

BIRDING IN THE SHEFFIELD AREA

What to look out for in..... MARCH

March is often thought of as a “quiet” month, but there is still plenty to look out for in the area at this time of year.

It may seem odd, but early March is often a good time to look out for “white-winged” gulls. Birds which have wintered further south are moving north again, and so sites such as Poolsbrook CP, Orgreave Lakes or the roost at Broomhead Res are worth a look for **ICELAND and GLAUCOUS GULL. MEDITERRANEAN GULLS** are probably moving west-east towards central Europe, and any adults will be obvious; they acquire their black heads before the brown ones of their “black-headed” relatives, and are particularly striking at this time.

The other gull to look out for in March is **KITTIWAKE**. The species makes an overland migration at this time of year, and , as well as scanning any groups of small gulls on lakes or reservoirs, any small party of “common” gulls passing through is worth a second look.

If you are going to see **LESSER-SPOTTED WOODPECKER** in the Sheffield area, March is the most likely month. The leaves are not yet on the trees and these superb little birds are at their most vocal, with the distinctive, kestrel-like, call a giveaway. They favour areas with mature, deciduous trees, often by rivers. The River Derwent at Froggatt was a reliable site in the past; more recently, the upper Porter Valley and the River Don valley north-west of the city have been good spots. If you hear one, remember these birds are small; the “sparrow” halfway along that branch could well be it.

March is traditionally a good month for raptors, with early in the month the best time to see displaying **GOSHAWK** at traditional sites to the west of the area although, sadly, they are rarely successful breeding there. In recent years, however, March has become THE month to see **RED KITE**. Once a great rarity (I remember the elation of many local listers when one was finally “nailed” in Derwentdale in March 1997) the species is now seen in increasing numbers throughout the area, even passing over the city centre much to the annoyance of the resident **PEREGRINES** at St Georges Church.

March is the best spring month to catch up with **ROCK PIPIT**. Unlike the autumn, when birds are noted in the uplands as well, spring passage seems to be a lowland phenomenon, with sites such as Orgreave Lakes, Thrybergh CP and Carr Vale the most likely sites. These birds are usually of the Fenno-Scandinavian sub-species *littoralis* and so, as well as being bigger and darker than meadow pipits, with the characteristic dark legs, they often show greyish heads with a noticeable white supercilium.

The first summer migrants should arrive in March (unless, as in 2013, we have a spell of arctic weather from mid-month). First prize usually goes to **SAND MARTIN**, with lowland water bodies such as Thrybergh CP, Orgreave Lakes and Rother Valley CP the most likely spots.

Singing **CHIFFCHAFFS** should appear from mid-month. As well as riverside vegetation along the rivers in both the east, and also the southern Peak District, sewage farms such as Hathersage and Carr Vale, with “reliable” insects, are also likely spots.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVERS usually appear in the second half of the month, with wader sites such as Orgreave lakes, Carr Vale and Middleton Moor all likely to record this species.

My own favourite March summer migrant is, however, **WHEATEAR**. Males arrive back in the area, usually from mid-month, with records from both the lowlands (Orgreave Lakes has been a good site in recent years, but any open area, even football pitches, can turn one up), and from the breeding sites to the west. There is nothing quite like the sight of the first one flying from fence post to fence post at Barbrook Pools, showing that distinctive white rump, to make you believe that spring has arrived (even though, at this site, it may not feel like it)!