

THE 2003 SHROPSHIRE BIRD REPORT

The 43rd Annual Report of the
Shropshire Ornithological Society

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Common Swift to Hoopoe
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Photographs: Tony Cross, John Harding, John Hawkins,
Allan Heath and Paul King.

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Grateful thanks to all those involved - Ed.

EDITORIAL

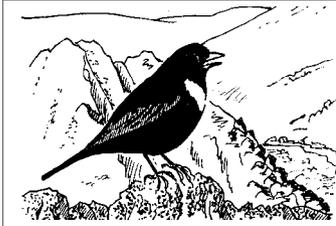
Once again, I have to apologise for the late publication of this Report. We have experienced some difficulties this year and having stated in last year's editorial that I was handing over the reins, the task of drawing this report together has again fallen me. However, I do hope a new Editor can be found in time for the 2004 Report!

Regular readers of the Shropshire Bird Report will notice changes this year to the Systematic List. Most people will be aware of the continuing international debate to try and standardise the English names of species and of moves to re-order the list.

The official British List is maintained by the British Ornithologists Union (BOU) and the Society's Conservation Sub-committee has agreed that, for use in the Shropshire Bird Report, we should adopt the English names used by BOU since they have the greatest acceptance internationally. Although some of these are unfamiliar, for instance, little plover rather than little ringed plover, we should all get used to them in time. However, British Birds magazine (BB) has also published a new list of English names and this has brought a return to some old favourites such as Bewick's swan rather than tundra swan and, for less scientific use, this is welcomed. Consequently, the Conservation Sub-committee has agreed that, the BB English name should appear in brackets if it is different from the BOU name. For less scientific use, such as the quarterly bulletins, the BB names will be preferred.

The re-ordering of the list is perhaps even more controversial, but the Taxonomic Sub-committee of BOU Records Committee have recommended changes to place wildfowl (*Anseriformes*) and gamebirds (*Galliformes*) ahead of all other species. Based largely on work by Sibley and Munroe, the BOU have recommended that all County Recorders adopt the new list when preparing their 2003 annual reports and this has also been agreed by our Conservation Sub-committee.

Geoff Holmes, June 2005
County Recorder and Bird Report Editor



THE LONG MYND BREEDING BIRD PROJECT

UPLAND BIRDS OF THE LONG MYND

INTRODUCTION

Intensive fieldwork was carried out by The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project during the five years 1994-98. The Project grew out of *An Atlas Of The Breeding Birds Of Shropshire*, published by the Shropshire Ornithological Society in 1992. The Project combined the fieldwork techniques used for *The Atlas* (1992), and the territory mapping method (for example the BTO Common Birds Census) described in *Bird Census Techniques* (Bibby, Burgess & Hill 1992).

The species which were intensively studied and mapped are:

Teal	Grey Wagtail	Whinchat
Buzzard	Pied Wagtail	Stonechat
Kestrel	Dipper	Wheatear
Red Grouse	Redstart	Ring Ouzel
Snipe	Skylark	Reed Bunting
Curlew	Tree Pipit	

In addition, other species were monitored:

Peregrine	Merlin
Hobby	Raven

An annual summary of the Project's work was published each year in the Shropshire Bird Reports up until 1998. This article consolidates these summaries, considers the results of correlating the distribution of each species with the different habitats found on the Long Mynd, and discusses how these results have influenced the management of the site by the National Trust.

Survey methodology

Every time one of the listed species was seen, it was recorded in the field on a 1:10,000 map. At the end of each season, a separate map was compiled for each species, showing each registration, with date. These were then grouped into territories.

Comparison of the number of territories found in each of the five years of the Project enabled population estimates to be produced. These are included in Table 1A (page 12).

CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR THE UPLAND BIRDS OF THE LONG MYND

The population and population trend for each listed species, locally and nationally, has been considered, particularly in relation to the Red and Amber Lists, in *The Population Status of Birds in the UK - Birds of Conservation Concern: 2002-2007*.

A set of criteria to judge which species should benefit from active conservation measures was drafted, in consultation with the Shropshire Ornithological Society's Conservation Sub-committee, and these criteria have been agreed with the National Trust. They give priority to those species where a significant proportion of the Shropshire population breed on the Long Mynd.

The Trust has also accepted specific responsibility to seek to safeguard, and wherever possible increase, the breeding population of these priority species, primarily through maintaining and enhancing their habitat.

Criteria

- Species that are primarily dependent on upland habitats, and where the Long Mynd is particularly important for them.
- Priority species for conservation action that have already been identified, through *The Population Status of Birds in the UK - Birds of Conservation Concern: 2002-2007*. and the *Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan*.
- Species that form part of the 'upland breeding bird community' for Upland Moorland and Grassland in the criteria for selecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Priorities

Very high priority

- Species on the *Red* and *Amber Lists* in the *Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007*
- Species primarily restricted to the uplands
- Species targeted in the *Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan* and the Long Mynd holds more than 5% of the Shropshire population.

High priority

- Species on the *Red* and *Amber Lists* in the *Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007* and the Long Mynd holds more than 1% of the Shropshire population.

The population data, application of the criteria, and resulting priority for each species is detailed in Tables 1A and 1B (pages 12 & 13). In summary, the resulting priorities are:

Very high priority		High priority
Teal	Whinchat	Curlew
Merlin	Stonechat	Skylark
Red Grouse	Wheatear	Grey Wagtail
Snipe	Ring Ouzel	Redstart
Tree Pipit	Reed Bunting	
Meadow Pipit		

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

The National Trust's computerised geographical information system was used to produce a distribution map for each species, showing all territories found over the five years 1994-98. This distribution map has then been overlaid on a vegetation habitat map, based primarily on the map produced for the National Trust by the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS) in 1995. The habitats basically comprise different mixes of heath (heather, bilberry and other dwarf shrubs), bracken, grass, gorse, acid flush (wetland), and pools. The distribution maps for those species that are primarily associated with heath were also overlaid on the National Trust's own map showing Heather Condition.

Because the plateau represents a different habitat from the steep valley sides for some species, and the plateau is treated as a separate entity by the National Trust as far as habitat management is concerned, the boundary of the plateau has also been shown on these maps.

The software was then used to produce a count of the number of territories in each different habitat vegetation mix (with separate counts for the plateau, and for the hillsides). However, because this does not necessarily show the habitat preference for each species, because the total area of each habitat is different, a density was calculated for each species in each habitat, using the known total area of each habitat (including the split between the plateau and the valley sides). This density was then converted into a density ratio. Similarly, corresponding density ratios have been calculated in relation to Heather Condition for those species that are primarily associated with heathland.

These density ratios show the relative importance of each habitat for each species, and, therefore, provide a fundamental tool for habitat management and wildlife conservation on the Long Mynd. Table 2 (pages 14 & 15) illustrates the results and shows the habitat preferences and density ratios for each of the species for the overall study area of 2148.4 hectares.

DEPENDENCY ON PARTICULAR VEGETATION TYPES

The analysis shows that most species are dependent on particular niches and vegetation types, and some are restricted to either the plateau or the hillsides and valleys. For the last ten years, the National Trust has been preoccupied with improving heather condition, and reducing grazing pressure. However, the correlation between distribution and habitat of the priority species shows that only three of them – Red Grouse, Stonechat and Ring Ouzel – show a preference for areas where heather comprises more than 50% of the vegetation cover.

Now the habitat requirements of the priority species are known, they too can be taken into account.

The breeding territory of any bird has four fundamental requirements:

- Cover to hide the nest, to keep eggs and nestlings safe from predators.
- Cover for the adults, to keep them safe from predators while resting and roosting.
- A song post / display area, for males to proclaim territory, and attract a mate.
- Areas to gather food.

The habitat preferences shown in Table 2, and knowledge of their breeding requirements, shows that many priority species of bird are dependent on:

- Wetlands (pools & flushes).
- Bracken.
- Short grass.
- Trees.
- Habitat variety.

Species dependent on wetland:

- Teal require pools with emergent vegetation to feed and hide ducklings.
- Snipe require soft wet ground.
- Reed bunting require juncus (acid and wet flush) for food.

Species dependent on bracken:

- Tree pipit feed on the ground, as well as in trees.
- Redstart feed on the ground, as well as in trees.
- Whinchat are virtually restricted to bracken habitats on hillsides, and by springs / pools.

Species dependent on short grass:

- Curlew require short grass for feeding, and for somewhere to land at the end of their display flight.
- Skylark require short grass for feeding. When the grass gets too long they are replaced by Meadow Pipit.
- Redstart feed on the short grass under the scattered trees.
- Stonechat feed on short vegetation, including grass.
- Wheatear are restricted to areas of very short grass and badly eroded hillside, and rabbit holes provide the nest sites.
- Ring ouzel require short grass for feeding.

Species dependent on trees:

- Buzzard build their nest in trees.
- Tree pipit display and feed in trees.
- Grey wagtail get supplementary food from trees.
- Redstart nest in holes in trees, and feed in the foliage.

Two species are indirectly dependent on trees:

- Kestrel lays eggs in old Crows' nests.
- Merlin lays eggs in old Crows' nests.

Species dependent on variety:

All species need a combination of habitats, but especially:

- Stonechat nest near the boundary between vegetation types, and feeds in each.
- Whinchat nest near bracken and water.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

The Project's results and analysis have already affected the management of the Long Mynd. For example, whinchat are wholly dependent on bracken habitats, but only inhabit the steep hillsides. However, red grouse and skylark have an aversion to bracken, but they only inhabit the flat plateau. Removing bracken from the plateau, but leaving it on the hillsides, benefits all three species.

The National Trust has formally incorporated the following habitat management objectives into its overall policies and strategies, particularly *The Long Mynd Property Management Plan*, and *The Long Mynd Conservation Plan*, to maintain and improve habitat for priority bird species:

- Retain small-scale diversity, and break up heather, bracken and short grass "monocultures" where they cover large areas.
- Increase the number and size of pools and wetland flushes by breaking down the banks of existing steep sided pools, and creating shallows with emergent vegetation (and, in addition, consider damming some springs just below the springline, at the interface between the plateau and the valleys, and digging new pools).
- Clear bracken from the plateau, but do not clear it from areas adjacent to the flushes, or from the hillsides, especially under trees and near water (and amend the bracken spraying programme accordingly).
- Maintain short grass, on the heathland plateau, and on the hillsides.

- Maintain mature scattered trees on the hillsides.
- Manage the reduction of overgrazing in the most appropriate way to extend heathland eastwards across the plateau, while retaining some areas of short grass as feeding areas for priority bird species.

UPLAND BIRDS OF THE LONG MYND

This work has been detailed in a full report to The National Trust, *Upland Birds Of The Long Mynd: Report Of The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project 1994 – 98*. A copy of the full report has been supplied to the County Bird Recorder.

This report includes:

- Species accounts - a full description, an estimate of the number of breeding territories found, important observations and results, distribution and habitat maps, and a summary of the population trends and breeding status for each species at the county and national level.
- proposals for integrated conservation action to safeguard and enhance the population of priority, and high priority, species.
- proposals for habitat management and further research.

A black and white photocopy of the full 170 page report is available from the Project, c/o 8 Welsh Street Gardens, Bishop's Castle, Shropshire SY9 5BH, price £4 including postage and packing.

The full set of habitat and density ratio tables, showing the split between the plateau and the hillsides, and the correlation with heather condition is included in the report, but can also be sent separately, on request, if a stamped addressed envelope is supplied to the Project.

BIRDS AND WILDLIFE OF THE LONG MYND

The results of the Project's work are being incorporated into a forthcoming book, *The Long Mynd - its Birds and Wildlife*, to be published by the National Trust.

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Leo Smith, December 2004



Merlin (copyright Rory McCann).

This is one of 20 drawings produced to illustrate a forthcoming book "The Long Mynd - its Birds and Wildlife", to be published by The National trust in 2005-06"

Table 1A Population of the birds of the Long Mynd

Species	Estimated population (breeding pairs)					
	National. Trust.Long Mynd 1998	Shropshire		Long Mynd as % of County 1998		
		1990 (Atlas1992)	Revised 1998	Approx. %	>5%	>1%
Teal	4	5	4-5	100	yes	
Buzzard	4-5	<300	>600	<1		
Kestrel	5*	700-1400	NQ	<1		
Merlin	1	1	no change	100	yes	
Red Grouse	25-35	<100	<50	66	yes	
Snipe	20-25	200-300	100-150	~20	yes	
Curlew	7-8	700	<500	>1		yes
Skylark	140-230	14,000	<10,000	2		yes
Tree Pipit	90-100#	900-1800	NQ	5	yes	
Meadow Pipit	600-1050	2500-5000	NQ	10	yes	
Grey Wagtail	12*	250-500	NQ	2		yes
Pied Wagtail	10*	2500-5000	NQ	<1		
Dipper	1	160-480	<200	<1		
Redstart	75-85#	1400-4200	NQ	3		yes
Whinchat	110-130	110-275	300	40	yes	
Stonechat	22	<25	<100	25	yes	
Wheatear	50-60	180-300	no change	20	yes	
Ring Ouzel	13	12	13	100	yes	
Yellowhammer	40-45#	35,000	NQ --	<1		
Reed Bunting	50-60	570-1900	NQ --	5	yes	

Notes:

* The figure includes territories at the edge of the National Trust property, where the Long Mynd provides the main feeding area.

The figure excludes territories at the edge of National Trust property.

NQ There is no quantifiable evidence to calculate a change in the population estimate given in *The Atlas 1992*. Where this is followed by -- the population has almost certainly declined by a considerable but unquantifiable amount.

Table 1B Conservation Status of birds of the Long Mynd

Species	Conservation Status				Priority	
	National 2002-07		SSSI Criteria Score	Shropshire BAP Target	Importance of Upland Habitat	Long Mynd Management Plan
Red List	Amber List					
Teal		yes	3		high ++	v.high
Buzzard			3		high --	low
Kestrel		yes			low	low
Merlin		yes	4		v.high	v.high
Red Grouse		yes	1		v.high	v.high
Snipe		yes	2	yes	high ++	v.high
Curlew		yes	2		high ++	high
Skylark	yes				low	high
Tree Pipit		yes			high	v.high
Meadow Pipit		yes			high	v.high
Grey Wagtail		yes			high	high
Pied Wagtail					Low	low
Dipper					high	low
Redstart		yes			high	high
Whinchat			2		v.high	v.high
Stonechat		yes	2		v.high	v.high
Wheatear			2		v.high	v.high
Ring Ouzel	yes		2.5	yes	v.high	v.high
Yellowhammer	yes				low	low
Reed Bunting	yes				low	v.high

Notes:

- ++ Indicates that the uplands are becoming relatively more important as the species is declining in or disappearing from the lowlands.
- Indicates that the species range is expanding from the uplands.

Table 2. Correlation of Distribution of all Species with habitat Area (Almost all of National Trust Property)

(No. = sum of the number of territories found in each of the five years 1994-98)
(D.R. = Density Ratio, showing relative importance of each habitat/vegetation type)

HABITAT	Red Grouse		Snipe		Tree Pipit		Redstart		Skylark		Wheatear						
	No.	%	D.R.	No.	%	D.R.	No.	%	D.R.	No.	%	D.R.					
Heath	40	50.6	1.6	20	25.6	3.3	8	2.8	5	2.8	212	34.8	4.7	10	5.2	1.0	
Heath with scattered bracken	21	26.6	1.6	10	12.8	3.1	24	8.5	7	4.0	137	22.5	5.7	16	8.4	3.0	
Heath with grass + scattered bracken				1	0.4		1	0.4			3	0.5		7	3.7		
Heath and grass				1	0.4		1	0.4	2	1.1	2	0.3					
Bracken + bracken litter understorey	2	2.5		5	6.4	1.0	138	48.8	80	45.5	3.7	37	6.1	1.0	42	22.0	5.1
Bracken + heath understorey	13	16.5	1.0	20	25.6	6.1	53	18.7	22	12.5	1.6	114	18.7	4.7	11	5.8	2.1
Bracken +grass understorey				14	4.9		14	4.9	12	6.8	1.0	30	4.9		40	20.9	8.8
Bracken + heath & grass u'storey				25	8.8		25	8.8	25	14.2	10.8	2	0.3		7	3.7	
Grass	1	1.3		9	3.2		9	3.2	12	6.8	2.9	5	0.8		13	6.8	8.2
Grass + heath				4	1.4		4	1.4	3	1.7		2	0.3		10	5.2	28.9
Grass + Heath + Bracken				5	1.8		5	1.8	7	4.0		3	0.5		1	0.5	
Grass + scattered bracken																	
Gorse																	
Acid flush	1	1.3		20	25.6	28.2	1	0.4	1	0.6		5	0.8				
Recent Burn	1	1.3		2	2.6							12	2.0				
Pools				1	1.3												
Total	79	100	n/a	78	100	n/a	283	100	176	100	n/a	610	100	n/a	191	100	n/a

Table 2 (continued)

HABITAT	Whinchat		Stonechat		Ring Ouzel		Yellowhammer		Reed Bunting		All N.T.					
	No.	%	D.R.	%	D.R.	%	D.R.	%	D.R.	%	Area (Ha)	%				
Heath	24	5.5	1.0	32	33.3	2.0	21	32.3	2.5		23	13.3	1.7	526.7	24.5	
Heath with scattered bracken	69	15.9	5.4	19	19.8	2.2	20	30.8	4.4		25	14.5	3.5	280.7	13.1	
Heath with grass + scattered bracken	3	0.7					1	1.5							19.5	0.9
Heath and grass							1	1.5							20.4	0.9
Bracken + bracken litter understory	165	38.0	8.4	13	13.5	1.0	7	10.8	1.0		11	6.4	1.0	432.0	20.1	
Bracken + heath understory	75	17.3	5.9	13	13.5	1.5	6	9.2	1.3		4	5.7	1.0	281.1	13.1	
Bracken +grass understory	20	4.6		1	1.0						14	20.0	4.1	239.7	11.2	
Bracken + heath & grass u'storey	30	6.9	14.2	4	4.2		3	4.6			3	4.3		46.4	2.2	
Grass	8	1.8		2	2.1		2	3.1			4	5.7	3.4	83.0	3.9	
Grass + heath	4	0.9		1	1.0									18.2	0.8	
Grass + Heath + Bracken														2.7	0.1	
Grass + scattered bracken	9	2.1		2	2.1						5	7.1	3.4	102.2	4.8	
Gorse											1	1.4		20.5	1.0	
Acid flush	27	6.2	9.7	9	9.4	4.9	4	6.2	4.0		49	28.3	31.4	61.2	2.8	
Recent Burn											12	6.9	41.7	11.3	0.5	
Pools											2	1.2		2.7	0.1	
Total	434	100	n/a	96	100	n/a	65	100	n/a		173	100	n/a	2148.4	100	

Note: A "Density Index" has been calculated for each species in each habitat / vegetation type by dividing the total number of territories found over five years in that habitat by the total area of that habitat. For each species, all the different Density Indexes have then been divided by the minimum Density Index for that species to give a Density Ratio for each habitat. This gives a direct comparison of the relative importance of each habitat for that species (only for habitats containing more than 5% of the total territories). The habitat with the lowest density of territories will have a Density Ratio of 1.0, so a habitat with a Density Ratio of 2.0 will contain twice as many territories in the same sized area.

<p>BREEDING BIRDS OF TELFORD AND WREKIN WOODLAND MARCH - JUNE 2003 A SURVEY AND EVALUATION</p>

Objectives

The present paper summarises the findings of a bird survey commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council (T&WC) as part of its policy of regular monitoring of woodland birds under the terms of agreement with the Forestry Stewardship Council UK Woodland Assurance Scheme and submitted in a full report to T&WC in September 2003. Four fieldwork objectives were devised for the 2003 woodland breeding bird survey in order to permit an evaluation of the distribution and status of all breeding species and to allow for the future monitoring of changes in species composition and populations within the sites. The objectives were:

- To determine the species composition and distribution of breeding birds in six sample types of woodland in the Telford & Wrekin Unitary Authority area.
- To plot the location of breeding territories and to determine the breeding populations of bird species included in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), species of UK conservation concern and species of county conservation interest.
- To plot the location of breeding territories and to determine the breeding populations of a number of woodland specialist species.
- To plot the location of breeding territories and to determine the breeding population of species associated with a scrub habitat.

The T&WC woodland sites for the purpose of this survey were as follows:

T&WC site	Grid reference
Queensway Woodland	SJ713065
Paddock Mound	SJ687073
The Cockshutt	SJ700116
Lightmoor	SJ683057
Randlay Pool and Blue Pool	SJ702078
Limekiln Wood	SJ652098

A total of 25 site visits were completed during the period 1 March 2003 to 30 June 2003. Visits were conducted at various times of the day and included after-dusk visits for owls. Definitive routes through the sites were followed as prescribed by T&WC. However, to ensure that potential bird species and their territories were not missed, detours were made on site visits and then prescribed routes returned to.

Bird species composition of the T&WC sites

Fifty nine species were recorded in the T&WC woodland sites during the breeding season March to June 2003 (Table 1, pages 18 & 19). Of these, 53 were considered to be breeding in that territories were occupied or, in the case of non-territorial species, singing males or pairs were recorded. The richest diversity of 43 species was recorded in Randlay Pool and Blue Pool. Lightmoor also supported a rich diversity of 37 species. This was due to the fact that both sites were unique in having open-standing water habitat. The presence of lesser redpoll in Limekiln Wood is significant in that this species is a rare summer resident in Shropshire.

Bird species composition of the woodland habitat



Nuthatch (*Glenn Bishton*)

Table 2 (pages 20 & 21) presents the number of species occupying breeding territories solely in a woodland habitat. The exclusion of species from this part of the analysis is not meant to detract from their value. The analysis allows for a direct comparison of the bird species composition of the woods. It will also enable comparisons to be made in the future between the different woodland types and their succession over time.

Thirty seven breeding species were recorded in the woodland habitat in the T&WC sites. Limekiln Wood is an ancient woodland comprising a range of structures with areas of mature oak woodland, coppice, well-developed shrub layer, hedgerows and large quantities of dead wood. At the other end of the spectrum, the density of the coniferous stands at Paddock Mound, little variation in age of the trees, a low diversity of tree species and the small quantities of dead standing and fallen wood probably contribute to the low diversity of birds.

Table 1 Species recorded in the T&WC sites March-June 2003

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock Mound	The Cockshutt	Light-moor	RandlayPool & BluePool	Limekiln Wood
Little grebe				+		
Great crested grebe					+	
Heron*				+	+	
Mute swan					+	
Canada goose					+	
Mallard				+	+	
Tufted duck					+	
Sparrowhawk					+	
Buzzard	+			+		+
Kestrel	+	+		+		
Red-legged partridge						+
Pheasant				+		+
Moorhen	+			+	+	
Coot				+	+	
Common sandpiper*					+	
Stock dove			+	+	+	
Wood pigeon	+	+	+	+	+	+
Collared dove				+	+	
Cuckoo				+		
Tawny owl						+
Kingfisher*					+	
Green woodpecker			+	+	+	+
Great spot. woodpecker	+		+		+	+
Grey wagtail	+					
Pied wagtail				+		
Wren	+	+	+	+	+	+
Dunnock	+	+	+	+	+	+
Robin	+	+	+	+	+	+
Blackbird	+	+	+	+	+	+
Song thrush	+	+	+	+	+	+

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock Mound	The Cockshutt	Light-moor	RandlayPool & BluePool	Limekiln Wood
Mistle thrush	+		+	+	+	+
Lesser whitethroat	+					
Whitethroat	+		+		+	
Garden warbler	+		+		+	
Blackcap	+	+	+	+	+	+
Chiffchaff	+	+	+	+	+	+
Willow warbler	+	+	+	+	+	+
Goldcrest	+	+	+	+	+	+
Long-tailed tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Marsh tit			+	+	+	+
Willow tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Coal tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Blue tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Great tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Nuthatch	+				+	+
Treecreeper	+					+
Jay	+		+	+	+	+
Magpie	+	+	+	+	+	+
Jackdaw*			+			
Raven						+
Carrion crow	+	+	+	+	+	+
Starling*					+	
House sparrow*		+	+			
Chaffinch	+	+	+	+	+	+
Greenfinch	+	+	+	+	+	+
Goldfinch		+		+	+	
Linnet			+			
Lesser redpoll						+
Bullfinch	+	+	+	+	+	+
Total species	59	32	23	31	43	33

* Denotes non-breeding species using the site for foraging and breeding elsewhere

Table 2 Species occupying a woodland habitat in the T&WC sites

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock Mound	The Cockshutt	Light-moor	RandlayPool &BluePool	Limekiln Wood
Sparrowhawk					+	
Buzzard	+			+		+
Kestrel	+	+		+		
Pheasant				+		+
Stock dove			+	+	+	
Wood pigeon	+	+	+	+	+	+
Collared dove				+	+	
Cuckoo				+		
Tawny owl						+
Green woodpecker			+	+	+	+
Great spot. woodpecker	+		+		+	+
Wren	+	+	+	+	+	+
Dunnock	+	+	+	+	+	+
Robin	+	+	+	+	+	+
Blackbird	+	+	+	+	+	+
Song thrush	+	+	+	+	+	+
Mistle thrush	+		+	+	+	+
Blackcap	+	+	+	+	+	+
Chiffchaff	+	+	+	+	+	+
Goldcrest	+	+	+	+	+	+
Long-tailed tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Marsh tit			+	+	+	+
Willow tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Coal tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Blue tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Great tit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Nuthatch	+				+	+
Treecreeper	+					+

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock Mound	The Cockshutt	Light-moor	RandlayPool &BluePool	Limekiln Wood
Jay	+		+	+	+	+
Magpie	+	+	+	+	+	+
Raven						+
Carrion crow	+	+	+	+	+	+
Chaffinch	+	+	+	+	+	+
Greenfinch	+	+	+	+	+	+
Goldfinch		+		+	+	
Lesser redpoll						+
Bullfinch	+	+	+	+	+	+
Total species	37	26	21	30	29	31



Coal tit (*Glenn Bishton*)

Queensway Woodland

Queensway Woodland supported 32 bird species (Table 1). Ignoring all other habitats, 26 species were recorded in the woodland habitat (Table 2). Originating as a Telford Development Corporation plantation along the busy A442 Queensway, the woodland is a relatively young, broadleaf woodland, uniform in structure with occasional mature oaks and stands of coniferous trees. This did not appear to deter species typically associated with maturing broadleaf woodland, including great spotted woodpecker, coal, blue and great tits, nuthatch and treecreeper with good numbers of chiffchaff and blackcap in broken canopy woodland and along woodland rides. Marsh tit, a species particularly dependent on mature broadleaf woodland, was absent.

An important component of the site was the extensive area of scrub, ranging from scattered, low-level hawthorn, clumps of bramble, nettle and other tall herbs in neutral rank grassland to dense areas of taller, almost impenetrable scrub. Consequently, the Queensway Woods supported the greatest diversity of scrub warblers in the T&WC sites, with lesser whitethroat, being unique to the site. Bullfinch (BAP) was recorded in high numbers with nine territories identified. The abundance of mature hawthorn and thickets of blackthorn aligning the rides, at the woodland edge and in scrub corners appeared to be favourable to bullfinch.

The Queensway Woodland site suffered intense noise pollution from traffic on the adjacent A442 Queensway. Studies in Holland have shown that willow warbler densities are lower along busy roads. It is, therefore, feasible that this might affect the diversity and density of birds on the site.

Paddock Mound

Paddock Mound supported 23 breeding bird species (Table 1), the lowest diversity of species in the T&WC sites. Woodland at Paddock Mound supported 21 species (Table 2). Paddock Mound is dominated by a monoculture of Scot's Pine and the woodland is closed-canopy and structurally uniform with little age range, few tree species and little dead wood. The heavy shading contributes to a sparse shrub and field layer and other pioneering tree species such as silver birch are largely confined to the woodland edge.

These factors possibly account for the absence of great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch and treecreeper which require decaying and dead wood as an invertebrate food source and holes and cavities in dead wood for nest sites. Nuthatch also has a close affinity to mature oak of which Paddock Mound

supported few specimens. The presence of some open areas in the form of heathland with pioneering birch at the edges and open scrub accounted for the occupation of the site by good numbers of willow warbler. A section of the scrub was fire-damaged in 2003, which may have impeded occupation by additional willow warbler and other scrub species.

The Scot's pine woodland adds a valuable dimension to the T&WC woodlands as a whole and enhances the diversity of species present. For instance, siskin and redpoll are winter visitors which feed on pinecones and were recorded in Paddock Mound in March.

The Cockshutt

Thirty one species were recorded in The Cockshutt (Table 1). The woodland habitat supported 25 species (Table 2). The site was unique amongst the T&WC sites in that it supported breeding linnet (BAP) which inhabited the central gorse scrub area. The site also supported a substantial population of 21 song thrush (BAP) territories, the highest number in the T&WC sites.

The Cockshutt is a site of two particular contrasts with an extensive area of gorse scrub at the heart of the site and predominately beech woodland around the perimeter. The scrub supported a range of scrub associated summer migrant warblers including four whitethroat and willow warbler territories, and one garden warbler as well as five bullfinch (BAP), 11 song thrush (BAP) and the two linnets. The Cockshutt held more whitethroat than any other site.

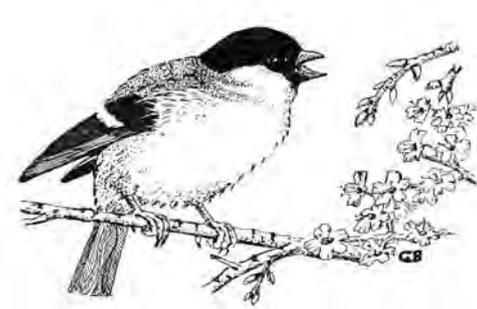
The Cockshutt supported a high density of woodland specialists (Table 5, page 28). Beech mast is valuable food source for tits and finches in autumn and winter and this factor, in combination with the availability of some birch as nest sites, might contribute to the high density of tits in the site. The dominance of a beech monoculture, low volumes of dead wood in places, and the relative scarcity of oak and birch possibly contribute to the absence of nuthatch and tree creeper.

The shaded, damp conditions in the beech woodland did appear to suit song thrush, whilst marsh tit, a species dependant on mature broadleaf woodland, was recorded on two territories. The dense canopy and resultant low light levels might be inhibiting the development of a shrub and field layer in places, exemplified by low numbers of blackcap and chiffchaff. These birds require tall trees and a scattered shrub layer for feeding and song posts and patches of bramble and nettle in which to construct their nests.

Lightmoor

Lightmoor supported a rich community of 37 bird species (Table 1). Several of these inhabited the open-standing water and included little grebe, heron, mallard, moorhen and coot. Species confined solely to the woodland habitat numbered 30 (Table 2).

Dominated by naturally colonising silver birch and goat willow on old pit mounds, the absence of great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch and treecreeper indicates that the woodland has not yet attained maturity. These birds require quantities of dead wood. The presence of chiffchaff in greater numbers than any other T&WC site reflects the light, open-canopy structure of the silver birch dominated woodland, while willow warbler were characteristically found at lightly wooded parts of the woodland edge.



Bullfinch (*Glenn Bishton*)

Although several gorse and bramble clumps were available in the southern section of the site, none were occupied by the typical scrub warblers. It is likely that the scrub is not sufficiently substantial or dense enough for the scrub warblers. Hawthorn is increasingly spreading into the grassland and as this matures it is envisaged that additional species could colonise the site.

Three BAP species kestrel, song thrush and bullfinch were recorded and Lightmoor supported two species not found within the other T&WC sites; these were cuckoo and pied wagtail.

Randlay Pool and Blue Pool

Randlay Pool and Blue Pool supported the highest diversity of bird species in the T&WC sites with 43 species (Table 1). The woodland habitat held 29 species (Table 2). The diversity of species can be attributed to the range of habitats in the site including large areas of open-standing water, some scrub, grassland and broadleaf woodland. Six species, great crested grebe, Canada goose, tufted duck, common sandpiper, kingfisher and sparrowhawk, were unique to the site.

Great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, coal tit and marsh tit were confined to the oak and ash dominated woodland around Randlay Pool. The absence of treecreeper from the site suggests the woodland has yet to reach maturity. Blue and great tit were largely confined to Randlay Pool woodlands. The Blue Pool woodland supported the one willow warbler territory and two BAP species, song thrush and bullfinch.

The scrub species, whitethroat, garden warbler and willow warbler, were recorded on one territory each. Randlay Pool and Blue Pool supported only small areas of scrub, but the development of hawthorn scrub on the neighbouring grassland to the south of the site within the Telford Town Park Local Nature Reserve is promising for scrub species.

Limekiln Wood

Ancient semi-natural woodland with a range of habitat from upland-oak woodland, coppice, some light scrub and hedgerows, are all factors which contributed to the diverse range of 33 bird species (Table 1). The woodland alone supported 31 breeding species, the highest number of the T&WC sites. Limekiln Wood also held the most territories of woodland specialist species (Tables 2 & 5).

Lesser redpoll, a rare breeding resident in Shropshire, was recorded in Limekiln Wood. This species is present in good numbers in Limekiln Wood and the neighbouring Ercall and Wrekin woods in winter, where it feeds on the seeds of birch, alder, pine and European larch. The presence of the bird in suitable breeding habitat in summer is particularly interesting and further monitoring is important.

Raven was observed displaying and calling immediately above the canopy. The presence of raven is indicative of its recent and continued eastward expansion across Shropshire.

The light, open canopy of the oak woodland and abundant silver birch, both mature and decaying, contributed to the high number of marsh tit. Densities of song thrush (BAP) was highest in the damp, coppiced section of woodland in the south of the site while bullfinch (BAP) were particularly associated with edge habitat and hedgerows along the northern and eastern perimeter of the site and along some woodland paths. Similarly, blackcap and chiffchaff were particularly evident along woodland paths, in clearings and along the perimeter at the interface with Wrekin Golf Course and fields. Sections of the woodland in the eastern section of the site were species-poor.

T&WC Local Biodiversity Action Plan species

Fifty nine song thrush territories were identified and birds were recorded in all of the T&WC sites (Table 3, page 26). An exceptionally high density of song thrush was recorded in The Cockshutt where most territories were located in the gorse and thorn scrub at the centre of the site. Most territories were recorded in edge habitat, whether along the woodland boundaries or on the margins of internal paths and rides. Coppiced woodland in Limekiln Wood appeared to be favourable to song thrush, where the damp ground probably promoted the availability of molluscs and other invertebrate food on the woodland floor. The closely shaded, but damp beech woodland at The Cockshutt supported several territories and song thrush were equally able to thrive in the more lightly foliated oak and birch woodlands of Lightmoor and Randlay Pool and Blue Pool. A dense leaf litter layer was a common factor in song thrush territories.

Table 3 Number of breeding territories of Local Biodiversity Action Plan species in the T&WC sites March June 2003:

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock-Mound	The Cockshutt	Lightmoor	Randlay Pool & Blue Pool	Limekiln Wood	Total
Kestrel	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
Song thrush	6	3	21	8	10	11	59
Linnet	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Bullfinch	9	3	7	9	7	8	43

Linnet was recorded in one site The Cockshutt where two pairs were identified in typical low-level gorse scrub habitat (Table 3). Some of the gorse at The Cockshutt had suffered relatively recent fire damage, while other sections were deteriorating and becoming tall and leggy. 43 bullfinch territories were identified with the highest number of nine in the Queensway Woods and Lightmoor (Table 3). Bullfinch in the Queensway Woods adopted edge habitat, both internally along rides and in scrub corners. The habitat comprised mature hawthorn or blackthorn surrounded by clumps of bramble, dog rose or nettle. The gorse and hawthorn dominated scrub in The Cockshutt was an important habitat for bullfinch, holding six of the seven territories on the site. Two of the three territories at Paddock Mound were also in scrub.

The distribution of bullfinch territories in Lightmoor illustrates the bullfinches strong preference for edge habitat, mainly hedgerows and light scrub, in mature woodland. Similarly, bullfinches on Lightmoor were concentrated at the woodland edge, along the margins of paths and in hedgerows around the pasture in the northeast corner of the site.

Birds of high UK conservation concern: red-listed species

Table 4 Number of breeding territories of species of high UK conservation concern (red-listed) in the T&WC sites March June 2003:

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock Mound	The Cockshutt	Light-moor	Randlay Pool & Blue Pool	Limekiln Wood	Total
Marsh tit	0	0	2	2	1	6	11
Willow tit	1	1	2	2	2	1	9

Eleven marsh tit territories were identified in the T&WC sites (table 4). High numbers in Limekiln Wood suggests a preference for mature broadleaf woodland, which includes oak, silver birch and ash. The immature woodland of The Queensway and the Scot's pine dominated Paddock Mound do not provide suitable habitat for marsh tit. The marsh tits avoidance of beech woodland is exemplified in The Cockshutt where the beech dominated woodland was avoided in favour of ash-dominated woodlands in the south of the site. Whilst it is unlikely that the marsh tit will colonise the coniferous Paddock Mound, populations in developing woodland such as at Lightmoor and Randlay Pool and Blue Pool may increase in the long-term as succession to oak-dominated woodland occurs. However, marsh tits are largely sedentary and colonisation of new sites is likely to be slow.

Nine willow tit territories were identified in the T&WC sites with an even spread of 1 to 2 territories in each (Table 4). The willow tit, like marsh tit, exists at low densities and is largely sedentary. Consequently, colonisation of new sites will be gradual. The presence of willow tit in Paddock Mound, Queensway Woods and Lightmoor indicates the species is not dependent on broadleaf woodland or mature woodland. Rather, finer structural features appear to be important, such as damp areas of woodland in the Queensway Woods and Lightmoor and edge habitat at the woodland exterior or along paths. Hedgerows comprised part of the willow tit territories at Lightmoor and Limekiln Wood and the presence of elder was noted at Queensway Woods and Paddock Mound.

Woodland specialists

In order to determine the relative abundance of broad structural and micro-features within each T&WC site and to allow for future monitoring of populations the number of territories occupied by a sample of woodland specialist species was determined (Table 5)

Table 5 Number of breeding territories of woodland specialists in the T&WC sites March-June 2003:

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock Mound	The Cockshutt	Light-moor	Randlay Pool & Blue Pool	Limekiln Wood	Total
Green woodpecker	1	0	2	1	1	1	6
G. spot. Woodpecker	1	0	4	0	1	3	9
Blackcap	14	5	11	8	12	9	59
Chiffchaff	6	8	14	16	10	6	60
Goldcrest	2	2	1	3	4	10	22
Coal tit	2	3	7	2	4	6	24
Blue tit	7	6	12	7	11	23	66
Great tit	13	4	10	9	8	15	59
Nuthatch	1	0	0	0	2	6	9
Treecreeper	1	0	0	0	0	2	3
Total	48	28	61	46	53	81	316

Scrub species

Table 6 The number of breeding territories of scrub species in the T&WC site March- June 2003:

Species	Queensway Woodland	Paddock Mound	The Cockshutt	Light-moor	Randlay Pool & Blue Pool	Limekiln Wood	Total
Lesser whitethroat	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Common whitethroat	1	0	4	0	1	0	6
Garden warbler	2	0	1	0	1	0	4
Willow warbler	2	4	4	2	1	1	14
Linnet	0	0	2	0	0	0	2

One lesser whitethroat was recorded in the T&WC sites at the Queensway Woods (Table 6). Habitat occupied comprised tall, mature hawthorn encompassing a large nettle bed midway along the southern fringe of the site. The location had a high sunlight incidence and sheltered aspect, which probably favoured the

availability of its insect and invertebrate prey. The species has a limited distribution in the T&WC area. It is, therefore, imperative that if this species is to remain as a summer migrant breeding species its habitat at the Queensway Woodland is conserved.

Common whitethroats were confined to a scrub habitat which comprised low-level open scrub, mainly pioneering hawthorn in rank grassland or tall herbs with dense patches of bramble and nettle at the Queensway Woodland and predominantly low-level gorse scrub with scattered hawthorn and bramble at The Cockshutt. A common constituent of both of the sites was the presence of extensive patches of bramble with emerging grass or herbs, which provide nest sites. A sunlit, warm environment was also common to the scrub habitat adopted by common whitethroat.



Garden Warbler
(Glenn Bishton)

Garden warblers occupied four territories in the T&WC sites (Table 6) Habitat occupied comprised dense scrub of mature, tall hawthorn with dense foliage and merging with extensive clumps of bramble, nettle and other tall herbs. A common factor was the high sunlight incidence and sheltered aspect that probably promoted foliage development and the availability of insects.

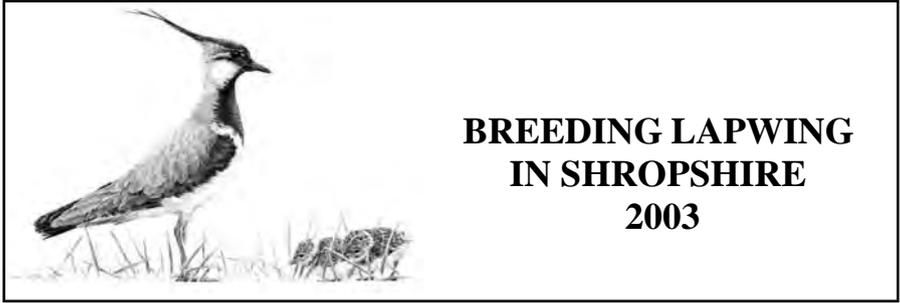
Willow warbler is amber-listed (medium UK conservation concern). Fourteen willow warbler territories were identified, the species being present in all of the T&WC sites (Table 6). Paddock Mound and The Cockshutt held the highest numbers of four territories. Habitat adopted comprised light, scattered scrub at the woodland edge where it interfaced open scrub or heathland. At

Paddock Mound pioneering silver birch woodland gradating into the heathland was adopted. Similar pioneering birch was utilised at Lightmoor while Randlay Pool and Blue Pool supported territories at the edge of goat willow woodland. Pioneering hawthorn where it interfaced open scrub was favoured at the Queensway Woodland. A common feature was the emergence of rank grassland or tall herbs through the lower foliage of the trees.

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Glenn Bishton



BREEDING LAPWING IN SHROPSHIRE 2003

Introduction

The Lapwing population has been declining since the 1960s, but more quickly in recent years. National surveys organised by the British Trust For Ornithology (BTO) found a 49% decline in the breeding population between 1987 and 1998. As a result, Lapwing is included on the national *Amber List of Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007*. The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) shows a continuing decline in the UK, by 13% between 1994 and 2003.

In Shropshire, the local results of the national surveys suggested that the County population in 1998 was only a quarter (25%) of what it was just 11 years earlier. This massive local decline led to Lapwing being a target species in the Shropshire *Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)*, with the aim of increasing the population by 50% by 2010.

The 2003 Survey

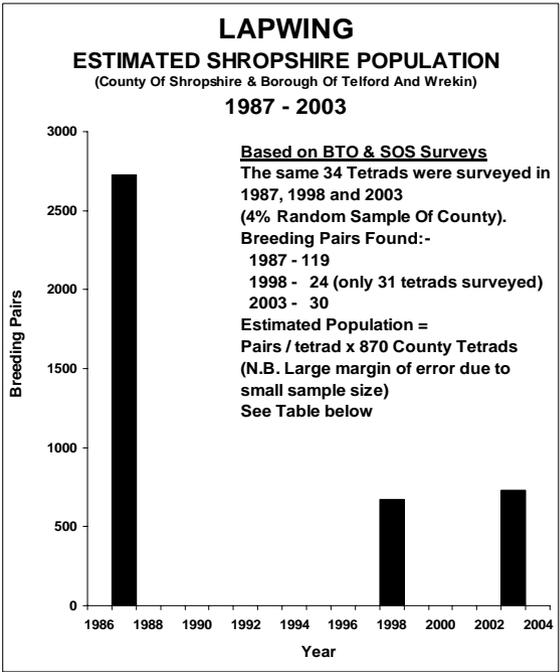
The 1987 national survey covered all suitable habitat in one tetrad (a 2x2 kilometre square in the Ordnance Survey National Grid) in each OS 10-kilometre square, equivalent to a 4% sample survey. The 1998 survey repeated the 1987 survey. As part of these surveys, 34 tetrads were surveyed in 1987 in Shropshire (including the area that has since become the Borough of Telford and Wrekin), and 31 of the same 34 tetrads were surveyed in 1998. As part of the Shropshire *BAP* Lapwing Action Plan, the Shropshire Ornithological Society agreed to re-survey all 34 tetrads in 2003 to establish if any progress has been made to achieving the *BAP* target of a 50% increase by 2010.

The total number of breeding pairs found in Shropshire in each of the three surveys was:

1987	-	119
1998	-	24 (only 31 tetrads surveyed)
2003	-	30

Based on these results, the estimated County population is shown in Figure 1 below. Although there is a large margin of error in the figures, because of the small sample size, the underlying picture is clear – a massive decline between 1987 and 1998, with no statistically significant reversal of the decline in more recent years.

Figure 1:



The table below shows the estimated density (pairs / tetrad) and population size of Lapwing in Shropshire in 1987, 1998 and 2003 with bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals.

	1987 BTO	1998 BTO	2003 SOS
Density (pairs / tetrad)	3.13 (1.72-4.49)	0.77 (0.32-1.28)	0.84 (0.44-1.33)
Population size (850 Tetrads)	2727 (1503-3910)	674 (280-1115)	730 (384-1160)

Thanks to Dr Stuart Newson, Population Biologist (Census Unit), British Trust for Ornithology, for the Statistical analysis.

Table 1 below shows the regional variation in the Shropshire results. Because three of the 34 tetrads were not surveyed during 1998, the results shown reflect the 31 tetrads covered in all three years.

Table 1 Regional distribution within Shropshire of the number of breeding pairs found in the 1987, 1998 and 2003 surveys:

Year	North-West	North-East	South-West	South-East	Total Pairs
1987	37	20	7	26	90
1998	6	10	0	8	24
2003	16	6	0	4	26

The large decrease which occurred between 1987 and 1998 appears to have halted. However, it is interesting to note the differing trends within the County. Further slight decreases in both the north-east and south-east have been more than offset by an increase in the north-west. No birds were found in the south-west during the last two surveys.

In 2003, bare ground and spring sown crops were the most widely used field types with 21 of the total of 30 pairs. Permanent pasture and stubble both had three pairs, set-aside two and autumn sown cereals a single pair. During the first survey in 1987 arable crops accounted for 73% and pasture (including rough wet grassland) 27% of all pairs. By 2003 this had changed to arable 90% and pasture 10%, with no pairs on rough wet grassland. Although available habitat was not recorded, wet grassland is known to have disappeared from at least one tetrad where three pairs bred in 1987. In addition to providing cover for nesting birds, wet grassland provides good feeding areas for chicks which are often moved to this habitat after hatching on adjacent arable land.

The results of the survey indicate that no progress has been made towards achieving the overall *BAP* target.

Cause of decline

Lapwings need two separate habitats for breeding - bare earth or short tussocky vegetation for their nest, and somewhere close by where chicks can find enough food – insects and worms, mainly from wet ground.

The population decline has been caused by:

- The switch from Spring to Autumn / Winter Cereals, reducing the availability of short vegetation on arable land in April (Autumn / Winter Cereals have already grown too high to provide nest sites).
- Drainage of farmland, and reduction in the level of the water table through increased extraction for agricultural and other human activities, which reduces the availability of damp feeding areas for chicks.
- A reduction in mixed farming, so chicks have to move a considerable distance from the nest site to the nearest suitable feeding area. This takes up a lot of energy, and exposes the chicks to predation, and to chilling and exposure if they have to move through tall, wet, vegetation. Many drown trying to cross steep-sided drainage ditches if any are in the way. Chick survival rate has therefore declined.
- Increased intensification in modern agriculture:
 1. Spring arable crops grow more uniformly, and more quickly, than they used to, so there are fewer suitable nest sites later on in the breeding season, limiting the opportunity for pairs which lose early clutches to re-lay.
 2. Farm machinery is much bigger, so farmers who traditionally drove around or moved Lapwing nests are less likely to see them now.
 3. Farms are bigger, and more likely to employ casual or contract labour, who are perhaps less experienced or sympathetic to local wildlife.
 4. Stocking levels on pasture have increased substantially, increasing the risk of trampling nests and chicks.

In some parts of the County, the decline has been accelerated by high levels of predation - the smaller number of lapwings increases the vulnerability of nests and chicks to predators, particularly corvids and foxes. The increased availability of carrion from dead sheep and pheasants, which is also partly a side effect of agricultural intensification, and from road kills, has almost certainly encouraged a considerable increase in the numbers of these predators. Crows now breed at very high densities, and these food sources will also have benefited all the other, more numerous, predators, to the detriment of lapwing. Although corvid control is carried out by many farmers and gamekeepers, several of the records submitted to the County Recorder report predation of nests by carrion crows. Even if action is taken to reverse the impact of agricultural change by re-creating good habitat, the current level of predation is likely to prevent an increase in population and an expansion of range in some areas.

In short, there are now many fewer places where lapwings can nest, and destruction or predation of nests and chicks, or starvation, means that insufficient young birds fledged to replace the older ones that die off.

Distribution

To complement this survey, other information about breeding lapwings in the County has been collated, using results from:

- The 50 1-kilometre squares surveyed each year as part of the national BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS).
- The Shropshire Wildlife Trust Lapwing project in and around the Severn – Vyrnwy Confluence.
- Records submitted to the County Recorder by Society members

In total, 724 adult lapwings (birds, not pairs) were recorded in the breeding season. These birds have been categorised as definitely breeding (282), probably breeding (282) or possibly breeding (160).

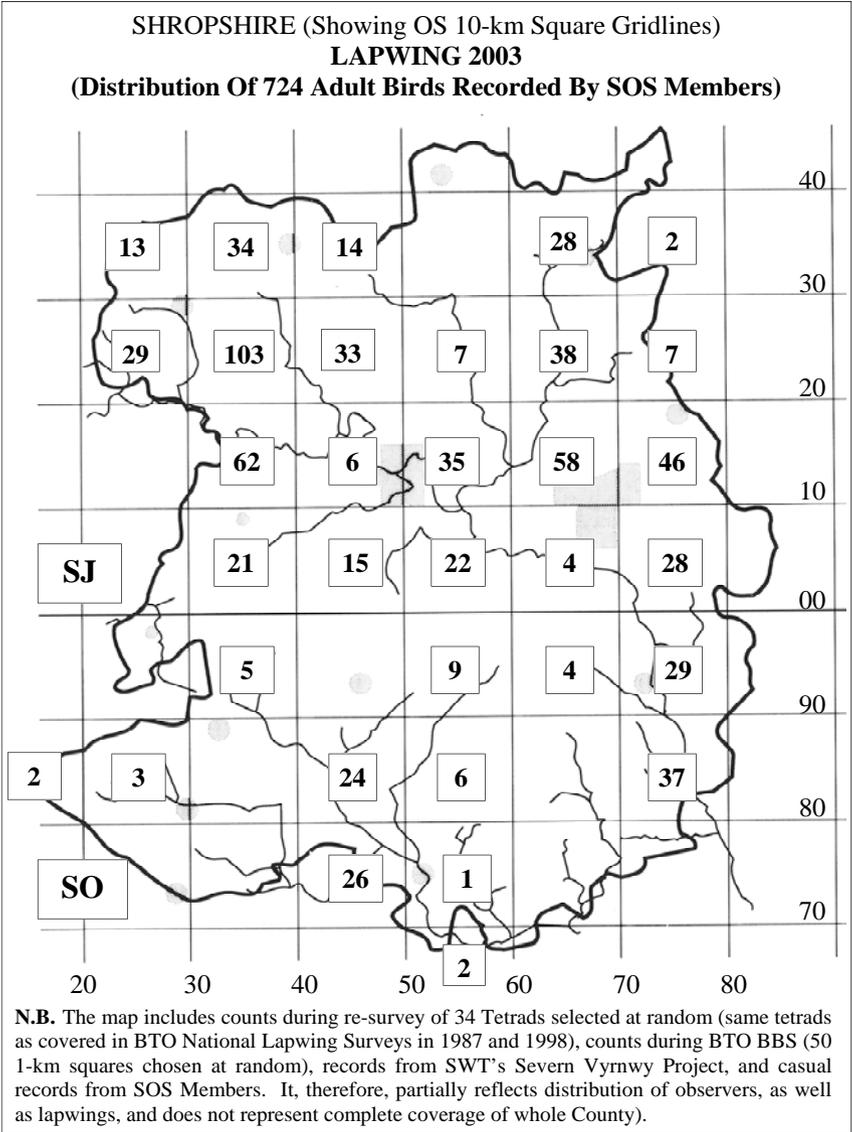
To illustrate the patchy distribution of lapwing in the County, these 724 birds have been grouped into 10-kilometre squares, as shown in Figure 2 (page36). It should be noted that the map partially reflects distribution of observers, as well as lapwings, and does not represent complete coverage of the whole County. Even so, it clearly shows that higher numbers occur in the damper lowland arable areas in north and central Shropshire, and the species is now scarce or absent in large areas of the south-west hills.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to

- all those SOS and BTO members who carried out the systematic surveys.
- SWT and Tim Ashley for providing Severn-Vyrnwy Project results.
- SOS members who submitted Lapwing records.
- Dr Stuart Newson, Population Biologist (Census Unit) at BTO for carrying out the statistical analysis of the Survey data.
- William Marler for helping carry out the collation of all the different sources.
- Rory McCann for producing the lapwing drawing.

Figure 2:



Allan Dawes and Leo Smith

BTO BREEDING WOODCOCK SURVEY 2003

Due to their secretive nature and nocturnal habits woodcock are not monitored adequately by standard surveys. In order to provide a population baseline against which future survey results can be compared and to correlate distribution with habitat characteristics a breeding survey was carried out in 2003. A selection of 1 km squares containing woodland of various sizes was chosen at random. Observers were asked to make up to three visits at dusk and note all woodcock seen or heard and collect habitat data from the site.

Surveys were completed at 27 plots in Shropshire with woodcock being recorded at just five of them. Because this was the first survey of this type there are no previous results to provide a measure of change. A limited comparison with Atlas data can be made bearing in mind that the Atlas data was gathered over six years and that the recording unit was the tetrad (4 x that of the BTO survey). The Atlas also states that 'as evening visits to many sites were not undertaken it is almost certainly substantially under-recorded.' Overall the woodcock was found in 18% of the Atlas tetrads and 18.5 of the BTO 1km squares.

The table compares the results of the two surveys.

BTO Survey 1km square	Shropshire Atlas Tetrad	Number of plots
Present	Present	2
Present	Not recorded	3
Not recorded	Present	3
Not recorded	Not recorded	19

Nationally, numbers tended to be highest in eastern and northern Britain and parts of the south. Fewer birds are encountered as one moves towards Wales and the southwest. Initial habitat analyses show that the abundance of woodcock is greatest in mixed woodland, lowest in coniferous and intermediate in deciduous. Numbers are also higher in areas where trees are less dense and where there is relatively well-developed ground vegetation. Thanks are due to the land owners for permitting access to private woods and to the field workers for their late nights.

Allan Dawes, BTO Regional Representative

BTO WINTER FARMLAND BIRD SURVEY

This survey was designed to study the winter use of different agricultural crops and field margins as part of the investigation into the decline of farmland birds. The survey was to run for three winters from 1999/2000, however fieldwork was postponed in 2001/2002 due to foot and mouth restrictions and, therefore, continued until 2002/2003. Observers were asked to make three visits to a 1 km square each winter, walk the field boundaries and record the position of certain priority species, in addition to recording the type of crop and boundary. Non-agricultural habitats within the square were not surveyed.

In Shropshire 15 plots were surveyed each year and three other plots were surveyed at least once. The first table shows the mean area of habitat per 1 km square averaged across the three winters.

Habitat type	Mean in Nov/Dec	Mean in Jan	Mean in Feb
Pasture	56.6	54.3	52.5
All crops	22.1	21.5	18.3
Cereal crops only	13.5	14.8	14.1
All stubbles	4.6	5.6	7.5
Cereal stubbles only	3.9	3.8	3.9
Other farm habitats	2.4	3.9	6.3
Farmyards	0.8	0.9	1.0
Bare till	1.3	2.6	4.9

Pasture tends to dominate in the west of the County with arable land increasing further east. Counts of skylark, yellowhammer and grey partridge came mainly from the eastern parts and reflected the association of these species with arable land. Song thrush, chaffinch, greenfinch and house sparrow were more evenly distributed, both across the region and between years while other species such as lapwing, pied wagtail and tree sparrow fluctuated greatly between years. The absence of woodlark, twite and snow bunting was not surprising, but a few golden plover, corn bunting and, to a lesser extent stonechat, may have been expected.

The second table shows the total number of the priority species recorded during the survey. A number of additional species were added to the list after the first year but, as their recording was optional, some observers did not record them and they are not shown in the table.

Species	No. of squares occupied	% of visits where present	Winter 1999/2000	Winter 2000/2001	Winter 2002/2003	All winters
Grey Partridge	6	5.3	37	9	7	53
Golden Plover	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Lapwing	7	6.9	135	0	272	407
Snipe	9	15.3	32	18	29	79
Curlew	2	1.5	1	0	2	3
Stock Dove	10	20.6	38	32	65	135
Woodlark	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Skylark	10	20.6	297	78	85	460
Meadow Pipit	12	30.5	174	238	197	609
Pied Wagtail	17	47.3	222	91	95	408
Stonechat	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Fieldfare	17	67.2	1871	1551	1654	5076
Song Thrush	17	55.0	74	72	77	223
Redwing	18	65.6	1563	2583	1398	5544
Mistle Thrush	15	36.6	56	42	29	127
Starling	18	55.0	1960	3422	1536	6918
House Sparrow	13	52.7	359	309	298	966
Tree Sparrow	9	13.7	103	18	21	142
Chaffinch	18	87.0	736	719	847	2302
Brambling	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Greenfinch	17	45.0	104	109	113	326
Goldfinch	13	29.8	96	83	36	215
Linnet	6	12.2	207	295	329	831
Twite	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Lesser Redpoll	1	0.8	0	4	0	4
Bullfinch	9	21.4	41	17	21	79
Snow Bunting	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Yellowhammer	12	35.1	209	148	98	455
Reed Bunting	3	5.3	9	4	27	40
Corn Bunting	0	0.0	0	0	0	0

Thanks are due to the field workers who often walked long distances without encountering the target species and to the land owners for granting access.

Allan Dawes, BTO Regional Representative

THE BTO BREEDING BIRD SURVEY 2003

Efforts to increase the number of Breeding Bird Survey plots surveyed in Shropshire were successful in raising the 2003 total to 53. The results are presented in the tables on pages 42 and 43, along with a summary of the previous five years. For a full account of the Breeding Bird Survey in Shropshire see the 1998 Shropshire Bird Report.

Because the number of surveys completed each year varies, both the total number and the percentage of survey plots that a species was recorded in is shown. An additional column has been incorporated this year showing the total number of individual birds counted during the survey. The remaining columns show the average number of adults found in each occupied square from 1997 to 2003 (no data is available for 2001 because foot and mouth restrictions prevented survey work).

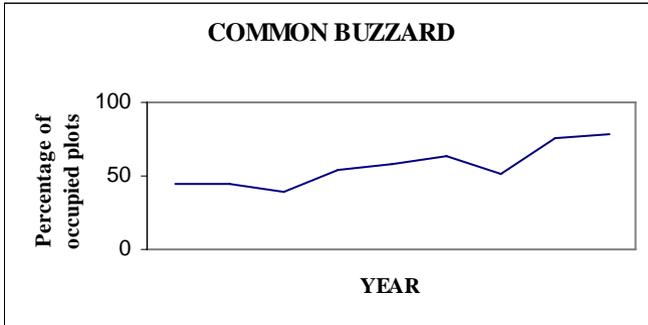
The following species were recorded in fewer than 10 plots during 2003 and have been omitted from the table. The figures indicate the total number counted followed by the number of plots in which the species was recorded:

Mute Swan 3-2, Greylag Goose 2-1, Eurasian Teal 2-1, Tufted Duck 9-3, Ruddy Duck 5-1, Grey Partridge 8-4, Little Grebe 3-1, Great Cormorant 2-2, Eurasian Hobby 2-2, Common Coot 14-5, Eurasian Oystercatcher 1-1, Common Sandpiper 1-1, Black-headed Gull 14-3, Lesser Black-backed Gull 16-6, Herring Gull 1-1, Feral Pigeon 21-7, European Turtle Dove 6-3, Little Owl 4-3, Tawny Owl 4-4, Common Kingfisher 2-1, Green Woodpecker 17-8, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker 2-2, Sand Martin 3-1, Tree Pipit 4-2, Meadow Pipit 26-5, Yellow Wagtail 6-3, Grey Wagtail 3-3, Whinchat 10-1, Stonechat 5-2, Northern Wheatear 4-1, Ring Ouzel 2-1, Fieldfare 233-9, Redwing 28-3, Sedge Warbler 5-4, Lesser Whitethroat 10-8, Wood Warbler 4-2, Spotted Flycatcher 9-7, Pied Flycatcher 2-1, Marsh Tit 13-7, Willow Tit 2-2, Common Crossbill 8-1, Reed Bunting 13-8, Corn Bunting 1-1.

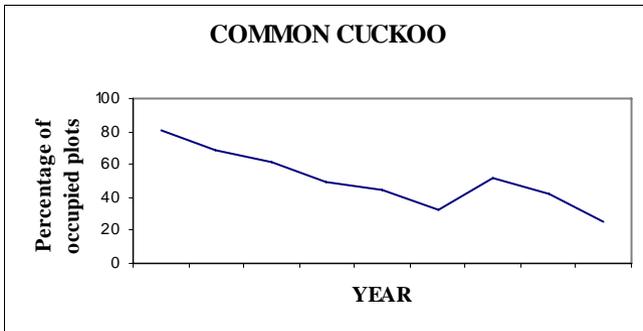
Some of these species, such as dipper, whinchat and sedge warbler are restricted by special habitat requirements and winter thrushes and large gulls will be on passage. Apart from the owls, which are not adequately represented by this survey, the small number of records for the remaining species reflects their scarcity within the County.

For widespread species the trends shown by these results provide a good indication of the species 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 web site.

The following graph shows how the buzzard has spread throughout Shropshire over the period since the BBS began. Increasing from 44% of survey plots in 1994 to 79% in 2003. The Atlas found buzzard in 49% of the County



In contrast the cuckoo is becoming less frequent. Found in 81% of plots in 1994, despite a brief comeback between 2000 and 2002 it was only recorded in 25% of the plots in 2003. The Atlas recorded cuckoo in 90% of the County.



Thanks to everyone for their continued support of this national monitoring scheme.

Allan Dawes, BTO Regional Representative

Species	No of plots found in	% of plots found in	Total birds found	Average number per occupied plot					
				1997	1998	1999	2000	2002	2003
	2003	2003	2003						
Grey Heron	10	19	24	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.3	2.4
Canada Goose	16	30	89	3.4	4.1	3.5	4.5	2.6	5.6
Mallard	28	53	178	4.8	4.7	3.3	12	5.5	6.4
Sparrowhawk	13	24	14	1.1	1	1	1	1	1.1
Buzzard	42	79	85	1.7	2.1	2.5	1.9	2	2
Kestrel	13	24	13	1.2	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.1	1
R/leg. Partridge	13	24	25	2.4	2.4	2.1	2.7	3.6	1.9
Pheasant	51	96	274	3.8	4	4.3	4.6	4.7	5.4
Moorhen	10	19	13	1.7	1.4	1.7	1.8	2.2	1.3
Lapwing	22	41	132	5.4	2.9	4.4	4.5	5	6
Curlew	15	28	50	2.5	2.8	2.1	2.9	2.8	3.3
Stock Dove	26	49	70	2.3	2	2.9	2.5	4.7	2.7
Woodpigeon	52	98	1112	18.7	18.9	21.5	21.7	23.4	21.4
Collared Dove	30	57	102	4.1	3.9	4.1	4.1	6.5	3.4
Cuckoo	13	24	22	1.8	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.7
Swift	17	32	77	4.2	5.6	8.4	4.3	4.8	4.5
G/S Woodpecker	34	64	62	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.8
Skylark	38	72	148	4.2	4.1	3.4	3.7	4.8	3.9
Swallow	48	91	307	7.9	6.2	6.6	7.8	7.2	6.4
House Martin	32	60	242	6.8	5.5	11.3	7.2	8.4	7.6
Pied Wagtail	28	53	26	1.6	2.3	1.3	2.1	1.7	1.7
Wren	49	92	512	6.1	7.6	10.4	10.3	11.3	10.4
Dunnock	47	89	216	3.8	2.9	3.5	3.9	5.3	4.6
Robin	52	98	434	5.2	6.3	7.3	7.7	8.7	8.3
Redstart	12	23	30	3.5	3.5	2.9	3.2	2.7	2.5
Blackbird	52	98	670	10.1	10.8	12.1	12.5	12.8	12.9
Song Thrush	43	81	151	2.2	3	2.8	3.5	3.8	3.5
Mistle Thrush	26	49	45	1.9	2.6	2.3	2	1.8	1.7
Whitethroat	19	36	52	2.4	2.2	1.5	2.1	2	2.7

Species	No of plots found in	% of plots found in	Total birds found	Average number per occupied plot					
				1997	1998	1999	2000	2002	2003
Garden Warbler	16	30	36	3	2.3	2.2	1.8	1.7	2.2
Blackcap	27	51	85	2.8	3.4	2.6	2.7	2.7	3.1
Chiffchaff	43	81	186	3.3	3.6	2.5	2.9	4.2	4.3
Willow Warbler	27	51	95	5	4.7	4.4	4.2	3.5	3.5
Goldcrest	14	26	36	2.8	2.6	2.7	3.1	3.4	2.6
Long-tailed Tit	29	55	78	4.2	3.7	3.7	2.9	2.7	2.7
Coal Tit	16	30	46	3.2	2.2	2.1	2.8	2.4	2.9
Blue Tit	48	91	497	9.8	9.2	8.7	8.9	9.6	10.3
Great Tit	48	91	253	5.3	4.8	5	6	5.5	5.3
Nuthatch	19	36	31	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.2	1	1.6
Treecreeper	11	21	18	1.5	1.7	1.3	1.1	1	1.6
Jay	15	28	28	1.8	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.3	1.9
Magpie	41	77	152	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.1	4	3.7
Jackdaw	39	74	393	7.3	8.7	9.3	12.3	10.8	10
Rook	29	55	772	21.2	18.3	19.4	18.1	20	26.6
Carrion Crow	53	100	753	13.6	13	13.6	13.3	15.9	14.2
Raven	12	23	29	2.3	1.5	1.8	1.6	2.3	2.4
Starling	29	55	270	14.5	10.3	6.5	9.5	8.8	9.3
Raven	12	23	29	2.3	1.5	1.8	1.6	2.3	2.4
Starling	29	55	270	14.5	10.3	6.5	9.5	8.8	9.3
House Sparrow	35	66	534	9.9	9.3	9.2	11.9	14.9	15.3
Tree Sparrow	14	26	35	3.6	1.9	4.4	3.6	2	2.5
Chaffinch	52	98	719	13.4	13.7	13.9	14	13.5	13.8
Greenfinch	36	68	147	3.6	3.7	4	4.7	4.7	4.1
Goldfinch	27	51	128	3.2	3.3	4.1	2.8	3.4	4.7
Linnet	23	43	111	4.7	4.3	4.9	5.4	5.8	4.8
Bullfinch	16	30	32	1.7	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.8	2
Yellowhammer	34	64	174	4.1	4.2	3.6	5.1	4.9	5.1
Plots surveyed	53			61	56	51	54	45	53

BTO HERONRIES SURVEY 2003

The status of the grey heron has been monitored by the BTO since 1928. In Shropshire regular counts have been made at Ellesmere and Halston Hall since the sixties and Chelmarsh and Onslow Hall have been counted regularly in recent years. To mark the 75th anniversary of the heronry census a full national survey was planned in 2003. Random sites were also searched in an attempt to locate new colonies.

Previous County estimates were 54 nests in 1954 falling to only 22 in 1969 (*Perkins 1971*). The last BTO national census in 1985 found 67 nests in seven heronries (*Shropshire Bird Report 1985*). One site on private land, thought to hold four or five pairs, was not counted during that survey and information received for two other small sites was still to be followed up. This means that the true total for 1985 would have been slightly higher than the figure quoted. The Shropshire Atlas based on fieldwork from 1985 to 1990 gave a total of 100-120 pairs.

Good coverage was achieved in 2003 and all but one of the known sites was visited, giving a total of 114 nests at ten heronries:

Ashford Hall	10
Halston Hall, Whittington	17
Millichope Park	2
New House Farm, Chelmarsh	15
Onslow Hall, Bicton Heath	10
Peplow	18
Skyborry Green	4
Stead Vallets	8
The Mere, Ellesmere	21
Confidential site in the South	9

Heronry have been seen near Leighton during the breeding season and a heronry is thought to be nearby, but as yet, it has not been located. Many remote areas are seldom visited and some small heronries could still be overlooked. However, sixteen random tetrads were searched in 2003 and three more were checked in 2004 without locating any new colonies. Taking these factors into account it is likely that 120-130 pairs were present in 2003.

The low point reached in the sixties was caused by a combination of habitat loss due to increased drainage, pesticide poisoning and deliberate persecution. New wetlands are now being encouraged under agri-environmental schemes while harmful pesticides have been withdrawn and deliberate persecution is less evident. Prolonged spells of freezing conditions can cause heavy mortality, particularly of young birds, but the recent run of relatively mild winters has enabled the population to rise steadily.

The following table shows the number of nests at regularly counted heronries. The large drop in numbers from 2000 to 2002 at Halston Hall is believed to be due to disturbance caused by opening the site to fishing. The herons that remained moved to another part of the wood further from the lake, the whereabouts of the missing birds is unknown. Fluctuations at individual colonies are not indicative of national or even County trends. Overall, the Shropshire situation mirrors the national population which has seen a steady rise to an estimated 14,200 pairs.

Numbers of pairs at regularly counted sites on selected dates:

	85	90	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	02	03
Halston Hall	17	28	31	47	32	36	30	31	36	46	22	17
Ellesmere	8	24	11	16	13	14	16	23	19	21	23	21
Chelmarsh	14	*	*	*	*	8	7	9	8	12	13	15

Thanks are due to all who took part in this survey, especially those who make regular counts each year and to land owners for allowing access to private sites.

Allan Dawes, BTO Regional Representative

Correction:

Shropshire Bird Reports 2000 and 2002.

Please note that a count of 23 pairs at Halston Hall in 2000 which was first published in the Shropshire Bird Report 2000 and repeated in a table in the Shropshire Bird Report 2002 was an error and should have been 46 pairs as shown in the table above.

Apologies Ed.

VENUS POOL REPORT 2003

The year at Venus Pool began on a high note with the acquisition, in February, of 23 acres of additional land, in the form of the adjacent arable field, thanks again to a generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The land is being managed under a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and management is specifically aimed at providing habitats on which farmland birds depend. The field was planted in March with strips of bird-friendly crops, such as wheat, oats, kale and quinoa, which produce plenty of seed and attract invertebrates, as well as some land left fallow. The fields will have wide, weedy margins, and stubble will be left to over-winter.

In June, the hayfields looked even better than the previous year, and additional species such as green-winged orchid, marsh marigold and ragged robin made an appearance. The number and variety of butterflies increased and many painted ladies were seen. The 7th of the month saw the official opening of the Reserve and the meadows looked at their best in the hot, sunny weather. A number of members and invited guests attended the unveiling of the new reserve notice board in the car park, speeches were made and photos taken, followed by guided walks around the Reserve and a buffet lunch in Berrington Village Hall. Such was the interest in the recreated meadows that further, unscheduled, walks took place during the afternoon.

Two post-breeding work parties took place in late summer, at which the main islands were weeded, vegetation was trimmed, willow coppiced and ragwort pulled. In addition, the hayfields were mown and the fencing of the fields completed. A short period of aftermath grazing took place once the hay had been removed, but this was not entirely successful, largely because the cattle were not really suitable for this type of land. Grazing by traditional breeds of cattle was to be negotiated for future years. The inner and outer marshes were “topped” in October and paths opened up in the new field.

In August, two evenings were held for new members, who were invited to come and meet members of the Management Committee, to do some bird watching and to have a guided walk around the Reserve, and a number of new members turned up in spite of the torrential rain! A family day in September was well attended, and as well as bird-watching and walks around the Reserve, a ringing demonstration was given.

The birding year at Venus Pool was a mixture of good news and bad. Highlights of 2003 included a purple heron for one day in September, a bittern which roosted most evenings in the reedbed, often in the same spot, from the beginning of the year until the third week of March, one or two little egrets seen regularly over the summer, three whooper swans seen a number of times in February, an osprey present for much of April and May, and two species rarely recorded in the County – grey plover and firecrest. Numbers of birds in the arable field built up towards the end of the year when up to 40 reed buntings, 30 yellowhammers, 100 linnets, 50 goldfinches, 40 greenfinches, 200 chaffinches and 100 tree sparrows fed in the field. Up to 6 bullfinches were recorded feeding in the hedges in February and 30 redpolls were present in November.

A total of 21 species of wader was recorded during the year, with 14 in the three days between 27 and 29 August, when black-tailed godwit, curlew, oystercatcher, little ringed plover, dunlin, greenshank, common sandpiper, green sandpiper, snipe, ruff, ringed plover, lapwing, spotted redshank and redshank were seen. Fourteen species of duck were seen on the Reserve in 2003, including a roost of 66 goosander in January, a pair of gadwall seen several times in March, and 120 plus teal, 50 plus shoveler and up to 10 wigeon in early October.

The breeding season was not entirely successful; two pairs of great crested grebes nested and one pair produced three young but they vanished after a few days and their fate is unknown, several broods of mallard were seen but not all survived, kestrels bred in a nest box and three young fledged on 12 July, the oystercatcher pair produced three young, and four attempts to breed were made by little ringed plovers but only two chicks hatched and they were predated within a few days. The number of black-headed gull nests was at least 40 but, sadly, they were predated until none survived. Other success stories include coot, moorhen, tree sparrow, great and blue tits, blackbird and robin. However, breeding was generally disappointing and the Committee will be faced with difficult decisions since it is apparent that some predator control is going to have to be undertaken before the Reserve can hope for a successful breeding season.

The Reserve continues to attract more and more people, from within and outside Shropshire, and there is always something to see, even on a quiet day. The main reserve sign with its map was completed and erected in the Car Park during the year (although the final version was not ready for the opening and a temporary one had to be used!) and a number of information boards with specially commissioned artwork, to be placed at various points around the Reserve, were in preparation. Benches, made from local hardwood, were also planned

Helen J Griffiths

FIRST AND LAST DATES FOR THE COMMONER SUMMER MIGRANTS

Species	First date 2003	* Average first date	Last date 2003	* Average last date
Eurasian Hobby	26 Apr	23 Apr	04 Oct	30 Sep
Little Ringed Plover	20 Mar	26 Mar	05 Sep	17 Sep
Common Cuckoo	26 Mar	11 Apr	28 Aug	14 Aug
Common Swift	19 Apr	21 Apr	01 Sep	08 Sep
Sand Martin	03 Mar	13 Mar	14 Sep	25 Sep
Barn Swallow	29 Mar	23 Mar	17 Oct	21 Oct
House Martin	27 Mar	30 Mar	09 Oct	20 Oct
Tree Pipit	13 Apr	12 Apr	24 Aug	02 Sep
Yellow Wagtail	13 Apr	09 Apr	26 Sep	26 Sep
Common Redstart	19 Apr	09 Apr	17 Nov	17 Sep
Whinchat	22 Apr	24 Apr	28 Sep	15 Sep
Northern Wheatear	14 Mar	17 Mar	11 Oct	06 Sep
Sedge Warbler	15 Apr	16 Apr	27 Aug	27 Aug
Reed Warbler	17 Apr	24 Apr	17 Sep	23 Sep
Lesser Whitethroat	16 Apr	23 Apr	08 Sep	08 Sep
Common Whitethroat	15 Apr	15 Apr	14 Sep	10 Sep
Garden Warbler	04 Apr	14 Apr	12 Sep	26 Aug
Wood Warbler	27 Apr	15 Apr	25 Aug	06 Aug
Willow Warbler	28 Mar	27 Mar	21 Sep	24 Sep
Spotted Flycatcher	04 May	06 May	09 Sep	17 Sep
Pied Flycatcher	01 Apr	17 Apr	19 Aug	30 Jul

Notes:

- * Average first and last dates are calculated from records for the years 1992 to 2002. Chiffchaff and Blackcap are omitted because of frequent over-wintering.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Abbreviations:

ASF	Allscott Sugar Factory
BBS	BTO Breeding Bird Survey
BCC	Birds of Conservation Concern
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
CBC	BTO Common Bird Census
DEFRA	Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EGM	Ellesmere Group of Meres
VP	Venus Pool
WeBS	Wetland Bird Survey

Summary of weather conditions:

Jan–Mar: The first half of January was dominated by high pressure and was cold and frosty, but it turned much milder from mid month before another cold snap with northerly gales and snow from the 29th. Except for a brief cold snap mid month, February was mild with exceptionally high temperatures recorded towards the end of the month. In March, high pressure dominated and it was one of the driest and sunniest on record.

Apr–Jun: April was dominated by high pressure, bringing exceptionally dry and sunny weather and not until the final week was there a return of the more usual Atlantic influence, bringing wet and windy conditions. This unsettled weather continued throughout much of May, with a return to more settled conditions only in the final week. June was exceptionally hot, with generally light winds often with a southerly bias.

Jul–Sep: July was mostly settled and exceptionally warm with generally southerly winds, but towards the end of the month it was more unsettled with some rain although still warm. The hot settled conditions continued for much of August with light winds from the south and east, however, it turned cooler at the end of the month with winds switching to the north. September was again mainly dry and hot.

Oct–Dec: October was very changeable with several depressions crossing the Atlantic. However, there was a spell of easterly winds in mid month. This changeable weather continued in November and it was generally quite mild and this trend continued into December which was exceptionally mild with just a few short cold snaps

A Summary of the birding year:

During the first quarter, a **bittern** at VP, which was first seen in 2002, delighted observers until 25 Mar together with three **whooper swans** which continued to roost here until 20 Mar. A **bittern** was also seen at Severn Valley Country Park on 19-20 Jan and 4 & 6 Mar. The first rarity to arrive in the new year was a **red-breasted merganser** at Priorslee Lake on 2 Jan. A female **black redstart** was seen in Ellesmere from 3 Jan until 1 Mar and a first winter **glaucous gull** at The Mere on 19 Jan. Three **snow buntings** were seen on the Long Mynd on 23 Jan with one at Brown Clee on 14 Feb where a **great grey shrike** was seen on 27 & 30 Mar. Two **long-eared owls** were seen near Market Drayton on 13 Feb.

Early spring passage brought at least four **black redstarts** to Brown Clee in late March, a **grey plover** to VP on 30 Mar, a pale-bellied **Brent goose** to Chelmarsh Reservoir on 1 Apr and a **red-throated diver** to Priorslee Flash on 5 Apr. Two **common cranes** were seen near Market Drayton on 15 Apr and near Queen's Head from 10-19 May. Two excellent summer plumage **black-necked grebes** were found at Priorslee Lake on 11-12 Apr and then one of the real highlights of the year was found at the same site, a **red-rumped swallow** on 27-28 Apr. The spring movement continued and three **Temminck's stints** were at Wood Lane on 2-4 May with a **spoonbill** also present here on 2-3 May. At Whixall Moss, an adult **Mediterranean gull** seemed to be paired with a black-headed gull and was often seen displaying from 10 May until 1 Jun.

The main highlight of the summer months was the County's second **gull-billed tern** which was at Cranmere Bog on 11 Jun. Up to three **little egrets** were seen at VP and a similar number at Wall Farm in July and August. Return passage produced a host of rarities including a **Temminck's stint** at Wall Farm on 16-18 Aug, a **marsh harrier** at Tibberton on 27 Aug, four **Sandwich terns** at Chelmarsh on 7 Sep, **knot** at ASF on 10-11 Sep & 30 Sep and at Chelmarsh on 10-12 Sep. A **pectoral sandpiper** was at ASF on 10-19 Sep. The year's third major rarity a juvenile **purple heron** was at VP on 25 Sep and finally a **hoopoe** at Longdon Common on 26 Sep. Late autumn produced a **grey phalarope** at The Mere, Ellesmere on 11 Oct, **rock pipits** at ASF on 16 Oct and 25-25 Oct, a **water pipit** at ASF from 25 Oct into the new year and a **firecrest** at VP on 11 Nov.

During the second winter period, a **bittern** returned to VP from 16 Nov and five **Bewick's swans** were seen at Whixall on 7 Dec. As usual, the year ended with some interesting gull records. An adult **glaucous gull** was seen at Priorslee Lake on 4 Dec, a first winter **ring-billed gull** was at Chelmarsh on 12 Dec with a first winter **Iceland gull** here same day. Finally a sub-adult **Iceland gull** was at Chelmarsh on 13 Dec.

THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Status: Common resident.

In the first half of the year, a large non breeding flock was found at Buttery Farm, Kynnersley with maximum counts of 30 in Jan, 25 in Feb, 59 in Mar and 66 in Apr. Nearby at Tibberton, counts of 40 on 2 Feb and 47 on 9 Mar were noteworthy. By the 16 Mar, most of the Tibberton flock had relocated to Buttery Farm which accounts for the increase. The flock dispersed in May, when 29 were back at Tibberton and many more joined a moulting flock at Belvide Reservoir, Staffordshire, that peaked at 82 in May, 113 in June and 122 in July.

At VP, a flock of 29 on 21 Feb built up to 48 on 26 May with a maximum of 54 on 1 Jun. Other notable flocks early in the year included 16 at Ponthen on 5 Jan, 20 on the River Severn at Cound/Cressage on 14 Jan, 12 on the River Severn at Bridgnorth on 20 Feb, 24 at Molverley on 13 Mar, 16 at Wall Farm on 29 Mar and 15 at Atcham Bridge on 5 Apr.

Breeding was reported from 24 sites with a total of 86 cygnets. Two pairs nested at Newport Canal hatched broods of six and nine cygnets. However, on 29 May the two males were involved in a territorial dispute. In the confusion, the cygnets became mixed up when the female with the brood of nine called to her cygnets and all 15 responded! From then on she looked after all 15 cygnets, until they departed in October. In December, she had the misfortune to fly into power lines and was electrocuted. Her mate then drove off the other male and, subsequently, paired with the remaining female.

The pair that has nested at Priorslee Flash every year since 1990 (except last year when they nested near Shifnal), hatched six cygnets on the island but, unfortunately three of them perished in the first couple of days. Then, in early June, as usual the pair with their surviving cygnets walked to Priorslee Lake where they were recorded throughout the month, together with the resident pair. However, the resident pair attacked them in early July and the female was recorded back at the Flash on 5 Jul but the male was not seen subsequently and appears to have died. The cygnets were left to fend for themselves and perished after a few days. On 23 Nov, the female was paired up with a young male that had arrived with an un-ringed female. Curiously, her new mate is one of her own cygnets from a brood of six in 2000.

Of the seven pairs breeding in the Telford area, only two pairs were successful. Those at Trench Pool produced three cygnets and at Dothill, Wellington the pair had two cygnets. However, apart from Priorslee Flash, where as detailed above all of the cygnets perished, the other pairs at Priorslee Lake, Holmer Lake, Stirchley and Telford Town Park, all had nests but failed to hatch any young.

Five breeding pairs recorded from the South of the County (SO map reference area) which produced a total of 11 cygnets. However, the nests at Church Stretton and Bromfield were only reported when the female was incubating and no details of resultant cygnets were received.

Counts of flocks in the second winter period included 18 at ASF on 4 Nov, 28 near the River Severn at Upper Brompton on 12 Dec, 14 at Cae Howell on 14 Dec, 34 at Tibberton on 15 Dec, 45 at Priorslee Lake on 26 Dec, 27 near the River Severn at Cronkhill on 27 Dec and finally 30 at ASF 30 Dec.

Colour ringing mute swans helps build up a fascinating picture of their movements and reports are always welcome. This is evidenced by the following account: The flock at VP in May, included a colour ringed bird (Blue F7M) that had been ringed at Ellerton Mill in August 1998 in a brood of six cygnets. It was, subsequently, recorded at Winterley Mere, Cheshire in January 1999, Bangor Harbour July 2000 and River Clwyd, Rhyl in September 2000. It returned to Shropshire in July 2001 when it was found on the River Severn at Atcham and then in August 2002 and April 2003 it was paired at ASF. Following its appearance at VP in May it was back at ASF in a flock of 18 in November.

TUNDRA SWAN (Bewick's Swan) *Cygnus columbianus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Five adults were present on the floods near the canal at Moss Farm, Whixall on 7 Dec (RV), where, interestingly, two adults had been present, briefly, on 27 Dec 2002.

This year's birds were first seen in flight over Whixall Moss before being relocated on the adjacent floods.

Tundra swans have now been recorded in seven of the last 10 years with 1994, 1998 and 1999 constituting the only blank years. The last four years have seen single figure counts and we have to go back to January 1997 for the last double figure count, when an impressive 21 birds (15 adults, 6 juveniles) were present at ASF.

WHOOPEE SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

The three adult birds that frequented the Crosshouses/Cound area from 28 Dec 2002 (KW) remained in the general vicinity until 20 Mar, when they were last recorded at VP. The birds spent daylight hours in fields between Crosshouses and Cressage, often in the company of up to 13 mute swans, before flying in to VP during the evening to roost.

The traditional County site for this species is the Alberbury, Cae Howell, Meverley and Ponthen area on the Severn/Vyrnwy flood plain. This year was to be no exception, with eight birds at Ponthen on 5 Jan, 10 at Cae Howell on 20 Feb, 10 at Meverley on 13 and 14 Mar and eight at this site on 21 Mar. However, the only record for the second winter period from this area was of seven birds at Ponthen on 14 Dec.

The first record for the second winter period was of eight birds at ASF on 8 Oct (AL). Single birds were then recorded at ASF (SD) and VP (GJW, GEH) on 1 Nov and The Mere, Ellesmere on 6 Nov (GE). An adult bird at VP on 31 Dec (AB) completed the years records.

This species has now been recorded in 13 of the last 15 years with 1989 and 1993 constituting the only blank years. During this period, 29 at Cae Howell in January 1995 was the largest single site count.

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE *Anser brachyrhynchus*

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

The only record for the first winter period was of a single bird at VP on 26 & 31 Jan. May records constituted two birds in flight at Upper Affcot on the 6th and a single bird at Wood Lane on the 14th.

In October eight birds flew north at Chetwynd Aston on the 15th (EJW), whilst a fine skein of 280 birds were seen flying south east at ASF on the 25th (AB). The second winter period saw two birds present at VP on 23 Nov.

The birds reported at ASF birds will certainly be of wild origin and given the date, it is most likely that the Chetwynd Aston record will also refer to genuinely wild birds. The provenance of the other records is, as always, open to debate.

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*

Status: Common feral resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	3	7	-	24	-	-	15	2
Polemere	300	26	-	-	-	-	200	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	4	2	5	-	25	-	72	2
VP	90	66	31	243	220	67	345	-
Wood Lane	-	-	-	82	40	65	1	-

The 345 reported at VP on 23 Nov (EJW) is, quite probably, the largest single site concentration recorded in the County. In addition to the above, triple figure counts came from Shavington Big Pool where 190 were seen on 31 Aug and VP where 110 were reported on 27 Jul. Counts in excess of 50 birds came from Crose Mere, St. Martins and The Mere, Ellesmere.

Recorded in all months of the year but surprisingly, not from VP in December. Breeding was confirmed at Dudmaston, Priorslee Flash and VP.

Two Hybrid Greylag x Bar headed Goose *Anser indicus* were present at VP on 14 Aug, with singles also recorded at this site on 2 Mar and 26 Jul. A hybrid Greylag x Canada Goose was also present at VP on 14 Aug.

GREATER CANADA GOOSE (Canada Goose) *Branta canadensis*

Status: Common feral resident

In addition to the monthly maxima shown in the table below, significant counts included 320 flying in to roost at dusk at Whixall Moss on 21 Feb, 355 at Chelmarsh and 400 at Wood Lane on 25 Aug, 385 at VP on 29 Aug, 514 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 14 Sep and finally 588 at Wood Lane on 28 Sep, which represented the largest count of the year.

Breeding continues to be poorly recorded, with just 11 sites identified as holding breeding birds which is similar to the 12 sites reported in 2002. A comprehensive set of records from Priorslee Flash saw a peak count of 77 goslings present with 74 adult birds on 24 May. The main 'crèche' was absent from The Flash on 26 May, where two goslings were reported as being poorly looked after by their

parents, indeed one gosling was being attacked by a Carrion Crow on the observers arrival (EJW).

Whilst breeding was not recorded at Condoover, a report of two birds that “attacked my husband and the dogs near the brook” on 15 May, would suggest defence of either a nearby nest or goslings (MJ).

A full albino bird was reported from Bromfield Gravel Pits on 15 May, this almost certainly being the same bird that was seen at nearby Burley in May 1999 and Jul 2001 (WM).

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	1	220	280	166	120
Chetwynd Park	80	30	208	118	183
Cole Mere	43	5	216	7	9
Crose Mere	467	120	124	93	215
Dudmaston	184	150	-	252	284
Isombridge Gravel Pit	-	13	320	198	35
Priorslee Flash	-	60	86	58	120
Priorslee Lake	-	33	43	7	44
The Mere, Ellesmere	130	100	198	4	96
VP	270	243	40	310	-
Wood Lane	60	13	423	2	3

BARNACLE GOOSE *Branta leucopsis*

Status: Scarce feral resident and rare winter visitor

Forty two were present at Polemere on 15 Feb, the birds were observed feeding with Greylag and Canada Geese (JT). This count is certainly the highest recorded in the county during the last 15 years, the last double figure count coming from Chelmarsh, when 21 were present in Jan 1993. Whilst the provenance of geese within the county will always be subject to speculation, the flock size and timing of this record, would suggest wild birds.

Birds of probable feral origin were recorded at eight sites, with four at VP in August being the largest count. Two birds were recorded at both Crose Mere and Wood Lane in September and October, these records almost certainly relating to the same birds. VP hosted two birds in both May and December, with single bird records coming from Crose Mere, Dudmaston, Monkmoor Pool, Pool Hall, The Mere, Ellesmere, Tittenley Pool and VP.

BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicla*

Status: Rare winter visitor and passage migrant

An adult of the pale-bellied sub species *Branta b. hrota* was at Chelmarsh on the single date of 1 Apr (MO, AB). This was followed by an adult of the dark-bellied nominate race which was present at VP from 8-15 Apr (GEH). This bird associated with Canada Geese and was often to be found grazing on the north marsh.

Recorded in four of the last five years with 2001 constituting the blank year, all previous records during this period have referred to birds of the nominate race.

In addition to the above record, birds were also recorded at VP in 1999 and 2000.

COMMON SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant and scarce summer visitor

Recorded in all months of the year except October with, as is customary for this species, the predominance of records coming from the well watched sites of VP and Wood Lane.

Monthly maxima of adult birds at Wood Lane:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Wood Lane	13	15	18	19	13	12	3	8	-	-	1	4

The only confirmed breeding for the year came from Wood Lane, where two adults with 6 juveniles were recorded on 17 Jun, the juveniles recorded as surviving until 16 Jul at least. Three juveniles were recorded on several dates from 20 Jul to 21 Aug.

Two immature birds were present at VP on 8 Aug, whilst a single immature was present at ASF on 30 Aug and 3 Sep. There is, however, nothing to suggest that breeding occurred at these sites.

MANDARIN DUCK *Aix galericulata*

Status: Rare feral resident

The only confirmed breeding for the year came from the River Severn between Hampton Loade and Highley. However, no details of brood size were included. Other breeding season records came from Bromfield, the River Severn at Coalport and at Highley, the Severn Valley Country Park at Alveley and Whitcliffe, where four males and a female were present on 5 Apr.

Outside of the breeding season, seven were on the River Severn at Bridgnorth on 20 Feb, where six were also present on 18 Mar, a pair were at Dudmaston on 15 Mar and, finally, a female was present at VP on 19 and 21 Nov.

EURASIAN WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Status: Common winter visitor and passage migrant

The largest count for the year came from the Whixall/Fenns Mosses where 320 were recorded in flight on 2 Mar (AB). However, most of the birds were considered by the recorder to be over the Welsh border!

Three figure counts were received from just four sites with 168 at Hayes Farm, Alberbury and 100 at Cae Howel on the designated WeBS count date on 5 Jan. Following this, 158 were counted at Hayes Farm on 16 Feb with 115 at Crose Mere on the same date. The only three figure count for the second winter period came from Cae Howel on 14 Dec when 127 were present.

Counts in excess of 50 birds were received from Chetwynd Park, Cole Mere, The Mere, Ellesmere and Whixall canal floods, where 88 on 29 Jan constituted the largest of these counts.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cae Howel	100	12	-	-	80	127
Chetwynd Park	56	32	13	3	23	49
Crose Mere	88	115	-	-	-	66
Hayes Farm, Alberbury	168	158	-	-	-	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	76	46	28	1	-	59
Whixall (canal floods)	88	-	21	22	14	71

Most birds had departed the County by mid March with just three sites recording birds beyond the 20th. The final spring record was of a single bird at Wood Lane on the late date of 27 Apr.

The first returning bird was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 25 Aug, the same site hosting two birds on 27 Aug. Three birds were at ASF on 3 Sep, with singles here and VP on the 7th and one at Wood Lane on the 13th, completing the September records.

GADWALL *Anas strepera*

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

An excellent year for gadwall with birds recorded in all months except October. Records came from 12 sites which compares favourably with the 10 sites from where this species was reported in 2002.

Double figure counts came from Dudmaston, where up to 11 birds were present in March, Burlington where 20 were present on 15 Nov and finally Ellerton where the year's highest count, an impressive 23, was recorded on 16 Nov.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	5	5	2	3	-	2
Dudmaston	7	6	11	2	-	8
VP	-	3	2	1	6	-
Wood Lane	3	2	4	4	1	-

During the breeding season, pairs were present at Cheswell, Knighton Reservoir, Queens Head and Wood Lane, although, once again, there was no evidence of successful breeding having taken place.

EURASIAN TEAL *Anas crecca*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

Recorded in all months of the year, with, surprisingly, the only May record being of two birds at Wood Lane on the 2nd. Breeding season records were received from six locations but none this year from any of the traditional Long Mynd sites. Breeding was confirmed at Whixall Moss, when a pair with seven ducklings was observed on 15 Jun (AH, JHaw).

The largest count for the first winter period came from Ponthen where 608 were recorded on 5 Jan. The maximum count at Wall Farm was 500 on 1 Jan although numbers remained high at this site until mid Feb. ASF, Whixall and Wood Lane held large concentrations of birds, whilst 122 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 5 Jan was noteworthy, as was 120 at Shavington Big Pool on 15 Feb.

The largest count of the second winter period was 350 birds at Wall Farm on 21 Dec with significant counts also including 300 at ASF on 19 Oct, 180 at VP on 29 Nov and 240 at Moss Farm floods, Whixall on 23 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	180	100	30	132	300	-	20
Venus Pool	37	70	29	118	129	180	55
Wall Farm	500	240	85	39	80	175	350
Whixall	160	30	85	-	-	70	240
Wood Lane	102	120	75	16	104	104	121

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Status: Common resident

Breeding records were received from 17 sites which compares favourably with the 12 sites from which evidence was received in 2002 but clearly mallard remains vastly under-recorded as a breeding species. A pair at Aston Square, Oswestry successfully utilised a nest box by building over a blackbirds nest with six eggs hatching from a clutch of eight which were laid. A nest was built in a flower pot, three metres over the footpath on the English Bridge at Shrewsbury and 10 metres above the water below but the subsequent outcome of the nest was not reported. No particularly unseasonal nesting records were reported.

Three figure counts came from 10 widespread sites. The largest count for the year review was 325 which were present at The Mere, Ellesmere on 5 Jan. The largest count for the second winter period came from the Whixall canal floods, where 320 were counted on 4 Dec.

In addition to those shown in the table below, additional three figure counts were 120 at ASF on 17 Jan with 110 here on 25 Oct, 105 at Howle Pool on 16 Aug, 150 at Shavington Big Pool on 15 Feb and 127 at Stead Vallets on 31 Oct.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	112	80	14	8	22	89	118
Cole Mere	181	72	11	8	57	47	33
Howle Pool	34	12	8	18	82	78	49
Priorslee Flash	-	30	-	40	97	87	85
The Mere, Ellesmere	325	98	117	67	-	142	138
VP	37	19	10	70	43	79	34
Wall Farm	50	70	16	-	2	40	51
White Mere	137	70	48	23	105	38	67

A hybrid mallard/northern pintail which was seen at Middle Pool, Trench and Priorslee Flash was, presumably, the same bird that was reported in 2002.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (Pintail) *Anas acuta*

Status: Scarce winter visitor, passage migrant

The only significant counts for the year came from the traditionally favoured site of Hayes Farm, Alberbury which is situated on the Severn/Vyrnwy flood plain. Given favourable conditions, the area can hold significant wildfowl numbers, this year proving no exception with 180 birds present on 5 Jan and 59 on 16 Feb (both WeBS counts). Nearby, Cae Howel held eight birds on 16 Feb and 16 on 14 Dec, the latter count being the highest of the second winter period.

Away from this area, birds were recorded at a further seven sites but the only double figure count was 14 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 18 Jan. Nine at Moss Farm floods, Whixall on 29 Jan was also noteworthy, otherwise birds were reported in ones or twos, the exceptions being at VP and Whixall where three birds were recorded on single dates in January.

Wintering birds had departed the county by the end of March and the first returning bird, was a female at Ebnall Hall, Gobowen on 27 Sep.

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*

Status: Rare passage migrant

A female was present at Pen-yr-Estyn wetland near Rednal on 15 Apr (PB) where a male was then recorded on 13 May (AW). What were almost certainly the aforementioned birds, were then reported as a pair on 14 & 24 May, with the final report from this site, being of a male on 26 May.

An adult male was present at Wall Farm on 11 and 12 Aug (PJ).

Recorded annually in the county since 1989.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (Shoveler) *Anas clypeata*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

Breeding was confirmed at Whixall Moss where a pair with four ducklings was seen on 15 Jun. However, at least three of the young are thought to have perished. This constitutes the first confirmed breeding in the County since 1990 and follows on from the suspected breeding at the same site in 2002. Breeding season birds were recorded at Chelmarsh, VP and Wood Lane, although it is not considered that any attempt at breeding took place.

As with 2002, the highest count for the year came from Chetwynd Park where 175 on 11 Nov (MGG) eclipsed the previous years count of 166. This years count represented the highest County total since 1995, when 180 birds were recorded at the same site. Chetwynd Park also recorded the highest number of birds in the first winter period with a count of 120 on 5 Jan (MGG). No records were received this year from the favoured site of Oss Mere.

Maximum counts at Chetwynd Park:

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
45	180	22	109	44	64	80	67	166	175

At VP, 20 birds were present on 29 Sept with a peak counts of 54 on 11 Oct and 50 on 15 Oct. Double figure counts were received from a further four sites with 24 at Mirelake on 24 Sept the highest of these. The floods by the canal at Moss Farm, Whixall held 14 birds on 28 Jan, 15 were at Brown Moss on 21 Feb and 13 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 10 Mar. The second winter period saw 14 birds at Brown Moss on 2 Nov and 10 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 4 and 14 Dec.

First returning bird was at VP on 1 Aug, where four were present on the 7th. Six birds were at ASF on 15 Aug, with three at Priorslee Lake on the 25th. At VP, August counts peaked at nine on the 30th.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	12	1	2	24	3	4	-
Chetwynd Park	120	26	30	14	114	175	121
The Mere, Ellesmere	7	-	13	-	1	9	10
VP	-	5	12	20	54	10	-

COMMON POCHARD *Aythya ferina*

Status: Common winter visitor, rare resident (RBBP)

Mirroring 2002, this species was recorded in all months of the year except July. Birds of both sexes were recorded at VP in April and May, whilst up to two males were present in June, with the final summer sighting being a male on 12 Jun. A single bird was at Wood Lane on 26 May with two birds present at this site on 8 Jun though neither record reported the sex of the birds. Despite these breeding season records there was nothing to suggest breeding was attempted. The last confirmed breeding in the County was at VP in 1995.

Other than the aforementioned, wintering birds departed the County in March with the latest records being five at Chetwynd Park and two at Newton Mere on the 23rd. The first returning birds were two at VP on 8 Aug with two at Chelmarsh on the 27th. Recorded at ASF, Crose Mere and Priorslee Lake in September, after which the species was widespread and numerous.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	15	28	27	2	26	20
Cole Mere	16	13	17	2	-	14
Priorslee Flash	-	9	-	28	31	43
Priorslee Lake	58	45	24	33	27	41
The Mere, Ellesmere	24	68	12	12	19	46
VP	38	37	14	1	8	2

The largest counts for both winter periods came from The Mere, Ellesmere, with 68 on 16 Feb and 46 on 14 Dec. The only other count in excess of 50 birds came from Priorslee Lake where 58 were present on 11 Jan.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK *Aythya nyroca*

Status: Very rare vagrant

2002

A drake was at Cole Mere on 4 Dec 2002 (AB) but was not relocated subsequently despite extensive searching.

The bird was seen by two lucky observers and the record has been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee. An account of this exciting finding can be found on page 176.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	230	64	77	50	140	130
Chetwynd Park	20	61	31	24	15	43
Croze Mere	18	38	51	10	28	29
Dudmaston	68	19	30	-	5	7
Priorslee Flash	-	26	-	50	47	40
Priorslee Lake	73	34	24	48	38	32
The Mere, Ellesmere	34	26	50	66	18	30
VP	50	40	32	3	10	1
White Mere	30	19	27	71	43	53

The highest count for the year came from Chelmarsh Reservoir where 230 were present on 11 Jan (AB). This represents the largest single site count since Feb 1991, when 288 were recorded at the same locality.

Chelmarsh Reservoir was the only site where three figure counts were recorded with 204 on 27 Sep particularly noteworthy. Counts of 50 or more birds came

from a further nine sites. Of these, 73 at Priorslee Lake on 8 Jan and 71 at White Mere on 12 Oct represented the highest counts for each winter period, other than at Chelmarsh Reservoir.

Breeding continues to be poorly recorded with confirmation coming from just three sites. At Priorslee Flash, five ducklings were observed on 5 Jul, four were at Sambrook Mill on 12 Jul and finally two were reported from Wood Lane on 26 Jul. Also, 11 juveniles were present at ASF on 10 Aug which may indicate breeding took place at this site.

The species was recorded in every calendar month at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Priorslee Lake and VP.

GREATER SCAUP *Aythya marila*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

An excellent year with birds reported from seven sites, although some duplication of records is certainly involved.

First record for the year was of two first winter males which were found at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 9 Jan (AGP, SLH) and which remained until 3 Mar. On occasions, only one bird was present and it is almost certain that records of an immature male on 8 Feb and two males on 1 Mar at nearby Dudmaston were the same birds. Chelmarsh was also responsible for the first bird of the second winter period, when an immature female was present on 3- 4 Oct (KB).

A first winter male bird was present at Chetwynd Park on 2 Nov (EJW) and was reported on five further dates up to 13 Dec. A record of a first winter male at Howle Pool on 29 Nov (EJW) almost certainly refers to this bird. What was possibly the same bird was then reported at Trench Pool from 29 Dec (MRA) until the year end.

The northern meres got in on the act, when an adult female and two first winter males were found at Cole Mere on 28 Dec (AL). The female stayed loyal to the site, whilst the male birds relocated to nearby Crose Mere on 30 Dec before, finally, all three birds were recorded again at Cole Mere on the morning of the final day of the year although, interestingly, the female could not be located in the afternoon.

It is likely that a minimum of seven different birds were responsible for the above records, which constitutes an above average year for the County.

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Status: Uncommon visitor

The single record for the year comprised a female which was present at Chelmarsh on 4 Oct (JM).

This species has been recorded in nine of the last 10 years, with 1998 constituting the only blank year. Whilst the species can be recorded in any month, it is interesting to speculate as to how many birds go unrecorded from the summer months, when our more extensive water bodies are largely under-watched. Traditionally, multiple counts within the county have come from the months of June and July.

COMMON GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*

Status: Common winter visitor

The largest concentration of birds was again centered around the northern meres, with 39 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 10 Mar, the highest count for the year under review. The largest count for the second winter period was made at Cole Mere where 24 were present on 30 Dec.

Double figure counts for both winter periods were made at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Cole Mere, The Mere, Ellesmere and White Mere. The only other sites to register double figures were Dudmaston with a peak of 18 on 3 Mar and Crose Mere with 10 on 30 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	5	14	6	4	16
Cole Mere	12	22	21	10	24
Crose Mere	8	8	2	-	10
Dudmaston	4	14	18	-	7
The Mere, Ellesmere	20	14	39	16	21
White Mere	20	8	10	1	10

Away from the above sites, the only other records received concerned single birds at ASF, Chetwynd Park, Isombridge and Priorslee Lake.

Most birds departed the County in March. However, April records were received from Chelmarsh, Cole Mere, Dudmaston and The Mere, Ellesmere. The final date for the first winter period was 11 Apr when three were at The Mere, Ellesmere and one at Cole Mere.

Surprisingly, no returning birds were noted in October, with a female at Chelmarsh and 15 birds at The Mere, Ellesmere on 3 Nov the first records for the second winter period. One suspects that the latter birds did not arrive en masse on this date and that a lack of observer coverage, rather than delayed return of the birds, resulted in no October records being received.

SMEW *Mergus albellus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

The first record for the year was of a male on the single date of 3 Feb at Dudmaston (SLH). A redhead was then present at Chetwynd Park from 23 Feb (EJW) to 5 Mar.

The second winter period saw a male at Chelmarsh on 14 Dec (SLH) and then two redheads on 17 Dec (JM). What was almost certainly the male from Chelmarsh was then seen at nearby Dudmaston on 15 Dec and the 26-27 Dec.

1990 and 2001 constitute the only blank years for this species in the last 15 years.

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*

Status: Rare breeding species and common winter visitor

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	44	17	19	46
Cole Mere	40	16	4	24
Crose Mere	7	11	26	9
Dudmaston	44	-	-	30
The Mere, Ellesmere	25	28	-	14
VP	66	44	-	-
Walcot Lake	31	45	-	-

For the third year in succession, VP has recorded the largest count of the year with 66 birds on 13 Jan. The previous two years highest counts were 63 birds on 28 Jan 2001 and 59 on 16 Jan 2002. Clearly, January is the month to visit VP if you wish to see a large concentration of this sawbill in the County. The highest count for the second winter period came from Chelmarsh where 46 were present on 13 Dec, nearby Dudmaston also hosted impressive numbers of birds in both winter periods, although there will almost certainly be some movement of birds, between the two sites. Walcot Lake at Lydbury North was graced by 31 birds on 26 Jan and 55 birds on 8 Feb, these the only two records received from this site.

Away from the above sites, double figure counts (excluding broods) were recorded from a further eight sites with 47 on the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas the highest concentration. This count will almost certainly include some birds of the year.

Breeding was confirmed at three sites, with birds reported, in suitable habitat, at a further 11 sites during the breeding season. On the River Severn in the Leighton/Buildwas area, a pair with 10 young were seen on 12 Apr, an adult with 12 young on 28 May and two females with five and 17 juveniles respectively on 15 Jun. At Wroxeter, at female with two small young was reported on 21 Apr and the other breeding record came from Cressage, where a female with 10 three quarter grown young were reported on 29 May. Whilst there may be some duplication of records, it is probable that at least four separate broods were responsible for these breeding records.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

A male at Priorslee Lake on 2 Jan was the only record for the year under review (PAK).

This species is a rarity in the County and this constituted the first record since 1996 when birds were recorded from Chelmarsh, Cole Mere, The Mere, Ellesmere, Priorslee Flash and the River Severn.

RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Status: Uncommon resident

Breeding was confirmed at just one site, with the first record being of a single small duckling at the traditional site of Howle Pool on 1 Jul. Broods of two and four birds were then seen at this site on 16 Aug and it is probable that the above

records refer to three separate breeding attempts. Juvenile birds were reported from three sites, with two at VP on 22 Jul, five at Priorslee Lake on 9 Aug and one at ASF on 15 Aug. However, it is not thought that any of these records refers to birds fledged at the respective sites. In addition to Howle Pool, breeding season records of adult birds came from Brown Moss, Priorslee Lake, Shavington Big Pool, Upper Forge and VP.

Double figure counts (excluding broods), came from just two sites with 27 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 12 Oct the highest count. Ten were also recorded at this site on 16 Nov with 16 here on 13 Dec. Shavington Big Pool had the largest first winter count with 18 on 9 Mar and also a count of 11 on 30 May. Other notable counts came from Priorslee Lake and VP, where nine birds were recorded on 15 Apr and 3 May respectfully.

Maximum single site counts for the last 10 years:

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
45	74	30	30	39	30	45	22	19	27

It is difficult to ascertain whether the controversial DEFRA cull of Ruddy Duck, designed to protect the White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* from potential hybridisation, is having any significant impact on the species in the County.

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (Red Grouse) *Lagopus lagopus*

Status: Uncommon resident (BCC Amber listed)

First record for the year came from the Shooting Box area of the Long Mynd when a male and two females were recorded on 27 Jan. March records from the Long Mynd concerned a male in full breeding plumage at Pole Cottage on the 19th with a ‘superb male drinking at a pool’ at the top of Cardingmill on the 30th. Further Long Mynd records followed in April, with two birds at Callow Hollow on the 5th and four birds at Pole Bank on the 24th. A single was reported on 31 May. Later in the year, an adult male was present near Shooting Box on 13 Nov and the final record for the year was of four at Pole Bank on 23 Dec.

The National Trust conduct regular surveys of the red grouse population on the Long Mynd and on 15 Jun a summer census found 27 adults and 11 young from four broods. However, the census did not provide complete coverage. In addition, the Trust reported that 22 territorial males were found during winter counts.

Only two records were received from the Stiperstones. Two were seen at Gatten Plantation on 23 Oct with a pair near Manstone Rocks and a female near Devil's Chair on 25 Oct.

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE *Alectoris rufa*

Status: Common resident

Increased observer coverage this year resulted in 181 records being received from 69 sites. Double figure counts in the early part of the year came from five sites with 38 at Kynnersley on 2 Jan the highest of these. However, the observer states that they were "almost certainly released birds". A total of 22 were at Wall Farm on 4 Jan, 15 near the River Severn at Hampton Loade/Highley on 25 Jan, 13 at Rowton on 28 Jan and 28 at West Felton on 1 Feb.

Breeding was confirmed at four sites. An adult bird and five chicks were at Leamoor Common on 8 Jul, five 'quarter grown' chicks were at Kynnersley on 12 Aug, a pair with three chicks were reported from Somerwood on 25 Aug and one adult with six chicks was at Tibberton on 30 Aug.

Eleven double figure counts from nine sites were received from autumn onwards, undoubtedly coveys being boosted by the release of reared birds for shooting interests. Counts included 12 birds at Hampton Loade on 25 Aug, with 20 present on the 27 & 28 Aug and 17 at Chelmarsh on 27 Aug. Surprisingly, no double figure counts were received from September. During October, 26 were at Onibury on the 11th, 25 at Wall Farm on the 18th and 11 at Upton Magna on the 26th. Twelve were present at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 1 Nov, 13 at Romsley and 17 at Bowhill Dingle, Alveley on 22 Nov and finally 37 at Cronkhill on 27 Dec which was the highest count for the period.

The species was recorded at Wood Lane in all months except March and birds were reported visiting gardens at Oswestry and Waters Upton.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

A total of 62 records from 44 sites represents similar coverage to 2002 when the ratio was 66:37. No double figure counts in the early part of the year with nine at West Felton on 1 Feb the highest and four at High Ercal was the next best. Otherwise, birds were present in ones and twos, the exception being at West Felton, where three birds were recorded in both March and April.

Breeding was confirmed at Birch Farm, Broseley, Edgmond Marsh, Sandford and Stead Vallets. Brood details were not received from Birch Farm or Broseley but two adults and four juveniles were at Sandford on 1 Aug, two days later three juveniles were reported from Stead Vallets and finally three adults and nine juveniles were at Edgmond Marsh on 24 Aug.

Later in the year, double figure counts (excluding breeding records) came from five sites with 22 at Broseley on 26 Nov the highest. This record concerned two coveys of 10 and 12 birds and the observer reports that ‘none of the local shoots have put down any Grey Partridge’ (AWS).

Later in the year counts included 11 at New Home on 10 Oct, 10 at Tibberton on 21 Oct, 18 at West Felton on 22 Nov and 19 at Cosford Airfield on 23 Nov. Perhaps surprisingly, no double figure counts were received in Dec.

A bird visited a Harnage garden on 4 May whilst a one was observed perched on a gate post at Berwick Wharf on 23 Nov.

COMMON QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*

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

A fairly poor year with birds recorded from only six sites within the county. As is usual for this species, all but one record concerned unseen singing males, the exception being a male that was observed at dawn on the road at Ightfield on 3 Aug (AB).

First record for the year came from Market Drayton when a male was heard singing in flight at 02.00 hrs on 22 Jun (GT). This was followed by a single bird at Sleaf Airfield on 30 Jul (WRBD), with at least two birds singing at nearby Noneley on 1 Aug (AB). What was presumably the same bird as reported above, was then recorded at Sleaf Airfield on 2 Aug (GT) whilst a single bird was present at Rodington on the same date (NP). This bird was also recorded at 02.00 hrs. and was reported to be ‘moving around quite quickly’. The bird at Sleaf was reported as being in a pea field. The final record for the year came from Cross Lane Head where a single bird called in the observer’s garden (PGD).

It is probable that just seven birds were responsible for all of the above records, which is somewhat below average for the County.

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

Status: Common resident

The largest count for the year came from Pradoe, near West Felton, where 31 were present on 2 Oct. Double figure counts came from a further 11 sites including 20 at VP on 28 Jan, 23 at VP on 10 Oct, 20 at Ford on 16 Mar and 20 at Brown Clee on 16 Apr

Breeding was confirmed at just four sites which surely represents significant under recording. A pair at Candy Valley were observed with nine juveniles on 16 May, this number reduced to five on the 26th and just two on the 27th, when the birds were reported as able to fly. Sadly, the two remaining birds were killed by a local cat on 30 May. The other confirmed breeding sites were Atcham Bridge, the Old Racecourse, Oswestry and Somerwood.

A male bird was observed at least 50 feet up an oak tree at Rodington on 23 Nov, whilst roadside casualties were reported from Crudginton and Long Lane/Sleapford. Of the 190 records received, remarkably 72 were from one observer representing 38% of coverage (PB).

RED-THROATED DIVER *Gavia Stellata*

Status: Very rare winter visitor

The only record for the year was of a winter plumage adult at Priorslee Flash on 5 Apr (JI).

The previous county record was in 1996 when a badly oiled first winter bird was on Cound Fishery, first recorded on 25 Feb the bird was picked up dead on 1 Mar. Prior to this, a full summer plumage bird graced Priorslee Lake on 19 Jun 1991.

Of the two other diver species that occur in the County, black-throated diver *Gavia arctica* was last recorded at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 15 Oct 2003, whilst the last record for great-northern diver *Gavia immer* was of a bird that was taken into care at Presthorpe, Much Wenlock on 30 Oct 1999.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Status: Common resident

A bird that continues to be poorly recorded as a breeding species, with breeding confirmed at only six sites. However, this meagre return compares favourably with 2002, where only three confirmed sites were identified.

An adult with two juvenile birds was reported from Wall Farm on 15 Jun, with the only other Jun record being of two adults with two juveniles at the Severn Valley Country Park, Alverley on 30. Howle Pool hosted a pair with a juvenile on 19 Jul, whilst two adults with three juveniles were present at Astbury Hall, Upper Forge on 26 Jul. Aug saw an adult with two juveniles at ASF on the 10th, two juveniles from different broods at Howle Pool on the 16th and 14 birds at Oerley Reservoir on the 28th, which were reported as three pairs feeding young. Finally, an adult feeding a tiny juvenile at ASF on 13 Sep, completed the confirmed breeding records.

Possible breeding came from both Priorslee Lake and Sambrook Mill, where juvenile birds were recorded in Aug. In addition to the above record for Oerley Reservoir, double figure counts came from Brown Moss with 17 on 24 Aug, ASF with 15 on 3 Sep and Edgmond with 10 on 18 Oct. Given the dates involved, the counts will almost certainly comprise of both adult and, albeit well grown, birds of the year.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Chelmarsh Reservoir	4	-	14	22	18	-	6	14
Cole Mere	1	6	12	-	11	2	2	14
Priorslee Lake	14	18	10	9	3	9	9	10
The Mere, Ellesmere	28	33	20	-	9	14	27	41

The 33 birds at The Mere, Ellesmere on 16 Feb, represented the highest count for the year. This site and Chelmarsh Reservoir traditionally hold the largest concentration of birds in the county. Other than the above, the only other double figure count of adult birds, came from Priorslee Flash with 10 birds present on 10 Mar and 11 May.

As demonstrated in the following table, Chelmarsh traditionally holds large numbers of birds in August, this year being no exception, with a highest count of 23 on 23 Aug. Indeed, double figure counts were recorded in the three preceding months at this site, with 24 on 18 May, 22 on 25 Jun and 28 on 26 Jul. Birds were recorded in all months of the year at Priorslee Lake.

Maximum counts for the last five years:

2003	33	16 Feb	The Mere, Ellesmere
2002	27	15 Feb	Chelmarsh Reservoir
2001	62	17 Jan	The Mere, Ellesmere
2000	52	28 Aug	Chelmarsh Reservoir
1999	60	22 Aug	Chelmarsh Reservoir

Breeding was confirmed at Isombridge, Knighton Reservoir, Priorslee Flash, Priorslee Lake, VP and Wall Farm. Four nests were noted at Priorslee Flash on 18 May of which at least two were successful in hatching young. At VP, three young hatched but they survived just one week. Breeding success at VP is poor and this follows four failed attempts in 2002. Juvenile birds were recorded at Shavington Big Pool in July and Chetwynd Park in October, the latter bird begging its parent for food!

BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis*

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

Two adult birds in full summer plumage were found at Priorslee Lake on 11 Apr (JI,EJW). They were still present the following day, when they were observed displaying. News of the birds presence was relayed via the information services and they proved extremely popular with observers during their stay.

Recorded in six of the last ten years, we have to go back to 1995 for the last record of two birds present together, when a pair were recorded at Crose Mere. Single birds were recorded at ASF in the three years to 2002. The last recorded breeding in the County was in 1989.

GREAT CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Status: Common winter visitor and passage migrant.

Despite being recorded in every month of the year for the fifth year running, the species was not recorded in all months at any single site. Summering birds were recorded at eight sites in May, three sites in June and five sites in both July and August.

Not surprisingly, the largest counts came from the northern meres. However, the 132 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 17 Jan (APD) is surely unprecedented within the

county. The largest second winter count also came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 101 were present on 14 Dec. Autumn birds favoured VP where monthly maxima were 16 in August, 29 in September and 44 in October. A notable count of 35 was made at Shavington Big Pool on 31 Aug.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	12	18	10	-	17	3
Cole Mere	42	7	-	7	2	2
Crose Mere	10	54	-	-	17	3
Priorslee Lake	34	13	5	-	-	45
The Mere, Ellesmere	132	64	36	2	82	101
Wood Lane	21	31	6	9	4	18

EURASIAN BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris*

Status: Rare winter visitor

The two birds that were present in the county at the end of 2002 thankfully stayed into the New Year, albeit that the one at Priorslee Lake was to depart much earlier than the VP bird.

The Priorslee bird, which was first recorded on 26 Dec 2002, was seen on the 4th, 9th, and finally 11 Jan. It is interesting to speculate as to whether this was the bird that was subsequently recorded at Severn Valley Country Park, Alveley on 19 & 20 Jan (CBu).

The VP bird, which had been present since 29 Nov 2002 was first recorded in 2003 on 2 Jan and was subsequently reported on 24 dates up to 22 Feb. This bird often showed well, particularly when roosting in willows behind the reed-bed.

Remarkably, one was then recorded again at Severn Valley Country Park on the 4 & 6 Mar (CBu) whilst at VP, one was present from 16-25 Mar and, again, consideration should be given as to whether these records could have related to the same bird.

A particularly un-seasonal bird was present at VP on 11 and 12 Aug (HMP), whilst single birds were also recorded at this site, on the more expected dates of 16 Nov (SNT) and 3 Dec (JBU).

Eurasian bittern has now been recorded during the last three years but in only seven of the last 20 years. Consequently, it remains a much sought after rarity within the County.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

Status: Rare vagrant.

Following the County's second ever record, at Chelmarsh in Aug 1993 (the first record having been at VP in May of the previous year) the systematic list contained the following observation, "We can look forward to even more sightings of the species if, as expected, it becomes a very welcome addition to the British breeding list". How prophetic!

First record of the year under review was of two birds at VP on the single date of 24 Apr (AL). One was then recorded at VP on several dates from 16- 27 Jul (WRBD), with what was almost certainly the same bird present at Atcham on 28 Jul (WRBD). A single bird on the River Severn at Bridgnorth on 24 Jul (SP), may also have been the same individual, as it was not recorded at VP on this date.

August saw peak counts of three birds at Wall Farm on the 9th (ARS), the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on the 13th (JI) and VP on the 18th. Ones and twos were recorded at VP between the 5th and the 29th, two were on the gravel banks of the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on the 19-20th and a single bird was recorded at Wall Farm from 12-16th. There will undoubtedly be some duplication of records with regard to these sightings, and with two at VP and three at Wall Farm on the 9th, a minimum of five birds were present in the County in August.

The final record of the year came from the south of the County, when a bird was observed in flight at Bromfield on 1 Sep (DP).

This species has now been recorded annually since 1998, but three birds still constitutes the largest single site count for the species. Taking into account the birds seen this year, and allowing for some duplication, it is probable that around 30 birds have now graced our County since the first record in 1992.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

Status: Common resident.

Traditionally, breeding records are restricted to the regularly reported sites of Halston Hall, Whittington and The Mere, Ellesmere. However, this year, thanks to the BTO 2003 Grey Heron Survey, a more comprehensive picture of occupied heronries within the County was obtained. The survey established that from the 10 sites surveyed, 114 pairs were present or nests were occupied, valuable baseline data on which future surveys can be measured. A full report of the survey can be found on page 44.

The Halston Hall heronry shows a fall to 17 nests from the 22 occupied in 2002. However, the observer notes that the heronry has moved from its traditional site, on or by the island, to larches on the edge of nearby woodland. The number of occupied nests at The Mere, Ellesmere has remained fairly steady for the last five years ranging from 19 in 1999 to 24 in 1998 so 21 this year is about average.

Away from the breeding sites, double figure counts were made at Chelmarsh on three occasions with 19 on 10 Sep the highest. Eleven were reported roosting on the runway of Cosford Airfield on 16 Jun. Birds were recorded in all months of the year under review, at Condover, Wall Farm and Wood Lane and were noted visiting garden ponds at Aston Square, Oswestry, Leebotwood and Waters Upton.

PURPLE HERON *Ardea purpurea*

Status: Very rare vagrant

A juvenile bird was at VP on 24 Sep (RV) constituting only the second ever record for the County.

It was present from at least midday until late evening, when it was last observed entering a section of reed-bed, in front of the fen hide at the rear of the pool. The bird had spent several hours in the fields between the reserve pool and the adjacent Cound Fishery, affording excellent views for those fortunate enough to see it. The bird was considered by some observers to be in poor health and we can only speculate as to its eventual fate.

The first record of purple heron in Shropshire was also a juvenile which frequented the Prees/Lower Heath area from 30 Oct to 17 Nov 1995.

A full report can be found on page 178.

EURASIAN SPOONBILL *Platalea leucorodia*

Status: Very rare vagrant

The single record for the year concerned a bird found by a visiting school party at Wood Lane on 2 May (JD). News of the birds presence was immediately released, enabling many reserve regulars the opportunity to add the species to their site list.

It roosted overnight at Wood Lane before departing at 06.50 hrs. but was later relocated nearby at Cole Mere. The final sighting was at midday on the 3 May, when the bird was seen roosting with grey herons on the island at The Mere, Ellesmere.

This record follows records at Wall Farm and Edgeley in June 2002 which might have been the same individual. The only other records in the last 10 years were both at VP, with singles reported in September 1997 and October 1994.

EUROPEAN HONEY BUZZARD (Honey Buzzard) *Pernis apivorus*

Status: Rare summer visitor (RBBP)

The established pair within the County failed for the third successive year. By mid-June, the adult male and female were back on territory and a nest had been built once more, but the birds were not found to be on eggs when members of the Raptor Panel visited the site.

If it is the case that this pair are now approaching the end of their reproductive lives, then it is probable that we will lose this species as a breeding bird within the County at least for the present because, as recent research suggests, when one of a member of a pair is lost, a replacement partner is not recruited and the territory is eventually abandoned.

RED KITE *Milvus milvus*

Status: Uncommon visitor

The number of records continues to increase rapidly, indicative of the continued increase in the Welsh population, which is now estimated at 350-400 breeding pairs, and the continuing expansion of range. There were 54 reports from 32 locations, compared to 27 from 24 locations in 2002, 15 from 14 locations in 2001 (foot-and-mouth year) and 20 from 18 locations in 2000, the highest number

of reports up to that year. There were three reports of more than one bird, compared with no such records in 2002 or 2000, and only one record of two birds in 2001.

The gap in records during the winter months was again evident in 2003, with none before 15 Mar and none after 7 Nov, but the period of absence is decreasing. The late summer gap has now disappeared - there were no records between 15 Jun and 3 Aug, apart from a bird seen on a weekly basis right through the summer and into the autumn on the Long Mynd (MT).

There were 29 breeding season records (March–June), largely concentrated on and around the Long Mynd (14 records, including a pair together on 27 May), and the Teme valley (three records, including one of three birds), where a Welsh pair nest close to the Shropshire border. Other records of one bird on one date in this period came from Stiperstones, Bury Ditches, Mardu, Marton, Marlow, More and Woolston, in the south-west Shropshire hills; Brown Clee; and five locations north of the River Severn - Allscott Sugar Factory, St Martins, Candy Valley, Somerwood and Ebnal Hall near Gobowen.

Records in the August to November period are probably due to an influx of young birds, with several now visiting the County, evidenced by reports of seven birds from four widely separated sites on one date (13 August) - Nedge Hill (Telford), Ludlow Racecourse, Stiperstones, and Catherton Common (three birds together). This was certainly the case with the first ringing recovery in the County, a bird found near Lydbury North, on 23 August which had been ringed only 47 days earlier, more than 50 miles away, near Pumsaint, Lampeter, Carmarthenshire. The bird was found in deep very soft mud in an almost dry farm pond. It was waterlogged and believed to have drowned. It had a full crop.

Other records in this autumn period came from Venus Pool (one bird on two dates), Bayston Hill and Long Mynd (one bird reported from each site twice on the same day), and at Harnage, Middleton (near Ludlow), Lydebrook Dingle, Lydham, Hayes Farm (Alberbury), Bourton and Hinstock (one bird seen on one date).

With the encouraging population growth and expansion of range of the Welsh population, and known nests now close to the Shropshire border, it appears only a matter of time before red kites are found nesting in the County. As a result, the Welsh Kite Trust (www.welshkitetrust.org) is now actively seeking reports of kites during the breeding season, and is undertaking fieldwork in the south-west

Shropshire hills. Kites were seen several times at three locations on the County border, and also once near the Long Mynd, and once at another location near Newcastle-on-Clun, but no evidence was found of a breeding attempt or an active nest.

EURASIAN MARSH HARRIER (Marsh Harrier) *Circus aeruginosus*

Status: Rare passage migrant and summer visitor

A female/juvenile was seen between Cherrington and Tibberton on 27 Aug (SJ).

This was the fourth year in succession that this species has occurred in the county and about the 21st county record.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

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

Another excellent year, at least nine individuals were recorded, with the adult female remaining at Wall Farm from the end of 2002 probably the easiest to see, being reported on a further seven dates until 17 Mar. What is believed to have been the same bird was also seen at Tibberton on 4 Mar (SJ).

Also in the first winter period, a male was near Shepherds Rock on the Stiperstones on 15 Jan (JT). Sightings of a female at Pole Bank on 7 Feb, Wilderley Hill on 15 Feb and at Long Synalds on 26 Mar are thought likely to relate to the same individual which seems to have wintered in the Long Mynd area having also been seen towards the end of 2002. A male on the Long Mynd on 19 Mar (WRDB) and 31 Mar completed the sightings for the first half of the year and is perhaps best treated as different to the Stiperstones bird of 15 Jan due to the significant time gap. Mature male birds would also seem less likely to go unnoticed.

In the second winter period a ringtail seen on the Stiperstones on 15 Oct (TW) may have been the same bird seen there on 27 Nov and may also have been responsible for eight sightings on the Long Mynd up until mid December, when it was usually reported as a female. On Brown Clee, a ringtail flew over the summit of Abdon Burf on 21 Oct (AB), and finally a male was present at Wall Farm on 2 Nov (ARS).

NORTHERN GOSHAWK *Accipiter gentilis*

Status: Scarce resident (RBBP)

Forest Enterprise monitored 10 nests in woods in the south of the County, and a total of 21 young were raised. In addition, breeding season records were received by the Society from 14 sites, with signs of breeding noted at many and likely to have taken place at most. However, the geographic spread of these records suggests considerable overlap with those monitored by Forest Enterprise. Never-the-less, it seems likely that several new sites will have been identified this year.

Just a few records were received from outside the breeding season and these were largely from known or possible breeding sites which is perhaps to be expected for this largely sedentary species.

Northern Goshawk is a species which still suffers some persecution and observers are wary about disclosing details and, where they do, they usually ask for confidentiality. Such caution is understandable, but it does make it difficult to establish the true status of this species in the County, and to report fully in this publication and to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Status: Resident

Eurasian sparrowhawk remains a popular bird with observers and perhaps the species most likely to inspire observers to supply additional notes when submitting records. Reported from 97 sites, coincidentally exactly the same number as in 2002, but, of course, the individual sites were not completely duplicated. A very widespread species occurring in low densities, reflecting its status as the most significant avian predator of smaller birds within the County. Records came from a wide variety of habitats including the urban areas of Shrewsbury and Telford. Seen mainly as singles, with occasional records of two, but four displaying together at Market Drayton on 18 April was notable.

As usual, many observers reported on hunting activities and one of the most significant was that of one of an incubating pair of little ringed plovers being taken by a female sparrowhawk low down in flight over VP on 27 Apr. A male was discovered on the road at St. Martins, having taken a young "pigeon". The sparrowhawk flew off reluctantly when approached leaving the severely crippled pigeon to be despatched by the observer.

At Tedsmere, sparrowhawks were observed to be habitually preying on collared doves and numbers were stated to be reducing rapidly. This species is often the unfortunate recipient of sparrowhawk attacks, being largely conspicuous in its habits, fairly easy to catch and providing a substantial meal. Having said that, the collared doves near year round breeding cycle seems more than able to replenish losses and, after all, the rapid colonisation of the country by collared doves occurred almost simultaneously with the recovery of the sparrowhawk after the well documented population crash.

More unusually, a female was seen “carrying a very large rodent” at The Wrekin. Mammals form less than 3% of prey items in most studies, (*Dr. Ian Newton – The Sparrowhawk*). Other prey items recorded included starling, greenfinch, blackbird, blue tit, woodpigeon and sparrow sp. At Yockleton a female caught a young blackbird before dropping it. The sparrowhawk returned to retrieve the blackbird but was driven off by a labrador before the adult blackbirds rescued the intended victim. One enterprising individual made an unsuccessful attempt to capture a feral pigeon in the market place at Ludlow whilst at Wall Farm, a female made several failed attempts to catch teal from in front of the hide.

Several observers noted sparrowhawks making attacks on birds at garden feeding stations and others were noted “flipping” over hedgerows along country lanes. Noted being mobbed by such diverse species as hirundines, pied wagtail, rook and carrion crow. A female was killed when flying into a window at Adderley, whilst at Yockleton, a juvenile male was luckier, being caught and released after flying into a kitchen. One was trapped and ringed at VP.

There was no direct evidence of breeding reported, but the increasing numbers of records indicate that this species does so very successfully.

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

Status: Common resident

Common buzzard remains a very successful, widespread and well-recorded species with reports from 219 sites and clearly well past the stage where observers report each and every sighting. As has been the case for several years, recorded from the entire length and breadth of the County, from all habitats provided a few mature trees are within the vicinity, having long since pushed out from its upland strongholds. Even the sprawling conurbation of Telford produces regular sightings of the species soaring overhead.

By far the biggest count of the year was an astounding 63 in a field of recently sown winter wheat at Lower Broughton Farm, near Bishops Castle on 27 Oct (DLB) plus at least another 10 in a nearby field. This huge gathering, which must have attracted birds from many miles around, is surely the largest count witnessed in the County, at least since the formation of the Society. The following day, 35 were seen in a field at nearby Upper Broughton with 26 again in the original field on 20 Nov.

Other double figure counts in chronological order were 14 at West Felton on 1 Feb, 18 at West Felton on 1 Mar, 16 at Anchor on 17 Mar, 14 at Llanfair Waterdine on 17 Mar, 12 at Wood Lane on 29 Mar, 12 at Grinshill on 11 Apr, 12 at Lipley on 11 Apr, 15 at West Felton on 15 Apr, 10 at Brown Clee on 16 Apr and 14 at West Felton on 12 Sep. Most of these counts were at times of the year when the species is at its most aerially active with birds engaged in display and defence of territories.

Direct evidence of breeding came from four sites and was suspected at two others although it is clear that the species nests successfully throughout the majority of the County. At Adderley, young were fledged in the same oak tree that had been used the previous year. A pair with two chicks was discovered in an old ravens nest at Purlogue. Although buzzards will often re-use their old nests, there is little in the literature regarding the utilisation of nests of other species.

At Knighton Reservoir, anglers reported a common buzzard taking a near fully-grown mallard from the waters edge. They described it as coming low over the water and clattering into the young mallard, which was dabbling in the margins. The female mallard flew at the buzzard in a vain attempt to protect its young, which was then carried away (DbA). At VP, one was observed feeding on a Canada goose carcass. Buzzards were observed being mobbed by carrion crows, jackdaws, house martins, kestrels and ravens.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Once again Venus Pool and the adjacent Cound Fishery were utilised as a food source by the species during the spring and early summer. This year, however, only a single was present although two were seen in flight over Shrewsbury on 15 Jun. Only five sightings came from locations away from this “core” area.

The first record of the year came from Homer Lake on 14 Mar and may have been the VP bird en-route. This bird, recognisable by a gap at the base of the primaries on the left wing, was then seen on many dates at VP until 22 Jun although on occasions it went unreported for periods of up to a week at a time. Sightings at Severn Valley CP, Alveley on 20 Apr and Chelmarsh Reservoir on 13 Jun coincided with the bird not being seen at VP and one was seen flying north at Church Stretton at 1130 am on 20 May just under three hours before the bird at VP was seen so this too could have been the same individual.

One was at VP on 12 Jul, a gap of 20 days after the previous sighting there. On 25 Aug one was at Wood Lane, with the last of the year again at VP on 28 Aug.

Ospreys are beginning to establish a foothold as a breeding species in England with birds at the release site at Rutland Water continuing to breed and others in Northern England independently establishing themselves with the assistance of nest protection by the RSPB.

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Recorded from 177 sites and still a common, successful and widespread species which occupies a variety of habitats, often close to human habitation or close to main roads. Apart from family parties, no counts of more than four birds were recorded.

Breeding attempts were reported at Brownhills near Market Drayton, Chetwynd Park, Leebotwood, Norton-in-Hales, Sleaf Airfield and Venus Pool with family parties noted at two other sites. The pair at Chetwynd Park failed when their tree hole nest site collapsed, possibly as a result of vandalism. Three young were fledged by the well-watched pair at VP from their nest box site. Three breeding territories were identified during a survey of Telford and Wrekin Council Woodlands (GB).

One road casualty was noted at Cherrington Cross. On the Stiperstones a juvenile kestrel was seen dive-bombing a juvenile common buzzard in a tree, whilst at Conover, a pair of kestrels was seen "attacking the buzzards in their nest". Throughout the first winter period a male roosted under the eaves of a farmhouse near Ightfield, almost above the front door.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

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

There were considerably fewer wintering reports than last year with only 11 records from eight sites up until 4 Mar and seven records from five sites from 8 Oct until the end of the year.

In the former period, single merlin were seen on the River Severn between Cressage and Leighton on 1 Jan, the Long Mynd on 2 Jan and 15 & 26 Feb, Much Wenlock on 16 Jan, Wall Farm, Cherrington Moor on 17 Jan, Candy Valley 24 Jan and 12 Feb, Venus Pool on 26 Jan, Cole Mere on 29 Jan and Whixall Moss on 4 Mar.

In the later period, single merlin were seen at Chelmarsh Scrape on 8 Oct, Wall Farm, Cherrington Moor on 12 Oct, 1 Nov and 7 Dec, Cressage on 25 Nov and Carding Mill Valley on 7 Dec. Two birds, a male and a female, were seen at Cosford Airfield on 23 Nov.

Between 4 Mar and 8 Oct, apart from a single bird seen on 23 Mar near Market Drayton, records were received only from the traditional breeding area. There were 10 records in the two months while the birds were prospecting for a nest site, but, apart from the observer monitoring the nest, only one was received after 6 May. Only one pair was known to have bred. The nest was found on 14 May and two young, one male and one female, fledged in early August.

EURASIAN HOBBY (Hobby) *Falco subbuteo*

Status: Rare summer visitor (RBBP)

Reported from 50 sites, comparable to last year's 47, although the number of individual reports is down by 20 to 96. The indication is that the massive range expansion and colonisation of the species within the county during the late 1980s and 1990s has stabilised and the population may have reached a plateau at least for the present.

As highlighted in previous Shropshire Bird Reports, since 1997 the first hobby sighting of the year has always been either on the Long Mynd or at VP, and so it was to prove again, but it was a close call! A single at Boiling Well on the Long Mynd on 26 Apr was the precursor to what appeared to be a mini movement the following day when singles were at Brown Clee, Priorslee Lake and Weeping Cross with possibly the latter bird again at VP an hour later. The only other April record was from Telford Town Centre on the 30th. Numbers built up only slowly

during May with just 20 further reports and no large gatherings were reported during the entire year. The largest group was just three at Whixall Moss on 19 May, unlike in May 2002 when a group of 18 were seen at this site.

Breeding did not take place at either of last year's two known successful sites. A pair was present at one of these sites in early May only and just one adult was seen at the other. Breeding was suspected at just one site, in the south of the County, where a juvenile was seen on four dates in August. Nevertheless, it is likely that some pairs bred undetected in other areas, the species being notably secretive around nest sites.

Observers often noted hunting forays and one was seen to take a swallow from a flock at Adeney, apparently catching the flock by surprise, as they had not started alarm calling. At Cross Lane Head, one chased a greenfinch around a garden, recalling the hunting method noted around gardens in Adderley the previous year. Several others were noted chasing and being chased by hirundines.

As usual, sightings began to tail off in the second half of September and there was just one record in October, at VP on the 4th.

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*

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

Recorded at 62 sites including the breeding areas.



Peregrine (Glenn Bishton)

The peregrine group monitored some 20 sites, two of which turned out to be unoccupied in 2003. Of the other 18, over 53 eggs were laid, at least 35 hatched and a total of 21 young were fledged. The total of young hatched, although a sharp drop from the exceptional total of 32 in 2002, still represents the joint second highest ever along with 1999 and the steady trend towards recovery is maintained. Tempering this is a concern that 50% of the nests in which eggs were laid resulted in total failure.

At one site, four young were fledged for the fifth successive year and this pair, if they are both the original birds, are responsible for a

substantial 18.34% of all young known to have fledged within the County during those five years. One other site also fledged four young in 2003. The celebrated tree nest discovered in 2002 was again occupied with three eggs laid but unfortunately the nest collapsed before hatching. There were subsequent unconfirmed reports of a juvenile in the area, so hopefully they may have re-laid nearby. At one site where the young were lost to stoats in 2002, the chicks were again taken, this time by an unknown predator.

Unfortunately, this species remains a target for humans with vested interests and one was recovered near Oswestry on 30 Dec having been shot. Interaction with other raptors and corvids was noted occasionally and a probable juvenile was seen attacking a common kestrel at Willstone on 11 Oct. Species hunted by peregrines included meadow pipits on the Long Mynd, duck sp. at ASF, green sandpiper at Wall Farm, northern lapwings at Wood Lane and another which was seen regularly “beating up” the lapwing flock at Whixall canal floods.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*

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

105 reports from 15 sites was broadly similar to the previous year.

In the first winter period, up to three were present at Priorslee Lake during January and birds were occasionally seen there until mid-March. One or two were at VP during the same period. A single was at Wood Lane on 13 & 19 Jan, 2 Feb and 18 Apr. Three were at ASF on 14 Jan with a single on 17 Jan. At Chelmarsh singles were present on five dates between 1 Jan and 3 Mar. Elsewhere, singles were seen at Wall Farm on 1 and 2 Jan, Shrewsbury Sewage Farm on 4 Jan, Market Drayton on 12 Jan, Nant y caws on 23 Jan and two were heard at Whixall Moss on 14 Mar.

During the summer, two were at Madeley Court balancing pool on 6 Jun with a single on 8 Jun and three were present there on 24 Jul. Two were at Shavington Big Pool on 19 Jul and a single on 31 Aug.

The only autumn/winter sighting at ASF was on 13 Sep when two were seen, an adult and a “scrawny” juvenile. At VP one or two were present during October, November and December with three seen on 17 Oct. At Wood Lane, after a single on 19 Oct, two were seen on 31 Oct, a single was present during early November, but no more were recorded until another single on 29 Dec. One was

at Monkmoor Pool on single dates in November and December. At Priorslee Lake, a single was seen on 25 Oct, two were seen on 3 Nov and singles on two dates in December. A single was at Severn Valley Country Park, Alveley on 25 Oct, three were present two days later and another single was seen on 25 Dec. One was at Wall Farm on 27 Sep but no more were seen there until two were recorded on 7 Dec.

The probability is that many off the above sites hosted birds throughout the winter periods. One at VP was watched eating a fish until dispossessed by a moorhen.

Monthly maxima for selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	3	-	-	2	-	-	-
Chelmarsh	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Priorslee Lake	3	1	2	-	1	2	1
Severn Valley Country Park	-	-		-	3	-	1
Venus Pool	1	2	1	-	3	2	2
Wall Farm	1	-	-	1	-	-	2
Wood Lane	1	1	-	-	2	1	1

COMMON MOORHEN (Moorhen) *Gallinula chloropus*

Status: Common resident

Although reported from just 78 sites, moorhen clearly remains a highly successful species and is present at most suitable water-bodies.

Breeding noted at Middleton Pool, Priorslee Flash, Priorslee Lake, Sambrook Mill, Telford Town Park, Venus Pool, Wall Farm, Wood Lane and Worfield Bog. Undoubtedly bred at many other sites, unseen or unrecorded and ignored by many observers. The breeding season is long and the bird is often at least double brooded, with very young birds being seen in early September.

The highest count was of 28 on floods adjacent to the canal at Whixall on 2 Mar with 21 at Monkmoor Pool on 16 Nov the only other count over 20.

COMMON COOT *Fulica atra*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Over 500 records were received from 58 sites yet this is still, in some ways, a difficult species to assess. Although many of the smaller pools were recorded with extraordinary diligence, some of the historically important waters went unchecked for long periods. Even at Venus Pool, no estimates at all were submitted during September and December and, when counts were received, it was sometimes unclear if birds on the adjacent fishing pool were included.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	200	86	170	176	-	272	258
EGM & Wood Lane	153	169	96	196	172	118	202
Priorslee Flash	-	25	-	10	30	32	35
Priorslee Lake	70	56	39	63	51	46	47
Venus Pool & Cound Fishery	76	50	23	43	10	2	-
Howle Pool	11	10	5	6	16	16	7

Chelmarsh provided the highest counts from both winter periods, 200 on 1 Jan and 272 on 26 Nov and the species was recorded here in every month in both 2002 and 2003 with numbers in 2003 being higher by an aggregate of 45.5%. At Priorslee Lake, the same comparison showed an increase in each month of the first quarter by an aggregate of 85% but, conversely, showed an aggregate decline of almost 50% during the final four months of the year.

At EGM, where Webs counts are undertaken during the winter months, fluctuations compared with 2002 appeared to be much more random. In both January and September, counts were little more than half of the corresponding month of the previous year; although other months compared more favourably, a decline over the counted months of about 20% is indicated.

At Howle Pool (although small it is included in the table since regular counts are received), numbers were down on 2002 in every month except January by an aggregate of 38%. However, small waters such as this are likely to be even more susceptible to fluctuations and hard weather movements than the other sites treated here.

Breeding was recorded at Buttery Farm, Howle Pool, Norbroom Marsh, Priorslee Flash, Priorslee Lake, Shropshire Union Canal at Rednal, Sambrook Mill, Shelvock, Showell Mill, Somerwood, Stead Vallets, Stokesay, Telford Town Park and Worfield Bog. At a small pool at Telford Town Park the trials of a breeding pair were well recorded as they managed to cope with the close attentions of anglers, dogs and rubbish dumping to successfully raise young.

COMMON CRANE *Grus grus*

Status: Very rare passage migrant or winter visitor

Following an unsubstantiated report of two at Whixall Moss on 31 Mar for which no description has been submitted to the records committee, two were seen from a moving car in flight near Woodseaves on 15 Apr (JTB, CM). Then what was likely to have been the same two birds, were near Queens Head from 10-19 May (HMP).

The birds near Queens Head were discovered by non-birders from a canal boat on the Montgomery branch of the Shropshire Union Canal near to the Pen-yr-Estyn wetland and were reported to HMP. Both birds were adult, although one had extensive grey in the tail. Assuming that these were the same birds as the Woodseaves sighting, where they had spent the intervening 25 days or so one can only speculate, although the Queens Head area is probably very under watched. They certainly remained here until 19 May with unconfirmed reports from areas near this site until at least early June.

Remarkably, this is the fourth year in succession that this impressive species has been seen in the County, and these are the 6th and 7th individuals since the formation of the Society. It is also the first multiple occurrence.

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (Oystercatcher) *Haematopus ostralegus*

Status: Scarce summer visitor and passage migrant

A total of 211 reports were received from 19 sites which gives less than a true representation of distribution since 142 (67%) of the reports were from VP and neighbouring sites, 44 (21%) were from Wood Lane and the EGM and 16 (8%) were from the ASF/Isombridge area, with just nine sightings from elsewhere.

The first bird to return to the county was at VP on 15 Jan on what has become a fairly typical date in recent years. A pair was then present at VP from late January with occasionally three seen from 11 Mar. Incubation was noted on the main gravel island from late March. Four adults were present on 13 Apr. Three

young hatched on about 21 Apr, two of which had to be rescued the following day when they became trapped behind the wooden shoring on the island. The three fledged in late May and were reported less frequently from then on, hopefully by virtue of them ranging more widely and eventually leaving the area. Up to three birds, (aged as adults), continued to be seen until the end of July, with an exceptional eight on 16 Jul obviously including migrants.

At Wood Lane, two were present on 27 Jan and then four from late February through to early June, with five on 30 Mar and 9 Jun and six on 5 Apr. Two pairs were seen to be incubating in early May but no young were recorded. Birds presumably from this site were noted at Cole Mere on three dates, (including five on 10 Mar), Crose Mere on two dates, Newton Mere on one date and White Mere on two dates. The last sighting in the area was a single at Wood Lane on 20 Jul.

At Isombridge two were seen on 20 Feb and a probable pair during April and May. Juveniles were reported although these were not seen during May. The two seen at ASF on three dates in March may have been the Isombridge birds wandering although four were at ASF on 6 Apr and three on 29 Apr.

Two were present at Tittenley Pool from mid March until mid April, a site with some potential for breeding but much disturbed by anglers. A notable group of six were on the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 30 Mar were presumably passage birds. Two were at Almington on 29 Mar and the only other records were all of singles between 19 Mar and 23 Apr at Buttery Farm, Knighton Reservoir, Norbroom Marsh and Whixall Moss, all of these on single dates.

A single bird remained at VP until November. This bird was in poor condition and was not seen to fly. It was last noted alive on 9 Nov and was rumoured to have been killed by human intruders.

LITTLE PLOVER (Little Ringed Plover) *Charadrius dubius*

Status: Scarce summer visitor (RBBP)

As is often the case, the report for this species in many ways will reflect that of the previous species at least in terms of principle sites used and breeding activities therein. A total of 121 (62%) of the 194 reports for the year came from VP. Recorded at just 12 other sites which, if anything, is slightly above normal.

The first record of the year was at Wood Lane on 20 Mar when two were present. Three were seen on 22 Mar and on many subsequent dates until 4 May when four were present. Incubation was noted in early May and two young were seen on 20 May, but could not be located subsequently.

Two on 25 Mar were the first to return to VP and then numbers fluctuated greatly throughout spring and early summer with highs of eight on 14 May and seven on 14 Apr, 10 May and 23 Jun. By 27 Apr one pair were incubating on the main gravel island and on the same date, one was taken by a sparrowhawk low over the pool shortly after a change over at the nest. Nevertheless, incubation continued and on 5 May the bird on the now caged nest was tormented by a jackdaw. This bird and its partner put up a good distraction display and were joined by two others. The jackdaw managed to extract something “small and fluffy” from the cage but whether this was a chick is doubtful as the nest continued to be incubated until mid-month when it was finally deserted leaving un-hatched eggs.

From about 2 May, a second pair were incubating in the north field and shortly afterwards a third pair began incubating on the re-profiled island. Unfortunately, at the time, no cage was available for this third pair and they deserted after a few days followed shortly by the pair in the north field. By 3 Jun, a pair were again incubating on the gravel island and on 28 Jun two small young were seen, but by 2 Jul they had disappeared, presumed predated.

At Chelmarsh Scrape a pair were incubating on a caged nest from mid May and three of the four eggs hatched by 5 Jun. One young survived to be independent of the adults by 22 Jun at which time the adults were incubating a second clutch. This low-lying nest always appeared vulnerable and was, unfortunately, washed out by flooding a few days later. Undaunted, the pair moved to a higher ground on an island and by 9 Jul were again incubating. Unfortunately, vandals, who for good measure also attempted to burn down one of the hides, stole two of the eggs on 18 Jul. After initially appearing to have deserted, the pair were again incubating the remaining two eggs on 20 Jul before eventually failing. The surviving young from the first clutch continued to be seen until the end of July.

At Bromfield gravel pits, after a single was noted on 1 May, three adults including a pair brooding two young were located on 18 Jun. All were still present the following day but no further reports were received, although singles nearby on the River Onny on 27 Jun and near Ludlow Racecourse on 19 May may also have been one of these birds. Five were seen on the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas on 30 Mar, six on 12 Apr and on 15 Jun two birds were located some distance apart in suitable breeding habitat by observers on a canoe trip.

Two were at Sambrook Mill Pool on 13 Apr, one at Wall Farm on 20 Apr with two here next day and a single was at Priorslee Lake on 29 Apr. One was reported from a new pool near the new Hodnet by-pass on 1 Jun and a single was at Alington on 28 Jun.

At Venus Pool birds continued to be logged on most days during July and August with high counts of four on 15 and 17 Jul and 21 Aug. Up to two juveniles were occasionally seen during late July and August but they were not believed to have originated at VP. At Wood Lane one or two were seen regularly during July and August with three between 23 and 30 Jul. A single remained at VP during the first five days of September being the last in the county for the year.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*

Status: Common passage migrant

Seen at just four sites and in very low numbers, a poor year.

The first to be seen was a single at Wood Lane on 24 Mar, and may have been the same bird that was seen later in the day on nearby floods at Moss Farm, Whixall. Also recorded at Wood Lane on 26 Mar (2), 2 Apr (2), 3 Apr (1), 16 Apr (1), 18 Apr (1), 21 Apr (1), 27 Apr (1), 14 May (2), 27 May (1) and 30 May (3). The only other site to record spring passage was VP, where singles were recorded on 17 Apr, 21 Apr, 27 Apr, 30 Apr to 1 May, 16 May and 22 May.

A single which was present at Wood Lane on 13-14 Jun was possibly an early returning failed breeder. Normal return passage birds were recorded from 18 Aug when one was at VP where they continued to be recorded until 23 Aug with a maximum of three on the latter date, and again from 28 Aug with one or two recorded most days until 13 Sep. At Wood Lane return passage consisted of singles on 20-21 Aug and 28 Aug.

The last of the year was a single on 18 Sep at ASF, and the only record of the year for this site, which was affected by high water levels throughout the passage periods.

Monthly maxima for selected sites:

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Allscott Sugar Factory	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Venus Pool	1	1	1	-	-	3	2
Wood Lane	2	1	3	1	-	1	-



Green Sandpiper, Venus Pool, 2003 (*Paul King*)



Ruff, Venus Pool, 2003 (*Paul King*)



Black-necked Grebes, Priorslee Lake, April 2003 (*Alan Heath*)



Purple Heron, Venus Pool., September 2003 (*Alan Heath*)



Adult Mediterranean Gull, Whixall Moss, May 3003 (*Alan Heath*)



Hobby, Whixall Moss . July 2003



Common Buzzard, Pentre Coed, December 2003 (*John Harding*)



Little Owl, Duddleston, May 2003 (*John Hawkins*)



Dipper, Shell Brook, nr Pentre Coed, April 2003(*John Harding*)



Robin, Pentre Coed, April 2003 (*John Hawkins*)



Nuthatch, The Wrekin, 2003 (*Paul King*)



Ring Ouzel, Long Mynd 2003 (*Tony Cross*)



Fieldfare, Pentre Coed, October 2003 (*John Harding*)



Song Thrush, Pentre Coed October 2003 (*John Hawkins*)



Common Whitethroat, Whixall Moss, June 2003 (*John Hawkins*)



Chiffchaff, Pentre Coed, May 2003 (*John Hawkins*)



Jay, Pentre Coed, December 2003 (*Alan Heath*)

EUROPEAN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*

Status: Common winter visitor

The highest count of the first winter period was an excellent flock of 400 on 1 Jan with northern lapwings on flooded fields near ASF. Numbers at this site quickly dropped to 40 over the next four days, although 200 were nearby at Isombridge on 3 Jan with 100 present on 5 Jan. Between 100 and 150 were south of Bayston Hill on 12 Feb.

Around 100 were at Long Batch on 20 Mar, 85 recorded on the same date in Batch valley were presumably part of the same flock. Half were in summer plumage suggesting northward migrating birds.

Another notable count was 66 which circled VP for several minutes on 21 Feb. They landed briefly, but were clearly nervous and soon departed. Also seen at Prees Heath with a maximum of 40 on 19 Jan, Kynnersley with 55 on 26 Mar; Wall Farm with a maximum of 15 on 10 Mar and Lyth Hill with 40 on 9 Apr. The last of the first winter/spring passage period was 39 at Wood Lane on 21 Apr which was a site record count by some way.

The first of the autumn was a single at VP on 28 Sep, but the second winter period was dominated by some very impressive counts of birds mainly seen in flight from Priorslee Lake. After 50 were seen on 5 Oct, counts of 120 on 28 Oct, 300 on 3 Nov, 400 on 5 Nov, 100 on 16 Nov, 200 on 27 Nov, 115 on 13 Dec, 250 on 19 Dec, 150 on 24 Dec and finally the biggest count of the year of 500 on 25 Dec. This represents the biggest count in Shropshire since 14 Nov 1999 when an estimated movement of 5000 flew over ASF in several large flocks. The previous largest wintering count was of 519 at ASF on 1 Dec 1996.

Other large counts in the period were 200 at Wall Farm on 29 Oct, the same number at Hunger Hill on 16 Nov, 150 at ASF on 19 Nov and again on 13 Dec. Recorded on six dates at VP with easily the highest count being 84 on 29 Nov.

Also recorded in the second winter period at Broome Park, Neen Savage (max 22), Burlington (45), Cherrington (13), Eardington (6), Haddon Hill (15), Kingslow (50), Lyth Hill (50), Nedge Hill (30), Sleep Airfield (41), Tern Hill (1), The Humbers (39), Tong (40) and Whixall (1).

As always with this species, a considerable amount of duplication is probable as flocks move between sites but, nevertheless, a considerable revival is apparent during 2003, the previous year's highest count being a mere 184.

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*

Status: Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

A winter plumaged individual was discovered at VP on the morning of 30 Mar (CR, GEH). It remained until dusk, but had gone the following morning.

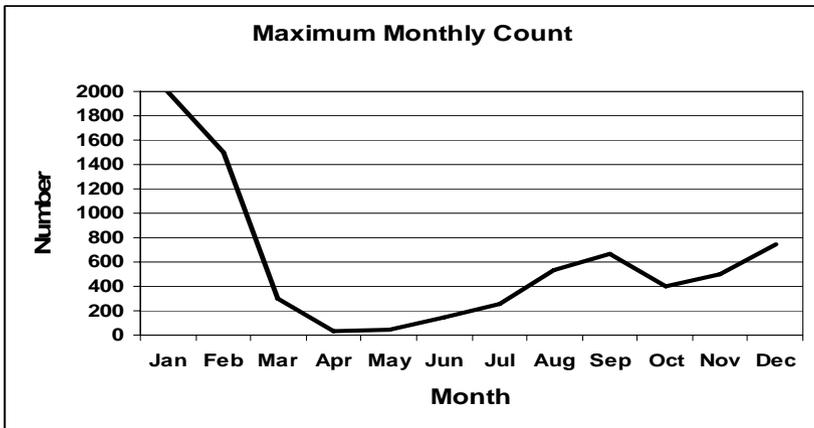
This represents the first record since 2001. A total of 13 have now been seen in the last 10 years, but only four in the last seven. Interestingly, four of the records in the early 1990s were of birds seen in January, all between the 6th and the 8th.

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*

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

The breeding population of British lapwings continues to decline, and a detailed survey was carried out in the County in 2003. The total breeding population now estimated to be in the region of 730 pairs which is down from over 2700 in 1987. (see the article “Breeding Lapwing In Shropshire 2003” on page 31).

Maximum monthly count:



As the above chart shows, post-breeding flocks begin to assemble in June, but local birds tend to migrate south and west for the winter. Flock sizes in the County reflect weather conditions here and abroad, as lapwings cannot feed on frozen ground. Large numbers come here from continental Europe every year, but more come if lowland western Europe is cold and hard. They stay for as long as the ground is wet and soft, but they too may have to move west and south if conditions deteriorate. Most of these winter migrants arrive between late

September and early November, and leave again in February and March, just before the smaller flocks of breeding birds return. Flocks in early autumn are likely to contain both local and continental birds.

A massive flock of 2000 at Prees Heath on 1 Jan was the highest count of the year, (2750 had been present on 27 Dec 2002). Numbers remained high at this site during January with 800 on the 4th and 1200 on the 19th but by 11Feb just 100 remained. Also on 1 Jan, 600 were present on flooded fields to the east of the Mirelake, ASF with 1000 at nearby Isombridge on 3 Jan. Numbers at Wall Farm remained high from January to mid-March, peaking at 1500 on 12 Feb with 500 plus being recorded on five other dates. At Wood Lane, easily the best count during this period was 600 on 9 Feb. Other sites to hold flocks of over 200 on occasional dates during the first winter period were Hinstock (250), Morville (200), Polemere (300), Quinna Brook (200), Rodway near Crudgington (200), and VP (250).

Post breeding flocks included 252 at Wood Lane on 26 Jul and 534 on 9 Aug with 300 plus present throughout the remainder of August. Numbers here peaked at 668 on 7 Sep and remained fairly high until the end of the year with 300 plus on eight dates in November and 200 plus on 13 dates in December. A count of 264 was made at Whixall canal floods on 11 Nov and this site held the highest count of the second winter period of 750 on 4 Dec. It should be noted, however, that a certain amount of movement is suspected between Whixall and Wood Lane.

Other flocks of 200 or more were 365 at Lizard Wood, Shifnal on 25 Sep, 300 at Priorslee Lake on 13 Nov; 300 at ASF on 19 Nov and 13 Dec, 285 at Venus Pool on 29 Nov, 200 at Morville on 9 Dec, 350 at Oxford Bridge, Adeney on 21 Dec and 400 at Atcham Bridge, on 24 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	600	-	-	-	8	-	-	300	300
Priorslee Lake	25	40	4	-	-	-	61	300	86
Venus Pool	250	212	26	120	70	11	79	285	100
Wall Farm	581	1500	300	58	51	3	-	-	41
Wood Lane	323	600	102	252	534	668	400	500	500
Whixall	60	-	95	-	-	-	-	264	750

RED KNOT *Calidris canutus*

Status *Rare passage migrant*

An excellent year with four individuals, all in the second half of the year. The first was at Chelmarsh where a winter plumaged adult was present on the dam from 10-12 Sep (AB). Also on 10 Sep, a juvenile was located at ASF (AL). Another was present at ASF on 30 Sep (MGG) and, remarkably, ASF hosted its third individual of the year when an adult was found on 29 Dec (AL).

The bird at Chelmarsh was the only one to remain for more than one day and this bird spent much of its time feeding inside a decomposed and dried out Canada goose carcass.

Four in a year is the best annual total for at least 25 years, although three were together at ASF in September 1983. During the last 10 years, this species has been much less than annual with a total now of just 11 birds and 1997-2000 being completely blank years.

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*

Status: *Uncommon passage migrant*

A good year with six being seen, five on spring passage and one on return migration. All but one were at Venus Pool which is the premier site for the species in Shropshire. Three paid a very brief visit to VP on 20 May (PN) which is a typical date. A single partially summer plumaged bird was at Wood Lane on 27 May (CG). One at VP on 8 Jun (GEH) completed the spring passage and the final record of the year was of a single at VP on 14 Oct (CEW).

A total of 36 individuals have now been recorded in the last 10 years with 26 of these having been seen at Venus Pool. Thirty one have been recorded in spring, by far outnumbering the five seen on return passage. The only blank year in the period was 1999.

Sanderling in Shropshire 1994-2003:

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
Spring	2	2	4	1	4	-	3	2	8	5
Autumn	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2	1

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

Another very poor year for the species, just two were seen, typically both on autumn passage. The first was at Chelmarsh scrape on at least 27-28 Aug (KB) and one was a brief visitor to VP on 13 Oct (WRBD).

This species is recorded annually in the County, but in vastly fluctuating numbers. The recent trend, however, is of a sharp decline, with the last five years producing less than a quarter of the individuals recorded during 1994-2003, although this statistic is heavily influenced by an unprecedented passage in autumn 1996. As the table indicates, this species is a very rare on spring passage.

Estimated numbers of little stint 1994-2003:

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
Spring	-	-	-	1-2	-	-	-	-	2	-
Autumn	4	12	c.57	1	c.18	3	c.3	c.16	2	2

TEMMINCK’S STINT *Calidris temminckii*

Status: Very rare passage migrant

An excellent year for this neat, if slightly understated, little “peep”. Three were at Wood Lane from 2-4 May (JHaw, AH) and one was at Wall Farm from 16-18 Aug (ARS).

One of the Wood Lane birds was in full summer plumage with the other two in transitional stage. They gave extremely close views as they fed within a few yards of Lapwing hide. Due to the nature of the site, the Wall Farm bird was much more elusive, but occasionally provided good views and, like the Wood Lane birds, was photographed. It remained until the evening of 18 Aug, thus overlapping with one found at Belvide Reservoir in Staffordshire on the same date. Fortunately, all lingered long enough to give many observers their first chance to see the species in Shropshire.

These four become the 9th to 12th individuals to be recorded in the County and it is interesting to note that the years 1995, 2001 and 2003 account for all but one of these with just the first ever in 1986 being the exception.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER *Calidris melanotos*

Status: Rare vagrant

A juvenile was present at the Mirelake, ASF from 10-16 Sep (AL). Although showing well at times, it was often elusive as it fed amongst the weedy margins.

Mid September is a typical date for this species and this constituted the 13th County record and the fourth in the last five years. Quite remarkably, it is the 11th to have been found at ASF.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

Status: Common passage migrant

The first of the year was at VP on 22 Feb. One at Wood Lane from 23 Mar until the month’s end showed characters of the northern race *C. a alpina*. One was at Whixall Moss on 24 Mar. A trickle of sightings then came from VP and Wood Lane from mid-April. At VP, singles were recorded on 11 dates between 14 Apr and 26 May, with four on 28 & 30 Apr and three on 16 & 20 May whilst at Wood Lane singles were noted on seven dates between 11 Apr and 15 May with three on 15 Apr and 13-14 May. Three were at Chelmarsh scrape on 24 May.

Return passage was first noted at VP on 19 Jun when one was present. Passage at this site was protracted with singles on 19 dates between 30 Jun and 9 Nov, two birds on five other dates, three on three dates and four on 8 Aug. The only autumn records at Wood Lane were singles on 9 Aug and 3 Oct whilst Chelmarsh held a single on 1 Aug, three on 27 Aug and one next day. The only records of the year from ASF were of two on 18 Sep and six, which was the year’s highest count, on 16 Oct. Priorslee Lake held two on 22 Oct and a single on 28 Oct. The last report of the year was of two at VP on 29 Nov.

Although it is probable that the species was present on more days than actually reported, the indication is of another very poor year for the species.

Monthly maxima for selected sites:

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
ASF	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	6	-
Chelmarsh Res.	-	-	3	-	-	3	-	-	-
Venus Pool	-	4	3	1	1	4	3	2	2
Wood Lane	1	3	3	-	-	1	-	1	-

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*

Status: Common passage migrant

The only spring records were of two, a ruff and a reeve, at VP on 16 Mar and a single at Wood Lane on 27 Mar.

Return passage was noted from 7 Aug when a ruff was at VP. Another single was at VP on 28 Aug, with two the following day building to three between 1-6 Sep with a one remaining until 8 Sep. At Wall Farm, four were seen on 17-18 Aug with two on 20 Aug and one on 26 Aug. Singles were seen at a “farm tank” near Tibberton on 26 Aug, ASF on 30 Aug and Priorslee Lake on 30 Aug. One at Knighton Reservoir on 31 Aug was the observer’s first record of this species at the site in nine years of regular visits

At Wood Lane, three were present most days between 6-12 Aug, with at least one lingering until the 28th. Subsequently, a juvenile was present from 10-22 Sep and a single on 18 Oct which turned out to be the last record of the year.

A total of three birds in spring, and a minimum of 18 in autumn represent a fairly good year for this species.

Autumn maxima from selected sites:

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

JACK SNIPE *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

The first record of the year was two at Cole Mere on 1 Jan and this site also held three birds on 29 Jan. The only other records in the first winter period were of two at The Mere, Ellesmere on 5 Jan and one at Chelmarsh scrape on 26 Jan.

The first of the autumn was at VP on 25 & 27 Oct and singles were reported at Severn Valley Country Park on 26 Oct and Wood Lane on 8 Nov. Other records

continued the recent pattern of wintering birds being found on the Shropshire hills with one at Yearlet, Long Mynd on 27 Oct and one at Haddon Hill, Long Mynd on 21 Nov. The last records of the year were a single at Whixall Moss on 7 Dec and two at Cole Mere on 23 Dec.

It was poor year for this species, but jack snipe are always likely to be overlooked.

COMMON SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*

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

Another very poor year. Although the number of sites where the species was reported rose from 33 to 40, almost half of these were single records of mainly low numbers. Almost a third of the reports were from VP.

Monthly maxima for selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	-	-	-	-	-	23	30	-	-
Chelmarsh Res.	-	6	13	2	3	9	-	-	2
Cole Mere	14	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	45
Priorslee Flash	8	6	7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Venus Pool	10	8	8	9	15	12	5	3	2
Wall Farm	-	-	2	1	7	5	1	-	-
Wood Lane	32	9	12	15	10	17	15	39	28

By far the largest count in the first winter period was a flock of about 60 in flight over Whixall Moss on 2 Mar, mainly over the Welsh section, but also venturing into Shropshire. Eight had been seen earlier on the floods adjacent to the canal at Whixall. The only other count in this period above twenty was of 32 at Wood Lane on 25 Jan.

The only evidence of possible breeding was from Norboom Marsh on the Staffordshire border where three were drumming on 26 Mar, but no follow up reports were received. No records at all came from the moorland areas on the Long Mynd, where breeding by the species seems to be becoming a distant memory.

The first count of significance in the second winter period was 20 at ASF on 10 Sep. Twenty three were at ASF on 24 Sep and a mini-influx may have taken place here in October when counts of 20, 30 and 20 were made between the 18th and 20th. Twenty five were at Spoonley on 20 Oct. At Wood Lane, 39 on 21 Nov and 28 on 6 Dec were the highest counts of the year from this well watched site. The highest count from the second winter period was 45 at Cole Mere marsh on 23 Dec. Although VP had the lion's share of reports, numbers were always low with the highest count of the year a mere 15 on 29 Aug.

Although the well-documented decline of this species is surely real in national and county terms, it is also the case that information in this report at least directly reflects the habits and input of observers. Many of the areas which previously provided significant counts of this and other species no longer seem to be visited on a regular basis. Are we getting out to the remoter areas of the County to the same extent as observers of 20 years or more ago, or are we confining our activities more and more to the comfort and security of the new reserves with their excellent new hides? Inevitable perhaps, but if so it is also likely to result in a major change in the statistical record.

EURASIAN WOODCOCK (Woodcock) *Scolopax rusticola*

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

A significant upturn in the number of reports during both of the winter periods and in the breeding season, the latter primarily due to fieldwork for the BTO Woodcock survey the results of which are shown on page 31. This is slightly tempered due to the highest count for the year being a mere four birds at Hawkstone Park on 1 Feb.

The first winter period produced records from a number of sites and the figures shown in brackets indicate firstly the number of dates recorded and secondly the maximum count. At ASF (1-1), Berwick Park (1-2), Candy Valley (5-2), Cross Lane Head (2-1), Eaton Mascott (1-1), Felhampton (1-1), Haughmond Hill (1-1), Hawkestone Park (4-4), Kerry Ridgeway (1-2), Prees (1-1), Shavington Big Pool (3-3), Smethcote (1-1), The Mere, Ellesmere (1-1), Trefonen (1-1), Wilderley Hall (1-1), Wood Lane (1-1), and the Wrekin (1-1). As is often the case with this species, several were flushed, during pheasant shoots, and others were seen in flight at dusk.

Fieldworkers for the BTO woodcock survey found single birds in the breeding season at Clunton Coppice, Eastbridge Wood/Haberley, Mytton's Coppice, the Wrekin and in the Wyre Forest where at least two were roding. One was also flushed from near the top of the Wrekin on 26 Jun by an independent observer.

Second winter period records came from Broseley (1-2), Bushmoor Coppice (1-1), Mount Pleasant, Shrewsbury (1-1), Shifnal (1-1), Stanway Coppice (1-1) and Venus Pool (1-1). At Mount Pleasant one was discovered feeding on earthworms in a very small garden in Lancaster Road on 22 Oct (MJ). It crouched on close observation but did not fly. One flew over the M54 near Shifnal on 24 Nov.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Another excellent year for the species, continuing the marked upward trend in the county for this elegant wader. Numerically the best year yet, with an estimated minimum of 68 individuals seen, eclipsing the total of around 50 recorded in 2001. This was mainly due to large arrivals at Wood Lane in May and Ebnall Hall near Gobowen, Venus Pool and Wood Lane in August. In the 1984 Bird Report, the average for the previous 10 years was stated as having been about six. Many of the birds involved seem to be non-breeding or immature individuals.

The first of the year were three at VP on 3 May and a single was seen here from 23-28 May, a single on 28 Jul, three on 5 Aug, a single on 7 Aug and a notable flock of eight on 29 Aug. The most significant arrival was a flock of 24, which must have been an almost surreal sight, when discovered on the scrape in front of Lapwing hide at Wood Lane on 28 May. This represents the largest flock ever seen in the County, almost doubling the previous record of 13 at VP in September 2001. The Wood Lane flock had reduced to 15 the following day with eight remaining from 30 May to 3 Jun; the last three departed on 9 Jun. A single was then seen on 1 Jul with two on 15 Aug which increased to 10 on the 16th, although all 12 departed next day. Another single was seen on 27 Aug. At Ebnall Hall near Gobowen, a flock of nine found on 21 Aug had risen to 10 on 23 Aug, with one remaining two days later. It is interesting to speculate if these could this have been birds from Wood Lane relocating. Elsewhere, three were at Chelmarsh on 17 Aug and one was at ASF on 30 Aug.

The last of the year was also the longest staying, a single at Wood Lane from 10 Oct until 3 Nov.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Venus Pool	3	-	1	8
Wood Lane	24	8	1	12

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

The first of the year were five at VP on 27 Apr. These were briefly joined by a sixth but all departed together shortly afterwards. At the same site, one was again present the following morning with possibly a different bird in the evening. The final record at VP was as single on 13 & 14 May. Elsewhere, singles were seen at Wood Lane on 28 Apr, 2 May and 6 May, in a field adjacent to the approach road to Morris's Bridge at Whixall Moss on 6 & 7 May, near the Montgomery Branch Canal at Queen's Head on 13 May and on 29 Jun at Wall Farm.

The only records on return passage came from the Priorslee area. One was heard several times in the vicinity of Priorslee Flash on 16 Aug and this bird, or another, was seen at Priorslee Lake two days later.

These records involved a minimum of 14, possibly as many as 17 individuals which was numerically the best year for the species since 1995. As usual the majority were on spring passage.

EURASIAN CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

Status Common breeding species, passage migrant and winter visitor

The largest flock of the year came in the first winter period when an impressive total of 150 were counted at Ponthen near the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence on 5 Jan. Other flocks at this time included 20 at ASF on 1 Jan with 25 here on 4 Jan, 23 at the West Midland Showground on 15 Jan with 35 here on 3 Feb, 27 at Pimley Manor on 16 Feb, 37 at Isombridge on 20 Feb, 36 at Ebnal Hall near Gobowen on 1 Mar and 30 at Cae Howel on 13 Mar. Almost all of these are traditional sites where flocks of this species are regularly present in the early part of the year. Regular roosting flocks of up to 55 at VP and 37 at Wood Lane were counted throughout March.

Breeding was confirmed only at Habberley, where two adults and one juvenile were seen on 24 May and at Spoonley near Market Drayton where a pair with two chicks about one week old were present on 30 May.

The post breeding roosts at VP and Wood Lane began to build up again in the second half of June, peaking at the latter site at 87 on 6 Aug but with counts over 60 throughout the month. Numbers at Wood Lane remained high well into November. At VP, numbers fluctuated more and tailed off completely after late September.

Away from VP and Wood Lane, the only significant post-breeding counts over 20 were 22 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 30 Jul and 28 at ASF on 21 Oct.

Monthly maxima for selected sites:

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Venus Pool	4	55	10	1	38	36	19	26	9	-
Wood Lane	37	23	15	4	60	50	87	75	38	33

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

Juveniles were at VP on 29 Aug (WRBD,GEH) and Wood Lane on 31 Aug and 1 Sep (AH). The Wood Lane bird was missing for most of the latter date, but flew in just after 1900 hrs before leaving again 30 minutes later.

A comparatively poor show after the bumper year of 2002 when nine were seen, but this species has now been recorded for the eighth consecutive year after two blank years in 1994/1995. The average over the last 10 years is 3.1 per year.

Number of Spotted Redshank recorded in Shropshire over the last 10 years:

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
	-	3	2	2	6	4	3	9	2

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

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

Winter records came from ASF where up to four were present in early January, with two remaining on 1 Feb, and three were seen on 9 Mar with a single on 17 & 19 Mar. Another single was at Houghton on 4 Feb.

Singles were at Wall Farm on 18 Mar and 11 Apr. Two were at Wood Lane between 30 Mar and 12 Apr. At VP, a single was seen intermittently between 20 Mar and 9 Apr, with two on 11 Apr. Another single was at VP on 19 May. At Norbroom Marsh, Newport birds were present between 26 Mar and 31 May, with

a maximum of four recorded on the former date and on 1 May. Some behaviour indicative of attempted breeding was witnessed including display, but no young were seen.

Passage birds began to be seen again from mid-June at Wood Lane, with singles on 11 dates until 17 Oct, but with four present on 12 Jul and six, which was the highest count of the year, on 30 Jul. Elsewhere, singles were seen at Chelmarsh on 10 Sep and 3 Oct, ASF from 18-21 Oct and Priorslee Lake on 26 Jul, with two here briefly on 13 Nov having arrived with lapwings, but soon departing. At VP, one or two were seen between 8 Jul and 29 Nov, with the last of the year, a single, on 12 Dec.

COMMON GREENSHANK (Greenshank) *Tringa nebularia*

Status: Common passage migrant

This species is usually scarce in spring so records from three sites was unexpected. The first was a one at Wall Farm on 13 Apr whilst at VP singles were seen on 15-16 Apr, 3 May and 26 May. Wood Lane also hosted singles on 15-17 Apr and 23 Apr.

In June birds are most likely to have been on return passage and singles were seen at Chelmarsh on the 13th and Wood Lane on the 29th. However, return passage got properly underway in early July.

Two were seen at Priorslee Lake on 4 Jul with one here on 30 Aug. At Wall Farm there were two on 5 Jul which increased to three on the 8th. Singles were then reported here on other dates in July. In August one was seen on 17 Aug, two the 26th and one the 27th. Finally at Wall Farm, singles were reported on the 17 and 20 Sep.

At Wood Lane, singles were present on most dates in August, with eight, which was the highest count of the year, on the 6th, four on the 14th and three on three other dates. Singles were recorded here on three days in September the last being on the 21st.

At Knighton Reservoir, one was seen on the 13 Aug, two on 26 Aug and three on 31 Aug. Elsewhere, singles were reported at Bromfield on 1 Sep, Chelmarsh Reservoir on 17 Aug and 12 Sep; Priorslee Lake on 30 Aug, the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 11 and 21 Sep and Tibberton, on 23-24 Aug. Two were seen at Yorton on 1 Oct.

The lion's share of the autumn records, however, came from VP, with at least a single bird recorded on most dates from 31 Jul until the end of September, with peaks of five on 10-11 Aug, four on 12 Sep and three on five other dates. The last of the year was a single at this site on 12 Oct.

The most glaring statistic is the complete absence of records from ASF for the first time in at least 25 years, probably due mainly to the very high water levels throughout the early autumn. Notwithstanding this, 2003 was a better year for the species than of late with six birds recorded in spring and probably a minimum of 50 in autumn.

Monthly maxima from selected sites:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Venus Pool	1	1	-	1	5	4	1
Wall Farm	1	-	-	3	2	1	-
Wood Lane	1	-	1	-	8	1	2

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

Status: Common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor

A count of six at ASF on 1 Jan proved the species to be once again wintering in numbers at this site. One or two were also present at Wood Lane throughout the first quarter, but were often elusive and one seen at White Mere on 5 Jan may have wandered from here. Also in the first quarter of the year, singles were seen at Cae Howel on 5 Jan, Priorslee Lake on 26 Feb, Chelmarsh Reservoir on 2 Mar, and Wall Farm on 18 Mar.

In April and May, months when the species is always scarce, singles were seen at Cae Howel on 20 Apr, the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 12 Apr and Wood Lane on 11 May.

Returning birds began to reappear from mid-June at most of the main sites and Mid-August at ASF. Peak counts from these sites are shown in the table below. Eight at Chelmarsh on 23 Aug was the highest count of the year. Return passage was also noted at Knighton Reservoir on three dates with a maximum of three on 26 Aug and at Tibberton on two dates with a maximum count of two on 26 Aug. Single late autumn birds were recorded at Cranmere Bog on 4 Nov, Pen-yr-Estyn on 11 Nov, Shavington Big Pool, on 1 Nov and Standford Bridge on 23 Nov.

Birds seen in December and looking set to winter included up to three at VP throughout and singles at Bromfield on the 7th and 29th, Edgmond on the 13th, Wood Lane on the 13th and 24th. One at Sambrook Pool on 6 Dec may have been the same as one seen earlier in the day at nearby Showell Mill.

Wood Lane achieved an unusual ‘full house’ of hosting the species during every month of the year.

Monthly maxima at selected sites during return migration:

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

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Singles were found at Wood Lane on 9 Jul (RR, JH, ST, AH) and at Wall Farm on 9 Aug (PJ, MG).

Two is just above the average for the last ten years but, unfortunately, both were present for just one day. The last true spring passage record may have been as long ago as 1996, although one at Wood Lane in 1997 is included in the totals, the date of 5 & 6 Jun suggests that it was equally likely to have been a failed breeder returning early.

Wood Sandpipers in Shropshire 1994-2003:

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
Spring	-	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Autumn	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	3	4	2

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

Status: Common passage migrant

The first of the year was on the extremely early date of 2 Mar at Wood Lane, perhaps suggestive of local wintering. Perhaps the first true migrant was at Priorslee Lake on 2-5 Apr put passage commenced on a broad front in mid-April with one Wood Lane on the 9th and 12th, one at Knighton Reservoir on the 12th, two at the River Severn Leighton/Buildwas on the 12th, three at Monkmoor on the 13th, one at Priorslee Lake on the 14th, one at VP on the 14th and one at Wall Farm on the 15th. Numbers peaked early with four at Wood Lane on 16 Apr and the same number at Priorslee Lake on 21 Apr.

There was no evidence of breeding, although birds were seen in May or June at Bromfield on the River Onny and on the River Severn near Bridgnorth and between Highley and Upper Arley.

Return passage was recorded from late June at Priorslee Flash (max three) and VP and the highest count of the year was six at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 9 Jul. At VP, birds were recorded on 56 dates from 18 Jun until 14 Sep.

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
ASF	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Chelmarsh	-	-	1	-	6	2	-
Priorslee Flash/ Lake	-	4	2	3	3	1	-
Venus Pool	-	3	1	1	4	5	2
Wood Lane	1	4	2	-	-	2	1

In addition to these key sites, autumn records were also received from Atcham Bridge, Cranmere Bog, Knighton Reservoir (maximum of three), Ponthen, Standford Bridge, Stokesay, Tibberton and Whitcliffe. Curiously, although none were seen in October, singles were seen at VP on 4 Nov and another at Wood Lane on 20 Nov.

GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Status: Very rare vagrant

An adult was found at The Mere, Ellesmere on 11 Oct (AC).

Thanks to the finder promptly releasing the news, many local birders managed to see the bird and photographs were taken. It was not present the following day.

Amazingly, although only the fifth accepted record for the County, this species has now been recorded during every year of the new millennium. It is also the second record for The Mere. The date of this record the fairly typical for occurrences in Shropshire.

Grey Phalarope in Shropshire:

The Mere, Ellesmere, first winter, 31 Oct – 12 Nov 1990.

Battlefield, Shrewsbury, 18 Oct 2000.

Venus Pool, 24 Nov 2001.

Priorslee Lake, 16 Oct 2002.

The Mere, Ellesmere, ad, 11 Oct 2003.

In addition a record of one trapped, photographed and ringed in the mid-1990s at Chelmarsh seems likely to be added to the list when the Records Committee completes its review of old records.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

The first winter period produced five records, all from The Mere, Ellesmere. The first was an adult in winter plumage on 11 Jan (DAB), followed by a 2nd winter on 8 (AL). A similar aged bird, presumed to be the same individual, was also seen on the 14 & 16 Feb. In addition, on the 14th an adult in winter plumage and a 1st winter were also present (AB). Finally, an adult in summer plumage was seen on 8 Mar (AH, GT).

A real highlight of the year, however, was a pristine summer plumage adult which was present at Whixall Moss from 10 May until 1 Jun (HMP). It was found amongst the breeding colony of black-headed gulls and was apparently a male paired to black-headed gull. It showed regularly with its mate on one of the

open pools adjacent to the scrap yard and both birds were often seen dropping into the gull colony. Due to the inaccessible nature of the site it is not known if these two birds actually constructed a nest. The Mediterranean gull could often be located by its distinctive call even when not seen. During its stay it was well photographed (see page 95).

In the second winter period, two records were received, again from The Mere, Ellesmere on 3 Nov (AB) and 9 Dec (GEH). Both were winter plumage adults.

This was a fairly good year with a total of perhaps nine individuals seen.

LITTLE GULL *Larus minutus*

Status: An uncommon passage migrant.

Just two were seen. A first summer bird was at VP, briefly, on 6 May (PN) with another first summer bird at Whixall Moss on 15 Jun (AH) but it did not linger either.

Records of little gull in Shropshire during the last ten years have been sporadic both in term of annual occurrences and the dates recorded. In 1994, ten records of single birds were received during the spring, albeit that some may have been duplications; and four were also reported in the autumn. However, none were seen in 2000 and 2001. The range of dates in the period has been from 21 Mar to 12 Nov and has included every month in-between. Spring passage is between late March and early May, with autumn passage being even more protracted. Most of the unseasonable, mid-summer records are of immature birds. Many of the late autumn sightings came after westerly gales.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

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

In the first winter period, monthly maxima at The Mere, Ellesmere were all between 6% and 25% higher than for the corresponding month the previous year. An estimated 5000 at this site on 8 Mar was the highest of the quarter. The count of 1500 at Priorslee Lake was significant, although the observers report that this appears to be a pre-roost gathering, with most birds departing before dusk, perhaps to Belvide Reservoir in Staffordshire. Other counts in the first quarter included 560 at Almington on 16 Feb, 330 at Cole Mere on 10 Mar and 300 at Whixall Moss on 18 Mar.

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	400	-	-	200	30	1500
Priorslee Lake	1500	550	142	600	1110	3900
The Mere, Ellesmere	3200	2000	5000	1200	3800	500
Wood Lane	230	600	310	953	480	600

*Wood Lane is a bathing and loafing site, rather than a roosting site.

Breeding or attempted breeding was noted at Cranmere Bog, VP, Wall Farm and Whixall Moss. At Cranmere Bog 13 occupied nests were counted on 26 May and 16 juveniles were present on 6 Jul, ranging in size from half-grown chicks to full-sized flying birds. At VP sadly, after the improvement in fortunes for the species in 2002, unknown predators wiped out the entire nesting area. After 40 nests were counted on 10 May, all those on two of islands were predated by 20 May and the remaining 10 on the middle sandy island were lost by 3 Jun. At about this time, an injured adult was seen to be bludgeoned to death by a carrion crow. No information on breeding activity was received from nearby Berrington Pools. A large colony at Whixall Moss was settling to breed by mid-April, but breeding success was thought to be low, although close observation is difficult at this site due to the difficult terrain and risk of disturbance. The very small colony at Wall Farm probably hatched just one or two young.

Numbers in the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere held up quite well in the closing months at the year, although 5000 on 5 Dec was a pronounced peak. At about this time it became increasingly apparent that gulls were tending to use other meres to roost as weather conditions changed. In particular, when there was an easterly element in the wind, Cole Mere and White Mere seemed to be favoured, although by the time observers at The Mere had realised, it was too dark to attempt counts. Observers at Wood Lane continued to supply valuable counts of birds, which feed on the adjacent tip using the pools to bathe and preen with 953 on 11 Oct being the peak. Also, 800 were at Cole Mere in a pre-roost on 4 Dec

A count of 3900 at Priorslee Lake on the last day of the year suggested a considerable influx at this site. As in the first winter period, few records were received from Chelmarsh and most were daytime counts rather than estimates

from the roost. Elsewhere, counts of note came from Severn Valley Country Park, where 1054 were noted moving south at dawn on 26 Dec, possibly from Chelmarsh, and 450 were at Shavington Big Pool on 1 Nov.

An interesting report came from Whittington where a colour-ringed bird, present on 5 Jan, was traced to have been ringed as a three year old at Sjaelland, Denmark on 25 Mar 1997. A partially leucistic bird, presumably an adult, was present at the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere on 29 Jan. This individual had no dark markings on the head, an almost white mantle and much reduced black in the primaries. This species was observed harassing common coots for food at Chelmarsh on 4 Oct and great cormorants at VP the same day.

RING-BILLED GULL *Larus delawarensis*

Status: Very rare vagrant

A first-winter bird was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 Dec (AB).

Watched from the hide, this large looking individual was located bathing on the edge of the gull roost. It showed well to the single observer for several minutes before flying to the dam to preen. Unfortunately, it could not be relocated the following evening or subsequently.

This was the first record in the county since a well-watched adult was present at The Mere, Ellesmere on 25 and 26 Mar 1995. There are also four other published records of ring-billed gull in Shropshire, but all are subject to the current review of old records by the Records Committee.

MEW GULL (Common Gull) *Larus canus*

Status: Common winter visitor

A total of 52 reports from just 13 sites with, as usual, the vast majority of reports and all of the substantial counts coming from the EGM area. Elsewhere, this remains a scarcely recorded bird within the County.

During the first quarter, the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere peaked at 1300 on 10 Jan, but within a week numbers more than halved and then reduced gradually until mid-February. Counts included 520 on 18 Jan, 400 on 29 Jan, 250 on 11 Feb and 210 on 14 Feb. The next count received was on 8 Mar, numbers had risen to 750 but halved again to 380 on 10 Mar. At nearby Wood Lane, counts of 10 on 1 Jan and 16 on 8 Feb were quite good for this site, however, 69 recorded

on 15 Mar was exceptional. Single figure counts were received on odd dates. from six other sites, Chelmarsh, Condoover, Priorslee Lake, Shrewsbury, VP and Whixall.

A single bird was reported at Wood Lane on five dates during June, July and August, which is an unusual period for this species in Shropshire.

In the second winter period, 340 roosted at The Mere on 3 Nov and between 450 and 650 regularly roosted from the end of November until the year's end, with an exceptional 2400 on 30 Dec easily the highest count of the year. During this period, the highest count at Wood Lane was 22 on 9 Nov. Forty were present in a presumed pre-roost gathering at Cole Mere on 4 & 29 Dec. Small numbers also reported on odd dates at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Priorslee Lake, Tibberton and VP.

It is a measure of the importance of the EGM area for this species in the County that the highest count away from there was just 10 at Chelmarsh on 13 Dec.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	20	26	-	1	350	2000
Priorslee Lake	800	600	44	1300	633	1800
The Mere, Ellesmere	250	320	260	570	310	480
Wood Lane	150	48	275	430	450	93

The largest count during the first winter period was 800 at Priorslee Lake on 4 Jan although, as with other gulls at this site, all left before dusk, heading towards Staffordshire, perhaps to Aqualate Mere or more likely Belvide Reservoir. Numbers roosting at The Mere remained low throughout and no roost counts seem to have been undertaken at Chelmarsh in the quarter. As usual, the various landfill sites within the county attracted large numbers of this species and other *Larids*.

Several large gatherings were noted during the summer and early autumn, notably peaks of 200 at Wood Lane in June, 165 in July, 199 in August and 149 in September. 150 were at Eardington on 26 Jul.

By mid-September, other large flocks included 240 at Adderley on the 16th, 150 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on the 18th and an impressive 650 at Welsh Frankton on the 28th, the latter, undoubtedly, having strayed from the nearby Wood Lane landfill site. The first four-figure count of the autumn was 1300 at Priorslee Lake on 28 Oct and 2000 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 13 Dec was the year's highest count. Elsewhere, notable counts included 500 at Cranmere Bog on 8 Oct, 600 at Shavington Big Pool on 1 Nov and 1300 at Eardington on 23 Dec. The Cranmere and Eardington birds would presumably roost at Chelmarsh.

Recorded during every month of the year.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Monthly maxima at key sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	30	-	-	-	2	100
Priorslee Lake	47	20	1	2	6	83
The Mere, Ellesmere	370	306	19	6	42	56
Wood Lane	26	28	17	62	19	38

The first count of the year, 370 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 10 Jan, was to remain the highest count of the year. This was similar to 2002 when 300 at The Mere on 20 Jan was that year's highest and recent statistics suggest a regular peak in the first six weeks of the year, particularly in the EGM area. Apart from at the sites shown in the table, the only record of more than single birds in the first quarter was five at Childs Ercall airfield on 20 Feb.

A few were seen at Wood Lane during the summer and early autumn, with a maximum of nine on 5 Jul.

Numbers remained generally low throughout the second winter period although a count of 62 at Wood Lane on 28 Oct was notable. Counts of note from sites not included in the table were 20 at Cae Howel on 14 Dec and 25 at Barnsley Tip on 19 Dec.

In total, just 61 reports were received from 14 sites, but the species was recorded in every month except May.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus argentatus michahellis*

At The Mere, Ellesmere, an adult was seen on 5 Jan (AL), a 1st winter on 10 & 18 Jan (AB), an adult on 29 Jan (AB), two adults on 10 Mar (AB) and adults on 29 Nov & 4 Dec (AB). Nearby at Wood Lane, single adults were seen on 7 Jun (JMo) and 28 Jun (AH), two adults on 10 Jul (AL) and then what was believed to be the same bird on seven dates from 7 Sep until 6 Dec (SNT, BP).

At Chelmarsh Reservoir, an adult was seen on 7 Feb (MO), an adult on 27 & 28 Feb (SLH), two adults on 4 Nov (AWG), six, comprising three adults and three 1st winter birds, on 12 Dec (AB), with two adults reported until the 14th and one first winter until the 13th.

Elsewhere, a first winter was at Trench Pool on 6 Jan (MDR) and an adult at Priorslee Lake, 29 & 30 Dec (JI).

Although duplication cannot be totally eliminated, it is likely that in excess of 20 individuals were seen during the year and the total of six seen at Chelmarsh is the largest single count in the County to date.

All records referred to the form *michahellis* although an adult gull seen at Chelmarsh on 12 Dec showed some characters of Caspian Gull *L.a.cachinnans*, but was not seen sufficiently well to clinch a positive identification. This form which, like *L.a.michahellis*, is likely to be granted full species status at some time in the future, has yet to be recorded in Shropshire and is very much a sub-species to look out for.

ICELAND GULL *Larus glaucoides*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

A near adult was seen at Chelmarsh on 11 & 13 Dec (JPM). A 1st winter at Chelmarsh on 12 Dec (AB) and another 1st winter at Priorslee Lake from 25-31 Dec (EJW).

The first report of the year was a pager message of a “third winter” bird at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 11 Dec. The roost was searched the following evening when this bird could not be relocated, but a first winter was found. On the 13th the first winter bird was not seen, but remarkably, a bird described as a near adult by a vastly experienced observer was seen at distance in poor light and this is presumed to be the bird reported on the pager on the 11th.

The first winter bird at Chelmarsh was a very dark individual and showed well from the hide, the wind direction on the afternoon in question having pushed the majority of the roosting birds to that side of the reservoir.

The 1st winter bird at Priorslee Lake was seen most nights from 22 Dec until the year's end and was also seen on the early mornings of the 25 & 31 Dec.

Iceland gull in Shropshire 1994-2003:

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
Jan-Mar	3	3	2	1	2	-	-	1	2*	-
Oct-Dec	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	3

* One of these was also seen in late 2001 and is also included for that year.

The table shows that 2003 was a good year for this species with three seen compared to the average over the last ten years of 1.8. Unusually all in the second winter period. It is also interesting to note the significant change with birds being recorded more frequently, in recent years, in the final quarter.

GLAUCOUS GULL *Larus hyperboreus*

Status: Rare winter visitor

There were just two records this year. The first was a 1st winter bird at The Mere, Ellesmere on 18 Jan (AB). It flew into the roost very late in the evening harried by large numbers of black-headed gulls and settled on the water. The second was an adult was seen at Priorslee Lake on 4 Dec (JI).

Unfortunately, none of these birds were seen subsequently.

Glaucous gull in Shropshire 1994-2003:

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
Jan-Mar	1	1	1	2	-	2	1	-	2	1
Oct-Dec	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1

The average is 1.3 per year slightly less than the previous species. All but two were found in the first winter period.

2002

A late report received of a first winter bird at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 24 Jan 2002 (WFP, WRHP) has been accepted by the records Committee.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Only 34 reports were received from just six sites.

During the first winter period, this species was noted at Priorslee Lake on seven dates in January with a peak of six on the 18th, whilst at Chelmarsh Reservoir one was seen on 1 Jan and two on 29 Jan. At The Mere, Ellesmere, there were counts of five on 10 Jan and three on 29 Jan. At Wood Lane, five on 4 Jan, four on 7 Feb and two on 1 Mar were the only records in the County for those two months.

None were then seen until 7 Jun when two were at Wood Lane with two again on 5 Jul. Occasional birds were then recorded here until the end of the year with a maximum of 10 on 20 Nov. A single was at Eardington on 27 Sep, with three at Shawburch on 18 Oct and a single on 6 Dec. Reported on four dates in December at Priorslee Lake with a maximum of four on the 29th. Also reported at Chelmarsh Reservoir on four dates in December with a count of 17 (15 adults and 2 immatures) on the 27th being the highest count of the year.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (Kittiwake) *Rissa tridactyla*

Status: Scarce vagrant

Just two were seen and this species has become a very scarce visitor to the County. An adult was seen at VP on 27 Apr (AL) and another at The Mere, Ellesmere on 23 Dec (AB).

The bird at VP flew straight through without pausing whilst the bird at The Mere roosted after being seen at Wood Lane earlier in the day.

Kittiwake in Shropshire 1994-2003:

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
Jan-Jun	2	c10	44	9	8	4	4	1	-	1
Jul-Dec	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	1

An incredible record of 35 at White Mere on 16 Mar 1996 heavily influences the statistics in the table with this record alone accounting for more than 31% of individuals seen in the period. The overall yearly average for the period is around 8.9 but is only 1.8 for the last five years. Only six of the c89 individuals occurred in the second half of the year.

GULL-BILLED TERN *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Status: Very rare vagrant

What would undoubtedly have been bird of the year for the County, if only it had lingered, was found at Cranmere (Worfield) Bog on 11 Jun (AWG). Harassed by the breeding black-headed gulls, it quickly left the area and, as is often the case with this enigmatic species, could not be relocated.

This is the second County record of this much-prized tern following one at VP on 19 May 1997. Unfortunately, both birds departed soon after discovery and were enjoyed only by their fortunate finders. A full report can be found on page 180.

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*

Status: Scarce passage migrant.

The only record was of a party of four at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 7 Sep (JM).

This species has now been seen in the County in four of the last five years after a three year gap from 1996-1998. The yearly average is now 2.5 per year over the last 10 years. However, the apparent upsurge in records over three of the last four years gives little indication of how difficult this species is to see in Shropshire as birds rarely linger even on return passage. It remains a much sought after rarity.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Status: Common passage migrant

For the fifth successive year, the first record of the year was at Priorslee Lake where two were present on 21 Apr. Subsequently, singles were reported here on 14 & 16 Jun, two on 19 Aug, one on 25 Aug and finally one on 13 Sep.

Two juveniles were at Chelmarsh Reservoir on the very early date of 25 Jun when, intriguingly, the observer stated that they were 'reported to come into roost most evenings'. These birds were reported again on 30 Jun. Two were then seen at this site on 25 Aug and one on 27 Aug.

At VP, one was seen on 16 May, three on 17 Jun, two on 28 & 30 Jun and 2 Jul, with a single on 13 Jul. A party of five at VP on 28 Aug was the largest group of the year. Elsewhere, singles were reported at Wood Lane on 6 Jun & 19 Jul and at ASF on 13 Sep.

ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

The first was one at VP on 2 May (WRBD) which lingered for a few hours. Four at Chelmarsh on 30 Jun (KB) had been forced down briefly by heavy rain. One which was present at VP on 5 Oct (HJG) was the latest in the County since one at Fenemere on 13 Oct 1985.

A total of six birds is a return to more expected levels after the bumper year of 2002 when between 15 and 17 were seen.

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia*

Status: Common resident

Largely ignored by birders, the majority of reports were from just two observers. The area between Shrewsbury and Newport and the Severn Valley below Bridgnorth both figured prominently but this distribution pattern reflects the birding activities of the two recorders rather than that of the birds themselves.

The highest count was from Bridgnorth where scattered groups in the town totalled 80 on 20 Feb and Ludlow with 50 on 27 Jul. Although a feature of most town centres, these were the only ones noted. Some of the larger counts made elsewhere were thought to be of racing pigeons but, leaving these aside, the average flock size was 11.

STOCK PIGEON (Stock Dove) *Columba oenas*

Status: Common resident

The Society's newly acquired and environmentally managed field at VP proved irresistible in February and March when 150 birds were reported on several days. The only other flock approaching this size was at Wall Farm on 18 Oct when 110 were present. A weedy field at Tibberton attracted 80 on 9 Mar and 80 were also found on set aside at Buttery Farm on 4 Jun. Numbers feeding on a newly planted spring crop at Broome peaked at 55 on 15 May and two similar sized flocks were near Market Drayton on 8 Nov and 28 Dec. These were the

exceptions, however, since, although widely reported from across the County, few of the remaining records reached double figures.

Stock doves often use nest boxes, one breeding record from Aston Square and two clutches noted by a ringer at Market Drayton were from artificial sites while an old oak tree at Leebotwood was more traditional.

COMMON WOOD PIGEON (Wood Pigeon) *Columba palumbus*

Status: Common resident

The large flock noted feeding on oil seed rape at Sommerfield in Dec remained into the New Year and 1000 were still present on 17 Jan. Counts soon dwindled to 100 in mid Mar but no further flocks were reported until late in the year when numbers eventually rose to 750 on 10 Nov. A similar pattern was seen at Wall Farm with peaks of 600 on 4 Jan and 650 on 15 Nov. Over 500 were at Priorslee Lake in October and December and 500 were counted flying south over Broome Park on 15 Oct. There were 438 at Wood Lane on 11 Oct and flocks of over 100 were reported at 16 other sites.

The average flock size was 81 but this is clearly biased by the tendency of most recorders to only submit counts of large flocks. Regular counts from garden or site recorders reflect the small but widespread numbers. Similarly the BBS results show that birds were present in 98% of the survey plots with an average of 21 per site.

Once again breeding was poorly documented with three territories on a CBC plot at The Old Racecourse, Oswestry being the only indication received.

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE (Collared Dove) *Streptopelia decaocto*

Status: Common resident

Reported from 54 scattered locations, but rarely away from towns, villages or farms. Never forming large flocks, singles, pairs or small groups were the norm but larger congregations were noted at garden feeding stations and farms. The largest flock was at Sommerwood on 16 Oct when 29 birds were present whilst earlier in the year 19 had roosted in an ivy covered hedge at this site on 6 Feb. Elsewhere, 20 at Upper Hampton Farm on 27 Sep and 23 flying over Newport on 6 Dec were notable. The latter flock were almost dismissed as being local feral pigeons, the observer had not seen anything like this number before.

Breeding was confirmed at six sites. Nests are often built in conifers and these were utilised at Condoover and Waters Upton. At Aston Square, Oswestry a low hedge was used and at Edgmond Marsh birds were seen building in an electricity conductor on a pole. A nest with eggs was found at Wall Farm, juveniles were seen at Tedsmere. Two pairs were present on the CBC plot at The Old Racecourse, Oswestry.

EUROPEAN TURTLE DOVE (Turtle Dove) *Streptopelia turtur*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

The Rea, Upton Magna had the first bird on 2 May and by the 20th five were present with three the next day, but no further reports were received from here until 26 Sep when one bird was said to have been present for about three weeks. This was also the last sighting. At nearby Roddington, the first bird, possibly two, were heard on 5 May. Further east one was purring at Buttery Farm on 4 Jun and another at Priorslee from 7 Jun to 12 Jul. Two further reports from Nedge Hill on 25 May and 30 Aug both referred to passage birds.

The remaining records were from the south of the county. Severn Valley Country Park remains a reliable location and regular reports of between one and three birds were received from 8 May to 29 Jul. Nearby, two birds were calling at Birch Farm on 31 May and 16 Jun and a BBS plot at Lower Brock Hall Farm recorded its first bird for four years on 4 Jun.

Although birds were found in some new locations the situation remains grim, with no reports from some previously regular sites. Excluding passage birds, the highest count from each site gives a total of just 16 birds.

COMMON CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Two birds recorded in Mar were well ahead of schedule arriving at Horsehay on the 26th and VP on the 29th. Most recorders note their first cuckoo of the year and reports arrived steadily from 15 Apr when single birds were at Severn Valley Country Park and Tibberton until 8 Jun. A total of 110 records were received during this period from 72 widespread locations and, except for five pairs, all were of single birds. Just eight reports were received after this date, three in June, including the highest count received of three at Whixall Moss on the 15th, two in July and three in August, the final coming from Wood Lane on the 22nd.

Several negative reports were received from previously regular sites, suggesting the decline continues, although two juveniles were noted. One on 14 Jun was being fed by a dunnock at Wall Farm whilst the other was at Tibberton on 18 Aug and may have been on passage.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Status: Common resident (RBBP)



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

The Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) confirmed breeding barn owls at 12 sites. These included Welsh Frankton, Trench (Ellesmere), Ellesmere, Colemere, Welshampton, Moreton Say, Adderley, Kynnersley, Betton, Doley, Stanton Lacey and Peaton. Breeding barn owls at an additional three sites notified to SBOG but not monitored were St. Martins, Preston-on-the Weald Moors and Mose.

Of 48 internal and external nestboxes available to barn owls at the start of 2003 three were utilised for breeding purposes and ten held roosting barn owls giving a total occupancy rate of 27.08%. Internal nestboxes in buildings comprised modified tea-chests and external nestboxes erected on trees were mainly large A frame nestboxes fixed to tree trunks but also rectangular shaped boxes positioned on the upper side of horizontal tree branches. Other nestboxes held breeding stock dove (9), jackdaw (7), tawny owl (1) and feral pigeon (1). SBOG had 90 barn owl nestboxes in place at the end of 2003.

Table 1: Occupation of nestboxes by barn owls in 2003

Nestbox site	No. nestboxes monitored	No. nestboxes occupied		Total occupied	% occupied
		Breeding	Roosting		
Building	26	2	4	6	23.07
Tree	22	1	6	7	31.81
Total	48	3	10	13	27.08

Pairs were well established at nest sites by the end of March with the first egg noted on 25 April and the first chick on 9 June. All chicks had hatched by 21 June and the last young fledged on 30 August. Chick numbers for both nestboxes and natural nest sites monitored by SBOG is given in Table 2. In view of the difficulty in recording the fledging of young barn owls, breeding success of barn owl pairs is confined to chick productivity. 28 chicks were produced, eight from nestboxes and 20 in natural sites, mainly tree cavities. Brood sizes ranged from one to four young, mean 2.33 per pair. A total of 12 barn owl chicks have been produced in SBOG nestboxes since its inception in 2002 and 40 from natural sites monitored by SBOG.

Table 2: Number of chicks produced in nestboxes and natural sites in 2003

Nest site	No. nests	No. chicks	Mean No. chicks
Building nestbox	2	6	3.00
Tree nestbox	1	2	2.00
Building	1	2	2.00
Tree cavity	8	18	2.25
Total	12	28	2.33

In addition to the above, 100 records were produced by the Society, 46 of which related to the barn owls main breeding season of March to August. Breeding was confirmed at Westbury and The Weald Moors. Most of the SOS records related to single birds but two were reported roosting at Betton Moss. Two were also recorded at Tedsmere in June, the observer noting that this was the first record of barn owl in the area for several years. Similarly, a barn owl at Woolston was the first for nine years.

Reports noted barn owls emerging at 1645 hours in October and most records related to the evening with one early morning observation. One barn owl was flushed from conifers at Kingsnordley around mid-day which supports SBOG’s observations that coniferous trees might be an important secondary roost site in the absence of tree cavities or other holes. Feeding habitat included river meadow, marshland and rough ground and involved aerial hunting or perched hunting from a low post. SBOG noted adults carting short-tailed field vole, wood mouse and common shrew to nest sites and preliminary results from a three-year study by SBOG of pellet samples obtained throughout Shropshire suggest that these small mammals are important prey species.

Thirteen road casualties were recorded by SBOG in February (2), March (2), July (2), October (4) and November (3). The preponderance of casualties in the winter period would suggest that they relate to juveniles dispersing from their natal site, utilising marginal habitats prior to securing permanent breeding sites.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*

Status: Common resident



Little Owl (*Glenn Bishton*)

A total of 71 records were received from 25 locations, the majority of these being from the north and east of the county, Seifton, in the Corvedale being an exception.

Breeding was confirmed at one location only, Wall Farm on the Weald Moors where two adults plus one juvenile were seen on 13 Jul, but was suspected at another site, Hilley Farm, Pentre, where a bird was

observed several times on the same perch and was believed to be breeding in an old pollarded willow. Reports of more than one bird seen together during the summer period included Knighton Reservoir, Little London Farm, Alveley, Severn Valley Country Park and Tibberton.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

Status: Common resident

A total of 91 reports were received during the year from 44 widespread locations.

Despite the relatively small number of reported locations, tawny owls were reported to be reasonably numerous in some areas. Records of calling birds at Catherton Common on 25 Jul, two juveniles at Darnford on 2 Aug and one bird at Gatten Plantation in sites ranging from 210 metres to 490 metres above sea level indicates that altitude does not restrict the distribution of tawny owls in Shropshire where suitable habitat exists

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*

Status: Scarce resident

Two birds were found at Upper Hill Farm, Spoonley on 13 Feb (AG). The birds were roosting in an ivy-covered willow tree and were reported by the farmer to be present again on 15 Feb. Two birds were then recorded again on 4 Mar and finally one on 15 Mar.

2003 was the second year in a row to produce records of Long-eared Owl in Shropshire after two blank years.

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

Status: Rare winter visitor and passage migrant

Birds were reported from six widely separated areas comprising typical moorland, heathland or open grassland habitat. The first record of the year was of one on the Long Mynd on 15 Jan (MC) which was reported to the National Trust several times during the month. Four were present on the Weald Moors on 5 Feb (ARS) two on Whixhall Moss on 22 Feb (LJG) and one on Brown Clee on 9 Mar (SJagd).

Following an absence of sightings during spring and summer one bird was recorded at Crosshouses on 29 Aug (AB) followed by wintering birds at Brown Clee Hill on 27 Oct (EGP) and near Hughley on 13 Dec (DP).

COMMON SWIFT *Apus apus*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first migrant was at VP on 19 Apr, this was followed by singles at Monkmoor and Priorslee Lake on the 23rd. By the next day, eight were at the latter site and records were received daily from then on. Large concentrations are usually found feeding over water, 100 were at Condover on 3 May and nearby at Venus Pool two days later, by 14 May numbers at Priorslee Lake had also risen to this level. Later in the summer 160 were feeding over oil seed rape at Weald Moors on 5 Jul and 220 were feeding over the River Severn at Atcham on 8 Jul.

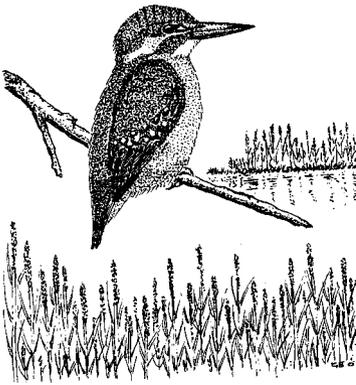
Although reported from 64 widespread locations the only screaming birds noted were 15 by the Abbey in Shrewsbury on 23 Jul. Small groups were seen over several towns; 26 at Bridgnorth, 20 at Cophorne, 25 at Highley, 30 each at Much

Wenlock and Newport and 10 at Oswestry. These towns and many more must surely have breeding colonies in some of the buildings. Breeding was confirmed at Hilley Farm, Pentre where two birds nested under the eaves and Ironbridge where a single bird was also seen emerging from under the eaves. A single juvenile was seen at Woolston on 7 Aug.

On 9 Aug several small parties, totalling 150, were seen flying south over Radbrook. Only six more sightings were made after this date, just one bird remained into September being seen at Broome Park on the 1st.

COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

Status: Common resident (RBBP)



Kingfisher (Glenn Bishton)

This popular species generated 280 reports. Over a quarter of these were from the River Severn from Cae Howel where the river enters the county to Highley where it leaves us, although these reports were clustered around the more accessible parts of the river. The rivers Teme, Onny, Tern and Meese were also well represented along with a good number of smaller streams. The well watched reserves provided a good number of records as would be expected. They are at their best in the second half of the year, 75% of birds are sighted during this period as young birds disperse and winter floods colour the rivers.

Most of the reports concerned just one or two birds as would be expected, they are very territorial outside the breeding season and the young usually disperse by September. However, Howle Pool had several counts of six or more in the last three months and 14 were present on 8 Nov. The same number was also found on the final day of the year at Middle Pool, Trench.

The only confirmed successful breeding was a pair and family at Beambridge, Corvedale and an adult and juv by the West Mid Showground, both in August. Earlier a pair was working on a previous nest hole at Ercall Mill in April and an adult was seen to emerge from a hole at Leighton, Buildwas also in April.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops*

Status: Rare summer vagrant

One was found at Longdon Common on 26 Sep (GHo).

After a gap of seven years this was the third autumn bird in three years. However, records of this species are normally associated with over shooting migrants in the spring and the previous birds in 1993 both fell into this category.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

Status: Common resident

Records of this attractive and popular species were received from all parts of the county including such contrasting areas as Telford Town Park and the summits of the Clee Hills.

The highest counts were five along the River Severn in the Coalport-Apley area on 23 Apr and five at Hampton Loade on 28 Jul. Six pairs were found during a survey of Telford and Wrekin Council woodland.

Breeding was confirmed at Bucknell, Ironbridge and Wood Lane Nature Reserve.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos major*

Status: Common resident

A most impressive 328 records were received from 113 locations.

A notable count was of eight birds on 8 May at Button Oak. This species is easily the most numerous and widespread woodpecker in Shropshire and it may be seen virtually anywhere.

It is a regular visitor to garden feeding stations and many reports of evidence of breeding involve recently fledged young being brought by their parents to peanut feeders. The first report of “drumming” was on 8 Jan at Moston and breeding was confirmed at 12 widely scattered locations. During a survey of Telford and Wrekin woodlands nine pairs were counted in Telford Town Park on 15 Jun.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos minor*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

There were 42 records of this elusive species from 23 widespread locations (compared with 16 locations in 2002 and just 10 in 2001). Familiarity with its distinctive call is undoubtedly a great help in locating this bird which often spends its time feeding in the tree-canopy.

Breeding almost certainly occurred near to Adderley where a juvenile was trapped and ringed on 29 Jun.

One was seen frequently at Venus Pool during November and December to the delight of many observers.

SKY LARK *Alauda arvensis*

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

Recorded throughout the year, with clusters of records in the east and south-east of the County where detailed records were gathered by two or three observers. Flocks of 30 at Morville on 13 Feb and 75 at Dudmaston on 15 Feb were the only large flocks recorded early in the year and song was first noted at Tedsmere on 22 Feb. Several of these early records mentioned birds among stubble and there were 30 in this habitat on Baggy Moor on 20 Apr.

Groups of up to six singing birds were noted on set-aside, stubbles and winter cereals whilst at the Gliding Station on the Long Mynd over 20 singing birds were noted during April. Birds carrying food were noted from mid-May and most records this month were of less than 10 birds, although 55 were noted at Wall Farm on 26 May (ARS).

Only two records were received in August, but by the end of September the flocks were starting to build up with 22 at Venus Pool on 25 Sep, and 31 at Broome Park on 29 Sep. On 7 Oct, 81 were at Meeson, but autumn counts were rarely in double figures. Wall Farm peaked at 45 on 15 Nov but 100 at Rudge Heath was the largest flock of the year. Stubbles, set aside and weedy fields were often mentioned and these habitats are clearly important for these birds.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

Status: Common summer visitor

A single bird at Wood Lane on 2 Mar was the first record for the year and the second earliest in Shropshire in recent times (a bird at Condoover on 28/2/99 is our earliest record). Forty were at Chelmarsh on 5 Mar and a single at VP on 7 Mar then there was a gap of 10 days before two at Priorslee Lake on 18 Mar, one at the Lawley on 20 Mar and four at Wall Farm on 22 Mar. Numbers gradually increased with 50 at VP on 27 Mar and 50 at Wood Lane on 29 Mar where numbers increased to 200 on 5 Apr. The northern meres attracted large flocks with 300 at The Mere, Ellesmere on 11 Apr and 200 at Cole Mere on 15 Apr.

Breeding sites were reported at Wood Lane, Condoover, Bromfield Gravel Pits with 110 holes counted (not all occupied), in the river bank of the Severn in Shrewsbury and at Alington where a bird with a Spanish ring was caught (ringed at Laguna de San Juan, Chinchon, Madrid on 14 Apr 2002).

Only one record came from the south west with 20 at Clunbury on 15 Jun and there were no records west of Shrewsbury along the Severn. In contrast many records were received for the Severn Valley below Bridgnorth (KB). A count of 200 at Wood Lane on 22 Aug was the largest number reported in that month with 45 at Priorslee Lake on 28 Aug, a good number as the birds slipped away on migration. Wood Lane still had 30 on 8 Sep but three at the Mirelake, ASF and 12 at Wood Lane on 14 Sep were the last records.

BARN SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

Status: Common summer visitor

A single bird on wires at Hadnall 29 Mar was the first reported. Two at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry on 4 Apr were next, then singles at VP on 7 Apr and Knighton Reservoir on 8 Apr. Twelve were at Cole Mere on 10 Apr, two at Mynydd Myfyr and three at Priorslee Lake on 11 Apr. Over the next four days "first seen" records came thick and fast from all corners of the county often single birds and rarely more than five, with eight at West Felton on 15 Apr being the exception. A week later numbers began to increase with flocks of 10 at VP and 30 at Priorslee on 24 Apr, 30 at Cole Mere 25 Apr and Priorslee had 80 on 27 Apr.

However, numbers remained low throughout with observers commenting on the scarcity of the species this year. Nests were noted at Camp Farm east of

Sambrook on 26 May, at Wood Lane on 15 Jun, with three young at Woolston Nr Wistanstow on 29 Jun. The first flying juveniles were reported at Adderley on 14 Jul.

By early August small flocks were being recorded with 65 at Sleaf Airfield and 37 on wires as Tedsmere on 2 Aug. Fifty were on wires at Somerwood on 15 Aug and 50 were feeding at VP on 19 Aug whilst, later in the month, 80 were at Condover on 26 Aug, 50 at Oerley Reservoir on 28 Aug and 100 at VP on 31 Aug. Sixty at Tedsmere were moving south on 11 Sep, 50 were counted passing through ASF and over 100 were moving south at Shrewsbury on the afternoon of 13 Sep. Eighty at Adderley on 16 Sep, 40 at Whitchurch on 20 Sep and 46 at Wood Lane on 29 Sep were the last notable flocks, although, VP still had 20 on 29 Sep.

In October, 14 were seen at Adderley on the 4th, two at Broome Park the 8th, one at VP on the 9th and two at Wall Farm on the 15th. The last record of the year came from Priorslee Lake with a single bird on 17 Oct.

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW *Hirundo daurica*

Status: Very rare vagrant

One was present at Priorslee Lake on 27-28 Apr (AL).

News of this national rarity was quickly released and it was seen by many observers from both Shropshire and adjoining counties. It was part of an extraordinary influx of this species into Great Britain with about 29 other sightings around the same time. The record was accepted by British Birds Rarities Committee.

For most local observers, it was their first opportunity to see this species in Shropshire and it is only the second County record; the first was at Shrewsbury Sewage Farm from 30 Apr until 5 May 1978. An account of the 2003 sighting can be found on page 182.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

An early bird at Monkmoor on 27 Mar was the only record for the month and the same observer found six on 12 Apr. These were followed by two at Market Drayton on 13 Apr, seven at West Felton on 15 Apr, a single at Woolston on

16 Apr, a single at Middleton, Oswestry on 19 Apr and the first at VP the same day. Over the next few days records came from all parts of the County and numbers began to build up with 18 at Rednal on 22 Apr, 15 at Cole Mere on 25 Apr, 15 at Priorslee Lake on 27 Apr and at least 80 gathering on wires during a thunderstorm near Bromfield on 29Apr, the same day that Priorslee Lake had 75 amongst a large flock of hirundines over the lake. "First for the year" records were still coming in from various parts of the County in the first week of May.

Birds were collecting nest material from a fresh molehill at Priorslee Flash on 24 May and the first nesting records came from Bucknell and Comley on 15 Jun, the Comley record being the only sighting reported in the south west of the County. Eight birds were seen gathering mud for nests in Ironbridge on 29 Jun. Seven nests were noted in Ludlow on 9 Jul and 15 occupied nests were seen at Adderley on 14 Jul where it was noted that several nests had been destroyed by house-owners. A third brood being fed in Newport on 4 Sep was the last breeding record.

Summer counts included 60 at Adderley on 14 Jul, 70 in Chelmarsh Village on 28 Jul, 98 feeding over Priorslee Lake on 17 Aug, 80 at Adderley on 24 Aug and 350 at Oerley Reservoir on 28 Aug.

Later records included 50 at ASF and 40 passing south in an afternoon at Shrewsbury on 13 Sep. The largest flock for the month was 100 at Coton Hill, Shrewsbury on the 29th and VP had 50 on the 23rd feeding over the new field extension to the reserve. Thirty were at Much Wenlock 25 Sep, 16 at Chelmarsh on 27 Sep and 10 at Alverley on 29 Sep. The last to be seen at Adderley were 20 on 4 Oct and there were birds at Gobowen, Leebotwood and VP on 6 Oct. The last record of the year was three at Aston Square on 9 Oct.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

Status: Locally distributed and declining summer visitor (BCC.Amber listed).

Recent years have seen a reduced number of records for this species and 2003 has continued the trend, with a mere 17 reports from 10 locations, involving only some 25 birds. The first birds of the year were a single at Brown Clee on 13 Apr, closely followed by six at the same location on 16 Apr. Elsewhere, no birds appeared until early May, following which they were at Ashes Hollow, Doctor's Coppice, Button Oak (4), Clunton Coppice, Habberley, Whixall Moss (2), the Wrekin (5) and Wyre Forest (3). Only two displaying male tree pipits were recorded on the BBS Survey at Callow Hollow (Long Mynd), where up to four or five have been recorded in most years since the BBS started in 1994.

The final sighting of the year was from the River Severn near Highley, a single bird presumed to be on passage on 24 Aug.

Once regarded as a common breeding species in Shropshire with, for example, over 60 pairs estimated on the Long Mynd as recently as 1998, it is principally a bird of the south and west of the County. Hopefully, the decline of this species, whilst likely to be serious, is not as great as available records imply, but partly a reflection of observer coverage. Former strongholds such as Clun Forest, Wenlock Edge, The Stiperstones, Catherton Common, Haughmond Hill and Oswestry uplands may still hold breeding populations and reports from these areas would be welcome.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*

Status: Common but declining breeding resident and passage migrant which also winters in small numbers (BCC Amber listed).

In both winter periods, counts were generally in single figures but there were 22 at Wall Farm on 4 Jan, 56 at Dudleston Heath on 7 Feb, 30 at West Felton on 17 Feb and 20 at Aston Square, Oswestry on the same date. In December, there were 15 at Long Oak on the 30th.

Passage periods brought the highest counts, with 170 at Tibberton on 25 Mar, 66 at Wall Farm on 6 Apr, 100 at Trefonen on 12 Sep, a series of records from Venus Pool between 5 Sep and 16 Dec, peaking at 60 on 30 Oct, 83 at Cherrington on 29 Sep, 80 at Ercall Heath on 5 Oct, 82 at The Stiperstones on 11 Oct, 60 at Brown Clee on 25 Oct and 110 at Sandford on 2 Nov.

In the breeding season, records were predominantly from hill country in the south and west of the County with the largest numbers being found at Brown Clee (40), Catherton Common (35), The Stiperstones (30), Rorrington Hill (30) and Mynydd Myfyr (26). Whixall Moss was again the only lowland site to hold significant numbers during the summer with 20 on 29 May. No confirmed breeding records were received.

WATER PIPIT *Anthus spinoletta*

Status: Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

One was seen at ASF from 25 Oct–11 Jan 2004 (AL). However, the bird was not always present at the site, probably frequenting nearby fields.

This species is less than annual in Shropshire, the previous record being a single bird, also at ASF, from 21 Oct until 10 Nov 2001.

ROCK PIPIT *Anthus petrosus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Singles were seen at ASF on 16 Oct (AL) and 24-25 Oct (AL, AB).

October is the best month for this species in Shropshire, although there have been spring records. Birds were seen in 2002 at ASF on 11 Oct and Chelmarsh on 13 Oct and the previous record to these was one at ASF on 19 Oct 1998.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*

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

More records than usual were received this year as a result of the SOS Yellow Wagtail Breeding Survey, fieldwork for which began in 2003 and will continue in 2004. A full report on this project, which was initiated to investigate a suspected serious decline in the population locally, will appear in the 2004 Annual Report.

The first birds of the year were on 13 Apr at Knighton Reservoir and Sambrook Mill, following which spring passage records came from most areas of the County, with the largest numbers from Venus Pool and Wood Lane where ones and twos were seen on a regular basis until mid-May.

In the breeding season, the majority of records came from arable land in the NE and E of the County, with potatoes, cereals and set-aside being the favoured habitats. Twenty birds were found at Kingslow in a two mile circuit on 11 Jun and breeding was, subsequently, confirmed at this location, where an estimated 15 pairs were thought to be present in a relatively small area. Other locations where breeding was reported included Eyton Moor (3 pairs), Great Ness (3+ pairs), Stableford (3 pairs), Wall Farm (2 pairs), Tibberton, Standford Bridge, Upper Affcot, Bromfield, Pentre, Isombridge and Cranmere Bog.

Autumn passage was most in evidence at Venus Pool with records of between one and four birds on various dates between 18 Aug and 21 Sep. Interestingly, no autumn passage was recorded from Wood Lane and only one bird from ASF, on 20 Sep. Ten birds were at Nedge Hill on 29 Aug, nine at Cherrington on 30 Aug and the last record of the year was a juvenile at Adderley on 26 Sep.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Continues to be very popular with observers and was reported from 98 widespread locations. Rivers and streams are frequented throughout the year whilst wetland reserves, lakes and pools are visited more regularly outside the breeding season.

The maximum counts were seven adults between Leighton and Buildwas during a canoe trip on the River Severn on 15 Jun, and six at Hampton Loade on 27 Aug.

Breeding season records came from many watercourses but with the River Severn and the southern half of the County accounting for a significant proportion. Confirmed breeding occurred at Atcham, Aston on Clun, Bromfield, Bucknell, Buildwas, Jackfield, Ludlow, Market Drayton, Priorslee Lake and Shrewsbury.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrelli*

Status: Common resident



Pied Wagtail (Glenn Bishton)

This species can be found throughout the County, but has a more northerly distribution than grey wagtail, reflecting different habitat preferences. Outside the breeding season it tends to gather in large flocks at favoured feeding or roost sites. Open habitats are generally preferred for feeding, such as large areas of short grassland, low cultivation or wetlands, whilst roost sites are usually areas of dense vegetation such as reed-

beds or bushes, but buildings are also used, probably because they can provide warmth in winter.

The largest count was an excellent 346 emerging from a small reed mace pool at Severn Valley Country Park at dawn on 25 Oct. A regular roost took place at Priorslee Lake where maxima of 130 were recorded on 4 Jan and 82 on 8 Nov. Other large counts included 120 at Telford Town Centre on 5 Jan with 80 there on 27 Oct and it is interesting to speculate if these are the same birds which roost

at Priorslee Lake. Elsewhere, a maximum of 85 on 6 Oct were at Venus Pool, whilst 40 were seen roosting in the central willows on 26 Sep, 70 at Cosford Airfield on 23 Nov, and 70 at ASF on 13 Dec. Other sites attracting significant numbers of birds were Broome Park, Neen Savage with 32 on 24 Oct and Wood Lane where 40 were present on 26 Mar and 15 Nov.

Favoured breeding sites are often around farms or other buildings and near water. Only three confirmed breeding records were received this year - from Venus Pool, Wall Farm and Wood Lane, but breeding probably also took place at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Ludlow, Priorslee Flash, Queen's Head, Tibberton and West Felton.

White wagtail *Motacilla alba alba*

Nine records from four locations represents a good year for this species which is usually recorded in the County on spring passage.

The first bird of the year was at Whixall on 14 March (AB) followed by a further sighting at the same location on 24 March (AB). The next bird was at Brown Clew on 30 March (SJagd). Venus Pool then had a series of records of 1-2 birds involving a possible six altogether between 16 and 28 April (GEH, HJG). A single was at Wood Lane on 23 April (HMP).

BOHEMIAN WAXWING (Waxwing) *Bombycilla garrulous*

Status: Rare winter visitor



Bohemian Waxwing (Glenn Bishton)

Four were seen in Market Drayton on 14 Jan (AL). Three were seen at Middleton Road School in Oswestry on 4 Feb with one still present the following day (TWE). Eight were seen briefly in a garden in Pant on 6 Feb (DL) and finally two were seen feeding on berries with fieldfare at M54 Priorslee Services on 19 Dec.

A total of four reports this year continues a good recent run in the County and it is now six years since the last blank.

Regular checking of berry trees and knowledge of this bird's distinctive call can lead an observer to success.

Occurrences of waxwing in Shropshire 1994-2003:

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03
Localities	0	1	4	0	0	2	1	8	1	4
Est. Birds	0	3	21	0	0	3	10	43	1	17

2002

A report of four at Market Drayton on 14 Jan was erroneously published in the 2002 Shropshire Bird Report. The record was in fact in 2003 and is included above. *Apologies Ed.*

WHITE-THROATED DIPPER (Dipper) *Cinclus cinclus*

Status: Locally common resident

A popular species with observers. A total of 79 reports were received from 38 localities on 17 of our waterways but many stretches of suitable riverside habitat are difficult to access. There were five records of proven breeding but many others were reported at suitable locations in early spring.

A record of two on the River Tern in Market Drayton 22 Nov was particularly good news, being the first from that locality for 15 years, after it was reported in the 1998 Shropshire Bird Report that the species “now appears to be extinct from the upper River Tern”.

Another interesting report was of 18 dippers being ringed from roost sites under bridges in the south of the County during the night of 14-15 Nov (AC, AH).

WINTER WREN (Wren) *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Status: Common resident

A total of 177 widespread reports were received from observers plus another 512 birds from 53 BTO Breeding Birds Survey plots. They included seven counts of over 30 individuals with the highest, a commendable 94 seen or heard on a 50 mile cycle ride from Newport to Venus Pool in July (EJW).

Relatively few records relate to breeding with only eight received. An unusual nest site was an artificial house martin nest-box. An interesting regular garden count in Shrewsbury increased to a maximum of seven in June including five juveniles whilst another in Market Drayton increased to 10 including juveniles.

HEDGE ACCENTOR (Dunnock) *Prunella modularis*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)



Dunnock (Glenn Bishton)

A total of 181 reports were received from observers plus another 216 from 53 BTO Breeding Birds Survey plots. A popular species with garden recorders in single figure counts with many recorded around feeding stations during the winter.

Again, few breeding records, however five birds, including three fledged juveniles, were seen in a Conover garden in June. An excellent 29 pairs were identified in June during a survey of Telford and Wrekin Council woodland (GB).

EUROPEAN ROBIN (Robin) *Erithacus rubecula*

Status: Common resident

Long-term CBC work at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry, revealed 13 territories from the nine visits (TWE) and, at Earl's Hill, Pontesbury on 6 Mar they were reported as "numerous throughout the wood – some song" (CEW). A winter count of 1km on 26 Jan at Rigwardine produced 26 birds (GT). Otherwise numerous reports from around the County throughout the year.

BLACK REDSTART *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Status Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

The first record of the year was a female at Ellesmere from 3 Jan until 1 Mar. First reported on the pagers on 3 Jan it was confirmed next day (AB). It frequented the churchyard and roof tops along both sides of the A495 close to the NW corner of The Mere but was often elusive.

Spring passage produced a number of records from Brown Clee. Three females were seen at Clee Burf on 23 Mar (ARS) and two, a male and a female were at the more frequently visited Abdon Burf on 31 Mar (AB). Another report was also received from here the same day (EGP). A minimum of four birds were involved.

Brown Clee is clearly a favourite stopping off place for this species and autumn produced another string of records. Singles were seen on 1 & 15 Nov (Pager), two, a male and a female on 10 Nov (DN) and a female on 21 Nov (MDR).

COMMON REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Status: Common summer visitor

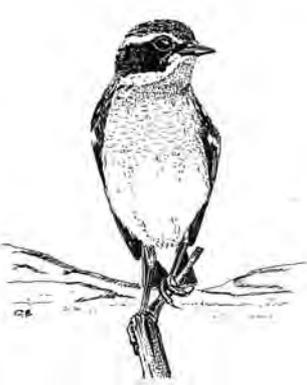
The first of the year was at Cynynion Woods on 9 Apr followed by a steady influx from the 12th with a total of 11 records from 12-24 Apr.

In the context of long-term CBC work on the Old Racecourse, Oswestry, two records of males holding territory in May (TWE) were significant. Otherwise recorded from the usual areas in the south and west, less often further north to Telford and Molverley on the Severn and in autumn from Venus Pool where what was expected to be the last of the year was recorded on 4 Sep.

Extraordinarily, however, one was seen at Nind from 17-21 Nov (AP, JT). This species is largely a sub-Saharan migrant although in winter a few are found around the Mediterranean basin and there have been a few records from further north. Non the less, it seems likely that this bird was a very late migrant rather than one which had opted to winter in Shropshire.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

Status: Common summer visitor and passage migrant



Whinchat (*Glenn Bishton*)

This species appears to be very poorly recorded with a total of just 29 records received from 17 sites. Passage birds were reported from around the County. The earliest were two at Wood Lane and one at a confidential site in the south of the County, both on 22 Apr. Other records followed on from the 26th with a total of six more reported before the end of the month.

The only breeding season observation (mid-May to mid July) was of six counted in Callow Hollow on the Long Mynd on 13 Jul.

The last record of the year was of one at Cherrington on 28 Sep which was observed “flycatching” on the edge of a beet field in close company with a stonechat.

STONECHAT (Common Stonechat) *Saxicola torquata*

Status: Resident and summer visitor



Stonechat (Glenn Bishton)

Slightly more records than the previous species with 61 records received from 20 sites, however, close to half the records refer to wintering birds from November to February and two thirds of those were from Wall Farm. Other wintering sites were either Brown Clee/Long Mynd (three records) or much lower in the Severn Valley or on the Weald Moors (six records) with other singles near Craven Arms and Rednall. Most winter counts were of one or two birds with just a few of three or four.

All breeding season records came from the Clee Hills, the Long Mynd or the Stiperstones. A count of 10 at Brown Clee on 16 Apr was notable and a surprisingly high total of 39 territories were identified in the Titterston Clee area on a BTO RAS (Ringed Adults for Survival) survey over three weekends.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Status: Common summer visitor

The earliest records for the year were singles at Wall Farm and nearby Buttery Farm on 14 Mar. These were quickly followed by others and passage birds continued to be seen away from suitable breeding habitat until the middle of May. A count of six at the summit of Brown Clee on 13 Mar was notable as were similar counts at Nedge Hill on 30 Apr and near the Montgomery Canal at Queens Head on 13 May.

A total of five breeding season records (mid-May to mid-July) came from the Clee Hills and Caer Caradoc. One which was trapped at Titterstone Clee on 31 May had been rung as a pullis at the same location on 28 May 1995 setting a new longevity record for this species of eight years and three days.

Late departing migrants were at Upper Affcot and Bridgnorth on 18 Sep. The Bridgnorth record was unusual since it was of a bird seen on a front garden in a residential area! These were followed by one at Venus Pool on 21 Sep and, finally, the last of the year on the Stiperstones on 11 Oct.

Most records were assumed to be of the nominate race but one of five seen at Nedge Hill on 3 May was said to be of the Greenland race *O.leucorhoa* as were two here on 6 May. Five near the Montgomery Canal at Queens Head on 14 May were thought to probably be this race.

RING OUZEL *Turdus torquatus*

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



**THE LONG MYND
BREEDING BIRD
PROJECT**

The catastrophic decline of the species has continued, in spite of its conservation status. Ring ouzel is also declining elsewhere in Britain, and is on the *Red List of Birds Of Conservation Concern 2002-2007*. It is also a Target Species in the *Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan*.

Records, of presumably passage birds, were received from a number of sites including a male at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry on 23 Mar. Eight records came from Brown Clee between 24 Mar and 21 Apr, all were of one bird except two males and a female on 13 Apr and two males on 21 Apr. One male was seen at Titterstone Clee on 3 May and four records were received from The Stiperstones between 18 Mar and 8 May, all were of one bird except a small flock of three males and three females on 23 Apr. The Clee Hills and the Stiperstones appear to be regular passage sites.

For the last 50 years or more, ring ouzels are known to have bred only on the Long Mynd, apart from occasional pairs on the Stiperstones where the last confirmed breeding record was in 1982. Not surprisingly, most records in 2003, and the only confirmed breeding record, came from the Long Mynd. However, apart from those submitted by National Trust staff and The Long Mynd Breeding Project, only two casual records were received. These were of a pair on 16 Apr and a single male in Light Spout Hollow on 8 May. This is indicative of the population crash that has occurred and many experienced bird watchers who regularly visit the Long Mynd reported seeing no ring ouzels at all in 2003.

Requests for information, in the County Bird Report in previous years, in the Shropshire Ornithological Society bulletin, and through posters put up at the start of every footpath, produced several reports to the Project:

- A male singing on the east slope of Long Synalds on 6 Apr in the same place as one of the two 2002 pairs was seen.

- A male at the top of Townbrook in mid-April.
- Two at the top of Grindle on April 22.
- Several different reports of one or two birds in Light Spout Hollow.

In addition, Project fieldwork located:

- Three together (two males and one bright female), plus another very dull female, in the upper reaches of the east Synalds Valley, in Ashes Hollow, on 21 Apr.
- A male, on the opposite side of Ashes Hollow, on the lower slopes of Grindle, on the same date.
- A male and two females, plus another dull female, in the east Synalds Valley the following day. However, the appearance of all the females was different, suggesting they were different groups.

All these were presumably passage birds, apart from those in Light Spout Hollow, as they were not relocated.

A pair was first reported to the Project in Light Spout Hollow on 5 May and a nest, which eventually contained five eggs, was found on 13 May. All eggs hatched, and all five young fledged around 11 Jun. A further intensive search found no evidence of an attempt to raise a second brood. This was the only pair found on the whole of the Long Mynd, in spite of an intensive search and the local poster appeal.

The Project reports that colour ringing shows that the female at Light Spout Hollow was the same individual (RRW) found at the site each year since 2000, and she was seven years old, an unusually old age for such a bird.

The colour-ringed male bird at this site in previous years did not return, and the male that was present was, initially, un-ringed, but he was caught and ringed (GM/WGG) when all the nestlings were also colour-ringed. Ring ouzels have a strong local dialect. This male did not sound at all like any other bird heard previously on Long Mynd and the contrast between the white tips and the remainder of the black feathers was unusually strong. It is, therefore, believed that he did not originate on the Long Mynd. Passage birds usually move through quickly so female RRW would have had little time to recruit him here if she arrived back unpaired. This suggests that pairing took place before arriving back on the breeding grounds, either in the winter quarters or on migration.

Apart from the pair at Light Spout Hollow, a colour-ringed female (OWO) was seen once in Ashes Hollow on 21 Apr. Several subsequent attempts to relocate her were unsuccessful, and no male was seen or heard on any of these visits. Presumably either she moved out of the area in an attempt to find a mate elsewhere, or she was predated. She originally fledged from the successful nest of the Light Spout Hollow pair in 2001.

The estimated population in 2003 is, therefore, only one breeding pair. This pair fledged five young from one brood. The Long Mynd population fluctuated around 10-12 pairs over the last 50 years, right through until 1999, but it has almost disappeared since. Only one brood fledged in 2001 and 2003, and none fledged in 2002. This population crash is shown graphically in the chart.

Number of breeding pairs found by The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project:

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
12	16	11	13	13	11	8	3	2	1

The crash is mainly attributed to poor breeding success, due to a high and increasing level of nest predation. This has not been helped, in some years, by relatively low numbers of the previous year's birds returning from migration. There are no local environmental factors or changes which can explain the decline, apart from an increase in predators. A study of feeding areas has shown that there is no shortage of available food. Hopefully, the successful fledging of a brood will avert extinction of the species in the County in 2004.

A full Report on ring ouzel 2003 is available from the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project c/o 8 Welsh Street Gardens, Bishops Castle, SY9 5BH (01588 638577). Readers are requested to report any ring ouzels seen anywhere in the County, particularly on the Long Mynd, to the Project as soon as possible.

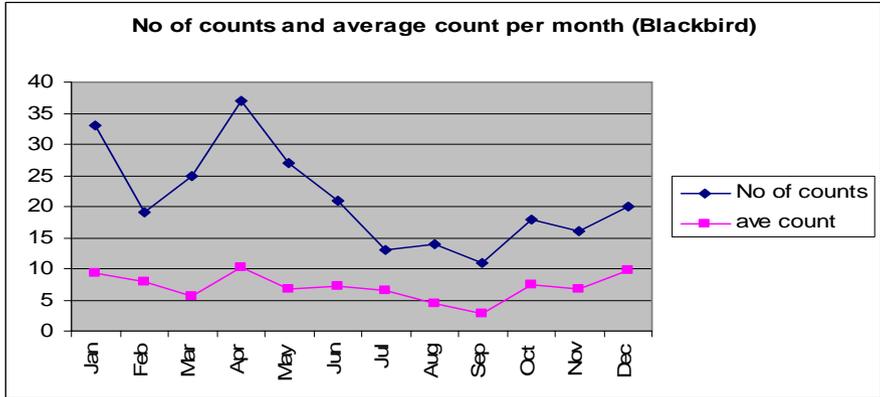
COMMON BLACKBIRD (Blackbird) *Turdus merula*

Status: Common resident

Although common and widespread as a breeding bird with numbers supplemented by winter visitors most of the records submitted came from the north and east of the Severn divide. It was recorded in 52 of the 53 BBS squares covered for the BTO during the year with an average of 12.9 birds per square. Blackbirds almost certainly bred in or close by every members garden but there were few breeding records, although a nest with four eggs at Shrewsbury on

15 Apr was the first of the year. A nest with four chicks at Market Drayton was the first for the year for that observer.

The chart below shows the number of records submitted each month together with the average count per record (it does not include BBS data).



The best counts were 25 at Market Drayton on 4 Jan, 21 at Ridgwardine on 26 Jan, 30 at Bridgnorth on 10 Apr, 41 at Pimhill on 16 Apr, 40 at Bridgnorth on 29 Apr, 35 at Monkmoor on 24 Oct, 30 at Priorslee Lake on 25 Oct and 35 at Leebotwood on 12 Dec with 40 here on 22 Dec. It is difficult to compare these records as some were counts on a walk whilst others were concentrations, usually at a feeding station or, as at Leebotwood, feeding on fallen apples.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

Status: Common winter visitor

In the early months of the year the large flocks of the pre-Christmas period were not repeated and the average flock size fell to c.60 birds. However there were 450 at Yorton on 8 Jan, 300 at Buttery Farm and 650 at Maesbury Marsh on 26 Jan, 300 at Condoover on 15 Feb and, thereafter, flocks only occasionally reached 200 and a flock of this size was at Broome Park on 22 Apr. The last record of the winter was 18 at Lower Brock Hall on 25 Apr.

A loose flock of 20 at Leebotwood on 11 Oct were the first autumn record, then a single at Marshbrook and six at Wood Lane on 12 Oct. On 13 Oct there were flocks of 50 or 60 birds at Mynydd Myfyr, Somerwood, Tibberton and Trefonen.

Thereafter, small parties were widely reported with a few notable flocks including 400 at Wall Farm on 26 Oct, 800 at Upton Magna on 30 Oct, 600 at Wall Farm on 2 Nov and 460 at Priorslee Lake on 3 Nov.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Recorded from all parts of the County and found in 43 of the 53 BBS squares (81%) with an average of 3.5 per occupied square (an improvement on the 2.2 birds per occupied square recorded in 1997). The majority of the records were of single birds, often singing, but of the counts made it is difficult to compare the data as the transects were of different lengths even where specified.

A total of 59 pairs were recorded on a survey of the Telford and Wrekin Woodlands (GB). Seven singing birds were noted at Tibberton on 18 Feb and 19 at West Felton on 1 Mar. Breeding evidence, other than song, was noted at Leebotwood on 19 Mar, Aston Square on 10 Apr, Market Drayton on 22 Apr (feeding young), at Somerwood on 15 May, Bucknell on 15 Jun, Much Wenlock on 20 Jun and Diddlebury 22 Jun.

There were few records in August and September, but singing birds were being recorded by November.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Recorded from most parts of the county, occasionally in small numbers but flocks ranged from 20 to 150 in January and February. A notable count was 250 which were feeding on a school sports field at Kingsland, Shrewsbury on 3 Mar and a lot of these birds were in sub-song in trees at the same site on 4 Mar. Flocks were smaller by the end of March, rarely more than 20. Four at Priorslee Lake on 5 Apr were the last for this site and the last to leave were 20 at Dudleston Heath on 16 Apr.

First autumn birds were noted on 6 Oct when three were seen at Adeney, 10 at Leamoor Common and 13 at Tibberton. Fifty were on the Long Mynd 9 Oct and, on 13 Oct, there were 120 at Mynnyd Myfyr and 120 at Trefonen. Thereafter, counts were widespread, but generally low, numbers, although the exceptions were 200 at VP on 8 Nov and 110 at Broome Park on 24 Dec.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Less widely reported than the other thrushes, but popular with some observers which produced clusters of records in the Oswestry and Newport areas. Recorded in 26 of the 53 BBS squares (49%) with an average of 1.7 birds per occupied square suggesting numbers are lower than in recent years.

Confirmed breeding was recorded at Aston Square where a pair raised four young and drove off a grey squirrel, a sparrowhawk and two jackdaws with the last two chicks fledging on 15 Apr. Also confirmed at Doctor's Coppice at Brandhill, Leebotwood, Market Drayton, Newport and Woolston near Wistanstow.

Small flocks were noted from late July onwards with 35 at Wall Farm on 20 Jul, 37 at Priorslee Lake on 27 Aug, 38 at Apley Pool on 30 Aug and 31 at Wood Lane on 6 Sep. For the remaining months records were widespread, but usually only one or two birds together.

COMMON GRASSHOPPER WARBLER (Grasshopper Warbler) *Locustella naevia*

Status: Summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

Seven reports were received from five different locations involving a total of seven reeling birds which was a considerable improvement on the previous year when only two singing males were reported from two locations.

The first report of the year came from Wood Lane Nature Reserve on 19 Apr followed by two reeling males at a confidential site near Craven Arms on 22 Apr and one at Brown Clee Hill on 26 Apr. The two birds at the Craven Arms site were, subsequently, recorded again on 5 & 7 May suggesting probable breeding. Late summer records involved one reeling male on 30 Jun at Gatten Plantation and two reeling at Rorrington Hill on 8 Jul.

This crepuscular species prefers to deliver its characteristic song on hot summer evenings, but will also sing during the day. Some considerable effort and dedication might be required to survey suitable habitat which often comprises areas of open scrub with emergent rank grassland on warm, south facing slopes.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Status: Common summer visitor

A total of 134 reports were received from 22 locations. The first bird of the year was at Wood Lane Nature Reserve on 15 Apr with most arriving elsewhere in the last week of April and early May.

Peak counts from key wetland sites included two at ASF and Atcham Bridge on 11 May, three at VP and Hampton Loade on 25 Apr and 24 May respectively, six at Priorslee Lake and Chelmarsh Scrape on 29 May and 25 Jun respectively and eight at Chelmarsh on 30 Jun. Elsewhere, a maximum of four were recorded at Queen's Head Canal on 14 May and four males sang from wetland on a farm in Countryside Stewardship at Dryton on 12 Jul. Single birds were noted at Bromfield, Buttery Farm, Howle Pool, Isombridge, Maesbury Marsh, Monkmoor, Ponthen, Telford Town Park and Tibberton.

Breeding was confirmed at Chelmarsh Scrape and Severn Valley Country Park, but was most likely at all key sites.

Sedge warbler was last recorded at VP and Wood Lane on 27 Aug.

EURASIAN REED WARBLER (Reed Warbler) *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Status: Common summer visitor

A total of 127 reports were received from 21 different locations supporting common reed *Phragmites australis*.

The first migrant was noted at Wood Lane on 17 Apr with subsequent peak counts of two on the River Severn at Hampton Loade on 5 May, three at Ashton Locks, West Felton on 18 May, six to seven at Queen's Head Canal on 20 May, eight at Priorslee Lake on 6 Jul, nine at Priorslee Flash on 5 May and 12 at Wood Lane on 21 Jun. Single birds or two males were also recorded at Atcham Bridge, Attingham Park, Bromfield, Howle Pool, Sambrook Mill, Severn Valley Country Park, Shavington Big Pool, Telford Town Park and Tibberton.

At least 25 to 30 reed warbler were estimated to breed at Chelmarsh Scrape, ringers trapping 24 males and 17 females, while an 80% reduction in breeding pairs was reported at ASF. Breeding was also confirmed at Wood Lane, but most probably occurred at other key sites. Birds were reported throughout the summer with the final reed warbler at Wood Lane on 17 Sep.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

Status: Common summer visitor and scarce winter visitor



Blackcap (Glenn Bishton)

Records of blackcap in the winter months of January to March comprised mainly one to two birds, both male and female, with the exception of three at Radbrook on 24 Feb and three at Woodlands Park on 15 Mar. Many reports related to birds feeding at garden feeding stations while other reports referred to one blackcap in a mixed flock of tits at Haughmond Hill on

17 Jan, one feeding on apples at Overdale on 29 Jan and a male in the car park of Oakengates Town Hall on 20 Feb.

Large breeding season counts were five at Button Oak on 8 May, six at Shavington Big Pool and Earl's Hill on 19 Apr and 20 Apr respectively and 10 on The Wrekin on 15 May. A survey of Telford and Wrekin Council woodlands in summer 2003 identified 59 blackcap territories in habitat comprising mainly open canopy woodland with a well developed shrub layer along rides and clearings. Breeding was confirmed only at Bucknell, but this species is widely distributed in the County and the incidence of breeding is likely to have been high.

Twelve records were received from 11 locations in the second winter period from October to December and related mainly to single birds except for two at Woodlands Park on 15 Nov and at Radbrook on 15 Nov. One female was noted feeding on fat at a garden feeding station in Ironbridge on 2 Dec

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*

Status: Common summer visitor

The scratchy, but melodious, song of the garden warbler emerging from dense scrub in the bright sunlight of early May signifies that summer has truly arrived. A total of 93 reports were received from 40 widespread locations in 2003.

The first garden warbler of the year was a bird sadly killed by flying into a window at Leighton on 19 Apr: this bird had been ringed the previous summer at Twemlows Big Wood, Prees on 2 Jun. Generally occurring at low densities, five garden warblers were reported at Severn Valley Country Park on 4 May, with

four at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry, during a CBC survey on 10 May and four at Attingham Park on 31 May. Four singing males were recorded in a survey of Telford and Wrekin Council Woodlands between April and June, all occupying dense scrub of hawthorn, bramble, nettle and other tall herbs: a sunlit and warm aspect was also noted on the territories.

Breeding was not confirmed but undoubtedly occurred, and the last garden warblers of 2003 involved two birds at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 Sep.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

Status: Common summer visitor



Lesser Whitethroat (Glenn Bishton)

Although the abrupt and rather beautiful rattling song of the lesser whitethroat is readily identifiable, its relatively short song period and tendency to remain well hidden in dense scrub possibly results in an under recording of this attractive little warbler. A total of 96 reports were received in 2003 from 45 sites.

The first migrant was recorded at Priorslee Lake on 26 Apr. Breeding typically appeared to be at low densities with only one or two males reported at a site, but breeding was not confirmed from any site. Habitat in which males were noted singing included dense, overgrown hedgerows and scrub, particularly hawthorn and blackthorn.

The final record for the year was at Nedge Hill on 8 Sep.

COMMON WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Status: Common summer visitor

A total of 177 reports were received from 72 locations in many parts of the County. The first whitethroat of the year was at High Ercall on 15 Apr. Most sites subsequently supported one to five singing males with six at Market Drayton on 3 May and seven at Wall Farm on 12 Jul. Whitethroats were recorded in low-level open scrub of hawthorn, bramble, nettle gorse and willow.

Breeding was confirmed at High Ercall on 5 May when an adult was observed carrying food and, subsequently, at Almington, Gatten Plantation, Ashford Carbonell, Market Drayton and Priorslee Lake. The last evidence of breeding came from Almington on 13 Jul when three birds, including fledglings, were noted.

The final report of the summer was at Tibberton on 14 Sep.

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Status: Summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

A total of 22 records were received in 2003, slightly up from 19 in 2002. However, the number of sites was down from 12 in 2002 to 9 in 2003 which confirms to its possible BCC red list candidacy in the near future.

Six wood warblers at Brown Clee Hill and one singing male at Benthall Edge Wood on 27 Apr were the first reports for 2003, the latter bird absent on subsequent visits to the site. Similarly, Candy Wood and Whittey held one male each on 29 Apr with no subsequent records suggesting the individuals were passage migrants. Only five sites – Clunton Coppice, Eastridge Wood, Horderley, Whitcliffe and The Wrekin held territorial males in May or June, indicating potential breeding. The last wood warbler was reported at Whitcliffe on 20 Jun.

The fall in the number of records appears to reflect a real decline of the species in Shropshire and not simply a lack of site coverage by observers. For instance, one traditional stronghold of the wood warbler, the Severn Gorge woodlands, supported 20 singing males in 1983 and none in 2003. Woodland management initiatives aimed specifically at the wood warbler are being adopted in the Severn Gorge and might be required elsewhere in Shropshire to stem the decline.

COMMON CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

Status: Common summer visitor, rare in winter

A total of 428 reports were received in 2003 from 123 locations in many parts of Shropshire.

There was only one true first winter period report of chiffchaff involving a single bird at Hampton Loade on 25 Jan. The first birds of spring were two at Venus Pool on 11 Mar followed by a single bird at Candy Valley on 12 Mar and a total

of twelve reports on the 15 Mar which appears to indicate a large influx of chiffchaff over a short period.

Large counts included 10 at Severn Valley Country Park on 22 Mar, 10 at Shavington Big Pool on 22 Mar and 19 Apr, 20 at Whitcliffe on 5 Apr, 12 at Woodseaves on 6 Apr, 13 at Candy Wood on 15 Apr, 11 at Pimhill on 15 Apr, 10 at The Wrekin on 16 Apr, with 20 there on 15 May, 15 at Brown Clee Hill on 26 Apr, 12 at Button Oak on 8 May, 10 at Haughmond Hill on 22 Jun and 60 in Telford and Wrekin Council Woodlands in May.

Breeding was confirmed at Bucknell, but undoubtedly occurred at many other sites.

Odd birds continued to be reported throughout October and up to 26 Nov but these seem likely to have been late migrants. Coupled with the paucity of January and February records, just two December reports of single birds at VP on 2nd and 27th suggests that wintering in the County is extremely rare.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

A total of 238 reports were received from 83 sites. This compares to 109 reports from 46 locations in 2002. Given the willow warbler is BCC amber listed as a species of medium conservation concern, the increase in both the number of reports and sites is encouraging.

The first bird of the year was at Priorslee Lake on 28 Mar and two were there on 30 Mar. One was recorded at Acton Scott on 31 Mar. Large breeding season counts included at least 30 on The Wrekin on 16 Apr, 10 at Trefonen on 24 Apr, eight at Ashes Hollow and 10 at Brown Clee on 26 Apr, six at Severn Valley Country Park on 2 May, six at Cardingmill Valley on 3 May, six at Button Oak on 8 May, eight at Priorslee Lake on 17 May, five at Hawkestone Park on 26 May, seven at Priorslee Flash on 1 Jun and five at Brownhills on 26 Jul.

Fourteen singing males were located in a survey of Telford and Wrekin Woodlands and 23 pairs located in a BTO Common Bird Census at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry, during summer surveys. Breeding was confirmed at Market Drayton and Rednal.

Departure was marked by few September records, with one at VP on 1 Sep and eight at Wood Lane on 6 Sep. The last bird of the summer was at VP on 21 Sep.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

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

A total of 132 reports were received from 62 locations in many parts of the County. Many reports were of single birds or of small groups consorting with tits and warblers in mixed autumn flocks.

Among the larger counts received in 2003 were 20 at Bury Ditches on 17 Mar, 10 at Limekiln Wood on 26 Apr, 10 at Button Oak on 8 May, 20 at Chelmarsh Scrape on 25 Aug, 25 at Hawkstone Park on 18 Oct and 40 at Brown Clee on 21 Nov. Twenty two territories were identified in a survey of Telford and Wrekin Council Woodlands in the summer of 2003. A bird with a feather in its beak by a Scot's Pine at Aston Square, Oswestry on 19 Apr was the only positive indication of breeding which was reported.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor

A single bird was present at VP from 11-19 Nov (ADi).

The bird was found by visiting birders from the Smestow Valley Bird Group and favoured the area around the feeding station, although it was not reported actually using the feeders. Throughout its stay, the bird was generally elusive and patience was required to see it. However, persistence usually paid off and many observers were rewarded with their first sighting of this species in the County.

This was the fifth year in a row to produce records of firecrest, which has now occurred in seven of the past eleven years.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

A total of 57 reports were received during 2003, from 37 widespread localities; this is a small increase in the number of records received during the previous year, but this species, which favours shady locations such as woodland clearings, gardens and churchyards, particularly those close to water, continues to decline in number.

The first record of the year was of a single bird at Lodge Hill on 4 May. This was followed by single birds at Horderley on 5 May and at The Old Racecourse, Oswestry on 6 May. Evidence of breeding was received from Aston Square in

Oswestry, Candy Valley, Chelmarsh where three pairs bred successfully, Leebootwood where a pair and four juveniles were seen on 29 Aug, Market Drayton, Kingsland Bridge in Shrewsbury where an adult was feeding four fledged young on 13 Aug, Woodlands Park in Shrewsbury, Tedsmere near Baschurch, and Wall Farm.

There were three September records, from Bronygarth, Dudmaston, and Cherrington, the last sighting of the year being of a single bird at Cherrington on the 9th of the month.

PIED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Status: Common summer visitor



Pied Flycatcher (*Glenn Bishton*)

The 51 reports from 21 locations, largely from oak woodland and often associated with nest boxes, is an increase over the number of records received in 2002, but this species also appears to be declining.

The first bird of 2003 was seen at Arscott on the very early date of 1 Apr. Next were two at Craig Sychtyn and two at Trefonen on 14 Apr. Pairs or singing males were reported from several locations, including Bridges (three pairs on 16 Apr), Bucknell (two singing males from 4 to 14 May),

Lydebrook Dingle (pair at a nest box), Trefonen where a pair raised six young in a nest box, and Stiperstones village where two pairs were using nest boxes on 10 May, as well as from nest box schemes at Candy Valley, Craig Sychtyn (nine pairs bred with 25 young fledged), and Hurst Woodlands in Clun (14 pairs successfully raising 92 young).

The last record was of one bird hunting flies on a lawn in Waters Upton on 19 Aug.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

Status: Common resident

This species was recorded during all months of the year from throughout the County, with a total of 296 reports received. It is a regular visitor to gardens, particularly to peanut feeders.

The only confirmed breeding was in Bucknell, although several instances of nest building were noted, including at Venus Pool and in Wellington, and several family parties were seen later in the year. Over 30 reports of flocks of between 10 to 20 birds were received, and larger flocks were of 30 at Kingslow on 22 Dec, 25 at Priorslee Lake on 16 Aug, 25 at Tibberton on 17 Aug, 20 at Oswestry Golf Course on 11 Jan, 20 at Somerwood on 17 Jan, and 20 at Venus Pool on 28 Oct and 1 Nov.

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

This species was recorded throughout the year, with a total of 124 records received from 49 locations. Regular visits were made to many garden feeding stations.

A pair was confirmed breeding in a Bucknell garden and eleven pairs were located during a survey of Telford and Wrekin Council woodlands (GB). Most records were of one or two birds, but larger flocks included 10 at Shavington Big Pool on 15 Feb, six along the River Severn (Coalport to Arley) on 25 Jun, five at Dudmaston on 22 Feb, four at Venus Pool on 19 & 23 Nov and four at Ludford on 5 Dec.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus*

Status: Locally common resident (BCC Red listed)

This species was reported from 27 different locations and a total of 89 records from all months of the year were received. It is scarcer in Shropshire than the previous species, with more specialised habitat requirements, preferring overgrown areas beside lakes, pools and streams, where it nests in rotting tree stumps.

Breeding was confirmed from Stead Vallets, where two agitated and noisy pairs were thought to be nesting close together in rotting lakeside alders on 16 April, and from Whixall Moss where a pair plus six juveniles were seen on 28 May. Nine pairs were located during the survey of Telford and Wrekin woods (GB). Most other sightings were of one or two birds, although up to four were noted several times. Three birds were ringed at Venus Pool during the year, although the previous species is much more commonly seen there.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*

Status: Common resident

201 records of this species were received from 59 locations. It was recorded in all months of the year and was seen in particularly large numbers in coniferous woods, as well as being a regular visitor to garden feeding stations.

Breeding was confirmed at eight locations, Attingham Park (eight in family parties on 24 June), two sites in Bucknell (including a pair plus six juveniles at Stowe Hill on 5 July), two sites in Newport, Woodlands Park in Shrewsbury, Tedsmere, and Woodlane. 28 pairs were recorded in May during the Telford woodland survey (mentioned in previous accounts). Large counts included 24 at West Felton on 1 December, 19 at Dudmaston on 8 February, 15 at Kingslow on 22 December, 14 at Button Oak on 8 May, 12 at Bridgnorth on 10 April, and 60 on The Wrekin on 17 November.

BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*

Status: Common resident

A species found throughout the County with a total of 227 records received, including one of a bird in Telford Town Park in full song on Christmas Eve.

Breeding was widely reported and 66 pairs were located during the Telford Woodland survey. Many pairs used nest boxes, other chose holes in walls for their nest-sites and a pair at Doctor's Coppice, Brandhill nested in the top of the hollow post supporting a road sign. Larger counts included 47 along the River Severn in Bridgnorth on 20 February, 40 in Gatton Plantation on 23 October, 40 at Venus Pool on 19 November, 40 in Whitcliffe Wood on 11 January, 25 at Hawkstone Park on 6 September, and 23 successful pairs in nest boxes at The Hurst, Clun reared 198 young. Three pairs nested in Craig Sychtyn, laying 21 eggs, with a maximum of 17 fledged.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*

Status: Common resident

Another widespread species in the County, with 187 records received, many from garden feeding stations. The Telford woodland survey recorded 59 pairs.

Breeding was reported from many locations, including seven pairs nesting at The Hurst, Clun, five occupied nest boxes at Adderley, and six pairs in nest boxes at

Craig Sychtyn (21 eggs laid with a maximum of 13 young fledged). Larger numbers reported included 46 along the River Severn in Bridgnorth on 20 February, 38 at Venus Pool on 24 August, 23 at Pimhill on 16 April, 20 on Brown Clee on 18 March, at Ludford on 5 December and at Whitcliffe Wood on 1 January, and 10 at Cound Stank on 10 February.

WOOD NUTHATCH (Eurasian Nuthatch) *Sitta europaea*

Status: Common resident

This species favours mature deciduous woodland and is widespread in the County in this habitat, with 200 records received during the year, including one bird recaptured in Market Drayton in January at the same place it was ringed five years earlier. Generally recorded in small numbers of one to four birds, although counts of six at Shavington Big Pool on 15 February, at Attingham Park on 12 April, and at Hawkstone Park on 1 June were made.

There were 10 confirmed breeding records, from Candy Valley, Conover where one young was killed by flying into a window, Diddlebury, Ironbridge, Much Wenlock where five young fledged on 15 May, Newport, Purlogue (4 nestlings ringed on 1 June), River Severn between Coalport and Arley where 15 juveniles were counted along a three mile stretch on 25 June, Woodlands Park in Shrewbury (nesting in the same hole in a wall as last year), and at West Felton where a pair used a nest box on the side of a house.

EURASIAN TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*

Status: Common resident

A total of only 105 records were received for this species from 56 widespread locations, and largely associated with mature deciduous woodland, including one seen at Edgmond Marsh on 12 April, climbing an ivy-covered wooden fence searching for invertebrates. This is an unobtrusive bird which is likely to have been under-recorded in the County.

Most records were of single birds or pairs. There were no records of confirmed breeding, even from the owners of nest boxes! Larger counts were of six at Brown Moss on 21 February, four at Shavington Big Pool on 22 March and Hawkstone Park on 8 June, with three at Oreton on 15 March, at Bridgnorth on 10 April, at Monkhopton on 12 April, and at Hawkstone Park on 26 May.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*

Status: Rare winter visitor

There were three records. For the second year running, one was seen at Abdon Burf, Brown Clee in both winter periods, most probably a returning individual. Another was seen briefly at Wood Lane on 21 Nov (AA, PA, JS).

The Brown Clee bird was first noted on 27 Mar (EGP) and seen again on 30 Mar. More records were received in the second winter period when the bird was present from 18 Oct (pager record) until 24 Nov at least. This bird was photographed (PK) and features on the front cover. A description was obtained on 28 Oct (AB).

Although this bird was not reported at all during December it is, nevertheless, thought to have wintered in the area and was recorded again regularly from early January until 29 Mar 2004. Many observers made the trek to the summit but not all were lucky. The bird often frequented the scrub below the radio mast but proved elusive at times.

This continues the recent good run and great grey shrike has now been recorded in Shropshire for six consecutive years.

EURASIAN JAY *Garrulus glandarius*

Status: Common resident

A handsome bird often first drawing attention to itself by its harsh calls. Most records were of single birds, but an impressive count of 14 was obtained at Shavington Big Pool on 15 Feb. Also on 15 Feb one was seen taking peanuts from a feeder in Candy Valley. Breeding was confirmed at Bucknell on 15 Jun.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (Magpie) *Pica pica*

Status: Common resident

This attractive looking corvid is not universally well-liked, but remains popular with observers. Mostly recorded in single figure counts, but there were 15 reports of more than 10 birds. The highest counts were of 34 at Priorslee Lake on 16 Mar and also 34 at Priorslee Flash on 27 Nov.

One bird was seen raiding a nest at Waters Upton on 18 May and an interesting sighting of one being distracted by five little ringed plovers occurred at Venus Pool on 28 Apr.

Breeding behaviour was noted at Candy Valley on 14 & 31 March and breeding was confirmed at Bucknell on 15 Jun.

EURASIAN JACKDAW (Western Jackdaw) *Corvus monedula*

Status: Common resident

Most records were of less than 10 birds but there were 13 of over 100. The highest counts were 400 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 Dec and 388 at Priorslee Lake on 14 Dec.

This species does not appear to receive a lot of attention from observers as only two records of breeding activity were received.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

Status: Common resident

Most records were of sizeable flocks. The largest flock being 800 at Eardington on 23 Dec and with high counts of 550 at Wall Farm on 22 Feb, 400 at Cold Hatton on 3 May and also 400 at Hampton Loade on 28 August.

Active rookeries were noted at Buildwas, Crosshouses, Edgmond Marsh, Hincks, Haughmond Hill, Longford, Wenlock Priory, Old Racecourse Oswestry and Weeping Cross.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Status: Common resident

Of the 142 records received, the largest flock was 50 on 20 February at Bridgnorth. Most records were of less than 10 birds. Only four definite breeding records were received, although this bird is undoubtedly a common breeder.

An example of the predatory and opportunist nature of this species was shown on 3 Jun at Venus Pool when one killed an injured Black Headed Gull.

Three birds showing white wings were reported at Priorslee Flash on 26 Aug and two at the same site on 8 Nov and 13 Dec.

COMMON RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Status: Uncommon resident



The population density and range of this popular species, appropriately known as the “charismatic corvid”, both continue to increase. A total of 283 records were received, a slight increase on last year.

Casual records included only three instances of confirmed breeding, and no new nest sites. However, two records from Catherton Common suggest a further expansion eastwards and there was a welcome increase in records from the Oswestry uplands, including a flock of 10 at Moelydd in June. There were a large number of observations from lowland areas to the north and east of the River Severn, confirming the continuing spread of the species from the uplands. It was again recorded in the Wood Lane log book every month of the year, and 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. The number of records from Venus Pool increased from four in 2002 to seven in 2003.

Surprisingly, there was a reduction in both the number of reports of large flocks, and the size of the flocks reported. There were only ten separate accounts of ten or more together, and the biggest, at Stowe Hill near Bucknell on 18 Sep was only 31. The other counts were of 22 and 12 from two other sites above the Teme valley, 27, 24, 14 and 10 at the Stiperstones, 10 at Caer Caradoc and 12 at Candy Wood in addition to that from Moelydd noted above. In 2002, around 50 were reported at Oaker Wood, near Aston-on-Clun, and the largest flock recorded so far was 53 on the Long Mynd in July 2000.

Four of the large flocks recorded in 2003 were observed in March or April, including 27 birds on the Stiperstones on 1 Mar and 24 on 25 Apr with 22 on the intervening date of 16 Mar, suggesting two different large flocks. As breeding ravens would have had eggs or chicks in the nest on these dates, this confirms that these flocks consist of adult non-breeding birds. Ravens do not usually nest until they are 3-5 years old, so the size of flocks of non-breeding birds is an important indicator of population growth. Observers are specifically requested to report flocks of 10 or more Ravens.

The Shropshire Raven Study Group continued to monitor the population, looking for colour-ringed birds and visited 248 current, or previously occupied, raven nest

sites. A total of 140 nests were actually found and a further 26 territories were located. As the primary fieldwork objective was finding colour-ringed ravens, and reading the two-letter code on the ring, there was insufficient time in some parts of the survey area to find those pairs that had moved to an alternate site, or search other areas to locate more new nests. The actual number of nesting pairs would therefore have been much higher. Many of the occupied nest sites have not been occupied in previous years, and are close to established pairs, suggesting that the breeding population is continuing to increase through in-filling, and consequent reduction in the size of territories, as well as expansion of range.

In the Group's draft report covering the first phase of the Project (1994-99), evidence was presented for a rapid increase in the estimated breeding population, from around 50 pairs in 1990 to 175 pairs in 1999. The breeding population has continued to increase rapidly, and is estimated at around 250 pairs in 2003.

Mid-Wales had the highest recorded Raven densities in Europe, reaching 21 pairs per 10-km square on hill sheep walk (*New Atlas 1993, Trends Guide 1990*). Although the density in southwest Shropshire was much lower at that time (the late 1980s), it substantially exceeds that figure now in 10-km squares SO27 and SO28.

A total of 55 colour-ringed adult breeding birds was found in 2003. As the colour was identified, the age of all these birds is known, and the sex of most of them has also been determined. The average age of these birds is 6.3 years old, and four nine-year-old breeding birds were found. One of these disappeared during the breeding season, and was replaced in the breeding pair, but hopefully the other three will return as 10 year olds in 2004. Several others were ringed as nestlings in the second year of the Shropshire Project, in 1993, so these breeding Ravens are eight years old. The average age at which colour-ringed birds have been first found in the breeding population since the Study started is five. The unique two-letter code on 37 colour-rings was read, so these birds have been individually identified and their natal site is known. The Study Group aims to continue to visit nest sites to seek colour-ringed adults. Reports of new nests are welcome (telephone below).

The British Trust For Ornithology (BTO) has awarded a grant towards the cost of the Group's fieldwork, which is gratefully acknowledged. The progress report submitted to the BTO, which contains detailed results for 2003, can be viewed on the Society's website or be obtained from the Group, c/o 8 Welsh Street Gardens, Bishops Castle, SY9 5BH (01588 638577).

COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Although this species is declining in numbers, several large flocks associated with breeding behaviour were noted during the winter periods.

The largest flock was of 20,000 birds in the Harlescott area of Shrewsbury on 12 Feb where a large roost had been noted since January at least. Other large counts were 2000 at Edgmond Marsh on 11 January and 1000 at Waters Upton on the same date, 10,000 at Sundorne Grove on 23 January, 6000 at Priorslee Lake on 16 March, 1000 at Wood Lane on 21 October and 4000 at Eaton Upon Tern on 8 November.

Largely ignored as a breeding species, but breeding was confirmed at Edgmond and Somerwood.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Although the population of this species in England has declined by approximately 70% over the last 25 years, the rate of decline does appear to have levelled off in recent years and there may be a glimmer of hope for a future recovery in that recent survey results for both Scotland and Wales appear to show a population increase. A total of 157 records were received from 48 sites across the County. There were 25 counts of 30 or more birds, the highest being 80 at Bromfield on 1 Nov, 70 at Hampton Loade on 28 Jul, 68 at Ridgwardine on 21 Jun, with 60 at both Adderley and by the River Severn in the Buildwas/Leighton area on the 26 Jan and 16 Aug respectively.

Breeding was reported from Adderley, Conover, Cranmere Bog, Diddlebury, Edgmond Marsh, Prees, Shrewsbury, Somerwood, Tedsmere and Woolston near Wistanstow. A second brood was noted at one site.

Many records were associated with birds at feeding stations, either on or below peanut feeders, although house sparrows in Overdale took a fancy to raisins.

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (Tree Sparrow) *Passer montanus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Although showing a long-term, steep decline nationally, this species is well reported locally with 281 records from 68 sites spread across the County. This possibly suggests that tree sparrows have not fared as badly in Shropshire as they

have nationally and, if this is the case, there is a need to ensure that this species is supported locally through the use of agri-environment schemes etc.

An impressive flock of 200 birds was reported from Ludlow on 16 Feb, with 100 at Prees on 8 Mar. A hundred birds were recorded at VP on four occasions, three in September and once in December; counts of over 50 were also regularly reported from this site. Other sites with counts of over 50 were Adderley, Bedstone and Merrington Green. During the two winter periods, many of the reports were of birds visiting feeding stations.

Although breeding was reported from 14 sites (Adderley, Alveley nr Bridgnorth, Broome Park (Neen Savage), Condover, Edgmond Marsh, Edgmond, Maesbury Marsh, Prees, Tedsmere, Tibberton, VP, Wellington, Wood Lane Nature Reserve and Woolston Nr Wistanstow), birds were reported from a further 18 sites during the breeding season.

CHAFFINCH (Common Chaffinch) *Fringilla coelebs*

Status: Common resident

A well-reported species with over 250 records. This perhaps reflects the overall status of this species which is showing a slight increase. VP held the largest reported flocks with 200 birds on both the 13 and 31 Dec; several other high counts came from this site during the second winter period and was almost certainly due to the planting of a wild bird seed crop on the newly acquired field. Other three-figure counts came from Prees on 18 Jan and Bowhill Dingle (Alveley) on 22 Dec, both being flocks of 100 birds. Interestingly, apart from the large flocks at VP which occurred in the second winter period, the majority of reports of 50 or more birds came from the early part of the year.

Although singing birds were noted at several sites, breeding was only confirmed at three: Condover, Cressage and Shrewsbury. However, birds were noted during the breeding season at a further 18 locations.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*

Status: Winter visitor

A relatively good year for this winter visitor with 71 records from 32 separate sites. Having said this, two thirds of the reports were from the first winter period and it was during this period that the largest flocks were also seen. Forty two were in Attingham Park on 10 Feb, feeding on beech mast with chaffinches, and other large flocks during these first few months of the year included 30 at both Ratlinghope Hill on 13 Jan and Ellesmere on 16 Feb, and 27 at Market Drayton

on 24 Jan. The last report for this period was one bird at Priorslee Lake on 24 Apr.

The first returning birds were reported on 18 Oct with six at Hawkstone Park and one at Leamoor Common. The largest count during the second half of the year was ten birds at Chelmarsh on 14 Dec.

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (Greenfinch) *Carduelis chloris*

Status: Common resident

A very well recorded species which perhaps reflects its abundance across much of Shropshire. It is also a species that appears to be increasing nationally.

As might be expected, the largest counts came from the two winter periods, particularly in the second part of the year when numbers are boosted by young birds. During the first winter period, notable counts included 74 at Tibberton on 1 Jan, 45 at Wood Lane on 21 Jan and 45 at Adderley on 7 Mar. The maximum count during the breeding season was of 30 at Adderley on 18 May. During the second winter period high counts included 60 at Newport on 31 Oct, with the same count at Adderley on 11 Nov and 70 at Butter Cross on 20 Dec. However, these were all eclipsed by an impressive sequence of counts of birds leaving their roost at Priorslee Lake between 17 and 31 Aug. A maximum of 580 birds was recorded on 24 Aug and there were seven other counts of over 300 birds.

In spite of over 50 records during the summer period, breeding was only noted at five sites, Bucknell, Condover, Shrewsbury, Newport and in the Candy Valley.

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (Goldfinch) *Carduelis carduelis*

Status: Common resident

Another well-reported species, reflecting its continued popularity with observers. Although the majority of records were of less than 10 birds, there were 49 double-figure counts. The largest reported flock was of 90 birds at Stirchley Grange on 13 Jan feeding in roadside birches and alders, but 60 were also counted at Bolas Heath on 9 Mar, 53 in Newport on 19 Oct and 51 at Wall Farm on 15 Oct.

Although reported from across the County, with numerous reports during the breeding season, breeding was only confirmed at nine locations: Adderley, Craven Arms, Newport, Oswestry, Priorslee Flash, Shrewsbury (2), Teddsmere and Wall Farm.

EURASIAN SISKIN (Siskin) *Carduelis spinus*

Status: Common winter visitor and uncommon resident

Although this species could breed in Shropshire, and may indeed do so, all but four of the 215 records came from the two winter periods, more-or-less split evenly between the two. All four 'summer' records were of single birds, but the most interesting was of a juvenile trapped and ringed at Adderley on 29 Jun. Whilst this could indicate local breeding, Adderley is sufficiently close to both the Staffordshire and Cheshire borders for the bird to come from either of these Counties never mind further afield

During the early part of the year, there were seven reports of 60 or more birds: 120 at Granville Country Park on 1 Jan, the highest count during this winter period, 62 at Priorslee Lake on 12 Jan with 98 at this site on 1 Feb, 60 in The Quarry, Shrewsbury on 4 Feb, 90 at Adderley on 28 Feb with 100 on Haughmond Hill on the same day and 75 at the latter site on 23 Mar.

With no records in August, the first report of the autumn was of one bird at Hawkstone Park on 6 Sep. During the latter half of the year there were only three reports of 60 or more birds with 80 at Oswestry Golf Course on 8 Nov, the same number at Whitcliffe on 13 Nov and 120 at Dudmaston on 27 Dec.

COMMON LINNET (Linnet) *Carduelis cannabina*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Although this species declined rapidly in the UK between the mid 1970s and mid 1980s, with a continued shallow decline in England since 1994, the population in Shropshire would not appear to have been affected as badly as elsewhere in the Country with over 160 records submitted during the year, including 20 three-figure counts.

Despite this high number of counts, including over forty during the summer, there was no report of confirmed breeding, something that observers can hopefully address in future years. However, two territories were identified at the Cockshutt, Wrockwardine Wood during a survey of Telford and Wrekin woodlands (GB). Otherwise, and as might be expected, the greatest number of records and largest flocks were from the two winter periods, usually associated with set-aside, over-wintered stubbles or wild bird/game crops. During the first winter period, 150 were at VP on 1 Mar, 300 near Market Drayton on 7 Mar, with 200 at the same site on 4 Apr, 200 at Wall Farm of 11 Mar and 200 at Upper Affcot on 27 Apr. Towards the end of the year, the same observer reported separate flocks of 300 birds from both Ponthen and Cae Howel on 14 Sep.

LESSER REDPOLL *Carduelis cabaret*

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

Numbers of this species have declined sharply in England since the mid 1970s. It was once abundant and widespread across lowland Britain, but is now largely absent as a breeding species in such areas. Survey work seems to suggest lesser redpolls may have withdrawn in recent decades from the lowlands to northern and western Britain.

Whilst well over a hundred records were received for the year, only five were from the breeding season: a flock of 20 at Clunton Coppice on 15 May, with singles in Wellington on 7 Jun, at Priorslee Lake on 7 Jun and 18 Aug with another at Priorslee Flash the next day. The record from Clunton Coppice gives hope that this species may still breed in the hills of the south and west of the county and observers are encouraged to look for lesser redpolls in this area during the breeding season.

During the two winter periods, there were three reports of flocks of 25 or more birds, with 28 at Harmer Hill on 14 Jan, 40 on the Wrekin on 11-12 Feb and 30 at VP on 15-16 Nov.

COMMON (MEALY) REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

Since 2000, common redpoll has been considered as a separate species from lesser redpoll. It occurs in Britain as a migrant and winter visitor and a bird of this species was reported from VP between 13 Nov and 30 Dec (MDR, DT & AL). It was usually found in association with lesser redpolls, often feeding on fat-hen *Chenopodium album*.

COMMON CROSSBILL *Loxia curvirostra*

Status: Irregular resident and winter visitor (RBBP)

As might be expected with this species, most of the records were of birds in conifer forest and, more often than not, in the south of the county. Interestingly, 30 of the 34 records came from the first half of the year and, although no evidence of breeding was reported, there is the distinct possibility that common crossbills may have bred in Shropshire this year.

The largest reported flocks during this first winter period included 26 at Cefn Coch 31 Jan, 25 Dudmaston on 6 Feb and again on 2 Mar, 25 at Mainstone on

16-17 Feb with another 25 in Sowdley Wood also on 16 Feb and 37 on Brown Clee 3 Apr. Of the four records from the second half of the year, the largest count was of three in Eastridge Wood, Habberley on 3 Dec.

COMMON BULLFINCH (Bullfinch) *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

The fact that almost 250 records were received for this species indicates its popularity with observers across the county. Most were single figure counts, but 15 were in Granville Country Park on 1 Jan, 13 at Priorslee Lake on 16 Mar and 10 at Haywood on 21 Jun. The Severn Valley Country Park, Alveley, also had an impressive string of records with 19 on 25 Aug and 20 on 25 Oct followed by double-figure counts on the next three days.

A surprisingly high total of 43 breeding territories, at six different sites, were identified during a survey of Telford and Wrekin Council woodlands (GB). Elsewhere, breeding was only reported from three sites, Candy Valley, Ironbridge and Shrewsbury, but the number of breeding season records suggests that it must be much more common.

HAWFINCH *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Status: Scarce resident

As with previous years, the majority of records (eight out of eleven) for this elusive finch came from Whitcliffe, Ludlow, although the fact that most counts were of singles, and the maximum count was of only three birds on 5 April, does suggest that even this small population may be in terminal decline. However, the fact that single birds were also reported from Much Wenlock on 10 & 14 Mar and Trefonen on 20 Nov does show that they do exist elsewhere in the county. The latter record was the only one from the second half of the year, all the rest being between 4 Jan and 20 Apr.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

A popular species with observers but still under recorded. 253 widespread records were received, but only one case involved an identified family party, at Leebotwood in August.

Many records involved the showy spring males chanting their distinctive song from farmland hedgerows with 97 being counted in July between Newport and Venus Pool (EJW).

The regularly reported winter flock count at Tedsmere near Baschurch peaked at 110 in February (ARH). This observer and diligent counter also, unusually, reports them from his garden feeder. The only other garden record was a window strike from Conover. Another winter flock of 55 was seen at Prees Heath in January. Many high counts in double-figures were reported from stubble and set-aside in mixed flocks with *Passer* sp.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

A total of 285 records were received with distinct bias from the Severn Valley particularly from Venus Pool, Severn Valley Country Park and Chelmarsh Reservoir. Other breeding season records were widespread, but localised.

To receive only one confirmed breeding record, from Hampton Loade, is not unusual but this is due to severe under reporting as many of the sites frequented by this species are also popular with ringers and surely more records of juveniles are outstanding?

The highest count of 40 was at Venus Pool in December. Other double figure counts came from Wall Farm, Whixall Moss, Allscott Sugar Factory, Aston Locks West Felton, Chelmarsh, Noneley, Dudmaston, and Hampton Loade.

CORN BUNTING *Miliaria calandra*

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

A total of 98 records from 40 sites were received of this large and popular bunting. The vast majority were from the north and west of Telford. Encouragingly most are of males singing from prominent perches in spring and summer with 63% of records being in May, June and July.

Reported locations for singing males were Rodington Heath, Crudginton, Stableford, Tibberton, Hincks, Kingslow and Lilleshall. Listening for the distinctive song or checking roadside wires and tops of trees is the most likely way to spot this otherwise unobtrusive bird.

Maximum counts were 26 at Noneley, 21 at Tibberton, 20 at Childs Ercall, 19 at Allscott Sugar Factory and 17 at Tern Hill. No records were received for September.

ESCAPES AND RELEASES

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

Two birds were at VP on 31 Aug and one at Wall Farm on 7 Dec. No breeding season records following the confirmed breeding at Ollerton in 2001.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons*

A single record of a tame bird at The Mere, Ellesmere on 24 Dec.

SNOW GOOSE *Anser caerulescens*

The only record for the year was of a single bird at Wood Lane on 11 Oct.

RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*

A single bird was at VP on 29 Aug with a hybrid type bird. Two were then at Wood Lane on 30 Aug, 22 & 30 Sep and 7 Nov. Presumably the same then at Woollaston Pond on 20 Nov and Baggy Moor on 28 Dec. The largest count for the year was four at ASF on 13 Dec.

CAPE SHELDUCK *Tadorna cana*

One was at VP on 23 Nov.

MUSCOVY DUCK *Cairina moschata*

One at Sambrook Mill from 6 Apr until 26 May.

WOOD DUCK *Aix sponsa*

A male bird was recorded at Butter Cross on 5 May.

WHITE-CHEEKED PINTAIL *Anus bahamensis*

One was at VP on 22-25 Apr.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK AT COLE MERE ON 4 DEC 2002

On the afternoon of 4 Dec 2002, I visited Cole Mere, near Ellesmere as I regularly do every two weeks or so. I arrived around 14.00hrs and after an initial scan of the open water produced just a few goosander and goldeneye of any note, I walked through the adjacent Yell Wood and Cole Mere marsh, the latter producing an excellent count of 16+ jack snipe. As I started back towards my car at around 15.30 I noticed that a large number of Canada Geese had moved in front of the sailing club and, in doing so, had pushed out a number of ducks from under bank-side birches. I decided to have one last scan and immediately saw a “white backside” which I recognised as belonging to a drake ferruginous duck.

The following description was obtained:

- Noticeably smaller than accompanying pochards.
- Chunky—short and broad bodied.
- Distinctive head shape—bulbous crown peaked behind the eye.
- Bill quite long and broad, pale blue grey with black nail and bill tip and a pale diffuse sub-terminal band.
- White eye.
- Head and neck chestnut with some darker patches.
- Two tone body with mantle, scapulars, back, rump and upper tail a very plain dark chocolate colour.
- Breast and flanks chestnut but paler than the head.
- Short spiky tail.
- Pure white and extensive under-tail coverts, sharply demarcated with dark brown surrounds.
- White belly showed when it briefly roll-preened.
- One leg also seen briefly - it was grey in colour and un-ringed.

The bird spent most of its time asleep, only occasionally raising its head. It did not fly at all, nor did it unfold its wings so, consequently the wing pattern was not seen. Neither did it dive during the period of observation. It loosely associated with about 10 pochard but always remained the most distant of these. When it did drift closer to the shore it tended to swim away with its head still tucked in.

The bird appeared to be a full adult drake ferruginous duck although the darker patches on the head may have suggested that it could have been a first winter drake or a late eclipse bird. It gave no indication of being other than of wild origin although, as stated, only one leg was seen and the bird did not fly.

During a heavy downpour, I retreated to my car and rang Rare Bird Alert to release the news and also contacted several local birders by telephone or text. Due to the late hour and it being a weekday only one, Rob Dowley who happened to be working nearby in Ellesmere managed to get to the site before dark. Rob concurred with the identification.

Despite extensive searching of Cole Mere and other local waters the following day and over the following weekend by several Shropshire birders, it was, unfortunately never relocated.

After returning home an examination of all my fieldguides and other literature confirmed my original identification.

Tony Butter

This species is a national rarity and the record was submitted to the British Birds Rarities Committee and after considerable time in circulation it was eventually accepted in May 2005. Consequently, this account appears in this year's report rather than in that for 2002.

There are two previously published records of this species, at Chelmarsh in 1984 and Priorslee Lake in 1985. At this time, records of this species were adjudicated upon locally, however, neither are well documented and may not survive the current scrutiny of old records which is being undertaken by the Records Committee. It seems likely that, in due course, this will become a County first.

Interestingly, a note in the Logbook at Chelmarsh on 7 Oct 2002 indicated that a ferruginous duck was present but no details were ever received. Also, a report was received of a male ferruginous duck at Churncote Moss, Bicton Heath on 6 Jan 2003 but this was not accepted by BBRC because of a lack of detail. Who knows, however, perhaps the bird did linger in Shropshire, largely unseen, for some time after all! Ed

PURPLE HERON AT VENUS POOL 24 SEPTEMBER 2003

I visited Venus Pool during the afternoon of 24 September 2003 following a telephone call from Howard Prince. Richard Vernon had contacted him to say that a great bittern was being seen but that he questioned the identification.

When I arrived at the site there was a gathering of about ten people including Richard, and Jack Sankey, watching the bird from the footpath between Venus Pool Reserve and Cound Fishery. At that time the bird was feeding at a distance of c100m on the edge of the trout lake and it was clear that those gathered suspected the bird to be a juvenile purple heron but no one then present had a field guide to enable the identification to be confirmed. Although I was certain their suspicions were correct, reference to the Collins Bird Guide removed all doubt.

The generally brownish plumage with a yellow bill and a dark crown made its original identification as a bittern somewhat understandable especially since the bird was often hunched low. However, the obvious "heron" shape when it did stand upright and the strikingly striped face pattern quickly ruled this out. The bird was much the same size as a grey heron which was feeding nearby but appeared longer necked and the bill was much longer and dagger shaped.

Richard Vernon noted:

"Just its stance made me realise this was not a bittern and the general jizz and its bill and head shape led me to believe it was a heron species. The bill was orange/bronze with a white chin leading into a heavily striped throat and neck, the streaks were black and the feathers went from white to bronze/gold as they went down the neck. The head markings were distinct with a black stripe coming under the eye almost reaching the ear coverts. The forehead and crown were black leading into a rusty coloured nape. The eye colour was golden. Feathers on its back were a deep bronze with slight dark grey purple tinge to some of them. The bird had a tall stance, long neck and walked in a stalking manner often standing still and moving its neck slowly downward to look for food. The bird's legs were of a golden colouration. It did not fly at all during the viewing."

When the identification had been confirmed news of the birds presence was quickly released to the bird information services and many locals together with a few from adjoining areas of the West Midlands managed to see it before dusk. It was photographed by Alan Heath and video footage was obtained by Steve Nuttal.

During the afternoon, it continued to feed on the edge of the fishing lake but later moved closer to the Reserve boundary before clambering, in rather ungainly fashion, through two fences before continuing to feed in the meadow on the eastern side of Venus Pool. At dusk it was seen to disappear into a small patch of bulrushes in front of the fen hide. Much to the dismay of those gathered next morning it was not seen again. Some observers questioned the health of the bird particularly with reference to the bizarre way it crossed the fences and once it was clear that the bird was not present a search was made of the bulrushes to see if it had perished. Happily, however, nothing was found so it was assumed to have departed overnight.

This is just the second County record of this species. The first which was also a juvenile was seen in the Prees and Lower Heath area from 2-12 November 1995.

Geoff Holmes



Juvenile Purple Heron at Venus Pool
(*J Sankey*)

GULL-BILLED TERN AT CRANMERE BOG

11 JUNE 2003

On the morning of 11 June 2003 I had been carrying out a yellow wagtail survey for the SOS, checking various sites in the vicinity of Worfield near Bridgnorth. Before returning home during the afternoon I decided to check out Cranmere Bog, mainly to see how the small black headed gull colony there was faring. This is a site which I have visited casually many times before, but had never seen anything very unusual there. On my arrival at the east side of the pool I scanned around quickly with my binoculars and was very surprised to see a tern standing on the southern edge of the pool, as I had not seen one here before – “probably a common” I thought, as this was the only tern species which I had previously seen in this part of Shropshire. However, on closer inspection, I was even more surprised to find that it had a shortish black bill, black legs and a smart black cap without a crest. At this point I knew that it must be a gull-billed tern, having had extensive experience of the species in Spain (including a visit only a month earlier) and also having seen two previously in the U.K.

In view of the rarity of the bird, I wanted to make absolutely certain of its identity so, after cursing myself for not having brought either my telescope or a field guide (neither of which I thought I would need for a yellow wagtail survey!), I quickly drove round to the west side of the pool to see if I could get an improved view. Although the bird was no closer, the light was better so I was able to confirm all the main features. Also, I noted additional points which included relatively long legs for a tern, stout bill and dark grey primaries contrasting with the otherwise pale grey wings and mantle. Shortly afterwards the bird flew around the pool for 2-3 minutes and I was able to see the relatively short tail with a shallow fork, broadish wings (for a tern) and dark grey outer edge to the primaries. In flight, it fed by dipping down to the surface of the water to take prey items, and whilst on the shore it picked food (presumably insects) from the ground occasionally.

After observing the bird for only about 10 minutes altogether, during which time I also scribbled some field notes, it flew off west, gradually gaining height until it was lost to view heading into the sun. I checked a local pig farm in that direction just in case the bird was feeding there, but there was no sign of it.

I telephoned the Rare Bird Alert pager service with news of the bird, noting that it had flown off, and then hung around for a further two hours hoping that it might

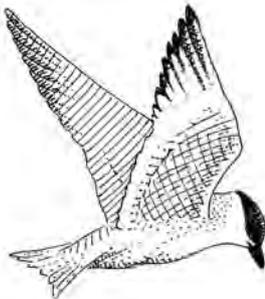
return, which unfortunately it didn't. Neither did any birders appear, from Shropshire or anywhere else, so I guess there must have been some sceptics out there, as well as those who understandably would not want to waste time on a bird which had flown – although I do know of at least one person who hadn't been looking at his pager!

The record was eventually accepted by BBRC, thus demonstrating that single observer records can sometimes get through – they are not all rejected, as some birders believe. No doubt it all depends on the circumstances and the bird in question. This bird was an adult in summer plumage occurring on a typical date for the U.K. – the most unusual aspect of the sighting was its inland location as the great majority of previous records have been coastal, although of course the species has occurred in Shropshire once before, at Venus Pool on 19 May 1997.

Allan Gaunt

Just two other gull-billed terns were seen in Britain in 2003; one in Hampshire and West Sussex on 26-28 May and another in Essex on 5 Jul. Accepted on the first circulation by the British Birds Rarities Committee, this was the 300th to be seen in Britain, (this total includes those seen in Britain and Ireland until the end of 1957 and Britain only since the formation of the records committee in 1958).

Gull-billed tern has a widespread though discontinuous distribution in mainland Europe and is declining in most parts of its range. The nearest (small) colonies are in Germany and Denmark but larger numbers breed in Spain although, even there, colony sites are erratic and prone to sudden abandonment. Most colonies are well inland, and birds tend to feed as much over land as over water, even following the plough. The European population winters in coastal West Africa. The Asian breeding range extends eastwards to Mongolia and NW China. Other races of the species are found in the Americas and Australasia.



Gull-billed Tern (John Martin)

Records such as this just go to show that you never know what may turn up next, even in inland counties such as ours in the middle of June, and gives all the more incentive to get out there and find that next good bird!

Ed

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW AT PRIORSLEE LAKE ON 27-28 APRIL 2003

Hearing that there was an influx of red-rumped swallows in the Country, I spent the weekend checking water bodies for large groups of hirundines and hoping to find one in Shropshire. The task started at the North Shropshire Meres on Friday evening when lots of hirundines were present, but not the hoped for red-rumped swallow. Saturday was spent in much the same way checking large flocks of hirundines, but still no reward.

On Sunday morning there was a strong south westerly wind bringing heavy showers and I arrived at Venus Pool very early expecting to encounter some passage migrants. A whimbrel and a kittiwake were at this site but, having satisfied myself that nothing else out of the ordinary was present, I moved on to Priorslee Lake at about 10.00 hrs.

Priorslee Lake is one of the best sites in Shropshire for passage terns and I was hoping one might be present. On arriving, however, I could see lots of boats and tall sails and my heart sank since I reasoned that this amount of disturbance would be bound to have a detrimental effect on any self-respecting tern! However, having made the effort I thought I had better have a quick look from the comfort of the car. There were no obvious signs of a tern, but plenty of hirundines were present and, remembering my efforts of the previous two days, I muttered that I might as well check whilst I'm here.

Amazingly, the second bird I looked at though my binoculars looked different. Although the visibility was poor due to the heavy rain, I was sure it had a pale rump, not white, but a sort of dirty orangey white! I was sure of what I'd seen but, given the fact I'd spent all weekend looking for a red-rumped swallow, was I letting my imagination run wild? After searching for several minutes I picked up the bird again and this time I concentrated on all the salient features.

Happy with my snap decision I contacted Alan Heath and other local birders and the news was released to the bird information services. The bird spent all Sunday and the next day in the area allowing everyone who was interested to see it. Although it often fed high up, sometimes over the adjoining factories, occasionally it came down low over the lake to give excellent views.

The following description was obtained.

Structure:

The general shape was a typical hirudine with swept back, pointed wings, sleek streamlined body, long tail and short head with “no neck.” Although barn swallows were present in the hirudine flock, the red-rumped swallow seemed to associate more with the house martins, quite often feeding high above the surrounding vegetation not low over the water with the barn swallows. The profile of the bird made it relatively easy to pick out in silhouette, the wing tips looked blunt like house martin but the tail streamers were long like a barn swallow although broader not fine. Also the fork in the tail was shallow compared to barn swallow, not sharp. The flight looked martin-like with slow glides between short wing beats.

Upper-parts:

Not so iridescent as barn swallow and the peach/buff rump was very apparent even at a distance. The rump seemed slightly paler towards the tail—almost off white. The tail was dark royal blue. The mantle and coverts were also dark royal blue contrasting slightly with the flight feathers which looked very dark brown in certain lights. The crown was dark royal blue as the rest of the upperparts contrasting with the pale collar on the nape which continued onto the side of the head. The collar looked darker buff, almost chestnut in sunlight but did not contrast so strongly with the rest of the upperparts as the rump.

Under-parts:

Throat, breast and belly were a soft cream colour with extremely fine dark streaks, which were only visible though a telescope. The under-wing coverts were slightly darker than the breast and belly with contrasting dark flight feathers. The vent and tail looked black against the lower belly when seen from below and the tail lacked any white spots.

Andy Latham.

Red-rumped swallow is a national rarity and the record was accepted by The British Birds Rarities Committee. This bird was part of an influx into the United Kingdom in 2003 when about 40 were seen, mainly between the middle of April and the end of the first week in May and included birds seen in our adjoining counties of Cheshire and Herefordshire.

This comprises the second record of red-rumped swallow in Shropshire. The first was at Shrewsbury Sewage Works from 30 Apr until 5 May 1978. Ed

LIST OF OBSERVERS

Mr MR Adlam	Mr N Eden	Mrs J Jennings	Mr G Richardson
Mrs A Andrews	Mr TW Edwards	Mrs JI Jones	Mr MD Richardson
Mr A Arrowsmith	Mr G Egarr	Mrs M Jones	Mr C Roberts
Mr P Arrowsmith	Mr P Ellicott	Mr P Jordan	Mr R Savage
Mr T Ashley	Mr N Ellis	Mr PA King	Mr AR Seagrave
Mr I Baggley	Mrs B Falconbridge	Ms C Landles	Mr J Searle
Mr J Baker	Mr M Fallon	Mr D Larkin	Mr J Shearman
Miss DE Balmer	Mr DP Farncombe	Mr A Latham	Mr DN Shirra
Mr JT Balmer	Mr D Fildes	Mr S Lewis	Mr AW Smith
Mr DA Barnes	Mrs J Finney	Mr J Lloyd	Mrs FM Smith
Mr RN Barratt	Mr B Ford	Mr J Longstaff	Mr GR Smith
Mrs C Bateman	Mrs M Frater	Mr J Mackintosh	Mr L Smith
Mr K Bates	Mr D Freeth	Mr W Marler	Mrs M Smith
Mr IA Beddows	Mr D Fulton	Mr BG Martin	Mr P Souster
Mrs M Bell	Mr RP Fussell	Mr J Martin	Mr M Stewart
Mr P Bell	Mrs A Garton-Jones	Dr JL Mason	Mr RM Stokes
Dr J Bent	Mr AW Gaunt	Mr DG May	Mr R Swindells
Mr GC Bird	Miss V Geen	Ms A McCann	Mrs S Swindells
Mr G Bishton	Mr M George	Mr R McGinness	Mr D Talbot
Rev T Blackshaw	Mr LG Gibbons	Mr C Milner	Mr D Tarry
Mr HJ Blofield	Mrs G Glover	Mr D Moore	Mr G Thomas
Mr DL Boniface	Mr A Gouldstone	Mr R Moores	Mrs C Travis
Mrs C Boyes	Mr MG Grant	Mr J Morris	Mr JJ Tucker
Mr IAR Brown	Mrs L Greenall	Mr A Morton	Mrs L Tucker
Mr P Brown	Mr FC Gribble	Mr D Nicholls	Mr J Turner
Mr J Buckley	Mr C Griffin	Mr P Nickless	Mrs V Turrells
Mrs BE Burns	Miss HJ Griffiths	Mr A Owen	Dr SN Twigger
Mr A Butter	Mr G Hall	Mr M Owen	Mr R Vernon
Mr C Butterworth	Mr P Hammersley	Mrs N Pacult	Mr A Walker
Mr R Camp	Mr H Hannaford	Mrs P Parker	Mr GJ Walker
Mr D Canvian	Mr J Harding	Mr R Parker	Mr T Wall
Mr J Clarke	Mr R Harris	Mr PE Parton	Mr M Wallace
Mr RA Corfield	Mr J Hawkins	Mr D Pearce	Mr WR Watkins
Ms M Cousins	Mr SL Haycox	Mr WF Peplow	Mr TC Weale
Mr D Cox	Mr A Heath	Mr WRH Peplow	Mr K Webb
Mr N Craze	Mr FJ Hinde	Mr A Phillips	Mr R Webb
Mr A Cross	Mrs P Holburn	Mr EG Phillips	Rev WJ Webb
Mr WA Davidson	Mr AR Holder	Mr CR Poole	Mr EJ Wilson
Mr AP Dawes	Mr BW Holford	Mr J Porter	Mr J Wingfield
Mr A Dawson	Mr GE Holmes	Mr S Poulton	Mr GT Woodvine
Mr PG Deans	Ms G Holyoake	Mr B Powis	Mr CE Wright
Mr A Dickie	Mr H Hughes	Mr HM Prince	Mrs R Wright
Mrs S Dodwell	Mr J Isherwood	Mr KT Pryce	Mr GE Young
Mr WRB Dodwell	Mr S Jagdev	Ms R Rees	
Mrs J Duffy	Mr S Jaggs	Mrs A Remfrey	

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

FIELD TRIPS AND MEETINGS 2003

Main Society Indoor Meetings:

8 Jan	“Wildlife of the Dee Estuary”	Terry Pickford
6 Feb	“Birds of Northern India”	Robin Jukes-Hughes
6 Mar	“From the Islands to the Highlands”	Rosemary Morris
3 Apr	AGM & “A Year in the Life of a Birdnut”	Alan Heath
2 Oct	Presentation by The Shropshire Hawking Group	
6 Nov	“Harriers and Farmland Bird Feeding Ecology”	Roger Clarke
4 Dec	“Lundy—Its Birds and Flora”	Colin Wright

Main Society Field Trips

		21 Jun	Cannock Chase
19 Jan	Rutland Water	26 Jul	Allscott Sugar Factory
21-23 Feb	Norfolk	31 Aug	Belvide Reservoir
22 Mar	Llanfairfechan	20 Sept	Chelmarsh Reservoir
13 Apr	The Stiperstones	12 Oct	Hilbre Island
18 May	Elan Valley	22 Nov	Martin Mere

Ludlow Branch Field Trips:

08 Jan	Wellington Gravel Pit	14 May	Langdale Wood, Malvern
25 Jan	Cole Mere and Wood Lane	17 May	Whitcliffe Common
12 Feb	Wigmore Rolls and Wapley Hill	08 Jun	Ynys Hir
12 Mar	Upton Warren	11 Jun	Bodenham Lakes
23 Mar	Marsh Lane Reserve	09 Jul	Venus Pool
16 Apr	Clee Hill	13 Aug	Upton Warren
26 Apr	Dinas and Llynbrienne	10 Sep	Chelmarsh Reservoir
03 May	Whitcliffe Common	14 Sep	Blithfield Reservoir
10 May	Haughmond Hill	08 Oct	Criftin Ford Bridge
		12 Nov	Dolydd Hafren and Coed-y-Dinas

Ludlow and Stretton Branch Meetings:

January	“Ethiopia, the roof of Africa”	Brayton Holt	Stretton
27 Feb	AGM and video show		Ludlow
February	“Birds of the Welsh Mountains”	J. Lawton Roberts	Stretton
March	“The Estuaries of Britain”	John Wyatt	Stretton
October	“Honey Buzzards in Britain”	Steve Roberts	Stretton
16 Oct	“Birds & Mammals of Scotland”	Keith Mason	Ludlow
November	“The Dee Estuary”	Dr. John Raines	Stretton

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@tiscali.co.uk

- 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	Hen Harrier	European Nightjar
Black-throated Diver	Spotted Crake	Hoopoe
Great Northern Diver	Corncrake	Wryneck
Red-necked Grebe	Grey Plover	Wood Lark
Slavonian Grebe	Red Knot	Rock Pipit
Black-necked Grebe	Temminck's Stint	Water Pipit
Shag	Pectoral Sandpiper	Nightingale
Great Bittern	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	
Marsh Harrier	Short-eared Owl	

* a description is not required of summer plumage drakes.

OFFICERS & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

For the period April 2003 - March 2004

- 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
- Other Elected Members: Mr N J Eden, Mr A W Smith,
Mr H M Prince, Miss H J Griffiths
- Non elected member: Mrs A Andrews (Membership Secretary)

Other Representatives:

- County Bird Recorder and Bird Report Editor: Mr G E Holmes
- Excursion Co-ordinator: Mr A Latham
- Bulletin Editor: Mr R Camp
- Branch Reps: Mr C Bell (Ludlow), Miss M A B McVey (Church Stretton)