

THE 2002 SHROPSHIRE BIRD REPORT

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EDITORIAL

This year there are two changes to the report. First, as most readers will be aware, many of our breeding birds are suffering declines nationally including some of the commoner species and, to a large extent, these declines are mirrored in Shropshire. To bring attention to this, the British Trust for Ornithology has published lists of birds of conservation concern. The Amber List includes species of medium concern with the Red List those species of high concern. For those species which breed in Shropshire, it has been decided to include a note of their national listing in the status summary within the systematic list. In a similar vein, the population of the rarest breeding species is monitored by The Rare Breeding Birds Panel and, again, it has been decided to draw attention to these species in the status summary. The hope is that, in highlighting these species, it will encourage more observers to report breeding activity and help us monitor our breeding birds.

The second change is to include a table showing the first arrival and last departure dates for many of our summer migrants and winter visitors and to compare these with the previous year and the average. I hope readers will find this interesting and my thanks go to Allan Dawes for his work on this article.

This is the sixth Annual Report for which I have been editor and I am proud that I have been able to continue the progress made by my predecessor Fiona Smith. However, I now feel I have taken it as far as I can and that it is time to hand over the reigns to someone with fresh ideas and more energy! Fortunately for me, and, I hasten to add, the Society, such an individual has emerged and, starting with the 2003 report, William Marler has agreed to take over as Bird Report Editor. I wish him all the best with a job which can at times be frustrating, but is rewarding, especially when the finished report eventually arrives from the printers!

I am certain William will do an excellent job and it will enable me concentrate on my continuing role as County Recorder and also on my involvement with the management of Venus Pool.

Geoff Holmes, January 2004
County Recorder and Bird Report Editor

AN ESTIMATE OF THE BREEDING POPULATION OF BARN OWL IN SHROPSHIRE 2002



Providing nestboxes for barn owls and promoting the conservation of their habitat in Shropshire

Introduction

A national survey of breeding barn owls *Tyto alba* in 1932 (Baker, 1932) estimated the population at 12000 pairs, Shropshire supporting 287 pairs. The national population had declined to 4000 pairs by 1987 (Toms, 1999) whilst the Shropshire population has been variably estimated at 95 pairs in 1985 (Shawyer, 1998), 140 in 1992 based on fieldwork between 1985 and 1990 (Deans et al 1992) and currently 70 pairs (Hawk & Owl Trust 2002). The decline has mainly been attributed to a drastic reduction in prey-rich foraging habitat and the destruction of traditional nest sites (Cayford 1992). The indications are that the national decline may have halted (Mead 2000), but the barn owl remains vulnerable (Gregory et al 2000).

The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) was formed in 2002 with the aim of providing nestboxes for barn owls and promoting the conservation of their habitat in Shropshire. Where nestboxes are placed in areas of suitable habitat, but with few potential nesting sites, the number of nesting pairs can be increased significantly (Taylor 1994). Conversely, in a study of breeding barn owls in relation to barns and barn conversions in Devon, a 'knock-on' effect was discovered whereby the loss of an occupied barn, usually the breeding site, through conversion or decay resulted in abandonment of the barn and also other nearby roosting sites within 1.5 kilometres of the barn (Ramsden 1995).

In order to measure the effectiveness of the provision of nestboxes, and to assist their targeting, a contemporary baseline breeding population figure was

considered essential. It was envisaged that analysis of recent barn owl sightings might identify adjacent and similar sites that should be investigated for additional breeding pairs. The present analysis was confined to all random Shropshire Ornithological Society (SOS) records from the period 1993 to 2002 and SBOG records for 2002.

Defining a barn owl pair

A site was counted as supporting a breeding pair where at least one barn owl was recorded in the months March to August in any one year. Research in the UK indicates that adult barn owls are sedentary, pairs are generally established by February and courtship begins in February or March (Taylor 1994, Shawyer 1998). Once established at a site, barn owls are highly faithful to it (Taylor 1992). Observations of birds between the months of March and August at regularly occupied sites are therefore likely to relate to members of a breeding pair.

It is equally possible that some records of single barn owls during the breeding season relate to unmated birds. However, since some of these sites are relatively secluded, second birds could easily have gone unnoticed by observers. Barn owls can be extremely elusive and can occupy a site without being noticed by the landowner (Bunn 1982). The female also spends much time on the nest in the early stages of breeding (Taylor 1994) and, therefore, the opportunity of observing two birds at any one time is initially limited.

August marks the end of the breeding cycle, when most birds will have fledged. Several sites in Shropshire regularly supported birds during the non-breeding period, but not subsequently in the breeding period. This supports the assumption that observations of single birds during the winter probably relate to unmated juveniles dispersing from their natal site and settling on wintering grounds, rather than members of a pair. Juvenile barn owls complete their dispersal phase within about three months of fledging (Taylor 1994), but some do not settle on their future breeding site until February or March (Shawyer 1998). It is, therefore, feasible that February observations in Shropshire relate to young birds still dispersing and consequently these late winter records were excluded from the analysis.

Although the average life expectancy of a one year old barn owl is around three years and their lifespan is relatively short for a bird of prey (Shawyer 1998), male and female barn owls have a site fidelity of 99.29% and 95.1% respectively (Taylor 1994). In addition, of 137 male and 150 female barn owls studied over a

period of 13 years, movements were all less than eight kilometres and, in all but one case, were to an adjacent nest site on the death of a partner (Taylor 1994). These factors, therefore, point to continuous and long-term occupation of sites where environmental conditions, particularly in terms of nesting sites and feeding areas, are right.

An analysis of records 1993 to 2002

All SOS barn owl records for the years 1993 to 2002 were analysed. Confining the analysis to records of barn owls since 1993 was a decision based on the assumption that records prior to 1993 might now be out of date due to potential changes in habitat and loss of nest sites and could suggest the existence of pairs that in reality no longer occupy a site.

In addition to the SOS data, the SBOG has data of confirmed breeding pairs in 2002, based on a programme of site survey, nestbox provision and monitoring and liaison with landowners around Oswestry, Ellesmere, Market Drayton and the Weald Moors, north of Telford.

The resultant SOS and SBOG breeding pairs were entered on OS maps using the available grid references. Barn owls occupy ranges of around three square kilometres (Cayford 1992) and hunt mainly within one kilometre of their nest site (Taylor 1994). Pairs plotted in adjacent one kilometre squares were counted as one breeding pair. The exception to this rule was where the density of habitat features, such as the confluence of waterways or the presence of several farms with associated outbuildings, suggested that two pairs of barn owl might co-exist in close proximity to each other.

The final count for 2002

The final process of eliminating some probable duplicate pairs produced a population estimate based on known data of 121 breeding pairs in 2002. Of these, 110 pairs were identified from SOS records (not counting three sites that had been eliminated as not supporting a breeding pair by SBOG fieldwork) and 11 from SBOG's site surveys. However, if we assume that SBOG has only been active in approximately 40% of lowland Shropshire (although it should be recognised that by no means has every hectare and nook and cranny been surveyed) and the results were replicated in the relatively unsurveyed remaining 60% of the lowland part of the county south of Shrewsbury and Telford, around Bridgnorth and in south Shropshire, an additional 16 unrecorded pairs might be present. Conversely, survey of this additional area may also eliminate a number

of pairs and we have estimated this as five pairs. This would provide a breeding barn owl population estimate of 132 pairs. This figure does not consider the implications of a more detailed survey of the upland parts of the county and it is tempting, therefore, to expect to find a few more pairs here and be able to round-up the population figure to 140 pairs (see below).

The obvious question is how reliable is this estimate? Some 76 % of the 121 pairs are based on site records of barn owls during the breeding season March to August within the last five years. Fifty one (42.0%) of the pairs are based on one breeding season record of a barn owl in the respective site in any one of the ten years 1993 to 2002, 35 (29.0%) pairs are based on records of a barn owl recorded on two or more separate occasions and the remaining 35 (29.0%) pairs relate to confirmed breeding or to two birds recorded simultaneously and therefore probably a pair.

A word of caution. Although barn owls occupy relatively small breeding ranges and can be strongly defensive of their immediate nest site, they do not defend exclusive feeding territories (Shawyer 1998). Consequently, feeding ranges can overlap and members of several pairs might be present in any one good feeding area. It is, therefore, feasible that the process of elimination of records of birds in some abutting squares might have eliminated actual breeding pairs and that the breeding population could be understated. However, the preponderance of records of single birds rather than of several birds in close proximity suggests that the likelihood of this error is low.

There was some evidence of sites vacated by barn owls but, equally, there was some evidence of recently occupied sites. This may be partially due to changes in observer coverage as much as specific changes in the sites. Barn owls require around four hectares (10 acres) of rank or rough grassland, supporting good supplies of small mammal prey, especially short-tailed field voles (Shawyer 1998). Grassland with a thick sward and deep litter layer provides the best habitat, but on farmland this is now largely confined to linear features such as hedgerows, headlands, drainage ditches, fence lines and woodland edge. Elsewhere, a miscellany of semi-managed or unmanaged rough grassland along riverbanks, road verges and railway embankments also provide suitable foraging habitat (Cayford 1992). The SBOG has tentative evidence in Shropshire that the creation of grassy headlands on arable farms and lightly grazed pasture on livestock farms under Arable Options and Countryside Stewardship schemes is providing prey-rich habitat and new opportunities for the barn owl and is attracting birds to previously unoccupied sites.

Beyond the car headlights.

A quick glance at the dots of barn owl pairs on the OS maps and you could be forgiven for assuming that the barn owl's life revolves around the network of A and B roads disseminating from the major county towns. The dots along main roads such as the A49, A442 and A5 out of Shrewsbury and Telford are particularly striking. Does this tend to reflect the behaviour of motorists spotting barn owls in their headlights rather than a strong association of barn owls with road verges?

Some of the observations along roads will relate to traffic casualties, but the SOS annual report for 2001 referred to only one such incident. Whilst a number of roads no doubt support good rank grassland verges, the dearth of observations across the intervening farmland and in sparsely populated areas of the northwest and west of the county suggest the apparent distribution of barn owls reflects a random observer coverage which is biased towards the densely populated areas and main roads. So, although all sightings of barn owl are important in building up a picture of their distribution and numbers, there is a need to check for barn owls in the more secluded and inaccessible parts in the north of the county. There was only one pair recorded in Oswestry with none in the surrounding area for a radius of around six kilometres. Do barn owls, for instance, breed around Melverley and Alberbury in the west or Childs Ercall in the northeast?

The “unexplored” south

It is generally assumed that barn owls avoid land above 300 metres (Shawyer 1998), although the Montgomeryshire Barn Owl Group discovered that barn owls will breed above the 300 metre contour where nestboxes are provided on poles (Formaggia, 2001). Barn owls were present in the immediate vicinity of high ground at Cosley Wood (Clun), Church Stretton, All Stretton and Cardington. The remainder occupied the intermediate river valleys. Perhaps then, the limiting factor in the Shropshire uplands is the absence of suitable nest sites and not the lack of feeding habitat.

Whilst most of the definitive river valleys supported breeding pairs, there were large tracts of land, well away from roads and villages, that had no evidence of breeding barn owls. For example, there was no evidence of occupied breeding sites in southwest Shropshire around the Clun Forest and Knighton and in a large triangle from Corve Dale, between Much Wenlock and Ludlow, east through Clee St Margaret, Brown Clee Hills and Ditton Priors to Bridgnorth. Even though much of the land east of Corve Dale is intensive farmland, surely a number of barn owls breed there.

Should we be more open about barn owls?

Historically, there has been a tendency for landowners to keep records of ‘their’ barn owls secret. Perhaps this has been partly due to its population decline, its perceived vulnerability to egg collectors, and its elusive and secretive nature, all of which have served to create a protective response by landowners and birdwatchers in general to barn owls.

Whilst records submitted to the SOS should remain strictly confidential where the observer specifies and data protection insists, the Barn Owl Trust reports that there are incidents where barn owls have been lost from sites because conservationists were unaware of their presence and consequently were unable to take action to protect the breeding site (Barn Owl Trust 2003).

The barn owl is not particularly rare or under threat from egg collectors and, in any case, most barn owls nest on private and relatively secluded land. Perhaps it is time to be more open about the presence of barn owls and to make conservation bodies aware of them in order that they can openly discuss barn owl sites and take measures to protect their sites and better understand their population dynamics and habitat requirements.

The future

In conclusion, the SOS records for 1993 to 2002 with adjustments for losses and gains from the SBOG’s data and potential unrecorded pairs in unsurveyed areas estimates the breeding barn owl population for Shropshire to be in the region of 121 to 140 pairs. Comparing the current population with the Atlas estimate of 140 pairs suggests that the barn owl breeding population in Shropshire has either remained stable or, more probably, slightly declined through the 1990s; the Hawk and Owl Trust estimate of 70 pairs in 2002 is almost certainly too low.

Are there alternative ways of obtaining a population estimate? One possibility is a countywide survey. However, a survey of barn owls in Devon found that it was time consuming and even with extensive support from fieldworkers and landowners, only a proportion of the county could be checked (Grant 1993). The survey also found that it was not possible to check every ‘nook-and-cranny’ in every sample site. Estimating the barn owl breeding population of Shropshire using the present process is probably the most appropriate option for now and it provides an estimate which can be ‘fine-tuned’ and modified each year as new data comes in.

Unless some of the older sites are re-visited to verify the continued presence of barn owls there is a risk that the database will become increasingly unreliable. The SBOG hopes to have the opportunity to visit some old sites during the course of survey work and its programme of nestbox installation, but it would be of immense value if SOS members could make a determined attempt to check for evidence of barn owls. Just one evening site visit producing one sighting of a barn owl during the breeding period of March to August would be enough to indicate the possibility of breeding and to help keep site records up to date.

This analysis clearly indicates that gaps across the county remain where suitable habitat appears to exist and barn owls are unrecorded. The challenge is there: - to search suitable habitat in isolated areas, away from main roads and centres of population, and especially in south Shropshire. The discovery of a new pair of barn owls awaits!

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A SUMMARY OF THE STIPERSTONES BREEDING BIRD SURVEY 2002

The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve

The Stiperstones is a quartzite ridge, ten kilometres long, parallel to the Welsh border in south west Shropshire. It is part of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and lies within the Shropshire Hills Environmentally Sensitive Area. The heathland at the northern end of the ridge, around Manstone Rock, has been a National Nature Reserve (NNR) since 1982, and is managed and largely owned by English Nature. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation under the European Habitats Directive; this is now the most important nature conservation site designation in the UK.

The NNR covers an area of 481 hectares. It is mainly a plateau, with slopes descending gently each side of the summit ridge down to around 425 metres, but the northwest quadrant is cut by five steep sided valleys, or “dingles”, and is bounded by a steep west-facing slope.

Survey Objectives

The primary objective of the Survey was to search for ring ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*). The Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) states “its preferred breeding grounds in Shropshire are the hills of the Long Mynd and occasionally the Stiperstones. The Long Mynd population has undergone a very serious decline in recent years, from 21 pairs in 1997 to three or less in 2001”. The BAP includes the target to “survey potential breeding areas for ring ouzel in Shropshire by 2005”. Apart from the Long Mynd, The Stiperstones is the most likely breeding site and it is the only area in Shropshire from where ring ouzels are regularly, albeit infrequently, reported. The last confirmed breeding record for the species in Shropshire Bird Reports, other than from the Long Mynd, was from the Stiperstones in 1982.

The secondary objective, as requested by Tom Wall (English Nature Site Manager), was a search for and estimate of the numbers of pairs of stonechat, whinchat, whitethroat and any other species of particular interest, concentrating on Crows Nest Dingle, Mytton Dingle, Perkins Beach and Rigmores Oak.

Methodology

Six full day visits were made (two of which were interrupted by rain), on the 3rd, 4th and 27th June, and 1st, 2nd and 7th July. All visits were approximately 9.30am – 6.00pm, averaging about 8.5 hours. Only the species that primarily use the open heathland were recorded with no attempt made to cover either those species using the deciduous woodland that covers around 10% of the NNR, or common species that use a wide variety of habitats.

For ring ouzel, all sites where they are known to have bred in the past, or been observed during the breeding season, were visited at least twice. All other areas of apparently suitable habitat were also searched. A tape recording of a singing male ring ouzel was played frequently during all six search days. This is an adaptation of the method used in the national survey 1999.

For all other species, an adaptation of the methodology of the BTO Common Birds Census was used

Survey results

No ring ouzels were seen or heard, in spite of systematic search for the species. It is believed that none were present.

No curlew were seen or heard on the NNR. It is believed that none were present.

The minimum population estimates for other species on the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve, based on the 2002 Survey, is as follows:-

- Skylark: 54 pairs*
- Tree Pipit: 5 pairs
- Stonechat: 14–18 pairs
- Whinchat: 3, possibly 4, pairs
- Wheatear: 1 pair
- Whitethroat: 16 pairs
- Reed Bunting: 4, possibly 5, pairs

* Analysis of the data for skylark gives a range of 48-60, with 54 being the best assessment. This density is very high by national standards.

Red Grouse

Red grouse were not included within the survey, which was conducted much too late in the season to count them, but 12-13 calling males were recorded by English Nature staff while censusing the species earlier in the season.

Population trends

In comparison with the results of a survey in 1995-96 (Tony Cross, Birdwise Ornithological Consultants), curlew have disappeared (five pairs in 1995-96), stonechat have increased from 10 pairs, and whinchat have declined from 10 pairs.

The full report

The full report contains:

- The results of the 2002 survey, including a full description of the methodology, species accounts, habitat analysis for whinchat, stonechat, whitethroat and reed bunting, and distribution maps.
- Full comparison with the results of the 1995-96 survey.
- References and acknowledgements

Copies of the full report have been supplied to English Nature and the County Bird Recorder. Further copies are available from the author.

Leo Smith
November 2003



Common stonechat

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This is one of a series of 19 drawings produced by Rory McCann to illustrate *The Upland Birds Of The Long Mynd - Report Of The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project 1994-98*, and a forthcoming book, *Birds Of The Long Mynd*, being written by Leo Smith and to be published by The National Trust

BTO BREEDING WADERS OF WET MEADOWS SURVEY 2002

The first Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows Survey took place in England and Wales in 1982. At that time, sites were not randomly selected, so presumably, they were chosen because they were likely to hold breeding waders. The areas surveyed varied in size from eight to almost 700 hectares and, although the majority of sites were clustered along the Severn Valley and Weald Moors, other plots were located at Whixall, The Perry and Millen Heath in the north and Bucton Bog and Broadward Bridge in the south.

A repeat survey of these sites was scheduled to take place in 2001, but this was postponed for a year following the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease. The survey required three visits between mid April and the end of June. The location of any waders encountered was marked on maps provided and these were then returned to the BTO for analysis.

Over 3000 hectares were resurveyed in 2002. Many of the sites could no longer be classed as wet meadows, having been drained and now used to grow arable crops. However, others were being managed for conservation under agri-environment schemes or, in the case of Whixall Moss, by English Nature.

The following table shows the number of pairs located during the two surveys:

	1982	2002	% Change Shropshire	% Change England & Wales
Oystercatcher	0	1	100	51
Lapwing	53	24	-55	-40
Snipe	4	0	-100	-61
Curlew	26	13	-50	-40
Redshank	4	1	-75	-21

Nationally, it was found that six key sites, comprising 25% of the survey area, held 40% of lapwing, 71% of snipe and 57% redshank. Specific management, to enhance the breeding habitat for waders, had been successfully undertaken at some of these sites. Taking this into account, the local results would appear to be in line with the national findings. Hopefully, with several good wetland reserves and other wet areas being restored under various agri-environment schemes, we may see a change in fortunes for some of our waders in Shropshire.

THE BTO BREEDING BIRD SURVEY 2002

Volunteers in Shropshire surveyed 45 1km squares as part of the counties contribution to the BTO Breeding Bird Survey in 2002. The results are given in the table on pages 14 and 15 along with a summary of the previous five years. Note that the results are presented in a different format from those published in earlier reports. For a full account of the BBS in Shropshire see the 1998 Shropshire Bird Report.

The number of surveys completed each year has varied considerably, from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 61. For this reason, both the total number, and the percentage of survey plots that a species was recorded in, has been given. The remaining columns show the average number of adults found in each occupied square from 1996 to 2002.

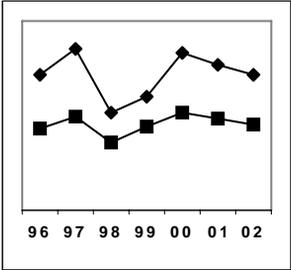
In addition, the following species were recorded in fewer than ten plots during 2002 and have been omitted from the table. The figures indicate the number of plots in which the species was recorded: little grebe 1, cormorant 1, mute swan 3, greylag goose 1, tufted duck 3, sparrowhawk 6, kestrel 9, peregrine 1, red-legged partridge 9, grey partridge 1, coot 6, oystercatcher 1, black-headed gull 3, lesser black-backed gull 5, herring gull 2, feral pigeon 6, turtle dove 1, little owl 1, tawny owl 2, kingfisher 1, green woodpecker 7, lesser spotted woodpecker 1, sand martin 2, tree pipit 1, meadow pipit 3, yellow wagtail 3, grey wagtail 1, dipper 1, whinchat 1, wheatear 5, fieldfare 1, sedge warbler 4, lesser whitethroat 6, spotted flycatcher 6, pied flycatcher 2, marsh tit 4, willow tit 2, treecreeper 2, raven 9, siskin 1, lesser redpoll 1, reed bunting 2, corn bunting 1. Some of these species, such as dipper, whinchat and sedge warbler are restricted by special habitat requirement, but, apart from the owls which are not adequately represented by this survey, the small number of records can be taken to reflect the scarcity of these species in the county.

For widespread species, the trends shown by these results provide a good indication of their status in Shropshire but, for the majority of species, the sample size is too small to provide an accurate assessment and the information is provided for interest only. However, these records still play a vital role in the national monitoring scheme, the results of which can be found on the BTO website.

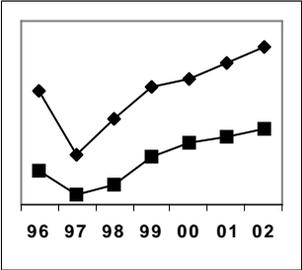
By way of illustration, the following graphs compare the local results (diamonds) with those obtained for England (squares) and also, in the case of the house sparrow, for Wales (triangles). The Shropshire totals have been converted to percentage changes and, because no fieldwork took place due to the foot and mouth restrictions, the data for 2001 has been placed mid way between that for 2000 and 2002.

The graph for swallow clearly shows how local fluctuations have mirrored those in the rest of England with peaks in 1997 and 2000 sandwiching a low point in 1998. Similar trends are also seen with robin whose numbers have risen steadily after a blip in 1997. The fortunes of song thrush also appear to be improving at last with the minor local set back in 1997 not being as evident as in England as a whole. The decline of the house sparrow has received much publicity of late and is the subject of on-going research. The decline has been most pronounced in England, particularly the southeast, whilst numbers in Wales are increasing. The situation in Shropshire is mixed with an initial decline followed by a rise and falls someway between the English and Welsh trends as might be expected given our position on the border.

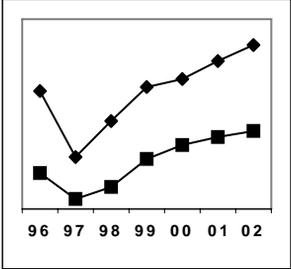
Swallow



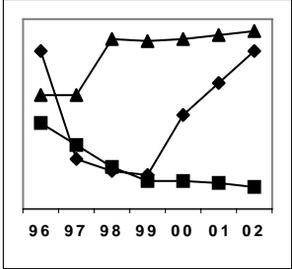
Robin



Song Thrush



House Sparrow



Species	No of plots found in	% of plots found in	Average number per occupied plot					
			1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002
	2002	2002						
Grey Heron	12	27	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.3
Canada Goose	14	31	2.6	3.4	4.1	3.5	4.5	2.6
Mallard	30	67	1.9	4.8	4.7	3.3	12	5.5
Common Buzzard	34	75	1.1	1.7	2.1	2.5	1.9	2
Common Pheasant	42	93	3.1	3.8	4	4.3	4.6	4.7
Moorhen	16	35	1.5	1.7	1.4	1.7	1.8	2.2
Northern Lapwing	13	29	3	5.4	2.9	4.4	4.5	5
Eurasian Curlew	18	40	2.3	2.5	2.8	2.1	2.9	2.8
Stock Dove	21	47	2.1	2.3	2	2.9	2.5	4.7
Woodpigeon	44	98	18.5	18.7	18.9	21.5	21.7	23.4
Collared Dove	31	69	3.1	4.1	3.9	4.1	4.1	6.5
Common Cuckoo	19	42	1.5	1.8	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.3
Common Swift	12	27	8.8	4.2	5.6	8.4	4.3	4.8
Gt. Spotted Woodpecker	25	55	1.8	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6
Skylark	28	62	3.2	4.2	4.1	3.4	3.7	4.8
Barn Swallow	39	87	7.2	7.9	6.2	6.6	7.8	7.2
House Martin	25	55	12.6	6.8	5.5	11.3	7.2	8.4
Pied Wagtail	26	58	1.6	1.6	2.3	1.3	2.1	1.7
Wren	42	93	7.7	6.1	7.6	10.4	10.3	11.3
Hedge Accentor	36	80	4.3	3.8	2.9	3.5	3.9	5.3
Robin	43	95	7.3	5.2	6.3	7.3	7.7	8.7
Common Redstart	11	24	2	3.5	3.5	2.9	3.2	2.7
Blackbird	45	100	10.4	10.1	10.8	12.1	12.5	12.8
Song Thrush	37	82	2.7	2.2	3	2.8	3.5	3.8
Mistle Thrush	21	47	1.4	1.9	2.6	2.3	2	1.8

Species	No of plots found in	% of plots found in	Average number per occupied plot					
	2002	2002	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002
Common Whitethroat	29	64	2.4	2.4	2.2	1.5	2.1	2
Garden Warbler	20	44	2.4	3	2.3	2.2	1.8	1.7
Blackcap	33	73	2.5	2.8	3.4	2.6	2.7	2.7
Chiffchaff	32	71	3	3.3	3.6	2.5	2.9	4.2
Willow Warbler	30	67	5.4	5	4.7	4.4	4.2	3.5
Goldcrest	11	24	3.2	2.8	2.6	2.7	3.1	3.4
Long-tailed Tit	18	40	2.9	4.2	3.7	3.7	2.9	2.7
Coal Tit	18	40	4	3.2	2.2	2.1	2.8	2.4
Blue Tit	43	95	11.4	9.8	9.2	8.7	8.9	9.6
Great Tit	42	93	4.5	5.3	4.8	5	6	5.5
Wood Nuthatch	14	31	1.4	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.2	1
Eurasian Jay	13	29	1.8	1.8	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.3
Magpie	39	87	4.1	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.1	4
Eurasian Jackdaw	36	80	5.7	7.3	8.7	9.3	12.3	10.8
Rook	29	64	12.3	21.2	18.3	19.4	18.1	20
Carrion Crow	45	100	16.2	13.6	13	13.6	13.3	15.9
Common Starling	33	73	15	14.5	10.3	6.5	9.5	8.8
House Sparrow	34	75	14.6	9.9	9.3	9.2	11.9	14.9
Tree Sparrow	14	31	1.8	3.6	1.9	4.4	3.6	2
Chaffinch	45	100	14.4	13.4	13.7	13.9	14	13.5
Greenfinch	32	71	3.8	3.6	3.7	4	4.7	4.7
Goldfinch	29	64	3.2	3.2	3.3	4.1	2.8	3.4
Linnet	22	49	3.6	4.7	4.3	4.9	5.4	5.8
Bullfinch	13	29	2	1.7	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.8
Yellowhammer	34	75	4.7	4.1	4.2	3.6	5.1	4.9

Allan Dawes

VENUS POOL REPORT 2002

The success of the grassland recreation at Venus Pool was apparent to everyone during the spring and summer when the fields surrounding the pool were a mass of colour, with species such as ox-eye daisy, knapweed, bird's-foot trefoil and red clover flowering amongst the grasses. All the hard work of the previous year (when over forty different people spent time strewing green hay over the fields) paid off to produce flower-rich meadows of a quality which was a very pleasant surprise to many people. The fields will be monitored for a number of years to measure the success of the project and we can look forward to an even better display in future years as the sward becomes established and more and more species characteristic of traditional hay meadows make an appearance.

Routine management work on the reserve continued throughout the year, and a number of work parties took place. Some spraying of thistles was done in spring; use of herbicides on the reserve is kept to a minimum, however, and only used when strictly necessary. The hay fields were mown and baled in late July, after the flowering plants had seeded. In future years, the fields will be grazed by cattle for a few weeks after the hay has been harvested. In the autumn both marshes were cut, the "Norfolk drain" was deepened and a bund constructed to retain water in the ditch throughout the year by means of a turn pipe. At work parties in November and December, access to the new hide was prepared and trees planted around the car park. Water levels in the pool were kept high during the winter months to accommodate the ducks and other water birds which winter here, then lowered to expose plenty of mud to provide suitable conditions for spring and autumn passage waders.

A new hide was constructed on the far side of the pool in the autumn and willow screening erected to reduce disturbance, particularly over the causeway. Tree planting, to provide screening, was carried out and a path cleared through the wood to allow access to the new hide. This new hide provides an opportunity to see the reserve from a different perspective, enables visitors to walk around the edges of the meadows, and allows close views of the birds moving through the trees and shrubs at the back of the pool.

Bird highlights early in the year included a bittern, seen most days until the last week of March, and three whooper swans which flew in at dusk each night for several weeks. A large number of curlew were present at an evening roost with

a maximum of 77 in March. Two ospreys were seen on many dates throughout the spring. Up to 11 common sandpipers were present and wheaters recorded feeding on the fields. Two pairs of oystercatchers were nesting from late March and one pair produced three young. A little egret and several white and yellow wagtails were recorded during April, with two different "blue-headed" yellow wagtails seen on the same day in late April.

Again, breeding success was low. Lapwing and little ringed plover both sat, but the lapwings failed and the two little ringed plovers which hatched disappeared after a few days. Two pairs of great crested grebes attempted to nest (one pair tried up to four times) but both had failed by the third week of April. Predation was apparent again this year, with a brood of six mallard ducklings all taken by a grey heron within 24 hours. However, moorhen, coot and tree sparrow were successful, as well as probable breeding by sedge and reed warblers, ten of each of these two species being ringed in August.

Large flocks of hirundines fed over the water most evenings during the summer, and hobbies were seen on a number of occasions. The last swallow of the year was recorded flying over the marsh during a work party on 20 October.

Fifteen species of duck were recorded on the reserve during the year, as well as 19 species of wader, including sanderling, little stint, spotted redshank, up to six black-tailed godwits and eight ruff over Easter. Sandwich, common, arctic and little terns all made appearances as did both Mediterranean and little gulls.

Three interesting Records/Recoveries during the year were i) one of the two oystercatcher chicks ringed on 22 May 2002 at Venus Pool was re-trapped and released on 10 September 2002 on Brownsea Island, Poole Harbour, Dorset, having travelled 222 kilometres in 111 days - ii) a tree sparrow caught at VP on 2 April had been ringed at Cressage on 30 May 2001 (6 km in 307 days) - iii) a curlew found dead at Venus Pool on 17 September 2002 was found to have been ringed at Allscott Sugar Factory by Chris Whittles on 17 August 1980 - 22 years ago!

Helen J Griffiths

FIRST AND LAST DATES FOR THE COMMONER SUMMER MIGRANTS

Species	First date 2002	* Average first date	Last date 2002	* Average last date
Eurasian Hobby	24 Apr	23 Apr	18 Oct	29 Sep
Little Ringed Plover	16 Mar	27 Mar	12 Sep	18 Sep
Common Cuckoo	3 Apr	12 Apr	11 Aug	15 Aug
Common Swift	27 Apr	20 Apr	3 Sep	9 Sep
Sand Martin	14 Mar	13 Mar	4 Oct	24 Sep
Barn Swallow	24 Mar	23 Mar	10 Nov	19 Oct
House Martin	3 Apr	30 Mar	25 Oct	20 Oct
Tree Pipit	27 Apr	11 Apr	28 Aug	2 Sep
Yellow Wagtail	7 Apr	9 Apr	2 Oct	25 Sep
Common Redstart	4 Apr	10 Apr	22 Aug	20 Sep
Whinchat	27 Apr	24 Apr	17 Oct	12 Sep
Northern Wheatear	17 Mar	17 Mar	5 Oct	6 Oct
Sedge Warbler	21 Apr	15 Apr	26 Aug	27 Aug
Reed Warbler	23 Apr	24 Apr	28 Sep	22 Sep
Lesser Whitethroat	15 Apr	24 Apr	28 Sep	6 Sep
Common Whitethroat	20 Apr	15 Apr	11 Sep	10 Sep
Garden Warbler	30 Mar	15 Apr	1 Sep	25 Aug
Wood Warbler	16 Apr	15 Apr	13 Jul	8 Aug
Willow Warbler	26 Mar	27 Mar	3 Oct	23 Sep
Spotted Flycatcher	5 May	6 May	19 Sep	17 Sep
Pied Flycatcher	16 Apr	17 Apr	13 Jul	1 Aug

Notes:

- * Average first and last dates are calculated from records for the years 1992 to 2001. Chiffchaff and Blackcap are omitted because of frequent over-wintering.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Abbreviations:

ASF	Allscott Sugar Factory	BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
EGM	Ellesmere Group of Meres	SSF	Shrewsbury Sewage Farm
BCC	Birds of Conservation Concern	VP	Venus Pool
BOU	British Ornithologists' Union	WeBS	Wetland Bird Survey

Summary of weather conditions:

Jan–Mar: In January, the weather was very mixed, but generally mild with just a few colder snaps. This continued into February, which was again mild, but very windy and wet. A cold spell towards the end of the month was short lived. It continued to be generally mild throughout March, especially towards the end of the month, and this resulted in the arrival of some early migrants.

Apr–Jun: High pressure dominated for much of April with a cool north-easterly air-stream, although it was warmer in the final week with south-westerly winds. May was unsettled with Atlantic systems bringing mainly cool and often wet conditions. June was again unsettled, although much warmer with occasional thunder around mid-month.

Jul–Sep: July was generally cool and unsettled with thunder storms towards the end of the month. But, in contrast, August was a warm and often humid month with further thunder storms mid month.. The warm weather continued throughout September which was exceptionally dry, though less humid with high pressure dominating.

Oct–Dec: High pressure dominated in early October but, from the second week, this gave way to more unsettled Atlantic weather. This continued throughout November and a succession of depressions crossed the country bringing heavy rain and frequent strong winds, although it was generally mild. Apart from a brief cold snap during the second week, this mild Atlantic weather continued for most of December with torrential rain towards the end of the month.

A Summary of the birding year:

The year started with three rarities from 2001 remaining into the new year. The drake **ring-necked duck** continued to be seen at Chelmarsh and Dudmaston until 3 Feb whilst, on the 1 Jan, two **tundra swans** were still at Kynnersley Moor and a first winter **Iceland Gull** at Priorslee Lake. Another first winter Iceland Gull was seen at The Mere, Ellesmere from 4 Jan until 10 Mar and a first winter **glaucous gull** was seen here on 3 and 6 Jan. A **bittern** delighted many observers at VP from 6 Jan until 24 Mar with two seen on several dates. Other notable sightings during this first winter period included a **great grey shrike** at Brown Clee on 29-31 Mar and a **black-necked grebe** at ASF on 29 Mar-6 Apr. However, undoubtedly the quarters best bird was a drake **green-winged teal** on the floods at Moss Farm, Whixall from 19 Jan until 16 Mar.

Spring saw a **little tern** at VP on 26 Apr and three **Sandwich terns** were here on 16 May. A **common crane** was seen at Whixall Moss on 3 May, up to three **long-eared owls** on the Long Mynd from 18-21 Jun and a **spoonbill** was seen at Wall Farm on 24-25 Jun and Edgerley on 27-29 Jun. The highlight of the quarter and indeed the year was, however, an adult **rose-coloured starling** at Minsterley on 16-17 Jun. A female **marsh harrier** was reported on three dates from 3 June in suitable breeding habitat.

Summer and early autumn were comparatively quite. There was another **Sandwich tern**, this time at Priorslee Lake on 6 Jul. A pair of **honey buzzards** laid two eggs but failed to hatch any young and another was reported at Ryton-X1-Towns on 8 Jul. A **wryneck** was seen in a garden at Pant on 18 Sep.

Late autumn was exceptional. Migrants included **rock pipits** at ASF on 11-12 Oct and Chelmarsh on 13 Oct and **grey phalarope** at Priorslee Lake on 16 Oct. Chelmarsh also held a **black-throated diver** on 15 Oct and a **purple sandpiper** on 27 Oct. A **gannet** was at Broome on 1 Nov and a **hoopoe** was a popular attraction in a Stableford garden on 1-2 Nov. **Firecrests** were seen at Alverley on 2 Nov and Shrewsbury on 17 Nov. Winter birds included **great grey shrikes** at the Stiperstones on 4-9 Nov, Brown Clee on 10 Nov-1 Dec and Twicken on 29 Nov, **woodlarks** at Sheinton on 4 Dec and near Woodcote Hall on 5 Dec, and a **long-eared owl** was found near Market Drayton on 16 Nov. **Bitterns** were seen at Wall Farm from 9-29 Nov, VP from 29 Nov and Priorslee Lake from 26 Nov with the latter two remaining into the new year. A drake **ring-necked duck** at Chelmarsh/Dudmaston from 12 Oct-21 Dec was thought to be the bird seen earlier in the year returning. Finally, two **tundra swans** were seen on the floods at Moss Farm, Whixall on 28 Dec.

THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

BLACK-THROATED DIVER *Gavia arctica*

Status: Very rare winter visitor

The only record for the year was of a winter plumage adult at Chelmarsh on 15 Oct (GEH).

The previous county record was also at this site, where a badly oiled, headless corpse was picked up in December 2000. Prior to this, a first year bird was present at The Mere, Ellesmere from 28 Oct to 3 Nov 1990.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Status: Common resident

A disappointing year with breeding only confirmed at Dudmaston, Stead Vallets and Wall Farm. A single juvenile was observed at Wall Farm on 16 Jun, with two juveniles present on the later date of 30 Jun. Stead Vallets held two pairs with very small young on 30 Aug.

In addition, probable breeding took place at ASF and Howle Pool. At the former site two pairs were present on 9 Jun, with three juveniles recorded on 15 Sep, whilst, at the latter site, two juveniles were observed on 3 Jul. A juvenile was present at VP on 17 Jul, but was not thought to have fledged at this site.

The only double figure count for the year came from ASF, where 12 were present on 22 Sep.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Breeding was only confirmed at a disappointing four sites, which compares poorly with the 12 sites where it was recorded in 2000. Breeding data for 2001 is unreliable due to Foot and Mouth access restrictions. Two pairs on nests at Hawk Lake are thought to have failed due to predation by grey herons. A pair at VP failed despite four valiant attempts. They were first recorded sitting on 10 Apr and they finally conceded defeat on 24 Jun. The cause of the failures is unknown. Display was noted at The Mere, Ellesmere on 16 Feb.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	10	8	6	10	25	10	-	4
Cole Mere	8	6	13	5	5	4	6	7
Priorslee Lake	3	11	11	8	5	6	10	22
The Mere, Ellesmere	24	6	21	-	15	10	15	23

The highest count for the year came from Chelmarsh where 27 were present on 15 Aug. Apart from the above monthly maxima, the only other notable count for the year came from Holmer Lake, where 20 birds included 10 juveniles.

BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis*

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

A summer plumage bird was present at ASF from 29 Mar to 13 Apr. (KTP).

The species has now been recorded at ASF in each of the last three years, following records of juvenile birds in July 2001 and July/August 2000. Prior to this, one was at White Mere in 1996, whilst a summer plumage bird at Wood Lane and a pair at Crose Mere constituted the records for 1995.

The species was last recorded breeding in the county in 1989.

NORTHERN GANNET *Sula bassana*

Status: Very rare vagrant

A single adult was seen at Broome on 1 Nov (WM).

An extremely rare bird in the county. The last published record was also an adult at The Mere, Ellesmere on 8–9 Aug 1992. However, subsequent investigations found that this bird had been picked up outside the county and released on The Mere so, consequently, the record was rejected by the records committee.

Prior to this, since the formation of the Society, there are just four other records all of which are currently subject to review. Of these, three relate to grounded individuals. One was found dead and the other two were released after feeding with one known to have died subsequently.

GREAT CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Status: Common winter visitor and passage migrant.

For the fourth year running, this species was recorded in every month of the year, with Wood Lane holding the distinction of being the only site, to achieve this. Increasingly seen during the summer, birds were recorded at six sites in May and June, with records from three sites in both July and August.

The highest count for the year came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 78 were counted on 27 Jan. Other notable counts, during the first winter period, included 32 at Wood Lane on 3 Mar, with 27 at White Mere on the same day. The highest count during the second winter period also came from The Mere, Ellesmere with a total 53 on 27 Dec. Other high counts included 26 at Walcot Lake on 13 Nov, 35 at Crose Mere on 23 Nov, 28 at Priorslee Lake on 10 Dec and 29 at Wood Lane on 7 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	10	2	1	3	4
Crose Mere	15	15	-	35	4
Priorslee Lake	2	5	6	5	28
The Mere, Ellesmere	78	8	52	47	53
Wood Lane	8	5	32	1	29

GREAT BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris*

Status: Rare winter visitor

A remarkable year with three sites hosting a minimum of three birds, but with potentially five different birds involved.

First record of the year was found at VP on 6 Jan (DGM). This bird was not seen again until 15 Jan but, subsequently, showed on most days. It proved extremely popular with observers and, with patience, gave excellent views either as it crossed gaps in the reed bed or, towards dusk, when it roosted in the willows or bulrush. However, it often went unrecorded for a number of days only to reappear, raising the question of whether it sometimes moved to an alternative site or was always present, but just not seen by the attendant regulars; the latter seems most likely.

Incredibly, on 10 Feb, two birds were seen together in flight (GEH). Sightings of single birds continued on most days up until 8 Mar when, again, two birds were seen at dusk. Interaction between the two birds was recorded on both the 17 and 19 Mar when one of the birds was observed holding its neck outstretched, with its neck feathers “fluffed out”, which would suggest either display or aggression. On the 19th, one was also observed to “dance around and quivered its partially opened wings for more than five minutes” (PN). Sightings of single birds continued until 24 Mar.

In the second winter period three were seen. The first was at Wall Farm from 9-22 Nov (PEP). This bird often showed well on the marsh and was photographed but, as with the VP birds, could go unrecorded on some days. Another was found at VP on 29 Nov (AHa, WO) and it was still present at the year end. It is interesting to speculate if this was the Wall Farm bird relocating within the county and, indeed, as to whether or not it was one of the two seen earlier in the year returning to the site. Finally, one which was found at Priorslee Lake on 26 Dec (ARS) and was also still present at the year end

A truly remarkable set of records and the ornithological highlight of the year for many observers.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

Status: Rare vagrant.

All records for the year were from, or near to, the well watched sites of VP and Wall Farm. We can only speculate as to how many birds go unrecorded from the many, little watched, wetland sites within our county.

The first record for the year was of a single bird at VP on 3 Apr and this or a different bird was then seen on 11 Apr. Two were seen here on 13 May and these, or perhaps two others, were then recorded at Wall Farm on 19 May. A single was at Wall Farm on 16 Jun. The final record for the year, was of one near Cressage Bridge on 8 Aug.

It is difficult to ascertain, with certainty, how many different birds were involved. A conservative estimate would suggest a minimum of five and, using this figure, gives a minimum of 21 now having graced the county. The first was at VP on 30 May 1992. The further expansion of this species' breeding range on the south and west coasts of England, would suggest that we can look forward to increasing records of this enigmatic heron.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

Status: Common resident.

Reports of breeding were again restricted to the well-watched sites of Halston Hall, Whittington and The Mere, Ellesmere, with no reports from smaller heronries apart from one of probable nests in the tall fir trees adjacent to the River Severn at Emstrey.

Occupied nests at county heronries:

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Halston Hall	30	31	36	23	-	22
The Mere, Ellesmere	16	23	19	21	19	23

Note: Halston Hall was not visited in 2001 due to Foot and Mouth restrictions.

Away from the breeding sites, the only double figure counts for the year came from Chelmarsh where 24 were present on 21 Jun, 28 on 15 Jul and 21 on 20 Aug.

Grey herons were recorded visiting garden pools in Oswestry and Waters Upton, whilst, perhaps surprisingly, the only site where the species was reported in all months of the year was Wood Lane.

EURASIAN SPOONBILL *Platalea leucorodia*

Status: Very rare vagrant

One was found at Wall Farm on 24 Jun (EJW) and was still present the following day. A second, or quite possibly the same bird, was recorded at Edgerley on 27 Jun (NJ).

The previous record was also at Wall Farm on 18-22 Jun 2001. However, this species remains a great rarity in the County, with just five earlier records since the formation of the Society. The first was at Newport in Aug 1965 and this was followed by four at Claverly in Oct 1972. None were then reported until Nov 1990 when one was at VP. This was followed by further singles at VP in Oct 1994 and Sep 1997.

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Status: Common resident.

Early in the year, a large flock was present at Kynnersley with 65 reported in January increasing to 80 at the end of March. During February and March, a flock of up to 25 roosted at VP after spending the day on meadows at Crosshouses; they were often accompanied by three whooper swans. It is probable that many from this flock were included in a count of 35 recorded on the River Severn at Atcham on 20 Apr.

A total of 32 pairs were recorded breeding, mostly on central and northern pools, meres and rivers with few pairs in the south. Two pairs in Telford failed to hatch any cygnets due to vandals and whilst a pair at Springfield Mere, Shrewsbury hatched four cygnets from eight eggs they were, unfortunately, predated by mink. Including these birds, a total of 149 cygnets were reported.

Breeding was confirmed at two new sites this year. A pair with eight cygnets were reported on a new pool on the golf course at Hawkstone and a pair on the River Teme at Ludlow had four cygnets. One of these was taken into care having swallowed fishing line, but it was successfully treated and released later.

A pair that had nested at Priorslee for the previous 12 years moved to a site near Shifnal and together with nine cygnets, had to be rescued when they tried to cross the M54 to get to Priorslee Lake! They were, subsequently, released on the River Severn at Cressage because a young pair had nested at Priorslee raising six cygnets. The adults flew back to Priorslee in November but were then taken into care, the female with a hook and fishing line in its throat and the male having been “beaten up” by the young pair. Subsequently, both were released on the River Severn at Cressage.

Flocks at the end of the year were smaller than in the first winter period. Maximum site counts including 16 at Wall Farm on 19 Oct, 19 at Howle Pool on 3 Nov, 28 at Tibberton on 1 Dec and 22 at Crosshouses on 29 Dec.

TUNDRA SWAN *Cygnus columbianus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Two adults were at Buttery Farm on New Years Day (AL), having been present in the area since 29 Dec 2001. In the second winter period, another two adult birds were found on floods near the canal at Moss Farm, Whixall on 27 Dec (AB, AHe). However, having flown in at 10.20 hrs, the birds departed east just twelve minutes later.

This species has now been recorded in the last three years and in seven of the last ten years although, latterly, numbers are much reduced and certainly do not compare to the 21 recorded at ASF in Jan 1997.

WHOOPER SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

The first record of the year was of six on 13 Jan at Hayes Farm, Alberbury, which is situated on the Severn/Vyrnwy flood plain, the traditional area for this species. Eight were reported nearby at Cae Howell on 3 Mar. The majority of records in the first winter period, however, related to three birds in the Crosshouse/VP area from 15 Jan to 15 Mar. These birds spent daylight hours on fields adjacent to Crosshouses village before flying in to roost at VP. They were often in the company of mute swans. The only other record in this period was of two in flight near Wall-under-Heywood on 20 Mar.

The first to return to the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence were 14, comprising 10 adult and four juveniles, at Alberbury on 12 Nov. This represents the best Shropshire count since 1998, when 19 were present in the same area. Subsequently, two were reported at Ponthen on 17 Nov and 8 Dec, five at Hayes Farm on 8 Dec and two at Pentre on 16 Dec.

Four adult and three juvenile birds were present on a stubble field at Quina Brook near Wem from 30 Nov to 8 Dec, with six birds present at this site on 23 and 24 Dec, an adult having departed. What were almost certainly the same six birds, were seen in flight and calling, over Whixall Moss on 26 Dec, the birds departing to the north east without landing.

The final records of the year concerned three birds in the Crosshouses/Count area from 28 Dec until the year end. They were thought likely to be the same birds seen earlier in the year returning to the site although, interestingly, they were not reported at VP during this period.

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE *Anser brachyrhynchus*

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

During the first winter period, a total of four at Tittenley Pool on 13 and 17 Jan represented the largest count of the year. Also in January, one or two birds were recorded at ASF, Buttery Farm, Chelmarsh, Kynnersley, VP and Wall Farm whilst a single at Middle Pool, Trench was the only Feb record.

The only record later in the year was of a single bird which was recorded sporadically at VP from 21 Aug until 17 Nov.

With no records of skeins this year, we cannot be confident of the provenance of the birds recorded. However, the concentration of records in January, may give credence to the birds being of wild origin.

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant

Formerly a common winter visitor to the county, the decline in recent years continues with the only records for the year coming from VP.

Three birds of the more common Siberian race *A.a.albifrons* were present on 16-17 Feb and then again from 16 Mar to 4 Apr. Not recorded every day, probably due to the fact that the birds used the pool primarily for roosting, often flying in after dark. Where they spent daylight hours is open to speculation. The final record of the year was of an adult bird, associating with a greylag goose, on 17 Dec.

Despite the decline in flock sizes, this species has been recorded in nine of the last ten years, with 1999 being the only blank year.

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*

Status: Common feral resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Polemere	200	-	-	-	-	-	200
Shavington Big Pool		27	140			191	164
VP	135	133	298	27	258	191	170

In addition to the above counts, 235 were at Tittenley on 17 Jan, and 120 at Polemere on 24 Jul. Double figure counts were made at Aston Square, Oswestry, Chelmarsh, Ebnall Hall, Hales and Shelvock.

Breeding was confirmed at ASF, Betton Moss, Dudmaston and VP.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

Status: Common feral resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	300				
Chelmarsh	245		55	-	1
Chetwynd Park	100	68	120	104	105
Cole Mere	7	19	538	110	480
Isombridge Gravel Pit	-	-	400	515	-
Prees Wood	331	66	-	-	-
Priorslee Lake	132	20	64	120	59
The Mere, Ellesmere	10	84	172	329	53
Tittenley Pool	268	2	-	496	-
VP	290	300	610	402	380
Whixall Moss	300	500	-	257	64

In addition to the above, significant counts included 1036 at Wood Lane on 21 Sep, 500 at ASF on 29 Aug, 750 at Shavington Big Pool on 31 Aug and 750 at VP on 22 Sep. The Wood Lane count was the highest for the year and this is the second successive year that counts in excess of 1,000 birds have been made at single sites.

Continues to be poorly recorded as a breeding species, with breeding pairs confirmed at just twelve sites. Three separate broods of six, four and one were recorded at ASF, whilst, at Priorslee Flash, on 9 May, two adults guarded a crèche of 30 goslings.

BARNACLE GOOSE *Branta leucopsis*

Status: Scarce feral resident and rare winter visitor

Single birds were reported from nine widespread sites within the county. Three birds were present at Tittenley Pool on 17 Jan, four at VP on three dates in September and four reported flying low to the north west at Alberbury on 8 Dec.

No records of breeding, although a hybrid barnacle/Canada goose was present at VP on 10 and 22 Sep, in addition to four “pure” birds.

BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicula*

Status Rare winter visitor and passage migrant

The only record for the year was of a bird of the dark-bellied nominate race which spent five minutes on the shoreline of Cole Mere on 21 Apr (AB).

Recorded in seven of the last ten years.

COMMON SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant and scarce summer visitor

Recorded in every month of the year, with the well watched-sites of ASF, VP and Wood Lane providing the predominance of records; no single site recorded birds present in every month of the year.

The only double figure counts, excluding juveniles, came from Wood Lane where the monthly maxima were 11 on 27 Jan, 18 on 15 Feb, 17 on 23 Mar, 14 on 19 Apr and 14 on 11 May.

Breeding was confirmed at both ASF and Wood Lane. At the former site, two adults with eight juveniles were recorded between 9 Jun and 26 Jul, whilst at the latter, two adults with 10 juveniles were present from 1-29 Jun. Also recorded during the breeding season at Shelvock and VP, although there is nothing to suggest that breeding occurred.

MANDARIN DUCK *Aix galericulata*

Status: Rare feral resident

There was no reported breeding this year, although breeding season records concerned a female and five males on the River Teme, Ludlow in April and two males on the River Severn at Apley Park in May.

The highest count of the year was 15 at Dudmaston on 7 Oct, where four were present on 10 Nov and a single on 19 Nov. The released male at Priorslee Flash was seen in February and March, whilst a single bird was at The Mere, Ellesmere on 16 Oct.

The only other records for the year came from the River Teme, Ludlow, where a female and two males were present on 12 Jan and one female and three males on 27 Jan.

EURASIAN WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Status: Common winter visitor and passage migrant

During the first winter period, counts in excess of 100 birds included 137 at Cae Howell on 13 Jan, 145 at Whixall Moss on 19 Jan with 159 here on 3 Feb and 120 at Ponthen on 10 Feb. What turned out to be the highest count for the year came from the favoured River Severn flood meadows, when an impressive 1203 were present at Hayes Farm, Alberbury on 10 Feb. This site had previously hosted an incredible 1370 birds in Dec 2000.

Recorded at just six sites in March, with the last record of the spring being four at The Mere, Ellesmere on 9 Apr. The first returning bird was a single bird at ASF on 22-31 Jul and, in August, five were at Priorslee Lake on the 26th and two were at VP on the 29th.

Towards the end of the year, the highest count was 216 birds at Oss Mere on 28 Dec, with 125 at Ebnall Hall, near Gobowen on 25 Dec, the only other three figure count. At Chetwynd Park, 91 were present on 24 Nov and 98 on 1 Dec. The floods adjacent to Whixall Moss held 99 birds on 28 Dec whilst counts in excess of 50 birds came from Shavington Big Pool, The Mere, Ellesmere and White Mere.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	8	2	91	98
Hayes Farm, Alberbury	-	1023	32	40
Oss Mere	25	2	31	216
The Mere, Ellesmere	32	39	5	94
Whixall	145	159	12	99

GADWALL *Anas strepera*

Status: Scarce winter visitor, passage migrant, rare resident (RBBP)

Recorded from 10 different sites throughout the central and northern parts of the county; July was the only month in which the species was not reported. The highest counts for the year came from Sambrook Mill Upper Pool where 18 were present on 26 Oct and 17 on 3 Nov. The only other double figure counts comprised 11 at Ellerton on 21 Sep, 11 at Dudmaston on 7 Oct and 10 at Chelmarsh on 22 Oct.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	6	7	5	6	-	-	2	6	10		-
Dudmaston	-	9	4	3	-	-	-	6	11		5
VP	5	5	7	-	1	2	-	1	-		-
Wood Lane	2	2	4	4	-	-	-	-	2		-

Breeding season records came from Chelmarsh, VP and Wood Lane, although there is nothing to suggest that breeding took place. A juvenile at Priorslee Lake on 29 Aug is not considered to have fledged at this site

COMMON TEAL *Anas crecca*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	300	180	50	155	210	300	350	-
Chelmarsh	11	1	10	1	55	42	4	25
Hayes Farm, Alberbury	6	47	220	-	-	-	18	40
Venus Pool	36	13	18	38	51	40	30	42
Wall Farm	40	250	150	6	4	60	400	300
Whixall Moss	232	108	132	88	-	-	243	252
Wood Lane	191	57	39	12	21	45	96	112

The highest counts for the first winter period came from ASF and Buttery Farm where 300 birds were present on 13 Jan and 21 Jan respectively. Other significant counts included 232 on the Moss Farm floods, Whixall on 26 Jan, a site record of 191 at Wood Lane on 26 Jan, 250 at Wall Farm on 3 Feb, 150 at Ponthen on 10 Feb and 220 at Hayes Farm, Alberbury on 3 Mar.

The second winter period produced the years highest count when 400 were present at Wall Farm on 24 Nov. Other maximum site counts included 120 at Dryton on 10 Nov, 350 at ASF on 12 Nov, 150 at Ponthen on 18 Nov, 96 at Wood Lane on 30 Nov and 252 on the Moss Farm floods on 16 Dec.

Breeding season records came from six locations including a traditional Long Mynd site. Breeding was suspected at Whixall Moss, where two females engaged the observer in short flight distraction display on 17 Jun, although no juvenile birds were seen.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL *Anas carolinensis*

Status: Very rare vagrant

A male was at Whixall from 19 Jan until 3 Mar (AHe,AB).

It was found on the flooded fields, adjacent to the canal at Moss Farm and proved popular during its stay. It was often found away from the main teal flock, in the company of a presumed female common teal.

This is the third county record of this, North American cousin of common teal and follows those at VP in 1996 and ASF in 2001.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Status: Common resident

Three figure counts came from ten widespread sites within the county. In addition to those shown in the following table, 106 were at Brown Moss on 6 Jan with 101 at Oss Mere on the same day. Counts of 137 on 13 Jan and 107 on 3 Mar came from the River Severn at Shrewsbury.

Ignored by many observers as a breeding species, it was reported from just 12 sites, which compares unfavourably with the 21 sites from which breeding was reported in both 2001 and 2000. The earliest reported breeding was at Clun, where a female with 11 juveniles was noted on 27 Mar. No particularly late breeding records were received. A brood of six ducklings, which were first seen

at VP on 19 Apr, are thought to have all been eaten by a grey heron; predation of three of the young birds was definitely observed.

A hybrid mallard/northern pintail was reported at Middle Pool, Trench on 10 Dec (MGG).

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	53	30	16	-	11	50	85
Cole Mere	78	31	21	86	106	54	110
Hayes Farm, Alderbury	14	30	180	-	18	24	300
Howle Pool	35	8	7	113	67	81	74
Priorslee Lake	38	18	14	74	50	69	46
Shavington Big Pool	85	22	-	-	62	25	14
The Mere, Ellesmere	350	138	104	196	76	92	84
VP	146	44	1	182	92	55	40
White Mere	50	59	30	127	45	129	125
Whixall	300	310	70	-	-	-	388

NORTHERN PINTAIL *Anas acuta*

Status: Scarce winter visitor, passage migrant

Whilst still a scarce winter visitor to the county, recent years have seen some significant flocks no more so than at the favoured site of Hayes Farm, Alberbury, which is situated in the Severn/Vyrnwy floodplain, and soon attracts large numbers of wildfowl if water levels are favourable. This year was no exception, with 341 present on 10 Feb (MW), quite possibly the highest count ever recorded within the county. In addition, 44 were recorded on 3 Mar and a count of 40 on 8 Dec was the highest for the second winter period.

Maximum counts at Hayes Farm, Alberbury:

1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
127	15	320	40	341

Away from the above site, the only double figure count in the first winter period, was 15 on the Moss Farm floods, Whixall on 3 Mar. Other records came from Coton Hill, Shrewsbury, VP and Wood Lane.

The first returning birds were reported at ASF on 29 Aug. Following this, ones and twos were reported in September at Chelmarsh, The Mere, Ellesmere and VP, but there were no records at all in October and November. During December, in addition to the 40 at Hayes Farm mentioned earlier, records were received from Buttery Farm, Dudmaston and the Moss Farm floods, Whixall Moss where six were present on 28 Dec.

The released “wing clipped” male at Priorslee Flash, was reported to be in poor condition on 9 May.

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*

Status: Rare passage migrant

The only spring record was of two pairs on an irrigation reservoir between East Wall and Gilberries on 28 Mar (ACu).

The first post breeding record was of an eclipse male at ASF from 14 -21 Jul (AL). An eclipse male at VP on 16 Jul (GEH) might well have been the same bird. The final record was of a juvenile at VP on 29 Aug (GJW).

Surprisingly, and certainly bucking the trend of recent years, neither of the birds reported at VP remained for more than one day.

NORTHERN SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	19	-	23	12	2	-
Chetwynd Park	13	-	18	-	166	119
The Mere, Ellesmere	9	3	-	14	8	13
VP	5	4	55	17	3	1
Oss Mere	86	13	-	-	70	-
Whixall Moss	14	13	-	-	-	14

The highest count for the year came from the favoured site of Chetwynd Park where 166 on 17 Nov represented the highest county total since Oct 1995 when 180 were recorded at the same site. Another favoured site for this species is Oss Mere where the highest count for the first winter period of 86 on 14 Jan was made; a total of 70 here on 27 Nov is also noteworthy.

Away from these sites, the only count to exceed 50 came from VP where 55 were present on Sep 14. The first returning bird, excluding potential breeders, was at ASF on 16 Jul and numbers built up here in August peaking at 26 on the 22nd. Another Aug record was of five at Shavington Big Pool on the 31st. Recorded at six sites in September after they became more widespread.

Recorded from VP in every month of the year and it seems likely that a pair, which were present during the breeding season, may have attempted to breed. Probable breeding also came from Whixall Moss where two females allowed close approach on a small pool, neither birds flushed and both gave a two syllable call. However, no juvenile birds were seen at either site. The last confirmed breeding in the county was at VP in 1990.

COMMON POCHARD *Aythya ferina*

Status: Common winter visitor, rare resident (RBBP)

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	-	-	-	-	36	68
Cole Mere	6	-	9	-	4	47
Priorslee Flash	-	-	-	14	14	50
Priorslee Lake	6	11	7	33	47	66
The Mere, Ellesmere	71	2	-	23	12	2
VP	40	30	7	21	35	23

Recorded in every month of the year except July, with unseasonal birds at ASF, VP and Wood Lane, again raising hopes that the bird will return to breed in the county. At VP, five were present on 13 May and a pair on 27 May whilst at Wood Lane a single male lingered until the 16 Jun. Sadly, there is nothing to suggest breeding occurred.

With the exception of the above, all birds departed the county in Mar, the last record being two at Monkmoor Pool on the 23rd. The first to return in the autumn was one at ASF on 31 Aug, after which birds were recorded at four sites in Sep with a count of five at The Mere, Ellesmere on the 24th being of note.

In addition to those shown in the table, double figure counts came from a further ten sites with 30 at Ponthen on 17 Nov the most noteworthy.

RED-CRESTED POCHARD *Netta rufina*

Status: Rare vagrant

Just one record for the year, a female which was present on the Moss Farm floods, Whixall on 9 Feb (GEH).

A problematic species in terms of origin. Winter records would perhaps suggest genuine vagrancy, but feral or captive origin remains more likely. This was the second successive year that the species has been recorded in the county, following one at Chelmarsh on 1 Jan 2001. Prior to this, the previous two records were both at Chetwynd Pool in Oct 1996 and Dec 1995.

RING-NECKED DUCK *Aythya collaris*

Status: Rare vagrant

The adult drake that was found at Chelmarsh on 28 Dec 2001, remained at this site until 3 Feb and was also reported at nearby Dudmaston on 27 Jan.

A drake found at Chelmarsh on 12 Oct is thought to be the same bird returning and, true to form, it often commuted to nearby Dudmaston. Interestingly, the bird was recorded at both sites on 28 Oct, although there is nothing to suggest that more than one bird was involved.

In 2001, in addition to the drake at Chelmarsh, two females were at VP. However, the encouraging number of records in the last two years followed a run of five blank years with the previous record being a drake at Oss Mere in 1995.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Other than those shown in the table, no counts reached 50. However, notable counts included 48 at ASF on 9 Apr, 46 at Wood Lane on 7 April, with 47 on 15 Jun, 22 at Chelmarsh on 22 Jul, 34 at Shavington Big Pool on 17 Nov, 49 at Showell Mill on 22 Dec and 37 at Oss Mere on 26 Dec.

Recorded in all months of the year at both Priorslee Lake and VP. Breeding was very poorly reported with confirmation at just ASF and Dudmaston, but let us hope that this is symptomatic of observer apathy, rather than a genuine decline in breeding numbers.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	120	2	15	162	120	95	155
Chetwynd Park	-	19	18	11	16	116	87
Dudmaston	65	-	-	-	23	40	30
Priorslee Flash	45	38	37	-	58	11	10
Priorslee Lake	26	31	27	28	67	62	59
The Mere, Ellesmere	57	40	40	63	31	30	24
VP	43	28	39	6	34	26	72

GREATER SCAUP *Aythya marila*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

There were two records. The first was a male at VP on 15 Jan (HJG). Present for one day only, this is the fourth year in succession that the species has been recorded at the site. The second was a female at Chelmarsh from 13 Feb to 20 Mar (JMa), although reports suggest that it might have been present from as early as 3 Feb.

An average showing for recent years.

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Status: Uncommon visitor

Two were seen, the first was a male at Cole Mere on 7 Apr (DAB) and the second was also a male at VP on 19 Jun (GEH). Unfortunately, both birds restricted their stay in the county to just one day.

More or less annual and recorded in nine of the last ten years, with 1998 being the only blank.

COMMON GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*

Status: Common winter visitor

Traditionally, the majority of records come from the northern meres and this year proved to be no exception. The Mere, Ellesmere held the largest numbers for both winter periods with maximum counts of 45 on 2 Feb and 27 on 17 Nov but counts at Cole Mere and White Mere were also in double figures. In the second winter period, double figure counts were achieved at each of these sites plus Crose Mere. Away from this area, Dudmaston in the south east of the county is much favoured and double figure counts were made in both winter periods.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	8	1	4	1	2	7
Cole Mere	14	27	27	-	14	19
Crose Mere	6	-	4	-	12	4
Dudmaston	6	14	10	-	1	12
Oss Mere	2	4	7	-	-	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	25	45	28	5	27	17
White Mere	13	12	11	4	10	4

Most birds departed the county in March with the last being four at Dudmaston on 8 Apr and one at Cole Mere the following day. The first returning bird was at Shavington Big Pool on 9 Oct following which there was a gap until the 28 Oct when birds were found at Chelmarsh, The Mere, Ellesmere and White Mere.

An interesting record concerned two adult males and a first winter male displaying to a female at Oss Mere on 3 Feb (HMP).

SMEW *Mergus albellus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

Only two records for the year. A redhead, considered to be an adult female, was at Oss Mere on 13 Jan (HMP) and a male was at Dudmaston on 3 Feb (SLH).

Not quite annual, 1990 and 2001 were the only blank years during the last 15.

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*

Status: Rare breeding species and common winter visitor

Breeding was confirmed at two sites. First, a female with eight juveniles was reported from Pentreheylin Water Mill on 17 Apr, with a female and five juveniles recorded as Ashford Carbonel on 28 Apr. Breeding season records were also received from a further nine sites and one can only speculate that, given the preponderance of suitable breeding habitat within the county, breeding success may well be under recorded.

As in 2001, the largest count for the year came from VP, where 59 birds roosted on 16 Jan. The only other count to exceed 50 birds came from Shavington Big Pool where 57 were present on 13 Jan.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	37	22	17	-	20	35
Cole Mere	23	5	10	-	12	9
Crose Mere	4	24	4	-	5	5
Oss Mere	9	7	-	-	11	23
Leighton/ Buildwas	2	-	3	16	-	-
Shavington Big Pool	57	3	-	14	9	3
The Mere, Ellesmere	8	5	7	2	7	19
VP	59	2	14	2	12	37

Away from the above sites, double figure counts were made at a further 12 locations, with 20 plus recorded at Atcham Bridge, Dudmaston and twice at Walcot Lake, Lydbury North. Of these, 45 at Dudmaston on 14 Dec was the most noteworthy.

RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Status: Uncommon resident

Only recorded in double figures from five sites within the county, with the largest count being 19 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 6 Jan. Traditionally, maximum winter counts at The Mere have exceeded 30, but there has been a

decline in the last two years. Other notable counts included 10 at VP on 17 Mar, 14 at Brown Moss on 23 Apr, 15 at Howle Pool on 1 Sep and 16 at Shavington.Big Pool on 16 Nov.

Confirmed as breeding at just two sites. A pair with six young was reported at Howle Pool on 31 May, whilst a female with five juveniles was at ASF on 10 Aug. However, in addition, breeding season records came from Brown Moss and Priorslee Flash. None were found at Hawk Lake where, historically, up to three pairs have been present. The protracted breeding season of this species, may account for successful breeding going unrecorded at traditional sites.

HONEY BUZZARD *Pernis apivorus*

Status: Rare summer visitor (RBBP)

As stated in the 2001 Shropshire Bird Report, this species is now confirmed as having bred in the county since at least 1998. The established pair laid two eggs in a new nest across the valley from the wood that had previously been used. Unfortunately, the eggs did not hatch, resulting in a failure for the second consecutive year. This species' foothold as a breeding bird within the county is, consequently, extremely tenuous.

In addition to the breeding pair, one was seen at Ruyton-XI-Towns on 8 Jul (TWh).

RED KITE *Milvus milvus*

Status: Uncommon visitor

Twenty seven were seen at 24 sites. Most, as expected, were in the south-western sector of the county and 20 of the reports were in the first half of the year. All records were of single birds.

Between 17 Feb and 14 Jun, birds were seen at Arscott, Batch Valley, Bayston Hill, Berriewood, Bridgnorth, Chapel Lawn, Chelmarsh Reservoir, Habberley, Long Mynd, Panpunton Hill, Shelve, Shifnal, Skyborry Green, Stableford, Stiperstones, Upper Teme Valley, Venus Pool and Whitcliffe.

There was then a gap of over two months until the next sighting. It is interesting to consider the significance of this break in records, but could be accounted for by wandering Welsh birds returning to their breeding grounds. However, limited breeding in some, as yet undiscovered, part of Shropshire can not be entirely ruled out.

The records in autumn were at Harnage, Trefonen, Berrington Top Pool, Kempton near Walcot, Morville, Chelmarsh Reservoir and Inwood. The record at the latter site on 7 Oct turned out to be the last of the year (cf. 2001 Shropshire Bird Report, when the last record was on 11 Sep). Again, is this significant? Perhaps, during post breeding dispersal, birds push out into Shropshire, but then move back to the easier pickings around the now numerous winter feeding sites in mid-Wales.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Status: Rare passage migrant and summer visitor

A female was seen at a site in the north of the county on 3 Jun, 30 Jun and 25 Aug. Although the area has some potential as a possible breeding site, breeding was not suspected.

Assuming the same female was involved in all of these sightings, this represents the 20th county record. The previous ten records have occurred in the last six years after a blank stretching back to 1990. It would seem, therefore, that this species is now occurring much more regularly in the county than formerly, perhaps reflecting improved breeding success nationally.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

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

An excellent year with probably seven or eight individuals seen. These included long staying, but typically wide ranging, birds on the Long Mynd in the first winter period, and in the Wall Farm / Weald Moors area in the final quarter of the year.

On 14 Feb, records came from Inwood (RH), Townbrook Valley (DSk) and Ragleth Hill (RPK) in the Long Mynd area. Reported as a female or immature, these records almost certainly refer to the same widely ranging and, possibly newly arrived individual. What is presumed to be the same bird was reported at Batch Valley, Wild Moor and Haddon Hill on a further five occasions up to 25 Feb. There were, however, no subsequent sightings until 29 Mar (GG), when a ringtail was hunting near the triangulation point. Records were then received from the Gliding Station, Round Hill, and finally at Wild Moor on 24 Apr. With gaps of as much as 32 days between sightings. It is unclear if more than one individual was present on the Long Mynd during this period. However, all sightings referred to a female or immature and a single individual seems most likely.

Other records in the first half of the year were of a female between Roden and Poynton on 29 Mar (NP).

On 6 Oct, a female was seen at Wall Farm (MGG, PJ), which was to remain in the area until the year's end. Although this bird was not actually reported at Wall Farm between 17 Oct and 24 Nov, a female was seen on the nearby Weald and Eyton Moors during this period, so, presumably, it remained in the vicinity throughout. Remarkably, on the date of the female's re-appearance at Wall Farm on 24 Nov a male was also present at the site (Wall Farm logbook). This bird was seen again on 7 Dec (ARS, EJW).

The remaining records involved a male on the Stiperstones on 24 Oct (DH), a ringtail on the same site on 9 Nov (AL) and a female at Cow Ridge on the Long Mynd on 26 Nov (CU), which was seen to catch prey.

Numerically, this was the best year since 1993 when probably 10 were seen, although none of those records involved lingering individuals as in the year under review.

NORTHERN GOSHAWK *Accipiter gentilis*

Status: Scarce resident (RBBP)

Fourteen occupied nests were recorded and at eight of these 15 young were successfully fledged. All of the nest failures were thought to be due to natural causes. Although the number of occupied nest sites represents the highest yet recorded, the fledging rate was disappointingly low and the worst since 1998.

Away from the known breeding areas, a female was seen at Millenheath near Prees on 21 Mar, one was seen distantly from VP on 29 and 30 Mar; on the first occasion, it was soaring with eight common buzzards.

One was seen at Wood Lane on 13 Oct and again on 3 Nov.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Status: Resident

Widely reported in ones and twos from 97 sites. The highest number seen together was three at Market Drayton on 3 Mar.

Prey taken included two white doves at Aston Square, Oswestry and a bat species at Atcham Bridge at dusk. Also taken were goldfinch, pied wagtail, blue tit, starling and blackbird.

Several unsuccessful attacks were noted. At Aston Square, one was observed diving into a bush after a mistle thrush. However, at the same site a few days later, the tables were turned and a sparrowhawk was seen to be dive bombed by a mistle thrush! At Attingham Park, one made several attempts to catch blue tits from feeders by launching itself off an office windowsill, whilst at Chetwynd Park a wood nuthatch was narrowly missed. At Tedsmere, a sparrowhawk caught a blackbird but released it when mobbed by other blackbirds and at Wall Farm a female chased a common teal low over the marsh before breaking off and alighting in a large willow. Other sparrowhawks were mobbed by potential prey species including barn swallows and pied wagtails

The most interesting encounter was at Longnor, where a sparrowhawk went after a dipper which promptly went underwater and the sparrowhawk flew up with its talons dripping water! Dipper is not mentioned as a sparrowhawk prey species in Dr. Ian Newton's monograph "The Sparrowhawk", and such interactions are probably rarely witnessed due to the viewing restrictions of the habitat involved.

There were no confirmed breeding records, but this is undoubtedly a widespread resident, breeding in reasonable numbers throughout the county.

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

Status: Common resident

A total of 519 records, submitted from 169 sites, demonstrates the popularity of this species which is clearly extremely widespread and abundant. Indeed, it would be difficult to find an area within the county where one could spend even a short amount of time without seeing at least one in the air. It now seems a long time since common buzzards were largely confined to the wooded hills in the south west of the county; how times have changed!

By far the largest count was an impressive 29 seen from Wood Lane on 24 Mar. Good soaring conditions, i.e. suitable thermals, can often attract all the common buzzards from a wide area into the air at this time of year. Other double figure counts included; 10 at Bury Ditches, 10+ at Chapel Lawn, 12 at Hayes Farm/Alderbury, 10 at the Stiperstones, 15 at Trefonen in a freshly tilled field, 15 at West Felton and 10 Withington.

Birds were seen talon grappling at Adderley and VP and one sat on a street light in Ironbridge on 7 Dec. One present at Wall Farm on 19 Oct was stated to have superficially resembled a rough-legged buzzard, and a very pale juvenile was present at Bucknell.

Confirmed breeding at Adderley where two young were fledged from an isolated oak tree, Leebootwood, Longford Moors, Short Ditch and Woolston near Wistanstow.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Another excellent year with birds lingering in the county from mid-March until at least mid-July and, even more remarkably, a pair were observed in the early stages of nest building.

The first of the year was on the fairly typical date of 17 Mar at Chelmarsh and what was probably the same bird was seen again on the 19, 20 and 24 Mar. Further records were on the 29 and 30 Apr and 25 Jun.

At VP, the first record was on 19 Mar when one was present for 10 minutes before heading off south east. It may be that there is a certain amount of commuting between VP and Chelmarsh as the River Severn, a natural corridor for ospreys, flows within about one mile of both. Records from Atcham Bridge on 3 Apr, between Leighton and Buildwas on 28 Apr, Cluddley, Wellington on 29 Apr, Hampton Loade on 6 May and Morville on 12 Jun indicate ospreys moving along the Severn Valley.

A single osprey continued to visit VP during March and April, regularly fishing here or in the adjacent trout fishery, often mobbed by the local oystercatchers and black-headed gulls. On 29 Mar, it was believed to have roosted in the tallest conifer on the skyline beyond the trout pool.

Nearby on 30 Mar, an osprey was observed perched in a tree and, remarkably, two were present in the same tree on 7 Apr. Both birds were present on the 8, 9 and 10 Apr when they were seen carrying sticks into the tree. On the latter date, one called persistently from the tree and was joined by the second bird which presented it with a fish. On 11 April the base of a nest platform was evident, but after 14 Apr, when a branch was carried into the tree, no further activity was recorded at the site.

No leg rings or wing tags were noted on either of these birds, although the latter of course are eventually lost through moult. We shall never know, therefore, whether or not they originated from the Rutland Water introduction scheme. If not, this nesting attempt would seem to have even more significance, with

ospreys recently re-establishing themselves naturally as breeding species within England. Recently published information has disclosed that three pairs of ospreys attempted to breed in Cumbria in 2001.

Away from the Severn valley, one was at Stapely Hill near the Stiperstones on 7 Apr. Birds which were probably on return passage birds were noted at Highly on 26 Aug and Shrewsbury on 11 Sep.

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Remains a common and widespread raptor with reports from 127 sites and very much a favourite with many observers, as befits a bird of such charm and character.

Bred or suspected to have bred at Brownhills (four pulli ringed), Haughmond Hill (an adult on a probable nest in a broken tree), the Long Mynd (nesting in an old carrion crow nest in rowan tree), Betton Moss (a female incubating in nest box), Norton-in-Hales (four pulli ringed) and Short Ditch (two young flying with adults on 15 Jun). Late season juveniles were also seen at several other sites indicating local breeding.

Apart from family parties, the largest concentration was six which were reported on the Weald Moors on 29 Sep.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor, rare breeding species (RBBP)

There was a noted increase in wintering records. In fact, it was the best in recent years with about 28 reports which even surpassed the good year of 1999. In the first winter period, noted at VP on five dates between 6 Jan and 30 Mar, at Longslow on 18 Feb and Prees Heath on 26 Jan and 26 Feb. Birds were seen at Rhos Fiddle on 19 Apr and Titterstone Clee on 10 Apr which are both areas with some potential for breeding, but there were no subsequent reports.

A pair were back in the traditional breeding area from the end of March and three young were fledged with at least two surviving on 10 Jul. A juvenile was seen feeding on brown hawket dragonflies on 28 Aug.

Towards the end of the year, records came from Wall Farm on 9 Nov and 5 and 26 Dec. Also from Stableford on 2 Nov, Hawkestone Park on 9 Nov,

Overley on 13 Nov, Berwick Park and Neen Savage on 15 Nov, Hinks and Pole Cottage on 19 Nov, Bridgnorth on 30 Nov, Wood Lane on 1 Dec, Kynnersley on 9 Dec and St Martins on 23 Dec.

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

Status: Rare summer visitor (RBBP)

The number of individual records (116) received is a new high, although the number of sites (47) is down on 2000 which was the best year so far. All in all, however, there is every reason to believe that this falcon is at least continuing to consolidate within the county. Records have increased tremendously in the last 20 years, particularly so in the last ten. For example, only four were seen in the whole of 1983.

The first arrival of the year was on the Long Mynd on 24 Apr. It is interesting to note that from 1997 onwards the first record of the year has always been from either the Long Mynd or VP. Other April records were two, and possibly four, at VP on the 27th and a single at Chelmarsh on the 30th.

Throughout May until late July ones or occasionally twos were seen at many sites scattered throughout the county. The exception to this was an incredible count of 18 at Whixall Moss on 11 May. All were hawking insects (on the Shropshire side of the border!) and this is easily the largest gathering of the species ever recorded in the county. The majority of these birds were obviously migrants as the same observer (AH), could only locate two of them when he returned the same evening.

Breeding was confirmed at two sites where broods of two and three were fledged, the latter from an old carrion crows nest in a hedgerow tree. Breeding was also suspected in at least four other areas.

They were often seen attempting to catch hirundines, their normal prey. Unusually, however, one was seen hunting low through an Adderley garden, where there is a well-stocked feeding station, attempting to catch passerines in the manner of a sparrowhawk.

As expected, sightings tailed off during September, the last being at Hencott Pool on the late date of 18 Oct. However, the latest county record ever is from Market Drayton on 2 Nov 1985 at a time when the species was still a rarity so far north.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor, rare breeding species (RBBP)

This was the year of 10 year BTO Breeding Peregrine Survey which had been postponed from 2001 because of the Foot and Mouth restrictions. The Shropshire Peregrine Group took part and monitored 17 sites of which 15 were occupied. A total of at least 45 eggs were thought to have been laid from which at least 38 chicks hatched and 32 young were fledged. The previous national survey in 1991 revealed just two pairs in the county, so the increase (750%) is quite dramatic and far surpassed the overall national increase which was just 9%. The West Midlands and Lancashire lowlands area, which includes Shropshire showed a 240% increase in known territories in sharp contrast to areas such as much of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where populations fell.

It was the most successful year since monitoring began with the previous record number of young fledged being 21 in 1999. With regard to nests where young failed to fledge, at one site a brood of two is believed to have fallen victim to a family of stoats which had a nest hole within 50 metres of the eyrie. At another, four two week old chicks were taken, probably by a fox, although human predation could not be ruled out. However, there were no other reports of human disturbance.

Comparison of peregrine nest sites for 2001 and 2002 reveals a marked degree of consistency with pairs which were successful in 2001 tending to do well again in 2002. One site fledged a full brood of four for the fourth successive year.

The breeding season also brought further exciting news. A pair were found nesting in an old carrion crow's nest in an mature oak tree in farmland near the River Severn. The farmer noticed that "they didn't look like crows" and mentioned it to one of our members. It was discovered in Jun during a farm bird survey when the chicks were almost fully fledged. This tree nest was the first recorded not only in the county, but, according to BTO records in the whole of England. There are a few records of peregrines using abandoned raven nests in Scotland and Wales. However, use of a carrion crow nest tree is thought to be unique.

Away from the breeding sites, especially outside the breeding season, records were frequent and widespread with well-watched sites such as ASF, VP, Wall Farm, and Wood Lane featured prominently in reports, as did many areas of the Long Mynd. Noted prey included lapwing, wood pigeon and feral pigeon.

RED GROUSE *Lagopus lagopus*

Status: Uncommon resident (BCC Amber listed)



Red Grouse
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

A co-ordinated count on the Long Mynd, undertaken by the National Trust on 31 Jan, produced a total of 30 birds. This is exactly the same number as found during the previous survey on 20 Nov 1999. One would suspect that few individuals were missed. The breakdown of the count was five at Minton Hill, four at Haddon Hill, three at Calf and Cow Ridge, six at Pole Cottage, three at Priory Cottage, five at Pole Bank, one at Wild Moor and three at Round Hill.

Other observers reported small numbers until mid Jun, usually never more than two, except for three on 17 Feb and eight on 15 May in the Pole Bank / Shooting Butts area. There was no direct evidence of breeding. The only report in the second half of the year was of one heard near Shooting Butts on 6 Aug. It is likely that the paucity of reports at this time is due, at least in part, to lack of observer coverage.

In the first part of the year, five reports were received from the Stiperstones, all were of single birds apart from two at Gatten Plantation on 22 Jan. However, English Nature undertook a spring count of calling cocks which produced a total of 12 or 13 birds, although an August count of all birds revealed just 23 suggesting an extremely poor breeding season.

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE *Alectoris rufa*

Status: Common resident

A total of 115 reports were received from 53 sites which is similar to the previous year. As is usual with this species, numbers in the early part of the year were fairly low with small coveys. Some really big counts came in the second winter period, consistent with the autumn release of young birds raised in captivity by shooting syndicates.

Only four double figure counts were received for the first winter period. Ten were at Buttery Farm on 1 Jan, 11 at Kynnersley on the same date, 12 near the

River Severn between Hampton Loade and Highley on 27 Jan and 10 were at Butter Cross on the same date.

Sixteen double figure counts were reported from the end of Sep until the year's end. The largest of these were at Bowhill Dingle, Alveley with 41 on 29 Sep and 42 on 26 Dec. Other counts included 35 at Hartlebury on 13 Oct, 23 at Neen Savage on 13 Nov and 24 at Coton Hall on 24 Dec. Some of the larger counts were noted by observers as consisting of one or more flocks of released birds coming together to feed on stubble or winter wheat. In this context, it is probably more accurate to call them flocks rather than to use the term coveys. One observer (KB), submitted nearly 27% of all records, mainly for the Severn Valley south of Bridgnorth.

Surprisingly, there were no breeding records.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Sixty six records were received from 37 sites. The number of records was markedly higher (by 27) than in 2001 with a slight increase in the number of sites. Although in itself encouraging, this may be due, in part, to observers becoming more aware of the declining fortunes of this species nationally and making greater efforts to find and record them.

The main pockets of surviving birds seem to be in the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence area, the area surrounding Sleaf airfield, the Weald Moors, and the Severn Valley near Buildwas and south of Bridgnorth. As with the previous species, however, the true status is clouded by the release of captive bred birds by shooting interests.

There were very few reports in the first four months of the year, all of ones or twos except for seven at Adeney in January and three at West Felton and four at nearby Woolston, both in April. There was no confirmed breeding, but the species was present during the season at several sites.

In the second winter period, the biggest concentration by far was an impressive 35 at Buildwas on 5 Oct. They were in the same field, but separate from, 12 red-legged partridge. A concentration such as this is strongly suggestive of captive-reared birds. The only other double figure counts were 15 at Woolston nr. West Felton on 28 Sep, 17 at Cae Howel on 6 Oct, 11 at Prees on 20 Oct, 15 at Kingslow on 3 Nov and 15 at Wall Farm on 27 Nov.

COMMON QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*

Status: Rare summer visitor (BCC Red listed and RBBP)

Fifteen records were received from 12 sites involving a minimum of 15 singing males which in terms of individuals present, is the best year since 1999.

The first record was on 11 Jun when two were calling from a hay meadow at Middle Morrey (AHe), as was a single at Morville Heath on 14 Jun (PGD). Presumably, both of these fields were due for imminent cutting. The remaining records were two at Welshampton on 30 Jun (CG), one at Lyneal on the 1 and 3 Jul, one at Lyth Hill on 4 Jul with two here on 20 Jul (HJB), one Hardwick 6 Jul (CG), one at Spoonley on 8 Jul (AG), one at Kingslow on 9 Jul (AWG), one at Sleaf Airfield on 10 Jul and 2 Aug (WRBD), one at Eardington on 15 Jul (KB), one at Kynnersley on 22 Jul (ARS) and one at Heaven's Gate, Burley on 2 Aug (WM). All records were of unseen singing birds.

The record from Hardwick was reported as "calling in the afternoon whilst playing cricket!!" Now that's a Famous Quail indeed – or is that the wrong species/commercial?

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

Status: Common resident

Most records came from observers "doing their local patches". Remains a common and widespread species with very catholic habitat requirements, being absent from only the most urbanised town centres. Many records came from garden feeding stations, but the prodigious appetite of this species for the products of the locally based, leading wild bird food supplier proves a little expensive for the pockets of some observers!

The largest count was of 50 at Sandford in the north-west of the county on 28 Sep. They were feeding in a maize field at a site noted by the observer as a breeding/shooting area. This also applies to many other areas where the species occurs in high densities and, as with other game species, the true status is difficult to determine.

Breeding was reported from only one site, but clearly under recorded. Regularly encountered on roadsides obtaining grit, often to their cost, as this species seems to have little sense of self-preservation on the highways and byways.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*

Status: Scarce breeding species and uncommon winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)



Water Rail
Painting by Nick Derry

A total of 98 records from 17 sites continued the upward trend and breeding within the county was confirmed for the first time in 12 years.

In the first winter period, a maximum of two were reported at ASF on six dates up to 4 Apr, a maximum of three were at Monkmoor Pool on six dates up to 23 Mar and a maximum of two were at Wood Lane on four dates up to

24 Feb. At VP, a single was seen on seven dates up to 1 Mar. Other single birds were recorded at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 1 Jan, Cole Mere on 24 Feb, Priorslee Lake on 17 Mar and Whixall on 3 Feb.

On 27 Jul, two, one week old, chicks were seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir, representing the first proven breeding within the county since a nest with eggs was discovered at the same site in 1990. An immature was present during mid-Aug on the scrape. One was also reported during Jul at Wall Farm on four dates and at ASF on the 13th, whilst a juvenile was at the latter site with an adult on 15 Sep.

Much more frequently reported in the latter part of the year. After one at Ironbridge on 15 Sep, records came from ASF on six dates from 15 Sep, Chelmarsh on five dates from 19 Aug with a maximum of two seen, Madeley on three dates from 15 Sep, Market Drayton on 20 Oct, VP on 15 dates with a maximum of two seen, Walcot Lake on 7 Nov, Wall Farm on 20 dates from 11 Nov with a maximum of two seen and Wood Lane on three dates from 11 Sep.

For birders wishing to obtain views of water rail, the most reliable opportunity may prove to be the new hide at VP where birds have been seen fairly regularly feeding at the back of the reedbed although, of course, with this elusive species, nothing is guaranteed.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*

Status: Common resident

Remains a very successful species, present around most areas of still and slow moving water within the county. Breeds commonly throughout the county, with confirmed records coming from Adderley, Aston Locks, Atcham Bridge, Lower Brompton, Market Drayton, Middleton Pool, the River Severn at Shrewsbury, Tibberton, VP and Wall Farm. A pair at the English Bridge on the River Severn, had an early nest washed away by floods before rebuilding and having three tiny chicks on 23 Jul, although only one was surviving a week later.

The largest count in the first winter period was of 23 at Moss Farm Floods on 10 Feb. Large counts from post-breeding and winter periods include 26 at Madeley, on 28 Oct, 21 at VP on 27 Nov and 21 at Wood Lane on 29 Aug. The highest count of the year was 26 on the Moss Farm Floods, Whixall on 18 Nov.

COMMON COOT *Fulica atra*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

The status has been largely unchanged over the last few years, although monthly maxima show considerable fluctuations from year to year. There is some indication of a long-term decline in wintering numbers over the last 20 years or so, but with several of the waters, which historically produced high counts no longer being checked on a regular basis, trends are difficult to determine.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EGM & Wood Lane	303	115	92	367	176	194	145
Chelmarsh Reservoir	120	32	-	90	172	202	238
Howle Pool	3	22	22	22	23	10	13
Monkmoor Pool	30	30	15	37	86	35	35
Oss Mere	185	109	-	-	-	80	59
Priorslee Lake	33	28	28	108	109	114	78
Venus Pool	20	62	49	23	19	43	60

The largest count during the first winter period was 303 at the EGM on 13 Jan, although 185 at Oss Mere on the same date was the highest from any single water body. Post-breeding and second winter period records were highest at EGM and Chelmarsh. The highest count of the year was 367 at the EGM on 8 Sep and, of these, 294 were at The Mere, Ellesmere.

Breeding was poorly documented, but birds were present at many sites during the breeding season.

COMMON CRANE *Grus grus*

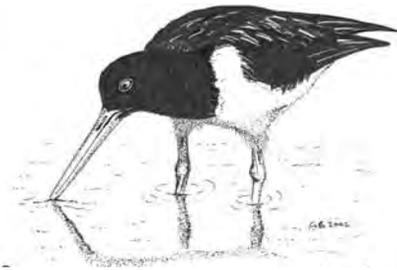
Status: Very rare passage migrant or winter visitor

One was seen in flight at Whixall Moss on 3 May (EH).

This represents the 5th record since the formation of the Society and the third year in succession that this magnificent species has occurred in the county. It follows on from the well-watched bird at Higginswood, near Market Drayton in 2000-2001.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*

Status: Scarce summer visitor and passage migrant



Oystercatcher
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

A pattern is clearly established of breeding oystercatchers arriving early at their favoured sites in Shropshire, but also departing early in mid-summer. Oystercatchers form long term pair bonds, often for many years, although it is not clear if they winter and migrate together. However, it is likely that many of the birds breeding in the county have done so for several years.

The first arrival of the year was at VP on 22 Jan. Birds were present here throughout the breeding season with numbers building to five by early Feb. Two pairs quickly established territories, and eggs were soon being incubated on the stump island and the re-profiled island. Three chicks were hatched from the former site by 19 Apr, and all were still present until 10 Jun having successfully

fledged. Two young had hatched from the nest on the re-profiled island by 8 May but, unfortunately, around this time both parents became heavily entangled around the legs with fishing line. They valiantly continued feed and protected their young, vigorously defending their territories as their own predicament became ever more desperate. To make matters worse, one of them was also encumbered by a stick, bound into the line, which it was forced to stand on like a crutch.

On 22 May an attempt was made to catch the adults to remove the fishing line. The young birds, which crouch when approached, were soon captured and held to attract the adults, unfortunately without success. Shortly afterwards, one of the entangled adults disappeared, presumably having perished and around this time one of the young also vanished. However, the second entangled adult continued to feed the surviving youngster which successfully fledged. Interestingly, on 1 Jul this young bird was being attended by a fully fit adult, presumably, an adoptive parent! It was last seen on 19 Jun.

The spectacle of the poor birds proved very distressing for many SOS members and visitors to VP and many emotional comments were made in the VP log-book. Perhaps we, as individuals, and the Society, as a conservation body, should be thinking of ways to impress on the angling community, the hazards of carelessly discarded fishing tackle. On a much more positive note, an interesting postscript to these events came when the surviving youngster, having been ringed when it was captured, was re-trapped at Brownsea Island, Poole Harbour, Dorset on 10 Sep 2002.

At Wood Lane, the first returning oystercatcher was seen on 3 Feb. Numbers fluctuated here, perhaps due to some individuals frequenting the working part of the site as well as some birds passing through. However, probably as many as seven adults remained. Two pairs bred and broods of three and four were present on 27 May. Three chicks were still present on 15 Jun and a count of nine on 21 Jul included fledged juveniles. Occasional records from Blake Mere, Cole Mere, Crose Mere and Newton Mere were likely to have involved birds wandering from Wood Lane. A single on 16 Oct, more than two months after the previous sighting, was clearly a migrant and was the last recorded in the county by the same margin.

At ASF, although there was no evidence of breeding, up to three were recorded between 29 Jan and 22 Jul and these birds probably strayed to nearby Isombridge gravel pits where they were reported on three dates during this period. Elsewhere, up to four were seen on the Moss Farm Floods, Whixall between

17 Feb and 3 Mar, two were at Ellerdine on 30 Mar and two at Market Drayton on 8 and 15 Jun. Singles were reported at Monkmoor Pool, Priorslee Lake, and on the River Severn between Highley and Upper Arley and also between Leighton and Buildwas.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*

Status: Scarce summer visitor (RBBP)



Little Ringed Plovers
Drawing by Nick Derry

The first returning bird was at Wood Lane on 16 Mar and up to six adults summered here. One pair were incubating on the main island by 6 Apr but, unfortunately, this nest failed before hatching. Two young which were hatched at a second breeding attempt were lost early and two further chicks which hatched at the end of Jun also failed to survive.

At VP, the first returning birds were noted on 24 Mar and a maximum of eight adults were present during April and May with two pairs becoming established. Both first nesting attempts failed early, but one re-laid and by early June two had hatched. By 30 Jun one of the young was lost very close to fledging, but the other went on to become the first to fledge at VP since 1997. The juvenile was last seen on 27 Jul. The second pair also re-laid, hatching four young in early July, but all were lost within a few days.

Recorded on the middle reaches of the River Severn from 23 Mar, where two pairs went on to breed, raising broods of four and one. At Chelmarsh, up to three adults were present during the breeding season and one pair fledged three young. Elsewhere, at Bromfield three were seen on 24 Mar with six there on 1 Apr and a spring migrant was at Priorslee Lake on 29 Apr.

A sustained return passage was evident at ASF from late June with a maximum of nine on 13 Jul. Juveniles were often noted, but did not originate from ASF. Single migrants were also at Wall Farm and Whixall Moss in June. The last record of the year was a party of six at ASF on 12 Sep.

GREAT RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*

Status: Common passage migrant

This species was found at just two sites on spring migration. A single at VP from 24-27 Mar got passage underway, but then there was a gap until one on 30 Apr, after which, the species was present on many dates until 17 Jun with a maximum of five on 15 May. At Wood Lane, the first was on 10 Apr followed by an impressive eight on 19 Apr. Subsequently seen on many dates up to 2 Jun.

For once the two passage periods were clearly defined, with a gap of six weeks until the first returning birds at ASF on 4 Aug. Recorded here regularly until 26 Sep with a maximum of seven on 19 Aug whilst at VP a maximum of four were seen from 8-14 Aug. Single return passage birds were also seen at Chelmarsh on 17 Aug and 23 Sep, Stanford Hall on 25 Sep, Wood Lane on 27 Aug and the last of the year at Priorslee Lake on 14 Oct.

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
ASF	-	-	-	-	7	5
Venus Pool	2	5	1	-	4	-
Wood Lane	8	3	1	-	1	1

EUROPEAN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*

Status: Common winter visitor

A very poor year in terms of flock sizes with only one three figure count. This was at ASF on 13 Jan when 184 were recorded. Eighty two had been present here the previous day and 80 remained on 16 Jan with 20 on the 27th and 30 Jan.

The only other reports in the first half of the year were a single at Chelmarsh on 1 Jan, 18 at VP on 27 Jan, 70 at Bayston Hill on 29 Jan, 40 at Kerry Ridgeway on 6 Mar, 6 at Wall Farm on 9 Mar and 25 in flight over the A53 at Albrighlee on 15 Mar. For the first time in several years, none were reported from Norbroom Marsh, Newport, which had been establishing itself as a stopover for northward moving birds in the spring.

A single was seen at ASF on the unusual date of 4 Aug and another early record was a single at Wood Lane on 11 Sep which was only the third record for the reserve. Returning birds were more widespread from early October, but always

in low numbers. The only significant flocks were 52 at Wall Farm on 11 Oct, 50 at Prees Heath on 17 Oct, 50 at Kemberton on 7 Nov, 50 at Haddon Hill on 15 Nov, 40 at Pimhill on 11 Dec, 41 at Showell Grange on 22 Dec and 50 at Wall Farm on 26 Dec. Once again there were no significant numbers recorded from the former stronghold in the Cosford/Albrighton area. Apart from becoming much scarcer, this species seems to be displaying much less site fidelity than formerly.

The decline of wintering golden plovers has been well documented. In the early eighties several flocks of over 500 were recorded annually and huge gatherings of over 1000 were seen in four of the five years from 1980-1984. Following the occasional poor year in the interim, 1500 were present at Cosford in November 1990 and four other sites held flocks of over 500 at around the same time. After this, however, the trend has been one of rapid decline.

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

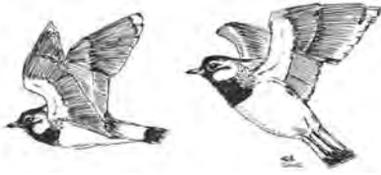
This species is giving great concern nationally as breeding numbers decline and there is no doubt that this situation is reflected in Shropshire. However, lapwing remains a popular, well-reported, species and breeding was confirmed at Broseley, Burford, Hayes Farm Alderbury, Hilton, Hindford Grange, Highley, Marchamley, Sandford, Wall Farm, the Weald Moors and Wood Lane and was attempted at several other sites including VP. Four nests at Hayes Farm were in spring barley and all were moved and repositioned by the farmer during cultivation. Any help this species can be given during the breeding season can make a difference. Thirteen nests were found at Hilton.

Monthly maxima from key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Allscott Sugar Factory	502	100	-	3	13	22	318	180	-
Moss Farm, Whixall	280	500	194	-	42	-	-	54	264
Neen Savage	300	200	-	-	-	-	-	90	200
Priorslee Lake	46	75	11	-	-	-	70	13	68
Venus Pool	10	-	9	288	300	200	6	5	100
Wall Farm	170	500	52	15	11	91	92	110	250
Waters Upton	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	120	400
Wood Lane	1643	680	258	141	400	571	500	440	595

In the first winter period, there was a huge count of 1643 at Wood Lane on 27 Jan which was a new site record by a considerable margin, eclipsing the previous best of 1000 set the previous day. At Wood Lane, lapwing roost during the day before moving out to the fields at dusk. Other notable counts included 700 at Eaton-upon-Tern on 3 Feb and 1000 at Upton Magna on 22 Jan.

Post breeding flocks began to form again by early July, but numbers generally fell below those recorded earlier in the year. The exception was a massive flock of 2750 at Prees Heath on 27 Dec. This site occasionally throws up some very large counts, but only for short periods of time. The next highest was 800 at Crudgington Moor on 29 Nov.



Lapwing
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

The count at Prees Heath was the largest single count since a scarcely credible 4500-5000 seen at Sleaf Airfield on 3 Dec 1984. In the interim, flocks of 2000 were recorded at Prees Heath in Aug 1985 and Dec 1990 and at Buildwas in Feb 1995.

A colour ringed bird seen at VP on 7 Sep, had been ringed as a chick in May 2002 on the Dyfi estuary, somewhat belying the accepted trend of general westwards post-breeding movements of this species.

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

An excellent year with probably ten individuals seen which is the best total for at least 20 years, beating the nine seen in 1998. Eight were seen in spring, and two on return passage when they are always scarcer.

The first of the year was at Priorslee Lake on 28 Apr, flying off with common sandpipers when accidentally flushed. This bird was unusually early, being the first April record since 1989 and was also the first away from VP since 1996. The remaining seven spring records were back at VP which is undoubtedly the hotspot. On 13 May, singles were seen at separate times and were considered to be different birds and these were followed by singles on 15 May and 18 May and by three on 30 May.

A juvenile at ASF on 27 Jul and another single on 10 Aug rounded off a superb year for this species.

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

A very poor year for this species which occurs annually, but in greatly fluctuating numbers. Four were seen.

Unusually, the first two were in spring at Wood Lane on 1 Jun and were the first at this time of year since 1997. On return passage, singles were reported at VP on 19-20 Sep and at ASF on 14 Oct.

PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*

Status: Very rare vagrant

One was on the dam at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 27 Oct (MO) but, unfortunately, it could not be relocated later in the day.

Subject to the current review of old records, this is the fifth record since the formation of the Society and the second in successive years following one at ASF on 18 Sep 2001.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

Status: Common passage migrant

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	6	4	-	5	-
Chelmarsh	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	3	-	-	1	-
Venus Pool	-	-	1	3	8	2	2	3	1	1	2	1
Wood Lane	-	-	2	4	3	1	3	1	-	6	2	2

It was a poor year for this species with generally low numbers involved. The only records in the first winter period were at ASF where three were present on the 8 and 10 Jan and a single was seen on 16 Jan.

At VP, a single on 5 Mar was a precursor to spring migration which got underway with another single on 26-27 Mar. Passage peaked here on 15 May when eight were present which turned out to be the highest count of the year.

As is often the case, odd birds which were present in late June and early July were difficult to assign to either passage. Return passage never reached more than a trickle with three birds on two dates in August being the highest count. The last at VP was a single on 14 Dec.

At Wood Lane, the first were two on 2 Mar and spring passage peaked at four on 19 Apr. Return passage began with three on 22 Jul but, thereafter, only ones or twos were recorded with the exception of six on 31 Oct. Two present on 14-16 Dec were the last of the year at this site.

At ASF, autumn passage began with a single on 13 Jul and peaked at six on the 4 and 19 Aug. Four on 23 Sep ended the main passage here with the exception of a flock of five seen on 3 Nov.

Singles were reported at Chelmarsh on five dates in May, a single on 17 Aug and three on 22 Aug. Torrential rain in mid-Aug resulted in flooded fields at Moss Farm, Whixall, where up to three were seen between the 15 and 19 Aug.

Other records included two at Devil's Dingle on 29 Apr; one at Cosford Airfield, on 2 Nov, three at Cranmere Bog on 3 Nov and one at Buildwas on 7 Dec.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*
Status: Common passage migrant

For the second year in succession, there was a rare winter record when two were at Moss Farm Floods, Whixall on 12 Jan. Almost as unusual was a spring record at VP, even more so as it involved a total of eight birds all of which were reeves. Found on 27 Mar they departed to the north east in the evening next day.

The first return passage bird was a single at VP on 23 Jul. This site then held three on 6 Aug, singles on the 8 and 29 Aug and 11 Sep. Another single from 13 Sep was joined by a second on 15 Sep with both remaining until 24 Sep.

At ASF, a single was present on 12 Aug, four were seen on 6 Sep and singles on 22-26 Sep and 29 Sep. Passage at Wood Lane consisted of singles on 12 Aug and 31 Oct with the latter being the final bird of the year.

A minimum of 26 individuals would seem to have been involved.

JACK SNIPE *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

In the first winter period, three were at Cole Mere on 19 Jan, with a single at the same site on 2 Feb. One was at ASF on 20 Jan. On Wild Moor, Long Mynd, four were located during a red grouse survey by the National Trust on 31 Jan, and a single at nearby Plush Hill was well-watched on 17 Feb. At Wood Lane, one was seen on 2 Feb, two on 10 Feb and another single on 15 Apr. The final bird of this period was at Wall Farm on the fairly late date of 21 Apr.

Two at Wall Farm on 10 Sep were the first of the second half of the year and another was seen here on 2 Oct. One seen at VP on 22 Oct was the only record for the reserve during the year. Two were seen at Spoonley on 31 Oct with a single there on 16 Nov. Singles at Haddon Hill on 8 Nov and Calf Ridge on 12 Nov brought the total on the Long Mynd for the year to seven. The recent run of mild winters may be the catalyst for this species establishing a pattern of wintering in the Shropshire hills or, perhaps, they have been previously overlooked.

At Cole Mere, five were on the marsh on 23 Nov, before an incredible count of at least 16 was logged on 4 Dec. This is, probably, the highest ever count in Shropshire eclipsing the 14 seen at Whitchurch in December 1995. Singles were seen at Chelmarsh on three dates in Dec with two on the 23rd.

COMMON SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*

Status: Uncommon resident, common passage migrant and winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Monthly maxima from key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	1	-	-	-	3	25	16	2	-
Chelmarsh	4	-	-	-	1		4	3	6
Cole Mere	8	18	-	-	-	-	-	25	58
Priorslee Flash	9	9	10	7	-	-	5	7	8
Venus Pool	11	11	20	3	3	11	11	6	-
Wall Farm	7	-	3	12	3	3	8	10	5
Wood Lane	17	31	9	21	19	50	40	32	32

Another very poor year, particularly in the opening months, and the number of sites from where the species was recorded dropped from 45 to 33. Counts in the first winter period were, quite frankly, dismal with just four totals of 20 or more with the only addition to those shown in the table being 20 at Hayes Farm, Alderbury in on 10 Feb.

The BTO Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows Survey 2002 (see report on page 13) showed that since 1982 the national population of common snipe has declined by 60% and the records suggest that the species is now absent as a breeding species from the whole of lowland Shropshire. However, drumming was heard on the Long Mynd on three dates in May in the Boiling Well and Pole Cottage areas whilst birds were also seen at Wild Moor during this period. Hopefully, therefore, a few pairs may have bred in these upland parts.

In the second winter period, numbers were slightly higher, although Wood Lane was the only site to produce consistently high counts with twenty plus frequently present between mid Sep and the year's end. At Spoonley, near Market Drayton, 47 were counted on 31 Oct and 105 on 16 Nov which was easily the highest count of the year. Other notable counts included 30 at Whixall on 18 Aug, 25 at ASF on 29 Sep, 25 at Cole Mere on 23 Nov and 55 on 4 Dec. Some small counts came from Whixall Moss where common snipe undoubtedly winter in some numbers. However, due to the nature of the site, it is difficult to estimate numbers.

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*

Status: Uncommon resident and winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Reported from just 13 sites. By far the largest count in the first winter period was of nine at Hawkestone Park on 23 Feb which were flushed during nest box cleaning. Elsewhere, two were at Cole Mere on 19 Jan and singles were seen at Woolaston, Ellesmere, Shavington Big Pool and Boddington in January and February.

In the autumn, one was seen at Severn Valley Country Park, Aveley on 18 and 21 Aug and singles were reported at Hencott Pool, Nipstone Rock and Candy Valley in October. Finally, numerically the most significant series of records came from Albrighton where four counts, of from eight to 15 birds were flushed on a series of shoots between 23 Oct and 13 Dec.

The mainly nocturnal habits of woodcock and its wonderful camouflage plumage mean it is rarely seen and most records were of birds which had been accidentally, or intentionally, flushed. It is likely, therefore, that that this species is more numerous, at least in winter, than the actual records suggest. However, their distinctive display flight makes breeding birds easier to detect so the lack of breeding season records is more of a concern. Just one was received this year, a single roding in the Wyre Forest on 25 May.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

The first of the year was at Wood Lane on 11 Jun and another was seen here on 14-18 Jun, followed by two on 3 Aug, singles on the 7 and 26 Aug and three on 11 Sep. The final record of the year for the county was also at Wood Lane, an unusual winter record of one on 20 Dec.

The heaviest passage was at VP. Six which were present on 14 June dropped to three next day and four present on the 17th could have been part of the original group. However, plumage details, suggested that five which arrived on 19 Jun were different birds. After a single on 3 Jul, another arrived on 9 Jul increasing to three the following day. A break of about a month ensued before the next, a single on 10 Aug. Then another single on 29 Aug increased to two the following day, these two being joined by a third individual with a broken leg from 7 Sep. This unfortunate individual was present until 20 Sep its companions having departed on the 15th. Another single was reported on 24 Sep.

Monthly maxima from Venus Pool and Wood Lane:

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Venus Pool	6	3	2	3
Wood Lane	1	-	2	3

Elsewhere, recorded at just two other sites. Singles were at ASF on 30 Jul and on the River Severn at Atcham Bridge on 29 Sep.

The records suggest a minimum of 32 individuals were seen which represents a fairly good year. Some of the birds reported in June were juveniles which would suggest they were of the nominate subspecies and possibly from the very small British breeding population. The Icelandic subspecies breeds too late in the year for them to have originated from there.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

A fairly average year with a minimum of seven birds and, possibly, as many as 11 seen, all of which were on spring passage.

The first were two at Wood Lane on 23 Apr and these could, conceivably, have been the same two that associated with roosting curlew on 29-30 Apr, although it was thought four may have been present on the latter date. It is interesting to note that a whimbrel was also noted roosting with curlew at Wood Lane in autumn 2001. Other singles were at Wood Lane on 7 and 14 May.

The only other site was VP where singles were seen on 26 and 30 Apr and on 5 May.

EURASIAN CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

Status Common breeding species, passage migrant and winter visitor

Along with Wood Lane, VP is establishing itself as a second important site for roosting curlew with the birds finding the re-profiled islands to their liking. The figures in the table are a mixture of daytime and evening roost counts for VP and almost exclusively evening roosts at Wood Lane. One found dead at VP on 17 Sep had been ringed at Walcot on 17 Aug 1980, over 22 years earlier but only 9 km away!

Monthly maxima at Venus Pool and Wood Lane:

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Venus Pool	36	77	2	2	68	20	31	27
Wood Lane	17	32	23	5	46	100	80	77

The largest count from the early part of the year was 77 present at VP during the middle of the day on 6 Mar with 67 roosting there three evenings later. These numbers quickly tailed off as birds returned to their breeding grounds. Away from VP and Wood Lane, a substantial flock of 62 was at ASF on 1 Jan, whilst counts of 30 at Isombridge on 13 Jan, 40 at Monkmoor also on 13 Jan and 40 at ASF on 12 Feb were also noteworthy.

The post-breeding roost at Wood Lane peaked at a lower level than the previous two years, although this was somewhat negated by occasional large counts at other sites including 40 at Almington on 27 Jul, 44 at ASF on 22 Oct, 40 at Isombridge on 3 Nov, 92 at Cae Howell on 16 Nov, 100 at Ponthen on 17 Nov and 60 Hayes Farm, Alderbury on 8 Dec. The latter three sites are all close together in the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence area.

Indications of attempted breeding, including song flight or other territorial behaviour, came from at least 15 sites, but there was no evidence of any success and no nests or young were reported. There were few reports from the traditional breeding area of the Long Mynd.

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

An exceptional and perhaps unprecedented year. A total of nine were seen, all on return passage.

The first was a juvenile at ASF on 4-6 Aug (MGG) and this was followed by another juvenile on the Moss Farm floods, Whixall on 15 Aug (HMP, AHe). The latter bird was part of a two-day purple patch at Whixall when waders quickly took advantage of suitable conditions following sustained heavy rain and a wood sandpiper and three greenshank were also present.

Following this, three were at ASF on 19 Aug (MGG) and two were at Wood Lane on 11 Sep (JHaw). The final record was of two at VP on 29 Nov (AO), certainly the latest county record for at least last 20 years

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant, scarce summer and rare winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

As suggested in the 2001 Bird Report, redshanks did indeed over winter at ASF and up to four were noted on several dates throughout January and February but birds seen here on 4 and 27 Mar were perhaps more likely to have been on migration. Spring passage were also noted at VP from 3 Mar until 2 Apr and at Wood Lane between 10 Mar and 29 Apr with a best count of two at both sites.

During the breeding season, odd birds were seen at ASF, Wall Farm and Whixall Moss, but with no real evidence of attempted breeding.

Autumn passage got under way from late June at VP, early July at Wood Lane and mid July at ASF. All records were of one or two birds except for four at Wood Lane on 23 Aug. Elsewhere, two were seen on River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 13 Jul and one was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 15 Jul.

The last of the year were singles at ASF and VP on 16 Nov

COMMON GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

Status: Common passage migrant

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
ASF	-	1	4	3	3
Venus Pool	-	2	1	-	-
Wall Farm	1	4	2	1	-
Whixall	3	-	3	-	-
Wood Lane	1	1	3	4	-

Another modest year with passage never reaching more than a trickle and no counts higher than four. Just one spring migrant was recorded, at Wood Lane on 15 Apr.

Singles at Wood Lane on 7 Jun and at Wall Farm on 17 Jun were almost certainly failed breeders returning south, but return passage proper was noted from mid July. A single at ASF on 11 Jul was the only one at this site until 5 Aug and, thereafter, singles were reported on 12 dates, two on two dates, three on 11 dates and four on 28 Aug.

At VP, a single was present on 13 Jul with two the following day and singles were present on three other dates until 13 Aug. Four were at Wall Farm on 14 Jul and singles were seen on four dates until 1 Sep with two present on 11 Aug. At Wood Lane, reported on 12 dates between 20 Jul and 11 Sep, mainly singles, but with three on 6 Aug and 9 Sep and four on the final date.

At Whixall, a single was on the Moss on 6 Aug and up to three were present on the Moss Farm floods from 14-19 Aug. The only other record was a single at Knighton Reservoir on 9 Sep.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

Status: Common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor

Monthly maxima from key sites:

	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	-	9	11	12	9	6	-
Chelmarsh	-	5	7	4	1	-	-
Venus Pool	1	3	4	2	1	-	-
Wall Farm	1	4	5	2	-	1	-
Wood Lane	2	8	10	6	2	2	1

During January and February, up to six over-wintering birds were reported at ASF and two were at Wood Lane, although three were seen on 30 Mar. Three were also reported on the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 17 Feb with a single here on 23 Mar. Passage was evident at Wood Lane from 30 Mar until 23 April with a maximum count of three. Also in April, single passage birds were seen at Chelmarsh, the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas and Upper Brompton.

Return passage was noted from the early date of 11 Jun when one was at VP, and birds started to trickle in here and at Wall Farm and Wood Lane from the end of the month. These early birds are probably females, which are believed to leave the breeding grounds first.

As usual, the main passage was prolonged, lasting from late July until late September and the highest counts came from ASF and Wood Lane. Being less gregarious than other *tringa* sandpipers, accurate counts are sometimes difficult as birds feed in bank side vegetation, often only giving away their presence when calling or taking flight. Apart from the sites in the table, autumn migrants were also reported at Adeney, Knighton Reservoir, Kynnersley, Newport, Stanford Hall and Whixall but always in very small numbers.

The only December records were of a single at Wood Lane on several dates, perhaps suggesting rather fewer wintering birds than in recent years.

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

A good year with four seen, all on return passage.

The first was a juvenile at ASF on 3 Aug which was remarkably joined by a second the following day (AL). Both remained until the 6th, with one of them lingering until the 15th.

Another juvenile was at Moss Farm, Whixall from 15-18 Aug (AHe, HMP). It was discovered on flooded fields, adjacent to the approach road to Whixall Moss near Morris’s Bridge after several days of heavy rain.

The final record was of one at Wood Lane on the 27 Aug (BP).

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

Status: Common passage migrant

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
ASF	-	1	-	7	10	2	-
Chelmarsh	5	2	-	-	3	-	1
Priorslee Lake	7	3	-	4	1	1	-
Venus Pool	11	4	2	3	3	2	1
Wood Lane	3	1	-	2	4	1	-

There was one report in March, a single at Wood Lane on the 24th and another early migrant was at Priorslee Lake on 6 Apr. Spring passage proper got underway on 16 Apr and at Chelmarsh, Priorslee Lake and VP the highest spring counts were made within the next four days. In addition to those sites shown in the table, spring records came from six sites along the River Severn including Atcham Bridge and Frankwell, Shrewsbury. Colour ringed birds were noted at VP in mid-April, but it has not been possible to trace information on them.

The only indication of possible breeding came from the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas where 11 were seen on 13 Jul, a count which included juveniles.

Return passage was heaviest between mid-July and mid-August, slowing to a trickle during September. In addition to those shown in the table, records were received of one or two birds at Knighton Reservoir, Market Drayton, three sites along the River Severn and Whixall Moss. There were only four October records, three from Chelmarsh and one from Wood Lane. The last of the year was a single at Wood Lane on 6 Nov.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

A summer plumaged bird was at VP briefly on 8 May (GEH).

This is a fairly typical date for this species and a number of recent records have been at VP. Recorded most years in very small numbers with the last blank years being 1988 and 1999. Normally, turnstones are birds of rocky coastlines and they migrate along well established coastal routes, so perhaps we are fortunate to get the number of records that we do.

GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Status: Very rare vagrant

One at Priorslee Lake on 16 Oct (RMS).

This was only the fourth since the formation of the Society but, amazingly, it was the third in successive years.

This is the most maritime of the three phalarope species and the Western Palaearctic population moves along essentially oceanic routes off the western seaboard of Great Britain, from breeding grounds such as Iceland and Spitzbergen, to winter off the coast of West Africa. It is also thought that a large proportion of the Nearctic population crosses the Atlantic to winter in the same area. Thus, it is normally only after deep Atlantic depressions and their associated gales in the late autumn that grey phalaropes tend to occur inland in Great Britain.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

A total of seven were seen which is at least a partial recovery from the poor showing last year.

The first three were found in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere. An adult was present on 10 Mar (AL) and two immaculate summer plumaged adults on 16-17 Mar (AHe). The behaviour of the latter two birds suggested a bonded pair. March is proving to be the peak month for this species in Shropshire. Spring records were completed by a first summer at VP on 10 Apr (GJW).

Later in the year, a first winter was in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 7 Oct (DAB), an adult was at Priorslee Lake on 11 Dec (JI) and an adult in winter plumage was at The Mere, Ellesmere on 14 Dec (DAB).

LITTLE GULL *Larus minutus*

Status: An uncommon passage migrant.

An excellent year following blanks in 2000 and 2001. A total of 13 were seen which is the highest numerically since 1996 when 14 were reported. This species was recorded every year in the 1990s, so this return to form was, perhaps, not unexpected.

The first of the year was a single in first winter plumage at Priorslee Lake on 26 Apr (PJ). An immature was at VP, briefly, on the unusual date of 21 Jun (DB), and another unseasonable bird, this one in adult summer plumage, hawked insects for 15 minutes with black-headed gulls at ASF on the evening of 16 Jul (AL).

At Chelmarsh Reservoir, a second winter on 23 Sep (SLH) was followed by two first winter birds. The first of these was on 10 Oct (MO) and the second was on 27 Oct (MO). Another first winter was present at The Mere, Ellesmere from 12-27 Oct (DAB). This bird was also at Wood Lane, briefly, during the afternoon of the 27th when it was seen to fly off towards The Mere, where it was subsequently relocated along with an adult (AHe).

The last record of the year was a group of five at ASF on 10 Nov (AL). This party of mixed age birds comprised two first winters, two second winters and one adult (AL).

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

Status: Common resident and very common winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

As usual, the majority of reports and the highest counts came from established roosts and other well-watched sites with very few reports of birds feeding on freshly tilled farmland, although this is undoubtedly still a regular habit of the species.

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	500	500	200	340	1000	5	-
Priorslee Lake	1700	1200	63	250	900	1100	2000
The Mere, Ellesmere	3000	1500	4000	-	4000	1900	3500
Wood Lane*	400	500	100	500	360	360	500
* Wood Lane is used for bathing and loafing rather than as a roost site.							

In the first winter period, the largest count was of 4000 roosting at The Mere on 17 Mar and the only four-figure count away from the sites shown in the table was of 1000 on the Moss Farm floods at Whixall on 17 Feb.

Fortunes during the breeding season were once again mixed and unclear. At VP, after a fairly slow start with just a few pairs at the beginning of May, numbers gradually built up with a minimum of 30 nests counted on 3 Jun. The first young were noted on the 8 Jun and 26 juveniles were counted on 13 Jul. Although poor, this was at least an improvement on 2001. No information was received from the nearby Berrington Pools where breeding took place in 2001.

At Wall Farm, from a peak of 12 occupied nests, up to 10 young hatched, but very few fledged. At Worfield Bog, seven nests were noted in early June, but the outcome is unknown. On Whixall Moss, the regular colony settled on the English side of the border for the first time in several years. The numbers present were impossible to estimate due to the inaccessibility of the nesting area which was situated in dense cover and surrounded by deep ditches, however, several juveniles were present in mid July.

In the second winter period, the largest count, again of 4000, was also at The Mere, Ellesmere on 14 Oct. At Cosford Airfield, a large feeding and loafing flock was present during late autumn, peaking at 1770 on 13 Nov. Large numbers were regular at Wood Lane, with birds feeding on the adjacent landfill site and then bathing and resting on the pools. The peak count was 500 but, undoubtedly, many more visited during the course of a day.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

Status: Common winter visitor

As usual, counts were dominated by records from the EGM area and, in particular, the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere. In the first winter period, counts included 130 on 4 Jan, 160 on 12 Jan, 300 on 19 Jan, 1000 on 20 Jan, 640 on 1 Mar, 750 on 17 Mar and 1600 on 23 Mar. In addition, 190 were at Cole Mere on 12 Jan and the maximum count for Wood Lane was 20 on 26 Jan. Odd birds also seen at Moss Farm, Whixall with a best count of 18 on 26 Jan. Small numbers also reported from Conover, Frankwell, Priorslee Lake and SSF.

Two were present at Wood Lane on 28 Jul which is very early but, subsequently, small numbers were recorded at this site on and off until the end of the year with a maximum of 20 on 28 Dec. The first early winter count from The Mere was of 10 on 14 Oct and others included 80 on 19 Oct, 91 on 9 Nov, 2500 on 14 Dec (the year's highest count) and 120 on 27 Dec. At Cole Mere, 40 were in the pre-roost on 4 Dec. Away from EGM, small numbers were reported at ASF, Chelmarsh (a maximum of 10 on 28 Dec), Priorslee Lake, VP and Moss Farm, Whixall.

The EGM and, in particular, the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere is clearly important for this species in Shropshire but even here the numbers roosting fluctuate with little apparent correlation to weather conditions. Even when numbers roosting at The Mere are high, relatively few feed at the Wood Lane Landfill site. Possibly they are not robust enough to compete with the larger gulls and corvids and are less agile than the opportunist black-headed gulls.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*

Status: Common winter visitor

A fairly typical year for this, the commonest of the large gulls within the county, with slightly better coverage from the roosts and regular reports of large feeding flocks elsewhere.

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	600	100	150	1500	63	1100
Priorslee Lake	95	249	-	440	1300	2500
The Mere, Ellesmere	750	650	230	1500	66	450

By far the largest count in the first winter period, and the only one to exceed the tabulated roost counts, was of 2300 on flooded fields near the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 9 Feb.

A roosting flock of 400 at VP on 10 Jun was notable for the time of year. Numbers started to build at Wood Lane from mid-summer with 109 counted on 15 Jul and 350 on 16 Aug. One found dead at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 22 Aug was bearing a Norwegian ring, details of which are being awaited.

In the second winter period, large counts 1050 and 1250 came from Cosford Airfield on the mornings of 2 and 13 Nov, with the birds appearing to have roosted overnight on the runway. A count of 1500 came from the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 16 Nov, and 700 were at Shavington Big Pool on the same date. Counts of 644, 804 and 707 came from Newport on three dates in October with these birds thought to be flying to roost at Aqualate Mere just over the county boundary in Staffordshire. The largest count of the year was 2500 at the Priorslee Lake roost on 10 Nov.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Numbers returned to more normal levels following the large influx during the winter of 2000/2001.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	20	-	-	10	7	12
Priorslee Lake	28	1	-	1	4	26
The Mere, Ellesmere	300	14	35	5	22	150
Wood Lane*	100	17	7	4	29	106

* Wood Lane is used for bathing and loafing rather than as a roost site.

The first really large count was of 300 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 20 Jan, and this was to remain the top count of the year. Recorded during every month of the year at Wood Lane with the highest counts always coinciding with peaks in the roost at The Mere. In the first winter period, maximum counts elsewhere included 20 at Chelmarsh on the 1st and 28 Jan, 28 at Priorslee Lake on 20 Jan, 33 at Wall Far on 23 Feb and 20 at Moss Farm, Whixall on 26 Jan.

Unseasonable summer records included 10 at Conover on 21 Jun, six at VP on 22 May, three at Wall Farm in late May and early June and Wood Lane hosted small numbers throughout with 28 on 6 Jul.

Numbers remained fairly low in the second winter period, the highest count being 150 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 14 Dec. Away from the tabulated sites, recorded in very small numbers at Cosford Airfield, Eardington and VP.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus argentatus michahellis*

Records of this form, still classified by the BOU as a sub-species of herring gull, remain very much on the increase, at least partly due to increased observer awareness, but possibly also reflecting a genuine range extension. In time, it seems probable that the BOU will move to elevate yellow-legged gull to full species status as most other European records committees have done for some years. One of the taxonomic problems the BOU is still considering is the status of Caspian gull *L.a.cachinnans* which is yet to be recorded in Shropshire. In the meantime, however, it is a fact that the vast majority of other British publications and most individuals, consider and count both of these forms as full species.

Few were seen in the first winter period, with a single at Chelmarsh on 7 Jan and two at The Mere, Ellesmere on 26 Jan the only records.

In the second part of the year, separate influxes appear to have occurred in late summer and early autumn. On 6 Jul, two third or fourth summer birds were at ASF with singles of a similar age present there on 20 Jul and 4 Aug. At Wood Lane, single adult(s) were seen on seven dates between 8 Aug and 6 Sep with two present on 16 Aug, an adult and a first winter were well-watched on 11 Sep with presumably the same adult again on 14 Sep.

None were then reported until an excellent count of 5 adults at Chelmarsh on 25 Sep. One or two were then reported here on five dates until the end of the year, with four counted on 28 Oct. Two seen near Cranmere Bog on 3 Nov were probably birds that would roost at Chelmarsh. At The Mere, Ellesmere, an adult

and a first winter were in the roost on 7 Oct, four adults on 8 Oct, one on 12 Oct, two on 19 Oct, four on 21 Oct and three adults and a first winter on 14 Dec. At Priorslee Lake, single adults were seen on 18 Nov and 11 Dec.

An exact, or even close estimate of numbers during 2002 is impossible due to probable movement of birds between sites and gaps between sightings with coverage at roosts by no means comprehensive. A disproportionately low number of immature birds is also apparent from the reports and it may well be that observers are put off from reporting young birds due to perceived identification problems, however, first year birds can be distinctive. All factors considered, a minimum figure of around 20 individuals would seem likely.

ICELAND GULL *Larus glaucooides*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

Two were seen, both first winter birds in the first winter period.

The first was at Priorslee Lake on 1 Jan (AL). This bird had roosted the previous two evenings having been first found on 30 Dec 2001. Although present at dawn on 1 Jan it was not seen again.

The second, or just possibly the same bird having moved, was at The Mere, Ellesmere from 4 Jan—2 Feb (AB, AHe, HMP). This bird, which was found in the roost, often gave excellent views, regularly being one of the closest gulls. However, it was seen only intermittently during its stay and was definitely absent on some evenings. After a not being seen for a period of five weeks, what was considered to be the same bird was again in the roost on 10 Mar (AL).

Two a year was about the average during the 1990s until a blank three years occurred from 1998

GLAUCOUS GULL *Larus hyperboreus*

Status: Rare winter visitor

One was seen after a blank year in 2001. One a year is about the average over the last 10 years or so.

On 3 Jan, one was seen very distantly standing on ice at the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere and was aged as a first or second winter (AHe). It could not be found the following evening when, to cause confusion, a first winter Iceland gull was present! However, on 6 Jan when The Mere was 50% frozen, a first winter

glaucous gull, presumably the same bird as seen on the 3rd, flew out of the thick fog and gave good flight views before disappearing back into the gloom. It was not seen again (AB).

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Recorded from just six sites and all counts were in single figures, except for two at Cosford Airfield at the end of the year.

At Wood Lane, a single was reported on 19 Jan, two on 22 and 26 Jan, three on 15 Feb, one on 2 Mar, eight on 6 Apr and four on 11 May. However, during the first winter period this species was only recorded in January at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Priorslee Lake and The Mere with monthly maxima of three, three and eight respectively.

At Wood Lane, the lure of the landfill site saw birds returning from the early date of 28 Jul when eight were present but, after this, there were only sporadic reports of low numbers with the maximum being three on 14 Dec.

On 2 Nov, a massive total of 105 at Cosford Airfield was the highest total since 118 were present in the roost at Chelmarsh Reservoir in Jan 1988. By comparison, a count of 16 on the Airfield on 13 Nov was modest. Two were on the floods at Moss Farm, Whixall on 18 Nov and, in December, up to two were reported at Priorslee Lake on four dates with singles at The Mere on two dates.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*

Status: Scarce vagrant

Two were seen, both in late autumn. This attractive gull is just about annual in Shropshire but in greatly fluctuating numbers.

An adult was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 27 Oct (MO) and another was seen at Priorslee Lake on 10 Nov (EJW).

SANDWICH TERN

A good year with three records of six birds. All but one were at VP but, typically for migrant terns, none lingered to be appreciated by a wide audience.

Three flew into VP from the SE at 20.30 hrs on 16 May (PM). They settled on a log in front of the main island and were still present at 2130 hrs, but had,

unfortunately, departed by the following morning. Two more were seen at VP on 20 Jun (WRBD) and, finally, a single was at Priorslee Lake on 6 Jul (MRA).

Recorded in six of the last 10 years, with a total of 24 individual birds including a bumper total of 11 in 2000.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Status: Common passage migrant



Common Terns
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

For the fourth year in succession, the first of the year was at Priorslee Lake where singles were seen on 11, 13 and 18 May. At VP, singles were also reported on 13 and 18 May and 7-8 Jun, whilst one was at Cole Mere on 18 May.

Subsequently, three were present at Priorslee Lake on 26 Jun and then between 1-9 Jul a maximum of four were seen on six dates. Two were also seen at Trench Pool on 29 Jun, but they could have been birds moving from Priorslee. It seems probable that this run of sightings involved displaced or non-breeding birds rather than a late sustained passage.

On return passage, three were seen at Wood Lane on 14 Jul with two on 21 Jul and two were at ASF on 8 Aug. At VP, a single was seen on 20 Jul, two on 29 Aug and two on 13 Oct which was the final record for the year. This is the latest record since two were present at The Mere, Ellesmere on the same date in 1990.

ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

Between 15 and 17 were seen, making it the best year numerically since 1993.

In the spring, two were seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 May (MO) with 12 there the following day (SLH) and two were seen at VP for 5-10 minutes on 18 May before flying NW (AL).

On return passage, a single was at VP on 8 Aug (WRBD).

LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons*

Status: Rare passage migrant

One was at VP on 26 Apr (DGE).

This was the first county record since 1999 when one was at Priorslee Lake during the same month.

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

A fairly poor year with the only sightings being over a three-day period at a single site.

Ten were seen distantly at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 17 Aug, but they left after just a few minutes (KB). A single was present at the same site two days later (KB).

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia*

Status: Common resident

Reported from 20 scattered sites, mainly in the north of the county. This represents a large increase over previous years, but most of the records were from a single dedicated observer. Once again, the highest count came from Priorslee with 72 on 31 May. Elsewhere, the average flock size was 15.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*

Status: Common resident

The largest flock of the year was attracted to a stubble field at Quina Brook, Whixall on 26 Dec when 300 were present. At Tibberton, a large field containing set-aside and a root crop held 81 birds on 28 Feb and 80 were at Wall Farm on several days in Nov. Sixty were found in a mixed flock along with 140 wood pigeon at Cross Houses on 16 Jan. Records from 54 further locations included several groups of around 40 feeding in fields, but the majority of counts were in single figures.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*

Status: Common resident

A flock of 800 feeding on rape at Alderton on 3 Jan easily exceeded last year's highest total of 700 and there were even larger counts later in the year. Further

January counts included 200 at Adeney on the 6th, 420 at Wall Farm on the 13th and 300 at Neen Savage on the 18th.

Breeding was poorly reported, but substantial post-breeding flocks started to build from mid summer when 200 were at Long Lane on the 17 Jul. The highest totals were, however, in the second winter period and far surpassed those seen earlier in the year. Southerly movements were noted at Tibberton on 4 Nov when 1400 passed over between 7.30 and 7.40 and at Neen Savage on 15 Nov when 2250 birds were counted in 11 flocks between 7.30 and 9.00. Numbers at Wall Farm increased from 1000 on 5 Dec to 2500 on the 27th and counts of 1000 were also made at Sommerwood on the 23rd and Chelmarsh on the 25th.

Garden recorders noted small numbers throughout the year visiting feeding stations or taking ivy berries.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

Status: Common resident

Fifty on electricity cables at Grange Farm, Upton Magna on 21 Jan was the highest count since 1997 when 50 were at Kemberton (down from 120 the previous year). An oak tree in a maize field at Kynnersley provided a refuge for 41 on 29 Sep. The only other counts to exceed 20 were 30 at Prees on 15 Jun, 26 at Crudington on 31 Oct and 25 at Loppington on 23 Nov.

Frequently noted in gardens, usually in small numbers, but 12 at Overdale in November were considered to be “getting too many” by the householder.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

The majority of the reports came from just two regular areas. The first of the year was at Severn Valley Country Park, Alveley on 4 May after which a further eight records were received from the River Severn Valley between Alveley and Upper Arley with a maximum of three birds on 14 Jul. Following the first at Haughmond Hill on 20 May, nine further records, all of single birds, were received from the traditional area between Haughmond and Roddington.

Three records came from the Telford area. Two were at Willey Park on 15 May, one at Granville Country Park on 20 Jun and two at Telford Town Park on 19 Jul. These were close to previous sites whereas records of two at Belvidere Paddocks, Shrewsbury on 31 May and singles at Blakeridge Wood,

Bishops Castle on 15 May and Brown Clee 1 Jun were unexpected, but very welcome. A single at Wood Lane on 7 Jul and two on 27 Jul were the only records from this well-watched site so, presumably, referred to passage birds as did the final record of one at Buildwas on 28 Sep.

No records were received from the Hortonwood/Buttery Farm or Morville/Shirlett areas where the species has previously been found. Turtle Dove is red listed as a species of conservation concern, the national population having fallen by over 50% over 25 years and the records suggest this decline is mirrored in Shropshire. Observers are again asked to look out for this species and send in all records.

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*

Status: Rare vagrant or escape

A single at Smethcote on 2 Aug (IARB) makes this the third successive year that this species has been recorded. However, escape from captivity rather than vagrancy from the feral population in the London area seems the most likely origin.

COMMON CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

After a single at Shifnal on 3 Apr, it was a week before the next arrival was heard calling at Berriewood. Reports were then received steadily from mid-month, but several observers had to wait until the first week of May before noting their first bird. Three were at Whixall Moss on 11 May but, otherwise, records of single birds or, occasionally pairs, were noted from a wide number of locations.

By 20 Jun most birds had fallen silent or departed. No further reports were received until Aug when juvs were noted at Tibberton on the 5th and Short Ditch on the 8th. The final records, at Coton Hill and Wall Farm, both on 11 Aug were also likely to have been juveniles.

One observer commented “It’s been a cuckoo year with birds calling almost every day from April to June with many sightings of flying birds”. In contrast another commented “scarce here”. Despite these variations, however, the general picture seems to be one of decline with the Shropshire situation following the national trend which as seen this species amber listed as a bird of conservation concern.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Status: Common resident (RBBP)

The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) identified seven breeding pairs. These were at Bronington, Ellesmere, Newton, Welshampton, Weston Lullingfields, Doley and Kynnersley. Twenty one young birds were raised from these sites with broods ranging from two to five young. Five pairs nested in ash trees, one in a sycamore and one pair in a nest box. In addition, single birds roosted in an oak and ash tree at Ellesmere and one roosted in a brick farm building at Welsh Frankton. The SBOG had 41 nest boxes in place by the end of 2002 and full monitoring of these will commence in 2003.

In addition to the above, eighty records were received, fifty four of which related to the barn owl's breeding season from February to August. Four nest sites were noted at Calverhall, Moreton Say, Prees and in the Shavington area, producing two and four young from those that were known to be successful. Nest sites used included one nest box and one natural tree site. A single owl was reported roosting in an ash tree.

Observations of barn owls outside the breeding period may well have related to juveniles dispersing from their natal site and the preponderance of records of single birds would seem to support this. Many observations related to owls hunting over grass verges or from fence posts along roads. Other foraging sites included turnip stubble and various other unspecified field types. Hunting birds were observed between dusk and 23.00 hrs with, surprisingly, no early morning records. One was noted hunting in daylight in winter. Five road casualties were discovered in the months July (one first-year male), October (one male), November (one male) and December (one first-year females). Three came from the A5 and one from the old A5 at Atcham.

An analysis of all barn owl records for the period from 1993 to 2002 has been undertaken by the SBOG and the current population of barn owls is now estimated at between 121 and 140 pairs. A full report can be found on page 3. The population of this species is monitored, nationally, by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and additional breeding season records are invaluable. Especially useful are records from secluded areas away from main roads, for instance in the Oswestry area or South Shropshire. Observers are asked to note the type of roost and nest site occupied and the feeding habitat utilised since this information would help in building up a data base for conservation purposes.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*

Status: Common resident

This species is often active during the day and can be very vocal at times. Records were received regularly throughout the year from 40 widespread locations. Inevitably, these concerned either single birds or pairs, the exception being three at Wall Farm which included a juv. The only other confirmed breeding was at Wollerton where a pair nested in an ash tree. Another first for Wood Lane occurred when this species was found at the reserve on 19 Feb.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

Status: Common resident



Tawny Owl
Photograph by Alan Heath

Reported throughout the year, more frequently during the winter months when birds are calling. Roosting birds were found at Wall Farm and Hookagate where one was being mobbed by passerines. Most records were of single birds or pairs, but five were at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov. Despite being reported from 35 sites, the only nest located was in a hollow alder at Pentre Coed. A juvenile was also seen at Middleton, Oswestry.

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*

Status: Scarce resident

A single bird was located at Pole Cottage on 18 May (AD) and next day two were located roosting here (GEH). Both birds were present until the 21st with three being seen on the 20th (AH, HMP, HJG). Towards the end of the year, one was flushed from a hedge near Market Drayton on 16 Nov (AG).

This represents a good year for this species. The last record was in 1999 when an injured bird, which subsequently died, was picked up at the roadside near Prees. The last healthy specimen was at Pole Cottage on 30 Mar 1996.

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

Status: Rare winter visitor and passage migrant

It was an excellent year for this species with early and late winter birds and spring migrants. Some movement between sites may have occurred but, even allowing for this, between nine and twelve birds were present during the year.

The first record was from Heathton on 15 Jan (EGP, SLH) and this was followed by one on the Weald Moors from 10 Feb to 23 Feb (ARS). Another was seen at the Stiperstones on 2 Mar (EJW) and what might have been the same bird was seen on the Long Mynd from 17 to 20 Mar (ED & MC). After a considerable gap, one, which was reported at this site on 15 May (AWG) and 26 May (AL & JJ), was probably a spring migrant, as was one at Whixall Moss on 11 May (GT). A well decomposed carcass found on 15 May (ARS) at Wall Farm may have been the one seen earlier in the year on the nearby Weald Moors.

A wintering bird was seen at Wall Farm from 14 Oct to 13 Dec (PJ, JL) and records from nearby areas on 4 Nov and 27 Dec (ARS) probably related to the same bird. Similarly sightings at Black Rhadley 15 Oct (TW), The Stiperstones 10 Nov (LGG) and the Long Mynd 8 Dec (CH) could relate to a wandering individual. Unfortunately, an injured bird found on the road between Montford Bridge and Ford on 7 Dec (JT) did not survive.

COMMON SWIFT *Apus apus*

Status: Common summer visitor



Common Swift

Illustration by Glenn Bishton

The arrival of this species is generally late April and this year was no exception with birds reported daily from the 27th when the first for the year were two at Venus Pool. These were followed next day with birds at Frankwell, Priorslee Lake and VP again.

Large concentrations are generally associated with

feeding over water. Seventy five were at VP on 10 Jun and 50 were present here on the 23rd. Other counts of note included 60 at Market Drayton on 28 Jul, 45 at Wall Farm on 21 Jul and 40 at Priorslee Lake on 4 Jun . Most birds had departed by mid-August, although several lingered until later in the month and one was noted at Monkmoor on 3 Sep.

Breeding was obviously under recorded with just two records from Shrewsbury and West Felton and no counts were received of birds involved in screaming display flights.

COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

Status: Common resident (RBBP)



Kingfisher
Photograph by Alan Heath

A very popular species, providing many records throughout the year, but with a seasonal pattern. The breeding season from April to July produced the fewest number of sightings, whilst the three month period from August to October was responsible for almost half the records. Reports for the remaining months fell some way in between.

The surge in late summer records is probably caused as young birds disperse with many of the sightings from reserves and well-watched pools coming at this time. A third of the sightings were made at these sites, but the majority came from the River Severn and its tributaries. The remainder came from smaller rivers, particularly the Tern, Teme, Clun and Onny, small streams, pools and canals.

Juveniles which were reported at ASF and Wood Lane and were the only indication of breeding. Nationally, this species is monitored by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel to whom the Society makes a return and observers are asked to send in all records, especially those of confirmed or probable breeding.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops*

Status: Rare summer vagrant



Hoopoe at Stableford 2002
Photograph by Alan Heath

One was at Stableford, near Bridgnorth on 1-2 Nov (PH).

The bird was discovered frequenting a garden by the owner who realised it was an interesting bird and notified the Recorder. Despite parking being difficult, he kindly agreed to the news being put out and allowed some cars to be left along the private drive to the house. Fortunately, the bird was still present the next morning enabling it to be seen by several observers. No problems were encountered at the site and all who saw the bird and, I guess, some who didn't, were extremely grateful to the property owner for being given the opportunity.

After an eight year absence, this is the second successive year this species has been recorded. It is unusual that both these recent records occurred in the autumn since, historically, most have been in spring with April and May the favourite months.

WRYNECK *Jynx torquilla*

Status: Rare passage migrant

One was at Pant on 18 Sep (JS). This bird was found by a fortunate observer, feeding on ant hills in his garden at a range of just five metres! He watched it for about 20 minutes during the afternoon but it was not seen subsequently.

This species occurred almost annually in the 1980s but has been much scarcer in recent times. However, after the second record in three years hopefully things are looking up.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

Status: Common resident

Strangely for a woodland species, a third of the reports came from three wetland sites; Chelmarsh, Venus Pool and Wood Lane. This species often occurs in open areas with scattered trees and frequently takes ants from the ground. However, these reports, no doubt, reflect a concentration of observers rather than a density of birds. Elsewhere, mostly singles and occasionally pairs were noted at a further 33 locations spread throughout the county.

Said to nest annually in Cwmdale or Batch valley and juveniles were noted at Leighton and VP.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos major*

Status: Common resident

Well documented with reports of singles, pairs or family parties coming from 93 sites. These included many gardens, where birds are often seen feeding on peanuts. An unusual observation came from Betton Moss where a bird was seen to take sunflowers from a feeder and wedge them into a crack in a tree trunk before pecking them open.

A bird carrying a BTO ring was killed when it flew into a window at Wellington on 19 May. The records showed that it had been ringed on the Wrekin as a juvenile on 16 Aug 2000. The BTO Migration Atlas states “this species shows remarkably little tendency to undertake long-distance movements. Overall, the median distance for all recoveries of birds found dead is just 2km from the ringing site”. This recovery fits the pattern very well.

Drumming was noted from 2 Jan until 24 Apr. Breeding was confirmed at nine sites, often when young were brought to garden feeders.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos minor*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Thirty reports were received from 16 locations which is a vast improvement on the previous year when just ten single birds were reported. Even so, this difficult to observe species must be under recorded.

Quite a few observers enjoyed good views of a pair at Cound Stank where a nest was located in a dead tree by the bridge on 7 Apr. The last record from here was on 1 Jun when fledged young were seen being fed by the adults. Two were heard drumming at Attingham Park on 25 Apr and a pair visited a garden at St Martins on 20 Jun. The remaining records were all of single birds.

One trapped at Allscott Sugar Factory on 18 Jul had previously been ringed at the same site as a juvenile in 1997. There are fewer ringing recoveries for this species compared with its larger relative, but the BTO Migration Atlas states “this species is very rarely observed out of typical habitat or at locations far from the nearest breeding pair, and appears to be extremely sedentary at all seasons”.

Nationally, this is a species of conservation concern and is red listed having undergone a rapid decline of >50% over 25 years. The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Shropshire, published in 1992, showed a fairly even distribution throughout the County and suggested a population of 250-500 breeding pairs. With so few reports received, it is impossible to judge the situation now some 12 years or so on from the Atlas survey work, however, observers are asked to look out for this species and report all sightings.

WOODLARK *Lullula arborea*

Status: Very rare visitor

One at Sheinton on 4 Dec and another near Woodcote, south of Newport the next day (DSt).

These birds would have been unrecorded but for a RSPB field worker who was required to carry out transects through stubble fields as part of a farmland bird study. Both were flushed on close approach and were separated from skylark on a combination of features including the disyllabic call

Woodlark probably ceased to breed in the county in the mid-sixties, although the last confirmed record was at the Ercall in 1957. Since that time it has been extremely rare, as it has been nationally, with just two records in the 1970s and two in the 1980s, the last one being in July 1987. However, nationally, the decline has now been reversed and the population has increased in recent years with breeding recorded in the neighbouring county of Staffordshire for some years. Even so, these records came as something of a surprise.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor (BCC Red listed)

Over half of the records received were of just one or two birds from the early part of the year. Only two flocks of over 50 birds were reported. Seventy three were at Morville on 4 Jan and 55 at Newport on 16 Jan.

More were seen in the period from October to December. Records from Wall Farm dominated, with several counts over 100, including a count of around 200 which were put up by a hen harrier on 16 Oct! Numbers peaked at this site in the second week of November with a counts of 400 on the 9th and 11th. Away from this area, totals included 111 at Neen Savage on 13 Nov, counted during a Winter Farmland Bird Survey, and 56 at VP on 29 Sep.

Song was heard over a long period from 12 Feb to 7 Aug. Although widespread, only one breeding record was received for this difficult to confirm species. This came from Harnage. Nationally, this species is red listed as a species of conservation concern and, consequently, observers are asked to look out for and report confirmed or probable breeding.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

Status: Common summer visitor

This species normally returns from mid March and this year was no exception. The first was a single at VP on the 14th and two days later four were noted both at this site and at Wood Lane. Another two days passed before the first report from Priorslee Lake. Numbers then increased steadily with 22 at Cole Mere on the 23rd and 45 at Priorslee Lake the next day.

By the end of March, 200 were at Wood Lane where up to 600 were present during May and June. Maximum counts received from other locations include 300 at Chelmarsh on 29 Apr, 250 at VP on 28 Apr, 200 at Almington on 27 Jul, 190 at Leighton on 13 Jul, 100 at Brompton on 24 Jun and 90 at Priorslee Lake on 30 Apr.

In addition to the large breeding colonies at Wood Lane and Almington, smaller ones were noted at Lower Brompton, Upper Brompton, Knowle Sands near Bridgnorth and Daniel's Mill, Hampton. Observers are asked to report all colonies with an estimate of breeding numbers.

One hundred and thirty were still present at Wood Lane on 4 Sep, but most had departed by mid month and none were reported from anywhere else in the county after the 15th. Numbers at Wood Lane slowly dwindled with the last record being of two on 4 Oct.

BARN SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

Status: Common summer visitor

In recent years, it has become regular for the first arrivals to appear in March and, again, this was repeated in 2002. The first was at Priorslee Lake on the 24th and the second at Adderley on the 30th. Following singles at Benthall Edge and VP on 2 Apr, sightings were daily and birds had been noted at 40 further locations by the end of the month.

Breeding was poorly recorded from just six sites but several of these reported pairs successfully raising two broods.

A flock of 550 feeding over rough grassland and roosting on wires at Kinnersley on 6 Aug was the largest concentration noted since 1996. Other gatherings included 200 at Wood Lane on 18 Sept and 200 nearby at Lyneal on 28 Sept. Counts of 100 were made at ASF on 13 Aug and VP on 29 Aug.

Most had departed by the 20 Oct with late records of two at Alderton on the 27th and one at Tibberton on the 31st. Finally, continuing the recent trend of odd birds remaining into November, one was seen at Leebotwood on the 10th.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

The first of the year were six at Wood Lane on 3 Apr. These were 10 days ahead of the main influx which commenced on the 13th with a single at Cound Stank. On 17 Apr, 20 were at Chelmarsh and 100 were at VP, but even so some observers had to wait until the first week of May for their first sighting. On the 21 May, 200 were present at Priorslee Lake whilst on the same day an observer at Waters Upton commented that very few were about.

Breeding was noted at twelve sites, including recently built houses at Ludlow and the main house and stable block at Attingham Park. A pair at Ruyton-X1-Towns was still feeding young on 10 Oct. The local population of this species was thought to be around 7000 pairs at the time of the Breeding Atlas and anecdotal evidence suggests that this has declined, perhaps, in line with the

national picture where it is amber listed as a species of conservation concern. It is an easy species to confirm breeding and observers are asked to report all nest counts.

Late summer saw flocks of 100 at Priorslee Lake on 30 Aug, 140 at Adderley on 4 Sep and 250 at Cardington on 17 Sep. Many birds stayed into October and the final record was of three at Leebootwood on the 25th.

An unusual, partial albino, was at VP on 13 May. It was similar in all respects to the other house martins, with which it associated, but had a wholly white head. This follows on from another odd house martin which was seen in the ASF and Wellington areas in August 1995 which had all white primaries.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

The lack of records last year was blamed on access restrictions to the countryside due to Foot and Mouth disease. However, just sixteen records were received this year, most from traditional sites, and with a maximum of 61 birds involved, it is only a marginal improvement.

The first of the year was at Caer Caradoc on the 27th and was the only record for April. However, by early May they were more numerous. A total of eight were counted at both Ashes Hollow and Callow Hollow on 5 May, five were at Whixall Moss on 11 May and ten at Brown Clee on 20 May. Survey work in the Wyre Forest found five territories which was the same as in the previous year. Five were found on the Wrekin on 25 Jun and three were at Gatton Plantation on the Stiperstones on 13 Jul. Two at Wood Lane on 28 Aug would have been on passage.

Based on recent records the population of 900–1800 pairs estimated in the Breeding Atlas would seem rather optimistic. Nationally, tree pipit is amber listed as a species of medium conservation concern and the limited evidence we have seems to suggest a serious decline locally.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Most of the reports received during the first three months of the year were from low-lying parts of the county and, with the exception of 75 at Church Stretton on 21 Mar and 40 at VP the next day, flocks were small.

The southern hills are the main breeding sites for this species and records from these areas dominated the next four months. The highest count was 52 at Gatten Plantation on 12 Apr and other totals included 30 on the Long Mynd on 27 Apr, 20 at Titterstone Clee on 14 Apr and 15 at Rhos Fiddle on 19 Apr. The only site away from the hills to hold comparable numbers was Whixall Moss which had 20 on 11 May.

Mixed flocks of adults and juveniles began to form from July when 40 were at Short Ditch on the 15th and 32 were at Gatten Plantation on the 25th. Although numerous widespread reports continued until the end of the year, flock sizes were small. The largest included 65 at Tedsmere on 1 Oct, 57 at Rhos Fiddle on 21 Sep, 50 at Abdon Burf on 14 Sep and 50 at Wootton on 8 Oct.

ROCK PIPIT *Anthus petrosus*

Status: Scarce migrant

Two records, singles at ASF on 11 Oct (AL) and Chelmarsh on 13 Oct (MO).

This species is less than annual in Shropshire and these were the first since 1998 when one was seen at ASF on 19 Oct. There are odd spring records, but October seems to be the best month.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*

Status: Passage migrant and summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

This species is traditionally associated with wet meadows so it is not surprising that the first three to arrive were all seen at well-watched wetland sites; singles at VP on 7 Apr, Wood Lane on 11 Apr and Priorslee Lake on 14 Apr. These sites, along with ASF, Chelmarsh and Wall Farm were then responsible for half of all the records. The remainder came mainly from the Severn Valley or from arable areas in the NE where birds were noted in cereals, potatoes, peas, beans and root crops. A few scattered records came from outside these areas, including one of flying low over the heather on the Long Mynd.

Ten were at Kingslow on 4 Jun and breeding was later confirmed at this site. Smaller numbers were noted elsewhere. The only other breeding reports were from Marchamley and Tibberton. Many birds stayed well into September and October records are unusual, although, three young birds were seen with pied wagtails at Cosford on 2 Oct.

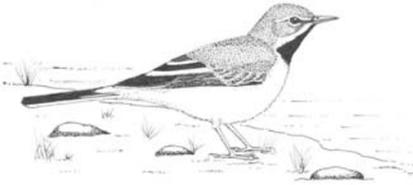
Nationally, this species is amber listed as a species of conservation concern and the paucity of records seems to indicate a decline locally. Certainly, the population estimate published in the Breeding Atlas in 1992 of 1150-2300 pairs now seems very optimistic. Observers are asked to pay particular interest to this species and report all sightings especially those in the breeding season. In addition to wet meadows, potato crops and set-aside seem to be favoured habitats.

Blue-headed wagtail *Motacilla flava flava*

A male at VP on 27 Apr (APD) was still present the next day when a female was also seen (AB, AHe, AL). This sub-species, the nominate continental race, may be under reported and the last records were in 1996 when four were seen.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)



Grey Wagtail
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

This species is very popular with observers and 243 records were received from 79 locations. Half of the reports were from reserves, pools and meres. These sites are favoured by birders so there will be an element of observer bias, but it is clear that such sites are regularly visited by this species, particularly outside of the breeding season. A quarter of the reports were from along the length of the River Severn and, rather

surprisingly, most of these were also from outside the breeding season.

The remainder were mainly from smaller rivers and streams. These sites were occupied all year and ten confirmed breeding reports came from this type of habitat compared with just two sites along the Severn at Coalport and Shrewsbury. Five territories were located on a WBS plot on the river Clun which was an increase from three in 2000.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrelli*

Status: Common resident

Reported from 76 locations, mostly in the northern half of the county. A roost in Telford Town Centre contained 160 birds on 15 Feb and other roost counts included 30 at Chelmarsh on 22 Apr, 64 at Wood Lane on 22 Sep, 80 at VP on 25 Sep and 56 at ASF on 3 Nov. A minimum of 79 flying NE over Priorslee Lake on 10 Nov were also considered to be going to a roost. Other large flocks included 75 on the filter beds at Monkmoor on 6 Jan, 48 on a newly ploughed field at Meeson on 13 Jan, 150 at both ASF and Mirelake on 1 Aug and 62 at Cosford airfield on 29 Oct.

An early nest was found in the works at Shrewsbury Sewage Works on 23 Mar. Five nests were found elsewhere in May and June and juveniles were reported at several other locations.

White wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Priorslee Lake maintained its excellent reputation for records of this nominate continental race with a single on 21 Mar (JI). All subsequent records came from VP and involved up to five birds. The first at this site was found on 30 Mar (GEH, AL) and was still present the next day. Two males and a female were seen together on 16 Apr (GEH) and a male was still at the site on the 21st (HJG).

This is an above average return but many more must stop off at other locations less frequented by birders before continuing their journeys unnoticed.

BOHEMIAN WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulous*

Status: Rare winter visitor



Waxwing

Illustration by Glenn Bishton

Four were at Market Drayton on 14 Jan (AL) and one was by the River Roden at Wem on 2 Feb (BH) but, unfortunately, there were no subsequent sightings at either site.

Normally, five birds would be considered a good year but, after last year's influx, it seems rather disappointing. This was not helped by the fact that the birds did not linger.

DIPPER *Cinclus cinclus*

Status: Locally common resident

Once again, as would be expected, there was a southerly bias to the records. On the River Severn, singles were at Jackfield, Highley, Upper Arley and a small brook running into the Severn near Woodside. One was also reported on the Cound Brook around Cound Stank. On the River Onny, records came from Horderley, Craven Arms, Stokesay and Onnibury and on the River Teme from Bromfield and Ludlow. Other reports came from the Mor Brook at Eardington and Cardingmill Valley.

Three territories were found on the River Clun on a BTO WBS plot which was down from six in 2000. At least two and possibly four territories were found on the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest. Two of these pairs raised young and five independent juveniles were present late in the season. Nest building was observed under a bridge in the Candy Valley.

An interesting observation was made at Longnor. A sparrowhawk was seen to plunge from a yew tree towards a dipper which was on a stone in the river. The dipper dived under the water, the sparrowhawk flew up with its talons dripping and the dipper emerged and sat on the stone giving its alarm call.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Status: Common resident

The number of sites for which records were received was up slightly to 48. Although widespread and common, few reports came from the southern half of the county, but this is due entirely to the distribution of the observers.

Once again, most records were from gardens or reserves and were often monthly maxima. In gardens, one or two birds were usually present. The highest counts came from Wood Lane with 14 on 4 Jun and Priorslee Lake with 19 on 17 Mar and again on 6 May. The only other site where more than ten were counted was the Rea Brook Valley where 12 were seen on 24 Apr.

A nest was built in a hanging basket at Ironbridge and, at Oswestry, a bat box was used as a nest site for the second year, but was later deserted.

HEDGE ACCENTOR *Prunella modularis*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)



Hedge Accentor
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

If the distribution of this species was mapped on the basis of the records received the result would be almost identical to that for both the previous and the following species. Although they have much in common, the main reason for the similarity is the origin of the records, mainly from regular garden recorders and reserves.

The number of individuals reported from each garden was slightly higher than for wren, no doubt due to the promiscuous lifestyle of this species. Three, four and, occasionally, five being noted throughout the year. The only sites where double

figures counts were recorded were Rea Brook Valley with ten on 11 Mar, Tedsmere with 18 on 30 Mar and Priorslee Lake with 15 on 19 Oct.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

Status: Common resident

The distribution and records were similar to the previous two species. Due to the strong territorial nature of robins, most gardens had one or two birds but, during cold spells in the winter, up to four were noted in some gardens. Counts from larger sites included 11 at Beck's Field on 1 Mar, 15 at Rea Brook Valley on 19 Mar, 28 at Priorslee Lake on 14 Sep and 12 at Wood Lane on 21 Sep.

There were 13 confirmed breeding records, including one pair nesting in a garden shed and another in an old teapot.

COMMON REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first arrival of the year was a male at Batchcott on 4 Apr, but it was over two weeks before the main influx began. Two were seen at Hayes Farm on 19 Apr and three were singing near Trefonen the next day. The species was then reported at a further seven locations before the end of the month. Reports came

from the traditional breeding areas shown in the Atlas with maximum counts of six on the Long Mynd on 1 May, seven near Trefonen on 3 May and six at Helmeth Hill on 2 Jun.

Some dispersal was noted from July, but fewer birds than usual were found away from the breeding areas. Six birds were reported during August, with the final record being a single at Hampton Loade on the 22nd.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

Status: Common summer visitor and passage migrant

Spring passage was more pronounced than usual with eight birds being noted. The first was on the Weald Moors on 27 Apr and this was followed by three at Nedge Hill on 3 May, a single at Priorslee Lake the following day, one at Marchamley on 6 May and finally two at Chelmarsh on 13 May. By this time, birds had already returned to their breeding areas and 11 were counted in Ashes Hollow on 5 May, with one at Whixall Moss on 11 May. Ten at Short Ditch on 15 Jun included parents feeding young.

Four birds were seen on autumn passage. Singles were seen at Wood Lane on 19 Aug, Coton Hill on 24 Sep, ASF on 3 Oct and Alderton on 17 Oct. The latter bird was seen moving between a hedge and sugar beet tops and was said to look lost, perhaps it was! October records of whinchat are extremely unusual and, before these two, the last was as long ago as 27 Oct 1990.

COMMON STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

Status: Resident and summer visitor

It is always difficult to draw a line between resident birds and summer visitors, but the number of probable wintering birds appears to have increased dramatically. Following on from the 34 noted in the final three months of 2001, 26 were recorded between 1 Jan and 10 Mar, from widely scattered parts of the county.

Birds are quick to establish territories and a BTO Ringing Adults for Survival project at Titterstone Clee identified 27 pairs on 24 Mar, with this total later rising to 35. Apart from a single bird at Aston Locks on 11 May, all records received between 27 Mar and 21 Sep were from eight known breeding sites. Seven of these were in the southern hills including the Long Mynd, the Stiperstones and Brown Clee, with the other from Whixall Moss in the north.

The numbers reported at these sites were low and a count of nine, which included two family parties, at Rhos Fiddle on 21 Sep, was the highest.

Three seen at Leighton on 29 Sep marked the species return to low lying areas and, before the end of the year, a further 24 records were received from eight sites involving a minimum of 19 birds.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first of the year was at Priorslee Lake on 17 Mar. This is a typical date for the return of wheatear and Priorslee Lake continues its reputation as a good site for early migrants. This was the third time in four years that the first record of this species came from here. The next was at Titterstone Clee on 21 Mar and, by 30 Mar, numbers at this site had risen to 30. Surprisingly few records were received from the other hills in the south and no other counts reached double figures. In contrast, passage birds continued to be reported until 16 May and, although in small numbers, they were found at 18 different sites.

Return passage began on 27 Jul with a single at Wood Lane and continued until 5 Oct when the final bird appeared at Wall Farm. During this time 16 birds were found at ten sites.

RING OUZEL *Turdus torquatus*

Status: Rare passage migrant and summer visitor (BCC Red listed)



**THE LONG MYND
BREEDING BIRD
PROJECT**

The catastrophic decline of this species has continued. The estimated population in 2002 was two breeding pairs, but all breeding attempts failed, and no young were fledged. A depressing year.

Records of birds, presumed to be on passage, were received from Titterstone Clee with one on 21 Mar and five on 8 Apr, and the Stiperstones with one on 26 Mar. The Clee Hills and the Stiperstones appear to be regular passage sites.

A female was seen in Carding Mill Valley on 17 Apr with a male two days later. A party of at least four, two males and two females, was found in Ashes Hollow on 21 Apr. One of these males had an undeveloped

white gorget and was presumed to be a first year bird still a long way from its breeding grounds. The National Trust had received a casual report of five, two males and three females, in Carding Mill Valley the previous week. Single reports of singing birds in Bilbatch in late April and Wildmoor in early May, were also received. However, no ring ouzels were found at any of these locations during several subsequent, intensive searches so presumably they too were all passage birds.

Almost all the other casual records relate to a breeding pair in Light Spout Hollow, but two casual records arise from a second breeding pair in Ashes Hollow. The Light Spout Hollow pair, both colour-ringed, were first reported on 2 Apr and a male was reported on Long Synalds on 30 Apr and in the valley behind it on 16 Jun.

Colour ringing shows that the pair at Lightspout Hollow comprised the same two individual birds were at this site in 2001. The male was four years old in 2002 and female six. This pair built five nests and eggs were laid in at least three of them. Unfortunately, all were predated.

The male of a pair in Ashes Hollow was heard six times, but not seen at all so it is not known if he was colour-ringed. The female was fledged from the successful nest of the Light Spout Hollow pair in 2001. In spite of regular searching, however, no nests were found. The nature and timing of the sightings suggest two breeding attempts, although, there was no evidence of adults feeding nestlings, or of any fledged young.

Monitoring of the colour-ringed population since 1999 and comparison with studies in other areas which are reported to the National Ring Ouzel Study Group, suggest that the estimates of population size on the Long Mynd reported previously in the 1999 and 2000 Shropshire Bird Reports were probably too high. The revised estimates of 11-13 pairs in each year between 1996 and 1999, falling to eight in 2000, and only three in 2001 are shown below.

Ring Ouzel Population on The Long Mynd:

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Previous Estimate	14	18	12	21	13	12	8	3
Revised Estimate	12	16	11	13	13	11	8	3

Although these revised population estimates are somewhat lower, they do not affect the basic trend, and the 2002 population was lower still. It has crashed to

less than 20% of its previous regular level in only four years. The cause of the decline is unknown.

A full report from the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project on Ring Ouzel 2002 is available from Leo Smith (Tel: 077 9190 1732 or email: leo@sy9-5bh.freeserve.co.uk).

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

Status: Common resident

Reported from 63 sites often as monthly maxima by garden recorders or from reserves. During a spell of hard weather on 2 Jan, 30 were attracted to a garden at Adderley. Twenty five were counted at Shavington Big Pool on 26 Jan, Market Drayton on 24 Feb and Longford Moors on 19 May. No other counts exceeded 20.

Breeding was noted at 16 locations, mainly by garden recorders.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

Status: Common winter visitor



Fieldfare at Pentre Coed 2002
Photograph by Alan Heath

Early in the year, flocks of 100 or more were counted at 28 different sites and the average flock size reported was 92. The largest flocks were 400 at Broome Park from 24 Jan to 17 Feb, 440 at Wall Farm on 9 Feb and 500 at Eaton Upon Tern on 3 Feb. However, these counts were eclipsed when 733 were reported at Crudginton Moor on 16 Apr, presumably birds returning north. After this date, only two more sightings were made; two at

Redhill on 27 Apr and a single at Pole Cottage on 19 May. This is the latest spring record since 40 were seen at Tittenley Pool on 22 May 1995.

The first birds to return in the autumn were at Wall Farm on 12 Oct when eight were present. Then, after three at Trefonen on 17 Oct, birds began to be reported daily. The average flock size during this period was 113 which was

even higher than those of the first winter period and spring. The average was boosted by counts of 564 at Priorslee Lake on 3 Nov, 500 at Berriewood on 8 Nov and a massive 1000 at Wall Farm 9 Nov.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Nationally, this species is red listed as a species of high conservation concern because the population has fallen by more than 50%. The publicity given to this decline may have prompted some observers to send in their records and 301 records were received from 93 different locations. It is difficult to judge if the national picture is mirrored in Shropshire, but these records suggest song thrush is still a relatively common and widespread species.

Once again, mainly monthly maxima were received from gardens and reserves. Even so, only a sixth of the reports were of more than two birds and 11 at Wall Farm on 5 Oct was the largest count.

One garden recorder commented “first for several years” and another “first pair in the garden for about 15 years”. Whether this is the result of a recent upward trend as suggested by the latest BBS results (see report on page 13) or just good fortune, remains to be seen.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Status: Common winter visitor

In the early part of the year, the trend set the previous autumn continued with relatively small flock sizes averaging 25 birds. Only six flocks of 100 or more were recorded, including 150 at Betton near Market Drayton on 13 Jan and 150 on school playing fields at Kingsland, Shrewsbury on 10 Mar. Most of these soon departed and, after mid-March, birds were scarce. Even so, five stayed into Apr with four reported at Red Hill on the 13th and one at Wood Lane on the 29th.

Returning birds were first noted at Priorslee Lake when three were present on 25 Sep. Another September record came from Lilleshall where one was seen on the 29th. Numbers built up quickly from the second week of October and 120 were seen at Trefonen on the 17th, with 260 at Shavington Big Pool two days later. At the latter site, counts reached a peak of 600 on 16 Nov and 500 were at Mirelake the next day. Six other sites held over 100 birds and the average autumn flock comprised 52.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Reported from a total of 82 sites across the county. Occurring in fewer gardens than its smaller relative, being recorded more often from the southern hills. A loose flock of 50 was seen over Batch Valley on 31 Jul and 40 were at Short Ditch on 1 Nov. Only seven other counts reached double figures and these were all made in late summer.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

Status: Summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

Only two records were received, both involving 'reeling' males. The first was present at Bilbatch on 2 May followed by a second on the Long Mynd in a valley to the west of Shooting Box on 15 May.

The secretive nature of this largely crepuscular species may result in it being somewhat overlooked. However, even taking this into consideration, this year's meagre showing constitutes a rather poor year.

Grasshopper warbler is red listed as a species of conservation concern, the national population having fallen by over 50% over 25 years and the records suggest this decline is mirrored in Shropshire. Observers are again asked to look out for this species and send in all records. The situation looks bleak but, who knows, well-timed concentrated efforts in suitable habitat may reward diligent observers and show the situation to be a little better than it currently appears.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Status: Common summer visitor

Earliest arrival involved a single male at VP on 21 Apr, whilst the bulk of arrivals occurred during the last week of April and through the first week of May.

Peak counts from key sites included five at Wood Lane Nature Reserve on 28 Apr, three at Priorslee Lake on 28 Apr, four at Chelmarsh on 29 Apr (with four again present on 4 May), five at Atcham Bridge on 30 Apr, 12 at Wall Farm on 4 May, five at ASF on 8 May, eight at Lower Brompton on 24 Jun and ten which were trapped and ringed at VP on 4 Aug.

Also recorded in low single figures from Cressage, Crudgington, Dryton, Hampton Loade, Howle Pool, Long Mynd, Maesbury Marsh, Market Drayton, Redwith, Short Ditch, St. Martins, Telford Town Park and Woolston, Nr. West Felton. Notable amongst these was a bird observed feeding in the vicarage garden at St. Martins.

Confirmed as breeding at Chelmarsh and Wall Farm, though likely to have bred at all key sites.

The year's final record involved a single at Wood Lane on 26 Aug.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Status: Common summer visitor

A localised species, being recorded from only 14 sites, compared to 22 for the previous species, and exclusive to areas with established beds of common reed *Phragmites australis*.

The first spring arrivals were noted on 23 Apr when two were present at Priorslee Lake and one was at Wood Lane. Most other regular sites had recorded birds by early May.

Peak counts from key sites included 21 at ASF on 8 May, five at Ashton Locks, West Felton on 11 May, nine at Priorslee Lake on 1 Jun, seven at Hawk Lake on 1 Jun, 11 at Wood Lane on 20–21 Jul and four at Chelmarsh on 19 Aug. Eleven which were trapped during a ringing session at VP on 4 Aug comprised ten new birds and one control. Records were also received from Maesbury Marsh, Newport Canal, Priorslee Flash, Queens Head, Sambrook Mill, Severn Valley Country Park and Wall Farm.

The only records to confirm breeding came from Priorslee Lake and VP. However, as with the previous species, it is certain to have bred at other key sites.

Several birds lingered into September and not only did Priorslee Lake and Wood Lane share the earliest arrivals, but the final records too, with single birds present at both sites on 28 Sep!

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

Status: Common summer visitor

Widely, though sparsely, distributed with a total of 80 records coming from 39 well-scattered locations. The year's earliest record involved a single bird at Berrington on 15 Apr.

All but five of the records involved either one or two birds, whilst the remainder comprised three at Priorslee Lake on 9 May, with three again present at the same site 13 May, four at Ightfield on 6 Jun, five at Middle Morrey on 15 Jun and three at Tibberton on 15 Aug.

Breeding was confirmed at Ightfield and Middle Morrey with recently fledged young being observed at both sites. Noted as a garden visitor at Adderley where one was observed feeding amongst a garden shrubbery on 14 Jul.

The final record of the year came from Chelmarsh where a single was present 28 Sep.

COMMON WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first record of the year came from Upper Brompton where a pair were present on 20 Apr. Thereafter, common and widespread with the bulk of arrivals occurring in late April and throughout the first week of May.

Of the 118 records received, 94 involved just one or two birds, whilst a further 21 involved between three and seven. Counts to exceed these comprised 13 at the Weald Moors on 27 Apr and 12 at ASF on 2 May, with an excellent count of 22 singing males at the same site 8 May.

The only records of confirmed breeding came from Puleston, Tedsmere and Upper Brompton although, as with many other common species, largely ignored with regard to breeding records.

The final record of the year came from Wood Lane where a single was noted on 11 Sep.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*

Status: Common summer visitor

This classic “little brown job” probably goes under recorded and is no doubt far more frequent within the county than the 60 records received suggests.

The first record of the year involved two birds at Priorslee Lake on 19 Apr which was closely followed by a single at Lower Brampton on the following day. There were only three other April records; the bulk of arrivals appeared during early May. Generally occurring at low densities, indeed all bar 10 of the records received involved only one or two birds. The exceptions comprised four counts of between three and five from Priorslee Lake on separate dates between 1 May and 4 Jun, six at Haughmond Hill on 6 May, three at Bridgnorth Golf Club on 7 May, five at Upper Brompton on 12 May, three at Hawkstone Park on 12 May, three at Whitcliffe on 15 May and three at Twemlows Big Wood 1 Jun. The only record of confirmed breeding came from Lipleigh.

The year’s final record was of two at Priorslee Lake on 1 Sep.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

Status: Common summer visitor and scarce winter visitor

In addition to occurring as a common summer migrant, this popular species now winters in increasingly significant numbers within the county. However, in contrast to its widespread summer distribution, winter populations show a distinct bias towards central and northern regions and remain almost entirely exclusive to garden feeding stations.

During the first winter period, 29 records were received from 15 locations, all bar one of the records involved either one or two birds, the exception being three birds in a Newport garden on 6 Jan. There was no clearly discernable interval between winter departure and spring arrivals and, although birds at Alveley and Market Drayton on 29 Mar may have been the heralds of spring arrival, a male sang vigorously on the much earlier date of 4 Mar at Bayston Hill, just to add further confusion to the picture!

A total of 130 records were generated from the summer period, showing a pretty even distribution throughout the county. Generally occurring in single figure

counts, the only exceptions involved 11 at Rea Brook Valley, Shrewsbury on 24 Apr, 10 at Haughmond Hill on 25 Apr and 10 at Hawkstone Park on 19 May. Despite the large number of summer records, the only instance of confirmed breeding came from Shrewsbury.

During the second winter period, 19 records were received from 11 locations. Again, most records involved one or two birds, with the exception of three at Church Aston on 3 Dec and three at Ironbridge on 20 Dec.

A wide variety of food items taken by winter garden visitors included fat and various fruits and berries

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Status: Summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

This year saw a slight increase in both the number of records and number of sites for this delightful summer visitor. A total of 19 records were received from 12 different locations.

The earliest arrival involved a single at Whitcliffe on 16 Apr. Thereafter, also recorded at Brown Clee, Bury Ditches, Candy Wood, Ercall Woods, Haughmond Hill, Lodge Hill, Purlouge, The Wrekin and the Wyre Forest, with the last bird, again a single, being noted at Gatten Plantation on 13 Jul. All but three records involved either one or two birds, the exceptions being three noted on a dawn chorus trip to The Wrekin on 27 Apr, four at Ercall Woods on 14 May and 10 at Purlouge on 10 Jun, the latter being the cumulative count of two successful broods.

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

Status: Common summer visitor, rare in winter

During the first winter period, a bird was present at ASF on 3–9 Feb and, whilst birds at Cole Mere on 1 Mar, Severn Valley Country Park on 2 Mar, Chelmarsh on 3 Mar and the Severn Valley between Highley and Upper Arley on 4 Mar, were probably wintering birds, the tight crop of dates does not rule out the possibility of a burst of early spring arrivals.

However, spring arrivals began in earnest on 9 Mar when four birds were present at Priorslee Lake. Thereafter, very common and widespread throughout the county. Peak counts from selected sites included 11 at Cole Mere on 9 Apr,

10 at Hawkstone Park on 21 Apr, 15 at Haughmond Hill on 25 Apr, 10 at Lodge Hill on 7 Jul and 15 at Priorslee Lake on 1 Sep. The final records of summer visitors involved single birds at Edgmond Marsh and Wood Lane, both on 12 Oct.

There were a further six records during the second winter period, all involved single birds and came from Madeley on 18 Nov, Severn Valley Country Park on 27 Nov, the Severn Valley between Hampton Loade and Highley on 27 Nov, Broome Park, Neen Savage on 6 Dec, Much Wenlock on 6 Dec and Belle Vue, Shrewsbury on 17 Dec.

There was no indication of racial variation reported, therefore all records assumed to be of the race *P. collybita collybita*.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

This species is amber listed as a species of medium conservation concern and the well documented national decline now appears to be increasingly apparent within Shropshire, being recorded from only 46 sites this year, compared to 70 sites in 2000 (no relevant comparison can be gathered from 2001 due to Foot and Mouth restrictions).

The first record of the year came from VP where a single bird was noted on 26 Mar. Thereafter, a further 108 records were received of which 75 records involved either one or two birds, whilst a further 30 records involved between three and nine birds. The only records to exceed single figures comprised 25 at Ashes Hollow, Long Mynd on 5 May, 15 at Callow Hollow, Long Mynd on 5 May and 25 at Whixall Moss on 11 May, with all three counts coming from the same observer.

Breeding was confirmed only from Gatten Plantation where fledged juveniles were observed on 25 Jul. The final records were on the unusually late date of 3 Oct when singles were reported at Atcham Bridge, Eardington and Wood Lane. An interesting record was received from Market Drayton on 23 Apr (DB) concerning a bird which would deliver perfect willow warbler and chiffchaff songs, often combining the two, normally opening with chiffchaff then changing to willow warbler, but on occasion noted to do the reverse.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Recorded in all months with the largest counts predictably coming from the post-breeding and winter periods. The majority of records also came from the winter period, with only 36 of the 120 records coming from the period April to September.

Ninety five records involved just one or two birds with a further 20 of between three and eight. Counts to enter double figures comprised 10 at Hawkstone Park on 8 Sep with 15 present at the same site on 5 Oct, 16 at Madeley on 28 Oct, a count of 50 was described as a low estimate amongst a very large tit flock at Madeley on 18 Nov and 12 were present at Shavington Big Pool on 17 Dec.

This is another species which is amber listed, having undergone a national decline, and its current breeding status in Shropshire is unclear. No evidence of successful breeding was noted. A bird controlled at Radlith on 24 Nov had been ringed as a first year male at Hollesley, Suffolk on 27 Oct 2001. It seems likely that, given its east to west movement, this individual may have been a returning winter migrant from Scandinavia.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

There were two records of this delightful and much sought after county rarity this year, both occurring during the second winter period.

Both were in private gardens. The first was at Alveley, near Bridgnorth, on 2 Nov (WRW) and this was followed by one at Coton Hill, Shrewsbury on 17 Nov (RMS). The second bird, having been initially observed feeding in the garden hedge, was caught by the observer's cat but, fortunately, it was rescued unharmed and released none-the-worse for its ordeal. The fate of the cat, however, remains unclear!

Firecrest has been recorded in six of the past ten years.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

This species has been in rapid decline since the 1960s and is a BTO red-listed species and this trend is reflected within the county.

The first record of the year came from West Felton where two birds were present on 5 May. After which, a further 40 records were received from 33 widespread localities. Of the records received, 33 involved just one or two birds, whilst a further three involved three birds. The remainder comprised five at Wood Lane on 9 Aug, four at Pool Hall on 18 Aug and five at Attingham Park on 21 Aug.

Breeding was confirmed at Adderley, ASF, Candy Valley, Cardington, Harnage, Little Stretton, Little Wenlock, Stanton Lacy and Little Sutton. That breeding should be confirmed at so many sites is wholly attributable to this species' affinity with places of human habitation.

The final record involved a single bird at Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury on 19 Sep.

PIED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Status: Common summer visitor

This remains a rather poorly reported species generating only 33 records from a total of 17 sites, most of which were in the west of the county.

The years first record came from the River Clun at Purslow where two birds were present on 16 Apr. All records away from the established nest-box schemes involved single figure counts. Notable amongst these were three at Bridges on 21 Apr, a peak count of eight at Candy Valley on 28 Apr, three at Lydbrook Dingle on 11 May and three at Market Drayton on 16 Jun.

Results were received from nest box schemes at Craig Sychtyn, Hawkstone Park, Purlouge and Wood Batch Valley. At Craig Sychtyn, eight pairs produced 20 young and at Wood Batch Valley 12 pairs nested, but success rate was not reported. Ten pairs nested at Hawkstone Park which was the lowest occupancy for many years and a decrease of over 50% on 2001. Of these, eight pairs successfully produced young. At Purlouge, 64 pairs were present of which 52 were successful. Breeding was also confirmed at Candy Valley and Smethcote and at both sites nest-boxes were utilised.

Most birds vacate their breeding grounds soon after fledging young, therefore, the final record, involving three birds at Gatten Plantation on 13 Jul, although early, was quite typical with later records often involving migrants.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

Status: Common resident

This is a common species throughout the county and is very popular with observers, attracting over 250 records, most of which involved single figure counts. However, there were 57 counts which entered double figures. The most notable of these were 34 at Bridgnorth on 9 Jun, a peak of 31 at Wood Lane on 2 Sep, 35 at Shavington Big Pool on 9 Nov and 25 at Hawkstone Park also on 9 Nov. However, these counts were eclipsed by an incredible 70 amongst a large mixed tit flock at Madeley on 18 Nov.

A regular visitor to observers' gardens, although the only records specifically referring to birds using feeding stations came from Ironbridge, Newport, Oswestry, Radbrook and Waters Upton.

Breeding was confirmed at Aston Locks, Bridgnorth, Cardington, New Marton, Tedsmere, Upper Brompton and Wall Farm, Cherrington Moor.

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

A total of 84 records were received from a total of 37 sites of which 48 involved single birds whilst a further 29 records involved two birds. The only counts to exceed these comprised three at Whixall Moss on 12 Jan, three at Chelmarsh on 24 Mar, three at Newport Canal on 5 Sep, seven at Lodge Hill on 8 Sep, four at Shavington Big Pool on 19 Oct, three at Severn Valley Country Park on 27 Nov and seven at Shavington Big Pool on 27 Dec.

Recorded in all months of the year with many records referring to garden visitors.

The only record of confirmed breeding came from Lower Brampton where fledged young were observed on 24 Jun.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus*

Status: Locally common resident (BCC Red listed)

This BTO red listed species has suffered the largest decline of any species monitored by the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) with numbers falling by 72% between 1994 and 2002. It is unclear whether the situation in Shropshire has followed the national trend, but observers are asked to submit records of all sightings.

Generally scarcer than the previous species, attracting a total of 71 records from 29 widely scattered locations. In common with the previous species, the large majority of records involved only one or two birds with the only counts to exceed these being three at Severn Valley Country Park on 4 Mar, three at Whixall Moss on 7 Apr, three at Whitcliffe on 15 May, four at Priorslee Lake on 8 Jun, four at Whixall Moss on 6 Jul, three at Severn Valley Country Park on 14 Jul and four at Whitcliffe on 17 Nov.

Willow tit has a slightly different habitat preference from marsh tit, therefore, it is unusual for both species to occur at the same site. However, both species were recorded at Market Drayton, along the River Severn between Coalport and Apley, along the River Severn between Hampton Loade and Highley, Severn Valley Country Park, Wall Farm, Whitcliffe and Whixall Moss.

Successful breeding was confirmed at Whixall Moss and whilst a pair were observed excavating a nest hole in a dead willow tree by a pond at Moss Cottage, Betton Moss, the breeding attempt was subsequently abandoned, it was thought possibly due to the presence of Grey Herons.

Noted as a visitor to garden feeding stations at Caynton and Betton Moss.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*

Status: Common resident

A large majority of the records involved low single figure counts. The only counts to exceed this were 11 at The Wrekin on 6 Apr and 12 at Shavington Big Pool on 19 Oct. In addition, monthly counts at West Felton recorded 34 on 1 Oct, 30 on 1 Nov and 20 on 1 Dec.

Breeding was confirmed at Shrewsbury and Tedsmere, otherwise ignored as a breeding species.

BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*

Status: Common resident

A very common species and extremely popular with observers. In addition to the many single figure counts, 44 counts into double figures were recorded. Notable amongst these were 60 at Cotton Hill, Shrewsbury on 10 Aug, 60 at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov and 64 which were ringed in an Adderley Garden on 17 Nov. However, these counts were eclipsed by an incredible 150 amongst a large mixed tit flock at Madeley 18 Nov.

Unusually for a common species, many records confirmed breeding, largely due to this species readiness to utilise nest boxes.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*

Status: Common resident

Another common species which enjoys great popularity with observers. In addition to the large number of single figure counts, a further 24 double figure counts were recorded. Notable amongst these being 41 at VP on 15 Aug and 40 at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov. An impressive count of 100 was noted amongst a huge mixed tit flock at Madeley 18 Nov.

Records of confirmed breeding were received from ten widely scattered locations including Twemlows Big Wood where a pair reared five young at ground level in a plastic tree protector.

WOOD NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*

Status: Common resident

A widespread and common resident, although generally occurring at low densities with the large majority of records involving low single figure counts. Notable counts included eight at The Wrekin on 6 Apr, four at Cole Mere on 9 Apr, 10 at Leebotswood on 11 May, four at Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury on 15 Jul, four at Hawkstone Park on 21 Sep, four at Shavington Big Pool on 19 Oct and four at Whitcliffe on 17 Nov.

Breeding was confirmed at Ercall Woods, Hawk Lake and at Leebotwood where a pair reared eight young in a nest box.

TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*

Status: Common resident

A widespread, though unobtrusive species, generally occurring at low densities, in common with the previous species with which it shares the same woodland habitat.

Of the 89 records received, 82 involved just one or two birds. The remainder comprised three at The Mere, Ellesmere on 9 Feb, three at Coton Hill, Shrewsbury on 12 and 31 Mar, five at Shavington Big Pool on 29 Mar, three at Cole Mere on 9 Apr, four at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov and five at Whitcliffe on 17 Nov.

Breeding was confirmed at Buildwas and along the River Severn between Coalport and Apley where a pair were discovered nesting in the brickwork of a derelict cottage.

Rare as a visitor to garden feeding stations, one observed on a peanut feeder in a Ludlow garden was, therefore, particularly noteworthy.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*

Status: Rare winter visitor

Another good year for this charismatic species which now appears to be becoming established as an annual visitor to the county, this being the fifth consecutive year in which it has been noted.

One was present on Brown Clee favouring the area around the radio mast compound on 29–31 Mar (DSc) and what was possibly the same bird returned to the same area in the second winter period. It was first reported on the pager networks on 10 Nov and remained until 1 Dec (MO et al). Regular updates via the various information networks ensured that many observers were able to obtain views of this bird. However, it often remained frustratingly elusive!

Also during the second winter period, one was present at Twitchen for one day only “during the first week of Nov” (Rev. JTP.). This was followed by a well-watched individual on the Stiperstones 4–9 Nov (DH et al) which favoured the area around Gatten Plantation.

Given the spread of dates, it is impossible to say how many individuals were involved and it is not inconceivable that one bird may have accounted for all the year’s records!

EURASIAN JAY *Garrulus glandarius*

Status: Common resident

This handsome corvid remains ever popular with recorders. It enjoys a widespread distribution, although generally occurring at low densities. Indeed, only 13 of the 157 records received involved in excess of two birds. Notable amongst these were four at Harmer Hill on 4 Apr (however the observer reports a much larger flock of 15 – 20 birds in the same area a few days earlier, which were not initially identified), four at Wall Farm on 11 Aug, four at Bury Ditches on 22 Aug, four at Lodge Hill on 8 Sep, four at Hawkstone Park on 21 Aug and a peak of 10 at Shavington Big Pool on 19 Oct.

The only record to indicate breeding success came from Bury Ditches where juvenile birds were seen 22 Aug. An obviously confused bird was seen chasing a cat at Drury Lane, Rodington on 29 Sep!

MAGPIE *Pica pica*

Status: Common resident

The much maligned magpie remains surprisingly popular with recorders. Although generally recorded in single figure counts, 18 counts into double figures were reported, notable amongst these were 16 at Cwmdale, Church Stretton on 16 Jan, 24 at Reabrook Valley, Shrewsbury on 21 Jan, 14 at ASF on 3 Feb, 16 at Neen Savage on 5 Feb, 12 at Woodlands Park, Shrewsbury on 15 Feb, 10 at Beck's Field on 20 Feb, an impressive count of 33 at Priorslee Lane (where double figure counts were frequent) on 24 Feb and 25 at Horton Lane on 25 Dec.

One was disturbed with a young starling in its bill at Overdale, Telford on 29 Aug, where upon it released the starling which flew away! Another took a blue tit in an Oswestry garden on 15 Aug which prompted the neighbour to initiate a cull. These were the only two instances of predation which were reported. On a lighter note, two were watched, watching a fox, watching the geese at VP on 3 Jul!

Totally ignored as a breeding species.

EURASIAN JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

Status: Common resident

As with most of the common corvid species, the majority of records came from a small core of observers.

Most records involved single figure counts, however 44 counts into double figures were noted along with a further 15 into treble figures. Peak counts from selected sites included 120 at Chetwynd Park on 12 Feb, 120 at Corbett Wood on 13 Mar, 140 at Wood Lane on 8 Aug, 150 at VP on 27 Oct, 300 at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov, 200 at Eaton upon Tern on 30 Nov, 165 at Ridgewardine on 27 Dec and 381 at Priorslee Lake on 31 Dec.

Recorded as breeding at Harnage, Monkmoor Pool and Tedsmere.

Noted as a visitor to several garden feeding stations including eight which were observed feeding on apples in a garden at Edgmond Marsh.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

Status: Common resident

A gregarious species, rarely being reported in single figures, indeed only 22 such records were received.

Fifty four double figure counts were recorded along with a further 55 into treble figures, with the majority of records coming from central and northern regions of the county.

Peak counts from selected sites included 800 at Tedsmere on 22 Jan (with the same number again present 30 Dec), 155 at Wall Farm on 27 Jan, 140 at Neen Savage on 4 Feb, 250 at Whitchurch on 9 Feb, 200 at Conover on 15 Feb, 200 at Waters Upton on 27 Feb (with three similar counts during Jun), 250 at Much Wenlock on 15 Apr, 150 at Edgmond on 26 Jun, 300 at Crudgington on 10 Aug, 200 at Haughmond Hill on 10 Aug, 355 at Priorslee Lake on 18 Oct, 250 at Harmer Hill on 13 Nov, 490 at Cosford Airfield on 15 Nov and 150 at VP on 19 Nov.

Active rookeries were noted at the following sites with the number of nests, where noted, in brackets; Attingham Park, Battlefield, Shrewsbury, Edgmond Marsh (25), Haughmond Hill, High Ercall, Ludlow Racecourse (17), Upton Forge (50) and Wroxeter (two rookeries of 32 and 20 nests).

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Status: Common resident

Far less gregarious than the previous species, therefore flock sizes were generally significantly smaller. Of the 145 records received, 110 involved single figure counts, a further 29 involved double figure counts whilst the remaining six entered treble figures. Peak counts from selected sites comprised 80 at Monkmoor Pool on 6 Jan, 30 at Priorslee Lake on 26 Mar, 22 at Neen Savage on 27 Mar, 20 at Twemlows Big Pool on 1 Jun, 250 at Waters Upton on 15 Jul and 300 at Wood Lane on 6 Aug.

Largely ignored as a breeding species, with the only record of confirmed breeding coming from Wood Batch Valley.

A bird with almost completely white wings was reported at Caer Caradoc on 27 Apr.

COMMON RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Status: Uncommon resident



The population density and range of this popular species continue to increase. A total of 267 records were received.

Casual records include a new nest on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, with four other nests in the lowlands. Observations were recorded in the Wood Lane log book for every month of the year. The species was also reported frequently from well watched sites at Wall Farm and Allscott, and from a number of different locations in, and south of, Bridgnorth in the Severn Valley. Several records from the vicinity of Ironbridge suggest a new territory there.

There was also a big increase in the number of reports of large flocks with eleven separate accounts of ten or more together. However, the highest of around 50, at Oaker Wood near Aston-on-Clun on 12 Nov, falls just short of the largest flock recorded so far which was 53 on the Long Mynd in July 2000.

The Shropshire Raven Study Group continued to monitor the population, looking for colour-ringed birds at nest sites. Ninety three sites were found to have occupied nests, but many previously occupied sites were not visited in 2002 as a result of insufficient time, so the actual number of nests would have

been much higher. The 93 occupied nests included 16 at new locations. Many of these have not been occupied in previous years and are close to established pairs, suggesting that the population is continuing to increase through in-filling, with a consequent reduction in the size of territories, as well as expansion of range.

Thirty one adult breeding birds were found to have colour rings of which 24 were read. The average age of these birds is six years old. Four were ringed as nestlings in the first year of the Shropshire Project, and one was ringed the year before (1993), so these breeding Ravens are eight and nine years old respectively.

The Study Group aims to continue to visit nest sites to seek colour-ringed adults. Reports of new nests are welcome.

COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

The large number of records received came mainly from a small dedicated core of observers. The many single and double figure counts were complimented by 69 counts into treble figures with an additional 13 into four figures, whilst only one count exceeded these.

Many of the larger counts referred to pre-roost gatherings. Peak counts from selected sites included 5000 at VP on 22 Feb, 1000 at Coton Hill, Shrewsbury on 10 Mar, 1300 at Emstrey on 10 Mar, 2000 at Tedsmere on 8 Nov, 2000 at Howle on 9 Nov, 1000 at Stanton Upon Hine Heath on 18 Nov, 13,666 at Wall Farm on 24 Nov, 1400 at Trefonen on 26 Nov, 2300 at Eaton upon Tern on 30 Nov, 1500 at Waters Upton on 8 Dec and 1000 at Roden on 28 Dec.

Confirmed as breeding at Buildwas, Mydle, Prees and Shrewsbury, otherwise ignored as a breeding species.

ROSE-COLOURED STARLING *Sturnus roseus*

Status: Very rare vagrant

An adult male was present in a private garden at Minsterley on 16 Jun (DEB).

This constitutes the first county record and a full account found on page 130.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

The humble house sparrow remains in significant decline within England, a trend which appears to be increasingly apparent within our own county. However, the fact that this species was reported from only 47 sites and by only 34 observers suggests that it may be under-recorded and may even be largely ignored. Perhaps the red listing as a species of high conservation concern will encourage more observers to submit records.

Of the 153 records, only 61 involved double figure counts. Notable amongst these were 30 at Long Mynd on 12 Jan, 40 at Betton, Market Drayton on 13 Jan, 33 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 15 Jan, 28 at Purslow on 12 Mar, 75 at Myddle on 29 Jun, 30 at Somerwood on 15 Aug, 30 at High Ercall on 4 Sep and 25 at Alderton on 17 Oct.

The only records to confirm breeding came from Colemore Green, Condover, Diddlebury, Harnage, Myddle, Prees, Radbrook and Shrewsbury.

Four found writhing on the ground at Aston Square, Oswestry on 6 Mar, all subsequently died with no apparent injuries, suggesting some form of poisoning, although the cause of death was not known.

TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)



Tree Sparrow at Adderley 2002
Photograph by Alan Heath

Unlike the previous species, the tree sparrow enjoys good fortunes within the county and thrives in localised populations.

Extremely popular with observers with a grand total of 292 records received from 74 widely scattered locations, the majority of which involved single figure counts. Eighty five double figure counts were noted with counts ranging between 10 and 50 birds.

Peak counts from selected sites included 40 at Prees Heath on 13 Jan, 30 at Tedsmere on 17 Jan, 50 at Adderley on 27 Jan, 18 at Condoover on 15 Feb, 30 at Moreton Street, Prees on 1 Mar, 28 at Wood Batch Valley on 15 Jun, 17 at Wood Lane on 16 Jul, 40 at VP on 3 Aug and 38 along the Severn Valley between Hampton Loade and Highley on 28 Sep. These counts were, however, eclipsed by an excellent count of 100 at Quina Brook on 9 Nov which were discovered feeding on maize stubble.

Breeding was confirmed at Edgmond Marsh, Edgmond, Maesbury Marsh, Oswestry, Prees, Rowton, Tedsmere, Tibberton, VP, Wall Farm, Waters Upton, Wood Batch Valley and Wood Lane, with most reported as utilising nest-boxes.

One caught during a ringing session at VP on 2 Apr had originally been ringed at Cressage on 30 May 2001. Being a quite sedentary species, the movement of just 6 km in 307 days is unsurprising!

This species benefits greatly from sympathetic farming practices and the provision of nest-boxes. Therefore, further enrolment into schemes such as Countryside Stewardship can only be beneficial to its continued recovery.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

Status: Common resident

A very common species throughout the county. In addition to the many single figure counts, a further 96 counts into double figures were received ranging in numbers of between 10 and 92 birds. Additional counts into treble figures included 150 at Cole Mere on 21 Jan, 100 at Neen Savage on 3 Feb, 100 at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov, 100 at Pradoc on 22 Nov, a peak count of 200 at VP on 14 Dec and 150 at Bowhill Dingle, Alveley on 26 Dec.

The only records of confirmed breeding came from ASF, Hook-a-Gate and Tedsmere, otherwise ignored as a breeding species.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*

Status: Winter visitor

Following on from the second winter period of 2001 when 14 records were received, the first winter period of 2002 saw a significant influx of this species into the county. Between January and April a total of 136 records were received with a peak of 48 records during February.



Brambling, Adderley 2002
Photograph by Alan Heath

The majority of these records involved single figure counts. However, 19 counts into double figures were noted, with peak counts from selected sites including 20 at Attingham Park on 7 Jan, 20 at a garden feeding station at Higher Heath on 25 Feb, 10 at Drury Lane, Rodington on 27 Feb, an impressive count of 40 at a garden feeding station at Moreton Street, Prees on 15 Mar, 40 at Colsley Woods on 22 Mar, 25 at Prees on 29 Mar and 50 at Twemlows Big Wood on 31 Mar. The final record of the first winter period involved a single bird at Prees 23 Apr.

The first record of the second winter period involved six birds at Black Rhadley on 15 Oct. Thereafter, a further 25 records were received, of which seven were double figure counts. These comprised 15 at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov, 10 at Gatten Plantation on 9 Nov, a site peak of 20 at Brown Clee on 10 Nov, 30 at Long Mynd on 19 Nov, 30 at the Stiperstones on 24 Nov, 10 at Whitcliffe on 24 Dec and 12 at Higher Heath on 31 Dec.

In total 58 widespread sites were responsible for the years sightings with many records referring to garden feeding stations.

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

Status: Common resident

This common species remains very popular with observers, which is no doubt largely due to its close association with garden feeding stations.

In addition to the many single figure counts, a further 94 counts into double figures were reported. Peak counts from selected sites included 60 at Adderley on 27 Jan, 50 at Wall Farm on 3 Feb, 80 at Kynnersley on 18 Aug, 49 at Priorslee Lake on 29 Aug, 82 at Newport on 31 Aug, 40 at Wood Lane on

20 Oct, 50 at Bridgnorth Golf Club on 29 Nov, 50 at VP on 14 Dec, 50 at High Hatton on 20 Dec, 45 at Bowhill Dingle, Alveley on 26 Dec and 80 at Tibberton on 31 Dec. These counts were, however, eclipsed by an incredible 150 at Wellington Road, Newport 20 Oct.

The only records to indicate breeding activity came from Diddlebury and Shrewsbury, otherwise ignored as a breeding species.

One ringed at Sutton, Shrewsbury on 27 Dec 2000 was killed by a cat at Belle Vue on 20 Feb whilst another ringed as a juvenile at Sutton on 28 Jul 2002 was found dead at Condover on 20 Dec.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

Status: Common resident

This delightful finch remains ever popular with observers, generating a total of 332 records, the large majority of which involved single figure counts. However, an additional 79 counts into double figures were reported. Peak counts from selected sites included 40 at Chelmarsh Res on 1 Jan, 50 at Newport on 15 Jan and again on 15 Feb, 60 at Tibberton on 12 Feb, 40 at Norbroom Marsh on 16 Feb, 80 at VP on 21 Feb, 46 at Rhos Fiddle on 21 Sep and 55 at Wall Farm on 29 Sep. Counts to exceed these involved 110 at Crudginton Moor on 22 Sep and 120 at Upper Pentiken, near Clun on 28 Sep, both instances referred to flocks feeding on seeding thistles.

Recorded in all months of the year, though the larger counts predictably came from the post breeding and winter periods. The only records to confirm breeding came from Diddlebury, Lilleshall and Shrewsbury.

SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*

Status: Common winter visitor and uncommon resident

A very well recorded species attracting a total of 199 records. During the first winter period, from January through to April, 283 records were received of which 30 involved double figure counts with peak counts from selected sites comprising 40 at Cole Mere on 8 Jan, 50 at Bromfield on 12 Jan, 80 at ASF on 20 Jan, 70 at Buttery Farm on 10 Feb, 39 at Wood Lane on 15 Feb and 80 at Whixall Moss on 25 Feb.

During the summer months, six records were received which involved one bird at Wood Lane on 2 May, with a pair present at the same site on 8 May, four at Woolston nr Winstanstown on 8 May, two at Worthen on 15 May, one at Higher Heath on 8 Jun and one at Condover on 23 Jun. None of these records indicated confirmed breeding and, whilst the record from Higher Heath involved a juvenile bird, one can only speculate as to whether this may have been a locally bred bird.

During the second winter period, a further 123 records were received of which 40 records involved double figure counts. Notable amongst these were 35 at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov, 35 at Madeley on 30 Nov, 50 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 5 Dec, 47 at Priorslee Lake on 7 Dec, 72 at Severn Valley Country Park on 26 Dec, 40 at Oss Mere on 28 Dec and 50 at Market Drayton on 29 Dec.

Many records involved birds visiting garden feeding stations.

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

This BTO red-listed species was recorded from 65 widely scattered locations and enjoys a county-wide, if somewhat sparse, distribution. Of the 163 records received, 83 referred to single figure counts, a further 72 involved double figure counts, whilst the remaining eight involved flocks into treble figures.

The largest flocks were predictably noted during the post breeding and winter periods and include 190 at Meeson on 13 Jan, 120 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 6 Feb, 100 at Nedge Hill on 23 Mar, 250 at Kynnersley on 28 Aug, 100 at Wall Farm on 1 Dec, 150 at Kynnersley on 9 Dec, 196 at Bowhill Dingle, Alveley on 26 Dec and 200 at Rodway, near Crudgington on 31 Dec. Larger flocks were linked with areas of set-aside, agricultural stubbles and brassicas.

Despite a significant number of summer records being received, it is disappointing to report, particularly given its current declining status, that this species was totally ignored as a breeding species.

LESSER REDPOLL *Carduelis cabaret*

Status: Common winter visitor and rare breeding resident (BCC Amber listed)

Records (127) were received from 51 scattered locations, and generally showing a bias to central and northern regions of the county.

Of the records received, 91 involved single figure counts, with the remainder involving between 10 and 55 birds. Peak counts from selected sites included 25 at Brown Clee on 26 Jan, 30 at Whixall Moss on 9 Feb, 35 at Priorslee Flash on 23 Mar, 25 at Shrewsbury on 24 Mar, 50 at Twemlows Big Wood on 31 Mar and again on 1 Apr, 31 at The Wrekin on 6 Apr, 30 at Hawkstone Park on 5 Oct and again on 4 Nov, 35 at VP on 16 Nov, 55 at Whitcliffe on 15 Dec and 26 at Severn Valley Country Park on 25 Dec.

The only records from the summer months involved single birds at Howle Pool on 9 May and at Wood Lane on 10 May, these were followed by an interesting run of records from Priorslee Lake, which involved single birds on 4 Jun and 21 Jul, with a party of five being noted on 30 Aug. No records gave any indication of breeding activity.

Unusual as a visitor to garden feeding stations. Therefore, two feeding on niger seed at South Hermitage, Shrewsbury 17 Mar are worthy of note.

COMMON (MEALY) REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

Following the recent taxonomic split of lesser and common redpolls, this year's run of records represent an excellent showing of this sporadic Scandinavian visitor. A total of 15 records were received from three locations in the north of the county which, allowing for duplication, probably involved a cumulative total of at least 16 birds. Eight were present at Hawkstone Park on 23 Feb (AB, GT), associating with a flock of lesser redpolls, whilst 11 were present at the same site on 16 Mar (AH). Although showing extremely well at times feeding amongst leaf litter within the oak and birch woodland, these birds generally remained frustratingly elusive.

Up to three birds were present at Twemlows Big Wood on several dates from 23 Mar to 1 Apr (AH, HMP). These birds were again in the company of lesser redpolls. The final records involved two birds which were present in a garden at South Hermitage, Shrewsbury 7 Apr (GG), with one still remaining the following day.

COMMON CROSSBILL *Loxia curvirostra*

Status: Irregular resident and winter visitor (RBBP)

A reasonably good year for this sporadic and unpredictable species, with the 33 records being received from 20 scattered locations, 22 of which involved single figure counts, whilst the remaining 11 entered double figures.

Peak counts from selected sites included 25 at Dudmaston on 3 Feb, 25 at Hopton Titterhill on 13 Aug, 15 at Black Hill on 10 Sep, 30 at Bury Ditches on 5 Nov, 14 at Calverhall on 6 Nov, 17 at Hawkstone Park on 9 Nov, 10 at Brown Clee on 30 Nov and 21 at Blakeridge Wood on 1 Dec.

Also recorded in single figures from Black Mountain, Bringewood, Bromlow Callow, Eastridge Wood, Lodge Hill, Long Mynd, Oaker Wood, Sych Farm, The Bog, Wellington, Willey Park and the Wrekin.

Invariably linked to plantations, this species was recorded in all months except Mar.

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

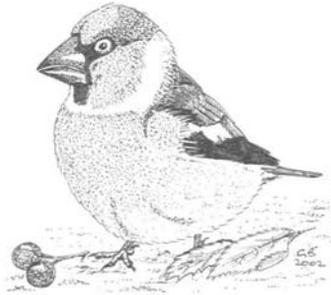
This handsome finch remains ever popular with observers attracting a total of 191 records. Of the records received, 127 involved just one or two birds whilst a further 62 involved between three and nine. Peak counts from selected sites included six at Bury Ditches on 3 Jan, eight at Short Ditch on 4 Jan, six at Priorslee Lake on 17 Jan (with the same numbers noted on 19 Mar and 1 Sep), seven at Condover on 18 Jan, six at Gatten Plantation on 22 Jan, seven at Market Drayton on 3 Mar, six at Earls Hill, near Pontesbury on 17 Mar and seven at South Hermitage, Shrewsbury on 15 May. The only counts to exceed these involved 12 birds at Hawkstone Park on 8 Sep with the same number present again on 21 Sep.

Breeding was confirmed at Bridgnorth, Bury Ditches, Priorslee Lake, Radbrook and Shrewsbury.

Noted as a visitor to garden feeding stations at Ironbridge, Market Drayton and Shrewsbury.

HAWFINCH *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Status: Scarce resident



Hawfinch
Illustration by Glenn Bishton

A very poor year for this elusive species, following on from the second winter period of 2001 when no records were received.

The only records from Whitcliffe, Ludlow, where this species maintains a precarious toehold, involved a single during the first winter period on 10 Feb (WAD). This was followed by two records during the second winter period, both again involving single birds, the first on 9 Dec (WM) whilst the second was discovered during an RSPB members group field trip 15 Dec (IB et al).

Elsewhere, a female was present in a Somerwood garden 16 Feb (AWS). It is intriguing that birds were also noted at this site during the early spring period of 2001 and raises the question of whether or not there is a small, as yet undiscovered, breeding population in the Haughmond area.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Despite its well documented decline, this BTO Red Listed species remains popular with observers and is well recorded within the county enjoying a wide, if somewhat scattered, distribution.

A total of 180 records were received, of which 139 involved single figure counts, whilst an additional 39 counts entered double figures. Double figure counts were recorded at 13 sites, with peak counts from selected sites comprising 45 at Prees Heath on 26 Jan, 80 at Spoonley, Near Market Drayton on 30 Jan, 22 at Bolas Heath on 14 Feb, 60 at Bowhill Dingle on 3 Mar, 32 at Newport on 3 Mar, 50 at Benthall on 23 Apr, 20 at Wall Farm on 7 Oct, 30 at Yockleton on 24 Oct and 20 at Ponthen on 8 Dec. These counts were, however, eclipsed by excellent counts of 105 at Tedsmere, near Baschurch on 9 Jan with 102 noted at the same site 26 Jan. Large flocks were generally associated with agricultural stubbles and set-aside.

Breeding was confirmed at Myddle, Short Ditch, Tedsmere and Wall Farm. A male was noted visiting a garden feeding station at Broseley during April.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

A well recorded species attracting 209 records from a total of 53 widely scattered locations. Of the records received, 144 involved just one or two birds, whilst a further 58 single figure counts of between three and eight birds were noted. Only seven double figure counts were recorded, comprising of a superb count of 50 at Buttery Farm on 1 Jan, 12 at Prees Heath on 2 Jan, 10 at Wood Lane on 7 Jan, 20 at Whixall Moss on 11 May with 20 again present at the same site on 6 Jul, 18 at the Weald Moors on 4 Nov and 12 at the Moss Farm floods, Whixall on 4 Dec.

Despite a considerable number of summer records being received, no indication of breeding success was noted. Surprisingly, the only records of garden visitors came from Market Drayton and Newport.

CORN BUNTING *Miliaria calandra*

Status: Common, but localised resident (BCC Red listed)

This Red Listed species is very much in decline nationally. The local position is not clear, but there is some evidence that our population is holding up better than in many other parts of the country. However, the population is very localised in its distribution, being confined to lowland areas of the central and northern regions of the county.

A total of 76 records were received from 43 scattered locations, 50 of which came from one dedicated observer! Sixty of the records received involved just one or two birds, whilst a further six records involved three birds. Counts to exceed these comprised four at ASF on 1 Jan, five at Kingslow on 4 Jun, four at New House on 9 Jun, nine at High Ercall on 16 Jun, seven at Kingslow on 9 Jul, four at Tibberton on 13 Oct, five at Meeson on 30 Oct, four at Howle on 3 Nov and four at Lilleshall on 18 Nov. The only double figure count involved a flock of 22 at Sutton-Upon-Tern on 29 Mar.

Only 27 of the records came from the winter periods. Singing males were noted at several sites, but, no evidence of breeding activity was noted.

The dramatic decline of this species and other farmland birds has been well documented and it can only be hoped that agro-environmental reforms such as the changes to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme may go some way to redress the balance.

ESCAPES AND RELEASES

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

Single birds were recorded at The Mere, Ellesmere on 17 Nov and 28 Nov, this site also holding two birds on 24 Sep. What were probably the same birds were earlier present at nearby Crose Mere on 8 Sep, whilst two birds at Much Wenlock on 2 Mar, constituted the only records away from The Meres. No confirmed breeding this year, following last year's success at Ollerton.

SNOW GOOSE *Anser caerulescens*

Single birds were recorded at Cae Howell in March, Cole Mere in December, Whixall Moss in February, October and November and Wood Lane in August. The latter site held two birds on 21 Sep. The Whixall Moss and Wood Lane birds were recorded as "white phase".

BAR-HEADED GOOSE *Anser indicus*

One or two present at VP on and off from 17 Jan until 11 Mar. Three bar-headed x greylag hybrids were present on 17 Jan.

RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*

Singles were recorded at Wood Lane on 16 Jan and VP on 19 Feb. It is quite possible that one bird was responsible for both sightings.

WOOD DUCK *Aix sponsa*

A single bird reported from Middle Pool, Trench on 27 May and 10 Dec. Another was present on the Montgomery Canal south-west of Ellesmere 17 Nov

VILLAGE WEAVER *Ploceus cucullatus*

There were three records, all of birds visiting garden feeding stations. The first was at Lyneal on 2 Jun, followed by Ellesmere on 18 Jul and, finally, Clungunford on 25 Aug. Despite a distance of c60 km between the last two sites it is, none-the-less, likely that all three records were attributable to the same bird

ROSE-COLOURED STARLING AT MINSTERLEY



Rose-coloured Starling at Minsterley June 2002
Photograph by Daryl Edwards

Peter Wilson and I were visiting Pontesbury for the weekend to stay with my family and finish off last-minute wedding preparations. In the early afternoon of Sunday, 16 June 2002 we received a telephone call from Daryl Edwards from Callow Crescent, Minsterley. Daryl explained that there was an odd looking starling in his Uncle's garden, it was "half white, half black". He had taken a photograph of the bird from the window, and also looked in his bird book but couldn't find it. We suspected it may be rose-coloured starling given the influx occurring at the time.

His Uncle also lived in Callow Crescent and I asked if it was possible for us to call at the house to see the bird. We arranged to meet Daryl at his Uncle's house 10 minutes later. As the bird had only been visible from the lounge window facing the back garden, we were taken into the house to look for the bird. After just a few minutes, a pristine adult rose-coloured starling flew in and landed on a garden post, before dropping down to a small patch of lawn. There was a great deal of excitement as we explained where the bird had come from and showed the owner a rose-coloured starling in our field guide. We watched the bird through the window for a few minutes, and then it flew out of the garden. We waited a while, but it did not reappear. We checked the nearby green, playing fields and roof tops, but could not locate it.

Walking back towards the house, Daryl called us into the garden, this time we entered through the back gate directly into the garden. The tall garden fence meant that the lawn could not be viewed from the lane. The rose-coloured starling was feeding on the small lawn again; there were no other starlings present despite a good number present in the general area. I kicked myself for not having my camera, but Peter was able to make some sketches as it fed on the lawn. We watched the bird for a further 10-15 minutes at close range (c.6m) before it flew off again. Despite searching, we could not relocate the bird when it was outside the garden; presumably it visited other well-hidden gardens.

The rose-coloured starling visited the garden periodically throughout the afternoon and was seen again the following morning 17 June but there was no sign of it in the afternoon (Daryl Edwards *pers comm.*). Given that the rose-coloured starling was only viewable from within the house or back garden, we agreed with the house owner that we would release the news, but only state the location as “Minsterley”.

The rose-coloured starling was in immaculate adult plumage. The head, nape and upper breast were glossy black and the crest shaggy. The underparts and back were bright pink, which contrasted with the glossy black wings and tail. Pale fringing was visible on the under-tail coverts. The bill was bright pink and the legs pink/orange. The extent of the shaggy glossy crest and the pristine bright plumage suggests that it may have been a male.

There was an unprecedented invasion of rose-coloured starlings into Britain and Ireland during June 2002, starting with the first bird in Cornwall on 31 May. Throughout June about 140 were recorded (mostly adults) with a good number reaching the west of Britain. An adult at Chasewater (Staffs) on the 16 June was the only other record near Shropshire. Rose-coloured starlings breed from Moldova and south-west Ukraine, across southern Russia to Kazakstan and east into Central Asia and winter mainly in India. They are a nomadic species, which invade from the east looking for suitable areas to breed with a high population of grasshoppers. In some years they reach as far west as Greece and Bulgaria but in others penetrate into Europe, eventually reaching Britain and Ireland.

Dawn Balmer

This comprises the first record of this former BBRC rarity in Shropshire since the formation of the Society in 1954. A report of one at Mount Pleasant, Shrewsbury on 2 November 1986 was not accepted by BBRC.—Ed.

LIST OF OBSERVERS

Mr MR Adlam	Mr A Dudley	Mr B Hunt	Mr R Scott
Mrs A Andrews	Mr SP Dudley	Mr J Isherwood	Mr AR Seagrave
Mrs JS Armstrong	Mr N Eden	Mr S Jagdev	Mr DN Shirra
Mr I Baggley	Mr A Edwards	Mr S Jaggs	Mr D Skidmore
Miss DE Balmer	Mr TW Edwards	Mrs J Jennings	Mrs C Slowick
Mr DA Barnes	Mr P Ellicott	Mrs J Jones	Mr AW Smith
Mr RN Barratt	Mr DG Evans	Mrs N Jones	Mr GR Smith
Mr D Barrow	Mr L Evans	Mr P Jordan	Mr L Smith
Mr K Bates	Mrs B Falconbridge	Mr R Jukes-Hughes	Mrs M Smith
Mrs M Bell	Mrs J Finney	Col. JF Kenyon	Ms R Snookes
Mr P Bell	Mr B Ford	Mr R Keyes	Mrs D Stevens
Mr EG Birch	Mr D Freeth	Mr A Latham	Mr RM Stokes
Mr GC Bird	Mr D Fulton	Mr J Lloyd	Mr J Sudd
Mr G Bishton	Mr RP Fussell	Mr W Marler	Mr J Swift
Mr HJ Blofield	Mr AW Gaunt	Mr BG Martin	Mr R Swindells
Mr S Boyes	Mr M George	Mr J Martin	Mrs S Swindells
Mr IAR Brown	Mr LG Gibbons	Mr PG Mason	Rev. J Talbot-Ponsonby
Mr P Brown	Mrs G Glover	Mr P Maxim	Mr D Tarry
Mr DL Buckingham	Mr A Gouldstone	Mr DG May	Mr G Thomas
Mrs BE Burns	Mr MG Grant	Ms M McVey	Mr JA Thompson
Mr A Butter	Mr M Green	Mr D Moore	Mrs C Travis
Mr R Camp	Mrs L Greenall	Mr J Morgan	Mr JJ Tucker
Mr P Carty	Mr C Griffin	Mr J Morris	Mrs L Tucker
Mr J Clarke	Miss HJ Griffiths	Mr A Morton	Mr J Turner
Mr G Cole	Mr A Hadfield	Mr D Nicholls	Mrs V Turrells
Mr S Coney	Mr G Hall	Mr P Nickless	Ms C Uff
Mr A Cook	Mr A Hamer	Mrs W Oakley	Mr R Vernon
Mr G Cooke	Mr P Hammersley	Mr A Owen	Ms H Walford
Mr RA Corfield	Mr R Hansford	Mr M Owen	Mr A Walker
Ms M Cousins	Mr D Hatfield	Mrs N Pacult	Mr GJ Walker
Mr A Cross	Mr J Harding	Mr R Parker	Mr T Wall
Mt A Cullis	Mr J Hawkins	Mr MAJ Parton	Mr M Wallace
Mr WA Davidson	Mr SL Haycox	Mr PE Parton	Mr WR Watkins
Ms C Davis	Mr A Heath	Mr M Paul	Mr TC Weale
Mr S Davis	Ms L Henderson	Mr EG Phillips	Mr R Webb
Mr AP Dawes	Mr C Hogarth	Mr J Porter	Rev WJ Webb
Mr A Dawson	Mr AR Holder	Mr B Powis	Mr T Whalin
Mr PG Deans	Mr BW Holford	Mr HM Prince	Mr P Wigley
Mrs J Dodwell	Mr T Holland	Mr KT Pryce	Mr EJ Wilson
Mrs MS Dobson	Mr P Hollingsworth	Ms R Rees	Mr CE Wright
Mr WRB Dodwell	Mr GE Holmes	Mr MD Richardson	Mr GE Young
Mr E Dryburgh	Ms E Hughes	Mr D Scott	Rev. WM Young

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

FIELD TRIPS AND MEETINGS 2002

Main Society Indoor Meetings:

9 Jan	“Dee Estuary”	Dr. R.J. Raines
7 Feb	“Work of BASC”	Carl Cox
7 Mar	AGM and “Honey Buzzards”	Steve Roberts
3 Oct	“Roseate Terns”	Andy Warren
7 Nov	“Photographing Wildlife”	Terry Wall
5 Dec	“Birds of the Welsh Moorlands”	John Roberts

Main Society Field Trips

19 Jan	WWF Slimbridge	14 Jul	Prees (Butterflies)
17 Feb	Whitcliffe, Ludlow	17 Aug	ASF
17 Mar	Shropshire Meres	14 Sept	Blithfield Reservoir
21 Apr	Clee Hill	26 Oct	Point of Ayr
2-9 May	Lesbos (group visit)	23 Nov	Cors Caron NNR
11 May	Wrekin (dawn chorus)	21 Dec	Cole Mere
8 Jun	South Stack		

Ludlow Branch Field Trips:

20 Jan	Belvide Reservoir	29 Jun	Lake Vyrnwy
13 Feb	Chelmarsh Reservoir	10 Jul	Venus Pool
17 Mar	Cors-Caron NNR	14 Aug	Upton Warren
13 Apr	Downton Gorge	8 Sep	Dolydd Hafren
24 Apr	Clee Hill	11 Sep	Wellington
4 May	Whitcliffe	9 Oct	Criftin Forge Bridge
15 May	Wyre Forest	6 Nov	Chelmarsh Reservoir
2 Jun	Whixall Moss	9 Nov	Connah’s Quay
19 Jun	Bodenham		

Ludlow and Stretton Branch Meetings:

28 January	“Corn Crakes in Britain”	Peter Carty	Stretton
21 February	AGM		Ludlow
25 February	“The Language of Birds”	John Wyatt	Stretton
25 March	“On the edge of the Arctic”	Brayton Holt	Stretton
21 October	“Birds down under”	John Barnes	Stretton
14 Nov	“Choughs”	Tony Cross	Ludlow
25 November	“Birds of Northern India”	Robin Jukes-Hughes	Stretton
11 Dec	“Migrants of the Exe Estuary”	John Bowers	Ludlow

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

* a description is not required of summer plumage drakes.

OFFICERS & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

For the period April 2002 - March 2003

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 Mrs M Donoghue

Officers:

Chairman Mr P G Deans, Springfield, Cross Lane Head,
Bridgnorth WV16 4SJ Tel 01746 766718

Hon. Secretary Mr J Turner CPM, 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:

Chair Conservation Sub-committee – Mr G J Walker

Chair Publicity Sub-committee – Mrs C Travis

Excursion Co-ordinator Mr A Latham

Other Elected Members Mr N J Eden, Mr A W Smith, Mr H M Prince

Non elected member Mrs A Andrews (Membership Secretary)

Other Representatives:

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

Bulletin Editor – Mr R Camp

Branch Reps.—Mr C Bell (Ludlow), Miss M A B McVey (Church Stretton)