, the **Common Starling** murmurations attracted many birders and wildlife enthusiasts alike, with between 40-50,000 present at Neumann's Flash although only a few thousand were at Budworth Mere. The wintering **Eurasian Bittern** was present throughout the month in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere, with 2 seen on the 6th. The wintering pair of **European Stonechats** also spent the month at Ashton's Flash. Most **Pink-footed Geese** sightings are of skeins passing overhead, so a flock of 10 at Budworth Mere on the 8th were notable. On the same day and across the mere, a flock of 34 **Eurasian Skylarks** were also noteworthy. The first new scarcities were a flock of 6 immature **Greater Scaup** which arrived onto Budworth Mere on the 10th. 3 **Jack Snipe** were at Ashton's Flash on the 12th. A cold spell mid month brought in little of note, however on the 17th another **Greater Scaup** appeared, this time a female and the same as had been seen in December 2023. It stayed until the 20th. The 19th produced the first **Western Marsh Harrier** of the year, a female at Budworth Mere which was to be seen again around the flashes on the 22nd and 25th. Towards the month end, up to 30 **Goosanders** were around the patch and **Common Goldeneye** numbers peaked at 8 at Budworth Mere on the 27th, the same day that a drake **Northern Pintail** was at Neumann's Flash, joined by a female the next day. Pretty much on cue, the first **Eurasian Oystercatcher** of the year arrived at Budworth Mere on the 29th.



Greater Scaup, Budworth Mere © Greg Baker



Common Scoter, Budworth Mere © Marc Ratcliffe

FEBRUARY was the wettest on record, seemingly not an issue for the **Western Marsh Harriers**, with four different individuals seen during the month at the Witton Flashes. Two **Bohemian Waxwings** were found at the east end of the Witton Flashes bund on the 1st, however they very quickly moved on. The first **Little Egret** of the year was at Budworth Mere on the 2nd. On the 5th there was a remarkable count of 157 **Eurasian Curlew** at Budworth Mere, probably the most ever recorded there. The regular **Eurasian Bittern** was again joined by a second individual on the 11th but just for the one day. On the 14th a drake **Common Scoter** was

found on Budworth Mere. It became quite approachable and remained until the 18th. By mid month the **Common Starling** roosts began to decline, although earlier in the month the Coward Reedbed roost had reached c10,000. Two **European Golden Plovers** alighted briefly at Budworth Mere on the 16th, and on the same day a pair of **Mandarin Ducks** appeared under the heronry there but were not seen again during the month. The first **Mediterranean Gull** of the year was at Budworth Mere on the 19th, when a pair of **Northern Pintail** were also present. The Ashton's Flash **European Stonechats** were last seen on the 24th. The final highlight of the month was an exceptional flock of 30 **Whooper Swans** that graced Budworth Mere on the 26th.

MARCH was cold and wet, although the first **Sand Martin** of the year on the 7th brought some cheer. Prolonged north-easterly winds in spring often bring **Little Gulls** to Budworth Mere, however the appearance of 4 on the 8th was unexpectedly early. 3 remained until the 11th.



Eurasian Bittern. Budworth Mere © Graham Roberts

On the 10th a pair of beautifully plumaged **Black-necked Grebes** joined the Little Gulls along with a pair of **Mediterranean Gulls** at the mere. The **Eurasian Bittern** in the Coward Reedbed was last seen on the 13th, and as usual had been showing well just prior to its departure. Another male **Common Scoter** was at Budworth Mere on the 16th. On the 18th a lonely **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was photographed at Marbury Country Park, unfortunately the only sighting of the year. 16 **Common Buzzards** over the patch on the 22nd clearly included some local migrants, and the first **Little Ringed Plover** was at Neumann's Flash the same day. 3 **Pied Avocets** arrived onto

Neumann's Flash on the 23rd, although it was to prove a poor year overall for them. Individuals were also seen on the 24th and 30th. The 23rd had also seen the arrival of the year's first **Barn Swallows**, with 2 at Budworth Mere. A sub-adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Neumann's Flash on the 25th, the same day that the last **Jack Snipe** reported for the spring was on Ashton's Flash and 3 **Mandarin Ducks** began a sequence of appearances at Budworth Mere. Sightings of **Western Marsh Harriers** had continued through the month, with 3 seen at Ashton's Flash on the 26th, and a single **Red Kite** passed over Witton Mill on the 27th. The first **House Martin** was at Budworth Mere on the 27th, and a **Willow Warbler** was back at Neumann's Flash on the 28th. A visit to tilled fields at Higher Marston on the 29th revealed the first **Northern Wheatear** and **White Wagtail** of the year along with 28 **Meadow Pipits**.

APRIL is usually the best birding month at M&WF, although this year wet, windy and often unseasonably cold conditions meant it felt slower than normal. Other than a pair of **Mandarin Ducks** present at Budworth Mere until mid month, the first notable sighting was not until the 4th when a **Great White Egret** flew over Ashton's Flash. The 7th produced the first **Eurasian Reed Warbler** and the 8th an early **Common Grasshopper Warbler** at Haydn's Pool (present until at least the 23rd) and 2 female **Northern Wheatears** at Higher Marston. **Egyptian Geese** are more usually associated with late summer and autumn, so 1 at Neumann's Flash on the 9th was noteworthy. An immature **Black-legged Kittiwake** was a great find at Budworth Mere on

the 10th, and it hung around on-and-off until the 12th. The 10th had also seen at least 1200 **Sand Martins** over the mere. A **Sedge Warbler** was back on Ashton's Flash on the 11th. The year's only **Common Redstart** was seen briefly along the Trent and Mersey Canal on the 12th. On the same day an early **Eurasian Hobby** went over Haydn's Pool, another **Common Grasshopper Warbler** was at Dairy House Meadows (still there to the 24th), the first



Black-legged Kittiwake, Budworth Mere © Greg Baker

Common Sandpiper was at Budworth Mere, and **Northern Wheatears** and **White Wagtails** began a period of obvious passage at Higher Marston, with at least six different individuals of the former and four of the latter seen. Wheatears were also by the sailing club at Budworth Mere from the 14th when there were also 3 male **Western Yellow Wagtails** (plus 2 'Channel' Wagtail types) and 7 **White Wagtails** there. On the 16th an **Arctic Tern** began a two day stint at Budworth Mere, and the flock of **White Wagtails** by the sailing club had grown to ten. On the same day a **Whimbrel** flew over Ashton's Flash, the first of only a few sightings in a very poor year for them. The first **Common Whitethroat** was pretty much on cue at Dairy House Meadows on the 18th. The last spring sightings of **Northern Wheatears** and **Western Yellow Wagtails** by the sailing club were on the 19th. The earliest **Common Swift** was over the Witton Flashes on the 20th, when there was also a **Common Grasshopper Warbler** at Ashton's Flash



'Channel' Yellow Wagtail, Budworth Mere © Greg Baker

and another in the Forge area on the 21st. On the latter date an immature **Red Kite** was seen over both Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes. **Garden Warblers** were back near Wincham Mound and at Carden's Ferry Bridge by the 23rd. The 24th was one of the month's better days, with a **Lesser Whitethroat** between Neumann's Flash and Dairy House Meadows, plus a male **Whinchat**, a male **Mandarin Duck** and another flyover **Whimbrel** at Ashton's Flash, and the year's first definite **Common Tern** at Budworth

Mere. A **Pied Avocet** was at Neumann's Flash on the 25th with 2 there on the 27th. Towards the end of the month it was clear that the unprecedented series of **Western Marsh Harrier** sightings were culminating in a pair of immatures holding territory on Ashton's Flash. One even flushed a drake **Garganey** from there on the 27th, which unfortunately couldn't be relocated. A poor spring for waders was highlighted by the month's only **Dunlin**, seen in flight at Ashton's Flash on the 29th.

MAY 1st saw the arrival of the first **Common Cuckoo** at Ashton's Flash, and up to four then became regular around the west end of the flashes and less often by Budworth Mere. The 1st also saw the second (and last) **Lesser Whitethroat** of the year, this time at Carey Park, 2 **Whimbrel** and a **Pied Avocet** over Ashton's Flash, and the last **Northern Wheatears** for the year at Higher Marston. A male **Whinchat** was at Ashton's Flash on the 2nd, and a drake **Mandarin Duck** again at Ashton's Flash on the 3rd. A flock of 6 **Little Egrets** passed over

Ashton's Flash on the 5th, when the same site also held a female **Whinchat**. A report was received of 2 **Garganey** present at Neumann's Flash on the 6th. A dire spell for passage waders finally ended on the 7th when 81 **Black-tailed Godwits** arrived onto Ashton's Flash along with the year's only **Ruff** and 2 more **Whimbrel** also passed through. 2 **Great White Egrets** were at Ashton's Flash on the 8th. What was probably the year's best bird was the **Little Tern** seen briefly by a single observer at Neumann's Flash on the 10th, the first ever for the flashes. Meanwhile, the **Western Marsh Harriers** continued to be seen daily at Ashton's Flash.



Western Marsh Harrier, Ashton's Flash © Marc Ratcliffe

Otherwise it was rather quiet mid month, although 2 **Egyptian Geese** were at Budworth Mere on the 14th and a **Red Kite** flew over Dairy House Meadows on the 15th. 3 **Common Ringed Plovers** and 3 **Dunlin** were briefly on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on the 17th, the same day that a male **Greater Scaup** made a surprise appearance at Neumann's Flash, staying until the 26th (with a few days break in between). **Pied Avocets** continued their occasional appearance at the Witton Flashes with 3 on the 21st, then 1 or 2 seen though to mid June. A

male **Mandarin Duck** was at Budworth Mere on the 24th. Another **Common Ringed Plover** made a brief appearance at Neumann's Flash on the 30th and on the same day a pair of **Pied Avocets** arrived onto Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere and were still present next day.

During **JUNE** it was obvious that the **Western Marsh Harriers** on Ashton's Flash were nesting, with food passes seemingly confirming that young had been hatched. By the end of the month however it was clear the breeding attempt had ultimately failed; the pair's lack of experience the most likely cause. On a more positive note, the occasional presence of a male **Mandarin Duck** on Ashton's Flash during the spring was most likely linked to the discovery of a female at Witton Mill Bridge on the 10th joined by two ducklings from the 19th. If they did actually nest within the patch boundaries that would be a first for M&WF. Over at Budworth Mere there had been 2 males on the 12th and a pair on the 28th. Earlier in the month, there had been more potential breeding intrigue with a male **European Stonechat** at Ashton's Flash on the 1st. It was seen again on the 22nd. A **Red Kite** was photographed at the Lion Salt Works on the 5th and a late **Whimbrel** headed over Ashton's Flash on the 9th. Egrets began to appear more regularly from mid month, with a **Great White Egret** at Ashton's Flash on the 15th, then at Neumann's Flash on the 29th and 30th and also at Budworth Mere on the latter date. There were also 3 **Little Egrets** at Budworth Mere on the 21st and 5 at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on the 30th. **Eurasian Hobby** sightings had been on the increase at Ashton's Flash mid month, and a patch record of



Female and young Mandarin Ducks, Witton Mill © Greg Baker

3 were present on the 19th. A male **Common Pochard** was a surprise summer visitor to Budworth Mere on the 20th, when there were also 4 **Common Terns** present, which remained until the 24th. With no late winter or spring sightings, a **Green Sandpiper** at Ashton's Flash on the 24th was the first of the year.

Into **JULY** and the **Mandarin Duck** family were still present at Witton Mill Bridge until the 16th, when the female moved on leaving the juveniles to remain for the rest of the month. Egrets became a regular sight across the patch but more noticeable at the Witton Flashes, with



Little Egrets, Neumann's Flash © Stuart Jackson

notably 2 **Great White Egrets** at Neumann's Flash on the 4th and 6 **Little Egrets** at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes from the 1st-3rd. A pair of **Mandarin Ducks** were at Budworth Mere up to the 11th when they were joined by a second male to the month end. A high summer count of 41 **Great Crested Grebes** were at Budworth Mere on the 2nd, 4 **Common Terns** were again at Budworth Mere in the 4th, and 7 **Little Ringed Plovers** at Ashton's Flash on the 5th. A **Pied Avocet** was on Kid Brook Spit on the 7th and again from on the 11th and 12th. The last

Common Cuckoo report of the year was at Dairy House Meadows on the 9th. Ten **Common Sandpipers** were at Neumann's Flash on the 10th, with a **Common Greenshank** at Budworth Mere on the same day being the first of an excellent string of records, particularly given the dearth of other passage waders. More seen later in the month were individuals at Neumann's Flash on the 10th and at both Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on the 29th. There was a scattering of **Green Sandpiper** sightings throughout the month but never more than two at any one time. 4 **Egyptian Geese** were at Neumann's Flash on the 13th and back again there and later at Budworth Mere on the 17th. The best sighting of the summer was a breeding plumaged **Western Cattle Egret** that spent much of the morning at Neumann's Flash on the 16th. A juvenile **Pied Avocet** was also at Neumann's Flash on the 16th, and a **Western Osprey** was picked up in flight over Comberbach on the 17th being mobbed by an Eurasian Oystercatcher and having obviously just flown over Budworth Mere. Another good count of 6 **Little Egrets** were at Ashton's Flash on the 22nd.

AUGUST started with the unexpected arrival of 13 migrant **Pied Avocets** onto Neumann's Flash on the 1st. Three **European Green Woodpeckers** were on Ashton's Flash on the 2nd, including 2 juveniles. The juvenile **Mandarin Ducks** maintained their stay at Witton Mill Bridge for most of the month, and 1 was also at Budworth Mere from the 2nd-5th. The month usually witnesses a build up of wildfowl at the Witton Flashes, which this year included 580 **Mallard** on the 5th and 71 **Gadwall** on the 28th. There were 2 **Great White**



Black Tern, Budworth Mere © Greg Baker

Egrets at Ashton's Flash on the 8th. Given the absence of any during spring passage, the arrival of 3 moulting adult **Black Terns** at Budworth Mere on the 12th was significant. A **Common Ringed Plover** was also at the mere the same day, followed by a juvenile at Neumann's Flash from the 19th-21st and another individual at Budworth Mere on the 29th. 17 **Black-tailed Godwits** made a visit to Budworth Mere on the 15th. A mobile flock of 4 **Egyptian Geese** had roamed the main patch sites during the month, with 6 seen from the 21st onwards. At the end of the month, a male and two juvenile **Western Yellow Wagtails** were an attraction behind Budworth Mere on the 28th, 2 **Common Greenshanks** were at Ashton's Flash on the 29th, and 2 **Green Sandpipers** on the east side of Budworth Mere on the 30th.

SEPTEMBER contained the usual mixture of departing summer visitors, early winter arrivals and passage migrants. A **Common Greenshank** at Neumann's Flash on the 1st and a **Whinchat** at Ashton's Flash on the 4th were examples of the latter. 2 more **Common Greenshanks** were at Ashton's Flash on the 6th (another was there on the 19th) along with a **Great White Egret**. The first **Northern Pintail** of the autumn was at Ashton's Flash on the 7th, with up to 3 present mid month. Also on the 7th, 110 **Common House Martins** were recorded migrating over



Yellow-legged Gull, Neumann's Flash © Malc Curtin

Ashton's Flash. Up to 4 **Egyptian Geese** moved between Budworth Mere and Neumann's Flash up to mid month with just 2 remaining into October. A third year **Yellow-legged Gull** was a good find at Neumann's Flash on the 10th and on the same day a juvenile **Black Tern** was at Budworth Mere, staying until the 12th. On the 11th a **Jack Snipe** was watched arriving onto Ashton's Flash from the east. A classic paradox on the 13th saw the last **Common Swift** of the year at Ashton's Flash as the

first **Pink-footed Geese** of the autumn moved over Higher Marston. Morning counts of **Meadow Pipits** noted from Witton Mill peaked at 315 on the 15th, and on the 19th four early **Redwings** were at Marbury Country Park. A pair of **Mandarin Ducks** were at Budworth Mere on the 23rd, when there were also 15 **Little Grebes** on Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes. The year's only **Tree Pipit** passed over Ashton's Flash on the 25th, and on the same day a young male **Common Scoter** was a surprise find at Neumann's Flash, remaining there until the 30th. A pair of **European Stonechats** were back at Ashton's Flash from the 26th, with 2 more there on the 27th. Sightings at Ashton's Flash on the 29th included a **Great White Egret**, 2 **European Golden Plovers**, and another arriving **Jack Snipe**.

OCTOBER proved to be rather disappointing for scarce migrants. **Green Sandpipers** still at Ashton's Flash on the 2nd and 4th, and a late **Eurasian Hobby** at Budworth Mere on the 8th were of note. 2 **Great White Egrets** were at Budworth Mere on the 4th. The sometimes elusive pair of **European Stonechats** remained at Ashton's Flash throughout, with 3 there on the 6th-10th. Some interest was provided early in the month by a mass build up of geese, which reached a high of 1030 **Canada Geese** and 456 **Greylag Geese** at Budworth Mere on the 7th. The Greylag count was at the time the highest ever for M&WF but was just eclipsed by the 458 roosting at Ashton's Flash on the 10th. On the 11th, a total of 37 **Eurasian Skylarks** were noted flying south over the main patch sites. On the same date a flock of 19 **Whooper Swans** arrived



Whooper Swans, Neumann's Flash © Greg Baker

onto Neumann's Flash, with 2 also seen there on the 13th and 18th. Also at Ashton's Flash there was a **Great White Egret** on the 13th, 2 juvenile **Northern Pintails** on the 15th, a **Brambling** on the 18th, a patch record of 9051 **Common Woodpigeons** overhead on the 23rd, and 2 **European Golden Plovers** over on the 24th. Finally for the month, 26 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Budworth Mere on the 28th.

On **NOVEMBER** 1st four more **Whooper Swans** were over Marbury Country Park and then at Neumann's Flash, and a pair of **Egyptian Geese** were at Budworth Mere along with a high count of 1150 **Black-headed Gulls**. The geese were also at Neumann's Flash on the 4th and 19th. Following a regional influx, birders were on the lookout for **Hawfinches** at Marbury Country Park, and one was duly found on the 5th, with 4 then sighted on the 8th following which they became an ongoing local winter attraction. On the 6th a colour ringed immature **Great White Egret** (from a colony on the Somerset Levels) was at Budworth Mere, and at Neumann's Flash there were 2 drake **Northern Pintails** and less welcome the first ever **Ring-necked Parakeets** for the Witton Flashes. 2 **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Budworth Mere on the 8th. The regular pair of **European Stonechats** appeared to have moved on from Ashton's Flash after the 11th. Also on the 11th, a patch record of 3500 **Pink-footed Geese** were noted passing overhead in various large skeins, another 5 **Whooper Swans** arrived onto Neumann's Flash (with 2 still present on the 12th), and a drake **Northern Pintail** was on Ashton's Flash (remaining until the 15th). A **Jack Snipe** was visible on Ashton's Flash from the bund on the 13th. Although the **Hawfinches** remained, the end of the month was rather quiet, although of note was another **Great White Egret** at Budworth Mere on the 20th and a male **Brambling** at Marbury Country Park on the 21st.



Great White Egret, Budworth Mere © Stuart Jackson



Hawfinch, Marbury Country Park © Kev Bruen

During **DECEMBER** the **Hawfinches** were still present throughout at Marbury Country Park, with up to 3 reported but more usually just singletons on view. They could however be very evasive. 3 **Whooper Swans** were at Budworth Mere on the 2nd and the presumed same trio were at Neumann's Flash the next day. On the 3rd a **Great White Egret** settled in for a stay around the Marston Flashes through to the end of the month and sometimes visited Budworth Mere. Two **Little Egrets** were at Budworth Mere on the 6th. A pair of **European Stonechats** were seen at Higher Marston on the 11th, when there was also a **Scandinavian Herring Gull** at Budworth Mere. A wintering **Eurasian Bittern** finally

arrived back at the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere on the 13th, although it only showed occasionally thereafter. A female **Common Scoter** was a good winter sighting at Budworth Mere on the 15th. A **Little Egret** joined the Great White at the Marston Flashes on the 16th. Mid month up to 7 male **Common Goldeneyes** were at Budworth Mere, where usually it's females or immatures that predominate, and 22 **Goosanders** were at Marston Flashes on the 20th with 27 at Budworth Mere on the 30th. A count of 32 **Eurasian Skylarks** was made at Higher Marston on the 23rd, and the pair of **European Stonechats** were back at Ashton's Flash on the 24th after a six week absence. 2 **Great White Egrets** were at Neumann's Flash on the 30th, no doubt including the roving individual from the Marston Flashes. Also on the 30th there were 7 **Common Pochard** at Neumann's Flash with 3 more at Marston Flashes. The **Common Starling** murmurations at the year end were not quite as spectacular as in past years but still numbered around 15,000 at Neumann's Flash and 12,000 at Budworth Mere.

Weather review

It was a wet and mild start to the year, turning very cold mid January and with the first snow of the year overnight on Jan 15th-16th and temperatures down to -7 overnight on 17th-18th. Storm Isha brought gale force winds on the 21st followed by Storm Jocelyn a few days later and it was generally mild thereafter. February was the wettest on record with above average temperatures, but becoming much colder (although still wet) at the end of the month and into early March. Drier but still cold conditions followed, with a cutting easterly wind to mid month. It was then milder with southerly winds from the 16th and then colder with northerly winds from the 22nd but always remaining wet. Early April continued wet and often windy but mild with frequent low pressure systems moving up from the south-west, then much colder with below average temperatures from mid month. It wasn't until mid May that temperatures finally began to reach average levels with a dry period mid month, before more heavy rain in the third week followed by unsettled conditions with a few drier periods into early June. It remained unseasonably cold with the odd heavy rain downpour to mid June before hot and settled weather finally became a feature through to the month end. It was cooler and damp from early to mid July with hot weather returning for a few days from the 18th-20th and a mini-heatwave at the end of the month extending into early August, along with the odd overnight thunderstorm. Less rain followed and there was another hot spell mid month before low pressure again dominated from mid August, including the passage of Storm Lilian, before becoming warmer and drier at the month end. Early September was relatively unsettled but nonetheless temperatures reached above 25°C. There was heavy rain again mid month then another period of warm weather dominated by high pressure and an easterly airflow through to the 21st, following which there were more heavy downpours through to the end of the month. October began with high pressure and an easterly airflow, but it was mild and wet again by mid month, with some overnight frost and even local displays of the Northern Lights. Storm Ashley (the first of the autumn) moved through on Oct 17th-18th, followed by calmer, relatively warm but gloomy conditions dominated by ant-cyclonic systems which prevailed into mid November. There was snow and ice from the 18th, then local flooding from Storm Bert on the 23rd, but then very mild from the end of November to early December. Storm Darragh brought more heavy rain and damaging winds on 7th-8th, although it was then relatively settled and mild but with more strong winds from the 21st-22nd and on New Year's Eve.

Migrant arrival and departure dates for 2024

TABLE 1

Arrival and departure dates for species arriving in the spring and departing in the autumn

	Arrival 2024	Average arrival 2018-2023	Departure 2024	Average departure 2018-2023
Oystercatcher	Jan 29th	Jan 31st	July 23rd	Aug 10th
Pied Avocet	Mar 23rd	Mar 29th	N/A	N/A
Little Ringed Plover	Mar 22nd	Mar 26th	Aug 12th	Sept 5th
Whimbrel	Apr 16th	Apr 19th	N/A	N/A
Black-tailed Godwit	May 6th	Apr 7th	Oct 28th	Oct 20th
Common Sandpiper	Apr 12th	Apr 12th	Sept 5th	Sept 3rd
Common Redshank	Mar 5th	Mar 15th	Nov 8th	Sept 19th
Common Tern	Apr 24th	Apr 28th	Aug 9th	Sept 26th
Common Cuckoo	May 1st	Apr 27th	N/A	N/A
Common Swift	Apr 20th	Apr 26th	Sept 13th	Aug 25th
Eurasian Hobby	Apr 12th	May 2nd	Oct 8th	Sept 8th
Sand Martin	Mar 7th	Mar 10th	Sept 12th	Sept 9th
Barn Swallow	Mar 23rd	Mar 29th	Nov 8th	Oct 6th
House Martin	Mar 27th	Apr 1st	Oct 15th	Sept 26th
Willow Warbler	Mar 28th	Apr 1st	Sept 6th	Sept 16th
Common Chiffchaff	Feb 23rd	Mar 6th	Nov 15th	Oct 20th
Sedge Warbler	Apr 11th	Apr 16th	Sept 7th	Aug 9th
Reed Warbler	Apr 6th	Apr 9th	Sept 27th	Sept 12th
Grasshopper Warbler	Apr 8th	Apr 19th	N/A	N/A
Eurasian Blackcap	Mar 25th	Mar 26th	Nov 8th	Oct 10th
Garden Warbler	Apr 23rd	Apr 21st	Aug 14th	Aug 19th
Common Whitethroat	Apr 18th	Apr 17th	Aug 14th	Sept 8th
Whinchat	Apr 24th	Apr 21st	N/A	N/A
Northern Wheatear	Mar 29th	Apr 6th	N/A	N/A
Yellow Wagtail	Apr 14th	Apr 14th	Aug 28th	Aug 31st
White Wagtail	Mar 29th	Apr 10th	N/A	N/A

TABLE 2

Departure and arrival dates for wintering species

	Departure 2024	Average departure 2018-2023	Arrival 2024	Average arrival 2018-2023
Pink-footed Goose	Apr 11th	Feb 23rd	Sept 13th	Oct 3rd
Common Goldeneye	Apr 8th	Mar 24th	Oct 27th	Sept 3rd
Eurasian Bittern	Mar 13th	Mar 10th	Dec 13th	Nov 8th
Eurasian Curlew	May 17th	Apr 27th	June 19th	June 19th
Redwing	Mar 22nd	Apr 9th	Sept 19th	Oct 2nd
Fieldfare	Feb 19th	Apr 8th	Oct 23rd	Oct 20th
Eurasian Siskin	Apr 17th	Mar 31st	Oct 17th	Sept 11th

Note: Those entries considered to be N/A in the above tables are due to the lack of meaningful data available, in the most part as that species is either usually not present or simply much more difficult to record (such as with Common Cuckoo) within the relevant period.

TABLE 3

Monthly maxima for selected wetland species in 2024

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Canada Goose	620	348	131	108	64	61	58	910	855	1042	327	408
Greylag Goose	200	38	16	23	12	15	41	273	377	458	139	134
Mute Swan	11	16	25	21	13	13	20	29	36	30	25	14
Shelduck	14	10	9	10	16	11	9	3	2	2	7	8
Shoveler	44	30	19	22	4	8	8	14	46	46	38	31
Gadwall	10	34	5	7	20	22	24	71	50	23	19	13
Wigeon	235	35	231	2	0	0	0	0	19	96	154	133
Mallard	138	111	51	45	71	130	243	580	308	118	95	95
Pintail	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	2	1
Teal	80	34	28	8	1	7	9	137	280	26	41	48
Pochard	4	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	3	10
Tufted Duck	70	73	59	48	24	22	31	33	30	30	82	76
Goldeneye	8	6	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	8
Goosander	30	20	10	3	1	0	0	5	4	10	13	32
Little Grebe	5	3	5	8	8	7	4	12	15	10	3	4
Gt. Crested Grebe	40	28	30	20	19	45	46	36	30	24	23	28
Grey Heron	21	23	13	35*	13	8	6	6	9	9	4	6
Cormorant	18	19	7	4	5	4	6	13	21	27	31	36
Water Rail	5	6	6	12	10	11	6	4	9	6	7	7
Moorhen	9	10	11	14	13	12	12	11	15	15	9	8
Coot	107	86	50	24	26	75	106	149	75	123	58	66
Lapwing	225	350	33	7	19	89	249	344	285	203	250	370
Curlew	105	157	83	48	1	2	46	67	92	94	97	92
Common Snipe	25	2	4	2	3	1	2	2	13	18	4	15
Black-headed Gull	100	380	280	120	6	15	400	500	500	280	1150	270

The above counts relate to all the Marbury & Witton Flashes sites

Juveniles hatched and raised on site are only included in the above totals once fledged.

* The Grey Heron count for April is based on estimated occupied nests at the heronry.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

The taxonomy of these species accounts follows British Ornithological Union (BOU) guidelines. The list of species includes Egyptian Goose, Mandarin Duck and Feral Pigeon, all of which may or may not be of feral origin. Without any direct evidence of them being escapes however they are included here as they are similarly within the annual Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society (CAWOS) reports.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

The regular wintering flock at Budworth Mere reached 530 on Jan 8th and 620 on Jan 18th during a very cold spell. 348 were still there on Feb 2nd and 110 on Mar 22nd which was the last three figure count in the first half of the year. Meanwhile numbers struggled to reach double figures at Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes early in the year until 190 were counted at the dawn roost on Feb 12th, down to 131 by Mar 11th and 88 on Apr 8th.

During the breeding season there were 3 nests at Neumann's Flash by mid Apr and at least 2 pairs at Ashton's Flash. The adults suffered from regular harassment by the resident male Mute Swan at Neumann's Flash, and one was killed on Apr 23rd. 5 goslings had hatched at Ashton's Flash by May 6th and there were 3 broods at Neumann's Flash by mid May (of 3, 2 and 1), when also 2 broods of 4 on Marston Flashes. Only the Marston Flashes broods survived beyond the gosling stage, and similarly a new brood of 4 on Neumann's Flashes in early June had disappeared (presumed predated) by mid month.

52 adults were noted across Ashton's Flash and Neumann's Flash on May 6th and 46 had returned to Budworth Mere by June 10th, and roughly this number remained there through to mid July. Notably absent from the Witton Flashes in July with just a single seen on July 17th and 2 on 25th. The first three figure count for late summer was 113 at Budworth Mere on Aug 2nd, with 202 there and another 113 at Neumann's Flash on Aug 8th, increasing to 910 at the Neumann's Flash dawn roost by Aug 19th. Up to 50% of those roosting at the flash in Aug then spent the day around Budworth Mere. Between 550 and 855 roosted at Neumann's Flash each evening from late Aug to late Sept. Notably, 600 were at Budworth Mere on Sept 27th, then 820 on Oct 2nd (when 710 had earlier roosted at Ashton's Flash), followed by a year high of 1030 on Oct 7th. By the end of Oct onwards less than 200 were roosting on Neumann's Flash, however 261 were there on Dec 9th but with only a few by the end of the year. At this time numbers at Budworth Mere were affected by shooting in Kid Brook Fields, but nonetheless 314 were there on Nov 26th and 394 on Dec 9th.

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*

It proved to be a record breaking year for this species, starting with cold conditions during Jan prompting the regular flock at Budworth Mere to reach three figures, with highs of 172 on the 18th and c200 on the 26th. A reduction in Feb saw just 38 there on the 12th and again on the 23rd, with no double figure counts there after the 26th. Over at the Witton Flashes there were no more than 11 from Jan to Mar, although 15 were noted on Apr 8th and 23 adults on the 14th.

Two pairs had established themselves at Ashton's Flash by early Mar and the first brood of 7 goslings was seen there on Apr 9th. 9 goslings there from the 14th possibly included some from a different brood, as adults and goslings often form creches at breeding sites. A new brood of 5 were also at Ashton's Flash on May 9th. A pair also nested at Budworth Mere, although they only hatched a single gosling first seen on May 15th. 8 of the goslings at Ashton's Flash had fledged by mid June.

Post breeding flocks began to congregate at Budworth Mere from late July, and 47 were there by Aug 2nd. 76 then roosted at Neumann's Flash on Aug 5th. Numbers grew steadily throughout Aug and Sept at both the Neumann's Flash dawn roost and at Budworth Mere during the day, breaking all previous patch records. 273 at Budworth Mere on Aug 28th was at the time the highest ever count for the patch, whilst 267 at the Neumann's Flash roost at dawn on Sept 10th was the highest ever count for the Witton Flashes. Records continued to be broken seemingly on a daily basis throughout Sept and into Oct, culminating in 456 at Budworth Mere on Oct 7th (the new record for the mere) and 458 at Ashton's Flash on Oct 10th being the new overall patch record. Thereafter there was a gradual reduction, and 139 were roosting at Ashton's Flash by Nov 1st. 113 were still at Budworth Mere on Nov 8th (when 81 had roosted at Ashton's Flash) and 134 on Dec 2nd, but just 42 by Dec 11th and no more than 15 by the end of the month. There were no double figure counts at the Witton Flashes during Dec.

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE *Anser brachyrhynchus*

During Jan, 70 passed over Budworth Mere on the 7th, quickly followed by 17 over Neumann's Flash and 73 over Higher Marston on the 8th. No more overhead skeins were reported until 152 flew north-west over Budworth Mere on the 27th, followed by another hundred or so west over Marbury Country Park on the 29th, then 58 south-east over Witton Mill and another 48 north-west over Neumann's Flash on the 30th, and 110 in two skeins south-west over Neumann's Flash on the 31st. Also in Jan, 10 were with the goose flocks at Budworth Mere from the 8th-10th, with 3 still present to the 15th and just 1 through to the 20th. Also an injured individual was on Ashton's Flash on the 30th.

As is usual, reports were much reduced by Feb. 1 passed over Budworth Mere on Feb 9th, then following a report of a flock heard flying over Marbury Country Park during darkness on Feb 28th, 19 flew north-east over Budworth Mere on Mar 1st. Finally for the spring, 1 flew north over Budworth Mere on Mar 11th and 13 went east over Higher Marston on Mar 17th. A late individual was then in the fields north of Budworth Mere on Apr 11th.

As has been the case in recent years, overhead movements in the autumn were more pronounced than those during the early months of the year, however this year they were earlier than normal (typically not until early Oct) and also more numerous. The first autumn sighting was of 280 flying south-east over Marston on Sept 13th, following which a small flock passed over Marbury Country Park on Sept 15th. Further Sept records were of 62 over the Witton Flashes on Sept 17th, 148 over Ashton's Flash and 45 over Marbury Country Park on Sept 18th (all heading north), 280 south and 425 north over Ashton's Flash on Sept 19th, 14 north over Ashton's Flash on Sept 24th, 118 over the Witton Flashes on Sept 25th, and 40 south over Neumann's Flash on Sept 29th. Into Oct, counts of more than 100 were of 250 over

Budworth Mere (3 skeins) on Oct 4th, 155 south over Ashton's Flash on Oct 12th, 140 east over Dairy House Meadows on Oct 13th, 200 south over Ashton's Flash on Oct 13th and another 290 on Oct 14th, 200 on Oct 22nd, 213 on Oct 26th, and 234 on Oct 29th. Most of these autumn movements are typically of skeins high overhead as they move between wintering grounds in the Dee and Mersey Estuaries and the Lancashire Mosses with those in East Anglia. However skeins of up to 500 seen heading low over Marbury Country Park from Nov 6th-13th were probably from flocks that had been recorded feeding locally near Stretton and Lostock Gralam. A separate massive movement early morning on Nov 11th saw at least 3000 pass over the Witton Flashes and another 500 or so over Marbury Country Park, all heading east. This was by far the highest ever day count for the patch. 1 briefly joined the Canada Geese at Budworth Mere on Nov 16th, and was the only grounded individual noted during this period. None were then reported following a cold snap in mid Nov until 225 flew north-west over Higher Marston on Dec 11th, followed by c50 over Neumann's Flash on Dec 12th, 35 on the 14th and 53 on the 20th. 46 passing south-west over Marbury Country Park on Dec 23rd proved to be the last reported for the year.

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Following the demise of the post-breeding gatherings at Neumann's Flash, most attention has now shifted to the fortunes of the resident and breeding populations. A pair were briefly back on territory at Ashton's Flash on Jan 25th and more permanently from Feb 23rd, with nest building commencing in mid Mar. At Marston Flashes, the resident pair were nest building by Feb 12th, and at Budworth Mere the pair were visiting their usual nest site in the Coward Reedbed from the end of Feb. Pairs were also nesting at Eyres Pit from early Mar and at the Forge/Witton Brooks confluence from the end of Mar. Another pair nested at Anderton Nature Park (although details were scarce), and finally a pair moved in to nest on Stilt Island at Neumann's Flash from mid Apr. A total of 7 pairs were therefore breeding across the patch.



Mute Swan, Neumann's Flash, 24th May 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe

The first cygnets began to appear during May and the final total hatched was 29. These were 6 at Budworth Mere, 6 at Ashton's Flash, 5 at Eyres Pit, 4 at Witton Brook (from 9 eggs laid), 4 at Anderton Nature Park, 2 at Marston Flashes and 2 at Neumann's Flash. Unfortunately, the brood at Ashton's Flash suffered from an apparent lack of food or possibly from predation, and all had disappeared by the end of May. The brood at Witton Brook was also down to 2 by mid May. The Eyres Pit brood did not hatch until the end of June (possibly from a second clutch) and were down from 5 to 3 by the end of July. The other pairs fared better. The experienced pair at Budworth Mere surprisingly lost one of their cygnets early on and another was rescued due to having a deformed neck. However the remaining 4 were still present with their parents through to the end of the year. One of the cygnets at Anderton Nature was also taken into care following a dog attack. The broods of 2 at Neumann's Flash and Marston Flashes and the remaining 3 cygnets at Eyres Pit and Anderton Nature Park plus the 2 at Witton Brook all made it to being fully fledged juveniles.

Notable site counts (including the resident pairs or family groups) were of up to 13 at Neumann's Flash at the end of Mar and 17 there on Apr 2nd, 18 at the Witton Flashes on Sept 4th, with 25 on Sept 10th, 20 still on Sept 20th and 17 to mid Oct. 9 were at Budworth Mere on Sept 13th in addition to the resident family.

WHOOPER SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

An excellent year, particularly during the autumn, and all the more encouraging given there were none reported in 2023. Although it was the only spring sighting, a flock of 30 which arrived onto Budworth Mere on the afternoon of Feb 26th was the second highest ever patch record. They were all adults apart from one immature. They only stayed for an hour or so before flying off south-west.



Whooper Swans, Budworth Mere, 26th February 2024 © Maggie Bullock



Whooper Swans, Budworth Mere, 26th February 2024 © Maggie Bullock

Autumn and early winter passage was undoubtedly the best ever, and began with 19 adults arriving onto Neumann's Flash early afternoon on Oct 11th, and remaining through to early evening when they departed to the south. On Oct 13th, 2 then flew onto Neumann's Flash and remained to mid afternoon at least. What may have been the same pair were then seen on Oct 18th flying over Dairy House Meadows before settling onto Ashton's Flash and later seen on Neumann's Flash. 4 more flew over Neumann's Flash and then Marbury Country Park on Nov 1st, and 5 adults were then at Neumann's Flash early morning only on Nov 11th, with 2 adults on Neumann's Flash late afternoon on Nov 12th. 3 were at Budworth Mere on Dec 2nd and were then seen at Neumann's Flash early morning only on the 3rd.

EGYPTIAN GOOSE *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Spring records were of 1 at Neumann's Flash on Apr 9th and a pair at Budworth Mere on May 14th. More typical summer wanderers were 4 on Neumann's Flash on July 13th, then again there early morning on July 17th and moving to Budworth Mere later the same day. 2 were at Neumann's Flash regularly from July 25th to Aug 5th, with 4 there from July 28th and seen most mornings to Aug 20th with occasional visits to Budworth Mere during the same period. A sighting of 4 at Higher Marston on Aug 17th suggests they may have been spending at least some of the day there. 2 were then at Neumann's Flash on Aug 21st when 4 were also at Budworth Mere, with all 6 seen together at Budworth Mere on Aug 26th, at Neumann's Flash on the 29th, and back at the mere on the 30th. 4 continued to visit Neumann's Flash and Budworth Mere through to Sept 6th, followed by 2 regularly at Budworth Mere from Sept 10th to Oct 7th, and also seen at Neumann's Flash on Sept 23rd. Presumably the same pair were

again on Neumann's Flash on Oct 15th and back at Budworth Mere from Oct 23rd to Nov 1st, also visiting Neumann's Flash on Nov 4th and the 19th.



Egyptian Geese with Canada Geese, Neumann's Flash, 14th August 2024 © Greg Baker

COMMON SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Although 10 were at Neumann's Flash on Jan 1st, only single figures were then reported until 11 were at Budworth Mere on Jan 18th during particularly cold conditions. 8 were then at Neumann's Flash (often displaying) and 4 at Budworth Mere on Jan 25th, with 12 at Neumann's Flash and 2 more at Budworth Mere on Jan 27th. The maximum count in Feb was of 8 at Neumann's Flash and 2 at Budworth Mere on Feb 26th. In Mar, 5 were at Neumann's Flash and 4 at Budworth Mere from Mar 6th-20th, with up to 8 around the patch (mostly at Neumann's Flash) by the end of the month.

By early Apr two pairs were presumed to be nesting around Budworth Mere and another at Higher Marston. 10 were on Neumann's Flash on May 6th and breeding was confirmed there on May 23rd when four ducklings were seen. However by the 27th they were down to three after which the family remained intact and present until July 16th. On May 30th a pair were seen at Budworth Mere with 6 ducklings, and on the same date 16 adults were present on the patch. 11 adults were in fields south-east of Budworth Mere on June 5th. The pair at Budworth Mere were left with just 2 youngsters from June 10th onwards until they all departed in mid July. Numbers are typically low in late summer, and there was just 1 at Budworth Mere on July 23rd and 1 at Neumann's Flash from July 25th to Aug 8th, joined by a juvenile on the 5th and another on the 8th and 9th. Thereafter 2 juveniles visited Budworth Mere on occasions through to Sept 3rd and were at Ashton's Flash on Sept 5th, with an adult alone at Budworth Mere on Aug 23rd. The 2 juveniles were back at Budworth Mere from Sept 20th to Oct 3rd, and occasionally roosted with geese at the Witton Flashes. 1 was at Neumann's Flash on Oct 15th and 23rd with 2 there on 31st, then 4 on Nov 4th (when there

were also 3 at Budworth Mere), increasing to 7 by the 19th. Up to 6 were then at Neumann's Flash through to mid Dec, and sometimes also at Budworth Mere, with 8 at Neumann's Flash from Dec 20th-30th.

MANDARIN DUCK *Aix galericulata*

Following a relatively quiet year in 2023, this year maintained the longer term trend for increased sightings and even involved the probable first ever breeding record for the patch. It began with a pair at Budworth Mere under the heronry on Feb 16th. However there were no further sightings until two males and a female were again at the mere on Mar 25th. Being typically elusive, they were then only reported occasionally through to Apr 17th. Auspiciously, a male was on Ashton's Flash early morning only on Apr 24th and again on May 3rd, with a female nearby at Witton Mill Bridge on June 10th. Presumably the same female was then seen at the bridge with 2 ducklings from June 19th to July 16th at least. Although mobile enough to have travelled from outside its boundaries, this is the first time young have been seen on the patch. The juveniles (a male and a female) were still present to Aug 28th, although often hidden from view.



Juvenile male and juvenile female Mandarin Duck, Witton Mill Bridge, 25th July 2024 © Greg Baker

Meanwhile at Budworth Mere, a male was seen on May 24th, with 2 there on June 12th, and a female on the 14th. There were further very infrequent sightings of individuals until a pair were then regularly seen together from June 28th to July 11th, with 3 (2 males) there from July 12th to Aug 1st, with just 1 remaining on Aug 2nd-5th. The final record anywhere for the year was of a pair at Budworth Mere on Sept 23rd, and winter records remain surprisingly rare.

GARGANEY *Spatula querquedula*

Only two sightings this year and both were brief and by single observers, Firstly a male was flushed from Ashton's Flash by a Western Marsh Harrier on Apr 27th (DH) and then another 2 were reportedly on Neumann's Flash on May 6th (ANO).

NORTHERN SHOVELER *Spatula clypeata*

As usual, the majority of records were from the patch stronghold of Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes. An unexpected influx at the end of Dec 2023 saw 44 at the former on Jan 1st and 40 were still there on the 27th, down to 24 from Feb 12th. 19 were then across both flashes from Mar 1st-7th but just 6 by Mar 28th. There were surprisingly 22 for one day only on Apr 2nd and 20 on Apr 12th but less than 10 between these dates. Up to 4 remained (mostly on Ashton's Flash) into mid May, which included an obvious pair. This pair (but most often just the male) were sometimes visible on Ashton's Flash through to the end of June and nesting may have been attempted but was not proven. The highest mid summer count at the flashes was of 8 on Ashton's Flash on June 26th, with 14 there from mid to the end of Aug. An influx in early Sept saw 30 across Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on the 3rd, increasing to 45 on the 10th, with year highs of 46 noted on the 23rd and again on Oct 2nd. These relatively low autumn flocks were undoubtedly a result of high water levels at the flashes. 32 were at Neumann's Flash on Oct 28th and 38 there on Nov 6th, slowly reducing to 25 by Dec 6th. 18 were usually present at Neumann's Flash during Dec before 31 were recorded on the 23rd.

Scarcer as is the norm at Budworth Mere. Early in the year there were 6 on Jan 16th, 1 on Feb 9th, 1 on Mar 21st, a pair from Mar 25th-27th, and 1 on Apr 4th. Summer sightings at the mere are unusual, so 4 on June 14th, 2 on July 4th and 12th, 8 on July 22nd with 7 still present on the 26th and 1 remaining to Aug 2nd were notable. Autumn records were of 4 on Aug 23rd, 2 on Oct 18th and finally a female on Oct 31st.

GADWALL *Mareca strepera*

A fairly typical spread of records across the year. The first double figure count was of 10 at Neumann's Flash on Jan 25th, followed by a sudden increase to 34 on Feb 1st, with 24 still by Feb 15th but only 1 or 2 at the end of Feb. At Budworth Mere there were 6 on Jan 8th, 2 on Jan 18th, and 3 on Feb 12th. Numbers remained low at the flashes in Mar through to mid May with no more than 6 reported and often none present. There were also a few records from Budworth Mere during this period, including 3 from Mar 22nd -27th, and 6 on Apr 5th. 20 arrived onto Neumann's Flash on May 16th for a brief stay.

There were no more than 9 anywhere during the summer other than 22 at Neumann's Flash on June 26th, until an influx saw 24 at Neumann's Flash on July 29th and around that number remaining into early Aug. Further increases there saw 40 by Aug 9th and 71 on Aug 28th, the year's highest count. Around 50 were at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes in early Sept, down to 33 from the 11th-23rd and around 20 from the end of Sept into early Oct. but only just reaching double figures mid month. However, 22 arrived on Oct 28th with 23 present on the 31st. Meanwhile, 4 at Budworth Mere on Sept 20th were the first there since late June. 1 was

also at the mere on Oct 7th, 3 on Oct 11th and again on Nov 11th, and 5 on Nov 22nd. At the Witton Flashes there were no more than 10 in Nov until 19 were seen at Neumann's Flash on the 19th, but following 13 there on Dec 4th there were no further double figure counts. 2 were on pools at Higher Marston on Nov 27th where they are notably scarce.

EURASIAN WIGEON *Mareca penelope*

The nomadic wintering flock numbered 235 at Neumann's Flash on Jan 1st, then 144 on 10th and 162 on 12th, with all of the latter arriving from high to the south early morning. However there were no further sightings there until 64 dropped in at midday on Jan 25th and at least 200 were still there on Jan 27th. A few were present on occasions at Budworth Mere in Jan, with a high of 15 on the 20th. Following 35 at Neumann's Flash on the 1st, there were far fewer anywhere during Feb before flocks in Mar included 36 at Neumann's Flash on the 7th and an impressive 231 there on the 9th. 10 were at Budworth Mere on Mar 21st with pair remaining on the 22nd. The last of the spring were a pair at Neumann's Flash on Apr 14th and 1 flying north over Ashton's Flash on Apr 23rd.

There were no summer sightings, with the first returning migrants being 3 at Ashton's Flash on Sept 1st, with 5 there from the 3rd and 12 on the 10th. The first at Neumann's Flash was a male on Sept 17th. 10 were at the flashes on Sept 20th, the same day that a further 9 were at Budworth Mere, the first of the autumn there. The next significant arrivals were of 38 onto Neumann's Flash on Oct 2nd and then 53 there on Oct 11th, and 96 on Oct 28th. At Budworth Mere there were 3 on Oct 18th, a juvenile on Oct 30th and 2 males on Nov 1st. Day counts of over 100 at Neumann's Flash during early winter were of 152 on Nov 1st, 116 on Nov 6th, 142 on Nov 21st, 110 on Dec 14th and 133 on Dec 23rd.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Despite facing the same threats from habitat loss and predation as other wildfowl species, the breeding population of Mallards remains remarkably robust across M&WF. The first broods noted were of 11 at Neumann's Flash on Apr 11th and 6 at Budworth Mere on Apr 12th. The last newly hatched broods noted were of 9 at Neumann's Flash and 6 at Witton Mill Bridge on July 29th. Across the patch (but probably more which were not reported at Anderton Nature Park) there were estimated to be 25 broods hatched comprising 199 young (141 in 2023). The average number of broods over the previous three years was 20. This year there were significantly more broods at the Witton Flashes than at Marbury Country Park (17:4) whereas in past years the spread has been more even.

The first notable count of the year was of 96 at Budworth Mere and another 12 at the Witton Flashes on Jan 15th during cold weather, with 138 then at Budworth Mere on Jan 18th when most surrounding waters were completely frozen. The highest count across the patch in Feb was of 111 on Feb 19th, and there were no further three figure counts from Mar to May. 53 at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes (mostly males) was the first sign of post-breeding flocks beginning to assemble and 94 were at Budworth Mere on June 3rd. 130 were at Budworth Mere and the Witton Flashes on June 21st, with 179 at the flashes and 64 at the mere on July 22nd. The late summer roost at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes had reached 580 early morning on Aug 5th, but was down to c350 by Aug 14th and numbers continued to decrease to

the end of Aug. By Sept 23rd there were 226 at the Witton Flashes roosts and another 82 at Budworth Mere. Monthly highs during the last quarter of the year were of 54 at the Witton Flashes and 64 at Budworth Mere on Oct 23rd, and c30 at the Witton Flashes and c65 at Budworth Mere during Nov and Dec.

NORTHERN PINTAIL *Anas acuta*

A male was at Neumann's Flash on Jan 27th and was joined by another male and a female on the 28th. A pair were along the north shoreline of Budworth Mere on Feb 19th. These were the only sightings during the first half of the year.

Autumn passage began with 1 arriving onto Ashton's Flash on Sept 7th with 2 there on Sept 9th and 3 (a pair and a male) on the 10th, with 2 still on the 12th and 1 on the 16th. 2 juveniles were then on Ashton's Flash on Oct 15th, 2 males on Neumann's Flash on Nov 6th, and a male visiting Neumann's and Ashton's Flash from Nov 11th-15th, although not always visible. A pair flew over Budworth Mere on Nov 13th, and finally a male was at Neumann's Flash on Dec 13th.

COMMON TEAL *Anas crecca*

Early in the year the largest flocks were around Dairy House Meadows and along Witton Brook (often hidden from view), with for example 38 seen leaving the former at dusk on Jan 1st and 32 at the latter on Jan 15th. 28 were at Budworth Mere on Jan 18th during freezing weather, most remaining until the 20th. 34 were at Witton Mill Bridge on Feb 5th and 4 visited Budworth Mere on Feb 19th. 28 were still at Witton Mill Bridge on Mar 1st but just single figures there by the end of the month. April sightings were of 5 at Neumann's Flash on the 2nd, 2 there on Apr 4th, 8 on Apr 22nd and at least 1 from Apr 24th-29th. A male was at Budworth Mere on May 11th and another at Ashton's Flash on May 31st with what seemed to be the same individual back at Budworth Mere from June 3rd-10th. 3 were at the flashes on June 7th with 2 males on 13th and 1 male still on the 17th with 7 at Ashton's Flash on June 25th. 3 were at Budworth Mere on July 1st. 9 were at Ashton's Flash on July 3rd but more usually up to 4 there to the end of July. At Budworth Mere there was 1 on July 12th, 4 on Aug 1st and 1 on Aug 14th. Numbers began to increase at Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes in Aug reaching 35 by the 14th, then 137 on Aug 26th and seemingly increasing daily until 280 were seen on Sept 11th. As water levels then increased so numbers dropped off, with just 38 across the both flashes on Sept 23rd. During this period some ventured across to Budworth Mere where there were 9 on Aug 28th, 3 from Aug 30th-Sept 2nd, 4 on Sept 17th and 2 on Sept 27th. By early Oct numbers at the Witton Flashes struggled to reach 20, although 10 were at Budworth Mere on Oct 18th. 36 were around the Witton Flashes on Nov 19th-29th (mainly at Witton Mill Bridge) and 5 at Budworth Mere on Nov 22nd with 2 on Nov 25th. During Dec there were around 40 at the Witton Flashes, and as at the start of the year they were mainly at Witton Mill Bridge and Dairy House Meadows. 8 were at Budworth Mere on Dec 16th.

COMMON POCHARD *Aythya ferina*

A male was at Budworth Mere from Jan 21st-25th, joined by 2 females on the 27th and another male on the 28th. A female was at Budworth Mere on Feb 12th, and a pair were there on Feb 22nd. 2 males and a female were at Ashton's Flash on Apr 14th, with 1 also there on Apr 27th.

An unexpected summer record was of a male at Budworth Mere on June 20th, following which there were no further records until an eclipse plumaged male was at the mere from Aug 21st-30th. What appeared to be the same individual was then at Neumann's Flash on Sept 10th and apparently again on Oct 7th. An immature male was then at Budworth Mere on Oct 10th. In Nov, a female was at Budworth Mere on the 4th and 3 males were there on the 6th, a male was at Budworth Mere and another visited both Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on the 15th, and a pair were at Budworth Mere on the 22nd. Into Dec, a first year male was at Neumann's Flash on the 2nd, 2 males at Neumann's Flash on the 6th and again on the 12th, 3 at Neumann's Flash and another 5 at Budworth Mere on the 20th, 6 at Neumann's Flash on the 23rd, and finally the only double figure patch count of the year was of 7 at Neumann's Flash and 3 more at Marston Flashes on the 30th.



Immature male Common Pochard, Budworth Mere, 10th October 2024 © Greg Baker

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

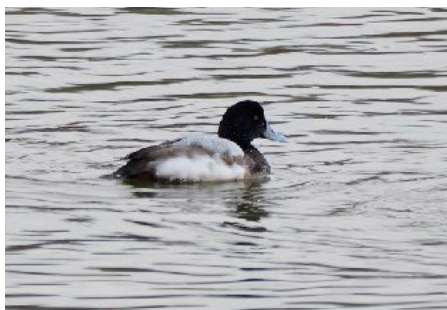
A generally average year. 42 were at Budworth Mere on Jan 10th and 56 there on Jan 18th when other sites were frozen. A further increase saw 22 at Neumann's Flash and 48 at Budworth Mere on Jan 27th, whilst 40 were then at Neumann's Flash on Jan 29th. 64 were spread across Neumann's Flash and Budworth Mere from Feb 16th-23rd and were mobile between both sites, rising to 73 from Feb 26th to Mar 1st. By Mar 22nd there were 24 at Neumann's Flash, 21 at Budworth Mere and another 14 at Marston Flashes, with the same sites holding 48 on Apr 8th. Only 1 was seen on and off at Budworth Mere during mid May, and there were 23 at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes from May 15th-27th. 12 were back at Budworth Mere by June 3rd, with 21 there and a further 10 on Neumann's Flash on July 2nd. The Budworth Mere flock reached 23 on July 10th but then only just reaching double figures to early Aug. There was a maximum of 15 at Budworth Mere and 18 at Neumann's Flash from mid Aug but decreasing again with no more than 30 across the patch from early Sept to end Oct (and usually less than 20). 27 were at Budworth Mere and 12 at Neumann's Flash on Nov 6th, then 62 at Budworth Mere on Nov 11th, and 74 on Nov 19th. 57 were at Budworth Mere

and 19 at Neumann's Flash on Dec 6th, however there were no more than 50 across all sites for the last few weeks of the year.

Only one pair bred this year, with a female first noted with 8 ducklings at Neumann's Flash on June 16th. Two ducklings had disappeared by June 26th, but the remaining 6 were still present to July 25th and successfully fledged.

GREATER SCAUP *Althea marila*

No sooner than designated as a patch rarity following the first sighting in over five years in Dec 2023, a flock of 6 immatures (4 males and 2 females) spent an hour or so at Budworth Mere on Jan 10th (GB). They were unfortunately flushed by dinghies from the sailing club but apparently were then seen at nearby Pickmere. The same immature female that was present in Dec 2023 was then seen again at Budworth Mere on Jan 17th-20th (MT et al) and again on Jan 30th (C&LH). A male was a surprising find amongst Tufted Duck at Neumann's Flash on May 17th (MM). It remained until the 19th when it was seen to fly off strongly to the south-west, however it returned on May 22nd (SB) and stayed until the 26th.



First winter male (left) and female Greater Scaup, Budworth Mere, 10th January 2024 © Greg Baker



Male Greater Scaup, Neumann's Flash, 17th May 2024 © Malc Curtin

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Another good year with four separate individuals seen, although there were no flocks. A drake was at Budworth Mere from Feb 14th-18th (SJ et al), usually favouring the area where Forge Brook flows out of the mere, and another male was also at Budworth Mere on Mar 16th (CH,LH). A proper rarity for the Witton Flashes, an immature male was at Neumann's Flash from Sept 25th to the 30th (RM et al). Finally, a female was at Budworth Mere on Dec 15th (MR).



Male Common Scoter, Budworth Mere, 17th February 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe



First winter male Common Scoter, Neumann's Flash, 25th September 2024 © Malc Curtin

COMMON GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*



Male Common Goldeneye, Budworth Mere, 11th January 2024 © Nathan Wilde

Up to 5 were at Budworth Mere to mid Jan, with 7 seen on Jan 19th and then 8 on Jan 27th, but just 4 by Feb 1st and 3 from Feb 7th-13th. A single female was also at Neumann's Flash on Feb 12th. 6 were then at Budworth Mere on Feb 14th, with a remaining pair to the 16th who moved to Neumann's Flash on the 18th and were back at the mere on the 19th. On Feb 23rd an adult and immature males were at Budworth Mere, and a male and 2 females there on Mar 8th, with one female remaining through to its last sighting on Apr 8th.

Unusually the first of the autumn was firstly an adult male and secondly at Neumann's Flash (rather than at the mere) on Oct 27th. It wasn't until Nov 27th that any were seen at Budworth Mere, with 3 on Nov 20th, and thereafter 1 or 2 were often seen through to Nov 25th. The next sighting though was not until Dec 10th when a male was at Budworth Mere, however from Dec 11th-17th there were up to 7 males present there (6 of which were adults), often joined by a female, 4 males and a female on Dec 20th-21st, and 3 males on Dec 30th.

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*

In early Jan small flocks could be found at Budworth Mere and Neumann's Flash (early morning and late afternoon), and also often at Dairy House Meadows and the Marston Flashes, with highs of 14 at Budworth Mere on the 5th, 17 on the 15th and then 28 during icy conditions on the 17th. 29 across the patch on Jan 25th indicated much the same flock of up to 30 was mobile around the main sites, but down to around 20 by mid Feb. 10 were at Budworth Mere on Mar 5th and 4 at Neumann's Flash on Mar 6th, with just 2 at Budworth Mere by Mar 17th then odd reports of a female and a male to Mar 28th. There were fewer at the Witton Flashes in early spring, with a female at Neumann's Flash on Mar 25th, and 3 heading north over Ashton's Flash on Apr 2nd. The last spring sighting at Budworth Mere was of a male on Apr 3rd. At the flashes, 2 were over Ashton's Flash on Apr 8th, a pair were on Neumann's Flash at dawn on Apr 23rd and 1 flew over Ashton's Flash on May 7th. These later spring records may have related to a breeding pair nearby, as a female with 7 ducklings was seen along Witton Brook on May 20th but how far away they nested is unknown.



Female Goosander, Budworth Mere, 16th January 2024 © Stuart Jackson

The first late summer sighting was of 5 heading south over Ashton's Flash on Aug 10th and what was possibly the same flock flew over Budworth Mere on Aug 23rd. 4 flew over Budworth Mere on Sept 6th. Sightings increased in Oct (usually overhead), with 5 at Budworth

Mere on the 25th when there were also another 5 at Ashton's Flash. Up to 5 were then mobile around Budworth Mere and the Witton Flashes until 13 redheads were on Neumann's Flash on Nov 14th. At least 9 were at Budworth Mere in late Nov, with 12 there on Nov 22nd. 6 were at Neumann's Flash on Nov 25th. By late Nov, flocks began to assemble on Marston Flashes, with just 3 from Nov 27th-Dec 2nd but 20 on Dec 9th and 22 on Dec 20th. Numbers increased at Budworth Mere during Dec with for example 8 on the 2nd, 18 on the 5th, 26 on the 28th (including 19 males) and 27 on the 30th. At Neumann's Flash there were 5 on the 6th, 16 on the 12th, and 10 on the 17th and again on the 30th.



Male Goosander, Budworth Mere, 21st February 2024 © Stuart Jackson

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

Becoming less common around the patch, even in agricultural areas. Of note, 2 separate individuals were at the Witton Flashes on Feb 26th and again on Mar 11th, and 1 was often in the fields behind the Coward Reedbed from mid to the end of Mar. 3 were around the Witton Flashes on Apr 2nd and again on the 24th. On Apr 8th, males were noted north of Budworth Mere, on Ashton's Flash, Carey Park, Higher Marston (2) and Haydn's Pool. 4 at Higher Marston on Apr 12th was the year's highest site count. A male was at Ashton's Flash in Aug and then occasionally through to the end of the year.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

At least 1 was at Budworth Mere from Jan 1st with 5 there on Jan 15th when other nearby sites were frozen. 2 were still at Budworth Mere on Feb 5th when the first returning individual was also seen on Ashton's Flash. The last record at Budworth Mere for the first half of the year was of 1 on Feb 7th. The first seen at Neumann's Flash was on Feb 19th. 1 was at Eyres Pit on Feb 26th. 2 were at Neumann's Flash from Mar 1st and there were 2 pairs on Ashton's Flash and probably also 2 pairs on Neumann's Flash from early Apr. The first chicks seen were 3 at

Neumann's Flash from May 26th with 2 more at Ashton's Flash from May 27th. It was difficult to ascertain how the chicks fared as they were usually hidden from view. However only one juvenile could be found across both flashes in late June, and 4 adults was the maximum count in July. A new brood of 2 chicks were then on Ashton's Flash from Aug 22nd. Numbers overall had begun to increase at Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes in Aug with 12 seen from the 28th-30th. 10 were on Neumann's Flash on Sept 19th, then 11 on Neumann's and another 4 on Ashton's Flash on Sept 23rd. 10 were on Neumann's Flash on Sept 27th with up to 8 through to early Oct (with usually just 1 still on Ashton's Flash) but just 2 by Oct 11th through to Nov 11th, with 1 remaining to Nov 19th. Meanwhile at Budworth Mere, 1 on Aug 29th was the first there since Feb, however there were no further reports until 1 was there from Oct 2nd with 2 from Oct 23rd and 3 from Nov 25th to the end of Dec. 1 was also at Marston Flashes from Nov 27th to Dec 9th. 1 was back early at Ashton's Flash on Dec 20th and had moved to Neumann's Flash by 23rd and was presumed to be the same as seen previously at Marston Flashes.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*



Great Crested Grebes, Budworth Mere, 21st March 2024 © Nathan Wilde

On Jan 1st there were 36 at Budworth Mere, 1 at Neumann's Flash and 1 at Marston Flashes. 5 were then at the latter on Jan 8th. 40 were at Budworth Mere on Jan 18th when other sites

were frozen. The highest site count for Feb was of 28 at Budworth Mere on the 1st. 5 were at Marston Flashes again on Feb 12th. A pair were back at Neumann's Flash from mid Feb and were displaying on 16th, with 2 pairs there from the 19th when 1 had also returned to Eyres Pit. A pair were first seen nest building at Marston Flashes on Feb 18th. 24 were at Budworth Mere from Mar 11th-15th with up to 14 there in Apr and a maximum of 17 in May. A pair made a couple of attempts to nest on the north side of Budworth Mere in May but without success. Only one of the two pairs present at Neumann's Flash during the spring nested (on the North Island), and hatched a first chick on June 3rd with a second visible from June 6th. They remained until Aug 19th when one adult and a juvenile departed, with the second juvenile leaving on Aug 23rd and the last adult on Aug 29th. A pair at Eyres Pit during Apr were not seen after mid May and were presumed to be the same then seen fairly regularly at Ashton's Flash. 2 pairs remained at Marston Flashes throughout the spring. One pair had 2 chicks from June onwards but the other pair were thought to have failed to advance beyond egg laying. A pair were also seen at the regular nesting site on the River Weaver at Carden's Ferry Bridge in mid June, however there were no further documented sightings. At Budworth Mere, there were no further breeding attempts until a pair nested off the Coward Reedbed from June 26th and had 4 eggs by July 2nd, but the nest was soon washed away during poor weather.

The first post-breeding gathering was of 24 at Budworth Mere on June 7th, with 41 there by July 2nd but only a dozen or so from late July to mid Aug, after which number increased again with 33 by Aug 28th. 1 was back at Neumann's Flash on Sept 11th and again on Sept 19th and Oct 2nd. 27 were at Budworth Mere on Sept 19th but more usually there were around 20 through to early Dec. 5 were at Marston Flashes Dec 9th with 2 remaining to the end of the month. 26 were at Budworth Mere from Dec 23rd-30th.



Great Crested Grebe, Budworth Mere, 29th December 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe

BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis*

A pair in breeding plumage were at Budworth Mere for the day on Mar 10th (DB) and were the earliest ever recorded at M&WF. Unfortunately though they were the only ones seen all year.



Black-necked Grebes, Budworth Mere, 10th March 2024 © David Bedford

EURASIAN BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris*

At least 1 was in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere from Jan 1st onwards, with 2 observed on Jan 6th. All sightings had only been at dusk until 1 showed there in the mornings from Jan 15th-18th. 2 were present again on Feb 11th. The last sighting was of one on Mar 13th when it typically showed well prior to its departure.



Eurasian Bittern, Coward Reedbed, 8th March 2024 © Barbara Baker

It was not until Dec 13th that one was seen back in the Coward Reedbed, and it remained very elusive, being reported again only on the 18th, 21st, and 25th.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

The ongoing decline of the heronry at Budworth Mere continues, with an estimated 35 occupied nests this year compared to 42 in 2023 and 64 in 2022.



Grey Heron, Budworth Mere, 21st February 2024 © Mike Sanderson

There were nonetheless some good counts early in the year as potential breeders began to congregate near the heronry, with 19 on Jan 24th and 21 on Jan 30th, with around this number present through to mid Feb. There were however fewer around the heronry in Mar with a maximum of 12 on the 22nd and just 7 in Apr and May. It's clear the heronry is still viable though, with the first juveniles evident on May 15th (at least 4) with 7 on nearby Kid Brook Spit on May 24th. Ones and twos were regularly noted at the Witton Flashes, with the highest count in the first half of the year being 4 together over Ashton's Flash on May 3rd. Adults and juveniles quickly disperse from the heronry once breeding has completed. 7 were still around Budworth Mere on Sept 20th, then up to 6 at the mere and 3 at the Witton Flashes in late Sept to mid Oct. There were just a few around late autumn to early Dec until 6 were at Budworth Mere and Higher Marston on Dec 11th.

GREAT WHITE EGRET *Ardea alba*

Despite the presence of one in Dec 2023, there were no sightings until 1 was seen flying south-east over Ashton's Flash on Apr 4th, followed by 2 briefly at the same site on May 8th, and 1

briefly there on June 15th. Typically sightings increased during the summer. 1 was at Neumann's Flash on June 29th and presumably the same was at Budworth Mere early morning on the 30th and then back at Neumann's Flash later that same day and remaining there to July 13th, with 2 reported on July 4th. The same original individual also made visits to Budworth Mere from July 9th-13th and was also at Ashton's Flash on July 17th. The next sightings were not until Aug 8th when 2 were at Ashton's Flash, then 1 reported from Neumann's Flash on Aug 23rd, 1 heading north over Ashton's Flash on Sept 6th and 1 on Ashton's Flash on Sept 29th. 2 were at Budworth Mere on Oct 4th. 1 flew south over Ashton's Flash on Oct 13th. A colour ringed immature was at Budworth Mere on Nov 6th and had apparently been ringed as a chick at Ham Wall RSPB reserve in Somerset in the spring. It was the same as had been seen at Tatton Park in October. 1 flew over Marbury Country Park and was then seen at the mere on Nov 20th. 1 took up semi-residence at Marston Flashes from Dec 3rd, being seen regularly there to Dec 30th. It also visited Budworth Mere on Dec 20th and Neumann's Flash on Dec 30th when it was joined by a second individual.



Immature Great White Egret, Budworth Mere, 6th November 2024 © Stuart Jackson

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

Somewhat surprisingly, the only report for the first quarter was from Budworth Mere on Feb 2nd. The next sighting was then not until Apr 29th when 1 flew north over Ashton's Flash, although 6 went south there together on May 5th. 1 was briefly at Ashton's Flash on May 7th and 1 flew over Marston on May 16th. 1 was at Ashton's Flash on May 19th. 2 were at Ashton's Flash on June 14th when another was also at Budworth Mere. 1 was again at Budworth Mere regularly from June 17th-30th with 3 there in the 21st. 2 were at Ashton's Flash on June 28th, then 5 roaming between Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on June 30th and 6 there on July 1st-3rd (3 adults and 3 juveniles). At least 4 then roamed between the flashes and Budworth Mere through to late July but with never more than 3 at one site until 6 were at Ashton's Flash early morning only on the 22nd. In Aug there were 2 still at Neumann's Flash and 1 at Budworth Mere on the 2nd, then 1 at Ashton's Flash on the 5th and again on the



Little Egret, Budworth Mere, 4th July 2024 © Stuart Jackson

10th when also seen at Neumann's Flash. Up to 3 were mobile between Budworth Mere and the Witton Flashes from Aug 12th through to Sept 10th, however more usually only one was reported. 2 remained around Budworth Mere to Sept 27th with 1 through to Oct 2nd. 2 flew high south-west over Ashton's Flash on Oct 12th and 3 more on the 13th. 1 was at Ashton's Flash on Oct 26th. 2 were roosting on the north shore of Budworth Mere early morning only on Dec 6th, and finally 1 was with the Great White Egret at Marston Flashes on Dec 16th.

WESTERN CATTLE EGRET *Bubulcus ibis*

1 was briefly on the North Island at Neumann's Flash on the morning of July 16th (LH, CH) but thankfully returned later the same day to spend the late afternoon and evening on the flash. It was only the fourth ever patch record and the first to be seen in breeding plumage.

GREAT CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Up to 14 were at Budworth Mere to mid Jan, with the first definite Continental race *sinensis* noted on the 10th. 18 (unassigned to subspecies) were at the mere on Jan 18th-27th and 19 on Feb 12th. 1 on the River Weaver at Anderton Nature Park on Apr 23rd had very obvious aberrant white markings on the wing coverts. Most if not all sightings from the Witton Flashes early in the year were of overflying individuals including 3 on Jan 30th and again on Feb 19th. During the summer months a small roost of at least 4 were along the River Weaver at Carey Park and the first juvenile was seen at Budworth Mere on June 10th.

There were no double figure counts from anywhere from Mar through to July and not until 13 were at Budworth Mere on Aug 21st, after which up to 11 were regularly seen through to mid Sept. 12 flew north over Ashton's Flash on Sept 14th and a total of 18 at the Witton Flashes on Sept 17th included a flock of 13 passing west high overhead. 4 feeding on Neumann's Flash on Sept 19th were notable. Small flocks of up to 7 were then seen regularly overhead at the flashes through to the end of Sept. 13 were at Budworth Mere on Oct 11th and again on the 23rd. 16 headed south over the Witton Mill area on Oct 13th. In Nov, at least 14 were at

Budworth Mere from the 6th, with 31 present on the 21st during a cold spell. 17 were at Budworth Mere on Dec 6th, 20 there on Dec 11th (when also 3 at Marston Flashes), and 33 on Dec 30th with another 3 flying over Neumann's Flash.



Great Cormorant (*P.c. sinensis*), Budworth Mere, 14th February 2024 © Stuart Jackson

WESTERN OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

1 was seen flying west over Comberbach on June 17th being mobbed by Oystercatchers (JE) and had presumably already passed over Budworth Mere.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Continuing from the end of 2023, the Common Starling roost at Neumann's Flash attracted 4 to the feeding opportunities there on Jan 1st. 2 were at a similar roost at Budworth Mere in Feb. A pair were displaying over the ranger's cabins at Marbury Country Park on Mar 23rd, and a pair were presumed to be breeding at Furey Park (not within the patch boundaries) with individuals seen regularly over Carey Park. 3 were frequently seen at Ashton's Flash from Apr 8th to 23rd. There were few notable summer reports, with the first juvenile noted at Neumann's Flash on Aug 9th. 2 were soaring together over the east side of Ashton's Flash on Sept 23rd, and 4 were noted around the Witton Flashes on Oct 10th. 2 females were sparring over west side of Budworth Mere on Nov 1st. 2 were seen together over Ashton's Flash on Nov 13th. 1 was hunting starlings over the Coward Reedbed on Nov 26th with at least 2 doing the same from mid Dec.



Male Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Budworth Mere, 11th November 2024 © Stuart Jackson

WESTERN MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Although sightings have increased over the years, most have been of individuals passing through or visiting from the Mersey Valley breeding sites. It would therefore have taken a leap of faith to predict that this year would involve the first ever breeding attempt for the patch.

Sightings began with a female seen carrying a fish and dropping into the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere on Jan 19th. The same individual was then seen over the Marston Flashes, Neumann's Flash and Ashton's Flash on Jan 22nd and it was again at Ashton's Flash on Jan 25th, having seemingly roosted there overnight. It was back again at the flashes on Feb 4th-5th and again on the 9th and 11th. On the 4th a separate juvenile was at Budworth Mere; at the time the first record of two separate individuals present on the patch at the same time. A juvenile type was seen at both the Witton Flashes and also briefly over Budworth Mere on Feb 26th. It was also at Ashton's Flash on Mar 23rd when it was joined by a second juvenile, with both seen frequently through to Apr 6th and joined by a third (a third calendar year immature male) on Mar 26th. The two juveniles were also joined by a female on Apr 3rd. 1 of the juveniles was also seen at Budworth Mere on Mar 28th. At least 1 juvenile remained at the flashes until Apr 11th. A juvenile on Ashton's Flash on Apr 16th was however a different individual showing obvious tail moult, and an immature female type was reported on Ashton's Flash on Apr 18th. It seems as if at least 7 different individuals visited the patch during the spring.

A second calendar year juvenile (now moulting its flight feathers) was at Ashton's Flash on Apr 21st-24th. A second fully winged juvenile was also present on the 23rd and remained into



Third calendar year male Western Marsh Harrier, Ashton's Flash, 10th May 2024 © Howard Fearn



Second calendar year female Western Marsh Harrier, Ashton's Flash, 11th May 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe

May. On Apr 26th a third calendar year male (probably the same as seen in Mar) began to visit Ashton's Flash more regularly. It was soon clear that a breeding attempt was underway at Ashton's Flash as this male was seen displaying and regularly taking nesting material into the centre of the flash from May 3rd. It was paired with the fully winged juvenile type, which was clearly a female. The other moulting juvenile (presumed female) was seen on May 6th and 7th, plus a new immature female with a dark crown was also seen on May 9th. The nesting pair continued to be seen regularly on Ashton's Flash for the rest of May and during June with a food pass between them noted on June 25th, seemingly confirming that young had been hatched. However drone footage obtained in late June showed the nest to be rather rudimentary and surrounded by water and there was no conformation of any young being present. As a result there were far fewer reports by early July, and views of the female showing well on July 11th and the male on July 25th proving to be the last sightings.

A fresh juvenile unrelated to the failed breeding attempt was at Neumann's Flash on Sept 3rd, followed by the brief return of the immature male to Ashton's Flash on Sept 6th. 2 juveniles were on Ashton's Flash on Sept 26th with at least one remaining on the 27th and seen again there on Oct 2nd. An immature female was at Ashton's Flash on Oct 11th before flying off north. A juvenile flew north over Neumann's Flash and Dairy House Meadows on Oct 23rd and later the same day a female was at Budworth Mere. Another juvenile was at Ashton's Flash on Oct 29th and one was also at the Coward Reedbed on Nov 11th. Juveniles were also seen at Ashton's Flash on Nov 25th, and on occasions at the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere from Dec 10th to 16th.

RED KITE *Milvus milvus*

Only four sightings this year. The first drifted north over Witton Mill on Mar 27th (BA), then an immature was over Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on Apr 21st (CH, LH, KB, BA), and 1 passed north-east over Dairy House Meadows on May 15th (CH, LH). Finally, although not locally reported, 1 was photographed perched on the Lion Salt Works at Marston on June 5th



Second calendar year immature Red Kite, Neumann's Flash, 21st April 2024 © Kev Bruen

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

The breeding population appears to be stable with 6 pairs on territory, the same as in 2023. Notable records included 4 together over Dairy House Meadows on Jan 22nd, 11 visible around Neumann's Flash plus 2 more at Higher Marston and another 3 at Budworth Mere on Mar 22nd, and 7 moving west over Neumann's Flash on Oct 11th. An immature became very tame as it scavenged around the west areas of Marbury Country Park in mid Dec.



Second calendar year immature Common Buzzard, Marbury Country Park, 2nd February 2024 © Mark Jarrett

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*

At the start of the year 2 were in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere and at least 3 were around the Witton Flashes. 2 could be heard singing on Ashton's Flash on Feb 19th, and 3 were calling from the Coward Reedbed on Mar 15th-17th. A total of 6 pairs were estimated to be present during the breeding season, all of which were at the Witton Flashes, with 3 on Ashton's Flash, 2 on Neumann's Flash and 1 along Witton Brook. The first 2 chicks were reported from Neumann's Flash on May 20th. On one of the very infrequent visits to Kid Brook Marsh at Budworth Mere, 1 was heard calling on June 17th indicating another potential breeding site. An adult with its new brood of 2 chicks was at Neumann's Flash on July 10th. At Budworth Mere, 1 was back at the Coward Reedbed from July 25th onwards and was joined by a second individual from Oct 1st through to the end of the year. A juvenile was at Witton Mill Bridge on July 29th. A total of 8 were around the Witton Flashes on Sept 5th, including a tame juvenile in front of Pod's Hide. An adult then joined the juveniles feeding regularly around the hide through to Sept 23rd, but they became much more elusive in Oct and Nov although at least 5 were still around the flashes, including an adult sometimes showing at Pod's Hide.



Water Rail, Neumann's Flash, 30th July 2024 © Kev Bruen

COMMON MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*

Below average numbers at all sites early in the year with a maximum of 9 at Budworth Mere and the Witton Flashes in Jan, 10 in Feb and 11 in Mar. The first brood noted was of 2 chicks by Pod's Hide at Neumann's Flash on Apr 21st, with presumably the same pair there with 5 chicks by Apr 25th. A total of 3 broods were at Neumann's Flash on May 31st. A brood of 4 were at the Wildlife Pond at Marbury Country Park from June 12th, however there were none by the 28th when the pair were constructing a new nest. This nest failed and a new nest was occupied from 15th, which also soon failed. 2 more broods of 6 chicks were at Neumann's Flash from mid June, at least one chick was at Witton Mill Bridge in July, and another of 2 at Ashton's Flash from Aug 1st. The pair at Pod's Hide had 2 new chicks (probably their third brood) from Aug 8th. Of interest, an adult was seen feeding on a Mallard corpse at Neumann's Flash on Oct 1st. 7 were at Budworth Mere and Marbury Country Park on Oct 28th, and 7 around the Witton Flashes and 4 at Bedworth Mere from late Nov to early Dec.

EURASIAN COOT *Fulica atra*

Notable counts early in the year at Budworth Mere included 76 on Jan 15th, 101 on Jan 25th, 68 on Feb 12th, and 38 on Mar 11th. Numbers were notably low during the spring with monthly highs of just 8 in Apr and 12 in May. It was a poor breeding season at the mere with just two pairs attempting to nest at the end of May, however neither was successful. Non or failed breeders began to return in June with 35 on the 10th and 63 by the 28th, 79 on July 25th, and a high of 85 on Aug 2nd. By Aug 8th numbers had dropped to 47 and remained relatively stable then to the end of Sept before declining to 34 by Oct 23rd. Early winter saw some more return with counts of 41 on Nov 25th and 55 on Dec 1st.

At the Witton Flashes at the start of the year numbers were low and peaked at just 18 on Feb 12th, with that same number seen again on Apr 18th. As was the case at Budworth Mere, it was poor breeding season at the flashes. Two pairs were nesting at Neumann's Flash in late May, but both apparently failed. A pair however did manage to hatch 2 chicks at Ashton's Flash on May 29th, both of which survived. Over at Eyres Pit, 2 pairs had 6 chicks by the end of July. A pair were also nest building at Marston Pools on Aug 1st. Juveniles were present at Neumann's Flash from mid July but there was no evidence they had actually been raised there.



Eurasian Coots, Budworth Mere, 9th May 2024 © Nathan Wilde

A slow increase in numbers at the flashes saw 22 on June 28th, 42 on July 22nd, 77 on Aug 8th, and a notable high of 119 at Neumann's Flash on Aug 16th. 51 were still at the flashes on Sept 23rd, up again to 86 (mostly on Ashton's Flash) on Oct 7th but just 16 (all on Neumann's Flash) on Oct 23rd. Counts at the end of the year included 31 on Nov 4th and 28 on Dec 9th.

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*

Late Jan arrivals are now the norm at Budworth Mere, so not unexpectedly 1 was back on Kid Brook Spit by Jan 29th, joined by a second on Feb 2nd with 5 present by Feb 5th and 7 on Feb 7th. 2 were also back at Neumann's Flash from Feb 11th. There were generally only 2 at Budworth Mere by mid Feb and they were seen copulating on the 16th, but then 4 were seen on 19th and 6 (3 obvious pairs) on the 23rd-26th. Three pairs were then pretty much resident throughout Mar, with one at Neumann's Flash, one at Budworth Mere and 1 at Higher Marston. The pair at Neumann's were nest building on Stilt Island on Apr 8th but remained generally very unobtrusive. The Budworth Mere pair nested in fields by the sailing club in mid Apr but the nest was destroyed when the field was ploughed. The Higher Marston pair were present through to the end of May at least and may have also had a nesting attempt there curtailed by land activity. At Neumann's Flash, and despite concerns that the breeding attempt

had failed, a fairly well grown chick was first seen on May 31st. The family remained in the area until the chick fledged and they were last seen on July 17th. At Budworth Mere there were infrequent sightings of individuals in early June, with 2 there on the 4th and 17th, 5 on the 21st, and 4 on the 28th. 5 were also at Neumann's Flash on June 18th and again on July 1st. 4 were at Budworth Mere on July 4th but more usually 2 through to July 15th, with the last sighting of the year at any site being of 1 there on July 23rd.

PIED AVOCET *Recurvirostra avosetta*

High water levels at both Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes meant there were far fewer sightings than in recent years and there was no significant mid May influx. Neither was there any nesting attempt this year.



Pied Avocets, Neumann's Flash, 1st August 2024 © Greg Baker

The first seen were 3 at Neumann's Flash on Mar 23rd, with 1 remaining on the 24th. 1 was then briefly on Neumann's Flash on Mar 30th but there were no further reports until another was also at Neumann's Flash on Apr 25th with 2 there on the 27th. 1 flew south over Ashton's Flash on May 1st. On May 21st, 3 arrived onto Neumann's Flash followed by regular sightings of one or two at both Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes through to June 17th, usually early mornings only. Meanwhile, a pair were at Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on May 30th-31st. There were no sightings in June, however 1 was again at Kid Brook Spit on July 7th and also from July 11th-12th having also been at Neumann's Flash on the morning of the 11th. A single juvenile was at Neumann's Flash on July 16th. There as a surprisingly arrival of 13 at Neumann's Flash on Aug 1st following an overnight thunderstorm, easily the highest count of the year.

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*

High counts early in the year involved flocks passing overhead (usually having been disturbed from nearby feeding sites), with 225 over Budworth Mere on Jan 11th and 350+ over

Neumann's Flash on Jan 28th. Two pairs had returned to territories at Higher Marston by Mar 6th, with 1 back at Ashton's Flash on the same date. 3 were holding territory on Ashton's Flash by early May. High vegetation made it difficult to tell how they were faring, however at least one chick was taken by the breeding male Western Marsh Harrier in mid May. 16 were at Higher Marston on May 30th, although none appeared to be juveniles. 2 fledged juveniles became visible at Ashton's Flash from June 17th and then 4 more recently hatched chicks were there from the 18th, with at least 3 still present to July 3rd.

70 were at Budworth Mere on June 19th and 22 at Ashton's Flash on June 21st, the first real signs of flocks gathering post breeding. More arrived from mid July, with 249 at Budworth Mere on July 20th and 179 at Ashton's Flash on July 30th, followed by high counts in Aug of 232 on Aug 16th at the mere and 211 on Aug 26th at the flash. 282 were at Budworth Mere and 62 at Ashton's Flash on Sept 3rd. Following 285 at Budworth Mere on Sept 17th, numbers decreased through the rest of Sept to early Oct, until 203 were noted over Ashton's Flash on Oct 18th. There were few notable sightings during the late autumn by when the main flocks were roosting to the south-east of the patch at Rudheath Lime Beds. A flock of c250 flew over Neumann's Flash on Nov 25th and c100 were at Higher Marston on Nov 27th. 80 were at Budworth Mere on Dec 1st and c90 overhead there on Dec 16th and again on 21st. 370 passed overhead in loose flocks at Neumann's Flash on Dec 30th.

EUROPEAN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*

The only ones seen on the patch were 2 which settled briefly amongst a flock of Northern Lapwing at Budworth Mere on Feb 16th (GB). All other sightings were from autumn migration watches undertaken at Witton Mill (BA), with 2 flying north over Ashton's Flash on Sept 29th and another on Oct 24th. On the latter date a further 120 were visible distantly with a large Northern Lapwing flock far to the south-east (and presumably over Rudheath Lime Beds), with another 80 visible in the same area on Oct 27th.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*



Juvenile Common Ringed Plover, Neumann's Flash, 19th August 2024 © Greg Baker

Spring sightings were limited to 3 present for only a few minutes on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere along with 3 migrant Dunlin on May 17th, then 1 even more briefly passing through at Neumann's Flash on May 30th. During late summer passage 1 flew west over Budworth Mere on Aug 12th, a juvenile was at Neumann's Flash from Aug 19th-21st, and finally 1 was at Budworth Mere on Aug 29th.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*

Early arrivals were 1 briefly at Neumann's Flash on Mar 22nd and 1 at Budworth Mere on Mar 27th. 3 were at Higher Marston on Mar 29th, with 2 pairs there from Mar 30th to Apr 8th but just 1 pair from Apr 11th-18th. A pair flew over to the east of Ashton's Flash on Apr 10th, with 1 also flying over Ashton's Flash on Apr 16th. 1 was at Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on Apr 22nd, with a pair there on 24th and seen infrequently through to mid July but nonetheless seen displaying on May 13th. Another pair flew over Neumann's Flash on May 17th, and 1 was there on May 21st. 1 was at Ashton's Flash on June 14th and again on the 24th, with a pair from 26th which were joined by 3 fledged juveniles (possibly from Rudheath) on July 2nd. A total of 7 were at Ashton's Flash on July 5th down to 3 on the 10th. A second pair joined the regular pair at Budworth Mere on July 4th. A juvenile was on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on July 18th. Departures were very early this year, with the last sightings being an adult at Ashton's Flash on Aug 9th and 1 at Kid Brook Spit on Aug 12th.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

A particularly poor year with all sightings related to migrants seen in flight only. The first was over Ashton's Flash on Apr 16th, with another north over there on Apr 24th, 2 more on May 1st, 1 on May 2nd and 2 on May 7th. 1 noted flying over Ashton's Flash on June 9th was a notably late (or very early) migrant. As is usually the case, none were recorded in autumn.

EURASIAN CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

The only notable roost at Ashton's Flash at the start of the year was of 81 on Jan 4th, with often none at all present during the coldest conditions. Milder weather then attracted 93 back by Jan 25th, 105 on Jan 30th and 125 on Feb 5th. Counts from the north shore of Budworth Mere included 49 on Jan 9th, 79 on Jan 30th, and 157 on Feb 5th, probably the highest ever count here and the largest flock seen at any site for the year. More notable counts in Feb were 104 at Ashton's Flash on Feb 12th. 109 at Budworth Mere on Feb 16th (89 of which later moved to Higher Marston), 95 at Budworth Mere on Feb 23rd, and 106 at the Ashton's Flash roost on Feb 26th. As expected, by early spring numbers began to decline, although there were still 83 at the Ashton's Flash roost on Mar 11th, down to 48 on Mar 22nd and again on Apr 3rd. 42 were at Budworth Mere on Apr 4th, and only 2 at the Ashton's Flash roost on Apr 8th, although 14 were at Higher Marston and 6 at Budworth Mere the same day. 24 were at Higher Marston on Apr 12th. The last spring records were of 1 heading north over Neumann's Flash on Apr 24th and another also over the same site on May 17th.

2 returned for a few days at Ashton's Flash from June 19th, which meant there were sightings in every month. 1 was also there on July 2nd with the earliest returning to Budworth Mere being 14 on July 4th. Further increases saw 41 at Budworth Mere on July 17th and 46 at Ashton's Flash on July 19th which included a single juvenile. 3 juveniles were with 11 adults at

Ashton's Flash on Aug 2nd. The flashes dawn roost moved to Neumann's Flash from early to mid Aug with 61 there on Aug 5th. Similar numbers then roosted at both flashes throughout Aug, with an influx seeing 90 at dawn on Sept 5th then 92 at Ashton's Flash on Sept 14th. There were few at Budworth Mere from mid Aug onwards until 31 were noted on Sept 13th, 52 on Sept 25th, 48 on Oct 11th and 77 on Oct 31st. High water levels at the Witton Flashes from late Sept onwards meant the roosts on Ashton's Flash were very variable, with for example just 8 on Sept 23rd, then 94 on Oct 11th but none on Oct 17th. Between 85-90 roosted at Ashton's Flash from late Oct to the end of Dec with a high of 97 there on Nov 4th and 92 on Dec 9th. At Budworth Mere, notable counts were 69 on Nov 25th, 51 BM on Dec 2nd and 62 on Dec 30th. 59 were feeding on fields behind Marston Flashes on Dec 9th.



Eurasian Curlew, Budworth Mere, 10th February 2024 © Kev Bruen

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

With high water levels seemingly a deterrent, it wasn't until May 6th that the first was seen, with one in flight only over Ashton's Flash. That was quickly followed however by the arrival of an exceptional flock of 81 onto Ashton's Flash on May 7th. 2 flew over Neumann's Flash on June 30th. In July, 1 was at Ashton's Flash on the 11th and 12th, 3 were at Budworth Mere on the 16th, and 4 flew over Ashton's Flash on the 17th. In Aug, 1 was at Neumann's Flash on the 7th, 1 was at Ashton's Flash and later at Budworth Mere on the 10th, 17 visited Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on the 15th, and singles were at Ashton's Flash on the 21st and 28th, with 2 also at Budworth Mere on the latter date. 1 was at Ashton's Flash on Sept 4th with 5 there on Sept 5th. 1 was roosting with the Eurasian Curlew on Ashton's Flash from Sept 14th to 17th. The last sighting was of a flock of 26 which arrived onto the north shore of Budworth Mere on Oct 28th.

RUFF *Calidris pugnax*

Reflecting an abysmal year for passage waders, the only record was of a female seen arriving with a Black-tailed Godwit flock onto Ashton's Flash on May 7th (BA), however it was not seen subsequently.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

A dire year saw just two reports, with 1 flying south over Ashton's Flash on Apr 29th and 3 briefly on Kid Brook Spit at Budworth Mere on May 17th. It's likely that no records during autumn passage is unprecedented across the patch.

EURASIAN WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*

There was an excellent count of 16 seen leaving their roost sites at Dairy House Meadows at dusk on Jan 1st. 7 were around the east side of Ashton's Flash on Jan 8th but there were just 2 there on Jan 12th, when also 1 flew over Witton Mill car park prior to dawn and another was at Dairy House Meadows. 1 was also at Ashton's Flash on Jan 15th. 4 flew over Budworth Mere and another over the Marbury Country Park arboretum on Jan 20th. At least 2 were at Ashton's Flash, 3 at Haydn's Pool and 3 at Dairy House Meadows on Jan 28th. 1 was at Dairy House Meadows and 1 flew over the east end of Budworth Mere on Jan 30th. 1 was at Dairy House Meadows on Feb 5th and located in the same area on Feb 26th. 2 were at Ashton's Flash on Feb 10th. 3 flew over Budworth Mere at dusk on Feb 14th, and 6 were at Dairy House Meadows at dusk on Feb 15th. The last spring sightings were of 1 at Dairy House Meadows on Mar 17th and 1 at Ashton's Flash on Mar 25th.

There were far fewer reports at the end of the year, most likely due to a lack of coverage than a decline in the wintering population. 5 were seen leaving roost sites at Dairy House Meadows on Nov 12th, 1 flew over the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere on Nov 23rd, and 1 flew behind the hide at Budworth Mere on Dec 1st.

JACK SNIFE *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Ashton's Flash remains the the best site when conditions are favourable. 3 were there on Jan 12th in an area where there had been none on the 8th during icier weather. 1 was seen at Kid Brook Marsh on Jan 28th, and was presumably wintering there. The last of the spring was 1 at Ashton's Flash on Mar 25th. Later in the year, 1 was watched arriving from the east at Ashton's Flash on Sept 11th and then circling before dropping into the middle of the flash. Another was also seen arriving onto Ashton's Flash on Sept 29th. The only other record was of 1 seen relatively well on Ashton's Flash viewable from the bund on Nov 13th.

COMMON SNIFE *Gallinago gallinago*

Counts from regular sites in early Jan were low and included 3 at Kid Brook Marsh on the 9th, 3 at Ashton's Flash and 4 at Dairy House Meadows on the 12th, and 4 along the north shore of Budworth Mere on the 18th. Nonetheless, 18 were flying around Ashton's Flash on the 25th having been flushed by a Western Marsh Harrier, indicating that many are in areas inaccessible for everyday surveys. There were just a few reports of individuals in Feb, although the main sites were not surveyed. 2 were still on Ashton's Flash on Mar 11th, however a survey there on

Mar 25th recorded none. Nevertheless it's possible that small numbers spend the late spring and summer months at Ashton's Flash, with 1 ones or twos infrequently seen in flight from mid April to late May and with 3 seen on May 9th. 1 was at Neumann's Flash on June 24-26th and again on July 10th-12th, with 2 at Ashton's Flash on July 28th and 1 on the 29th. There were further occasional sightings of individuals at Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes in Aug, with 2 at Ashton's Flash from Aug 26th-28th. The first seen at Budworth Mere since Jan were 2 on Kid Brook Spit on Aug 30th. A marginal increase in Sept saw 5 at Ashton's Flash on the 7th and then 11 on the 17th-20th and 13 on the 23rd. 2 were at Budworth Mere on Sept 25th. There were still up to 12 at Ashton's Flash for most of Oct, with 18 noted on the 24th. 1 at Budworth Mere on Nov 6th proved to be the last seen there for the year. 4 were at Ashton's Flash on Nov 15th but just 2 by Nov 29th, however there were 4 on Dec 11th and 15 on Dec 12th. 8 were found roosting together on a bare field at Higher Marston on Dec 23rd.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

The first migrant of the year was along the north shore of Budworth Mere on Apr 12th, however there were no further sightings until 2 were also at Budworth Mere on Apr 22nd-23rd with 1 remaining from 24th-27th. The first at the Witton Flashes was not until May 17th when 1 was at Neumann's Flash, followed by another there on May 20th.

The first presumably failed breeder was at Budworth Mere on June 18th, followed by 4 at Neumann's Flash on June 24th and 2 there on July 3rd. 3 were at Budworth Mere on July 4th. 1 was at Neumann's Flash on July 9th and an excellent flock of 10 there on the 10th during an obvious regional influx. 1 was also at Budworth Mere on July 10th staying until the 12th. 1 was at Budworth Mere on July 22nd and 2 were there on July 29th. Into Aug, 2 were on Neumann's Flash on the 14th, with individuals at Budworth Mere on the 19th and from the 28th to Sept 3rd, with 2 present on the Aug 29th and again on Sept 3rd. 2 were then at Neumann's Flash on Sept 4th and 5th and were possibly the same as had been at the mere.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

There were no wintering records at either end of the year and no spring migrants either, with the first not being until June 24th when one was at Ashton's Flash and later Neumann's Flash.



Green Sandpipers, Budworth Mere, 30th August 2024 © Greg Baker

Another (or possibly the same) was at Neumann's Flash on July 1st. 2 were on Ashton's Flash on July 10th, with 1 there from July 12th-19th, and individuals also on July 30th, Aug 8th and briefly on Aug 14th. 2 were on pools on the south-east side of Budworth Mere on Aug 30th. 1 was at Ashton's Flash and later at Neumann's Flash on Sept 17th, and finally 1 was at Ashton's Flash on Oct 2nd and Oct 4th.

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

A relatively poor year for sightings, starting with 1 at Neumann's Flash on Mar 5th-6th and then at Ashton's Flash on the 8th. 1 was at Budworth Mere on Mar 28th. 2 were on the pontoons at the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Apr 19th. 1 at Ashton's Flash on Apr 23rd proved to be the last seen until 1 was back there on June 12th. 2 were then at Budworth Mere on June 17th. 1 was at Ashton's Flash on July 2nd, and 2 were at Budworth Mere on July 9th and the 16th and again on Aug 9th. 3 were briefly at Neumann's Flash on Aug 29th with 3 again there on Sept 4th. The only juvenile reported was at Neumann's Flash on Sept 10th and an adult was there on Sept 17th. Given none were seen in Oct, 1 at Budworth Mere on Nov 8th was rather a surprise.

COMMON GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

There were no spring migrants reported, however late summer and autumn passage was impressive by recent standards and more so given the general dearth of migrant waders across the patch. An adult was along the north shoreline of Budworth Mere on July 10th, another in Mound Bay at Neumann's Flash on July 25th, 1 at Neumann's Flash and then at Ashton's Flash on July 29th, 2 at Ashton's Flash on the evening of Aug 29th, 1 at Neumann's Flash on Sept 1st, 2 at Ashton's Flash on Sept 6th, and lastly 1 also there on Sept 19th.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyl*

A second calendar year immature moulting into first summer plumage was at Budworth Mere on Apr 10th (MM et al) and often showed very well by the sailing club. It became mobile over the next couple of days spending much time away from the mere, and was last seen early afternoon on the 12th.



Second calendar year Black-legged Kittiwake, Budworth Mere, 10th April 2024 © Greg Baker

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

During Jan, 200 were at Budworth Mere on the 10th and again on the 18th. 370 flew north over the Witton Flashes at dawn on Feb 5th and later the same morning 380 were on Budworth Mere, presumably the same flocks. Early spring passage was rather substandard, with highs of 210 at Budworth Mere on Feb 26th and 280 at Neumann's Flash on Mar 7th. Interestingly, of 113 at Budworth Mere on Mar 15th only 4 were not adults, whereas of c100 there on Apr 5th only 20% were adults. On Apr 12th there were only 2 present across the entire patch, and 14 at Budworth Mere on Apr 23rd was the highest number seen through to the end of June. Only single figures were present (and on many occasions none) anywhere on the patch during May and through to late June.



Juvenile Black-headed Gull, Budworth Mere, 24th June 2024 © Stuart Jackson

The first juvenile was at Budworth Mere on June 24th with the next at Ashton's Flash on July 1st. Overnight roosts began to develop in July, with c400 at Ashton's Flash on the evening of the 16th. 465 were at the dawn roost at Ashton's Flash on Aug 5th, with 500 there and at Neumann's Flash by the end of Aug through to mid Sept, down to 370 on Sept 23rd. 180 were at Neumann's Flash on Oct 23rd with another 100 at Budworth Mere. 1150 at Budworth Mere on Nov 1st was totally unexpected in the context of other counts during the year, with 300 still there on Nov 8th. 100 were at Budworth Mere and 170 at Neumann's Flash on Dec 12th.

LITTLE GULL *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Following a period of persistent easterly winds, 4 adults in winter plumage were at Budworth Mere on Mar 8th (JG), with 3 remaining until the 11th. These are the earliest ever recorded on passage at M&WF, nonetheless they were to be the only ones seen all year.



Adult Little Gull, Budworth Mere, 11th March 2024 © Barbara Baker

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

A relatively sparse set of sightings across the patch, beginning with an adult at Budworth Mere on Feb 19th, followed by 1 at the same site on Mar 8th when there was also a pair at Neumann's Flash, which were seen again there on 9th. 1 flew over Budworth Mere on Mar 21st and again on Mar 27th. A pair flew south-east over Ashton's Flash on Apr 10th and a pair were at Higher Marston fields on Apr 21st. A pair were again seen over Ashton's Flash on May 5th and 7th. There were no June sightings, and the first summer record was of an adult roosting at Ashton's Flash on the evening of July 16th. The next sighting was not until an adult was amongst a large arrival of Black-headed Gulls at Budworth Mere on Nov 1st, with the same seen again on Nov 6th and joined by another adult on Nov 8th. 1 was also reported from Neumann's Flash on Dec 6th.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

The usual escalation in numbers from winter to early spring saw 16 at Budworth Mere on Jan 5th rising to 43 thereon Feb 12th, when also 12 at Neumann's Flash and 1 at Marston Flashes. 34 were at Budworth Mere on Mar 11th and 31 on Mar 20th, however there were only single figures by early Apr. They are always uncommon later in the spring, so of note were an immature at Budworth Mere on Apr 23rd, 1 over Ashton's Flash on May 2nd and another individual there on May 30th. With no records in June, the first returning post or non-breeder was at Budworth Mere on July 17th-25th, with up to 4 there by the end of that month. 1 was at Ashton's Flash from July 25th. Up to 4 were around the mere and the Witton Flashes during Aug and early Sept, then up to 3 at Budworth Mere through to early Oct with 4 on the 10th. The first juvenile reported was at Neumann's Flash on Sept 20th. 16 at Budworth Mere on Oct 21st and 18 on Oct 23rd were an obvious sign of autumn passage. 8 were at Neumann's Flash on Nov 6th. A small influx in Dec saw 12 at Budworth Mere on the 6th rising to 21 on the 16th.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

The irregular adult was seen occasionally at Budworth Mere early in the year, although it was present daily from Feb 12th-16th. It was also seen twice in both Mar and May, on four dates in July, three in Aug, four in Sept, four in Nov, and twice in Dec.

All other records apart from this individual were of 1 flying south low over Dairy House Meadows on Jan 25th, a third calendar year immature at Budworth Mere on Feb 5th, a pair at Budworth Mere on Mar 20th, a second year immature also at the mere on Apr 3rd, an adult (possibly the usual mere individual) harassing the Eurasian Oystercatchers at Neumann's Flash on May 3rd, a second calendar year immature at Neumann's Flash on May 20th, singles at Neumann's Flash on Sept 25th and Oct 15th, and 5 seen overhead from Witton Mill Mound on Oct 24th.

EUROPEAN HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

Sightings were more consistently reported this year, however yet again there were no double figure counts.



Second calendar year European Herring Gull, Budworth Mere, 12th February 2024 © Stuart Jackson

5 were at Budworth Mere on Jan 5th and 4 at Neumann's Flash on Jan 12th and 15th, with up to 3 at the mere in Feb and 4 again at Neumann's Flash on Feb 12th. 2 were displaying at Neumann's Flash on Feb 23rd and possibly bred somewhere in the local area. 3 immatures were at Budworth Mere on Apr 23rd. 2 at Ashton's Flash on May 31st may have been the pair mentioned earlier and 1 was often seen in early June through to early July there, with 2 on July 15th and 3 on Aug 8th. A family party of 5 (1 adult) were then seen at Ashton's Flash on Aug 14th-16th. There were fewer sightings and usually just singles at any site in Sept, although there were 3 juveniles at Budworth Mere on Sept 20th. Mostly singles were recorded in Oct and Nov, however 4 were at Neumann's Flash on Dec 2nd.

Scandinavian Herring Gull (*L.a.argentatus*): an adult showing characteristics of this nominate form was at Budworth Mere on Dec 11th.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL *Larus michahellis*

As in 2023 there were just two records this year, both at Neumann's Flash, with a near adult on Mar 25th (GB) and a third calendar year immature on Sept 10th (MM).



Fourth calendar year Yellow-legged Gull, Neumann's Flash, 25th March 2024 © Greg Baker

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*

There were no notable sightings early in the year. Passage was light over the Witton Flashes in Apr to mid May (when usually most prevalent) with the highest counts being 34 heading north on Apr 16th, 26 over on Apr 24th and 35 on May 7th. The highest number seen at Budworth Mere was just 23 on Apr 23rd. The first juvenile of the year was at Ashton's Flash on July 20th with 6 then at Budworth Mere on July 23rd. Late summer passage saw 67 over Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on Aug 9th. 31 at Neumann's Flash and 26 at Budworth Mere on Nov 4th were noteworthy for late autumn. 33 were also at Budworth Mere on Nov 6th and 29 on Nov 8th.

1 showing characteristics of the Scandinavian form *L. f. intermedius* was at Neumann's Flash on Dec 2nd.

LITTLE TERN *Sternula albifrons*

Undoubtedly one of the best records of the year, 1 was briefly at Neumann's Flash on May 10th before flying off south (MM). This constitutes the first ever record for the Witton Flashes, with all of the previous three sightings having been at Budworth Mere.

'COMMIC' TERN *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea*

An individual considered at the time to be an Arctic Tern was at Budworth Mere on Apr 8th, however certain features also better suited Common Tern so its identity was not confirmed.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

The first definite sighting (see above) was of a single at Budworth Mere on Apr 24th and it was still present on the 26th. 1 was then at Budworth Mere somewhat irregularly from May 15th to June 5th. Possibly the same individual was fishing at Eyres Pit on June 10th and was back at Budworth Mere on June 18th. At least 2 were then regularly seen through to July 17th and were displaying on June 26th, with 4 present on June 20th and 24th, and July 2nd, 9th and 10th, with just 1 from July 18th-25th. Presumably the same 4 as seen earlier at the mere flew south over Ashton's Flash on July 2nd. 1 was at Neumann's Flash on July 9th and 16th. An adult and it's presumed juvenile offspring were at Budworth Mere on Aug 1st. The last record was notably early and was of 1 at Budworth Mere on Aug 9th, with none seen in autumn.



Common Tern, Budworth Mere, 9th July 2024 © Stuart Jackson

ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*

The only confirmed sighting (see 'Commic' Tern above) was of one at Budworth Mere on Apr 16th and 17th (CH, LH, GB).

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*

There were no sightings this year during spring passage, however 3 adults mostly in non-breeding plumage arrived at Budworth Mere on Aug 12th (MJ) and stayed for the rest of the day, and then a juvenile was also at Budworth Mere on Sept 10th to the 12th (GB).



Juvenile Black Tern, Budworth Mere, 10th September 2024 © Greg Baker

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia*

There are resident colonies beyond the boundaries of the patch at Witton, Lostock and Winnington. There is also a smaller population at Higher Marston. A count of 70 from Ashton's Flash on Aug 28th was the only notable record. Away from Higher Marston, records of individuals or flocks that are not passing over appear to be very rare.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*



Stock Dove, Marbury Country Park, 21st March 2024 © Stuart Jackson

The highest count early in the year was 7 at the Witton Flashes on Jan 30th. 9 were at Dairy House Meadows on Apr 8th. Individuals could often be seen entering an owl box here whilst at least 1 adult Barn Owl was clearly in residence. At least 4 pairs were at Marbury Country Park and 3 at the Witton Flashes during late spring, however this is likely a significant under estimate of the true population. Up to 10 were around Marbury Country Park and Budworth Mere in July and Aug. 5 were at Ashton's Flash on Oct 3rd where normally uncommon. Higher Marston often has flocks outside of the breeding season but this year they were scarce here. There were very few sightings across the patch in Nov, however at least two territories were already established back at Marbury Country Park from mid Dec.

COMMON WOOD PIGEON *Columba palumbus*

The only significant reports in the first half of the year were of 68 feeding in the fields north of Budworth Mere on Mar 1st, and 124 at Higher Marston on Apr 8th.

Autumn passage always produces the most noteworthy records. The first obvious sign of movement was a count of 102 south over Witton Mill on Aug 16th, however typically it wasn't until the end of Sept that larger numbers began passing through. Thanks to numerous visible migration watches undertaken by BA from Witton Mill, record numbers were registered. The first really sizeable count was of 2922 on Oct 3rd, followed by 3718 on Oct 11th, 3597 on Oct 13th, 4534 on Oct 18th, 7930 on Oct 22nd, and 9051 on Oct 23rd (when there was a notable movement nationally) which now stands as the patch record. 6485 were still migrating on Oct 27th, however this was the last four figure count. 957 were counted on Oct 30th. 860 went over the Witton Flashes on Nov 11th, and over 200 were noted feeding in fields at Higher Marston on Dec 11th.

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

The only on patch breeders are at Higher Marston, but there has been a noticeable reduction there since 2022. Just 2 were present there in Jan and 3 in Feb, however none could be found on a visit on Mar 6th. 4 there on May 30th indicated breeding pairs are still present, and 8 seen on Nov 27th was a positive sign, with 5 there on Dec 23rd. At least one pair breeds at Marston and usually accounts for occasional sightings at Neumann's Flash and Dairy House Meadows. Fairly regular sightings over Witton Mill in May possibly related to a pair that nests near the Northwich Recycling Centre, but they were not seen again there until early Aug. 3 were then noted on Aug 17th, Sept 20th and Sept 24th, but more usually just the 2 through to early Nov.

COMMON CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

The earliest this year was seen rather than heard, with 1 flying south over Ashton's Flash on May 1st. One was then around the north part of the Witton Flashes on May 3rd and possibly the same again roaming around the Carey Park, Haydn's Pool, Uplands and Witton Mill area from May 8th-17th. Two were very vocal and active around the west end of Marbury Country Park on May 11th with 2 also seen on Ashton's Flash the same day. One or two were then reported daily from the Witton Mill Meadows area through to June 10th, with a pair seen together on May 27th, and bubbling calls from a female indicating egg laying on a few days after that. 1 was calling from Coward Wood at Budworth Mere on June 7th and 10th, and 1

was around Budworth Mere on June 12th. 1 remained around the west side of the Witton Flashes to June 30th, but becoming much less regular towards the end of its stay. 1 was calling again from Coward Wood on June 23rd. 1 calling at Dairy House Meadows on July 9th proved to be the last reported for the year.



Common Cuckoo, Marbury Country Park, 11th May 2024 © Barbara Baker

WESTERN BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

At least one was again present in the owl box at Dairy House Meadows from Jan through to late summer and then again from mid Sept onwards. Reflecting a poor breeding season locally however no eggs were laid. An adult was seen in flight there on Nov 7th having been disturbed from the box by a Grey Squirrel. It's possible that a pair were also occupying one of the nest boxes on Haydn's Pool, as a pair were seen in flight here just after dawn on Apr 9th. Away from these sites, 1 flew low across the bund between Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes early evening on Jan 26th, and 1 was hunting over Neumann's Flash at dawn on Apr 23rd. There was also evidence of Common Starlings being consumed by Barn Owls in Pod's Hide at Neumann's Flash at both ends of the year.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

No doubt significantly under recorded given the general lack of coverage when they tend to be most active. There were at least four territories at Marbury Country Park early in the year with at least two more at the Witton Flashes. 2 were seen in flight at dusk over the Coward Reedbed on Feb 11th and again on Mar 23rd. Individuals calling during daylight hours were at Forge Wood on Mar 5th and Apr 18th, at Haydn's Pool on Mar 28th, Apr 22nd and Apr 24th,

and north-east of Neumann's Flash on Nov 11th. 4 were calling around Marbury Country Park at dusk on Sept 12th. There were no reports of any seen at roost sites.

COMMON SWIFT *Apus apus*

As in 2023, the first of the year was not at Budworth Mere as has traditionally been the case but at the Witton Flashes, with one over Ashton's and then Neumann's Flashes on Apr 20th, quickly followed by 2 over the former on Apr 21st. 6 were over the flashes on Apr 24th-26th and often double figures seen into mid May. The first at Budworth Mere were not until May 13th when 7 were seen, with 13 there on May 23rd. 42 were over Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on May 26th and c50 on May 29th-30th, plus 30 at Budworth Mere also on May 30th plus c50 there on June 5th. 70 were over Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on June 13th, and 18 at Budworth Mere on July 4th. This latter count disguised an overall lack of sightings around Budworth Mere, and 1 next day on July 5th was to be the last reported from there. Meanwhile, further counts over Ashton's Flash included 27 on July 9th, 14 on July 17th, and the final double figure count of 14 on Aug 19th. Sightings continued into early Sept with 3 over Witton Mill on the 4th, 2 on the 6th and 4 on the 7th, with the last sighting being of 1 over Ashton's Flash on the 13th.

COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*



Male Common Kingfisher, Budworth Mere, 29th February 2024 © Mark Jarrett

There were usually at least 2 viewable from the hide or along the south side of Budworth Mere in Jan, with 4 present on Jan 18th and 3 regularly seen later in the month through to mid Feb. During this period a male was often seen feeding a female in front of the hide. A pair were on territory at the start of Forge Brook from mid Feb, and 4 were in front of the hide on Feb 23rd.

1 was often reported along Marbury Brook in Hopyards Wood in late Mar, and was presumed to be the male seen feeding in front of the hide at Budworth Mere and then usually flying off in that direction carrying food. Taking into account various sightings it was considered that 3 pairs nested in the general vicinity of Marbury Country Park.



Male Common Kingfisher, Budworth Mere, 18th January 2024 © Maggie Bullock

One seen in flight and perched at Ashton's Flash on May 31st was the first reported from the Witton Flashes and was then seen occasionally around Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes through to July 20th. A pair were also seen along Witton Brook upriver of the road bridge on June 21st and an adult and a juvenile were at Ashton's Flash on July 17th. Back at Budworth Mere, a pair had returned along with a juvenile to the area in front of the hide by June 5th and up to 4 could be seen there by mid month and through to late Aug. On Aug 1st these were joined across the patch by 1 at Dairy House Meadows and another at Marston Flashes. 1 or 2 were regularly seen around the north area of the Witton Flashes from mid Sept to late Oct. Although only two were usually seen at Budworth Mere in Sept and Oct, at least 3 were present from Nov onwards. 1 was at Marston Flashes on Dec 23rd. Of note, one was seen to catch 17 fish during a session at the Budworth Mere hide on Dec 27th.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopus minor*

It would appear a tenuous hold is being maintained at Marbury Country Park given one was photographed on Mar 18th and presumably the same was heard calling on Apr 2nd.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopus major*

First reported drumming at Marbury Country Park on Jan 7th, with 2 drumming there by Feb 2nd and 3 on Feb 23rd. The first heard drumming at the Witton Flashes was along Marbury Lane on Feb 5th, and 2 were drumming in Butterfinch Wood on Mar 22nd when another was also drumming in Forge Wood. An estimated 3 pairs were nesting around Marbury Country Park and 3 pairs around the Witton Flashes by mid Apr. Although not all potential sites were covered, this was two less than in 2023. 5 at the Witton Flashes on Sept 17th may have indicated some local passage, and similarly 4 in the Witton Mill area on Oct 11th. 1 was already drumming in Big Wood at Marbury Country Park on Dec 12th.



Male Great Spotted Woodpecker, Marbury Country Park, 22nd February 2024 © Stuart Jackson

EUROPEAN GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

One was calling north-east of Neumann's Flash on Jan 15th and again on the 24th, with possibly the same calling from the canal area of Marbury Country Park on Jan 30th. 1 was

calling and and seen in Big Wood at Marbury Country Park on Feb 17th. It's possible that further reports from Dairy House Meadows on Feb 26th and 1 Haydn's Pool on Mar 17th all related to the same mobile individual, however 1 along the east side of Ashton's Flash on Mar 29th was presumed different. Further reports included 1 in Hopyards Wood on Apr 3rd and 1 very active around Black Wood on Apr 4th, and also 1 calling at Carey Park on May 6th. There were no further reports during the summer until 1 was calling at Dairy House Meadows on July 9th. From July 18th a juvenile was regularly seen and heard along the bund at the Witton Flashes and often roaming to Dairy House Meadows, Haydn's Pool and Carey Park. Of note, 3 at Ashton's Flash on Aug 2nd included at least 2 juvenile females. There were only a few reports of an individual in the Witton Flashes area during Sept, Oct and early Nov, however one became more obvious again during Nov and was still present on occasions to the end of Dec. At Marbury Country Park, 1 was along the south side of Budworth Mere on Aug 30th and 1 was mobile around the park on Sept 19th. 1 was in Big Wood on Dec 5th and 6th and at Black Wood on the 24th.



Juvenile female European Green Woodpecker, Ashton's Flash, 2nd August 2024 © Greg Baker

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Relatively scarce nowadays, with none breeding on the patch but likely three territories nearby (west of Marbury Country Park, east of Higher Marston and east of Ashton's Flash) which account for the majority of records. Early in the year there were single sightings at Higher Marston and Marbury Country Park in Jan, east of Ashton's Flash on Feb 26th, and east of Budworth Mere on Mar 9th. On Apr 14th separate individuals were seen to the north-east of Neumann's Flash and on Ashton's Flash. There were three more sightings at Dairy House Meadows and Ashton's Flash in Apr, and single records from the latter site and from Budworth Mere in May and June. The first juvenile reported was at Ashton's Flash on July 15th, and 2 juveniles were there occasionally from July 26th to Aug 22nd. A male was at Neumann's Flash

on Aug 5th. From Sept to mid Oct there were again single sightings from Ashton's Flash and Budworth Mere, however the only records after that were of 1 by the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Nov 8th, and a female at Eyres Pit on Nov 25th.



Juvenile Common Kestrel, Ashton's Flash, 22nd August 2024 © Kev Bruen

EURASIAN HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

An early individual flew north-west over Haydn's Pool on Apr 12th, with the next being 1 showing well at Budworth Mere on Apr 30th. 1 was seen twice at Ashton's Flash on May 6th and again on May 7th, with 2 seen together there on May 8th. 1 was over the north side of



Eurasian Hobby, Ashton's Flash, 26th September 2024 © Malc Curtin

Budworth Mere on May 13th and 17th. There were regular sightings from Ashton's Flash from May 20th-31st, with 1 also there on June 12th and 16th. Two at Ashton's Flash on June 18th were involved in a dispute and appeared to be a male and female from different pairs. Three adults were there on the morning of the 19th, the first time more than 2 have been seen together on the patch. 1 was chasing hirundines over Budworth Mere on July 3rd, and presumably the same was over Coward Wood on July 19th. There were three further sightings of adults at Ashton's Flash in July, with the first juvenile seen there on the 22nd. 1 at Ashton's Flash on Aug 10th was watched chasing swifts. From Aug 14th, 1 was regularly seen flying north-east over Ashton's and then Neumann's Flashes early mornings, with 2 seen on Sept 5th, and last seen on Sept 10th. 1 headed south over Witton Mill on Sep 19th and an adult was often seen perched in the middle of Ashton's Flash from Sept 20th-26th. Notable late records were of 1 over Budworth Mere on Oct 2nd and again on the 8th when still hunting dragonflies.

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*

With the nest site at Winnington now abandoned, the only nest site in the immediate vicinity of the patch is at Lostock. It is visible (distantly) from Ashton's Flash, and one was seen back at the site from Feb 19th and the pair became generally more noticeable once young were hatched in mid May. It is undoubtedly this pair that account for sightings over the Witton Flashes. The first individual seen within the patch boundaries was over Neumann's Flash on Mar 26th, and then again on Apr 3rd and Apr 23rd, followed sightings over Ashton's Flash on May 6th and 21st. 3 were then over Carey Park on July 4th and presumably included at least one of the fledged juveniles. 2 were seen hunting together over Ashton's Flash on Aug 8th and 2 more there on Aug 16th were both juveniles. There were further infrequent sightings of singletons over Ashton's Flash during Sept with the last there being seen on Oct 21st and 22nd.

Away from the flashes sightings may or may not be from the Lostock family. A juvenile watched chasing an Eurasian Oystercatcher over Budworth Mere on July 17th probably was though. The only other sightings away from the flashes were of 1 hunting Feral Pigeons at Higher Marston on Oct 12th, and 1 over Marbury Country Park on Dec 20th and the 23rd.

RING-NECKED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*

The sight of two flying east over the north side of Neumann's Flash on Nov 6th (GB) was one of the most unwelcome additions to the Witton Flashes species list. With the population expanding from Dunham Massey and now established in Tatton Park, they seem destined to become more regular over the coming years.

EURASIAN JAY *Garrulus glandarius*

Fairly common around the main sites all year, with a maximum of 5 at the Witton Flashes on Apr 23rd being the highest count during the first half of the year. The first (and only) double figure count was typically in autumn with 10 around Neumann's Flash on Sept 17th. At least 6 were regularly seen carrying acorns across Witton Mill Meadows in Oct and another 2 or 3 doing the same from Coward Wood. Noticeably more common around the feeders at the Budworth Mere hide during Nov and Dec.



Eurasian Jay, Marbury Country Park, 18th June 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe

EURASIAN MAGPIE *Pica pica*

Common at all sites but more particularly at Higher Marston and the Witton Flashes. High counts at the former were 16 on Jan 8th and again on Mar 6th. At the flashes there were 12 on Feb 19th, 35 at Ashton's Flash on Oct 3rd and 21 still there on Oct 10th, and 12 at Neumann's Flash on Dec 2nd.

WESTERN JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

The main breeding population within the patch boundaries remains at Marbury Country Park, although there was no estimate of nest site numbers this year. Notable site counts were 53 at Higher Marston on Jan 8th, 80 at a pre-roost gathering east of Budworth Mere on Jan 20th, and up to 35 on Ashton's Flash in early May. There were fewer at any site during the summer months. Visible migration counts from Witton Mill during the autumn revealed 63 on Sept 25th, 57 on Oct 3rd, 74 on Oct 4th, an impressive 201 on Oct 18th, 64 on Oct 21st, 38 on Oct 23rd, and 84 on Oct 25th. 70+ were at Higher Marston on Dec 11th.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

The rookery along Ollershaw Lane appeared to have just four occupied nests during the spring, although up to 11 adults were often present. 36 had been seen feeding in a field nearby at Higher Marston on Jan 30th. There was a typical scattering of sightings of individuals flying over the Witton Flashes and Budworth Mere early in the year, presumably heading to and from the rookery. 2 were then regularly seen flying north-east over Witton Mill early mornings in late Apr, followed by 4 north over Neumann's Flash on May 15th, 4 over Kid Brook Fields at

Budworth Mere on May 17th, 2 over Marbury Country Park on June 7th, and 2 again over Kid Brook Fields on June 17th. 20 were at Higher Marston on Sept 3rd, some of which were juveniles and probably from the local rookery.

Autumn saw a clear increase in sightings, with many more than usual at the Witton Flashes. 3 flew north over Ashton's Flash on Sept 18th and 9 south there on Sept 28th, with 3 over Witton Mill on Oct 12th, 11 on Oct 14th, and up to 4 then on occasions to the month end. At Marbury Country Park, 8 passed overhead on Sept 19th, after which up to 3 were seen on a few occasions to mid Nov. 21 heading east over Dairy House Meadows on Nov 19th were notable. 23 were around the housing estate at Higher Marston on Dec 2nd. 12 flew north over Marbury Country Park on Dec 6th and a few were regularly moving overhead there to the end of the year.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Common in small numbers across the patch, so the following records were notable: 15 at Marbury Country Park on 11th Jan, and 22 at Ashton's Flash on Apr 20th, then 25 on the 21st and 23 on the 24th. The next double figure count was not until Aug 16th when 14 flew over Witton Mill. 35 were at Higher Marston on Sept 3rd. 14 at Marbury Country Park on Sept 5th and 25 on Sept 13th. 35 were recorded from Witton Mill Mound on Oct 12th and an impressive 82 on Oct 18th.

NORTHERN RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Individuals were noted passing overhead at Dairy House Meadows and Budworth Mere in early Jan, less so later in the month into early spring. 1 was soaring over Ashton's Flash on Feb 19th, with 2 over on Mar 22nd. They became more regular over the Witton Flashes and Marbury Country Park from the end of Mar, with 3 together over the latter on Apr 8th. A pair seemed to be nesting somewhere at the Winnington complex and seemingly accounted for numerous sightings over the flashes from mid Apr through to early May (presumably on food gathering forays). A family of 4 was then first seen over Witton Mill on May 13th and feeding on a carcass (probably a Canada Goose) on Ashton's Flash on May 21st. 5 flew over Dairy House Meadows on June 3rd and 3 were over Haydn's Pool on June 10th. There were no reports in July and then until 1 was over Ashton's Flash on Aug 8th and 1 at Marbury Country Park on Aug 12th. 2 were then more regularly seen over the Witton Flashes from mid Aug to mid Sept, with 4 on Aug 26th. 2 went over Budworth Mere and another over Neumann's Flash on Oct 7th, and 3 went north over Ashton's Flash on Oct 21st. 2 were infrequently over Marbury Country Park and the Witton Flashes in Nov and early Dec but none thereafter.

BOHEMIAN WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulus*

A pair were at the east end of the bund between Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on Feb 1st (CH & LH), briefly seen eating sorbus berries and drinking from a puddle. They moved off west and unfortunately were not seen again.

COAL TIT *Periparus ater*

The feeders at Marbury Country Park (Big Wood and the mere hide) attracted up to 6 during both winter periods. The first heard singing was at Marbury Country Park on Jan 10th. As usual, reports from the Witton Flashes were few, but included 2 at Neumann's Flash on Jan 10th. Individuals were heard singing around the old paddocks to the north-east of Neumann's Flash in Apr and it seems possible that a pair had a territory there. Even at Marbury Country Park they are significantly under recorded, with the only reports of more than two outside of either winter period being 3 on May 2nd and 3 on Oct 11th. Mild conditions led to one already singing at Marbury Country Park on Dec 23rd.



Coal Tit, Marbury Country Park, 27th September 2024 © Nathan Wilde

EURASIAN BLUE TIT *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Surveys undertaken at the start of the year revealed 45 around Marbury Country Park on Jan 11th and 22 at the Witton Flashes on Jan 25th. Five broods were hatched in the nest boxes in Coward Wood at Budworth Mere, however none of them fledged. Four of the broods were predated by Great Spotted Woodpeckers and the fifth were found dead in the box along with one of the adult parents (see Great Tit below). 18 were noted at the two main feeding stations at Marbury Country Park on Dec 15th.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*

Surveys undertaken early in the year revealed 15 at the Witton Flashes on Jan 25th and 25 around Marbury Country Park on Feb 2nd. As with the Eurasian Blue Tits it was a depressing

breeding season in Coward Wood at Budworth Mere with much the same story. Three nest boxes were occupied with eggs hatched, but all three broods failed to fledge. Two were predated by Great Spotted Woodpeckers and the third brood were again found dead in the box along with one of the adult parents. Other than the surveys mentioned earlier, the only counts of more than a dozen were of 15+ at Marbury Country Park on Feb 11th, whilst the only count of more than six at the Witton Flashes was of 7 on Apr 2nd.

EURASIAN SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*

Although 2023 had proved to be a blank year for wintering flocks at Higher Marston, a flock of 34 were discovered nearby in the fields to the south-east of Budworth Mere on Jan 8th. One on Ashton's Flash on Jan 25th was too early to be considered back on territory, although 1 at Higher Marston on Feb 16th was in song flight and a pair were there on Mar 6th. 1 was also singing plus 3 more present to the south-east of Budworth Mere on Mar 6th. At least 3 were at Higher Marston from Mar 17th-Apr 12th with 5 there on Mar 29th. 1 flew north over Ashton's Flash on Apr 25th and another on May 2nd. 4 were at Higher Marston on May 30th, including 3 in song flight but only one was singing there on June 21st once the fields had been ploughed. With no territories maintained at the Witton Flashes or around Budworth Mere it seems there were none that successfully bred this year.

Autumn passage was much more pronounced than in the spring and commenced with 16 noted over Witton Mill on Sept 25th. Notable counts then included 34 south over Ashton's Flash on Oct 3rd, 32 over the Witton Flashes on Oct 11th, 11 over Neumann's Flash on Oct 18th, and 13 south over Witton Mill Mound on Oct 22nd. The first at Marbury Country Park passed over on Oct 7th, with 5 south there on Oct 11th, 3 over on Nov 6th, and 2 on Nov 8th. At the Witton Flashes in Nov, 6 went over on the 11th and 1 on the 15th. 23 were located wintering at Higher Marston on Nov 27th and 32 were there on Dec 23rd.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

One was over Budworth Mere as early as Mar 7th, joined by a second from Mar 8th-11th. A "few" at Ashton's Flash on Mar 12th were the first reported at the Witton Flashes. By Mar 15th there were 34 at Budworth Mere and 50 dropped in there late afternoon on Mar 16th. c200 were then at the mere on Mar 22nd and 23rd with a steady increase to 500+ on Mar 27th as poor weather held sway. Meanwhile, 38 had been over Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes on Mar 25th. 1200 were present during persistent rain at Budworth Mere on Apr 10th (when 230 were also noted passing south over Ashton's Flash), with 300 still on Apr 12th. 450 headed north over Ashton's Flash on Apr 14th, and 350 passed through there plus another 260 were at Budworth Mere on Apr 16th. 400+ were at Budworth Mere from Apr 19th-22nd. 305 passed north over Ashton's Flash on Apr 20th, 60+ were flushed from a roost there on Apr 21st, and 220 were at Ashton's and Neumann's Flashes on Apr 23rd. 200 north over Ashton's Flash on Apr 26th was the last sizeable spring movement, and there were few records in May and June from any site.

Poor weather in early July attracted some to Budworth Mere, with around 40 there from 2nd-4th, however there were still relatively few anywhere until 35 passed over Ashton's Flash on Aug 14th. Up to 50 were amongst a large mixed flock of hirundines at Budworth Mere on Aug 23rd, although there were hardly any again thereafter. Late records in Sept were of 1 over

Witton Mill Meadows and 2 at Budworth Mere on Sept 10th, and finally 14 over Budworth Mere on Sept 12th.



Sand Martin, Budworth Mere, 15th April 2024 © Nathan Wilde

BARN SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

The earliest spring migrants were 2 over Budworth Mere on Mar 23rd, however the next were not until 2 were at the same site on Mar 27th. Passage remained slow with just 1 until Apr 7th, then 2 on Apr 8th and 9 on Apr 10th (all at the mere). The first reported at the Witton Flashes were 3 over Ashton's Flash on Apr 10th. 10 at Neumann's Flash on Apr 19th was the first double figure count, repeated over Ashton's Flash on Apr 23rd with 17 there on Apr 24th. Very few were at either the Witton Flashes or Budworth Mere in May, usually just single birds or pairs. More positively, at least 3 pairs appeared to be nesting at Old Hall Farm, Higher Marston at the end of May, although there was no sign of any there by mid June. Another pair apparently nesting at nearby School Farm appeared to be more successful.

Up to 10 were around Budworth Mere in June, probably from nest sites in Comberbach, with 35 there on July 2nd but only single figures again through to early Aug. There were very few records from the Witton Flashes in the summer before a flock of 32 headed south over Neumann's Flash on Aug 5th. After that, late summer and autumn passage certainly surpassed what had been witnessed in the spring. Flocks began to accumulate at Budworth Mere in mid Aug, culminating in 80 there on Aug 19th. There was a regular flow of migrants over the Witton Flashes from late Aug, peaking at 178 noted from Witton Mill on the morning of Sept 17. 22 were at Budworth Mere on Sept 5th. Other notable counts were 124 over Ashton's Flash on Sept 18th, 70 over Witton Mill Mound and 13 south over Budworth Mere on Sept 25th, and further passage over Ashton's Flash of 30 on Oct 3rd, 46 on Oct 4th, and 5 on Oct 12th. Late sightings were of 1 over Budworth Mere on Oct 21st, 1 over Ashton's Flash on Oct

22nd, and most unexpectedly 1 at Budworth Mere from Nov 3rd-7th and joined by a second individual on Nov 8th, although neither were reported thereafter.



Barn Swallow, Budworth Mere, 15th April 2024 © Nathan Wilde

COMMON HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbichum*

The first of the year was amongst the mass flock of Sand Martins at Budworth Mere on Mar 27th, however there were no further sightings until 2 were amongst a mixed hirundine flock there from Apr 8th-10th. There were however very few at the mere from mid Apr though to late May. The earliest at the Witton Flashes were 2 over Ashton's Flash on Apr 14th, but then few reports until 12 were present on Apr 23rd and 8 on May 2nd, and after that only single figures irregularly at both flashes for most of the summer. There were also few sightings at Budworth Mere in May, although 20 were there on the 23rd, followed by 40+ there on June 4th and an estimated 100 present on June 5th. 50+ were at Budworth Mere on July 1st-2nd, with 35 still on the 4th.

Late summer passage at the Witton Flashes finally kicked in with 45 over Ashton's Flash on Aug 8th. Other counts in Aug included c50 over Budworth Mere on the 9th, 25 over Ashton's Flash on the 16th, c60 at Budworth Mere on the 23rd, and 26 over Witton Mill Meadows on Aug 28th. Passage continued into Sept with 12 at Budworth Mere on the 5th, 110 south over Witton Mill on the 7th and 85 on the 9th, 55 were over the flashes on the 13th and a loose flock of around 50 visible east of the flashes on the 25th. Unlike 2023, movements were maintained into Oct with 25 south over Ashton's Flash on the 2nd, 12 on the 3rd, 10 on the 4th, and 3 south on the 11th. 1 was still around Marston on the 12th, and the last recorded were 6 heading south viewed from Witton Mill Mound on Oct 15th.

CETTI'S WARBLER *Cettia cetti*

Although there were no formal surveys in 2024, it would seem that the population has decreased substantially across the patch (for reasons unknown), with those remaining being established at the prime habitats. A maximum of three could be heard singing around the Witton Flashes from early Jan, and one was in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere on Jan 24th. 1 was singing from a new territory by the heronry at Budworth Mere on Mar 11th and again on Apr 10th, however it may well have been the same as previously reported at the Coward Reedbed. There were certainly fewer than usual around the Witton Flashes in early Apr, with only 5 recorded on the 8th. 1 was along the east side of Forge on Apr 12th and 3 were singing along the River Weaver in the Carden's Ferry Bridge area Apr 23rd, however there were very few reports from any site from May and throughout the summer months, and only singles singing again from mid Aug. 1 was singing by the sailing club at Budworth Mere occasionally from Aug 30th, and 1 was back at the Coward Reedbed from Sept 19th but was then only heard occasionally though to the end of the year. From autumn onwards at the Witton Flashes, a maximum of 6 were singing on Sept 20th and again on Nov 4th.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

Most often reported outside of the breeding season when mobile flocks are most visible. Early in the year there were 13 at Neumann's Flash on Jan 10th, 16 at Marbury Country Park on Jan 15th, and 14 around the Witton Flashes on Feb 8th. There were no other reports of note until a flock of up to 28 established themselves along the south side of Budworth Mere from Aug 19th-23rd. 15 were at Anderton Nature Park on Aug 15th, then 25+ at the Witton Flashes on Sept 23rd, 20 at the Witton Flashes on Oct 4th, 13 in the Ashton's Flash area alone on Oct 11th, 22 at Marbury Country Park on Nov 1st, 13 at Anderton Nature Park on Nov 2nd, 20 at Marbury Country Park on Nov 8th, and 20 at the Witton Flashes on Dec 9th.



Long-tailed Tit, Marbury Country Park, 2nd February 2024 © Mark Jarrett

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Keeping the traditional end of Mar arrival timeframe alive, 1 was singing on the east side of Neumann's Flash on Mar 28th. It was quickly followed by one on the east shore of Budworth Mere on Mar 29th. By Apr 11th there were already 12 around Neumann's Flash, and 3 migrants were along the south side of Budworth Mere on Apr 12th. By the end of May there were still 5 territories around Neumann's Flash. After a break of a month or so, individuals were again singing around Witton Mill in late July and early Aug. 3 were singing at Marbury Country Park and 1 at Neumann's Flash on Aug 16th. The last at Marbury Country Park was reported signing on Aug 22nd, and at least 2 remained around the Witton Mill area until Sept 4th with the last noted on Sept 6th.

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

The only wintering individual early in the year was along the east side of Neumann's Flash on Jan 12th and again on Feb 2nd. The honour of what was presumed to be the first of early spring passage went to Marbury Country Park with 1 on Feb 23rd actively feeding in the manner of a recently arrived migrant. 1 was singing at Dairy House Meadows from Feb 24th to Mar 6th but there were no other migrants until 1 was at Witton Mill car park on Mar 8th. A walk around the Witton Flashes and Marbury Country Park on Mar 21st revealed 34 in song, with at least 55 across the patch on Mar 23rd (37 of which were at the Witton Flashes). By Apr 3rd this number had increased to at least 82, 48 of which were at the Witton Flashes, 31 at Marbury Country Park and 3 at Higher Marston. 14 were at Anderton Nature Park and 9 at Carey Park on May 6th. 13 were still singing around Marbury Country Park on June 3rd, and 18 at the Witton Flashes and 9 at Carey Park on June 17th.



Common Chiffchaff, Marbury Country Park, 13th August 2024 © Stuart Jackson

As late summer migrants arrived counts began to increase again from mid Aug, with 19 around the shores of Budworth Mere on Aug 16th. 23 were around the Witton Flashes on Sept 1st and again on the 5th, with 27 around the general area of Neumann's Flash on Sept 17th including

16 songsters. Into Oct, 8 were at the Witton Flashes on the 10th and 3 at Budworth Mere on the 11th. 1 was singing on Dairy House Meadows on Oct 17th. Of the 2 at Ashton's Flash on Oct 15th, 1 remained around the west side and along the bund until the year end. Another was also at Neumann's Flash on Oct 25th and 1 at Wincham Mound on Nov 3rd. Including the wintering individual, 3 were around the Witton Flashes from Nov 11th-15th.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

As usual, Ashton's Flash produced the first of the spring, with one on Apr 11th. 6 had established territories there by Apr 23rd. 1 was at Haydn's Pool from Apr 30th to mid May at least, with a second individual also present in early May. An excellent total of 13 were on territory around the Witton Flashes on May 6th, which included 10 on Ashton's Flash. One in the south-west corner of Neumann's Flash on this date was present to at least May 17th. One was on territory at the east end of Budworth Mere on May 30th. There were still 6 singing at Ashton's Flash on July 17th. A juvenile was in front of the hide at Budworth Mere on July 22nd. The last heard singing at Ashton's Flash was on July 29th. The only report in Aug was of 1 at Ashton's Flash on the 16th, however a late individual was also seen there on Sept 7th.

EURASIAN REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*



Eurasian Reed Warbler, Neumann's Flash, 24th May 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe

The first of the spring was singing by Pod's Hide at Neumann's Flash on Apr 6th, soon followed by 2 at Butterfinch Bridge and 1 at Haydn's Pool on Apr 8th. 4 were audible from Butterfinch Bridge on Apr 10th. The first at Budworth Mere were 2 in the Coward Reedbed on Apr 12th. By

Apr 24th there were 11 on territory in the vicinity of Neumann's Flash. A survey on May 6th (but excluding Budworth Mere) revealed 36 on territory with 12 at Witton Mill Meadows, 9 at Neumann's Flash, 2 at Ashton's Flash, 3 at Haydn's Pool, 6 at Anderton Nature Park and 4 along the River Weaver at Carey Park. There appeared to be fewer in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere this year. From May to mid June there were an estimated 12 territories around the mere with at least 5 in the Coward Reedbed, 2 along the south-east shoreline, 1 on the south side, 1 by the sailing club and 3 at Kid Brook Marsh.

Late summer and autumn records included 1 at Witton Mill Meadows on Aug 28th, 2 at Budworth Mere on Aug 30th, 2 on the north side of Neumann's Flash on Sept 1st, and 1 at Budworth Mere on Sept 3rd. Finally, 1 was seen by Pod's Hide at Neumann's Flash from Sept 18th to the 29th.

COMMON GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

Another reasonably good year, beginning with one was reeling in front of the Tata Hide at Haydn's Pool from Apr 8th to the 23rd at least. 1 was also along the south side of Dairy House Meadows from Apr 12th-24th and again there on May 17th. 1 was heard in the north-east corner of Ashton's Flash on Apr 20th, with possibly the same by Eyres Pit on the 21st. On the latter date, 1 was also reeling from on the Forge side of the Trent and Mersey Canal. 1 was along the west side of Ashton's Flash on Apr 23rd, and another along the south-east side on May 18th. There were no reports in June, however 1 was reeling again on Dairy House Meadows on July 7th to the 9th.



Common Grasshopper Warbler, Haydn's Pool, 23rd April 2024 © Greg Baker

EURASIAN BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

One was reportedly at Marbury Country Park on the early date of Feb 2nd. The first definite spring arrivals were 2 males singing at Marbury Country Park on Mar 25th, with the first at the Witton Flashes being at Neumann's Flash on Mar 28th, the same date that 1 was also at Uplands. By Apr 3rd there were 12 at the Witton Flashes, 16 at Marbury Country Park and 3 at Higher Marston, with 4 more at the park on Apr 5th. A couple of surveys in May and June suggested there were at least 61 on territory around the patch with 24 at Marbury Country Park, 21 at the Witton Flashes, 12 at Anderton Nature Park, 3 at Carey Park and 1 in the Marston area. Although not a formal survey, this total was well down on the 137 territories present in 2023. There were 23 at Marbury Country Park on July 5th.

As numbers began to decline in early autumn, there were still 6 at Dairy House Meadows on Sept 17th, 2 at Marbury Country Park and 1 along the south side of Neumann's Flash on Sept 19th, a male at Dairy House Meadows and 1 at Marbury Country Park on Sept 20th, 1 at Neumann's Flash and 2 at Dairy House Meadows on Sept 23rd, and 2 at Neumann's Flash on Sept 25th. A male with Long-tailed Tits at Marbury Country Park on Nov 8th may have been wintering although it was not reported subsequently.



Juvenile Eurasian Blackcap, Marbury Country Park, 3rd June 2024 © Stuart Jackson

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*

The earliest reports of singing individuals were by Eyres Pit and at Carden's Ferry Bridge on Apr 23rd, with 1 at the traditional site of Wincham Mound from Apr 24th. 1 was at Dairy House Meadows on Apr 28th with 1 at Carey Park on Apr 30th and 2 there on May 2nd, when also 2 were at Wincham Mound and 1 along the east side of Ashton's Flash. The first at Marbury

Country Park was not until May 6th, and no more than 2 singing males were present during the summer. By mid May, there were only an estimated 11 territories around the patch compared to 23 in 2023. Although not a formal census it did feel that far fewer had returned to breed. A maximum of 6 were singing around the Witton Flashes on May 13th but just 2 on June 4th. 1 was still singing at Marbury Country Park on July 2nd and 1 at Neumann's Flash on July 3rd, with the latest there on July 30th. It was a notably poor late summer and autumn passage with the only record after July being 1 with a mixed flock feeding on elderberries at Marbury Country Park on Aug 14th.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

There were two spring records this year, and neither lingered much beyond their initial discovery. 1 was between Neumann's Flash and Dairy House Meadows on Apr 24th (GB) and another was at Carey Park on May 1st (VL).

COMMON WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Dairy House Meadows recorded the first of the year on Apr 18th, with 2 there on the 21st when 1 was also at Haydn's Pool. Individuals were at Anderton Nature Park and on the east side of Ashton's Flash from Apr 23rd. By May 6th there were 7 around the Witton Flashes and 2 at Anderton Nature Park, with 4 other new territories established by May 27th. 1 was at the east end of Budworth Mere on May 30th. 1 was discovered singing near the scrape at Marbury Country Park (a territorial area that has been occupied in the past) from June 3rd to at least July 5th. As with other *sylvia* warblers. the number of probable breeders seemed much reduced from 2023, and autumn passage was also particularly poor. The latest reports were of 1 at Ashton's Flash and 1 at Dairy House Meadows on Aug 14th.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

Seemingly commoner this year. Up to 5 were seen regularly at Marbury Country Park in Jan and early Feb, and 6 were noted on Feb 19th. There were at least 4 territories at Marbury Country Park during the breeding season. The only known territory at the Witton Flashes was



Goldcrest, Marbury Country Park, 24th December 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe

in Butterfinch Wood. The first juvenile was seen by Budworth Mere on July 2nd. Up to 3 were tagging along with a Long-tailed Tit flock at Marbury Country Park on Aug 19th-23rd. The highest counts were typically during autumn with 8 at Marbury Country Park on Sept 5th and again on Sept 13th. 3 were regularly noted along the east side of Neumann's Flash in mid Oct, and 2 were at Witton Mill on Oct 29th. 5 at the Witton Flashes on Nov 7th was the highest count there. 4 were at Anderton Nature Park on Nov 2nd. 6 at Marbury Country Park on Nov 25th was the maximum there during the last months of the year.

EURASIAN WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Significant counts were of 29 singing around the Witton Flashes and 22 at Anderton Nature Park on May 6th, 30 at Marbury Country Park on May 9th, 54 singing around Marbury Country Park on June 3rd, 20 at the Witton Flashes on June 13th, and 26 at Marbury Country Park on July 5th. Common but much less noticeable outside of the breeding season.



Eurasian Wren, Marbury Country Park, 27th February 2024 © Stuart Jackson

EURASIAN NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*

Commonly heard around Marbury Country Park, where all the double figure sightings were from. These included 13 on Jan 5th. 12 on Feb 2nd, and 11 on Mar 1st. A total of 19 territories were located here on Apr 2nd with at least 2 more territories identified on Apr 5th. With fewer calling during the summer and early autumn there were no notable counts until 11 were recorded on Oct 11th. Although up to 9 were reported during the Nov and Dec this was the last double figure count.

At the Witton Flashes, 4 were around the Witton Brook and Forge Brook woodlands on Jan 25th and the same number again in that general area on Mar 22nd. Reports suggested at least 2 pairs were present here all year. They are scarce around the southern parts of the Witton

Flashes, so notable records were of 2 flying over Witton Mill on Apr 24th, and 1 in the south-east corner of Ashton's Flash on July 17th.



Juvenile Eurasian Nuthatch, Marbury Country Park, 18th June 2024 © Mark Ratcliffe

EURASIAN TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*

Can be found in most of the woodlands around the patch, more so at Marbury Country Park. One or two pairs along the south side of Budworth Mere being the most regularly reported. No



Eurasian Treecreeper, Marbury Country Park, 30th November 2024 © Mark Ratcliffe

more than 3 were reported on any one day from any site. They are relatively scarce at the Witton Flashes, so 2 reported there on June 24th were notable.

COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

There were some impressive murmurations early in the year (particularly at Neumann's Flash) but less so at the year end. Continuing from the end of 2023, around 40,000 roosted at Neumann's Flash in early Jan, increasing to a peak of 60,000 by the end of the month. There was a decline to 25,000 by mid month, although 4000 or so had moved across to Ashton's Flash. There were no significant counts at either flash beyond the end of Feb. Over at Budworth Mere, up to 3000 roosted in the Coward Reedbed from the New Year through to early Feb with an increase mid month reaching an estimated 10,000 on Feb 14th. Only 1000 could be seen here from Feb 19th-25th, however 5000 over the mere on Mar 8th then roosted by the sailing club. A rapid reduction saw just 22 at the roost on Mar 15th.

Gatherings of post-breeders were first noted at Budworth Mere with 32 there on July 2nd, and 280 were on wires by Eyres Pit on July 17th. The first evidence of late summer roosts was of 620 leaving Neumann's Flash at dawn on Aug 5th. Of note, an all white leucistic individual was at Budworth Mere on Aug 12th. By late Aug a small roost had developed at Ashton's Flash, and up to 600 were there overnight from early Sept to the end of Oct. c200 roosted at Neumann's Flash on Oct 10th, with around 3500 there by the end of the month and 8000 by late Nov. c1000 began roosting at Budworth Mere in early Nov with 5100 there by Nov 26th, 8,500 by Dec 16th and 12,000 by Dec 23rd. 12,000 were seen departing the Neumann's Flash roost at dawn on Dec 9th and 15,000 on Dec 20th. Away from the roosts and murmurations, up to 500 were feeding in fields at Higher Marston from late Nov to the year end.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelus*



Song Thrush, Marbury Country Park, 25th November 2024 © Nathan Wilde

By Jan 30th, there were already 7 singing from territories around the Witton Flashes, with 9 at Marbury Country Park on Feb 2nd and 10 at the Witton Flashes on Feb 5th. Other counts at Marbury Country Park included 8 singing on May 27th and 10 on June 3rd. As usual they became rather elusive in late summer. The first apparent autumn migrants were 4 avidly feeding together on berries at Marbury Country Park on Sept 12th. Later in the year, 1 was already singing Neumann's Flash on Dec 20th.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

In Jan, a pair could regularly be seen feeding in the fields north of Budworth Mere. They were most probably the pair that usually breeds somewhere north of the mere. At Marbury Country Park at least one territory was being maintained in Big Wood from Feb onwards, and another in Black Wood from mid Mar. This latter individual could also often be heard singing across the canal at Dairy House Meadows. 3 flew together over Marbury Country Park on Mar 22nd. 1 was singing from Butterfinch Wood at the Witton Flashes on Apr 24th although there was no clear evidence that they nested around the flashes this year. The two pairs were still at Marbury Country Park in mid May.

Apparently absent during most of the summer months until 3 were at Marbury Country Park on Sept 19th, with 6 there on the 20th. Obvious passage included 11 seen heading south over Ashton's Flash on Sept 25th, followed by 3 heading north on Sept 28th and then regular passage of between 1 and 3 most mornings through to Oct 18th. 5 were at Marbury Country Park on Oct 28th with at least 2 remaining through to mid Nov. 1 was already singing at Marbury Country Park as early as Nov 29th. 4 were seen together in the fields north of Budworth Mere on Dec 6th. 1 was singing from the south-east corner of Carey Park from Dec 20th onwards.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Mid winter rarely produces significant numbers at M&WF, and 33 feeding on Dairy House Meadows at dusk on Jan 1st was easily the highest count that month. 50 were at Marbury Country Park on Feb 1st and 36 at Carey Park on Feb 8th. c150 had gathered in Big Wood by Mar 10th with many singing. 7 over Ashton's Flash and 3 in Big Wood on Mar 22nd were surprisingly the last reported in the spring.

Four early autumn arrivals were at Marbury Country Park on Sept 19th when many other sites across the country also recorded their first of the season. The next sightings however were not until Oct 3rd when 12 passed south over Ashton's Flash and a small flock was also at Anderton Nature Park. Small flocks were seen moving overhead from Witton Mill Mound in early Oct but numbers picked up mid month with 162 on Oct 12th, 211 on the 15th, 462 on the 17th, 526 on Oct 18th, and 148 on Oct 30th. 168 passed west over Marbury Country Park on Oct 28th and 117 on Nov 1st, with around 130 feeding in the yew trees there from Nov 4th-8th. There were no significant counts at the end of the year, with only c25 at Marbury Country Park at the end of Nov (often fewer). There were also 42 at Higher Marston on Nov 27th, 28 at Marbury Country Park on Dec 16th, and 22 at Higher Marston on Dec 23rd.

COMMON BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

Significantly under recorded being so widespread and conspicuous for most of the year. In the first few months counts of over a dozen included 16 at Marbury Country Park on Jan 5th and 15 at the Witton Flashes on Feb 19th. At least 18 territories were maintained around the Witton Flashes during the spring, and 26 singing males were recorded at Marbury Country Park on June 3rd (although not a true reflection of the overall population). There were notably few visible or audible from mid Aug to mid Sept, with none on some visits. 13 were however at Marbury Country Park on Sept 19th following a small fall of thrushes. The highest main site counts later in the year were 16 at the Witton Flashes on Nov 21st and 17 at Marbury Country Park on Dec 2nd.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

There were very few recorded early in the year with reports limited to 3 at Higher Marston on Jan 8th, 2 by the sailing club at Budworth Mere and 16 at Higher Marston on Feb 16th, and lastly 12 by the sailing club on Feb 19th.



Fieldfare, Higher Marston, 11th December 2024 © Greg Baker

The first of the autumn was seen from Witton Mill Mound on Oct 23rd. An obvious pulse of migrants then resulted in an impressive 399 moving generally south over the same site on Oct 30th (when large numbers were also reported regionally) and 378 on Nov 4th. At Marbury Country Park, 2 were in Coward Wood on Nov 3rd and 219 passed overhead on Nov 6th, when another 28 were also seen over Witton Mill. There were fewer again in the last few weeks, however 12 were seen over Ashton's Flash on Nov 11th, and 12 at Marbury Country Park on Nov 22nd. 1 was at Higher Marston on Nov 27th, with 10 there on Dec 11th and 2 still on Dec 23rd.

EUROPEAN ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

Far commoner than reports would suggest. Notable records included 36 singing at Marbury Country Park on Feb 23rd, 30 there on Mar 28th and 25 still in song by June 3rd. At the Witton Flashes there were 20 on Apr 22nd. They typically become much more elusive once breeding has finished and the first double figure counts of late summer were 12 at the Witton Flashes on Aug 12th and 15 around Budworth Mere on Aug 30th. Later in the autumn there were 22 at the Witton Flashes on Oct 28th and the same at Marbury Country Park on Nov 11th.



European Robins, Budworth Mere, 16th April 2024 © Stuart Jackson

COMMON REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

There was only one sighting again this year with a male briefly along the Trent and Mersey Canal between Forge and Higher Marston on Apr 12th (CH).

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

Mainly thanks to prolonged visible migration watches from Witton Mill Mound there were more reports than usual this year. The first seen was a male in the north-west corner of Ashton's Flash on April 24th (BA et al), with another in the same area on May 2nd (BA) and a female there on May 5th (BA). Ashton's Flash also accounted for the only sighting on autumn passage, with one present on Sept 4th (BA).

EUROPEAN STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

Another good year, mostly due to the regular presence at Ashton's Flash of the pair first seen in Oct 2023. They remained here from Jan 1st through to Feb 24th, however during the spring only single males were reported, at Witton Mill Meadows on Mar 5th and at Neumann's Flash on Mar 19th. As in 2023, there were intriguing summer sightings from Ashton's Flash, with a male seen on June 1st and then a female or juvenile type present on June 22nd.

The presumed regular pair were back at Ashton's Flash on Sept 26th, with 4 there on the 27th. Views obtained could not establish with certainty as to whether the two additional birds were juveniles. At least 2 remained (although they could be surprisingly elusive) through to early Oct and 3 were seen (a male with the pair) from Oct 6th to the 10th, with just the pair from Oct 11th to Nov 11th. They were seen again on Nov 25th. A different pair were then located at Higher Marston on Dec 11th. The pair were then back on Ashton's Flash on Dec 24th. Where they reside when not present here remains a mystery.



Male and female European Stonechats, Ashton's Flash, 23rd February 2024 © Greg Baker

NORTHERN WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

All sightings were from the spring only as there were again no autumn passage records. The fields between Marston Hall Farm and the Trent and the Mersey Canal were the main attraction early in the spring, producing a male on Mar 29th, 2 females on Apr 8th, a male and 2 females on Apr 11th, 2 males and a female on Apr 12th, 1 male on Apr 14th, 2 males and 1 female on Apr 18th, 3 males on Apr 25th and 1 on Apr 28th. Elsewhere, 2 males were in the fields behind the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Apr 14th-16th, with 1 there on Apr 19th. A male was also at Ashton's Flash on Apr 30th. The only May record was of 2 males at Higher Marston on the 1st.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

The only report away from the resident housing estate populations was of 2 at the Witton Mill car park on June 26th. The highest count was of 18 by Wincham Mound on Feb 19th although there is usually a higher population at the Higher Marston estate.

DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis*

Wholly under recorded, as is the case with many reasonably common species. The highest counts at the main sites were 22 around Marbury Country Park on Mar 23rd and 9 around the Witton Flashes on Feb 19th. Only 4 could be found singing on territory at Marbury Country Park on June 3rd. A family of 5 were feeding on the main track by Witton Mill Mound on July 29th.



Dunnock, Marbury Country Park, 13th June 2024 © Marc Ratcliffe

WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*

There were 3 males in the fields behind the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Apr 14th (see also 'Channel' Wagtail below) with at least 1 still present on the 16th and 19th. The only other record was of a male and 2 juveniles around Kid Brook Spit and the fields to the north of Budworth Mere on Aug 28th.

'Channel' Wagtail (*Motacilla flava flavissima* x *flava*) - 2 males of this hybrid sub-species form were with the Western Yellow Wagtails at Budworth Mere on Apr 14th. One looked a particularly good bet for a full *flavissima* Blue-headed Wagtail but views were too distant for formal confirmation.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

At the start of the year 1 was at Marbury Country Park on Jan 1st and again Jan 30th, Feb 2nd and Feb 15th. A female was on soil heaps behind the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Mar 6th. A pair were along Forge Brook in Big Wood on Mar 8th and assumed to be the same were at the boathouse at Budworth Mere on Mar 11th and also in front of the hide there on Mar 28th. 1 was by the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Apr 19th. It was not until May 17th that there was a record from the Witton Flashes, when 1 flew south over Ashton's Flash. A pair was presumed to have bred somewhere in the vicinity of Marbury Country Park, somewhat confirmed by a juvenile along Forge Brook in Big Wood on June 3rd. A juvenile was also at Witton Mill on June 6th, and probably the same as seen on Forge Brook was at Budworth Mere on June 7th. It was seen again at Forge Brook on June 18th and this time joined by both parents. Further late summer records from Budworth Mere were of at least 2 on July 1st, 1 on

July 16th, and 3 on Aug 12th. Elsewhere, 1 flew over Ashton's Flash on Aug 10th, 1 was at Anderton Dragonfly Pond on Aug 29th and 1 at Witton Mill Bridge on Aug 30th. 1 was at Budworth Mere on Sept 1st and 5th. 1 was along Witton Brook on Sept 3rd, 2 at Witton Mill on Sept 6th, and 1 headed south over Ashton's Flash on Sept 14th and another on Sept 18th. 2 were then seen regularly around the Witton Mill area from Sept 28th to Oct 23rd, with 3 present on Sept 29th and Oct 2nd. Later in the autumn and early winter 1 was in Hopyards Wood on Nov 6th, 1 at Budworth Mere on Nov 13th, and again on 23rd-27th, on Dec 6th and then over Marbury Country Park on Dec 20th.



Grey Wagtail, Budworth Mere, 25th November 2024 © Nathan Wilde

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrelli*

Rather uncommon around the main sites during the winter months. Higher Marston usually has the biggest population in winter, however there were just 2 there on Jan 8th and 4 on Jan 30th. 1 was at Marbury Country Park on Jan 20th and was then seen regularly to Feb 2nd. 2 flew over Neumann's Flash on Jan 28th. A compost heap behind the sailing club at Budworth Mere became an attraction from mid Feb, with 26 feeding there on Feb 16th, 12 on Feb 23rd and 10 on Mar 6th. 16 then gathered at Higher Marston on Mar 17th, but there were no more than 5 by mid Apr. A pair nested along Kid Brook north of Budworth Mere from late Apr onwards with at least 3 juveniles visible there from mid June onwards. At least 1 juvenile was at Ashton's Flash from June 14th, however there was no direct evidence that it had fledged there.

A flock of 8 at Budworth Mere on July 5th indicated some accumulation of local breeders, but then only 2 to mid July and none anywhere after that until 1 flew over Neumann's Flash on Aug 5th. They remained generally scarce in Aug until 12 were in fields north of Budworth Mere on Aug 28th, and 14 there (mainly juveniles) the next day. Surprisingly, only a few were noted during visible migration sessions from Witton Mill in Sept with a peak of 11 on the 29th.

Numbers picked up however in Oct with 16 south on the 4th and 11 on the 11th. The only other sightings at the flashes for the year were singles on Nov 11th and 21st and Dec 6th and 30th. There was only a maximum of 3 at Higher Marston from the end of Nov and only a few records of singles at Marbury Country Park and Budworth Mere in Nov and Dec.

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba alba*): A male was at Higher Marston on Mar 29th and another or the same on Apr 11th, with 4 males in the same field there on Apr 12th and 1 male remaining on Apr 14th. 7 were in the fields behind the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Apr 14th, with 10 there on Apr 16th. 1 flew over Ashton's Flash on Apr 30th.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*

The best year for records in recent memory, helped by the visible migration session undertaken at Witton Mill Mound. There were few present early in the year, with records limited to 3 at Marbury Country Park on Jan 26th, and 2 by the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Feb 16th with 1 on Feb 23rd. Spring migrants began appearing on the scene with 2 over Ashton's Flash on Mar 22nd, and then 28 noted in an arable field at Higher Marston on Mar 29th, with 16 still there on Apr 8th and 8 on Apr 12th. 6 flew north over Ashton's Flash on Apr 2nd. 4 were in the fields behind the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Apr 14th when 3 more also passed over Ashton's Flash. Finally for the spring 3 went over Ashton's Flash on Apr 16th.



Meadow Pipit, Marbury Country Park, 25th October 2024 © Greg Baker

The first sign of autumn passage was when 1 passed over Witton Mill on Aug 16th however the next was not until 1 flew over the same on Sept 4th, followed by 4 on Sept 7th. Numbers here picked up mid Sept (all moving generally south) with 30 over Ashton's Flash on Sept 13th, 115 on Sept 17th, 59 on Sept 20th, an impressive high of 315 on Sept 25th, 59 on Sept 28th, 130 on Oct 3rd, 45 on Oct 4th, 59 on Oct 11th, 38 on Oct 13th, 54 on Oct 22nd, 40 on Oct 23rd, 27 on Oct 27th, 5 on Nov 4th, and finally 18 on Nov 11th.

Elsewhere later in the year, 10 had gathered in the pastures at Marbury Country Park on Oct 25th, with c20 there on Nov 13th. Aside from overhead passage, some were settled at Ashton's Flash, with 4 on Nov 13th, increasing to 12 by Nov 15th and c20 by Nov 21st, but just 1 by Dec 4th. 15 were still in the pastures at Marbury Country Park on Nov 21st and 12 on Nov 27th when there were also 9 at Higher Marston. This latter flock then grew to 15 by Dec 11th with 33 there on Dec 23rd. 2 flew west over Dairy House Meadows on Dec 20th.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

Following a blank year in 2023, there was one sighting this year with an individual heading south-west over Witton Mill Mound on Sept 25th (BA).

COMMON CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

Remains relatively common but nowhere abundant. A flock at Higher Marston numbered 14 on Jan 30th and 23 on Feb 16th. There were no other double figure counts from anywhere in the first half of the year. A total of 8 territories were estimated to be around Marbury Country Park from mid May, with a further 3 territories at Higher Marston and at least one at the Witton Flashes.

Autumn passage commenced with 5 heading west over Neumann's Flash on Sept 25th. A few were then regularly picked up moving south during Oct, with notable counts of 12 over the Witton Flashes on the 10th, 15 noted from Witton Mill Mound on the 11th, then 13 on the 18th and again on the 25th, and 15 on the 27th. 19 were at Marbury Country Park on Oct 28th and again on Nov 1st. Numbers dissipated however with 9 by Nov 25th and around 8 remaining throughout Dec.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*

Disappointingly there were only two records this year. 1 was picked up by two separate observers as it called when heading over Ashton's Flash on Oct 18th (BA, LO-H), and then a male was found by the play area at Marbury Country Park on Nov 21st (StH, SH).



Male Brambling, Marbury Country Park, 21st November 2024 © Steve Hart

EURASIAN BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Fairly common across the patch in the right habitat. Favoured areas throughout the year were around Wincham Mound, Witton Mill car park, the Marbury Country Park car park and behind the Budworth Mere hide. Notable reports were of 7 at the Witton Flashes on Jan 30th, 3 males together at Dairy House Meadows on Sept 23rd, 5 at Neumann's Flash and Dairy House Meadows on Nov 4th, and 6 around the Witton Flashes on Nov 25th.



Male Eurasian Bullfinch, Marbury Country Park, 10th January 2024 © Stuart Jackson

HAWFINCH *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Given the national and regional influx at the end of Oct, it was no great surprise when 1 was found near to the rangers' cabins at Marbury Country Park on Nov 5th (KB). There were however no further sightings until 4 were located in the same general area on Nov 8th (GB). Sightings of at least 1 then became more regular through to the end of Nov, with 2 seen by the hide at Budworth Mere on Nov 16th, 2 along the old carriage drive to the west on Nov 19th and 4 again on Nov 30th. There were daily sightings in Dec around the site of the old hall, often of up to 3 early in the month (appeared to be a pair and a separate female), with at least 4 present on Dec 1st and again on 15th-16th, then 2 from the 17th-21st, and 3 on the 24th.



Female Hawfinch, Marbury Country Park, 29th November 2024 © Greg Baker

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH *Chloris chloris*

Although 6 were seen flying to roost at Witton Mill car park on Jan 1st, there was no further evidence of the regular winter roost there. Carey Park is probably the main breeding site on the patch, and 9 were there on Feb 8th with many singing, however just one was found on territory there on Apr 23rd. 7 near Wincham Mound on Feb 14th were notable. 3 territories were located around Marbury Country Park on Feb 23rd. There were at least 2 territories along the east side of Neumann's Flash in the early spring. 6 were at Ashton's Flash on Apr 13th.

The earliest sign of a post-breeding roost at Witton Mill car park was of 9 there on Aug 28th. 11 at Marbury Country Park on Sept 19th were avidly feeding on yew berries. 12 were around the west end of Marbury Country Park from early to mid Nov, down to 5 from the end of Nov to the year end.

COMMON LINNET *Linaria cannabina*

There were no large flocks reported again this year, with generally just a few at the regular sites and the largest numbers being reported on visible migration.

During the first quarter the only records were of 1 over Carey Park on Feb 3rd, 3 by the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Feb 16th and 4 there on Mar 22nd. Also, 1 was singing back on territory along the east side of Neumann's Flash from Mar 29th. 6 were in the fields behind the sailing club at Budworth Mere on Apr 14th. Aside from Neumann's Flash, 1 territory was briefly maintained at Dairy House Meadows in early May, and 2 pairs were at Higher Marston from late Apr to the end of May. A pair were seen feeding a juvenile at Neumann's Flash from June 3rd, but sightings became few and far between by the end of the month, following which none were reported there until 2 were seen on Aug 8th.

The only other reports were on visible migration viewed from Witton Mill Mound, commencing with 6 heading south on Sept 18th, and a high of 28 on Sept 29th. Into Oct there were 15 over on the 3rd, 12 on the 4th, 6 on the 11th, 10 on the 13th, 15 on the 14th, 13 on the 17th, 15 on the 18th, 17 on the 23rd, and finally 5 on the 27th. There were no records from any site during Nov and Dec.

REDPOLL *Acanthis flammea*

The only report from Marbury County Park early in the year was of 1 on Jan 10th. At the Witton Flashes, 1 was at Ashton's Flash from Jan 12th to Feb 16th with 2 present on Feb 19th. Spring passage then brought the usual influx, mainly along the bund between the flashes, with 6 from Feb 26th, increasing to 12 by Mar 15th and a peak of 29 by Mar 22nd. There were still 25 on Apr 3rd and 4th, but only 4 by Apr 14th. c12 were then at Dairy House Meadows on Apr 19th. 6 were around Witton Mill on Apr 21st and 2 on Apr 23rd-24th. A late individual was on Ashton's Flash on May 1st, and intriguingly 1 flew low over the flashes bund on June 17th.

The first autumn record was of 1 at Witton Mill Meadows on Oct 7th, with 5 there on Oct 18th. 8 were at Ashton's Flash from Oct 23rd-31st. At total of 47 were around the Witton Flashes on Nov 4th, 26 of which were in the old paddocks by Neumann's Flash. Up to 6 were along the bund at the Witton Flashes from Nov 7th, with 34 there on Nov 15th. There were still 22 here on Nov 19th but far fewer thereafter and just singles being reported by the end of Dec. Meanwhile the only records from Marbury Country Park were of 1 over the Coward Reedbed on Oct 28th and 1 over the park on Nov 6th.

Common / Mealy Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea flammea*): 1 was reportedly with a flock of *cabaret* Lesser Redpolls along Marbury Lane on Jan 24th, however no identification details have been provided.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

This remains the commonest finch across the patch, however the only notable counts early in the year were of 16 at Marbury Country Park on Jan 11th and 14 at the Witton Flashes on Feb 5th. 4 pairs were on territory at Carey Park on Apr 23rd. Numbers are always higher post-breeding as flocks of adults and juveniles assemble. 22 were around Neumann's Flash on July 3rd and 26 at Marbury Country Park on Aug 16th. A flock of 80 were feeding at the old paddocks to the northeast of Neumann's Flash on Aug 19th, with c60 still there on Sept 5th. The biggest flock of the year however was the 85 on Ashton's Flash on Sept 7th, with 51 still present on Sept 24th. 41 were noted moving south viewed from Witton Mill Mound on Oct 18th. 22 at Marbury Country Park on Nov 6th was the highest count there towards the end of the year and 22 at Witton Flashes on Nov 11th was the last double figure count anywhere.

EURASIAN SISKIN *Spinus spinus*

Much of the large flock seen along the south side of Budworth Mere at the end of 2023 had moved on by early Jan, and the remaining flock of up to 12 moved to the alders at the scrape in Marbury Country Park through to mid month. 15 were back along the south side of the mere on Jan 24th, and then a flock of c50 were visible in the trees at the heronry at Budworth

Mere on Jan 30th with the same flock then located along the south side of the mere on Feb 5th. This flock then reduced over the next few weeks with just 3 from Mar 11th-20th. Meanwhile elsewhere, 4 were at Carey Park on Feb 4th, 2 at the Witton Flashes bund on Feb 15th, 2 at Dairy House Meadows on Feb 19th, and 3 along Marbury Lane at Marbury Country Park on Mar 22nd. A male at Marbury Country Park on Apr 17th was the last reported in the first half of the year.



Female Eurasian Siskin, Marbury Country Park, 5th February 2024 © Mark Jarrett

It was not until Oct 17th that the first were recorded in the second half of the year, when 4 were noted heading south over Witton Mill Mound. 1 then went south over Wincham Mound on Oct 18th, 6 more were over Witton Mill on Oct 23rd, and 5 were at Dairy House Meadows on Nov 4th. 12 were on the south side of Budworth Mere on Oct 28th, and flock of 22 were around the west area of Marbury Country Park on Nov 1st, however only a few were reported after that until 10 were seen on Nov 16th. They were then scarce again at the park until 14 appeared on Dec 6th with a few then remaining to end Dec. 16 at Dairy House Meadows on Dec 9th was the only report from the Witton Flashes that month.

COMMON REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Given what would appear to be plenty of appropriate habitat, not as common around the patch as might be expected. At least 2 were regular visitors to the Witton Mill car park feeders in Jan. 2 were back in the Coward Reedbed at Budworth Mere by late Jan. 3 were singing territorially on Ashton's Flash on Feb 26th, and 6 were there in mid Apr. 4 pairs were at Kid Brook Marsh behind Budworth Mere on June 17th. Became very elusive in Aug but more regular from mid Sept with up to 13 around the west side of Ashton's Flash and at Witton Mill Meadows through to mid Oct, with 9 still by the end of Oct. 1 or 2 were around the hide at

Budworth Mere from late Oct to late Nov, with 3 regularly there in Dec. A flock wintering in the hedgerows at Higher Marston numbered 5 on Dec 11th and had grown to 11 by Dec 23rd.



Male Common Reed Bunting, Budworth Mere, 2nd February 2024 © Mark Jarrett

ESCAPES and HYBRIDS

CANADA x GREYLAG GOOSE *Branta canadensis* x *Anser anser*

An adult showing some similarities to an immature Greater White-fronted Goose was at Budworth Mere on Jan 8th and 18th. A different individual was at Ashton's Flash and later Budworth Mere on Feb 12th. 1 was at Budworth Mere on Feb 19th and 26th, 2 at Ashton's Flash on Mar 11th and 1 on Mar 22nd, and 2 at Neumann's Flash on Apr 8th. There were no further records until an adult was back amongst the Canada Geese from July 18th through to Oct 11th, most often at Budworth Mere and roosting overnight at Neumann's Flash. On Aug 5th, a mixed pair of adult Greylag and Canada Geese were first seen with their 6 hybrid juveniles at Neumann's Flash and then later at Budworth Mere. They then roosted regularly at Neumann's Flash and later Ashton's Flash until at least Oct 2nd but were only occasionally seen at Budworth Mere. The 'Whitefront' type individual seen in Jan was back at Budworth Mere on Sept 17th-18th. A new adult was at Budworth Mere on Oct 7th and also at Ashton's Flash on Oct 25th and Nov 4th.



Hybrid juvenile Canada x Greylag Geese, Neumann's Flash, 26th September 2024 © Greg Baker

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

An adult was at Neumann's Flash on Jan 27th but rather surprisingly was not reported again.

TUFTED DUCK x COMMON POCHARD *Aythya fuligula* x *ferina*

A male considered to be the same as last seen in 2020 was at Budworth Mere on Jan 30th and then at Neumann's Flash on Feb 5th before being seen again at the mere on Feb 7th and 20th.

SOURCES AND CONTRIBUTORS

Production of this report would be impossible without the contributions by regular and visiting birders to the various forums and websites linked to the Marbury and Witton Flashes patch. The key source is the Marbury Patch Sightings WhatsApp group to which any reports of rare, scarce and common species are encouraged. In addition the @marburypatch Twitter account, entries on eBird (which more and more local birders are now using) and the Marbury Country Park and Neumann's Flash sites on the Manchester Birding website provide valuable additional data. In addition Sheelagh Halsey again provided access to her bird record spreadsheets, which were a useful supplement to my own patch records, and Joe Carroll provided data on the nesting tits at Coward Wood.

The list below is as complete as I am aware of those who have contributed via the data sources above, and my apologies to anyone who has been inadvertently omitted. Initials after names indicate that the individual was the finder of the particular bird or birds referenced in the species accounts.

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John Barber	John Gregory (JG)	Luke Ozanslav-Harris (LO-H)
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Alan Booth	Steve Hart (StH)	Graham Roberts
Paul Brewster	Paul Hill	Mike Sanderson
Kevin Bruen (KB)	Dave Hughston (DH)	Allan Rustell
Joe Carroll	Tim Irwin	Andy Slee
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Jack Crowshaw	Lizzie Hynes (LH)	Rod Wainwright
Malc Curtin (MC)	Stuart Jackson (SJ)	Nathan Wilde
Trevor Davies	Mark Jarrett (MJ)	John Williams
Peter Dawson	John Jones	Roger Wilkinson
Frank Duff		

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