

FIELD MEETINGS IN JUNE & JULY & MURDER ON THE BEACH

Twelve of us met for our meeting on 16th June at the RSPB's reserve in Teeside. From the Saltholme cafe with its panoramic views we were pleased to see the large number of **Sand Martins** breeding in the artificial sand bank nearby. On the islands in the main water were noisy **Black-Headed Gulls** (with many chicks) and **Common Terns**. En route to the large hide overlooking West Saltholme Pool we spotted **Reed Buntings**, **Linnets** and **Great White Egret**. From the hide we had close views of **Avocets** including some of this year's youngsters, **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Black-tailed Godwits** (many in their cinnamon red breeding plumages) and **Spoonbills**.



At Seaton Carew we met the volunteer wardens who were providing 24 hour vigilance of the breeding **Little Terns** in their fenced off area on the beach. Little Terns, one of our rarest and most vulnerable seabirds, lay their 2-3 eggs in a shallow scrape in the pebbly sand and rely on their camouflage. During the day the volunteers ensure no people or dogs stray into this area; during the night they do their best to deter the local foxes. Around 80 pairs were there when we visited, and some already had chicks; we watched the parents bringing in sandeels to feed them. During the hour or so we were there we were saddened to witness a **Kestrel** take 3 chicks (no



doubt for its young). The wardens can do nothing to deter the Kestrel which is also protected by law. Derek Wood, Senior Warden there has now told me: "...the birds abandoned and the site closed on 6th July - about 6 weeks early. **Little Terns**: 83 nesting pairs produced 211 chicks, of which 67 fledged but 144 were predated. **Ringed Plover**: 13 nesting pairs had 39 chicks of which 19 fledged. The concern now is that the Little Tern colony may decide not to attempt to nest there next year.

Photos by Derek Wood

In July, 13 of us met at **Scorton Lakes**, a delightful complex of former gravel quarries that have now been restored for nature with a network of paths and a mosaic of habitats; the site is near Catterick just off the A1.

July is always a quiet month in the birdwatching calendar; most singing has stopped and breeding is mainly over, with young birds fledged. Ducks are in their dull brown "eclipse" plumages, and are tricky to identify. We saw quite a few species and I misidentified **Gadwalls** for **Pintails** (ducks that are very different and easy to identify in their winter colourful plumages). Much easier to identify were a family of **Great-crested Grebes** with their 3 juveniles; the latter were in their distinct "humbug" stripes. On the second lake we went to we were treated to a vista of large flocks of geese: the usual **Greylags** and **Canada** but also the smaller **Barnacles** that breed at Scorton (we sometimes see them to a Saltholme in the winter). Two large flocks of **Lapwings** were a delight to see and also a smaller flock of **Curlews**; all of these will have been breeding on the uplands and were now regrouping in flocks. The muddy margins of the lakes, and the islands, offer safety and

safe feeding. Dotted along the shorelines were some more unusual waders: a dark **Spotted Redshank** was a notable find and with the **Common Sandpipers** there was a more distinctly marked **Green Sandpiper**.

After lunch at the cafe at nearby Ellerton Lakes we went to YWT's Bolton-on-Swale lake which has two hides one of which has close bird feeders. As we arrived we saw and heard all the Geese leave the reserve: the cause was a paddle-boarder (YWT subsequently confirmed paddleboarding or other water sports are not allowed on their lake there which is an SSSI). We added a close view of a Reed Warbler to conclude our day's birdwatching.