

The Birds of Berkshire



Annual Report
2010

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Berkshire Ornithological Club

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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
- 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.
- Exclusive access to the pre-eminent site Queen Mother Reservoir (subject to permit)
- Conservation involvement in important local habitats and species. BOC members are involved in practical conservation work with groups such as Friends of Lavell's Lake, Theale Area Bird Conservation Group and Moor Green Lakes Group.
- Opportunities to participate in survey work to help understand birds better. The surveys include supporting the BTO in its work and the new Berkshire 2007–11 County Atlas and avifauna.
- The Club runs the Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund to support local bird conservation projects.

This 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 informative and fully illustrated County Atlas and Avifauna, The Birds of Berkshire, published in 2013, can be purchased at www.berkshirebirdatlas.org.uk, price £35, and is available to members at meetings at the discounted price of £30.

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

Mike Turton, 7 Fawcett Crescent, Reading, RG5 3HX
telephone 0118 969 4197;
e-mail berksocsecretary@gmail.com

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Annual Report for 2010

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Edited by Derek Barker, Chris Heard and Renton Righelato

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Introduction

This year the systematic list was written single-handedly by Derek Barker, who has also produced the excellent 2005 and 2008 reports and we are delighted that Derek has taken on the role of Editor for future reports. To economise on printing costs, this report is being published in tandem with that for 2009, a process that we intend to repeat with 2011 and 2012 later this year.

Although the great majority of observers submit records on line during the year, we are still receiving a minority a year or two after the year end. The county database of bird records is the source of information for research, for advising conservation organisations and planning authorities and for preparing these annual reports. Please help us maintain a database that is complete and up to date by submitting records promptly, preferably on line at www.berksbirds.co.uk or as excel or .csv files to records@berksoc.org.uk. See below for submission guidelines. As a result of late acquisition of data, there is a large number of records missing from the 2006/7 report. These, together with some corrections, have been published as a sheet for insertion into the report.

2010 was one of the survey years for the national and county atlas (2007–2011). As a result a great many more records on the commoner species were available than is normally the case. This is best viewed in the new edition of *The Birds of Berkshire* or at <http://berkshirebirdatlas.org.uk>.

We are again including a summary of records of dragonflies and damselflies as many bird-watchers' interests extend to the Odonata. We would like to invite readers to submit similar county summaries of records for other taxa, *e.g.* butterflies and moths, bats etc.

Acknowledgements

The preparation of the County bird report relies on the voluntary efforts of many people for data collection, species account writing, preparing articles, providing photographs, editing and, critically, the observers who put in their records. At the end of this report is a list of the observers whose records contribute to the reports. We hope the list is accurate: please let us know of any errors or omissions, for which we apologise.

We are particularly grateful to Derek Barker for preparing the systematic list and to the County Recorder, Chris Heard, chair of the Berkshire Records Committee, for the review of records. Our thanks also go to Tim Ball, Mike Turton and Renton Righelato who provided articles and to the photographers who generously provided their excellent shots. Thanks also to Robert Gillmor for his cover picture of Oystercatchers, which bred for the first time in Berkshire in 2010.

Renton Righelato

Editorial Board: Tim Ball, Derek Barker, Chris Heard,
Ken Moore, Renton Rghelato (Chair), Marek Walford.

Submitting records

Sending your records promptly and electronically will enable the County database to be kept complete and up to date. To facilitate review and report preparation, records may be sent throughout the year and anyway should be filed within three months of a year end. If you are unable to send your records electronically, we may be able to help: please contact Renton Righelato¹.

Records can be entered on line at www.berksbirds.co.uk or sent by email to records@berksoc.org.uk as an excel file or as a CSV file. Excel files should have the following eight columns in this order:

Species, Site, Grid reference, Arrival date, Departure date, Number, Notes, Observer, Breeding status.

Species: Required. If possible please use the species name from BWP. Please not use plurals. i.e. do not enter “Siskins” or “Canada Geese”, but “Siskin” or “Canada Goose”.

Site: Required. If possible please use the **BBB abbreviations**. Please enter the site as the nearest landmark on an OS map and if necessary quantify this with a grid reference in the “Grid reference” field. Sites such as “my garden”, “River Thames”, “3 miles east of Reading” or “by the A33” are examples of inappropriate site names.

Grid reference: Optional. Four or six figure grid ref. The prefix, either “SU” or “TQ” should be included and there should be no spaces between characters. Grid references are only required for less well-known sites, or to give a very precise location within a large site.

Arrival date: Required. In the format “dd/mm/yyyy” i.e. “01/01/2005”. For records that refer to more than one day enter the first date in this field and the last date in the “Departure date” field.

Departure date: Optional. In the format “dd/mm/yyyy” i.e. “01/01/2005”.

Number: Required. Whole number only. i.e. the following are not valid: “c10”, “10+”, “1–2”, “many”. Enter any quantifying information in the notes field.

Notes: Optional. Use the notes field to enter information on age, sex, behaviour, breeding details etc. Any reference to other species made in this field will not be recorded for that species – please make a separate entry for each species.

Breeding Status: Optional. Please use the BTO breeding evidence codes: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas/methods/breeding-evidence>.

Observer: Required. Please enter your full name and include your middle names if you have any.

CSV files should use the same eight fields separated by commas (whether or not they contain data) and note that any field containing a comma should be enclosed in double quotes. Thus, for example: Siskin,”Searles Lane, Burghfield”,03/02/2001,,100,,,MJT

Confidentiality: Confidential records should be sent separately but in the same format, and noted as confidential in the covering email. The locations of records for rare breeding species will, in any case, be held in confidence.

Species requiring a description: Records of rarer species will be reviewed by the Berkshire records Committee and may require a description or additional notes – please see the BRC report page 26.

¹Renton Righelato tel 0787 981 2564, email renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk

THE EFFECT OF THE HARD WINTERS OF 2008/9 AND 2009/10 ON BERKSHIRE'S STONECHAT POPULATIONS

Renton Righelato

The Stonechat *Torquata saxicola* is a scarce summer visitor to Berkshire and a passage migrant or winter visitor in larger numbers. It is typically found breeding on areas of heathland, but also occurs on commons and wasteland, particularly where Gorse *Ulex europaeus* is present, and in young coniferous plantations. On passage and in winter it also occurs at gravel pits, sewage farms and on farmland. Nationally the breeding population, which is sensitive to hard winter weather, fell through the latter half of the 20th century then grew 2–3 fold from 1994 to 2007, with a series of warm winters, but has since fallen dramatically (BTO Birdtrends). The 2007–11 Atlas surveys covered a period in which a twenty year period of predominantly warm winters to 2007/8 was followed by two hard winters in 2008/9 and 2009/10. Here I use the abundance surveys of the 2007–11 Atlas to examine the effects of winter weather on the wintering and subsequent breeding populations of Stonechats in Berkshire.

Methodology

Stonechat abundance was estimated from the counts in two-hour timed visits to each tetrad (2 km × 2 km square) in Berkshire. Although the tetrad is a fairly coarse spatial resolution, the consistency of methodology across the county and from year to year, provides a useful basis for comparative analyses between seasons. Each tetrad was surveyed in one winter and in one summer and a more or less random sample of the county's 394 tetrads were surveyed each year. Surveyors were asked to visit the main habitats in each tetrad and count all birds seen (except young). Whilst it is not possible in the time allocated to count all birds in the tetrad, the counts obtained are considered a reasonable basis for measuring the abundance of a species in a tetrad relative to that in other tetrads. As the number of tetrads surveyed varied from year to year, the abundance for Berkshire or regions of it was estimated by scaling up the counts for each period according to the proportion of surveyed tetrads to all tetrads and expressing the figure as a proportion of the peak estimate for Berkshire of 102 in November/December 2007 (Table 1). It should be noted that the area covered by the surveys, which includes the whole of border tetrads however much of Berkshire they contain, was 1,576 km², 25% greater than the area within the county border. Stonechats are reasonably prominent, particularly in the breeding season, and it is likely that a fairly high proportion of the birds in a tetrad were counted; if so, the relative abundance figure can be regarded as a minimum estimate of the number of birds present.

To test for bias in the tetrad selection between years in the amount of preferred Stonechat habitat, the area of heath in each tetrad was recorded, using the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre's habitat data. 39 tetrads in Berkshire contain areas of heath, 95% of which is in the south and east Berkshire region as defined in Table 2. Snelsmore Common, which accounts for almost all of the remainder of the heath, lies in two tetrads just outside the region. Although there was little difference in the habitat surveyed in the first two years, proportionately more heath-containing tetrads were surveyed in the last of the years, leading to a possible overestimate of abundance in that year.

Table 1 Winter abundance of Stonechats in Berkshire

	South & east Berkshire (178 tetrads) ¹					Berkshire (394 tetrads)			
	Total Stonechats recorded	Tetrads occupied	Tetrads surveyed	Tetrads surveyed with heath	Relative abundance estimate ²	Total Stonechats recorded	Tetrads occupied	Tetrads surveyed	Relative abundance estimate ²
Nov/Dec 2007	13	8	82	16 (20%)	27	50	27	194	100
Jan/Feb 2008	16	9	82	16 (20%)	34	40	23	195	79
Nov/Dec 2008	6	1	59	12 (20%)	12	28	8	109	99
Jan/Feb 2009	1	1	57	12 (21%)	3	11 ³	6	104	41
Nov/Dec 2009	3	1	31	10 (32%)	17	14	9	73	74
Jan/Feb 2010	2	1	31	10 (32%)	11	3 ⁴	2	75	16

¹ The survey area covered 178 tetrads containing any part of Berkshire in the 10km squares SU26, 35, 36, 46, 56, 66, 76, 85, 86, 96, 97 and T007.

² abundance relative to Nov/Dec 2007

³ Students t-test between early and late winter counts $p = 0.03$; ⁴ $p = 0.004$.

Wintering Stonechats

Although in the breeding season almost all Stonechats in Berkshire are to be found on the heaths in the south and east of the county, the majority of the wintering population is found in the north and west, notably on the Downs. As well as analyzing the county as a whole, the south and east region is analysed separately in Table 1.

In the early winter of 2007/8, 194 tetrads (49%) were surveyed and 50 birds counted, from which an abundance measure for Berkshire of 102 was extrapolated. The abundance measured in surveys in the second half of the winter was lower at 81 (Table 1), though the fall was not statistically significant. For comparison, the totals recorded in the 2007 and 2008 Annual Reports for November to February ranged from 70 - 96 birds. The 2007/8 winter was relatively mild, with temperatures continuing the warming trend that characterised the preceding 25 years (Righelato, 2013).

The following winter began with similar numbers of Stonechats, but the weather became unusually cold, with prolonged snow cover and Stonechat numbers in the late winter surveys had fallen by 60% (Table 1, Figure 2). The weather in the 2009/10 winter was similarly cold and the Stonechat abundance fell by 80% between the early and late winter surveys. The differences between early and late winter counts were statistically significant and thus it appears that either Stonechats suffered heavy attrition during the cold winters or they moved outside Berkshire.

Breeding season

The 2008–11 Atlas breeding surveys showed that, with the exception of a single record in tetrad SU37L, north-west of Newbury, Stonechats were confirmed to have bred only in the south and east of the county, where confirmed or probable breeding was recorded in 18 tetrads (Bucknell *et al.*, 2013). During the spring (April and May) timed surveys, they were

Figure 1: Days of air frost.

Met Office, Heathrow data. The number of freezing days in the 2007/8 winter (19) was close to the average of the preceding decade. The 2008/9 and 2009/10 winters recorded more days of air frost (36 and 35 days) than all but one of the preceding ten years.

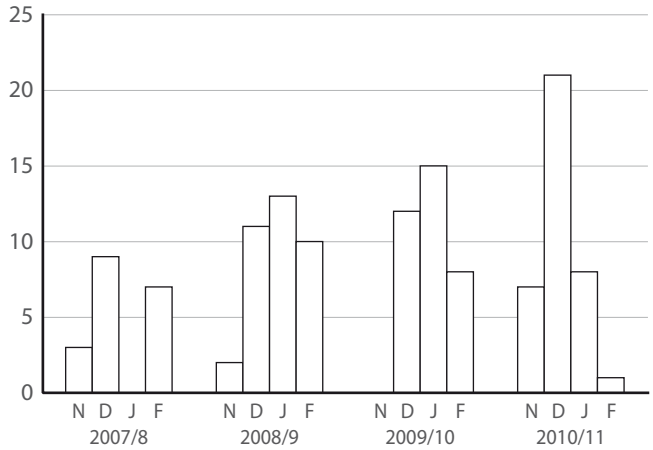
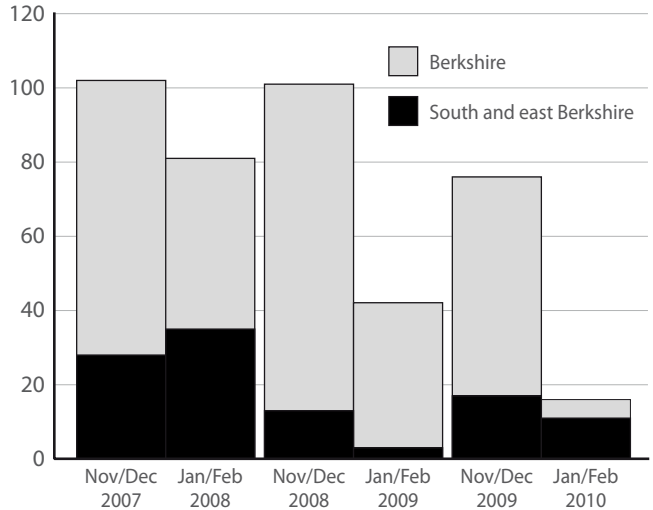


Figure 2: Wintering Stonechat abundance.

Dark – south and east Berkshire; pale – north and west Berkshire. Data from table 1. Whilst the mild 2007/8 winter had little effect on Stonechat abundance, significant losses occurred during the subsequent cold winters.



only recorded in the south and east. Although not observed in the timed surveys, one pair was observed in the 2009 and 2010 breeding seasons on Bury Down. Although there were records elsewhere in the surveys in July, these probably relate to post-breeding dispersal.

The adult Stonechat abundance for April and May 2008, 51 (Table 2), was approximately twice the winter figure (Table 1) for the south and east of the county, indicating an influx of breeding birds. The Annual Report for 2008 suggests somewhat higher numbers: 39 territories in south and east Berkshire, implying around 80 adult birds. An analysis of the timed survey records suggests that they may have underestimated numbers in the more densely populated areas.

In the breeding season following the hard winter of 2008/9, the abundance of Stonechats fell by approximately 80% (Table 2, Figure 3). Whilst this decrease is highly significant statistically, subsequently, the numbers of Stonechats recorded were too low to ascribe significance to further changes. Data in the annual reports for 2009 suggest a decline of approximately 60% in the number of pairs between 2008 and 2009 with little further change in 2010.

Figure 3: Breeding season Stonechat abundance in the south and east Berkshire region. Data from table 2 are from surveys in April and May. Following the cold 2008/9 winter the abundance of Stonechats fell approximately 80%.

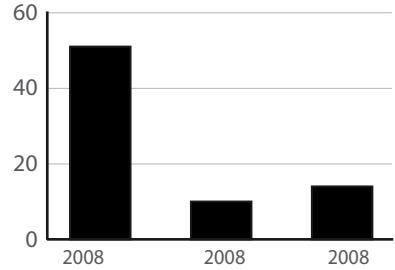


Table 2: Spring abundance of Stonechats in south and east Berkshire.

	Total Stonechats recorded	Tetrads occupied	Tetrads surveyed	Tetrads surveyed with heath	Relative abundance estimate ¹
Apr/May 2008	21	9	74	12 (16%)	50
Apr/May 2009	3 ²	3	53	10 (19%)	10
Apr/May 2010	3	2	39	11 (28%)	14

¹ abundance relative to Nov/Dec 2007 ²Students T test between 2008 and 2009 counts p = 0.008.

Discussion and conclusions

Stonechats are clearly vulnerable to moderately hard winters of an intensity (measured by days of air frost) that has occurred on six occasions during the last twenty years. The majority of wintering Stonechats in Berkshire are found in the north of the county, mostly on downland. The origin of these birds is not known. Ringing data suggest that they are likely to have come from more northerly sites in Britain or be of local origin (Wernham *et al.*, 2002). In the mild 2007/8 winter the Berkshire population was stable over the November to February period. During the two succeeding hard winters, the population fell by 60–80% between the November/December and January/February periods.

Almost all of the Stonechats breeding in Berkshire are found on the in the south and east of the county. The wintering grounds of these birds are not known. Whilst some British breeding birds remain on territories all year, others migrate, usually to southern Iberia (Wernham *et al.*, 2002). Following the hard winter of 2008/9, the breeding population in Berkshire fell by 60–80%. Interestingly, there is no evidence of further attrition after the second successive hard winter of 2009/10.

The methodology applied here, of using atlas abundance surveys to explore a time sequence across the survey window, in this case 2007–11, may be applicable to other species that may be affected by weather or other conditions that vary on an annual scale.

References

Bucknell, N.B., Clews, B.C., Righelato, R.C. and Robinson, C. 2013. *The Birds of Berkshire*, 2nd edition. Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group, Reading, UK.

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Wernham, C., Toms, M., Marchant, J., Clark, J., Siriwardena, G. and Baillie (eds). 2002. *The Migration Atlas*. Poyser, London.

BLACKCAPS IN A SUBURBAN GARDEN

Tim Ball, Reading and Basingstoke Ringing

Introduction

I started ringing in my garden in Kidmore Road, Caversham Heights, in November 2007 and since then I have ringed 71 Blackcaps and re-trapped 5 of them. This seems to be a fairly high number of different birds and the records illustrate several interesting features which are worth investigating and also illustrate how important a suburban garden can be for migrant warblers.

The garden is situated close to the northern edge of Caversham Heights and the Berkshire/Oxfordshire border. The garden itself is about 45 m long by 7 m wide and all the gardens on our side of the road our similar in length. Our garden is mature with lawns and well established trees and bushes and many of our neighbours' gardens in Kidmore Road are similar and these form a green corridor which extends from the open countryside of the Chilterns down into the built up area of Caversham and Reading. The size of the local breeding population isn't known but is unlikely to be large – I haven't heard singing Blackcaps in this area very often and suitable breeding habitat within half a kilometre of my garden is limited so there are almost certainly a lot less than 10 pairs breeding within this area.

Ringing Methods

Birds have been caught using standard ringing mist nets and between one and three nets 3 m and 6 m long and 2.5 m high are used in a session. Typically ringing has been done for up to one or two morning sessions a week in most weeks of the year except late April until late May. The spring break is because the net sites are close to nest boxes which are used in most years. Birds are fed more or less throughout the year with sunflower and mixed seed and since the winter of 2008/09 fat balls and nyjer seed have been provided. Sound lures, ie playback of songs and/or calls, are not used to increase Blackcap captures.

Numbers caught

There are a number of ways of looking at the pattern of when birds have been caught these are presented separately here and then discussed in more detail below. Very few birds have been re-trapped and these are discussed where relevant below.

Annual Distribution

Table 1: Annual totals of new birds ringed 2006 and January to March 2013

2006*	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*	Total
4	2	5	9	20	8	19	4	71

* Ringing only took place in November and December 2006 and January to March 2013

Methods were reasonably consistent for the years 2009 to 2012 and these four years clearly demonstrate the variation between years.

Monthly Distribution

Table 2: Monthly totals of birds ringed and re-trapped

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Ringed	16	6	6	2	0	1	6	7	3	2	9	13	71
Re-trapped	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5

As noted above very little if any mist netting is carried out here in May and so no real conclusions can be drawn from the total lack of Blackcaps in this month, however a lot of ringing is done in June so the fact that only 1 Blackcap has been ringed in 6 years in June is probably highly significant and could be due to very low numbers breeding close to the site.

Seasonal Distribution

For the purposes of this study the year has been split rather arbitrarily into 3 “seasons”. Whole months have been used to define the seasons as the total numbers of Blackcaps caught are not high enough for rigorous statistical analysis and using boundaries between months to define the boundaries between seasons is actually reasonable in this case. The “seasons” used are:

Winter

November to March, spring migration can start during March but this seems to vary between years and possibly populations and our re-traps show that a significant proportion of birds caught in this month are wintering birds.

Spring/Summer

April to July, due to the lack of ringing in May and the low numbers caught in traditional summer months it is inappropriate to try and distinguish between Spring and Summer.

Autumn

August to October, the drop in numbers caught in September and October suggests that it would be inappropriate to include November in the Autumn migration period.

Table 3: Seasonal totals of new birds ringed

Winter Nov-Mar	Spring/Sum. Apr-Jul	Autumn Aug-Oct
2006/07	4	1
2007/08	1	0
2008/09	8	0
2009/10	14	4
2010/11	5	2
2011/12	9	2
2012/13	9	
Total	50	9

Age Distribution

Blackcaps in juvenile plumage or undergoing their first autumn moult are easy to age and it is generally possible to age most first year birds into the first month or two of their second year on the basis of a few un-moulted juvenile feathers. However this becomes progressively more difficult as the feathers wear and many second year birds are indistinguishable from adults so only two age classes have been used – juvenile/first winter and adult.

Table 4: Age of birds caught in each month *

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Juv/1st winter	9	5	6	0	0	1	6	7	3	1	3	8	49
Adult	6	1	3	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	6	5	23
Not aged	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
% Juv/1st win.	56	83	67	0	n/a	100	100	88	100	50	33	62	67

* Totals of different birds caught each month including re-traps if not previously caught in the same month – ie a bird ringed in March and re-trapped 2 days later in March is only counted once.

The age distribution through the autumn and winter raises some interesting questions. The vast majority of birds caught between July and September are juveniles and whilst they are still commoner than adults through the winter the proportion of juveniles/1st winters drops significantly. The reasons for this are probably complex. In the late summer and autumn we capture many more juvenile warblers than adults across all our sites. Across the months of July to October from 2007 until 2011 we have caught 1,197 warblers of all species across all our sites and the monthly proportion of juveniles birds across the years varies between 71% in July and 94% in September. In contrast to my garden there is a breeding population of warblers on most of our sites so some adults would be expected in all these months. It seems likely that juveniles disperse more during the autumn than adults and probably visit more places before properly setting off on migration. Adults are probably more focused and direct in their migration. During the winter juvenile Blackcaps still seem to outnumber adults, but because the monthly sample sizes are small no firm conclusions can be drawn however the very low proportion of juveniles in November may indicate that adults tend arrive on their wintering grounds earlier than juveniles. The January figures seem to be atypical but the February and March figures could also demonstrate that adults leave the wintering grounds before many of the 1st winters. Many studies have shown that adults survive the non-breeding seasons better than juveniles and first winters consequently the lower proportions of 1st winters during the winter are expected due to losses during autumn migration and winter.

Sex Distribution

Once Juvenile Blackcaps have undergone their first autumn moult they are easily sexed and males can be told as soon as they start getting black feathers on the crown.

Table 5: Sex of birds caught in each month *

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Unsexed juveniles	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	4	0	0	0	0	11
Male	9	4	5	1	0	0	0	2	2	2	5	10	39
Female	7	2	4	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	4	3	23

* Totals of different birds caught each month including re-traps if not previously caught in the same month – ie a bird ringed in March and re-trapped 2 days later in March is only counted once.

The predominance of males during the winter months is very noticeable and suggests that males could be leading the switch in central European wintering areas. Males tend to outnumber females in birdwatchers' reports of wintering Blackcaps in gardens but the study by Catry *et al.* 2006 found little or no segregation of the sexes in winter quarters. Four of the five birds which have been re-trapped in this study were females (see section 4 below) and although this is a very small sample it could imply that females are more sedentary than males in winter.

Recaptures of ringed birds

Only 5 birds ringed in the garden have been re-trapped here and all were in the winter months in the same winter:

V325375	1st winter male	ringed 22/11/2006	re-trapped 13/03/2007
X864762	1st winter female	ringed 17/01/2010	re-trapped 06/03/2010
X864818	1st winter female	ringed 23/01/2010	re-trapped 25/01/2010
X864826	1st winter female	ringed 27/01/2010	re-trapped 30/01/2010
Y021302	adult female	ringed 08/01/2012	re-trapped 10/03/2012

As ringing is carried out regularly it is likely that the longer gaps between ringing and recapture relate to birds that wandered around during the winter and didn't return to the garden for several weeks. One bird ringed here has been caught elsewhere:

L280773	ringed 26/07/2010	Caversham Heights, Berkshire	re-trapped 23/09/2010	Icklesham, East Sussex 133 km ESE
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This was a juvenile bird on it's first autumn migration. It's not uncommon for Berkshire migrants to be re-trapped in Kent and Sussex and this suggests that some head for a shorter Channel crossing before heading south.

Variations in the condition of birds caught through the year

Like many long-distance migrant passerines Blackcaps frequently put on weight in the form of large fat deposits before they migrate and so their weight varies quite dramatically through the year. All Blackcaps caught during this project have been weighed and this has produced some unexpected results. The heaviest birds have been caught in the winter and

this probably illustrates one of the conclusions of Bearhop *et al.* 2005 – central European breeding Blackcaps that winter in the UK arrive back on their breeding grounds earlier and in better condition than sympatric breeders that winter in the Mediterranean region.

Table 6: Weights in grams of birds caught in each month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	All
Number of birds	18	6	9	2	0	1	6	7	3	2	9	13	74
Minimum	18.4	18.3	17.3	18.6	n/a	n/a	16.5	15.6	17.5	19.3	17.6	17.9	15.6
Average	21.1	20.6	19.1	20.3	n/a	16.3	18.1	17.7	19.3	19.6	19.1	20.6	19.8
Maximum	23.8	22.8	24.2	22.0	n/a	n/a	19.5	19.5	20.4	19.8	21.5	24.8	24.8

The average weight each month varies between 16.3 and 21.1 g whereas the minimum varies between 15.6 and 19.3 g and the maximum between 19.5 and 24.8 g. Many birds caught during the winter have large fat deposits and have weights normally associated with migrants about to set off on a long migration. It would seem possible that wintering birds try to keep good fat deposits so that they can readily survive or move away from sudden periods of extreme weather.

Only one bird in March and one in April weighed more than 20 g and both had big fat deposits and were probably too heavy to be recently arrived summer visitors and were almost certainly winter visitors. The heavy April bird was caught on 3 April and this isn't too late for a bird to still be in the UK if it's going to migrate to Central Europe although our summer visitors are starting to arrive around this time.

Discussion

A few Blackcaps have been known to winter in the UK since the early 19th century (Yarrell 1839), numbers are thought to have increased significantly since the 1950s and a survey in the 1978/79 winter estimated that at least 1,714 birds were present (Leach 1981). The BTO's garden bird survey has shown that numbers have continued to increase and now in the peak winter weeks they are recorded from well over 10% of UK gardens taking part in the survey.

Studies have shown that Blackcaps have developed two distinct populations. British breeding birds migrate to the western Mediterranean region for winter. The birds that winter in the UK are part of the population that breeds in south central Europe where birds using both wintering areas breed (Wernham *et al.* 2002). A study by Bearhop *et al.* (2005) found that birds wintering in the UK arrived back on their breeding grounds in south central Europe earlier than birds wintering in the Mediterranean region and further-more they were in better condition, paired with birds from the same general wintering area, laid bigger clutches and raised more young. This suggests that the UK wintering population may well continue to increase and may eventually lead to two separate species developing.

Whilst this project has demonstrated that Blackcaps are definitely commonest in this garden in the winter months fairly significant numbers use it at other times. The study by Bearhop *et al.* (2005) suggests that there should be very little overlap in spring between departing winterers and arriving breeders in a single year but there is no way of distinguishing which birds are involved.

The eight captures in March include three re-traps from earlier in the same winter and one new bird on 13 March 2009 which was very heavy at 24.2 g and was almost certainly

not a freshly arrived summer migrant. It seems likely that most, if not all March records relate to wintering birds.

Only two birds have been caught in April and it would be logical to assume these were summer visitors, although a female caught on 3 April 2012 had big fat deposits and weighed 22.0 g and may well have been a late departing winter visitor.

All seven June and July records have been juveniles so the garden is clearly used by birds dispersing before they begin their autumn migration.

The only adult caught in August was a female undergoing its post-breeding moult so was probably from a fairly local breeding site, and all the rest of the August birds have been juveniles at the end of their post-juvenile moult. So August records seem to comprise birds at the transition between post-breeding dispersal and autumn migration. All the September records have been juveniles and are almost certainly migrating British bred birds.

Rather surprisingly only two birds have been caught in October and both these were late in the month with relatively small fat deposits and were perhaps most likely to be arriving winterers.

Birds in November through to February are clearly winter visitors and the number of birds caught and the very low numbers of re-traps suggest that birds are mobile and turnover is fairly high. Routine observations have not been carried out but wherever possible I have checked birds seen in the garden for the presence of a ring and I have gained the impression that if there is a gap in sightings of more than 10 to 14 days then new birds are almost certainly involved in most cases. Of course this may well be a general feature of wintering Blackcaps and could suggest that the number of birds using Berkshire gardens during the course of a winter is much higher than would be implied by simply calculating the sum of all the maximum numbers seen in individual gardens.

References

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BLACKCAP IN THE SNOW

Blackcaps are a fascinating bird. As recently as the 1970s they were really scarce in winter, but things soon changed. As they became more common in winter the temptation was to think of these as 'our' birds managing to stay the winter instead of migrating. But ringing showed this to be far from the truth and these were actually birds from northern Europe migrating west instead of south for the winter. Presumably as more and more of these birds survived our milder winters the rogue gene for this new migration heading became more prevalent.

So it's interesting to think of the possible impact of this current harsh winter on these birds. Will it wipe them out, leaving them as a scarce winter visitor again???

One bird in particular seems to be doing pretty well though. We received details of a colour-ringed bird in a Reading garden in early January 2010 and after a bit of digging tracked it down. X170529 was ringed on 3 January 2009 at near Tipton St. John in Devon.

Ian Stanbridge, who ringed the bird, catches winter Blackcaps by feeding them fat, and has so far ringed 41 birds since winter 2001/02. Some are then retrapped and one bird ringed in January 2002 has been recaptured in March 2006 and again in February 2008, showing how faithful these birds can be to their wintering areas.

Thanks to Tim Ball for getting in touch about this bird, to Roger Stansfield for the pics and to Ian for sending us details of his work.

(Original article can be found at <http://btoringing.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/blackcap-in-snow.html>)



Blackcap, colour ringed in Devon in January 2009 and seen in Glencroft Gardens, Reading in January 2010. Photo: Roger Stansfield.



Little Gull, Queen Mother Reservoir; 4th November 2010. Photo: Mike McKee.



Water Rail, Freeman's Marsh, 12th December 2010. Photo: Mike McKee.



Hybrid Tufted x Ring-necked Duck at Wraysbury GP, March 2010. Several Aythya hybrids can resemble Ring-necked Duck but this one unquestionably has Ring-necked Duck as one of its parents: note the prominent pale bands at both the base and towards the tip of the bill, the grey flanks with a white border at the front and the orange tone to the eyes. Photo: Chris Heard.



Oystercatchers with chicks at Twyford GPs, 6th June 2010. Photo: Marek Walford. Oystercatchers first bred in Berkshire this year, at Twyford and at Theale (page 57).



Waxwing, World's End Hill, 9th November 2010. Photo: David Harris.



*Cattle Egret, Sulhamstead, 4th December 2010.
Photo: David Crawford.*



*Great Grey Shrike, Wishmoor Bottom,
October 2010. Photo: Michael Hunt.*



Rock Pipit, Queen Mother Reservoir, 9th November 2010. Photo: Mike McKee.



Water Pipit, Queen Mother Reservoir, 14th December 2010. Photo: Mike McKee.



Lesser Redpoll (left) and Mealy Redpoll (right) caught and ringed at Moor Green on 28th Nov 2010, illustrating the difference in colouration and size which is normal for these two species. Photos: Tim Ball.





*Great White Egret, Great Shefford,
21st December 2010. Photo: Mike McKee.*



*Glossy Ibis, Freeman's Marsh,
10th December 2010. Photo: Mike McKee.*



Dipper, Welford, 24th December 2010. Photo: Mike McKee.



Smew, Dinton Pastures, 28th November 2010. Photo: Marek Walford.



Whooper Swan, Leverton, 11th December 2010. Photo: Marek Walford.



Grasshopper Warbler, Dinton Pastures, 25th April 2010. Photo: Nigel Rampton.

Damselflies & Dragonflies in Berkshire 2010 Highlights

Whilst much of the early part of the flying season was highly favourable for dragonflies, with hot, dry, sunny weather from late May, through June and into early July, adverse weather conditions once again made it a poor year for dragonflies during the latter part of the flying season. As a whole, the summer was exceptionally dry and by August water levels were low at many sites.

The first 2010 records for Berkshire were on 17th April (4 days later than 2009) with **Large Red Damselfly** *Pyrrosoma nymphula* reported from two ponds in Sonning. Honours for last species flying (on 19th November) were shared between **Common Darter** *Sympetrum striolatum* and **Southern Hawker** *Aeshna cyanea*. Five species were reported on 3rd November – more than usual for the time of year: **Common Blue Damselfly**, **Migrant Hawker** and **Common Darter** at Felix Farm Trout Fishery (Binfield) and **Black Darter** and **Southern Hawker** (plus **Common Darter**) at Crowthorne Wood.

The highlight for 2010 has to be the influx of **Hairy Dragonfly** *Brachytron pratense*. Records in 2009 at Wildmoor and on the River Loddon at Arborfield (the first records since 1999) were followed by records of one or two individuals at no less than 7 sites in 2010 as far north as Reading and west to Greenham Common. It is likely that all these originated from the population in N Hampshire.

Another species which saw an increase in its recorded range this year was the **Common Club-tail** *Gomphus vulgatissimus*. Records were received from a number of locations along the River Thames as far as Windsor; the first time that it has been recorded this far east in Berkshire.

Since it was first recorded in the county in 2005, **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** *Erythromma viridulum* has spread throughout the county, being recorded in 2010 from Bracknell in the east to Thatcham in the west. Breeding was reported as far west as Burghfield.

Following a decline in records countywide since 2006 and no records at all in 2009, **Common Hawker** *Aeshna juncea* made a welcome return in 2010 with records from the Bracknell area of at least 2 adults from Wildmoor and an ovipositing female at Bush Fields in Swinley Forest. An exuvia was found at another site in Swinley Forest, indicating that the species was present in the Bracknell area for at least some of the time since it was last recorded there in 2006.

Brilliant Emerald *Somatochlora metallica* had a particularly good year and was recorded at nine local sites in the Bracknell area as well as Decoy Heath and Paices Wood in West Berkshire.

There were reports of **Common Blue Damselfly** *Enallagma cyathigerum* as late as 3rd November this year (a new record for the county – the previous latest date was 25th October).

Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* was recorded mainly along the Kennet Valley and on the Pang at Moor Copse, normally never more than 30 at a time, though larger numbers were seen around Southcote and Calcot with a maximum of count of 355. There are also a number of incidental records of this species from across the county, both near and well away from rivers. There was one report of dozens of neatly-severed demoiselle wings (Banded & Beautiful) scattered over the ground underneath a hawthorn bush - presumably caused by an insectivorous bird preying on demoiselles & regularly returning to the same perch

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator* is widespread across the county, occurring on well-vegetated ponds and lakes. The maximum number recorded at any one site was 17 at Thames Valley Park (Reading), where one was observed being eaten by a Grey Heron.

Most records of **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** *Cordulegaster boltonii* come from the heathland areas around Bracknell and in the SW of the county. However dragonflies can move some distance away from their normal breeding habitat, an example being a female which was found at Lavell's Lake (Dinton Pastures) in August.

More details for all the species occurring in Berkshire are given in the annual report and newsletter, available from the email address below. Please also contact me for details on how to submit records of any dragonflies and damselflies that you see.

If you are interested in the national picture of the distribution of dragonflies, the British Dragonfly Society is compiling a National Dragonfly Atlas which is due for publication in autumn 2013.

Mike Turton
County Dragonfly Recorder
berksdragonflies@gmail.com

REPORT FOR 2010 BY THE BERKSHIRE RECORDS COMMITTEE (BRC)

By Chris Heard

Committee for 2010: Chris Heard (Chairman), Ken Moore, Peter Standley

The BRC examines all records that involve rare species (see the accompanying lists), unusual dates and unusually large counts that are accompanied with descriptive notes. Unfortunately there are still a substantial number of records that have to be omitted from the report due to the lack of supporting notes. On occasions when the bird has been seen by a large number of observers the BRC may accept the record without further details. However the record may run the risk of being attributed to the wrong observer/s, or may be attributed to many observers (MO).

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

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

Category 2 Locally rare species for which a full description is required.

Category 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; Velvet Scoter; Fulmar; Manx Shearwater; Storm Petrel; Night Heron; Cattle Egret; Great White Egret; Purple Heron; White Stork; Spoonbill; Glossy Ibis (from 2013); Honey Buzzard; Black Kite; White-tailed Eagle; Goshawk; Rough-legged Buzzard; Golden Eagle; Redfooted Falcon; Spotted Crake; Corncrake; Crane; Kentish Plover; Dotterel; Pectoral Sandpiper; Purple Sandpiper; Red-necked Phalarope; Grey Phalarope; Pomarine Skua; Arctic Skua; Long-tailed Skua; Great Skua; Sabine's Gull; Ring-billed Gull; Caspian Gull; Iceland Gull; Glaucous Gull; White-winged Black Tern; Roseate Tern; Guillemot; Razorbill; Little Auk; Puffin; Alpine Swift; Short-toed Lark; Shore Lark; Red-rumped Swallow; Richard's Pipit; Tawny Pipit; Red-throated Pipit; Olive-backed Pipit (from 2013); Dipper; Bluethroat; Aquatic Warbler; Marsh Warbler; Icterine Warbler; Melodious Warbler; Pallas's Warbler; Yellow-browed Warbler; Bearded Tit; Golden Oriole; Woodchat Shrike; Hooded Crow; Rose-coloured Starling; Serin; Twite; Common (Mealy) Redpoll; Parrot Crossbill; Common Rosefinch; Lapland Bunting; Cirl Bunting; Ortolan Bunting; Little Bunting; all rare subspecies (e.g. Scandinavian Rock Pipit; Yellow Wagtail races and 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; Redbreasted 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; Grey Plover; 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. is based on drumming only); Wryneck; Woodlark (away from usual habitat); Rock Pipit; Water Pipit; White Wagtail (rump colour needed and full details for autumn records); Waxwing; Black Redstart; Ring Ouzel; Wood Warbler; Pied Flycatcher; Willow Tit; Redbacked Shrike; Great Grey Shrike; Raven; Tree Sparrow; Hawfinch; Snow Bunting.

Review of records for 2010: Records that the Committee has not been able to accept are listed below; although as comprehensive as possible, some of the unaccepted records may not have been included. Note that * indicates that no description was received; 'date' indicates an unusual sighting; and 'count' indicates a highly unusual number.

Bewick's Swan	3, Pingewood GPs 2/2*
Whooper Swan	2, over West Ilsley 22/10*
Bean Goose	1, over Dinton Pastures CP 8/12*
White-fronted Goose	1, Hosehill Lake, 25/4*; 3, Windsor Gt Pk 31/12*; 1, Winkfield Polo Grounds 16/10*
Ferruginous Duck	Wraysbury GP 4/1*
Scaup	1, Moor Green Lakes Feb 16/2*
Common Scoter	2, Theale GPs Sep 29/9*
Red-breasted Merganser	2, R Thames at Hurley Dec 8/12*
Black Grouse	7, Chapel Row Jan 13/1*
Black-throated Diver	1, Berrys Lane GP 18/2*
Red-necked Grebe	1, Woolhampton GP 6/10*
Black-necked Grebe	1, Moatlands GP 10/11*
Shag	2, Christchurch Meadows, Reading 13/3*
Spoonbill	1, Lower Fm GP 24/10*
Black Kite	1, Brimpton, May 22/5*; 2, Moss End, Apr 25/4*
Marsh Harrier	1, Hungerford Marsh, Mar 11/3*; 1, Frogmill Hurley 28/8*
Goshawk	1, Maidenhead Court, Jan 1/1; 1, Combe 26/3
Osprey	1, Eversley GPs, 18/3*; 1, Sandhurst, Mar 31/3*; Slough, 21/4*
Merlin	1, Dinton Pastures CP, 21/1*; 1, Beech Hill, Great Pk Farm 30/3*; 1, Slough, 12/2*
Common Crane	1, Bisham 3/6
Avocet	1, Eversley GPs MGL 15/9*; 1, 17/10*.
Wood Sandpiper	1, LFGP 13/4*; Pingewood 17/4*; 1, Sheepdrove 2/5*; 1, Woolhampton GP 27/7, 28/7 & 18/8*; 1, Lavell's Lake 28/9*
Little Gull	1, LFGP 13/8*
Yellow-legged Gull	1, LFGP 3/5*
Common Tern	4, DW 17/3*
Wryneck	1, LFGP Aug 31/8*
Red-rumped Swallow	1, Wraysbury 1 Apr 18
House Martin	80, QMR 30/3 count; 1, Eversley Mar 22/3
Woodlark	1, QMR, 30/12*
Water Pipit	1, DW Dec 29/12*
Tree Pipit	1, Snelsmore Common 30/3 (date)
Yellow Wagtail	1, Thatcham 5/12 date
White Wagtail	3, Borough Marsh Mar 6/3*
Waxwing	70, Thatcham Dec 21/12*
Black Redstart	1, Winnersh 27/2*
Whinchat	2, Woolhampton GPs May 18/5; 2, Dorney Wetlands Oct 10/10*
Wheatear	10, Lambourn Downs 23/4; 2, 'Pewit Farm' 18/3 (county!)
Greenland Wheatear	2, Greenham Common May 5/5*
Ring Ouzel	1, Lambourn Downs 23/4*; 1, Crookham Common 19/10*
Mistle Thrush	25, Swinley Brickpits 22/10
Cettis Warbler	1, Binfield 16/5*

Reed Warbler	1, Woolhampton GPs 31/3 (date)
Garden Warbler	1, Bottom Lane, Theale, 1/4 (date)
Lesser Whitethroat	5, Caesars Camp 25/5 (count)
Wood Warbler	1, Cake Wood 17/4*; 1, Frogmill Hurley, 6/8*
Yellow-browed Warbler	1, Cow Down 2/10
Spotted Flycatcher	1, Windsor Great Park 3/5 (heard only)
Willow Tit	1, Englemere Pond 29/3*
Tree Sparrow	3, Chapel Row, 13/1*; 2, Frogmill Hurley, 22/10*
Brambling	1, California CP, 24/5 (date)
Mealy Redpoll	2, Eversley GP 27/11*
Parrot Crossbill	2, Padworth Common 9/4–10/4*