

Review of the Week: 2-7 January 2024

Recent weeks have seen a procession of Nearctic passerines found in gardens – namely a Baltimore Oriole, two American Robins, White-crowned Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco – but after the autumn to end all autumns it felt only a matter of time before an even bigger prize from across the pond was unearthed somewhere.

So it came to pass on 3rd, with the momentous finding of a **Northern Waterthrush** on a Heybridge, Essex, garden pond, found while the supremely fortunate resident birder ate his tea at the dinner table! Much to the delight of many the next morning it was swiftly relocated along a nearby drainage ditch, where it attracted a long procession of twitchers by the week's end (despite proving elusive for much of Saturday). Residing only 20 minutes from the continuing Essex **Canvasback** meant the duck attracted renewed attention also, despite proving highly elusive over the weekend.



Northern Waterthrush, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex (Chris Mayne).

A first for Essex, it is only the third mainland record and the first British record since 2011-12, when one wintered on St Mary's, Scilly. The eighth for Britain, Ireland has hosted a further two records – both on Cape Clear, Co Cork. Keep abreast of all the latest updates on the Northern Waterthrush at www.birdguides.com/sightings or via the **BirdGuides app**.



Northern Waterthrush, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex (Jonathan Farooqi).

The rapid change in status of **Baikal Teal** continues to gather pace, with this now near-annual winter visitor seeing a further run of records this week. Although there was no sign of the Somerset drake, a female was found just 7 km to the north at Catcott Lows on 6th. It is just the second female for Britain following one at Finningley GPs, Nottinghamshire, in January 2023. Unexpectedly, this was followed by a first-winter drake with **Eurasian Wigeon** at Bishop Middleham, Durham, on 7th – a county first.

Baikal Teal, Catcott Lows NR, Somerset & Bristol (Gary Thoburn).

An exciting spell for **Whishmore**, Co Galway, began on 6th, with the discovery of a first-winter female **White-winged Scoter** at close range at the island's harbour. Incredibly it is only the third for Ireland, with the country's first found as recently as December 2022. Twitchers to the island the following day stumbled across a **Pied-billed Grebe** at Loch Achill Chorrúch. It is Ireland's first in 10 years – the last captured an adult on Achill Island, Co Mayo, between August 2013 and April 2014.

The turn of the year saw **Smew** uplisted to Scarce on the BirdGuides sightings service, following the continued decline of this attractive duck in Britain (see [here](#)). Approximately 40 were logged in Britain this week, with just one in Ireland – at Derrybrick Lough, Co Cavan.

Smew, Fisher's Green NR, Essex (Matthew Mellor).

A new drake **Lesser Scaup** on Lough Neagh, Co Armagh, was one of 12 across Britain and Ireland. News elsewhere included three **American Wigeon**, four **Surf Scoter**, four **Ferruginous Ducks**, 12 **Green-winged Teal**, 22 **Ring-necked Ducks** and the Co Mayo **American Black Duck**.

Lesser Scaup, Penberry Reservoir, Pembrokeshire (Richard Bonser).

Ring-necked Duck, Lisvane Reservoir, Glamorgan (Tom Brien).

A highlight of the week's **Snow Geese** was a blue morph with a large mixed goose flock near Wrexham, Denbighshire – potentially just the second wild Welsh record. A lone white morph at Slimbridge WWT, Gloucestershire, is perhaps left as 'of unknown origin'. Three more were in Scotland. A notable **Taiga Bean Goose** record concerned two with Pink-feet at Longtown, Cumbria, on 2nd.

Young **Red-breasted Geese** hung on in Norfolk and Essex, with adults still in Northumberland and Lancashire. **Black Brant** lingered in Kent and East Yorkshire. A **Cackling Goose** was again on the Mullet, Co Mayo, on 2nd, with another still with Canada Geese at Lunt Meadows, Lancashire.

Red-breasted Goose (left of centre) with Dark-bellied Brent Geese, Cley Marshes NWT, Norfolk (Jonathan Farooqi).

A quiet winter for the taxon means that **Ring-billed Gulls** at Hayle Estuary, Cornwall and Strathclyde Loch, Clyde, would have proved popular with budding year lists. Two first-winter **Bonaparte's Gulls** remained in Cornwall, with an adult again at Ballygalley, Co Antrim. **Glaucous Gulls** numbered a meagre 20, while 30 **Iceland Gulls** included **Kumlien's Gulls** in Highland and Orkney.

Ring-billed Gull, Strathclyde Loch, Clyde (Douglas Edmond).

Bonaparte's Gull, Marazion, Cornwall (Andrew Jordan).

Waxwings were again on the agenda for many at the start of January, with over 800 reports published on the BirdGuides sightings pages since the turn of the year. Several good-sized flocks were noted across much of Britain and the east coast of Ireland, including large numbers in south-east England for the first time since the start of the influx. Pleasingly, it looks like the animated trill of Waxwings will continue to be heard across Britain and Ireland for some time yet.

Waxwing, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire (Martin Ansley).

A map of Waxwing sightings from 2-7 January (BirdGuides.com).

Social media produced another 'find' when an adult male **Black-throated Thrush** was photographed in a Sheffield, South Yorkshire, garden on 2nd. The East Yorkshire bird remained reliable at Tophill Low throughout. At least three **Little Buntings** were still in Cornwall, while a paltry five **Great Grey Shrikes** split three in England and two in Scotland. Two **Yellow-browed Warblers** at Oakthorpe, Leicestershire and Rutland, came as a pleasing surprise for county birders, especially given the small numbers wintering in Britain this year. One at Bardsands, Devon, was traced to a bird ringed in Norway during the autumn.

Black-throated Thrush, Tophill Low NR, East Yorkshire (Bethan Clyne).

Great Grey Shrike, Nairn, Moray & Nairn (Christopher Bennett).

In Gloucestershire, a **Richard's Pipit** at Awre from 1st concerned a returning adult from last winter – one of a pioneering population that has begun wintering in Europe in recent years. News broke of another at Caerthillian Cove, Cornwall, on 6th – having been present since 29 November. **Shore Lark** numbered 23 across six sites – including 14 at Holkham Gap, Norfolk.

Richard's Pipit, Awre, Gloucestershire (Ian Curran).

Britain's midwinter **Pallid Harrier** count increased to a impressive three this week, with the discovery of **Pallid Harrier** at Castlemartin Corse, Pembrokeshire, on 5th. Another was in Ireland at Ballynamona, Co Cork, having first been seen there in November 2023. A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was at Loch Killin, Highland, while a white-morph **Gyr Falcon** reported at Ardgaten, Argyll, on 1st would undoubtedly prove popular if pinned down.

Pallid Harrier, Llanelli Wetland Centre WWT, Carmarthen (Alannah Ruthen).

A brief **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Fleetwood, Lancashire, was joined by all three long-staying birds. Also continuing was the East Sussex **Long-billed Dowitcher** and Somerset **Kentish Plover**.

Western Palearctic

A Christmas market at Durbuy, Belgium's smallest town, became the surprise host location of the country's second **Blue Rock Thrush**. The first came as long ago as 1877, making this midwinter treat popular in and around the Christmas fair a bumper rise in visitor numbers! The two **Ross's Geese** persisted on the West Flanders polders too.

A **Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit** returned to the very same fields it occupied at 's-Gravendeel, Netherlands, last winter and an **Oriental Turtle Dove** lingered at Sneek. Georgia bagged its second **Hume's Leaf Warbler**, a **Blyth's Pipit** persisted in Poland and the regular drake White-winged Scoter was still at Keflavik, Iceland.

Blue Rock Thrush, Durbuy, Luxembourg (Vincent Legrand).

Continuing in Spain was the Barcelona **White-throated Sparrow**, with a **Double-crested Cormorant** again on Faial, Azores. The Canaries **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** at Costa Tegucira, Lanzarote, was confirmed as an **Alaskan**, while a popular **Red-billed Tropicbird** returned to a Fuerteventura shopping centre and a **Semipalmated Plover** was back on Tenerife.

A young **Pacific Diver** continued to provide enviable views off Eilat, Israel, and a **Lesser Flamingo** lingered in Kuwait.

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08/01/2024 22:30	Lesser Scaup Pembrokeshire Details
08/01/2024 21:57	Black Brant Essex Details
08/01/2024 21:34	Ring-necked Duck Devon Details
08/01/2024 20:52	Ring-necked Duck Somerset & Bristol Details
08/01/2024 18:57	Green-winged Teal Kerry Details

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