

ALDERNEY

WILDLIFE



SPRING 2018 | SEABIRDS

Protecting Alderney's wildlife for the future



Editorial

As we resume production, welcome to the first new edition of *Alderney Wildlife*, my first as editor. I have chosen to focus on seabirds, in part because this is the theme for Wildlife Week 2018 (28th May - 3rd June), but also because the decline of seabird populations present just some of the many threats to our wildlife here on Alderney and worldwide.

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Seabirds are some of the species most exposed and most threatened by plastic pollution and in this edition we will also cover some of the work going on in Alderney to reduce the use of plastics.

In this spring article we also highlight some species to look out for as the seasons change as well as giving an in-depth look into our changing climate.

I hope you enjoy the magazine and would welcome your feedback on any of the articles, or suggestions for the next edition.

Claire



Welcome back Alderney Wildlife!

I'm delighted to welcome this, the 36th edition of *Alderney Wildlife*, which is back after five long years of absence. This is the Alderney Wildlife Trust's dedicated magazine whose purpose is to bring into your homes a little bit of our island's stunning natural landscape and to talk about the issues that it faces.

The last half decade has seen little change on many of these issues - waste, planning, public access (and its impacts) and economics continue to hold sway over the rock. But nature never stays still, Gannet populations have continued to rise, whilst tragically Puffin numbers have declined significantly. New invasive species have arrived threatening to reduce species diversity whilst at the same time new research is discovering more and more about the abundance of life to which our little island plays host.

Coming into this, the Trust's 16th year, our Board has set us some challenging objectives. Through the work of the staff and volunteers and, we hope, with our members' support, we are aiming to increase environmental awareness, as well as taking strides towards improving practical conservation across the island and promoting recognition of the value of our work.

To meet these aims, the Trust has set a number of specific goals for 2018, which we will touch on in detail in this and future magazines. These goals include working with local stakeholders, most especially the States of Alderney and residents, to reduce plastic (and other) waste; responding strongly on the development of planning legislation and policy; and the establishment of the Alderney Bird Observatory.

So welcome back members of the Alderney Wildlife Trust; I truly hope you enjoy your magazine!

Roland Gauvain





News round-up

Weather Grant LeMarchant

I type this halfway through February and the weather is cold, windy and there was a lengthy period of rain earlier. This has been the pattern for most of this winter.

In December we lost the roof from the Longis Bird Hide, during extremely strong winds with gusts of over 60 knots. Several mature trees came down this winter, no doubt due to the soft ground with the rain being a contributory factor.

Alderney Shipping had an interesting time in the run-up to Christmas with the severe gales but managed to battle on; a good effort appreciated by all.



An interesting development in the naming of storms has been introduced recently. Any storm considered a danger to life or property can be named by the Irish, UK or French Meteorological organisations. This follows the same format as the American method for hurricanes in using

names in alphabetical sequence as the season progresses.

This winter has been so windy and wet mainly because of the jet stream being either sat right over us or very close. This is the borderline separating cold Arctic air to the north from warmer air to the south; where these air masses meet it is very turbulent as the warm and cold mix. We haven't seen any settled conditions yet, unlike January 2017 when an anticyclone gave us sunny and quiet conditions.



Before I finish, some of you might have noticed the graphics on the BBC forecasts to be slightly different; this is due to the UK Met. Office losing their contract with the BBC and MeteoGroup taking over.

Alderney Bird Observatory John Horton

On 3rd February the ABO reached the milestone of becoming the British Isles' 20th accredited bird observatory. We are all delighted and thank everyone involved for helping make this possible. The ABO demonstrated to the National Bird Observatories Council, and the world, that Alderney is one

of the best places in the British Isles to observe and record bird migration. A confirmation that the ABO meets the highest standards in ornithological excellence and responsibility, a position that will showcase Alderney to millions of people.



Important to the progression of the new bird observatory as accreditation is, our primary focus remains the study of Alderney's birds. Their welfare during the unusually cold spell in late February and early March and its impact on the survival of our feathered friends - particularly smaller songbirds - was certainly a concern.

However, with the melting of the snows it is apparent that species including robins, wrens, tits, finches and thrushes have all survived. Since the bad weather, observations of our bird feeders have confirmed good numbers of birds (already ringed by the ABO over the last two years) visiting, giving us further evidence that our birds survived the cold. Another encouraging factor



apparent over this winter is the number of birds reported by Alderney residents using their garden bird feeders, some of which have been sporting a ring from the ABO's ringing program. This information tells us that many of the birds that we encounter and ring whilst they are breeding on the island's nature reserves retreat to gardens in town, placing themselves into your care to see them through the winter.

Spring migration is beginning, (it being the 2nd week in March

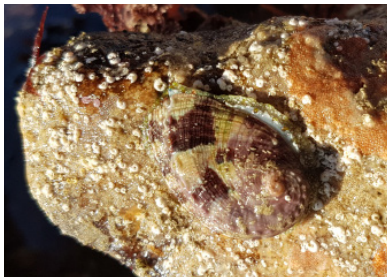


as I write) and assistant warden Justin spotted our first Wheatear at Platte Saline. There has also been an increase of another early mover, the Chiffchaff. These tiny birds, weighing in at around 7 grams and named after their Chiff-Chaff call are now returning to breeding grounds in their hundreds and thousands.

Living Seas Mel Broadhurst-Allen

Over this winter, our team of Living Seas volunteers has been busy completing survey reports and developing programmes for 2018. This year, work will be limpet-packed with rocky-shore species hunts, eelgrass habitat surveys and marine mammal watches.

Despite the recent weather and report writing duties, early this month we ran a Green Ormer Hunt. The aim of this survey was to find this locally important marine mollusc in Clonque Bay, which is within the island's Ramsar Site. We managed to find three tiny individuals (< 5cm long) and one large individual (> 15cm!), in addition to a variety of rocky shore animals.



A couple of weeks ago we were called out to check a Common Dolphin carcass which had washed up. Instead we came across shark eggs on the beach and a pod of visiting Bottlenose Dolphins out to sea! Needless to say it was an exciting morning out. We record everything we find, and you can too; either pop into our office to add your sightings to our book, or on our website www.alderneywildlife.org



Gannets Claire Thorpe

Alderney's Gannets first landed back on Les Etacs on the 4th

February this year, which is early compared to the last few arrivals (the previous earliest being the 27th January in 2013). The birds did come and go steadily for the first couple of weeks, occasionally leaving the rocks bare, but by the 10th hundreds had settled back on both colonies.



One of the reasons the Gannets do not immediately settle is that they need to rest and to feed up on fish after their northwards migration.



Good Tidings for Glanvilles David Wedd

After a bitterly cold spell, which we feared would harm the numbers of Alderney's most important butterfly species, it is good to find that the Glanville Fritillary caterpillars have come through hibernation well. There are not so many larval 'nests' as in the past two record-breaking years, but there are plenty, and the number of caterpillars in the spun webs seems to be more than usual.



Spring seabirds



Some of the amazing seabirds we have spotted in Alderney so far this year

From the first to arrive back in October to the late comers in March here is a small selection of photos of some of our seabirds this winter



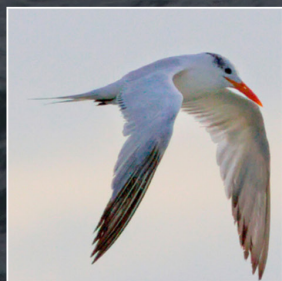
Ringed Plover feeding on the rocks



Shag swimming with crest up



Oystercatcher - listen for their peep-ing call



Royal Tern visiting in late 2017



Herring Gulls spend the winter here



Sanderling in the sea foam



Sights of spring

By Rachel Conway, Conservation Officer

Nature gets busy in spring as everyday brings changes, growth is fast and birdsong fills the air. With winter months clinging on, it's hard to picture spring, but as the days grow longer and the nights warmer, there are a few tell-tale signs to look out for as the green world returns.

Carpets of Blue and Yellow

With beautiful displays covering the heathlands and coastal grasslands, Alderney's diverse landscape is rich in wildflowers. Come spring, buds are bursting and the leaves unfolding. Bluebells and Daffodils start to emerge giving splashes of colour across the island. Look up at Hazel trees for their caterpillar-like catkins hanging off the branches.



Hawthorn and Blackthorn shrubs start to blossom too, enticing bugs to come out from hiding!



Kidney Vetch

Coastal plants such as Kidney Vetch can be found all around the island from late April until late June, particularly along the East Coastal Path near Houmet Herbé, at Platte Saline and on the Clonque Road verges. It has round clusters of small flowers that are mainly yellow, but can also be orange and red. Each flower has its own hairy calyx which gives the flower cluster a woolly appearance.



Sand Crocus

The tiny flowers of Sand Crocus (*Romulea columnae*) can be seen in Alderney's short coastal grasslands during April. With only two known sites, this plant is nationally rare in the UK, but relatively common in the Channel Islands. Look for it along the east coastal track near Houmet Herbé or on the main coastal track from Essex towards St Anne.



The Buzz is Back

Watch your step as the year's first insect life comes back in force.

Caterpillars crawl along the paths and big queen bees emerge from



their hibernation. Queen bees can be seen scouting for suitable nesting sites to lay their first clutch of eggs. The Buff-tailed Bumblebee is one of the most numerous species in Europe and is usually the first to appear.

Dawn Chorus

Summer residents such as Chiffchaffs and Wheatears are amongst the first to appear.

Swallows and Swifts follow, all signalling spring has finally sprung. These migrating birds return from spending the winter months in warmer climates such as southern Europe and Africa. Spot Chiffchaffs with their distinctive tail-wagging moves, and listen out for the fluting song of the Blackcap. The return of Puffins to Burhou Island is also a well-known local spring sighting.

Waking up



As the weather warms up, frogs emerge following their hibernation during the winter months and the noticeable appearance of jelly-like spawn can be found in ponds and streams.

Also awakening from their slumber are hedgehogs. With an unusually high proportion of the Alderney population being blonde (leucistic), it is perhaps the most iconic of the island's land mammals. Look amongst the hedgerows and long grass to see them scurrying around hunting for earthworms and beetles.



Making your garden wildlife friendly by leaving an area unkempt can provide good nesting and hunting grounds for hedgehogs. They also like to swim and are attracted to garden ponds. Creating a sloping edge using rocks or wood to make a pond more accessible can be beneficial. Finally think local - by planting and growing some wild flower seed you can attract butterflies and bees to your garden.





Seabirds and pollution

A wide variety of pollution can affect seabirds, in many different ways, from oil slicks that cause feathers to mat together to plastic pollution that can tangle or be eaten. Here we have a look at some of the sources of pollution and how you can help prevent some of the resulting detrimental effects on seabird populations.

Chemical pollution can come in many forms: oil, sewage, run off from fields like fertiliser and pesticides and chemicals that have been tipped

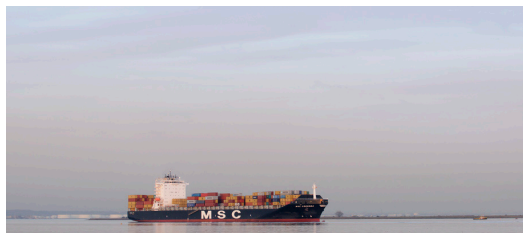


down drains or washed off ships. These chemicals will harm any marine life that comes into contact with them, including seabirds. In some cases damage may be indirect, harming the birds' food source – likely fish – or directly damaging the special coating on seabird feathers which makes them buoyant and protects them from the cold.

You can help protect marine life from chemical spills by using eco-friendly cleaning products, buying organic produce where possible and by reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

Physical pollution has captured the attention of the media recently following the BBC's Blue Planet II. The most prevalent pollution of this type is of course plastic and non-biodegradable plastic fragments also attract some of the chemicals mentioned above to create a toxic soup in the oceans. See the opposite page for some ways to reduce your waste, and remember to always think before you flush.

It seems inconceivable that we will ever see our oceans free from pollution, but by making these changes you are reducing the pollution encountered by seabirds (and all marine life), particularly as they come to land to breed and raise young.



Terry Whittaker/2020VISION

Alderney, a plastic free community?

Alderney received the Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) approval as a 'Plastic Free Community' on the 12th December 2017 after completing the required action steps set out in the SAS Plastic Free Coastlines toolkit. These steps included reducing use of single-use plastics and holding regular beach cleans.



There has been much progress since our approval with many more businesses and individuals doing their bit to turn the tide on plastic waste.

But now you've stopped using plastic bags, have your own reusable coffee cup and water bottle and refuse plastic straws, what next? Here are some ideas and tips to further reduce your plastic consumption.

There is still a long way to go, but every small change can make a difference as Alderney takes its first steps to becoming a true plastic free community.

9 MORE TIPS FOR LIVING WITH LESS PLASTIC



1 Clean your home with natural ingredients



2 Swap bathroom bottles for soap bars



3 Use natural oils to cleanse & moisturise



4 Ladies, discover the mooncup!



5 Invest in a stainless steel razor



6 Choose plastic-free natural deodorant



7 Brush with bamboo



8 Avoid synthetic clothes, they shed microfibres



9 Buy local & request plastic-free packaging

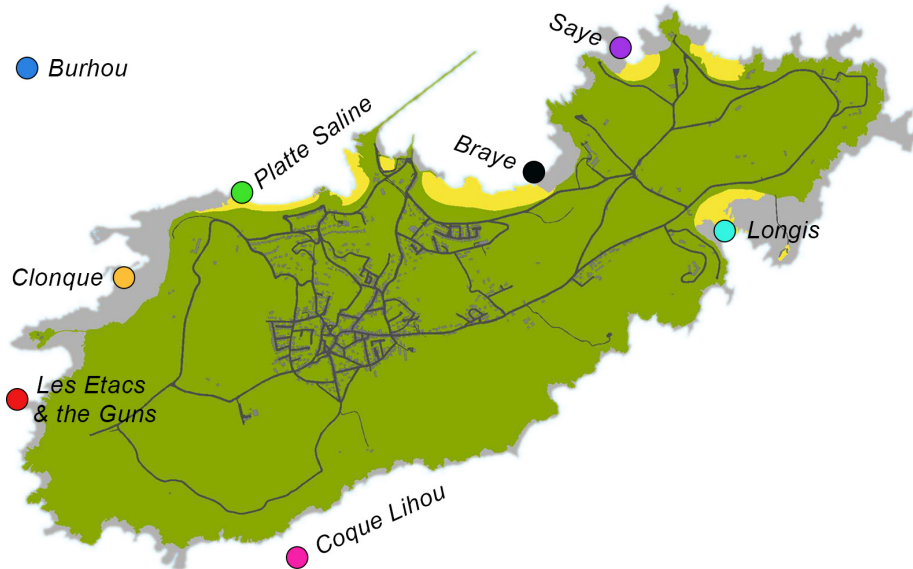
LESS PLASTIC.

WWW.LESSPLASTIC.CO.UK



Where to watch seabirds

These are some of the best locations to watch our seabirds. Please remember that the birds breed from mid-March to mid-July so try not to get too close and keep dogs under close control.



Puffin



Mar - Aug



Common Tern



May - Aug



Little Egret



All Year



Fulmar



Dec - Sept



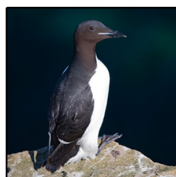
Gannet



Feb - Oct



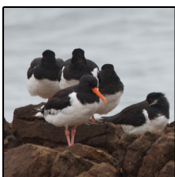
Guillemot



Oct - Jul



Oystercatcher



All Year



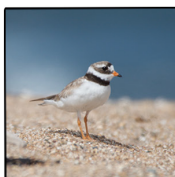
Razorbill



Oct - Jul



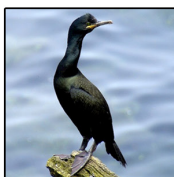
Ringed Plover



All Year



Shag



All Year

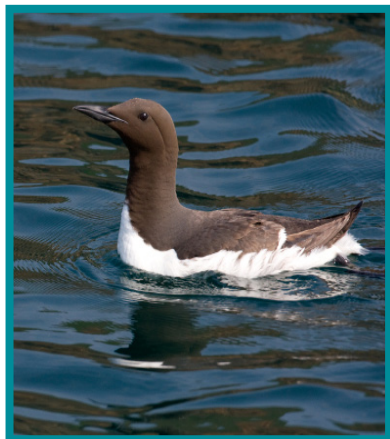


Spot the difference



We have three Auk species in Alderney: the Atlantic Puffin, which is the most easily identifiable due to its small size and flamboyantly coloured beak, and two perhaps lesser known species, the Common Guillemot and Razorbill.

But can you tell these two similar species apart?



Whilst both species look to be of similar size, Razorbills tend to be slightly smaller in both length and wingspan, but only by around 5-10 cm. One of the key differences between these birds is their colour, both may look black and white, but the Guillemot is actually a dark chocolate brown colour and the Razorbill is jet black.

If the birds have their back to you, another differentiating feature is their tail feathers; Guillemots tend to have a short rounded tail whereas on a Razorbill, the tail is longer and pointed.

But by far the easiest way to identify these two species is by the differences in their beaks. Guillemots have longer, pointed, plain black beaks, while Razorbills have broader beaks with a vertical white line running down the middle.

With these handy tips you should now be able to easily identify these two birds, see if you can in these pictures.



Climate change?

By David Wedd

Alderney has had five years of fairly steady winter warming, emphasized by a very mild November/December 2017 and January 2018. Our planned article on the effect of climate change on Alderney seemed straightforward – but then February’s weather went mad! We had our first snow since 2013, and it was deeper than for decades. The temperature fell to a level not experienced for more than thirty years (and some aged residents said ‘never’!) Then, at the beginning of March, the weather was mild once again, with long sunny periods. What will come next?

We have more than a thousand species of wildflower in our small island and before the recent cold snap a remarkable number seemed still to be blooming in sheltered sites. Lindsay, our most assiduous observer, was able to demonstrate that in fact nearly a dozen summer species are usually still in flower in Alderney at the end of the year. She suggested that perhaps we should look out for early spring flowers, such as Lesser Celandine – which was in bloom on 1st January this year!

Hazel and Elder catkins were also out in January in Vau du Saou. Three-Cornered Leek, which occurs in huge swathes in many parts of the island, is always in flower to a degree in December, but the rather similar but much rarer Summer Snowflake has now started to appear in January. Perhaps the plant’s name should be changed...

Alderney is a wonderful bird-island. Most resident species are well established, and they do seem to be increasing, although this may be



Summer Snowflake in January



Female Blackcap



Angle Shade moth

because good conservation-work by islanders has made it easier to see them. We are also on the main migration route between the Continent and the UK. Several species that were previously known only as summer migrants are now overwintering in Alderney in increasing numbers.

Some previously rare birds have become more common recently and can now be seen even in winter, for example the beautiful firecrest.

Insects seem to present the clearest indication of climate change. Most of them occur during the late spring and summer, but autumn and early winter numbers are high, too, and we have an increasing group of moths that appear throughout the year. Angle Shades, Double-Striped Pug, Common Wainscot and the micro Apple Moth and Rusty Dot Pearl can not only be seen in every month, but are actually not uncommon in mid-winter.

Of the common butterfly species which hibernate, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells can often be found in the bunkers or in garden sheds. Until recently Red Admirals never hibernated in the Channel Islands, but in the last five years or so an increasing number have passed the winter months here, before being joined by a mass influx from Africa and Southern Europe in the spring. This was made clear to several islanders when we saw the first red admirals of 2018 on 1st January! No one has yet discovered where they hibernate, and none has been found in an outhouse, tunnel or bunker.



Red Admirals on Ivy



We have much to learn about this beautiful butterfly, and only last autumn several of us witnessed a counter-migration from the shore by Fort Houmet Herbé, with dozens of Red Admirals leaving Alderney and heading for France. Many do spend the winter here, however, something that would have been unlikely, only five or six years ago. The cause must surely be climate change, but whether long or short term we must wait and see. It was quite a relief on 4th March to see a Red Admiral basking on a wall. It had obviously suffered no ill effects from the recent snowy weather.



Wildlife week 2018

The full 2018 wildlife week programme is available from the AWT office in Victoria Street but here are a few of the highlights to get in your diary now. The week runs from Monday 28th May to Sunday 3rd June

Monday and Thursday 2pm, from the RNLI

– seabird special boat trips, a round-island sail to view the seabird colonies with an expert ornithologist from the ABO. Improve your knowledge of Alderney's seabirds along the way.



Tom Marshall

Wednesday 7.30pm, AWT office – wild gardens and the ecosystem, with garden designer and horticulturalist Lee Sanders. Learn about the features that will make your garden a wildlife haven before heading out on a walk to try and spot some of the creatures of the night that will make themselves at home in your wild garden.

Friday 7pm, Cinema – Clare Brook, CEO of the Blue Marine Foundation, a leading oceans conservation charity, will talk about the threats to our oceans and how these can be reversed through marine protected areas and responsible, small-scale fishing.



**BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION**

Oceans are the source of all life on earth. They cover 71% of the earth's surface, they absorb half the CO₂ we produce and provide half the oxygen we breathe. Yet humanity is wrecking them at an alarming rate; warming them, filling them with pollution, and stripping them of life.

But it is possible to manage our oceans sustainably. The UK government has committed to protect four million square kilometres of ocean. New models of sustainable fishing show it is possible to harvest seafood to the benefit of both marine ecology and fishermen's livelihoods.



Interview with the staff



Roland Gauvain talks to Robin Whicker February 2018

This has already been an important year for the Trust. What for you as Manager is your main preoccupation at the moment?

Creating an effective operational framework for the Trust's strategy over the next five years! With a strong Board of Management, seven to nine people on the staff, and a large number of volunteers in various roles who contribute significantly to the work of the Trust, we need to introduce a more efficient system to ensure that we make the very best use of our resources.



What is the Trust doing at the moment to care for our island environment?

Largely what it has been doing for the last ten years or so, with two principal Nature Reserves and other smaller reserves, the Ramsar site and more recently the Community Woodland. We are establishing better ways of assessing the effects of our work, so as to apply our money and effort where it is most valuable.

How does the Bird Observatory fit into all this?

The Bird Observatory is part of the Alderney Wildlife Trust and its warden and deputy warden are employed by the Trust, but it has its own board of management, some of whose members are also on the board of the AWT. At the moment work is in progress, with the support of the States, to develop the Nunnery as a field centre and public resource. This should produce enough income for its running, with any surplus going back into the care of the Nunnery as an historic building.

Finally, what do you see as this year's prime challenge?

This island, along with the rest of Britain (at last!), has become aware of the danger to the environment of waste materials, particularly plastics, and we must increasingly find ways of meeting that threat.



Watch news

Our Watch group met in early January to take part in the Big Channel Islands Beach Clean, helping to remove over a tonne of rubbish across the islands and protect our marine environment. Horrible weather in early February meant postponing the ormer hunt but we still



Hedgerow planting for Arbor Day

managed to get out for a walk in the woodland to learn about eggs and nesting later in the month. Finally in March we planted a new hedgerow near Kiln Farm, which we hope will grow to create a new wildlife corridor in this part of the island, perfect for birds, insects and hedgehogs.

Wildlife Quiz

How much do you know about Alderney's wildlife?
Answers on the side of the page

1. When is a Black-headed Gull not a black-headed gull?
2. Which is the largest of our Alderney gulls?
3. What colour is the beak or bill of an adult Herring Gull?
4. And what colour are its legs?
5. And talking of legs, which has the longer legs, the Common Tern or the Arctic Tern? (Useful info for telling these two very similar species apart, as one stands closer to the ground, almost as though sitting.)
6. Which auks nest in burrows?
7. What do Guillemot chicks do when they are three weeks old and unfledged?
8. Which are more talkative, Guillemots or Razorbills?
9. Which petrel breeds near Clonque and glides on stiff wings?
10. And which petrel breeds on Burhou?

Answers: 1. As a juvenile or in winter 2. Great Black-backed Gull 3. Yellow with an orange/red dot 4. Pink 5. Common Tern 6. Puffins 7. Plunge off rocks into the sea 8. Guillemots 9. Fulmars 10. Storm Petrels

Visiting a UK reserve



By Josh Copping, 2017 Ramsar Officer now studying in Manchester

An old quarry flanked by the M6 in a rather industrial area on the edge of Preston is not a site most people would think of for a nature reserve. But the **Lancashire Wildlife Trust** took over

250 acres of this land in 2011 and this has now become their flagship reserve. With a range of habitats similar to those found on Alderney and a floating eco-village visitor centre on the main lake, **Brockholes** has become a great destination for wildlife watchers.



When I visited this reserve in February, the four large reed-lined lakes were alive with activity. There was the loud distinctive call from a group of Lapwing on the edge of the lake, a couple of Cormorants diving for fish and a number of duck species. Although bittern and water rail had been seen that day, endless staring into the reed bed didn't prove successful for me.

Despite the impressive lakes, the woodland portion of the reserve was what stole the show for me. Nuthatch and Treecreeper and endless tits and finches were attracted to piles of seed. Most



amusing was the small group of Long-tailed tits, spending their time hopping between perches in a feeding frenzy. There was a pair of Buzzards flying overhead and a lone female Roe Deer disappeared into the woods. But the best of all were the Bank Voles; delicately

climbing around logs and stumps, seemingly unbothered by my presence. For such a newly established site, the diversity and abundance of species was impressive and I'll definitely be returning to see what else I can find.

Business members

AWT has new sponsorship packages for business owners wishing to give support beyond business membership. Please speak to Claire for more information.



Thank you to our first Gold Sponsor: Farm Court Alderney.
Our thanks also go to long term supporters Kiln Farm and Alderney Shipping.

Get in touch

We would love to hear your thoughts, questions and ideas
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