



Thames Water is pleased to sponsor Berkshire Ornithological Club's Annual Bird Report. The occurrence and distribution of birds is a vital component of biodiversity and the information gained from bird records, such as those reported here, is a key element of understanding where to target protection. Many of our operational sites across the Thames Water region are recognised as internationally, nationally or locally important for birds whether for breeding, wintering or migration. The compilation and reporting of bird statistics can be used as indicators of the health of the countryside and to reflect other issues such as climate change which itself has important implications for water resources management. 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**

Berkshire Ornithological Club



The Berkshire Ornithological Club (BOC) was founded as Reading Ornithological Club in 1947 to promote education and study of wild birds, their habitats and their conservation, initially in the Reading area but now on a county wide basis. It is affiliated to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Membership is open to anyone interested in birds and bird-watching, beginner or expert, local patch enthusiast or international twitcher. The Club provides the following in return for a modest annual subscription:

- A programme of indoor meetings with expert speakers on ornithological subjects
- Occasional social meetings
- An annual photographic competition of very high standard judged by the President Gordon Langsbury FRPS
- A programme of field meetings both locally and further afield. These can be for half days, whole days or weekends.
- Regular mid week bird walks in and around many of Berkshire's and neighbouring counties' best birdwatching areas.
- Conservation involvement in important local habitats and species. BOC members are involved in practical conservation work with groups such as the Friends of Lavell's Lake, the Theale Area Bird Conservation Group and the Moor Green Lakes Group.
- Opportunities to participate in survey work to help understand birds better. The surveys include a regular Garden Bird survey and supporting the BTO in its work.
- The Club runs the Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund to support local bird conservation projects.

This annual Berkshire Bird Report is published by the Club and provided free to members. Members are encouraged to keep records of their local observations and submit them, electronically or in writing, to the Recorder for collation and analysis. The Birds of Berkshire, published in 1996, the authoritative book on local avifauna, and the culmination of many years of member's field work, is available to members at the highly-discounted price of £5 while copies last.

For further details of the Club and membership visit www.berksoc.org.uk or contact the Hon. Secretary:

Renton Righelato, 63 Hamilton Road, Reading, RG1 5RA
telephone 0118 926 4513;
e-mail renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk

The Birds of Berkshire

Annual Report for the year 2004

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Introduction

Again this report has taken far too long to produce and we ask all readers to accept our apologies for this.

You will see a variety of articles inside demonstrating a number of the ornithological activities undertaken in Berkshire and as usual Chris Heard provides some interesting and relevant information about some of our rarities and their identification. We encourage all readers to contribute articles and if you have something that may be suitable please contact the Managing Editor at the address below.

The Berkshire Ornithological Club has now seen a year pass since its name change and reaffirms its intention to work in harmony and co-operation with the other groups, resources and organisations involved with county birding and their details can be found in our directory. Additions to this directory are welcome and suggestions should be sent to the Managing Editor.

The next few years will see much time expended by local birdwatchers on the Berkshire Bird Atlas and the British Trust for Ornithology Atlas Projects. This may lead to reduced records initially as survey records are submitted direct to the BTO website and we request that records of interest continue to be provided to www.berksbirds.co.uk or via Berkshire Bird Bulletin, or to the Recorder or Assistant Recorder. The BTO records will be provided to the county database in due course but the detail may not be as great as required to embellish species accounts as we have tried to do in the past.

Work has already started on the 2005 Report and as soon as we have the records for 2006 that report will also be started. If you have any records for 2006 or later years please do submit them as quickly as possible, we need records early to assist us in producing reports more quickly.

*Colin Wilson
Managing Editor
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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 them.

The work involved in distilling the thousands of records from many sources into species accounts has been undertaken by Derek Barker, Paul Bright-Thomas, Brian Clews, Richard Crawford, Ken Moore, Bill Nicoll, Ted Rogers and Marek Walford and we thank them sincerely for their important contributions and patience while the report has been finalised. Derek Barker has undertaken a thorough editing role on the species accounts complemented by the expertise of Chris Heard.

A Report is much more than a set of species accounts and we thank all those who contributed articles, Jan Legg, Chris Robinson, Cath McEwan and of course, Chris Heard for his three valuable contributions. Brian Clews undertook the thorough analysis of ringing records and Bill Nicoll investigated weather for the year, their efforts are much appreciated.

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 the Dotterel. Other superb drawings have been provided by Martin Hallam and an illustration by Derek McEwan adds further attraction.

Photographs have been provided by Mike McKee and Marek Walford. I sincerely apologise for labelling a picture of a Spotted Crake in the 2000/2001 Report as being by Mike McKee when in fact it was taken by Jerry O'Brien. This was entirely my mistake.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to Thames Water who have been consistent supporters of Berkshire bird reports with generous donations for many years. We also appreciate the support of London Camera Exchange who have helped with financial support for many years. Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre have also made an important grant to assist us and more information concerning this appears later.

We have a number of other advertisers and supporters, too many to list here and we ask readers to take note of these and please consider use of their services. Lafarge kindly also supported us again this year.

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
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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

A Club for birdwatchers throughout Berkshire, with indoor and outdoor meetings, surveys and publications, including Birds of Berkshire annual reports – see page 2 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

NEWBURY DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

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

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

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) and BERKSHIRE BIRD ATLAS GROUP

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

FRIENDS OF LAVELL'S LAKE

Conservation volunteers managing Lavell's Lake local nature reserve near Dinton Pastures CP Country Park, Wokingham. Bird walks, occasional meetings and newsletters.

Contact Chairman Fraser Cottington at Fraser.cottington@ntlworld.com or see 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. Contact Membership Secretary: Keith Littler, 316 Yorktown Road, College Town, Sandhurst, Berks, GU47 0PZ

www.mglg.org.uk

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/

Contact Cath McEwan, Secretary,
Email 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/ or directly from:

East Berks Local Group
www.eastberksrspb.org.uk/

Reading Local Group
www.reading-rspb.org.uk/

Wokingham and Bracknell Local Group
www.wbrspb.btinternet.co.uk/

BERKSHIRE BIRD INDEX 2004

*An edited version of the 2004 BBI report by Chris Robinson,
with acknowledgment to Patrick Crowley*

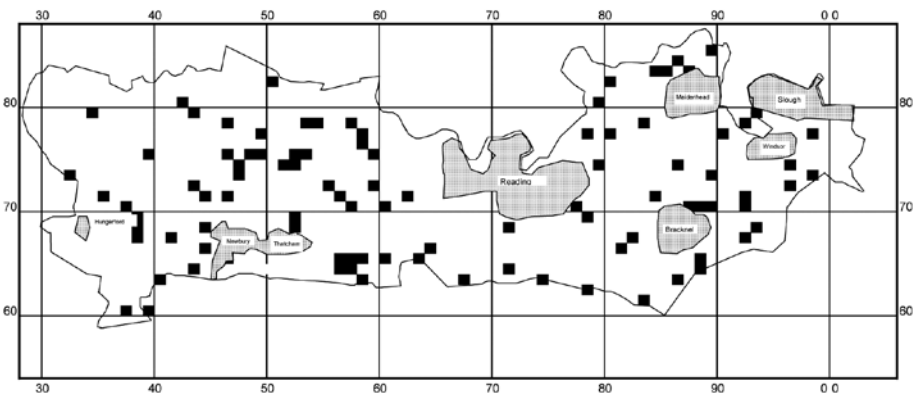
The Berkshire Bird Index (BBI) was started in 2000 by representatives of local ornithological groups and clubs in Berkshire and the county wildlife trust BBOWT to address a perceived shortage of detailed information on the numbers and status of bird populations in the county. The aim of the survey was to determine bird population trends over a period of time.

From 2000-2003 the BBI used a similar method to that used by the BTO for the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), but with less detail. There were three visits to a one kilometre square, one to plan the survey route and record basic habitat details and two to carry out the actual survey by walking a transect out and back across the square between April and June. The analysis was carried out by members of the BBI group.

In 2004 there was a significant change with the survey being carried out using the full BBS protocol, which involved three visits as described above, but with more detailed distance and habitat information being recorded. The reason for this change was that BTO had offered to take over full responsibility for the processing and analysis of the survey returns – a massive saving in local manpower and resources for which we were very grateful. All the BBI survey squares were “converted” to full-blown BBS ones and these have now become part of the national database as well as providing the data for this local analysis.

In 2004 95 squares were surveyed in Berkshire, which is the highest number of squares covered so far, having started with 73 squares in 2000. Of the squares surveyed in 2004, 60 have been surveyed continuously throughout all five years. Five of the squares covered in 2003 were not done in 2004, while six new ones were covered in 2004.

Data for the 38 species seen in 27 or more squares are given in Table 1 which shows the changes in their population size for the period 2000-2004 and the annual change from 2003. Strictly speaking, species occurring in less than 30 squares do not provide



Distribution of survey squares 2004

Table 1. Trends for top 38 species in order of abundance

	Species	2000-04					2003-04		
		Mean squares occupied 2000-2004	% change	Lower Confidence Level	Upper Confidence Level	Statistically Significant	% change	Statistically Significant	
1	Wood Pigeon	68	-22	0.69	0.90	*	-39	*	
2	Blackbird	68	-25	0.68	0.83	*	-26	*	
3	Chaffinch	68	+12	0.99	1.27		2		
4	Robin	67	+4	0.92	1.17		0		
5	Blue Tit	66	+7	0.94	1.21		-18		
6	Great Tit	66	-36	0.56	0.73	*	-21		
7	Wren	65	-34	0.56	0.77	*	-42	*	
8	Carrion Crow	65	+124	1.84	2.73	*	17		
9	<i>Dunnock</i>	60	+21	0.98	1.50		-23		
10	Pheasant	59	+22	1.00	1.49		-5		
11	Song Thrush	59	+43	1.13	1.80	*	32		
12	Magpie	56	-42	0.50	0.68	*	-28	*	
13	Blackcap	52	-23	0.62	0.96	*	-40	*	
14	Jackdaw	52	+54	1.22	1.96	*	25		
15	Greenfinch	52	+3	0.84	1.27		-13		
16	Skylark	49	-16	0.72	0.98	*	-11		
17	Chiffchaff	48	+36	0.92	2.01		-35		
18	<i>Swallow</i>	45	-45	0.41	0.74	*	-29		
19	Starling	44	-25	0.60	0.95	*	3		
20	Whitethroat	42	+34	1.01	1.79	*	-11		
21	<i>Green Woodpecker</i>	41	-24	0.58	0.99	*	19		
22	Great Spotted Woodpecker	41	-15	0.63	1.16		-42		
23	Goldfinch	41	+91	1.45	2.52	*	-6		
24	<i>Mistle Thrush</i>	39	-2	0.69	1.37		-32		
25	Yellowhammer	38	-52	0.38	0.62	*	-32		
26	Mallard	37	+8	0.78	1.51		-25		
27	Collared Dove	37	-7	0.76	1.15		-9		
28	Long-tailed Tit	37	-32	0.49	0.95	*	-32		
29	Rook	36	+408	3.21	8.05	*	75		
30	Pied Wagtail	35	-21	0.55	1.14		-24		
31	House Sparrow	33	-12	0.72	1.09		-39	*	
32	Jay	32	+70	1.19	2.42	*	15		
33	Linnet	32	-16	0.59	1.19		-33		
34	<i>Lapwing</i>	31	+64	1.04	2.57	*	45		
35	<i>House Martin</i>	28	-30	0.45	1.10		-33		
36	<i>Goldcrest</i>	28	-63	0.24	0.56	*	-69	*	
37	Nuthatch	28	-34	0.47	0.92	*	-47	*	
38	<i>Willow Warbler</i>	27	-60	0.26	0.59	*	-40		

* = Statistically significant

Bold = 'Red List' species (of high conservation concern)

Italics = 'Amber List' (of medium conservation concern)

a sufficient sample size for robust trend analysis but this figure has been stretched to 27 squares because of the interesting four additional species involved (House Martin, Goldcrest, Nuthatch and Willow Warbler), three of which are 'Amber' listed.

The format for the data is similar to that used in the BBS Annual reports, where 'Mean squares occupied 2000-2004' is the mean number of 1 Km squares occupied over the five years of the survey and ' % Change ' is the trend. Additional columns containing asterisks show whether the changes are statistically significant at the 5% level. The trends are calculated using a log-linear regression model that corrects for differences in coverage over the years.

Inspection of Table 1 suggests that the picture for the 38 species over the five year period 2000-2004 appears not to be a particularly happy one for Berkshire, with 15 species showing statistically significant decreases. This compares with the South East of England where 9 species showed statistically significant decreases over the ten year period 1994-2003. Examining some of the changes in more detail:-

Species with notable changes in 2004 compared to 2003

8 species showed statistically significant decreases in populations in 2004 as compared to 2003. These are Woodpigeon, Blackbird, Wren, Magpie, Blackcap, House Sparrow, Goldcrest and Nuthatch. A possible explanation for at least some of these declines may be that 2003 was generally a poor breeding season when many early broods were lost in sharp frosts during April. This could have produced a knock-on effect into the following season 2004 and contributed to the lower numbers observed. Declines over one season may not be too much to worry about but 6 of these species also show statistically significant declines over 5 years.

Resident species with notable changes over 2000-2004

12 Resident species from the top 38 have shown statistically significant decreases during the last five years. Especially high decreases were noted for Blackbird, Great Tit, Wren, Magpie, Starling, Yellowhammer, Goldcrest, and Nuthatch. Of these however, only the red-listed Starling and the farmland species Yellowhammer showed a similar long term trend in the South-east of England, while the others have either shown a stable population, or have been on the increase as in the case of Goldcrest and Nuthatch. The red-listed key farmland species Skylark also decreased in Berkshire in line with decreases in SE England and the UK.

The news is not all bad however, with seven resident species showing a statistically significant increase during this time, especially the corvids Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Rook and Jay, as well as Goldfinch, Lapwing, and the red-listed Song Thrush. Of these, Song Thrush, Jackdaw and Lapwing also show similar trends in SE England, but Rook and Jay have shown long-term decreases. Rook in particular showed a very large increase (408%) in Berkshire, which seems hard to explain as it is very out of line with data for the South East of England. It is possible that that some large flocks were seen which have biased the data in some way and it should be noted that the confidence limits for Rook are much higher than for other species. It is nice to see increases in the Lapwing population, which have also been seen in South-east England, as this species had appeared to be in long term decline because of changes in farming practice.

As a footnote, Buzzards have shown a large increase (35%) over 2000-2004, which although not significant statistically, is consistent with the steady statistically significant increases in SE England and the UK.

Migratory species with notable changes over 2000-2004

Of the six migratory species in the top 38 in Berkshire, three (Blackcap, Swallow, and Willow Warbler) have shown worrying statistically significant decreases over the last five years. Of these Willow Warbler is consistent with the long-term trend in SE England, but in contrast Blackcap and Swallow have been increasing in the South-east.

It is worth noting that, although the figures are not statistically significant, both House Martin and Cuckoo showed decreases in Berkshire that are in line with statistically significant decreases in SE England.

On the positive side it is nice to record that both Whitethroat and Chiffchaff have shown a statistically significant increase in numbers in Berkshire, which has also been mirrored in the South-east and nationally.

WHITE STORK IN EAST BERKSHIRE

By Chris Heard

In April 2004 a White Stork traversed East Berkshire and, thanks to modern communications, it was possible to establish where it had been both before and after it left the county.

It first became widely available – rather unpromisingly – on 1st April. While most of Britain's birders were debating whether an internet report of a Black-throated Gray Warbler in Gloucestershire was an 'April Fool', many Berkshire birders were wondering if they could catch up with this rather mobile White Stork and, furthermore, whether it could be counted on their county lists!

In fact, the bird was first sighted the day before, when a homeward-bound Brian Bennett was shocked to see it fly across the M4 at Bray, apparently heading towards the Jubilee River (at 4.49pm). However, although several birders were on-site at the Jubilee River, it wasn't seen there until around 7pm when London birder Dave Morris got a call to say it had just flown over the Manor Farm bridge. That evening there was some speculation that it might be an escape but this all became academic when birders at the Jubilee River the following morning were unable to relocate it. Then, just after midday, Mike McCarthy and Bucks birder Dave Ferguson noticed it circling low over the Dorney Wetlands section. Thanks to a timely call from Lee Evans, I was able to shoot straight over to the Lake End car park from where I watched it circling over towards Etonwick (from 12.20pm). Opting to follow it, I drove the couple of miles to Etonwick and watched it circling over Windsor racecourse for some time. Meanwhile Derek Barker, who had been working at Bray, had driven to the Windsor bypass and was watching it from there and Brian Clews was watching it from Eton.

Eventually it flew away to the South-east of Windsor Castle and I had to gamble on whether it had headed for Windsor Great Park or more directly East. I plumped for the latter and raced over to Runnymede where I was relieved to spot it, to my left, flying steadily eastwards over Wraysbury (at 1.20pm). I pulled into the Runnymede Pleasure-grounds car park and, fortuitously, it came directly overhead, before drifting off low South of Egham, Surrey (at 1.40pm). It was subsequently reported flying NE over Chertsey (2.15pm) and then later over Leatherhead.

From my excellent views at Runnymede I was able to see that the plumage was heavily soiled on the mantle, neck and breast and I could confirm that it was un-ringed (on both the upper and lower portions of the legs). I also noted that it was missing 1-2 of the innermost primaries on the left wing and, on the upperwing, I could see silver-grey edgings to the secondaries - indicating that it was in first-summer plumage (see *Birding World*: 11;195-197).

The following day the stork continued eastwards over Sittingbourne, Kent (at 4.15pm) and later flew over the car park at the Tesco supermarket in Faversham and it was assumed to be this same bird which roosted on the Campbell's building in Ashford, on the 3rd, before reappearing in East Kent in the Sandwich Bay area. From the reference to "stained underparts" it may be this bird which then turned-up at Ninfield, East Sussex, on 12th, and maybe also in West Sussex subsequently.

From internet accounts and photos I am now certain that the White Stork in Berkshire is the same bird which wintered in Kent. Apparently it soiled its plumage while spending much of the 2003/2004 winter in a muddy field by Swanton Court, near Ashford (see **Jan 16th photo on PlanetThanet.org**). Furthermore, on its return to Kent, it was noted that it was "missing primary 7 or 8 on the left wing" (see **April 9th entry on PlanetThanet.org**) - comparable with my own observation. It also seems likely to be the same bird which first turned up, as a juvenile, in Oxfordshire during August 2003 and which was subsequently seen at Harefield, Greater London and in Buckinghamshire during September (per LGRE). August is a good time for the dispersal of wild White Storks and, indeed, I saw my first **BBRC** accepted one at Romney Marshes in Kent in August 1976.

The assessment of this bird was clearly linked to that of the Kent winterer... which was eventually categorized with other White Stork sightings in the 2004 KOS Report (where it was recorded as last being seen on April 28th - although BLSE records indicate this bird was still present at Lower Halstow in Kent until June 24th). From a photo on the 'London's Birding' website (showing the left wing with a moult contrast/missing feather @ the 7th primary) it was clearly this bird which reappeared at New Denham in Bucks on 30th June, where it remained until July 4th, but it has not been seen since. Both of the Bucks sightings (on the Bucks side of the border at Dorney on April 1st and at New Denham in June/July) have been fully accepted in the Buckinghamshire Bird Report (and the 2003 sighting at Harefield, Greater London was also fully accepted by the LNHS).

The Berkshire Records Committee has consequently accepted this bird as presumed to be of wild origin. Several past White Storks in Berkshire were known or presumed to be of captive origin but only three previous records have been deemed to refer to wild birds:

- 1 flying East over Ham Island towards Wraysbury GPs, on November 2nd 1968 (seen by Ken Nalder)
- 1 over Walbury Hill (seen by an ROC group, including Martin Hallam, Z. & J. Karpowitz *et al*) on March 16th 1975
- 1 at Englefield on May 22nd 2000 (seen by Dick Burness)

In recent years the status of White Storks in the UK has been plagued by a number of widely-travelled known escapees. On the other hand, White Stork sightings have dramatically



increased in SE England - perhaps associated with various reintroduction projects in Western Europe. Faced with this situation, county records committees have to take account of all associated sightings and then judge each record on its relative merits. The apparent UK arrival (August 2003) and departure dates (July 2004) of this bird indicate successful overwintering by a first-year White Stork of wild origin.

THE BONXIE* AT QUEEN MOTHER RESERVOIR

by Chris Heard

On 22nd September Dave Parker was visiting Queen Mother Reservoir when he found an unidentified skua at around 6pm. He described it to Birdline South East as a “chunky skua” but, later that evening, it was identified as an Arctic Skua by Andy Tomczynski and this was repeated again the following morning by Paul Cropper (per BLSE). However, as a number of Berkshire and West London birders gathered at the site, a debate ensued with four different skua species being mooted (including Brown Skua *S. antarctica*- not yet recorded in the UK!). This variety of identifications may seem surprising but out-of-context skuas at inland reservoirs can be notoriously tricky. In fact, this was the second skua to cause confusion in the region that month: a rather buff-looking juvenile skua nearby at Staines Reservoir in Surrey (on 9th) was initially thought to be an Arctic Skua before it was reidentified several hours later as a Long-tailed! (For a revealing photo essay on another ‘problem skua’ at Chew Valley Lake see: <http://www.cvlbirding.co.uk/kev/skuu.html>). All of which also begs the question of how many mistaken identifications are made on sea-watches!

I was out of the county on 22nd but, since I had seen several previous Arctic Skuas, I was in no hurry to catch up with it. I arrived later on the morning of 23rd and, though distant,

(* the Shetland name for Great Skua, preferred by most birders)

I was immediately impressed by the size of the bird and I told Robin Dryden that it could not possibly be an Arctic! So it was either a Pom and or Bonxie... Although dark overall it clearly showed fresh buff tips to the upperwing coverts indicating that, whatever it was, it was a juvenile. Circumstantially this favoured Pomarine Skua - since it had been well-publicised that Bonxies had suffered a disastrous breeding season, with almost no young raised in Shetland for example (see Brit.Birds 97: 425, No 8; Aug 2004). However, there was no evidence of any barring on the undertail coverts or on the underwing (but note that in 'Skuas & Jaegers' it says that rarely some dark juvenile Pomarines can entirely lack barring) and the rufous tone to the plain underbody was much more like a juv Bonxie. By midday I was happy that, unlikely as it might seem, that is what it was (and most of the London birders arrived at the same conclusion).

In view of this paradoxical occurrence, and the first extended stay of a Bonxie in the county, it seems worth recording its field appearance (in addition some excellent photos were eventually taken of the bird).

DESCRIPTION (from field observations)

In general, fairly obvious as a 'large skua' - when chasing gulls it was obviously closer in size to Herring, and much larger than Black-headed - but it appeared slimmer-winged, and with a slimmer head and bill, than the rather thickset jizz associated with adult Bonxies. The tail usually looked slightly wedge-shaped (but with no projection of the central tail-feathers). Also the rather dull upperwing flash (at the base of the primaries) - probably duller than many Pomarine Skuas - is a feature of some juvenile Bonxies, as is the rather plain body plumage. The head did not look 'hooded' (as it does with most juv Bonxies); on the water at least, the whole of the nape and hindneck appeared slightly paler.

The plumage was dark brown overall - darkest on the wing and tail feathers but with fresh, dull rufous tips to the wing coverts - and a more rufous tone to the underbody. The head, neck, mantle and body were completely unstreaked and there was no barring anywhere. The darker crown and face contrasted (to varying degrees according to light conditions) with the paler rufous-tawny nape and hindneck - this contrast providing some resemblance to the head patterns of juveniles of the smaller skuas.

The whole upperside (including the rump) tended to look plain and dark in flight, with the pale flash on the upperside of the primaries noticeably less obvious than on the underwing. The underwing coverts were plain dark brown, with the median under-primary coverts slightly darker than the greater under-primary coverts (but not actually producing the 'double carpal patch' of Pomarine).

The bill was lead grey with a fairly obvious dark tip (distal third). Legs & feet dark grey (no black areas).

It was seen daily at QMR until 26th but, although it was regularly observed chasing gulls, it was rarely seen to successfully gain food from these pursuits. It seemed to lack the stamina to attack and kill a gull - nor did it seem to benefit from surface-feeding (as the Long-tailed Skua did in Sept 2006). Sadly, I recovered the corpse of the Bonxie from the shore by the yacht club on 27th Sept. It showed no sign of injury and I suspect that it died of starvation during the night.

WHITE WAGTAILS IN BERKSHIRE

by Chris Heard

The White Wagtail (the nominate race of our Pied Wagtail, breeding in Iceland and much of continental Europe) has long been recognised as a regular migrant through Berkshire and W.B. Alexander, writing in 1952, described it as “...recorded a good many times in April, but only occasionally in autumn...” That description remains valid for the rest of the 20th century, and although the number of spring sightings increased this was probably much in line with the increase in observer numbers. There have also been occasional double-figure counts, notably 13 at Eversley GPs on 17th April 1988 and 15 at Theale on 17th April 1993; the coincidence of these dates serves to emphasise the peak passage period during which Whites are most likely to be encountered.

The following examination of the accepted White Wagtail sightings in east Berkshire, between 1947 and 2004, reveals further vagaries in their occurrence, as well as highlighting the possibility of misidentification – an ever-present peril with subspecific identifications. The first thing to note is that, between 1949 and 1962, the spring records conform pretty much with what we now observe. The earliest date was the 21st March 1959, when a “small group” was recorded in Windsor Great Park (a regular site for migrants in those days – when this area suffered much less disturbance from the general public), and the latest date was 23rd May 1955 at Ham SF. More surprising is the fact that there are almost as many autumn sightings during this period... the earliest of which was on the unlikely date of 19th August 1961 at Ham SF (there must have been a high probability of misidentification at this time – when the principal source of information on autumn plumages will have been the expensive five-volume Handbook by Witherby).

The next ten years (1963-1972) then produced just five records in total! There is no obvious explanation for this marked reduction in sightings, although it is possible that some incident sparked a ‘crisis of confidence’ in White Wagtail separation as has happened with the identification of several other species/subspecies over the years (eg Greenish Warbler). It seems unlikely that the famously hard winter of 1962/63 had any effect since White Wagtails winter from the Mediterranean, south in to Africa (both sides of the Sahara).

White Wagtail sightings seemed to recover from 1973 onwards, although the earliest-ever autumn report – of an adult at Ham SF on 6th August 1975 – now looks doubtful (a record of one at Newbury on 3rd February the previous year is even more anomalous). The earliest east Berks records for the remainder of the century were 12th March 1988 (at Eversley GPs) and 10th March 1994 (at QMR). There were very few autumn records during this period but, as highlighted in the 2003 Birds of Berkshire Report, they have been annual since the turn of the century. Once again, this surely has more to do with observer confidence than *alba* occurrence patterns. The Collins Guide (Mullarney, Svensson et al) was published in 1999, providing the first widely available new illustrations of the autumn plumages for many years, and this was followed in 2003 by the landmark volume on Pipits and Wagtails (Alstrom & Mild). The latter reference, in particular, has enabled keen birders to confidently identify almost every autumn individual – so long as the age of the bird is carefully determined. But there really are no shortcuts to the I.D. process in autumn (which is why it has taken so long for it to be refined). So, for instance, a yellowish face is not indicative of autumn White Wagtails and can also be seen on juvenile, first-winter and adult Pied Wagtails.

The pattern of accepted autumn records so far this century shows a distinct 'window' of passage in late September (the earliest accepted sighting was at QMR from Sept 11th 2000), followed by a tailing-off during October and then occasional sightings into November. It is certainly possible that more White Wagtails linger well into November (as is the case in Switzerland) and an at present internet-only paper ('Identification Guide to Autumn Wagtails' by Iain Livingstone) argues that they may be 'common' in southern England in late autumn/early winter. However, this conclusion remains controversial and, although based on Svensson's 'Identification for Ringers' guide, the correct application of those I.D. criteria is called into question by the photos which accompany the paper.

Wintering White Wagtails are certainly occasional in SW England (as far up as Dorset) and I have personally observed single mid-winter White Wagtails in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Whereas my experience of wintering wagtails in east Berks indicates that the vast majority can be firmly labelled as Pieds, although this could of course vary between sites, as my autumn sightings suggest that (as in Spring), Whites are not uniformly present among concentrations of Pieds. Thus, while the banks of QMR have been a regular site for them, the often larger Pied Wagtail flocks at Slough SF have been much less productive (presumably mostly local birds). Additionally, although it is often assumed that Berkshire White Wagtails are of Icelandic origin, my best autumn numbers usually coincide with easterly winds (note that west European Whites are known to mostly migrate on a southwest heading when departing in autumn).

2004 provided the earliest Spring record in recent years – with a sighting at Burghfield Mill GP on Mar 7th. There has been a recent increase in March reports and this could be part of the general trend for earlier arrivals by spring migrants. But, ever since noting several 'white wagtail look-alikes' at Maidenhead SF during March-April 1980, I have been concerned about the scope for misidentifications at this time of the year (and certainly some photos of 'White Wagtails' published on the internet have, upon closer examination, proven to be female Pieds). The problem is that by early spring some female Pieds can be so worn/bleached that their mantle appears closer to 'ash grey' than 'charcoal'. By April most will show a few blackish patches (but even then a few first-summer females can look surprisingly uniform). It is also telling that, while March sightings are increasing, the often significant White Wagtail passage later in the Spring goes largely unnoticed (as observers are no longer concentrating on 'early migrants'). They can also be under-estimated during this later spring period (eg at QMR in 2006 I realised that the 1-2 birds present on 14th April were actually c.7 different birds being replaced, as they moved on, by other migrants/pairs). The latest of these Spring records was at Slough SF/Dorney Wetlands on 26th-27th May 1998 (a female with a foot abnormality). Occasional breeding is certainly a possibility, though hybridisation with a local bird is more likely (as has happened with Blue-headed × Yellow Wagtails). A mixed White/Pied Wagtail pairing was reported from Manor Farm in 1972 and this may have occurred again in 2002, when I observed a female White apparently prospecting for nest sites at Tickleback Row in April (but was unable to relocate her subsequently). There are occasional breeding records for southern England (less in recent years, it would seem), but Whites only breed regularly in the Shetland Isles; where, interestingly, they show a statistically significant tendency to assortative mating [Perhaps the separate entry that White Wagtail has always been accorded in both the MTNHS and Berkshire Bird Reports was prophetic after all...]

As we learn more about the field separation of White Wagtails it will be interesting to see how our ideas about their status evolve (and, indeed, how the wagtails themselves respond to milder winters). But if new occurrence patterns are to be established they must be

supported by accurate identifications - and that will require close and critical attention to the wagtails field characters, including the age and sex of the bird.

Acknowledgements

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Male White Wagtail at Burnthouse Lane on 14th April 2007 (Marek Walford).

Note: *uniform light grey mantle and rump, restricted pale grey on flanks, white line separating black bib from black of hindneck and duller wing coverts than Pied Wagtail.*

SUMMARY OF WEATHER AND BIRD HIGHLIGHTS OF 2004

By Bill Nicoll and Chris Heard

JANUARY

A fairly wet month dominated by a continuous succession of Atlantic depressions: temperatures ranged from -4°C to 11°C . Winds were very variable but predominantly from the SW quadrant. There were showers during the first week, which started cold and then became very mild. During the second week it was windier but still mild weather with regular rain. In the third week a NW airstream brought a few days of cold weather which were followed by another warm spell. On 27th and 28th there was moderate snow before the month ended with several days of wind and heavy rain. Notable birds remaining from 2003 included the popular Bearded Tit at Burghfield Mill GP (which was last seen on 23rd Feb) and the Great Grey Shrike in the Cow Down/Bury Down area – which also harboured up to 7 Short-eared Owls. There was also a Tree Sparrow at Cookham on 1st and an adult Little Gull was an unusual mid-winter sighting at Remenham on 3rd. The far west of the county produced an impressive count of at least 250 Corn Buntings at Sheepdrove (on 24th) but the surprise of the month was undoubtedly the Dipper on the River Lambourn at Easton on 24th.

FEBRUARY

During the first half of February a SW airstream brought generally mild conditions with a maximum of 15°C on 3rd but it was windy at times and generally wet, with 7mm on 6th. The second half of the month was dry and cold due to a mostly northerly wind. There was frost in the last week with snow showers on last 2 days. The undoubted birding highlight was the county's third-ever Green-winged Teal, which was intermittently present at Slough SF/Dorney Wetlands from 23rd (and was last seen nearby at Bray GPs on 4th March). Other waterfowl included a small influx of Pintail and a peak count of 17 Smew at Wraysbury GPs on 12th. Notable counts of Chiffchaffs were 12 at Burghfield GPs on 10th and 7 at Wraysbury GPs on 15th.

MARCH

From the beginning of March until 12th, cold conditions predominated, with overnight frosts (-5°C) and up to 2cm of snow on 3 dates. From 13th to 23rd, strong winds from the SSW (max 40mph) raised daytime temperatures to between 10°C and 18°C until 28th. The month ended with warm, sunny days (18°C) in a mainly westerly flow. The month was much drier than average but much of the precipitation was in the form of hail. An adult Kumlien's Gull first appeared at Lower Farm GP on 2nd, and then showed up at Pingewood GPs the following day; although only the second county record it is possibly the same individual which passed through the county in 2001. A summer-plumage Red-necked Grebe at Wraysbury GPs, from 9th, proved to be a reliable attraction. A drake Red-breasted Merganser circled Bray GPs on 4th and Common Scoters were seen at three sites, including a two-day stopover at Theale Main GP (on 29th-30th). There was also a Brent Goose at the latter site on 19th and two Black-necked Grebes on 29th. The earliest Little Ringed Plovers in the UK were at both Dorney Wetlands and Twyford GPs on 7th and, similarly, a male Yellow Wagtail at Pingewood GP on 19th was the earliest county record for 30 years.

APRIL

Mild conditions, with sunshine and showers, continued into April due to southerly airflow. The light winds changed to northerly making the second week settled and cold with frosts at first then becoming milder. The third week was similar to the first but rain-bearing fronts passed through near the end of the week and temperatures reach 20C+ on 3 days. In the final week it was mostly warm (despite a light northerly airflow) but dull with heavy downpours on several days. With spring migration now in full swing there were some exciting arrivals. A White Stork crossed the east of the county on 1st (having arrived the day before). On 2nd a male Marsh Harrier flew over Dinton Pastures CP and was later seen from QMR as it continued NE; three more Marsh Harriers were seen later in the month on 3rd, 12th and 24th. An early Quail was at Denford Park on 2nd and the first Nightingale of the year was at Burghfield GPs on 3rd. A second-winter Ring-billed Gull put in an appearance at the QMR roost on 11th (and then reappeared in July) and 27 Little Gulls passed through Theale GPs on 25th. Nearby a Great White Egret – Berkshire's second record – was, again, only seen by the finder at Field Farm GP. The last day of the month produced a flock of 16 Bar-tailed Godwits and 5 Grey Plover through QMR.

MAY

The start of the first week was mild to warm with some sunshine but the wind changed from WSW to N from mid week and the remaining days were cold with rain, heavy at times, and thunder. 7th to 10th were wet due to a front carried by a NE wind but from 11th to 19th high pressure gave light winds from the west and settled weather (max 25°C on 18th). From 20th to 23rd a northerly airstream gave cooler conditions (min 3°C). From 24th to 31st air mostly from the east led to mild days with sunny periods and a few showers. The wader passage on the last day of April continued on 1st with 8 Bar-tailed Godwits, 9 Whimbrel and a Grey Plover through Dorney Wetlands, another Grey Plover at Greenham Common and 12 Black-tailed Godwits at Pingewood GPs. There was also a Little Tern at Dorney Wetlands and a Wood Warbler in Windsor Great Park – the only one of the year. Three Temminck's Stints were together at Greenham Common on 12th but the best wader was a long-awaited Dotterel at Bury Down on 17th. Three Black-necked Grebes were at Lower Farm GP on 2nd, but they did not linger.

JUNE

The month began generally dull, mostly dry and mild (min of 16°C on 5th) despite a light NW airflow, becoming hot by day from 6th to 16th (max 30°C) and staying dry in a light SE airstream. From 17th it became cooler with NW to N winds giving daytime temps in the mid teens (min 5°C on 24th). From 20th to 23rd there were blustery showers with strong (generally westerly) winds at times and temperatures in the low teens. The rest of the month was generally warm but very changeable with some moderate showers. Mid-summer sightings of both Teal and Shoveler suggested that they may have bred in the county, but there was no proof. More tangible were the survey results from the East Berkshire woodlands which yielded 55 pairs of singing male Redstarts and 73 Firecrest territories and also the two family parties of Siskins. Strangely, this was also the last month of the year to produce any Crossbill sightings.

JULY

The first week of July brought cool days with sunshine and showers (with light SSW winds) until a NE trend brought gales and heavy rain on 7th/8th followed by a few days of still, cloudy weather with occasional showers and thunder. From 14th until the end of the month light and variable winds brought mostly warm nights and cloudy days with

occasional showers, but when the cloud broke (on 23/25/29-31) there were hot sunny days with temperatures over 25°C. A second-summer Gannet proved to be a popular draw on Black Swan Lake at Dinton Pastures CP, on 2nd, but after being taken into care it sadly died overnight. Unexpectedly the Ring-billed Gull reappeared in the QMR roost – providing the first-ever summer sighting in the county; it was also found to be spending part of the day just over the county boundary at Little Marlow GPs in South Buckinghamshire. A total of 73 churring Nightjars represents a modern day record.

AUGUST

The first 9 days were mostly hot and sunny with localised thunderstorms and hot nights (min of 20°C on 9th) influenced by a SE airflow. Heavy rain on 10th introduced a spell of cloudy, showery weather in a mainly SW airflow with peak temperatures generally around 22°C with cool nights (min 9°C) which lasted until the end of the month. Weather was generally close to the average for August but there were 20 rainy days. There was a small influx of Garganey from 4th (continuing into September) and a Little Tern appeared briefly at QMR on 9th. A juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper at Pingewood GPs, from 26th, proved to be the same bird seen previously at Staines Reservoir in Surrey.

SEPTEMBER

Light winds from the NE brought warm, calm, dry days (max 29°C) and mild nights that lasted until 9th, which was warm but windy. The rest of the month was showery and changeable, with variable (but predominantly south-westerly) winds as a series of front and shower bands moved quickly through from the west. There was thunder on 14th. QMR dominated the headlines this month, most notably with a Great Skua from 22nd to 26th (subsequently found dead: see Bonxie at QMR article). Also a flock of five Arctic Skuas flew over there on 23rd (the first flock of this species to be seen in the county), plus a flock of 42 Black Terns on 2nd and a rather mobile Wryneck on 9th. A Spotted Crake stopped briefly in Windsor Great Park on 9th-10th and a Tree Sparrow – one of just two sightings this year – at Dorney Wetlands on 4th. A Meadow Pipit at Wraysbury GPs, on 25th, had been ringed on North Ronaldsay (in Orkney) the month before! A flock of 113 Egyptian Geese set a new county record (and a sign of the times) at Cookham Rise on 29th.

OCTOBER

The month was quite wet with significant rain on 18 days. It began mild and showery (wind from southerly quarter) until 10th when a moderate north-easterly made it feel cold. The wind moved to the southwest and weakened bringing a period of heavy rain on 14th followed by dull, showery weather until 19th. A rapid pressure drop on 20th brought mild, humid air from the SSW leading to wetter, windier conditions (bringing down trees) lasting until the end of the month, except on 26th/27th when high pressure gave sunny days and frosty nights in a light ESE flow. A Great Grey Shrike was, unfortunately, only seen at Slough SF on 10th. The same day, a Rock Pipit was notable at Lower Farm GP because they are still rarely recorded in the west of the county. There were also three Short-eared Owls in west Berks on 7th (following 1 at QMR on 29th Sept.). A Leach's Petrel stopped off and was then observed departing from QMR on 16th, and the first of a series of Caspian Gulls were noted there. The last of several late Common Terns was seen on 27th.

NOVEMBER

Mild, dull and drizzly or showery days with some sunny periods lasted until 9th when a N airstream lowered temperatures but brought slightly drier, sunnier conditions. From 11th a variable but generally NW airstream brought very unsettled conditions, with cloud cover,

wind strength and temperature changing daily over a wide range. From 19th to 22nd it was cold with air frosts and some wet snow, and then, in a mostly light southerly airstream, several days of mild, damp and cloudy weather were followed by colder, drier days with night frosts. An unprecedented flock of 90 Common Scoter touched down briefly at QMR on 8th and a singleton joined a long-staying female Scaup on a relatively small gravel-pit in the Woolhampton complex. The unfolding Caspian Gull influx included *five* in the QMR roost on 27th and there was a Snow Bunting there on 8th, followed by two together on Inkpen Hill from 13th-16th.

DECEMBER

After 3 cold days with frosty nights a SW airstream brought a week of mild but generally dull, rainless days until 11th when temperatures rose several degrees and some local sunny patches appeared, but there was night fog. From 10th, the wind backed through ENE to N giving several still, cold days. A few changeable days followed, and it rained hard on several days between 18th and 22nd. From then until 29th, despite the SW airstream, it was cold with occasional sun and with some snow on 27th. The month ended with 2 mild, dull and damp days. A flock of 27 White-fronted Geese was tracked flying E/NE across the county on 1st. More remarkably, 17 Tundra Bean Geese arrived at Coldharbour on 13th, departing the following day (and the same flock were then relocated in Staffordshire on 15th!). Completing our *third* wild goose species of the month were Brent Geese at QMR on 22nd and Eversley GPs on 26th. A Red-breasted Merganser was at Heron Lakes, Wraysbury on 9th. A roost of 73 Red Kites must have been an impressive sight at Woolley Down on 19th and, nearby, up to seven Short-eared Owls were seen in the Cow Down/Bury Down area. An adult Iceland Gull was an early returnee at QMR on 5th and, at the opposite end of the county, an adult Glaucous Gull was near Newbury landfill site on 29th. Also towards the end of the month, there were up to 17 Waxwings at Bracknell (part of a national influx).

TVERC Small Grant Acknowledgement

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RINGING HIGHLIGHTS 2004

By Brian Clews

WEST BERKSHIRE

The combined efforts of Newbury Ringing Group, Smith & Wilson (Hungerford area), John Buchanan (Hermitage) and Nigel Cleere were rewarded with 4453 birds of 51 species, the greatest capture rate for a decade. Although no new species were encountered, highlights included Nightjar, the first Collared Dove since 1996 and no fewer than 26 Barn Owl pulli. Encouragingly, all the water-side warblers showed increases on previous years.

The top ten species were:-

2004			1967-2004		
1	BLUE TIT	942	1	BLUE TIT	38691
2	GREAT TIT	549	2	GREAT TIT	18261
3	BLACKCAP	431	3	WREN	10003
4	REED WARBLER	428	4	REED WARBLER	9360
5	CHIFFCHAFF	364	5	SEDGE WARBLER	9124
6	GREENFINCH	217	6	BLACKCAP	8305
7	SEDGE WARBLER	178	7	GREENFINCH	8150
8	REED BUNTING	148	8	CHIFFCHAFF	8067
9	WREN	142	9	BLACKBIRD	7503
10	CHAFFINCH	128	10	WILLOW WARBLER	6845

Other interesting species included 17 Kingfishers, 16 Great Spotted Woodpeckers, 31 Cetti's Warblers and 27 Marsh Tits. Reed Buntings totalled an impressive 148.

Notable Recoveries included:-

Barn Owl: Chippenham 17 Feb 04 – Kintbury 17 Jul 03 (50 km 215 days)

Reed Warbler: Woolhampton 25 May 04 – Nouakchott, Mauritania 09 Oct 03
(3921 km, 229 days)

Chiffchaff: Thatcham 25 May 04 – Ludina Caruna, Spain 15 Dec 02 (1042 km, 1yr 279 days)

Reed Bunting: Brompton 17 Feb 04 – Icklesham, E Sussex 11 Oct 03 (140 km 129 days)

The latter follows 2 recoveries of this species last year from the same East Sussex location.

LAVELL'S LAKE

Tim Alexander submitted the following information:-

Total number of birds ringed – 238

Top five species:-

BLACKCAP – 50

REED WARBLER - 29

CHIFFCHAFF - 26

GREAT TIT – 21

SEDGE WARBLER – 15

Other interesting species included 3 Willow Warblers and 3 Lesser Redpolls. Site fidelity was evidenced by several birds re-trapped from previous years, including 2 Long-tailed Tits, a Wren, a Bullfinch, 2 Reed Warblers and a Garden Warbler, all first trapped the year before.

A Garden Warbler ringed at Lavell's on Aug 26th was subsequently recovered in Algeria on Oct 12th, having collided with a car, and is the second Garden Warbler ringed in UK to be found in that country.

JEALOTT'S HILL

The Hughenden Ringing Group, continuing their work at this site, had a total of 600 birds processed, involving 418 first-time adults, and 182 retraps/recoveries.

Top five birds were:-

CHAFFINCH – 158

BRAMBLING – 78

REED WARBLER - 65

BLUE TIT – 62

GREENFINCH – 54

Other notable statistics include no less than 46 Yellowhammers and Green Woodpecker. A female Chaffinch ringed here 16th Mar 2002 was found precisely 2 years later (16 Mar 2004) in Newark, Notts having died colliding with a fence, (189 km, 731 days).

EAST BERKSHIRE

Runnymede Ringing Group continued their work at several sites in Berkshire and surrounding areas, amassing a record total of 8866 new birds of 62 species.

At **Site 1**, a wetland site, 501 new birds were processed, comprising 29 species, the most numerous species being:-

REED WARBLER – 156

BLUE TIT – 55

BLACKCAP – 52

SEDGE WARBLER - 42

GREAT TIT – 27

ROBIN – 27

Interesting captures included a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and no less than 5 Kingfishers. A pair of Black Swans produced 3 young at this location.

At **Site 2**, 1905 new birds of 35 species were ringed, and there were 714 re-traps. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker again was included, plus a Redstart and a Firecrest. The highest number of any one species by far was 1000 Blue Tit pulli, plus a further 824 adults and re-traps of the same species. Totals of other species included:-

GREAT TIT – 163

ROBIN – 79

CHAFFINCH – 63

BLACKBIRD – 49

BLACKCAP – 46

GOLDCREST – 46

Site 3 was worked on just 33 occasions, resulting in 207 birds processed, the majority being Blue Tit (44), Great Tit (39), Goldcrest (29) and Long-tailed Tit (25). A new species for the site came in the form of a Mandarin Duck whilst a highlight was the ringing of a Dartford Warbler.

At **Site 4**, another regular wetland site, 2816 new birds were ringed, covering 34 species, a large increase of effort compared to previous years. The most numerous species here were:-

CHIFFCHAFF – 700 (441 in Sep)

BLACKCAP – 580 (415 in Sep)

WHITETHROAT – 221 (48 in Sep)

WILLOW WARBLER – 133 (mostly in Jun to Aug)

ROBIN – 102

There were no less than 80 Meadow Pipits, 85 Garden Warblers, 38 Bullfinch and 36 Reed Buntings. Other highlights included 5 Kingfisher and 2 Grasshopper Warblers. There was a total of 13 recoveries during the season, including a Blackcap ringed in Swindon in August, controlled here 25 days later whilst a Meadow Pipit ringed on North Ronaldsay in August was caught here 34 days later.

Of birds processed at this site in previous years, a Song Thrush ringed Sep 2002 was found freshly dead in Luneburg, Germany Apr 2004, whilst 3 Chiffchaffs ringed in Sep 2003 were found this year at Holme, Norfolk (Apr), Isle of Grain Kent (May) and Languard Point (May).

A review of longevity records for the RRG areas resulted in a Canada Goose of 13y 350d, A Great Spotted Woodpecker of 6y 106d, A Dunnock 7y 155d and a Reed Warbler of 9y 307d.

At this location, Joanne Nicholson continued a study already lasting 9 years to establish whether Sedge Warblers learn their complex songs from genetic and father/son relationship, or by learning and copying songs of immediate neighbours in the chosen territory. The evidence so far is that young males are more influenced by song elements of adjacent males than by the songs of their father, and that a complex sharing of syllables develops in the first few days of males establishing adjacent territories.

Since 1977, the Runnymede group has processed over 128,000 individual birds of 113 species, accumulating a huge amount of data and information on the movements and trends within our avian community.

HOSEHILL LAKE – THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

By Cath McEwan, Secretary, TABCG

“I can remember this when it was a field and the farm cow grazed in here. It supplied all the houses with milk”. So said a generous benefactor to Hosehill Lake LNR and the Theale Area Bird Conservation Group (TABCG) as we were walking round looking for a site for a memorial bench to her late husband. They had moved to avoid the disruption of the gravel extraction, which created the lake.

Today Hosehill Lake is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) owned by West Berkshire Council and focus for much of the practical conservation work carried out by TABCG, which was formed in 1988. Gravel extraction at Hosehill stopped in the early 1980s and the site was left for “public use” which was never defined. It was designated as a LNR in

1997, following a sustained programme of recording by TABCG members. This started with the bird records, and work was done on plants, butterflies, moths, dragonflies and grasshoppers. More recently spiders, amphibians and water beetles have been added to the species lists.

The site has a variety of habitats: the lake, reed beds, meadow, woodland, and scrub, which means 168 species of birds have been recorded. Home to many, particularly waterfowl such as Coot, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Gadwall, Canada and Egyptian Goose, it has also hosted its share of rarities. Over the years, with the support of West Berkshire Countryside Department staff, BTCV Volunteers, as well as the hard work of many TABCG members these habitats have been created and improved.

In the early days the site contained waterfowl and waders and very little in the way of reedbed. In the early 1990's with the assistance of BTCV volunteers, the artificial island was created by sinking telegraph poles into the lake, piling old tyres over them, adding a topping of rubble, then old conveyer belt, topped with a dressing of gravel. Rafts made from polystyrene blocks, telegraph poles and garage doors topped with gravel were also built, designed to provide nesting sites for Terns. In recent years both the Island and the Rafts have been taken over by Black-headed Gulls. These are apparently less common as nesters inland than the Common Terns, but most people would prefer to see the Terns! The Cormorants also like to rest there, although a recent addition of a "perch" away from the island has encouraged them to move.

One of the first "improvements" was the provision of Nest boxes. These have been put up all round the site and are mainly used by Blue Tit and Great Tit, although Mice and Hornets also use some. The boxes have always been monitored for use and in 2007 a formal ringing programme was set up. Feeding stations have also been established, which allows close up views of Goldfinch, Marsh Tit, Reed Bunting and Greater Spotted Woodpecker, amongst others.

Much of the work at Hosehill was funded in 1997 when the last Local Government reorganisation took place, and the old Berkshire County Council had money to spend before it was disbanded.

A natural wet-spot was dug out with a bulldozer and a Pond created to benefit Dragonflies, as a food supply for Hobby. The resident Mute Swans also use it as a refuge when moulting, and Coots have nested in its margins. It is now also home to a healthy colony of Newts and a locally rare species of water bug *Berosus affinis*.

At the same time the margins of the main Lake were scooped out in crescent shapes and reed cuttings were planted. Unfortunately just after planting it turned into a long dry summer, and the Lake level plummeted. TABCG members would go down in the evenings and form a chain gang to get buckets of water from the Lake to water the cuttings. They survived and the reed beds they have grown into are now home to Sedge Warblers and Reed Warblers in summer, and provide shelter to Water Rail in winter. The past few winters have also seen a Bittern regularly using the site. Reed Buntings can be found almost all year round.

1997 also saw work begin on what became known as "The Great Wall of Theale" to those involved in its construction. It is today better known as 'The Sand Martin Bank'. It took 3 years of back breaking work to complete as all the bricks, breeze blocks and mortar had to be taken down the side of the bank in wheelbarrows. In 2001 it was home to 35 pairs of nesting birds and the following year it was up to 120.

Map of Hosehill Lake



Common Terns by D McEwan



Suddenly in 2004 the birds deserted it. Various theories were given but nobody has yet come up with an answer. Vegetation is going to be removed from the vicinity of the bank to see if this helps and ways of making it easier to get at the sand itself are being looked at.

In Summer Hosehill is also “home” to Nightingales. One particularly obliging bird sings during the day and often poses quite happily in the open. Hobby can be seen hawking over the water, as can House Martin and Swallow. Winter sees the arrival of Shoveler, Pochard, Wigeon, Teal and the occasional Ruddy Duck. Black-necked Grebes have also been recorded. Buzzards, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon are seen regularly throughout the year.

In the future it is hoped to have the Horse Paddocks, which were leased off by the council, brought back into the site, they hold Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush and flocks of Fieldfare and Redwing at certain times of year. The East Meadow is being more actively managed and has been fenced off to allow grazing to get rid of the encroaching soft rush and dominant grass species. This will allow more flowers to flourish, without sacrificing the chance of seeing a Barn Owl at the right time of day.

The main island, which used to have up to 5 pairs of nesting Redshank, has, in spite of many hours of “scrub bashing”, become more heavily vegetated. The front strip is still kept clear and gravelled for waders. Consideration is now being given to ways of creating more of a Scrape in front of the island.

The reserve is being more heavily used as more people become aware of it, and recently offices have been built near to it. The biggest challenge is yet to come, as the Water Management proposals for the controversial Kennet Valley Park proposals would have a huge impact on the site. Whatever the future may hold the TABCG will continue to try and maintain as varied a patchwork of habitats as possible to benefit the birds and birdwatchers alike.

REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) AT THATCHAM MARSH CONSTANT EFFORT SITE

By Jan Legg (for Newbury Ringing Group)

Newbury Ringing Group has ringed birds at Thatcham Marsh since the 1960's. Ringing sites ranged all over the marsh both sides of the railway embankment. In the mid 1970's gravel extraction began first where Newbury Angling have fisheries, followed by Thatcham Angling's Fishery and finally, the Discovery Centre Lake. The waste tip next to the latter closed in the early 1980's and the adjacent sewage treatment works lost its settling and filter beds around the same time. With the opening up of the area to access these operations and as a consequence of intrusion by the ever increasing local populace, the group's operations retreated to the more remote and less accessible areas of reedbed and scrub.

Sessions took place in rotation with other sites around Newbury and were mostly confined to the reed bed bounded by the Moors Stream, the footpath across to Bulls Lock and north



Reed Warbler at Thatcham LNR by P James

of the railway embankment at the western end of the marsh. In the late 1980's the four members of the group decided that during summer months the site should be given priority over others, reflecting its importance locally. Regular (Structured) ringing began and in 1993 we joined the British Trust for Ornithology's Constant Effort Site (CES) scheme. The object of the scheme is to monitor bird population and productivity and eliminate as many variables as possible from the process. The season is from the last week in April through to the end of August and ringing takes place once in each ten day period (12 sessions) using standard lengths of mist net for a fixed time. As we all work this effectively limits sessions to three weekend days in each period. To date we have managed to achieve every session required (144 sessions). The "standard nets" consist of a 660' of net in one line along a ride between the reed bed and the Moors stream. The nets are up by 06:00 hours and we stop at 10:00 hours. This gives the birds time to feed, before we interrupt their day. Additional nets are sometimes erected in the nearby scrub depending on how many ringers are present. These do not count towards the basic CES.

Our operations are dominated by three species in order of capture size. They are Reed, Sedge and Cetti's Warbler. Many other species are captured but not in sufficient regular number for meaningful analysis.

This note considers Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*): The first birds arrive the last week in April with the main arrival mid-May sometimes slipping well into June depending on the weather along the migration route. Males arrive first followed by females and breeding begins immediately. Their stay can be broken down broadly into 2 week periods: arrival, pairing and nest building; laying and brooding; hatching and feeding; fledging and feeding. Once the fledglings have become independent the adults leave for Africa. In a good year this means a stay of eight to ten weeks. Most adults leave in July. Some juveniles linger a bit longer but soon begin to follow the adults. We continue to capture birds into September but these are thought to be migrants moving through the site on their way south plus the odd late brood probably as a result of an early season failure. Males and females are sexed by checking for signs of breeding activity. The number of females present is considered to give a good indication of the strength of the colony; see Figure 1. This shows that the colony averages around 25 nests and probably about 40 for the reedbed. As can be seen males are usually more abundant than females. This may reflect that males are wider ranging during breeding and looking for opportunities also some will be unattached and maybe migrants though it is unlikely that migrants will be in breeding condition.

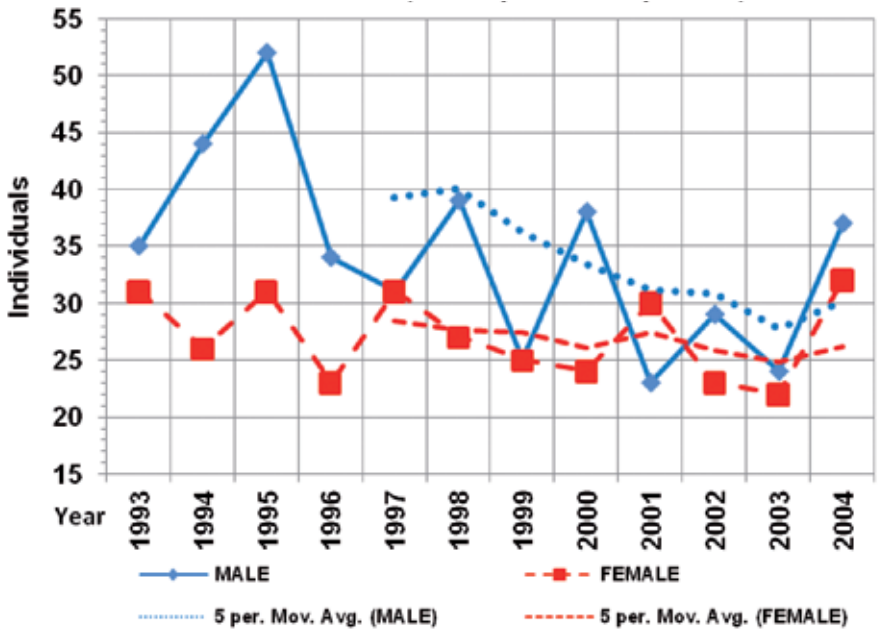


Figure 1

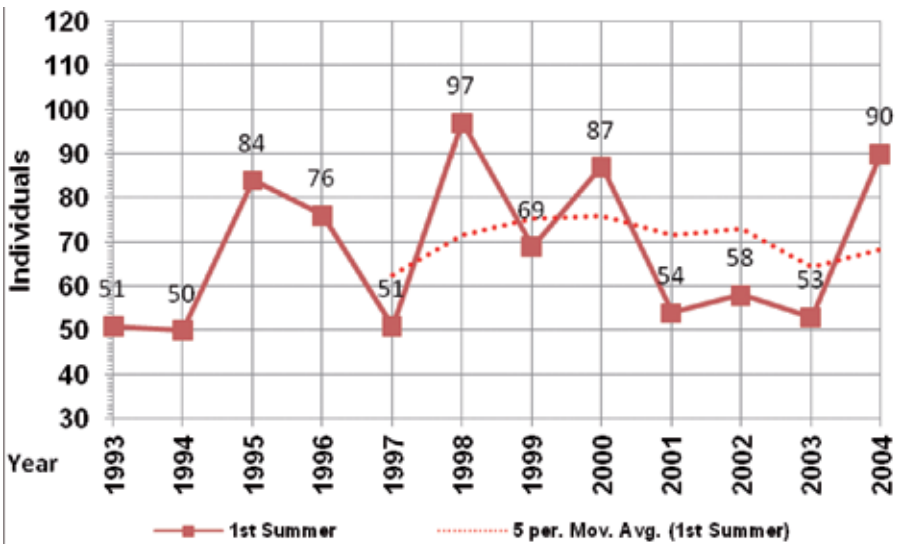


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows juvenile (1st summer) productivity and a 5 year moving average trend line. The numbers fledging each year vary considerably and this is mostly weather related particularly affecting the aphids that feed on phragmites (reed) and alder/willow scrub. These aphids are the main source of food for many species breeding on the marsh. In recent years heavy spring/early summer rain has washed aphids from foliage and we believe this affects productivity; 2004 however is one of our better years. A comparison with the male line in Figure 1 shows that peaks in fledgling numbers correlates with peak male numbers. It is difficult to say why this is except that perhaps more male activity may increase fertility.

Where do Thatcham’s Reed Warblers migrate to? Our recoveries of ringed birds show that they leave the country on a front from Dorset (Portland Bill) to Kent. Birds have been retrapped at Iklesham West Sussex just a day or so after being ringed at Thatcham. From here they appear to move down the Atlantic coast of France, Spain and Portugal probably stopping off to replenish reserves. Normal weight is between 10 and 11 grams. Just prior to migration they put on fat rapidly and when fuelled up can weigh up to 24 grams. This is probably burnt off in one huge flight to the above destinations where they will fuel up again before flying to Africa; we have recoveries from Morocco, Mauritania and the furthest so far Ghana, 3000+ miles. It is probable that Thatcham birds winter in West Africa but the species is known to winter further south down to East Africa. We have many records of birds of 7 to 9 years old and the oldest is over 10 years old. With a direct round trip of over 6,000 miles some will have travelled well over 60,000 miles during their lifetime.

Returning birds arrive in the UK on broad front; we have recoveries from Norfolk round to Devon.

Below is an extract from a table that shows birds returning each year for 1993 to 2004.

	Ringed	Returning from previous years									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2004	236	16	7	4	1	1	1	1	-	-	-
2003	123	14	1	4	1	3	1	-	-	-	-
2002	142	9	2	1	5	2	-	-	1	-	-
2001	112	11	3	7	1	2	1	1	-	-	-
2000	172	14	11	6	1	1	1	-	-	1	-
1999	177	15	9	3	6	1	1	-	1	-	-
1998	187	15	10	6	3	1	-	-	1	-	-
1997	138	10	11	5	4	1	1	1	-	-	-
1996	174	16	9	2	-	2	1	1	1	-	-
1995	185	21	7	3	8	2	2	1	-	-	-
1994	147	13	8	5	3	3	2	-	1	-	-
1993	114	12	9	8	3	2	1	1	1	-	-

On average about 9% of birds ringed in the previous year return the next year. This may seem low but to put it in context small passerine retraps are less than 3% of those ringed and for warblers and other long distance migrants it is much lower. Destinations of birds that stop off at Thatcham on migration include: South Yorkshire, Norfolk and mostly the south Midlands.

Finally, it is amazing that such a small being can travel thousands of miles each year from another continent braving the elements and arrive not just in the UK or Southern England or Berkshire but in the same few square metres of reed bed year in year out. Do they winter in the same few square metres somewhere in Africa each year? Probably according to the BTO’s Migration Atlas.



Black Tern – Lower Farm GP (August) by Mike McKee



Sanderling – QMR (August) by Mike McKee



Little Stint – Pingewood GPs (September) by Marek Walford



Bean Geese – Coldharbour (December) by Marek Walford

REPORT FOR 2004 BY THE BERKSHIRE RECORDS COMMITTEE

By Derek Barker

The committee continues to consist of Chris Heard, County Recorder and Chairman, Ken Moore, Peter Standley and as secretary to the committee, Derek Barker.

All records which have accompanying descriptions are examined by the BRC. However, every year, a substantial number of records are received without supportive notes. Where the bird has been seen by a number of observers, the BRC may accept the record without a descriptive note. But the BRC has no option but to omit records from the report which were seen by a single or only a small number of observers until a description is provided on which the record can be assessed.

Species for which notes or descriptions are required fall into 3 categories:

(Cat 1) Nationally rare species for which records first have to be accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee.

(Cat 2) Locally rare species for which a full description is required.

(Cat 3) Locally scarce species (or commoner species seen at an unusual time of year or in exceptional circumstances) for which short supporting notes are required.

The species in categories 2 and 3 are as follows:

Category 2

Bean Goose; Pink-footed Goose; American Wigeon; **Green-winged Teal**; **Ring-necked Duck**; **Ferruginous Duck** (2006 onward); Velvet Scoter; Fulmar; **Manx Shearwater**; Storm Petrel; **Night Heron**; Purple Heron; White Stork; Spoonbill; Honey Buzzard; **Black Kite** (2006 onward); Goshawk; Rough legged Buzzard; **Red-footed Falcon** (2006 onward); Spotted Crake; Crane; Kentish Plover; Dotterel; Pectoral Sandpiper; Purple Sandpiper; Red-necked Phalarope; Grey Phalarope, Pomarine Skua; Arctic Skua; Long-tailed Skua; Great Skua; Sabines Gull; Ring-billed Gull; Caspian Gull; Iceland Gull; **Glaucous Gull**; **White-winged Black Tern** (2006 onward); Roseate Tern; **Guillemot**; **Razorbill**; **Little Auk**; **Puffin**; **Alpine Swift** (2006 onward); **Short-toed Lark**; Shore Lark; **Red-rumped Swallow** (2006 onward); Richards Pipit; Tawny Pipit; **Red-throated Pipit** (2006 onward); Bluethroat; Aquatic Warbler; Marsh Warbler; Icterine Warbler; Melodious Warbler; Yellow-browed Warbler; Golden Oriole; Woodchat Shrike; **Hooded Crow**; **Rose-coloured Starling**; Serin; Twite; Common Rosefinch; Lapland Bunting; **Cirl Bunting**; Ortolan Bunting; Little Bunting; all rare subspecies (eg Scandinavian Rock Pipit, Siberian Chiffchaff) and all non-BB Rarity species (Cat 1) not currently on the Berkshire List.

Category 3

Bewick's Swan; Whooper Swan (unless feral); White-fronted Goose; Brent Goose; **Barnacle Goose** (unless feral); **Garganey**; Scaup; Eider; Long-tailed Duck; Common Scoter; **Red-breasted Merganser**; **Quail**; Red-throated Diver; Black-throated Diver; Great Northern Diver; Red-necked Grebe; Slavonian Grebe; Black-necked Grebe; Leach's Storm Petrel; Gannet; **Shag**; **Bittern**; Marsh Harrier; Hen Harrier; Montagu's Harrier; Osprey; **Merlin**; **Avocet**; Knot; **Sanderling**; **Little Stint**; Temminck's Stint; Curlew Sandpiper; Black-tailed Godwit; Bar-tailed Godwit; Whimbrel; Spotted Redshank; **Wood Sandpiper**; Mediterranean Gull; **Little Gull**; **Yellow-legged Gull** (spring records); **Kittiwake**; **Little Tern**; **Sandwich Tern**; **Arctic Tern**; Long-eared Owl; Hoopoe; Lesser spotted Woodpecker

(where i.d. based on drumming only); Wryneck; **Woodlark** (away from usual habitat); **Rock Pipit**; Water Pipit; **White Wagtail** (autumn records); Waxwing; Dipper; Black Redstart; Ring Ouzel; Wood Warbler; Firecrest (away from E Berks); Pied Flycatcher; Bearded Tit; **Willow Tit** (in mid and east Berks); Red-backed Shrike; Great Grey Shrike; Raven; Tree Sparrow; **Hawfinch**; Snow Bunting.

This updated list includes several species that have been added to Category 2 or 3 due to the species change of status within the county or because of recent evidence showing that some observers have had problems with the identification. All such species are shown in bold print, as well as species that were until recently British Bird Rarities (Cat 1) and have subsequently been added to Category 2.

Species moved from Category 1 to 2 which may not have featured in any recent list:	Species reinstated or new to Cat 3
Green-winged Teal Ring-necked Duck Ferruginous Duck Night Heron Black Kite Red-footed Falcon White-winged Black Tern Alpine Swift Short-toed Lark Red-rumped Swallow Red-throated Pipit Rose-coloured Starling	Berwick's Swan Barnacle Goose Garganey Common Scoter Red-breasted Merganser Shag Bittern Merlin Avocet Sanderling Little Stint Wood Sandpiper Little Gull Yellow-legged Gull Kittiwake Sandwich Tern Arctic Tern Lesser spotted Woodpecker (for drumming-only records) Woodlark Rock Pipit White Wagtail Willow Tit Hawfinch
Species reinstated to Cat 2	
Cirl Bunting Species promoted to Cat 2 from 3 Manx Shearwater Glaucous Gull All Auks Hooded Crow	
Species removed from the list	
Little Egret – no longer a rarity Red Kite – no longer a rarity Peregrine – no longer a rarity Buff-breasted Sandpiper – not on Berks list Bee-eater – not on Berks list	

REVIEW OF 2004 RECORDS

This report on the outcome of the BRC's consideration of rare or unusual Berkshire records for 2004 follows the same pattern as in 2003. Records that the BRC has not been able to accept are listed below. An asterisk (*) indicates no details were received by the BRC and where a species has not been accepted because of an unusually early or late date this is indicated by "(date)". Unacceptable high counts are indicated by "(count)".

Bewick's Swan	2 Wraysbury Pond in Sep/Oct*
Pink-footed Goose	3 Jubilee River 12/2; 3 Cockmarsh 15/2*; 3 A4 Maidenhead Thicket 17/2*
Brent Goose	Eversley GPs 26/12*
Garganey	Horton GPs 1/9*; 10 Wraysbury GPs 1/9*(count); 3 Wraysbury GPs 1/9 –1/10* (count)
Red-crested Pochard	10 Datchet Common Lake 1/11 (count)
Scaup	Theale Main GP 9/2*
Eider	Pingewood GPs 14/3*
Long-tailed Duck	Woolhampton GPs 12/11
Smew	7 Wraysbury GPs Nov* (count); 53 Wraysbury GPs Dec* (count)
Red-breasted Merganser	2 Eversley GPs 2/2*; 2 Eversley GPs 18/2
Black-necked Grebe	2 Theale Main GP 30/3*; Wraysbury GPs 5/11 (probable, not confirmed)
Shag	Moatlands GP 15/3*; Jubilee River 2/4*
Bittern	Eversley GPs 3/12*
Booted Eagle	Wokingham 7/8*
Honey Buzzard	Streatley 13/5*; Cookham Rise 28/8; Widbrook Common 28/8;
Black Kite	Wash Common 3/8 (not submitted to BBRC)
Hen Harrier	Combe 7/2*; Inkpen Hill 24/11
Montagu's Harrier	Caversham 4/9*
Goshawk	Cookham Rise 29/2; Denford Park 4/5*; Brightwalton 23/5; Caversham 3/10*
Rough-legged Buzzard	Brimpton 13-18/2; Walbury Hill 6/3*
Osprey	Muddy Lane GP Thatcham 1/3*(date); Tilehurst 3/6* (date)
Merlin	Wickham 22/2*; Binfield 26/10 and 17/11; Tilehurst 1/1*
Little Stint	Lower Fm GP 26/9*
Wood Sandpiper	Dorney Wetlands 29/6*(date); Eversley GPs 2/7 *(date)
Mediterranean Gull	Dinton Pastures CP 18/1*; Moatlands GP 12/12*
Caspian Gull	Bray GPs 28/1 (withdrawn by observer); Moatlands GP 17/2; 8 records from Eversley GPs 13/3 to 20/3 with 7 on 17/3* (count); Hurst 21/11*; Burghfield GP 22/11; Pingewood GP 30/12 and Smallmead Fm GP 30/12
Glaucous Gull	Lower Farm GP 17/2*
Sandwich Tern	2 Lower Farm GP 14/3* (date); 2 Muddy Lane GP 15/3 *(date)
Common Tern	Bray GPs 1/4 ; Summerleaze GP 1/4
Little Tern	Theale GPs 18/6*
Cuckoo	Finchampstead 13-14/2* (date)
Barn Owl	212 Bradfield 9/10
Short-eared Owl	1 heard along K&A Canal at 2300hrs 19/11*
Nightjar	Eversley GPs 1/5* (date)
House Martin	Theale Main GP 1/11; 2 Bray GPs 7/2* (date); 10 Lower Farm GP 24/3* (date)
Tree Pipit	Walbury Hill, 2 on 17/4 and 1 18/7*
Waxwing	50 Theale 8/12*
Reed Warbler	Lower Farm GP 7/11* (date)
Yellow-browed Warbler	Theale 18/6* (date)
Spotted Flycatcher	Dinton Pastures CP 19/4* (date)
Willow Tit	2 Binfield 2/12*
Raven	Burghfield GPs 16/5*; M4 Yattendon 28/8*; Combe 5/9, 10/10, 12/12*
Brambling	300 "Berkshire Downs" 1/2 (count)
Mealy Redpoll	2 Brimpton GP 14/2*
Crossbill	Newbury 3/2*; Moatlands GP 17/3*;