

# THE 2004 SHROPSHIRE BIRD REPORT

**The 44th Annual Report of the  
Shropshire Ornithological Society**

**ISSN 0962-547X**

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**County Recorder and Bird Report Editor:**

**Geoff Holmes**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Editorial help:** Graham Walker and Helen Griffiths

**Records data input:** Joyce Jones

## **Compilers of the Systematic List:**

Martin Grant	Mute Swan
Howard Prince	Tundra Swan to Grey Heron (except Red Grouse and Grey Partridge)
Tony Butter	Honey Buzzard to Black Tern (except Red Kite, Merlin, Common Snipe and Eurasian Curlew)
Pete Jordan	Feral Pigeon to Common Cuckoo and Great Grey Shrike to Carrion Crow
Glenn Bishton	Barn Owl to Short-eared Owl
Alan Gaunt	Common Swift to Water Pipit (except Sky Lark and Tree Pipit)
Colin Wright	Waxwing to Black Redstart (except Dipper) and Blackbird to Mistle Thrush
Dave Barnes	Grasshopper Warbler to Firecrest
Helen Griffiths	Spotted Flycatcher to Eurasian Treecreeper
Graham Walker	Common Starling to Snow Bunting
Leo Smith	Red Grouse, Grey Partridge, Red Kite, Merlin, Common Snipe, Eurasian Curlew, European Nightjar, Sky Lark, Tree Pipit, Yellow Wagtail to Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Common Redstart to Ring Ouzel, Common Raven and Yellowhammer to Corn Bunting

**Photographs:** Jim Almond ([almond.jim@virgin.net](mailto:almond.jim@virgin.net))  
Ian Butler ([www.ianbutlerphotography.com](http://www.ianbutlerphotography.com))  
John Harding  
John Hawkins (01691 690264)  
Alan Heath  
Paul King ([paclett@instantemail.t-mobile.co.uk](mailto:paclett@instantemail.t-mobile.co.uk))  
Martyn Owen  
John Robinson

**Drawings:** Glenn Bishton and Rory McCann

## EDITORIAL

All but newer members will recall that I tried to hand over the editorial reins after publication of the 2002 Annual Report. Nevertheless I, rather reluctantly, became involved again in 2003 and now find myself writing my eighth editorial! However, Fiona Smith who, with husband Geoff, produced the report prior to my involvement has agreed to serve a second term as editor and my best wishes go to her. As County Recorder, it will still be my responsibility, with the help of compilers, and the Records Committee, to prepare and vet the Systematic List.

This report includes papers on surveys undertaken by the Society into the status of two farmland species, yellow wagtail (page 15) and corn bunting (page 18), which are declining nationally. The aim was to try and establish if the national picture was mirrored in Shropshire. I think readers will find the results interesting and I would urge more observers to become involved in such surveys since the information gained has a scientific foundation lacking with casual observations.

The same goes for the Breeding Bird Survey or other surveys organised by the BTO—please get involved. The better the coverage, the more we can learn about the status of our breeding birds. In coming years, the Society is proposing to undertake a county-wide breeding bird survey and atlas to tie in with similar BTO national surveys. This will provide the opportunity for many to take part and its success will depend upon new observers volunteering. Training on survey methods will be provided and support given to less confident observers.

I would also like to pay tribute to single species groups such as The Shropshire Peregrine Group, Shropshire Barn Owl Group and The Raven Study Group whose enthusiasm and commitment to their favoured species has led to such an improvement in our knowledge of these species and their conservation. Surely there is room for other species to receive similar treatment. For instance, referring back to the previous paragraph, why not become the county expert on corn bunting or yellow wagtail? Other interesting candidates might include kingfisher and dipper although, I guess the list is endless.

**Geoff Holmes**  
**County Recorder and Bird Report Editor**

# THE SHROPSHIRE PEREGRINE GROUP

## 1997-2004

### The Peregrine Falcon in Shropshire



Peregrine Falcon at its nest in Shropshire  
(Jim Almond)

In Britain, the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), is found mainly as a breeding bird on the more precipitous sections of coastline, or on the rockier mountains inland. Most inland peregrines belong largely to the northern and western hills and moorlands. This followed the dramatic decline in this species as a result of the use of organo-chlorine pesticides in the 1950s/early 1960s, with successful breeding largely confined to the

remote parts of Britain. First reports of peregrines returning to Shropshire to breed were received in the late 1980s, although earlier records of single non-breeding birds featured regularly in the annual reports of Shropshire Ornithological Society. Initially, nest sites seemed confined to quarries, both working and disused, mainly in the south and west of the county. In view of the shortage of suitable natural cliffs and rock faces in the area, it was natural for the peregrines to select the numerous artificial rock faces which existed at quarry sites. In 2002 it was reported by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) that 171 new quarry territories had been recorded nationally and that “the spread of nesting into inland Central England highlights both the recent success and flexibility of peregrines” (*BTO Nest Record News*).

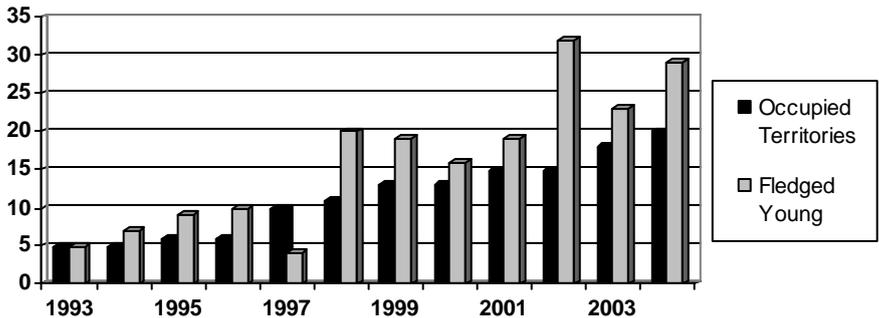
In 1987, the first confirmed pair of peregrines nested at a disused quarry in the south of the county and successfully fledged one chick. The following year a second nest site was reported, and by 1993 a total of five sites were recorded producing five young. Thereafter, the steady increase in reported sites continued, and by 1997, the year the Shropshire Peregrine Group was formed, no less than 11 pairs were occupying territories in the county and attempting to

breed. With one exception, these nest sites were located in either working or disused quarries. The exception being an eyrie situated on rocky outcrop in moorland which, according to anecdotal evidence, had been used for a number of years.

The following year, 1998, the number of nest sites had risen to 13 from which 20 young were fledged, representing a threefold increase in the space of five years. Over the course of the next five years, this steady but significant increase in breeding pairs continued, and by 2002, the year of the National, 10 year Peregrine Survey organised by the BTO, a total of 17 sites were recorded of which 15 were occupied and a record number of 32 young fledged. Similar, though not quite so dramatic, increases were recorded throughout the West Midlands and the Lancashire Lowlands by the 2002 BTO National Survey. This survey also reported a 240% increase in known territories between 1991 and 2002 (*BTO Research Report No. 330*). In 2003 a further three territories were reported, bringing the total number in the county to 20. No additional reports were received in 2004.

By the mid-nineties, available quarry sites most favoured by nesting peregrines had virtually been exhausted, and alternative locations included four natural rock faces and, in 2002, the first tree-nesting pair. To date, there have been no known attempts by peregrines in Shropshire to nest on buildings or other man-made structures as has occurred in some parts of the country.

The following chart shows the steady increase in the number of occupied territories and the number of young fledged. Monitoring in 2001 was affected by foot and mouth restrictions:



## **The Peregrine Group - Aims and Objectives**

The Group was formally established in September 1997 with the first meeting of volunteer site wardens. Prior to that, groups of volunteers had worked with local village communities to provide round the clock protection at two of the most vulnerable nest sites in the county.

The aims of the Group are to:

- Monitor the breeding activities of Peregrine Falcons in Shropshire.
- Submit records to the BTO and the County Bird Recorder and participate in national and local surveys.
- Provide protection, where possible with other agencies, at vulnerable nest sites.
- Liaise with other wildlife groups and agencies with similar aims.

The Group is licensed by English Nature, the statutory agency with this remit under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to "observe and examine nests for the purpose of science and education" and to "take and possess addled/deserted eggs". In practice, the licence is granted annually to the Group co-ordinator, who then appoints accredited agents (wardens) in respect of each nest site. The latter in turn may also employ assistants provided they work under the personal supervision of the agent. This has been found necessary at two of the most vulnerable nest sites where up to six additional assistants have been employed on surveillance work. A report on the work carried out under the licence is sent to English Nature each year at the end of the breeding season.

Members of the Group meet twice a year, usually prior to and after the breeding season. Field trips and excursions are also planned during the year. The Group includes an accomplished rock climber - essential for carrying out physical checks of nest scrapes, a Police Wildlife Liaison Officer (WLO), and a licensed BTO ringer. Total membership is currently 26.

## **Nest Records and Breeding Data**

In addition to the licence report submitted annually to English Nature, a nest record card is completed in respect of each nest site where breeding is attempted and sent to the BTO at the close of the breeding season. The card provides detailed coded information in respect of the nest site location and habitat together with the breeding results. A minimum of three visits to each

site during the breeding period is required in order to obtain sufficient data to complete the card. In recent years the cards submitted by the Group have comprised almost 15% of the total number of cards (129) submitted to the BTO, a significant proportion of the data collected on this rare breeding falcon. In 2002, along with other national raptor groups and individual peregrine watchers the Shropshire Peregrine Group participated in the BTO's National 10 year Peregrine Survey. The survey had been postponed in 2001 due to the Foot and Mouth epidemic that year resulting in restrictions on access to the



Gerry Thomas and Alan Heath ring a young Peregrine (Photo-John Edwards 1999)

countryside. The United Kingdom's peregrine population is very important internationally because it represents 20% of the European population.

Data from ringing young Peregrine chicks is also obtained by licensed members of the Group and submitted to the BTO. The Group also plan to colour ring some chicks in an attempt to trace the movement of the Shropshire peregrines outside the breeding season.

## Species Protection

Nationally, in common with most birds of prey, peregrines remain under threat from individuals associated with shooting estates, pigeon racing, falconry and egg collecting, although the national bodies associated with the first three of these activities certainly do not condone this or any other illegal activity. This is in spite of the introduction of increased penalties for wildlife crime under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. In 2002, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Investigations Unit reported that, whilst the threat from egg collectors was declining, the shooting, poisoning and destruction of peregrine nests was actually increasing. The same year reports were received of six birds being shot and a similar number poisoned.

In Shropshire, the comparatively small peregrine breeding population remains under pressure and a great deal of time and effort is spent each year by members of the Group to combat the threat from egg collectors and other illegal activities. There is also an ever present risk of nest disturbance at some nest sites from members of the public. The Group have used various methods to combat this threat,

frequently working with other wildlife agencies, the RSPB Investigations Unit and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) Special Operations Team. Protective measures have included:

- Deployment of volunteer wardens at vulnerable nest sites.
- Camera surveillance.
- DNA sampling.
- Use of "Smartwater" - an indelible forensic dye.
- Improved site security.
- Use of wildlife crime intelligence (Police & RSPB investigations).
- Installation of "Foxwatch" - an ultra-sonic fox repellent.
- 

At one site where the nest had been robbed repeatedly despite increased surveillance, an attempt was made to attract the birds to a less accessible location by installing a nest box on a virtually inaccessible rock face. Unfortunately, the birds decided to nest on the original nest ledge which was again predated.

In spite of the above measures, since 1997 a total of 10 nests have been robbed of either chicks or eggs, one female and one juvenile peregrine have been shot (in the former incident, three very young chicks also died), two attempts were made to destroy nests and at one site a report was received of pigeons laced with poison being flown in proximity to nesting peregrines. At another quarry site, the observation hide used by members of the Group was deliberately wrecked. These incidents have all been reported to the local Police through the Group's Wildlife Liaison Officer and the RSPB Investigations Unit who maintain a data base in respect of wildlife crime. To date, despite some individuals being warned by the Police, no prosecutions for offences associated with peregrines in the County have been undertaken, mainly through lack of evidence.

In recent years, increasing evidence has come to light that natural predators, i.e. foxes, polecats, and, in one case, a stoat, are targeting nesting peregrines and robbing the nest, usually of young chicks, during the temporary absence of the parent birds. Such incidents occur more frequently at the most accessible nest sites and are difficult to prevent, although the arrival on the market of an ultra-sonic fox repellent may assist in this respect. At some quarry sites where large numbers of jackdaws nest in close proximity to the peregrine eyrie the possibility of the former predated young falcon chicks or eggs cannot be excluded. The threat posed by nesting jackdaws was vividly demonstrated during the filming of the BBC TV series "Britain Goes Wild" (see below).

## **“Britain Goes Wild” in Shropshire**

During the first two weeks of June 2004, the BBC Natural History Unit at Bristol produced a series of programmes featuring Britain’s wildlife recorded at various locations in England, Wales and Scotland. These included one of 20 peregrine eyries monitored by members of the Shropshire Peregrine Group who were closely involved with the BBC film crew on site both before and during the filming.

The eyrie, located in a working limestone quarry in the south of the county, had been used for several years but, unfortunately, the three young chicks had been predated the previous year. In 2004, only one egg from a clutch of three hatched and filming commenced when the chick was approximately two weeks old. The adults proved to be excellent parents, seldom leaving the chick alone for more than a few minutes. Feeding time invariably coincided with live filming when the falcon was observed regularly collecting prey from a nearby “larder.”



John Turner with Simon King during the filming of “Britain Goes Wild”

The most amazing scenes during filming involved large numbers of nesting jackdaws in the vicinity of the peregrines’ eyrie. They not only harassed the brooding falcon by pecking her protruding tail feathers on the nest, but also mobbed her when she stooped to take a young jackdaw which was immediately below the eyrie, forcing the falcon to release the young bird.

The programmes were watched by an average of three and a half million viewers each night and, according to the producer, the Shropshire peregrines were a “real highlight for many viewers.”

### **The Future**

The peregrine is one of the most positive UK conservation stories of the last fifty years and this is reflected in Shropshire. Who would have thought, 40 years ago, that there would have been record numbers of peregrine breeding in the county. However, we cannot afford to be complacent.

Future plans for the Shropshire Peregrine Group include:

- "Aren't Birds Brilliant" - a joint project with RSPB.
- Colour Ringing - a BTO licensed scheme.
- Improved contact with other Raptor Study Groups.
- A Group website.

In conclusion, to quote Derek Ratcliffe who died in 2005 but was widely regarded as the UK's foremost authority on the peregrine falcon, "the peregrine is a key species that acts as a barometer of ecosystem health and its fortunes should be a matter of widespread concern. Those to whom the peregrine is a source of inspiration and wonder have a special duty of vigilance. It will be their responsibility to ensure that it survives in its own right as one of the most spectacular inhabitants of our planet".

The Shropshire Peregrine Group will continue to work to achieve this aim.

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**John Turner**  
**Coordinator Shropshire Peregrine Group**

# **BREEDING SNIPE IN THE SOUTH-WEST SHROPSHIRE HILLS 2004**

## **Introduction**

This paper provides a summary of the full report of the survey that was carried out between April and June 2004 to establish the population, distribution and breeding requirements of snipe in the south-west Shropshire Hills. This summary reports the results of the survey and suggests the size of the county's breeding snipe population, briefly considers some issues arising from the survey such as survey methods, predation and habitat requirements and suggests a programme of action. The full report of the survey is available from the author.

## **The survey**

Three sites where snipe are known to have bred previously were surveyed – The Long Mynd, The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve and Rhos Fiddle Nature Reserve.

In addition, a large number of other apparently suitable sites throughout the south-west Shropshire Hills (total area approximately 580 square kilometres) were also assessed. The 24 sites judged to have the greatest potential to hold breeding snipe were then surveyed along with an additional site adjacent to The Stiperstones making a total of 25.

## **Results**

On The Long Mynd, an estimated 7 – 8 pairs were found. This is only around one-third of the population found in 1994-98. The range has also contracted considerably – snipe were only found on and around Wild Moor.

On The Stiperstones NNR, none were found, although snipe are known to have bred there in 1995-96, when the population was estimated at six pairs.

On Rhos Fiddle, an estimated 3 - 4 pairs were found (including a possible pair at an adjacent site on Bicton Hill).

Of the other 25 sites, only three were found to hold breeding snipe:

- Black Mountain, near Anchor
- Black Marsh / Stapeley Common, near Stapeley Hill and Shelve
- The Hollies Farm, east of The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve.

Each of these three sites apparently only held one pair, so the total estimated population of all 25 sites is only three breeding pairs.

The total population of the survey area is, therefore, estimated at 13 – 15 breeding pairs.

### **County population**

The population and distribution of snipe in the county, and recent trends, are summarised in the full report, but the Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas is now believed to have significantly overestimated the population and distribution because passage birds in April were counted as possibly or probably breeding in the county. Recommendations are made in the full report to avoid this problem if and when the Atlas is repeated.

Unless there are substantial populations in areas currently not known to conservation bodies and birdwatchers, the county population is now estimated at only 20-25 pairs.

### **Evaluation of various survey methods**

The vast majority of snipe found during the survey were either drumming or chipping in deep twilight, at dusk, well after sunset. If only the standard survey method had been used, far fewer snipe would have been recorded than the number actually found. Extending survey visits until dark is required.

Some birds were seen when they were flushed, but they only moved when approached within five metres. Use of a tape recording of drumming and chipping snipe changed the behaviour of drumming birds. However, it was unhelpful as a means of censusing the population, and may be counterproductive at dusk, but it may be helpful at any sites visited prior to dusk.

## **Habitat management and new breeding sites**

The breeding requirements of snipe are summarised in the full report. Recommendations are also made to safeguard and improve the few current breeding sites and improve the potential of other sites.

In general, the recommendations aim to:

1. Ensure that substantial areas of wet (not damp) ground, with very short vegetation or mud, remain right through until the end of July;
2. Minimise nest loss as a result of predation and trampling, through the control of predators and the removal of livestock from nesting areas during the breeding season.

Implementing these recommendations will contribute to achieving the Shropshire *BAP* target to “provide suitable breeding conditions on an additional 10 sites by 2010”.

A total of 18 potential Additional Sites have been identified:

- three that apparently require little work to raise the water level and create extensive habitat
- five near existing breeding sites that probably require extensive work
- ten other sites that probably also require extensive work

## **Predation**

The populations of snipe and other ground-nesting birds have declined considerably in the last ten years. Evidence is presented in the full report to suggest that, as well as other factors such as changes in agricultural practices and habitat loss, an increase in the number of predators is probably a major contributory factor. The likely causes of such increases – the indirect results of intensive sheep farming and pheasant rearing – are discussed. Recommendations are made to Defra to undertake further research to assess the full impact of these practices and, based on the results, develop policies, programmes and regulations to minimise their impact on ground-nesting birds.

## Programme of action

Recommendations are made to a variety of statutory and voluntary organisations, and the Shropshire *BAP* partnership, to participate in a co-ordinated multi-agency programme of action to prevent the extinction of this species in the south-west Shropshire Hills.

This includes encouraging the various landowners to make improvements to the sites which currently hold breeding Snipe, and the 18 potential Additional Sites identified in the Report, utilising resources and advice available from Defra and the other *BAP* Partners.

## Support

The Survey was supported and funded by: Defra, The National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, English Nature and Shropshire County Council (on behalf of the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan (*BAP*) Steering Group)

Leo Smith



Common Snipe (*copyright Rory McCann*).

This is one of 20 drawings produced to illustrate a forthcoming book:

**Wild Mynd** – A Visitors Guide to the Birds and Wildlife Of the Long Mynd, written by Leo Smith , Peter Carty and Caroline Uff and to due be published by the National Trust before the end of 2006

## **SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY YELLOW WAGTAIL SURVEY 2003 & 2004**

In 2002, concern over the national decline and range reduction reported for yellow wagtail prompted the Society's Conservation Sub-committee to investigate the current situation in Shropshire. The yellow wagtail is only found in a small number of BTO BBS plots within the county, typically 1-4, and this is far too small to provide an accurate assessment of trends. It was decided, therefore, to organise a local survey using the Shropshire Atlas as a base line from which any changes could be measured.

Breeding was confirmed in 146 tetrads during the atlas fieldwork. To obtain a random sample every 5th tetrad was chosen and observers were asked to search for evidence of breeding using the same criteria as that used in the Atlas. An 'optional box' also asked for an estimate of the number of breeding pairs in the tetrad. In the first year breeding was only proved in four of the sample tetrads, it was therefore decided to extend the survey for another year. Additional tetrads were added in the second year to replace those where breeding had already been proven.

The following table shows the results from 28 tetrads which were surveyed in either one or both years.

Confirmed Breeding	Probable Breeding	No birds Recorded	Total Tetrads	Estimated No. of pairs
7	5	16	28	29 - 34

Although the Atlas was used as a base line, the results obtained above are not directly comparable because the amount of time spent in the field was not quantified in either survey. Nevertheless, there appears to have been a massive change in Shropshire. This sample shows a 57% reduction of breeding tetrads. In addition, the estimated number of pairs per tetrad varied from one to six, with a mean of three, compared with the Atlas estimate of five to ten.

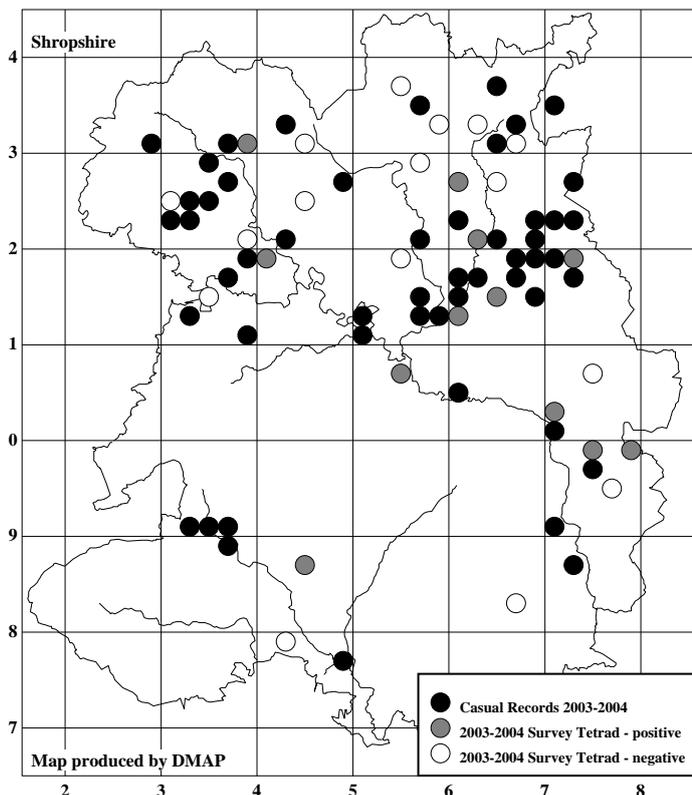
As well as the organised survey, members were encouraged to report all yellow wagtails seen during the breeding season in both years. Some reports gave details of sexes, breeding activity and habitat, others just a total number, one bird, pair etc. These records were interpreted quite generously; a single bird was logged as

one pair, two males as two pairs, three birds as two pairs etc. and records from mid-May to the 1st week of July were treated as being local breeding birds. Records were received from an additional 53 tetrads as shown in the following table; this includes a detailed survey carried out by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group in 2004.

Confirmed Breeding	Probable Breeding	Possible Breeding	Total Tetrads	Estimated No. of pairs
14	17	20	53	80 - 93

The distribution of these records closely matches that shown in the Atlas, the vast majority being north and east of the River Sever. There is no sign of a range reduction, although fewer records came from south of the river, there is a paucity of observers in this region.

#### Yellow Wagtail Survey 2003/2004



Habitat details were not requested in the survey, but several observers did include habitat information, as did some of the casual recorders. Wet meadows used to be cited as good yellow wagtail habitat, these areas are now extremely limited within the county and fewer than 10% of the pairs were found in this habitat. The remainder were in the arable landscape, with cereal (where given spring and winter roughly equal) and potatoes accounting for nearly 70%. This may reflect the availability of these crops rather than a clear preference.

Habitat	Number of pairs	Percentage
Cereal Spring/Winter	18	40
Potato	13	29
Beet	5	11
Pasture	4	9
Set aside/Fallow	3	7
Pea/Bean	2	4

Yellow wagtails can be conspicuous when feeding young making it easy to confirm breeding, but with large arable fields and a small population, some pairs may have been missed during the SOS survey. Arable rotation may also have removed suitable crops from some tetrads but, in view of the wide range of crops utilized, this seems unlikely. These habitats are not popular with birders so casual records will almost certainly under-represent the situation. However, it would appear that the Shropshire population is now much smaller than that given in the Atlas.

Nationally, the yellow wagtail decline started before the Atlas fieldwork began and has continued steadily to the present, the BTO BBS showing a 27% reduction from 1994 to 2004. From the local survey, it would appear that the Shropshire situation mirrors this trend. Still widespread, but in small numbers, the county population is likely to be in the region of 400 to 600 pairs.

The Conservation Sub-committee would like to thank everyone who contributed towards this project either by surveying tetrads or for sending in casual reports.

**Allan Dawes**

## SHROPSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY CORN BUNTING SURVEY 2004

The corn bunting is one of the priority species used for targeting conservation schemes within the county. Consequently, the data held by the Society plays an increasingly important and direct role in reversing the downward trend shown by farmland birds over the past 25 years. Some detailed records of Corn Bunting were received during 2002 and 2003 but, apart from this data, the Atlas remains our main source of information. This survey was organised to find the current status of the Corn Bunting in the county.

During the Atlas fieldwork birds were recorded in 188 tetrads, using these as the starting point, tetrads with no recent records (2002 & 2003) were selected to be re-surveyed. In order to make best use of the volunteers available, those squares that were already being surveyed for yellow wagtail were chosen first, every tenth remaining tetrad was then picked, bringing the total to 30. Unfortunately volunteers could not be found for all squares hence results were only received from 25.

Corn buntings are found in open habitats, usually associated with arable land. In these areas the easiest way to locate birds is by their short jangling song, often likened to a bunch of keys rattling and delivered from a prominent perch. Observers were asked to visit all suitable habitat within the tetrad to establish whether corn bunting were present during May, June and July and if possible to estimate the number of singing males. No attempt was made to confirm breeding.

The following table shows the results received from 25 of the 30 priority tetrads.

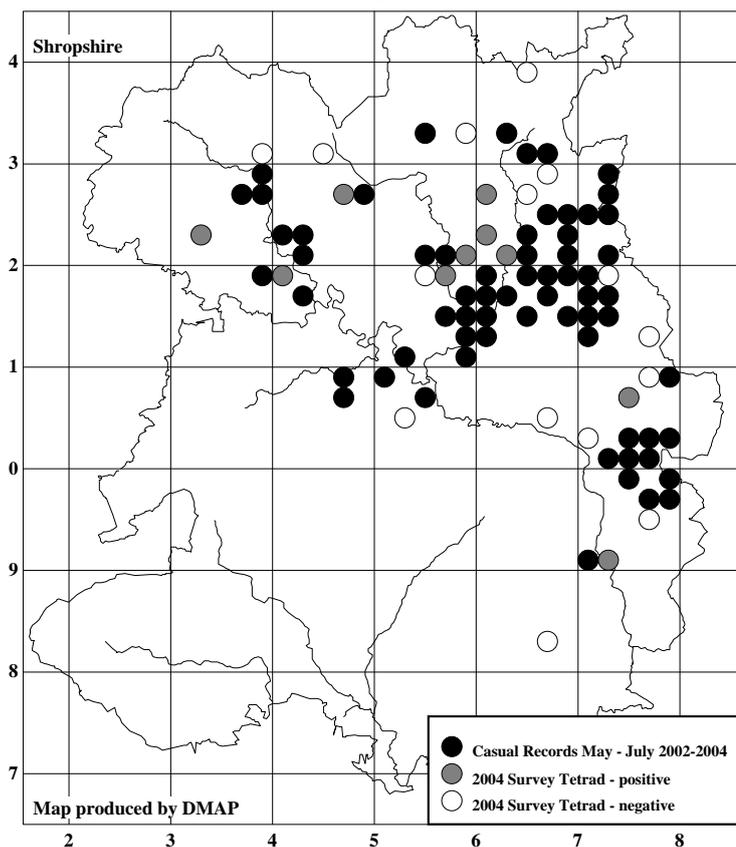
Birds Present	Birds Absent	Total Tetrads	Estimated no. of singing males
10	15	25	19 - 22

In addition to the organised survey, members were encouraged to report all corn buntings during the breeding season. The following table summarises the casual sightings from 2004 along with the records from 2002 and 2003.

Number of Tetrads	Estimated number of pairs/singing males
65	93 - 98

These results are not directly comparable with the Atlas because the amount of time spent in the field was not quantified in either survey. At first sight, the 60% decline in the number of occupied squares noted in the organised survey looks dramatic. However, because squares with records in 2002 and 2003 were not surveyed, the main core areas for corn bunting were mostly excluded from the survey. This meant that most of the tetrads surveyed were either at the periphery of the core areas or at outlying sites. More by luck than judgement, this has provided some interesting results. The distribution has not changed significantly from that given in the Atlas, with ‘the Shropshire Plain between Telford and Market Drayton and the eastern sandstone plain between Bridgnorth and Shifnal’ being the key areas, although smaller numbers were noted elsewhere ‘scattered throughout the north extending as far as Rednal in the west’.

### Corn Bunting Survey 2004



The casual reports from 2002 to 2004 and the positive results from the organised survey all fall within these three main areas whilst the negative tetrads were all scattered around the edges of these core sites, except for one at a remote spot in the south. At first sight, it appears that the range of the corn bunting has contracted around the core areas. This pattern is normal in a declining population, however the Atlas states that ‘some tetrads near the edge of the range were not occupied every year’, bearing in mind that the atlas data was collected over six seasons the reduction may not be as great as it first appears. Interestingly, the most westerly tetrad in the Atlas, 6km from the nearest site, still held 2 singing males in 2004.

The estimated number of singing males found in the priority tetrads; 1.9 – 2.2, is lower than the figure of 3 – 7 given in the Atlas. However, because we decided to omit sites with recent records, the core areas were not covered in this survey and numbers are likely to be higher in these locations. In the absence of counts from these sites, an exact estimate is impossible, but the figure is likely to be higher than that found in the priority squares and probably near the lower figure quoted in the Atlas.

While there is some evidence of range contraction, there has been little change since the Atlas which probably over estimated the true range in any one year. The Atlas gave a county population of 400 – 900 pairs, the lower figure may be nearer the mark. Nationally the corn bunting has continued to decline, the English BBS index falling by 19% from 1994 to 2004.

The Conservation Sub-committee would like to thank everyone who contributed towards this project either by surveying tetrads or for sending in casual reports.



**Allan Dawes**

Corn Bunting,  
Moortown nr Crudgington  
(*Ian Butler 2005*)

## FIRST AND LAST DATES FOR THE COMMONER SUMMER MIGRANTS

Species	First date 2004	* Average first date	Last date 2004	* Average last date
Eurasian Hobby	22 Apr	23 Apr	26 Sep	01 Oct
Little Ringed Plover	17 Mar	23 Mar	23 Sep	17 Sep
Common Cuckoo	18 Mar	10 Apr	20 Aug	16 Aug
Common Swift	16 Apr	20 Apr	25 Sep	07 Sep
Sand Martin	16 Mar	13 Mar	28 Sep	21 Sep
Barn Swallow	19 Mar	24 Mar	22 Oct	21 Oct
House Martin	31 Mar	30 Mar	12 Oct	17 Oct
Tree Pipit	29 Mar	12 Apr	7 Jul	01 Sep
Yellow Wagtail	05 Apr	09 Apr	23 Sep	26 Sep
Common Redstart	01 Apr	10 Apr	29 Aug	22 Sep
Whinchat	05 Apr	24 Apr	23 Sep	16 Sep
Northern Wheatear	18 Mar	17 Mar	21 Sep	06 Sep
Sedge Warbler	15 Apr	15 Apr	13 Sep	01 Sep
Reed Warbler	21 Apr	23 Apr	11 Sep	22 Sep
Lesser Whitethroat	24 Apr	22 Apr	31 Aug	08 Sep
Common Whitethroat	20 Apr	15 Apr	18 Sep	11 Sep
Garden Warbler	11 Apr	10 Apr	26 Sep	27 Aug
Wood Warbler	29 Apr	16 Apr	05 Jul	07 Aug
Willow Warbler	20 Mar	27 Mar	26 Sep	23 Sep
Spotted Flycatcher	02 May	06 May	15 Sep	16 Sep
Pied Flycatcher	11 Apr	15 Apr	13 Aug	01 Aug

**Notes:**

- \* Average first and last dates are calculated from records for the years 1992 to 2003. Chiffchaff and Blackcap are omitted because of frequent over-wintering.

## THE BTO BREEDING BIRD SURVEY 2004

The high level of support for this monitoring scheme was maintained in 2004 and for the second successive year results were received from 53 survey plots. These are shown in the tables on pages 24 & 25, along with a summary of the previous 5 years. For a full account of the BBS in Shropshire see the 1998 SBR.

For widespread species the trends shown 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 make a valuable contribution to the national monitoring scheme, the results of which can be found on the BTO web site.

The following species were recorded in fewer than 10 plots during 2004 and have been omitted from the table. The figures indicate the total number counted followed by number of plots in which the species was found. After a brief upsurge in 2003, Eurasian sparrowhawk, treecreeper and tree sparrow return to this category whilst goosander and reed warbler make their first appearance.

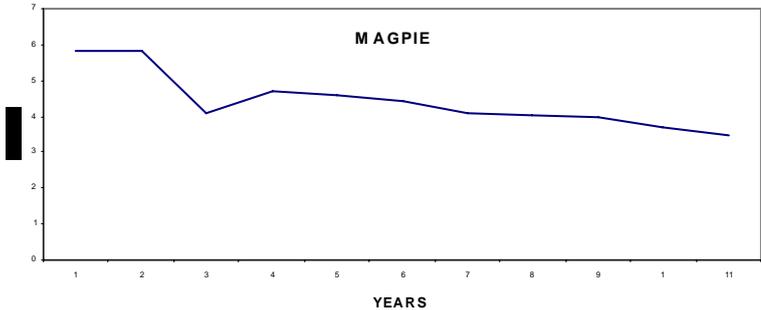
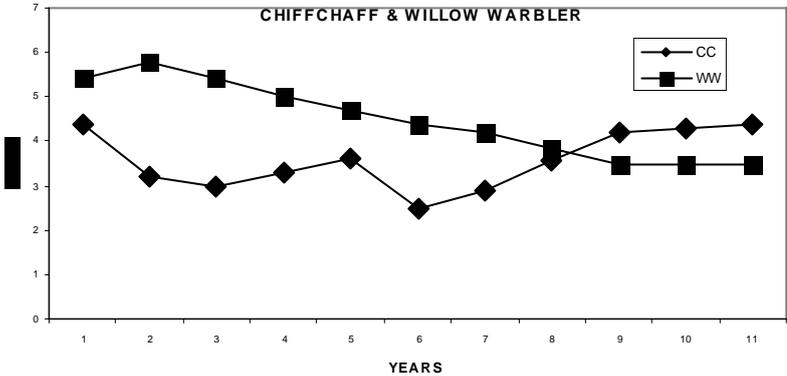
Mute Swan 28-6, Greylag Goose 7-3, Eurasian Teal 6-2, Northern Shoveler 1-1, Tufted Duck 8-2, Goosander 1-1, Ruddy Duck 3-1, Grey Partridge 3-2, Common Quail 3-2, Little Grebe 1-1, Great Cormorant 4-2, Northern Goshawk 3-2, Eurasian Sparrowhawk 8-7, Eurasian Hobby 1-1, Peregrine Falcon 1-1, Common Coot 16-7, Common Snipe 1-1, Eurasian Woodcock 2-1, Black-headed Gull 13-3, Mew Gull 3-1, Lesser Black-backed Gull 29-5, Herring Gull 13-8, Little Owl 2-2, Tawny Owl 4-3, Common Kingfisher 5-4, Sand Martin 9-3, Tree Pipit 5-1, Meadow Pipit 18-2, Yellow Wagtail 8-4, Grey Wagtail 3-2, White-throated Dipper 3-2, Whinchat 6-1, Stonechat 1-1, Northern Wheatear 23-5, Fieldfare 6-1, Sedge Warbler 2-2, Reed Warbler 1-1, Lesser Whitethroat 5-5, Wood Warbler 4-2, Spotted Flycatcher 9-8, Pied Flycatcher 2-2, Marsh Tit 11-4, Willow Tit 2-2, Treecreeper 12-8, Tree Sparrow 24-7, Brambling 1-1, Siskin 4-2, Reed Bunting 8-4, Corn Bunting 2-1, Lesser Redpoll 3-2.

Since the start of the BBS, chiffchaff has prospered nationally. Although it has increased in all areas, the growth becomes more pronounced as you move from the south east to the north west, averaging 76% overall and an impressive 98% in the West Midlands region. In contrast, the closely related willow warbler is just holding its own nationally. Marked declines in the south, including a 31% decrease in the West Midlands have been offset by increases further north. The

graph shows that the Shropshire results correspond quite well with these national trends, the discrepancy at the beginning may be due to the small number of plots surveyed at that time.

There is nothing quite like the magpie for causing heated debate amongst birders, it is either loved or hated and a popular scapegoat. Nationally, there has been almost no change, down just 1%. The West Midlands region bucks this trend with a decrease of 14% and the graph shows that Shropshire is contributing to this decline. Although consistently found in 80% of the survey plots, the number at each site has fallen considerably from 5.8 birds per plot at the start of the BBS (small sample size) to 3.5 at present. Depending on your stance on the subject you may be heartened or dismayed.

The success of the BBS is dependent on volunteer support. I would like to thank everyone involved for giving their time and also the farmers and landowners for allowing access to their land.



Species	No of plots found in	% of plots found in	Total birds found	Average number per occupied plot					
	2004	2004	2004	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Canada Goose	21	40	64	4.1	3.5	4.5	2.6	5.6	3
Mallard	28	53	196	4.7	3.3	12	5.5	6.4	7
R/leg. Partridge	15	28	42	2.4	2.1	2.7	3.6	1.9	2.8
Pheasant	47	89	245	4	4.3	4.6	4.7	5.4	5.2
Grey Heron	11	21	12	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.3	2.4	1.1
Buzzard	43	81	93	2.1	2.5	1.9	2	2	2.2
Kestrel	10	19	10	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.1	1	1
Moorhen	17	32	26	1.4	1.7	1.8	2.2	1.3	1.5
Lapwing	14	26	79	2.9	4.4	4.5	5	6	5.6
Curlew	16	30	30	2.8	2.1	2.9	2.8	3.3	1.9
Stock Dove	25	47	97	2	2.9	2.5	4.7	2.7	3.9
Woodpigeon	52	98	1014	18.9	21.5	21.7	23.4	21.4	19.5
Collared Dove	32	60	136	3.9	4.1	4.1	6.5	3.4	4.2
Cuckoo	17	32	26	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.7	1.5
Swift	17	32	88	5.6	8.4	4.3	4.8	4.5	5.2
G/S Woodpecker	28	53	51	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.8	1.8
Skylark	32	60	131	4.1	3.4	3.7	4.8	3.9	4.1
Swallow	44	83	372	6.2	6.6	7.8	7.2	6.4	8.4
House Martin	21	40	132	5.5	11.3	7.2	8.4	7.6	6.3
Pied Wagtail	23	43	38	2.3	1.3	2.1	1.7	1.7	1.6
Wren	48	91	468	7.6	10.4	10.3	11.3	10.4	9.7
Dunnock	46	87	231	2.9	3.5	3.9	5.3	4.6	5
Robin	52	98	382	6.3	7.3	7.7	8.7	8.3	7.3
Redstart	15	28	47	3.5	2.9	3.2	2.7	2.5	3.1
Blackbird	52	98	689	10.8	12.1	12.5	12.8	12.9	13.2
Song Thrush	43	81	149	3	2.8	3.5	3.8	3.5	3.5
Mistle Thrush	20	38	37	2.6	2.3	2	1.8	1.7	1.8
Whitethroat	23	43	63	2.2	1.5	2.1	2	2.7	2.7

Species	No of plots found in	% of plots found in	Total birds found	Average number per occupied plot					
	2004	2004	2004	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Garden Warbler	15	28	39	2.3	2.2	1.8	1.7	2.2	2.6
Blackcap	35	66	107	3.4	2.6	2.7	2.7	3.1	3
Chiffchaff	39	74	171	3.6	2.5	2.9	4.2	4.3	4.4
Willow Warbler	31	58	108	4.7	4.4	4.2	3.5	3.5	3.5
Goldcrest	14	26	35	2.6	2.7	3.1	3.4	2.6	2.5
Long-tailed Tit	25	47	66	3.7	3.7	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.6
Coal Tit	16	30	45	2.2	2.1	2.8	2.4	2.9	2.8
Blue Tit	52	98	476	9.2	8.7	8.9	9.6	10.3	9.1
Great Tit	50	94	279	4.8	5	6	5.5	5.3	5.6
Nuthatch	19	36	23	1.8	1.6	1.2	1	1.6	1.2
Jay	13	25	16	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.3	1.9	1.2
Magpie	43	81	152	4.6	4.4	4.1	4	3.7	3.5
Jackdaw	39	74	441	8.7	9.3	12.3	10.8	10	11.3
Rook	26	49	308	18.3	19.4	18.1	20	26.6	11.8
Carrion Crow	52	98	644	13	13.6	13.3	15.9	14.2	12.4
Raven	13	25	44	1.5	1.8	1.6	2.3	2.4	3.4
Starling	32	60	335	10.3	6.5	9.5	8.8	9.3	10.5
House Sparrow	41	77	591	9.3	9.2	11.9	14.9	15.3	14.4
Chaffinch	53	100	686	13.7	13.9	14	13.5	13.8	12.9
Greenfinch	38	72	186	3.7	4	4.7	4.7	4.1	4.9
Goldfinch	32	60	103	3.3	4.1	2.8	3.4	4.7	3.2
Linnet	21	40	141	4.3	4.9	5.4	5.8	4.8	6.7
Bullfinch	17	32	31	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.8	2	1.8
Yellowhammer	34	64	144	4.2	3.6	5.1	4.9	5.1	4.2
<b>Plots surveyed</b>	<b>53</b>			<b>56</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>

**Allan Dawes, BTO Regional Representative**

## VENUS POOL REPORT 2004

Early in the year, the large numbers of buntings, finches, and tree sparrows feeding on the bird-friendly crops which had been planted the previous year in the arable field were quite a spectacle; the land is being managed under a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and management is specifically aimed at providing the summer and winter feeding areas and breeding sites on which farmland birds depend. Up to 110 tree sparrows were present on a number of occasions and five corn buntings were recorded one day in February. In future years, the field will continue to be planted in spring with strips of bird-friendly crops, such as wheat, oats, kale and quinoa, which produce plenty of seed and attract invertebrates, with some areas being left fallow. The fields will have wide, weedy margins, and stubble will be left to over-winter.

In spring and early summer, the hayfields continued to improve with more green-winged orchids evident, and plenty of other colourful flowers including additional species, such as marsh marigold and ragged robin, making an appearance. Due to the very wet August, when it rained almost every day, the hay was not cut until the Bank Holiday weekend, and, following the hay harvest, three cattle aftermath-grazed the fields from Christmas until mid-February, later than ideal but most of the ground drains well and little poaching was anticipated; in addition to having access to the whole grassland area, the cattle were fed on hay which had been harvested from the site.

Two post-breeding work parties took place in late summer, at which the main islands were weeded, vegetation trimmed, willow coppiced, docks removed from the hayfields, ragwort pulled and the old sheep pen dismantled. The inner and outer marshes were “topped” in October. The rabbit fencing of the little field at the Cound Stank-end of the Reserve was completed in November and a new hedge planted.

June saw the installation, at long last, of the main notice boards at either end of the Reserve, as well as of several information boards at various points on the site. Disabled access to a viewing “platform” in the arable field was constructed and three wooden benches were installed.

The birding year at Venus Pool was a mixture of good news and bad. Highlights of 2004 included a bittern seen several times from the beginning of the year until

mid-April, regular visits from an osprey giving spectacular views as it fished in Venus Pool and in the fishing lake, a black-necked grebe, a pectoral sandpiper and two wood sandpipers in August, little egrets recorded regularly throughout the summer with a maximum of six on 8 August, and a long-eared owl which remained for a fortnight in late August, delighting all who saw it with excellent daylight views from its fence-post perches.



Pectoral Sandpiper, Venus Pool, 15 Aug  
2004 (*Paul King*)

Twenty one species of wader were recorded during the year, with nine on one day, the 15 August – ringed plover, northern lapwing, pectoral sandpiper, dunlin, common snipe, black-tailed godwit, common greenshank, and green and common sandpiper. Fourteen species of duck were seen on the Reserve in 2004, including two long-staying male goldeneye, a maximum of 24 wigeon in January, up to four pintail, and a female garganey in August. Ten species of raptor were seen including a red kite, hen harrier, osprey, hobby and goshawk.

Once again, the breeding season was not entirely successful; great crested grebe, mallard, coot, moorhen, oystercatcher and little ringed plover all attempted to breed on and around the pool and islands, and there were up to ten black-headed gull nests at one stage although success was low. Successful breeders on the Reserve during the year included nuthatch, pied wagtail, blackbird, great, blue and marsh tits, and probably sedge and reed warblers.

On the whole, 2004 was another successful year for Venus Pool Nature Reserve; the site continues to attract more and more people, from within and outside Shropshire, and there is always something to see, even on a quiet day.

**Helen J Griffiths**

# **RESEARCH PAPERS AND SURVEY RESULTS**

## **2004**

The following are privately produced reports of which the Society holds a copy which can be made available to researchers on request. Where indicated, they can be viewed on the Society's website: [www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com)

### **Decline of Ground Nesting Birds on the Long Mynd 1995-2004**

*(Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project)*

Four species are considered – ring ouzel (100% decline in 10 years, from around a dozen pairs to 0), curlew (80% - 10 to two), snipe (60% - around 16 to seven) and teal (75% - four to one). The decline is attributed to a large increase in the number of predators, resulting from a recent considerable increase in their food supply – carrion, from dead sheep and pheasants throughout the south Shropshire hills. (available on [www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com))

### **Ring Ouzel Report 2004** *(The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project)*

The Project has been researching ring ouzels since 1994. The results 1994-99 were published in the County Bird Report 1999, with a 2000 report the following year. Since then summaries have appeared in the account for this species in the Systematic list of the County Bird Report with the full report available from the Project c/o 8 Welsh Street Gardens, Bishop's Castle SY9 5BH.

The 2003 and 2004 reports can be found on the Society's website. The 2003 report considered the reasons for the catastrophic decline, and showed that the rate of return of colour-ringed birds was sufficient to sustain the population (i.e. the cause of the decline was not a result of any factor between fledging and return the following spring - post-breeding, on migration or on the winter quarters), and there were still large areas of wet short grass with an abundance of earthworms (ie there was no change in food supply), but poor breeding success due to nest predation was higher than in any other comparable British study area up until 1999, and became even worse after 1999. This Report concluded that the decline was almost wholly caused by the high level of nest predation. The Report on the *Decline Of Ground-Nesting Birds On The Long Mynd 1995 – 2004*, referred to above, was produced to further substantiate this conclusion. The 2003 Ring Ouzel Report also included maps of known nest sites and territories, and correlated distribution with habitat. The 2004 Report summarised and updated this research. (available on [www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com))

## **Lapwing, Curlew & Other Breeding Birds in the Upper Onny Valley Survey Results 2004** (*Upper Onny Wildlife Group*)

The Upper Onny Wildlife Group carried out a Breeding Bird Survey in 2004, concentrating on curlew and lapwing. It covered a total area of about 122 square kilometres between the Long Mynd and the Welsh border, primarily within the parishes of Ratlinghope, Wentnor, Norbury, Myndtown, More and Lydham. Most of this area is within the Shropshire Hills Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and the Shropshire Hills Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA).

An estimated 19 pairs of lapwing and 24 pairs of curlew were found, and breeding success was monitored. The number of chicks and fledged young found appears to be insufficient to sustain even the existing small remnant populations, and both species are likely to become extinct in the next decade unless action is taken to improve breeding success, and increase the area of suitable habitat.

Skylarks were also counted, and members were also asked to record several other species – cuckoo, dipper, red kite, grey partridge, snipe, wheatear, yellow wagtail, yellowhammer and brown hare. (available on [www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com))

## **The Stiperstones Breeding Bird Survey 2004** (*Leo Smith*)

This is the first part of a three year project being carried out for English Nature, to survey the whole of the heathland along the Stiperstones ridge. The southern half of the National Nature Reserve, and the Heathland Restoration Areas around Nipstone Rock and further south, were covered in 2004. Population estimates were produced for the target species: curlew, ring ouzel, stonechat, whinchat, tree pipit, cuckoo, redstart, wheatear, whitethroat and reed bunting, with meadow pipit and skylark recorded off the National Nature Reserve. The report also notes the numbers of all species observed during the survey, and compares the populations of target species with those found by a similar survey in 1995. Results for individual species are noted in the Systematic List. (available on [www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com))

## **Shropshire Barn Owl Group 2004 Report** (*Shropshire Barn Owl Group*)

Summarises the records and breeding success of barn owls during the year. Information regarding the group can be obtained from: John Lightfoot, The Bungalow, Sandy Lane, Ellesmere, SY12 0RA or Glenn Bishton, 47 Church Hill, Ironbridge, TF8 7QB. (available on [www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com))

## **Raven Study Group Fieldwork Report 2004** (*Shropshire Raven Study Group*)

The Group has been monitoring the county raven population since 1994. It has grown from an estimated 50 breeding pairs in 1990 to 175 pairs in 1999 and 250 pairs in 2003, together with a large increase in the size of flocks of non-breeding young birds. In the period 1994-99, 783 chicks were colour-ringed in the nest, and work now consists mainly of tracking these birds as they join the breeding population, to monitor dispersal, age of first breeding, re-mating when one of the pair dies, and longevity. Summaries have appeared in previous County Bird Reports, as articles or in the raven species account in the Systematic List. Grants towards the cost of fieldwork have been provided by BTO for 1997-99 and 2002-2005, and the annual report of the group submitted to BTO is also posted on the web-site.

## **Breeding Birds at Mose and Sandymose Farms 2004** (*John Tucker*)

A CBC style survey of breeding birds was carried out in 2004, year three of a 10 year Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreement on these farms at Dudmaston. The report was prepared for The National Trust, Attingham Park and sets out the results and summarises records for 2002—2004. The survey is scheduled to be repeated 2009-2011 to examine changes. For further information contact John Tucker, Oakerley, Clun Road, Aston on Clun, Craven Arms SY7 8EW ([john.tucker@lanius.org.uk](mailto:john.tucker@lanius.org.uk))

## **The Birds of Rectory Wood, Chuch Stretton 2004** (*John Tucker*)

A CBC style survey examining breeding species, their distribution and densities produced for the Rectory Wood and Fields Interest Group. Densities were high, thought to be because of high level of edge effect. For further information contact John Tucker, Oakerley, Clun Road, Aston on Clun, Craven Arms SY7 8EW ([john.tucker@lanius.org.uk](mailto:john.tucker@lanius.org.uk))

## **Sky Larks and Meadow Pipits on the Long Mynd, Shropshire 1996-2004** (*John Tucker*)

A survey of breeding skylarks and meadow pipits was undertaken for the National Trust, Carding Mill Valley. Fieldwork, based on eight transects, was undertaken in the years 1996-1998 and repeated in 2002-2004. The report sets out the results showing the changes to the populations. For further information contact John Tucker, Oakerley, Clun Road, Aston on Clun, Craven Arms SY7 8EW ([john.tucker@lanius.org.uk](mailto:john.tucker@lanius.org.uk))

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

## Abbreviations:

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
ASF	Allscott Sugar Factory
BBS	BTO Breeding Bird Survey
BCC	Birds of Conservation Concern
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
EGM	Ellesmere Goup of Meres
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area
RBBP	Rare Breeding Bird Panel
RSPB	The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RSPCA	Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SOS	Shropshire Ornithological Society
WeBS	Wetland Bird Survey

## Summary of weather conditions:

**Jan–Mar:** January was unsettled with heavy rain but a cold snap brought some snow towards the end of the month. February was mostly mild with southerly or south-westerly winds but, as in January, there was a cold period at the end of the month. March was rather mild with frequent quite heavy rainfall.

**Apr-Jun:** April started and ended with warm spells, but was generally unsettled with heavy rainfall associated with a northerly airstream. May was largely dry with high pressure, but an often cool northerly wind. The first three weeks of June were dry, settled and warm in contrast to the final week which saw several Atlantic depressions crossing the country bringing heavy rainfall.

**Jul-Sep:** The first half of July was very cool, wet and unsettled, but the weather then improved with high pressure dominating. August started with very warm, humid weather with thunder-storms but, after the first week, was cooler with a succession of Atlantic depressions bringing heavier than expected rainfall. Early September saw a brief return to summer, but then a series of depressions crossed the country bringing strong westerly winds and frequent rainfall.

**Oct-Dec:** The westerly air-flow continued in October and most of November was exceptionally mild with south-westerly winds and cloudy conditions, but with brief cold snaps in the middle two weeks. December was mixed with a mild, wet, westerly airflow at the beginning and end of the month, although the middle two weeks were quite cool with frequent overnight frosts.

## A Summary of the birding year:

A few rarities which were first found in 2003 remained into the new year with the **water pipit** at ASF being seen until 11 Jan, the **Eurasian bittern** at Venus Pool until 12 Apr and the **great grey shrikes** at Great Woolascott, near Bomere Heath and Brown Clee until 11 Jan and 29 March respectively. A second **Eurasian bittern** was seen at Severn Valley Country Park on 4 Feb and other highlights of the first winter period included a **black-necked grebe** at The Mere, Ellesmere from 1-12 Feb, five **Bewick's swans** at Cressage from 21 Feb until 2 Mar and a **short-eared owl** at Wall Farm on 15 Feb with one seen nearby on 15 Feb. As expected, gulls featured quite strongly including an adult **ring-billed gull** at Candles Landfill Site in Telford, a 3rd winter **glaucous gull** at Priorslee Lake on 15 Jan and four **Iceland Gulls** split between Chelmarsh and Priorslee Lake.

Spring passage also produced the usual crop of rarities. **Firecrests** were seen at Western-under-Redcastle on 2 Mar, Venus Pool on 20 Mar and Brown Clee on 25 Apr and two dates in June. Two **red-breasted mergansers** were at Chelmarsh on 20 Mar, a **black redstart** at Brown Clee on 17 Apr, a **purple heron** at Priorslee Lake on 27 Apr and **Sandwich terns** at Wall Farm on 3 May and Wood Lane on 13 May. Finally, a **hoopoe** was seen at Newport on 13-14 May. At least one **European nightjar** was present at The Stiperstones on 2-14 Jun.

Remarkably, three **pectoral sandpipers** were seen, the first at Wood Lane on 8-11 Jun, the second at ASF on 8 Aug and the third, a first for Venus Pool, on 15-20 Aug. A juvenile **marsh harrier** passed through ASF on 20 Aug and at Venus Pool there were two new species for the reserve with a **long-eared owl** from 19 Aug until 1 Sep and a **black-necked grebe** from 26-31 Aug delighting visitors. Autumnal storms resulted in a number of unusual seabird records. A **manx shearwater** was found dead at Black Hill on 14 Sep and another was picked up in Shrewsbury on 21 Sep. The latter bird was released, after treatment, at Llandudno on 26 Sep together with an immature **gannet** which had been found at Sheriffhales on 23 Sep. Finally, a **Leach's storm petrel** was seen at The Mere, Ellesmere on 21 Sep.

Late autumn and second winter period produced two **short-eared owls**, at the Long Mynd on 19 Oct and the Weald Moors on 15 Dec. Also, two **great grey shrikes** were seen, the first at Brown Clee from 31 Oct until 29 Nov and the second at Whixall Moss which remained from 25 Nov into the New Year. A **snow bunting** was seen on the Long Mynd on 6 & 12 Nov and an **Iceland gull** was at Priorslee Lake on 23-25 Dec.

## THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

### MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Status: Common resident.

During the first winter period, a flock of 24 mute swans, with a single whooper swan, were found at Waters Upton on 26 Jan grazing winter wheat. The flock built up to 36 by the end of the month, with 21 still present on 7 Feb. The regular wintering flock at the Buttery, Kynnersley was also present early in the year with 14 recorded on 26 Jan. The flock had increased to 58 by 23 Feb with the addition of most of the flock from Waters Upton including the whooper swan. On the 10 Mar the flock had reached its maximum count of 65, with 30 still present 10 Apr and 22 on 2 May. There was also a flock of 32 at Ponthen on 25 Jan and 35 next day nearby at Molverly when nine whooper swans were with the flock.

In the Buttery flock was a mute swan that was ringed yellow CLF as one of a brood of seven cygnets in July 1993 at the RSPB Sandwell Valley reserve. In 2000 it bred in Shropshire and hatched eight cygnets at Flashbrook. However, it was taken into care with five cygnets, its mate and the other three cygnets having died due to water pollution. Unfortunately, two more of the cygnets died in care. It was released at Howle Pool in September 2000, with the remaining three cygnets, where it bred the following year with a new mate and raised five cygnets from a brood of six. It was not recorded again until sightings in the flock at the Buttery.

Max counts of flocks at other sites early in the year were 18 at Atcham on 26 Feb, 41 at Cronkhill on 2 Mar and 55 at Lower Brompton on 26 Mar which probably involved some of the same swans as they are in the same area next to the River Severn. Elsewhere, flocks of 21 at ASF on 4 Jan, 19 at Cressage on 1 Mar, 14 at Bridgnorth on 27 Apr, 14 at Alveley on 4 Apr and a maximum count at Venus Pool of 25 in May.

Breeding was reported from 30 sites with 125 cygnets recorded, compared with last year where 24 sites produced 83 cygnets. The largest brood came from the south of the county at Dudmaston where a pair with nine cygnets was recorded on 26 Aug. One of the adults was reported "defending the cygnet in a water fight with a mink". It appears to have been successful as there were still nine cygnets on 30 Aug, but only one adult recorded. Also in the south, a pair with seven cygnets were reported at Hampton Load, a pair also with seven cygnets at Quatford and a pair with five cygnets at Chelmarsh Reservoir. At Stead Vallets

near Ludlow, a pair were reported with the female on a nest 11 Apr, but no subsequent report of any cygnets were received.

The female at Priorslee Flash, which in November last year paired up with her own cygnet from a brood of six in 2000, hatched five cygnets at the end of May. The parents walked the young to Priorslee Lake at the beginning of June, where they stayed until all five cygnets successfully flew off during third week of October. This pair, along with a pair at Dothill which hatched eight cygnets were, once again, the only successful breeding in Telford. However, the Dothill pair had to be taken into care, at the end of August, when only three of the cygnets remained and the male was unable to stand. The male recovered and they were all released fit and well back at Dothill in November. Pairs at Telford Town Park, Trench Pool, Holmer Lake and Mad Brook Stirchley all failed to hatch any cygnets.

At the Hem near Shifnal a pair raised seven cygnets and, most unusually, the pair allowed three of the previous years cygnets to remain into the breeding season. They were still present in August but, by the end of the month, the female had chased off all but one of the previous year's young. It may have been that the male of the pair was getting too old to bother as in September he died, probably of old age, as he was 15 years old. He was ringed orange TSJ as one of four cygnets at Brierley Hill near Dudley in 1988 when he was moved to Blakedown near Kidderminster with the female of the pair and three siblings after the male had been shot. Orange TSJ was still at Kidderminster in 1990 and on 19 Jan 1991 he was on River Avon at Tewksbury. The first sighting of him at the Hem, Shifnal was on 21 Feb 1991. On 19 Mar 1993, he was paired with yellow S97 on the River Severn at Bridgnorth and in 1995 the pair nested at Sunnyside Farm, Shifnal with eight cygnets reported on 4 June. However, on 6 July 1995, they arrived at the Hem, but had lost the cygnets. They bred at the Hem the following year and had four cygnets on 21 Jun 1996. In 1998, orange TSJ was paired with a new young female and it is likely that yellow S97 had died, she was 17 years old. In 1999, the young female was ringed blue 7AIL. This pair successfully raised four cygnets in 1998, seven in 1999, six in 2000, five in 2001, seven in 2002, six in 2003 and, finally, seven this year. After Orange TSJ died, the female continued to chase around the last remaining cygnet from the previous year, a male. However, he was going nowhere and, by the end of the year, had paired up with the female, even though he was one of her cygnets!

Towards the end of the year, counts included 13 at Alveley on 2 Oct and 27 at White Mere in September with 24 here in October. In November, 28 were reported at ASF and 26 at Tern Hill whilst 15 were at Venus Pool in December. The wintering flock at the Buttery, Kynnersley started to build up again with six at the end of Nov and 11 in Dec.

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

Status: Rare passage migrant and winter visitor

The only record was of two adults and three juveniles which were present in the Cressage area from 21 Feb until 2 Mar (AL, KW). The birds were associating with mute swans.

This species has been recorded in 11 of the last 15 years with 1994, 1998, 1999 and 2003 comprising the blank years. We have to go back to 1997 for the last double figure count, when 21 were recorded at ASF. In 1996 11 birds were recorded at Couind.

**WHOOPER SWAN** *Cygnus cygnus*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

The first record for the year under review came from Molverley which is one of the traditional sites situated on the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence. Nine birds were recorded here on 24 Jan and the following day 10 were at nearby Ponthen. Nine were at Cae Howell on 21 Mar and a count of 10 at Pentre on 22 Mar completes the records for the first winter period from this area.

Elsewhere, a single bird associated with mute swans at Waters Upton from 25 Jan until 7 Feb and what was quite probably the same individual was again with mute swans at Butterly Farm, Kynnersley from 15 Feb until 14 Apr.

The first returning birds were two at Chelmarsh 13–14 Oct, with three at Cressage on 4 Nov. Only one record was received from the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence during the second winter period when 12 were seen at Alberbury on 12 Dec. The final record of the year was of one at Leighton 23 Dec.

**PINK-FOOTED GOOSE** *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Status: Rare winter visitor and uncommon passage migrant, some feral birds

Records of genuine wild birds came from Molverley where 300 birds were recorded on 5 Feb, with the observer speculating that possibly up to 1,000 birds may well have been present on the floods (J & AM) and from Cherrington where two skeins totalling 62 birds were observed flying south east 24 Sep (SJ).

Single birds were at Venus Pool on 23 Jan, Wood Lane on 7 Mar and Priorslee Lake on 23 Mar. Two were at the latter site 11 Nov and counts of three birds came from Venus Pool on 17 Dec and Tittenley Pool on 22 Dec.

**GREYLAG GOOSE** *Anser anser*

Status: Common feral resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	-	-	-	73	34	-	-	5
Dudmaston	25	-	22	51	-	24	46	39
Shavington Big Pool	-	120	-	110	-	230	60	-
Venus Pool	23	71	16	180	150	240	130	191
Wood Lane	-	35	6	150	94	-	-	-

The largest count for the year came from Priorslee where 250 were seen on 21 Sep. Other than those recorded above, the only other three figure counts came from Cloverley Pool and Venus Pool where 130 birds were recorded at each site on 1 Feb and 30 Jul respectively. Counts in excess of 50 birds came from Cole Mere, Cosford, St. Martins and The Mere, Ellesmere. The species was recorded in all months of the year at Venus Pool.

Breeding was confirmed from just two sites. At Betton Moss, seven young hatched from two nests of four eggs, these birds last being seen on 26 Apr. Interestingly, the two adult females appeared to be 'sharing' a single gander. At Venus Pool, eight goslings from two broods were observed on 8 May, with seven juveniles still surviving by 22 May.

One or two hybrid greylag x bar-headed goose *Anser indicus* were reported at Venus Pool from 27 Jul and on 21 Sep three greylag x Canada goose hybrids were also seen at this site.

**GREATER CANADA GOOSE** (Canada Goose) *Branta canadensis*

Status: Common feral resident

Poorly recorded as a breeding species, with confirmed breeding coming from just five sites; this compares unfavourably with the 11 sites identified in 2003.

For the fourth year in succession, the largest recorded counts have come from the well-watched Wood Lane Nature Reserve. This years maximum of 1500 birds on 23 Aug (AH), may well be the largest ever concentration of birds at a single

site in Shropshire, certainly eclipsing the 1400 birds recorded at Brown Moss in 2001. Three figure counts were recorded on 17 days at Wood Lane in Aug, the birds most often flying in at dusk to roost on the pools.

Counts in excess of 500 birds came from the Whixall Moss floods where 650 were present on 24 Jan and Priorslee Lake where 826 flew over on 14 Sep. Four hundred and eight were counted at The Mere, Ellesmere on 19 Sep.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	88	80	50	200	240	-
Cole Mere	5	22	3	1150	1044	1200
Dudmaston	221	223	179	95	177	203
Priorslee Flash	86	93	67	55	-	-
Priorslee Lake	58	26	53	276	228	53
The Mere, Ellesmere	47	139	56	182	85	20
Venus Pool	256	90	69	2	-	170
Wood Lane	4	25	6	500	-	1

Six Canada goose x Chinese goose *Anser cygnoides* hybrids were present at Chetwynd Park on 14 Nov.

### **BARNACLE GOOSE** *Branta leucopsis*

Status: Scarce feral resident and rare winter visitor

Reports were received from 12 sites. However, with four of these being in the Ellesmere area, there is, undoubtedly, some duplication and all of this year's records are likely to refer to birds of feral origin. The largest count was just three birds at Cole Mere on 12 Dec, whilst two were recorded at both Wood Lane in August and October and Venus Pool on two dates in November.

Away from the northern meres, singles were seen at Atcham Bridge, Chelmarsh, Dudmaston, Monkmoor Pool, Pool Hall, Shavington Big Pool and Venus Pool. Again, some duplication of records is suspected. One found at Higher Heath was taken into care by the RSPCA and after treatment was released at Venus Pool on 1 Nov.

**COMMON SHELDUCK** *Tadorna tadorna*

Status: Scarce summer visitor and uncommon passage migrant

Recorded in all months of the year with, as is usual for this species, the larger counts coming from Wood Lane. Indeed, the 25 recorded on 1 Mar may well be the largest ever single site concentration of birds within the county.

Monthly maxima of adult birds at Wood Lane:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Wood Lane	12	24	25	14	15	14

Four birds were at Cole Mere on 13 Feb, five at Priorslee Lake on 22 Feb, four at Venus Pool on 31 Mar and four at ASF on 12 Oct. In addition to the above records, one to three birds were reported from a further nine widespread sites.

Breeding was again confirmed at Wood Lane when eight juveniles from one brood were recorded on 9 Jun. However, by the end of the month, only two young survived with predation by fox being suspected. This species has now bred successfully at Wood Lane each year since 2003. Three immature birds were present at ASF on 29 Aug, although there is nothing to suggest that breeding took place this year at what was once a traditional site.

**MANDARIN DUCK** *Aix galericulata*

Status: Rare feral resident

Perhaps poorly recorded, with a maximum count of three birds at Bromfield on 11 Apr, surely not indicative of the species status within the county.

Not confirmed as breeding this year, indeed other than the above birds, which comprised two males and a female, only single males were recorded during the breeding season.

Two females or immature birds were at Chelmarsh on 24 Jul, with quite probably one of these birds nearby at Dudmaston on 26 Jul. Away from these sites, singles were recorded at Aston Eyre, Bicton, Priorslee Lake, Upper Arley, Stead Vallets and The Mere, Ellesmere.

## EURASIAN WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Status: Common winter visitor and passage migrant

Three figure counts were received from six sites, with 500 birds at Hayes Farm, Alberbury, on 22 Feb (JT) the highest of the year. In addition to those scheduled below, the only other three figure count for the year came from Melverley where 300 were recorded on 25 Jan.

Hayes Farm, Alberbury has recorded the highest count in three of the last five years and, whilst this year's count is impressive, it does not compare with counts of 1370 and 1203 which were recorded there in years 2000 and 2002 respectively.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cae Howel	308	-	36	-	-	-
Chetwynd Park	115	18	16	-	34	31
Croze Mere	45	105	9	-	12	67
Hayes Farm, Alberbury	380	500	64	-	55	84
Shavington Big Pool	56	85	-	70	-	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	218	270	-	26	76	78
Whixall (canal floods)	62	150	-	-	25	-

No birds were recorded in April, with the final sighting of the first winter period being of 36 birds at Cae Howell, 9 birds at Croze Mere and 64 birds at Hayes Farm, Alberbury all on 21 Mar.

The first returning birds were four at ASF on 4 Aug, with a single bird at Chelmarsh completing the Aug records. Two birds were at Venus Pool on 6 Sep, which increased to six birds on 29 Sep. The only other September record came from Chelmarsh where two birds were present on the 13th.

**GADWALL** *Anas strepera*

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

Recorded in all months of the year with the highest single site count being of 20 birds at Sambrook Mill on 14 Mar. Double figure counts came on four occasions from the favoured site of Dudmaston, with 11 birds on 27 Nov constituting the largest count. Nearby at Chelmarsh, six birds were recorded on 20 Mar.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	-	5	6	2	5	-	-
Dudmaston	8	6	10	-	-	11	10
Sambrook Mill	3	1	20	-	-	-	-

Breeding season records of pairs were received from Chelmarsh Reservoir, Priorslee Lake and Wood Lane, although there is nothing to suggest that successful breeding took place. The last confirmed breeding in the county was at Cranmere Bog in 1988.

**EURASIAN TEAL** *Anas crecca*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

Breeding was confirmed at Whixall Moss for the second year in succession. A female with six young was observed on 20 Jun, whilst a brood of eight juveniles was reported with a female bird on 24 Jul (HMP). Breeding season records were received from a further five sites, although there is nothing to suggest that successful breeding took place. No breeding season records were received from any of the traditional sites on the Long Mynd.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Allscott Sugar Factory	136	-	-	205	200	204	-
Pen-yr Estyn	110	-	-	-	-	600	250
Venus Pool	41	20	30	76	126	150	33
Wall Farm	350	510	40	-	49	634	1004
Whixall (canal floods)	268	160	-	-	226	15	-
Wood Lane	108	67	70	51	49	52	58

The largest count for the first winter period came from Wall Farm where 510 birds were present on 7 Feb. This site also hosted 350 birds on 24 Jan. Other notable first winter counts came from ASF, Pen-yr-Estyn, Whixall canal floods where 268 birds were recorded on 2 Jan and Wood Lane.

The second winter period saw an incredible 1004 birds reported at Wall Farm on 8 Dec, this is quite probably the first recorded four figure count for the species in the county (MGG). This site also held 634 birds on 24 Nov. Other counts in excess of 500 birds came from Whixall Moss where 700 birds were seen in flight on 14 Nov and Pen-yr-Estyn where 600 were present on 20 Nov.

Recorded in all months of the year at Venus Pool and June constituted the only blank month at Wood Lane.

**MALLARD** *Anas platyrhynchos*

Status: Common resident

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Buttery Farm	-	-	-	242	230	225	185
Cae Howell	25	20	32	151	65	62	26
Chelmarsh Reservoir	10	-	4	-	45	17	113
Chetwynd Park	102	26	8	26	30	53	15
Hampton Loade	135	-	163	-	88	143	169
Hayes Farm	58	14	16	4	26	46	174
The Mere, Ellesmere	157	106	56	171	200	140	102
Venus Pool	27	28	18	113	25	21	50

In addition to the above, three figure counts were received from ASF, Cole Mere, Little Wenlock, Shavington Big Pool, Stead Vallets, Tibberton Moor and Whixall canal floods. The latter site held 220 birds on 1 Feb and also the highest count for the year, 300 birds on 6 Feb.

Very poorly recorded as a breeding species with reports from just eight sites compared to the 17 sites identified in 2003. At Venus Pool, a brood of nine first recorded on 27 Jul, was reduced to just one duckling by 24 Aug.

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (Pintail) *Anas acuta*

Status: Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant

A poor year by recent standards with 25 birds at Whixall canal floods on 30 Nov, the highest count for the year. The first winter period saw a peak count of 16 on 22 Feb at the favoured site of Hayes Farm, Alberbury. This site also hosted nine birds on 25 Jan. Other notable first winter period counts included eight at Chelmarsh on 1 Jan, 10 at Whixall canal floods on 8 Feb and six at Pentre on 6 Mar.

The first returning birds were two at Venus Pool on 24 Aug, with four birds at this well watched site on 27 Sept. Surprisingly, there were no October records received. Twenty two birds at Hayes Farm on 14 Nov represented the highest count for the second winter period, this site also hosting 13 birds on 12 Dec.

**GARGANEY** *Anas querquedula*

Status: Rare passage migrant

A juvenile was present at Wood Lane on the single date of 28 Jun (AH). An adult female was present at Venus Pool on 1 and 2 Aug (HMP) with this or another bird reported on 11 Aug (RV). Quite possibly the same bird was then reported from ASF from 12 – 14 Aug (AL).

Recorded annually in the county since 1989.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (Shoveler) *Anas clypeata*

Status: Common passage migrant and winter visitor, rare resident

Confirmed breeding at Whixall Moss for the second year running when a female with four young was observed on 20 Jun. Although not thought to have bred, breeding season reports also came from Chetwynd Park, Venus Pool and Wood Lane.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	136	156	81	101	220	110	16
Shavington Big Pool	9	14	6	40	24	-	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	24	28	28	5	18	19	17
Venus Pool	2	2	3	46	48	8	25

The first returning birds were at Wood Lane where two were recorded on 28 Jul, with five on 9 Aug. A single bird was at Venus Pool on 1 Aug and seven birds were at ASF on 2 Aug. Six were recorded at Venus Pool on 7 Aug, where the August maximum was 31 on the 15th.

**COMMON POCHARD** *Aythya ferina*

Status: Common winter visitor, rare resident (RBBP)

Recorded in every month of the year thanks to unseasonable records of single males from Venus Pool and Wood Lane in both May and June. The former site recorded birds in all months except September. An equally unseasonable female was at Venus Pool on 6 Jul but, again, there is nothing to suggest that a breeding attempt took place. The last confirmed breeding in the county was at this site in 1995.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chetwynd Park	7	26	7	2	6	37
Cole Mere	17	40	5	-	-	4
Priorslee Flash	72	54	18	11	-	-
Priorslee Lake	30	20	34	25	47	72
The Mere, Ellesmere	26	31	23	8	22	1
Venus Pool	32	43	17	2	2	15

The largest count for the first winter period was 72 at Priorslee Flash on 18 Jan and, coincidentally, the same number of birds constituted the second winter period’s highest count at nearby Priorslee Lake on 28 Dec.

In addition to those tabled above, double figure counts came from a further six sites, with 28 at Isombridge Gravel Pits on 31 Jan the highest.

Most birds departed the county by the end of March. The first returning birds were singles at ASF on 8 Aug and at Venus Pool on 12 Aug, followed by a single bird at Priorslee Flash on 12 Sep and four birds at The Mere, Ellesmere on 19 Sep.

## **TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya fuligula*

Status: Uncommon resident, common winter visitor

Continues to be poorly recorded as a breeding species, with confirmed breeding coming from just four sites. On 15 Jun, 34 juveniles from four separate broods were recorded at ASF. A pair with 10 juveniles were at Wood Lane on 28 Jun. Seven young were reported from Abdon Burf on 7 Jul and, finally, a female with six young were at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 25 Jul.

Birds were recorded in every calendar month at Chelmarsh and Priorslee Lake but, surprisingly, not at Venus Pool where November constituted a blank month.

Highest count for the year was an exceptional minimum count of 300 birds at The Mere, Ellesmere on 12 Feb. The highest count of the second winter period also came from the above site where 132 were recorded on 17 Oct.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	114	30	119	123	91	83
Dudmaston	140	-	8	10	65	3
Priorslee Flash	52	36	52	125	-	-
Priorslee Lake	26	36	47	63	73	110
Shavington Big Pool	52	78	-	77	-	-
Showell Mill	78	56	7	-	-	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	10	300	70	132	47	59
White Mere	26	32	48	57	55	52

Other than from those sites listed above, the only other count in excess of 50 birds was 76 birds at Wood Lane on 7 Mar. A count of 148 birds at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 27 Aug is also noteworthy.

An *Aythya* hybrid thought to be a tufted duck x New Zealand scaup *Aythya novaeseelandiae* was seen at Sambrook Mill on 21 Mar.

**GREATER SCAUP** *Aythya marila*

Status: Scarce winter visitor



Greater Scaup, Trench Pool, 10 Mar 2004  
(P King)

The two first winter males and the adult female that were found at Cole Mere on 28 Dec 2003 were present at Crose Mere on New Years Day. The birds then re-located to Cole Mere on 8 Jan where they were joined by another first winter male. All four birds were recorded at this site on the following day before, finally, three unsexed birds were reported here on 25 Jan.

The first winter male found at Trench Pool on 28 Dec 2003 was recorded regularly between 4 Jan and 25 Mar. A male was reported via the information services to be at Buttery Farm on 26 Feb and a first winter male was reported at Venus Pool on the single date of 3 Mar (MDR).

The only records for the second winter period came from Venus Pool where a first winter male was recorded on 16 and 17 Dec (GEH). The bird was then joined by an adult male on 18 and 19 Dec before the final record of the year was of one on 31 Dec (GEH).

An above average year by recent standards.

**COMMON SCOTER** *Melanitta nigra*

Status: Scarce visitor

An adult female was present at ASF from 5-8 Aug before being joined by another female on 9 Aug (AL).

An amazing 28 birds were present at The Mere, Ellesmere on 29 Oct, all of the birds being either female or immature (AB).

Finally, a record of a single unsexed bird at The Mere, Ellesmere was received via the information services.

## COMMON GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

As in the previous three years, the largest single site count came from The Mere, Ellesmere when 45 were recorded on 21 Mar. The largest count for the second winter period also came from this site with 19 birds recorded on 12 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh	4	4	5	-	3	2
Cole Mere	17	20	15	2	7	14
Croze Mere	10	5	7	-	-	7
Dudmaston	11	14	5	-	5	12
The Mere, Ellesmere	24	32	45	4	15	19
Venus Pool	2	2	2	-	2	-
White Mere	10	11	2	-	6	7

Other than at the sites scheduled above, the only two figure counts came from Newton Mere with 10 birds on 25 Jan and the River Severn at Quatt where 11 birds were reported on 5 Mar. The record from the latter site being the only one concerning birds on running water. A count of 34 birds at The Mere, Ellesmere on 4 Apr is noteworthy and two here on 7 Apr represented the last record for the first winter period. Other April records were received from Chelmarsh, Dudmaston, Priorslee Lake and Venus Pool.

The first returning birds were two at Cole Mere and four at The Mere, Ellesmere on the common date of 29 Oct. No other October records were received. The first double figure count of the second winter period came from The Mere, Ellesmere, where 15 birds were present on 14 Nov.



Goldeneye, Dudmaston, 25 Jan 2004 (*Paul King*)

**SMEW** *Mergus albellus*

Status: Rare winter visitor

The only record for the year was of a male at Brim Pool, Dudmaston between the dates 4 Jan and 7 Feb. This bird was first recorded at Dudmaston on 15 Dec 2003.

1990 and 2001 constitute the only blank years for this species in the last 16 years.



Smew, Dudmaston, 25 Jan 2004  
(Paul King)

**GOOSANDER** *Mergus merganser*

Status: Scarce resident and uncommon winter visitor

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	45	26	35	7	24	50
Cole Mere	6	7	13	5	9	11
Dudmaston	22	4	-	-	-	22
Shavington Big Pool	10	20	8	14	-	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	21	20	1	-	24	3
Venus Pool	2	-	4	2	15	2
Walcot Lake	31	54	35	-	-	35
White Mere	8	21	1	-	-	15

The highest count for the year came from Walcot Lake where 54 birds were recorded on 14 Feb. Thirty five were also recorded at this site on both 15 Mar and 26 Dec.

Forty five birds were recorded on New Years Day at Chelmarsh Reservoir, whilst 50 birds at this location on 27 Dec represented the largest count for the second winter period. In addition to those tabled above, double figure counts were reported from a further seven sites with 31 birds at Dothill Pools on 26 Dec noteworthy.

Surprisingly, the largest count from Venus Pool was of only 15 birds; this compares unfavourably with the last three years, when counts of 66, 63 and 59 have represented the highest counts for their respective years.

Breeding was confirmed from three sites, with the first record being of a female that drifted downstream with 10 ducklings at Cound Stank on 7 May. A female with 30 juveniles was then in the shallows of the River Severn at Preston Boats on 30 May, the observer speculating that three or four broods were involved. Finally, a female with 10 juveniles was on the River Severn at Apley Park on 5 Aug.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** *Mergus serrator*

Status: Rare winter visitor

A pair were present at Chelmarsh Reservoir on the single date of 20 Mar (MO), the observer visiting the site following a severe south westerly gale.

This is the second year in succession that the species has been recorded in the county. Prior to 2003, we have to go back to 1996 when birds were recorded from five different localities.



Red-breasted Merganser, Chelmarsh Reservoir,  
21 Mar 2004, (M Owen)

**RUDDY DUCK** *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Status: Scarce resident

Shavington Big Pool recorded the highest counts for both winter periods when 17 birds were recorded on both 17 Jan and 4 Sep. The only other double-figure counts came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 11 birds were recorded on 4 Apr and 12 birds were present on 19 Sep.

Maximum single site counts for the last 10 years:-

1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
74	30	30	39	30	45	22	19	27	17

Breeding was confirmed from Priorslee Lake when an unsexed adult with five ducklings was recorded on 17 Aug. However, only three ducklings survived by 11 Sep. Two ducklings were present at Shavington Big Pool on 4 Sep in the company of 17 adults.

Two males displayed to a single female at ASF on 19 July, but there is nothing to suggest that breeding took place at this site.

**WILLOW PTARMIGAN** (Red Grouse) *Lagopus lagopus*

Status: Scarce resident (BCC Amber listed)

All records came from the two main heather moorlands, the Long Mynd and The Stiperstones. Thirteen records came from the Long Mynd, one of which was the National Trust's annual monitoring count of males calling at dawn – 24 such males were counted on 29 Oct, compared with a total of 22 counted in 2003. A casual record of 10 birds on 3 Dec, nine in the area between Shooting Box and Pole Cottage, and one on Calf Ridge, was also received, but no other record from the Long Mynd was of more than four birds. However, records did come from seven months of the year. The exceptions were January and February, presumably due to an absence of observers rather than birds, and June - September, when the males are usually quiet.

On The Stiperstones, records were received from June, September, November and December, with more than two birds reported only on 3 and 21 Dec.

Annual surveys are carried out on the Stiperstones by English Nature. The count of calling males in spring at dawn found 17-19, and rope-dragging in late July and August to establish breeding success found 54-55 adult and juvenile birds. This suggests very poor breeding success – not much more than one juvenile per territorial male, assuming an equal number of females.

The combined results of the counts of calling birds on the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones gives an estimated county population of around 45 pairs. Thus the decline reported in the Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas (1992) has continued since. No reports of breeding evidence or young were received, apart from the Stiperstones count.

**RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE** *Alectoris rufa*

Status: Common resident, but supplemented by released birds

Poorly recorded in comparison to last year with only 123 records coming from 52 sites

There were two double-figure counts in the early part of the year; thirteen birds were at Wall Farm on 18 Jan, whilst a covey of 22 birds at Atcham Bridge on 5 Feb represented the largest count for the year under review.

The only double figure count from the autumn concerned 11 birds at Alveley on 29 Aug. This site hosted 12 birds on 26 Dec and, finally, 15 birds were at Kingsnordley and 13 birds were at Tuckhill on the common date of 28 Dec.

There were no reports received this year of successful breeding. Calling birds were reported from Leamoor Common and Howle, the former bird from on top of a post. Birds were reported visiting gardens at Edgmond Marsh, Oswestry, Waters Upton and Worthen.

**GREY PARTRIDGE** *Perdix perdix*

Status: Scarce resident (BCC Red listed)

A total of 31 records from 24 sites represents considerably less coverage than 2003 (62 records from 44 sites) and 2002 (similar to 2003). There was a strong northern bias to the records, with only three coming from the southern half of the county. One of these reported three coveys within a mile of Ludlow Racecourse, and another was the first on Barratts Mill Farm, near Ashford, “for a few years”. The last of the three was a single near Erdington on 31 August.

There were only eight records of more than two birds - 13 at Nagington Grange, near Childs Ercall on 21 Dec, nine at Heath Farm, Alberbury, on 19 Sep, eight at Edgebolton on 15 Feb, five at West Felton on 16 Apr, four at Ercall Park on 30 Jul, the same number at both Wall Farm (Cherrington Moor) on 26 Jul and Sleep Airfield on 11 Apr, and three at Condover on 25 Nov. Three of these records were of confirmed breeding – the party at Ercall Park included two half-grown chicks, the party at Wall Farm contained two fully-grown chicks, and the party at Condover included a juvenile which was “almost charcoal in colour”.

All other records were of only one or two birds. A wide variety of habitats were noted – cereal stubble next to hedgerow, a strawberry field, fallow and adjacent wheat, wheat stubble, weedy set-aside, a garden, horse pasture, pasture, winter wheat, oil seed rape and spring barley.

A distribution map, showing all Grey Partridge records for the last five years, can be found on the Society’s website ([www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com)).

### **COMMON QUAIL** *Coturnix coturnix*

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

All records refer to calling males and quite probably, as in 2003, refer to just seven individual birds. By recent standards, this is below average for the county.

First record came from Caynton Hall on 25 May with what is most likely to be the same bird, recorded at Caynton on 1 Jun. The only other June record concerned a bird that called briefly during the afternoon of the 14th at Hordley. A bird called just north of the Montgomery canal at Maesbury Marsh on 1 Jul. At Norbury, a bird called repeatedly for 10 minutes on 11 Jul.

Records of a bird heard calling from a field of rye grass at Woolston on the 18th, 25th and 31 Jul undoubtedly refer to the same bird. Similarly, a record of a calling bird at Worthen on 24 Jul and 31 Aug may well refer to just one individual. Finally, a bird called from a wheat field at 8.30 p.m. at ASF. on 10 Aug.

No records were received this year from the traditional areas of Aldersey near Prees or Sleep Airfield.

### **COMMON PHEASANT** *Phasianus colchicus*

Status: Common resident, but supplemented by released birds

The only three-figure count for the year concerned 700 birds at Stowe Hill, Bucknell on 22 Aug with the observer speculating that as many as 900 birds could have been present. The numbers of birds and the date indicates released birds for shooting interests. Double figure counts were received from a further seven sites with 92 at Butter Cross on 30 Aug, 74 at this same site on 2 Oct and 57 at Pool Hall on 29 Aug noteworthy. Again, one suspects released birds.

Breeding was poorly recorded with just one record of a female with four juveniles at Much Wenlock on 7 Jul. Birds were recorded visiting gardens at Condover and Worthen. A melanistic female bird was at Trench Pool on 4 Apr.

### **LITTLE GREBE** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Status: Uncommon resident

The only double-figure count for the year came from The Mere, Ellesmere when 10 birds were recorded on 17 Nov. Seven birds were at Oerley Reservoir on 4 Mar, six birds were at ASF on 14 Aug and counts of five adult birds came from Sambrook Mill on 10 Jan and Brown Moss on 22 Feb.

Breeding continues to be poorly recorded, a pair with one young bird were at Tibberton Moor on 10 Jul, with three adults and two juveniles also here on 14 Aug. An adult and two immature birds were at Little London Farm on 29 Aug. A pair with three young were at Condover Quarry on 3 Sep and a pair with one juvenile were at Ellerton on 5 Sep. Finally, an adult fed a juvenile at Ercall Heath on 7 Sep.

An interesting record came from Venus Pool on 8 Jul, when a bird followed a fox around the north bay, “very aggressive and facing the fox head on, it chased the fox along the bank. The fox seemed genuinely scared and ran off” (RV).

### **GREAT CRESTED GREBE** *Podiceps cristatus*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

Largest count for the year came from the traditional site of Chelmarsh Reservoir when 38 birds were recorded on 24 Jul. Equally impressive was the 45 birds recorded at The Mere, Ellesmere on 12 Jan, another site that regularly attracts this species in large numbers. Other than those tabled below, there were no other double figure counts for the year under review.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	6	6	19	12	23	9	6	3
Cole Mere	8	12	12	-	6	14	8	3
Priorslee Flash	3	21	16	18	2	4	-	-
Priorslee Lake	10	10	14	12	3	8	9	18
The Mere, Ellesmere	45	26	16	19	12	14	18	3

Successful breeding was confirmed at just five sites, with a remarkably early record coming from Priorslee Lake where a pair with two young were observed on 1 Mar. What was presumably the same pair was then seen with four young on 8 Mar. At least one other pair was successful at this site. Other confirmed breeding came from Dothill Pools, Dudmaston, Middle Pool Trench and Priorslee Flash. At Venus Pool, a Carrion Crow was seen to take an egg from a nest on 16 Apr, but birds were still reported as nesting on 25 Apr. However, there is nothing to suggest that successful breeding took place, sadly mirroring the situation for at least the last three years.

Birds were recorded in all months of the year at Priorslee Lake and the only record from running water concerned a single bird on the River Severn at Hampton Loade on 3 Mar.

Maximum counts for the last five years:-

2004	48	24 Jul	Chelmarsh Reservoir
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

**BLACK-NECKED GREBE** *Podiceps nigricollis*

Status: Rare visitor.



Black-necked Grebe, The Mere, Feb 2004  
(Alan Heath)

A winter plumage bird was present at The Mere, Ellesmere during the period 1-12 Feb. News of the bird's presence was initially via the information services giving many county bird watchers the opportunity to enjoy this bird.

A well-watched juvenile bird was then present at Venus Pool from 26 Aug until the month end. Again, the initial finder's identity is unknown.

Now recorded in each of the last five years, and in seven of the last ten years, the only blank years have been 1997, 1998 and 1999. The last recorded breeding in the county was in 1989.

**MANX SHEARWATER** *Puffinus puffinus*

Status Vagrant, usually storm blown

Remarkably two records for the year.

The first concerned the corpse of a bird that was picked up dead in the unlikely location of the Black Hill, near Clun on 14 Sept (AR). The head of the bird was detached from the body, but was present and intact. The feathers on the back of the bird had been plucked and there was no remnants of the tail. The finder speculated "probably hit by a peregrine or goshawk". The corpse was preserved in a freezer, subsequently enabling photographs to be taken in support of its identification.

The second record concerns an adult bird found at Mount Pleasant, Shrewsbury on 21 Sept and taken into care at Cuan House Wildlife Rescue at Much Wenlock. The bird was in good condition and was fed on whitebait before being released at Llandudno on 26 Sep.

These represent the first county records since 1990 when an exhausted bird was taken into care, before being released at Chelmarsh Reservoir.

**LEACH'S STORM PETREL** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Status: Vagrant, usually storm blown

The first record since 1996 concerned a bird present at The Mere, Ellesmere on the afternoon of 21 Sep (JHB). Despite being occasionally mobbed by black-headed gulls the bird was seen to feed by picking insects off the water and also appeared to patter on the water's surface.

Ironically, the finder was returning from watching Leach's and a single storm petrol off the Merseyside coast! The bird was present until at least 18.00 affording some lucky birdwatchers a new county species. However, to the disappointment of others, it did not linger into the evening.

The 1996 record was of a bird at Little Stretton which was "chased by corvids across the A49 and then watched flying over meadows and around trees". The date of the record being 6 Oct.

**NORTHERN GANNET** *Sua bassana*

Status: Vagrant, usually storm blown

An adult bird was picked up in a field at Manor Farm, Sheriffhales on 23 Sep and was taken into care at Cuan House Wildlife Rescue at Much Wenlock. The bird had no obvious injuries and was reported as being "fat and healthy" and also "aggressive and noisy".

The bird was released together with the previously reported Manx shearwater at Llandudno on 26 Sep. This is the first county record since 2002 when an adult bird was observed at Broome on 1 Nov.

**GREAT CORMORANT** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Status: Common visitor but scarce in summer.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	4	6	28	10	5	7
Priorslee Lake	27	14	6	2	14	23
Shavington Big Pool	5	40	15	45	-	-
The Mere, Ellesmere	132	65	8	21	36	54
White Mere	6	30	-	25	11	-

In addition to those records tabled above, double figure counts came from another six sites with 33 at Crose Mere on 12 Dec the largest count.

The largest count for the year came from The Mere, Ellesmere where 132 birds were recorded on 17 Jan. Co-incidentally, this number was also the largest count in 2003, again at The Mere. This site also claimed the highest number of birds for the second winter period with 54 on 12 Dec. The autumn build up of birds at Venus Pool was repeated this year, the monthly maxima being 16 in August, 32 in September and 32 in October.

For the sixth year running, birds were recorded in all months of the year but, as in 2003, no single site recorded birds in all months. Summering birds were recorded at six sites in June, five sites in July and seven sites in August.

### **EURASIAN BITTERN** *Botaurus stellaris*

Status: Rare winter visitor

The first record for the year came from Venus Pool on 10 Jan (DB), this bird was then recorded on a further 20 dates, before being seen to depart high to the north west on 12 Mar.

On 22 Feb a bird was flushed from a wet area on the Eaton Mascott Estate at 13.00 hrs (per WRBD) and was reported as flying towards Venus Pool. Interestingly, a bird was then recorded at Venus Pool in the reeds opposite the main hide at 13.26 hrs. Another was seen at Emstrey on 25 & 26 Mar (per JWS), both dates when the Venus Pool bird was not reported. Given that many of the Venus Pool records refer to the bird flying into, or out of the reserve, it is likely that all of the above records refer to one individual commuting around the local area.

The only other record for the year came from the Severn Valley County Park, where a bird was recorded on the single date of 4 Feb (PC). Again, with no records from Venus Pool between 20 Jan and 7 Feb, it is possible that just one bird was responsible for all records.

Recorded annually within the county for the last four years.

**LITTLE EGRET** *Egretta garzetta*

Status: Scarce visitor.



Little Egret, Venus Pool, Aug 2004  
(Paul King)

An unprecedented year with birds recorded at 14 widespread sites throughout the county. The first records for the year came from ASF and Atcham Bridge when single birds were recorded on 4 Jan. A single bird then frequented the Sambrook Mill area from 17 Jan to 3 Feb.

The first report at Venus Pool was of a single on 24 May, with another recorded here on 30 Jun. In July, single birds were recorded at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Cressage, Harnage, Venus Pool and Wall Farm. Two birds were at Venus Pool on 17 Jul and on a further five dates during the month. Two were also seen on the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas on 26 Jul, a date when two were also recorded at Venus Pool.

Single birds were recorded in August at Bridgnorth, Chelmarsh Reservoir, Hodnet by-pass, Trench Pool and Venus Pool. Two birds were recorded at Venus Pool on 13 dates in August with six present on the 8th (HJG). Five birds were then reported on 12-13 Aug with four birds recorded on two dates and three birds also seen on two dates.

September saw single birds at Bromfield, Chelmarsh Reservoir, Cound Fishery and Venus Pool with two birds present at Venus Pool on six dates. Finally, one lingered at Venus Pool into October being last reported on the 4th.

Even allowing for some duplication of records, this is by far the most impressive year for this enigmatic heron since the first record which was at Venus Pool in 1992.

**GREY HERON** *Ardea cinerea*

Status: Common resident.

Breeding records were received from Halston Hall, Whittington where 16 nests were occupied on 17 Apr, Stead Vallets where seven nests were occupied on 11 Apr and The Mere, Ellesmere where the heronry contained 25 occupied nests on 4 Apr.

Away from the breeding sites, the only double figure counts came from Chelmarsh Reservoir where, on eight dates, over 10 were seen with a count of 21 on 31 Aug the highest. Birds were recorded in all months of the year at the well-watched sites of Priorslee Lake, Venus Pool and Wood Lane.

Birds were reported visiting gardens at Oswestry and Waters Upton.

**PURPLE HERON** *Ardea purpurea*

Status: Vagrant

A first summer bird was at Priorslee Lake on the single date of 27 Apr (JI) represented the third record for the county. It was first seen in flight at 06.15 hrs before alighting in the willows at the western end of the lake. Subsequently, it was disturbed from a feeder stream at 07.00 hrs and was again seen briefly in flight by the finder and a second observer (EJW). However, despite not appearing to fly far, the bird could not be re-located.

The previous county record was of a juvenile at Venus Pool from at least midday until the evening on 24 Sep 2003. The first county record was a well-watched juvenile that was present in the Prees and Lower Heath area from 30 Oct until 17 Nov 1995.

**EUROPEAN HONEY BUZZARD** (Honey Buzzard) *Pernis apivorus*

Status: Rare summer visitor (RBBP)

The Raptor Panel reported that a male was seen, early in the season, in the area where a pair have bred or attempted to breed for a number of years. However, no female was observed until July. The pair then built a summer nest, but there was no successful breeding.

This is the fourth year running that no young have been raised.

## **RED KITE** *Milvus milvus*

Status: Scarce resident

The number of red kite records in Shropshire has increased steadily. Bird Reports show 20 records from 18 locations in 2000 (the highest number of reports up until that year), 15 from 14 locations in 2001 (Foot and Mouth year), 27 from 24 locations in 2002, and 54 from 32 locations in 2003. In 2003, three of the records were reports of more than one bird, compared with no such records in 2002 or 2000, and only one record of two birds together in 2001. In 2004, there were 57 records from 36 locations, a further small increase compared to 2003.

Almost half the records (23 out of 57) were in and around Craven Arms, whilst fifteen were from north or east of Church Stretton (including three widely spaced records from the Oswestry uplands). The first of the year was not until 29 Feb, although well over half (33) of all records were in April or May. There were only two records in June, with a one-month gap between 23 Jun and 29 July then four records in August, three in September and one in each of the last three months of the year.

There were four records of more than one bird: one record of four birds south of Stoney Pound, circling with buzzards before heading of north over the Clun Valley, on 29 Oct, and three separate records of two seen together - at Blake Mere on 8 Mar, near Onibury on 28 Apr and near Diddlebury on 3 Sep. All other records were of only one bird.

Two birds, possibly a pair, were reported to the Upper Onny Wildlife Group as over-wintering in the Upper Onny Valley, between the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, and a Breeding Bird Survey carried out by the Group between 27 Mar and 11 Apr, covering an area of 120 square kilometres between the Long Mynd and the Welsh border, produced at least 25 sightings, but none were of more than one bird at a time. The National Trust kept a record of sightings on the Long Mynd, but there were only four – a lot less than 2003.

Around one kite in 100 in Wales are “leucistic”– they suffer from absence of a brown pigment, but they are not true albinos as they do have some pigmentation. Such birds are very pale in colour, and a particularly pale individual, resident in Powys, was seen just inside Shropshire on 27 Mar. This bird has almost the colouration of a male Hen Harrier without black wing tips.

Kites have been wing-tagged in the nest on behalf of the Welsh Kite Trust, and at all the release sites in England and Scotland. Yellow wing-tag number 9 on the

left wing was seen at Aston, near the Wrekin, on 7 August. This was a one year old bird raised in the Chiltern Hills. The tags are different on each wing, but all the information can be gained from only one tag if the colour of the letters and of the background, and, importantly, the colour of the horizontal bar at the bottom of the tag, which identifies the area of origin, are noted, as well as which wing the tag is on.

The Welsh Kite Trust has started searching for nests in the county, as expansion of the breeding population over the border is imminent. Trust publicity requesting records produced additional information, and confirmed the presence of more than one bird. Two birds seen on 17 Apr, one at The Bog (Stiperstones) and one near Craven Arms, about 20 kilometres apart, had differences in plumage, and three were seen together circling over a silage field near Kempton on 28 Jun. This date is almost certainly too early for recently fledged young to be involved.

As kites usually do not breed until they are three years old, and young birds wander widely, many of these sightings will be of non-breeding young birds. However, the frequency of sightings in the Upper Onny Valley, and near Craven Arms, suggests at least one bird stayed in each of these areas for a considerable length of time. There may have been pairs present, so it is possible that two or more breeding attempts were made. However, a search of the Upper Onny area produced no evidence of nesting, no nest was found or reported from elsewhere, and no evidence has been received of any recently fledged young.

The pattern of observations matches those in the County Bird Report for the last few years – virtually none in the winter months, a big increase in records during the breeding season, as young birds disperse and forage in new areas, and then a marked shortage of records between June and October. This also suggests that there were no successful nests in 2004.

### **EURASIAN MARSH HARRIER** (Marsh Harrier) *Circus aeruginosus*

Status: Rare passage migrant and summer visitor

A single record of a juvenile which flew low over the pools at ASF on 20 Aug (AL) before continuing in a westerly direction.

The fifth year in succession the species has been recorded in the county and about the 22nd county record in total.

**HEN HARRIER** *Circus cyaneus*

Status: Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant

Five were recorded, which was the lowest annual total since 2001 and very disappointing after the good year in 2003. Reports of six others were not accepted by the Records Committee due to lack of, or insufficient, documentation. Hen harrier, particularly female and immature, remains one of the species with the highest rejection rates in the county and details of key plumage features structural proportions and behaviour is essential in support of records.

A female, which flew over Venus Pool on 3 Apr (DNS, PRS). was the only record for the first half of the year.

A female was then seen at Ditton Priors on 1 Oct (AS) with another at Brown Clee on 4 Nov (NAF). Although the proximity of these records suggests the same bird might have been involved, the two records are treated as separate here, principally as the month between sightings is a period when movement by the species would still be likely.

A female was near Shepherds Rock on the Stiperstones on 14 Nov (AW) and finally, the only male of the year, was on the slopes above Inwood, Long Mynd on 7-8 Dec (IARB).

**NORTHERN GOSHAWK** *Accipiter gentilis*

Status: Scarce resident (RBBP)

A female was observed in flight at Stantonhill Farm between Shifnall and Tong on 22 Jan. One was seen on a roadside hedge in the south of the county on 12 Feb. Another was at Wood Lane on 22 Feb and a presumed juvenile chased a jackdaw at Venus Pool on 12 Aug.

There were very few reports from independent observers from the main breeding areas but Forest Enterprise reported that 12 occupied nests were monitored by the Raptor Group and 25 young were known to have fledged, so the population would appear to be reasonably stable at present.

Historically, goshawks were probably widespread throughout England, Wales and Scotland whilst the countryside was still afforested to a great extent and human populations remained relatively low. Clearances for agriculture, the growth of the human population and the invention of firearms allied to the increase of kept estates, gradually caused a detrimental effect on goshawk numbers, to the extent that the species was extinct in England by the 1890s.

From the middle ages onwards goshawks were a species prized in falconry to the degree that by the laws of the time, only "noblemen" were allowed to own them. A renewal of interest in falconry after the Second World War, coupled with the increase in commercial coniferous forestation, was to prove the catalyst for the return of goshawks to many areas as birds began to escape or were deliberately released. The first post-war breeding in Shropshire was proven in 1966 and has taken place annually since with numbers probably limited by available habitat, persecution and disturbance.

**EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*

Status: Common resident

Reported from 92 sites. This constitutes fewer individual reports than in recent years, although many observers submitted monthly summaries. Nevertheless, remains widespread and well established.

The largest count of adult birds was of four soaring together at Newport on 13 Apr, almost certainly comprising two pairs from adjacent territories, possibly in a boundary dispute. Soaring birds were sometimes seen in loose company with other species including common buzzards and common ravens, although they were more likely to be mobbed by other corvids.

Many observers recorded sparrowhawks hunting in gardens, particularly where garden feeders were present. In Aston Square, Oswestry, a female took a domestic dove from a patio and took three more during one week in July and, on one occasion, was seen sitting under the bird table at dusk. At Much Wenlock, one took a blackbird from a bird bath and fieldfares and redwings were other thrush species targeted. Other comments from observers included: - "constantly around the garden", "very bold and causing great trouble on bird feeder", "bouncing on privet hedge - sparrows stayed safe!" and "sitting on the bird table". Regardless of the opportunist attentions of sparrowhawks, the owners of many garden feeding stations are of the opinion that numbers of potential prey species are largely unaffected.

Observers also commented on sparrowhawks being mobbed by other species including mistle thrushes, Eurasian jackdaws and barn swallows. The flight path of low flying sparrowhawks is often flagged up by alarm calling hirundines shadowing from a safe height.

Breeding was confirmed at only two sites, but this included a brood of three which fledged from an old carrion crow nest near Grinshill. Although direct evidence of confirmed breeding was in short supply, the population appears to be fairly healthy and stable at present.

Sparrowhawks almost invariably build a new nest from scratch each year, occasionally utilising an old nest of another species, most commonly wood pigeon, as a base. The use of an intact nest is very unusual. Newton in "The Sparrowhawk" found only 7% of a total of 1389 nests studied in south Scotland were not built from scratch and of those the majority were on old sparrowhawk nests. Just four (0.3%) were on an old crow nest.

### **COMMON BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*

Status: Common resident

The distribution map for common buzzard in the Atlas of The Breeding Birds of Shropshire would look very different if the survey was to be repeated today. The fieldwork, undertaken in the years 1985-1990, showed a marked and expected bias to the wooded hills and valleys of the south west and the north west uplands. Breeding was confirmed in 20% of tetrads and was probable or possible in another 29%. The text in the Atlas stated: "Away from this habitat [the highlands] pairs breed in undulating country with scattered woods. The blank areas are mostly prime arable land which fails to supply satisfactory nesting woods and hunting needs".

Subsequently, as population densities have increased in the favoured areas, the species has showed itself more than capable of utilising arable and dairy areas even though there is a much lower density of tree cover for hunting and breeding purposes. Indeed, there must now be a very low percentage of tetrads within the county that have not held breeding buzzards over recent years. Reduction of persecution encouraging the species to nest in less secluded areas, the partial recovery of rabbit populations from myxomatosis and the limitation of pesticides in the food chain are probably all contributory factors in the range expansion. How much more the species can consolidate remains to be seen and the higher population densities are always likely to remain in the tradition heartlands.

Records in 2004 came from nearly 200 sites covering all parts of the county. The highest count of the year was 18 at West Felton on 2 Mar. The same site also had counts of 13 on 15 Feb and 12 on 6 Apr. Other double figure counts included 10 at Chapel Lawn on 14 Feb, 17 at Pont Pentre-gwyn on 29 Mar, 10 at Titterstone Clee on 19 Sep, 16 at ASF on 14 Oct and 16 at Wyke near Broseley on 1 Nov.

Breeding was confirmed, or suspected, at Adderley, Neen Savage, Candy Wood, Condover, Gatten Plantation, Whittington, Ridgwardine, Leebotwood and West Felton though clearly overlooked in many other areas.

## **OSPREY** *Pandion haliaetus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Once again Venus Pool was the nucleus site over a large part of the spring for at least one osprey and birds continued to be recorded there during each month until September. However, several birds were likely to have been involved in the year's sightings. With the establishment of breeding pairs in Wales and northern England, not to mention the reintroduction scheme at Rutland Water, we can look forward to a continued association with this charismatic and often spectacular species within the county.

The first of the year was at Venus Pool on 24 Mar. On 2 Apr another, or possibly the same, appeared at Venus Pool and was then recorded most days until 21 Apr, with probably two seen in the vicinity on the 6th and 8th. On 3 Apr, it was reported in the log book to be ringed on the right leg. This bird was often to be seen fishing at either Venus Pool or the adjacent fishing pool and was successful on at least eight occasions. Sightings of one flying low carrying a fish over the A488 near Hanwood on 7 Apr and of one fishing over the River Severn at Monkmoor on 13 Apr, probably referred to this bird. After a gap of 14 days another was at Venus Pool on 5-10 May and then one was present on 21 & 23 May.

Others seen in the spring were at Stiperstones on 31 Mar (perched in an oak tree at Gatten plantation), Chelmarsh Reservoir on 5 Apr, Priorslee Lake on 17 Apr, Priorslee Flash on 11 May and The Wrekin on 23 May.

During the summer, individuals were seen at Mytton on 9 Jun and Cole Mere on 20 Jun. Singles were again at Venus Pool on 30 Jun, 11 Jul and 18 Jul, and then one was seen there on most dates between the 14 & 29 Aug before the last of the year on 12 Sep. The only record of the year from Wood Lane was of a sub-adult perched on one of the osprey platforms on 10 Sep.

## **COMMON KESTREL** *Falco tinnunculus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Recorded from just 130 sites compared to 177 sites the previous year. Although these bare statistics suggest a substantial reduction in numbers, hopefully, this may be due at least in part to lack of reporting. If a population reduction has occurred, a prime factor may be a cyclical dip due to a possible population crash of small rodents which form a substantial proportion of kestrels' prey.

The largest groups of the year were of five at West Felton on 6 Feb and Priorslee Lake on 29 Sep. Whilst the Priorslee Lake group may have involved a family party, the concentration at West Felton in February is noteworthy as the species, in the UK at least, is mainly solitary outside the breeding season; they had presumably come together to exploit a local surfeit of prey.

At Market Drayton, a male was observed actively following a mowing machine which was cutting the grass verges alongside the A53 by-pass, perching on fence posts as it went. A female stooped from a hover at Adderley and seized a dropped corvid primary feather blowing in the wind, before flying off with it.

Breeding confirmed at Neen Savage (in a listed house!), Cheney Longville, Craig Sychtyn and Norton-in-Hales and, undoubtedly, at many other sites. In the early part of the season, a pair again showed signs of breeding in the nest box at Venus Pool, but were unsuccessful.

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*

Status: Rare resident and scarce winter visitor (RBBP)

Last year's Bird Report commented on the scarcity of records from outside the breeding season, but there were even fewer in 2004. This may be due to an increasing tendency for merlins to remain on the breeding grounds all year, as prey species are also remaining in increasing numbers, presumably as a result of milder winters. However, hearsay comments to this effect from National Trust staff have not been translated into formal records.

Thirteen records were received from the traditional breeding area, the Long Mynd, the first on 30 March. However, most records were prior to nesting, up to and including 15 May. There was only one from a later date, of one bird seen after the end of the breeding season on 23 August, apart from records from the observer monitoring the nests. Two nests were found, the first time this has occurred since 1993. Four young fledged from one of these nests in early July. There were much smaller young in the second nest at around the same time, but they were predated. The culprit is unknown, but there was still an active carrion crow nest on the opposite side of the valley at the time.

A single merlin was reported from the Stiperstones on 10 Jun, but the sex was not identified. A male was seen there in suitable breeding habitat on 9 Jun and 13 Jul during a Breeding Bird Survey. No evidence of a nest or breeding behaviour was observed. Only one other breeding season report was received, of a single bird at a quarry at the northern end of Wenlock Edge on 7 Jun.

Outside the breeding season, only five records from three sites were received in the early part of the year – one at Shawbury on 1 Feb, one at Venus Pool on the 21st and 26 Feb, and again on 10 Mar, and one at Priorslee Lake on 13 Mar. After the breeding season, records were only received from Allscott Sugar Factory on 2 Oct, Chelmarsh Reservoir on 7 Nov and Lower Heath on 16 Nov.

The merlin population is increasing nationally, from a low point in the 1960s caused by the effects of organo-chlorine poisoning, and it has doubled in the last 25 years. Hopefully, therefore, the increase to two pairs at the traditional site will be maintained in future and there is also the prospect of breeding elsewhere in the county.

**EURASIAN HOBBY** (Hobby) *Falco subbuteo*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor (RBBP)

Recorded from 55 well scattered sites; the 153 individual reports easily exceeds any previous year.

The first of the year was on seen 22 Apr, heading west along the Clun Valley near Craven Arms. This is the first time since 1996 that the first record of the spring has been from a site other than the Long Mynd or Venus Pool. Other April records came from Venus Pool, Chelmarsh Reservoir, St. Martins, Priorslee Lake and Edgmond. Twenty three more reports were received during May, with the bulk of sightings coming in the period from mid-June to late August.

Many observers reported hobbys chasing hirundines and catching insects. Seen on several occasions catching dragonflies at Venus Pool, where hobbys were recorded on at least 28 days during the year.

Breeding was confirmed at one site where three young were raised and was probable at six others. The records also suggest breeding was possible at a further 16 sites, but even this may well underestimate the current Shropshire breeding population.

Sightings ceased abruptly at the end of September with the last being a single at Nescliffe on the 26th.

## **PEREGRINE FALCON** *Falco peregrinus*

Status: Scarce resident (RBBP)

Recorded from 70 sites, including the breeding locations. The Shropshire Peregrine Group reported an excellent breeding season. At the 15 sites where laying occurred, at least 42 eggs were laid, 35 of which hatched and 29 young fledged. The number of young fledged was only bettered in 2002 when the total was 32. At one traditional eyrie, four young were fledged for the sixth consecutive year; it is thought that this is unprecedented at any monitored eyrie in the UK at least. One of the eyries was filmed by the renowned wildlife photographer and broadcaster Simon King for the popular BBC mini series "Britain goes Wild". The tree nesting pair from 2002-2003 were again in the area during the breeding season, but no nest was located.

Unfortunately, it was not all good news; the male from a traditional eyrie was found dead having been poisoned. Another male was found dead near Sweeney Hall Hotel and a post mortem revealed that it had died from traumatic injuries to the head and neck, possibly as a result of flying into overhead wires. This bird had been ringed as one of three nestlings at a nest site in south Shropshire in June 1991, nearly 13 years earlier. At one nest site, four young were predated at two days old, possibly by Eurasian jackdaws, and a two week old chick was taken by an unknown predator at another site.

One young bird, which fledged from a brood of three, was subsequently recovered injured and treated. Two peregrines were treated by the Cuan House Rescue Centre during the year. The first was a female found in a chicken pen near Bridgnorth on 20 Mar and released after treatment on 11 Apr. The other was a male which flew into a lamp post in Hadley. On examination this bird was found to have trichomoniasis in the mouth. After treatment, it was taken to a falconer for assessment and was released on 26 Sep.

An unusual occurrence involved a peregrine roosting during January and February in a large wall cavity under the eaves of a house. The peregrine was observed perching in a tree before flying direct into the wall cavity at dusk (JT).

Observers often reported on prey taken by peregrines which included common moorhen and common pheasant. Species attacked, unsuccessfully, included northern lapwing, common snipe and common starling.

A report of the Shropshire Peregrine group covering the period from 1997-2004 can be found on page 4.

## **WATER RAIL** *Rallus aquaticus*

Status: Scarce visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Just 61 reports were received from 10 sites, a marked reduction on the previous year, when 105 reports were received from 15 sites. As is normal with this species, many of the reports were of unseen birds calling. The maximum concentrations of birds during the year was of three.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	2	1	-	-	3	3	1
Chelmarsh	-	-	3	-	1	1	1
Priorslee Lake	1	1	1	-	1	1	2
Venus Pool	-	1	-	-	1	1	1
Wood Lane	1	1	-	-	1	-	-

Sixteen of the records were from the first winter period. The first report of the year was on 4 Jan, when a single was at Walcot Lake, Lydbury North, a site where this species has not been recorded for many years. One was heard calling at Priorslee Lake on the 15, 17 & 18 Jan and singles were also recorded here on 28 Feb and 11 Mar. At ASF, two were present on 25 Jan and a single was flushed on 28 Feb. A single was at Wood Lane on 17 Jan and 14 Feb. Other singles were recorded at Queen's Head on 18 Jan, Shavington Big Pool on 7 Feb and Venus Pool on 22 Feb, whilst two were heard at Sambrook Mill on 26 Jan and two were at Monkmoor Pool on 22 Feb. The final record of the quarter was of two, possibly three, at Chelmarsh on 14 Mar.

During the breeding season, singles were recorded at Venus Pool on 25 Jun and 26 Jul, but there was no evidence of breeding. One was at Shavington Big Pool on 18 Jul and on the same date a single was at Wall Farm where the observer commented that it was "probably fresh in", although this turned out to be the only record of the year from the site.

From the latter date until the year's end, the species was recorded at just six sites. At ASF, three were present on 24 Oct and 7 Nov and birds were present on at least three other dates. At Chelmarsh, singles were recorded on odd dates in August, October, November and December.

At Shavington Big Pool, singles were present on 4 Sep and 30 Oct and at Wood Lane one was present on four dates in October. At Venus Pool, a single was noted on eight dates between 16 Oct and the end of the year. At Priorslee Lake, a single was recorded on 15 dates between 22 Oct and the years end. No records were received from Severn Valley Country Park.

**COMMON MOORHEN** (Moorhen) *Gallinula chloropus*

Status: Common resident

Recorded from 80 sites, which is comparable to the previous year, although it is clear that the species is vastly under-reported. The highest count in the first winter period was of 20 at Priorslee Flash on 14 Jan. On 9 Apr, 22 were counted at Pimhill. Twenty were at Wood Lane on 22 Oct, but easily the largest gathering of the year was a count of 35 at ASF on 27 Dec.

Breeding was reported from Adderley, Broome Park at Neen Savage, Chelmarsh, Chesterton Golf Course, Granville Country Park, Priorslee Flash, Priorslee Lake, Trench Pool, Venus Pool, Wall Farm, Wood Lane and The Wrekin. However, it is safe to assume that the above list represents a fraction of breeding activity within the county. At Broome Park, newly hatched young were seen being fed by a juvenile from an earlier brood. This is a well-documented trait for the species, some juveniles even incubating the eggs of a second or third clutch.

**COMMON COOT** *Fulica atra*

Status: Common resident and winter visitor

The largest counts for the first winter period came from Chehmarsh where 222 were recorded on 25 Jan, falling to 152 two days later. The combined WeBS count for the EGM area during this period peaked at 183 on 25 Jan, with the majority, 67, at The Mere. Cranmere Bog with 100 on 4 Feb, Showell Mill with 70 on 10 Jan and Priorslee Lake with 53 on 9 Jan were the only other sites to hold more than 50 birds during the period.

Breeding was recorded at Adeney, Buttery Farm, Chelmarsh Reservoir, Middle Pool Trench, the National Sports Centre at Lilleshall, Priorslee Flash and Lake, Rednal, Sambrook Mill, Sowell Mill, Springfield Mill at Shrewsbury, Stead Vallets, Trench Pool, Venus Pool, Wall Farm and Wood Lane. No reports of breeding came from the EGM, but it would be reasonable to assume that most, if not all of these waters would have been utilised, certainly large numbers of immature birds were present in the early autumn.

The feature of the autumn and second winter period was the exceptionally large counts from the EGM, obtained by the field workers for the monthly WeBS counts, starting with a mighty 760 on 19 Sep; numbers remaining high throughout the rest of the year. The vast majority, always over 82%, were at The Mere and White Mere. It could be speculated that the numbers present during this three to four month period would be close to the maximum that these meres can support, particularly as both The Mere and White Mere have limited bank side grazing available to supplement food obtained from birds diving for aquatic vegetation etc.

Very high numbers were also present during this period at Priorslee Lake. As shown in the table, numbers increased monthly from September until the end of the year, although the December count may have been swelled by birds from the nearby Priorslee Flash.

Conversely, Chelmarsh recorded rather modest counts during the final quarter, peaking at 133 on 27 Dec. Away from the tabulated sites, the highest count in the second winter period was a mere 19 at Dudmaston on 29 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	222	-	97	-	91	74	133
EGM & Wood Lane	183	164	123	760	560	656	633
Priorslee Flash	34	28	31	15	30	-	-
Priorslee Lake	53	40	41	118	149	150	197
Venus Pool & Cound Fishery	15	21	31	20	20	22	47
Howle Pool	7	9	10	-	4	7	4

**EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER** (Oystercatcher) *Haematopus ostralegus*

Status: Scarce summer visitor and passage migrant

As usual, the vast majority of records were from the established breeding sites at Venus Pool with 153 (58%) and Wood Lane 91 (34%) of the total of 264 reports received from 12 sites.

The first of the year was, predictably, at Venus Pool on 10 Jan which, by recent trends, is not a remarkably early date. However, this may have been a passage bird as the next one recorded at Venus Pool was over three weeks later on 3 Feb. At Wood Lane a single was present on 22 and 23 Jan.

At ASF, four on 28 Feb were noted by the observer as comprising pairs on Mirelake and the River Tern but, subsequently, only spasmodic reports came from ASF and nearby Isombridge until 15 May when two were seen at both sites, although duplication is possible here. The only other record from this area came on 11 Jul, when a pair were in a field near ASF.

Two were present on the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 17 Apr, with four here on 31 May, two again on 12 Jun and singles on two dates in July. Two were at Chelmarsh on 11 Apr. A remarkable record came from Priorslee Lake on 14 May when a flock of 10 were flying around at first light. Singles were recorded at Market Drayton on 27 Jun and 3 Jul, the latter flying west, and two were at Almington also on 3 Jul.

At Venus Pool, a pair were present from 7 Feb through to the end of July. This established pair were, as in other years, joined and harassed by outsiders, which may have been either passage birds or ones which may have attempted to breed nearby, possibly even at ASF. Five were present on 1 Apr and the 4, 21 & 28 May, with four present on nine other dates. From early April, a nest scrape was in use on the main gravel island with at least three eggs visible on 12 Apr. Three young were seen on 7 May and all were still present and apparently doing well until at least 23 May but, unfortunately, all had disappeared by 26 May.

At Wood Lane, four were regular throughout March and April, but with seven seen on 21 Mar and five on 10 Apr. Occasional sightings of birds at Cole Mere, Newton Mere and White Mere were probably birds from the Wood Lane nucleus. One pair nested on the gravel island hatching two young by mid-May but just one of these survived to fledge.

The last sighting of the summer/autumn period was a single at Wood Lane on 2 Aug. A single at Venus Pool on 17 Dec was extremely unusual and four and a half months after the previous sighting of the year. It is conceivable that this bird was returning to breed for the 2005 season.

**LITTLE PLOVER** (Little Ringed Plover) *Charadrius dubius*

Status: Scarce summer visitor and uncommon passage migrant (RBBP)

Recorded from 11 sites with, as usual, the vast majority of reports from Venus Pool and Wood Lane during spring and summer and from ASF during autumn passage.

The first returning bird was at Wood Lane from 17 Mar, with a second present from the 19th. At VP, a single on 23 Mar was joined by a second the following day. Other March records were three at Bromfield on the 28th and singles at Chelmarsh Scrape and Priorslee Lake on the 29th and 31st respectively. Three were present on a new pool adjacent to the A53 Hodnet bypass near Wollerton on 3 Apr.

At Wood Lane, two pairs were on territory during April and May and incubating by mid-May. Both of these nests failed, although one of them may have hatched young which were taken shortly afterwards. At least one pair re-laid with young being seen from early June, two of which eventually fledged successfully.

At Venus Pool, numbers during the breeding season fluctuated greatly with a maximum of nine on 15 May and seven or eight present on several other dates. Two pairs settled down to breed from early May. A pair on the gravel island hatched two chicks and those on the stump island four, but both broods failed to survive beyond the dates first seen. Up to three juveniles present during August were known not to have originated from the reserve.

At Bromfield, where four were present in early April, some activity indicative of breeding was noted, but the outcome is unrecorded. Two probable pairs were present on the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas during April and May, although it is unclear if two juveniles present with four adults at this site on 19 Jul originated from this area. At Chelmarsh, up to three were present in April and May, but no breeding information was recorded.

At the main breeding sites, birds departed early with the last three at Wood Lane on 17 Jul and the final two at Venus Pool on 20 Jul. Up to two at Wall Farm from 10-13 Jul would have been passage birds. A most unusual passage record was of six at Brown Moss on 30 Aug, a site not normally associated with this species. The first record of the year at ASF was not until 17 Jul, coinciding with the lowering of water levels during the sugar beet campaign. Eight, comprising four adults and four juveniles on 26 Jul, was the peak of the return passage at this site. Between two and six were present during August and early September. The last of the year was a single at this site on the 19th and 23 Sep, a very late date.

**RINGED PLOVER** *Charadrius hiaticula*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

Recorded from just four sites, Venus Pool, Wood Lane, Chelmarsh and ASF.

The first spring passage record was a single at Venus Pool on 6 Mar. Three were present there on 16 Apr and singles were seen on scattered dates in all months until 6 Sep with four recorded on 26 May. At Wood Lane, two were seen on 22 Apr with singles on 26-28 Apr and 13-19 May. On return passage, another single was seen here on 24-26 Sep.

Return passage at Chelmarsh fell within a five day period when up to two were present from 26-31 Aug. At ASF, the first of the year were two on 12 Aug, but a most impressive influx took place there on 16-17 Aug when 18 were present with 15 remaining until the 18th. The last two of the year were reported at Wood Lane on 30 Sep.

Monthly maxima for selected sites:

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Allscott Sugar Factory	-	-	-	-	-	18	4
Chelmarsh Reservoir	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
Venus Pool	1	3	4	1	1	2	1
Wood Lane	-	2	1	-	-	-	1

A reasonable year, the annual totals were at first glance largely influenced by the influx at ASF in August, although the maximum count of 18 may have been close to the annual total at this site. The small groups moving through Venus Pool over a more prolonged period may well have involved a similar number of birds to those at ASF. In any event, it is likely that at least 45 visited the county during the year.

## **EUROPEAN GOLDEN PLOVER** *Pluvialis apricaria*

Status: Common winter visitor

Easily the largest flock of the year was a massive 600 seen in flight from Priorslee on 8 Feb. During the first quarter, large numbers of this species were regularly seen in this area, mainly in flight to the east. The other notable counts being 210 on 1 Jan, 110 on 15 Jan, 273 on 28 Feb and 150 on 2 Mar.

Other three figure counts from the first quarter came from Calverhall with 230 on 15 Mar and Condoover with 100 on 3 Jan. Smaller numbers were recorded at ASF, Baker's Hill, Berriewood, Leamoor Common, Leebotwood, Melverley, Shooting Box on the Long Mynd, Sleaf Airfield, Venus Pool, Wappenshall Moor, Whixall canal floods and Wood Lane.

April records comprised counts of 50 and 70 at Venus Pool on the 7th and 8th respectively and 45 from Priorslee Lake on the 19th. Eight at Sleaf Airfield on 3 May were the only record for the month.

The first returning birds were singles at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 24 Sep and ASF the following day. Counts of between 200 and 300 were received from several sites around Long Mynd during November and December. Other three figure counts in the final quarter included 130 at Burlington on 13 Oct, 200 at Cockshutt on 18 Dec, 245 at ASF on 3 Nov. At Priorslee Lake, counts of between 110 and 125 were recorded, again in flight to the east. An unconfirmed pager report was circulated of 250 at Higher Heath on 15 Dec. Also recorded in smaller numbers during the final quarter at Cae Howel, Edgmond, Tong, Prees Heath, Upton Magna and Venus Pool.

As would be expected, the species regularly associated with wintering flocks of northern lapwings. The series of winter records of large flocks around the Long Mynd is interesting since this species would normally be expected to winter at lower altitudes. The count of 600 at Priorslee in February is the largest in the county since 1999.

## **NORTHERN LAPWING** *Vanellus vanellus*

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

On 2 Jan, an estimated 1000 were on the canal floods at Whixall, with at least 750 still present two weeks later. As previous years, Wood Lane held large numbers of daytime roosting birds throughout the first winter period. This included several counts over 300, peaking at an estimate of 2000 on 7 Feb, thus doubling the aforementioned next highest count of the period at Whixall. As in other years, it is likely that birds commuted between these two nearby sites.

Other sites to hold flocks of 300 or more during this period were Venus Pool with 300 on 5 Jan, Emstrey with 400 on 14 Jan, Isombridge with 650 on 31 Jan, Cranmere Bog with 400 on 4 Feb, Dudmaston with 300 on 12 Feb and Wappenshall Moor with 500 on 15 Feb. Three adjacent sites on the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence also hosted notable numbers. Nine hundred were at Melverley on 17 Feb, 600 at Ponthen on 22 Feb and 450 at Hayes Farm, Alderbury on the same date, although once again the potential for duplication is clear.

As usual, the larger flocks of wintering continental birds started to depart from the end of February, to be replaced by the smaller numbers of breeding birds moving into the county and onto territory during March and early April. The earliest territorial display was reported from Crateford on 5 March.

Records were received from 85 sites during the breeding season, early March to the end of June. Whilst some of these would have been late spring passage or post-breeding movements, records from 72 sites, either of displaying birds in March or birds in suitable breeding habitat in April to mid-June, probably reflect breeding attempts. Most Lapwings do not breed until they are two years old, and the small numbers seen throughout the early summer at well-watched wetland sites such as Venus Pool and Wall Farm where no evidence of breeding was reported, were probably first year birds.

Confirmed breeding was reported from 19 sites, where incubating birds or chicks were seen: Braggington Hall Farm, Bromfield Gravel Pits, Cressage, Ebnal Hall Nr Gobowen, Edgebolton, Hampton Loade, Knuck Bank (Clun Forest), Ludlow Racecourse, Maesbury Marsh, Pen-yr-Estyn wetland, Pool Hall, Prees Lower Heath, the Severn Valley between Quatford and Chelmarsh, Tibberton, Tyrley Wharf (Market Drayton), Upper Affcot, Wollaston, Wood Lane Nature Reserve and Woodseaves nr Market Drayton. Pairs "on territory" or displaying were reported from a further 19 sites.

However, numbers of this once-common bird were depressingly small, and numbers equivalent to five or more breeding pairs were reported from only 10 sites: Aston Eyre nr Bridgnorth (6-8 pairs), Cranmere Bog (10), Hampton Loade (9), Holy Well (6), Knuck Bank, Clun Forest (8), Norbroom Marsh (East) (11), the Severn Valley between Quatford and Chelmarsh (8), Sandford Hall nr West Felton (6), Trefonen (5-6) and Upper Affcot (5).

Three-quarters of the 72 probable breeding sites were in the northern half of the county (54), with 24 in the north-west quadrant and 30 in the north-east. Eighteen were in the southern half, with all except two of these in the lowlands in the Severn Valley and around Ludlow.

Pairs were reported nesting in set-aside, spring barley, maize, strawberries, wet grass and wet pasture. It would be very helpful if records in the future could estimate the number of breeding pairs and identify the habitat being used.

The Upper Onny Wildlife Group surveyed an area of about 122 square kilometres between the Long Mynd and the Welsh border, and found only 19 breeding pairs (only 10 within the designated AONB and ESA boundaries, five of which were on one farm). A detailed survey found very poor breeding success. More than a third of all pairs (seven out of 19 – 36.8%) did not produce any chicks at all (nests were lost to agricultural activities or predation), and almost one-fifth of all broods (two out of 12 – 16.7%) were destroyed by agricultural activity. The number of chicks and fledged young found appears to be insufficient to sustain even the existing small remnant population, and the Group concluded that it is likely to become extinct in the area within the next five years unless action is taken to improve breeding success and increase the area of suitable habitat.

In view of the detailed study of Lapwing carried last year (see SBR 2003), and the *BAP* Target to increase the population in the Clun ESA from six pairs in 1998 to 50 in 2005, an effort was made to find breeding pairs in the ESA during specialist surveys of snipe and raven. Only 5 pairs were found: two of the pairs had broods on a bare field on Kents Bank, but it was rolled in June, apparently killing both broods: another pair nearby, on rough pasture near Black Mountain, was probably predated; a pair nested in spring barley, and moved its chicks to wet grass within the adjacent Rhos Fiddle Nature Reserve. It is not known if the chicks fledged; and the final pair was seen on a recently ploughed field near Foxhole on 31 March. There were 20 Carrion Crows foraging in the same field, so it unlikely this pair had any chance, and might have moved on. Another pair was reported as nesting in another new spring barley field, some distance away, but this was not confirmed. It may have been part of the small colony noted above at Knuck Bank. These small numbers suggest a decline rather than an increase since 1998.

The Ruralscapes Lapwing Project, operating around the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence, found only four pairs in the Melverly area, compared with 19 in 2003, 24 at Maesbury Marsh (no change from 2003), and 13 around Baggy Moor, down from 15 the year before – a total decline of almost 30% in one year, from 58 to 41.

Monitoring surveys reported in SBR 2003 concluded that the population was only one-quarter of the 1987 figure. The results outlined above suggest that the breeding population is still declining rapidly.

Post breeding season flocks began to accumulate during July, particularly at sites such as Wood Lane, Venus Pool and ASF. The first really big count from Wood Lane was 430 on 27 Aug. Six other counts of 300 or over came from Wood Lane during the final four months of the year peaking at 630 on 12 Dec and flocks of 200-400 were probably present most days. The highest count of the second winter period was at Whixall canal floods with the estimated count of 1000 on 27 Nov, mirroring the high count from this site early in the year.

A flock varying in size between 250 and 600 was regularly present in the low lying wet fields between the River Tern and the new Hodnet bypass during the final quarter, an area which has become a regular wintering site for the species. The next highest count, other than at one of the tabulated sites was 290 at Chelmarsh on 30 Dec. Elsewhere, numbers remained fairly low during the final three months of the year.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	42	-	-	-	30	21	300	353	-
Priorslee Lake	52	76	10	1	1	2	94	140	280
Venus Pool	300	110	78	60	120	95	200	450	160
Wall Farm	34	59	80	79	10	-	-	25	300
Wood Lane	838	2000	400	350	430	409	420	16	630
Whixall	1000	400	18	-	-	-	-	1000	-

**SANDERLING** *Calidris alba*

Status: Rare passage migrant

Just two were seen, a poor year compared with the average of 3.6 per year over the previous years. As is normally the case with this species, both were present for just a single day.

A partial summer plumaged bird was at Venus Pool on 12 May, a fairly typical date for spring passage, the period which accounts for the vast majority of records in the county (JB, GEH). The second record was a bird in first winter plumage was at ASF on the unusually late date of 28 Nov (AL).

**LITTLE STINT** *Calidris minuta*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Three were seen. The first was a scarce spring passage bird, whilst the others were more to be expected autumn juveniles.

The spring record was at Chelmarsh Scrape on 28 Apr (KB). It was found late morning and was still present in the late afternoon. In autumn, one was at Venus Pool on 22 Aug and remained until 25 Aug. Another juvenile was present at ASF from 24-30 Sep (AL).

Three in a year has become a fairly typical figure over the last few years. The years of multiple occurrences of autumn juveniles are now very few and far between.

**PECTORAL SANDPIPER** *Calidris melanotos*

Status: Vagrant

An unprecedented three were seen, maintaining the excellent run of the species in the county over recent years. The first was found at Wood Lane on 8 Jun and remained until 11 Jun (AH), one was at ASF on 8 Aug (AL), but was not seen subsequently, and the final bird, an adult, showed well at Venus Pool from 15 Aug until 20 Aug (PAK).

The Wood Lane bird was a very untypical late spring record, although several were seen in other parts of the country around this date, perhaps suggestive of birds which had crossed the Atlantic in previous autumns. These were the 14-16th records for the county. A total of seven have been seen in the years 1999-2004, with 2002 the only blank year in this period. Remarkably, 12 of these have been at ASF.

## DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*

Status: Common passage migrant

Winter records came from Whixall canal floods, where a single was present on 2 Jan and Wood Lane, where two were seen on the same date, with one remaining until 10 Jan. After these early records, none were seen until a single at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 8 Apr, although spring passage started to get underway in earnest in the second half of April.

Three were at Venus Pool on 16 Apr and one or two were present on three other dates until 27 April. Twelve arrived here on 3 May and generally low numbers were seen on most dates during the month with the exception of a big influx of 21 on 8 May, easily the highest count of the year. The final spring record at Venus Pool was of a single on 30 Jun. At Wood Lane, one or two were seen most days between 26 Apr and the end of May with four on two dates, six on 22 May and eight on the 29th. Singles were then reported here on the 12 & 14 Jun. Two were at Chelmarsh on 26 Apr with three more on 3 May. At Priorslee Lake, a single was seen on 2 May and two on 17 May, whilst at Wall Farm a single was also present on the 17th. As is often the case, none were seen during this period at ASF, mainly due to high water levels.

Return passage was evident from mid July with singles at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Wood Lane, Venus Pool and ASF on the 10th, 12th, 13th and 17th respectively. Numbers at ASF peaked at nine on 16-17 Aug and 1 Oct, with birds present on most days until 21 Nov. At Venus Pool, numbers were very low, with just one or two present, apart from three on 21 Nov, and there were long periods with none recorded. The last of the year here was a single on 1 Dec. At Wood Lane, numbers never exceeded two, with the last being a single on 2 Oct. At Chelmarsh further singles were seen on the 20 & 25 Jul with seven on 30 Aug.

Monthly maxima:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
ASF	-	-	-	4	9	7	9	2
Chelmarsh Res.	2	3	-	1	7	-	-	-
Venus Pool	3	21	1	2	2	2	1	3
Wood Lane	1	8	1	2	1	1	1	-

**RUFF** *Philomachus pugnax*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

The year began with a scarce series of winter records from Wood Lane where two were present on 4 & 8 Jan, four on 10 Jan and two again on 12 Jan. An almost equally unusual series of spring passage records came from Venus Pool, with one on 14-15 May and two, both males, on 22 May.

Return passage commenced with a single at Wood Lane on 20 Jul. At ASF, at least one, and usually two, were present between 21 & 29 Aug, a single was seen on 6 Sep and one or two were present on five dates between 24 Sep and 4 Oct. Three were at Venus Pool on 1 Oct and two at Whixall canal floods on 29 Oct were the last of the year.

A minimum of 18 were recorded during the year which is a modest total compared with the upturn in records over the previous three years.

**JACK SNIFE** *Lymnocryptes minimus*

Status: Scarce winter visitor

The first records of the year was a single at ASF on 4 Jan. At Chelmarsh, singles were reported on the 8, 25th & 27 Jan. Three were reported at Market Drayton on 14 Feb. Elsewhere, singles were at Venus Pool on 17 Jan, the Long Mynd on 3 Mar and Wood Lane on 13 Mar. Three were reported at Market Drayton on 14 Feb.

In the second winter period, two were seen at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 11 Oct with singles here on 17 Oct and 25 Dec. Singles were also reported at Whixall Moss on 14 Nov and Venus Pool on 17 Nov when one was flushed from an area of set-aside

In all, a total of 13 reports were received involving 15 or 16 individual birds which, by recent standards, represents a poor to average year. Nearly half of the records came from Chelmarsh and, for the first time in several years, none was reported from the marsh at Cole Mere. Because of its secretive nature, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to assess the true status of this species in the county.

## COMMON SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*

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

Snipe is still a common winter visitor and passage migrant, and is seen regularly and in good numbers at the county's wetlands. However, it is now an extremely scarce breeding bird. A total of 291 records was received, but from only 42 different sites, whilst 80% of the records (233) came from only six sites – ASF (39 records), Chelmarsh Reservoir (16), Priorslee Flash (18), Venus Pool (88), Whixall Moss (11) and Wood Lane (61).

The monthly maxima for these sites is shown in the table.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	5				3	15	7	23	10	4
Chelmarsh Res.	10		5	1		4	3		8	2
Priorslee Flash	3	2	5	3						
Venus Pool	3		17	1	1	8	9	6	25	20
Whixall Moss	53	1	3					2	47	
Wood Lane	32	19	11	14	4	17	30	56		

The pattern is best illustrated by Venus Pool where there were 11 records up to 10 Apr, then no further records until 31 Jul, after which there were another 74 records in the year. Also by Wood Lane, where there were 41 records up until 12 May, then none until 18 Jul after which there were another 19 records up until 30 Oct.

Processing requirements at the ASF ensure that the pools there hold a lot of water in the early part of the year, so large areas of mud and shallow water, which are attractive to waders, are only available in the second half of the year. Thus, apart from a record of five birds on 4 Jan, all records came after 31 Jul. The last of the year here were 10 on 7 Nov and four on 4 Dec.

In addition to the maxima shown in the table, there were four records of flocks of more than 10 before the breeding season – 19 at Bakers Hill on 20 Feb, 18 at Ponthen on 25 Jan, 16 at Buttery Farm on 26 Jan, and 12 at Hayes Farm, Alberbury on 22 Feb and another five after the breeding season – 52 along the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas on 3 Nov, 18 at Hayes Farm on 12 Dec, 17 at Market Drayton on 18 Dec, 14 at Cae Howel on 12 Dec and 13 at Betton Moss on 9 Sep.

In comparison, only four records were received in May and June from potential breeding sites. Only one bird exhibited breeding behaviour, heard chipping at Newport Sewage Works on 9 May. The other three records came from Norbroom Marsh (east) – two birds on 13 May, Wall Farm - one seen flying into the middle of the marsh during the evening of 17 May, and the last on 28 Jun at Whixall Moss.

Other records were received from two known breeding sites – single birds were reported from two separate parts of the Long Mynd in February, and six were seen at Rhos Fiddle on 15 Apr, but these were more likely to be wintering or passage birds, rather than breeding birds.

A survey specifically designed to establish the population, distribution and breeding requirements of snipe was carried out at dawn or dusk at 28 sites in the South Shropshire Hills. On the Long Mynd, seven to eight pairs were found, compared with an estimated population of around 20 pairs in 1998. In addition to the big decline in population, there has also been a substantial contraction of range, with none found south of Shooting Box. On the Shropshire Wildlife Trust Reserve at Rhos Fiddle, three to four pairs were found (no previous base line). On The Stiperstones, none were found, compared with two to six pairs estimated by a 1995 survey. The other sites were selected as having the highest potential for breeding snipe, but only one drumming bird was heard on each of three of these 25 sites.

Thus the breeding population in the survey area was 13-15 pairs, and the whole county population is likely to be only 20-25 breeding pairs. A summary from the Survey Report is reproduced on page 11. In addition, snipe is one of the four species considered in the research report "*The Decline Of Ground-Nesting Birds On The Long Mynd 1995 - 2004*" (see page 28).



Red-legged Partridge, Wood Lane, 9 May 2004 (*John Harding*)



Peregrine chick with Darvic ring at nest in Shropshire, June 2004 (*Alan Heath*)



Common Snipe, Wood Lane, 27 February 2004 (*John Harding*)



Turtle Dove, The Rea, Upton Magna 18 May 2004 (*Paul King*)



Little Owl, Northwood, 17 January 2004 (*J Harding*)



Long-eared Owl, Venus Pool, 21 August 2004  
(*Jim Almond*)



Wren, Pentre-coed, November 2004  
(*John Hawkins*)



Dipper, Dowles Brook, Wyre Forest, June 2004 (John Robinson)



Stonechat, Venus Pool, November 2004 (Paul King)



Redwing, Pentre-coed, 27 December 2004 2004, (*J Harding*)



Mistle Thrush, Pentre-coed, November 2004 (*John Hawkins*)



Common Whitethroat, Cleobury Mortimer, May 2004 (*John Robinson*)



Brambling, Pentre-coed 28 February 2004 (*John Harding*)



Goldfinch, Pentre-coed March 2004 (*John Hawkins*)



Siskin, Wood Lane Nature Reserve, February 2004 (*Alan Heath*)



Bullfinch, Market Drayton, January 2004 (*John Hawkins*)



Yellowhammer, Duddleston Heath, March 2004 (*John Hawkins*)

**EURASIAN WOODCOCK** (Woodcock) *Scolopax rusticola*

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

After a much improved showing in 2003, the numbers of sightings reported to the Society dropped significantly to about 20 individual records.

In the first winter period, one was seen at Condoover on 3 Jan and two at Broseley on 7 Jan with four here on 21 Jan. At Shavington Big Pool, two were reported on a number of dates—17 Jan, 28 Feb, 8 Mar and 27 Mar. Singles were seen at Chesterton on 29 Jan, Wood Lane on 1 Mar and Priorslee Flash on 14 Mar.

Roding birds displaying over traditional breeding territory were reported at Haughmond Hill on 18 May (two birds) and Wyre Forest on 21 & 28 May. In addition, one reported at The Stiperstones on 25 Jun is also likely to have been a breeding bird. A report from Brown Clee speculated that at least five pairs were breeding on the Burwarton/Brown Clee Estate.

Towards the end of the year, four were reported at Whitehaven Quarry on 7 Oct, one at Shavington Big Pool on 30 Oct with two here on 13 Nov, and two at Priorslee Lake on 28 Nov with one here on 25 Dec.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa limosa*

Status: Common passage migrant

Another excellent year for this elegant species with a minimum of about 57 individuals involved. Unusually, there were two winter records, one in the opening and one in the closing months of the year.

A single which was present at Wood Lane on 11 Jan, would appear to be the first county record for the January. The next to be seen were a flock of 10 at Venus Pool on 1 Apr, in itself an early date. A single was at this site on 17 Apr. A flock of eight circled low over Priorslee Lake several times on 15 May before flying off. Singles were at Wood Lane on 3 May and 10-14 May and at Wall Farm on 16-17 May.

One at a pond next to the North Shropshire Reclamation Centre at Cockshutt on 19 Jun was the only record for the month but may well have been a failed breeder moving back south. At ASF, a single on 17 Jul and three on 26 Jul preceded an arrival of 12, the largest group of the year, on 13 Aug. The next peak at ASF was eight on 19 Aug, with numbers dwindling to a single on 24 Aug. A final single was at this site on 14-19 Oct.

Elsewhere, two were at Wall Farm on 20 Jul and singles were at this site on 29 Jul and 21 Aug. Two at Wood Lane on 27 Jul was the only return passage record at this site. A single remained at Ebnall Hall near Gobowen on 11-16 Aug and three visited Priorslee Lake briefly on 14 Aug. Two were at present at Venus Pool on 6 Jul, a single on 15-20 Aug, with three on the 16th. The last record of the year was also at Venus Pool when two were seen on 10 Dec.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa lapponica*

Status: Rare passage migrant

Three were seen all on spring passage, an excellent showing after three blank years.

The first was a fine full summer plumaged bird at Venus Pool on 21 Apr (GJW, HJG). This bird spent most of its time feeding on the north marsh. One was at Wood Lane from 26-30 Apr (L&BC) and varying plumage detail showed this was a different bird from that seen at Venus Pool. Finally, another was at Venus Pool on 27 May (AL).

**WHIMBREL** *Numenius phaeopus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

An excellent year, with a minimum of 17 and possibly over 20 seen, mainly due to a large spring passage through Venus Pool peaking with a notable double figure count.

The first of the year was a single at Venus Pool on 17 Apr. One was also present on at least the 18, 20 & 21 Apr, with three on the 22nd, five on the 24th and three again on 27 Apr. On the early morning of 28 Apr at least 10 were present (JB). The next report at Venus Pool was of two on 2 May and then seven on 3 May. A single was then seen daily until 10 May with two on the 9th. Most of these birds were seen at dawn or dusk and were clearly roosting, but due to the fluctuations in numbers and runs of days when none were reported it is impossible to state with certainty the numbers involved, but a very rough estimate would be in the range of 12-20 individuals.

Elsewhere, spring passage consisted of singles at Wood Lane on the 22, 28 & 30 Apr and 6 May; this was thought to have involved just one bird. Two were seen flying north over Severn Valley Country Park on 30 Apr.

Return passage consisted of four singles, at Ercall Heath flying SW on 6 Jul, Wood Lane on 24 Jul, ASF on 14 Aug and Wood Lane again on the 8 & 9 Aug.

## **EURASIAN CURLEW** *Numenius arquata*

Status: Uncommon breeding species, common passage migrant and winter visitor

With a few notable exceptions, mainly traditional winter sites around the Severn Vyrnwy confluence, curlew are absent during the winter months. Heavy spring passage started in early March, lasting until late April, and the heavy return passage starting towards the end of June, reaching a peak at the end of July and beginning of August, and finishing by mid-October.

In January and February, 25 records were received, but all except nine were of one or two birds. The exceptions were flocks of 22 on 6 Jan and 21 on 14 Jan at Isombridge Gravel Pits, flocks of 30, 60 and 40 at Molverley, on 24- 25 Jan and 12 Feb respectively, 80 and 65 at Cae Howel on 25 Jan and 22 Feb, 126 at Alberbury on 22 Feb and 23 at Whixall canal floods on 24 Feb.

Migration through Venus Pool and Wood Lane illustrates the pattern through the county. Maxima in the spring were 61 at Venus Pool on 10 Mar, and 24 at Wood Lane on 19 Mar, and on return 27 at Venus Pool on 2 Jul and 109 at Wood Lane on 28 Jul.

At Venus Pool, there was no record of more than four prior to 6 Mar, when there was an influx of 24. There were nine days on which at least 10 were recorded, including between 40 and 61 between 10-16 Mar, ending with 33 on 29 Mar, after which there were 10 on 16 Apr and 12 on 28 Apr, then only one record of more than 10 birds (11 on 28 May) until the last day of June. There were then 27 on 2 Jul and 16 the following day, followed by further influxes of 14 and 16 on 24 and 26 Jul and 22 and 10 on 6 and 8 Aug, but no other records of more than four birds in the last five months of the year.

At Wood Lane, the first influx was on 13 March, when 24 arrived, and between nine and 12 were present on six dates between 6-14 Apr, then there was no record of more than five birds until 23 Jun, when 20 turned up. There were then 100 or more on 28-30 Jul, and more than 50 on 11 other dates, and more than 10 on another 12 dates, between 7 Jul and 9 Aug. Apart from five isolated dates between 9 Sep and 11 Oct, there were no more records of more than 10, and the last of the year was a single on 26 Oct.

Other flocks of more than 10 in the second half of the year were reported from Almington (61 on 3 Jul), Cae Howel (45 on 14 Nov), ASF (16 on 25 Oct), Ponthen (20 on 17 Oct), and Shrewsbury Sewage Farm (20 on 22 Dec).

Breeding season records, between 1 Apr and 30 Jun, came from 41 widely scattered sites, with calling birds at Aston Square (near Oswestry), Neen Savage; Crudgington Moor; Roddington, below Gatten Plantation, Minton Hill, Priorslee Lake and Rhos Fiddle. Pairs were reported from Bromfield, Neen Savage, Callow Hollow, Cranmer Gutter, Crudgington Moor, High Ercall, Longden, Mynydd Myfyr, Prees Lower Heath, Queens Head, Rhos Fiddle, Tasley, West Felton, Weston, Whixall Moss, Wild Moor and Wollaston, although some of these are April records and might possibly refer to passage birds. However, the pair at Whixall Moss were reported as on territory on 29 May, and a bird at Weston was reported as in display flight, but there was only one record of nesting, at a farm adjoining Wall Farm, Cherrington.

Two surveys in the south-west Shropshire hills recorded curlew – the Upper Onny Wildlife Group found 24 pairs in a survey area of 122 square kilometres between the Long Mynd and the Welsh border, and the Snipe Survey (see page 11) recorded 14–15 displaying males on a casual basis on various sites in the Clun Environmentally Sensitive Area.

There is growing evidence of decline of curlew as a breeding species:

- Records were received from two sites in Telford, Nedge Hill and Red Hill, both stating “no records from this previously regular breeding site”.
- A survey of the southern end of The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve found no breeding pairs, where there were four in 1995.
- There were only two or three pairs on Long Mynd, where there were around a dozen pairs in 1995.
- The Upper Onny Wildlife Group survey found only 24 pairs. Although there are no earlier counts in the area, comparison of the distribution found in 2004 with that shown for the same 30 tetrads in the Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas shows a clear contraction of range. Curlew was recorded in every single tetrad, with confirmed or probably breeding in 28 of the 30 tetrads, in the 1992 Atlas. In 2004, curlew was breeding in only 20 of these tetrads, and was not recorded at all in seven of them.

Curlew is one of the four species considered in the research report “*The Decline Of Ground-Nesting Birds On The Long Mynd 1995 - 2004*” (see page 28).

**COMMON REDSHANK** *Tringa totanus*

Status: Uncommon visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Recorded from seven sites and present during every month except February, generally in very low numbers apart from a significant arrival at ASF in November. As in the previous year, presumed wintering birds were seen at ASF in January where three were present on the 4th and a single on the 24th.

Singles were at Venus Pool on 26-27 Mar and 10 Apr, Wood Lane on 24-29 Mar and 28-29 Apr and Whixall Moss on 27 Mar. A single at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 31 May was the only record for that month.

Return passage was noted from mid-June. A single was at Whixall Moss on 11 Jun and one was at Venus Pool on 19 Jun. Also at Venus Pool, a single(s) was seen on the 1, 5 & 7 Jul, with two on 27 Aug, two on 5 Nov and a single on 3 Dec. Singles were seen at Wood Lane on 29 Jun and the 11th, 13th and 19 Jul. A single was at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 26 Aug and two were at Wall Farm on 29 Nov. A single was seen near Aston on Clun on 13 Dec. At ASF, after singles on six well spaced dates between 31 Jul and 3 Nov a large influx of 13 arrived on 13 Nov. This represents the largest single site count within the county since 15 were recorded at the same site on 17 Jun 1986. The 2004 party had dropped to three by the following day and, presumably, the same three birds were seen on three other dates until 4 Dec with the final record being a single on 27 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1		13	3
Venus Pool	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	2	-	-	2	1
Wood Lane	-	-	1	1	-	1	1		-	-	-	-

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (Greenshank) *Tringa nebularia*

Status: Common passage migrant

Spring passage was extremely light and consisted of a single at Venus Pool on 25 Apr and two at the same site on 27 May.

Return passage was first noted at Wall Farm when a single was present on 6 Jul with probably a different bird between the 11 & 20 Jul. At Wood Lane, singles were seen on 10 Jul, 31 Jul and 8 Aug. Singles were also seen at Ebnal Hall near Gobowen on 12 Aug and Shavington Big Pool on 15 Aug.

The first autumn passage bird at ASF arrived on 24 Jul. Birds were then recorded on most dates between this date and 23 Sep, peaking at four on the 9 & 10 Aug and the 19 & 20 Aug. At Venus Pool, singles were recorded on 28 Jul, 9, 11, 15 & 17 Aug. The final record of the year was also at Venus Pool, another single on 15 Oct.

**GREEN SANDPIPER** *Tringa ochropus*

Status: Common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor

A very good year, with wintering birds at seven sites and high numbers of return passage birds, particularly at ASF which is the county stronghold for this species at this time of year.

Wintering birds were recorded during the first three months of the year at ASF (maximum of three), a farm tank near Adeney (one), Bromfield Gravel Pits (one), the Shropshire Union Canal at Goldstone (one), Spoonley near Market Drayton (one), Venus Pool (two) and Wood Lane (three).

Singles at Wood Lane on nine dates between 28 Mar and 22 Apr, (two on 3 Apr), singles seen on the 4, 5, 8 & 14 Apr at Chelmarsh Reservoir and four on the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 17 Apr were most likely to be northward moving migrants. Given the birds status as an autumn passage migrant in some numbers, and as a not uncommon wintering bird, it is notable how infrequently it is recorded on spring passage. No records were received for the month of May.

The first returning migrants began to trickle through from late June, with numbers peaking at most sites during July and August. ASF experienced an exceptional return passage. Double figure counts were regularly recorded between late July and late September, peaking at a hugely impressive 24 on 15 Aug. This is the largest single site count within the county since 25 were recorded at the same site on 28 Aug 1993.

At Chelmarsh, numbers peaked earlier with 10 on 25 Jul and counts fluctuated between one and eight from then until the end of August with the final bird being a single on 19 Sep. At Venus Pool, with the exception of three on 10 Aug, numbers never reached more than a trickle, with just one or two recorded on scattered dates between the end of June and mid August. At Wall Farm, one or two were occasionally recorded between the end of June and 7 Aug, with up to four between the 16 & 26 Jul. The last of the year here was a single on 18 Sep. At Wood Lane, the passage was very protracted with birds recorded on most dates between mid June and 26 Oct, with peaks of five on both 9 Jul and 28 Aug.

Elsewhere on return passage, 11 were counted at Whixall Moss on 24 Jul, a notable count for this site, up to five were at Ebnal Hall near Gobowen between 2-18 Aug and four were at Severn Valley Country Park on 23 Jul. Two were at Betton Moss on 9 Sep and another brace were seen on the Newport Canal on 16 Oct. Singles were seen at Bromfield, Condover Quarry, Cranmere Bog, Kinnerley and Tibberton Moor.

Presumed wintering birds towards the end of the year included up to seven at ASF in November, although no reports were received from here in December. Two were near the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 23 Dec. Singles were at Venus Pool on 21 Nov, Longslow on 18 Dec and Adeney on 29 Dec

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	3	1	-		-	1	13	24	12	7	7	4
Chelmarsh	-		-	1	-	5	10	7	1	-	-	-
Venus Pool	2	1		-	-	1	2	3	-	-	1	-
Wall Farm	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	1	1	-	-	-
Wood Lane	3	-	2	2	-	3	5	5	2	2	-	-

## **WOOD SANDPIPER** *Tringa glareola*

Status: Rare passage migrant

A superb year, with eight seen, at least doubling the annual total of any year after 1990, a year when the total numbers seen are unclear, but which were almost certainly less than the 2004 figure.

The first of the year were singles at Venus Pool (AL, AB) and Wood Lane (BP, AH) both on 14 May, although the Venus Pool bird was seen early morning only. Following this, one was reported at Whixall Moss on 11 & 14 Jun (AH) frequenting the pools at the rear of "Furbers". One was at Wood Lane on 31 Jul (HMP) and a juvenile at Venus Pool on 4 Aug (RV) was later joined by a second (HJG). The final records were also juveniles at Wood Lane on 7-9 Aug (BP) and ASF on 12-17 Aug (AL).

The two individuals at Venus Pool and Wood Lane on 14 May are the first spring records since 1997. The bird at Whixall Moss on 11 & 14 Jun would be very late for spring passage, and the fact that it lingered for four days strongly suggests that it was a returning migrant. The rest of the year's records neatly fit the dates expected for autumn passage and included at least three juveniles. Over the last 10 years autumn migrants have outnumbered spring passage birds by approximately 4:1.

## **COMMON SANDPIPER** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Status: Common passage migrant

An excellent year for passage migrants with exceptional numbers at Priorslee Lake in April and ASF and Venus Pool during August.

The first record of the year was a single at Sambrook Mill on 14 Mar, which if a passage migrant, was extremely early. Singles were at Chelmarsh on 5 Apr, Venus Pool on 8 Apr and Priorslee Lake on 10 Apr, heralding the main arrival which peaked between the 16 & 27 Apr. Priorslee Lake, a site which has probably become better watched than ever before, has proven to be an important staging post for this species during spring passage and 2004 proved to be no exception. After 12 were counted on 16 Apr, an impressive count of 18 was tallied on 17 Apr (seven on the grass and 11 on the dam). This was the largest single site count within the county since 19 were recorded at Cole Mere on 13 Jul 1997. Only a single remained at Priorslee Lake the following day with smaller peaks of five on 22 Apr, four on 25 Apr and six on 27 Apr. Very few were seen in May with the last of the spring, a single on 27 May.

At Venus Pool, after the first single on 8 Apr, small numbers were recorded most days between 11 Apr and 14 May peaking at four on 22 Apr. Another single was at Venus Pool on 7 Jun. Other spring passage birds were also seen in mainly low numbers at Adeney, Chelmarsh (10 dates in April with a max of three), Monkmoor, Shrewsbury, the River Severn between Coalport/Apley, Highley/Upper Arley and Leighton/Buildwas, Priorslee Flash, White Mere and Wood Lane.

Two seen by the River Severn at Leighton/Buildwas on 23 May were described as a probable pair with courtship flight noted. Birds were also noted at Bromfield near the River Teme during each month between May and August and one was by the River Onny at Craven Arms on 9 May.

Return passage started in early July with one of the first on a large pool just below the summit at Abdon Burf, Brown Clew on 7 Jul. As is often the case, ASF was the prime site for this species with double figure counts on seven dates between 8 & 16 Aug and several present on most other dates from the end of July until the end of August, with the last being two on 8 & 12 Sep. Four were at Venus Pool on 5 Jul and a single on 19 Jul, then, between one and three were present most days between 6 Aug and 2 Sep, apart from a marked influx of 12 on 9 Aug, all of which had departed by the following day. Six at Chelmarsh on 10 Jul was the highest count of the year but, thereafter, only recorded intermittently until 1 Sep with a maximum of four on the 11 & 26 Aug. At Priorslee Lake, recorded on 11 dates between 30 Jun and 30 Aug with peaks of six on 20 Jul and five on 12 Aug. Three were at Wood Lane on 7 Jul, but after that only singles were seen on odd dates between 9 Jul and 3 Sep. Also reported from Cranmere Bog, Oakley Pool, Shavington Big Pool, The Mere at Ellesmere, Trench Pool and Wall Farm.

Always scarce after the first week of September, singles at Dudmaston on 2 Oct (KB) and Chelmarsh on 13 Oct (APD) were noteworthy. One at Venus Pool on 8 Dec (DT) may have been the same bird seen on the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas on 23 Dec (SD).

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
ASF	-	-	-	8	13	2
Chelmarsh	3	-	-	6	4	1
Priorslee Lake	18	2	1	6	5	-
Venus Pool	4	2		4	12	1
Wood Lane	3	1	-	3	1	1

**MEDITERRANEAN GULL** *Larus melanocephalus*

Status: Scarce visitor

A very poor year with just three or four seen, all in the first quarter of the year.

On 25 Jan, a first winter was seen at Whixall canal floods (AB). Following this, an adult roosted at The Mere, Ellesmere on 25 Jan (AL), two adults, possibly a pair, also roosted at The Mere on 20 Mar and what was thought to be one of these birds was seen again here on 25 Mar (AL).

**LITTLE GULL** *Larus minutus*

Status: Scarce passage migrant.

On 3 Jan, a group of five, all second winter birds, were found at Priorslee Lake (PAK, EJW) and these were to prove to be the only confirmed records for the year, although a report of two, an adult and a juvenile at The Mere, Ellesmere on 24 Oct, was circulated by the bird information networks.

The birds at Priorslee Lake were a most unusual occurrence for the time of year; the most recent comparable record was of two of an unspecified age at Leegomery on 10 Feb 1988.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** *Larus ridibundus*

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

The highest count during the first winter period was 5000 roosting at Chelmarsh on 1 Jan. The highest March count was 1803 at Priorslee Lake on the 3rd which consisted mainly of a "huge passage of birds flying east". One feature of the quarter was the large numbers at Trench Pool, a site which has not often featured in recent reports as holding large numbers of the species. Candles Landfill site, where an estimated 2000 were seen on 26 Feb, probably provided a feeding area for many of the birds which passed through or roosted at Priorslee and Trench. Counts from the roost at The Mere were generally fairly modest, but movement of roosts to other meres in the area was apparent, as counts of up to 1700 at White Mere in January and 1000 at Cole Mere in February, indicated. Numbers at Wood Lane varied widely as birds associating with the adjacent landfill site utilised the site for bathing and preening. Notable counts elsewhere included 800 at Melverley on 12 Feb and 430 at Oerley Reservoir on 14 & 17 Jan.

Breeding, or attempted breeding, was noted at four sites. At Cranmere Bog, 12 nests were occupied on 1 Jun. The only report of breeding at Wall Farm was of one

on a nest on 27 Jun. The Whixall Moss colony held eight occupied nests on 29 May with 18 chicks already hatched. At Venus Pool up to 11 occupied nests were counted at the end of May, but all had failed by early June. One pair re-laid on the obvious stump, (this is clearly the prime nest site at Venus Pool), but again failed. The cause of the losses is uncertain, but once again predation is suspected, for instance mink have been reported in the vicinity. As long ago as the 1982 bird report, mink were cited as one of the factors connected with the demise of the former colony at ASF. Other sites where the species has bred within the last 25 years are Berrington Pools, Polemere, Felton Butler, Halfway House, Stapeley Hill Pool, Fenn's Bank and Shrewsbury Sewage Farm.

Winter flocks began to form from late August with the highest counts coming from Chelmarsh Reservoir and Priorslee Lake. At Priorslee Lake, 2600 present at 06.30 hrs on the morning of 13 Nov had all moved off NW by 07.15, but at 07.45 hrs large numbers began to arrive from the ENE. Only one roost count, of 3000 at Chelmarsh on 14 Nov, was returned during the quarter. Sadly no counts were received from The Mere, Ellesmere during this period, although 2500 were reported at White Mere on 30 Nov, but most moved off before dusk, possibly to The Mere.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	5000	-	190	400	3000	725
Priorslee Lake	3000	496	1803	700	3300	4499
The Mere, Ellesmere	2340	1500	2000	-	-	-
Trench Pool	1200	3600	4100	-	-	-
Wood Lane	1000	350	600	360	-	-

### **RING-BILLED GULL** *Larus delawarensis*

Status: Vagrant

An adult was discovered at the Candles Landfill Site at Telford on 23 Feb (KW). Unfortunately, it could not be relocated subsequently, perhaps mainly due to the viewing difficulties associated with this site.

This was the second successive year that the species has been recorded in the county, coming just two and a half months after the previous record.

**MEW GULL** (Common Gull) *Larus canus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Peak counts of this species within the county almost exclusively involve the EGM area. The highest count by a huge margin was of 1800 roosting at The Mere, Ellesmere on 17 Jan. Other counts at The Mere during this quarter were 300 on 12 Feb and 360 on 26 Mar. Three hundred were at White Mere on 8 Jan and 80 at Cole Mere on 16 Jan. Nearby, up to 39 were seen at Wood Lane and at Whixall canal floods during this period.

Notable was a count of 200 on pasture at Trefonen on 11 Mar. Other sites to record the species within the period were ASF (maximum of two), Chelmarsh (one), Moelydd (one), Priorslee Flash (one), Priorslee Lake (one), Trench Pool (four) and Venus Pool (one). Up to two were recorded at Wood Lane throughout the summer.

Unfortunately, the roost at The Mere, Ellesmere, was not counted during the second winter period, but 250 were at White Mere on 30 Nov. Up to six were counted at Wood Lane during this period. The only other sites to record the species during the final quarter were ASF (maximum of two), Chelmarsh (four), Priorslee Lake (three), and Venus Pool (one).

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus fuscus*

Status: Common visitor

As always, the commonest large gull within the county and recorded every month of the year, but most numerous in the winter months and during passage periods.

The highest count in the first winter period was 3500 in the roost at Chelmarsh on 17 Jan, but no subsequent counts were received for this site during the quarter. The total of 1268 at Priorslee Lake on 27 Feb included just four on the lake, the rest were in parties flying west. The traditionally large roost site at The Mere, Ellesmere, went largely unrecorded during the year, with the largest estimate being just 200 on 17 Jan. Large numbers were present during this period at the Wood Lane landfill site, feeding on the tip and utilising the adjacent nature reserve for bathing and preening. At Trench Pool, 550 were present on 23 Feb, with 325 on 9 Mar.

The landfill site at Wood Lane continued to attract good numbers of the species throughout the summer, e.g. 30 on 2 Jul and 175 on 23 Jul. Forty five flew south

west over Market Drayton on 4 Jul. The most notable count during this period, however, was an estimated 400 observed roosting at Whixall Moss on 11 Jul. Presumably these birds would have been immature/non-breeding individuals. Flocks began to be noted more frequently during early autumn, including 300 over Priorslee Lake in small groups on 18 Aug, 150 on a ploughed field at Tern Hill on 1 Sep, 100 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 28 Aug and 300 at the latter site on 30 Sep.

During the final quarter the highest count was of 3605 at Priorslee Lake on 5 Nov, most flying over but including 659 on the lake. Priorslee remained the most diligently counted site during this period, for instance, 500 plus were recorded during 14 dates in December with over 100 on seven dates, the top count during the month being 1913 on the 29th. Again The Mere at Ellesmere went largely uncounted with the only record received being a modest 90 on 29 Oct. However, there has been a tendency during recent years for the main roost to be at other meres, for instance, 320 were also recorded at Cole Mere on the latter date.

The peak count at Chelmarsh was of 2124 on 14 Nov, although after recording a total of 1300 on 2 Oct, the observer stated that there may well have been double this number as large numbers were still arriving as he left. Elsewhere, the most notable counts during the quarter were of 780 at Tibberton on 8 Nov, (which the observer noted as; "on flight out from roost, possibly from Aqualate, heading NW"), and 250 at Shavington Big Pool on 13 Nov.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	3500	-	-	1300	2124	400
Priorslee Lake	400	1268	58	177	3605	1913
The Mere, Ellesmere	200	70	6	90	-	-
Trench Pool	15	550	325	-	-	-
Wood Lane	48	40	101	270	-	-

**HERRING GULL** *Larus Larus argentatus*

Status: Common winter visitor

Always scarcer than the previous species and, as is often the case, the highest counts were in the first and last months of the year. The two highest counts in the first quarter were on the same date, 17 Jan, when 211 were at Chelmarsh and 160 were at The Mere, Ellesmere. Away from the tabulated sites the most significant site maxima for the period were 74 at White Mere on 17 Jan, 30 at Candles Landfill Site on 26 Feb and 53 at Trench Pool on 1 Mar.

None were reported during April and, as would be expected, very few were seen during May, June and July. Up to five were present during this period at Wood Lane and the only record elsewhere was a single at Venus Pool on 25 May.

A few began to be reported from August onwards, but no counts above 25 were recorded until December, with an influx at Priorslee Lake during the last few days of the year when 122 were counted on the 25th and 445, more than double the next highest count of the year, on the 29th. Very few were recorded from other sites during the last quarter, the next highest count being 40 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 27 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	211	-	-	18	16	40
Priorslee Lake	30	17	11	3	4	445
The Mere, Ellesmere	160	32	15	-	-	-
Wood Lane	49	14	24	20	-	-

**YELLOW-LEGGED GULL** *Larus michahellis*

Status: Uncommon visitor

Another very good year, for this species, recently split from Herring Gull by the British Ornithologists' Union. A minimum of 25 were seen (a figure arrived at by totalling the highest day count for each site during both winter periods). However, it is likely that more were actually involved as movements took place. All but two records came from just three sites: Chelmarsh Reservoir, Priorslee Lake and Wood Lane. The gradual rise in the number of records over the last ten years suggests a real increase in occurrences, perhaps allied to increased observer awareness.

Records during the first winter period all fell between the dates of 2 Jan and 17 Feb. At Chelmarsh Reservoir, up to four were present during the first few weeks of the year, rising to a county record count of eight on 21 Jan (AG). At Priorslee Lake, two clearly separable adults were seen on and off between the 2nd and 16 Jan with usually just the larger of the two present. A single at Wood Lane on 17 Jan and two adults at The Mere on 17 Feb completed the records for the period with all apparently departing the county by the end of the month.

A second summer was present at Priorslee Lake on the seemingly late date of 14 May.

In the latter part of the year the first to appear was a single adult at Wood Lane on 10 Sep which was seen on and off until 31 Oct. One or two were noted at Chelmarsh Reservoir from early October until the year's end with a peak of five adults on 29 Dec. One or two were also at Priorslee Lake during November and December, with an influx of six adults on 30 Dec, which the observer (JI) noted as coinciding with the onset of a very mild south westerly airflow (cf. the influx at Chelmarsh the previous day!). Two were reported by the pager services at Barnsley Tip near Bridgnorth on 29 Dec.

#### **ICELAND GULL** *Larus glaucooides*

Status: Rare winter visitor

An excellent year with five records received and accepted by the records committee, four in the first and one in the second winter periods. Numerically the best year since 1991 when a probable seven individuals were seen.

The first of the year was an adult was at Priorslee Lake on the 2, 9 & 10 Jan (JI, MDR, EJW). Following this, an adult and a third winter were at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 8 Jan (RM, MO). The third winter bird, together this time with a first winter, was again at Chelmarsh on 17 Jan (RM, MO, SH). In addition to these, an adult was reported by the bird information services to be on the River Severn at Leighton on 9 Feb but, to date, no record has been submitted to the County Recorder.

In the second winter quarter just one was seen. An adult was reported at Priorslee Lake on 23-25 Dec (JI). This individual was seen in a pre-roost gathering on the first two dates, flying off east on 23 Dec at 15.15hrs. On the 25th, it was seen at 10.15hrs, but had not been present an hour earlier.

**GLAUCOUS GULL** *Larus hyperboreus*

Status: Rare winter visitor

A single record this year of a third winter bird at Priorslee Lake on 15 Jan (EJW).

The average for the previous ten years is just over one per year, with January being the month it is most frequently recorded. This year’s record clearly continues this trend.

**GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL** *Larus marinus*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

An improved showing in comparison to the previous year with 64 reports from 12 sites and a maximum single site count of 37; the corresponding 2003 figures were 34 reports from six sites and maximum count of 17.

The majority of records consisted of a scattering of birds amongst the commoner species at the regular gull roosts. The highest count of the year was of 37 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 17 Jan, with the next highest count from there being 10 on 21 Jan. Twenty were at the Candles Landfill Site, Telford on 20 Feb and 10 were at White Mere on 8 Jan. Between one and five birds were recorded at eight other sites during the first quarter. These were Barnsley Tip, Cole Mere, Melverley, Priorslee Lake, The Mere at Ellesmere, Trench Pool, Venus Pool and Wood Lane.

Out of season records in May occurred when two were at Venus Pool on the 4th and a single was at Wood Lane on the 29th. The first record of the autumn was a single at Wood Lane on 9 Aug. In the final quarter, the only records were singles at Chelmarsh Reservoir, Dudmaston and Wood Lane apart from a late influx at Priorslee Lake culminating in counts of 12 on 27 Dec and 18 and 29 Dec.

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chelmarsh Reservoir	37	-	1	-	1	1
Priorslee Lake	5	-	1	-	2	18
The Mere, Ellesmere	2	5	1	-	-	–
Trench Pool	-	5	2	-	–	–
Wood Lane	4	5	4	1	-	-

**BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (Kittiwake) *Rissa tridactyla*

Status: Scarce passage migrant



Kittiwake, Priorslee Lake, 13 May 2004  
(Paul King)

Five records were received, all of single adult birds for one day only and all at Priorslee Lake. This is the highest annual total since 1998 when 10 were seen, although it seems likely that some occurrences are being overlooked, particularly within large flocks of other gull species.

The first at Priorslee Lake was seen on 13 Mar (PAK, EJW). This bird was present early morning only and flew off at 0805 hrs. The second arrived at 06 10 hrs in heavy rain on 18 Apr (EJW) but departed at 07.30 hrs. A summer plumage bird was seen on between 08.00 hrs and 10.00 hrs 28 Apr (JI) and another between 06.25 hrs and 07.30 hrs on 13 May (PAK). The final record in this remarkable sequence was another summer plumage bird on 21 Aug (EJW).

The latter individual was noted by the observer as having red legs. Birds with aberrant red or even yellow legs are rarely recorded, but well documented. Cramp et al, *The Birds of the Western Palearctic Vol 3*, Oxford University Press 1983 includes several references and these oddities are not to be confused with red-legged kittiwake *Rissa brevirostris* of the North Pacific.

**SANDWICH TERN** *Sterna sandvicensis*

Status: Rare passage migrant.

Two were seen which, although slightly less than the yearly average, included a rare but welcome lingering bird.

The first was an adult at Wall Farm briefly on 3 May (EJW). This was followed by another adult at Wood Lane on 13-14 May (FCG). It arrived early on the 13th and remained until at least the following morning. It showed well in flight over the reserve and could often be observed at close range preening on a rock in the scrape in front of Lapwing hide allowing many of the county's keen birders their first opportunity to see the species in Shropshire.

### **COMMON TERN** *Sterna hirundo*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

A total of around 26 reports were received from nine sites, involving a total of around 22 individuals. The first of the year were singles on 24 Apr at the adjacent sites of Chelmarsh Reservoir and Hampton Loade on the River Severn, (seen by the same observer and thought to involve different individuals). Other singles were seen on spring passage at Priorslee Lake on 27 Apr, Venus Pool on the 6, 8 & 12 May and Chelmarsh Reservoir on 12 May.

At Priorslee Lake, single adult(s) were present on 29 May and the 5 & 19 Jun with two adults seen briefly there on 28 Jun. On 29 Jul, an adult and three juveniles were present, one juvenile was still present the following day and an adult and two juveniles on 1 Aug. A single juvenile was present on 23 Aug.

On return passage four were at Wood Lane on 13 Jul, one on the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas on 19 Jul, one at ASF on 27 Jul with two here on 8 Aug. Finally, singles were seen at Venus Pool on 20 Aug and The Mere, Ellesmere on 12 Sep.

### **ARCTIC TERN** *Sterna paradisaea*

Status: Uncommon passage migrant

An excellent year, numerically the best since 1993, with 22 reports from four sites involving about 27 individuals, with over half the total of birds seen on a single day at Priorslee lake.

The first of the year was a single at Priorslee Lake on 18 Apr. This site enjoyed a bumper sustained passage on 28 Apr when 14 were recorded by one observer (JI), who recorded the movement as: one at 06 00 hrs, two at 06.30 hrs, two at 06.45 hrs which stayed until 10.30 hrs. A further nine birds arrived at 10.00 hrs and stayed for 30 minutes. No birds were present at 12.00 hrs or at 15.45 hrs. On the same day, 28 Apr, four passed through Venus Pool at 15.35 hrs. A single was at Priorslee Lake briefly the following morning and the final spring record was another single at Venus Pool on 9 May.

On return passage, a juvenile was observed roosting with black-headed gulls at ASF on 18 Aug whilst an adult and two juveniles were present for just five minutes at the same site on 22 Aug. At The Mere, Ellesmere, two juveniles were present on 18 Sep along with a black tern, with one of the Arctics remaining until at least 23 Sep with probably the same bird being seen again on 5-6 Oct.

**BLACK TERN** *Chlidonias niger*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

Six were seen, all on return passage. Although another poor year, it was certainly an improvement on the total blank in 2003.

A party of four, all moulting summer plumaged adults, cruised over the settling pool at Mirelake, ASF for much of 8 Aug (AL). A single was reported at Venus Pool on 23 Aug (log book) and, finally, a single was present at The Mere, Ellesmere on 17-18 Sep (JM).

**FERAL PIGEON** *Columba livia*

Status: Common resident

Most of the records came from just two observers. As might be expected the largest counts came from urban areas with 160 in Ludlow on 16 Dec and a flock of 220 in Shrewsbury on 23 Dec. Small flocks totalling 139 flying north over Wall Farm on 17 Apr were probably racing pigeons.

**STOCK PIGEON** (Stock Dove) *Columba oenas*

Status: Common resident

Although widely reported throughout the county, most of the records were single figure counts. The largest flock was 120 at Wall Farm on 17 Feb and 60 were seen near Cranmere Bog on 23 Apr.

Breeding was noted near Bridgnorth and Church Stretton. BBS results indicate that the species is increasing in the county and nationally.

**COMMON WOOD PIGEON** (Wood Pigeon) *Columba palumbus*

Status: Common resident

Counts were mainly in single figures but a flock of 440 was noted at Longford Road near Newport on 17 Jan. The largest count was 3977 in a series of flocks over Priorslee Lake on 31 Oct. There was also a large count of 1500 at Shavington Big Pool on 13 Nov. An impressive total of 30 birds in one tree was recorded at Crosshouses on 20 Dec.

Breeding behaviour of this species seems to be largely ignored by observers or at best treated with mixed feelings, as exemplified by the comments of one recorder – “two nested in the garden- a nuisance” BBS results indicate the population remains stable in the county with an increase nationally.

**EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE** (Collared Dove) *Streptopelia decaocto*

Status: Common resident

Reported from 66 scattered locations, mainly in small numbers. The largest count was of 45 near Wall farm on 17 Nov.

Breeding was noted at Edgmond Marsh where a pair built a nest behind a satellite dish on a house wall. The BBS results indicate that the population is stable in the county although continuing to increase nationally. Birds were present in 60% of the survey plots in the county with an average of four birds per plot.

**EUROPEAN TURTLE DOVE** (Turtle Dove) *Streptopelia turtur*

Status: Scarce summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

Birds were noted at 10 sites but only remained for any length of time at The Rea, Upton Magna and at nearby Roddington. The total number of birds seen does not appear to exceed 20 and some of these would have been on passage. Interestingly, some of the birds at The Rea were returning birds from 2002 and 2003.

The future looks ominous for this species in Shropshire.

**COMMON CUCKOO** *Cuculus canorus*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

The first record was of a very early bird at Oswestry on 18 Mar with the next on 8 Apr at Wollaston. Reports were then received steadily after the more usual arrival date of the middle of April. A total of 82 records were received from widespread localities, but this was 28 fewer than last year and reflects the national trend of a decline in this species.

Most records were of single birds, but at least eight different birds were seen on Whixall Moss on 29 May. The latest record was on 20 Aug from Ashes Hollow and was probably a juvenile.

## BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Status: Uncommon 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 13 sites. These included Welsh Frankton, Ellesmere (two), Colemere (two), Lyneal, Peaton, Moreton Say, Kynnersley, Weald Moors (two), Betton and Doley. Of 97 internal and external nestboxes available at the start of the breeding season, eight held breeding barn owls and 23 were occupied by roosting birds at some point in the year. As can be seen from Table 1, the occupancy rate for barn owls was 31.95%. Other nestboxes held stock dove (20), jackdaw (nine) and tawny owl (two). Pole boxes, only erected in 2003, were not expected to hold breeding barn owls in 2004. SBOG had 151 nestboxes in place at the end of 2004.

Table 1: Occupation of nestboxes by barn owls:

Nestbox type	No. nestboxes monitored	No. nestboxes occupied		Total occupied	% occupied
		Breeding	Roosting		
Building	41	4	5	9	21.95
Tree	51	4	14	18	27.45
Pole	5	0	4	4	80.00
Total	97	8	23	31	31.95
Tree	51	4	14	18	27.45

In view of the difficulty in directly recording the fledging of young barn owls, breeding success of barn owl pairs is measured by the number of chicks produced. Table 2 shows that 24 four chicks were produced in the nestboxes, an increase from eight in 2003. Six natural nest sites monitored by SBOG in 2004, mainly tree cavities, and produced an additional 19 chicks. Brood sizes ranged from two to five young, a mean of 3.07 per pair. Pairs were well established at nest sites by the end of March with the first egg recorded on 5 May and the first chick on 5 Jun. The last young fledged on 22 Nov.

Table2: Number of barn owl chicks produced in nestboxes and natural nest sites:

Nest site	No. nests	No. chicks	Mean No. chicks
Building nestbox	4	12	3.00
Tree nestbox	4	12	3.00
Building natural	1	5	5.00
Tree cavity natural	5	14	2.80
Total	14	43	3.07

A total of 36 chicks have been produced in SBOG nestboxes since its inception in 2002 and another 59 in natural sites monitored by SBOG.

In addition to the above, 99 records were submitted, 49 of which related to the main breeding season of March to September. Breeding was confirmed at one site – Betton Moss- where three young were produced in a nestbox and suspected in a natural tree site at Shifnal. However, most of these records related to single birds, but two were recorded hunting on riverside meadows at Tibberton and two were seen along the road at Stead Vallets.



Barn Owl  
Drawing by Glenn Bishton

Most records related to evening sightings with one early morning observation at 01.30hrs. Daylight hunting was noted along the River Meese at Tibberton on 17 days between 11 Feb and 1 May and also at Kynnersley. A barn owl hunted in daylight less than 0.5km from Telford Town Centre on 4 Nov at Priorslee. Feeding habitat noted across the county included arable fields, set-a-side, rough grassland, riverside meadows, marshland and road verges where birds were typically recorded perched on a fence post or flying over the road.

The long term population trend of the barn owl in the UK is one of decline. More records of barn owl pairs during the breeding season and especially confirmed natural breeding sites in trees or buildings are required to assist the targeting of nestbox schemes and conserving threatened sites.

### **LITTLE OWL** *Athene noctua*

Status: Uncommon resident

Forty six records were received from 26 locations and from every month of the year. Breeding was confirmed at Alveley, Little Sutton and Trefonen. Pairs were noted at several other sites including Adeney, Dudmaston, Great Ness and Mose near Bridgnorth where they probably bred. Nest or roost sites occupied included holes in mature ash and oak trees along hedgerows, a hole in the roof of an old train wagon serving as a stock shelter and farm buildings. Elsewhere, little owl were characteristically observed perched on telegraph poles or heard calling, usually at dusk.

The BBS trend for little owl shows fluctuations but no clear trend over the long term. This assessment may be unreliable because the species has large territories and is difficult to detect.

### **TAWNY OWL** *Strix aluco*

Status: Common resident

One hundred and fourteen records were received from 50 locations in every month of the year. Breeding was not confirmed at any site, but pairs were observed or heard calling at Adderley Pool, Condover and Ludlow and a juvenile was noted at Great Ness. Two calling birds were heard at several other sites and three on The Wrekin suggest breeding was widespread. Most calling was characteristically heard after dark but daylight calls were noted at 09.00 hrs and between 13 30 hrs and 15.00 hrs.

Habitat occupied included broadleaf woodland, plantations, hedgerows with mature trees, gardens, churchyards and road side verges where birds were observed perched on poles or wires. One roost site was noted in an oak tree, but records of birds calling from a yew tree and conifers suggest other roost sites. There were no records of type of prey taken. A tawny owl at Batch Valley was observed fighting a green woodpecker and one at Clunbury was mobbed by blackbirds and other birds in daylight.

The pattern shown by the BBS is a relatively stable one, but, as a nocturnal species, the tawny owl is relatively poorly covered by the BTO's monitoring schemes.

### **LONG-EARED OWL** *Asio otus*

Status: Scarce resident

Twenty five long-eared owl records were received but all related to a bird at Venus Pool from 19 Aug to 1 Sep (MR).

This bird was a most obliging individual which often roosted on fence posts on the inside of the roadside hedge near to the marsh. It was a new species for the reserve and provided many of the enthusiastic observers with a new county species.

Occasionally it was seen hunting during daylight by taking short flights from post to post and then dropping on prey close to its perch. However, it was sometimes seen to take slightly longer flights around the area and was noted hunting over the marsh and the field adjacent to the Memorial Hide. At the time of this record, cutting of the hay meadows, which usually takes place in July, had been delayed by bad weather and perhaps this provided good hunting opportunities for the owl.

### **SHORT-EARED OWL** *Asio flammeus*

Status: Rare winter visitor and passage migrant

Five records of short-eared owl were received from four locations. Single birds were noted in the first winter period at Cherrington Moor on 25 Jan (WRBD) and at another site on the Weald Moors on 15 Feb (ARS). In the second winter period, single birds were recorded on the Long Mynd on 19 Oct (CU) where the bird was disturbed from heather and, finally two were seen on the Weald Moors on 5 Dec (ARS).

### **EUROPEAN NIGHTJAR** *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Status: Rare summer visitor

A male was heard churring at dusk in the former Gatten plantation on The Stiperstones during a snipe survey on 2 Jun (TW). Following this being reported, a total of six other observers reported hearing it on five different dates between the 5th and 14 Jun. Only two observers reported seeing the bird, and another “possibly glimpsed (it) briefly”. One of them reported “male seen well displaying and churring, probable female too”, and another observer thought that more than one was calling. However, no other observer reported more than one churring male.

Nightjar was last reported from The Stiperstones in 1981 when three churring males were counted during the national Nightjar Survey, but there was an unconfirmed report of another churring male here in 1984.

The Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas summarised the status of the species up until 1990 and estimated an annual population fluctuating between none and six pairs. Since then there have only been records in the County Bird Report in six of the thirteen years 1991-2003, no year has records from more than two sites, no site has been occupied for more than two of these years, and the most recent previous record was in 2000. The last confirmed breeding came from the Wrekin in 1983.

The BTO organized a national nightjar survey in 2004. Because there were no recent breeding records from Shropshire, the national vegetation database was used to select 1km squares containing the correct habitat. Observers visited 15 such sites within the county, the habitat within the squares varied from ideal to unsuitable, but all had the same negative result.

### **COMMON SWIFT** *Apus apus*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first record of the year was a single at Venus Pool from 16 Apr onwards. This was followed by four at Monkmoor on 20 Apr, one at the Wrekin summit on the 24th and 10 at Brown Clee summit on the 25th. After this the birds became more widespread with evidence that the main arrival occurred during the first week in May.

Large concentrations are often associated with water and sometimes with particular weather systems. The highest counts this year were at Wall Farm, where 300 moved east ahead of a weather front on 17 Jul and Tilstock on 27 Jul where 170 were observed feeding at varying heights up to 500 feet. Other notable counts included 100 at Ludlow on 13 Jul, 100 over Craven Arms on 29 Jul and 60 over Much Wenlock town on 19 Jul. At the wetlands, numbers peaked at 80 at Venus Pool on 4 May, 50 at ASF on 11 Jul and 40 at Monkmoor on 4 Aug.

Although reported from approximately 70 locations, records of breeding were again very limited this year. A pair bred at Neen Savage, seven pairs did so at BelleVue, Shrewsbury and a series of September records from Prees church suggested that breeding may have occurred there (see also below). Other breeding season records which indicated probable local colonies came from Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Oswestry, Newport, Ellesmere, Bishops Castle, Trefonen and Waters Upton.

The majority of birds had departed by mid-Aug but this year there were more records than usual from late Aug and through Sep, perhaps indicative of some birds being late arriving this year or delaying their breeding attempt for some reason. The latest sightings included an exceptional 40 at Oswestry on 15 Sep, one at Priorslee on the 17th and finally the pair referred to at Prees church which were first seen entering the church on 10 Sep and were then seen regularly until 25 Sep.

**COMMON KINGFISHER** *Alcedo atthis*

Status: Common resident (RBBP)

This is a popular species with observers with 250 reports but, surprisingly, relatively few refer to the breeding season with just 35 this year. By inference, the autumn and winter are the best times to see a kingfisher in the county. Half of the total records were from lakes and reserves e.g. Venus Pool, ASF, Priorslee, Chelmarsh/Dudmaston and Wood Lane. Of the remainder, a high proportion came from the River Severn, but the Rivers Teme, Onny, Tern and Meese, together with a number of canals and streams, were also represented.

All reports related to either one or two birds, except for one record of three at Blake Mere on 15 Sep.

There were no probable or confirmed breeding records this year but, from the breeding season reports received, it is estimated that approximately 20 pairs were recorded.

**HOOPOE** *Upupa epops*

Status: Rare visitor

One seen briefly in an area of parkland near the Strine Brook at Newport on 14 May (KWi). This sighting followed a report on the bird information services of what was presumably the same bird near Harper Adams Agricultural College at Edgmond on 13 May.

This is the fourth year in succession that this species has been recorded in the county with occurrences in both spring and autumn.

**GREEN WOODPECKER** *Picus viridis*

Status: Common resident

A well reported species occurring widely throughout the county and at all times of the year. This is a bird which favours parkland, meadow and heathland habitats and is often encountered feeding on the ground on its preferred diet of ants. It is more thinly distributed in the north of the county due to relatively fewer nesting and feeding sites.

Although almost half of the reports came from well-watched sites such as Venus Pool and Wood Lane, the largest concentration of birds appear to inhabit the valley of the River Severn between Buildwas and Highley. This area produced some 50 records including counts of six birds at Severn Valley Country Park on 12 Oct, five at the same location on 28 Mar and five along the River Severn south of Highley on 29 Apr.

Elsewhere, five birds were recorded during an SOS Survey of a 2km square near Worfield on 1 Jun; birds were present all year on The Wrekin and Brown Clee, and other groups of records came from typical sites such as Chelmarsh Reservoir, Granville Country Park, Haughmond Hill, Hawkestone Park, the Oswestry uplands and Wyre Forest.

Breeding records came from Chesterton and Wood Lane, and juveniles were seen at Tibberton, Venus Pool and The Wrekin.

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** *Dendrocopos major*

Status: Common resident

Conspicuous at garden and reserve feeding stations, this species is very popular with observers, producing over 300 records. It is the most widely distributed of the three woodpeckers and may occur anywhere in the county within sight of a few mature trees, no doubt reflecting the ongoing population increase which is recorded by surveys.

Drumming was noted from 6 Jan to 24 Apr. Breeding was confirmed at Aston Eyre, Condover and Netchwood Common, and probable breeding records came from six other locations.

**LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER** *Dendrocopos minor*

Status: Uncommon resident (BCC Red listed)

This species is more difficult to find than its larger relatives owing to its much smaller and declining population, and its elusive habits. There were only 26 records received involving some 17 birds and 15 locations.

The distribution of this year's records shows bias towards the meres and mosses in the north of the county, no doubt reflecting the preference of the species for sites near water, and its avoidance of upland areas.

Best sightings of the year were at Wood Lane where one to three birds were seen between 8 & 20 Jun, peaking on 12 and 15 Jun with three males observed feeding in the reedbed.

Other locations producing more than one sighting were Shavington Pool with four singles between February and August, Market Drayton with two singles in April and August and Betton Moss where a bird visited a garden in June and July. One was seen during an SOS field trip at The Wrekin on 8 May. The remaining records included a "first" for an observer in Oswestry and singles from traditional sites such as Attingham Park, Chelmarsh Reservoir and Cole Mere.

There were no confirmed breeding records.

**SKY LARK** *Alauda arvensis*

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

Sky larks feed on seeds in the winter and often form large flocks on suitable fields, particularly stubble. Numbers are sometimes supplemented by continental migrants, particularly in years of hard winters overseas. They breed all over the county in short vegetation, usually at low densities, but occasionally at up to 20 pairs per square km in especially suitable habitat.

In the first three months of the year, 89 records were received from 29 different sites. Thirteen of these 89 records noted more than ten birds, the largest flocks being 40 at Rudge Heath on 29 Jan, 33 at Wall Farm on 7 Feb and 16 on 21 Mar, 29 at Cae Howel on 16 Jan and 10 at Hampton Loade on 25 Jan, while at Venus Pool there were 25 on 12 Jan, 20 on 20 Jan, 13 on 13 Jan, 12 on the 11 & 17 Jan and 10 on 2 Mar.

The flock at Rudge Heath was reported as feeding on stubble, but unfortunately no information was provided about the feeding sites of the other large flocks.

The first singing was noted at Chelmarsh Reservoir and Hampton Loade on 25 Jan, and from five different sites during the first two weeks in February. During the breeding season, between the beginning of April and the end of July, 142 records were received from 72 sites. Most records were of five birds or less, but three or more singing males were reported from several sites – 14 at the Shropshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Rhos Fiddle on 15 Apr, 10 at Aston Eyre near Bridgnorth on 19 May, nine at Hordley on 11 May, around eight at Myddle on 25 Apr, four at Tasley on 1 Apr, six at Edgmond on 4 Apr, five along the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas on 17 Apr, and five at Wall Farm on 17 Apr. There were three at Bromfield on 11 Apr, and the same number at Crudgington Moor on 12 Apr, Cranmere Bog on 23 Apr, and Diddlebury on 29 Mar.

Forty-five birds were reported from Kingslow on 1 Jun, and 40 from Aston Eyre near Bridgnorth on 22 Jun, but these flocks may include recently fledged juveniles, and there is no indication of the number of breeding pairs.

Breeding was noted only at Alberbury, where three pairs nested in the river bank. A breeding bird survey carried out for the National Trust at Dudmaston found 13 breeding pairs.

Post breeding flocks, where numbers are swelled by juveniles of the year, started to build up at the end of July, with 66 reported from Dudmaston on 26 Jul and 46 from Chelmarsh on the same date. The largest flock of the year was 170 at Wall Farm on 26 Sep. At ASF, 127 were seen flying over in small groups in a south-westerly direction in a three-hour period and 82 were counted flying in the same direction the following day in a two-hour period. Other large flocks reported were 100 at Ercall Heath on 26 Dec, 65 at ASF on 2 Oct, 60 at Cherrington on 4 Oct, 47 at Prees Lower Heath on 16 Nov, 45 at Wall Farm on 24 Oct, 40 at Cheswardine on 18 Oct, and the same number at Venus Pool on 27 Nov and Nagington Grange on 21 Dec. Flocks of 10-39 birds were reported from an additional eight sites, and nine birds or less were reported from a further 17 sites, all in the last five months of the year.

A Distribution Map, showing all Skylark breeding territories recorded in the last five years, can be found on the Society's website ([www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com)).

**SAND MARTIN** *Riparia riparia*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first record of the year was four birds at Venus Pool on 16 Mar, closely followed by 20 at the same site and five at Priorslee Lake on the 17th. Small numbers were subsequently seen at these two sites and Wood Lane on most days to the end of March. Numbers then increased during April with 300 at The Mere, Ellesmere on the 4th, 150 at Venus Pool on the 7th, 815 passing westwards through Priorslee Lake on the 18th and 250 at Wood Lane on the 24th.

Breeding was reported at Atcham (70 nests), Condover (10 nests), Craven Arms (10 nests) and Knowlesands, Bridgnorth (50 nests). Other locations where birds were present through the summer included the River Severn south of Bridgnorth, Venus Pool and Wood Lane where numbers peaked at 600 on 16 Jun.

The main departure normally takes place during August with stragglers moving out during September. There were still 150 at Wood Lane and 50 at Chelmarsh on 1 Sep, but only small numbers after this, with the last record being one at ASF on 28 Sep.

**BARN SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica*

Status: Common summer visitor

The first bird of the year was at Venus Pool on 19 Mar and a few subsequent dates. The next group of arrivals were at the end of March with birds at Quatford and Wood Lane on the 30th, and one near Diddlebury on the 31st. Arrivals continued throughout April, with sites in the north of the county not recording their first birds until the third or fourth week; large flocks of 100 at Venus Pool on 18 Apr and 300 at Priorslee Lake on 27 Apr were probably indicative of the main peaks in arriving birds.

At least eight active nests were noted at Wollaston in June, whilst there were three pairs at Dudmaston, two pairs at Myddle and single nests at Neen Savage, Craig-Llwyn, Edgmond, Leamoor Common where two broods were raised, and at Little Sutton.

Post-breeding flocks were being recorded by late July, with 60 at Venus Pool on 29 Jul and 80 at Adderley on 31 Jul. Larger groups developed in August and September, examples being 120 at Whitchurch on 13 Aug, 100 at Condover on 14 Aug, 200 at Priorslee Lake on 18 Sep and 400 at ASF on 27 Sep. Small numbers were reported from a variety of sites during the first half of October and the last record for the year was a single at Priorslee on 22 Oct.

**HOUSE MARTIN** *Delichon urbica*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Venus Pool scored a hat-trick of hirundine firsts for the year with six on 31 Mar. These were followed by two at Stokesay on 8 Apr and then singles at Ludlow on the 13th, Adeney on the 14th, Priorslee Lake on the 15th and Great Bolas on 17 Apr. The main influx occurred at the end of April with Priorslee Lake recording 250 birds on the 28th, although a flock of 75 birds at Venus Pool on 26 May could have represented late arrivals.

Although there were no reports of significant breeding colonies, a number of examples of successful breeding activity were recorded. Four pairs each reared two broods at Little Sutton, three pairs bred at Diddlebury and at Attingham Park a pair raised at least two young from a nest on the English Nature tearoom window. Other active nest sites were reported from Adderley, Craven Arms, Ludlow, Neen Savage, Myddle and Wellington, whilst instances of late breeding occurred at Ludlow where three young were being fed on 21 Sep and at Much Wenlock where two young fledged on 7 Oct.

Autumn flocks were at the main wetland sites in August and September with maxima of 400 at ASF on 9 Aug and 150 at the same site on 5 Sep. The last birds departed during the first half of October, with the final records being eight at Leebotwood and 12 at ASF, each on 12 Oct.

**TREE PIPIT** *Anthus trivialis*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor (BCC.Amber listed)

Only 26 records of this inhabitant of lightly wooded slopes were submitted. The first report was on 29 Mar from Brown Clee, and the last, from the former Gatten plantation on The Stiperstones, was on 7 Jul.

Twelve of the records came from Brown Clee (eight from one observer and three from another), with the maximum count being four displaying males. There were eight displaying males in Ashes Hollow on 24 April, three in the Shropshire part of the Wyre Forest on 7 May, and two singing males were reported from both Whixall Moss (31 May) and the Wrekin (6 Jun). Four reports from other locations recorded more than one bird – two in Callow Hollow on 24 Apr, two on Catherton Common on 2 May, two on Whitcliffe near Ludlow on 15 May, and eight at Bucknell on 16 May. In total, reports came from only 11 locations, all except Whixall Moss and the Wrekin being in the southern half of the county.

While this poor coverage reflects continued absence of observers (or reporting) in the South Shropshire Hills, it is an improvement on last year's total, but the appeal for records from the traditional strongholds contained in last year's report is re-iterated. The species is still widespread on the Long Mynd, and there is no apparent decline, but the systematic surveys carried out 1994 – 98 are not due to be repeated until 2006.

A Breeding Bird Survey on The Stiperstones estimated eight or nine breeding pairs in the southern half of the National Nature Reserve, another five or six pairs in the former Gatten plantation, eight in the heathland restoration area around Nipstone Rock, and another one or two pairs just south of that, in the heathland restoration area around The Rock – a total of 22-25 breeding pairs. The population on the National Nature Reserve appears broadly unchanged since the previous survey in 1995, but there has been a large increase in the area as a whole as a result of creating additional habitat by felling the alien coniferous plantations to create the heathland restoration areas.

**MEADOW PIPIT** *Anthus pratensis*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

In both winter periods the majority of counts were in single figures and generally came from farmland in the north and central areas of the county. Larger groups included 22 at Adeney on 4 Jan and 30 at Chelmarsh Reservoir on 5 Feb, whilst in the second winter period 35 were at Wollaston on 2 Dec, 60 at Alberbury on 12 Dec and 58 at Wall Farm on 24 Dec. Passage periods brought the highest counts, with 180 at Titterstone Clee on 19 Sep and 100 at Cherrington on 12 Oct.

In the breeding season, records were predominantly from hill country in the south and west of the county but no large concentrations were noted. Twenty at Rhos Fiddle in April, 20 at Ashes Hollow in July and 15 at Gatten Plantation in July were the largest groups reported. No confirmed breeding records were received.

Of particular interest were notes from observers of habitat being used by birds outside the breeding season. In the early spring period there were two instances of birds using winter wheat fields and in the autumn/winter period there were six instances of stubble fields being used (wheat/barley/maize) and one involving set-aside.

**WATER PIPIT** *Anthus spinoletta*

Status: Rare passage migrant and winter visitor

A bird at ASF which was first seen on 25 Oct 2003 remained until 11 Jan 2004 (AL).

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.

**YELLOW WAGTAIL** *Motacilla flava*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor but common passage migrant (BCC Amber listed)

This attractive migrant was first recorded at Venus Pool on 5 Apr, and on eight subsequent dates there until 21 Apr, before the first record was received from any other site. This was Cranmere Bog on 23 Apr, followed by Tern Hill on 24 Apr, ASF and Sleaf Airfield on 25 Apr, Quatford on 26 Apr and Priorslee Lake on 27 Apr, before another record from Venus Pool also on 27 Apr. There were no other April records, and the first from Wood Lane was not until 1 May. All the April records were of one bird, apart from Venus Pool where up to three were seen on various days from the 18th to the 27th.

Altogether 172 records were received, but from only 50 different sites. Breeding was confirmed at nine sites – ASF, Cherrington, Cold Hatton Heath, Ercall Heath, Great Ness, Cheswardine, the Pen-yr-Estyn wetland, along the River Severn between Leighton and Buildwas and near West Felton. Pairs were also reported from Alcaston, Dudmaston, Sutton Maddock, Upper Affcot and Venus Pool, but only five records were of more than one pair.

September records were received from ASF, Bromfield, Cound, Sleaf Airfield, Priorslee Lake and Cherrington with the last record being at Priorslee Lake on 23 Sep.

Habitats were noted on 17 records. Eight of these were in potato fields (two of which were noted as irrigated), two were in wheat, one was in both wheat and sugar beet, two were in spring barley and another in barley, two were in set-aside and one was of a bird flitting between cereal and set-aside. Only 24 records from ten sites came from the southern half of the county, and only four of these sites were outside and to the west of the Severn Valley. Of all the remaining records from the northern half of the county, only 27, from 12 sites, came from the north-west quadrant. This suggests that the species is largely restricted to the north-east of the county.

During the Breeding Bird Survey by the Upper Onny Wildlife Group, covering 122 square kilometres in the area between Long Mynd and the Welsh border, a total of 10-11 pairs were found in four adjacent tetrads on relatively flat arable land to the north and east of Bishop's Castle. Habitats used were winter wheat (three pairs), beans (four pairs), autumn barley adjacent to some set-aside land with short varied vegetation and a shallow pool with bare muddy margins (two pairs), and damp pasture (one to two pairs).

Yellow wagtail has declined nationally and, in 2003 and 2004, the Society re-surveyed around 20% of the tetrads where yellow wagtails were found to breed during "Atlas" fieldwork. This was to see if this decline had also occurred locally and it has. Yellow wagtails were found in only 12 of the 28 tetrads (43%) surveyed. A report of this survey can be found on page 15. Confirmation of the bias in the range of yellow wagtail in the county can be found on the SOS website ([www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com)) where a distribution map showing all records for the last five years is posted.

### **GREY WAGTAIL** *Motacilla cinerea*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

This popular wagtail was recorded in every month of the year. Breeding pairs are widely spaced along fast-flowing rivers and streams, and birds tend to stay in their territories, rather than form post-breeding flocks, so, not surprisingly, only 12 records were of more than two birds, and most of these referred to juveniles as well as adults. Only one record, from Sambrook Mill, specified two pairs, and breeding was confirmed here when a juvenile was seen on 10 Jun.

Breeding was also confirmed at seven other sites – Ashes Hollow, Bromfield, Halford Mill at Craven Arms, Lingen Bridge at Bucknell, Market Drayton, Teme Bridge at Stowe. Odd birds were seen at Venus Pool during the breeding season, including a juvenile on the late date of 16 Aug. However, these birds are likely to have come from the nearby Count Brook.

However, there is a tendency, particularly amongst first year birds, to wander widely outside the breeding season. Altogether, there were 251 records from 72 sites, and 31 of these 72 sites were in the southern half of the county, but 29 of the 41 sites in the northern half of the county had no breeding season records, whereas only six of those in the southern half had no breeding season records. Typical of this pattern are 21 records from Venus Pool up until 11 March, then none until 16 Aug, and a further seven until the last on 11 Nov, and seven records at Wood Lane in the first part of the year, up until 6 Mar, then only two May records before 2 Jul and then a further six up until 28 Oct.

**PIED WAGTAIL** *Motacilla alba yarrelli*

Status: Common resident

A total of 198 records from 57 sites were received. The largest flock by far was reported from a winter roost site on the roof of Tesco’s Supermarket in Ludlow. The roost grew from 100 on 5 Feb to 130 on 7 Feb and 200 on 13 Feb, before declining to 100 on 10 Mar. It built up again at the end of the year, with 170 on 26 Nov and 250 on 7 Dec. A similar pattern was found at other sites, while ASF and Venus Pool were primarily migration sites, as shown in the table.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
ASF	2							80	10			
Ludlow		200	100								170	250
Priorslee Lake	47	19	47	6	1	1	1	12	20	42	86	78
Venus Pool		2	17	30	3	5	2	4	50	3		2
Wood Lane	22	24	49	6	4	4	5	3	2	3		

In addition to the Ludlow roost, and the other sites listed in the table, there were also three gatherings of more than ten prior to the breeding season - 11 at Dudmaston on 3 Mar, 18 at Tern Hill on 8 Mar and 10 at West Felton on 21 Apr. After the breeding season there were 35 at Sleep Airfield on 5 Sep, 15 at Sutton upon Tern near Market Drayton on 20 Nov and 18 Dec. All other records were of less than 10 birds.

Breeding season records came from only 24 sites; breeding was confirmed at only six with juveniles reported from Aston Square (Oswestry), Diddlebury, Hilton, Little Sutton, Venus Pool and Wall Farm. Two broods were raised at Venus Pool, with three juveniles seen on 23 Jun, and then adults feeding new young on 22 Jul. One pair was found at Dudmaston during a Breeding Bird Survey carried out for the National Trust.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba*

Status: Scarce passage migrant

A maximum of four of the nominate race were seen at Venus Pool on six dates between 24 Mar and 3 May, and then one, or more usually two, were seen on seven dates between 28 Aug and 30 Sep, at the same site – a total of 14 records. In addition, a single bird of this race was reported from the River Severn, between Leighton and Buildwas, on 7 May. Compared with 2003 (nine records from four sites), there were more records but fewer sites involved in 2004.

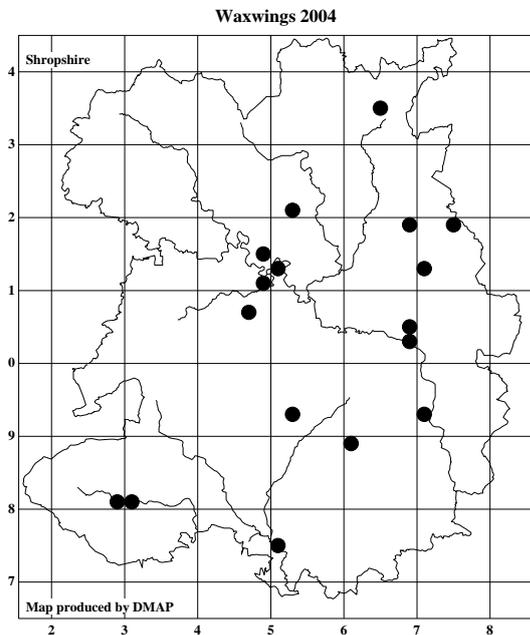
## BOHEMIAN WAXWING (Waxwing) *Bombycilla garrulous*

Status: Scarce, irregular winter visitor

With the arrival of thousands of waxwings in Scotland in late October and early November hopes began to rise that they would move south but it was not until 5 Dec that five birds were reported in Madeley. On the 16 Dec six were noted in Bridgnorth. Then, on the 20th, 20 birds were in Clun, 26 were found feeding on *Sorbus spp* berries at Shrewsbury by the Monkmoor Police Station and smaller numbers were noted at Newport, Ditton Priors and Ludlow.

Over the Christmas week-end, the flock at Monkmoor increased to 100 birds and another flock of up to 70 were found at Meole Brace, both these flocks giving birders and the general public excellent views of this colourful bird. Forty were at Bayston Hill on the 27th whilst elsewhere, in the closing days of the year, small flocks were noted at Donnington (20 on the 30th), near Newport (12 on the 30th) and a single bird at Market Drayton on the 28th.

The map shows all locations where waxwings were recorded in December. There would be no excuse for not seeing these birds as they remained in the county well into the following year.



**WHITE-THROATED DIPPER** (Dipper) *Cinclus cinclus*

Status: Uncommon resident

Reported in every month except August and November, from 40 different sites. Breeding was confirmed from the River Redlake at Chapel Lawn and from another site further south on the same river, from three sites on the River East Onny (Bridges, Whitcot and Walkmill), Monaughty Poeth, Neen Savage, Lingen Bridge at Bucknell, Clungunford, Longnor and Candy Valley. Two pairs were reported on the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest on 5 May, but this was the only record of more than one pair.

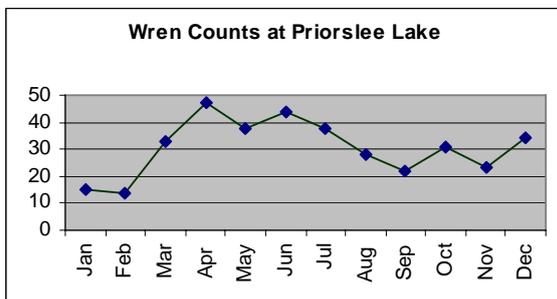
Reports came from only seven sites in the northern half of the county – four in the Oswestry uplands (Pont Pentre-gwyn, Candy Valley, Trefonen and Pen-y-Llan Mill), Longnor, the headwaters of the River Tern at Market Drayton, and Jackfield on the River Severn near Ironbridge. However, the possibility of dippers returning to breed on the River Tern for the first time in 15 years, heralded in the 2003 Report (two seen on 22 Nov) apparently did not come to fruition, and only one was seen on 25 Jan, 18 Apr and 8 May, but one was still present on 17 & 18 Dec, and two were seen on 24 Dec, leaving open this prospect for 2005.

Of the 33 sites in the south, seven are tributaries of the Severn, mainly in the south-east corner of the county, and the remainder are all from the River Teme catchment, mainly on the River Onny.

**WINTER WREN** (Wren) *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Status: Common resident

Widespread, much overlooked and only recorded by a few observers. Reports peaked in April often just pairs, although peak counts by month are shown for Priorslee Lake.



A survey of Rectory Wood, Church Stretton found 25-30 pairs.

A total of 468 birds were counted on 48 BBS sites (found on 91% of all plots) suggesting a slight drop in numbers.

**HEDGE ACCENTOR** (Dunnock) *Prunella modularis*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Under recorded with records from 46 sites scattered over most parts of the county, the most from Venus Pool where 20 were counted on 15 Feb and 6 Mar. Priorslee Lake held 17 on the 15 Oct.

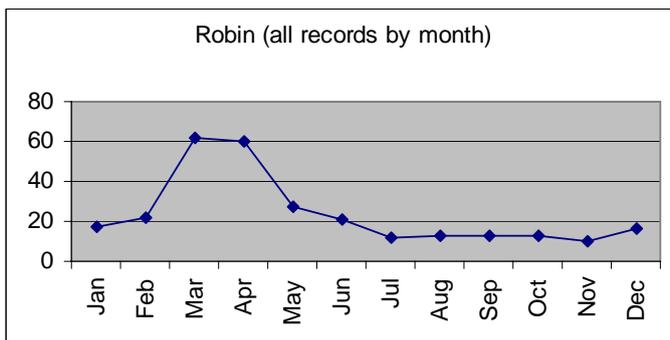
A total of 231 birds were counted on 46 BBS sites (found on 87% of all plots) suggesting little change in numbers in recent years.

**EUROPEAN ROBIN** (Robin) *Erithacus rubecula*

Status: Common resident

Like the hedge accentor, this common bird is under recorded with most of the 286 reports being submitted in March and April. Records were widespread around the county. Venus Pool and Priorslee Lake had many of the records but only at the latter site were detailed counts of birds recorded with 46 on 4 Sep. Eighteen were counted at Pimhill on 19 Apr whilst the best count at Venus Pool was eight on 21 Dec.

A total of 382 were counted on 52 BBS plots (98% of all plots) again suggesting little change in numbers.



**BLACK REDSTART** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Status Rare passage migrant and winter visitor

A female was seen on Brown Clee, a traditional site for this species, on 17-18 Apr (AL).

Only one record this year seems a poor showing after at least seven were seen in 2003. However, none were seen in 2000 and 2002 and just one in 2001 so it is about average.

**COMMON REDSTART** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Status: Common summer visitor

This early harbinger of spring was first reported from Venus Pool on 1 Apr, then not again from there until 18 Apr, while singles were seen at Bridges on 11 Apr and Chirbury on 12 Apr. The first report of more than one bird was six on Brown Clee on 13 Apr. There were two at Craig Sychtyn (including the first record of singing) and Trefonen on 15 Apr, and three and two birds at Nedge Hill on the 17 & 18 Apr respectively. After a gap up to 23 Apr, reports started coming from several locations.

Widespread on Brown Clee, and more than one singing male were noted at three sites - three at Bucknell on 23 May, three at Earls Hill on 24 May and four heard during the SOS field trip to the Wrekin on 8 May. A juvenile, probably an early returning passage bird, was seen at Cressage on 13 Jul, and another was ringed at ASF on 31 Jul. Apart from these records, more than two birds were reported only from Trefonen (six on the 7 & 12 May), Callow Hollow (three on 24 Apr), and the Old Racecourse, Oswestry (three on 13 May).

Redstarts usually disappear early, and there were only eight August records, the last two both at Venus Pool, on the 26th and 29th.

Records came from a total of 34 sites, divided equally between the north and south of the county. However, apart from four sites in the Oswestry uplands, Earls Hill and the Wrekin, all records from sites in the northern half of the county are likely to be of passage birds and many observers stated this. At Venus Pool, there were no records between 18 Apr and 16 Jul. All the records from the southern half of the county came from either the Clee Hills or the south-west Shropshire Hills, the local strongholds.

**WHINCHAT** *Saxicola rubetra*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor

This increasingly scarce summer visitor now appears to be restricted to breeding sites on bracken covered slopes in the South Shropshire Hills. It was even more poorly recorded than in 2003, with only 19 records from 11 sites.

The first records were of one at Nedge Hill on four dates between 29 Apr and 3 May with two seen on 2 May and one at Venus Pool on 2 May. There was then a gap until the first record from a breeding site, Wild Moor, on the Long Mynd, on 13 May, when a female was seen carrying food. Three males were recorded in Ashes Hollow and four on Wildmoor on 24 May, followed by 15, including eight juveniles, in Ashes Hollow on 10 Jul. Two were reported from The Stiperstones on 3 Aug. Two late migrants were at Wall Farm on 18 May.

Return passage was observed, firstly at Priorslee Lake on 19 Jul, then Wall Farm on 19 Aug, Venus Pool on 22-24 Aug (all records were of a single bird). A record of two on the River Severn at Leighton on 3 Sep was the last record.

A Breeding Bird Survey on The Stiperstones found five to six pairs at the southern end of the National Nature Reserve, a decrease from the eight pairs found in the same area in 1995. Breeding was confirmed for all these pairs.

A colour-ringing project on the Long Mynd, by Matt Stevens, as part of the BTO's Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) Project, reported ringing 21 adults and 68 chicks to the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project. The total number of pairs found was 69: 24 in Ashes Hollow, 18 in Callow Hollow, nine on Wild Moor, six in Bilbatch and 12 in Light Spout Hollow and Carding Mill Valley. This is less than the 110-130 breeding pairs in 1998 estimated by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project, but the 2004 ringing project did not cover all the valleys where whinchat were found to breed in the earlier project.

**STONECHAT** (Common Stonechat) *Saxicola torquata*

Status: Uncommon resident

A big increase in records compared with last year, with a total of 104 from 44 sites. There were no January records, and only one in February, from ASF on the 7th. Spring passage was reported from five lowland sites in March – one bird on 14, 15 & 22 Mar at Priorslee, two on 1 Mar and one on the 2, 3, 25 & 26 Mar at Tedsmere (near Baschurch), one at Venus Pool on the 20 & 23 Mar, and 16 records from Wood Lane of a single bird seen on seven dates - the 2, 3, 4, 6 & 15-17 Mar.

Twenty-two breeding season records were received, mainly from the Long Mynd, Stiperstones, and Titterstone Clee. Three confirmed breeding records of pairs with juveniles were received from The Stiperstones, the latest being on 21 Sep. Breeding was also confirmed at Whixall Moss (pair with young on 29 May) and Cefn Coch (two males, one female and two juveniles on 30 May), and a further breeding season record was received from Bucknell of a single bird on 15 May.

Pride of place must go to Titterstone Clee, where 30 nests and at least 12 other pairs were located by the Chelmarsh Ringing Group. Fifty-two adults and 210 chicks were ringed. The number of pairs found in this area continues to increase – there were 39 territories in 2003, 35 in 2002 and 25 in 2000.

Some over-wintering in breeding areas was reported towards the end of the year – a pair on Brown Clee on five dates (28 Oct, 1 & 5 Nov, and 2 & 21 Dec); a total of five males and two females at three locations around Shooting Box and Wildmoor, Long Mynd on 29 Nov, plus a pair in Carding Mill Valley on 3 Dec; and two males and two females on The Stiperstones, near the former Gatten plantation, on 3 Dec.

In the last three months of the year, 37 records were received from 11 sites. Usually two birds, with a maximum of four on 6 Nov, were reported from Venus Pool right through from 13 Oct to 31 Dec (20 records altogether). A pair was at Wall Farm on five dates between 21 Oct and 22 Nov. There was one at Whixall Moss on 28 Nov, with December records coming from The Rea, Upton Magna on the 8th, Childs Ercall on the 18th, Chelmarsh Reservoir on the 29th, Edgmond also on the 29th and Lower Frankton on the 30th.

A Breeding Bird Survey on The Stiperstones found ten breeding pairs in the southern part of the National Nature Reserve, compared with only four pairs in the same area in 1995. The Snipe Survey in the south-west Shropshire Hills located eight pairs. Two at Bryn Shop, two at Gorse Bank, one near Anchor, and one on the Black Mountain were all in the extreme south-west of the county, and other pairs were located at Lower Stapeley and Shelve Pool. These six sites fall within five tetrads, but Stonechat were only recorded in two of them during fieldwork for the Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas 1985-90.

The results from Titterstone Clee, The Stiperstones and the south-west hills all confirm that the population and range have both increased considerably in recent years, and particularly since *The Atlas* was published in 1992. This is attributed mainly to the long run of mild winters, resulting in an increasing tendency for birds to stay on the breeding grounds throughout the winter.

## **NORTHERN WHEATEAR** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Status: Common summer visitor

This is one of the earliest summer migrants to return, and a total of 78 records were received from 34 sites. The first record for the year came from Forton airfield on 18 Mar, with further March records from Cae Howel (two birds), Devils Dingle (two) and Wood Lane all on the 21st. Also, Mynydd Myfyr on the 22nd, Titterstone Clee (thirty) on the 27th, Townbrook Hollow, Long Mynd, on the 28th, and three birds at Nedge Hill on the 31st. All these March records were of single birds unless stated. Further spring passage records were received for April and May, but there were only three flocks of five or more birds - 18 at Nedge Hill on 16 Apr, 16 on a tilled field at Trefonen on 27 Apr, and five at Priorslee Lake on 17 Apr.

Breeding was confirmed only from Brown Clee, Titterstone Clee and Sleaf Airfield. Apart from these three records, and additional records of pairs at the same three locations, records from known breeding sites came from the Wrekin on 24 Apr, Ashes Hollow on 16 May, the Long Mynd above Asterton on 10 Jul and two pairs on the Lawley on 4 Sep.

Three separate reports were received of 20 birds at Titterstone Clee on 14, 17 & 18 Apr, and eight were still present on 19 Sep. The Chelmarsh Ringing Group has continued with its colour-ringing project on Titterstone Clee, and 41 nests were found. This is estimated to be around half to two-thirds of the total population, which has been relatively stable since 1998. Twenty-seven adults and 101 chicks were ringed.

Return passage was first observed at Nedge Hill on 8 Aug, with other migrants at Wood Lane on 10 Aug and Venus Pool on 26 Aug. There were further records from these sites in Sep, plus Condover Quarry on 3 Sep, Horsehay on 8 Sep and Priorslee on 12 Sep. The last record for the year was of two at Venus Pool on 21 Sep. Apart from this record and three together at Wood Lane on 4 Sep, all autumn passage records were of only a single bird.

No spring passage records were attributed to the Greenland race, although several different records of passage birds at non-breeding sites in early and mid-May are likely to be of this race. A very deeply coloured juvenile seen at Venus Pool on return passage on 4 Sep "may have been" of this race.

## **RING OUZEL** *Turdus torquatus*

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



### **THE LONG MYND BREEDING BIRD PROJECT**

Apart from systematic work by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project, only eight records were received for this species, all of passage birds. Three records came from Titterstone Clee - three (two males and a female) on 17 Apr, one on 18 Apr and another on 22 Apr. On the Long Mynd, one was seen in Ashes Hollow on 10 Apr, and two in Light Spout Hollow on 29 Apr. In addition, one was seen near The Stiperstones car park on 22 Apr. The record from Light Spout Hollow on 29 Apr was the latest spring passage sighting, but one was reported with a large flock of thrushes at Vineyards Farm, Wyke (near Broseley), on the extremely late date of 9 Nov.

The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project made a systematic search of Carding Mill Valley and Light Spout Hollow on seven dates in Apr and May. Ashes Hollow was searched on three dates, and two visits were made to Callow Hollow and Minton Hill. A single male ring ouzel was heard singing on the evening of 21 Apr, above Light Spout Hollow waterfall. A single male, presumably the same bird, was located below Light Spout Hollow waterfall at midday on 22 Apr, but by 17.00 he had moved right round the corner into the upper reaches of Carding Mill Valley. The male was colour-ringed GM/WLW and had fledged from the nest near Light Spout Hollow waterfall in 2003. Systematic attempts to relocate him the following day, and on several subsequent dates, were all unsuccessful. No female was seen at all.

Ring Ouzels were also not found by National Trust staff, or the ringer undertaking the whinchat project. In view of the intense effort made to find ring ouzels, the fact that none were seen or heard after 22 Apr indicates that no breeding attempts made were made in 2004, and the species is now on the verge of extinction as a breeding bird on the Long Mynd. A Breeding Bird Survey of The Stiperstones, covering the southern half of the National Nature Reserve, also looked for ring ouzel, but found none. As no breeding records have come from anywhere else in Shropshire in recent times (the last away from The Long Mynd was from The Stiperstones in 1982), the species is also presumed to be on the verge of extinction as a breeding bird in the county as a whole.

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. The crash is attributed mainly to poor breeding success, due to a high and increasing level of nest predation. There are no obvious 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.

Ring Ouzel is one of the four species considered in the Research Report “*Decline Of Ground-Nesting Birds On The Long Mynd 1995 - 2004*” (see page 28). “*The Ring Ouzel Report 2004*” produced by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project is also referred to here and both can be found on the Society’s website ([www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com)).

Readers are requested to report any ring ouzels seen anywhere in the county to the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project c/o 8 Welsh Street Gardens, Bishops Castle, SY9 5BH (01588 638577), as soon as possible.

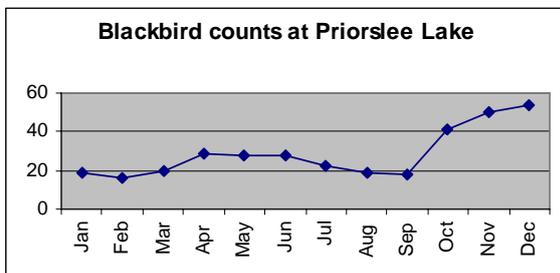
### **COMMON BLACKBIRD** (Blackbird) *Turdus merula*

Status: Common resident

A total of 321 records of this species were received with the number of records peaking in the spring. A third of the records were of less than six birds and, like most other common species, it was widely recorded in the county. The chart shows the maximum monthly counts for Priorslee Lake which gives a picture of the pattern for the year with the arrival of the winter migrants in the late autumn.

One bird was in full song by Telford Station on 2 Jan. First nests were noted on 13 Apr and juveniles were noted on 15 & 23 Apr. A flock of 34 were feeding on fallen apples in a garden at Trefonen on 25 Dec.

A total of 689 birds from 52 BBS plots (98% of all plots) showed a slight increase in numbers in recent years which has been reflected in the national figures.

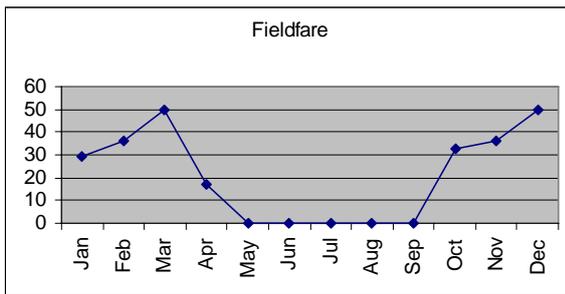


**FIELDFARE** *Turdus pilaris*

Status: Common winter visitor

Large counts from across the county included 360 at Showell Mill 3 Jan, 300 at Chelmarsh 15 Jan, 400 at Lyth Hill 27 Jan, 1000 at Wall Farm 21 Feb, although most reports were of smaller parties often less than 100. By March, small flocks were still widespread with the best counts being 200 at Condoover on the 24th and 200 at Dudmaston on 27th. There was still plenty of records in early April with 350 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on the 5th with 45 still here on the 15th and 40 near Bridges on the same day. Six at Red Hill on the 20 Apr and two at Leamoor Common on 23 Apr were the last reports of the spring.

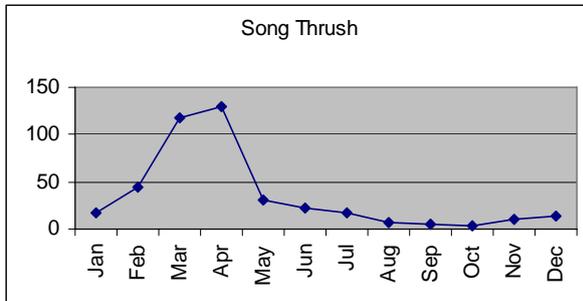
The chart shows the number of records received each month.



The first autumn arrival, a flock of 60, was noted at Bilbatch on 7 Oct. Wood Lane had 30 on the 8 Oct and 20 were at Leebotwood with 18 at Newport on the 9 Oct. Numbers slowly built up during the month to 150 at Edgmond on the 28th and 450 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on the 29th. During November, numbers increased and records were widespread with the best counts being 500 at Wall Farm on the 7th and the 24th, 350 on the Long Mynd on the 7th, 250 at Adderley on the 21st and 150 at Whixall Moss on 27th. Numbers remained high around Wall Farm during December with the largest flock of the year recorded at 1500 on the 13th. Other flocks were 350 at Rhiews on 18th, 650 on Brown Clee on the 19th and 300 at The Rea, Upton Magna on 22nd but, thereafter, flock numbers dropped dramatically with 150 at Waters Upton on 27th being the only flock in excess of 100 for the closing days of the year.

**SONG THRUSH** *Turdus philomelos*  
Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

A total of 420 records made this species better recorded than blackbird, although, in reality, most observers would agree that it is less common than that species. However, the chart shows the number of records received by month which demonstrates how the singing males draw attention to themselves as they announce the arrival of spring and a new breeding season.



Singing birds were first noted at Bedstone on 22 Jan and two were singing at Condover on the 25th. Most records were of one or two singing birds, but seven were at ASF on 4 Jan and nine at West Felton on 12 Feb. There were nine at Priorslee Lake on 22 Feb and 12 here on 4 Mar. The first juvenile was noted on 20 Mar at Aston Square. Many more singing birds noted in April and birds were taking food to young at Darnford on 21 Apr and at Pen-yr-Estyn on 9 May. Song was still being noted on 24 Jun at Condover and five newly hatched young were seen at Aston Square on 10 Jul.

There were few records in the late summer and early autumn, but more records came in during late November and December as adults started singing again, especially during mild weather. A total of 149 birds were counted on 43 BBS sites (found on 81% of all plots) suggesting little change in numbers this year.

**REDWING** *Turdus iliacus*  
Status: Common winter visitor

A good scatter of records, but less often in the hill country than fieldfare with whom it often associated on farmland. Numbers were much lower than fieldfare with only small parties noted in January with 35 at Shavington on the 17th a large flock. Three hundred at Attingham Park (with fieldfares) on 12 Feb was an exceptional flock with most flocks rarely exceeding 20 birds.

In March, most flocks were small although 75 at Edgmond on 7th, 87 at Priorslee Lake and 50 at Showell Mill both on the 14th, and 86 at Venus Pool on the 23rd were exceptions. There were just four records in April, 12 at Knockin and one at Wood Lane on 3rd, one at Newcastle-on-Clun on the 6th and the last were two at Nedge Hill on 14 Apr.

A very early autumn bird was at Wood Lane on 21 Aug and the next record, another single, was not until 25 Sep at Priorslee Lake where two were noted on the next day. In October, there were two at Higher Heath on 1st then 40 at Trefonen on 8th. On 9 Oct, 13 were at Edgmond Marsh, 50 at Leebotwood and 60 at Cockshutt. Subsequently, 200 at Adleymoor Common, 200 at Craig Llwyn and 150 at Trefonen confirmed the main arrival. Thereafter, records of small and large flocks continued widely spread to the end of year with the largest flocks reported being 247 at Wall Farm on 24 Oct, 250 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 12 Nov, 200 at Whixall canal floods on 14 Nov, 200 at Adderley on 21 Nov, 750 at Priorslee Lake on 24 Dec

#### **MISTLE THRUSH** *Turdus viscivorus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

Only 247 records were received of this large thrush, thinly spread throughout the county. By mid-January, singing birds were noted and on 24 Feb a pair were nesting at Condober. Most records were of single birds, often singing although the rattling alarm notes were also noted. Eight at Dudmaston on 3 Mar and small groups suggesting family parties were at Wood Lane on 16 May, Leebotwood on 27 May, Wrickton on 8 Jun and 12 at Dallicote on 18 Jun.

Parties were noted in July with 15 at Wall Farm on the 18th and eight at Broome Park, Neen Savage on the 20th. The peak count was in August with 45 at Loppington on the 29th, followed by 35 at Wall Farm on 4 Sep. Thereafter, a spread of records of one to six birds to the end of the year with 30 at Dudmaston on 1 Oct an exceptional count.

A total of 37 birds were counted on 20 BBS sites (found on 38% of all plots) suggesting a slight decline in numbers.

**COMMON GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** (Grasshopper Warbler) *Locustella naevia*

Status: Scarce summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

Again an increase in the number of records in 2004, with 19 of the distinctive 'reeling' call from 10 sites, including at the bottom of a Pontesbury garden! First recorded from Priorslee Lake on 17 Apr, a flurry of records took us through to the last on 27 Jul on The Wrekin.

Recorded as present on Brown Clee, five records from The Wrekin, two from Broseley, two from the Market Drayton area, two from the River Severn at Shrewsbury, eight records of probably the same bird from Priorslee Lake and single records from Leighton, Shirlett, Stiperstones, Wollaston and Wood Lane.

This species is notoriously difficult to see unless 'reeling', so it is no surprise there is no supporting evidence of breeding. However, the number of males on territory suggests we still have a few breeding pairs of this popular species.

**SEDGE WARBLER** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Status: Common summer visitor

A very slight increase in records over 2003 with 141 reports from 27 sites, perhaps a reflection of this birds ability to settle in marginal habitat as soon as conditions become favourable. The first record of the year was at Venus Pool matching the 2003 date of 15 Apr. The last reported was on 13 Sep at Chelmarsh Reservoir.

Evidence of breeding was seen at Berrington Moss, Venus Pool, Quatford and Chelmarsh Reservoir. Only the latter site gave double-figure counts, however, this was 50% up on last year's maxima of eight. Six were reported from both Wood Lane and Venus Pool with five from Pen-yr-Estyn, four from Wall Farm, Longdon-upon-Tern and Priorslee Lake. Three were seen at ASF, Queen's Head Canal and the River Severn at Quatford.

**EURASIAN REED WARBLER** (Reed Warbler) *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Status: Common summer visitor

A total of 124 localised reports were received, a similar number to last year. The number of sites, however, was down from 21 to 15, of which a number were locations along the River Severn.

The first of the spring was noted at Priorslee Lake on the typical date of 21 Apr, where numbers built up to a maximum of 11 on 29 Jul. Other high counts were 12 which were rung at Venus Pool 19 Jul, 10 singing males at ASF on 27 Apr and eight at Chelmarsh on 24 Jul. Maximum counts of seven were recorded at both Shavington Big Pool and Wood Lane.

No evidence of proved breeding was received but no doubt occurred at all these sites. A juvenile was seen at ASF on 22 Aug.

The last record of the year was of an individual at Wood Lane on 11 Sep.

**BLACKCAP** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Status: Common summer visitor, scarce winter visitor

Two hundred and fifty records were received for this year. During the first winter period (Jan to mid-March) there were 28 records from 11 different locations suggesting widespread winter residency. One male was heard singing in early February in Priorslee, but the spring rush started in earnest from the last days of March with eight different locations holding birds on 4 Apr.

As in 2003, only one confirmed breeding record, this time from Morton near Llyncllys with one further probable breeding at Castlefields, Ellesmere. The true picture, however, seems to be of widespread breeding through all regions of the county with observers satisfied that singing males indicate occupied territories. Five pairs were recorded on Brown Clee, five to six pairs in Rectory Wood, Church Stretton, and five males were counted at Earls Hill. A further five from Aston Eyre near Bridgnorth and the same number recorded from the Severn Valley Country Park and Market Drayton. A Society field trip on 8 May reported six at The Wrekin. However, the largest counts, which are almost certainly a true reflection of the birds status in the county, were 12 along the River Severn between Coalport to Apley on 7 May, 15 at Shavington Big Pool on 1 May and 16 at Priorslee Lake on 16 May. A further count of 18 at Priorslee Lake on 13 June was only eclipsed by 25 at Hawkstone Park on 28 Aug.

The second winter period (Oct to Dec) provided 10 records which included a female at Dorrington on 27 Dec which was feeding on Christmas pudding put out on a bird table!

**GARDEN WARBLER** *Sylvia borin*

Status: Common summer visitor

A total of 93 widespread reports matched that of last year. The first, a full seven days earlier than in 2003, were two at Priorslee Lake and one at Church Stretton on 11 Apr. The last, an unusual report, was of one bathing by skimming over a pond near Oswestry on 26 Sep. This drab but pretty bird is found in habitats similar to the blackcap but is not as tolerant of disturbance. Woodland, with an open canopy and a scrub layer in glades or woodland fringes, seem to be optimum habitat.

Four or more birds were reported 12 times through the spring and summer with a maximum of eight at Priorslee Lake on 15 Jun. Also notable was six singing males at Earls Hill on 24 May.

No confirmed successful breeding activity was reported, but the majority of spring records involved singing males.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia curruca*

Status: Common summer visitor

A total of 84 widespread reports were received from the first arrival at Market Drayton on 24 Apr to the last at Venus Pool on 31 Aug. Most of the records were from the north and central regions, but this may be more linked to observer coverage than to the distribution of the species in Shropshire.

Reports were never of more than three birds in contrast with often double figure counts of common whitethroat reflecting lower density of this species in the county. However, interestingly, the list of observers who have reported this species are often those with more experience as this species is often overlooked due to its less showy habits and less easily recognised song.

No breeding was confirmed, but a number of records received involved singing males.

**COMMON WHITETHROAT** *Sylvia communis*

Status: Common summer visitor

Reported from 78 widespread locations in the county, up on last year's 72. The total number of reports is slightly down to 159. The first of the summer, at ASF on 20 Apr, was later than last year's first which was seen on the 15th. The last to depart was slightly later on 14 Sep at Venus Pool.

The majority of records were of singing males, the eye catching song-flight from a hedgerow being synonymous with an English spring morning. The highest location counts were 10 at Henley Common on 3 May and 17 reported at ASF on 11 May.

Breeding activity, which is surely very widespread, was represented by a single juvenile in an Edgmond Marsh garden in July.

**WOOD WARBLER** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Status: Scarce summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Specialist habitat requirements make this the most localised of our three regular *Phylloscopus* warblers. Records increased by nearly 100% over 2003 with 41 being received from 11 sites. Fifteen records came from Brown Clew with 10 from The Wrekin.

The first of the spring was a single at Bridges on 29 Apr. On 1 May, other arrivals were noted at Poles Coppice, Candy Wood, The Wrekin and the Old Racecourse, Oswestry. A single at Brown Clew on 5 Jul was the last report of the summer. The highest counts were four at Clunton Coppice on 19 May with the same number at Eastridge Wood on 29 May, five at Brown Clew on 4 Jun and up to 11 on The Wrekin on 8 May.

There was no evidence of breeding. However, the increased reporting in both numbers and records, if not sites, over 2003 probably gives a more balanced view of the bird's status in the county.

**COMMON CHIFFCHAFF** *Phylloscopus collybita*

Status: Common summer visitor, rare winter visitor

A high number of records, 432, slightly down on last year, still reflects the common status of this bird in the county. Mirroring the 2003 situation, there were also a few over wintering individuals. One was reported in the first winter period at ASF and three records of two birds were received in the second winter period from the same site with another reported in a Ludlow garden.

Despite its simplicity, the chiffchaff's call, like the first sand martin or northern wheatear, is always welcome as a sign of things to come as winter gives way to spring. Two early March records at Cressage and Chelmarsh were followed by the main arrivals from 10 Mar onwards.

The only evidence of confirmed breeding came from Chelmarsh where an adult was seen with two juveniles in August. Possible nesting was reported from Snedshill, Telford and Castlefields, Ellesmere. It is, however, certain that breeding was widespread throughout the county as the vast majority of records were of males holding territory with 104 reports in late March, 253 reports during April and 53 reports in May.

There was a total of 31 double-figure counts, the highest being 25 at Shavington Big Pool on 15 Aug, 23 at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry on 17 Apr and 21 at Priorslee Lake on 31 Aug. A very interesting late record was one heard in full song at Leamoor Common on 28 Sep.

**WILLOW WARBLER** *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Status: Common summer visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Two hundred and two reports from 78 sites and 36 observers was down on last year, but surely this is simply observer bias despite the BCC Amber rating as records have increased from 10 years ago when 33 records were received from 15 observers.

A very welcome summer visitor as, unlike the chiffchaff, the observer is aware that his first willow warbler is certainly a trans-Saharan migrant! The first of 12 March records was a singing male on at Priorslee Lake on the 20th. Main arrivals kicked in from 3 Apr when birds were recorded at Wollerton, Market Drayton, Venus Pool and Wood Lane. There were only eight September records with the last being one at Adderley on the 26th.

The only breeding evidence was that of a juvenile at ASF on 14 Aug.

Double-figure counts included 20 at Brown Clee on 20 Apr, 14 at Priorslee Flash on 17 Apr with 11 at the Old Racecourse, Oswestry on the same day. Also, 10 were seen at ASF on 9 Aug with the same number at Severn Valley Country Park on 24 Apr .

**GOLDCREST** *Regulus regulus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Amber listed)

An increase in reports of over 20% from 2003, to 160 from over 60 locations including many gardens. Accounts were received in every month with a strong bias in the passage months. As well as garden watchers, this bird is reported by patch workers county-wide illustrating this bird's relatively catholic habitat requirements so long as trees or larger hedgerows are present.

Eight adults and juveniles were seen on the 21 Aug at Darnford, to suggest probable local breeding, although many birds were reported in song during the early spring and many people reported birds to be present in favoured breeding haunts. The highest single day counts were 15 at Cole Mere and eight at Whixall canal floods on 29 Oct.

**FIRECREST** *Regulus ignicapillus*

Status: Rare visitor

A superb year for this much sought after sprite with a record total of nine sightings from four sites. An amazing set of records considering that single records mixed with blank years has been the norm over the past 10 years.

The first was at Weston-under-Redcastle on the typical date of 2 Mar (DJE). The next was a single at Venus Pool on 20 Mar (Rev. HL), which was seen by a group of visiting bird watchers from Wrexham. This was followed by four sightings from three observers of another at Priorslee Flash from 24-27 Mar (EJW).

Intriguingly, a set of three reports were received from one observer, of birds present during the breeding season at Brown Clee (AG). A male was heard in song with another bird nearby on 25 Apr, one was heard calling, singing and was seen briefly at the same place on 8 Jun and, finally, what was probably one was heard calling again at the same place on 22 Jun.

**SPOTTED FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa striata*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor (BCC Red listed)

Forty seven reports were received during 2004, from 36 widespread localities; this is a decrease from the number of records received during the previous year, although records were received from only one fewer location. This species, which favours shady places 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 Cound Stank on 2 May. This was followed by single birds on the Wrekin on 6 May, Pole Cottage on 15 May and Hawkstone Park on 16 May. Evidence of breeding was received from Clunton Coppice, Gatten Plantation, Pentre, Leebotwood, where a pair nesting in ivy was seen with three young, Oswestry where a pair was seen regularly with beaks full of insects, and Market Drayton.

There were two September records in 2004, one at Venus Pool on the 2nd and three at Benthall on the 15th.

**PIED FLYCATCHER** *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Status: Uncommon summer visitor

The 56 reports from 24 locations, largely from oak woodland and often associated with nest boxes, is a slight increase over the number of records received in 2003, but this species also appears to be declining.

The first birds of 2004 were seen at Bridges and at Rectory Wood, Church Stretton, on 11 Apr. Next were singles at Mainstone on 14 Apr, and at Candy Wood and the Old Racecourse, Oswestry on 17 Apr.

Pairs or singing males were reported from several locations, including Benthall Edge, Bucknell, Bushmoor Coppice (pair feeding young in a nest box), Craig Sychten (52 eggs laid in seven nests with 46 young fledged), Earls Hill, Hawkstone Park (young reported in nest boxes but numbers not recorded), Lydbury North and the Wrekin (three males, two females and six juveniles seen on 24 Jun).

The last records were one juvenile trapped and ringed at ASF on 13 Aug, and, also on the 13th, an adult and two juveniles at the former Gatten Plantation on the Stiperstones.

**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 295 reports received. It is a regular visitor to gardens, particularly to peanut feeders.

No records of confirmed breeding were received this year, although several instances of nest building were noted, including at a bridge over the River Teme near Llanfair Waterdine, at Neen Savage and at Wall Farm, and several family parties were seen later in the year.

At least 28 reports of flocks of between of 10 to 20 birds were received during the year, including 20 at Venus Pool on 18 and 28 Sep, 20 in Condover on 8 Oct, 18 at Wood Lane on 17 Sep, and 15 at Cole Mere on 29 Oct. Larger flocks were of 38 at Priorslee Lake on 16 Jun, 32 there on 28 Aug, and 30 foraging in rowans at the Stiperstones on 21 Sep.

**MARSH TIT** *Parus palustris*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

This species was recorded throughout the year, with a total of 157 records received from 41 locations. Regular visits were made to many garden feeding stations, including Venus Pool. Breeding was confirmed at Earls Hill where a pair was seen feeding young in a nest box on 24 May.

Most records were of one or two birds, but larger flocks included six along the River Severn between Coalport and Apley on 26 Jun, and two flocks of six, in February and March, at Shavington Big Pool.

**WILLOW TIT** *Parus montanus*

Status: Uncommon resident (BCC Red listed)

This species was reported from 23 different locations and a total of 96 records from all months of the year was received, a small increase over the previous year. 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.

Although breeding was not confirmed, pairs were reported from Priorslee Lake, Granville Country Park and Betton Moss and a juvenile was ringed at ASF on 31 Jul. Most other sightings were of one or two birds, although up to four were noted at Cole Mere on 22 Nov and at Priorslee Lake during July.

**COAL TIT** *Parus ater*

Status: Common resident

Two hundred and twenty seven records of this species were received from 60 locations. It was recorded in all months of the year, particularly from coniferous woods, as well as being a regular visitor to garden feeding stations.

Breeding was confirmed at four locations, Belle Vue, Shrewsbury (two adults and two juveniles seen on 30 May), Craig-Llwyn (juveniles present in a garden throughout July), Muxton Wood where a pair were seen feeding young on 16 May, and Priorslee Lake (one adult and one juvenile recorded on 2 Jun).

Larger counts included 15 at Dudmaston on 2 Oct, 14 at West Felton on 2 May, and eight at Shavington Big Pool on 27 Mar and at West Felton on 8 Jul.

**BLUE TIT** *Parus caeruleus*

Status: Common resident

A species found throughout the county with a total of 299 records received from many localities during all months.

Breeding was widely reported with many pairs using nest boxes, while others chose holes in walls for their nest-sites. Five pairs nested in Craig Sychtyn, laying 45 eggs, with 37 young fledging. Five nesting pairs were also recorded at Dudmaston during a survey for the National Trust. At Venus Pool, a juvenile was caught by a rat which jumped from the ground and caught the bird in mid-air!

Larger counts included 35 at Severn Valley Country Park on 3 Oct, 30 at Adderley on 16 Feb, Cole Mere on 8 Mar and Priorslee Lake on 8 Aug, and 22 at Pimhill on 8 Apr. At Venus Pool 25 were ringed on 17 August.

**GREAT TIT** *Parus major*

Status: Common resident

Another widespread species in the county, with 172 records received, many from garden feeding stations.

Breeding was reported from many locations, including eight to ten pairs in Rectory Wood, Church Stretton, five pairs in nest boxes at Craig Sychtyn (28 eggs laid, with a maximum of 15 young fledged), a pair which raised six young in a nest box in a Newport garden, used for the first time since it was put up in 1999!

Larger numbers reported included 30 at Shavington Big Pool on 28 Feb, 24 at Priorslee Lake on 13 Jun, 20 in a vegetable garden in Leebotwood on 8 Jul, and 15 at Brown Moss on 22 Feb, and 28 birds were ringed at Venus Pool on 17 August.

**WOOD NUTHATCH** (Eurasian Nuthatch) *Sitta europaea*

Status: Common resident

This species favours mature deciduous and mixed woodland and is widespread in the county in this habitat, with 181 records received during the year. Generally recorded in small numbers of one to four birds, although counts of five at Bridges on 19 Apr and at Hawkstone Park on 5 Jun, six at Darnford on 21 Apr and at Venus Pool on 5 Jun, and eight at Dudmaston on 24 Apr were made.

Only four breeding records were received during the year, from Conover, Darnford, Rectory Wood in Church Stretton where between six and eight pairs were thought to be present, and Venus Pool where an adult with five juveniles was seen on 5 June. Breeding nuthatch are likely to be under-recorded, given the number of reports during the year from suitable habitat throughout the county.

**EURASIAN TREECREEPER** *Certhia familiaris*

Status: Common resident

A total of 125 records were received for this species from 56 widespread locations, and largely associated with mature deciduous and mixed woodland. This is an unobtrusive bird which is likely to have been under-recorded.

Most records were of single birds or pairs. There were four records of probable breeding, a bird seen carrying nesting material at Aston Eyre on 19 May, one collecting wood shavings at Darnford on 21 Apr, a pair in Ercall Woods on 11 May, and one carrying food at Wrickton on 8 Jun. Generally recorded in ones and twos, larger counts were of four at Brown Moss on 22 Feb and at Shavington Big Pool on 9 Apr.

**GREAT GREY SHRIKE** *Lanius excubitor*

Status: Rare winter visitor

Another good year for this very attractive species with five seen. Great grey shrikes have now been recorded in the county in seven consecutive years. Birds were recorded from three sites, Brown Clee, Whixall Moss and Great Wollascott.

This was the third consecutive year for Brown Clee where the long-staying adult, first seen on 18 Oct 2003 continued to be reported around the summit at Abdon Burf until 29 Mar. A second bird, seen nearby on 6-7 Feb (RM), was described as a first winter. In the second winter period, another was found around Abdon Burf on 31 Oct (AL) and this was present until at least 29 Nov. It is possible that this was last year's long staying individual returning to the same site for another winter.

The bird at Whixall Moss was found on 25 Nov (HMP). Initially it favoured the fields along the approach track from Morris Bridge before moving on to the Moss proper where it ranged widely over both Whixall and Fenns and remained into the New Year. The final record was of one at Great Woolascott near Bomere Heath from 11-30 Dec (GEH) Faint barring on the under-parts suggested that this bird was a female.

**EURASIAN JAY** *Garrulus glandarius*

Status: Common resident

This colourful corvid remains popular with observers and 142 records were received from all parts of the county. Most records were of one or two birds, but five were seen at Priorslee Lake on 4 Sep.

The BBS results indicate that the population is stable in the county and in line with the national situation.

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (Magpie) *Pica pica*

Status: Common resident

This well recognised, conspicuous species continues to be well reported throughout the county. Most records are of single figure counts but a large party of 27 flew to the island at Priorslee Flash on 22 Feb. The next highest count was also at Priorslee Flash where 23 were seen on 2 Jan.

An unusual aberrant white and grey individual was seen at Condoover on 7 Dec. The versatility of this species was instanced by a bird noted on a hanging nut feeder and described by the observer as “like a huge great tit”.

As with the previous species, the BBS survey suggests the county population is stable as is the picture nationally.

**EURASIAN JACKDAW** (Western Jackdaw) *Corvus monedula*

Status: Common resident

Most records were of less than 10 birds but the highest count was at Priorslee Lake on 29 Dec when 558 birds were observed flying SSE in a series of small flocks. This was the highest of a number of three figure counts for this species dispersing from a nearby roost through the year.

Other notable counts included 350 at Broome Park, Neen Savage on 31 Jul with 400 here with rooks on 9 Aug and 350 at Chetwynd Park on 20 Dec when a pre-roost gathering was observed.

Evidence of breeding was noted at Ellesmere, Dudmaston and Dothill and the BBS survey suggests the population in the county is fairly stable whilst increasing nationally.

**ROOK** *Corvus frugilegus*

Status: Common resident

As to be expected, most records were of flocks. The largest count was 1000 at Much Wenlock where monthly maxima in both August and September reached this figure. However, more usual were flocks of between 50 and 400 birds.

Active rookeries were noted at Aston Eyre (10-12 nests), Bedstone College (38 pairs), Bedstone village (19 pairs), Bromfield Church (10 pairs), Bucknell (80-90 nests with 14 and 18 pairs nearby), Edgmond Marsh (19 nests), Haughmond Hill (70 nests), High Ercall (at least 60 nests), Ludlow racecourse (at least 14 nests), Millenheath (at least six nests), New Invention (at least 109 pairs in three colonies), Purslow (15 nests), Stead Vallets (11 pairs), Stowe (50 pairs in two colonies) and Pentre-shannel, Trefonen (19 nests).

BBS records indicate that this species is declining in the county as is the position nationally.

**CARRION CROW** *Corvus corone*

Status: Common resident

Unlike the previous species, this bird is more often seen on its own or in small parties of less than 10 birds. However, some flocks were noted and the largest was 200 at Wood Lane on 24 Jul which were clearly attracted by the landfill operations.

Not always welcome in gardens and one observer stated “ very bold and persistent – constant nuisance vandalising the bird tables and one attacked a young greenfinch which did survive eventually”. Another observer recorded a bird “attacking a wood pigeon that was still alive and plucking feathers from its breast”.

BBS indicates that nationally the species seems to be increasing as is the position in Shropshire.

## COMMON RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Status: Uncommon resident



### SHROPSHIRE RAVEN STUDY GROUP

The number of records for the “charismatic corvid” continues to increase, with 328 from 113 different sites.

The number of large flocks, and the size of these flocks, increased considerably. Twenty separate reports were received of flocks of more than 10 birds. The biggest count, of 84 at Stowe Hill, Bucknell, on 4 Oct, is substantially greater than the previous largest flocks ever recorded – 53 on the Long Mynd in July 2000, and around 50 at Oaker Wood, near Aston on Clun, in November 2002. The Stowe Hill flock had already reached 70 by 22 Aug. A flock of 55 at Cefn Coch on 10 Apr was also larger than any reported in previous years. Large flocks were also seen at other places. On The Stiperstones there were 30 on 14 Nov, 14 near the former Gatten plantation on 13 Aug and 10 on 21 Sep. There were also 25 at Linley on 31 Aug, 25 at Chapel Lawn on 26 Sep and 6 Oct, 24 at Bakers Hill on 11 Mar, 23 at Brown Clee on 30 Aug, 22 at Titterstone Clee on 19 Sep, 18 at Stowe on 16 Sep, 17 at Ercall Heath near Childs Ercall on 27 Dec and 13 at the same place on 14 May, 15 at Bucknell on 14 Dec, 12 at Leebotwood on 4 Jul, 11 at Hilton on 18 Jun, and 10 near Tibberton on 6 Sep. The flocks at Chapel Lawn and Bakers Hill were reported as feeding on dead sheep, as were a group of eight at Maesbury Marsh on 21 Jan. Observers are specifically requested to report flocks of 10 or more ravens.

Family parties were seen at Nesscliffe, Oakley Pool, Childs Ercall and Hawkstone Park, and a nest with young was seen near Trefonen. Behaviour indicative of breeding was reported from Arley Hall, Leamoor, Ercall Heath near Childs Ercall, Ebnall Hall near Gobowen and Tibberton.

The records reflect the continuing expansion of range and 195 came from the north of the county. The number of records from Venus Pool has continued to increase, with 31 in 2004, compared with seven in 2003 and four in 2002. It was recorded there every month of the year except October.

The Shropshire Raven Study Group visited 216 current, or previously occupied, raven nest sites, and 128 nests were actually found, together with a further 16 territories.

A total of 45 colour-ringed birds was found. 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 unique two-letter code on 40 of these colour-rings was read, so these birds have been individually identified, and their natal site is known. Of the 40, 28 had been found previously, but the other 12 were found for the first time in 2004. Two of the 27 birds ringed in 1994 (the first year of the Project) were located in the breeding population in 2004 as 10-year-old birds.

The Group estimates that the breeding population has increased from around 50 pairs in 1990 to 175 pairs in 1999, and to around 250 pairs in 2003. No concerted effort was made to find new sites in 2004, but, even so, two were found (excluding several believed to be alternates), and reports from the northern part of the county summarized above show that there are more to find. This suggests that the population is continuing to grow, and the size of the non-breeding flocks of young birds is also increasing.

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 2004, can be viewed on the Society's website [www.shropshirebirds.com](http://www.shropshirebirds.com) 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)

Nearly 300 reports were received from 86 sites. The records were evenly spread during the first, second and forth quarters but only 23 were received during July, August and September. As expected, the largest counts came from the two winter periods when local birds are joined by an influx of birds from the continent.

The highest count of the year came in the early part of the year when a huge roost formed in the Harlescott area of Shrewsbury. Numbers are extremely difficult to estimate but around 50,000 birds were thought to be present on 23 Feb. A roost also formed in Oswestry where estimates of 2000 in Jan, 3000 in Feb and 5000 in Mar were received. Other counts at this time included 1000 at Wood Lane on 11 Jan, 2000 at Childs Ercall on 31 Jan and a pre-roost gathering of 3000 at Wistanstow on 10 Feb.

In the second winter period, around 1500 were regularly seen flying east at dusk and back at dawn over Tibberton and were thought to be roosting at Aqualate Mere, just over the Staffordshire border. Another observer reported 1000 over Edmond Marsh on 18 Nov and 1500 on 18 Nov and he too formed the view that they were flying to roost at Aqualate Mere. Other large counts at this time included a monthly maxima of 3000 at Wood Lane in October, 1000 at Cheswardine on 19 Nov, 1200 at Rhiewes on 3 Dec and 3500 roosting in conifers at Market Drayton on 26 Dec.

Breeding was poorly reported and was confirmed only at Ellesmere, Wellington, High Ercall and Aston Square near Oswestry. However, post breeding flocks were sometimes reported as containing both adults and juveniles. The paucity of records during summer suggests that the breeding population in the county has declined, as it has nationally, and indicated by its status a red data species. Fieldwork for the breeding bird atlas, published in 1992, found evidence of breeding in 99% of tetrads and the population at that time was estimated to be between 27,000 and 54,000 pairs but it is unlikely to be near that now.

#### **HOUSE SPARROW** *Passer domesticus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Nationally, survey data does little to suggest any significant reversal in the population decline witnessed over the last 25 years and declines in Britain are mirrored across Europe where this species is no longer considered 'secure'. However, in Shropshire, the number of records submitted during 2004, some 170, and the number of sites, 53, were a slight increase on the previous year.

This is also reflected in the BBS data where, even though the percentage of occupied plots has not increased significantly over the last six years, the average number of birds per occupied plot has gone up from 9.3 to 14.4.

Breeding was reported from 11 localities across the county, including an encouraging return to one site in Shrewsbury.

The highest counts reported were of post breeding flocks of 155 on 14 Sep at Wyke nr Broseley, 70 at Hampton Loade on 28 Aug, 60 at Cherrington on 30 Aug and 20 Sep and 60 at Leebotwood on 27 Aug. At other times, 108 were reported from Ridgwardine on 2 May with 60 at Adderley on various dates from March into April.

Again, many records were associated with birds at feeding stations, either on or below peanut feeders.

**EURASIAN TREE SPARROW** (Tree Sparrow) *Passer montanus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

The well reported steep decline in the national population of this species probably encourages observers to report sightings and, although the numbers of records, 253, and the number of sites, 67, are slightly down on 2003, there is no evidence to suggest that this represents a decline in the local population. Nationally, although the population has shown a slight increase since 1994, it should be remembered that this is still only some 3% of the population recorded in the 1970s. As with the previous species, the European status of this species is no longer considered 'secure' following declines across western and north western Europe during the 1990s.

Although there were 15 reports of flocks of over 75 birds, all but two came from Venus Pool during the first winter period, with 150 on 1 Jan and 120 on 23 Feb. It should also be noted that ten other reports of 100 or more birds came from the reserve during this period. The two high counts away from Venus Pool were also in the first winter period with 100 on Catherton Common on 17 Jan and 76 at Adderley on 12 Mar.

Breeding was only reported from 10 sites (Adderley, Alveley nr Bridgnorth, Aston Eyre nr Bridgnorth, Aston Square (Oswestry), Broome Park (Neen Savage), Condover, Dudmaston, Edgmond Marsh, Park Heath (Cheswardine) and Tilstock, although birds were reported from several other sites, including Venus Pool, during the breeding season.

**CHAFFINCH** (Common Chaffinch) *Fringilla coelebs*

Status: Common resident

Both the number of records, over 320, and the largest reported flocks are up on the previous year for this well-reported species. It continues to show a slight population increase nationally, although this is not really reflected in the BBS data for Shropshire where, if anything, there would appear to have been a very slight decrease over the last few years.

Again, Venus Pool held the largest reported flocks with 300 birds on the 3 & 17 Jan and 7 Feb, an increase on the largest flocks (200) reported from before Christmas in the previous year. Unlike 2003, however, counts from Venus Pool during the second winter period did not exceed 30 birds. Other three figure counts at the start of the year came from Catherton Common with 150 on 17 Jan, Cranmere Bog with 100 on 4 Feb and Edgmond, 180 on 6 Mar.

High counts for the second winter period included 120 at Shavington Big Pool on 13 Nov with a similar number at Bucknell on 14 Dec, and 170 on Brown Clew on 19 Dec.

Although breeding was only confirmed at six sites: Adderley, Brown Clew, Craig Llwyn, Diddlebury, Dudmaston and Waters Upton, singing birds were noted at several other sites and numerous birds were reported from across the county during the breeding season.

**BRAMBLING** *Fringilla montifringilla*

Status: Uncommon winter visitor

Another good year for this species in terms of reports with 86 records from 31 separate sites, but most of the counts were of fewer than five birds and there were only six double-figure counts, coming from just three sites. These were split evenly between the two winter periods: 30 at Pradoc near West Felton on 1 Jan, 11 and 10 by Clun Pool on 29 Feb and 6 Mar respectively, and a flock of up to 30 birds on Brown Clew on three dates between 3 Nov and 24 Dec.

The last report for the first half of the year was of three birds at Priorslee Flash on 15 Apr. The first returning birds were reported on 13 Oct, some five days earlier than 2003, with singles at Venus Pool and Benthall.

**EUROPEAN GREENFINCH** (Greenfinch) *Carduelis chloris*

Status: Common resident

This species appears to be increasing nationally and this is perhaps reflected in the 287 records from 63 sites scattered across the county.

As in 2003, the highest counts came from Priorslee Lake where 322 were recorded on 26 Sep, 251 on 12 Aug and 203 on 30 Jul, although this had decreased to 180 by 1 Oct. Other large counts of 150 birds came from Venus Pool on 25 & 28 Aug and Hawkstone Park on 28 Dec. Unlike for some of the finches, it is interesting to note that the highest counts for this species are of post breeding rather than wintering flocks.

Breeding was only noted at nine sites, in spite of numerous records over the breeding season.

**EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH** (Goldfinch) *Carduelis carduelis*

Status: Common resident

Not surprisingly, one of our most popular finches, at least terms of records submitted, with over 330 from 100 sites. Although the national population has fluctuated considerably since the mid 1960s, it is considered stable and secure, possibly partly due to its increased use of garden feeding stations during the winter. Use of feeding stations was certainly recorded in Shropshire, as were the traditional food sources of thistles, alder and birch.

Encouragingly, there were 26 counts of at least 30 birds and four of 100 or more. Round hundreds were at Wall Farm on 10 Jul, Lingen Bridge, Bucknell on 11 Oct and Priorslee Lake on 18 Nov, but an astounding 150 roosted in a holly bush at Priorslee on 30 Dec.

Although reported from across the county, with numerous reports during the breeding season, breeding was only confirmed at eight locations.

**EURASIAN SISKIN** (Siskin) *Carduelis spinus*

Status: Scarce resident, common winter visitor

As with 2003, most of the 200 or so records came from the two winter periods. However, although breeding was not confirmed, there was a reasonable number of records during the breeding season from the hill country in the south and west of the county, including singing and displaying males, to suggest this species breeds in Shropshire.

During the first winter period, there were only three reports of 60 or more birds compared with seven the previous year: 80 at Ironbridge on 20 Jan, a similar number at Lingen Bridge, Bucknell on 26 Jan and 60 at Market Drayton on 28 Mar. Flock size was also smaller when compared to the same period in 2003 when the top three counts were 120, 100 and 98.

After a period with no reports of this species, the first autumn record was of one at Priorslee Lake on 18 Oct. As with the start of the year, counts were much lower than for the equivalent period in 2003 with only two reports of 20 birds, both at Chelmarsh on the 25 & 27 Dec.

## **COMMON LINNET** (Linnet) *Carduelis cannabina*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Although this species continues to decline in the UK, and has a European status that is no longer considered 'secure', Shropshire data would suggest that the species has not fared as badly in this county as elsewhere. Analysis of the BBS data for the county shows an increase in the number of birds in each occupied plot over the last six years. Moreover, the number of records submitted during the year increased by 50 on the previous year to 210, with 21 three figure counts.

Counts of a hundred or more were more or less evenly split between the two winter periods, with 11 in the first half of the year and 10 in the second. Large counts in the first period included 200 at Woolston nr Wistanstow on 14 Mar, seven reports of 100 birds at Venus Pool between 3 Jan and 7 Feb, with further flocks of 100 individuals at Wood Lane on 3 Jan, Cae Howell on 21 Mar and Cherrington on 23 Mar. The first three figure count for the autumn was at Priorslee Lake on 24 Sep with 125 birds and was closely followed by 118 at the same site on 3 Oct. The largest flock of the year, 300, was at Tern Hill on 20 Nov and other flocks of between 100 and 150 were reported from Ponthen on 14 Nov, Woolaston on 23 Nov, Wall Farm on 27 Nov and 24 Dec, Tern Hill on 18 Dec, Sutton upon Tern on 26 Dec and Edgmond on 29 Dec. Interestingly, the largest flock at Venus Pool during the latter part of the year was only 80 on 27 Dec.

Although pairs and singing birds were noted at several sites during the breeding season, the only confirmed breeding was of a bird carrying food at Clunbury on 23 May. Again the value of set-aside, over wintered stubbles or wild bird/game crops for this species was noted by several observers.

## **LESSER REDPOLL** *Carduelis cabaret*

Status: Scarce resident, common winter visitor (BCC Amber listed)

Nationally, there is no evidence to suggest any reverse in the decline that this species experienced in England from the mid 1970s onwards. Whilst 160 records were received during the year, very few were from the breeding season, although they are still thought to be resident on Brown Clee.

There were 17 counts of 50 or more birds during the first winter period, but all were from Venus Pool between 17 Feb and 3 Apr with largest being a flock of 80 on the latter date. The highest count for the second half of the year was of 30 at Cole Mere on 22 Nov.

### **COMMON CROSSBILL** *Loxia curvirostra*

Status: Irruptive visitor and scarce resident (RBBP)

Only eight records, from five sites, were received in 2004 compared to 34 records in the previous year. The largest flock was also significantly down from 37 to 11 birds. However, reports from March through to June do raise the possibility that breeding occurred.

Three were in Market Drayton on 13 Mar, with 11 there on 8 Jun. Six were seen on Brown Clee on 26 Mar and crossbills were also recorded at this site as being 'resident' later in the year. Ten were at Lodge Hill near Leebotwood on 18 Jul, with one there on 5 Dec, two were at Priors Holt on the Long Mynd on 8 Aug. The final record of the year was of eight at Bucknell on 14 Dec. Feeding was noted on Scots pine and hawthorn berries.

### **COMMON BULLFINCH** (Bullfinch) *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

The UK bullfinch population has been in decline since the mid 1970s, following a period of relative stability. The decline was initially very steep, but has been shallower since the early 1980s. Locally, however, BBS data does not show any obvious trend over the last six year and this species remains popular with observers with some 224 records received during the year.

Most counts were of four birds or less, but Priorslee Lake had groups of 17, 11 and 10 on 1 Aug, 21 Mar and 21 Feb respectively. Although regularly recorded during the breeding season, there were only five confirmed records of breeding at Venus Pool, Bury Ditches, Belle Vue (Shrewsbury), Castlefields (Ellesmere) and Bromfield.

### **HAWFINCH** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Status: Scarce resident

With only three confirmed sightings in 2004, there is nothing to suggest anything other than a bleak future for this species in Shropshire.

Of the records received, a female was at Somerwood on 17 Jan (AWS), two were at Whitcliffe, Ludlow (WAD), on 4 Apr and, at the end of the year, one was seen feeding on hawthorn at White Grit on 14 Dec (PSB).

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Status: Rare passage migrant and winter visitor

One was seen on the Long Mynd on 6 & 12 Nov (ML). This bird was found by a National Trust Warden at the top of Motts Rd where it joins the Portway.

After three blank years this is the first since 3 Mar 2000 when one was also found on the Long Mynd. This species has been recorded in just four of the last ten years.

**YELLOWHAMMER** *Emberiza citrinella*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Yellowhammer were recorded every month of the year, from 93 different sites. They form flocks in winter, when they forage for seeds, then disperse to their breeding sites, mainly in hedgerows with trees, during April. Flocks of 20 or more birds were reported from 20 different sites. Some of these were monitored throughout the year, and the monthly maxima are shown in the table.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Tedsmere, Baschurch	60	50	60							44
Tilstock				17					25	30
Venus Pool	70	130	90	50	2	1	1		10	30
Woolaston				20					15	20

Several other flocks of ten or more birds were reported – 20 at Catherton Common on 17 Jan, 10 at Chelmarsh on 5 Feb, 20 at Morville on 12 Feb, the same number at Henley Common on 23 Feb, 20 by the River Severn near Bridgnorth on 30 Mar, the same number at Wollaston on 13 Apr and 13 at Aston Eyre on 23 Apr, then, apart from ten at Hilton on 18 Jun, none until the build up of post-breeding flocks - 10 at Erdington on 31 Aug and 15 at Cheswardine on 18 Oct.

After this date, there were no more large flocks until 85 were reported from Wyke near Broseley on 1 Nov, 35 at Ercall Heath on 5 Nov, 26 at Edgmond Marsh on 10 Nov, 16 at Prees Lower Heath on 16 Nov increasing to 35 by 29 Nov, and flocks of between 50 and 40 from six different locations in December.

Breeding season records, between the beginning of April and end of July, came from 60 sites, only ten of which were in the southern half of the county, and six of those were around Bridgnorth, with the seventh being in the Wyre Forest. Records came from only three sites in the South Shropshire Hills, and two of those were on the Long Mynd. Of the 50 sites in the northern half of the county, only ten were in the north-west quadrant, leaving two-thirds of all sites in the north-east quadrant. No breeding season record after late April exceeded 10 birds.

Confirmed breeding was reported only from Ercall Park and Wollerton (near Hodnet). At Dudmaston, nine pairs were found during a breeding bird survey carried out for the National Trust.

This Red List species has declined primarily as a result of the switch from spring to autumn cereal crops, resulting in a shortage of feeding sites in winter. Records which note the crops where large flocks were feeding are particularly useful. Flocks at Tilstock and Prees Lower Heath were in barley stubble, Wollaston was in wild bird cover, Ercall Heath in uncut seedy silage, Upton Magna along the field margin, Hinstock in sugar beet, Hampton Loade in a stubble field, and Cheswardine and Prees Lower Heath in wheat stubble.

**REED BUNTING** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Status: Common resident (BCC Red listed)

Reed bunting were reported every month of the year, from 58 different sites. Worryingly, non-breeding flocks of more than ten birds were reported from only four sites, and the vast majority of such records came from Venus Pool. The monthly maxima are shown in the table. There were good numbers reported on several dates in the first three months of the year, but the flock had dispersed to breeding areas by 8 Apr, and there were no records of more than 10 birds after this date until 18 Sep.

Monthly maxima at Venus Pool:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Venus Pool	120	150	90	30	5	6	5	1	20	1	6	30

The other large flocks were 11 and 14 at Chelmarsh Scrape, on the 5th and 29 Mar respectively, and again in autumn at the same site, 10 on 30 Oct, and 100 at West Felton on 5 Dec, where 80 remained on the 11th.

Breeding was reported from Berrington Moss, the River Severn between Quatford and Chelmarsh, Shavington Big Pool, and Venus Pool.

Ten birds were reported from Whixall Moss on 31 May, the only double-figure record during the breeding season. Multiple singing males were reported only from Wall Farm (six on 17 May) and Venus Pool (five on 3 Jul). Three males were reported from Chelmarsh Reservoir, and two pairs from Severn Valley County Park, but there was no indication in reports of more than 1-2 pairs at any other site.

Breeding season records came from only thirteen sites in the southern half of the county and, apart from five separate sites on the Long Mynd, and the SWT Reserve at Rhos Fiddle, all of these sites were in the Severn Valley. Of the 26 breeding season records from the northern half of the county, only eight came from the north-west quadrant, indicating that the county stronghold is the north-east quadrant north of Telford.

However, reed buntings also breed in small numbers at many of the upland bogs in the county, although these sites are rarely visited by bird watchers, and reports are few and far between. The Breeding Snipe Survey in the south-west Shropshire Hills found eleven pairs – one at Bryn Shop, two at Gors Bank, two near Anchor and one at Cabin Gutter (all in the Clun ESA), one at Lower Stapley, two at Shelve Pool and one at Norbury Hill (all in the Shropshire Hills ESA), and one at Walcot.

A Breeding Bird Survey on The Stipersones found four pairs in the southern half of the National Nature Reserve, a welcome increase on the two pairs found in the same area in 1995.

## **CORN BUNTING** *Miliaria calandra*

Status: Uncommon resident (BCC Red Listed)

Corn bunting were reported from 60 sites during the year, but no records were received for January, September or October. Worryingly, only four records of more than 10 birds were received – 14 at Great Bolas on 3 March, 16 at Cheswardine on 14 May, 30 at Nagginton Grange on 21 December, and 35 at Sutton upon Tern, Market Drayton, on 26 December.

Most records – 110 out of 122 – came from 56 different sites in the breeding season. Although males were reported as singing from 36 of these sites, there was more than one singing male at only 14 of them, and only one of these, at Cherrington, had more than two. Two males were heard at Beckbury, Erdington, Ercall Heath, Forton Airfield, Great Ness, Great Wytheford, Isombridge, Kingslow, Noneley, Rednall Airfield, Sutton Maddock and Upton (near Shifnal).

Of the 56 sites occupied in the breeding season, only four were in the southern half of the county, 10 were in the north-west quadrant, and 42 (75%) were in the north-east quadrant.

The Society carried out a survey of approximately 20% of tetrads that were found to be occupied 1985-90 during fieldwork for the Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas, to supplement the records submitted in 2002 and 2003. Twenty-five tetrads were surveyed. (See page 18). It is not clear from the survey results if the catastrophic decline which has affected this species nationally has also occurred in Shropshire, or indeed if any significant decline has occurred here at all. However, corn buntings are highly sedentary. Ten years ago, the maximum flock sizes listed in the County Bird Reports 1992-94 were 50, 80 and 60+, compared with much smaller maxima in the last three years - “the only double figure count involved a flock of 22” in 2002, a maximum of 26 in 2003, and 35 in 2004. This reduction in the size of winter flocks does suggest a substantial decline in the local population.

## ESCAPES AND RELEASES

### **BLACK SWAN** *Cygnus atratus*

Odd reports of single birds from the Severn/Vyrnwy Confluence in February and March and from Cole Mere and Wood Lane in May, July and August

### **LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** *Anser erythropus*

An immaculate adult bird was present at Venus Pool from 18 Sep to the end of the calendar year. Despite the bird's provenance being extremely suspect it was enjoyed by many Venus Pool regulars.

### **SNOW GOOSE** *Anser caerulescens*

Singles were recorded in Jan at ASF and Venus Pool and at Cae Howel in Nov.

### **RUDDY SHELDUCK** *Tadorna ferruginea*

Three birds were at ASF, briefly, on the morning of 25 Sep before departing with Common Shelduck. Recorded annually for the last four years.

### **WOOD DUCK** *Aix sponsa*

A drake was at Middle Pool, Trench on 10 Jan.

### **ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET** *Psittacula krameri*

There were two records. One from Bayston Hill and one from Oswestry.

## LIST OF OBSERVERS 2004

Mr MR Adlam	Mr N Eden	Mr PA King	Mr GR Smith
Mr J Almond	Mr TW Edwards	Ms C Landles	Mr L Smith
Mrs A Andrews	Mr G Egarr	Mr A Latham	Mrs M Smith
Mr JK Andrews	Mr P Ellicott	Mr J Lightfoot	Ms C Snyder
Mr J Baker	Mr J Elliot-Smith	Rev H Linn	Mr A Speadborough
Mr DA Barnes	Mr D Ellis	Mr J Lloyd	Mr JW Stabler
Mr N Barratt	Mr IG Ellis	Mr M Loft	Mr M Stewart
Mr D Barrow	Mr DJ Evans	Mr S McCrone	Mr RM Stokes
Mrs C Bateman	Mr DP Farncombe	Mr J Mackintosh	Mr PR Swales
Mr K Bates	Mr T Farrow	Mr W Marler	Mr R Swindells
Mrs M Bell	Mr NA Fellows	Mr BG Martin	Mrs S Swindells
Mr P Bell	Mrs J Finney	Mr J Martin	Mr D Talbot
Dr J Bent	Mr G Ford	Mr JP Martin	Mr D Tarry
Mr S Bierley	Mr S France	Mr PGN Mason	Ms J Tetsil
Mr G Bishton	Mr D Freeth	Mr DG May	Mr G Thomas
Mr HJ Blofield	Mr D Fulton	Mr A MacDonald	Mr D Trowman
Mr JH Boden	Mr RP Fussell	Mr R Moores	Mr R Tromans
Mrs C Boyes	Mr AW Gaunt	Mr A Morris	Mr JJ Tucker
Mr S Brierley	Miss V Geen	Mr J Morris	Mrs L Tucker
Mr DP Broome	Mr M George	Mr A Morton	Mr J Turner
Mr IAR Brown	Mr LG Gibbons	Mr A Mottram	Mrs V Turrells
Mr P Brown	Mrs G Glover	Mr D Nicholls	Dr SN Twigger
Mr N Brown	Mr MG Grant	Mr P Nickless	Mrs C Uff
Mr D Buckingham	Mrs L Greenall	Mr A Owen	Mr R Vernon
Mr J Buckley	Mr FC Gribble	Mr M Owen	Mr A Walker
Mrs BE Burns	Miss HJ Griffiths	Mrs N Pacult	Mr C Walker
Mr A Butter	Mr G Hall	Mr RB Palmer	Mr GJ Walker
Mr PS Butter	Mr P Hammersley	Mrs I Parfit	Mr M Wall
Mr J Cambell	Mr J Harding	Mr PE Parton	Mr T Wall
Mr R Camp	Mr M Harrison	Mrs C Pearce	Mr M Wallace
Mr P Carty	Mr D Hatfield	Mr D Pearce	Mr A Warne
Mr L & Mrs C Cassidy	Mr J Hawkins	Mr D Peck	Mr WR Watkins
Mr P Castleton	Mr SL Haycox	Mr EG Phillips	Mr TC Weale
Mr S Churchill	Miss D Haynes	Mr J Porter	Mr K Webb
Mr J Clarke	Mr A Heath	Ms S Powell	Mr R Webb
Mr K Claxton	Ms L Henderson	Mr B Powis	Rev WJ Webb
Mr R Coalbran	Mr FJ Hinde	Mr HM Prince	Mrs S Whild
Mr A Cooke	Mr AR Holder	Mr KT Pryce	Mr G Williams
Mr WA Davidson	Mr GE Holmes	Mr A Reid	Miss S Wilson
Mr G Davies	Dr HV Hughes	Mr MD Richardson	Mr K Williams
Mr S Davies	Mr TJ Hurdley	Mr M Ryder	Mr EJ Wilson
Mr AP Dawes	Mr J Isherwood	Mr AR Seagrave	Mr GT Woodvine
Mr PA Dawson	Mr S Jaggs	Mr J Searle	Mr D Wrench
Mr PG Deans	Mr W Jenkins	Mr J Shearman	Mr CE Wright
Mr I Diack	Mrs J Jennings	Mr DN Shirra	Mrs D Young
Mr S Dodd	Mrs JI Jones	Mr J Shutt	Mr GE Young
Mrs S Dodwell	Mrs M Jones	Mr J Sirrett	
Mr WRB Dodwell	Mr P Jordan	Mr AW Smith	

*Thanks to all these observers and apologies to anyone missed. Ed*

## FIELD TRIPS AND MEETINGS 2004

### Main Society Indoor Meetings:

7 Jan	“Beneath the Dark Canopy”	Michael Leach
5 Feb	“A Birding Journey, The Pyrenees to Gibraltar	Brayton Holt
4 Mar	“Use of SOS Data for Conservation Projects”	Andrew Gouldstone
1 Apr	“The Black Grouse Conservation Project”	Patrick Lindley
7 Oct	“A Lane in a Polish Marsh”	Mike Lane
4 Nov	“Red Kites in Wales and Shropshire”	Tony Cross
2 Dec	“Adventures of a Birdnut”	Alan Heath

### Main Society Field Trips

10 Jan	Porthmadog Area	5 Jun	North Staffordshire Moors
22 Feb	Southport & Marshside	17 Jul	Cannock Chase (Nightjars)
20 Mar	The Meres	21 Aug	Bird Watching Fair, Rutland
25 Apr	Doxey Marshes & Belvide	18 Sept	Blithfield Reservoir
8 May	The Wrekin	8-10 Oct	Spurn Point Weekend
		27 Nov	Leighton Moss

### Ludlow Branch Field Trips:

7 Jan	Wellington Gravel Pit	2 Jun	Venus Pool
25 Jan	Cotswold Water Park	19 Jun	Whixall Moss & Wood Lane
4 Feb	Wigmore Rolls	3 Jul	Lake Vyrnwy
3 Mar	Upton Warren	7 Jul	Ravenshill Reserve
20 Mar	Gilfach & Gigrin Farm	4 Aug	Upton Warren
7 Apr	Clee Hill	18 Aug	Wellington Gravel Pit
25 Apr	Cole Mere & Wood Lane	1 Sep	Chelmarsh Reservoir
01 May	Whitcliffe Common	18 Sep	Allscott Sugar Factory
12 May	Langdale Wood, Malvern	6 Oct	Crifftin Ford Bridge
15 May	Whitcliffe, dawn chorus	3 Nov	Dolydd Hafren & Coed-y-Dinas
22 May	Nag's Head, Forest of Dean	14 Nov	Point of Ayr

### Ludlow and Stretton Branch Meetings:

Jan	“A Tale of Two Islands”	Colin Wright	Stretton
Feb	“Indonesia, An Ornithologists Dream”	Julia Robinson-Dean	Stretton
26 Feb	“Estuaries of Britain”	John Wyatt	Ludlow
Mar	“The Peregrine Falcon in Shropshire”	John Tucker	Stretton
Oct	“Rose Red Cities and Finches”	John Wyatt	Stretton
21 Oct	“A Tale of Two Islands”	Colin Wright	Ludlow
Nov	“Birds of Kurdistan”	Brayton Holt	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. Record cards can be obtained from the Recorder.
- 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 page 158). 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 2004 - March 2005**

- President:** Mr FC Gribble MBE, 22 Rickerscote Avenue  
Rickerscote, Stafford ST17 4EZ Tel: 01785 254166
- Vice Presidents:** Mr HJ Blofield, Mrs M Donoghue, Mr CE Wright and  
Mr C Whittles
- Officers:**
- Chairman Mr PG Deans, Springfield, Cross Lane Head,  
Bridgnorth WV16 4SJ Tel: 01746 766718
- Hon. Secretary *To 30 June 2004:* Mr J Turner CPM.  
*From 1 July 2004:* Miss HJ Griffiths, 104 Noel Hill Rd,  
Cross Houses, Shrewsbury SY5 6LD  
Tel: 01743 761507
- 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: Vacant
- Other Elected Members: Mr NJ Eden, Mr HM Prince, Mrs J Duffy
- Non elected member: Mrs A Andrews (Membership Secretary)

## **Other Representatives:**

- County Bird Recorder and Bird Report Editor: Mr GE Holmes
- Excursion Co-ordinator: Mr A Latham
- Bulletin Editor: Mr R Camp
- Branch Reps: Mr J Martin (Ludlow)  
Miss MAB McVey (Church Stretton)