

The Birds of Berkshire



Annual Report
2005

Published 2009

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.
- 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 a regular Garden Bird survey, 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 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

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Annual Report for the year 2005

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Introduction

The Berkshire Ornithological Club is pleased to present the 2005 Annual Bird Report. Although we always aim to publish these reports as quickly as possible we think the wait has been worthwhile on this occasion and hope you will agree.

This year we have a good number of articles with a range of ornithological subjects including surveys in 2005 and other events and matters of interest contributed by local ornithologists. 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.

At the completion of this report Derek Barker has decided to stand down from acting as Editor of the species accounts and from his role as Secretary to the Berkshire Records Committee. This is a severe blow to us as his contribution to reports has been highly significant and reflected his encyclopaedic knowledge of the County birding scene. We acknowledge the high standard he has set for many years. We wish him well for the future and hope he will be able to enjoy his ornithology more now that he has relinquished his posts.

Another familiar face now departing is Chris Robinson, for sixteen years the BTO representative for Berkshire. Chris has moved to Herefordshire and will be a great loss to us because he has been so enthusiastic and diligent in his work for birds and the BTO for so long. We wish Chris well and are grateful that, for the time being, he is continuing in his role with the Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group. In Chris's place Ken White and Sarah Priest have taken on the task as BTO representative jointly and we welcome them and offer our best wishes for the future.

The birdwatchers of Berkshire are heavily involved in the BTO project to produce a national bird atlas and working with Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group to prepare a new one for the County. At the time of writing we are finishing the second full year of fieldwork and progress has been excellent. As will be understood, some people will be involved in the Atlas work as well as producing our annual bird reports. This may have an impact on the time taken to produce future reports but we will do all we can to find ways to reduce any conflicts. Volunteers are always welcome to help analyse records and draft species accounts and please contact the Managing Editor if you would like to know more.

The Berkshire Ornithological Club is pleased to announce that it has signed a licence agreement with Thames Water for exclusive birdwatching access to Queen Mother Reservoir. As will be seen in this report many of the rarer species occurring in the County are found there, albeit sometimes after many patient hours of watching. Permits are available to BOC members free of charge and can be obtained from Hon. Secretary whose contact details are on Page 2 of this report.

We hope you enjoy the Berkshire Bird Report 2005.

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

Acknowledgements

The production of a report of this nature requires the input of many people and none more than the contributors of bird records, a detailed list of those whose records have been used to compile this report are shown at the end of the systematic list. We apologise for any omissions and welcome advice of 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 development and 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, Bruce Archer, John Clark, Brian Clews, Richard Crawford, Rob Laughton, Jan Legg (two), Chris Robinson, Ian Twyford, Jonathan Wilding. Bill Nicoll investigated weather for the year and Chris Heard added the birding highlights, 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 Laughing Gull and again we welcome other superb drawings provided by Martin Hallam.

Photographs have been provided by several photographers and credits are given for each one.

We also appreciate the support of London Camera Exchange who have helped with financial support for many years. Our thanks also go to Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre about which you can read more on page 36. 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.

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
Blakeney, St Catherine's Road
Frimley Green, Camberley, Surrey
GU16 9NP*

County Directory

COUNTY RECORDER

Chris Heard, 3, Waterside Lodge, Ray Mead Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8NP.
Telephone 01628 633828.

Berkshire Rarities Committee: Chairman, Chris Heard, members – Ken Moore, Peter Standley.

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.

Membership Secretary, Karen Eggleton, 4 Thornfield, Headley, Thatcham, Berks, RG19 8AQ

Telephone 01635 269566

Email: info1@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

BIRDS OF BERKSHIRE CONSERVATION FUND

Charitable Fund managed for the benefit of Berkshire's birds, preferably but not exclusively related to wetland birds and sites.

Enquiries and applications to: Hon. Secretary, Renton Righelato (see Berkshire Ornithological Club entry).

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)

Joint local representatives for BTO matters including organising surveys: Ken White and Sarah Priest, Yonder Cottage, Ashford Hill, Thatcham, Berks, RG19 8AX.

Telephone 01635 268442

Email: btoberks.ken.sarah@googlemail.com

FRIENDS OF LAVELL'S LAKE

Conservation volunteers managing Lavell's Lake local nature reserve near Dinton Pastures Country Park, Wokingham. Bird walks, work parties, 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: David Bishop, 7 Ambarrow Crescent, Little Sandhurst, Berks, GU47 8JA

Email: dave.bishop@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/

HEATHLAKE

By Ian Twyford

Heathlake is an acidic lake situated between Crowthorne and Wokingham (OS map reference SU828653). The lake is man made, having been created by the Palmer family (of Huntley and Palmer fame). This article aims to inform readers of the birdlife of the lake and some of its attractions I have enjoyed over many years. A summary of my records is included, during my period of recording I have found eighty three species in total.

The lake is designated a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) due to the presence of rare aquatic plants such as the Six-stamened Waterwort and Shoreweed. However, this status is under threat, as the English Nature website's condition assessment states that Heathlake's condition is "100% unfavourable, indicating that the site is currently not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to the site management or external pressures." This has been the status of the lake for several years, despite a number of attempts by the local authority to remedy this situation.

With several areas of boggy woodland and scrub, at first sight Heathlake would seem to be an ideal breeding site for birds. However, situated as it is in the middle of housing estates, it has to be said that for much of the day, particularly at weekends, the site is used heavily by dog walkers and it is the constant interruption of people and their dogs that stops Heathlake fulfilling its true potential for wildlife. During the week, early morning, lunch time or early evening walks will be the most rewarding times, along with early mornings at weekends.

It is probably fair to say that for rarity hunters there is not often anything really unusual to be seen. For those who enjoy local birdwatching, walking and wildlife Heathlake is worth a visit and can be included as part of many longer walks. A quick walk around Heathlake will only take about fifteen minutes while a "birdwatchers walk" can often take an hour and be rewarded with close views of many of the more common woodland bird species.

Seasonal Summary

Winter:

Goosander, Siskins, Lesser Redpoll, Redwing and Brambling are all possibilities between November and March. Black-headed Gull numbers peak during winter months, when Common, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls can sometimes be present. Pochard and Tufted Ducks are present throughout winter months, while Shoveler, Gadwall and occasionally Teal, Wigeon and Ruddy Duck visit. Cormorants now seem to be resident in small numbers and during winter months a Starling roost of several hundred birds has established on the island.

Spring:

With the onset of spring, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Willow Warblers will generally be heard, along with more common residents. Water birds will be starting to pair up and nest and in recent years this has included Grey Herons. This can be a great site to observe Heron courtship. Up to six pairs have been seen starting to build nests, of which three pairs have remained to raise a family. One of the great delights in late spring is the "clacking" of young Herons drowning out most other bird song.

Summer:

Swallows, Hobby, Common Tern and more common warblers are possibilities during the summer, although at this time of year the lake does tend to be short of anything other than the more common species. House Martins and Swifts often join the Swallows to feed over the water. Buzzard can be seen overhead at any time of year. Towards the end of summer the lakes shallow fringes are ideal for waders, but due to human disturbance they are rarely seen. In ten years I have only ever recorded Common Sandpiper on six occasions, and none have settled to feed. The lake is also good for bats, and I believe that during summer months, Pipistrelle, Horseshoe and Daubenton's can all be seen at dusk. Heathlake also hosts a selection of dragonflies (8 species recorded) and damselflies (6 species recorded).

Autumn:

As autumn settles in, summer species start to depart and the winter ducks pass through. Flocks of Goldcrest, Long-tailed and Coal Tits will be forming. Leaves start to turn colour and this can be a good time of year for anyone interested in fungii. With several boggy areas and a selection of older trees, bracket and more colourful fungi thrive.

House Sparrows, Goldfinch and Pied Wagtails are common in nearby housing estates yet are rare at Heathlake. Typical farmland birds such as Yellowhammer are often to be seen in farmland to the north in winter, and on occasions large flocks of Brambling and mixed flocks of gulls, including large numbers of Common Gulls feed in the fields.

Memorable observations

As with all sites, every now and then something unusual will turn up. Waxwing, Goldeneye, Pintail and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker have all been recorded. But at sites such as Heathlake, it is just observing the more common species that can give so much enjoyment. Great Spotted Woodpecker nest in older trees and it is often possible to get quite close to the nest and observe adults feeding their young. One winter evening I watched as 60 plus Cormorants attempted to roost on the island, a quite extraordinary sight as birds zoomed in, missed their intended perch and plopped into the lake. A few summers ago, in the region of 200 Canada Geese occupied the lake, seeming to fill the water. A flock of more than 120 Lesser Redpoll was seen at close quarters at a quieter moment several winters ago. Kingfisher can be seen at any time of the year, but their presence tends to be intermittent. I am fairly sure that they breed at, or near to Heathlake, as an adult has been observed feeding two young birds.

Twelve Year Summary

The following convention has been used to complete these monthly charts:

- R Resident
- W Predominantly winter visitor
- S Predominantly summer visitor
- B Breeding (confirmed)
- V Vagrant (Observed on one occasion throughout the year)
- O Occasional recording (regular visitors but not observed monthly).

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Blackbird	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	RB	R
Blackcap	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Black-headed Gull	O	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	R	W
Blue Tit	R	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	R	RB	RB	RB
Brambling								V			V	V
Bullfinch	O			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Canada Goose	O	R	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	RB	R	OB
Chaffinch	R	RB	RB	R	R	R	R	R	RB	O	R	R
Chiffchaff	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Coal Tit	R	O	O	O	O	O	OB	OB	R	OB	R	RB
Collared Dove		O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Common Buzzard											O	O
Common Gull		V	V	W	V	W	V	V	W	W	W	V
Common Pochard	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
Common Sandpiper	V		V	V	V						V	V
Common Tern	S				S	S	S	S	S	S	S	
Coot	R	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB
Cormorant	V	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	R	R	R	R
Cuckoo		S	S					S				
Carrion Crow	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Dunnock		O	O	OB	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Egyptian Goose				O		V	V		V	V	O	O
Feral Pigeon					V	V			V			
Fieldfare				W		W	V			V	W	O
Gadwall	V	W	W	W	W	V		O		O	W	V
Goldcrest	R	O	O	R	R	O	OB	OB	O	O	O	O
Goldeneye			V									
Goldfinch	V	O	OB	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Goosander		W	V	W	V	W	V	W	V		V	W
Great Crested Grebe	OB	O	O	OB	RB	RB	RB	OB	O	OB	R	OB
Great Spotted Woodpecker	R	O	O	R	RB	RB	R	RB	R	O	R	O
Greenfinch			O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Green Woodpecker	O	O	O	O	O	OB	O	O	O	O	O	O
Great Tit	R	OB	OB	OB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	O	RB	RB
Grey Heron	O	O	O	O	O	OB	RB	OB	O	RB	RB	RB
Greylag Goose								O		V		V
Grey Wagtail	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	OB	O	OB	OB	O
Herring Gull				V	V	V						

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Hobby					V							
House Martin	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
House Sparrow	V	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0
Jackdaw		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jay	R	0	0	0	OB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kestrel	V											
Kingfisher	V		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lapwing							V					
Lesser Black-backed Gull	V				V	0	0	V		V	V	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker			V	V	V		V					
Little Egret											V	
Little Grebe	V			0			V		0	0	V	V
Long-tailed Tit	0	0	0	0	0	0	R	R	0	0	R	0
Magpie	R	R	R	R	R	R	RB	R	R	R	R	R
Mallard	R	RB	R	R	RB	R	R	R	RB	RB	RB	RB
Mandarin Duck					V			V			V	
Mistle Thrush	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	V	V	
Moorhen	R	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB
Mute Swan	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	RB	R	RB	R
Nuthatch	R	0	OB	0	OB	R	0	0	R	0	R	0
Pied Wagtail	0	0	0	0	0	0						
Pintail			V									
Lesser Redpoll	V				W	V	W		V	W		
Redwing	V	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	V	W
Reed Bunting					V							
Ring-necked Parakeet								V				
Robin	R	RB	OB	RB	R	R	RB	RB	RB	R	RB	R
Ruddy Duck												V
Sand Martin			S		S				V			
Shoveler	V			V			0			V	W	0
Siskin			W	W	W	W	W	W	W		W	
Song Thrush	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sparrowhawk				V		0	V	0		0	V	V
Spotted Flycatcher	V			V								
Starling	R	OB	OB	R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stock Dove					V			V	V	V		
Swift	V	V		S	S	S	S	S	S	V	S	S
Swallow		V			S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Teal								V	V	V	V	
Treecreeper	R	0	0	0	0	0	OB	0	0	0	R	0
Tufted Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	R	0	0	0	0
Wigeon						V	V	0		V	W	
Willow Warbler	S	S	V		S	V	S	S	V	V	V	S
Woodpigeon	R	0	0	RB	R	R	0	0	R	R	R	R
Wren	R	0	0	R	RB	R	R	0	R	R	R	R

FERAL BARNACLE AND SNOW GEESE IN THE UPPER LODDON AND BLACKWATER VALLEYS

By *J M Clark*

Abstract

The history of feral flocks of Barnacle and Snow Geese in the upper Loddon and Blackwater valleys between the 1970s and 2008 is reviewed. All birds are believed to have originated from wildfowl collections at Stratfield Saye Park (the Duke of Wellington's estate), and elsewhere. Barnacle Geese peaked at 237 following the 2001 breeding season and had declined to 20 by late 2008. Snow Geese peaked at 41 following the 1990 breeding season and had declined to two by late 2008. Both species have declined due to reduced breeding success. Possible reasons include decreasing fecundity arising from in-breeding and ageing, predation and, in the case of Barnacle Goose, shooting.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

As long ago as October 1950, a free-flying Barnacle Goose was seen at Fleet Pond, and between 1964 and 1974 at least two were present with Canada Geese in north-east Hampshire. A recent download of computerised WeBS data has revealed that between 11 and 14 were at Stratfield Saye in late 1965, although only one or two were there up to the 1974/75 winter. Subsequently, the site held maxima of seven in the 1975/76 winter and ten in 1976/77. It seems likely that breeding was occurring in the wildfowl collection there although there were no summer visits to the site to confirm this.

Post-breeding numbers in north-east Hampshire (including Stratfield Saye) increased to 16 in 1982, 44 in 1985 and 54 in 1987, with breeding recorded annually at Potbridge Fishery from 1979 and Stratfield Saye from 1981. During most of the 1980s only single figure groups reached Eversley GPs (Moor Green Lakes), but 50 were there on Sep 20th 1989. In 1990, one pair raised four young at Eversley. Counts in the following winter included 63 at Eversley GPs on Dec 1st and 87 at Stratfield Saye on Feb 3rd. By this time, a regular pattern of movement had been established between the two principal sites.

The history of the flock from 1991-2008 is displayed in Table 1.

During the early and mid 1990s, regular winter movements between Eversley GPs and Stratfield Saye continued, but since 1997/98 the flock has usually remained at Eversley, with 120 at Stratfield Saye on Dec 16th 2000 the only recent winter record there. Stratfield Saye has continued to be the main breeding location, with most birds leaving Eversley between mid March and mid April and returning after the breeding season. Numbers peaked at 237 in 2001/02 but have declined in every subsequent winter. Exceptionally, most of the flock went missing from Eversley in early 2006. A flock of 45 at Ibsley, in the Avon Valley, Hampshire, from Jan 25th-Feb 8th were confirmed as Eversley birds by the presence of a distinctive leucistic individual. In late 2008 the flock had reduced to 20 individuals.

Table 1. Barnacle Goose breeding data, 1991-2008

	Breeding Sites	Young Raised	Post-breeding/ Mid-winter max	Net Adult Gain/Loss	% Gain/Loss
1991	SS, P, E	16, 0, 4	87	0	0
1992	SS, E	14, 11	90	3	3.4
1993	SS, E	0, 2	76	-14	-15.6
1994	SS, P, E	17, 3, 7	86	10	13.1
1995	SS, E	28, 4	126	40	46.5
1996	SS, E, EC	47, 0, 0	153	27	21.4
1997	SS, E, EC	45, 0, 4	179	26	16.9
1998	SS, E	42, 0	206	27	15.1
1999	SS, E	3, 6	190	-16	-7.8
2000	SS, E	0, 0	147	-43	-22.6
2001	SS, E	?, 3	237	90	61.2
2002	SS, E	20, 0	184	-53	-22.4
2003	SS, E	0, 6	98	-86	-46.7
2004	SS, E, WCP	3, 0, 3	91	-7	-7.1
2005	SS, E	14, 1	60	-31	-34.1
2006	SS, E, WCP	1, 0, 2	52	-8	-13.3
2007	SS, E, WCP	0, 0, 4	39	-13	-25.0
2008	SS, E, WCP	0, 0, 0	20	-19	-48.7

SS = Stratfield Saye; P = Potbridge Fishery; E = Eversley GPs (Moor Green Lakes); EC = Eversley Cross wildfowl collection; WCP = Wellington Country Parks

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

The first Snow Goose to be recorded in north-east Hampshire was one which flew south over Fleet Pond on Apr. 12th 1973. By 1977, up to seven (of unknown origin) were seen regularly at Stratfield Saye and elsewhere, and in 1978 they were joined by a blue-phase bird. In 1979, a pair of pinioned birds raised free-flying young there. On Sep 12th 1982, there were 16 free-flying birds and a further 20, including two blue phase, in the open air collection at Stratfield Saye. Most of these appeared capable of flight. In 1983, four pairs bred and raised 18 young, and the post-breeding population was 46 (including three blue phase). Subsequently, one or two pairs attempted breeding at Stratfield Saye annually until 2005, although in 11 years no young were raised. Breeding was attempted at Eversley annually between 1994 and 1997, with respectively 7, 4, 5 and 6 nests recorded, but the only success was in 1995 when two pairs raised two young each. As with Barnacle Geese, there were regular winter movements between Stratfield Saye and Eversley in the early and mid 1990s but since 1997/98 the flock has remained at Eversley. The peak post-breeding population was 41 in 1990; the population has declined steadily since such that only two remained in late 2008. The Snow Goose flock was always discrete from the Barnacle flock, apart from one or two individuals which habitually accompanied them, presumably the result of Snow chicks imprinting on Barnacle adults in the Stratfield Saye nesting area.

The history of the flock from 1983-2008 is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Snow Goose breeding data, 1983-2008

	Breeding Sites	Young Recorded	Post-breeding/ Mid-winter max	Net Adult Gain/Loss	% Gain/Loss
1991	SS, P, E	16, 0, 4	87	0	0
1983	SS	18	46 (3 blue phase)	10	27.8
1984	SS	3	28	-18	-39.1
1985	SS	3	24	-4	-14.2
1986	SS	5	24	0	0
1987	SS	5	28	4	14.2
1988	SS	8	35	7	25.0
1989	SS	4	39	4	11.4
1990	SS	0	41	2	5.1
1991	SS	1	34	-7	-17.1
1992	SS	0	37	3	8.8
1993	SS	0	34	-3	-8.1
1994	SS, E	0, 0	30	-4	-6.0
1995	SS, E	0, 4	30	0	0
1996	SS, E	0, 0	25	-5	-16.7
1997	SS, E	0, 0	21	-4	-16.0
1998	SS	0	16	-5	-23.8
1999	SS	5	20	4	-25.0
2000	SS	4	19	-1	-5.0
2001	SS	2	17	-2	-10.5
2002	SS	0	15	-2	-11.8
2003	SS	1	11	-4	-26.7
2004	SS	0	6	-5	-45.5
2005	SS	0	5	-1	-16.7
2006			4	-1	-20.0
2007			3	-1	-25.0
2008			2	-1	-33.3

SS = Stratfield Saye; E = Eversley GPs (Moor Green Lakes)

Discussion

Table 1 shows that at least 312 young Barnacle Geese were recorded between 1991 and 2008. Earlier incomplete data indicate that around 100 young were noted between 1979 and 1990. Column 5 of Table 1 shows the total gain or loss of the population when the post-breeding maximum is compared with the equivalent figure for the previous year. This is expressed as a percentage in column 6. A positive percentage shows a successful, expanding population while a negative one indicates a population in decline, i.e. where the mortality rate exceeds the birth rate. Between 1991 and 1998, the mean change is +12.8%. The figure of +46.5% in 1995 is higher than would have been expected based on the number of young recorded; without any adult mortality this would give a rise of 37.2%, which suggests that some young were not recorded or that there was recruitment to the population from outside the area. The only negative figure was in 1993, when only two young are known to have been raised.

Between 1999 and 2008, the mean change was -16.7%. The mean for this period would be even lower were it not for a figure of +61.2% in 2001, when the population rose by 90 despite only three young being recorded. This low number can be explained by a lack of access to Stratfield Saye due to foot and mouth restrictions. However, the breeding season there would

have to have been by far the best ever to account for the whole of the net 87 bird increase, so it seems possible that some immigration from elsewhere occurred. Minimum losses between 22.4 and 48.7% were recorded in five years between 2000 and 2008, with falls of 53 (22.4%) in 2002 and 86 (46.7%) in 2003. During this period, the main flock was often missing for several weeks between leaving Stratfield Saye and assembling at Eversley GPs later in the autumn. The author strongly suspects that birds were shot while feeding on farmland immediately after the breeding season in 2002 and 2003. The ongoing decline in subsequent years has clearly been fuelled by poor breeding success and possibly further shooting in autumn 2005, 2007 and 2008. The failure to breed successfully may be due to the decreasing fecundity of an ageing in-bred population. Predation is unlikely to be an issue at Stratfield Saye as foxes are closely controlled, and the keeper assures me that he has not shot adult birds in the autumn or pricked eggs, a method which was used in the past to control breeding Canada and Greylag Geese there. Emigration is also a possibility, although to my knowledge there have been no records of significant numbers anywhere else in the Hampshire/Berkshire/Surrey area.

Table 2 shows that there were 28 adult Snow Geese in 1983 and that 63 young have fledged since then. It is known that the vast majority of these young survived until their second calendar year since they can easily be detected in winter flocks by their distinctive first-winter plumage. There was a surprising net loss of 18 in 1984 (-39.1%). Between 1985 and 1990 there was a gradual increase in the population, with a mean annual increase of 6.9% culminating in a total of 41 individuals in autumn 1990. Between 1991 and 2008, only 17 young have fledged and the mean annual decrease has been 16.6%, with the population falling to only two in autumn 2008. Repeated breeding failures have been the key cause of the decline. In particular, the failure to successfully colonise Eversley GPs between 1994 and 1997, when predation resulted in 22 breeding attempts producing only four young, is a clear contributory factor. Subsequently, most attempts at Stratfield Saye have failed, presumably due to similar reasons as outlined above for the Barnacles there.

Dudley (2005), in a review of populations of various feral species in the UK, concluded that the Hampshire/Berkshire Snow Goose population was not self-sustaining as it was in decline at that time. He also proposed that the Barnacle Geese in Bedfordshire and Norfolk/Suffolk, but not Hampshire/Berkshire, were established naturalised and self-sustaining populations. This was despite numbers and breeding success in Hampshire being higher than in Bedfordshire. However, subsequent events outlined in this paper suggest that Dudley was correct in not identifying the Hampshire population as self-sustaining.

Reference

Dudley, S.P. (2005) Changes to category C of the British List. *Ibis* 147: 803-820.
<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118644709/PDFSTART?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

Acknowledgements

Most of the data to compile this paper have been taken from *Hants/Surrey Border Bird Reports* from 1976-1997, *Moor Green Lakes Group Annual Reports* from 1993-2008 and the personal observations of the author. Thanks are also due to the BTO for the release of WeBS data and to John Eyre for his comments on the text.

John Clark, 4 Cygnet Court, Old Cove Road, Fleet, Hampshire GU51 2RL.

THE LAUGHING GULL AT READING - THE FIRST RECORD FOR BERKSHIRE

by Rob Laughton

On the 2nd December 2005 I had an appointment at two shops in Reading and, as I live in Bristol, my best route there was along the M4.

As I was approaching junction 11, I noticed a large flock of gulls on what looked like a gravel pit. I made a mental note to check them on the way home and carried on. After my appointments I had enough time to find the best place to view them from, but as I was looking through them I saw that there was a much bigger flock sat on a flat muddy field which I now know was the Green Park Estate.

So, after checking the gulls on the pit, I decided to check the large flock. Finding it hard to view them I found a small drive-in with a metal gate near the entrance to the tip. As I was checking through them I noticed a certain adult Caspian Gull with a pure white head, beady black eye and greyish pink legs sat amongst the larger gulls. It was a long way off so I drove back towards the M4 bridge.

There was another pull-in on the left hand side of the road, so I parked up and walked back along the road and found a gap in the trees. There were thousands of mainly large gulls sat only yards away! I tried to get up on the bank off the road as it was a bit dangerous and as I did this the whole flock shot up in the air! No chance of seeing that again, I thought.

Then, as I looked with my naked eye, I could see what I immediately recognized as a LAUGHING GULL still on the ground not 50yards away!! I lifted my bins up and... it was! it was! unbelievable! What made it even more amazing was that it was the only bird out of about 1,000 that stayed put! After confirming that it was an adult, and checking all the major features to eliminate Franklin's Gull, it was time to run for the car and get the camera. But, as is always the case, the bird had finally flown off. Probably to pre-roost as it was getting close to dark and the weather was foul.

After releasing the news, I and another local birdwatcher kept checking the gulls around the tip but there was no sign. Luckily the bird was relocated on the Saturday morning on the same spot and seen by most of the Berkshire birders later that day.

General Appearance and Observations.

Size: As the bird was alone at the time, it was hard to get an exact size comparison. But I estimated it to be in between Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gull, closer to a Common Gull in size.

General Plumage: The most obvious was its dark grey wings similar to Lesser Black-backed in colour. Its undertail coverts, flanks, belly, throat and breast were all clean white, it also had a white chevron on the edge of the secondaries.

Head Pattern: Quite pronounced white eye crescents above and below the eye, also an obvious dark grey/black smudge on the ear coverts area. The rest was white.

Bill: Almost drooping visual appearance, looked mainly black but had hints of dark red towards the end of the bill.

Primary Projection: Very long well beyond tail, Black with two very small white windows visible:

Tail: Pure white (pointing towards adult winter plumage)

Legs and feet: Quite long and black.

I know gulls are not everybody's cup of tea but when you look at even a Black-headed Gull closely they are brilliant creatures!

Rob Laughton (Bristol)

Recorder's comment: This discovery was part of an unprecedented influx of Laughing Gulls into the British Isles in the wake of Hurricane Wilma, which travelled up the eastern seaboard of the USA (on 24th–25th October), and across the Atlantic. The fallout from this weather system was that c.50 Laughing Gulls were found in the UK, mostly in the South-West and Wales but including birds on the Hampshire, East Sussex and Kent coasts. Many counties recorded their first ever Laughing Gulls, but only two were found in inland counties: the other, which was also an adult, was at Throckmorton, Worcestershire (roosting nearby at Westwood Pool) on 25th–28th November. Given the dates and plumage states of these sightings there is every reason to believe that they relate to the same bird (an interesting reversal of the Bean Geese in 2004 that relocated to Staffordshire a day after they left Cold Harbour; confirmation of the West Midlands 'connection!').

NB there was another inland Laughing Gull the following year– in Hertfordshire (at Hilfield Park Res in September and Amwell GPs in November), but that was believed to be a second-winter bird.

CETTI'S WARBLER *Cettia cetti* IN WEST BERKSHIRE

By Jan Legg of Newbury Ringing Group

While ringing at Thatcham Marsh LNR on the 24th October 1971 in a net ride, now part of a Constant Effort Site (CES), Newbury Ringing Group (NRG) captured a bird that could not be immediately identified.

The description sent to the Rarities Committee was as follows:

Reed Warbler size but looked slightly heavier built. Head, back, rump and wing coverts chestnut brown. White eye ring, pale grey supercilium extended from c2mm in front of the eye to c10mm behind, cheeks grey-brown. Throat white with faint yellowish wash, remainder of breast pale grey and flanks brownish grey, Primaries and tail feathers dark brownish-black. Tail rounded with only ten wide and very rounded feathers. Under tail coverts brown with broad white fringes. Legs pinkish including claws, bill flesh colour underneath, not so bright as legs, upper mandible blackish with pink showing through.

In those days the only reliable field guide available was Peterson, Mountfort, Hollom's *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*. The key to identification is ten tail feathers, remembering this enabled identification as a Cetti's Warbler soon after capture. It was the first inland record and about the eighth record ever in the UK. Even though it was before the instant communication era it attracted hundreds of birders some from as far away as Manchester.

This bird remained in the area until 28th May 1972. A new male sang and was subsequently captured on the 9th April 1973. The next occurrence was in 1975 at nearby Hambridge Lake. In 1976 singing was reported at Thatcham Marsh; 29th February and 22nd April. A female captured in 1978 at a site near Aldermaston in June had a brood patch; the first evidence of breeding activity in the area. 1979 had just one report of singing at Thatcham Marsh on the 8th April. The next record from here is one 16th April 1983. The only record of 1984 is one ringed Freeman’s Marsh 23rd April and recaptured a week later. 1985 provided a juvenile male ringed at the eastern end of Thatcham Marsh (Chamberhouse Marsh) and the first hint of permanent residency when two on the marsh bordering the Kennet and Avon Canal could be found singing from April onwards and were joined by a third in December. The next year an adult male was captured on the LNR and confirmation of breeding came when two males held territory from the 6th April and fledglings were reported on the 29th June in the same location as the three in 1985. 1987 saw ten singing males recorded from five sites including Thatcham Marsh indicating *Cettia cetti* moving into West Berkshire. In 1989 on the LNR two juvenile males were captured, one 9th July and the other 3rd September; the latter staying into October. In 1990 on the LNR an adult male was captured 29th April; a juvenile male 15th July; two females on the 5th August and 22nd September; another male on the 4th October. On the 7th Oct a male ringed at Kintbury earlier in the year was recaptured here. Although none were captured in 1991 on the LNR singing males were reported nearby. A female was captured 5th April 1992 with at least three singing males elsewhere on the marsh. In 1993 NRG joined the BTO’s CES project and had another blank season. There were however, up to 4 singing males nearby and a juvenile captured at another site. In 1994 a female was captured by NRG in July and another in August. A juvenile male captured in July, became the alpha male along the mist net ride until the end of 1997. In 1995 this male was parent to many of the 11 juveniles captured probably pairing with two females, one a 1994 bird. Cetti’s Warblers are polygamous holding linear territories along lines of scrub bordering phragmites reed on the marsh, often with more than one female.

Chart 1 – Annual records of adult and juveniles birds

The following considers the Cetti’s Warblers captured along a 200 metre mist net ride during the period 1993 to 2005. As can be seen 1995 established the species as a breeding resident with up to three males breeding in the area of the CES in any one of the subsequent years. From 1995 most years saw good numbers of fledged juveniles. Interestingly 2002 is also a poor year for juvenile Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) probably showing the effect on both species of adverse weather at a critical time. There are two peak fledging periods week 29 and week 35 indicating two broods a year are likely; the earliest juveniles are week 26. Following completion of adults post breeding moult, by mid-September, it is difficult to separate from juveniles and so autumn and late winter new birds are omitted from charts.

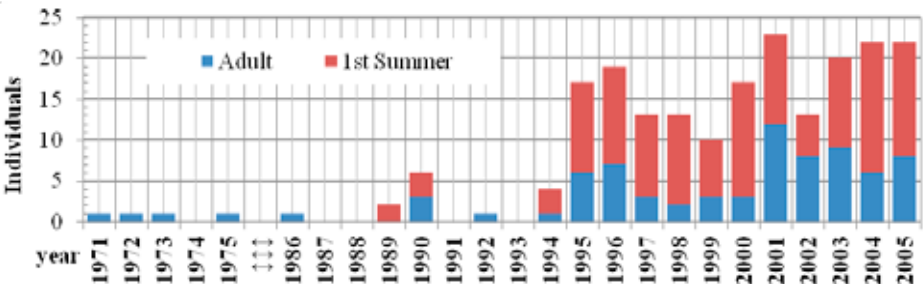


Chart 2: Adult Males captured 1995 to 2005 during the breeding season

This chart indicates adult males on site by year during the breeding season (March/August). Those sustaining territory are shown in green. Three years seems to be the nominal life of a territory. Often more than one male holds territory, presumably territories abut or it could also indicate that one usurped the other in the period. Males indicated black are trying to take over or establish a territory and/or could be from a nearby territory intruding on their neighbour.

BIRD ID	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
J685415	Green	Green	Green								
K677301		Black									
K677322		Black									
K677589		Black									
N163180				Green	Green	Green					
N567219				Black							
N567289					Green	Green	Green				
N567299						Black					
P320320							Black				
P683102							Black				
P683177							Black				
P320468							Green	Green			
P320434							Green	Green	Green		
P683171								Green	Green	Green	
R134220								Black			
P683641									Black		
R134128									Green	Green	Green
R134130									Black		
R134139									Black		
T146362										Black	
R134337											Black
T146756											Black
T632007											Black
T632212											Black

Notes: J685415 ringed as a juvenile in July 1994; N163180 a juvenile August 1997; N567289 a juvenile July 1998; P320434 and P320468 juveniles August and September 2000; P683171 a juvenile June 2001. The early date of capture for many of these juveniles indicates that they are of local stock. Possible new male blood came from R134128 an adult ringed April 2003 or P320468 late enough to be post fledging dispersal from elsewhere.

Chart 3: Adult Females captured 1995 to 2005 during the breeding season

This shows females captured along the ride during the breeding season. Fewer are captured due NRG believes to females being more secretive in this period and occupying a small sub-territory. There are indications that they begin to move elsewhere towards the end of the season. 2000 and 2001 are interesting as no adult females were captured but reference to Chart 1 shows good numbers of juvenile fledging.

BIRDID	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
J505711	Black										
J685503	Black										
K166303	Black										
J685585	Red	Red									
J495714		Red	Red	Red	Red						
K677378		Black									
K677448			Red	Red							
N163041			Red	Red							
P683067								Black			
P683072								Black			
R134099								Black			
P683297									Red	Red	Red
R134129									Red	Red	Red
R134135									Black		
R659266										Black	
T146219											
T146745											Black
T632185											Black

Notes: The female line appears to be the main source of new blood as seen by the following: J495714 a juvenile ringed at Fordingbridge July 1994 and first captured September 1994. J685585 is an adult ringed October 1994; K677448 a juvenile July 1996; N163041 an adult May 1997; P683297 a juvenile September 2001 and R134129 an adult April 2003 One of the two juveniles K677448 is probably of local stock while the other is late enough to be post fledging dispersal from elsewhere.

Discussion

Where have they come from? A juvenile ringed on the 24th July 1994 near Fordingbridge Hampshire was recaptured on the 17th September 1995 on the LNR (65km North East) and remained there as a breeding female (J495714) for at least four years; last capture date 11th July 1999. Two others (a male and a female) ringed at Kintbury Cress Beds also moved to Thatcham Marsh LNR 1990 and 1994/5 (14km East). Perhaps our birds moved into the area from coastal marshes via the Avon and Kennet Valleys?



Where do they go? A juvenile female ringed on the LNR 22nd June 1996 was recaptured at Cassiobury Park Hertfordshire on the 28th September 1997 (65km East North East). The longest movement to date is a juvenile female ringed on the LNR 13th Aug 2000, still there in September was recaptured 13th October 2001 at Uskmouth, Gwent (119km West). Many move short distances both east and west of Newbury along the Kennet Valley; the majority being females.

Current Status: Cetti's Warbler are now locally resident along the Kennet Valley mainly from west of Reading to Hungerford and may be found in suitable habitat usually associated with gravel extraction or the geological strata associated with it (gravel beds). They have yet to move into seemingly suitable habitat along the rivers and streams that feed into the Kennet although singing males are occasionally reported. 35 singing males were reported along the Kennet Valley in West Berkshire during 2005 from 18 different sites.

THE BERKSHIRE KINGFISHER SURVEY 2005

By Chris Robinson

Background to the survey:

The distribution of Kingfishers (*Alcedo Atthis*) in Berkshire has not been examined in detail since the survey work for the Birds of Berkshire (*Standley et al*) which was carried out during the years 1987-1989. This had revealed 81 confirmed breeding or probably breeding pairs across the county, a figure which the authors suspected may have been an under-estimate, largely due to the paucity of confirmed breeding records from central Berkshire. One aim of this survey was therefore to attempt a more accurate estimate, as well as bring our knowledge of the species' distribution up to date. The other was to encourage as many birdwatchers as possible to get involved in some simple survey work. There must be very few people who are unable to recognise the electric blue flash of the Kingfisher as it streaks downriver or across a lake, so it was felt that this would be an ideal survey species for both beginner and expert alike. As the bird is so easily recognisable, it was also thought that there would be very little risk to data integrity if we engaged ordinary members of the public in the recording process while at the same time this would gain

valuable publicity for the co-sponsors of the survey, the Newbury District and the Reading Ornithological Clubs. This was obtained through the local press and several newspapers were kind enough to print articles about the survey which attracted a good deal of interest as well as some useful records. There was also good publicity given via both bird clubs' websites as well as the widely read berkshbirds website.

Methodology:

In lowland UK, the Kingfisher tends to be more or less sedentary with parent birds normally remaining within their breeding range throughout the year and the young dispersing only short distances from it after fledging. Longer distance migration does occur but this is normally brought on by the onset of freezing weather. With British winters becoming milder it was felt that movement of birds within Berkshire was likely to be slight so the survey could be started in January in order to maximise the observation period and increase the number of sightings.

Preparation for breeding has usually started by early April and the first eggs are laid towards the end of the month. With an incubation period of 20-21 days and a fledging period of nearly four weeks, this means that the first young will be on the wing from mid-June onwards. A second brood may be raised following this. The cutoff date for the survey was therefore chosen as the end of July, a date selected to provide a long enough period to record most breeding attempts while (hopefully!) not confusing our counts too much with fledged or dispersing young.

Observers were asked to simply record the date and location of any sightings and make notes on activity or interesting behaviour if these were observed.

Results:

Records were received from three sources:

1. Paper or email sent in to the survey organisers in response to our publicity
2. Records downloaded from the 'Sightings' page of the berkshbirds website
3. Records submitted to the Berkshire Bird Bulletin

Some of these were duplicate (or even triplicate!) so the data had to be manually edited in order to eliminate these. This resulted in a total of 543 unique records, approximately half of which came from the first source with the remainder from the other two. These data were then entered into a MapMate® database for analysis and production of distribution maps

As well as straightforward number reporting a number of observers gave detailed or background information on what they saw and we are very grateful to all those who took the time and trouble to send in records for this survey. There is a section at the end of this report which summarises some of the *extra*-survey material.

Analysis:

Although some records supplied sufficient information to enable confirmation of breeding (e.g: a bird seen entering nest hole; carrying food or, later in the season, the recording of juvenile birds), most did not. With a primary purpose of the survey being to establish the number of breeding pairs in the county, we therefore had to rely on interpretive methods in order to estimate the location and number of breeding territories.

Firstly, all the records were examined and, if not already supplied, a grid reference was added. Usually this was a 4-figure one (i.e: to an accuracy of 1km), although occasionally enough

detail was given to get a greater precision. As the intention was to plot the distribution of all sightings to the 1km square level, 6-figure precision was not essential but did sometimes prove useful in segregating adjacent territories. A few supplied references had to be corrected, the normal error being a confusion between “eastings” and “northings”, resulting in apparent sightings in mid-Oxfordshire, Hampshire or even further afield! We had originally suggested that observers could submit records from just over the county border as it was felt that they might be useful in identifying Kingfisher territories which spanned a border (birds, after all, are no respecters of these!). In the end, with the small exception of Dorney Wetlands there were very few of these so they were not included in the final analysis.

Once all records were complete and correct they were imported into MapMate®. This allowed analysis and plotting of Kingfisher distribution across the county using a number of different criteria, such as date, site, etc.

Figure 1 shows the distribution, plotted by 1km square, of all Kingfisher records over the whole survey period. This shows a total of 152 squares which recorded at least one sighting during the survey period. This does not of course mean that there was this number of Kingfisher territories or even, necessarily, this number of Kingfishers in the county. In fact, given the long time period which the map spans one might expect it to better plot the distribution of water bodies and water courses within the county; which indeed it does rather well! It does serve one function however in that it reveals an apparent shortage of birds in a few places, notably the upper reaches of the R. Lambourn, the R. Pang and parts of the R. Loddon, with some possible blank areas on certain parts of the R. Thames and R. Kennet. It seems likely that the explanation for at least the first three might be more to do with lack of observer coverage rather than lack of birds, although some roughly similar observations were made in the Berks Atlas.

With the benefit of hindsight, it may have been better if we had plotted incoming records as they came in so that we could identify any potential “blank spots” and arrange extra coverage of these areas. We did in fact ask people to tell us where they did **not** find Kingfishers as well as where they did but, perhaps not surprisingly, we received very few such records. In any case many people held on to their records until the end of the survey period so this “map-as-you-go” method may not have been that productive.

Figure 1. Distribution of all Kingfisher records by 1km square

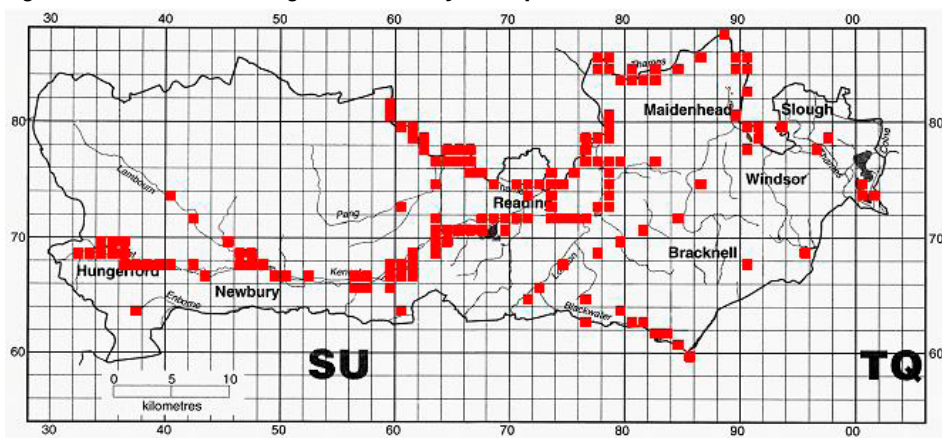


Figure 2. Distribution of winter Kingfisher sightings by 1km square

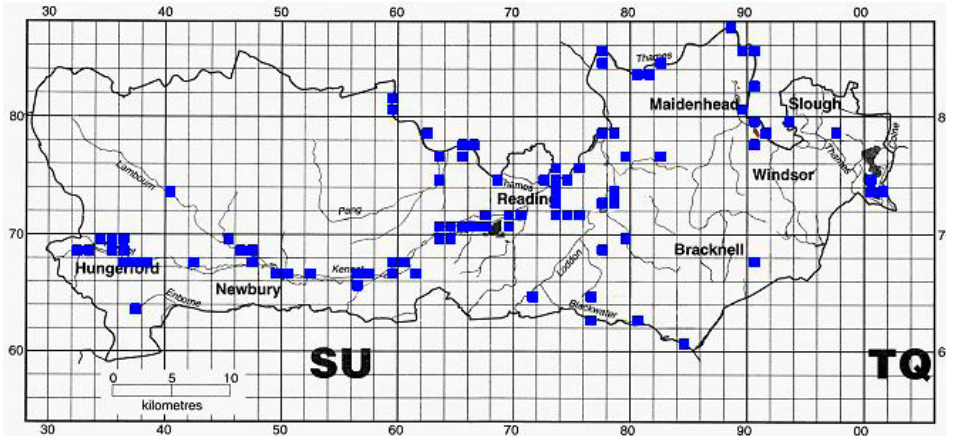


Figure 3. Distribution of spring/summer Kingfisher sightings by 1km square

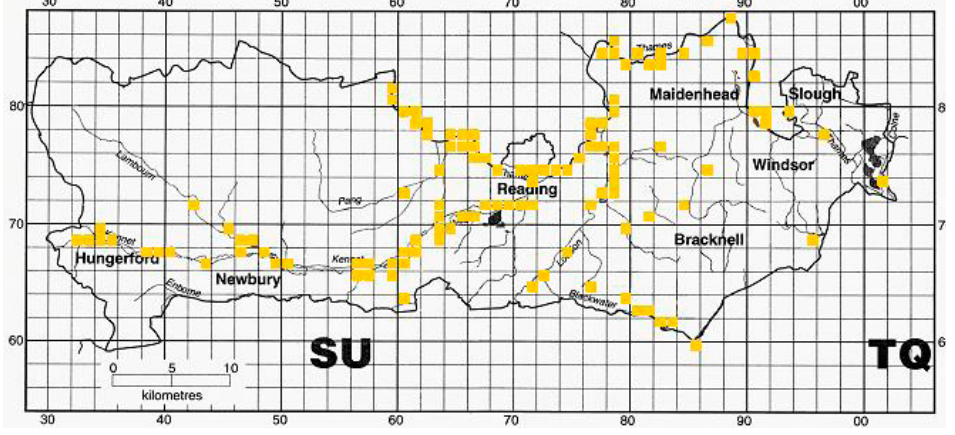
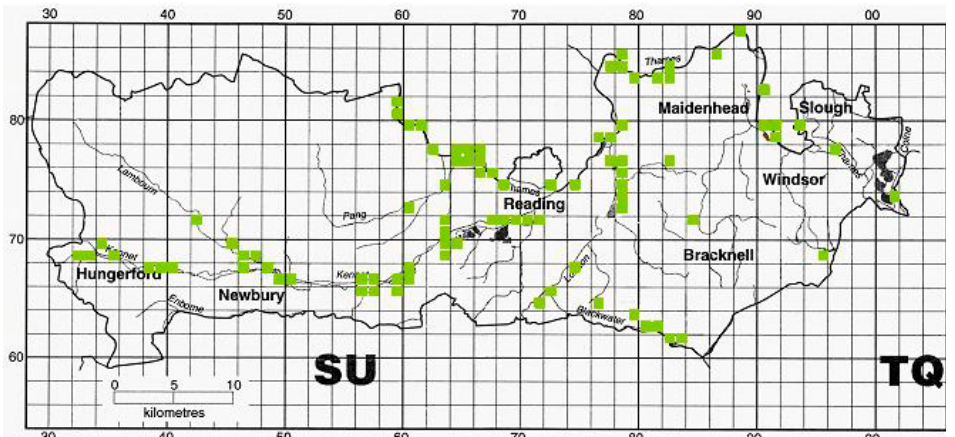


Figure 4. Distribution of “breeding season” Kingfisher sightings by 1km square



While the preceding map shows the absolute maximum distribution (with one or two possible exceptions, as already discussed), 152 breeding pairs is certain to be an overestimate. The main reason for this is that the map does not differentiate between winter and breeding period records so, given that there is some extra winter mobility in this species, many of the plotted squares will represent winter-only records.

In order to refine the estimate, the complete dataset was first analysed by inspection of each record in order to establish the true or likely status of each 1km square with respect to Kingfisher breeding usage. This was done using one of four criteria:-

- a. Squares with proven nesting (e.g: nest found or young seen by observer)
- b. Squares with a probable nesting or breeding attempt (e.g: bird carrying food)
- c. Squares with a possible breeding attempt (e.g: pair seen in breeding period)
- d. Squares occupied during both winter and spring/summer periods

The last method is perhaps a little controversial, but as there were relatively few records in the first three categories, it was hoped that this could provide a reliable alternative to the more traditional ones. In reality, this only generated 62 probably breeding birds, a figure which is almost certainly too low. There are at least a couple of probable explanations for this:-

1. The survey method, being basically non-structured, did not guarantee that all squares would be visited regularly or throughout the survey period. One just has to look at the dataset from a geographic perspective to see the variations in coverage; for example nineteen records from R. Thames at Remenham versus just six for the whole of the R. Pang!
2. Reduced surveyor activity during the winter months of the year, particularly in the more remote locations. A 13% increase in spring/summer records over winter ones would appear not to support this theory but see next!
3. Reduced observability of Kingfishers during the main breeding months. Records for April, May and June were all significantly lower than any of the three preceding months and only exceeded them in July when first broods would have been raised and young would be on the wing.

This method having failed to come up with a credible result it was time then to turn to an alternative analysis!

Figure 2 opposite shows the distribution of Kingfishers by 1km square for the three winter months (January through March), a total of 90 squares in all. 1km is probably not enough to separate individual birds, especially in the non-breeding season as they are likely to be much more mobile, but inspection shows that most squares are not adjacent so this figure could be close to the total number of birds holding winter territories.

Next the distribution of spring and summer sightings (April through July) was plotted, see Figure 3 opposite. This yielded a total of 111 occupied squares during the period April to the end of July.

The presumption was that the preceding map should represent the distribution (and number) of breeding pairs in the county but in light of previous comments about the jump in sightings during July, it was felt safer to eliminate these from the map. This amended “main breeding season” distribution is shown below.

This shows a total of 89 1km squares occupied during the months of April through June (the main breeding period), a figure remarkably close to that for the winter months.

Examination of the winter and spring distributions from a geographical perspective reveal an almost complete absence of spring records from the main gravel pits, such as Theale,

Wraysbury and Dinton Pastures, the likely reason being that these sites, while being good for winter feeding do not have appropriate habitat for breeding (i.e: good nesting banks) and birds therefore settle in sites which do. Presumably the same sorts of minor migration take place at the beginning of each breeding season in other, less obvious, locations too. This being the case, it seems a reasonable conclusion that the closely matching numbers of Kingfishers for winter and what I have called the “main breeding season” are in fact no coincidence and the two maps simply reflect the redistribution of the same birds.

The map below shows pictorially the difference between winter and “breeding season” distribution. The blue squares are those occupied only in the winter months; the green are those occupied in the breeding season. The locations of our main gravel pits stand out; although the blank in the Hungerford area is less explicable...

Conclusion

After allowances have been made for records from adjacent squares (which can represent just a single bird) there would appear to have been a minimum of 78 occupied territories recorded during this survey. There could be at least another 6 areas which might have held breeding birds but which failed to yield any breeding season records.

The probable number of breeding Kingfishers in Berkshire 2005 was between 78 and 84

Footnotes

- ◆ Several observers noted low numbers of sightings in areas which they have watched regularly over the years. With no serious cold spells in the 2004/5 winter it is not immediately clear why this should be.
- ◆ A number of records came from canoeists; this seems to be a good way of observing Kingfishers at close quarters!
- ◆ There were also a few records from anglers. In retrospect it was realised that the fishing clubs might have provided a useful extra source of records, perhaps from areas not easily accessible to birdwatchers.
- ◆ There were several records from gardens, some not very near to water. Garden ponds figured in some, but not all of these.
- ◆ Sadly two of the garden records included casualties from window strikes but one (from Brenda Tompkins near Hungerford) had a happy ending and with her permission I include her story and photo opposite.

I thought you might be interested in this photo. I was sitting out on the patio the other evening when I heard a thud against the window. Unfortunately the bird that had dazed itself was a kingfisher. I sat with it cupped in my hand to keep warm for 20 minutes and was so grateful it made a full recovery before flying away. A happy ending and I was grateful to get a photo of this most beautiful bird before he left.



SPARROWHAWK EYE COLOUR

Jan Legg for Newbury Ringing Group

The iris colour of Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) is an indicator of age. As the bird ages the colour become more intense. It starts pale yellow in first years as shown in the top right image. Adulthood is reached after the second summer and iris colour is orange yellow as the lower right image. On the 27th February 2005 a ringed male was recaptured at our winter feeding station along the Winterbourne valley near Bagnor. Ringed as a first year male at the same place on 15th December 1996 it was at least 8 years and 74 days old when recaptured. The age record for the UK is 17years 31days; normal lifespan is probably much less and around 5 years. As can be seen in the left hand image the colour of the iris is red and plumage colours generally are more intense.

The concentration of birds, visiting feeding stations often attract predators such as Sparrowhawk. We normally captured one about every three years since ringing began at this site in 1980; all thought to be winter wanderers. On checking none had been captured here between ringing this bird and its recapture. A pair holds territory along the Winterbourne valley each year, nesting in the woods towards Snelsmore Common and it is probable that this male is the territory holder.

References

Identification Guide to European Non-Passerines (Baker) BTO Guide 24
www.bto.org/BirdFacts



Photographs: Newbury Ringing Group



Pale-bellied Brent Goose – Theale Main GP, 17 March 2005 by Adam Bassett





Black-necked Grebes – Lower Farm GP, 15 March 2005 by Mike Prince



Leach's Petrel – Queen Mother Reservoir, 9 November 2005 by Mike McKee



Ring Ouzel – Finchampstead, 2 June 2005 by B and R McCartney



Garganey with Gadwall – Lavell's Lake, 12 May 2005 by Ashley Stow



Short-eared Owls – Bury Down, January 2005 by Mike McKee





Waxwings – Bracknell, January 2005 by Gordon Langsbury



WHISKERED TERN AT MOOR GREEN LAKES – 21ST TO 27TH MAY 2005

by *Bruce Archer*

A Whiskered Tern was reported at Tundry Pond in Hampshire at 15:45 on the Friday 20th May. It was later reported at Fleet Pond that evening and was then seen leaving at 21:06 and reported by John Clark as heading north in the company of 3 Common Terns. Moor Green Lakes is less than 5 miles north of Fleet Pond and there is a strong correlation in the numbers and dates of Common Terns arriving at the two sites in the spring. Some of the 50+ Common Terns breeding and roosting at Moor Green Lakes feed at Fleet Pond, as well as several other lakes in the area. Hence there was a strong possibility that the same Whiskered Tern would roost at Moor Green that evening. I am indebted to John Clark for posting prompt information of the sightings via the Hampshire Ornithological Society email group (HOSlist).

At 04:35 when I arrived at Moor Green on the Saturday morning many of the Common Terns and Black-headed Gulls were leaving Tern Island where they spend the night. At 04:50 I spotted a darker Tern on the NW corner of the island a bit apart from the remaining Common Terns. It took off and flew around the lake, enabling me to identify it as the Whiskered Tern. After making a couple of calls to people who I knew would not mind being woken up and texting some others, it was light enough to see that someone was in the hide. It was John Clark who had arrived earlier and had independently identified the bird; hence we became the joint finders of Berkshire's first Whiskered Tern.

It was smaller than the accompanying Common Terns and looked stocky in comparison. The flight was less bouncy and the same as that of a Black Tern I had watched for 30 mins, less than 24 hours before at Horseshoe Lake. The black cap and white cheeks ruled out other marsh terns. The body was clearly darker below than above, and showed off the paler wings with almost white primaries/secondaries and under wing. The tail was short and white and contrasted sharply with the dark belly. There was no doubt in my mind that it was a summer plumage Whiskered Tern. I later scoped the bird at rest on the island and the long red legs and deep-red bill were clear.

The Tern remained until 06:15 when it was seen flying off north, much to the disappointment of birdwatchers still arriving. Ian Brown (the Moor Green bird recorder) who had set out as soon as he read my text message, found it on Horseshoe Lake for 10 minutes at 07:10.

At 17:55 that evening it returned to Moor Green and was seen by numerous birdwatchers until dusk when it settled on the island for the night. It remained until after 08:30 Sunday morning. It was seen again on the evening of Friday 27th May. During the week it was seen regularly at Staines reservoir in Surrey – it was identified as the same bird because of a missing tail feather.



Whiskered Tern by Marek Walford

THEALE AREA BIRD CONSERVATION GROUP SURVEY OF THEALE AND BURGHFIELD AREA 2005

By Richard Crawford

The aim of any conservation group is not only to preserve and improve existing habitat but also to monitor the numbers and populations of species using it to inform its activities. In 1998 I conducted a survey of the Theale & Burghfield gravel pits complex to ascertain numbers of warblers and other species found there. In 2005 it was felt that another survey should take place to compare figures for the two years to note whether any significant increases or decreases had taken place in the seven-year period.

The habitat within the gravel pit complex is transitional, and over many years we have seen it change from farmland to gravel pits, then to scrub, and in some areas to woodland. With the cessation of gravel extraction the area is not the magnet for passage and breeding waders that it was 20 years ago, with the open muddy margins becoming overgrown and turning to reed, sedge and scrub. This does, however, create new habitat for other species, and with this in mind I organised the survey in 2005 to establish the numbers of not only warblers, but Nightingales, Song Thrushes, Reed Buntings and Bullfinches.

The area surveyed consisted of Theale, Burghfield and Pingewood gravel pits from Wigmore Lane and Bottom Lane in the west to Smallmead in the east, with the Holybrook at Southcote forming the northern boundary and Burnthouse Lane the southern boundary. The area was then divided into twelve 'core locations' and appropriate maps were drawn up and distributed to a team of volunteer surveyors from the Theale Area Bird Conservation Group who each made at least four visits to their allocated area between mid-April and mid-May, recording and plotting on their maps any of the target species encountered. The surveyors were also asked to note any scarce species that they came across such as Spotted Flycatcher, Turtle Dove or Marsh Tit, though these did not form part of the survey.

I then transferred the results onto individual species maps for each area signifying each visit date with a letter, i.e., first visit letter A, second B etc. Eventually I ended up with a map for each species from within each site containing 'clusters' of sightings, and by circling these clusters it is possible to estimate the number of singing males or territories in each area. This is the method used by the BTO as laid down in their Common Bird Census instructions, and although for our purposes the results are very much subject to individual interpretation, I believe it is the best method to calculate numbers of territories within a certain area. The 1998 survey was conducted in exactly the same way, so comparisons between the two surveys should be a true reflection on the status of each species. There are always those who argue that singing individuals may be just passing through on passage, but I believe that this is compensated for by the fact that not every single individual will be located, and that inevitably some areas within the survey area get missed.

The table below shows the results of the 2005 survey compared to 1998 and percentage increases:

Species	2005	1998	% Difference
Cetti's Warbler	7	0	
Grasshopper Warbler	0	3	
Sedge Warbler	120	179	-34%
Reed Warbler	73 (86)*	67	+ 9%
Lesser Whitethroat	5	16 (9)**	-45%
Common Whitethroat	87	84	+4%
Garden Warbler	111	77	+57%
Blackcap	201	193	+4%
Chiffchaff	104	118	-14%
Willow Warbler	78	99	-21%
Nightingale	57	59	-3%
Song Thrush	54	40	+35%
Bullfinch	19	Not Surveyed	
Reed Bunting	81	69	+17%

*Adjusted figure as one area was not surveyed sufficiently.

**Adjusted figure to compensate for migrant 'fall'.

As one would expect from a mix of migratory and resident species, the results indicate a considerable difference of fortune amongst them in terms of numbers. Although not too much can be read into these figures regarding long-term trends, some conclusions can be reached;

Cetti's Warbler

With none recorded in 1998 but seven in 2005 this was no surprise as this species has expanded its range in southern Britain in recent years, possibly as a result of a succession of mild winters.

Grasshopper Warbler

This is an irregular passage migrant to our area and no conclusions can be made regarding three in 1998 and none in 2005 – some years are better than others!

Sedge Warbler

Although still plentiful, numbers were considerably down on 1998. Loss of the old Wader Pit site in the intervening years would account for a large percentage of the decrease (25 territories). Good numbers were recorded at Moatlands & Burghfield Mill.

Reed Warbler

The 2005 figure has been adjusted to take into account one site that was insufficiently surveyed but known to contain good numbers of this species. Numbers have perhaps reached their peak with all available reedbed habitat seemingly occupied. Back in 1990 only about 10 pairs were recorded, but planting of phragmites by the TABCG at Hosehill and Burghfield Mill has increased the population to new heights, with those two sites holding 42% of the population.

Lesser Whitethroat

Another species where numbers can fluctuate between years, and a difficult bird to survey due to their brief song period. The 1998 figure of 16 is misleading as seven of these were almost together in the same bush, and were clearly migrants! Ignoring these, numbers were still down by 45% from nine singing males/territories in 1998 to just five in 2005.

Common Whitethroat

No significant change in numbers. Highest counts were made at Main Pit and Southcote.

Garden Warbler

A good year for this species with numbers rising from 77 singing males in 1998 to 111 in 2005, an increase of 57%. There are no obvious reasons to explain this increase. Searle's Farm Lane (30) and Wigmore Lane (23) were the favoured locations.

Blackcap

The most abundant warbler in our area showed a slight increase to 201 singing males/territories, with the highest count by far coming from Searle's Farm Lane where 62 territories were located.

Chiffchaff

With many birds arriving from mid-March I always feel that numbers of this species are under-recorded during the survey period, with breeding activity well under way and many feeding young rather than singing. There was a slight decrease this year.

Willow Warbler

A 21% decrease over the seven-year period would seem to reflect the general recent trend for this species in the southern half of Britain. Wigmore Lane/Bottom Lane provided the highest counts – 21 territories.

Nightingale

Our area continues to be attractive to this enigmatic species, with almost half the records coming from Burghfield GPs.

Song Thrush

A welcome increase from 40 singing males in 1998 to 54 in 2005, up 35%.

Bullfinch

Not surveyed in 1998, but as a declining species it was felt necessary to determine numbers as a yardstick for future surveys. Altogether 19 territories were located evenly spread throughout the area.

Reed Bunting

Another species where nationally, numbers are giving cause for concern but it is doing well in our area. A very healthy population of 81 singing males/territories were found, up 17% since 1998.

My thanks go to all those who participated in the survey, namely John Lerpiniere, John Andrews, Roland Povey, Ken Spring, Cathy & Derek McEwan, Peter Hickman, Chris Robinson, Brian Uttley, Andrew Cowdell, Roger Stansfield and Martin Sell.

RINGING AND NESTBOX HIGHLIGHTS 2005

By Brian Clews

WEST BERKSHIRE

A significant expansion of effort by West Berks teams comprising Smith & Wilson in the Hungerford area, John Buchanan at Hermitage, Nigel Cleere at Greenham Common and Newbury Ringing Group (Pat Martin, Jan Legg, Ian Weston, Duncan Long, John Swallow, Tim Ball, Karen Tucker, Paul James and Sue James) resulted in an impressive 6372 birds of 65 species, the best for many years. New species were Common Tern (due to the Thatcham tern raft being included for the first time – 15 pulli), Woodlark and Dartford Warbler.

Top ten species ringed

2004			1967-2005		
1	BLUE TIT	1543	1	BLUE TIT	40234
2	GREAT TIT	976	2	GREAT TIT	19237
3	CHIFFCHAFF	385	3	WREN	10223
4	GREENFINCH	380	4	REED WARBLER	9644
5	BLACKCAP	318	5	SEDGE WARBLER	9262
6	REED WARBLER	284	6	BLACKCAP	8623
7	WREN	220	7	GREENFINCH	8530
8	CHAFFINCH	208	8	CHIFFCHAFF	8452
9	ROBIN	186	9	BLACKBIRD	7669
10	BLACKBIRD	166	10	DUNNOCK	6989

Of note, Willow Warbler drops out of the top ten for the first time in many years, reflecting the regional decline in the status of this species.

Notable captures included the first Wheatear since 1973 and a Ring Ouzel, not caught since 1969. Barn Owls did well with 49 youngsters ringed (26 last year) but only 1 Willow Tit obliged.

Of 7 recoveries from birds previously ringed by the group, a 2004 Wren (perhaps usually thought of as sedentary) was found in Tring 71km away this July. Perhaps indicating migration routes, a Sedge Warbler ringed here last July was found again this May in Ashton Keynes, Wilts, the same group also re-trapping a Blackcap in September which had been ringed in Kintbury the previous month.

Six birds captured this year were ringed elsewhere, including a Blackcap ringed 8th Oct 2004 Beerse, Antwerpen, Belgium recaptured on Greenham Common 31st Oct 2005, and a Blackbird ringed 20th Sep 2003 Malmon, Vastmanland, Sweden recaptured Greenham Common 19th Nov 2005 (*Ed – which came all this way to be killed by a cat in Reading 18th Feb 2006!*)

There were none of the major highlights of previous years which gave the county Aquatic, Savi's and Paddyfield Warblers, but very rewarding and informative results nonetheless.

WOKINGHAM BARN OWLS

Countryside Ranger, Stuart Croft, reports that of 16 boxes, 9 showed evidence of breeding with no fewer than 18 young confirmed in 4 of them. A pair of Little Owls also commandeered a box, raising a single youngster.

LAVELL'S CONSERVATION AREA

Tim Alexander reported from this site, where double the number of birds of recent years was caught (506), including single Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler.

The top five species were:

Blackcap – 91
Blue Tit – 77
Lesser Redpoll – 49
Dunnock – 31
Chiffchaff – 25

Interestingly, for those who do not see as many as they might wish, there were as many Bullfinches and Garden Warblers in the net as Long-tailed Tits (21 of each), but only 6 Willow Warblers, reflecting the West Berks experience.

Birds coming back having been ringed last year included 2 Garden Warblers, 2 Sedge Warblers, a Blackcap and a Reed Warbler. Birds a bit longer in the tooth re-trapped from earlier years included a Blue Tit from 2001 and 2 Long-tailed Tits and a Wren from 2003.

Birds originally ringed elsewhere included a Reed Warbler first caught in Guildford in August 2003. Meantime, the above-mentioned Nightingale, ringed at Lavell's in July, was subsequently re-found at Icklesham, Sussex, on 18/08/2005.

MOOR GREEN NEST BOXES

Kevin Briggs reported on the survey of 45 boxes on the reserve, which experienced a significant 91% occupancy. Four boxes had Great Tit eggs in by April 9th but poor weather delayed the main laying period for about ten days. One pair unusually laid a second batch of 6 eggs immediately after raising 9 young, but more poor weather led to abandonment of the nest. Nonetheless, 88 young fledged from 128 eggs, with Blue Tit doing a little better (112 from 121 eggs).

Of 7 pairs of Stock Doves laying in the larger boxes, only three raised a total of 5 young between them, but interestingly, 6 pairs attempted second broods, only to face pressure from Squirrel and Mandarin, resulting in just one brood of 3 surviving. With sheer persistence, 4 pairs tried a third time, but a total of 8 eggs only produced 2 fledglings.

Mandarin took on 8 boxes, the first eggs laid March 5th, a month before the mean laying date of April 5th. Out of an incredible total of 122 eggs, only 4 broods survived but nonetheless produced 63 young Mandarins! Of course, egg dumping is well known in the species, and ringing details of the Moor Green birds showed for example that one 4-year old female laid 12 of her own eggs but also inherited 12 others from 2 other females, raising a total of 19 ducklings. Another feisty female lost her first clutch to Squirrels but moved to another box where she produced 7 eggs of her own and then was trumped with 8 from another bird, of which total she reared a respectable 13 young. A similar fascinating insight comes from another female Kevin found dumping eggs in one box whilst sitting on her own clutch of 10. The latter clutch failed, but the 'parasitised' duck raised most of her other brood for her.

Neither Tawny or Little Owls utilised boxes this season, which was disappointing in what turned out to be a good vole year.

JEALLOTT'S HILL

Peter Edwards and Steven Avery have summarised the work of Hughenden Ringing Group at this farmland location. A grand total of 706 birds (15% increase on 2004) from 27 species were involved, including 538 adults, and no less than 168 re-traps or recoveries. The

most numerous by far were Chaffinches (238 first-timers and 50 recoveries). The top five thereafter were (new birds and recoveries):-

Yellowhammer – (55 & 19)

Blue Tit – (37 & 30)

Great Tit (31 & 14)

Dunnock – (28 & 11)

Robin – (21 & 17)

One Sparrowhawk was trapped and no less than 23 Reed Buntings, but just a single Willow Warbler.

Amongst the interesting recoveries made at this site not previously summarised for the County Report was a Reed Bunting ringed at Englemere Pond in October 1995, re-trapped here in January 04, another of the same species ringed at Woolston Eyes, Cheshire in Feb 03 recovered here in Feb 04, a Brambling first caught in Hodne Klepp, Norway Oct 02 and recovered here April 04, and another Brambling from Westenschouwen Strand, Netherlands Oct 03, at Jeallotts Hill March 2004.

Of the 2005 recoveries, a Chiffchaff ringed at Hatton, Greater London in June 02 was found here this March.

EAST BERKSHIRE

Amongst the 23 sites covered by the Runnymede Ringing Group, a small number are in East Berks, which contributed to an impressive 6,293 new birds ringed and 836 pulli across the Group's range. Nonetheless, this was regarded as one of the poorer years since 2000. Malcolm Turner, Phil Davies, Roger Auger and Bill Haines summarise their successes in East Berkshire as follows:-

Site 1

Here, 18 sessions resulted in 506 birds of 29 species, the second highest result for five years, of which 246 were adults and 272 were juvs.

Top five birds here were:-

Reed Warbler – 95

Blue Tit – 90

Great Tit – 44

Blackcap – 40

Robin – 37

Interesting additions were a Kingfisher, 17 House Martins and a single Lapwing!

In addition, no less than 326 re-traps were made, including 113 Reed Warblers and 10 Treecreepers.

Site 2

Here, 1629 birds of 31 species were caught, plus 767 pulli, slightly down on 2004. New birds for the site included Ring-necked Parakeet, Mistle Thrush and Tawny Owl.

All the 767 pulli ringed were Blue Tits, and 469 more of the species were re-trapped, making it the most prolific bird on the site, with 204 broods. Other significant totals were:-

Great Tit – 325

Coal Tit – 65

Robin – 59

Chaffinch – 53

Blackbird – 47

No less than 20 adult Great Spotted Woodpeckers were ringed and 4 Willow Warblers.

Site 3

The site was operated on fewer occasions than in recent years, but nonetheless, 82 new birds of 15 species were ringed. Although Blue Tit was inevitably top of the list (16), Great Tit (13) was surprisingly relegated to third spot by Goldcrest (15). No new species were added to the list, but a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Firecrest (which came into the net twice) were significant events. Unfortunately, none of the 35 Waxwings present during March were trapped.

Site 4

No less than 2,255 birds of 38 species were caught during 27 separate visits. 1682 (74.6%) were new birds, 568 (25.2%) were retraps, and 5 controls (0.2%). Although the site effort was essentially comparable with recent years, the number of birds ringed was significantly less than the previous two. The total included no fewer than 10 species of warbler, including Grasshopper. The top ten species were:-

2005			2004		
1	BLACKCAP	509	1	CHIFFCHAFF	702
2	CHIFFCHAFF	368	2	BLACKCAP	580
3	GARDEN WARBLER	78	3	WHITETHROAT	223
4	WHITETHROAT	75	4	WILLOW WARBLER	131
5	DUNNOCK	74	5	ROBIN	102
6	WILLOW WARBLER	66	6	BLUE TIT	98
7	ROBIN	62	7	LONG-TAILED TIT	90
8	BLUE TIT	53	8	GARDEN WARBLER	85
9	BULLFINCH	47	9	MEADOW PIPIT	80
10	LONG-TAILED TIT	46	10	DUNNOCK	74

The number of Willow Warblers seems to buck the trend observed at other Berkshire ringing sites. Other notable species included 4 Treecreepers, a Sparrowhawk, Nuthatch, Redstart, Swallow and Starling and no less than 10 Kingfishers.

No fewer than 568 birds of 23 species were re-trapped, including 98 Chiffchaffs, 60 Dunnocks (which clearly like the site), 56 Willow Warblers and 48 Bullfinches. A Firecrest caught in January had only been ringed here the previous December. There were also 5 controls, 4 of which were UK ringed birds, but a Sedge Warbler had originally been ringed in France. One Reed Warbler re-trapped was now known to be 10 years and 79 days old. A Blackcap ringed here in July 2003 was re-trapped at Seine-et-Oise, France, 28th March 2005.

For the third year running, additional effort was applied at this site in September for returning migrants. Fewer birds were ringed in the return migration season than previous years, suggesting to the team perhaps lower numbers of birds arriving in spring and that breeding condition may also have been low, with 2005 not being a good breeding year overall. Nonetheless, 965 birds were caught during the month, over half of which were Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs, and a single Redstart. The majority occurred in the first two weeks of the month. Interestingly, the great majority of the Blackcaps in this period were males (66%) which also appeared to be passing through earlier than females, indicating possible asynchronous migration.

COOKHAM OWL BOXES

A total of 46 Little Owl boxes have been erected in the Cookham area between Cockmarsh and North Town Moor in recent years. In 2005, twelve of these were used by Owls early in the season. However, by winter, Squirrels had taken several of these over resulting in three boxes having un-hatched eggs beneath new drey material. In addition, one dead Owl was found under one of the boxes, possibly the result of a scuffle with the occupying Squirrel. Other species found using the boxes were Great Tit (2), Blue Tit (1) and Stock Dove (1).

Some 52 Tawny Owl boxes have also been supplied in the Quarry Woods/Bisham Woods and Carpenter Woods complex during the same period. In the 2005 season, the majority of boxes were taken by Squirrels, but 3 occupied boxes each produced 2 young birds. Apart from one box used regularly, the owls seem to move from box to box in different years, even if last year's box remained available. Other species using the boxes included Great Tit, Jackdaw, Stock Doves and Mandarin (all of 22 eggs in one of these once being hatched and the ducklings successfully led off.)

SUMMARY OF RINGING EFFORT

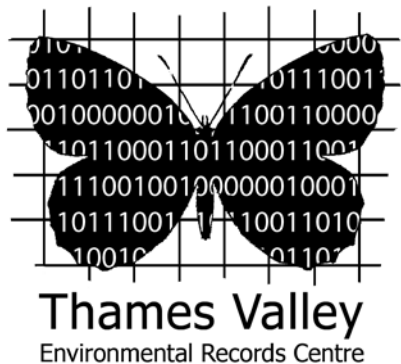
The 'net' result of combined ringing activity in the county in 2005 was that some 12,823 birds were ringed at the various sites, covering 72 species. The dedication of the teams involved continues to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the trends the data reveal.

TVERC Small Grant Acknowledgement

The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, proud sponsors of the Berkshire Bird Report, collects, collates and makes available information to help people make sound decisions about our natural environment in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. The information is also widely used for education and research purposes.

TVERC aims to hold all available information about the plants, animals, wildlife habitats and important wildlife and geological sites in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. There are many people collecting information about our natural environment and by collating all this information at TVERC, everyone can get a better picture of the status and distribution of wildlife.

To find out more about our work or to pass on your records please visit our website www.tverc.org or contact Melanie Hardie at TVERC, c/o The Oxfordshire Museum, Park Street, Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1SN.



STUDY OF TREE PIPITS IN WEST BERKSHIRE

By Jon Wilding

In 2005 Tree Pipits were not a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species, but were and are still classified as being on the amber list* (along with 120 other species), as they have suffered from a >50% decline in numbers over the last 25 years. It is believed that the current UK breeding population is around 75,000 pairs, with as many as 15 million breeding pairs throughout Europe.

Table 1 : BBI Results for Tree Pipits 2000-2004

Year	1km Squares covered	Birds recorded
2000	45	11
2001	48	10
2002	50	8
2003	55	5
2004	55	0

During the years 2000 to 2004 the Berkshire Bird Index conducted surveys of around 50, 1km squares across West Berkshire and during this 5 year period they recorded a decline in numbers from 11 birds in the first year to no birds in the last year. **

Throughout West Berkshire as a whole Tree Pipits appear to be an under-recorded species. During the 2005 breeding season only five West Berkshire records were placed on the county website (www.berksbirds.co.uk), these covered only three sites and recorded a total of twenty three birds. From my own observations made during the project I recorded forty four birds myself. On checking the records from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, the picture is just as bad. For the last thirty three years there have only been twenty seven records, recording just seventy birds, and the most recent record dates back to 1996! (NB Since producing this report, data not in the public domain at the time has been released which shows that during 2005 West Berkshire held a total of 15 breeding territories).

It is hoped that this project will help raise awareness of the species, with local ornithologists. It is also hoped to improve the recording of the species, currently on the amber list.

Research Questions

Below are the research questions that this project sought to answer;

1. What is the distribution of Tree Pipits in West Berkshire?
2. What is the preferred habitat for breeding success in West Berkshire's Tree Pipit population?
3. How closely does the Tree Pipit population of Snelsmore Common reflect the national trend of breeding success for the species?

* The UK government and non-governmental organisations colour code species according to their conservation status. This is then published in "The population status of birds in the UK : Birds of conservation concern".

** Berkshire Bird Index Group (2000-2004) – Annual survey of bird populations in Berkshire, Berkshire Bird Index Group.

Discussion

The distribution of Tree Pipit populations within West Berkshire, falls into what one would expect for the species. The main sites are all heathland sites with various degrees of scrub succession. Snelsmore Common is undergoing a very intensive management regime, in order to restore the common back to prime heath. Greenham Common has undergone some major restoration since the US airforce left, and returned the common back to the British government, and subsequently the people of Newbury in 1997. The runway, once the longest in Europe, has been removed and reseeded with heather cuttings from other areas of the site. Finally Bucklebury Common has been gently tidied up over a number of years, and in 2005 has, seen a major change in approach, with major earthworks being carried out in order to remove the top layer of humus. The effects of this clearance will remain to be seen. Other secondary sites around West Berkshire are either other heathland sites, such as Newtown Common and Padworth Common, or are woodland and plantation sites, such as Combe Wood, West Woodhay and Wasing Wood. There are a few records of birds singing in other downland habitats (Lambourne Downs and Churn Holt) but these have been presumed to be birds on migration, as no sustained records of breeding success have emerged from these sites. With heathland management high on West Berkshire Council's agenda it would appear that the Tree Pipit population may be expected to grow in the future.

Breeding success in West Berkshire would appear to rely on open heathland with a good supply of song perches, (these being either scattered mature trees or power/telephone lines). The top three sites in West Berkshire (Snelsmore, Greenham and Bucklebury Commons), between 1991 and 2002, have held 59% of the total population of West Berkshire's Tree Pipit population, with Snelsmore Common alone holding 38% of the total population. The comparison of results from the breeding atlases produced in 1976 and 1993, show that West Berkshire's population appears to be stable, whilst some of the counties surrounding Berkshire, appear to be suffering from a decline in numbers.

It should also be noted, that the Tree Pipit is a long distance migrant, with British birds migrating across the Bay of Biscay down to Portugal before flying onto North West Africa. According to Wernhams et al.* of the 16,460 Tree Pipits that have been ringed since 1960, only 33 birds have been recovered, most of these having been shot in Portugal. This signifies that problems encountered both on migration and whilst at their wintering grounds can have a dramatic impact on breeding success back in this country.

The Tree Pipit population of Snelsmore Common does not fit neatly in with the national figures produced by the BTO, which show that the **long term** trend nationally, is in sharp decline. Snelsmore's **long term** figures show a reduced level of decline. As a result of the project the figures show that in contrast to the **recent** national trend of steadiness, West Berkshire's **recent** population trend appears to be growing. This is borne out when comparing the BTO national atlas results for 1976 and 1993. **

* Wernham, C.V., Toms, M.P., Marchant, J.H., Siriwardena, G.M. & Baillie, S.R. (2002). *The migration atlas: Movements of the birds of Britain & Ireland*. T. & A.D. Poyser, London

** British Trust for Ornithology (2004) – Website (BTO Atlases>Species Index> Tree Pipit), BTO.ORG.UK

Conclusions

1. What is the distribution of Tree Pipits in West Berkshire?

Tree Pipits are predominantly found at heathland sites along the river valleys to the South of the area. The high chalk downs along the West and North of the area do not provide the habitat preferred by Tree Pipits.

2. What is the preferred habitat for breeding success in West Berkshire's Tree Pipit population?

Tree Pipits in West Berkshire favour heathland areas that are being actively managed to arrest succession. The three main breeding sites for Tree Pipits in West Berkshire are Snelsmore Common, Greenham Common and Bucklebury Common.

3. How closely does the Tree Pipit population of Snelsmore Common reflect the national trend of breeding success for the species?

The Snelsmore Common Tree Pipit population, between 1963 and 1991, had been in decline. This decline has been on a more even slope than the figures published by the BTO. Since 1991 the population has been slowly rising which is the reverse of the national trend. If the population continues to grow, the long term trend (since 1963) will begin to flatten out. Berkshire's long term continued growth, may well have a positive impact on the national trend of this species.

Findings

- i) Tree Pipits like managed heathland.
- ii) Succession on heathland, at first, provides a suitable habitat for breeding success in Tree Pipits. As the trees mature the habitat becomes more unsuitable for Tree Pipits and they leave the area.
- iii) The management of West Berkshire's heathland sites is suitable for breeding success in Tree Pipits.
- iv) Between 1991-2001 Snelsmore Common held 38% of West Berkshire's Tree Pipit population.
- v) Tree Pipits in West Berkshire, are going against the national trend, and since 1991 are steadily increasing in numbers, completely the reverse of the national situation.
- vi) Sensitive management of heathland sites is crucial for breeding success in Tree Pipits.

SUMMARY OF WEATHER AND BIRD HIGHLIGHTS OF 2004

By Chris Heard and Bill Nicoll

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

The first week of January was mostly mild and sunny by day with only a little local ground frost overnight. In the second week blustery weather from the west brought mild, unsettled conditions. In the 3rd week high pressure over the southeast brought colder weather with several grey, drizzly days and some snow on high ground. The month ended with a light, cold, northerly airflow over Berkshire, giving settled weather with gradual warming. This was the warmest January since 1990, with above average sunshine and below average rainfall. 1st to 9th February were dull, mild, dry days with light winds with only a few light night frosts. A NW airstream from 10th to 15th brought blustery, showery days with some long sunny periods. From 16th until the end of the month very light winds from the NE quarter drew cold air over the region. During this period, there were 10 days with light snow (max 1cm on 26th) that did not lie for long, but there was plenty of sunshine on most days. Mean temperatures were generally above average and rainfall levels generally below average.

January's ornithological highlight was a Black-throated Diver at Wraysbury GPs on 22nd-23rd and a wintering Firecrest was still present there (it was re-trapped twice!). Nearby there was a Brent Goose at QMR, on 10th, and two Iceland Gulls there were the first of five to be seen during the year. At Horton GPs there were 16 Jack Snipe, on 11th, and up to nine Short-eared Owls were present in the Cow Down/Bury Down area. The Waxwing irruption (which had reached Berkshire by Dec 2004) gathered pace during January but it was in February that the highest numbers were recorded – in excess of 700 birds. We now expect to register the first Ringed Plovers of the year in late winter and, right on cue, there was a sighting at Dorney Wetlands on Feb 10th. Glaucous Gulls made an appearance, with a first-winter at Smallmead GP, on 14th, followed by possibly the same bird at QMR on 26th. Cookham was host to a high count of 160 Reed Buntings on 7th (with 100 again there in November).

MARCH-APRIL

The cold light airstream from N or NE continued through the first week of March with 6 days on which snow fell (up to 1 cm) that lay for several days on high ground. Then, as the airflow moved towards the SE, temperatures rose towards the March average by 13th. From 14th to 19th westerly winds brought mild days while the associated rain belts passed mostly north of Berkshire. The last 12 days were mild and unsettled, with two fairly wet days (23rd & 29th) but there was plenty of sunshine too. Rainfall over the month was close to the average. There were 12 days with 4 or more hours of sunshine spread fairly evenly through the month; the warmest day was 19th (21°C). April was a very mixed month with weak ridges and weak frontal systems succeeding each other every few days. Rainfall was slightly above average, with 19 days having measurable rain. During the 1st week a light easterly flow brought dry, sunny days with cool nights succeeded by south-westerlies bringing scattered showers with sunny spells. The second week was colder as the light wind swung daily through NW, N, NE to east. The third week consisted of a series of weak fronts from the west giving showers, longer periods of rain and occasional thunder. The final week started cold and dull under a weak ridge, became unsettled with some sunshine and ended with light winds giving generally warm, dull weather.

A Scandinavian Rock Pipit was at QMR on Mar 1st and a Great Grey Shrike put in a brief appearance at Wickham on 11th. At Greenham Common there was a notable Spring count of 20 Ringed Plovers on 21st. A singing Common Redstart was back on territory at Wishmoor on 28th. April was notable for the number of early migrants: the earliest-ever Reed Warbler was at Eversley GPs on 2nd and the following day produced the second-earliest Garden Warbler at Denford. A reeling Grasshopper Warbler at Jealott's Hill, on 6th, was the earliest since 1968. A Blue-headed Wagtail appeared at Brimpton on 20th and five Ring Ouzels were seen during the month. QMR recorded a flock of 85 Kittiwakes (the only larger flocks to be seen in the county were all on Jan 25th 1993) and a single flock of 33 Little Gulls on 22nd. The best was reserved for the last day of the month: a flock of three Dotterel at Burnthouse Farm were accompanied by four Whimbrel – and all were found by birders looking for the Spotted Redshank there (which was itself the only sighting of the year).

MAY-JUNE

May began warm and humid, with some intense thunderstorms, and a peak temperature of 25°C. From 3rd to 9th a series of 'lows' from the west brought mixed weather including a few hail showers, several ground frosts and, when the sun shone, some quite warm spells (19°C). From 10th to 18th high pressure over UK produced a cold north-easterly flow (sometimes gusty) leading to some frosty nights and dry days with some sunny periods a few very light scattered showers. From 19th low pressure produced a weak, variable south or south-westerly airflow giving fairly mild weather, generally quite cloudy, with frequent showers and some heavier rain (sometimes containing Sahara dust). Southerly winds brought a very hot day (30°C) on 27th. The month ended with mild, variable days following a cold front from the west. The first week of June brought generally unsettled westerly weather, wet and thundery at times. This was replaced in the second week by an easterly flow under high pressure giving some cold nights and dry days with plenty of sunshine. The third week started with 2 wet days, and then it quickly became very hot with heavy thundery showers as the wind swung to southeast (max 31°C on 19th). The final week was mixed, often wet and thundery weather, but it remained quite warm in a variable, but predominantly easterly, airstream (26°C on 28th).

Berkshire's first Whiskered Tern was found at Eversley GPs on May 21st (its arrival was predicted the day before, after it was first seen at Tundry Pond in Hampshire); bizarrely it then relocated to Surrey before returning on 24th & 27th. Arctic Terns also made an impressive showing with 60 at Moatlands GP, on 4th, and 36 at Dinton Pastures CP the following day. The best waders were a Temminck's Stint at Horton GPs on 14th-15th (with possibly the same bird at Dorney Wetlands on 18th-20th) and single Curlew Sandpipers at Dorney Wetlands and Lower Farm GP. An early Quail was calling at Spencer's Wood on 3rd and a pair of Black-necked Grebes were displaying at Lower Farm GP on 14th-17th but, once again, they didn't stay... Towards the end of the month a Hoopoe entertained visitors at Reading Brewery, from 29th (having first been seen a few hours earlier in a nearby garden). A Wood Warbler at Cranbourne Chase on 15th was the only record of the year. June's big surprise was a Corncrake at Grazeley on 11th but, apart from a non-breeding Black-tailed Godwit at Hosehill Lake and a couple of summering Little Gulls at Horton GPs, the notable records all related to breeding. Proof of breeding by both Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls came from Slough Industrial Estate (with 1 pair of the latter and 3 pairs of the former producing young) and 173 pairs of Black-headed Gulls also bred in the county – raising nearly 200 young! Reassuringly, there were three confirmed cases of breeding Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and, in West Berks, three pairs of Long-eared Owls bred successfully. A Ring Ouzel was a totally unexpected find in a Finchampstead garden on 2nd-4th.

JULY-AUGUST

It was generally changeable and showery for the first 8 days with temps in the mid teens to low 20s and light, variable winds predominantly from the western quadrant. The 2nd & 3rd weeks were a complete contrast – high pressure and an easterly flow brought hot (touching 30°C on several days) and dry conditions, except for heavy thunder showers on 18th. The final week was like the first, cool (max of 20°C on 24th), cloudy and wet as Atlantic westerlies returned. The 30th was the wettest July day for many years and there was local flooding. During the first 2 weeks of August it was showery but quite sunny, though there was prolonged heavy rain on 4th and 13th. Winds were light and variable. Temperature maxima were 22–25 in the first week, a little warmer in the second. During the following 10 days Atlantic weather predominated. An unusually deep depression over Scotland led to cool wet conditions with much less sunshine (max of 16 °C on 24th). There were strong to gale force westerly winds on 24th, while on 25th large hailstones (up to 20mm) fell in several places. In the final 6 days, with winds from the SE, it became dry, increasingly hot and very sunny again (max 31°C on 31st) but marred by severe thunderstorms locally.

July is usually a quiet month for birds but, in a curious repeat of 2004, a Gannet was again found in the county – this time on tiny Russel's pond in Windsor Great Park on 26th–27th. Still more unusual was a sighting of a melanistic Montagu's Harrier on the Downs (from 16th into August); only the third such record. The start of the Autumn wader passage was marked by a flock of 15 Black-tailed Godwits at Eversley GPs, on 13th, and the assemblage of moulting Yellow-legged Gulls at QMR approached 90 birds. QMR then stole the show in August with a Shag, from 2nd (which stayed into November!), two Common Scoters on 5th and the county's first-ever juvenile Caspian Gull on 16th-17th. A Woodlark there, from 31st, was the first record for this site.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

September was mainly warm and sunny with temperatures exceeding 20°C on most days. Pressure was fairly high and the few weak fronts that crossed the country from the north or west had little effect in Berkshire. There were only 4 dull days and 3 wet days. Winds were mostly from the W quadrant, generally light but strong on 26th. On 10th thundery showers brought heavy rain to many places, heaviest in West Berks where there was up to 75mm. For most of the first 2 weeks of October a light wind from a generally northerly direction brought dry weather with temperatures mostly 16–20°C, though there was 1cm of rain on 12th, and several very sunny days during the second week, when 23°C was achieved on 10th. During the third week a moderate airstream from the SW kept temperatures in the 16–20°C range but gave up to 1cm of rain on several days and useful sunshine only on 21 & 22nd. The final week was a mixture – mostly dull though the 25th and 27th were exceptions, calm for the first 4 days then stormy, the wind coming from the west or northwest throughout.

September's birds were rather pedestrian, but there were three sightings of Marsh Harriers and an autumn flock of 21 Stone Curlews on the Downs. An albino House Martin must have been an endearing sight at Lower Farm GP on 23rd. Two October sightings of Hawfinches at Dinton Pastures CP were presumed to be part of the well-publicised national influx (there was another sighting at Reading in November). Similarly, an early Mealy Redpoll at QMR, on 3rd, heralded further arrivals in the late winter. The latest-ever Tree Pipit was seen in Cranbourne Chase on 15th. Arriving Short-eared Owls included one at QMR and up to five at Bury Down. QMR also logged four Grey Plover on 5th and four Brent Geese on 14th.

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER

For the first 10 days mild air from the Atlantic flowed gently southwards over Berkshire, giving pleasant days (12–18°C) and frost free nights. There were 2 wet days but there were 5 sunny days. The winds strengthened a little in the second 10 days as the Azores high directed a light SW flow over southern England. Temperatures dropped day by day and there were some night frosts. It was largely dry with mostly sunny days. The final 10 days were cold as the wind (strong at times) moved into the NW bringing Arctic air. There was little rain and up to 3 hours of sun on most days but hard frost at night (down to -4°C). Parts of Berkshire saw a little snow but elsewhere in UK it fell heavily. It was very wet on 1st and 30th December; when some areas got snow, and there was light rain on 7th, but mostly the month was dry. Temperatures were close to average (5–10°C) with maximum of 12°C on 16th and daytime minimum of 0°C on 29th. It was a bright month with over 4 hours of sunshine on 10 days. Only 5th, 6th, 20–23rd and 29–31st were dull, but on 11th, the smoke cloud from the huge fire at Buncefield, Hertfordshire reduced sunshine in some areas on what would have been a bright day. There were frosts on 8 nights. Snow fell on 4 days, but none lay. Winds were typically about 8 knots, from the north for the first 10 days then from SW until strong, cold NW winds arrived during the final 3 days.

The tail-end of the year was far from dull. November's star birds were a Rough-legged Buzzard at Hurley on 5th and Grey Phalaropes at Lower Farm GP, on 3rd, and QMR, on 2nd–5th, followed by a Leach's Petrel there on 9th; unusually, the petrel was actually observed flying in from the NE, mid-morning. The latest-ever Hobby was seen at Burghfield GPs, on 4th, and in what was a good year for Golden Plovers, especially in the west of the county, there was a report of 4000+ circling Lower Farm GP on 13th. Four White-fronted Geese flew over Windsor Great Park on 14th and careful observation at Dinton Pastures CP revealed that five Bitterns were present during the Nov–Dec period – unprecedented for this site. A Tree Sparrow at Streatley Warren on 19th was the only sighting of the year and there was another Mealy Redpoll and a flock of 400 Bramblings in Windsor Great Park. December came up trumps with the year's most memorable bird, another county first, in the form of a Laughing Gull at Smallmead GP, from 2nd; again part of a nationwide influx, it subsequently became a regular fixture at the nearby McDonald's restaurant. Meanwhile, a Grey Heron tried to make an early Xmas meal of a Water Rail at Lavell's Lake. Up to 17 Smew (and 40 Ruddy Ducks) were counted at Wraysbury GPs and, nearby, a Brent Goose took up a weeks residence at Horton fields. At the other end of the county there was a Snow Bunting at Inkpen Hill, from 3rd, and there was a record count of 80 Red Kites roosting at Woolley Down.

The last observation is typical of the current state of the county's birds, with many non-passerine species prospering (including introduced and reintroduced species such as Greylag Goose, Egyptian Goose, Red Kite, and Ring-necked Parakeet as well as several gull species) while the species of most concern tend to be at the small end of the scale (eg Turtle Dove, Lesser spotted Woodpecker, Wood Warbler, Hawfinch, Tree Sparrow).

REPORT FOR 2005 BY THE BERKSHIRE RECORDS COMMITTEE (BRC)

By *Derek Barker*

As in 2004 the committee consists of Chris Heard, County Recorder and Chairman, Ken Moore and Peter Standley. Derek Barker stands down from the position of secretary after this report.

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. 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:

(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 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 (from 2006); Velvet Scoter; Fulmar; Manx Shearwater; Storm Petrel; Night Heron; *Purple Heron*; White Stork; Spoonbill; Honey Buzzard; Black Kite (from 2006); *White-tailed Eagle*; Goshawk; Rough-legged Buzzard; Golden Eagle; Red-footed Falcon (from 2006); 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 (from 2006); Roseate Tern; Guillemot; Razorbill; Little Auk; Puffin; Alpine Swift (from 2006); Short-toed Lark; Shore Lark; Red-rumped Swallow (from 2006); Richard's Pipit; Tawny Pipit; Red-throated Pipit (from 2006); **Dipper**; Bluethroat; Aquatic Warbler; Marsh Warbler; Icterine Warbler; Melodious Warbler; Yellow-browed Warbler; *Bearded Tit*; Golden Oriole; Woodchat Shrike; Hooded Crow; Rose-coloured Starling; Serin; Twite; *Common (Mealy) Redpoll*; 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; 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; *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 autumn records); Waxwing; Black Redstart; *Ring Ouzel*; *Wood Warbler*; *Pied Flycatcher*; Willow Tit; Red-backed Shrike; Great Grey Shrike; Raven; Tree Sparrow; Hawfinch; Snow Bunting.

The lists above are the same as produced in the 2004 report apart from **Dipper** which has been moved from Category 3 to Category 2. Also listed are several species (in *italics*) that had been mistakenly omitted from either category on the 2004 report.

REVIEW OF 2004 RECORDS

This report on the outcome of the BRC's consideration of rare or unusual Berkshire records for 2005 follows the same pattern as in 2004. 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)".

Pink-footed Goose	7 The Wilderness 16/4*
Canada Goose	1000 Lower Fm GP 12/11 (count)
American Wigeon	1 Eversley GPs 26/2*
Pintail	Hosehill Lake 21/3; Eversley GPs 4/5 (date)
Garganey	12 Wraysbury GPs 18/9* (count); 4 Wraysbury GPs 16/10* (count)
Pochard	638 Wraysbury GPs 4/12 (count)
Tufted Duck	1005 Wraysbury GPs 13/2 (count)
Scaup	Woolhampton GPs 31/1*; Eversley GPs 28/2*; Moatlands GP 26/10*
Goldeneye	109 Wraysbury GPs 16/1 (count)
Smew	25 Wraysbury GPs 16/1 (count); 9 Wraysbury GPs 13/3 (count); 2 Wraysbury GPs 6/11 (date); 11 Wraysbury GPs 4/12 (count)
Little Grebe	36 Wraysbury GPs 13/3 (count); 41 Wraysbury GPs 4/12 (count)
Great Crested Grebe	83 Wraysbury GPs 16/1 (count); 119 Wraysbury GPs 13/2 (count); 122 Wraysbury GPs 13/3 (count); 101 Wraysbury GPs 4/12 (count)
Red-necked Grebe	Queen Mother Res 15/1*
Black-necked Grebe	Lower Fm GP 14/10*
Leach's Storm Petrel	Queen Mother Res 8/11* (date)
Cormorant	Wraysbury GPs: 75 16/1, 73 13/2, 106 13/3, 266 6/11 and 306 4/12 (counts)
Grey Heron	Wraysbury GPs: 37 16/1, 57 on 13/2 and 13/3 and 34 4/12 (counts)
Honey Buzzard	M4 near Hungerford 18/6; Cookham Rise 3/9; Wokingham 15/9
Hen Harrier	Field Fm GP 27/3*
Goshawk	Walbury Hill 12/2; Brightwalton 24/3*; Ufton Nervet 26/3; Hungerford 29/9*; Caversham 10/10*
Rough-legged Buzzard	Combe 30/1*; Bagnor Cressbeds 20/2 (record withdrawn by observer); Combe 26/2*; Combe 11/4*; Combe Wood 31/12* Freemens Marsh 24/3* (date); The Wilderness 25/4*; Dorney Wetlands 13/9 (pager report, observer not known)
Osprey	Moss End 1/1*; North Maidenhead 14/1*; Combe 13/2*; Woodley 4/7 (date); Caversham Heights 11/11*; Bray GPs 27/11*

Oystercatcher	RThames Windsor 17/4; Binfield 28/5
Golden Plover	3000 fields north of Bury Down 2/1 site would be in Oxon; 4000 Lower Fm GP 13/11 (count)
Wood Sandpiper	Lower Fm GP 13/11* (date)
Mediterranean Gull	Eversley GPs 4/1*; Braywick 19/2*
Little Gull	4 Dorney Wetlands 8/5 (observer not known)
Ring-billed Gull	Moatlands GP 11/3; Windsor Esplanade 17/12*
Common Gull	Eversley GPs 27/5 (date)
Caspian Gull	Eversley GPs 14/2*
Glaucous Gull	Hosehill Lake LNR 24/12*
Long-eared Owl	Burnt Hill 7/9
Kingfisher	Wraysbury GPs: 15 16/1, 13 13/2, 15 13/3, 16 18/9, 13 16/10, 5 6/11 and 4/12 (counts); Wraysbury Pond: 5 16/10, 4 6/11 and 7 4/12 (counts)
Wryneck	Eversley GPs 10/9*
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Inkpen 16/6
Swallow	Crowthorne 9/3 (date)
House Martin	20 Maidenhead 15/12 (date)
Yellow Wagtail	1f carrying food Thatcham Marsh 28/5*
White Wagtail	Woodley 18/1* (date); Eversley GPs 13/4*
Redstart	Wokingham 1/1* (date); Greenham Common 23/2* (date); Combe 22/11* (date)
Wheatear	Pingewood GPs 9/10 (unknown observer); 2 Long Lane Cookham 12/11* (observer's only submitted record)
Ring Ouzel	RThames Windsor 24/5* (date); Pinkneys Green 14/10*
Reed Warbler	Hosehill Lake LNR 25/3 (date)
Garden Warbler	Eversley GPs 25/9 (date)
Lesser Whitethroat	Lower Fm GP 12/2 (date)
Yellow-browed Warbler	Newbury 17/12*
Wood Warbler	Wishmoor 17/6*
Firecrest	Caesars Camp 12/1 (date); Moss End 31/1* (date); Swinley Brickpits 30/6
Willow Tit	Sulham 5/1*; Snelsmore Common 27/2*; 4 Lambourn Valley 9/8*; 2 Lambourn Valley 3/10*; 3 K&A Canal 15/11*
Golden Oriole	Lower Fm GP 4/2* (date)
Crossbill	13 Wishmoor Bottom 3/1*
Hawfinch	1 heard Bracknell 8/1*