

Winter birds

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refuse tip at Beddington. But when the Upper Pond was partially frozen a few landed on the ice for a while in the early morning. A first-winter Yellow-legged Gull amongst these gulls was a surprise find on 16th January, interestingly in similar circumstances to the last record of this rare visitor, in January 2009. At the onset of a blizzard on the morning

Wigeon were welcome winter visitors to Pen Ponds; for the second winter in succession they appeared in good numbers, peaking at 95 in November. They were joined by even better numbers of Gadwall (*picture above by Jan*) with 177 of these in December. Other dabbling ducks included small groups of Shoveler and Teal, the latter usually lurking close to the reed bed. Up to 25 Red-crested Pochard were also an attractive feature of the Ponds, although their appearances were sporadic and they disappeared during the cold spell. The single Shelduck frequenting Upper Pond was not wild but from the collection in Isabella Plantation, temporarily rehoused while its home pond was undergoing renovation.

An exciting raptor sighting was that of an immature female Peregrine on Boxing Day. It swooped low over the Upper Pond, banking against the edge of Pond Plantation before flying away, the whole incident lasting just seconds.

The only gulls normally seen on the Pen Ponds are Black-headed and Common. The larger species fly over daily on their way between their reservoir roosts and either the Thames or the

of the 18th, up to 70 Herring Gulls were forced to land on the ice of Upper Pond, amongst them two more first-winter Yellow-legged Gulls.

Apart from a forlorn Lapwing on the ice of the Lower Pond on 19th January, cold weather movements were disappointing. A survey of the Water Rails in the reed bed found at least seven birds, a notable increase on previous years, undoubtedly due to the work carried out by the Friends' Conservation Volunteers who had cleared some of the invading alder and willow scrub. The wintering Bittern still remains a dream, despite six being seen at the nearby London Wetland Centre.

Flocks of Fieldfares, grounded and flying over, were another feature of the snowy conditions. Unusually, they outnumbered Redwings, the other wintering thrush.

The rarest bird seen this winter was a Great White Egret over-flying Pen Ponds on 27th November. Seen earlier at the London Wetland Centre it had been disturbed by a helicopter and flown off towards the Park where it could be added to the Park list of species.