



## Tyttenhanger Gravel Pits near St Albans

Report and photographs are by Alan Gardiner, who visited on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2009.

I visit Tyttenhanger Gravel pits on a regular basis as it is one of the best places in Hertfordshire to see a wide variety of bird species. The photo to the left is a general view of the main pit which is used as a source of water to wash the sand and gravel extracted from an active quarry south of Coursers Road.

The photo on the right shows the spit of sand and mud which is attractive to gulls and waders. The larger waders are Lapwings and the two small birds on the left are moulting adult Dunlins. A Common Sandpiper and three Green Sandpipers were also there; the Green Sandpipers favour the margins of the pit and are not usually seen on the spit.



Other species of wader regularly visit at this time of the year with Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank and Greenshank all possible visitors in the next month



The photo to the left shows the two Dunlins together, these birds were around 120m away from the viewing position. Tyttenhanger is definitely a place where a telescope is essential to get the best views of any birds present on the pit. Other birds seen this morning were a male Ruddy Duck on the shallow area of the lake close to Tyttenhanger Farm and a few Sand Martins feeding on insects over the water.

Tyttenhanger is not just a place to visit to see birds but is also a good place to find butterflies and dragonflies.

There is a large Buddleia bush next to the bird hide which was covered in good numbers of these insects including this Red Admiral. Commas, Painted Lady, Small White, Peacock and Gatekeeper butterflies were also feeding on the bush.

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Another butterfly that has been seen there in past years is the Brown Argus. I had a look around for this species but it may be too early for the second generation to be on the wing. Brown Hawker dragonflies were particularly conspicuous and a variety of other dragonfly species were also visible. These insects often attract Hobbys although none were present this morning.

Small birds were quite hard to locate partly due to the stiff breeze but it was nice to see a pair of Linnets perching on the gate to field by the Willows Farm pond which can be seen from the large car park used by visitors to this popular attraction. Tree Sparrows can often be seen by Tyttenhanger Farm but at the moment it seems that they are mainly on the private land south of Coursers Road. They are best seen in winter when food is put out for the game birds reared for shooting purposes.

Directions to and around the site and a guide to the birds can be found at <http://hnhs.org/birds/sitesguide.php> .

### **Access to site**

There are several possible points of access to the area. It is possible to park outside water pumping station in Colney Heath at [TL 198058](#) and walk down the track to the SW which will take you into the north end of the site.

Another access point is from the end of the unmade gravel pit entry road beside the petrol station on the A405 between Hatfield and London Colney, where it is possible to park outside the entrance to the fishing lakes. However there has been some fly tipping at this location and it is a less secure location than the first in my view and at present the fishing warden suggests birders use the car park adjacent to the bailiff's caravan.

There is a car park at London Colney by the church at [TL 181037](#) which can be used; access to the lakes is via the public footpath running to the NE which takes you under the A1081. A possible access point is from Coursers Road but there is very limited car parking space.

The extensive parking areas at Willows Farm are reserved for customers visiting the farm facilities and retail outlets.

The car parks around the fishing lakes are for the use of the fishermen and should only be used if you have purchased a car parking permit.