

THE 2000 SHROPSHIRE BIRD REPORT

The 40th Annual Report of the
Shropshire Ornithological Society

ISSN 0393-5965

Contents:	Page
Editorial	2
Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project, The Ring Ouzel Update – Leo Smith	3
Ellesmere Wildfowl Counts – Allan Dawes	9
The BTO Breeding Bird Survey 2000 Update – Allan Dawes	19
Venus Pool 2000 – Geoff Holmes	20
Blackbird Feeding a Brood of Robins – John Hawkins	22
Introduction to the Systematic List	24
Systematic List	26
List of Observers	113
Dartford Warbler on the Stiperstones – Graham Walker	114
Common Crane at Higginswood.– Tony Butter	116
Field Trips and Indoor Meetings	118
Officers and Management Committee	119
Record Submission	120

Acknowledgements:

Data Input: Joyce Jones.

Compilation: Howard Prince – great northern diver to ruddy duck.
Tony Butter – red kite to black tern.
Alan Dawes – stock dove to mistle thrush.
Alan Heath – grasshopper warbler to corn bunting.

Editorial Help: Graham Walker and Helen Griffiths.

EDITORIAL

It is interesting to see how people's interest in bird watching develops, with some concentrating on ringing, survey work or local patch birding whilst others develop an interest in rarities. Those of you who know me will recognise that I fall into the latter category, having been an unashamed twitchee for almost 30 years! There have been some very well publicised instances of bad behaviour at rarity sites but, fortunately, these problems are largely a thing of the past and with the rapid growth in bird information services, travelling to see rare birds locally and nationally is widely practised by the bird watching community and I am pleased the Society has changed its view and adopted the following policy:

Shropshire Ornithological Society acknowledges the pleasure that birdwatchers obtain from seeing rare or unusual birds. In Shropshire, this can, in exceptional circumstances, include nationally rare species but, more often than not, it is birds which are rare or uncommon in the county. As a consequence, the Society endorses the exchange of information which enables individual birdwatchers to see such species, subject to the observance of the "Birdwatchers Code" throughout.

I am always willing to advise observers as to whether I consider any problems will be caused by the release of news but, ultimately, it is the finder's choice and, if asked to do so, for whatever reason, I will maintain confidentiality. No one should feel obliged to pass on details of rare or unusual birds.

On a different subject, it is pleasing to note that the number of observers submitting records is increasing. However, with only about 20% of membership contributing there is scope for further improvement. The records data base is a vital tool in the conservation process and I am regularly asked for site lists or information on species distribution in connection with a variety of conservation initiatives, site management or research studies. Consequently, I urge everyone to get into the habit of sending in records. In the species accounts in this report you will frequently see comments such as "under recorded" and reports of such species will be especially welcome as would records of species which appear to be declining in the county such as turtle dove, yellow wagtail, grasshopper warbler and corn bunting.

Geoff Holmes, Bird Report Editor



**THE LONG MYND
BREEDING BIRD PROJECT**

RING OUZEL UPDATE 2000

Introduction

The Project has been studying the ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus* since 1994. The results for the six years 1994-99 were published in the Shropshire Bird Report 1999 (SBR 99), and presented to the national Ring Ouzel Study Group. This paper reports the results of continuing the study in 2000.

Population

The year was characterised by the lowest number of pairs located (8) and nests found (5) since nest recording started in 1995. The population was estimated at 21 pairs as recently as 1997. This rapid decrease may be a fluctuation, and not a permanent decline. However, given the recent disappearance of the species from many areas in Britain (see SBR 99), this is unlikely.

Only five nests were found, three of which were successful. One pair raised two broods of two in Ashes Hollow, and another pair raised a brood of five in Light Spout Hollow. This latter pair had an earlier clutch of five eggs predated, from a nest only 10m from the successful nest. An even earlier nest, 400m distant, was abandoned in early May with young about two-three days old. It is likely, but not certain, that this earlier nest belonged to the same pair.

No evidence was found (e.g. fledged young or adults carrying food) of any other active nests, but fieldwork was restricted to the parts of The Long Mynd where ring ouzels were found in previous years. A report from a different area, which was not visited as part of the Project's fieldwork, was submitted to the County Bird Recorder - a male singing in Windy Batch, off Minton Batch, on 5 June (per. C Travis & J Jones). A singing male on this date was unlikely to have been a passage bird, but subsequent inspection of this Batch found no suitable breeding habitat. It is a suitable feeding area, and there are suitable nest sites well within the normal commuting distance. These sites were visited by the Project and no ring ouzels were seen or heard, but such an elusive species can easily be overlooked.

The population estimate for 2000 is therefore eight pairs, but there may perhaps have been as many as 10.

Population monitoring and colour ringing

Colour ringing started last year. Four adults and 12 nestlings were colour-ringed in 1999. In 2000, at least four, possibly five, of the 12 colour-ringed nestlings returned, and one of the four colour-ringed adults.

In common with the previous report (*SBR99*), and other studies of this type, it has been assumed that males holding territory are paired, even if the female was not seen. On this basis, an estimated eight pairs were located altogether. Neither of the birds in one pair, or three of the females, was seen at all. Of the other seven pairs, seven males and four females were well seen. All except one of these males, and all of the females, had metal BTO rings. Of the six males with BTO rings, three also had colour rings, showing that two of them fledged in 1999, and one fledged in 1998 (This latter was caught as an adult last year, after being previously ringed as a nestling). Of the four females, two of them also had colour rings showing that they fledged in 1999.

In addition to these observations of local colour-ringed birds, a total of three birds with BTO rings fitted between 1996-98 have been re-caught in 1998 or 1999. One female was caught in both years. All were initially ringed on The Long Mynd.

The extremely high proportion of locally ringed birds in the adult breeding population reinforces the conclusion in the 1994-99 Paper (*SBR 99*) that the three to four nests per year that have been ringed by the Project represents the vast majority of successful nests. Therefore, overall breeding success must be very poor.

In 2000, one adult pair raised two broods of two in Ashes Hollow. Both adults were colour-ringed, so they are known to have fledged in 1999. Another pair raised a brood of five in Light Spout Hollow. Both adults had BTO rings - the male was therefore at least two years old, and the female was caught and known to be four years old. The nine nestlings from these three successful nests were colour-ringed by Tony Cross, again with three separate rings, and with a red ring at the top.

The successful female in Ashes Hollow was colour-ringed as a nestling (white, yellow, green) in Cardingmill Valley, 2.1km from this year's nest. Her mate could not be positively identified, because one of the rings had come off, and only the white and a yellow ring remained. Attempts to re-trap him were unsuccessful. Only poor views were obtained of the other colour-ringed birds, so they were not identified.

The adult female that was caught had been ringed as a nestling on 11 July 1996 in Ashes Hollow, 1.5km distant from where she was colour-ringed (red, red, white) this year.

The male colour-ringed as an adult last year (white, white, red) was seen singing in Cardingmill Valley, 3.4km from last year's nest site, but only 0.3km from its natal site.

Nest sites

Although five nests were found, only two, or possibly three, pairs were involved. Both nests of the pair in Ashes Hollow were built in gorse *Ulex sp.* bushes, about 200 metres apart. All three nests in Light Spout Hollow were under heather *Calluna vulgaris* bushes. All five nests were on steep banks. The areas of open moorland used in previous years were searched, but no ring ouzels at all were seen there during 2000.

Abandoned nest

A nest found with four eggs on 29 April contained recently hatched young on the 13 May. Two were alive, but a third nestling of the same age was recently dead, with a bleeding head, just outside the nest. There was no sign of a fourth egg or nestling. No adult birds were seen at or near the nest on this occasion, or on a subsequent visit a week later. On this later visit there was a deposit at the bottom of the nest, which was almost certainly the decomposed remains of the nestlings.

This is the first example of an active nest found by the Project being apparently abandoned. As one of the nestlings was killed, and another was probably removed, it is likely that a ground predator found the nest.

Breeding season

The nest found on 29 April had a complete clutch of four eggs, so the first egg must have been laid on 25 April at the latest. As the nestlings were about two to three days old on 13 May, the eggs cannot have been laid much, if any, earlier than 25 April.

The first egg in the latest nest was laid about 17 June. The young were seen just out of the nest, and barely able to fly more than a few yards at a time, on 16 July.

Disturbance

Both pairs that successfully fledged young chose nest sites that were subject to considerable human disturbance.

The first nest of the first pair was on a steep slope about 20 metres from one of the main footpaths up Ashes Hollow. They were trying to feed well-grown young in the nest on the late May Bank Holiday, and were unwilling to go to the nest when walkers were in the vicinity. Both birds were frequently perched in nearby trees, giving persistent alarm calls, with beaks full of food. They must have experienced similar disturbance on the other days of the Bank Holiday week, and on previous weekends. They did have the sense to move their second brood nest about 200 metres up the hillside.

The second successful pair built what is believed to have been their second nest within 20 metres of the most popular footpath on the whole of The Long Mynd, up to Light Spout Hollow waterfall. Several hundred people walk this path each way on a fine weekend day. This nest was also within 100 metres of a successful kestrel's nest. The first clutch at this site was predated, but the pair built their second nest lower down the slope and even closer to the footpath. The nest was at eye level only 10 metres from the footpath, although a stream was between the footpath and the nest. It was possible to actually see the female sitting on the nest from the footpath. Five young were successfully fledged from this nest. Both adult ring ouzels regularly mobbed the kestrels when they came within the vicinity of the nest, but only after the eggs were hatched.

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

The Shropshire Response to the “Biodiversity Challenge: an Agenda for Conservation in the UK” listed ring ouzel as a species “of special conservation concern in Shropshire and under consideration as a candidate species for inclusion in the National Red Data species list”. It set the target to “maintain current population and monitor status”. Detailed proposals are now being prepared for many species for inclusion in the new revised Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Ring Ouzel Action Plan is still being finalised, but objectives set out in the draft include maintaining the present breeding population and range through habitat protection and restoration, continuing to survey and monitor the core population on The Long Mynd, and promoting education and awareness of the species’ status and needs.

Targets include increasing The Long Mynd’s breeding population and surveying other suitable habitat in Shropshire.

The National Trust has therefore agreed to examine any known ring ouzel feeding areas, to ascertain the food being utilised, and its abundance. This information will assist the development of the Trust’s Long Mynd Management Plan. Photographs of all areas where ouzels were seen to feed during 2000 were supplied to the Trust. In every instance, the ring ouzels were feeding on short grass, although on a few occasions they also ventured onto bilberry or bare earth. The short grass under trees, where sheep congregate for shade and shelter, and on sheep tracks between trees, was especially favoured.

Intensive sheep grazing creates this short grass. Possibly the number of invertebrates in these areas is higher than elsewhere, because the sheep also fertilise the soil. The bare earth is also mainly created by sheep, which erode the hillsides. Policies to reduce sheep grazing are being pursued for the conservation of many species of flora and fauna on the Long Mynd. It is therefore necessary to introduce complementary habitat management plans to ensure that sufficient short grass still remains to continue to provide ring ouzels with their essential feeding areas.

References

“*Biodiversity Challenge – The Shropshire Response*” prepared by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, commissioned by Shropshire County Council with support from English Nature, and published by the County Council in June 1996.

Additionally, all those References listed previously (*SBR 99*).

Acknowledgements

In addition to the previous acknowledgements (*SBR 99*), thanks are due to Tony Cross for the colour ringing; to Tony Cross, Ian Burfield and Chris Rollie for comments on the drafts of this Paper; and to Sue Cole for typing.

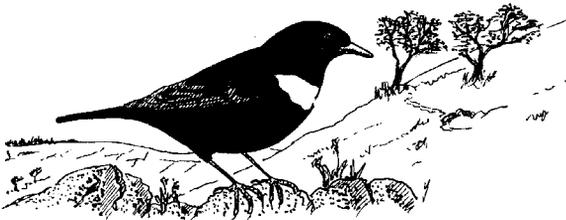
Request for information

Please report any sightings of ring ouzels on The Long Mynd immediately to Leo Smith, by ‘phone (01384 265504), by e-mail (leo@tf125qh.freeserve.co.uk), or by post to 32 Hodnet Drive, Pensnett, Brierley Hill, West Midlands DY5 4DB

Publication

This is a short summary of the full report of the project on ring ouzel in 2000. Copies of the full report can be obtained from Leo Smith (Address above)

Leo Smith



ELLESMERE WILDFOWL COUNTS

1978 – 2000

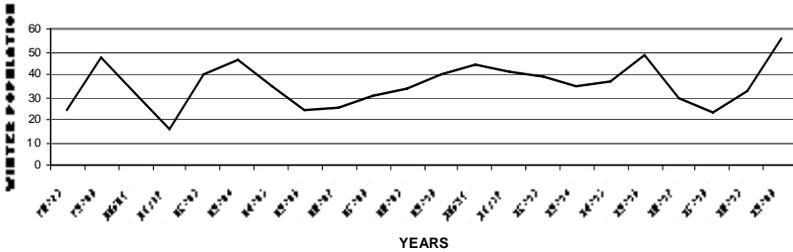
Introduction

The Wildfowl Count network was set up in 1947 by the International Wildfowl Inquiry Committee with the aim of monitoring as many waters as possible. During the winter, September through to March, volunteers were asked to count all wildfowl at their site on the middle Sunday of each month. The Wildfowl Trust took over responsibility for organising the counts in 1954 and continued until 1993 when the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) was introduced. and, as a consequence, the scope of the survey was broadened to include waders, gulls and terns and the count day altered to coincide with suitable tides at estuaries. WeBS is supported by the WWT, RSPB, BTO and JNCC.

The main meres in the Ellesmere district have been counted regularly since the project began. One person, or team, counts White Mere, Blake Mere and The Mere, Ellesmere, while another counts Crose Mere, Cole Mere and Newton Mere. The sites visited are alternated each month to provide some variety. Wood Lane was also included for the first time during the winter of 1999/2000, but, except where stated, birds from this site have not been included in this report. I joined Peter Williams and John Rowlinson in 1978 when Bill Edwards stepped down from the count team. More recently, Richard & Sue Swindells have taken over from Peter and John.

The following report is based on the data gathered during the 22 years, 1978 to 2000 that I have been counting wildfowl at the Ellesmere meres, and covers the most common species regularly found at this site. Except where stated, the figures given indicate a wintering population represented by the mean of the three highest counts each season. This figure has been used to minimise bias caused by unusual weather conditions, or movements, and provide a more accurate assessment of site usage.

Great Crested Grebe



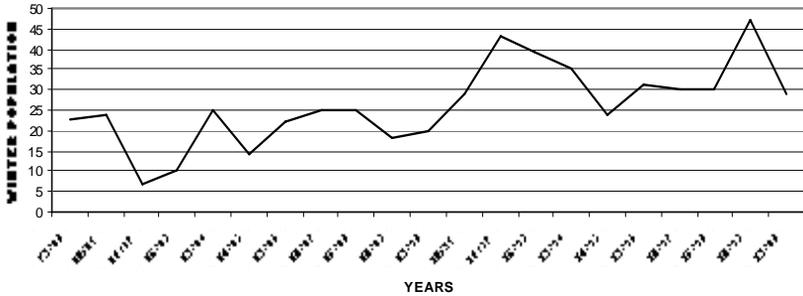
At the meres, numbers are normally at their highest in September, October and March. This is in line with national results. The autumn peak arises as young birds augment the breeding population, whilst mortality and cold weather movements to coastal areas reduce numbers until birds return in spring.

The low points on the graph appear to be related to low autumn numbers rather than the normal winter exodus caused by cold conditions. Whether this is a result of poor breeding success is unknown. For the last three years, autumn numbers have also been below average but, unusually, counts have risen to peak in mid-winter, the highest figure recorded being 64 in December 1999. A similar pattern occurred in 1979/1980 and 1990/1991. All these years were characterised by mild winters which may encourage the resident birds to remain, with their numbers augmented by birds moving to avoid harsher conditions elsewhere.

Generally, the population has remained fairly stable over the period and it remains to be seen if last year's upsurge will continue.

Great Cormorant

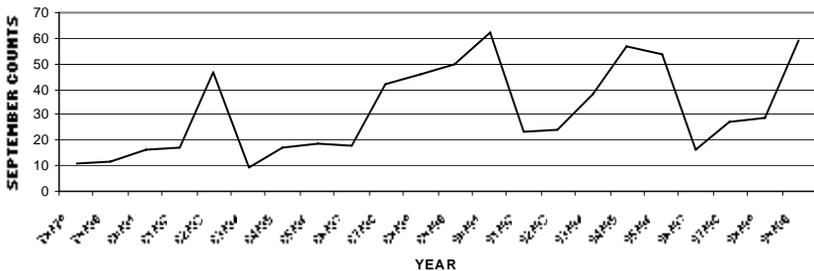
Cormorant were not included in the counts until 1979/80, the second year of my involvement in the scheme. Numbers are at their highest between November and February, except when freezing conditions force the birds to forage elsewhere; this explains the low numbers in 1981/82 and 1984/85. There has been a steady rise over the years reaching a high of 71 in January 1999.



There is a winter roost at the meres, this was formerly at White Mere but, in recent years, it has moved to the island at The Mere, Ellesmere. I have twice visited at dusk to count the roost; there were 35 in January 1986 and 46 in February 1997. On both occasions, this number was slightly higher than recorded on the normal count. It is a common sight to see cormorant flying some distance from the meres and birds from the roost are thought to visit other lakes and rivers in the vicinity

Mute Swan

Few mute swans are to be found using the meres in the winter months. There is a regular breeding pair at The Mere, Ellesmere and they can usually be recorded along with their remaining family. They are occasionally joined by odd birds which also turn up at the other meres from time to time. September is the only month when large numbers are present and these figures are shown.



This is due to non-breeding birds gathering at the meres from late June to undergo their moult; this flock starts to disperse from the end of August. The September count, the first of the winter, often records an element of the moulting flock and the large variation may be due to the earlier-than-normal departure of many of the birds before the count. I carried out two August counts in 1991 and 1994 and found 45 and 76 mute swans compared with 23 and 57 a month later.

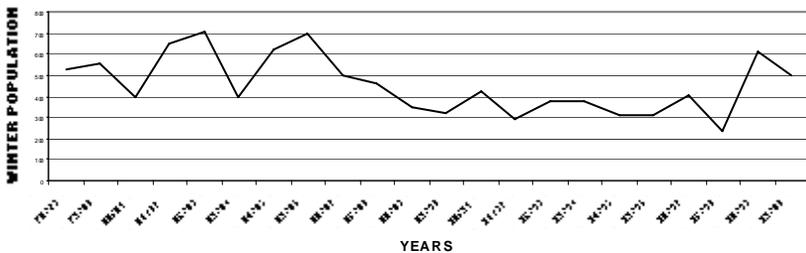
A full series of August counts would give a clearer picture for this species, but the trend would seem to be upwards. This is in line with national results which show numbers have risen slowly from a low point in the late 1970s. A ban on lead fishing weights was introduced in January 1987 and is known to have been a significant factor in the increase in the mute swan population.

Greylag Goose

Odd birds are found at the meres throughout the winter, usually in single figures, but 62 in September 1984 was exceptional. Moulting birds do gather here in the summer, but this was the only occasion when they were still present during the September count.

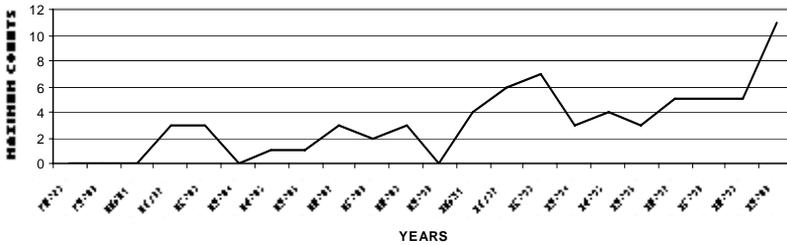
Canada Goose

Nationally, the population started to increase in the early 1960s and only began to



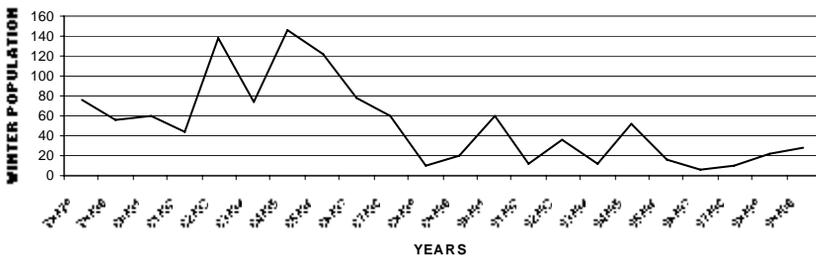
level out in the 1990s. At the meres, numbers peaked in the early 1980s when 923 birds were present in September 1982 and 924 in September 1984. Since 1985/86 there has been a steady decline, which continued until 1998/99 when a sudden increase occurred. The largest concentrations usually occur in the autumn, with numbers falling throughout the winter.

Common Shelduck



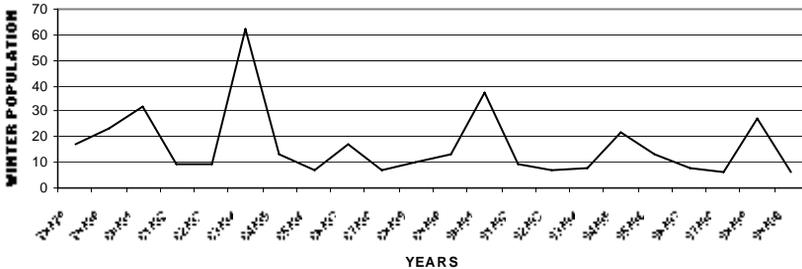
The first Shropshire breeding record was in 1963, but it was 20 years before the second attempt was noted near Cole Mere. Since then, breeding in the Ellesmere district has become a regular event. Shelduck can be found at the meres in any month, but most birds return from February onwards. The steady increase in numbers reflects the growing breeding population in this area.

Eurasian Wigeon



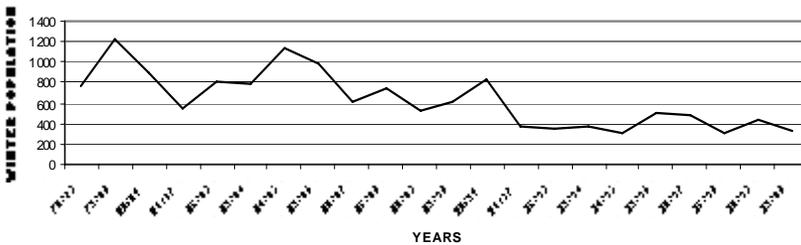
Nationally, wigeon reached a low point in 1988/89 since when numbers have continued to rise gradually. This low also occurred at the meres but, despite some fluctuations, numbers have remained relatively low ever since. January is the peak month for wigeon and the two highest counts during this period were 391 in January 1985 and 210 in January 1982. On both occasions, the meres were almost completely frozen and surrounding areas were almost certainly entirely frozen.

Common Teal



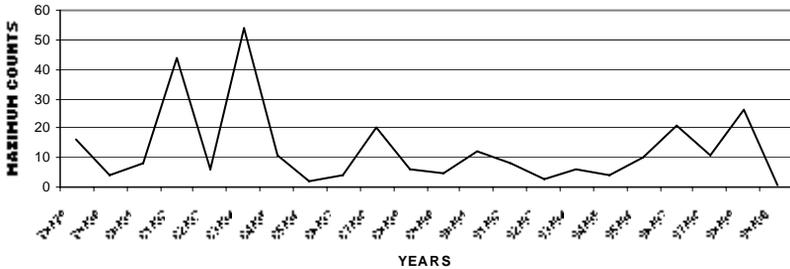
The meres do not provide suitable conditions to attract many teal. They are more numerous during spells of harsh weather when their preferred small pools and marshes become frozen. The peaks on the graph all occurred under these conditions as birds found refuge around the patches of water that remained unfrozen. If freezing conditions persist, as happened in 1981/82, the birds appear to be forced to move away in search of more favourable conditions, possibly along the coast.

Mallard



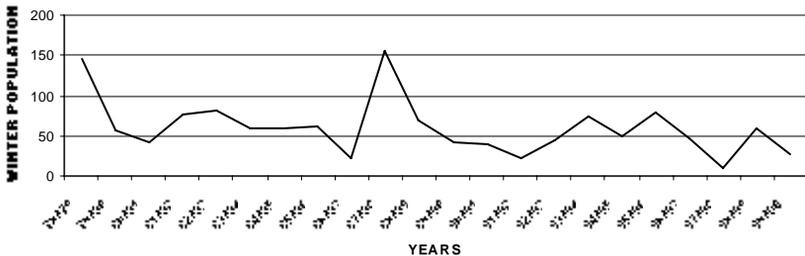
Nationally, the mallard population was stable until 10 years ago since when numbers have fallen by 40%. At the meres, however, there has been a steady decline since I began counting in 1978. The period from November to January sees the largest concentrations; 1923 were present in January 1980 but only 381 could be found in January 2000.

Northern Shoveler



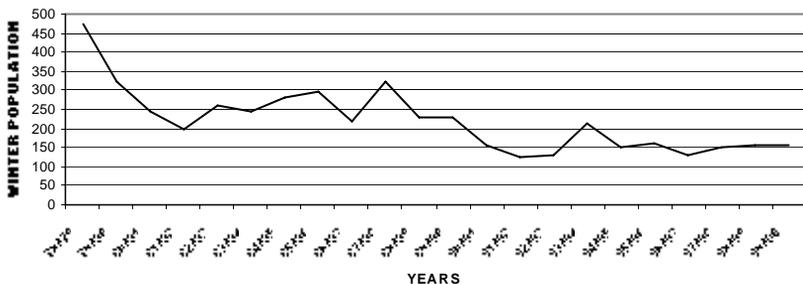
During the autumn, large numbers pass through the country and counts often fluctuate widely. This is also true at the meres. October to December are the best months for shoveler, but they are not regular visitors. The graph shows the maximum figure for each winter, ranging from 54 in November 1983 to a single bird in November 1999.

Common Pochard



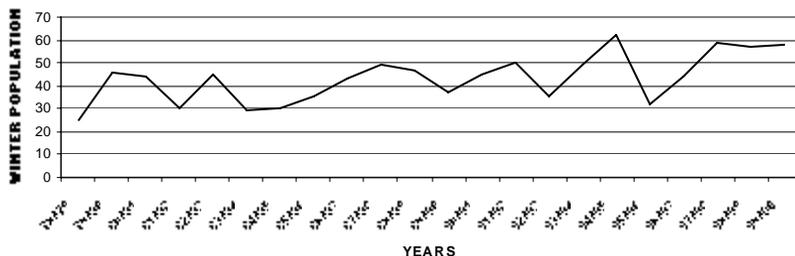
November is usually the peak month for pochard at the meres, but counts of over 150 in October/November 1978 and 276 in November 1987 were far higher than normal and show clearly on the graph. Tufted duck also peaked at this time, although what caused this sudden influx of these two species is unknown. At other times, despite fluctuations, the pochard population has remained fairly stable which is in line with national trends.

Tufted Duck



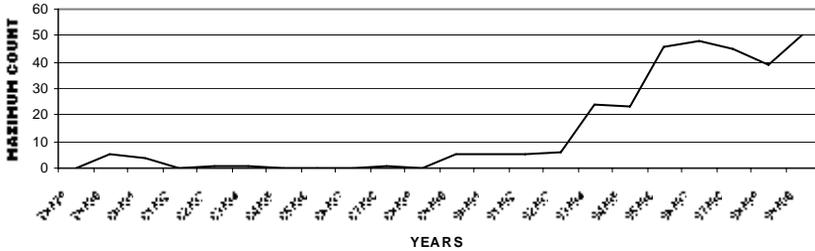
As with pochard, record numbers occurred in October/November 1978 and December 1987 with 513 and 404 respectively. This species is common throughout the winter period, but tends to be slightly more numerous in the early months. Nationally, the tufted duck has the most stable population of all wildfowl species, but, for reasons unknown, there is a clear downward trend at the meres.

Common Goldeneye



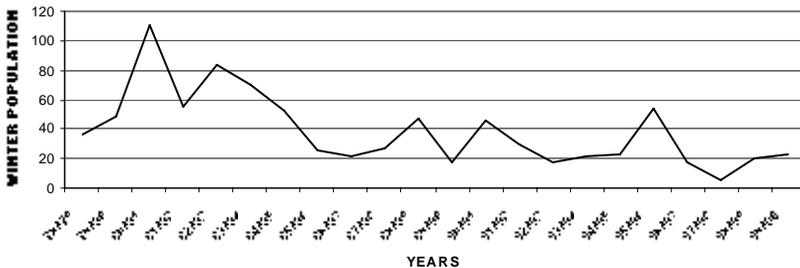
The first birds return to the meres during October and numbers continue to increase throughout the winter with maximum figures normally being reached in March. This is in contrast to other wintering wildfowl which have usually started to return to their breeding grounds by this time. The graph shows a small, but steady, increase over the period which accords with the national picture.

Goosander



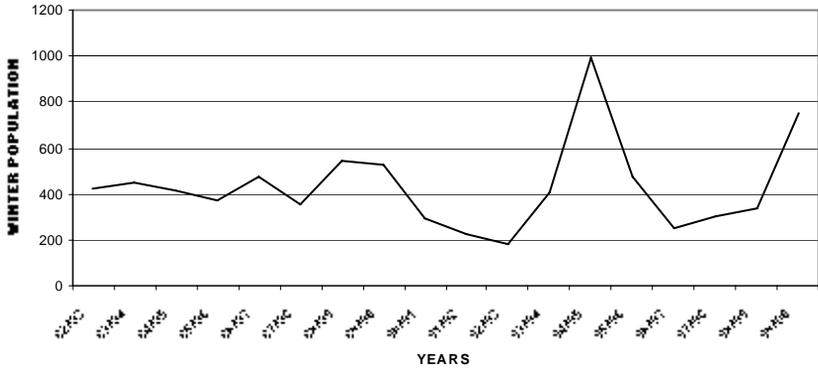
Goosander only used to be an occasional visitor to the Ellesmere meres. They have been recorded annually since 1989 and, after a slow start, they now seem to be well established. At first, January and February were the peak months for this species, but they have been arriving earlier over the past three seasons and 50 during November 1999 was the highest count of the winter. This local increase is not reflected nationally, however, the breeding population in mid Wales has expanded recently and, in addition, more birds are being reported from local rivers during the breeding season. If these birds are visiting the meres during the winter months it would explain the increase but as the origin of the winter visitors is not known this is only speculation.

Ruddy Duck



The highest count of 143 occurred at Crose Mere in October 1980, when the site was considered to be of national importance for this species! Although the national population has continued to rise slowly since this time, the number of birds using the meres has fallen considerably.

Common Coot



Prior to 1982/83, coot were only counted on International count days in January and March. At the meres, coot are usually at their most numerous between September and November and, therefore, the counts made before 1982/83 are not representative of the site and have been excluded. Counts of over 1000 in October/November 1994 and over 900 in September/October 1999 were well above average as can be seen on the graph, otherwise the population is fairly stable.

Summary

Some of the changes noted above, such as the increase in spring common shelduck and winter goosander, will come as no surprise and will have been noted by local bird watchers. The decrease in two “problem” species, Canada goose and ruddy duck, is less obvious but may be considered welcome. More worrying is the downward trend of mallard and tufted duck, the two commonest ducks on the meres. Despite small increases in great-crested grebe and common goldeneye, the number of wetland species wintering on the meres has fallen dramatically. The mean average of the counts from the last three seasons was only 55% of that for the first three years of the period under review; this represents a loss of almost 1000 birds.

Allan Dawes

THE BTO BREEDING BIRD SURVEY 1994 – 2000

The table below shows the population trends for the commoner species recorded by the BBS in Shropshire. It is not possible to calculate an index for the scarcer species found in the county but they make a valuable contribution to the national picture. The indices for the first year of the survey (1994) are set at 1. Subsequent figures above 1 indicate an increase in numbers and figures below 1 a decrease. For example, an index of 0.6 shows a decline of 40% based upon the 1994 population. For a full account of the BBS in Shropshire see the 1998 Shropshire Bird Report.

Species	1999-2000 % Change	1994-2000 Mean	1994-2000% Change	Signif- icant	Index		
					1998	1999	2000
Buzzard	-26.57	20	4.60		1.10	1.43	1.05
Pheasant	11.28	31	48.23	Yes	1.15	1.33	1.48
Wood pigeon	-9.82	36	1.41		1.03	1.12	1.01
Collared dove	4.92	20	27.87		1.11	1.22	1.28
Skylark	7.14	26	-55.13	Yes	0.65	0.42	0.45
Barn swallow	22.00	32	22.42		1.05	1.00	1.22
Wren	-0.76	35	30.08	Yes	0.98	1.31	1.30
Duncock	4.44	33	40.92	Yes	1.04	1.35	1.41
Robin	3.79	35	37.40	Yes	1.05	1.32	1.37
Blackbird	0.77	36	31.38	Yes	1.20	1.30	1.31
Song thrush	26.05	28	49.69	Yes	1.25	1.19	1.50
Blackcap	-4.11	23	39.55		1.62	1.46	1.40
Chiffchaff	15.24	26	20.63		1.57	1.05	1.21
Willow	-4.60	27	-17.47		0.95	0.87	0.83
Blue tit	-2.52	36	15.95		1.26	1.19	1.16
Great tit	13.08	34	20.87		0.98	1.07	1.21
Magpie	-10.39	31	-30.88	Yes	0.83	0.77	0.69
Jackdaw	21.18	30	2.59		0.91	0.85	1.03
Rook	5.62	23	88.29	Yes	2.01	1.78	1.88
Carrion crow	-2.20	36	-11.15		0.90	0.91	0.89
Starling	35.90	26	6.47		1.38	0.78	1.06
House sparrow	25.62	28	51.71	Yes	1.25	1.21	1.52
Chaffinch	3.30	37	-5.79		0.92	0.91	0.94
Greenfinch	21.24	23	36.68		1.08	1.13	1.37
Goldfinch	-29.69	20	-55.48	Yes	0.49	0.64	0.45
Yellowhammer	8.33	29	-9.11		0.82	0.84	0.91

Allan Dawes BTO Regional Organiser

VENUS POOL REPORT 1999

Development works

The year 2000 saw major changes at Venus Pool as the Society started to implement the management plan. The plan had formed an integral part of the successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the funds which, in the previous year, had enabled the acquisition of the land surrounding the pool



Earth moving to create a new marsh

Most work was planned for the summer months to avoid the breeding season and involved the use of heavy machinery. An excavator together with a bulldozer and scraper-box were on site for some weeks as over a metre of soil was removed from the area adjacent to the north bay in order to extend the wetland by creating a marsh. In addition, a wetland area was excavated behind the reedbed and a ditch was dug near the memorial hide.

As soon as this work was complete

construction of the new car park and paths was undertaken and a hide was erected to overlook the feeding station.

Towards the end of the year there were several well attended work parties which, in addition to the usual ongoing maintenance work, undertook a considerable amount of tree and scrub planting.

Much remains to be done, especially the establishment of the proposed hay meadows, but work is on schedule and should be completed in 2003.



Construction of the car park and paths

The birding year

The position of VP in the valley of the River Severn means it is ideally placed to attract migrants and once again the reserve lived up to its growing reputation as a site where anything can and, occasionally, does turn up. In total 131 species were reported which included 17 species of duck and 21 species of wader.

The year got off to a good start with an adult Brent goose present on 1 Jan together with a greater scaup which was also present next day. Two splendid drake smew were present on 18-19 Jan and a brambling, which were scarce in the county, was seen from mid Jan and ringed on 6 Feb.

Two of the rarer gulls species were seen in spring, two kittiwakes on 14 Mar with another on 29 May and an adult summer plumage Mediterranean gull from 21-23 Mar with a first summer on several dates from 28 Mar-13 May. Spring passage was good for sanderling with singles on 9 & 23 May and 4 Jun. Also seen were a pair of garganey on 19 Apr, a red kite on 30 Mar, an osprey on 27 Apr, a grey plover on 3 Apr, a jack snipe on 11 May, a bar-tailed godwit from 29 Apr-1 May and 9 black terns on 7 May.

Return passage included up to three garganey which were present from 12 Jul-2 Sep giving regulars ample opportunity to compare them with the similar teal. A little egret was seen on 20 Jul, a grasshopper warbler on 23 Jul and a sanderling from 27-30 Jul. August produced a wood sandpiper on the 28th and a spotted redshank on the 29th. An incredible record was of seven sandwich terns which passed through on 12 Sep.

During the second winter period, lesser spotted woodpecker was seen on a few dates in the area of the feeding station, a female scaup was present on and off for most of Dec and, towards the end of the month, it was seen with the year's star birds, two female ring-necked ducks which were found on 23 Dec and remained into the new year. The final rarities were two tundra swans on Christmas Day.

Although, these records show the importance of the site for winter wildfowl and passage birds it is disappointing to have to report that breeding success is low. Little ringed plover and lapwing failed and very few young fledged from the black headed gull colony. Regrettably, some control of predators may be necessary before the situation can improve.

Geoff Holmes

BLACKBIRDS FEEDING A BROOD OF ROBINS

Towards the end of May 2000 the residents of 5 Eric Lock Road, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury observed a blackbird *Turdus merula* visiting the nest of a pair of robins *Erithacus rubecula* and feeding the young. Realising that this behavior was unusual they contacted John Tucker a Conservation Officer with Shropshire Wildlife Trust and it was following a request from John that I visited the site.

The nest was in an open-sided nest box on a small pergola which was covered in clematis *Clemetis sp.* and soon I was watching a female blackbird feeding four young robins. Although it was a difficult site to photograph, and not at all straightforward, I decided that it would be worth recording this interesting occurrence on film.

On 25 May 2000 all was set up for photography. The first to arrive was a female blackbird with food: the chicks were fed and then, to my surprise, she



Male blackbird brooding young robins
Photograph by John Hawkins

squeezed into the nest box and brooded the chicks. After five minutes, the male blackbird arrived with a beak full of worms. The female then flew from the nest and the male spent several minutes feeding the young before it too left. The hen blackbird then returned to feed the chicks and I noticed a robin enter the pergola with food but was reluctant to approach the nest. After the robin made several attempts, I decided to move the hide further back for fear that I might be causing disturbance. Immediately, the robin came in and the female blackbird, who was still brooding, lifted herself off so that the robin could feed the chicks.

This continued during my stay with both robins and both blackbirds feeding the four robin chicks but only the hen blackbird brooding. The young robins fledged two days later and they were fed on a neighbouring lawn by both true and adopted parents.

John Hawkins

Ed: BWP makes little reference to this behaviour which is unexpected in a pugnacious species like the robin. However, in his monograph on this species, Chris Mead refers to robins using disused nests of other species. Although aggressive interactions with other species have been recorded, there are also many records of robins helping other birds by feeding young or fledglings of species such as song thrush, blackbird, spotted flycatcher, willow warbler and even long-tailed tit.

The most recent note came from BTO News where a single robin assisted with the feeding of a brood of three song thrush chicks at a Hampshire nest. It is unusual to hear of the boot being on the other foot as in this case, where it was the young of the robin which were being fed by the blackbirds, although there is a record of a wood warbler feeding a newly fledged robin in France. It is not known if the blackbirds had failed at a nest nearby just as the robins had started feeding their young and had transferred their paternal affections to the robin chicks.

References:

- Cramp et al. (1988). *Birds of the Western Palearctic (BWP), Volume V*. OUP.
Mead, C. (1984). *Robins*. Whittet Books.
Glue, D. (2001). *BTO News, No. 237*.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Abbreviations:

ASF	Allscott Sugar Factory	EGM	Ellesmere Group of Meres
SSF	Shrewsbury Sewage Farm	VP	Venus Pool
BOU	British Ornithologists' Union	BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
CBC	Common Bird Census (BTO)	WBS	Waterways Bird Survey (BTO)
WeBS	Wetland Bird Survey (Wildfowl and Wetland Trust)		

Summary of weather conditions:

Jan–Mar Jan started mild, wet and windy before high pressure became established in mid-month giving more settled weather with overnight frosts. The mild conditions returned at the end of the month and continued through Feb with just a few colder periods between low pressure systems. Mar was exceptionally mild with high temperatures in mid-month and below average rainfall

Apr-Jun Apr was generally wet and dominated by low pressure. The first half of the month was cool with a mainly northerly air-stream, before it turned much milder with southerly winds. High pressure in the first half of May brought cool north-easterly winds, but it then turned mild with a series of Atlantic depressions crossing the country. This continued throughout Jun apart from a brief period of high pressure and high temperatures in mid-month

Jul-Sep Jul was unsettled, often with a northerly air-stream and below average sunshine, but the weather improved during Aug which was generally settled and warm. Sep brought a return to more unsettled conditions with Atlantic low pressure systems crossing the country, bringing mainly westerly winds with moderate rainfall.

Oct-Dec Oct was dominated by low pressure producing a mainly south-westerly air-flow with frequent bands of rain. The end of the month brought a particularly intense depression with gales and very heavy rain resulting in extensive flooding. This generally mild, wet and windy weather continued throughout Nov and for much of Dec. Only at the end of the month did things change when temperatures plummeted and northerly winds brought frost and some snow

A Summary of the birding year:

The year started well with a first winter **glaucous gull** roosting at The Mere, Ellesmere in Jan and a **red-necked grebe** at Cole Mere on 30 Jan. A female **hen harrier** was on the Long Mynd from 24 Jan-25 Mar and a **firecrest** at The Mere, Ellesmere on 25 Feb. The only **waxwings** of the year were seen at Diddlebury on 26 Feb.

Early spring produced the year's star bird, a **Dartford warbler**. It was on the Stiperstones from 23 Mar-8 Apr and was a county first. Three **short-eared owls** were reported with two more later in the year and **great grey shrikes** were seen at Cleobury Mortimer from 5 Mar until 9 Apr, Crosshouses 14-16 Mar and at Tedsmere near Baschurch on 12 Mar. A **snow bunting** was on the Long Mynd on 3-4 Mar. Spring passage continued with **marsh harriers** at Chelmarsh on 29 Apr and Crudgington Moor on 21 May, a **grey plover** at VP on 3 Apr and, exceptionally, **golden orioles** at Poles Coppice on 26 May and Leebotwood on 19 Jun.

During the summer period **little egrets** were seen at Condovery and VP in Jul and at Wood Lane on 29 Aug. A **black-necked grebe** was at ASF from 18 Jul to 1 Aug, a **marsh harrier** at Wall Farm on 6 Aug, a **hen harrier** on Long Mynd on 19 Aug and a **pectoral sandpiper** at Wood Lane on 20 Aug. Four **Sandwich terns** were at Priorslee Lake on 18 Aug with seven at VP briefly on 12 Sep and a **wryneck** was at Cardeston on 3 Sep.

The final quarter produced a **grey phalarope** at Battlefield on 11 Oct, a **long-tailed duck** at White Mere on 22 Oct, a **hen harrier** at ASF on 22 Oct, a **great grey shrike** at Attingham and Harnage on 3-4 Dec and a **common crane** was near Market Drayton from 22 Nov to the year end. Two female **ring-necked ducks** at VP from 23 Dec and finally a second winter **glaucous gull** the Mere, Ellesmere on 22 and 24 Dec brought the year to a close.

On the negative side, no reports were received of **honey buzzards**. This was disappointing on two counts, firstly because as part of a nation-wide survey observers covered much of the suitable habitat looking for territorial/displaying birds and secondly because the completely unprecedented national influx during the second half of Sep seemed to miss the county. Another disappointment was the failure to find **dotterel** on the Long Mynd despite a systematic daily search during the spring migration period.

THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

BLACK-THROATED DIVER *Gavia arctica*

Status: Very rare winter visitor

The first county record of this species, since a first year bird at The Mere, Ellesmere in Nov. 1990, was unfortunately that of an adult bird picked up dead at Chelmarsh on 18 Dec (SH). The headless corpse of the bird, which was badly oiled, was found below the reservoir dam and was subsequently photographed by the finder. Fox is considered to be the most likely predator.

Sadly, the previous two diver records for the county, a red-throated diver *Gavia stellata* at Cound Fishery in Mar 1996 and a great northern diver *Gavia immer* at Cole Mere in Nov 1999, were also picked up dead, with the former bird also being badly oiled. However, unlike the bird under review, the above two birds were at least seen alive, before their untimely demises.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Status: Common resident

Recorded from 40 widespread sites throughout the county with the majority of records coming from VP. Confirmed breeding at ASF, Brown Moss, Cheney Longville, Chelmarsh, Hodnet Gardens, Monkmoor Pool and VP, with probable breeding at Wall Farm.

Whilst the species was recorded in every month at VP, the only double figure count for the year was of 10 at ASF on 25 Aug.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Confirmed breeding at twelve sites in central and eastern parts of the county. Surprisingly, no confirmed breeding from the northern meres, although display was noted at White Mere on 15 Mar, and juveniles were recorded at The Mere, Ellesmere in Aug and Sep.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

Great Crested Grebe	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	-	16	9	13	25	26	14	9
Cole Mere	6	15	10	6	5	5	16	13
Priorslee Flash	11	22	19	-	-	7	5	-
Priorslee Lake	5	1	13	10	8	5	13	3
The Mere, Ellesmere	51	38	18	14	21	12	23	34
White Mere	10	6	7	-	15	12	8	6

The largest count for the year was of 52 at Chelmarsh on 28 Aug, whilst an interesting record concerns a juvenile picked up on a road at Hindford on 9 Sep. The bird was released at The Mere, Ellesmere where it was reported to be unharmed, but thirsty!

RED-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps grisegena*

Status: Rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

The only record for the year was of a bird at Cole Mere on 30 Jan (AH, HMP). The observers were alerted to the birds presence by a “pager” message in the late afternoon and the original finder remains unknown. The bird was extremely active, often engaging in short flights across the mere, a 'record' photographic shot of the bird was obtained in poor light (AH). Despite extensive searching, the bird could not be relocated on the following day.

The previous record for the species, which is far from annual in the county, was of a winter plumage bird at Priorslee Flash from 2–26 Jan 1998.

BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis*

Status: A rare summer and winter visitor and scarce passage migrant.

An excellent record of a juvenile bird present on a small pool at ASF from 18 Jul to 1 Aug (AL, JP). During the previous ten years, there were records of a summer plumage bird at Wood Lane and a pair at Crose Mere in May 1995, whilst a single bird was at White Mere in 1996. The last confirmed breeding in the county was in 1989.

GREAT CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Status: Common winter visitor and passage migrant.

As with last year, this species was recorded in every month, with unseasonal birds seen at Atcham, Dudmaston, Wall Farm and VP.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

Great Cormorant	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
R. Severn, Bridgnorth	30	28	7	-	-	-	-
Cole Mere	14	-	4	-	-	-	-
Priorslee Lake	-	-	5	16	25	2	7
The Mere, Ellesmere	12	37	11	4	41	-	25
White Mere	14	5	2	5	1	-	-

In addition to the above, double figure counts were achieved at Cae Howel, Newton Mere, Shavington Big Pool, Tittenley and VP.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

Status: Rare vagrant.

Still a rare bird within the county, but one which is predicted to become more regular as its breeding range on the south coast of England consolidates and expands.

The first record of the year was of a bird at Conover on 19 Jul where it was also seen by the same observer on 26 Jul (ART). What was almost certainly the same bird was at VP on 20 Jul (GJW), where it was first observed in front of the central hide.

The other sighting of the year at Wood Lane on 29 Aug (RR) and constituted a first record for the reserve. This bird was photographed (JHar) and observed by six reserve regulars.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

Status: Common resident.

Breeding within the county appears to be restricted to the well established heronries at Halston Hall and The Mere, Ellesmere. At the former site, 23 nests were reported to be occupied on 8 Apr, whilst at the latter 21 occupied nests were noted on 29 Apr. Unfortunately, fledgling success was not reported at either site.

A bird at Condover was reported to be interacting with a common buzzard *Buteo buteo* on 5 Feb, whilst another was disturbed at a garden pond in Waters Upton on 26 Apr. A remarkable record concerns two birds observed preying the sand martin *Riparia riparia* colony at Wood Lane on 2 Jul (JHaw).

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Status: Common resident.

There was a continued decline in the numbers of breeding records, with only 25 confirmed sites which compares badly to the 31 sites in 1999 and 44 sites recorded in 1998. Dudmaston, Ellerton and Newport each held two breeding pairs.

At five of the regular breeding sites no cygnets were raised this year. At Dothill the male died after flying into power lines at the end of 1999, the lone female was seen nest building but, without a mate, did not lay any eggs. At Middle Pool, Trench the male also lost its mate early in the year and whilst it found a new female and built a nest she failed to lay any eggs. Pairs at Trench Pool and Church Aston both incubated eggs but they failed to hatch. At Whixall a pair hatched three cygnets from five eggs but they were found dead on the nest soon after and at Leegomery three cygnets were killed by vandals when only a day old. Despite this, 24 pairs were reported breeding successfully, raising 77 cygnets from 103 which hatched. However, four of these pairs only raised one cygnet each.

Both pairs at Newport had broods of seven on 18th Jun. One of the males had bred at Newport since 1986, raising 82 cygnets, including 12 in 1990 and 10 in 1991 and 1992. Unfortunately, it was driven off by the other Newport breeding pair on 7th Nov and crash landed on a traffic island in Telford. It was rescued and taken into care and, although it recovered and was returned to Newport, it

was attacked again and had to go back into care. Meanwhile its mate, a younger female, paired with another young male. The old male died soon after peacefully of old age.

Compared to 1999, winter flock sizes were more encouraging and counts of 30 or more were recorded in the first winter period in the Buttery/ Wall Farm area and at Melverley and in the second winter period at SSF, The Mere, Ellesmere, VP and Wall Farm. The largest count was 61 at Buttery Farm on 19th Apr.

TUNDRA SWAN *Cygnus columbianus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Both records relate to the second winter period and may involve some duplication. Two birds were at VP on 25 Dec (PJ), whilst four were recorded in flight at Wroxeter on 28 Dec (HJG).

These are the first records since 1997, a year which saw an impressive 21, comprising 15 adults and six juveniles frequent ASF on 4 and 5 Jan. At one time this species was recorded more frequently than the next, but fortunes have certainly been reversed in recent years.

WHOOPEE SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

On the Melverley floodplain, the first winter period saw three birds present at Hayes Farm, Alberbury on 16 Jan, with two recorded at Cae Howel on the same day and five were at Ponthen on 12 Mar. Later in the year, two were recorded at Hayes Farm on 19 Nov.

The second winter period also saw a number of whooper swans joining the mute swan flock in the Buttery/Wall Farm area. The first record was of a single at Buttery Farm on 1 Nov and the best count was five at Wall Farm on 23 Nov where a single lingered until 18 Dec. This last remaining bird was present from 8 Nov at least and carried a yellow darvic ring with the letters KDB. This bird was ringed in Iceland on 19 Aug 1998 and during the next winter it was seen at Welney, Norfolk, Upwel Fen, Cambridge and at two sites in Yorkshire. From 2 Nov 1999 until 25 Mar 2000 it was back at Welney.

The only other record was of five in flight over Berriewood on 20 Dec.

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant, some feral birds

A skein of 80 was seen in flight at Welshampton on 15 Jan, where a further 32 were seen, again on the wing, on 18 Jan (CG).

With the exception of the above, all other records are considered to be most likely of feral origin. Singles were seen at Crose Mere in Jan and Mar, at VP in Jan and Feb, whilst two were at Shavington Big Pool on 13 Feb.

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant

A party of 10 birds seen in flight at Yeaton Pevery on 15 Jan were recorded as flying west (DBu). Elsewhere, a single bird was at VP on 29 Jan, where three were present on 22 Feb and 10 Mar. The final bird of the year was also at VP on 29 and 30 Sep.

None of the birds were ascribed to race but are assumed to have been of the more common Siberian race *A.a.albifrons*.

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*

Status: Common feral resident

Recorded in every month of the year, although mainly during the autumn and winter months with surprisingly few reported during the breeding season. The largest flock of the year was 230 at VP on 4 Sep. There were only two confirmed breeding records, a brood of three was reported at Coal Brook Valley, Hales on 3 May and a single gosling at VP on 16 May. A bird which was coloured ringed as an adult at Drayton Manor Park, Tamworth on 26 Jun 2000 was present at VP on 24 Sep.

Monthly maxima at selected site:

Greylag Goose	Jan	Feb	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Polemere	124	-	-		-	-	160
Shavington Big Pool	-	124	-		190	-	-
VP	223	140	84		170	-	109

One was reported to be paired with a bar-headed goose at Atcham Island on 24 Mar and confirmed breeding between these species took place with up to five hybrid young seen at VP from 1 Aug. Four first winter birds of this hybrid pairing which were seen at Monkmoor Pool on 29 Oct presumably involved birds from this unfortunate liaison! Canada goose was the favoured partner for a bird on the River Teme at Ludlow on 17 Oct and a hybrid of such parentage was at VP on 2 Sep.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

Status: Common feral resident

Widespread throughout the county and surprisingly popular with winter flocks well reported. However, breeding was confirmed at only 12 sites which, suggests under recording at this crucial time of year.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Canada Goose	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	-	-	-	-	154	180	91	118
Chetwynd Park	-	-	-	-	200	120	-	-
Cole Mere	15	10	12	-	200	400	200	15
Cröse Mere	339	99	29	-	232	34	203	235
Monkmoor Pool, SSF	32	18	24	-	250	160	15	4
The Mere, Ellesmere	59	111	59	-	663	134	199	179
Tittenley Pool	166	136	30	-	-	125	13	202
VP	312	350	88	223	675	25	-	380
Wood Lane	-	-	12	505	1000	59	-	-

In addition to the above, counts in excess of 200 birds included 213 at Walcot Lake on 19 Mar, 400 at Brown Moss on 11 Oct and 500 at Leighton on 29 Dec.

BARNACLE GOOSE *Branta leucopsis*

Status: Scarce feral resident and rare winter visitor

Reported in all months except May and Jul, from 10 sites, mainly in central and northern parts of the county, although the south was represented with a bird on the River Teme, Ludlow on 30 Jun and 1 Sep.

All records were of single birds and whilst no reported dates are duplicated, the spread of records suggests that a minimum of two feral birds were involved.

BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicla*

Status: Rare winter visitor and passage migrant

An adult of the dark-bellied nominate race at VP on 1 Jan was followed by a first winter bird, of the same race, from 27 Jan which was seen on and off until 13 Mar. What is presumed to be the same bird was at Lower Brompton on 16 Apr and Middle Pool, Trench on 3 May before finally returning to roost at VP on 21 May.

COMMON SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant and scarce summer visitor

Recorded from 18 sites, predominantly in the north and east of the county, with the largest counts being in the first winter period. Aug was the only month in which the species was not recorded.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Common Shelduck	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cole Mere	11	4	3	2	-	-	2	16
Norbroom Marsh	6	3	9	-	-	-	-	-
VP	8	6	5	-	1	-	-	2
Wood Lane	8	14	20	10	-	3	7	3

The first confirmed breeding since 1997 occurred at Wood Lane where a pair was reported to have nine young on 28 May, although the brood had reduced to six by 8 Jul. In addition to the above, an incredible 16 juveniles were reported

from ASF on 4 Sep with six on 9 Sep. However, the species is not thought to have bred here. A single juvenile was at Monkmoor on 26 Oct, in the presence of an adult.

MANDARIN DUCK *Aix galericulata*

Status: Rare feral resident

An incredible series of reports from private land in the east of the county concerns at least nine broods of ducklings seen during the period 16 Jun to 24 Jul. On the latter date, an impressive count of 36 birds included two ducklings.

Elsewhere, breeding was confirmed on the River Severn between Ironbridge and Bridgnorth where a female and three juveniles were observed on 30 Jun.

Away from the above sites, a recently released male was at Priorslee Flash from 25 Jan to 23 Mar and again from 15 to 23 Oct. A male was seen at Telford Town Park on 6 Mar and 5 May, whilst a female was at Dudmaston on 4 Oct. Finally, a juvenile or immature male was at VP on 28 Oct.

EURASIAN WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Status: Common winter visitor and passage migrant

As is usual for this species, the largest counts in both winter periods came from the favoured River Severn flood meadows. Largest first winter count was 192 at Hayes Farm, Alberbury on 12 Mar, with the same site hosting a staggering 1370 birds on 17 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

Eurasian Wigeon	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cae Howel	50	20	-	-	10	42
Chetwynd Park	112	43	40	44	-	102
Hayes Farm,Alberbury	155	87	192	2	210	1370
Leighton/ Buildwas	-	60	-	-	4	19
Oss Mere	60	49	-	41	154	100
The Mere, Ellesmere	62	-	8	16	3	86
Shavington Big Pool	22	9	5	1	5	49

Other flocks of note were 30 at Ebnall Hall, Gobowen on 16 Jan, 42 at Buildwas on 18 Nov and 34 at VP on 24 Dec.

Most birds departed the county in Mar, although a single was at VP on 2 Apr. and four were at Isombridge on 15 Apr. An unseasonal male was recorded at Crose Mere on 29 May with presumably the same bird at Wood Lane on 25 Jul. The first returning birds of the autumn comprised three at VP on 4 Sep, with a similar number at Cole Mere on 9 Sep. At Chelmarsh on 26 Sep, 17 was the first double figure count of the second winter period after which birds became more widespread.

GADWALL *Anas strepera*

Status: Scarce winter visitor, passage migrant, rare resident

An excellent year with records from 13 widely scattered sites. Sadly, there were no breeding records, although pairs were seen at both Norbroom Marsh and VP on 7 May. Predictably, most records were from the winter period including counts of 17 at Dudmaston on 23 Oct with 15 on 4 Dec and 17 at Chelmarsh on 30 Dec (all SH), are unprecedented in recent years.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

Gadwall	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	4	2	-	-	-	1	1	2	17
Dudmaston	4	-	-	-	-	-	17	-	15
VP	1	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
Wood Lane	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	-

In addition, pairs were seen at Cole Mere on 13 and 21 Feb and at Holmer Lake on 5 Mar.

The first autumn bird was at VP on 30 Aug, with a single at Chelmarsh on 11 Sep which was the only record for that month. A pair were at Ellerton on 22 Oct, whilst on 19 Nov two birds were at Cole Mere and three each at Molverley and Ponthen. VP hosted a female on 25 Dec, whilst three males and two females were at The Mere, Ellesmere on 27 Dec.

COMMON TEAL *Anas crecca*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

Recorded in every month with impressive flock sizes in both winter periods. No confirmed breeding, although this is thought to be symptomatic of poor coverage of traditional breeding sites.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

Common Teal	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	100	102	-	130	150	120	103	-
Cae Howell	100	52	12	-	15	-	-	8
Hayes Farm, Alberbury	155	85	100	-	-	15	160	201
Shavington Big Pool	44	5	8	-	-	85	24	5
Wall Farm	80	60	-	10	-	132	180	60

Other notable flocks included 50 at Whixall Moss on 11 Mar, 68 at Ponthen on 12 Mar, 60 at VP on 7 Sep, 80 at Coal Brook Valley, Hales on 4 Oct, 50 at Molverley on 19 Nov, 64 at Ponthen on 19 Nov, 81 at Cole Mere on 27 Dec, 59 at VP 28 Dec, 115 at Oss Mere on 29 Dec, 170 at Cole Mere 29 Dec and 120 at Crose Mere on 30 Dec.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Status: Common resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites where three figure counts were achieved:

Mallard	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Buttery Farm	-	-	-	84	-	210	-
Cole Mere	120	60	23	80	100	179	390
Hayes Farm, Alderbury	107	121	29	2	133	86	-
River Severn, Shrewsbury	103	119	74	-	-	92	165
The Mere, Ellesmere	166	98	94	166	102	145	95
VP	53	46	40	124	64	30	160

In addition to the above, three figure counts included 170 at Whixall Moss on 16 Jan, 200 at ASF on 26 Aug, 242 at Wood Lane on 8 Sep, 200 at Meverley on 19 Nov and 226 at Ponthen 19 Nov.

As in 1999, breeding was reported at 21 sites which suggests serious under recording of a species which is widespread throughout the county.

NORTHERN PINTAIL *Anas acuta*

Status: Scarce winter visitor, passage migrant

An impressive total of 235 birds were counted at Cae Howel and Hayes Farm on 16 Jan with 42 still present at Hayes Farm on 13 Feb and 38 on 12 Mar. However, even this good showing was eclipsed later in the year when an incredible 320 birds were estimated at Hayes Farm on 19 Nov. These sites in the River Severn floodplain near Meverley are becoming increasingly important for this and other wildfowl species. Two hundred had been present in Feb 1996 and 127 in Jan 1998.

Away from the above, area a male was present at VP on 2–4 Jan with presumably the same bird again on 13 Jan. A single bird which was not ascribed to sex was at ASF on 26 Jan completed the sightings for the first winter period. An unseasonal eclipse drake on 12 Jun at Great Hay Golf Course was of doubtful origin, as was a regularly reported pair from Priorslee Flash, which were seen mating at the nearby lake on 12 Mar.

First returning birds were two at Chelmarsh on 16 Sep, with a single at The Mere, Ellesmere on 24 Dec. Seven birds were recorded at this site on 27 Dec with a good count of 36 the following day. However there was an incredible count of 294 at Cole Mere on 25 Dec. The year's final record of four on 29 Dec was also from this site.

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*

Status: Rare passage migrant

First record of the year was of a pair at VP on 19 Apr (JSh). This was followed by a female at Buttery Farm on 9 and 13 May (MGG).

A pair of adults in eclipse plumage were present at VP from 12 Jul to 13 Aug when they were joined by another female and all three were then seen up to 2 Sep (GEH).

A well watched juvenile was present at Wood Lane from 16 Aug to 26 Aug and it or another juvenile, was then present from 1 to 5 Sep (CG). Another juvenile at ASF on 20 Aug (AL) completed the autumn sightings.

NORTHERN SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

The last confirmed breeding in the county was at VP in 1990 and, whilst not confirmed this year, birds were seen during the breeding season at VP, Buttery Farm and Wood Lane so maybe we can hope for a repeat before too long.

The first returning birds were two females at Trench Pool on 19 Aug, a single bird at VP on 21 Aug and 30 at ASF on 22 Aug which increased to an impressive 66 by the 27th. Largest count of the year was 80 at the favoured site of Chetwynd Park on 17 Sep.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Northern Shoveler	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	15	23	-	-	66	32	56	-	-
Chetwynd Park	39	39	16	2	-	80	56	-	30
The Mere, Ellesmere	6	-	2	3	-	9	19	30	6
VP	4	3	2	6	5	26	12	8	-

Other double figure counts included 14 at Cottage Pool, Nibs Heath on 15 Jan, 17 at Whixall Moss on 16 Jan, 10 at Monkmoor Pool on 6 Feb, 35 at Shavington Big Pool on 21 Oct with 14 at the same site on 19 Nov.

COMMON POCHARD *Aythya ferina*

Status: Common winter visitor, rare resident

Most birds departed the county in Mar, although birds were recorded in Apr at Priorslee Lake, The Mere, Ellesmere and VP. Priorslee Lake hosted an unseasonal male on 12 Jul and again on 22 Jul. The last recorded breeding in the county was at VP in 1995 and this species was recorded here in all months except Jul and Aug.

First returning birds were three at The Mere, Ellesmere on 2 Sep. No flocks in excess of 20 birds were recorded other than those scheduled below.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Common Pochard	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	16	36	30	-	-	9	-	6
Cole Mere	21	4	5	-	-	-	50	19
Middle Pool, Trench	15	10	4	-	-	20	-	-
Priorslee Flash	40	40	25	-	3	28	18	-
Priorslee Lake	-	-	7	6	1	10	47	34
The Mere, Ellesmere	28	-	6	1	6	40	5	41
VP	65	51	13	4	7	30	6	39
White Mere	45	52	-	-	2	14	27	64

RING-NECKED DUCK *Aythya collasis*

Status: Rare vagrant

The two females which were first found on 23 Dec were still present at VP into the new year (KW). They could be elusive, often commuting to the nearby Cound Fishery, but sometimes absent from both. The plumage of the two ducks was distinctly different and it is thought that one was an adult and the other a first winter bird. Earlier in Dec, two females had been seen at Wellington Gravel Pits, Herefordshire and it is thought likely that these were the same birds.

This species remains an extreme rarity in the county, the previous record being a splendid adult drake at Oss Mere in Apr 1995.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Perhaps surprisingly, the species was not reported in all months of the year from any site and, mirroring 1999, breeding was confirmed at just four sites with probable breeding at a further two. This suggests serious under-recording.

Other than those scheduled below, the only count in excess of 50 birds, was 65 at Buildwas on 8 Aug.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Tufted Duck	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	-	-	9	2	-	51	12	146
Chetwynd Park	51	51	43	30	17	12	-	75
Cole Mere	20	16	44	-	30	4	40	15
Crose Mere	21	22	32	-	17	37	17	18
Middle Pool, Trench	40	30	18	5	-	19	-	-
Monkmoor Pool	28	34	24	11	7	-	6	19
Priorslee Flash	40	43	30	-	7	-	6	19
Priorslee Lake	-	-	35	20	43	8	4	9
The Mere, Ellesmere	41	38	29	27	102	94	25	42
VP	150	122	35	30	112	137	65	85
White Mere	26	25	24	21	55	51	27	12

GREATER SCAUP *Aythya marila*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

The immature male, which was found at VP on 30 Dec 1999, remained until 2 Jan, whilst an adult female was present at the same site from 1 to 9 Dec with presumably the same bird again from 15 Dec to the year end.

LONG TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*

A female was at White Mere on 22 Oct (APD). It was associating with a flock of goosander and was fitting reward for the finder who was undertaking a WeBS count.

In the last ten years, there have been only three other records of this species. In Dec 1991 an immature was at Cole Mere whilst a different bird was at nearby Crose Mere and in Nov/Dec 1993, one frequented VP and the nearby Count Fishery.

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Status: Uncommon visitor

The species is virtually annual in the county and 1998 comprises the only blank in the last ten years. However, an incredible record of 19 birds comprising 16 males and three females which were reported at Priorslee Lake on 25 Jul (EJW) are almost without precedent. We have to go back to Jun 1984 for a previous double figure count when 11 were at VP. Nine were at The Mere, Ellesmere in Jun 1997.

Elsewhere, a bird not ascribed to sex was present at Chelmarsh on 10 Mar (EJP), whilst a male was at The Mere, Ellesmere on 29 May (AH).

COMMON GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*

Status: Common winter visitor

As expected, the northern meres held the largest concentrations of this delightful winter visitor, with the largest count being 25 at Cole Mere on 17 Jan and 13 Feb. Most birds departed the county in early Apr with a female at Cole Mere on 12 Apr being the last record for the first winter period. The first returning birds were singles at Ellerton and The Mere, Ellesmere on 22 Oct, with a female at VP on 28 Oct completing the month's records.

Monthly maxima were:

Common Goldeneye	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cole Mere	25	25	23	13	-	8	17
Croze Mere	9	2	11	-	-	-	6
The Mere, Ellesmere	23	19	16	13	1	14	17
White Mere	6	20	13	10	-	3	5

Other noteworthy records were six at VP on 24 Jan, seven at Chelmarsh on 10 Jan and 6 Feb and 12 at Newton Mere on 27 Dec.

SMEW *Mergus albellus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

During the last ten years this species has been recorded annually with the predominance of records coming from the northern meres. Perhaps surprisingly, therefore, the only record for the year was of two males which graced VP on 18 and 19 Jan (GEH, HJG). It is just a pity that these splendid birds did not remain longer.

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*

Status: Rare breeding species and common winter visitor



Male Goosander
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

This species is certainly increasing and breeding was confirmed for the first time since 1997. Eight young on the River Severn near Bridgnorth were reported to be 40% grown on 20 May and 80% grown on 17 Jul (ARS). A further breeding record came from The River Clun where five juveniles were seen on 30 Apr (JSA). Breeding season birds were recorded from a further three sites.

Monthly maxima from selected sites:-

Goosander	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	-	25	14	19	-	-	26
Chetwynd Park	4	12	-	-	-		2
Cole Mere	25	12	-	-	-	11	18
The Mere, Ellesmere	11	8	4	1	7	3	2
VP	54	25	-	18	-	-	1
Walcot Lake	9	65	1	-	-	-	-
White Mere	20	8	1	-	21	7	1

As could be expected, however, most records came from the winter periods. The largest count came from the first winter period, with the 65 at Walcot Lake on 12 Feb (DS). Fairly typical for recent years but not comparing to the 257 recorded at Chelmarsh in Jan 1997. Fifty four were recorded at VP on both 23 and 14 Jan taking advantage of the islands on the reserve to roost at dusk. Twenty at Hardwick Pool on 3 Jan were also noteworthy.

Seventeen were recorded on the River Severn at Shrewsbury on 21 Apr with 15 on 11 Jul and 32 were reported along the Leighton/Buildwas stretch on 13 Aug and 25 on 9 Sep. The only significant flock sizes in the second winter period were 21 at White Mere on 22 Oct and 18 at Cole Mere on 30 Dec, with 26 recorded at Chelmarsh on the same day.

RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Status: Uncommon resident

The highest count of this species is traditionally made at The Mere, Ellesmere and this year was no exception with the maximum being 45 on 11 Oct. This compares favourably with peaks in recent years averaging 30. However, 74 in December 1995 was exceptional.

Breeding was confirmed at VP where a female with one juvenile was observed on 7 Jul, with a different brood of four seen on 29 Jul. Further breeding records came from Brown Moss where two juveniles were reported on 15 Aug and Priorslee Lake where a duckling was seen on 23 Sep. No records were received during the summer months from the traditional breeding site of Howle Pool .

Monthly maxima at The Mere, Ellesmere:

Ruddy Duck	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
The Mere, Ellesmere	6	-	1	-	-	-	-	8	27	31	45	25

Double figure counts were also recorded at Priorslee Lake with 15 on 12 Mar, 11 at VP on 13 Mar with 13 on 24 Apr, 15 at Priorslee Flash on 17 Mar, 19 at Shavington Big Pool on 1 Oct and 16 at Buildwas on 14 Oct.

RED KITE *Milvus milvus*

Status: Uncommon visitor

Twenty records were received from 18 locations which is the highest annual total so far. Most of the records, as expected, were from the south and west of the county, and sightings were fairly evenly spread throughout the year.

The exceptions to this were one reported at VP on 20 Mar circling to the west of the reserve before being driven off by common buzzards and one over Lilleshall Golf Club on 27 Dec which was being mobbed by a carrion crow. What was probably the same bird was at Church Aston the next day when it was noted that it was not carrying any wing tags. However, one which frequented the area between Hopton Cangeford and Middleton during Jul and Aug did have a green wing tag.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Status: Rare passage migrant and summer visitor

There were an unprecedented four records during the year. The first was a second summer male flying west at Hollins Farm, Merrington, on 22 Apr (DBu) and this was followed by a female at Chelmarsh on 29 Apr (PC, ARS). Another female was at Crudgington Moor 21 May (ARS). The finally record was an adult female at Wall Farm, Cherrington Moor on 6 Aug (ARS). One observer (ARS) was particularly successful, being involved in the finding of three of these individuals. Unfortunately, none of the birds lingered and they were only appreciated by the finders.

Subject to the current review of old records, these represent the 13th to 16th records since the formation of the Society and includes the pair involved in the well documented breeding attempt in 1988.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant, rare summer visitor

Seven reports were received but it is difficult to assess how many birds were involved. Indeed, it is feasible that all related to one wandering individual. However, it seems likely that two or three different birds were involved, all of which were ringtails.

The first was at Bayston Hill on 15 Jan (GRS) and, subsequently, one was seen at various locations on the Long Mynd between 24 Jan (GH) and 25 Mar and the final sighting was at ASF on 22 Oct (AL, GEH).

NORTHERN GOSHAWK *Accipiter gentilis*

Status: Scarce resident

Only 12 records were received, but these included three sightings of what were presumed to be pairs, in traditional areas, displaying over suitable habitat in Mar and Apr and a fourth record, again in traditional territory, of two males and a female. In another area, a pair were present during Apr and Jun.

One was reported to have attacked, and killed, a domestic pigeon, in a garden on 1 Aug and, away from the traditional areas, a female was reported at Wall Farm, on 16 Feb.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Status: Resident

This species was widely reported with an increase in records from the previous year and is, no doubt, a widespread and abundant breeding bird. However, juveniles seen at Adderley and Neen Savage were the only direct evidence of breeding but, in spring, soaring birds were seen at Acton Pool, Becks Field, Benthall Edge and Diddlebury and were suspected to have bred at Dowles Brook, in the Wyre Forest. On 12 Mar, two were seen at a site in the south of the county and whilst one was displaying the other was seen to attack a goshawk twice its own size. (AG).

Prey which was taken included an albino house sparrow, starling and blackbird whilst others were reported to have attacked meadow pipit, blue tit, great tit and siskin as well as large flocks of finches and hirundines.

On 23 Aug, at Whittingslaw, a female was observed mantling a male as prey. The female left the still living male but it subsequently died (GH). Newton, in "The Sparrowhawk" refers to instances of female sparrowhawks taking males, mainly juveniles, as prey after dispersal from their natal areas. In a reversal of roles, a female, chasing hirundines at Great Ness 22 Aug appeared to be attacked by a male. Sparrowhawks were often reported being mobbed by corvids.

A sparrowhawk which was found in a Belvidere Paddocks garden on 21 Nov unable to fly and which later died was sent to the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology for post-mortem.

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

Status: Common resident

A very well-reported species which is now widely distributed across the county.

The biggest count was an impressive 20 over Acton Pool 12 Mar which included 13 in one thermal. The only other double figure counts were 12 at Norbury on 1 Jan and 10 at both Lower Broughton Farm on 25 Feb and Wood Lane on 20 Aug. Many records came from observers engaged in the national honey buzzard survey.

Breeding was confirmed at Neen Savage, Callow Quarry, Condoover, Earls Hill and Hindford Grange, and was suspected at others. Soaring birds were noted at many sites. The pair at Earls Hill were seen to be attacked at the nest by ravens.

A pale individual which was first seen at the end of 1999 continued to be seen in the Whitchurch area into the new year, whilst another very pale bird took to perching on the osprey platforms at VP, causing some excitement until it started hunting rabbits! Such birds are a real trap for observers and apart from the potential for confusion with osprey, undoubtedly account for some claims of rough-legged buzzard.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Another excellent year with a probable total of eight birds, albeit without any long-staying, regularly seen, birds such as occurred in 1999.

The first of the year was at Cole Mere 2 Apr (CG, GT). This was followed by one at Harnage on 19 and 28 Apr (DFr) which would almost certainly be the same as at VP 27 Apr (PN). At VP it was seen to carry a green ring on the left leg, and a white or steel one on the right leg. One at Wood Lane on 30 Jun and 2 Jul (APD) was also reported at the Mere Ellesmere on the latter date. At Chelmarsh, one which was seen between 15 and 17 Jul (DFu) may have been present a few days earlier.

At Allfield on 2 Sep (per NB) one was seen to plunge into a large garden pond, after golden rudd!! This was followed by one at at Welshampton on 22 Sept (CG) before the last of the year over Tern Fisheries, Market Drayton, on the late date of 28 Oct (DBa, AG).



Osprey
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

With the continued success of the Scottish population, and with the reintroduction scheme at Rutland Water, this species is very much one to look out for in passage periods and it is interesting to speculate if the increase in birds lingering during the summer months is connected with the Rutland project.

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Status: Common resident

Although over 250 records were received from 98 sites this species is probably still under-recorded. Very cosmopolitan in its habitat requirement, records came from such varied areas as the centres of the larger towns, the high upland areas to the south and the low lying central farmland.

Breeding was confirmed at five sites and breeding activity or late season juveniles were noted at six others. At one site in north Shropshire two chicks were fledged from a nest box within a 100 metres of a hobby's nest which was also successful and on the Long Mynd, broods of two and three young were fledged from nests within 200 metres of each other. Another pair fledged four young from a tree nest which had produced one the previous year.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor, rare breeding species

Breeding was confirmed at a traditional site with at least one young fledged. However, birds were not as conspicuous as in most years and the nest might have been in a different area from that normally chosen, resulting in rather few records.

This reduction was mirrored during the winter months when just 12 records were received from 10 sites. In the first winter period, records came from Pultheley on 1 Jan, the Gliding station, Long Mynd on 2 Jan, Wall Farm on 27 Jan and 16 Feb, Weeping Cross on 5 Feb, Poles Coppice on 13 Feb and Berriewood on 20 Feb. At the latter site, a female was observed taking a chaffinch or yellowhammer from a stubble field.

At the end of the year, an immature or female chased a passerine into and around a tree at Tibberton 19 Nov. Subsequent sightings were Condover on 13 Dec, Nean Savage on 21 Dec and finally at Meeson on 27 and 30 Dec.

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

Status: Rare summer visitor



Hobby
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

The recent increase continued with 103 records being received from 57 sites. The first of the year was, fairly predictably, from the Long Mynd where two were present at Pole Bank on 27 April.

Breeding was confirmed at three sites with two pairs each fledging three young and the third at least one. One of the broods of three was ringed at the nest. In addition, displaying birds were reported at two sites and late summer juveniles were

seen at three others which certainly suggested local breeding. The general trend continues to be upwards since the first modern day breeding records in the early eighties.

At Pole Cott in early May one was seen to take a skylark three feet above the ground whilst at Rodway near Crudgington two birds combined as a team to chase a swallow. During late summer, they were often seen chasing hirundines, which in itself, can be a sign of local breeding, The dragonflies at Whixall Moss are a major attraction for this species and up to six were seen in early August. The last records for the year were at Wood Lane on several dates in Oct up to the 17th.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor, rare breeding species

A total of 134 records were received from 61 sites and further expansion of the breeding population may be held back by the paucity of suitable sites. Elsewhere, peregrines have bred on buildings and perhaps this might occur in Shropshire before too long. At total of 14 sites were monitored, an increase of one over the previous two years, although one was inactive. The new site was discovered late in the season when three fledged juveniles were seen.

From the 13 sites where breeding was attempted, 16 young survived to fledge which is a considerable reduction from 21 in 1999 and 20 in 1998. The rather wet weather may have been a contributory factor. Also, two sites were robbed although at one of these the female laid a second clutch at a nearby site and three young were fledged. The first success at this site for seven years. After laying a clutch of four eggs, the female at one site was killed by a new female which then proceeded to lay a new clutch of four but, unfortunately, none hatched.

At Berriwood, a peregrine was seen to attack a hobby and whilst the smaller falcon easily avoided the unwanted attention it was chased across the fields towards Condover. Other species to suffer the attentions of malevolent peregrines were grey heron and buzzard.

RED GROUSE *Lagopus lagopus*

Status: Uncommon resident

Although not widely reported, records were fairly evenly split between the two known sites of the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones. As would be expected with such a sedentary species, records were fairly well distributed throughout the year. Once again there were no reports of breeding.

One of the Long Mynd records was at Asterton on 7 Apr which is some way further south than the usual core area. The largest cluster of sightings was around Pole Cott but this may represent more intensive birder coverage rather than grouse densities. The largest counts were of five birds on both the 29 Apr and the 12 Nov. On the Stiperstones, the majority of birds were seen in the vicinity of Gatten Plantation with four being the largest count on 14 Nov.

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE *Alectoris rufa*

Status: Common resident

The majority of records, as usual, came from the low-lying arable areas. This is possibly more as a result of continuing captive-bred releases, rather than habitat preferences as this species is quite at home in more upland areas. At Venus Pool, 11 were present on 3 Nov which was the largest site count for a couple of years, but again may have been the result of a local release.

Breeding was confirmed at Neen Savage where a female was seen with 14 one day old chicks, Millenheath nr Prees, Somerwood where 10 juveniles were seen and Tibberton where six 6 juveniles were reported.

The largest non-breeding groups were 12 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 15 Feb, 19 Buttery Farm 28 Feb, 12 Wall Farm, Cherrington Moor 6 Oct, 13 Woolston nr West Felton 26 Dec and 12 Shifnal 27 Dec. Several reports were received of birds coming into gardens to feed.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix*

Status: Common resident

Just 24 records were received from 16 sites which represents a drop from the previous year and, in addition, covey sizes were smaller. Grey Partridge is now quite scarce within the county and unless the population starts to recover we will need to reconsider its status as a common resident. This is particularly worrying as the numbers, low as they are, may still be being boosted by captive releases. As with the previous species, most of the records were from the central farming areas of the county but no evidence was received to confirm certain wild breeding.

The largest covey was of 13 at Wall Farm on 4 Nov which were seen on a cattle shed roof! The only other double figure counts, each of 10 birds were at Cronkhill Island on 4 Jan, Pimhill on 2 Feb and Chelmarsh 30 Oct. One was dazzled by car headlights on Ellesmere Road, Shrewsbury at 10 p.m. on 19 May, but flew off when the driver returned to check the identification. The partridge confirmed the identification of the driver to be the county recorder!

COMMON QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*

Status: Rare summer visitor

It was a fairly poor year by recent standards with singing birds at just eight sites involving a minimum of nine individuals. As is frequently the case, all records were of birds which were heard but not seen.

The first of the year was at Bings Heath on 20 May and this was followed by one at Rodway near Crudgington on 27 May, 29 May and 18 Jun, with more than one bird thought to be present on the latter date. Birds were also heard at Wall Farm on 6 Jun, Huntington on 22 Jun, and Higher Heath on 1 Jul whilst one called throughout July near Upton Magna. The only definite record of more than one bird was three at Nonely on 18 Jul. It is tempting to believe that at least some of these birds may have been breeding.

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

Status: Common resident

Although common and widespread throughout most of the county the population is boosted by the large numbers which are reared and released for shooting purposes and the species is clearly ignored by most observers with just four observers contributing 52 of the 87 records.

The only confirmed breeding was at Somerwood and the largest recorded count was 28 at Sturt Common on 30 Apr.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*

Status: Scarce breeding species and uncommon winter visitor

No breeding season records were received and the population may have fallen since completion of the survey work for the atlas (*An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire 1992*) which suggested 18 pairs. It is clear that the species is primarily a winter visitor. Fifty two records were received from 13 sites but over half the records were from VP

In the early part of the year, one and occasionally two were present at VP until the 21 Apr. One at Lower Carwood on 19 Jan which was caught by a dog in a small rushy patch by the River Onny was fortunate in being rescued and released unharmed. An unusual record was of one away from normal habitat on

the Long Mynd on 5 Feb. Other records were received from Diddlebury, Chelmarsh, Priorslee Lake, Market Drayton, Monkmoor Pool and Priors Holt nr Marshbrook.

The first record of the autumn was at VP on 10 Sep and singles were reported on and off until the year end with two on 5 Oct. Other records from this period were at ASF, Chelmarsh, Coton Hill, Monkmoor Pool. The Chelmarsh record was of four on 18 Dec which was the highest count of the year. ASF, the former the county stronghold, returned only a single record of a bird heard on 22 Oct. The final records were of a single at Cole Mere on 29 Dec with two at the same site on 31 Dec.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*

Status: Common resident

Moorhen continues to be an extremely common and successful species, although the larger counts were well down on 1999. The largest gatherings were of 20 reported at VP on five dates between 7 Mar and 9 Apr and also Wood Lane on 1 Sep.

Breeding was confirmed at Conover, Merrington Green, Priorslee Lake, Queens Head, the River Clun at Parslow, Somerwood, Wall Farm and Wood Lane but no doubt took place at many other sites.

COMMON COOT *Fulica atra*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Monthly Maxima, at selected sites

Common Coot	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EGM inc Wood Lane	288	252	128	411	176	178	44
Oss Mere	326	173	-	-	168	210	286
Priorslee Lake & Flash	40	-	58	-	18	48	31
Tittenley Pool	123	52	32	-	17	66	49
Trench Pool	130	74	41	-	10	-	-
VP & Trout Pool	95	50	20	19	22	-	112

The most notable statistic shown by the above table is the exodus of birds from EGM at the end of the year, which is hard to explain given the mild early winter weather when counts were undertaken. Historically, however, coot at the meres have been at there most numerous during Sep to Nov.

Breeding was recorded breeding at 15 sites including urban areas such as Telford Town Park.

COMMON CRANE *Grus grus*

Status: Very rare passage migrant or winter visitor

An adult was present in the north-west of the county from 17 Nov until 28 Dec. It was first seen at Higginswood, near Calverhall, by a local resident on 17 Nov (DMe), but the identification was not confirmed until 24 Nov (AB). The crane showed well in the Higginswood area on most days for the next five weeks and, what was surely the same bird, flew west over Wood Lane on 28 Dec (AH).

A full report of this record can be found on page 114.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*

Status: Scarce summer visitor and passage migrant

Although reported from 16 sites the majority of records were from VP and Wood Lane where regular observers follow their fortunes from the first arrivals early in the year, through their eventful and often traumatic breeding attempts.

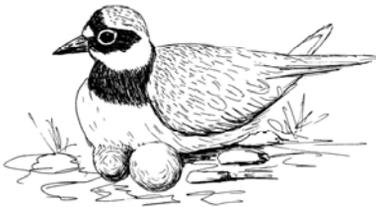
Oystercatcher return early to breeding sites but the first at VP on 2 Jan was especially so. Numbers rose gradually from early Feb to a maximum of eight on the 3 Apr, although some passage birds may have been involved and eventually two pairs bred. One pair nested on the top of the large tree stump in the pool and a few days after hatching on 15 Apr the youngsters launched themselves into the water bouncing like corks! The other pair nested on the gravel island in front of the main hide hatched one chick on about the 15 May. All three survived to fledge. The last report of the year was on 5 Aug.

At Wood Lane, the first bird returned on 20 Feb and a pair hatched four young on the large island all of which survived to fledge. The last record was on 3 Aug.

At ASF there were two on 24 Feb, four on 25 Mar and 18 Jul but there was no evidence of breeding. Other records of more than single birds were two at Tittenley on 2 Jan, two at Isombridge Gravel Pits on 15 Apr, three at Buttery Farm on 27 Apr and two at Priorslee Lake on 1 Aug. Birds seen occasionally in the first half of the year at Monkmoor Pool may have been on feeding forays from VP, whilst similar, occasional records from White Mere and Newton Mere may have involved birds from Wood Lane.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*

Status: Scarce summer visitor



Little Ringed Plover
Illustration by Rosie Rees

As with the previous species, the fortune of these birds is closely followed at VP and Wood Lane and reports from these sites accounts for three quarters of all records. The first records of the year were from Wood Lane, where three were present on 2 Mar including a very poorly marked bird which was probably in its first summer. Two pairs were present here throughout the breeding season, one of which hatched three young on the main island, two of

which probably fledged successfully. The other pair failed three times at the egg stage having not helped themselves by habitually nesting on one of the service tracks. It is likely that a third pair were successful off the reserve but within the working quarry.

At VP, one pair hatched four young around the end of May but all were lost by 11 Jun. Pairs also bred at two sites in the south east of the county. At one, a pair bred successfully after an early failure and at another a pair that endured two early failures were again sitting on a clutch of four eggs on 1 Jul but the outcome is unknown. A pair also bred at Chelmarsh with one juvenile on 8 Jul.

A colour ringed female which was present at VP on 2 Apr had been ringed as an adult at Nosterfield Gravel Pits, North Yorkshire, on 3 Jun 1999 where it bred, fledging four young. It returned to the same site on 9 Apr 2000 and paired with the same male.

All the records from ASF were autumn migrants with a maximum of seven on 12 Sep which was the last day they were present at this site.

GREAT RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*

Status: Common passage migrant

A good year for this species with spring passage noted at VP and Wood Lane. The first record of the year was two at VP on 2 Apr, with singles at the same site on 29 Apr and 4-8 May followed by two on 13 May and another single on 23 May. At Wood Lane three were present on 8-9 Apr, a single on 16 May, three on 19 May and two on 4 Jun. A single at VP on 3 Jul was difficult to assign to either passage.

Return passage got underway with a single at ASF on 20 Aug. This proved to be the main site with quite a strong movement which peaked on 26 and 28 Aug when nine were present. In Sep, numbers peaked at five on the 10th and 11th and the final record was a single on 29 Sep. At VP there were singles on the 1st and 2nd Sep and 14-18 Sep.

EUROPEAN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*

Status: Common winter visitor

Thirty five records were received from 21 sites, but many of the sites were adjacent and no doubt flocks moved freely between. This makes it difficult to assess the true wintering status which only a co-ordinated count would help resolve. The bare figures alone suggest a slight upturn in the numbers of wintering birds but this might be misleading.

Three figure counts in the first winter period include 150 at Walcot on 1 Jan, 300 at Cosford Pig Farm on 6 Jan, 300 at Atcham Grange on 28 Jan, 143 at Childs Ercall on 13 Feb and 110 at Cherrington Moor on 19 Feb. One hundred were on the airfield at Berriewood on 1 Apr and the observer (NB) commented "We used to get hundreds for weeks at a time in late winter but sadly not now".

At Norbroom Marsh, three figure counts were recorded on four dates between 16 Mar and 6 Apr. The largest flock was 162 on 25 Mar, 25 of which showed signs of the northern race *altifrons*, (MGG). In this form, the males acquire more black on the face and under-parts in breeding plumage, but it is no longer regarded as a legitimate sub-species due to the amount of variation shown throughout the range.

In the autumn, a flock of over 60 made brief visits to VP on 22 and 23 Oct, and singles on 15 Sep and 7 Oct were good reserve records for Wood Lane. Towards

the end of the year, wintering flocks included 300 at Shawbirch on 16 Dec and 180 at Cosford Pig Farm on 31 Dec. At Crudgington, flocks were recorded of 400 on 11 Dec, 250 on 16 Dec and 205 on 22 Dec.

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

A single winter plumage bird was at VP on 3 Apr (GJW). This is the second year in a row that the species has been recorded at VP following a blank period going back as far as 1990. The bird must have arrived late in the day since it was only present in the evening having not been seen earlier in the day. It was not present next day and its brief stay is typical for this species

Grey plover is not quite annual in Shropshire having been recorded in eight of the last 10 years.

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor



Lapwing
Illustration by Rosie Rees

The records suggest an increase in the number of birds wintering within the county with several very large flocks reported in both winter periods. However, publicity about the decline of this species may have resulted in more observers reporting counts. The highest were 600 at Cosford Pig Farm 6 Jan, 1000 at Prees Heath on 16 and 22 Jan and 500 at Wood Lane 31 Jan with 600 there on 13 Feb.

The post breeding flock at Wood Lane peaked at 727 on 24 Sep with 557 counted on 1 Oct and 512 on 10 Dec. Elsewhere, at least 600 were in the Molverley area on 19 Nov. 1250 were at Crudgington Moor on 11 Dec with 650 on 16 Dec and finally a massive 1500 were at Cosford Pig Farm on 31 Dec.

Whilst winter numbers were encouraging breeding success seemed to be very limited. Although many sites held birds on territory, chicks were recorded at only six of them.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Northern Lapwing	Jan	Feb	Mar	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
VP	121	90	13	33	30	250	270	-	25
Wall Farm	500	270	-	90	30	-	86	230	-
Wood Lane	500	600	72	39	450	727	557	420	512

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

An excellent year for this species. After a blank in 1999, four were seen, all of them at VP. The first was on 9 May (GEH) followed by other equally short staying individuals on 23 May (GEH) and 4 Jun (DBu). The final record was of a bird on return passage which lingered from 27-30 July (GEH).

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

A fairly poor year for this species which has been annual since 1983 but in greatly fluctuating numbers. This year the total may have been no more than three birds and, as is normal, all were seen on return passage.

A juvenile was at Wood Lane on 3 Sep with what was probably the same bird again on the 5th. A single was present at ASF on 25 Sep, with two on 27 Sep and 2 Oct.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER *Calidris melanotos*

Status: Rare vagrant

A juvenile was found at Wood Lane on the rather early date of 20 Aug (CG) It was discovered just a few hours before a work party was due to begin but fears that it would be flushed were unfounded. It seemed unperturbed by the use of three noisy strimmers, or the large number of people, despite every other bird quickly vacating the reserve!

It was the second year in succession this species had been found in the county and the eleventh record in all. It remained until 23 Aug and was enjoyed by many observers.

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

There were a sustained series of daily records at ASF between 22 Aug and 6 Sep (MGG et al). From the original party of six numbers fluctuated to a highest count of eight on 29 Aug with the last being a single which departed on 6 Sep.

One can speculate how many birds, if any, above the maximum count of eight were involved in this movement but, in any event, it constitutes the biggest flock since 8 Sep 1988 when a remarkable 32 were present at ASF.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

Status: Common passage migrant

In terms of numbers, it was a fairly typical year and, as might be expected, the vast majority of records were from the principle wader sites of ASF, VP and Wood Lane.

At Wood Lane, the first of the year was a rather unusual winter record of one on 27 Jan. Spring passage at this site began with five on 17 Apr and subsequently three were present on 29 Apr with one or two on odd dates until 11 Jun. Just one record on autumn passage, a single one on the late date of 26 Nov. The lack of records during the peak period was probably due to continuing high water levels.

At VP, after a single on 22 Feb small numbers were recorded on various dates between 2 Apr and 12 Jun with a maximum of six on 29 Apr. Return passage never reached more than a trickle with a best count of three on 14-15 Sep. The final record was a single on 6 Oct.

Water levels at ASF are rarely suitable for waders in the spring and no dunlin were reported. The situation in autumn is, however, reversed with much exposed mud and birds on return passage were recorded on most dates between 29 Aug and 19 Oct. The highest count was eight on 10 Sep.

Also recorded at Chelmarsh, Eaton on Tern, Priorslee Lake and Crudginton where the highest count of the year was 10 feeding on flooded arable fields on 22 Dec.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*

Status: Common passage migrant

There were no spring records but an excellent autumn passage was reported. The counts and dates suggest that the movement involved a minimum of 36 birds including 10 at VP, 13 at Wood Lane and 10 at ASF although, in the case of the latter site, this may well be an underestimate.

The first of the year was a single at VP on 14 Jul and this site held another single on 15 Sep with eight present briefly on 26 Sep. At Wood Lane singles were present on various dates between 9 Aug and 13 Oct with three on 28 Aug, two on 29 Sep and five on 30 Sep. Passage at ASF was noted between 20 Aug and 27 Sep, with peaks of five on 20 Aug, six on 25 Aug and four from 26-28 Aug and again on 11 Sep. The only other site to hold the species was Eaton-upon-Tern, where three were present on 2 Sep.

JACK SNIBE *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

Sixteen records were received from 11 sites. A minimum of 23 individuals were involved which is the best showing since 1995.

One of the best sites is the marsh at Cole Mere, although birds are difficult to see on the ground. One was reported here on 2 Jan, three on 26 Feb and the year's best count, a particularly noteworthy six on 26 Dec. Chelmarsh is another favoured site, and one where there is a better chance of seeing this skulking species well. Singles were reported on 10 Jan, 10 Feb and 22 Feb with two on 10 Oct.

Elsewhere, in the early part of the year, one was reported at Callow Hollow 2 Jan, two at Calverhall on 22 Jan, two at Wall Farm on 27 Jan and one at Berwick Park on 30 Jan. A single passage bird was at VP on 11 May.

In the second winter period, singles were reported at VP on 19 Oct, Cae Howel on 22 Oct, Wood Lane 17 Nov, Blake Mere near Whitchurch on 26 Nov and the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas on 29 Dec.

COMMON SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*

Status: Uncommon resident, common passage migrant and winter visitor

Always a popular species, with observers taking up the challenge to produce accurate counts. Reports were received from 45 sites, but with VP and Wood Lane producing the most records. There were very few breeding season records and the only suggestion of possible breeding was a second hand report from the River West Onny, and one heard in display flight on the Long Mynd.

A count of on the marsh at Cole Mere on 26 Dec together with the Jan counts at VP and Wood Lane were the highest in the county since the 175 at Whixall Moss in Feb 1995.

Monthly maxima at VP and Wood Lane:

Common Snipe	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Venus Pool	150	51	11	10	20	51	60	70	70
Wood Lane	100	58	40	34	22	11	22	20	20

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*

Status: Uncommon resident and winter visitor

Sixteen records were received from 12 sites which was a sharp drop from 1999 but surely this species must be much under-recorded. Few breeding season records but two territories were plotted using CBC type registrations at Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest, and two birds were roding at Haughmond Hill in May which is a traditional site.

In the first winter period, records were from Attingham, Berriewood, Cefn Coch, Haughmond Hill, Humbers Lane, Donnington, Nipstone Rock, Willey, nr Brosely and the Wrekin twice. All records were of one or two birds. Later in the year, five were at Willey on 30 Nov and six were flushed on 29 Dec during a shoot at Berriewood where woodcock are not shot. The only other end of year records were from Gatten Plantation and Lodge Hill.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

This species has been annual for at least the last 20 years with the best annual total being around 42 birds in 1998. Consequently, with a minimum of 19 birds seen it was a reasonable return and included a rare winter record of one at Crudgington on 22 Dec.

All other records were from VP and Wood Lane. At VP, a single was present from 17-19 Apr and this was followed by two on 2 Jul. A single from 4 Jul was joined by two more on 6 Jul with one still present the next day. The only flock of note was seven 9 Jul. Wood Lane held four on 6 Jul and then came a long gap until a single on 23 Oct. The early Jul records are difficult to assign to either passage, but it is worth noting that quite large numbers of apparently summering birds occur at various sites along the Dee and Mersey estuaries.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Three were seen, all at VP. A single which remained from 29 Apr to 1 May (GEH) was followed by two on 1-2 Jul, (KP).

Has now been recorded in six of the last 10 years with an average of about two a year and thus is always much rarer than the previous species.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Seven records were received from four sites involving a total of perhaps 13 birds but, unfortunately, none lingered for more than a day and most were fly-overs. This species is recorded annually, most frequently on spring passage, and this year's showing represents an average yearly total.

Two dropped into VP from a great height on 27 Apr (AB) which was the same day that two moved north over Wall Farm (DBu). Although it is not known if the times overlapped, they could conceivably have been the same birds. Two also flew over Wood Lane calling on 30 Apr (RD). A single was at Wood Lane on 15 May (AH, GEH), two more were seen at VP on 27 May (GEH) and finally a single was at Wood Lane on 3 Jul (AH). The final record was a party of three which flew over Berriewood on 15 Aug (NB).

EURASIAN CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

Status Common breeding species, passage migrant and winter visitor

In the early part of the year, two very large flocks were seen on the Melverley floodplain. On 1 Jan 170 were seen at Cae Howel and 200 at Edgerley on 11 Mar on flooded fields. These were the two largest flocks to be seen in the county for at least 20 years. Significant counts were also made at two other sites in this area 35 at Hayes Farm Alderbury on 13 Feb and 52 at Ponthen on 12 Mar. Other flocks in this period were 40 at Coton Hill, 40 at Monkmoor Pool, 69 at VP and 45 at Wood Lane.

Breeding activity was noted at about 11 sites and eggs or young seen at five of these. As in the previous year, very few records were received from the Long Mynd area which was, and probably still is, favoured breeding territory.

At Wood Lane, the post breeding flock started to build up exceptionally early with 50 present by the end of Jun. It peaked at 140 on 3 Aug thereafter declining gradually through Sep until a mini peak of 51 on 4 Oct which was the last significant record. This site has held large numbers of curlew in early autumn since at least the late 1970s. and during this time it has undergone a complete metamorphosis, from flooded arable land, to gravel extraction and restoration, before finally evolving into a fine nature reserve.

Other sizeable post breeding flocks were 30 flying north over Monkmoor on 6 Jul, whilst at Coton Hill up to 40 were present in the West Midland Show-ground area in Nov and Dec.

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

Four were seen, all of which were juveniles on autumn passage. This represents an average of two a year for a species which has been recorded in seven of the last 10 years.

The first was found at ASF on 20 Aug (AL) and remained until 28 Aug. A single at VP on 29 Aug (JM) could possibly have been the same bird. However, two at ASF on 1-2 Sep (SJ) were both thought to be new birds since none were found in the interim period despite searching.

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant, scarce summer and rare winter visitor

At VP, odd birds were seen from the 5 Mar with a maximum of four on 15 Mar after which none were seen until two were present 11 May and a single on odd dates until 12 Jul. The final record here was of two on 2 Sep. Wood Lane held two or three from 16-21 Mar and then a single occasionally up to 17 Apr. The only other records at this site were singles on 1 Jul and 12 Oct.

At ASF four were present on 13 and 19 Feb with singles on 24 Feb and 8 Jun. Autumn passage comprised four on 20 Aug, two on 27 Aug and a single from 16-18 Oct. Norbroom Marsh, Newport is another favoured site for this species and up to five were present between 16 Mar and 7 May, during which time two pairs were seen and a territorial dispute were noted. The only other indication of attempted breeding was from Coal Brook valley Hales, where a pair were present on 3 May and two pairs on 16 Jun but, thereafter, the only record was a single on 24 Jul.

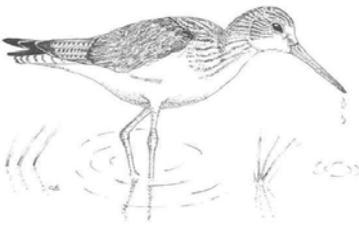
Elsewhere, singles were at Wall Farm on 19 Aug and 11 Sep, whilst one or two birds were reported on single dates at Atcham Grange, Buttery Farm, Cae Howel, Hayes Farm, Alderbury, Priorslee Lake and the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas.

COMMON GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

Status: Common passage migrant

It was a very good year for this species which featured in an exceptional autumn passage through ASF.

Spring records are always notable and the first was a single at VP on 2 May. This was followed by three at Buttery Farm on 4 May, one at Norbroom Marsh on 7 May and finally another single at VP on 11 May.



Greenshank

Illustration by Glenn Bishton

Return passage started early but singles at VP on 5-8 Jul and 17 Jul were probably failed breeders. After a single at Yeaton Pevereay on 9 Aug, return passage got under way properly on 12 Aug when two were at ASF and Wood Lane with singles at VP and Leaton Knolls.

Wood Lane had up to three from 12-16 Aug with a single on most dates until 25 Aug. The final record here was three on 3 Sep. At VP there was a steady stream of records until 14 Sep with peaks of three on 23 and 30 Aug and seven on 2 Sep. Elsewhere in Sep, two were recorded at Wall Farm with singles at Chelmarsh and Hales.

The real action, however, was at ASF. In Aug counts include 18 on the 20th, 23 on the 23rd, 18 on 26th and 16 on the 27th. This was followed by 10 on 1 Sep, 13 on 7 Sep, 15 on 11 Sep and 11 on 12 Sep. This marked the end of the main passage, with the last of the year being a single on 2 Oct. A regular observer at ASF (AL) estimated that at least 40 birds were involved.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

Status: Common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor

Records from the first winter period were of singles at VP 1 Jan, Cae Howel on 1 Jan and Atcham Island on 26 Jan with two at Ponthen on 12 Mar. In spring singles were at Lower Brompton on 2 Apr and ASF 15 Apr. None were then seen until singles were at VP on 11 Jun and Wood Lane on 30 Jun.

Return passage typically got under way in July and was a protracted affair with birds apparently lingering at several sites for long periods.

Monthly maxima at key sites:

Green Sandpiper	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
ASF	3	12	12	10
VP	8	5	4	-
Wood Lane	2	3	2	1

Elsewhere, one or two birds were reported at Chelmarsh, Hales, the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas, Ridgwardine and Tibberton. Birds which were presumed to be wintering were seen during Nov and Dec at ASF, Berwick Wharf, the West Midland Showground and Wood Lane.

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

There were three records for the year which is just about the annual average. All were seen on autumn migration.

A juvenile was at ASF from 20-22 Aug (AL) with another at this site between 8-12 Oct (MGG) was the latest county record since 1986. The third record was of one briefly at VP on 28 Aug (GJW).

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

Status: Common passage migrant

A group of four at Lower Brompton on 16 Apr heralded the start of spring migration with a single at Cronkhill Island the same day. A steady passage then took place until about mid May with all counts being between one and five birds except for eight at both Priorslee Lake on 19 Apr and Lower Brompton on 15 May.

There were only three records for the whole of Jun which included a group of five on the River Severn just south of Apley Bridge. Once again, there was no evidence of breeding. However, since no reports at all were received from the river systems in the south west of the county, perhaps this suggests a lack of coverage, rather than a total absence of breeding territories.

Return passage was evident from mid Jul, always in small numbers, peaking in mid Aug with a maximum of four birds at any site. The final record of the year was a single at Wood Lane on 13 Oct.

Monthly maxima at key sites:

Common Sandpiper	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
ASF	-	-	-	2	4	2
Chelmarsh	-	-	-	-	4	3
Priorslee Lake	8	3	1	-	2	1
VP	5	3	-	4	2	4
Wood Lane	1	1	-	-	3	2

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

There were three records, which is a return to about the yearly average after a blank year in 1999. The first was a summer plumaged bird at Priorslee Lake on 4 May (JI, EJW), followed by 1 at VP on 9 May (GEH, GC) and another on 4 Jul (GEH). Typically, none lingered for more than a day.

Sites where turnstone has been recorded between 1990 and 2000.

Turnstone	ASF	Brom-field	Chel-marsh	Priorslee Lake	VP	Whixall Moss	Wood Lane
Totals	4	1	6	4	11	3	1

GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Status: Very rare vagrant

One was discovered in the factory compound of the ABP meat processing plant at Battlefield, Shrewsbury on 18 Oct (DRM). Typically confiding, it allowed approach to six feet on a rainwater pool. From the description taken the bird appeared to have been a first winter. It was not seen subsequently.

This is only the second record for the county. The first was a well-watched first winter bird which was present at The Mere, Ellesmere, between 31 Oct and 12 Nov 1990.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

An average year by recent standards, albeit that all the records were during the first five months of the year and from just two sites.

The gull roost at The Mere, Ellesmere produced a winter plumage adult on 23 Jan (DBa) and a second winter bird on 7 Feb (AB, GEH). All the other records were of adult summer plumage birds with one on 29 Feb (GEH), two on 8 Mar (GEH), three on 9 Mar (AB), two on 10 Mar (APD) and one on 13 Mar (RD).

At VP, a summer plumage adult was reported from 21-23 Mar (JSh, GC) and first summer birds on 28-30 Mar (GJW, GEH), 29 Apr (GEH), 11 May (DBu) and 13 May (GEH).

It is impossible to determine how many birds were involved at either site. An estimate of four or five would seem reasonable for The Mere. The situation at VP is clouded by the comings and goings of the first summer bird(s). Although present on and off for over six weeks, it or they were seen on only six dates and one, two or even three could have been involved. The county aggregate for the year would therefore be between six and nine individuals.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

Status: Common resident and very common winter visitor

With just 152 records from only 31 sites, this species continues to be much under-recorded. The lack of any really large counts and, in particular, the failure of the breeding colony at VP gives cause for concern.

The counts shown in the table below are obviously very incomplete, with no systematic returns for the major roosts. The largest count away from these sites was 600 at Prees Heath on 14 Jan on newly ploughed fields.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Black-headed.Gull	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cole Mere	-	-	200	-	2500	-	-	-
Middle Pool, Trench	500	300	260	-	-	25	-	-
Monkmoor Pool	120	150	2	2	-	-	50	160
Priorslee Lake	60	-	210	342	-	102	1200	2200
The Mere, Ellesmere	2000	3000	-	250	800	-	1500	-
VP	-	200	800	370	-	-	-	-
Wood Lane	150	-	-	10	378	320	374	400

The only reported breeding colony, at VP, failed disastrously. Numbers built up here in Mar and 800 were present on the 30th although all had departed by the following day. This behaviour has been noted in previous years

(GEH *pers comm*) with the colony returning and rebuilding after a few days. Numbers built up with 500 present on 5 May and 300 on the 11th which including 178 sitting birds with others almost certainly nesting out of view.

The first chick was noted on 3 Jun and six were seen on 13 Jun, but by 22 Jun the colony had reduced from about 200 pairs to about 50 pairs. On 27 Jun the first fledged juvenile was seen but the observer reported that very few young were around. This was the last day any young were reported at VP in 2000.

The main reason for the catastrophic failure was believed to be predation. Foxes were suspected since several corpses were found with their heads bitten off. Measures to control this problem may have to be taken before black-headed gulls can successfully breed at VP again.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Seriously under-recorded with only 24 records received from just nine sites. The only notable estimates were, as usual, from the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere, in the early part of the year. These were of 500 on 2 Jan, 200 on 5 Feb and 1000 on 29 Feb. Excluding the EGM area, the sum total of other records submitted for all other areas amounted to just 19 birds!

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*

Status: Common winter visitor

As usual, most of the really big counts came from rubbish tips, roosts at the larger bodies of water or, as in the case of Wood Lane, a bathing and preening area adjacent to a rubbish tip. An estimated 1000 at Barnsley tip on 6 Jan and 600 at Cole Mere on 7 Sep fell into this category. Exceptions included 810 in a continuous NW movement over Wall Farm on 23 Apr, 600 at Darliston on 23 Sep and 450 at Crudgington on flooded arable land on 19 Nov.

The wintering of this species in Britain is a comparatively recent phenomenon. As recently as 1953 only 165 individuals were found wintering in the whole of England and Wales. Even allowing for the big increase in observer coverage, this represents a massive population shift. The pattern is for older birds, third years and upwards, to move less far south than formerly, which accounts for the low proportion of first and second year birds seen at roosts.

The largest concentrations of birds are always at the roost sites, from where they range to feed on rubbish tips, arable land and other sources of food. The sight of waves of these birds returning to their roosts on a winter's evening is often very impressive. A large roost at Doddington pool in SE Cheshire seems to draw a high proportion of the large gulls from the NE of our county.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

Lesser B B Gull	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	-	335	-	-	-	3000	1500	-	1500
Priorslee Lake	-	-	55	9	36	-	19	1250	1700
The Mere, Ellesmere	500	700	-	62	110	800	345	90	103
Wood Lane	-	-	250	62	110	800	345	90	103

Five Darvic ringed birds were seen at Wood Lane in the latter half of the year. These had all been ringed as nestlings in the large breeding colonies at either South Walney in Cumbria; the Ribble estuary in eastern Lancashire or Tarnbrook Fell on the Lancashire Pennines. As is usual, a few birds were seen which showed characters of the darker subspecies *intermedius*.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Very few records this year and, generally, counts were low. The only noteworthy counts in the early part of the year were at Barnsley tip and Wood Lane with peaks during Jan of 80 and 30 respectively.

Only occasional, single figure reports were then received until 18 Sep when 30 were at Wood Lane where subsequent counts included 52 on 3 Dec and 94 on 26 Dec. Elsewhere, 40 were at Chelmarsh on 18 Dec and 50 at Priorslee Lake on 21 Dec. The only three figure count of the year was 400 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 29 Dec which was the only report from this site, but included at least six birds of the *argentatus* race. This influx coincided with a change to a northerly airflow bringing a sharp drop in temperatures.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus argentatus michahellis*

Nine reports were received from four sites for this sub-species which is still regarded by the British Ornithologists Union as a race of herring gull. It is thought that about six individuals were involved.

A first winter at The Mere, Ellesmere on 11 Jan (AB) was the only record in the first winter period. This was followed by an adult at Wood Lane on 6 Jul which was present again on 15 and 16 Jul (AH). An adult was at Cole Mere on 9 Sep (DBu) and what might have been the same bird was at Wood Lane on 15 Sep (AH). Another adult was at The Mere, Ellesmere on 9 Dec (GEH) with two there on 23 Dec (AB). At Priorslee Lake an adult was present on 14 Dec (JI).

GLAUCOUS GULL *Larus hyperboreus*

Status: Rare winter visitor

A first winter which was found in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 3 Jan (DB), was seen on a further six dates until 30 Jan. This was followed by a second winter at the same site on 22 and 24 Dec (DB) and it is interesting to speculate if this was the Jan bird returning for its second winter. In any event, these records continue a notable run of success for the finder, who also found two in 1999, just reward for regular watching of the Ellesmere roost.

Counting the 2000 records as different birds, 12 glaucous gulls have been recorded in the period 1990-2000. All were seen at either Chelmarsh with three records or the EGM with nine. Records from Barnsley tip and Priorslee Lake are thought to have been birds which subsequently roosted at Chelmarsh.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

Status: Common winter visitor

In the first winter period, the only double figure counts were of 10 at Barnsley tip on 8 Jan and 18 Feb, and 11 at Wood Lane on 10 Jan. In the latter half of the year, 11 were at The Mere, Ellesmere on 29 Dec in conjunction with a large influx of herring gulls.

In total, just 26 records were received from nine sites which is generally a similar level of recording to 1999.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*

Status: Scarce vagrant

An adult and a first winter were at VP on 14 Mar (GEH, GJW) and on the same day an adult in summer plumage was at Priorslee Lake (JI). The only other record was of an adult at VP, briefly, on 29 May (GEH), before heading off north.

A total of four birds is the same as in 1999, but poor on recent standards being about half the annual average for the last decade.

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*

Status Scarce passage migrant

All records were of birds on return passage. Three adults and a juvenile at Priorslee Lake on 18-19 Aug (EJW) were the first to linger in the county for more than a day in at least the last 20 years. Seven adults which passed though VP on 12 Sep (BHo) was the largest flock seen in the county since the same number flew over Albrighton on 25 Jul 1991.

By no means annual in the county, this species has occurred in seven of the last ten years, but in only two of the last five. The annual total of 11 is the highest for at least 20 years.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Status: Common passage migrant

Priorslee Lake is perhaps the best site in the county for passage terns and, predictably, this site kicked off the spring passage with a single on 29 Apr. Two more were seen here on 4 and 5 May and then a maximum of three between 10 and 12 May. Elsewhere, a single was at VP on 4 May, with another on 30 May and two on 31 May. Two were reported at Chelmarsh on 29 May.

Although none were seen in Jun it is not uncommon for odd birds to be seen throughout the summer and there was an interesting run of records in Jul. Singles were at Priorslee Lake on the 1st, 22nd and 30th; VP on the 21st and 23rd and two were seen at Chelmarsh on the 15th. Return passage consisted of two at ASF on 12 Aug and singles at Wood Lane on 7 and 30 Sep.

It is probable that a minimum of 21 birds were involved in the years sightings.

ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

An exceptionally poor year with just one record of a single through VP on 29 Apr (GEH).

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

There was a small passage though VP on 7 May where four seen during the morning (GJW) were thought to have been different from the five which arrived later the same day (GEH).

Return passage was very poor, consisting only of a long staying bird at Priorslee Lake from 24-30 July (EJW) and a juvenile at The Mere, Ellesmere on 2 Sep (DBu).

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia*

Status: Common resident

Virtually ignored by observers for the second successive year and apart from a single bird at Wood Lane on 29 Sep, all the remaining records were from a single observer at Priorslee Lake. Present during Mar and Apr when numbers peaked at 35 and again from Oct to Dec reaching a max of 27.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*

Status: Common resident

The largest gathering occurred at Baggy Moor on 15 Apr when 94 were present. The only other large concentrations were 65 at Merrington Green on 25 Apr and 50 each at Prees Heath on 14 Jan and Barnsley Tip on 30 Oct. Widely reported elsewhere mainly in single figures.

One pair raised two young in a nest box at Aston Square and three pairs bred successfully in rabbit burrows at Wood Lane.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*

Status: Common resident

Three figure counts were received from 23 widely scattered sites for the second year in a row, but this year, larger flocks were noted. The highest count was at Pimhill with 1500 on 8 Jan whilst 750 were counted at Tibberton on 16 Jan and 628 at Priorslee Lake on 10 Nov.

Breeding was again poorly recorded with just four confirmed cases.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

Status: Common resident

Widely reported throughout the county but, typically, counts were of less than 10 birds with the majority involving less than five. The highest count was at Adderley where 26 were recorded on 19 Jan and 18 on 30 Nov. Counts of 20 at Somerwood on 30 Nov and 16 at Tedsmere 20 Oct were the only others to reach double figures.

A pair which deserted their nest in a flimsy *Leylandii* after repeated harassment by wood pigeons and a nest in a climbing rose at Sutton Farm were the only breeding attempts noted.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor

The first report of the year was at Severn Valley Country Park on 29 Apr and, subsequently, singles were seen at this site on several dates but with two reported on 28-29 May and 12 Jun. In the same part of the county, singles were reported at Alveley on 3 May and along the River Severn between Highley and Upper Arley on 30 Apr and 17 Aug with two on 9 Jul.

In recent years, Haughmond Hill has been the most reliable site for this species and a single bird was regularly heard calling from 8 May up to 6 Jul. Single birds were also heard calling on several dates at Buttery Farm in May and Jun and Kemberton in Jun and Jul.

Also reported at Bridgnorth on 26 Jun, Bush Wood, Chorley Covert on 11 Jun, Roddington on 10 May, Hoo Farm on 27 Jun, Mildenheath on 18 Jun and Sturt Common on 6 Jun. The final record was at Kemberton on 12 Jul.

These records suggest one territory at each of the five main sites with perhaps between five and seven others. Whilst this undoubtedly understates the true status, the decline is clear. Observers are asked to look out for this species and to ensure that any records are submitted.

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*

Status: Rare vagrant or escape

One which fed on sunflower seeds in a garden at Adderley from 22 Feb to 12 Mar (AB,GH) showed no apparent signs of recent captivity, but this is, non-the-less, the most likely origin. The last report was in Sep 1994 and even if these birds originated from the feral flock in the south-east of the country, colonisation of the county would not appear to be imminent.

COMMON CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

Status: Common summer visitor

This species was recorded at 52 widespread localities in a broad range of habitats. The first record of the year was at Kemberton on 16 April followed by Roddington on the 17th and Hughley on the 19th. Most records were of birds calling and they were heard regularly until mid Jun. Two territories were plotted using CBC type registrations at Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest.

During Jul there were just two records, both of which were juveniles. One was at Meverley Farm on 6 Jul and the other which turned out to be the final record of the year, was at Catherton Common on 24 Jul when it was still being fed by meadow pipits.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Status: Common resident

Single birds were noted regularly throughout the year from many parts of the county. Often seen hunting along road verges at night and occasionally during daylight. Three road casualties were found and one near miss involving an articulated lorry was reported.

Breeding was confirmed at three sites in the north-east and probably occurred at a fourth, but regular sightings from other localities would indicate a larger number of territories.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*

Status: Common resident

Single birds and pairs were reported in all months from 55 widely scattered locations. Five were seen between Ightfield and Tittenley Pool on 29 Apr and two pairs were at Isombridge on 5 Mar.

The only confirmed breeding record was of a pair with a juvenile at Lower Broughton Farm on 17 Jul. However, as with the previous species, clusters of records from numerous sites would indicate a much higher number of territories.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

Status: Common resident



Tawny Owl
Photograph by John Hawkins

Reports were received from 48 localities with most records coming during the winter months and were often of birds heard calling. At this time of year, this species can be very noisy as birds establish and defend territories.

Most records were of single birds or pairs, but three were reported at Neen Savage in Jan and Dec, Condover on 23 May, Much Wenlock in Nov and Dec and at Wolverton Wood, where on 20 May, two roosted together with another calling nearby.

Breeding was confirmed at Buttery Farm, Leaton Knolls, Nescliffe and at Kemberton where a pair used a nest box for the first time. However, this

clearly understates the true position since the records suggest widespread breeding in areas with suitable habitat.

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

Status: Rare winter visitor and passage migrant

Singles at Welshampton on 8 Mar (CG), Berriewood on 30-31 Mar (NB) and what was presumed to be the same bird again on 6 Apr (HJB). Spring passage was completed with one at Pole Cott, Long Mynd on 16 Apr (GJW).

Two more were reported on return passage. The first was at Whixall Moss on 17 Aug (AH) and the other at Gatten Plantation on 17 Oct (JT).

This species is just about annual in the county with the last blank year being 1991. The five birds recorded this year was the highest since 1992 when eight were present. Previously thought of, primarily, as a rare winter visitor, recent records suggest it is becoming more frequently encountered as passage migrant.

EUROPEAN NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Status: Rare summer visitor

A single bird was disturbed by a security light at Catherton Common on 31 Aug (per JM). It was subsequently seen and heard churring.

In the late fifties nightjar was reported to be quite numerous at several sites but the last confirmed breeding was on the Wrekin in 1983. However, after a five year absence, this is the fourth bird reported in the last three years, maintaining the species' precarious toehold in the county.

COMMON SWIFT *Apus apus*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first report was of 10 at Belle Vue on 6 Apr which is the earliest arrival since 1995. Single birds were reported at Monkmoor and Priorslee Lake on 24 Apr with another at Trench Pool the following day. These were the only birds seen before the main arrival took place from the first week of May.

The only three figure count was 125 at Priorslee Lake on 28 May. At VP, numbers peaked at 50 on 20 May and 40 were seen both at Market Drayton on 30 Jun and Wood Lane on 3 Jul. As usual some birds remained into Aug with the final record being two at Neen Savage on the 26th. Breeding was noted at Minsterley, Shelton Hospital and Woolston.

COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

Status: Common resident

Reported regularly throughout the year from 49 different sites. Most records referred to single birds, but occasionally to pairs. The exception was four which were seen along a three mile stretch of the River Severn from Coalport. An interesting record was of one at Shrewsbury Golf Club on 4 Mar which was sat on a post at the eighteenth green! An unusual observation was made at Worthen on 3 Sep where a bird was fishing in 2-3 ins of water in the village stream not by plunging but by chasing its prey.

The majority of reports were from lakes and pools rather than rivers. This probably reflects the comparative ease of watching these elusive birds, particularly when hides are present, rather than their distribution, but extensive flooding towards the end of the year will also have encouraged birds to leave the discoloured rivers and search for clearer waters. An adult with a juvenile at Coalport was the only breeding record.

WRYNECK *Jynx torquilla*

Status: Rare passage migrant



Wryneck at Cardeston
Photograph by Alan Heath

A single bird was found in gardens at Cardeston on 3 Sep (DW). The bird frequented the gardens of a row of semi-detached houses on the A458. It favoured two front gardens where it was generally seen on the paths feeding on ants from where it gave excellent views. It was reported to the bird information services by one of the residents and is understood to have been present for a few days. There was an unconfirmed report of the bird the next morning although the general consensus, amongst the observers present, was that it had departed.

Wryneck was reported annually from 1984 to 1990, usually on autumn passage, but this was the first since 1992 and gave many observers a county first. To the amusement of the local residents, it attracted quite a gathering including some birdwatchers from out of the county, but no problems were reported.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

Status: Common resident

Reports were received from 59 widespread sites in a variety of habitats but perhaps favouring the upland and parkland areas. Most reports referred to single birds or, in rather fewer cases pairs. Confirmed or probable breeding was reported at Apley Park, Batch, Cwmdale, Dolgoch Quarry and Leebotwood although the records suggest it was much more widespread.

The best count was five which were feeding on grassland at Buildwas on 14 Oct. Four birds including two juveniles were at Dolgoch on 18 Jul and three were at Haughmond Hill on 1 May. Quite a few records came from the valleys on the north end of the Long Mynd, from Haughmond Hill and from Wood Lane where the species was seen regularly from Apr to the year end.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos major*

Status: Common resident

Widely scattered throughout the county, more often in gardens than the other two woodpeckers. Reported evenly through the year, mostly as singles but with up to four occasionally. Breeding was noted at 11 locations, often when juveniles were brought to peanut feeders.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos minor*

Status: Common resident



A total of 33 reports were received from 26 locations which is slightly up on the previous year. Reported in all months except Aug and Nov, but with half the records coming in the first four months of the year with Feb and Mar the best months. This is the time of year when this species calls and is best looked for as pairs establish territories. No site generated more than two records with most birds appearing to move on quickly.

In recent years, the wood at Cole Mere has been one of the best places to look for this species especially in the winter when they often feed with

the tit flocks and this year one was reported on 26 Feb and 7 Apr. At Wall Farm three were seen on 28 Apr when the observer described a resident pair driving off an intruder. One visited the feeding station at VP on 14 Oct and two were here on 1 Dec.

Waterside habitat is often favoured by this species and reports from Apley Park, the Coal Brook valley, Coton Hill, Dudmaston, Emestry, Hawk Lake, Oss Mere and the River Clun reflect this. Other sites included Alverley, Attingham, Earls Hill, Hawkstone Park, Lilleshall and Trefonen.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Very widely reported from 89 sites and in all months of the year but with few records in Jul and Aug. The only large flocks noted were at the very beginning and end of the year. On 9 Jan 362 were at Wall Farm and on 30 Dec 200 fed in a weedy field at Tibberton whilst two days earlier 70 were feeding in a stubble field at Neen Savage. No other counts exceeded 40 birds.

Confirmed breeding was only noted at Cwmdale, but singing and territories were widely reported.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first record of the year at Whitchurch on 12 Mar was followed by multiple sightings the following day at Hopton Hill, VP and Priorslee Lake. Large numbers had returned by the first week of Apr when 300 were at Ellesmere and 200 at Cole Mere.

The colony at Wood Lane was estimated to hold 500 pairs and other large colonies were at Blodwell Quarry where 200 pairs were present, Eardington with 75 pairs, Morville with 150 pairs and the River Clun near Purslow with 36 pairs. One ringer commented that it was a very good breeding season and an estimated 3-4000 roosting in common reed at Chelmarsh on 15 Jul would appear to support this view. Previously, the highest count was of not less than 1000 birds feeding on and around VP back in 1982.

Large flocks were still evident in early Sep, but all the birds had departed before the end of the month with the final two being at VP on 21st.

BARN SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first two birds of the year were at Minsterley on 1 Apr and most observers reported their first sightings during the next two weeks. Breeding was confirmed at six locations including Greater Woolaston Farm where 13 pairs bred, ten of them raising three broods.

Autumn congregations included 200 at Great Ness on 16 Sep and 300 on wires at Leebotwood on 1 Oct. Flocks of 100 or more were also seen at ASF, Merrington, Wood Lane and Woolston. Migration was observed at Catherton Common on 27 Sep when 300 moved south over 1-2 hours and most had departed before the end of Oct. However, there were two late sightings which might have involved the same individual. One was seen at White Mere on 4 Nov and one at Wood Lane on 12 Nov. The latter was the latest staying bird since 1991 when one was recorded at VP a day later.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*

Status: Common summer visitor

Four which were reported at Diddlebury on 17 Mar were almost three weeks earlier than the next arrival at The Mere, Ellesmere on 4 Apr. Two more were seen at Minsterley four days later but most observers had to wait until the second half of Apr to record their first sightings. Breeding was confirmed at 14 sites. These varied from a single pair to a cottage with 26 nests at Neen Savage.

Six autumn flocks of between 100 and 200 birds were noted, but 1000 feeding over Cardingmill Valley was the highest count since 1991. Many birds remained into Oct and the final record was of one at Neen Savage on the 16th.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

Status: Common summer visitor

After the first arrival at Sturt Common on 30 Apr, birds were reported from their traditional locations of the Wyre Forest, Haughmond Hill, the Wrekin and upland areas in the south and west. The only record away from these sites was of the final bird which was probably on passage at Pimhill on 22 Aug.

Breeding was not noted, but six territories were plotted in the Wyre Forest, two were mapped on a CBC plot at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry and ten birds were seen in both Ashes and Callow Hollow.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Few flocks of any size were reported in the early part of the year, 52 at Annscroft on 13 Feb and 68 at Hope on 19 Feb being exceptions. Northward movements were noted by several observers from 13 Mar onwards and traditional breeding sites were occupied by the end of the month with counts of up to 40 being made on several of the southern hills. Pairs and territories were noted regularly but, despite this, only two confirmed breeding records were submitted.

Although birds continued to be reported from upland areas until the end of the year, others returned to lowland arable sites from late Jul. As in the early year, flock sizes remained small, the largest noted were around 50 birds at ASF and Ollerton both in Oct.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*

Status: Passage migrant and summer visitor

March sightings of this species are unusual and one at Hincks Lane on the 18th and a second at Atcham Island on the 24th were both earlier than previous Mar birds which were seen on the 25th in 1981 and on the 27th in 1990. Three sites, Wall Farm, Wood Lane and VP accounted for half the records and the remainder came almost entirely from the eastern side of the county.

The highest counts included ten at Cherrington and Ash Parva on 1 May and 3 May respectively, 11 at Chelmarsh on 2 Sep and 15 at VP on 10 Sep. The final record for the year was of one at Tibberton on 17 Sep. Most records were of birds on passage and the only reports of confirmed breeding came from Pimhill and Morville. At both these sites nesting occurred in wheat fields.

This species is of grave concern and although no specific survey work has been undertaken it seems likely that the population is much reduced. *The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire 1992* suggested a breeding population of between 1150 and 2300 pairs.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

Status: Common resident

Reported regularly throughout the year, but more frequently during the winter months. Most records were of single birds although, occasionally, up to four were reported. During the breeding season, as expected, most records came from rivers and streams with the shallow fast flowing streams in the south of the county a favourite habitat. During the rest of the year, the species was equally likely to be found around the shores of our lakes and meres.

A WBS showed a section of the River Clun held three territories and breeding was confirmed at Batch Valley, Broome Park, Caynton and Newport.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrelli*

Status: Common resident

The largest gathering since 1993 occurred on 7 Feb when 500 birds roosted on the Creamery at Minsterley. Other roost counts were 80 in laurel bushes at Safeways Supermarket, Newport on 13 Mar, at least 75 at The Princess Royal Hospital on 21 Feb and 11 at VP on 6 Sep. Fifty six were counted at Tyrley Wharf, Market Drayton on 12 Feb and 50 were reported at both Chelmarsh on 2 Sep and ASF on 2 Oct. Thirty six were at Wood Lane on 1 Oct. Smaller numbers were common elsewhere.

At Shrewsbury Sewage Farm seven pairs fledged young inside the works but none used the nest boxes provided for them. Confirmed breeding was also reported from a further five sites.

White wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Another poor year for this subspecies, with a maximum of five birds seen. In recent years, Priorslee Lake has proved to be a good place to seek this subspecies and this was again the case. A single was present on 14 Mar which is the earliest date so far at this site. This was followed by two on 27 Mar and another single on 27 Apr. The only other sighting was of one at Brown Clew on 1 May.

BOHEMIAN WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulous*

Status: Rare winter visitor

A flock of ten rested briefly in a garden at Diddlebury on 26 Feb (JF) before flying off in an easterly direction. This is the second successive winter they have been recorded but, with such a short stay, they could easily have been missed.

DIPPER *Cinclus cinclus*

Status: Locally common resident

Reported from more locations this year including the Rivers Tanat and Morda and Habberley and Dowles Brooks. The regular sites along the Rivers Severn, Onny, Teme and Clun were also well populated along with small streams in the Church Stretton area.

The number of territories on a WBS plot on the River Clun increased by one to total six this season. Breeding also occurred at Upper Treverward and Neen Savage.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Status: Common resident



Wren
Illustration by John Martin

Widely reported through the year in single figures. Larger numbers invariably resulting from surveys involving transect counts or territory mapping. The CBC plot at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry recorded 17 territories, down by one. Numbers along a WBS plot on the River Clun fell by three to 22. New surveys this year recorded 25 pairs at Dowles Brook, eight pairs at Lower Brompton, a 1km sq at Bitterley held 39 birds and 25 singing males were at Great Ness. An old swallow's nest in a porch at Berriewood was used as a winter roost and held up to five birds.

HEDGE ACCENTOR *Prunella modularis*

Status: Common resident

As was the case with the previous species, regularly noted in single figures, usually from one to four with any larger counts coming as the result of surveys. The maximum count was 14 at Tedsmere on 16 Dec and 13 was the maximum count over two visits to a 1km square at Bitterley in May. Twelve singing males were heard at Great Ness on 8 Apr and six pairs was the result of a CBC survey at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry.

This species was commonly reported visiting gardens, but breeding was poorly recorded and confirmed at just six sites.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

Status: Common resident

Widely reported in small numbers but with some larger counts from big sites often arising from more systematic survey work. These included 25 singing at Great Ness, 25 territories plotted at Dowles Brook and 24 on the CBC plot at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry, which was a reduction of one from the previous year. Other large counts included 29 at Hindford Grange on 13 Mar, 34 at Ladyhouse Farm, Hope on 19 Feb, 28 at Pimhill on 2 Feb, 27 at Plas-yn-Grove on 24 Feb and 25 at Prees Wood on 9 Sep.

Breeding was confirmed from 16 locations and, yes, they do nest in kettles! Unfortunately, this nest at Aston Square was deserted after a cold spell. At Bayston Hill a brood of robins were fed by blackbirds as well as their own parents and a note regarding this extraordinary behaviour can be found on page 22.

RUFOUS NIGHTINGALE *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Status: Rare summer visitor

One at Wood Lane on 14 May (CG) was the first to be found in the county since 1992. It was seen and heard calling but, unfortunately, could not be relocated later that day or next morning.

COMMON REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first record was of two males at Earls Hill on 9 Apr and another was at Yeaton Perverey the next day, however, the main influx took place towards the end of the month. The southern hills dominated the records and the maximum count of eight came from Ashes Hollow on 7 May. Scattered sightings elsewhere closely matched the distribution shown in the Atlas. Away from the above sites, late summer birds on passage were scarce and had all departed prior to Sep, except for a late brood at Clunton Coppice which was last seen on the 23rd.

Interesting behavior was noted in a Church Stretton garden where a brood of five youngsters in a nest box were watched being fed by one female and two males.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

Status: Common summer visitor and passage migrant

As might be expected, the majority of the records came from the Long Mynd and Stiperstones. The year's first arrivals were two at Callow Hollow on 29 Apr and this was also the site of the year's highest count which was 15 on 20 Jul. Several juveniles were noted on the Stiperstones so it seems likely that breeding occurred there. The final record of the year was four at Gatten Plantation on 16 Sep.

Elsewhere, singles at Sturt Common on 30 Apr and Wall Farm on 15 Jul might possibly suggest local breeding whilst singles at Chelmarsh on 6 Sep, Coal Brook Valley, Hales on 3 Sep, VP on 15 Sep were almost certainly passage migrants.

COMMON STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

Status: Resident and summer visitor

Much more frequently reported than the previous species, with which it shares a similar distribution, receiving almost three times the number of records. A BTO ringer working on the RAS project found 25 nests on Titterstone Clee. All but one failed due to heavy snow in May but, fortunately, they all successfully raised a second brood and ten pairs continued to raise a third.

Elsewhere, breeding was confirmed on the Stiperstones and at Cwmdale on the edge of The Long Mynd.

It is always difficult to distinguish between residents and summer visitors but eight reported in Jan, two in Feb, four in Nov and two in Dec must have been wintering. Except for one at Sleep airfield on 14 Feb, all these birds were reported from traditional upland sites. In contrast, only one of the Nov and Dec records was from the uplands with the remainder at Buttery Farm on 10 Dec, Tibberton on 30 Dec, Walcot on 17 Nov and Wall Farm on 2 and 28 Nov.

Several, probable passage migrants, were seen at lowland sites including singles at Adderley on 12 Mar, Coal Brook Valley, Hales on 9 Mar and Wood Lane on 29 Oct.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Status: Common summer visitor

Normally one of the first migrants to return, with one at Asterton on 14 Mar being typical. During both spring and autumn passage, birds were noted at widely scattered locations including 15 in winter barley at Broome Park. Between these dates, records from the southern hills predominated. A few lingered into Oct, the final one was at Granville Country Park on the 4th.

The BTO ringing project at Titterstone Clee revealed 46 pairs. A flock of 12 at the Stiperstones included nine juveniles and two broods were raised at Cwmdale.

RING OUZEL *Turdus torquatus*

Status: Rare passage migrant and summer visitor

This species is causing concern and the population seems to be dwindling. This year, no records were received away from the Long Mynd and even here, the species is becoming increasingly difficult to find and just nine casual records were received. The earliest record was of one at Ashes Hollow on 9 Apr and the last was of two below Boiling Well on 10 Aug.

Just eight pairs, which is the lowest total so far, were located by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project as part from the ongoing study of this species. A summary of the Project's findings for the year can be found at page 3.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

Status: Common resident

A very common species in all parts of the county. One professional fieldworker who, early in the year, was conducting survey work on farmland birds, produced counts of over 50 birds at nine different farms. However, most counts from casual observers were in single figures, but with a scattering of higher counts up to a maximum of 32.

The number of territories on a CBC plot at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry increased to 15 which was an increase of two after two stable years. Only eight records of confirmed breeding were received which is down from 18 last year.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

Status: Common winter visitor

Widespread and numerous in the early part of the year and counts of 100 or more birds were received from 37 different sites. These included 500 at Greater Woolaston Farm on 14 Apr, 600 at Hopton Hill on 1 Feb, 500 at Neen Savage on 23 Mar, 600 at Shavington Big Pool on 19 Mar, 580 at The Park, Tilscot on 14 Jan and 784 at Wall Farm on 22 Feb. The last spring record was of five at Wall Farm on 23 Apr.

Autumn birds were slow to return. The first record was of six at Priorslee Flash on 24 Sep but, subsequently, only three reports were received for the whole of Oct. A large movement eastwards, estimated to be in thousands, was noted over the Old Racecourse, Oswestry on 9 Nov. Elsewhere, in contrast to the beginning of the year, only eight counts exceeded 100. Wall Farm once again hosting the largest flock which was 600 on 20 Dec.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

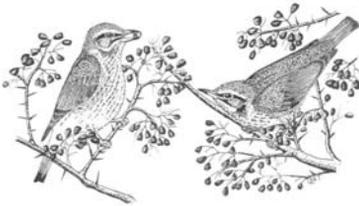
Status: Common resident

Very well reported from all areas, usually as singles or pairs with confirmed breeding at 16 sites. A few larger counts were made including 16 in a 1 km square at Bitterley on 31 May and a survey at Dowles Brook found 15 territories which the observer thought was probably an under estimate. Seven, including five singing males, were reported at Blakeway Coppice on 30 May and the observer commented that they were at high densities on the limestone ridge.

Early in the year, a fieldworker involved with surveying farmland birds reported double figure counts at six farms with a maximum of 20 at Wall Farm on 27 Jan. A comparison with his returns for blackbird which produced counts of over 50 birds at nine farms indicates the relative abundance of the species. Interestingly, these counts included a few birds of the nominate continental race *philomelos* as well as the much more numerous British sub-species *clarkei*.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Status: Common winter visitor



Redwing
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

In the first winter period, counts of over 200 birds were noted at five locations and of over 100 at a further five sites. Of these, the largest counts were 314 at Annscroft on 14 Jan and 450 at Market Drayton on 6 Feb. Small numbers remained into Apr and the final report was of ten at Melverley on the 15th.

Twenty feeding which were feeding on berries in a garden at Knowle Sands, Bridgnorth on 8 Oct were the first of several small groups noted during that month. A large influx occurred in early Nov with 130 at Ironbridge on the 4th and 220 at Neen Savage the same day. The following day, 150 were at Wood Lane and then 228 were at Priorslee Lake on the 8th and 100 near Oswestry on the 9th. These flocks either dispersed or moved on and the only large flocks noted after this time were 100 at Wall Farm on 9 Dec and the same number at Bolas Heath on 30 Dec.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

Status: Common resident

Very widely reported from 105 different locations, but most counts were of just single birds or pairs with just fifteen counts reaching double figures. Post breeding flocks gather in mid summer and these included 25 at Alkmund Park on 15 Aug, 30 at Berriewood on 6 Sep, 20 at Conover on 23 Jul and 25 at the Old River Bed, Shrewsbury on 11 Jun.

The largest gathering in the county since 1989 occurred at Wall Farm on 7 Jul when 49 birds were present. Other flocks of between 20 and 30 were also noted in late summer at Shrewsbury, Condover, Alkmund Park and Berriewood. Elsewhere and at other times numbers were much smaller, often fewer than five.

Males were reported to be singing as early as Jan, but breeding attempts were poorly documented from just six sites.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

Status: Summer visitor

This species appears to be rather scarce within the county and seems to have undergone a decline and is certainly absent from many of its former haunts. However, it may well go under-recorded due to its secretive nature and largely crepuscular habits.

Only seven records were received this year involving, in total, only five individuals. All these birds were initially located by their distinctive ‘reeling’ song. Singles were present at Somerwood on 23 Apr, 1 May and 9 Jun, Haughton Hill on 26–27 Apr, Bicton Heath on 20 May and Gatten Plantation on 25 Jun. The final record was of a passage migrant at VP 23 Jul.

Evidence of breeding is always difficult to ascertain, but the series of records from Somerwood suggests territorial behaviour.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Status: Common summer visitor

Surprisingly localised, sedge warbler appears to be absent from many areas of apparently suitable habitat within Shropshire. The first record of the year was at Priorslee Lake 21 Apr. Of the 45 records, 29 records involved one or two birds with a further 14 of between three and eight, whilst the remaining two broke double figures.

Peak counts from key sites were 15 at Chelmarsh on 29 Apr, 12 at Lower Brompton on 15 Jun, eight at Queens Head 22 Jun, seven at Wall Farm on 13 May and 6 Jun, five at Wood Lane on 15 May, four at Monkmoor Pool on 13 May, three at VP on 1 Jul and two at Owlbury on 8 May and 10 Jun.

Also recorded at Atcham Bridge, Neen Savage, Buttery Farm, Hawk Lake, Hinstock and Priorslee Lake. Final record came from Wood Lane 1 Sep when four were still present.

Evidence of confirmed breeding was received only from Owlbury, but almost certainly occurred at all the key sites.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Status: Common summer visitor

Almost exclusively confined to areas of common reed *Phragmites australis* a habitat with which we are not overly blessed in Shropshire and the localised distribution of this species is governed accordingly.

Of the 51 records received, 29 involved one or two birds, with the remainder involving between three and nine. The first record of the year was of two at Priorslee Lake on 24 Apr. Peak counts at key sites included nine at Priorslee Lake on 10 May, seven at Wood Lane on 12 Jul, six at Hawk Lake on 12 May, six at Queens Head on 21 May, six at Sambrook Mill on 21 May, two at Monkmoor Pool 13 May and two at VP 24 Aug.

Though no detailed single date count was received from Chelmarsh Reservoir, ringing results there suggested an estimated breeding population of around 30 pairs. No information was received from ASF, though it can be assumed that a breeding population still exists at this site. Breeding was also confirmed at Priorslee Lake and Wood Lane, thought almost certain to have taken place at all other key sites.

The only other reports came from Apley Castle, Crudginton Moor, Maesbury Marsh, Norbroom Marsh, Shavington Big Pool and Wall Farm. The final record of the year was a single at Wood Lane 20 Sep.

DARTFORD WARBLER *Sylvia undata*

Status: Very rare vagrant

A singing male discovered on the Stiperstones 23 Mar (TW), was a fitting reward for its finder who has played a central role as co-ordinator of the Stiperstones 'Back to Purple' campaign. This bird remained frustratingly elusive

throughout its stay and was more often heard than seen and was finally heard singing briefly on 8 Apr. This constitutes the first county record of this delightful warbler, and a full report can be found on page 112.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

Status: Common summer visitor

Reported from 35 widely scattered locations. The earliest arrival date was 20 Apr when three birds were present at Moat Farm, Annscroft. Of the 70 records received, 41 related to single birds, with a further 26 of between two and five. Higher counts were six at Pimhill on 5 May, eight at Wall Farm on 30 May with nine at this site on 7 Jul. The final record for the year was one at Buttery Farm on 2 Sep.

Breeding was confirmed at Dudleston Heath, Monkmoor Pool, Wood Lane and Woolston, Nr. Wistanstow with fledged young being noted at the latter three sites.

COMMON WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Status: Common summer visitor



Common Whitethroat
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

Rather poorly reported given this species' apparent abundance. The first record was of one at Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury on 9 Apr, but the next was not until 22 Apr when one was seen at Hencott Pool. From then, the species quickly became widespread and was ultimately reported from 49 localities. Most records were of one or two birds with only five of the 74 records exceeding four birds. These were 10 at Buttery Farm on 29 Jun, seven at Tibberton on 1 May, seven at Nescliffe on 22 May, six at Market Drayton on 6 Jun and six at Gatten Plantation on 20 Jul. The final report came from Telford Town Centre on 29 Sep.

Evidence of breeding came from Lower Brompton, Market Drayton, Priorslee Lake, Telford Town Park, Tibberton, The Weald Moors and Wood Lane.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*

Status: Common summer visitor

Surprisingly the earliest arrival was a single at Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury on 9 Apr. The only other Apr records were at Sutton Wood on the 15th and at Market Drayton on the 23rd. It was not until the first week in May that this species became widespread and was ultimately reported from 39 locations. Most records were of one or two birds with larger counts generally arising as a result of survey work rather than casual observation. Better counts included six at Pimhill on 5 May, four at Hawkstone Park on 7 May, and five at Priorslee Lake on 12 May. The final record was of a single at Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury on 19 Sep enabling this site, on the edge of the Rea Brook Valley, to keep going its run of early and late migrants.

The only evidence of breeding activity was received from Old Racecourse, Oswestry where four territories were found on a CBC plot and along the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest where three territories were plotted from CBC type registrations on eight visits from Apr-Jun.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

Status: Common summer visitor and scarce winter visitor

By far the most abundant of the *Sylvia* warblers and increasingly frequent as a garden visitor during winter. Extremely popular with recorders, it was recorded in all months generating a total of 174 records which indicated a county-wide distribution.

During the first winter period, birds were noted at Woodlands Park in Shrewsbury, Bayston Hill, Belle Vue, Broseley, Cruckmeole, Oswestry, Pimley Manor, Pontesbury, Wellington and Whitchurch. Most records were of one or two birds with a peak of four which were seen regularly at Belle Vue from 1 Mar until the month's end. There was no discernible interval between departing winter birds and spring arrivals and birds at Priorslee Flash on 23 Mar, Ellesmere on 26 Mar and Pimley Manor on 31 Mar are therefore difficult to categorise. However, it seems likely that they were the first spring migrants although the bulk did not arrive until the later half of Apr.

Peak counts from the summer period included 16 at Sturt Common on 30 Apr, 15 at Hawkstone Park on 30 Apr and 12 at Pimhill on 15 May. Fifteen were

counted on a WBS along three miles of the River Severn between Coalport and Apley on 30 Jun and 11 territories were plotted along the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest. Breeding was also confirmed at Woodlands Park in Shrewsbury, Batch Valley, Lower Brompton, the Old Racecourse, Oswestry and Woolston.

During the second winter period birds were present at Woodlands Park in Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Diddlebury, Ironbridge, Market Drayton, Muxton, Newport, Shrewsbury and Tedsmere. All bar two of the records from the second winter period involved either one or two birds, the exceptions being four at Ironbridge on 28 Dec and three at Market Drayton on 19 Nov.

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Status: Summer visitor

Remains a rather poorly recorded species, with a total of just 15 records from only 11 sites. The first report of the year came from Whitcliffe where two were present on 24 Apr. Thereafter also recorded at Bury Ditches, Dowles Brook, Haughmond Hill, Horderley, Linley, Lynclys Hill, Rectory Wood, Rorrington Hill, Shelve Hill and the Stiperstones. The final record also involved two birds, this time at Bury Ditches on 29 Aug.

No evidence of confirmed breeding was received although three territories were plotted along the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest using CBC type registrations on eight visits during Apr-Jun. When published in 1992, the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire* suggested a population of around 400 pairs and whilst there is some evidence of decline, is this species really so scarce within the county or does it remain somewhat overlooked?

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

Status: Common summer visitor, rare in winter

By far our most common *Phylloscopus* warbler and very popular with observers generating a total of 202 records. The bulk of spring arrivals occurred during the second half of Mar and the beginning of Apr with the earliest of these being at Whitchurch on 10 Mar after which the species became common and widespread until the final record at Market Drayton on 29 Oct. Mainly recorded in single figures, although nine double figure counts were noted, topped by 15 at Cole Mere on 19 Mar and 15 at Pimhill on 21 Aug. Nine territories were plotted along the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest.

Despite the large number of records received, the only evidence of confirmed breeding came from Molverley Farm where a nest was located 15 Apr. There were just two winter records of singles at Howle Pool 13 Feb (AB) and at VP on 9 Dec (GEH). No records indicated any racial variation, therefore all are assumed to relate to our regular form *Phylloscopus collybita*.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Status: Common summer visitor

The earliest arrival involved a singing male at Priorslee Lake on 25 Mar with possibly the same bird again noted on the 27th. The only other March arrival was present at Belle Vue, Shrewsbury on the 30th with the bulk arriving in mid April. This species appears to be more localised and less widespread than chiffchaff being reported at 79 sites compared to 100. However, it often occurs at greater densities at favoured sites. Double figure counts were received from 15 sites and included 20 at Hawkestone Park on 30 Apr, 40 at Twemlows Big Wood on 17 Jun, 30 at Prees Wood on 1 Jul and 20 at Wall Farm on 11 Aug.

Thirty eight territories were plotted on the CBC plot at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry, and nine and three pairs respectively at the Dowles Brook and Lower Brompton using CBC methodology. Otherwise, no confirmed breeding was noted although, as with most common species, breeding actively is largely ignored.

Most had departed by the end of Aug with very few Sep records. The final record came from Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury 27 Sep.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Recorded in all months and from widely scattered locations. Of the 103 records received, 77 involved one or two birds, a further 21 involved between three and nine birds, with the remaining five reaching double figures. All the double figure counts came from the post-breeding and winter periods. Thirteen were at Sturt Common on 6 Jun, 15 at Prees Wood on 9 Sep, 15 at Sych Farm on 8 Oct, 25 at Shavington Big Pool on 21 Oct and 15 Butterly Farm on 2 Dec.

The only evidence of breeding came from Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury where a juvenile was noted on 15 Jul.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*

Status: Rare winter visitor

One was discovered in the woodland at the north-east corner of The Mere, Ellesmere on 25 Feb (EJ). Unfortunately, it never remained long enough to be more widely appreciated since it could not be relocated despite a thorough search next day and subsequently.

This species, which most observers agree is a real gem, has been recorded in only four of the past ten years and remains elusive to many, including the editor!

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*

Status: Common summer visitor



Spotted Flycatcher
Illustration by Glenn bishton

This species is 'Red Listed' by the BTO as a species of high conservation concern. The significant national decline over the past 25 years has proved consistently apparent within Shropshire where it has now become a rather localised species. One of our later arriving spring migrants, it was first noted at Sturt Common on 30 Apr and thereafter it was reported from 46 scattered locations. The majority of records involved only one or two birds, but larger counts included eight at Plas-yn-Grove on 6 Jul, eight at Yeaton Peverey on 7 Aug with nine the following day, seven at Lower Broughton Farm on 10 Aug and eight along the River Severn at Shrewsbury 14 Aug. The final record came from Leebotwood on 23 Sep and involved three birds.

Evidence of breeding was received from Buildwas, Cardingmill Valley, Cole Mere, Great Ness, Hengoed, Leebotwood, Leighton, Ludford, Marton, Annscroft, along the River Severn between Coalport and Apley, Ratlinghope, Shelton, Stiperstones, and Yeaton Peverey. The abundance of breeding records is no doubt influenced by this species habit of nesting rather obviously in close proximity to human habitation, indeed one pair chose the rather convivial surroundings of the Charlton Arms at Ludford where they chose to nest in the pub wall!

PIED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Status: Common summer visitor



Pied Flycatcher
Illustration by Glen Bishton

This attractive summer visitor remains surprisingly poorly recorded and is surely more abundant than the meagre twenty records suggest!

On average this species arrives around two weeks earlier than spotted flycatcher and this year the first record was of two birds at Bridges on 20 Apr. Thereafter, it was reported from Birch Coppice, Brown Clee, Bushmoor Coppice, Church Stretton, Darnford, Dowles Brook, Hawkstone Park, Horderley, Myndtown, Pimhill, Raglith Wood, the River Clun, Stiperstones and Wolverton Wood.

Breeding was likely at most if not all of these locations, although it was only confirmed at Hawkstone Park in the north of the county where 14 pairs reared 63 young in nest boxes.

The final record was at Brown Clee on 22 Aug, although most had departed by late Jul.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

Status: Common resident

A popular species with recorders, generating a total of 212 records from 85 locations, reflecting a pretty even county-wide distribution. Predictably, the largest counts came from the post-breeding and winter periods with 52 counts of between ten and 20 birds and a further seven of above 20. Notable amongst these were 38 at Bridgnorth on 1 Jan, 40 at Yeaton Pevery on 5 Feb and 27 at Wall Farm on 9 Dec. Breeding activity was noted at 16 widespread locations.

A regular visitor to many garden feeding stations and one observer commented "after the noisy parties in the garden last summer these are the only sightings this year". Read this as you will!

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris*

Status: Common resident

A total of 132 records were received from 48 widespread localities. The vast majority involved one or two birds with a few records of three or four. The highest counts were five at Pimhill on 2 Feb, five at Neen Savage on 1 Mar and five at Shavington Big Pool on 30 Jul. Evidence of breeding was noted at Horderley and Ironbridge.

A lot of records came from VP where birds were frequently noted visiting the feeding station in front of Lena's Hide. Garden visitors were noted at Pulverbatch, Asterton, Craigllwyn and Much Wenlock.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus*

Status: Locally common resident

By far the scarcest of the brown-tits within the county generating only 51 records compared with 132 for the previous species. Thirty two sites were involved which indicates a sparse although county-wide distribution and the species was reported visiting gardens in Bridgnorth and Market Drayton. No evidence of breeding activity was received.

All but five of the records involved either one or two birds, the exceptions being counts of three at Whitcliffe on 5 Jan, Black Hill on 9 Apr, Earl's Hill on 9 Apr, Brockhurst Farm, Wem on 5 Aug and Bury Ditches 12 Oct.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*

Status: Common resident

A common and widespread species within Shropshire. It is, therefore, surprising that 130 of the records received involved only one or two birds. Of the remainder, 15 records involved between three and six birds with the only counts to exceed these being eight at Sturt Common on 6 Jun and an impressive 14 territories which were identified along the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest.

Confirmed as breeding at Church Stretton, Cwmdale, Dothill Pools and Twemlows Big Wood.

BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*

Status: Common resident

A very common species which is popular with recorders. Forty six counts into double figures were received and notable amongst these were 56 at Plas-yn-Grove on 24 Feb, 38 at Pimhill on 10 Mar and 60 at Hollins Farm, Merrington on 8 Aug. Seventy three were trapped and ringed at a garden feeding station in Adderley over six dates during the first winter period and a further 14 were trapped and ringed at the same site 30 Dec. Many accounts of nest-box breeding were received.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*

Status: Common resident

Another common and widespread species although flock sizes were generally smaller than those for the previous species. Seventeen counts entered double figures and most notable amongst these were 29 at Plas-yn-Grove on 23 Jan, with 30 at the same site on 24 Feb, 15 along a stretch of the River Clun on 6 Mar and 14 at Sturt Common on 30 Apr. A pair attempted to breed in a bat-box at Shelton which unfortunately fell out of the tree and was found to contain two young. Otherwise largely ignored as a breeding species.

WOOD NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*

Status: Common resident

A common species within the county, generally favouring areas of mature deciduous woodland. Usually recorded in low single figures and 108 of the 129 records which were received involved only one or two birds. A further 18 involved between three and five birds and the only counts in excess concerned six along the River Clun from Purslow to Broome on 6 Mar with 11 counted at the same site 5 Apr and eight at Hawkstone Park on 10 Jun.

Breeding birds utilised nest-boxes at Hawkstone Park (two pairs) and Shelton. Breeding activity was also noted at Woodlands Park and Beck's Field in Shrewsbury, Ironbridge and Church Stretton.

Noted as a visitor to garden feeding stations at Conover, Diddlebury, Leebotwood, Linley, Shrewsbury and Kemberton where it was the first record for over 25 years.

TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*

Status: Common resident

The account for nuthatch could quite easily be re-applied here for this species appears to share an identical habitat requirement and they enjoy a remarkably similar distribution within the county. Of the 114 records, 98 were of one or two birds with a further 13 records involving three or four birds. The only counts to exceed these were of five birds at Plas-yn-Grove on 20 Feb, Cole Mere on 14 Apr and Ridgewardine on 21 Jul.

Breeding activity was noted at Leebotwood, The Mere at Ellesmere and Whitcliffe, although its unobtrusive nature no doubt results in it going largely unrecorded as a breeding species. One was noted at the VP feeding station on 14 Nov but it was infrequently reported as a garden visitor.

GOLDEN ORIOLE

One was present at Poles Coppice 26 May (BH) and quite remarkably a second was discovered at Leebotwood 19 Jun (NG). Both were males and, unfortunately, remained for only one day. In each case the observers were first alerted by the distinctive call, which, in respect of the Leebotwood bird, the observer had become familiar with in Crete some two months earlier.

This striking vagrant remains an extremely rare and much sought after species within the county and the only other record in the past decade came from Stanton Lacy 28 May 1994.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*

Status: Rare winter visitor

It was an excellent year for this scarce winter visitor with at least five and possibly six recorded. This species appears to be becoming more frequent having been noted in each of the past three years after an absence of four years. This years records follow four in 1999 and three in 1998.

During the first winter period a well watched individual was present at Cleobury Mortimer. It was initially discovered on 5 Mar (EGP) and remained faithful to an area of Cleobury Mortimer Golf course and an adjacent, recently replanted, area of the Wyre Forest until 9 Apr.

Another, which was at Crosshouses from 14-16 Mar, was reported to the county recorder by a local resident. Despite extensive searching this bird could not be relocated, but video film confirmed its identity. The final record of the first winter period was of one at Tedsmere near Baschurch on 12 Mar (AH) which was photographed. This species was also recorded at this site on 3 and 19 Dec 1999 and it is possible that this was the same bird which had wintered in the area despite being unseen for much of its stay.

During the second winter period a bird was discovered at Attingham Park on 2 Dec (RD). This bird could not be found at Attingham next day but one, which may well have been the same bird, was found approximately 5km to the south at Harnage (DFr). Obviously still in a transient mood, the bird was not subsequently relocated.

EURASIAN JAY *Garrulus glandarius*

Status: Common resident

This handsome corvid remains rather poorly recorded within the county. Records were received for 54 widespread locations which indicated a county-wide, if somewhat sparse, distribution. Of the 87 records received, 69 involved only one or two birds, whilst a further 11 involved three or four. The highest count was seven at Nesscliffe on 24 Oct whilst five were reported at Shavington Big Pool on 19 Mar, the Stiperstones on 25 Mar, Berriewood on 5 Jul, Lilleshall Grange on 20 Aug, Bury Ditches on 12 Oct and Market Drayton on 25 Nov.

Evidence of breeding was noted at Berriewood, Lilleshall Grange and Minsterley.

MAGPIE *Pica pica*

Status: Common resident

The ubiquitous and much maligned magpie remains a popular species with recorders. The large majority of the 199 records involved single figure counts.

Double figure counts came from a only six sites and notable amongst these were 40 at Monkmoor Pool on 2 Jan, a communal roost numbering an incredible 98 at Granville Country Park 19 Jan and 22 at Telford Town Park on 28 Feb.

Several instances of predatory behaviour were noted. Two were observed attacking a grass snake *Natrix natrix* at Bridgnorth on 29 Apr and one showed a sinister interest in little ringed plover chicks at VP on 30 May, but it was successfully driven away by the adults and black-headed gulls. One, which killed a collared dove at Oswestry on 15 Jun, was itself promptly killed and disposed of by the observer's neighbour.

Largely ignored as a breeding species although it obviously does so with considerable success!

EURASIAN JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

Status: Common resident

This species thrives and remains commonplace throughout the county. Of the records received, 66 involved single figure counts, a further 54 involved double figure flocks whilst the remaining 10 involved flocks into treble figures. Notable amongst these were 160 at Eaton-upon-Tern on 19 Feb with 150 here on 29 Oct, 150 at Wood Lane on both 20 Feb and 9 Sep, 200 at VP on 24 Jun and 150 at Owlbury on 18 Jul.

Predictably, the majority of the larger flocks were recorded during the winter and post-breeding periods. It is, therefore, interesting to note that four of the three figure counts came from the summer months. Breeding was noted at Asterton, Pimhill, Shelton and Wellington. A flock of 70 Prees Heath on 2 Feb. was reported to hold two birds of the continental race *C.m.soemmeringii* (DBu).

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

Status: Common resident

Generally recorded as large flocks, in fact, only 23 single figure counts were reported, compared to a further 43 into double figures, 48 into treble figures, whilst the remaining two counts entered four figures. A total of 21 sites registered counts into treble figures. The highest counts came from Tedsmere where birds flying to roost totalled 1900 on 6 Jan with 1750 present on 5 Feb. However, only 300 were counted at this site in the second winter period and this was more typical of totals which also include 250 at Haughmond Hill on 13 Jul and 250 at Owlbury on 18 Jul whilst at Sytche Close, Much Wenlock there were 300 on 15 Jun, 600 on 15 Aug and 250 on 15 Oct.

Breeding was noted at Bromfield, Condober, Cwmdale, Halesfield, Haughmond Hill, High Ercall, Ludlow, Market Drayton, Ridgewardine, Purslow and Wellington with rookeries containing between five and 30 nests. This species appears to be distinctly more numerous in the north of the county.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Status: Common resident

Unlike the previous species, carrion crow is a solitary nester and far less gregarious outside of the breeding season. The only flock to break treble figures involved 125 at Six Ashes, Neen Savage on 16 Jan. Other notable counts were 70 at Eaton-upon-Tern on 19 Feb and 82 at Wood Lane on 26 Feb. Otherwise, 105 records related to single figure counts and a further 54 counts involved between 10 and 50 birds. Records suggest an even distribution throughout the county.

Breeding activity was noted at Beck's Field, Condober, Cwmdale and Priorslee Lake. Although it no doubt occurs, it is interesting to note that no instances of nest predation by carrion crows were reported.

COMMON RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Status: Uncommon resident

This charismatic corvid remains popular with recorders and appears to thrive within our county, where it continues to consolidate its spread from its strongholds in the south-west into the lowlands of the north-east of the county.

Most often recorded in low single figures with a phenomenal total of 191 records involving between three and nine birds. The timing of observations, however, frequently suggested that they relate to post breeding family parties. The largest flock so far was reported from the Long Mynd when 53 birds were seen in the area of Cow Ridge and Lightspout Waterfall on 15 Jul (LS). Other large gatherings included 20 at Black Mountain on 18 Jan, 18 at Cardingmill Valley on 21 Aug, 12 on the Stiperstones on 1 and 17 Oct and 18 at Haddon Hill on 23 Oct.

Shropshire Raven Study Group continued to monitor the species. A total of 123 nest sites, found between 1994 and 1999, were revisited, and breeding pairs were found to have occupied at least 85 of them. Eight new nest sites were also found, suggesting that the recent rapid population increase is still continuing. Fourteen individual adult birds breeding at these nest sites were found to have colour rings which were fitted, prior to fledging, as part of the study. Of these, one fledged in 1993, four in 1994, five in 1995, two in 1996, and two in 1997, confirming the belief that most breeding ravens are at least three years old.

The population in 2000 is estimated at 175-200 breeding pairs, plus a substantial number of younger birds that have not reached breeding age. The first report of the study group, including a detailed analysis of the results of fieldwork over the five years 1994-99, is almost complete, and publication is anticipated during 2002.

COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

Status: Common resident

Generally recorded in flocks and in fact only 39 records referred to single figure counts whilst a further 64 involved counts of between 10 and 90 and an additional 95 records involved between 100 and 800 birds.

The larger counts generally referred to roosting birds and included 1000 at Monkmoor Pool on 2 Jan, 1200 at High Ercall on 8 Jan, 1000 at Roddington on 10 Jan, 1000 at Oxen, Shrewsbury on 18 Feb, 1314 at Ladyhouse Farm, Hope on 19 Feb, 2000 at Eaton-upon-Tern on 19 Feb with 1200 on 29 Oct, 1000 at Upton Magna on 24 Nov and 1000 at Pulverbatch on 1 Dec. The only four figure counts were both in the Whitchurch area with an estimated 10,000 at Ash on 19 Jan and 5000 at Black Mere on 13 Feb.

Breeding was confirmed at Kemberton where two pairs utilised nest-boxes and Shelton where eight pairs were reported to have raised young. Otherwise, largely ignored as a breeding species.

The albinistic bird was once again noted in Newport this year on 2 Feb (DT) and 16 Sep (MGG).

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Status: Common resident

It maybe that this species goes largely under recorded within our county, however, the results of BTO census work has identified a steady and quite significant decline within Northern Ireland and England whilst populations appear stable in Scotland and Wales. The reason for the decline of this species is unknown and investigations are currently underway.

Many records involved single figure counts, but peak counts included 54 at Market Drayton on 2 Jan, 90 at Ridgewardine on 6 Feb, 40 at Purslow on 6 Mar, 50 at Greater Woolaston Farm on 29 Aug, 52 at Tedsmere on 30 Aug and 40 at Adderley on 30 Nov. Flocks of 20 or more were also noted at Oswestry, Shrewsbury, Neen Savage, Diddlebury, Hindford, Kemberton, Hope, Lower Broughton Farm, Monkmoor Road, Pimhill, Rednal Airfield, Roden, Trench, Upton Magna, Wall Farm and Waters Upton.

Other interesting records include one of 30 birds which were ringed in an Adderley garden over five dates between Feb and Apr and one of an albinistic bird which was taken by a sparrowhawk at Neen Savage 22 Oct. The only confirmed breeding was at Condoover and Tedsmere where young were fledged from a nest-box. Otherwise, it was unfortunately ignored as a breeding species.

TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*

Status: Common resident

A popular species with recorders attracting 237 records, compared with 134 for the previous species. Tree sparrows continue to thrive in localised populations within the county. Peak counts from included 30 at St. Martins on 15 Jan, 60 at Adderley on 22 Jan, 30 at Kinnersley on 13 Feb, 40 at VP on 19 Feb and 85 at Noneley on 16 Nov.

A much welcomed visitor to garden feeding stations and, at one such site at Adderley, a total of 68 birds were ringed over six dates between Feb and Apr. Despite this, the observer subsequently noted that only one in four birds visiting the garden were carrying rings which suggests a possible population in the region of 270 birds! A leucistic bird was noted at Woolston on 11 Feb. (GH).

Breeding activity was noted at Oswestry, Neen Savage, Cherrington, Leebootwood, Tedsmere, Tilstock, VP, Wood Lane and Woolston. Nest-boxes were utilised at all these sites with a pair also selecting a natural site in an Ash tree at Woolston.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

Status: Common resident

This common and widespread species is very popular with recorders. During the summer it was invariably recorded in single figures with, predictably, larger counts coming from the post-breeding and winter periods. Larger counts included 100 at Chelmarsh on 5 Jan, 184 Pimhill on 8 Jan, 150 at Upton Magna on 14 Jan, 200 at Neen Savage on 16 Jan, 150 at Tyrley Wharf, near Market Drayton on 12 Feb and 100 at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry on 9 Nov.

Largely ignored as a breeding species with only five observers noting breeding activity. These records included a nest with young discovered in gorse at Batch Valley on 3 Jun.

One was found dead at Hengoed on 3 Nov having flown into a window. It had been ringed as a first year bird at St Laureins, Belgium on 25 October 1999 a distance of 485 km.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*

Status: Winter visitor

This species remains a relatively scarce winter visitor to the county attracting only 51 records from a total of 32 widely scattered locations.

Many records involved just one or two birds with double figure counts at just six sites. The highest count was 80 at Rhosygadfa on 4 Jan in a mixed flock with chaffinches. Another large flock was reported at Ruyton-XI-Towns during the first winter period which peaked at 61 on 28 Mar. Elsewhere, there were 12 at Rorrington Hill on 23 Jan and 13 Feb, 13 at Asterton on 26 Jan, 20 at Berriewood on 27 Feb and 20 at Higher Heath 20 Apr.

There was just one record in the second winter period. Two birds were present at Lodge Hill on 18 Nov.

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

Status: Common resident

One of our commonest garden visitors and extremely popular with recorders. Frequently recorded in double figure flocks, especially during the winter and post breeding periods. Sixty flocks of between 10 and 40 birds were noted, along with a further eight records of between 50 and 80. These highest counts comprised 80 at Adderley on 22 Jan, 50 at ASF on 26 Jan, 52 at Wall Farm on 27 Jan, 50 at Colemore Green on 30 Jun, 50 at Alkmund Park on 15 Aug, 60 at Pimhill on 22 Aug, 50 at Wall Farm on 21 Oct and 50 at Chelmarsh Village on 30 Oct.

Regularly reported in single figures during the summer months, however, only seven records noted breeding activity.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

Status: Common resident



Goldfinch
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

A popular and well recorded species, frequently noted in single figure counts, especially during the spring and summer periods. In addition 42 records involved flocks of between 10 and 50 birds. Higher counts included 60 at Crudginton on 10 Jan, 70 at Wall Farm on 29 Aug, 60 at Berriewood on 7 Sep, 60 at Buildwas on 7 Oct and 90 at Wall Farm 21 Oct which had decreased to 75 by 4 Nov.

In common with several other species of finches and buntings, winter flocks benefit greatly from the provision of set-aside and its associated weeds. Breeding was confirmed only at Adderley, Dothill and Tedsmere.

SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*

Status: Common winter visitor and uncommon resident

The bulk of the records came from the winter periods and during the period from Jan to Apr a total of 133 records were received compared to only 34 for the period from Aug to Dec. However, this is the normal pattern and is likely to be linked to the exhaustion of natural food supply and more frequent use of garden feeding stations towards the end of the winter.

The larger counts included 60 at Whitcliffe on 8 Jan, 60 at Maesbury Marsh on 20 Jan, 51 at the Coal Brook Valley on 25 Jan, 60 at Cole Mere on 29 Jan and 80 at Lodge Hill on 18 Nov.

There was an increase in summer records this year with five birds noted at Brown Clee on 1 May. Elsewhere, singles or pairs were noted at Conover, Haywood, Lower Broughton Farm, the Old Racecourse Oswestry, Rorrington Hill and Woolston. No records confirmed breeding, however, a pair were observed courtship feeding in a larch plantation at Haywood.

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*

Status: Common resident

This nationally declining farmland species appears to be fairing reasonably well within the county and benefits from the provision of set-aside and uncultivated farmland. Widely distributed records were received from scattered locations throughout the county. Notable amongst these were 170 at Humbers Lane, Donnington on 2 Jan, 164 at Pimhill on 8 Jan, 226 at the Weald Moors on 29 Aug, 150 at Chelmarsh Village on 30 Oct and 150 at Kynnersley on 19 Nov. A huge flock estimated to be in excess of 1000 were noted at Shifnal feeding on mustard seed on various dates between Jan and Mar.

Despite a large number of summer records being submitted, breeding was only confirmed at Marville, Wood Lane and the Wrekin.

LESSER REDPOLL *Carduelis cabaret*

Status: Common winter visitor and rare breeding resident

Remains a relatively scarce species within the county, generating a total of 52 records from 32 widespread locations. Most records involved counts of less than ten birds, but higher counts comprised 35 at Haughmond Hill on 3 Jan and 40 on 14 Feb, 20 at Hopton Hill on 13 Mar, 12 at Tee Lake, Dothill on 20 Mar, 25 at Haywood on 29 Mar, 10 at Rorrington Hill on 13 Apr, 15 at Attingham Park on 18 Apr, 10 at Gatten Plantation on 5 Oct, 28 at Buildwas on 16 Nov and 12 at the Stiperstones on 29 Dec.

All records bar one came from the winter and post breeding periods. The exception being three birds present on Haughmond Hill 1 Jun but no evidence of breeding activity was reported.

COMMON REDPOLL *Carduelis.flammea*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

Following the decision of the BOU to award full species status to lesser redpoll it becomes more important for observers to look out for this fairly scarce species which is often known as mealy redpoll. Care should be taken with identification and the records committee will require a description.

There was just one record this year of four which were present at the Whitcliffe on 8 Jan (TCW). Originally submitted as Arctic redpoll, following discussion between the observer and the County Recorder they were subsequently accepted by the records committee to be mealy redpoll.

COMMON CROSSBILL *Loxia curvirostra*

Status: Irregular resident and winter visitor

Evidence of the irruption which took place in the latter part of 1999 remained and a total of 27 reports were received between Jan and May from nine scattered locations.

Haughmond Hill proved to be the most reliable site and after the first report of 16 birds on 1 Jan the species was recorded regularly until 14 Apr. The peak count was 20 on 3 Jan and three other double figure counts were received. The

only other sites where there were multiple sightings were Leaton Knolls with a peak of 15 on 8 Jan and Eastridge Wood, Habberley with a best of 20 on 13 Jan. Other records from the early part of the year were two at Lower Broughton Farm on 24 Jan, six at Ditton Priors on 5 Feb, four at Calverhall on 15 Feb, two at Pimhill on 10 Mar and one at Yeaton Pevery on 11 Mar.

The only records from the second half of the year involved four at Calverhall on 6 Jul, one at Birches Coppice on 16 Jul and 10 at Bury Ditches on 12 Oct.

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Status: Common resident

A very popular species with recorders generating a grand total of 182 records from scattered locations throughout the county. Most involved just one or two birds and the only double figure counts were 12 at Pimhill on 16 Jul and 10 at Prees Wood on 9 Sep. The only report of this species at a garden feeding station was at Belle Vue, Shrewsbury.

Generally secretive during the breeding season, the only records of confirmed breeding came from Llyncllys Hill, Pimhill, Shrewsbury and Sutton Wood.

HAWFINCH *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Status: Scarce resident

During the first winter period, a single was seen at the traditional site at Whitcliffe, Ludlow on 8 Jan (TCW) but sadly this was the only record for the whole of the 1999/2000 winter period. However, encouraging news came at the end of the year when on 30 Dec it was reported on the bird pagers that a party of five birds were present. A search the next day found one still present (AL).

Elsewhere, a female was present at Hollins Farm, Merrington Green on 6 Jan and again on 6 Feb (DBu), and this was the first record away from Whitcliffe since 1997.

These records raise at least a little hope for the future of this charismatic finch within Shropshire.

SNOW BUNTING *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Status Rare passage migrant and winter visitor



Snow Bunting
Photograph by Alan Heath

An extremely confiding male was discovered on the pathway leading from Pole Cott to Callow Hollow on the Long Mynd on 3 Mar (DN). The finder passed on news of the bird and, fortunately, it was still present next day to delight many grateful birders. The bird proved oblivious to rambblers who passed within feet as it fed on seeds of weeds and grasses on the edge of the short turf.

It was the second year running that this species has been recorded following blanks in 1997 and 1998. Last year's bird was on the Stiperstones on 3-4 Nov.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*

Status: Common resident

Despite a well documented national decline, this species remains very well recorded and popular with observers. Records indicate an even, county-wide distribution and a distinct preference for areas of low-intensity agriculture.

Most records involved single figure counts although around fifty double figure counts were reported including 64 at Yeaton Pevery on 15 Jan, 47 at Greater Woolaston Farm on 20 Jan and 43 at Billingsley on 5 Feb and again on 19 Feb. Wall Farm held the largest flocks with 107 present on 9 Jan and 120 on 18 Mar; these were the first three figure counts since 1995.

It is interesting to note that all the largest flocks were noted during the first winter period. Noted as a visitor to feeding stations at Neen Savage, Somerwood and Tedsmere but, in contrast, it is interesting that whilst seen regularly around the reserve at VP they are rarely seen at the feeding station. Breeding activity was noted at Lower Broughton Farm, Tedsmere, Wall Farm and Wood Lane.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Status: Common resident



Reed Bunting
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

A localised species within the county which was recorded at 37 widely scattered sites. Counts were generally small with the majority of single birds or pairs. Four double figure counts were received from Wall Farm with a peak of 12 on 27 Jan and 30 May. Elsewhere, 10 were at Lower Brompton on 15 Jun. Noted as a visitor to feeding stations at Middle Pool in Trench, Market Drayton and Newport and food taken surprisingly included bread and fat.

The only record of confirmed breeding came from Monkmoor Pool although suspected at several others.

CORN BUNTING *Miliaria calandra*

Status: Common, but localised resident

Nationally this species is in serious decline and the records would suggest that this picture is mirrored within the county. Although under-recording may have played a part, a meagre 29 records from a total of 20 sites does give rise to concern. Over recent years, the core area for this species has been within a triangle from Shrewsbury to the north of Telford and north to Market Drayton but with several isolated pockets such as Rednal, Noneley and in the east near Shifnal. It is at least encouraging that the species is still found in such areas.

Perhaps the most impressive record was a winter flock of 75 at Cotwall on 30 Jan with 12 present at the same site on 18 Mar. A flock of 18 were noted at Wall Farm on 18 Mar with 14 still here on 27 Apr. The only record of confirmed breeding came from Tibberton.

Records were also received from Beckbury, Buttery Farm, Cherrington, Eaton-upon-Tern, Ercall Heath, Hincks, Lower Brompton, Moortown, Muxton, Noneley, Northwood, Norton-in-Hales, Rednal Airfield, Shrewsbury Golf Course and Withington.

ESCAPES AND RELEASES

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

There were 15 records from six sites, with two birds being seen together at Tibberton on 7 Jan, at VP on 2 Feb and at Bridgnorth on 28 Jun and 3 Aug. Single birds were recorded at VP in Jan, Feb and Jun and Sep, at ASF in Sep and at The Mere, Ellesmere in Sep and Dec. It is possible that just two mobile birds accounted for all these records.

SWAN GOOSE *Anser cygnoides*

Four were at Oerley Reservoir on 17 Dec.

SNOW GOOSE *Anser caerulescens*

A single feral bird was present at Wood Lane from 7 to 9 Sep.

BAR-HEADED GOOSE *Anser indicus*

One was regularly reported at VP from 15 Jan to 8 Mar and again on 5 May and then regularly from 1 Aug to 12 Oct. Most records are thought to relate to one bird which bred with a greylag and up to four hybrid young were reported. Also reported at Buttery Farm in Sep and Monkmoor Pool in Oct

WOOD DUCK *Aix sponsa*

The pair at Middle Pool, Trench in 1999 were reported again from 15 Jan to 22 Jun, whilst one was at Priorslee Flash on 14 Feb.

MUSCOVY DUCK *Cairina moschata*

One was present at Brown Moss on 16 Oct.

COCKATIEL *Nymphicus hollandicus*

One was noted at Coal Brook Valley, Hales 3 May followed by a second bird found moribund at Leaton Knolls 27 Jul. which later died.

ZANZIBAR RED BISHOP *Euplectes nigroventris*

One at Priorslee Lake on 13 Aug (JP)

LIST OF OBSERVERS

Mrs A Andrews	Mr A Gaunt	Mr B G Martin	Mr J Speake
Mrs JS Armstrong	Mrs G Glover	Mr J Martin	Mrs A Stanley
Miss DE Balmer	Mr A Goldstone	Dr JL Mason	Mr EB Stanley
Mr D Barnes	Mr MG Grant	Mr PG Mason	Mrs D Stevens
Mr N Barratt	Mr N Green	Mr DG May	Mr M Stevens
Mrs M Bell	Mr C Griffin	Mr R May	Mr R Swindells
Dr J Bent	Miss HJ Griffiths	Mr R Mayall	Mrs S Swindells
Mr S Bierley	Mr G Hall	Mr D Meyers	Mr A Tanner
Mr GC Bird	Mr J Harding	Mr D R Morris	Mr D Tarry
Mr G Bishton	Mr J Hawkins	Mr D Nicholls	Mr G Taylor
Mr H.J Blofield	Mr S Haycox	Mrs N Pacult	Mr G Thomas
Mr M Bowler	Mr A Heath	Mr MJ Paddock	Mrs C Travis
Mr D Buckingham	Mr D Heath	Mr R Parker	Mr JJ Tucker
Mrs BE Burns	Mr AR Holder	Mr MAJ Parton	Mrs L Tucker
Mr A Butter	Mr B Holford	Mr P E Parton	Mr J Turner
Mr J Cambell	Mr T Holloway	Ms EJ Patterson	Mrs V Turrells
Mr R. Camp	Mr GE Holmes	Mr EG Phillips	Mr A Walker
Mr P Clulee	Mr B Holt	Mr J Porter	Ms D Walker
Mr G Cole	Mr RW Hotchkiss	Mr HM Prince	Mr GJ Walker
Mr G Cook	Mr B Hunt	Mr KT Pryce	Mr T Wall
Mr AP Dawes	Mr J Isherwood	Mr RJ Pugh	Mr WR Watkins
Mr PG Deans	Mr S Jaggs	Ms D Rees	Mr TC Weale
Mr HK Dodwell	Mrs J Jennings	Ms R Rees	Mr K Webb
Mr R Dodwell	Mr E Jones	Mrs A Remfrey	Rev WJ Webb
Mr TW Edwards	Mrs J Jones	Mr K Rogers	Mr CC Wild
Mr T Edwin	Mrs M Jones	Mr J Sankey	Mr EJ Wilson
Mr P Ellicott	Mr P Jones	Mr AR Seagrave	Mr CE Wright
Mr D Evans	Mr R Jones	Mr J Shearman	Mr GE Young
Mrs B Falconbridge	Mr P Jordan	Mr AW Smith	
Ms J Finney	Mr R Jukes-	Mr GR Smith	
Mr B Ford	Hughes	Mr I Smith	
Mr D Freeth	Mr A Latham	Mrs M Smith	
Mr D Fulton	Mr M Mainwaring	Mr G Smout	

Many thanks to all these observers without whose continued support there would be no County Bird Report and apologies to anyone I have missed – Ed

Dartford Warbler

On the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve

A First for Shropshire

On 23 March 2000, Tom Wall, English Nature's Site Manager for the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve (NNR), was inspecting some management works on the western flanks of the reserve. The area was heathland fringe comprising a mix of gorse *Ulex spp*, heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and low trees. His attention was alerted by a Sylvia warbler-type call which he described as a low "chay". This was followed by occasional bouts of a scratchy, warbler-like song coming from a patch of gorse in tall heather. Rather than full song, Tom described it as a low sub-song reminiscent of both common whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and dunnock *Prunella modularis*. The date was, however, far too early for whitethroat and a brief glimpse of the bird immediately suggested Dartford warbler *S. undata*.

Although largely skulking, four or five brief, but good, views of the bird were eventually obtained as the bird moved principally between gorse bushes. The following details were noted to confirm identification as a male Dartford warbler:

Although the location of the bird presented some difficulties in terms of footpath

- Common whitethroat size.
- Tail often cocked
- Dark grey-brown upper parts
- Red/purple under parts.
- Red eye.
- Light coloured warbler bill.
- Lighter shoulder edging.
- Paler grey ear coverts.

access through local properties, a number of local birdwatchers were informed of the find and arrived at the site just to the south of Crowsnest Dingle on the 27 March. Some of the first were Joyce Jones and Andy Latham who, almost immediately upon arrival, heard the bird singing above the public footpath. A quick scramble up the slope enabled Andy to see a typical silhouette of the bird, sitting on a small gorse bush with tail cocked, before it disappeared into tall heather. A number of other observers had brief or possible/probable sightings during the day which was cold and overcast with sleet in the wind, but it was not seen for anything other than a glimpse during the rest of the weekend.

The weather continued to be cold and although some observers looked for the bird no further reports were received until 7 April which was a fine, warm, sunny day. Jon Porter visited the original site but, having had no success, decided to walk the footpath southwards towards Mytton Dingle. On turning into the Dingle, he entered a relatively dense patch of south-facing gorse and soon heard and saw the warbler in full song from the top of a bush. The bird gave excellent views, and Jon was able to provide further notes on the bird.

Helen Griffiths, Geoff Holmes and I visited the Mytton Dingle site next day 8 April. It was a warm, sunny day and after a short period we heard the bird singing. Unfortunately, it could not be seen through the gorse and although we waited for some time we had no further contact with the bird and it was not reported thereafter.

The above is by no means a complete report but, rather, is intended to give a flavour of the all-too-brief, and often frustrating, sightings of the bird. Observers other than those listed above undoubtedly saw or heard the Dartford warbler, but those listed have been chosen to highlight specific points during the bird's stay.

Perhaps this record could have been anticipated since, nationally, the species has expanded its range during the last decade. In 1989 it was found in just five counties but, since 1993, it has regularly bred in eleven or twelve counties. The number of identified territories slumped to a maximum of 552 pairs in 1996 but had recovered to a maximum of 1747 pairs in 1999 (*Ogilvie et al.: Rare breeding birds in the UK in 1999*). The observation also follows on from reports from adjoining counties with five records for Worcestershire since 1995 and two for Cheshire since 1989.

Although noted as a 'first' for Shropshire, it is perhaps more correct to say it is the only modern record. The Handbook of British Birds (*Witherby et al. 1943*) reported a 'pair or two' breeding regularly in the county, although Herefordshire Birds (*Walker, C. W. & Smith, A.J. 1975*) suggests that this was near Leintwardine in Shropshire and may have been extracted from the Victoria County History which reported two pairs breeding on the banks of the River Teme.

Graham Walker

Common Crane At Higginswood near Calverhall



Common Crane at Higginswood
Photograph by Alan Heath

An adult common crane was present in the north-west of the county from mid November until late December, before reappearing again in January 2001. It was first seen on 17 November by Mr & Mrs D Meyer of Higginswood near Calverhall in a harvested maize field adjacent to their property. Unsure of the bird's identity, Mr Meyer contacted the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust at Martin Mere and, from the description supplied over the telephone, they tentatively identified it as a common crane. With Mr Meyer's permission, news of the bird's presence was released to the bird information services on 23 November. The directions were somewhat confusing, but the bird was eventually tracked down next day and the identification confirmed (AB).

The crane was showing well in a roadside field and, after due consideration of the nature of the site and the welfare of the bird, improved directions were given to the bird information services with the caveat that careful parking and consideration for local residents was essential. The crane was present in the Higginswood area on most days for the next five weeks although, it occasionally went missing for several hours at a time. It usually flew in from the north, about

an hour after dawn, and called frequently both in flight and on the ground. It was often seen dancing, sometimes with a stick in its bill, particularly during bright sunny weather. On one occasion, it was approached by a red fox *Vulpes vulpes* and, when the crane became aware of the fox, it walked purposefully towards it. The fox turned tail and was shepherded out of the field by the crane (DB).

At dusk on 2 December, the crane was seen to fly into another harvested maize field on the edge of the Calverhall Estate where it walked into a ditch, presumably to roost. Local farmers reported hearing the crane in this area on several occasions and it is assumed that this was its regular roost site.

What was surely the same bird was seen flying low over Wood Lane Nature Reserve on 28 December at 15.15 hrs, some 20 km to the west of Higginswood (AH). It was not seen again in Shropshire in 2000, but amazingly reappeared in the usual field at Higginswood on 12-14 January 2001 before finally departing.

This birds arrival in Shropshire coincided with an exceptional influx of common cranes into Belgium and the Netherlands. At that time, over 20,000 were in the latter country alone. During the birds apparent absence from Shropshire, single common cranes were reported in Lancashire and Pembrokeshire. It would, however, be pure speculation to think that the same bird might have been responsible for either or both of these sightings, let alone that it should find its way back again!

This represents the 4th modern record of this species in the county. The first was seen to the south of Audlem, on either side of the Cheshire border, from 6 June to 1 July 1962. The others were at ASF on 13-14 August 1986 and at Baggy Moor on 5 May 1995.

During the birds extended stay, it was seen by over 100 birders, some from as far away as Cumbria. The event caused much interest amongst local people with visiting birders often showing them the bird though their telescopes. All feedback was positive and, all in all, it was a good public relations exercise.

Tony Butter

FIELD TRIPS AND MEETINGS

2000 Field Trips and Excursions:

16 Jan	Whitcliffe Common, Ludlow
05 Feb	Ladywalk Nature Reserve, West Midlands
12 Mar	The Ellesmere Group of Meres
16 Jul	The Wyre Forest
17-20 Aug	Norfolk weekend
09 Sep	Allscott Sugar Factory
15 Oct	Point of Ayr, North Wales
25 Nov	Parkhall County Park, Stoke on Trent

2000 Indoor Meetings at the Shirehall Shrewsbury:

13 Jan	“The State of the Nations Birds”	Chris Mead
03 Feb	“The Shropshire Raven Study”	Leo Smith
02 Mar	“The Language of Birds“.	John Wyatt
05 Oct	“Little Brown Jobs”	Jeff Baker
02 Nov	“Our Newest Urban Terrorists”	Peter Rock
07 Dec	“Breeding Birds of the Long Mynd”	Leo Smith

Ludlow and Stretton Branch Meetings:

24 Jan	AGM and “Rowton Gorge”	Tom Wall	Stretton
30 Jan	Gilfach Res. and Gigrin Farm		Ludlow
24 Feb	AGM and film show		Ludlow
28 Feb	“Attracting birds to gardens”	Martin George	Stretton
27 Mar	“The birds of Spain”	Brayton Holt	Stretton
08 Apr	Ellesmere and Cole Mere		Ludlow
06 May	Whitcliffe Common		Ludlow
10 Jun	The Long Mynd		Ludlow
19 Oct	“Pied Flycatchers”	Chris Mead	Ludlow
30 Oct	“Two years in the Seychells”	Peter Carty	Stretton
04-11 Nov	North Norfolk Coast		Ludlow
19 Nov	Dolydd Hafren and Coed Y Dinas		Ludlow
27 Nov	“ The birds of the River Teme”	Gareth Thomas	Stretton

OFFICERS & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

For the period April 2000 - March 2001

President: Mr F C Gribble MBE, 22 Rickerscote Avenue
Rickerscote, Stafford ST17 4EZ Tel 01785 254166

Vice Presidents: Mr H J Blofield, Mr C E Wright, and Mr F J Thomas

Officers:

Chairman Mr P G Deans, Shatin Heights, Knowle Sands,
Bridgnorth WV16 5JL Tel 01746 766718

Hon. Secretary Mr J Turner, 1 Brookside Gardens, Yockleton,
Shrewsbury SY5 9PR Tel. 01743 821678

Hon. Treasurer Mr B Andrews, 6 Sytche Close, Much Wenlock
TF13 6JJ Tel 01952 727531

Management Committee:

County Bird Recorder and Bird Report Editor – Mr G E Holmes

Chair Conservation Sub-committee – Mr G J Walker

Bulletin Editor – Mr M George

Press Officer – Mr P Pickin

Excursion Co-ordinator – Mr A Latham

Other Elected Members – Mrs M Donoghue, Mr G Smith,
Mr C B Teece and Mrs C Travis.

Non elected members Mrs A Andrews (Membership Secretary)
Mr C Bell (Ludlow Branch Representative)
Miss M A B McVey (Church Stretton Branch Rep)

RECORD SUBMISSION

Records should be submitted to:

The County Bird Recorder

**Geoff Holmes
22 Tenbury Drive
Telford Estate
Shrewsbury
SY2 5YF**

Tel: 01743 364621
E-mail: geoff.holmes4@btopenworld.com

- Records are welcome however they are sent in but it greatly aids data input if the standard record cards are used. Records cards can be obtained from the Recorder and are usually available at indoor meetings.
- If standard cards are not used observers should ensure that the following minimum information is provided: The species, the site, the date of observation and the number of birds.
- Email records are welcome but those submitting large numbers are asked, wherever possible, to use MS Excel and send them as an attachment.
- Observers are asked to submit their records on a regular basis throughout the year. This is essential if the bird notes in the bulletins are to be up to date and interesting. It also helps spread out data input and reduces the end of year rush.
- A description will be required for national or county rarities (see opposite). Rarity forms are available from the Recorder.

RECORDS REQUIRING A DESCRIPTION

Records of the following require supportive descriptions and must be accepted by the Records Committee before they are published in the Annual Report:

- National rarities (which are forwarded to BBRC)
- Unusual races of species (except white wagtail in spring)
- Out of season migrants
- County rarities including the following more frequently encountered species (If in doubt please contact the County Recorder):

Red-throated Diver	Honey Buzzard	Sandwich Tern
Black-throated Diver	Marsh Harrier	Little Tern
Great Northern Diver	Hen Harrier	Long-eared Owl
Red-necked Grebe	Spotted Crake	Short-eared Owl
Slavonian Grebe	Corncrake	European Nightjar
Black-necked Grebe	Grey Plover	Hoopoe
Shag	Red Knot	Wryneck
Great Bittern	Temminck's Stint	Wood Lark
Little Egret	Pectoral Sandpiper	Rock Pipit
Spoonbill	Spotted Redshank	Water Pipit
Whooper Swan	Red-necked Phalarope	Nightingale
Tundra Swan	Grey Phalarope	Bluethroat
Bean Goose	Pomarine Skua	Black Redstart
Brent Goose	Arctic Skua	Cetti's Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Long-tailed Skua	Firecrest
Garganey**	Great Skua	Bearded Tit
Red-crested Pochard**	Mediterranean Gull	Great Grey Shrike
Ring-necked Duck	Ring-billed Gull	Twite
Long-tailed Duck	Yellow-legged Gull	Common (Mealy) Redpoll
Velvet Scoter	Iceland Gull	Snow Bunting
Red-breasted Merganser	Glaucous Gull	

** description is not required of summer plumage drakes.