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The compilation of bird records requires a great deal of effort on the part of birdwatchers and we endeavour to support birdwatching activity on our sites wherever possible. To this end we are planning to increase the opportunities for access to sites across our region. We have enhanced numerous sites to improve habitats for birds”.

Martin Wagner,  
Conservation, Access and Recreation Manager  
Thames Water Utilities Limited



# The Birds of Berkshire

*Report for the years 2000 and 2001*

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Edited by Colin Wilson and Peter Standley.

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# Introduction

This report has taken far too long to produce and we ask all readers to accept our apologies for this. Since the years in question much time and effort has been put into a report long needed. The original drafting of the species accounts was undertaken by a team many years ago and we are deeply grateful to them for their time and patience. Subsequent to that some considerable work on content by Derek Barker in particular, aided by Peter Standley, with technical input from Chris Heard has lead to a comprehensive and detailed record of birds in Berkshire for the two years, appropriate, we think for the millennium year. We have produced reports for 2002 and 2003 before this but now it should be possible to achieve a consistent, more timely output, starting with 2004 which is already underway.

Many readers will notice the species accounts are in Voous order to be consistent with other reports produced for this period. The 2003 report was placed in the new BOU order and it is our intention to continue with this new order for all subsequent reports.

Inside you will find a number of interesting articles about specific bird sightings and local surveys in the county which are very welcome in adding to our knowledge of our birds. We encourage all readers to contribute in this way and if you have something that may be suitable please contact the Managing Editor at the address below.

In April 2007 the Reading Ornithological Club held a vote of members on a change of name which it was felt would reflect its activities better. An overwhelming vote of the members lead to the club being renamed Berkshire Ornithological Club. The Club has reaffirmed its intention to work in harmony and co-operation with the other groups, resources and organisations involved with Berkshire birding and details of them can be found in our directory. Additions to this directory are welcome and suggestions should be sent to the Managing Editor.

Since 2000/2001 bird recording in the county has increased in leaps and bounds. The main contributor to this growth has been recording on the [www.berksbirds.co.uk](http://www.berksbirds.co.uk) website managed so expertly by Marek Walford. Many others contribute records via other routes such as Newbury District Ornithological Club, BTO Birdtrack, Berks Bird Bulletin or by maintaining their own spreadsheets or paper records. One of the delaying factors in producing reports as we catch up on recent years will inevitably be the time birdwatchers take to submit records to the many channels available. We are naturally reluctant to exclude valuable records from reports but it is not uncommon to find records are not available when needed which is critical if we are to produce reports in a more timely fashion.

This is the last Berkshire Bird Report benefiting from Peter Standley's expert editing and we wish to record once again our sincere thanks for his major contribution in past years both to our reports and to ornithological knowledge in Berkshire. Chris Heard and Derek Barker are the current Recorder and Assistant Recorder for the County and will seek to maintain the high technical standards set by Peter as they take full responsibility for the 2004 report onwards.

*Colin Wilson,  
Managing Editor  
Blakeney,  
St Catherine's Road  
Frimley Green,  
Camberley, Surrey  
GU16 9NP*

## Acknowledgements

The production of a report of this nature requires the input of many people and none more than the contributors of bird records, a detailed list of those whose records have been used to compile this report are shown at the end of the systematic list. We apologise for any omissions and welcome advice of such occurrences.

The work involved in distilling the thousands of records from many sources into species accounts has been undertaken for 2000 by Derek Barker alone and for 2001, under Brian Clews leadership, by Roy Alliss, Bernard Clark, Jerry O'Brien, David Fuller and Brian himself and we thank them sincerely for their important contributions and patience while the report has been finalised. Derek Barker has undertaken a gigantic share of the editing work on the systematic list for which we are very grateful. Peter Standley and Chris Heard have also made their usual important contributions.

The Report is much more than a set of species accounts and we thank all those who contributed articles, Richard Crawford, Chris Heard (for three articles), Pat Martin and Des Sussex for their valued work.

We try to add worthwhile artwork and photographs to illustrate birds of the years in question and have pleasure once again, to thank Robert Gillmor for his cover illustration of Honey Buzzards. Other superb drawings have been provided by Martin Hallam, our valued, regular contributor, Andrew Cowdell, Tony Keene, Helen Chadburn and newcomer, Terri Jones ([www.terrijonesart.com](http://www.terrijonesart.com)) with a Stone Curlew.

Photographs have been provided by John Andrews, Mike McKee, Jerry O'Brien and the late John Simpson.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to Thames Water who have now supported three years of Berkshire bird reports with generous donations.

Finally, to anyone inadvertently omitted we apologise and offer our thanks to you and all those who have helped in ways large or small to produce this publication.

*Colin Wilson  
Managing Editor*

# County Directory

## COUNTY RECORDER

*Recorder tasks are divided between the County Recorder and Assistant Recorder as follows:*

**Recorder:** Chris Heard, specialisation in bird identification. Chairman of the Berkshire Rarities Committee. 3, Waterside Lodge, Ray Mead Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8NP. Telephone 01628 633828.

**Assistant Recorder:** Derek Barker, specialising in breeding birds in Berkshire. Secretary to the Berkshire Rarities Committee. 40, Heywood Gardens, Woodlands Park, Maidenhead, SL6 3LZ.

## BERKSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

[www.berksoc.org.uk](http://www.berksoc.org.uk)

*A Club for birdwatchers throughout Berkshire, with indoor and outdoor meetings, surveys and publications, including Birds of Berkshire annual reports – see back cover for details. Collects bird records for the county, is responsible for the county database and administers ‘The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund’, a charity.*

Secretary, Renton Righelato, 63 Hamilton Road, Reading, Berks RG1 5RA  
Telephone 0118 926 4513  
Email: [renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk)

## NEWBURY DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

[www.ndoc.org.uk](http://www.ndoc.org.uk)

*A Club for birdwatchers in the Newbury area with a recording area of 10 miles radius of the town. Offers indoor and outdoor meetings, surveys and publications.*

Secretary, Trevor Maynard, 15 Kempstone Close, Newbury, Berks, RG14 7RS  
Telephone 01635 36752  
Email: [info@ndoc.org.uk](mailto:info@ndoc.org.uk)

## BERKSHIRE BIRD BULLETIN

*Publisher of monthly newsletters of birds reported in the County with a news summary and detailed listings of sightings. Records are welcome for publication.*

County Ornithological Services. Contact Brian Clews, Telephone 07071 202000 or email [brian.clews@btconnect.com](mailto:brian.clews@btconnect.com)

[www.berksbirds.co.uk](http://www.berksbirds.co.uk)

An independent website devoted to offering a free resource to birdwatchers in Berkshire and providing news, photographs and records of birds with additional optional information services.

## BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY (BTO)

Local representative for BTO matters including organising surveys: Chris Robinson, 2, Beckfords, Upper Basildon, Reading, Berks, RG8 8PB  
Telephone 01491 671420  
Email: [berks\\_bto\\_rep@btinternet.com](mailto:berks_bto_rep@btinternet.com)

## FRIENDS OF LAVELL'S LAKE

*Conservation volunteers managing Lavell's Lake local nature reserve near Dinton Pastures Country Park, Winnersh. Bird walks, work parties, occasional meetings and newsletters.*

Contact: Chairman Fraser Cottington at Fraser. [cottington@ntlworld.com](mailto:cottington@ntlworld.com) or see [www.foll.org.uk](http://www.foll.org.uk)

## MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP

*Conservation volunteers who manage Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve near Eversley. Work parties, Newsletters, an annual report and access to bird hides.*

Website is [www.mglg.org.uk](http://www.mglg.org.uk).

Contact: Membership Secretary: Keith Littler, 316 Yorktown Road, College Town, Sandhurst, Berks, GU47 0PZ

## THEALE AREA BIRD CONSERVATION GROUP

*A local Club devoted to the conservation of birds in the Theale area, west of Reading. Indoor and outdoor meetings, annual bird race and survey work.*

[www.freewebs.com/tabcg/](http://www.freewebs.com/tabcg/)

Contact: Cath McEwan, Secretary,  
Email: [Catherine@cmcewan.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:Catherine@cmcewan.fsnet.co.uk)

## LOCAL RSPB GROUPS

*Groups promote and represent the RSPB in the local community. Activities include indoor and outdoor meetings and fund raising events.*

Further details from the RSPB [www.rspb.org.uk/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/) or directly from:

East Berks Local Group  
– see [www.eastberksrspb.org.uk/](http://www.eastberksrspb.org.uk/)

Reading Local Group  
– see [www.reading-rspb.org.uk/](http://www.reading-rspb.org.uk/)

Wokingham and Bracknell Local Group  
– see [www.wbrspb.btinternet.co.uk/](http://www.wbrspb.btinternet.co.uk/)

# CORMORANT BREEDING COLONY SURVEY 2000

*By Pat Martin*

*[The only Cormorant breeding colony in Berkshire has been surveyed annually by Pat Martin as part of the ongoing National Breeding Cormorant Survey. As the Cormorant has only recently begun to breed in Berkshire it is appropriate that we should include in some detail in this annual county bird report the results of her survey for 2000 in order to record how and to what timescale this newly established colony develops over a breeding season (Recorder).]*

The 2000 breeding season started even earlier than in 1999 but was just as protracted with a glut of new nests in early May and the last bird fledging in July. In summary the breeding season results were as follows:

| Visit Date | No. Adults | Occupied Nests | Fledged Young |
|------------|------------|----------------|---------------|
| 17 Feb     | 22         | 4              | 0             |
| 15 Mar     | 29         | 12             | 0             |
| 31 Mar     | –          | –              | 2             |
| 27 Apr     | 28         | 14             | 20            |
| 12 May     | –          | +9             | –             |

As early as 17 Feb there were 22 adult birds on site and four occupied nests closely alongside those in the Heron colony. By 15 Mar the number of occupied nests had increased to 12 spread over an ever widening area around the lake edge and with all birds sitting tight but with no chicks seen. The number of adults present had risen to 29 which was to be the maximum seen this breeding season. At a visit on 31 Mar the first fledged young (2) were observed.

Of 14 occupied nests on 27 Apr, seven contained medium sized young plus 3 with almost fully grown wing-flappers and a further 4 sitting adults. Of a total of 48 flying birds present 28 were adults and 20 fledged young. A visit on 12 May revealed that there were a further 9 new nests each with adults sitting and that 3 nests had been vacated since 27 Apr.

In all a total of 25 nests were built and occupied, producing an estimated 60+ young. Nests were mostly successful but with smaller brood sizes, mainly of 2 or 3 chicks, with only one nest of 4 and one total loss when the nest bowl gave way and the parents abandoned the two half-grown chicks.

In 2000 Cormorants nested in and around the Heronry without separation, but are slowly destroying their, and the Heron's, nesting habitat. In spite of this encroachment of the Heronry it held 6+ occupied nests, doubling the poor results of 1999.

By 2 Aug all nests had been vacated and while 14 recently fledged young were still present no adults were seen. Although low numbers of Cormorants are present on the site outside the breeding season no roosting has been recorded.

# SURVEY OF HOUSE SPARROWS IN COLLEGE TOWN, SANDHURST IN 2000

*By Des Sussex*

As I undertake a regular leaflet delivery round of an area of College Town, Sandhurst, I decided to try to do a thorough survey of House Sparrows in this area to provide a meaningful set of data. Visits were made twice during May with every house being surveyed for House Sparrows (chirping males were usually the most evident). However, even this level of survey effort (each visit lasting about 7 hours) cannot be considered fully comprehensive. Only the fronts and most sides of the houses were observable and additional birds may have been present on the backs of the roofs, or indeed inside the roofs at their nest site. Additional visits would have been necessary to reduce error.

The surveyed area is approximately 65 hectares and includes some older roads and properties typically having bigger gardens with more established trees and shrubs (g-i about 330 houses) and a more recently built estate (a-f c600 houses) with fewer mature gardens. Many of the roads in this estate are named after birds, including Bluethroat and Corn bunting, but alas not the poor old Sparrow!. There are also two schools in the area, neither of which was accessed for the survey.

The results of my survey are shown below as a number of sections and as an overall total. It can be seen that for the three sections b, f and i there are large variations between the two counts, whilst most sections and the overall total remained fairly consistent on both 'visits'. Ideally the whole of each visit should have been on the one day rather than broken up.

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| Section  | Number of male sparrows and date |           | No. of houses |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
|  | Visit 1                          | Visit 2   |               |
| a. Moray Avenue (Tawny Row to Hopeman)         | 16 (9/5)                         | 14 (20/5) | 66            |
| b. Moray Avenue (Inverness to the end)         | 28 (9/5)                         | 14 (20/5) | 138           |
| c. Avocet Crescent (Bullfinch to Moray)        | 17 (9/5)                         | 13 (20/5) | 80            |
| d. Avocet Crescent (Bluethroat to Owlsmoor Rd) | 9 (9/5)                          | 11 (20/5) | 128           |
| e. Crane Court/Crake Place                     | 1 (9/5)                          | 5 (20/5)  | 60            |
| f. Silver Hill                                 | 0 (5/5)                          | 11 (19/5) | 120           |
| g. Branksome Hill Road                         | 34 (5/5)                         | 31 (19/5) | 199           |
| h. Florence Road                               | 6 (7/5)                          | 8 (19/5)  | 57            |
| i. Yeovil Road                                 | 8 (5/5)                          | 21 (19/5) | 82            |
| Totals   | 119 128                          | 930       |               |

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## Summary

I would not want to interpret this data without a lot of additional recording of both birds and habitat (including house) features. However the data do provide a measure of the number of male House Sparrows in a defined area of urban habitat, which could be monitored to plot the fortunes of a local population of this charismatic urban species. Equally the results could be compared with other urban areas of similar size/number of houses surveyed using the very simple method employed here.



If repeating the count I think it would be interesting to map the locations of the birds as I think this would reveal distinct clumping or grouping of the birds into 'colonies'. Obviously some habitat information laid over this would be helpful in showing the birds preferences. My thoughts from this survey are that suitable roofs, and dense bushes, hedges and shrubs up to about 3m tall (where groups often roost together) are two key features.

## **HONEY BUZZARD INFLUX IN SEPTEMBER 2000**

*By Chris Heard*

England witnessed an unprecedented influx of Honey Buzzards during September 2000. The majority were initially recorded on the East coast, from Spurn to Essex, having arrived across the North Sea from Scandinavia. Many birds then continued overland, with a subsequent build-up of numbers as birds departed from points along the South coast (contested by Fraser & Rogers<sup>1</sup>). Berkshire shared in the overland passage with an estimated 30 birds passing through the county between September 22nd and October 2nd – this nearly doubled the previous total in just eleven days! (The Birds of Berkshire (1996) records 14 sightings up to 1994; and a further two were accepted during 1995-1999).

The national picture of this influx was described in the November 2000 issue of Birdwatch magazine and in Brit.Birds 95: 610-612. Locally, an article on the berkbirds website summarised the known sightings at that time but the following account corrects for late submissions and unaccepted records (unattributed sightings have *not* been accepted into the county record) and provides further thoughts on this passage.

### **September/October 2000**

The first Berkshire sighting connected with this influx came on Sept 22nd when a pale morph juvenile flew SE over Eversley GP (at 1.08pm); another was later reported over Lavell's Lake, Dinton Pastures (at 2pm). The following day a juvenile flew over Caversham (at 11.30pm) and, taking a couple of breaks from Birdline South East duties, I soon located a dark morph juvenile flying over Widbrook Common (at 11.46pm) and then another over Cookham Dean (at 12.35pm); a bird over Legoland, Windsor at 12.15pm is presumed to be the former of these two, but others were sighted over Lavell's Lake and then later over Tilehurst (at 4.10pm).

Although the 24th was a Sunday, just one individual was seen that day: flying South over Queen Mother Res, viewed from Ditton Park (at 9.05am). But the following day a six hour watch from Long Lane, Cookham rewarded me with excellent views of eight dark morph birds and what may well have been a further individual was seen over Wellington College,

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1) Fraser & Rogers suggested that a further influx contributed to the high numbers along the South coast, despite the absence of any further arrivals in Essex or Kent etc. I think it far more likely that the true numbers passing over England only became fully evident when they collected at southern headlands.

near Crowthorne. The 26th was a day of poor weather, but I had three more sightings over Maidenhead on the 27th and a further single on 29th. The 30th produced four sightings - two of them in mid Berks - and Oct 1st produced another four.

The last sighting was a dark morph juvenile flying SE over Wraybury GPs (at 10.30am) on Oct 2nd.

## Comparison with other Counties

My own observations account for 19 of the total (most of them in the Cookham and Maidenhead area) and this obviously introduces an E.Berks bias into the distribution of sightings. However, the absence of W.Berks sightings is probably real, as there were notably few sightings in Oxfordshire and, to the East, concentrated efforts at Staines, in Surrey, also failed to produce a single accepted record (LNHS Report for 2000). Interestingly, my peak count at Cookham - eight on the 25th - coincided with the peak day total (48) in the Midlands region, and those which passed Pitstone Hill, Bucks that day were seen to turn South towards Amersham, instead of continuing along the Chiltern escarpment (LGR Evans *pers comm.*), which could have brought them to Cookham via the Chiltern Hundreds. I soon realised that most of the Honey Buzzards at Cookham seemed to come in from the Amersham direction and, also, that many of them then followed the ridge of Cookham Dean Woods (it may be relevant that Derek Barker, watching from further west at Hurley, didn't see any on 23rd - a day when at least three passed over Cookham). Several observers in the SE region commented that the Honey Buzzards appeared to follow wooded areas (BLSE Special report), but migrating raptors are known to follow topographical features and previous studies in Berkshire have demonstrated that diurnal migrants are often concentrated along physical features such as the Berkshire Downs.

## Ageing and Identification

Virtually all of those in the SE region were aged as juveniles and this was also the pattern in Berkshire: no adults were claimed and 17 of them were aged as juveniles. Depending on the quality of the views, it can be quite straightforward to age them - through a telescope it is often easy to see the juvenile's dark eyes, surrounded by a yellow cere, (whereas adults show a pale iris) and the plumage is generally more uniform in coloration than adults with much less obvious tail-bars<sup>2</sup>. These rather duller plumage features *could* have made them more confusable with Common Buzzards - especially juveniles, which show detectable structural differences from adults well into the autumn - but the manner of flight proved to be a very useful shortcut in the initial identification process. The Honeys nearly all deployed a methodical straight-line flight, with the regular beats of their longer wings recalling the flight action of Red or Black Kite. At times there was some thermalling to gain height but they didn't show the casual to-ing and fro-ing (changes of direction) that is so typical of Common Buzzards, and the impression was very much of sustained travelling flight; it is also worth noting that all were flying in a southerly direction (ie none were flying in the wrong direction for the time of year).

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2) However, a pale morph juvenile that was viewed from Slough SF, on Oct 1st, was particularly striking: with mostly whitish underparts and a greyish white rump and uppertail - recalling Rough-legged Buzzard!

## Subsequently

Just 12 months later, on Sept 21st 2001, I found myself watching a dark-morph Honey Buzzard flying south over the A308 Windsor Road at Bray. As well as providing an unexpected déjà vu experience, this confirmed my hunch that this late September period is the prime time in which to encounter a migrant Honey Buzzard in Berkshire. The *Birds of Berkshire* (1996) confirms that late September is the peak time for local Honey Buzzard sightings (and some of the most convincing of subsequent reports have also been in September).

The 2002 Berkshire Bird Report pointed out that there has been no significant change in the UK status of Honey Buzzard since 2000 but an after-effect of the influx seems to have been raised expectations of seeing one locally. Several recent claims have involved little evidence to justify the identification and some have even been for April - when birders are out looking for spring migrants - whereas Honey Buzzard is generally a late Spring migrant (in *The Birds of Berkshire* the June sightings actually outnumber those for May).

So the message for Berkshire birders is, yes, continue to look out for this species overflying the county – especially in late Spring and September – but remember that with the large number of resident Common Buzzards, and their immense plumage variation, there are many opportunities for a misidentification. And, as far as large raptors are concerned, you are statistically much more likely to encounter a migrant Marsh Harrier than a Honey Buzzard!<sup>3</sup> However, none of this should distract us from the remarkable events of September 2000 - which provided some unforgettable raptor passage and an experience which may not be repeated in our lifetimes.

## References

Birdline South East. *Special Report: The Honey Buzzard influx*.  
[www.southeastbirdnews.co.uk](http://www.southeastbirdnews.co.uk)

Fraser, P.A. & Rogers, M.J. *Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2000*.  
*Brit.Birds* 95: 610-612 (December 2002).

Mitchell, D. *The Honey Buzzard invasion: a once in a lifetime event*.  
*Birdwatch* 101: 60-61 (November 2000).

Walford, M. *The 2000 Honey Buzzard invasion: A Berkshire perspective*.  
[www.berksbirds.co.uk](http://www.berksbirds.co.uk)

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3) The 2003-2004 Rare breeding birds panel records up to 284 pairs of Marsh Harriers – mostly North of Berkshire – compared with up to 41 pairs of Honey Buzzards, mostly South of Berks (*Brit. Birds* 100:339-341).

# **AUTUMN PASSAGE OF THE YELLOW WAGTAIL IN BERKSHIRE**

## **A GENERAL OVERVIEW** *by Peter Standley*

Yellow Wagtails are consistent passage migrants through the county, with passage being stronger during the autumn when the highest numbers are recorded, particularly in September.

The general pattern of autumn passage is of small groups of birds occurring from about the middle of August (earlier records being likely to involve summer visitors that have bred locally, although in recent years only a small number of pairs are recorded breeding). During September passage birds are usually reported almost daily from somewhere in the county with parties of up to 30 most years and occasional falls of higher numbers. Although passage continues throughout October, in some years with stragglers into November, reports then are usually of fewer than 10 birds at any one time.

Most records of large numbers of birds have been of isolated counts on particular days, the highest counts in the five years from 1996 to 2000, for example, having been 40 at Slough Sewage Farm on 13 September 1998 and 62 at Dorney Wetlands in the same area and on the same day in 2000. Such one-off counts, however, are likely to under-represent the volume of passage which can comprise successive waves of passage birds. The extent to which numbers can be higher than annual reports suggest is well illustrated in 2001 when passage coincided with an ongoing survey by Richard Crawford of birds on farmland in the Kennet Valley at Englefield. An account of this passage is below.

His survey over the period August to October has shown that although the highest daily count was of 100+ Yellow Wagtails, because the number of birds fluctuated as some continued their passage and were replaced by new arrivals, the total number of birds passing through the area was in excess of 270. Whilst this is unprecedented in its totality and for this location, the peak single day count of 100+ is not a county record. This occurred 50 years ago when there were about 200 at Slough Sewage Farm on 31 August 1949 and again on 18 April 1953. That same location also recorded the second highest count of 114 on 24 August 1983.

## **UNPRECEDENTED NUMBERS OF YELLOW WAGTAILS AT ENGLEFIELD IN AUTUMN 2001** *by Richard Crawford*

For a number of years I have recorded Yellow Wagtails passing through farmland at Englefield in both spring and autumn, with small numbers sometimes breeding. In 2001, however, there was unprecedented autumn passage. Apart from two records of two and three birds in early August (which may have been remnants of the local breeding population), I did not record any until September 1st when seven were present increasing to twelve on 3rd and falling to a more normal two on the 7th.

On the 10th I noticed a larger number of birds feeding close to one of the tracks and I was surprised to count no less than 31. The following day just two were present and I could only find one on the 12th. I thought the peak had been reached but I was wrong: what was supposed to be a quick visit before starting work on 14th revealed large numbers present. One field – a recently cut and ploughed clover field – appeared to be covered in them,

accompanied by Pied Wagtails, Meadow Pipits and Linnets. Delaying my first business appointment of the day I started to count them.

This confirmed there were 84 feeding in this one field visible from a spot just inside the gate, but I could only see half of the field! There was a constant stream of Yellow Wagtails flitting in and out of the adjacent uncut clover field and from the maize field behind me. There was easily one hundred birds present and if I had had more time to count I might have found substantially more. The following day only (!) 15 were present.

Unfortunately I was away on holiday from 16th to 24th but Richard Burness recorded about one hundred on 23rd. On my return six were seen on 25th, two on 27th, eleven on 28th, seven on 29th but none on 30th. Birds were present in October until the 10th with a peak of 13 on the sixth.

In complete contrast to what must have been approaching 300 birds in 2001, the previous year I had only recorded one single bird in autumn, on September 23rd.

**Schedule of records and visits and presumed cumulative totals**

| Month     | Day           | Numbers seen and notes                | Cumulative Total |
|-----------|---------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| August    | 3rd           | 3                                     |                  |
|           | 10th          | 2                                     |                  |
| September | 1st           | 7                                     | 7                |
|           | 2nd           | No visit                              |                  |
|           | 3rd           | 12                                    | 12               |
|           | 4th-6th       | No visit                              |                  |
|           | 7th           | 2                                     |                  |
|           | 8th-9th       | No visit                              |                  |
|           | 10th          | 31                                    | 43               |
|           | 11th          | 2                                     |                  |
|           | 12th          | 1                                     |                  |
|           | 13th          | No visit made                         |                  |
|           | 14th          | 100+                                  | 143+             |
|           | 15th          | 15                                    |                  |
|           | 16th-24th     | On holiday – 100 plus per RJB on 23rd | 243+             |
|           | 25th          | 6                                     |                  |
| 26th      | No visit made |                                       |                  |
| 27th      | 2             |                                       |                  |
| 28th      | 11            | 252+                                  |                  |
| 29th      | 7             |                                       |                  |
| 30th      | 0             |                                       |                  |
| October   | 1st           | No visit made                         |                  |
|           | 2nd           | 3                                     | 255+             |
|           | 3rd           | 6                                     | 258+             |
|           | 4th           | 1                                     |                  |
|           | 5th           | 2                                     | 259+             |
|           | 6th           | 13                                    | 270+             |
|           | 7th           | 6                                     |                  |
|           | 8th           | No visit made                         |                  |
|           | 9th           | 0                                     |                  |
|           | 10th          | 1                                     |                  |

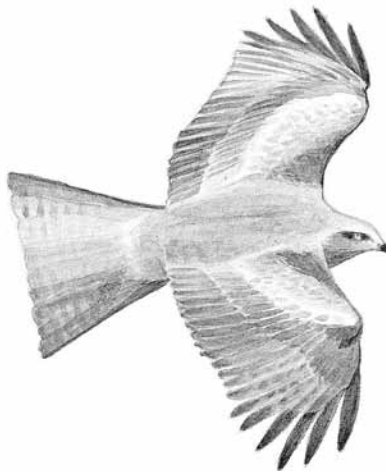
**Note:** The cumulative total is arrived at by adding in only the minimum number of assumed new birds so generally birds present one day are assumed to be in the total for the following day unless evidence points otherwise. This provides the safest possible result but may understate the actual total (Recorder).

# A BLACK KITE IN WEST BERKSHIRE

*By Chris Heard*

June 26th 2001 was the fifth day of SE winds and clear sunny conditions, and also the hottest (33 degrees), and earlier that afternoon I had watched 2 Red Kites, 3 Common Buzzards and numerous corvids sailing in the fresh SE breeze over the downs at Cholesey Fairmile. Later that afternoon I called in at West Ilsley, an open area of horse gallops and scrub that I often visit because of the excellent views across Bury & Hodcott Downs (Red Kites are regular and I saw a Montagu's Harrier in an interesting first-summer plumage here in June 1999).

I was sitting on the ground, taking a rest from the heat, and while doing so I had enjoyed excellent views of a (wing-tagged) Red Kite when I spotted another raptor, distantly, flying head-on. It looked surprisingly different, no doubt because I'd seen a Red Kite at similar range just minutes previously, and I was immediately struck by the shorter wings and tail (together creating a more compact outline). Although I could see no rufous tones I considered the possibility of a just-fledged Red Kite but it then turned showing distinctly blackish-brown plumage (including dusky tail) and a pale greyish head. Female Marsh Harrier crossed my mind but the head colour was greyish - not whitish/buff - and the flight-action and wing-set was clearly wrong. It was clearly a kite species and strange as it seemed - this being Red Kite country (at least in the past 6 years) - identification as Black Kite was soon inescapable! This thought process took a couple of minutes after which the bird gradually came closer sailing across Hodcott Down occasionally mobbed by corvids and a Common Buzzard (which was similar in size but a lot chunkier). As it passed to the west of me it was somewhat against the light, making coloration hard to detect, but the structure - notably the wing-set and tail shape - could be examined and confirmed. The trailing-edge to the wing was a bit worn and the tail was missing a single feather (and it was clearly not a juvenile!). It then flew some way south of West Ilsley village and I became worried that it might leave the area (although I had seen it well enough to be certain of the i.d. this was



*Black Kite –  
Martin Hallam*

still essentially a single fly-past). Thankfully it turned and retraced its route back to the top end of Hodcott Down where it spent about ten minutes flying low over a distant wood, occasionally being buzzed by the local Buzzards. It was a while before I realized that this wood was directly adjacent to the A34 (T) and when it eventually swooped and retrieved some food item – this may have been from the roadside! It then gave sustained views as it glided slowly over fields picking at the food in its talons. My eye had earlier been attracted by a pale patch on the upperwing coverts of the right wing (dreading that it might be some sort of wing-tag!) but these prolonged flight views showed that it was just a single whitish feather. It continued coming towards me, passing within 200 yards (and, with the sun directly behind me, giving the best views so far - revealing the pattern to the head and the warmer tone to the lower abdomen) before turning and disappearing over the downs to the West. I remained in the area, scanning the downs, for another 2 hours but the air was cooling and no large raptors were still on the wing (although I did see a Hummingbird Hawk-Moth - unusual in Berkshire). I returned the following afternoon but could only find 3 Red Kites and the Black was not seen again.

## Description

A large raptor, similar in size to Common Buzzard but clearly a kite species with long, slender wings and tail, but neither as long as in Red Kite - the shorter wing-span, in particular, being the single best separating character at long range. Wing-set similar to Red Kite: more or less flat, with slightly drooped hand.

Plumage mainly blackish-brown, not unlike 'plain chocolate' in colour but lower abdomen 'warmer' with slight rufous tone (only evident in good light conditions). Head pale grey (mainly crown and throat - these areas separated by a darker 'eye-stripe'/ear-covert area). Underwing coverts solidly dark (blackish), contrasting slightly with paler grey shade across the base of the primaries - but this often very hard to see (and much less obvious than on any Red Kite). Upperwing mostly dark, with the (presumably worn) greater coverts only providing a slightly paler band down the middle of the wing - more obvious towards the outer wing; also a single whitish feather in the 'hand' area on upperside of the bird's right wing.

Tail dusky grey-brown (slight suggestion of diffuse barring on closest views), missing a single tail feather, but tail shape otherwise intact: showing a very shallow notch when closed but distinctly square-cut when spread (not the sharp notch/fork of Red Kite's closed tail, or the concave shape when spread).

*Chris Heard*

The above description is an edited version of that submitted to the British Birds Rarities Committee. It was fully accepted by BBRC and represents the first record for Berkshire. Although there have been a number of previous reports, none have been acceptable and most of them have failed to eliminate the possibility of immature Red Kite – which can show rather dull plumage with a notably dull tail (no brighter than 'tan'). Nationally the species is bedevilled by a high rejection rate and the 2005 BBRC Report warns that: "The bogey bird for Black Kite claimants is the female or immature Marsh Harrier, especially at distance or unusual height. The recent (2000-2004) rejection rate has been a whopping 57% and county officers are urged to take care with local claims."

# SUMMARY OF WEATHER AND BIRD HIGHLIGHTS IN 2000 and 2001

## 2000

### JANUARY

Over the first two weeks it was generally mild, but wet and windy. Then with a high pressure system dominating, conditions became drier and overnight frosts and fog became a feature. During this latter period winds were mostly light, while towards the end of the month they became milder and south-westerly. Aquatic species provided the most interesting records with reports of Bittern, Ferruginous Duck (the Dec 1999 bird was seen until Jan 9), Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser and a high count for Twyford GPs of 18 Smew. Merlins were seen on two occasions, there was a Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owls on the Downs and the wintering Water Pipit at Horton GP was seen until the 21st. Reports of at least one wintering Common Sandpiper and nest building by a Robin on the 31st were indicative of the relatively mild weather.

### FEBRUARY

An unsettled but generally mild month, with maximum recorded day temperatures ranging between 8°C and 13°C, although there were overnight frosts on 14th and 25th/26th. Winds were mainly light and from the W/SW and on occasions southerly. The mildness of the weather meant there was no influx from the east of divers, the rarer grebes or the rarer geese or ducks, highlights being two Glaucous Gulls at Queen Mother Res (QMR) on 9th, a Firecrest at Crowthorn and a Great Grey Shrike at Wishmoor Bottom which was to stay until April. There were early reports of Little Egret on 2nd and Redshank on 6th.

### MARCH

Winds were predominantly from the W/SW and light or moderate giving mild conditions with maximum recorded day temperatures generally between 10°C and 13°C, and reaching 16°C on 9th. There were however several brief spells of easterly winds, with SE from 21st to 23rd, and NE on 27th/28th. A generally dry month. The mild W/SW winds coincided with an increasing number of early migrants from mid month with a fifth Scaup on 10th, Rock Pipit on 10th, Yellow Wagtail on 15th, 2 more Scaup and Water Pipit on 19th and as winds backed from the 21st, Willow Warbler on 24th and Osprey on 27th (earliest ever). Curlews returned to several sites on the Downs and there was a now rare sighting of a Tree Sparrow on 25th. Among rare Gulls were three reports of Iceland, on 20th and 21st at QMR and on 25th at Lavells Lake.

### APRIL

The first half was cool with a generally N/NE airstream giving maximum recorded day temperatures of 8°C to 12°C, the second half was dominated by southerly winds (S/SW) and it became much milder especially at the end of the month with temperatures in the range 12°C to 18°C. A very unsettled month with heavy and thundery showers on many dates. Reported as the wettest April on record. The month started well for rarities with a Purple Heron at Lavells Lake on 5th (only 6th county record) and a roosting Long-eared Owl at Twyford on 8th. The arrival of S/SW winds mid month was followed by records of White Wagtail on 13th, Pied Flycatcher on 17th and 21st and Marsh Harrier on 22nd. High numbers of Golden Plover were still present in April with c2500 at Lower Fm GP until the 8th. There were 4 April records of Ospreys migrating north and the Great Grey Shrike was heard in song on the 16th.



## MAY

The first half was dominated by light to moderate E/NE winds and maximum reported day temperatures ranging from 13°C to 23°C. With winds then veering to southerly, day temperatures reached 24°C/25°C during 14th/15th. For the remainder of the month winds were in a W/SW quarter bringing unusually heavy rain and cooler conditions (12°C to 18°C). Reported as the wettest spring since 1983. A Little Tern on the 2nd, a Red-necked Phalarope on the 4th (only the 4th county record) followed by a Wryneck on the 8th got May off to a good start. The rain and cooler conditions of the second half of the month continued to produce the occasional unusual/rare sighting with a pair of Black-necked Grebes on the 16th, a White Stork on the 22nd (3rd county record) and Spoonbill on the 28th (11th record). There were some high numbers of Hobby (10 at Theale and 13 at Horton) and several records of passage Greenshank. Notable among summer visitors were reports of Montagu's Harrier and Quail on the Downs, 3 singing Black Redstarts in Reading and the first breeding record for W Berks of Dartford Warbler. For a species in national decline there were encouraging counts of 20 pairs of Lapwing at Greenham Common and 25-30 pairs at Englefield.

## JUNE

Winds were light or moderate and predominantly from the W/SW bringing unsettled although generally mild conditions, with maximum reported day temperatures ranging between 17°C to 20°C. A ridge of high pressure from 16th to 20th saw temperatures peak at 24°C to 29°C, was this summer? Shelduck were reported breeding at four sites and there was another high count of Hobby (12 at Eversley GP). As in some other recent years there was another small June arrival of Teal but none appeared to stay. Water Rail were reported breeding at Brimpton GP and there was the first June record for Mediterranean Gull. Valuable surveys of breeding species resulted in some high counts (49 prs/males of Woodlark; Redstarts at 34 sites in E Berks; 114 singing Song Thrushes in SE Berks; 14 Cetti Warbler territories in W Berks).

## JULY

With winds predominantly from the north-west (and sometimes SW) it was unsettled with maximum recorded day temperatures well below the July average (17°C to 22°C), although a short spell of E/SE winds from 20th to 25th gave warmer conditions with temperatures between 24°C and 26°C. Rainfall was also below average. There was an influx of Yellow-legged Gulls during the first two weeks and passage became more pronounced from the third week with Garganey from 23rd, Curlew Sandpiper from 24th (first July record), three reports of Wood Sandpiper and Turnstone. Other notable sightings in what is often a quiet month included a Mediterranean Gull, the first county records of Black-tailed Godwits of the *islandica* race and signs of Hawfinch in E Berks (still a Berkshire breeding species?).

## AUGUST

A settled and warmer month with several short spells when maximum recorded day temperatures reached 23°C to 27°C, otherwise temperatures were around the 21°C/22°C mark. With high pressure, winds were mainly light (sometimes moderate) W/SW except from 22nd to 26th when they were E/SE which coincided with one of the warmer periods (26°C/27°C) mentioned above. The settled weather resulted in a quiet first half but there was noticeable passage from the third week with reports of 14 Common Sandpiper at QMR on 20th, 11 Common Scoter there on 21st, Black-necked Grebe from 22nd, a Hoopoe at Twyford from 24th, 9 Greenshank at Lower Fm GP on 25th and a Little Stint at Dorney Wetlands on 27th. There were 13 reports of Little Egret from some 10 sites, 3 Tree Sparrows at Old Slade GP and 2 Ravens at Combe.

## **SEPTEMBER**

An unsettled month with moderate amounts of rain. Winds were frequently from a westerly quarter and light or moderate. There were also short spells when winds were from the SE (19th/20th, 23rd/24th and 29th/30th). Temperatures were reported as slightly above normal, being generally in the range 18°C to 20°C, but did reach 23°C/24°C over the weekend of 23rd/24th. That weekend also produced the birding highlight of the year with Berkshire sharing in the unprecedented passage through the country of Honey Buzzards. There were some thirty-eight county sightings from the 22nd into early October with no less than 8 passing over Cookham in six hours on the 25th. Other notable sightings during the month included a party of 3 Avocets, Little Stint, two reports of Marsh Harrier, four Osprey records and strong passage of Yellow Wagtails (counts of 22 on 5th, 25 on 8th and 62 on 13th). Not to be outdone local Buzzards gathered at Combe on 22nd when 15 were counted. The increase in feral populations was illustrated on the 26th when there were 42 Egyptian Geese at Cockmarsh.

## **OCTOBER**

An extremely unsettled month with exceptionally heavy rains mid-month resulting in some local flooding, while the penultimate day of the month brought some of the strongest winds across the south since October 1987. This combined with heavy rains caused more flooding in the region. The month was dominated by a succession of low pressure systems giving predominantly SW winds, bringing with them frequent bands of rain. A deep depression centred over the UK mid-month, remained static resulting in very heavy and prolonged rain over this period. Maximum recorded day temperatures generally ranged between 12°C to 15°C, although southerly winds during the first week gave mild conditions with temperatures of 16°C to 18°C recorded. The end of month severe gale resulted in sightings on the 30th of a Leach's Petrel at QMR and a Storm Petrel at Burghfield GPs (only the 7th record but sadly soon to be the prey of a Sparrowhawk). Earlier a Spotted Crane had obligingly stayed for 11 days at Dorney from the 9th and there were 11 Jack Snipe at Wraysbury GPs. Although unsettled the month was sufficiently mild to produce a late Sedge Warbler record on the 15th.

## **NOVEMBER**

Again low pressure systems dominated the scene bringing exceptionally high rainfall. Maximum recorded day temperatures were marginally above the mean, but there was frost on 17th and it was quite mild on 28th/29th when temperatures reached 14°C/15°C. Winds were generally from the W/SW and moderate or fresh, the only exceptions noted being NE over 7th/8th and SE on 21st. This resulted in a generally quiet month bird-wise. New arrivals included Bittern on 15th, up to 3 Shag at Wraysbury GPs, 3 separate reports of Merlin and a Water Pipit on the 28th. Late departing migrants included Yellow Wagtail (10th) and Little Stint (24th).

## **DECEMBER**

As mentioned above the wet and windy theme of November continued, although it did remain mild up to 16th with maximum recorded day temperatures in the range 10°C to 13°C. Winds over this period were mainly from the SW, and fresh to strong, sometimes gale force. With light to moderate E/NE winds from 17th day temperatures dropped to 4°C/8°C, while towards the end of the month winds became more northerly giving day temperatures of between 1°C and 3°C with light snow and freezing fog. At Tythebarns Farm a minimum overnight temperature of -8°C was recorded. The shift to E/NE winds from the 17th coincided with sightings of 4 Whooper Swans on 17th and 6 Bewick's Swans on 19th. During the month there were 2 reports of Black-necked Grebe and two of Red-breasted Mergansers. The year then ended on a strong note with Waxwing on 27th, Caspian Gulls on 27th and 30th, a Ferruginous Duck and Firecrest on the 29th and Scaup on the 30th.

# 2001

## JANUARY

Unsettled weather conditions continued over the first ten days (maximum recorded day temperatures ranged from 6°C to 11°C), but with high pressure then starting to dominate winds were from the E/SE giving some bright frosty starts, but also patchy freezing fog on several dates with temperatures dropping to 4°C to 5°C. During the last week the winds returned to the S/SW bringing milder (5°C to 10°C) but unsettled weather and also some heavy rainfall which brought flood alerts to some local areas. A minimum temperature of -8°C was recorded at Tythebarns Farm during the month. Highlight of the month was the location of a female Ring-necked Duck at Virginia Water on the 17th (5th county record). Otherwise January was relatively quiet, notable records confined to the Ferruginous Duck from Dec 2000, a Black-necked Grebe on the 25th, several reports of Waxwings including 15 at Bracknell on 26th and a high count of 585 Wigeon at the Moor Green Lakes Reserve, Eversley.

## FEBRUARY

An unsettled and generally mild month, particularly over the first three weeks (8°C to 12°C). Winds were predominantly from the SW bringing more heavy rainfall, but with the onset of high pressure from mid-month winds took on a more northerly bias and during the last week sleet and snow showers were a feature, while temperatures dropped to around 4°C to 7°C. Notable records were largely confined to gulls with reports of an Iceland Gull at QMR on 1st and at Smallmead landfill site on 5th, a Little Gull at QMR on 9th, a Ring-billed Gull at Pingewood GPs on 19th (8th for Berkshire) and 2 Kittiwakes at Burghfield GP on 23rd. There was a Scaup at Burghfield GPs from 25th but otherwise little of note.

## MARCH

Again an unsettled month with rain a continuing feature, resulting in the wettest winter on record. With N/NE winds the month got off to a cold start with snow and sleet showers and maximum recorded day temperatures of 4°C/5°C. From the 5th, with winds from the S/SW temperatures increased to 9°C/10°C and then ranged between 9°C to 14°C for most of the remainder [with the occasional dip]. Winds were mostly light or moderate and from the 5th to 15th they were mainly S/SW, then predominantly E/SE up to 28th, then W/NW from 29th and strong at times. Following a Water Pipit on the 4th, the most notable records occurred in the 7 days from 19th to 25th coinciding with the change to E/SE winds. There were 3 Red-breasted Mergansers on 22nd, an Iceland Gull on 23rd, Marsh Harrier on 25th and 4 Black-necked Grebes on 26th. A Willow Warbler had been an early arriver on the 24th as was a Sedge Warbler on 29th. To end the month there was a report of a Kumlien's Gull on the 29th.

## APRIL

An unsettled month, but there were some dry and bright days. It was generally warmer with maximum recorded day temperatures generally ranging from 10°C to 15°C, but reaching 17°C/20°C locally on 2nd during a short warm spell. Winds were light or moderate and generally from the W/SW, although there was a short period from 19th to 21st when they took on a northerly bias which produced maximum day temperatures of around 10/11°C. A minimum of -2°C was recorded at Tythebarns Farm during the third week. Notable passage records/arrivals included a Pied Flycatcher on 7th, Marsh Harrier on 17th, Shag on 23rd, Little Gull on 22nd, Hoopoe at Enborne on 23rd and several sightings of Waxwing (with 35 at Jealott's Hill on 17th and 50+ at Bracknell on 22nd). Among early arrival dates for the species was a Whitethroat on the 3rd and a Spotted Flycatcher on 29th. Now an annual passage migrant there were no less than 4 records of Osprey.

## **MAY**

With high pressure dominating over the first two weeks and moderate E/NE winds it was generally cool with maximum recorded day temperatures ranging from 12°C to 17°C, although it did rise to 22°C to 25°C from 10th to 13th. The second half was fairly dry, sunny and warmer with occasional scattered showers, maximum day temperatures ranged from 16°C to 21°C reaching 22°C/24°C from 22nd to 25th. Winds during the second half were mainly from the W or SW, although there was a short spell from 20th to 25th when it was E/NE. Most notable records occurred during that dryer second half with Gannet over Colnbrook on 15th, 3 Kittiwakes on 17th, a Wryneck at Wishmoor from 26th and a late Hen Harrier at Lavell's Lake on 29th. Exceptionally, the Wryneck was to remain in the area into early June during which time it frequently sang! Hobbies again gathered at Horton GP with 10 on the 22nd and passage waders included Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Temminck's Stint (on 8th and again on 14th) and Wood Sandpiper on 9th and 30th.

## **JUNE**

After an unsettled start it was generally warm although sometimes humid. Frequent thunderstorms were a feature from mid-month. Winds were light or moderate throughout and predominantly from the W/SW interspersed with short spells when they were either from the E or SE [13th to 16th and 22nd to 23rd]. During the first three weeks the maximum recorded day temperatures ranged between 16°C and 21°C and over the last week rose to 23°C to 25°C peaking at 27°C/30°C on 25th and 26th. It was on that last hot day, the 26th, that a Black Kite was seen on the Downs, the first acceptable record for Berkshire and the highlight of what was otherwise a quiet month for passage migrants. A Little Stint on the 9th was, however, only the second June record. There was again a small June movement of Teal and Yellow-legged Gulls began arriving towards the end of the month. Notable breeding species counts were of 5 pairs of Shelduck (one on the Downs) and in E Berks 52 pairs/singing male Redstart and 45 pairs/singing male Firecrests. There were 2 singing Black Redstarts in Reading, a higher than usual number of Barn Owl records and reports of a Montagu's Harrier.

## **JULY**

An unsettled month with spells of very heavy rainfall accompanied by thundery showers a feature. Over the first and last weeks it was very warm with maximum recorded day temperatures ranging from 25°C to 31°C during both periods. Otherwise temperatures hovered around the seasonal average of 21°C. Winds were mainly E/SE during the first week, followed by a predominantly W/SW air stream from 8th to 23rd before reverting to E/SE for the remainder. Apart from Kittiwake on 11th, 28 Little Ringed Plovers at Slough SF on 22nd and a county high of 64 Yellow-legged Gulls at QMR on 28th this was a quiet month. In W Berks there was a report of breeding Red Kite and a Montagu's Harrier on the Downs.

## **AUGUST**

A generally warm month, sometimes hot and humid, with maximum day temperatures reaching 27°C to 31°C over the periods 13th to 15th and 22nd to 26th. Winds were light or moderate and predominantly from the south and south-west. Four returning Ospreys were spotted, a Marsh Harrier visited Lower Fm GP on 27th and there were passage records of Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Spotted Redshank (on 25th and 28th), Green Sandpiper (max of 12 at Slough SF on 9th) and Wood Sandpiper (5 records). A Wood Warbler at Tilehurst on 28th was the only record for the species in 2001. Encouraging was a report of a party of 16 Stone Curlew on the Downs.

## **SEPTEMBER**

A bright start to the month with strong north-westerly winds a dominating feature of the first half. With low pressure a feature in the second half, winds were light to moderate and from the SE/NE. Rainfall was generally fairly heavy, with occasional thunderstorms. It was a more exciting month for birders beginning with only the 5th record for Red-necked Phalarope at QMR on the 3rd and followed by a county high of 5 Spoonbills at Pingewood GP on 10th and only the 2nd acceptable record for Purple Sandpiper at QMR on the 24th. Other interesting records included 5 Curlew Sandpiper on 8th, a number of records of Little Stint, Temminck's Stint on 15th, Black-necked Grebe on 16th, Honey Buzzard on 21st and 3 Spotted Redshanks on 24th. There was a high count for Yellow Wagtail of 100+ at Englefield on 14th-16th and the highest recorded count for Stock Dove of c1500 on a bean crop at Coldharbour on 29th.

## **OCTOBER**

Generally an unsettled month with showers, sometimes heavy, recorded on 20 days, early morning fog/mist also featured. Winds were light or moderate and mainly from the S/SW, but they were E/SE for a short spell from 13th to 19th. A very mild month, with maximum recorded day temperatures ranging between 15°C to 20°C, reaching 21°C to 23°C on 12th and 13th. A Hen Harrier was reported on the 9th and a Long-eared Owl on 12th and during the spell of E/SE winds from 13th to 19th there were records of a Short-eared Owl at QMR on 17th and Rock Pipits at Englefield on 16th and at QMR from 25th. Late departures included a Garganey from 16th to 25th and the latest ever Reed Warbler (at Thatcham Marsh on 29th). Among feral breeding species there was a count of 126 Greylag at Padworth.

## **NOVEMBER**

An unsettled month, although with low pressure systems dominating and despite winds mainly from the W/NW it was generally mild, with maximum recorded day temperatures well above average, reaching 14°C/15°C during the first week and on several days towards the end of the month, but temperatures did drop to 7°C - 9°C from 13th to 23rd when winds went round to the NE/NW. Winds were otherwise light or moderate and from the W/NW, but fresh to strong SW during the last week. Aquatic species made the headlines with the county's second Green-winged Teal at Eversley GP from the 17th, the 6th record for Ring-necked Duck, a female, at Burghfield GP from 23rd and records of 2 White-fronted Geese at Theale GP on 10th, Red-throated Diver at QMR on 19th, the highest count for over a century of Water Rail (12 at Theale GPs) and a count of 552 Gadwall at Eversley GPs.

## **DECEMBER**

An unsettled but generally mild month, with sunny spells on many dates. Maximum recorded day temperatures ranged from 6°C to 14°C [except on 14th and 20th when it dropped to 2°C following cold frosty starts], but with winds moving round to the N/NW cooler conditions prevailed during the last week, when there were a few days of sleet over the Christmas period. Winds during the first three weeks were light or moderate and mainly from a SE/NE direction. At Lower Fm GP an estimated 5000 Golden Plover on the 2nd was the largest reported number together for at least a century and a count of 20 Jack Snipe at Horton GP was the highest since 1944. There were two wintering Merlins at Coldharbour and an impressive flock of 10,000 Corvids at the Widmead Lock roost, Thatcham on 7th, but as in November it was visits to local waters that produced the most interesting records with a Ferruginous Duck at Burghfield GPs from 2nd, Slavonian Grebe at Theale GP on 3rd, Hen Harrier over Eversley GPs on 12th, Great Northern Diver at Twyford from 23rd, reports of both Scaup and Red-breasted Merganser and, to end the year, both Caspian Gull (at Smallmead Fm landfill) and Iceland Gull (at QMR) on the 31st.

# REPORT FOR 2000 AND 2001 BY BERKSHIRE RECORDS COMMITTEE

## REVIEW OF RECORDS FOR THE YEAR 2000

The total number of species recorded during the year in Categories A and C was 194. This figure includes 7 Category C species (Egyptian Goose, Mandarin, Ruddy Duck, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Ring-necked Parakeet and Little Owl) and one released species (Red Kite) but does not include Snow Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Barnacle Goose, Red-crested Pochard, Wood Duck, Caspian Gull and White Wagtail which would bring the species for which accounts are provided to 201. This was, therefore, an average year in terms of the number of species but these did include four species recorded on six or fewer previous occasions.

The Berkshire Records Committee (BRC) considered a large number of records for which details to support identification are required as well as several records of species reported outside their normal arrival/departure date. Records accepted for publication appear in the Systematic List which forms the body of this report. Those records which the BRC were unable to accept, in very many cases because of no, or inadequate, supporting descriptions, are listed below (records are of single birds unless otherwise stated and those where date of sighting was a consideration are indicated by “(date)”):

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Great Northern Diver | Queen Mother Res (QMR) 20 Nov  |
| Slavonian Grebe      | QMR 25 Nov and 20-21 Dec   |
| Black-necked Grebe   | Dinton Pastures 9 Sep  |
| Bittern              | QMR 26 Feb   |
| White Stork          | Eton 26 Jun and Calcot 19 Jul  |
| Garganey             | 2 Wraysbury GP 9 Apr, 2 on 7 May (2) and 1 on 23 May   |
| Scaup                | Horton GP (fem) 22 Aug   |
| Goosander            | Wraysbury GP 2 Sep (date)  |
| Honey Buzzard        | Dinton Pastures 22 Sep; 3 over Bracknell 23 Sep; Chieveley 24 Sep; Cookham Dean 27 Sep; QMR 28 Sep; Caversham and Cookham 30 Sep; Englefield 1 Oct; 5 Eversley GP 1 Oct (in error for 1) |
| Goshawk              | Burghfield GP 1 Jan; nr Sulhamstead 30 Jan; Maidenhead 2 Feb; Englefield 6 Feb; nr Brightwalton 3 Jun; Tilehurst 12 July; Lower Fm GP 27 Aug   |
| Rough-legged Buzzard | Englefield 27 Mar  |
| Osprey               | over Reading 17 Mar (date)   |
| Red-footed Falcon    | Bray GP 12 Jun (not accepted by BBRC on recirculation)   |
| Merlin               | Sulhamstead 12 Feb; North Street (fem) 27 Mar; Theale 30 Apr; Windsor Gt Pk 20 Dec   |
| Water Rail           | 2 Wraysbury GP 7 May (date)  |
| Little Ringed Plover | 4 Eversley GP 24 Feb (date)  |
| Lapwing              | 5000+ Padworth early Dec   |
| Bar-tailed Godwit    | Lower Fm GP 8 May  |
| Arctic Skua          | QMR 19 Nov   |
| Mediterranean Gull   | Eversley GP 29 Jul   |
| Caspian Gull         | Summerleaze GP 21 Apr  |
| Sandwich Tern        | 16 QMR 20 Sep  |
| Common Tern          | 3 Muddy Lane 24 Feb (date)   |
| Arctic Tern          | 4 QMR 25 Aug, 2 on 29 Aug, 1 on 30 Aug   |
| Woodlark             | 2 over Caversham 14 Oct  |

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Black Redstart | Datchet 28 Aug                                  |
| Willow Warbler | Hurley 6 Mar (date)                             |
| Willow Tit     | Thames Valley Park 16 Oct; 6 at Tidmarsh 26 Nov |
| Raven          | Cookham Rise 27 Sep; Sonning 22 Dec             |
| Mealy Redpoll  | Theale GP 25 Nov; 5 Padworth Lane 20 Dec        |
| Hawfinch       | Cookham Rise 9 Dec                              |

## REVIEW OF RECORDS FOR THE YEAR 2001

The total number of species recorded during the year was 195. This figure includes 7 Category C species (Egyptian Goose, Mandarin, Ruddy Duck, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Ring-necked Parakeet and Little Owl) and one released species (Red Kite) but does not include Whooper Swan, Snow Goose, Barnacle Goose, Red-crested Pochard, Wood Duck, Caspian Gull, Kumlien's Gull and White Wagtail which would bring the number of species for which accounts are provided to 202 making this an above average year in terms of the number of species. Records include the first county sighting of Black Kite and five species recorded on six or fewer previous occasions.

Records accepted by the BRC for publication appear in the Systematic List. Records that the BRC were unable to accept, in very many cases because of no, or inadequate, supporting descriptions, are listed below (records are of single birds unless otherwise stated and those where date of sighting was a consideration are indicated by "(date)"):

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Black-throated Diver   | QMR 23-25 Nov  |
| Shag                   | Boulter's Lock, Maidenhead 3-6 Jan   |
| White Stork            | Sonning 28-29 Nov  |
| Bewicks Swan           | 3 over Windsor Gt Pk in Jan  |
| Pochard                | Fem + 3y Hamstead Marshall 3 Jun   |
| Scaup                  | Twyford GP (fem) 19 Jan  |
| Goldeneye              | Wraysbury GPs 120 in Jan, 123 in Feb and 85 in Dec   |
| Red-breasted Merganser | Wraysbury GP 8 Dec   |
| Smew                   | 29 Wraysbury GPs 14 Jan  |
| Honey Buzzard          | 2 prob this Burghfield GPs 30 Apr; 1 Wraysbury 5 May   |
| Marsh Harrier          | 1 poss this Sindlesham 23 Apr and 1 Quarry Woods 29 Apr  |
| Hen Harrier            | Bracknell (fem) 29 Apr; Compton Downs 10 Jun (date)  |
| Goshawk                | Caversham 3 Jan; Woolley Down (fem) 7 Jan; Theale GP (fem) 18 Apr; Cookham Dean 21 and 28 Apr; Theale GP poss this 3 May; Theale GP 23 May |
| Osprey                 | Winter Hill 20 Jun (date); Eversley GP 3 Sep; Wokingham 4 Sep; Theale GP 10 Nov; Brimpton GP 18 Dec (date)                                 |
| Merlin                 | Caversham (fem) 28 Oct; Sandhurst 30 Oct   |
| Little Ringed Plover   | 5 Slough SF 20 Sep   |
| Knot                   | QMR 9 Nov  |
| Spotted Redshank       | 2 Horton GP 28 Apr   |
| Wood Sandpiper         | Dinton Pastures 22 Jul; ad Slough SF 25 Aug  |
| Grey Phalarope         | Theale GP 1 Jan  |
| Arctic Skua            | 2 QMR 19 Aug   |
| Little Gull            | Green Park, Reading 27 Oct   |
| Ring-billed Gull       | Smallmead Tip 6 Mar  |
| Caspian Gull           | Smallmead Tip 9 Feb; QMR 4 Sep; prob Lower Fm GP 3 Dec   |
| Arctic Tern            | 2 QMR 12 Aug and 1 on 9 Sep  |
| Rock Pipit             | 6 QMR 10 Oct   |

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Water Pipit           | QMR 29 Sep, 24 Oct, 29 Oct  |
| Waxwing               | Pinkneys Green 9 Jan  |
| Lesser Whitethroat    | Wraysbury GP 11 Nov (date)  |
| Yellow-browed Warbler | Theale GP 9 Dec   |
| Pied Flycatcher       | 3 Reading 27 Aug  |
| Bearded Tit           | 2 Theale GP 3 Jun (date)  |
| Raven                 | Nr Aldworth 14 Aug  |
| Hawfinch              | over Theale GPs 3 Jan; over Winter Hill 7 Jan; 1-3 Windsor Gt Pk 18 Feb |

## **NOTE BY RECORDER**

This report for 2000 and 2001 is the second, and last, to be published out of chronological sequence, reports for the years 2002 and 2003 having already appeared. Species accounts have been written and edited without account being taken of records which may have already been published for later years. The County Checklist of species remains as given in the 2003 report (ie a total 310 Category A and C species) as that figure already includes the 2001 addition to the list of Black Kite.

This is my final BRC Report having retired as County Recorder at the end of 2004. The BRC currently comprises Chris Heard (County Recorder and Chairman), Ken Moore and myself with Derek Barker acting as Secretary to the Committee.

*Peter Standley*  
Recorder (Retd)