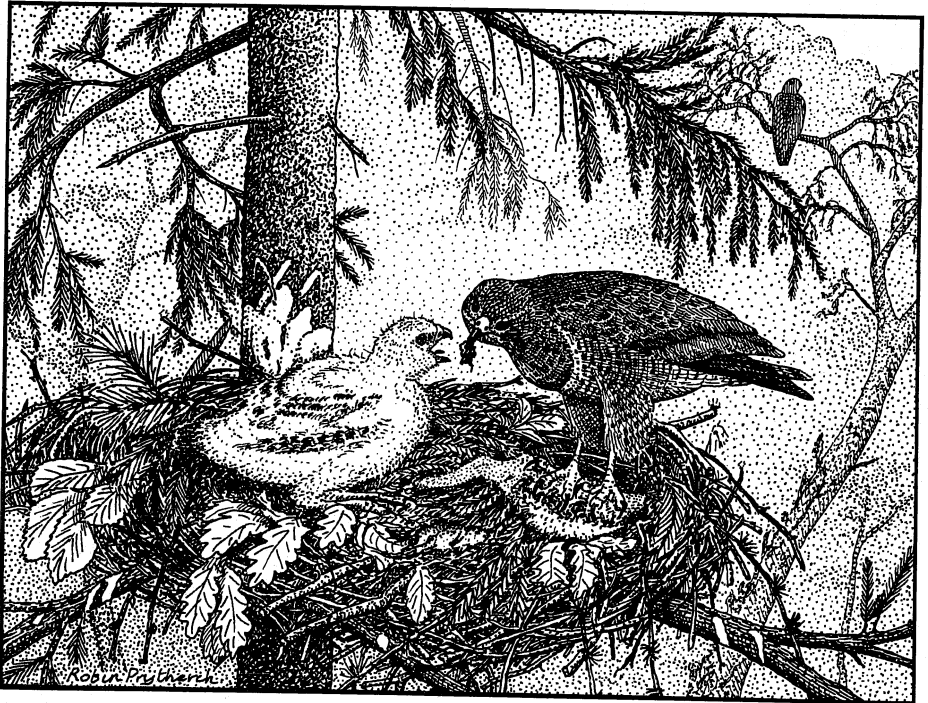


# *The Bedfordshire Naturalist 50 (Part 2)*

*The Bedfordshire Bird  
Report for 1995*



Bedfordshire Natural History Society 1996  
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# BEDFORDSHIRE BIRD CLUB 1996

(Established 1993)

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Dr Tim Sharrock

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Mr Tony Donnelly

Mrs Boo Matthews

Mr Kevin Sharpe

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Mr Martin Garner

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The Bedfordshire Bird Club is the ornithological section of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society (Registered Charity No. 268659). All enquiries should be directed to the Hon. Secretary (BBC), 14 Hornbeam Close, Leighton Buzzard, Beds. LU7 8UX.

**THE BEDFORDSHIRE NATURALIST**

**No. 50 (1995) – Part 2**

**Edited by R.A. Brind**

**CONTENTS**

**THE BEDFORDSHIRE BIRD REPORT 1995**

Officers of the Bird Club	ii
Report of the General Management Committee	2
Proceedings	3
Report of the Bird Recorders	4
Review of 1995	5
Systematic List	8
Miscellaneous Records – exotica	61
Appendix A – request for known records of other birds in 1995	62
Appendix B – list of unaccepted records for 1995	63
The occurrence of Knot, Wood Sandpiper & Turnstone in Bedfordshire, 1946–1995 – Peter Smith	65
Dunstable STW; review of 1995 – Paul Trodd	68
Common Crane – A new species for Bedfordshire – Stephen G. Williams	70
The Garden Bird Feeding Survey – Winter 1995/1996 – Barry Nightingale	71
Common Buzzard breeding in Bedfordshire in 1995 – Barry Nightingale	77
Cormorant – Attempted breeding in Bedfordshire in 1995 – Barry Nightingale	80
Bird Ringing Report 1995 – Duncan Woodhead	81
The Bird Club	iii
The Bedfordshire Natural History Society	iii
Map of Bedfordshire	iv

**Front cover:** Common Buzzard at nest, *Robin Prytherch*

**Front cover illustration for sale**

The original, specially commissioned, unframed pen & ink drawing of this picture is for sale in a postal auction. The original measures 160mm by 120mm. Send your bid (no money at this stage) to “Cover Bid”, Kevin Sharpe, Hon. Assistant Treasurer, 22 Russett Close, Stewartby, Bedford MK43 9LG to arrive by 31st May 1997. If your bid is the highest, and it exceeds the artist’s reserve price, you will be asked to pay the sum you bid (plus £1.50 for post and packing if necessary).

**Acknowledgements:**

The Society would like to thank Bedfordshire County Council, Bedford Borough Council, South Bedfordshire District Council and Luton Borough Council for grants towards the publication of the Journal this year.

## REPORT OF THE BIRD CLUB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR 1995

After a small decline in the membership of the Club at the end of 1994, the management committee resolved to find new ways of developing the Club to take us toward the millennium. The effect was to increase the membership to 261 by the end of 1995.

The AGM in February saw a number of changes to the committee. Firstly, Stuart Winter stood down as Secretary and Andy Whitney took on this key role. Stuart was one of the founder members of the Club and we thank him for all his hard work over the past three years. Don Green stood down as Assistant Treasurer and was replaced by Lindsay Puddephatt. This enabled Don to take over as Meetings Secretary from the late Ray Moore who has been sadly missed by all who knew him. Phil Cannings was co-opted to the committee and is the Bedfordshire Police Wildlife Liaison Officer.

1995 will also be remembered for the year in which we were blessed with two bird reports. That for 1993 was long overdue but the report for 1994 was published rather earlier than in recent years. In part, this was due to the decision of the BNHS to appoint Dave Odell and Martin Palmer as joint Recorders for Birds so sharing the enormous workload in succession to Dave Ball. The 1994 Bird Report was also special in another important way in that it now forms its own separate volume as part 2 of The Bedfordshire Naturalist

The Winter Garden Bird Feeding Survey, under the guidance of Barry Nightingale, has gone from strength to strength with more observers taking part year by year. A report of the 1995/96 winter with comparisons to the previous two winters is published elsewhere in this report.

Other surveys started during the year were that for the House Martin, asking members to note the location and number of nests, and the Lady Amherst's Pheasant population survey. The latter is in two parts. Firstly, an intensive study of this species' previously known haunts and key sites has been undertaken with observers recording along regularly visited transects. Secondly, one-off visits have been covering the non-core sites and smaller outlying woodlands. This survey is continuing in 1996 and will greatly add to our current knowledge of this brightly coloured but secretive speciality species in our county. We will be publishing the report and its conclusions in due course.

A comprehensive questionnaire was sent out to the membership in 1994. The wealth of information contained in the responses was collated and acted upon by the committee.

Our contacts with our twin birding societies, the New Haven Bird Club in Connecticut and the Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario have been maintained.

The Club's indoor and outdoor programmes kept up the high standard set in previous years with the star indoor meeting being the illustrated lecture given by eminent ornithologist, bird photographer and the co-author of "Shorebirds", John Marchant at the November meeting.

K. Sharpe, Hon. Chairman  
A. Whitney, Hon. Secretary  
Bedfordshire Bird Club



## PROCEEDINGS

### Indoor Meetings

- 18th Ordinary Meeting** 26th January, Aspley Guise. "Travels in Search of Birds"  
by Mr David Tomlinson, jointly with the BNHS. Chair: Mr D. Odell.
- 19th Ordinary Meeting** 31st January, Maulden. "Twitchers' Evening", jointly with the  
BNHS. Chair: Mr D. Ball.
- 3rd Annual General Meeting** 28th February, Maulden, followed by "Birding in Israel"  
by Mr D. Odell. Chair: Mr D. Kramer.
- 20th Ordinary Meeting** 8th March, Maulden. "The Great Tit's Year" by Dr A. Goslar.  
Chair: Mr K. Sharpe.
- 21st Ordinary Meeting** 28th March, Maulden. "A Barrage Too Far" by Mr D. Toomer.  
Chair: Mr K. Sharpe.
- 22nd Ordinary Meeting** 26th September, Maulden. "Birding in North America" organised  
by Mr D. Odell. Chair: Mr K. Sharpe.
- 23rd Ordinary Meeting** 4th October, Bedford. "Golden Orioles in Britain"  
by Mr P. Mason and Mr M. Rains, jointly with the BNHS. Chair: Mr D. Kramer.
- 24th Ordinary Meeting** 31st October, Maulden. "Conservation of the Cirl Bunting"  
by Mr A. Evans. Chair: Mr D. Kramer.
- 25th Ordinary Meeting** 28th November, Maulden. "Waders of the World"  
by Mr J. Marchant. Chair: Mr P. Smith.
- 26th Ordinary Meeting** 30th November, Aspley Guise. "Birds in Peril" by Mr. N. Collar,  
jointly with the BNHS. Chair: Mr D. Odell.
- 27th Ordinary Meeting** 19th December, Maulden. "Quiz Night", a light-hearted birding  
quiz. Chair and Quizmaster: Mr M. J. Palmer.

### Field Meetings

- North-west Norfolk** 8th January. Wintering birds. Leader: Mr M. Williams.
- W. London Reservoirs** 5th February. Wintering birds. Leader: Mr S. Winter.
- Solway Firth** 25th to 27th February. Long weekend to south-west Scotland for  
wintering birds. Leader: Mr D. Green.
- Gull Watch** 5th March. Looking at the wintering gulls in the Marston Vale. Leader:  
Mr K. Sharpe.
- Minsmere** 26th March. Wintering birds and early spring migrants. Leader: Miss S. Alliez.
- Blows Down** 23rd April. Spring migrants. Leader: Mr R. Dazley.
- Maulden Woods** 7th May. Dawn chorus. Leader: Mr P. Trodd.
- Dunstable STW** 10th May. Passage waders and other migrants. Leader: Mr P. Trodd.
- Hot Line Trip** 21st May. Looking for rare birds in Norfolk. Leaders: Mr D. Green and  
Mr K. Sharpe.
- The Brecks & N. Norfolk** 17th June. Species special to the area. Leader: Mr D. Green.
- Pegsdon Hills** 21st June. An evening walk. Leader: Mr T. Donnelly.
- Marston Vale Brick Pits** 20th August. Migrant waders. Leader: Mr D. Green.
- Humberside** 2nd to 3rd September. Weekend trip for seabirds and passerines. Leader:  
Mrs M. Sheridan.
- Hot Line Trip** 1st October. Looking for late, rare migrants. Leader: Mr B. King.
- North Kent** 9th October. Late migrants and early winter visitors. Leader: Mr K. Sharpe.
- West Sussex** 19th November. Wintering birds. Leader: Miss S. Alliez.
- Milton Keynes** 3rd December. Wintering birds. Leader: Mr G. Davis

## BIRD REPORT FOR 1995

### Report of the Recorders

#### INTRODUCTION

As usual we are grateful to all those BBC and BNHS members and all those others who submitted records for 1995. As in 1994, around 2500 record cards were received, many crammed with individual sightings. We would repeat our plea please that submissions are sent in on correct record cards rather than a list involving several species which somebody else then has to fill out onto record cards for assessment. Where appropriate for scarce and rare species, rarities description forms rather than a letter should be used for each individual occurrence. Required submission details were listed on pages 63 and 64 of *The Bedfordshire Naturalist* for 1994, No.49, part 2 (1995). Batches of record cards and rarity forms are freely available on request from either of the Recorders, at any indoor Bird Club meeting or via a request through any Bird Club Committee member.

Not surprisingly, the compilation of this report yet again took many hours. We would thank firstly the rarities panel, which again assessed well over 100 records for the year and which comprises, in addition to the Recorders, D.H.Ball, B.J.Nightingale, J.T.R.Sharrock and P.Smith. In keeping with our policy to rotate membership of the rarity committee to bring in fresh blood, the longest serving of the above will stand down at the end of 1997 and a replacement will then be selected by the joint recorders. That selection will be based on the nominee's experience of birding in Bedfordshire, Britain and overseas, as well as other important factors such as knowledge of the ability of their compatriots regularly bird-watching in the county and, of course, the time availability to carefully assess the rather wide spread of detail (or lack of) accompanying the large number of rarity reports that are circulated. Any member of the Bird Club who feels they have the necessary qualities and experience and who would like to be considered for a future vacancy are invited to contact Martin Palmer confidentially in writing at any time.

The review of the year is written by Dave Odell and the species report compiled and typed by Martin Palmer. As in recent years, various sections were drafted by a group of willing volunteers to whom we are particularly grateful, these sections being as follows:

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Divers, grebes, cormorants and herons  | - Steve Williams    |
| Swans and geese                        | - Peter Almond      |
| Ducks                                  | - Dave Kramer       |
| Raptors, game birds and rails          | - Dave Odell        |
| Waders                                 | - Peter Smith       |
| Skuas, gulls, terns and auks           | - Martin Palmer     |
| Doves, owls and woodpeckers etc        | - Paul Trodd        |
| Larks, hirundines, pipits and wagtails | - John Bowler       |
| Wren, dunnock, chats and thrushes      | - Rob Dazley        |
| Warblers and crests                    | - Barry Nightingale |
| Flycatchers, tits and crows            | - John Swann        |
| Sparrows, finches and buntings         | - Dave Ball         |

Thanks are again due to Peter Almond who analyzed and wrote onto record cards all the relevant entries from the log books kept at Rookery South CIP. Additionally, Peter Almond and Boo Matthews kindly wrote out onto record cards those submissions that were unfortunately only submitted in list form, thus duplicating the effort needed to include them in this analysis. Finally, our thanks go to our editor, Rosemary Brind, who proof-read and checked the entire report.

Contributors to the report are as follows, with due apologies to anyone inadvertently omitted:

J.Adams, P.Adams, S.Alliez (SA), P.Almond (PA), D.Anderson, M.Anstee (MA), S.Augsberger, D.H.Ball (DHB), W.Barrett (WB), R.I.Bashford (RIB), R.Bates (RB), M.K.Bierton (MKB), Birdline East Anglia, R.J.Bodily (RJB), J.Bowler (JB), R.A.Bowler (RAB), M.Brandon, S.Brooke (SB), R.S.K.Buisson (RSKB), Bob Bullock (BB), I.Burrows, G.Buss, P.Cannings, L.Carman (LC), R.M.Catchpole (RMC), M.Clark (MC), J.Cooper (JCo), A.Cutts (AC), J.A.W.Davis, G.Dawes (GD), R.Dazley (RD), T.Donnely (TD), L.G.R.Evans (LGRE), M.Everett (ME), I.Eyre (IE), P.Fawcett, P.Ford, M.S.Garner (MSG), A. & S.Garrett (AG,SG), A.Gill, T.Golding (TG), G.& C.Goodall (GG), D.& M.Green (DG,MG), M.J.Green (MJG), A.Grimsey, J.R.Guthrie, S.F.Halton, S.D.Heath (SDH), P.Housden (PH), P.R.Jameson, L.Jarrett (LRJ), A.Johnson, S.Kinsey, J.Knowles, D.Kramer (DK), A.J.Livett (AJL), P.& R.Madgett, D.V.Manning (DVM), R.& B.Matthews (RM, BM), J.Mayhead (JM), D.Mellor (DM), T.Moon (TM), B.Mowlem, R.Murphy, E.C.Newman (ECN), B.J.Nightingale (BJN), P.Nye (PN), R.A.Nye (RAN), D.J.Odell (DJO), P.R.Oldfield (PRO), J.O'Neil (JO'N), K.Owen (KO), E. & M.Paine, A.Palmer (AP), J.C.Palmer (JCP), M.J.Palmer (MJP), D.Parsons, T.Peterkin (TP), M.Pocock (MP), A.Proud, A.Randall, M.D.Rayment (MDR), A.L.Reeve, T.Robson (TR), M.D.Russell (MR), R.Saint (RS), R.E.Scott (RES), K.M.Sharpe (KMS), J.T.R.Sharrock (JTRS), W.Siddons, P.& K.Sims (PFS), D.Smith, P.Smith (PS), T.Smith, R.A.Spain (RAS), B.R.Squires (BRS), A.Stephens (AS), M.J.Stevens (MJS), J.D.Swann (JDS), C.Tack (CT), J.B.Temple, J.Tofts (JT), J.K.Trew (JKT), P.Trodd (PT), K.R. & M.Weeden (KRW), S.Welton (SWe), J.Whinnet, A.Whitney (AW), M.Williams, P.J.Williams, S.G.Williams (SGW), P.J.Wilkinson, S.Wing, N.Wood, D.S.Woodhead (DSW), A. & D.Zwetsloot (AZ, DZ), all BBS contributors and all Rookery South CIP bird-log contributors.

## REVIEW OF 1995

January saw a Red-necked Grebe at Brogborough Lake and a Smew at Harrold-Odell CP staying over from 1994. Two Bewick's Swans were brief visitors to Woburn Park and eight more flew over Priory CP. A Kittiwake was at Dunstable STW and single Merlins dashed over there and Warden Hill. Mediterranean Gulls, Glaucous Gulls and Iceland Gulls were located in the clay pit roosts. Only a few Bramblings were seen and Tree Sparrows were hard to find. However, good numbers of Stonechats were located, an increasing number of Goosanders were seen and several Common Buzzards overwintered. Indeed, 1995 proved to be the year of the Common Buzzard. A Peregrine was at Rookery South CIP and a Hen Harrier was at Barton-le-Clay. There were three Red-crested Pochards, one at Rookery South CIP and a pair at Harrold-Odell CP. A Scaup was at Priory CP and an elusive Bittern frequented the western end reedbed of Brogborough Lake. Possibly this was the returning bird from the previous winter. Other overwintering birds included several Chiffchaffs, an increasing number of Blackcaps, often reported from the gardens of birders, good numbers of Siskins and a few Green Sandpipers.

A Common Scoter was seen at Brogborough Lake in February and a Rough-legged Buzzard was an excellent find at Pegsdon. A Green-winged Teal, only our second county record, was at Luton Hoo on 8th February. A Kittiwake was a bonus at Stewartby Lake for the county's enthusiastic gull-watchers and a Firecrest was reported there. Merlins were brief visitors to Luton Hoo and Haynes. Another Scaup was found, this time at Rookery South CIP. A pair of Egyptian Geese were brief visitors to Stewartby Lake and the first Wheatear had arrived at Blows Downs by March 12th. A Water Pipit was at Dunstable STW, Black-tailed Godwits were seen at Rookery South CIP and Priory CP and the first Osprey of the year at the latter site was the earliest ever in the county. A Shag and a Black-necked Grebe were at Priory CP, another Kittiwake was found, at Rookery South CIP, and a pair of Short-eared Owls regularly showing at Sewell raised hopes that they would stay to breed.

By the beginning of April, spring passage was in full swing. There were good numbers of Northern Wheatears at Grovebury SP and Blows Downs. The well-watched latter site produced the expected records of Ring Ouzels, Common Redstarts and Black Redstarts. The irregular but long-staying Ring-necked Parakeet continued to make occasional appearances here. A dead Long-eared Owl was found near Stewartby. Rookery South CIP was host to a Black-necked Grebe, a Bar-tailed Godwit and a Sanderling. Two Firecrests and two Pied Flycatchers were also found this month. Priory CP was visited by a pair of Garganey, a Kittiwake, a Marsh Harrier and a Turnstone. Three more Garganey were discovered at Radwell GP and a Goshawk was seen at Millbrook. A Red-crested Pochard wandered around the clay pits.

In May, the regular watching at Rookery South CIP produced such goodies as Grey Plover, Turnstone, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, two Wood Sandpipers and Sanderlings, including a group of five together. Unfortunately, the news this year confirmed that this site is due to commence in-filling before the end of the century – its value as a refuse site far out-weighting its benefits as the best site for passage waders in the county and breeding site for gulls and waterfowl including Ruddy Duck. A Marsh Harrier frequenting this site also confirmed its status as one of Bedfordshire's best for finding scarce raptors to the county. Elsewhere, a few Black Terns, Arctic Terns and Little Gulls were seen around this time. Two Quail were near Bromham, a Black Redstart was at Blows Downs and another sang near the River Ouse just west of Bedford town centre. A Little Egret was at East Hyde. A Red Kite flew over and further Ospreys passed through the county. A Common Crane flew over a somewhat surprised Steve Williams along the River Ouse at Queens Park on his way to work early on the 23rd May and constitutes the first fully documented report of this species for Bedfordshire. An account of this addition to the county list appears elsewhere in this year's report. Two Ring-necked Parakeets were near Ampthill toward the end of the month and a singing Firecrest was located at Bluebell Wood.

June began with a pair of Garganey at Rookery South CIP and there were more sightings of Little Egret – the invasion of this species over recent years along the south and east coasts is at last producing more inland sightings. Breeding season successes included a pair of Woodlarks in the west of the county. We must unfortunately repeat last year's plea for observers to keep away from this territory so that disturbance is minimized to probably our rarest breeding species in Bedfordshire. Other breeders

included an increase in Grey Wagtail pairs and Wood Warbler at a new site. Cormorants attempted to breed and Common Buzzards actually did so for the first time so far as is known this century. A report of this occurrence is included elsewhere in the report. Long-eared Owls were successful at at least two sites. Quail called from three more localities. A Turnstone and two Spotted Redshanks visited Dunstable STW. A Temminck's Stint was an excellent find at Houghton Regis ChP in mid-July. Records from Rookery South CIP included Little Tern, two Turnstones and two Sanderling. The Little Tern was also seen at Stewartby Lake. Another Marsh Harrier spent several days there and a Goshawk was near Thurleigh. A Red Kite was reported from the north of the county.

An excellent total of 21 Black-tailed Godwits in one flock were seen at Rookery South CIP in August. Knot, Turnstone and Little Egret were also recorded at this site. The now anticipated sightings of Yellow-legged Gulls appeared in the clay pits in the late summer. A Spotted Crake at Dunstable STW appeared twenty years to the day after the previous record there and attracted a steady stream of visitors over the following week, it being a county tick for the vast majority of the county's listers, not least for the joint recorders! A Common Scoter at Priory CP was an unusual August record. Common Buzzards continued to be seen in increasing numbers. A pair of Garganey, two Spotted Redshanks and a Black-necked Grebe were at Rookery South CIP. A Wryneck visited a Toddington garden and a Red-necked Phalarope stayed all too briefly at Dunstable STW. Twenty-seven Barnacle Geese at Willington was a puzzling record.

In September, a Stone Curlew was another brief visitor, this time on a playing field at Stopsley. An amazing 17 Curlew Sandpipers spent 20 minutes at Rookery South CIP on 8th. The more expected wader records included two Black-tailed Godwits, two Little Stints, Spotted Redshank, Sanderling and Knot. A presumed escaped Avocet was in the east of the county. Two more Ospreys moved through the county, Common Buzzards peaked at over 15 birds in late September. At least five Pied Flycatchers were reported in the autumn. Two Firecrests and a Wood Warbler were at Priory CP and four Sandwich Terns were in the Stewartby area. A Goshawk was also seen and two Bewick's Swans at Rookery South CIP were extremely early returning birds.

Mediterranean Gulls were around the clay pits in October. Chiffchaffs, of an eastern origin, were noted at Priory CP but the rarity of the month was Bedfordshire's second American Golden Plover following that at Cranfield in November 1991. This individual was identified by Dave Ball at Willington GP on 21st and was later briefly seen near Harrowden on 21st but despite searching over subsequent days was not relocated. A Ring Ouzel was at Blows Downs, a Black Redstart was at Linslade and Hobbies were seen at various locations until mid-month.

In November, a Little Auk was seen on a tiny pond near Priory CP. Five more were reported flying past The Lodge, Sandy but, despite requests from the recorders, were not formally submitted so appear in appendix A only – a pity that such a good record during a time of extremely large coastal passage of this species should be lost to the archives. Two Red-crested Pochards were at Radwell GP and another had returned to Rookery South CIP. A Scaup and a Common Scoter were found at Stewartby Lake by those searching in the hope of finding a Little Auk. A Peregrine put in a brief

appearance at Willington GP. Barn Owls were seen in several new localities in 1995 but unfortunately a number of these were road casualties.

Two Red-throated Divers were noted in December, one at Southill Lake and the other at Houghton Regis ChP. An Eider was at Rookery South CIP staying into 1996. More Smew were seen and, at Harrold-Odell CP, the roost of Cormorants reached three figures. Finally, for December, another Red Kite flew over Dunstable, a Little Gull was in a vast roost at Stewartby Lake and two Bewick's Swans were seen at Brogborough Lake.

In summary, a total of some 190 species were accepted as occurring in the county during 1995 which is much the same as during other recent years. The Common Crane was the only new addition to the Bedfordshire list bringing the post-war total to 269 and the complete total to exactly 280.

### SYSTEMATIC LIST FOR 1995

Nomenclature follows, by and large, the 'familiar' English names used in the "*British Birds*" list of *Birds of the Western Palearctic (1984)*. These are the names in general usage by the county's birdwatchers as, in general terms, we do not enjoy visits by exotica from European or trans-Atlantic shores where perhaps some of the more modern naming might be considered more appropriate.

The following abbreviations have been used in the text: BBRC – British Birds' Rarities Committee, BBS – Breeding Bird Survey, BEA – Birdline East Anglia, BTO – British Trust for Ornithology, CBC – Common Bird Census, CES – Constant Effort Site, ChP – Chalk Pit, CIP – Clay Pit, CP – Country Park, GC – Golf Course, GP – Gravel Pit, NR – Nature Reserve, SP – Sand Pit, STW – Sewage Treatment Works, WP – Waterside Park, Zoo – generally used to refer to the Wild Animal Kingdom at Whipsnade. Place names for mineral excavations follow those by Nightingale (*Bedf. Nat.* 39 73–74) except that for Barkers Lane GP which is now generally known as Priory CP.

\*CBC – the Common Birds Census is the BTO's main scheme whereby breeding population levels of common birds are monitored in the UK (BJN, JTRS).

\*CES – Constant Effort Sites are those 120+ sites throughout Britain and Ireland where birds are trapped in a series of mist-nets, during 10–12 morning visits spread evenly between the beginning of May and the end of August, erected in the same place year by year, allowing the BTO to monitor changes in breeding success and survival of our common songbirds (ECN).

### Non-passerines

#### Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

There were two records of this very rare winter visitor in 1995. The first was an adult in winter plumage on Southill Lake from 3rd to 7th December (AC, BJN, AW *et al.*). Soon after, a first-winter individual was found on the fishermen's pit in Houghton Regis ChP staying from 16th to 19th December (DM, RD, PS *et al.*).

#### Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

This species remains common and widespread throughout the county's wetlands but is generally under recorded. Breeding was proved with young seen at Chimney Corner

North CIP, East Hyde, Grovebury SP, Harrold-Odell CP, Houghton Regis ChP, Langford GPs, Luton Hoo, Priory CP, Rookery South CIP, Stewartby Lake and Willington GP. Breeding season presence was also noted at Chalton STW, Coronation CIP, and Millbrook Pillinge CIP. Although present, they did not breed at Dunstable STW. Winter maxima reports were typical with 14 at Priory CP and at least ten at Rookery South CIP on 28th January, 17 at the latter site on 22nd April, 24 there on 22nd August and 23 on 30th September, 16 at Luton Hoo on 10th October, c.20 at Stewartby Lake on 5th November with 19 there on 29th December and 15 at Brogborough Lake on 16th December.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

This is a common breeding bird in Bedfordshire, flocking in winter and often present in large numbers, especially if there is a spell of severe weather when shallow waters freeze and additional birds from outside the county converge on the safe open waters of, for example, Stewartby and Brogborough Lakes.

Breeding was noted at Battlesden Lake, Felmersham NR, Grovebury SP, Harrold-Odell CP, Houghton Regis ChP, Langford GPs, Ledburn Road SP, Luton Hoo, Millbrook Pillinge CIP, Priory CP, Rookery North and South CIPs, Stewartby Lake, Southill Lake, Tiddenfoot WP, Willington GP and Woburn Park lakes. With overall fairly mild weather, winter counts at Stewartby Lake remained somewhat lower than in previous years with maxima of 48 on 7th January, 55 on 26th November and 75 on 29th December. Counts of 64 in March and 32 in November were the peaks for the two winter periods at Priory CP with 16 and 32 in the same months holding the highest counts at Southill Lake. Twenty were at Radwell GP on 26th November and 30 on 13th December was the highest count at Brogborough Lake.

**Red-necked Grebe** *P. grisegena*

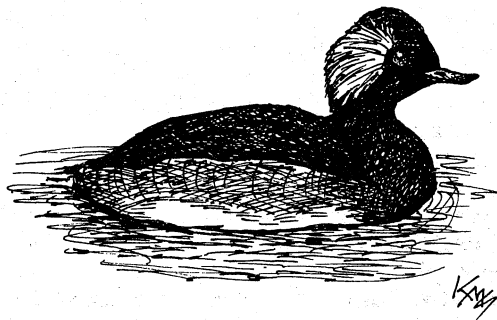
A rare winter visitor to Bedfordshire, the first-winter bird found at Brogborough Lake on 24th December 1994 remained until 26th February 1995 (MJP, JB *et al*).

**[Slavonian Grebe** *P. auritis*

This is a scarce vagrant to Bedfordshire for which there were no fully acceptable records in 1995. An individual at Harrold-Odell CP was reported on 1st January but the description proved insufficient to rule out the possibility of Black-necked Grebe, though it was clearly one or the other (AG, SG, JT).]

**Black-necked Grebe** *P. nigricollis*

After two blank years, 1995 provided three records of this scarce but almost annual migrant. Summer plumaged adults were seen at Priory CP on 29th March (AG, DK *et*



Black-necked Grebe

Kevin Sharpe

al) and at Rookery South CIP from 25th to 28th April (KO *et al*). A juvenile was present at Rookery South CIP on 26th August (PA, MJP *et al*).

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant, Cormorants were recorded at a wide range of suitable localities throughout the county. Numbers of birds in the Marston Vale were rather fewer than in recent years with, for example, winter roost counts at Brogborough Lake rarely exceeding 50 birds after 59 on 1st January. The roost at Harrold-Odell CP however continues to increase, an impressive 101 being logged on 9th December. Thirty at Grovebury SP on 1st January was a record count for this site. A colour-ringed bird present at Priory CP from 16th to 31st December had been ringed as a nestling at St Margaret's Island, near Tenby, Dyfed on 15th June 1995. As forecast in last year's report, attempted breeding in the county took place in 1995. This occurrence at Southill Lake on 26th February is documented elsewhere in this report.

Birds showing characters of the continental race, *P.c.sinensis*, were noted at a number of sites in the new year with numbers increasing, as would be expected, towards spring.

**Shag** *P. aristotelis*

Unlike the Cormorant, Shags are a rare albeit almost annual visitor to the county, usually during the winter months. An adult at Priory CP on 25th March and on the R. Ouse nearby the following day was the only record of the year (DK).

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*

The example of this rare winter visitor to Bedfordshire found in December 1994 remained faithful, but very elusive, to the reedbed at the western end of Brogborough Lake where it was seen on 14th and 18th January only (RAN, RIB, MJP).

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

The fifth county record occurred at East Hyde on 3rd May (MR). There were to be three more sightings, all in TL04. One was seen at Randall's Farm NR, Stewartby on 29th May (MA) when it was also reported at nearby Coronation CIP (RM, BM). One flew over Kempston on 6th July to the delight of the joint county recorders who were driving past at the time. It flew south towards the clay pits (MJP, DJO). One was seen at Rookery South CIP on 12th (MSG per RAN) and 13th August (RAN). It is not impossible that some or all of these four records related to one individual moving about the county but there was no firm evidence of such.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

This is a common and widespread primarily resident species in Bedfordshire. The four heronries in the county all had successful seasons again. The largest is at Southill Lake where a maximum of 19 nests were occupied and five unoccupied. About 50, excluding young, were present at this site on 16th April. Bromham Hall supported 12 occupied nests and 21 young fledged. Nine of 13 nests were occupied on the island at Luton Hoo and the most recent heronry, at Harrold-Odell CP, produced six young from three nests. No unusually large post-breeding concentrations were reported; 13 at Priory CP in July and August being a typical peak.

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*

A common and easily observed species widespread about the county's wetlands and rivers. Breeding was noted from Battlesden Lake, Brogborough Lake, R. Ouse Bromham, Chalton STW, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Felmersham NR, Harrold-Odell CP, Houghton Regis ChP, R. Ouse Kempston (two pairs), Langford GP (two pairs), Ledburn Road SP, Mentmore Road SP, Millbrook Pillinge CIP, R. Ouse Oakley, Priory CP area (four pairs), Rookery North CIP, Stewartby Lake, Tiddenfoot WP, Willington



GP and Woburn Park (six pairs). No breeding reports were received from Chimney Corner CIP, Coronation CIP and Rookery South CIP. Large gatherings reported involved 56 at Woburn Park in January, 33 at Harrold-Odell CP on 29th March, 42 at Stewartby Lake on 4th May with 70 there on 17th June and 91 on 16th July. On 27th July there were 97 plus six cygnets at Stewartby Lake. Thirty-two were at Rookery South CIP on 17th September rising to 45 on 12th November then reducing to 37 by 29th December. Forty-seven were by County Hall, Bedford on 8th September and 80 were at Radwell GP on 26th November rising to 111 there on 11th December. Three birds died after hitting overhead cables at Dunstable STW bringing the total deaths there to eight in the last three years.

**Bewick's Swan** *C. columbianus*

A scarce but fairly regular winter or passage visitor, there were five records in 1995. A pair were at Woburn Park on 1st January (DJO) and eight flew west-south-west over Priory CP on 14th (DK). Five flew north-east over Priory CP on 23rd February (DK). Two were at Rookery South CIP on 10th September (SB) and, lastly, two were at Brogborough Lake on 27th December (TP).

**[Whooper Swan** *C. cygnus*

There were no fully acceptable records for 1995 of this less than annual winter visitor to Bedfordshire. Six birds flying south-west over Ickwell on 3rd January were considered by the observer to be this species but the description supplied did not satisfy the rarities panel that the possibility of Bewick's Swan had been ruled out with certainty (WB).]

**Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus*

A single example of this rare winter visitor to the county was found north of Biggleswade on 2nd January (PFS *et al.*).

**Greylag Goose** *A. anser*

Possibly a rare winter visitor to Bedfordshire but generally our population occurs as a fairly common feral resident widespread throughout suitable waters in the county in all months of the year. Breeding was noted at Chimney Corner North CIP, where seven pairs were seen with 50 goslings on 3rd June, Felpersham NR and Southill Lake. It is assumed that breeding occurred at other sites but no records were received. Large gatherings reported included 271 at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th January and also 100 at Southill Lake this month, 51 at Rookery South CIP on 28th August and 112 on 27th September, 215 at Willington GP on 22nd October, 302 at Radwell GP on 23rd September and c.500 on 26th November, 150+ at Willington GP on 3rd December, 110 at Southill Lake during the month, 100+ at Rookery South CIP on 16th and 400+ at Harrold-Odell CP on 30th December.

**Greylag x Canada Goose hybrids**, *A. anser* x *B. canadensis*

'Grenada' geese were recorded from Woburn Park with one on 5th February, three on 18th February and two on 18th March. Singles were seen at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th January and 9th June, near Brogborough Lake on 5th March, Southill Lake on 25th June, Bedford Embankment on 26th November and Chimney Corner CIP on 31st December. Two were at Rookery South CIP on 9th August and two were at Radwell GP on 23rd September.

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*

This is another common but feral resident species about the county with breeding noted at Bromham Lake NR, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Felpersham NR, Harrold-Odell CP, Langford GP, Luton Hoo, Priory CP, Rookery North CIP, Rookery South

CIP, Southill Lake, Willington GP, Woburn Park and R. Ouse at Wyboston. Selected monthly high counts about the county are listed. There were 63 at Priory CP in January, 51 at Stewartby Lake on 1st and 69 at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th. Sixty were at East Hyde on 2nd February, 60 plus were at Stewartby Lake on 21st February and c.75 were at Luton Hoo on 26th March. As pairs hid away to breed, the highest group count for April was 44 at Southill Lake and 86 were at this site in May. There were 106 at Rookery South CIP on 4th June and 134 were at Southill Lake during the month. There were 78 at Harrold-Odell CP on 1st July and 113 on 16th were at Rookery South CIP falling to 91 by 29th. A total of 67 were at Priory CP in August, 160 were at Rookery South CIP on 9th, 209 was the highest evening roost count at Coronation CIP on 11th and, by 28th, c.100 were at Grovebury SP and 237 were at Rookery South CIP. Large post-breeding gatherings in September included 150+ at Brogborough Lake on 2nd, 191 at Rookery South CIP on 4th and 103 on 17th, 221 at Coronation CIP on 9th, 151 at Luton Hoo on 10th and c.220 at Southill Lake on 19th. Over 440 were at Radwell GP on 23rd September, the highest tally in the county in 1995. There were 137 at Coronation CIP on 1st October, 120+ at Willington GP on 8th when 90 were at Houghton Regis ChP, c.100 were at Luton Hoo on 10th and 111 were at Priory CP during the month. The highest count for November was 99, again at Priory CP, and over 70 were at Stewartby Lake on 12th. Lastly, for December, 109 were at Grovebury SP on 11th, 114 were at Priory CP and 100 were at Southill Lake during the month. There were 143 at Coronation CIP on 16th and 100+ were at Harrold-Odell CP on 30th December and Chimney Corner CIP on 31st.

Up to three of one of the small races, colloquially known as "Cackling Geese", were at Rookery South CIP intermittently from 21st July to 5th September and were seen at Radwell GP on 23rd September – see "Exotica".

### **Barnacle Goose** *B. leucopsis*

Nowadays, there is a regular but small feral population consorting with the Canada and Greylag Geese around the county's wetlands. Barnacle Geese were recorded in all months of the year but there were no confirmed breeding records this year. Their presence amongst Canada Geese or Greylags is a useful indicator of how our goose flocks move about the county and observers submitting cards for this species are urged to add details of accompanying species numbers to see if there is any pattern.

In January, four were at Stewartby Lake on 8th with five there on 15th to 17th then 21st February. Also in January, a single was at Priory CP on eight days and for two days in February when a single, perhaps the same, was at nearby Willington GP on 15th and 17th and again on 9th March. One was at Harrold-Odell CP on 29th March and earlier in the month, at Rookery South CIP, four were seen on 12th with three or four often present through till 6th May, with a single on three dates to the 28th May when four were present again. At least one was at Coronation CIP on 14th April and 1st May with two there on 2nd. One was at Dunstable STW on 15th May, two were at Houghton Regis ChP on 20th and one was at Harrold-Odell CP on 14th, 19th and 31st May and also 9th and 17th June. Two flew north-west over Priory CP on 16th June. A pair on eggs were reported from Rookery South CIP on 9th, 16th and 29th July but the outcome was unreported. One to four were present at this site from 8th to 28th August. Three were at Coronation CIP on 2nd August with five on 11th, probably visiting from Rookery South CIP, and one was at Harrold-Odell CP on 12th. An adult fed with Canada Geese at Dunstable STW on 13th August and at East Hyde between 14th August and 23rd September. A single was at Southill Lake on 15th August. Three

were at Roxton GP on 17th September and three were at Coronation CIP on 10th and 17th. As well as the occasional single, five were at Rookery South CIP on 4th September, four on 5th and 17th and five on 19th. The group of four plus three singles were all in one large flock comprising over 440 Canada Geese and 302 Greylags at Radwell GP on 23rd September (MJP). Probably the same five as seen in September at Rookery South CIP were at Coronation CIP on 1st and 8th October with four on 28th. A single at Radwell GP on 26th was the only November sighting whilst, in December, two were at Coronation CIP on 16th and one was at Harrold-Odell CP on 30th.

The most interesting record of this species for the year was the flock of 27 seen at Willington GP on 19th August (AS) which were probably roving feral birds from elsewhere in Britain rather than very early migrants from the northern breeding grounds.

### **Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

A rare winter visitor to the county, a pair were present at Stewartby Lake with a small flock of Canada Geese on 12th March (PS *et al*). A small breeding population is now established at Rutland Water and these birds could have wandered from there as easily as from their stronghold of north Norfolk. Northamptonshire had their most ever records of this species for a single year in 1995 (per BB).

### **Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

Generally a regular but uncommon winter visitor and migrant to the county, between one to three were recorded on 16 occasions at Rookery South CIP from the beginning of the year to 20th May with five present on 12th March. Two Shelduck were present on 18th June. Two juveniles arrived at dusk on 28th August and there were two present on 30th followed by three on 3rd September, one on 10th and 11th and a juvenile there on the 17th September. Four were present at this site on 12th December.

At Dunstable STW, three were present on 13th March and then one or two throughout the summer until 22nd September. The maximum at this site was four in June but they did not stay to breed. A pair was at Basin Pond, Woburn on 14th April. A pair was at Tiddenfoot WP on 5th May but there were no further sightings at this site. One was at Grovebury Farm SP on 5th and 23rd February, three were present on 18th March, two pairs were noted on 23rd April, a pair was seen on 14th and 28th May and one was present on 8th June. Two were at Houghton Regis CP on 9th September and, finally, one was at Harrold-Odell CP on 15th December.

### **Mandarin** *Aix galericulata*

This brightly coloured uncommon resident species can prove particularly elusive at times and numbers present in the county are difficult to assess. The only breeding report came from near the Beds/Bucks border near Charle Wood (RAN).

In an attempt to give an idea of the population in Bedfordshire, we have listed all the records received this year. Seven males and eight females were at Eversholt Lake on 4th and 7th January and four were seen there on 19th. A male and three females were at this site on 18th February and five pairs were there on 29th March. Four males and a female were on a stream by the Flying Horse Public House at Clophill on 3rd January. A male was at Tiddenfoot WP on 7th January. Up to four were at Luton Hoo in February, three pairs were present in March and the site held maxima of 20 on 7th and 10th September but numbers had declined to four on 10th October. Five males and five females were at Stockgrove Park on 3rd January with six males and five females on 8th then two pairs on 24th and one pair on 28th January. A pair was at

Wardown Park, Luton on 15th February. Three males and a female were at Basin Pond, Woburn on 20th May and seven females were on the lake on 15th August. A pair was on the R. Ivel near Blunham on 15th June. A female was at Grovebury SP on 13th August and another female was at Warren Villas NR, Sandy on 23rd August. At Swiss Gardens, Old Warden, a male was seen on 28th June then on 6th and 13th September then two males were present on 17th and 23rd, three males on 26th, four males displaying to one female on 27th, two males and a female from 28th–30th September, a male on 2nd October, three males and a female on 4th October and two males and a female on 5th. Finally at this site, a male and two females were present on 8th November and four males and a female the following day (WB). A male was at Rookery South CIP on 14th and 19th September. The same or another male was on the R. Ouse, Kempston on 27th September and 1st October with two males together there on 2nd. Probably the same bird was along the R. Ouse, Bedford on 4th October. At Spring Pond, Ickwell, two males and a female were present on 5th October, a pair were there on 13th. A pair were at Southill Lake on 3rd December. A male was at Kempston Mill on 2nd December then three males on 16th and two on 23rd and 27th. Lastly, five males and five females were at Stockgrove Park on 4th December and two males and two females were at Eversholt Lake on 17th December.

**Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

Although more cards were submitted this year from 17 sites for this often common winter visitor, there remains an unfortunate lack of continuity throughout the winter periods as the number of “no counts” in the table shows. The highest count for the year was of 454 at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th January. Rookery South CIP held reasonable numbers during the first few months of the year with 84 there on 28th January and 56 there on 5th March. Over 70 were recorded at Willington GP from the beginning of the year to mid-March and 59 which circled Priory CP at dusk on 1st January may have been disturbed from this site. There were 36 at Basin Pond, Woburn on 21st January and 57 were at Radwell on 24 March. Lone females were seen at Tiddenfoot WP on 7th January and 9th October where this species is scarce. The first of the autumn was a male at Rookery South CIP on 4th and 9th June with two there on 21st August. These had increased to 50 on 9th September and 69 on 17th, but few were seen there after this until 42 on 16th December then 69 on 29th. Coronation CIP held 25 on 4th September and these had increased to 39 on 15th October and 47 on the 22nd. Between 27 to 45 were recorded here until the end of the year. Over 50 were at Willington GP on 14th October and 30 were at Radwell GP on 26th November when 14 over Priory CP was the high count for the second winter period at this site. Numbers began to build up at Harrold-Odell CP on 2nd November when 48 were present. These had increased to 324 on 25th November, this being the second largest flock recorded in the county this year. Numbers declined after this with 153 there on 22nd December. Thirteen were noteworthy at Grovebury SP on 17th December, 20 were at Dunstable STW on 29th and c.140 were at a gravel pit west of Biggleswade Common on 31st December.

*Monthly maxima of Wigeon at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rookery South CIP	84	46	56	nc	nc	1	nc	2	69	10	16	65
Harrold-Odell CP	45	6	nc	1	nc	nc	nc	nc	2	nc	324	153
Coronation CIP	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	26	47	45	31
Willington GP	75	79	77	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	50+	nc	nc

**Gadwall** *A. strepera*

More than 30 observers submitted records from 19 sites for this common winter visitor and breeder in small numbers. Breeding was recorded at Luton Hoo where two pairs bred. At Willington, two pairs were present of which one pair produced two young. Although three pairs were present in the breeding season at East Hyde only one pair bred, hatching ten young all of which were predated. Three pairs bred at Dunstable STW producing 22 ducklings. Luton Hoo and Dunstable STW were again the main strongholds of this species with good numbers also recorded from Rookery South CIP as the table shows.

The remaining records for the year came from East Hyde with nine males and five females present on 22nd January; one at Chalton STW on 24th May; two at South Mills NR on 3rd April and 22nd May; a pair at Rookery North CIP on 12th August; six at Blunham on 3rd September; a pair at Felmersham NR on 7th October; four at Radwell on 26th November; six at Langford GP on 17th December; a pair were at Tiddenfoot WP on 18th and 31st December and a pair were at Bromham Lake NR on 22nd December. Lastly, 18 were at Chimney Corner CIP on 31st December.

*Monthly maxima of Gadwall at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	nc	70	30	20+	nc	2prs	nc	nc	25	2	nc	nc
Dunstable STW	56	21	20	20	13	11	6a22j	10	10	5	6	41
Rookery South CIP	8	3	3	2	1pr	3	5	19	5	16	60	13
Priory CP	2	5	3	2	2	1	0	0	2	2	5	6
Stewartby Lake	20	nc	2	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	3	7	19	42
Coronation CIP	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	6	17	21	19
Woburn Lake	26	25	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	2	12	14
Harrold-Odell CP	13	10	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	1	nc	13	19
Willington GP	4	6	9	1pr	1fj	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc

**Teal** *A. crecca*

A fairly common winter visitor sometimes occurring in large numbers and scarce breeder, this species was reported from fifteen sites but, although one pair displayed at Dunstable STW, no breeding was confirmed for 1995. There were 21 at Southill Lake on 22nd January and 37 were at Rookery North CIP on 21st January, 27 were there on 18th February and 12 on 19th March then 19 on 12th August. Teal were scarce this year at Luton Hoo with 18 on 8th February being the highest count. The highest counts at Priory CP were 17 on 1st January then 13 on both 6th February and 4th December. The year high at Willington GP was just 16 on 17th March. Numbers were also generally low at most sites during the second winter period with, apart from those shown in the table below, maxima of 16 at Harrold-Odell CP on 2nd November rising to 29 on 22nd December, just six at Brogborough Lake on 9th December and two at Chimney Corner CIP on 31st and c.100 at Crowholt Pond, Woburn on 26th December.

*Monthly maxima of Teal at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Dunstable STW	43	21	8	5	nc	nc	nc	28	8	25	29	37
Rookery North CIP	37	27	12	0	0	4	2	19	nc	nc	nc	nc
Rookery South CIP	47	34	27	12	1	1	2	44	78	80	34	100
Coronation CIP	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	24	32	37	25

**Green-winged Teal** *A. crecca carolinensis*

A male was discovered by two diligent observers at Luton Hoo on 8th February

(MC,TP). This is only the second county record of this North American race, the first, also a drake, was present at Radwell GP late afternoon and evening of 12th April 1987.

**Mallard** *A. platyrhynchos*

Only fifteen cards were submitted for this very common mainly resident species. Breeding was noted at the following sites. At Priory CP, 14 pairs produced 112 young of which 56 survived (DK). At Stewarby Lake, four broods comprised 29 young. At Rookery North CIP, eight young were noted. One pair bred at Rookery South CIP. Four pairs produced 28 young at Brogborough Lake. At Dunstable STW, c.15 pairs bred. At Wyboston GP, seven young were seen. At Swiss Garden, Old Warden, six young were reported. Eight young were seen at Tiddenfoot WP and one pair at "The Moor", Luton. Two pairs nested in a garden in Luton, adjacent to the R. Lea, producing broods of 13 and 11. Apart from those recorded in the table below, other reports involved 270 plus at Eversholt Lake on 4th January, c.100 at Luton Hoo on 5th February and 97 there on 10th September, 40 at Bromham Lake NR on 16th September, 99 at Rookery South CIP on 9th August, c.100 there on 19th September and 44 on 12th November and, lastly, 20 were at Radwell GP on 26th November.

*Monthly maxima of Mallard at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Dunstable STW	138	78	58	25	15 <sup>pr</sup>	96	106	92	138	46	61	110
Priory CP	107	96	34	19	23	41	84	122	82	111	74	92
Coronation CIP	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	119	123	104	29
Woburn Lakes	70	54	48	36	43	72	36	10	97	213	132	169
Southill Lake	136	18	12	8	19	73	36	43	46	60	27	251
Rookery North CIP	59	20	5	1	3	52	30	64	nc	nc	nc	nc
Felmersham NR	23	22	23	12	11	9	8	45	35	75	55	0

**Pintail** *A. acuta*

This species is an uncommon but regular visitor to the county during both winter periods but invariably in small numbers, usually single figures. There was the usual scarcity of records during the first winter period. Six were at Brogborough Lake on 1st January (RAN) with one remaining by 7th and seen again on 14th (KMS, MJP). The same or another drake was present here on 12th February (DJO). A male was at Rookery South CIP on 8th January (BJN). At Priory CP, two pairs were present on 16th and 20th March (DK, SGW) and a pair visited Rookery South CLP on 1st April (AW). A good series of records came from Rookery South CIP with one on 31st August (DJO), singles on 1st and 2nd September, two on 5th, one on 6th-8th, two on 11th, 12 on 14th, two on 15th September, 16 on 16th, six on 17th, eight on 19th, four on 20th, six on 22nd, one on 23rd, two on 24th, one on 25th, two on 27th, one on 29th and two on 30th September. There were two here on 2nd, 8th, 14th and 15th October, three on 16th, five on 17th, four on 21st and 26th, five on 27th and four on 28th October. A female was present on 2nd November then five on 3rd, three on 4th, four on 5th and 9th, a male on 11th, a pair on 12th, a female on 15th, three on 17th, a female on 22nd November, a male and a female on 23rd and 25th November. In December, three males and four females were seen on 11th, two females on 12th, two males on 13th and two pairs were there on 16th December (LC, KO, MJP, PS *et al*). Other records involved a female at Priory CP on 12th September, a male there on 4th and 8th November and a female there on 17th December (DK). Single females were at Willington GP on 14th October (AS), Dunstable STW on 4th November (PT) and Lower Drakelow Pond, Woburn on 26th November (AW), with a pair there on 8th December and three males present on 26th December (BJN). A male was at Langford

GP on 12th November (MJS) and there was a male at Brogborough Lake on 27th November (RAB).

### **Garganey** *A. querquedula*

An irregular but usually annual scarce migrant to Bedfordshire, the first of the spring were three males at Radwell GP on 16th April (PH) followed by a pair at Priory CP on 22nd April (DK, SGW). A pair at Rookery South CIP was present on the unusual date of 4th June (PS *et al*). In autumn there were several records from Rookery South CIP with one on 12th August, two on 22nd–23rd August (KO, MJP) and one on 13th September (KO, JB). One was at Chimney Corner CIP on 1st September (KO). It is worth noting that a new collection of exotic ducks at Woburn Park includes a pair of Garganey (BJN).

### **Shoveler** *A. clypeata*

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant to the county which has bred. Numbers are generally low and do not usually exceed around twenty. Shoveler were recorded from fourteen sites and interestingly there was an unsubstantiated report of breeding at Millbrook Pillinge CIP. A fairly well fledged youngster, but still retaining some down, was seen at Stewartby Lake on 27th August and this may have originated from Millbrook Pillinge CIP (RAN). A pair at Tiddenfoot WP on 30th March were an unusual occurrence at this site. Rookery South CIP and Southill Lake held the highest numbers as shown in the table. Reasonably regular counts were received for Dunstable STW, Priory CP and Luton Hoo. Elsewhere, Shoveler were present at a variety of the county's waters. Five were at Brogborough Lake on 2nd January. Basin Pond, Woburn had eleven on 21st January. A male was at Stewartby Lake on 1st May and one was in Rookery North CIP on 17th June. Two were at Lower Caldecote on 22nd August. One was at Stewartby Lake on 4th November. Seven were at Langford GP from 5th–26th November. Singles were at Harrold-Odell CP on 12th, 16th and 23rd September and 23rd November then five on 5th and one on 22nd December. Two were at Radwell GP on 26th November. Eight were at Swiss Gardens, Old Warden on 3rd October then six next day and just two on 13th. Four were present here on 6th December then at least eight from 7th December to the year end.

*Monthly maxima of Shoveler at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rookery South CIP	21	2	12	5	2	0	0	6	17	18	12	35
Luton Hoo	nc	2	2	6	2	1	1	nc	2	4	nc	nc
Dunstable STW	11	11	4	2	2	0	4	10	5	5	6	3
Southill Lake	11	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	7	8	19	9	20
Priory CP	5	14	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	8

### **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*

This species is just about annual in the county and records often involve returnees from previous years. Where they originate from can never be certain and we chose here to publish all records unless the individual is obviously from captive origins. A male was at Rookery South CIP on 12 dates between 1st January and 26th February (KMS, JB, BJN, PS). A possible hybrid was seen there on 15th and 16th September (AW). Two males were at Harrold-Odell CP on 3rd January (KMS). A female was at Brogborough Lake on 14th, 16th and 22nd April then 1st May (TP, PT, MJP) and a female was at Chimney Corner North CIP on 3rd June (PS). The Brogborough bird showed a close relationship with a drake Mallard on 22nd April! A male at Dunstable STW on 11th October was the first for the site (PT). A pair were found at Radwell

GP on 4th November (JDS) and, presumably, the returning male from the first winter period was present at Rookery South CIP on 2nd, 4th, 5th, 12th, 19th, 22nd and 25th November then again on 13th, 16th and 29th December and into 1996 (MJP,AW, DJO *et al*).

**Pochard *Aythya ferina***

This is a numerous species in Bedfordshire in the winter months that has occasionally stayed to breed, however, there were no reports of breeding in 1995. Maxima during the first winter period involved 372 at Rookery South CIP on 7th January, c.200 at Brogborough on 2nd January, 127 at Chimney Corner CIP on 4th January, 203 at Priory CP on 5th February and 205 on 13th. Moulting movements, usually involving one to ten birds, were noted in June and July at Priory CP, Southill Lake, Rookery South CIP, Dunstable STW and Houghton Regis ChP. Moulting flocks were under-recorded this year. With a total British breeding population of around only 400 pairs, it is important that we monitor the sites utilised for moulting during the post breeding period. During the second winter period, Rookery South CIP was the only site to hold good numbers. In September, 176 were present on 24th increasing to 280 on 30th. This tally further increased to c.300 on 21st October before falling to 223 on 12th November and to 142 on 9th December then rising to over 200 on 16th. Priory CP held maxima of 83 on 30th November and 140 on 9th December and 244 were counted at Chimney Corner CIP on 31st December. There was only one count submitted for Brogborough Lake following a zero in 1994. This site is still a stronghold of this species in Bedfordshire and extra effort is called for at this important location. As commented in last year's report, Brogborough Lake held 842 Pochard on 3rd October 1983 and 630 the same month in 1984. Harrold-Odell CP and Radwell GP also receive minimum reportage and for all wildfowl species additional reports will be most welcome from these three sites.

*Monthly maxima of Pochard at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	nc	27	4	4	nc	nc	nc	nc	0	39	nc	nc
Dunstable STW	55	48	28	2	1	1	8	4	3	13	29	48
Rookery South CIP	372	c100	nc	nc	1	10	0	0	280	c300	223	142
Priory CP	169	205	168	0	3	0	1	2	17	24	83	140
Coronation CIP	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	5	37	81	83
Woburn Lakes	22	69	19	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	22	50
Southill Lake	81	0	0	1	1	0	8	6	1	3	8	22
Millbrook P. CIP	29	12	0	0	0	0	17	26	26	nc	nc	nc

Other records came from nine further sites. 13 were at Bromham NR on 11th February and two on 8th October. A pair were at Willington GP on 28th April. One was at Houghton Regis ChP on 2nd June. Three were in Rookery North CIP on 17th June. There were 40 at Warren Villas NR on 10th October. Six were present at Radwell GP on 26th November. Fourteen were at Harrold-Odell CP on 2nd November and 24 were counted there on 15th December. There were 16 present at Grovebury SP on 17th December.

**Tufted Duck *A. fuligula***

A numerous and common winter visitor and regular breeder in small numbers. Breeding took place at Chalton STW (one brood of three young), Luton Hoo (two broods), Southill Lake (broods of eight, nine and four), Chimney Corner North CIP (one brood of nine young), Coronation CIP (one brood), Rookery South CIP (one



brood of six young), Stewartby Lake (one brood of four young), Brogborough Lake (at least three broods) and Willington GP (three broods). Four pairs summered at East Hyde and one pair were at Bromham Lake NR but breeding was not proven. This species failed to produce young at Dunstable STW for the first time in 15 years, possibly due to predation of eggs.

Recorded from most of the county's waters, Brogborough Lake appeared to hold the highest numbers with 350 on 2nd January and 259 on 26th October, but as noted for Pochard, this site is grossly under reported, these two counts being the only ones submitted. Maxima recorded at other sites included 17 at Felmersham NR on 18th February and 36 there on 19th March and 50 at Radwell GP on 26th November. At Chimney Corner CIP, 24 were present on 4th January and 41 on 31st December.

*Monthly maxima of Tufted Ducks at selected sites:*

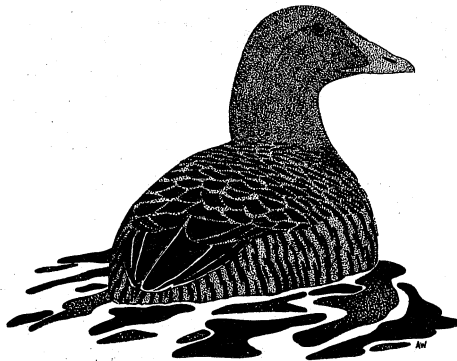
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	nc	24	48	53	nc	21+	57	nc	28	19	nc	nc
Dunstable STW	30	32	45	20	23	35	34	3	42	11	27	29
Rookery South CIP	nc	10	nc	nc	nc	nc	88	nc	35	91	113	107
Priory CP	40	37	29	12	4	2	2	1	5	7	27	12
Coronation CIP	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	71	97	82	60
Woburn Lakes	87	77	70	25	5	8	0	1	0	18	29	56
Southill Lake	12	5	13	9	10	6	10	7	4	7	0	2
Millbrook P. CIP	37	28	10	13	6	15	50	69	68	nc	nc	nc
Willington GP	nc	nc	22	25	30+	nc	22	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc

**Scaup** *A. marila*

Scaup occur as an occasional, almost annual in recent years, winter visitor or passage migrant to the county. The first-winter male which arrived at Priory CP on 31st December 1994 remained throughout January and was also present on 6th, 7th and 10th February (DK, JCP). A first-winter male was at Rookery South CIP on 4th March and was seen to fly off on the following day (RAN, PN). In the second winter period, an immature/female was seen at Stewartby Lake on 4th November (DJO, MJP, TR, SGW).

**Eider** *Somateria mollissima*

A female was reported at Rookery South CIP on 8th December (TP) but not confirmed until 11th but was then seen on several dates and remained into the new year (TD, CT, PS *et al*). This was the sixth county record of this maritime species. The first



Eider

Andy Whitney

was an immature drake present at Brogborough Lake from 8th to 11th December 1982. Next came a long-staying drake at Wyboston GP present intermittently from 15th November 1992 until at least 1st January 1994. On 14th November 1993, almost exactly a year after its discovery, it was joined by a female and an immature male. The female had gone by the next day but the immature drake was still present and also stayed until at least 1st January 1994. The only other record concerns a drake at Chimney Corner CIP on 31st October 1993 following an influx in small numbers into other Midlands counties.

### **Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

There were three records of this irregular and scarce passage visitor to the county during 1995, all involving females. One was reported at Brogborough Lake on 12th January (TD) then again on 4th February (AC) and was seen regularly between 10th and 21st February (DJO, MJP, MDR, AW *et al.*). Another was at Priory CP on 14th August (DK) and one was at Stewartby Lake on 4th November (DJO, MJP, TR, SGW).

### **Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

As usual, Brogborough Lake held the largest and most regular numbers of this species which is never a truly plentiful winter visitor to Bedfordshire. At this site the birds often group toward dusk making assessment of numbers easier during winter gull roost vigils. A comparatively very large but uncountable flock flew in with other wildfowl at dusk on 1st January at Brogborough Lake and other counts at this site included 28 on 7th January, 38 on 14th rising to 34 on 28th. There were 46 present on 12th February, 39 on 14th and 18th then 43 on 28th but numbers then fell to 31 on 12th March and 14 by 20th. The last in spring here were four on 30th March. The first returnee was seen on 4th November. Seven were present by 27th November and at least 15 by 13th December.

Elsewhere, Goldeneye were found at ten more sites. At Rookery South CIP a pair were present on 1st January, two males on 5th March, a pair on 24th and a female on 25th, followed by November sightings of one female on 4th, two females on 5th and 17th, two males and three females on 19th and four females on 23rd. At Stewartby Lake, two females were seen on 1st January then a single female on 7th January but no more were seen until three females were noted on 3rd November, one on 5th November then two on 27th and 31st December. A single Goldeneye was at Langford GP on 7th, 15th and 22nd January. A male was at Felmersham NR on 21st January. Six birds were at Harrold-Odell CP on 3rd January rising to eight on 8th. Five were here on 5th February then 16 on 9th and two on 12th followed by five on 3rd March and one male on 19th and 25th. The last in spring here were a pair on 2nd April. In November, six had returned on 25th and were still present on 9th December then five were seen on 15th and 22nd December. At Priory CP, a female was present on 11th March then, in November, 7 were seen on 2nd and a single female on 4th, 18th and 23rd. Two females were at Chimney Corner CIP on 4th January and a single female on 4th November. Two Goldeneye were at Dunstable STW on 5th November and a single bird was present at Radwell GP on 26th. An interesting summer record concerns a male at Houghton Regis ChP from 29th May until 2nd June.

### **Smew** *Mergus albellus*

There were four records involving seven individuals of this scarce but delightful winter visitor during 1995 and, as is most often the case, all records were of "red-heads". The first was at Harrold-Odell CP on 3rd and 6th January (KMS, MJP, JB). In December, two were at Brogborough Lake on 8th-9th (LGRE, PS), one was at Coronation CIP

between 23rd and 31st occasionally visiting Chimney Corner CIP and staying on into early January 1996 (KMS) and three were at Priory CP on 30th (DK, ECN).

### Goosander *Mergus merganser*

This species visits us every winter but usually in small numbers, though occasionally influxes occur. 1995 was another good year for this species with most records from the Woburn Lakes and from Grovebury SP. At Woburn, a red-head was present on 1st January and three birds were seen next day. Two males and four red-heads were present on 15th January and one male occasionally thereafter to 5th February. A red-head was also present on 24th January and 5th and 11th February. Two males and four red-heads were there on 12th February and four red-heads on 14th. Two Goosander were present on 18th February. Eight males and six red-heads were together on 26th November and three males and five red-heads were present on 8th December with eight birds still present on 26th.

At Grovebury SP, one male and three red-heads were present on 1st January, one red-head on 14th January, two males and one red-head on 29th January, one male and five red-heads on 5th February, four red-heads on 16th February, two males and five red-heads on 17th, one male and six red-heads on 23rd and three males and seven red-heads on 26th February. Two males and four red-heads were present on 5th March, then two males and four red-heads on 23rd March, one pair on 26th, two males and four red-heads on 28th and two males and seven red-heads on 29th March with the last spring sighting here being of two red-heads on 9th April. A site record of 17 Goosander were present on 17th December comprising seven males and ten red-heads. Five males and nine red-heads were present on 27th December.

Elsewhere, there were three males at Eversholt Lake on 19th January, two males and three red-heads there on 12th February, three males and one red-head on 18th February and two males and four females on 17th December. One red-head was at Rookery South CIP on 7th January and three were there on 11th November. A red-head was at Dunstable STW on 11th January. Three red-heads were briefly at Brogborough Lake on 13th January. There were singles at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th January and 12th February and three red-heads were at Priory CP on 11th March.

### Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Since the first authenticated record for Bedfordshire on 12th December 1980 at what is now Priory CP, this enigmatic little duck has become a fairly common resident in small numbers in Bedfordshire with most records from the clay pits. It now breeds in low numbers regularly and the recorders hope that, despite recent intentions nationally to cull this species lest it interbreed in Europe with **White-headed Duck** *O. leucocephala*, it may enjoy peace and quiet and prosper in its chosen habitat in Bedfordshire. Successful breeding was recorded at three sites: at Southill Lake, where one pair were with three young on 16th July and another pair possibly bred; at Rookery South CIP, four pairs were present of which one pair were seen with seven young on 4th August; at Luton Hoo, seven young were present with 11 females on 18th June. At Coronation CIP, a pair was present and two pairs were at Brogborough Lake in May but breeding was not proven.

*Monthly maxima of Ruddy Duck at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Rookery S.CIP	22	3	15	3pr	4pr	1	3	16a3j	17	15	27	27	
Luton Hoo		5	11	9	6	3	16a7j	nc	nc	12	13	nc	nc
Southill Lake		nc	nc	nc	4	2	1	2a3j	1	nc	nc	nc	nc
Brogborough Lake		3	nc	2m	3	pr	pr	nc	2	nc	nc	nc	8

During the first winter period, maxima of 22 were recorded at Rookery South CIP on 7th January and 11 at Luton Hoo on 26th March and in the second winter period Rookery South CIP held 13 on 26th August, 17 on 30th September, 15 on 22nd October, 27 on 22nd November and 2nd December. Other records involved a female at Harrold-Odell CP on 3rd January; a female at Priory CP on 3rd and 4th March; a male at Dunstable STW from 24th April to 1st May and a female there on 27th July; a male was at Harrold-odell CP on 12th August when three males and two females were at Rookery North CIP; a male was at Stewartby Lake on 30th April and another male was there on 5th November, a pair were present on 26th then a female on 17th December, five males and a female on 29th and a pair on 31st.

### **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

Formerly a rare breeder until the mid 19th century, the Red Kite has proven to be a rare vagrant to Bedfordshire with only eight records between 1946 and 1989. The current picture is clouded by the re-introduction programme into England with healthy populations now occurring as close as Oxfordshire. The majority of these birds are wing-tagged and observers finding a Red Kite in the county are asked to supply as much detail as possible with their descriptions. The first for the year was between Great Barford and Roxton on 29th May (SWe). Potentially the same bird was at Bolnhurst on 30th July (DSW). A presumed wing-tagged bird was seen at Luton Hoo on 17th November. This was almost certainly a wanderer from the highly successful reintroduction population in Oxfordshire (LGRE), as was probably the Red Kite seen over Dunstable on 14th December (JCo).

### **Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

A rare passage migrant through Bedfordshire, a first-summer female at Rookery South CIP was present for an hour or so before it flew towards Amphill on 13th May (RAN). A similar bird was located at the west corner of Rookery South CIP on 30th July and this individual stayed in the general vicinity (though was frustratingly not seen by many that went in search of it) being recorded on 7th to 10th then 13th August (RAN, PS, KO, DJO *et al*). A juvenile was at Pegsdon Hills NR on 6th August (AP).

### **Hen Harrier** *C. cyaneus*

The only two accepted reports for the year of this scarce, mainly winter visitor were of a female flying low over fields adjacent to the B665 at Barton-le-Clay on 31st January (MC) and a "ringtail" at Wood End, Marston on 3rd March (PC).

### **Harrier sp.** *Circus sp.*

A brief view of a "ringtail" at Pegsdon Hills on 14th May could not be specifically identified and was either the preceding species or Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus* (L.) (JCP).

### **Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*

There were only four reports accepted this year for this rare resident but several more appear in appendix B as rejected records because the descriptions submitted proved insufficient to satisfy the rarities panel that **Sparrowhawk** *A. nisus* had been satisfactorily ruled out. An adult male was at Millbrook Warren on 29th April (KMS). An adult female was seen east of Thurleigh on 20th July (PA) and another was at Warden Little Wood on 23rd September (DG, MG). It is understood that at least one pair continues to be seen occasionally along the edge of the Buckinghamshire border and it is likely that these birds occasionally wander into Bedfordshire. A displaying pair reported in the west of the county on 2nd April were possibly these birds. Observers are reminded of the rarity of this species in Bedfordshire and hence the need for a very complete description.

**Sparrowhawk** *A. nisus*

There was an increase in sightings again this year for this widespread resident and Bedfordshire's Sparrowhawk population appears to be at a healthy level from the sightings of 35 observers submitting records. At Priory CP this species was seen on 147 bird days as compared to 121 in 1994 and 139 in 1993. A pair raised a single chick at a regularly watched location along the R. Ouse, Queen's Park, Bedford. Another pair nested in a Kempston garden and raised two young. At Luton Hoo, the head keeper thought that up to eight pairs were present. Breeding was also noted at Bramingham Wood, near Tiddenfoot WP, Bromham Park, at Thorn Wood and near Rookery CIP. Display was also reported from Studham and Blunham. An interesting record concerned a male caught in a chicken run at Haynes on 18th December which had killed a Long-tailed Tit and had to be cut free. Prey reported taken also included Blue Tit, Pied Wagtail, Starling, Hedge Warbler, Blackbird and a juvenile Moorhen.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

1995 was an excellent year for a species that has been a regular visitor in small numbers to the county for several years now. A pair bred at Southill Park raising one young, the first time Common Buzzard have bred in the county this century. A separate article by Barry Nightingale elsewhere in this report details this major occurrence. In the Southill and Old Warden area, colloquially known to birders as "The Raptor Triangle", Common Buzzards were seen every month of the year with seven together on 9th September and eight or, probably, nine on 23rd reducing to six on 28th September. Birds from this stronghold wandered to Ickwell, Northill, Upper Caldecote, Haynes, Ireland, and Biggleswade (BJN *et al*).

Other sightings came from the Pegsdon area with one record on 18th February and then further reports for 14th, 26th, 27th and 29th (2) May, 25th June (2) and 2nd, 22nd, 23rd (2) September and 15th October (2). A pair was seen on several occasions and breeding hopes have been raised for the future (JCP *et al*).

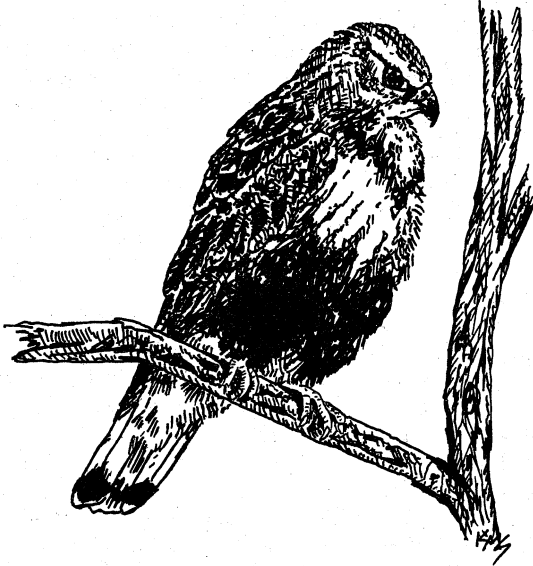
On 2nd January, a Common Buzzard was seen at Heath and Reach. A bird was seen at The Lodge, Sandy twice in February. In May birds were seen flying over Blows Downs on 1st and Bromham on 23rd. August records came from Studham on 2nd, East Hyde on 14th, Whipsnade Zoo on 18th, near Woburn with two on 22nd, Ledburn Road SP on 23rd and near Dunstable STW on 30th. In September, an unprecedented series of sightings occurred. Following one at Battlesden on 10th, another was seen over Blows Downs on 14th and possibly the same was at Houghton Regis ChP on 17th. At Whipsnade Zoo, Common Buzzards were seen on 14th and 22nd and one was seen on the latter date at Luton Hoo. On 23rd, five were seen together north of Odell Great Wood and another was over Biggleswade. On 29th September, three birds were seen at Steppingley and singles at Oakley (a very pale bird), Moneypot Hill and Galley Hill. On 30th, four flew over a Woburn garden. Up to three birds were present in Luton Hoo from 27th September to the end of the year. In October, three birds circled over Chicksands Wood on 8th and singles were seen on 9th at Whipsnade and on 22nd at Cople. Two were at Santa Pod on 23rd October. One was reported from Steppingley Woods on 5th November and another was near Studham on 23rd. In December, two were again at Santa Pod on 15th, one was at Battlesden on 16th and one was at Totternhoe Knolls from 24th to 26th.

Whether this post breeding influx to the county will be repeated in future years and breeding numbers increase remains to be seen, but the Common Buzzard is now thankfully very much part of the birding scene in Bedfordshire in the quieter wooded areas whereas as recently as the 1970s there were barely up to five records a year. The

present day position seems to have begun with increasing reports year on year since the 1982/3 winter.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** *B.lagopus*

On 18th February, one was watched for five minutes at Pegsdon Hills before it drifted off north-east (JCP). This record coincided with an influx of substantial proportions into eastern and south-east Britain. This was the sixth documented record for Bedfordshire since 1946 and was the first in the county since one over Sandy Warren on 2nd March 1986.



Rough-legged Buzzard

Kevin Sharpe

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

One at Priory CP on 23rd March was the earliest ever record for the county of this rare but annual passage migrant (ECN, RS). The previous earliest was at Blunham on 14th April 1983. An Osprey was seen near Aspley Heath on 15th May (IE) and another was over The Lodge, Sandy on 22nd May (ME). There were no further spring reports but, in autumn, one was at Stewartby Lake then Rookery North and South CIPs on 3rd September (LC, RAN). One flew east over Red Cow Farm, Bidwell on 16th September (DG, MG) and, finally, there was a young bird at Blunham on 3rd September followed next day by an adult at this site which lingered until 16th October (AZ, DZ per JTRS).

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

Just 19 record cards were received for this common resident in contrast to seven in 1994. Four chicks were ringed in a Whipsnade Zoo nest box. At Priory CP, Kestrels were reported on 142 bird days compared to 101 in 1994 by the same observer. At Dunstable STW, prey taken included attempts on a Little Ringed Plover brood.

**Merlin** *F. columbarius*

This species is a rare winter visitor and passage migrant in Bedfordshire. On 2nd January, a female or first-winter was raiding a Skylark flock east of Warden Hill (JCP). A similarly plumaged bird was seen at Dunstable STW on 6th (PT). At Luton Hoo, one was seen on 9th February (AJL) and one was at Haynes on 19th (DP). An immature male was seen near Bedford STW on 8th October (DK).

**Hobby** *F. subbuteo*

Thirty-seven record cards were received, indicative of the small but widespread summer and passage population in Bedfordshire. However, five observers across the county commented that there seemed to be another real decline in sightings in 1995 following recent years of relatively high numbers. The first of the year was on the early date of 16th April at Bush Wood, Caddington (PT). The next was at Stewartby on 29th April and the main influx from 4th May. Successful breeding was recorded near Dunstable STW, where two to three young were raised, and at Battlesden Lake where two young were reared. Prey observed being taken included dragonflies, a Swift, Swallows, Sand Martins, House Martins and a Dunlin was taken at Rookery South CIP. The main departure was by 30th September, but October reports came from Turvey Abbey on 1st and 2nd, Felmersham NR on 7th, Willington GP on 8th, Priory CP from 4th to 9th and the last was over Camestone Park, Kempston on 15th October.

**Peregrine** *F. peregrinus*

A rare, usually winter visitor to Bedfordshire. Only two Peregrines were seen in Bedfordshire in 1995. An adult was seen at Rookery South CIP on 2nd January where it was on the ground for two to three minutes before flying off north (RD). A small female was at Willington GP on 18th November (DHB).

**Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*

Fifteen observers submitted record cards for this widespread and common resident. The largest coveys were 28 at Priory CP on 30th December, 21 at Stopsley on 18th September, 20+ at Pegsdon Hills in two noisy parties on 30th July and at Dunstable STW the highest count was of 20 in January. Small numbers were seen most months in Luton Hoo where Grey Partridge was absent. This species is outnumbered by Grey Partridge in the Stopsley Common area, although it is the more common on Pegsdon Hills. This species appears to favour areas with more variety of habitat whereas Grey Partridge favours open agricultural land (JCP). Indicative perhaps on the ban on introductions of **Chukar** *A. chukar* and hybrids in recent years, there were no reports of individuals showing characteristics of this close relation in 1995.

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix*

Although a still declining resident species, 27 observers submitted records, several confirming the downward population trend. However in the Butterfield Green, Stopsley Common, Warden and Galley Hills area there was an estimated 15+ breeding pairs. About 145 were counted in the same area on 10th September and there were 150+ at Stopsley Common on 10th December. On 29th December, the 'Christmas Partridge Count' produced 54 at Butterfield Green, 44 east of Warden Hill, 12 at Galley Hill and 88 east of there. This total of 198 is the highest in ten years of these yuletide counts (JCP). Away from this stronghold of the species, high counts received were mostly in October and included 21 at Quest CIP on 1st, 14 at Great Oak Farm, Turvey on 19th, 34 north of Cople on 22nd, 17 at Coronation CIP and up to 15 at Ledburn Road SP on 28th. About 30 were present by Old Warden Tunnel on 29th December.

### **Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*

An irregular summer visitor and rare breeder, calling birds were located at Bromham on the early date of 29th April (PA) and at Stevington on 2nd May (PA). Two sites, around Cople and Willington, had calling birds from 6th to 20th July and from 7th July until 10th August respectively (AS). At Warden Hill, one was heard on 15th July (JKT) and two were heard on 26th July with a third calling from over the Hertfordshire border (AW). At nearby Galley Hill, there were up to three calling birds from 8th July onwards with one still calling on 1st August (JCP, LRJ, AC *et al*). One of these three was probably just over the county boundary. There was another calling male at Cockayne Hatley from 16th to 30th July either from a wheat field or from an adjacent linseed field. The wheat was harvested on 30th July but the bird did not return to the linseed field although it remained standing for several weeks (R,SKB). Finally, one was calling at Knotting Green in late June and early July (DHB, DJO, MJP).

### **Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

Although only seven observers submitted records for this very common species, this was better than the single report sent in for 1994! A pair bred at a West Street, Dunstable allotment, an area completely surrounded by housing. On 27th March a melanistic bird apart from brown tail feathers was seen at East Hyde. A total of 46 were counted at Kingshoe Wood on 30th September.

### **Lady Amherst's Pheasant** *Chrysolophus amherstiae*

Details of the ongoing population survey of this introduced resident will be published in due course but reports through the year involved just over 60 birds of which under 20% were females. A male was at Aspley Heath, six males and two females at Kingshoe Wood, c.15 max. at Luton Hoo, two males at Lowes Wood, four males at Maulden Woods, four males and six females at Moneypot Hill, one male at Wakes Wood, one male at Warden Great Wood and six at Woburn Park including three females. Six males and three females were at another Greensand Ridge site. In Luton Hoo, the future is far from encouraging. Very few females are believed to be present, indeed one was found dead by the B653, and it is feared that this once healthy population could well become extinct in the early years of the next century (AJL). In contrast, at Buttermilk Wood and Nun's Wood, which are mostly in Buckinghamshire, up to ten calling birds and four females were seen (PT).

### **Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

This is undoubtedly an under-recorded mainly winter visitor but also rare breeder in the county. Due to its secretive nature and habitat choice, it is more often heard than seen. At Priory CP one or two were present throughout the firstwinter period until 17th March and the first returnee was recorded on 29th October. From November, up to three were present until the year's end. At Flitwick Moor, where this species again probably bred, five or six were heard calling at dusk on 13th April. Other reports in the winter periods came from Brogborough Lake (2), Coronation CIP, East Hyde, Harrold-Odell CP, Houghton Regis ChP, Langford, Luton Hoo, R. Ivel near Sandy STW, Stewartby Lake, Stockgrove CP, Southill Lake and Sundon STW (2).

### **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana*

A well-watched adult, probably a female, was at Dunstable STW from 12th to 19th August (PT *et al*). There have only been five previous records in Bedfordshire since 1946. This one was enjoyed by perhaps 250 birders and was the second record for the site, 20 years almost exactly after the previous one arrived!



**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

A common and widespread but under-recorded resident for which only eight record cards were received. The largest count was of 30 at Coronation CIP on 12th November. At Dunstable STW there were up to 20 throughout the year. Most of the young from eight breeding pairs at this site were predated by Carrion Crows. At East Hyde a grey plumaged adult was present throughout the year. Also of interest was a bird returning to County Hall pool by R. Ouse, Bedford in December which was the observer's first record there for many months, all the others having been eaten by the local Mink! On 9th December, three were perched in a Hawthorn bush at Felmersham NR well above ground level, probably eating haws as the site was frozen over.

**Coot** *Fulica atra*

A common breeder in the county and winter visitor when often present in large numbers on chosen waters. At Dunstable STW, ten pairs nested but not one young or egg survived the local Carrion Crows and Foxes. Selected high counts from other sites were as follows: Brogborough Lake, 268 on 4th January; Coronation CIP, 145 on 10th September; Dunstable STW, 42 in March; Harrold-Odell CP, 180 on 26th January and 141 on 30th December; Luton Hoo, c.100 on 5th February and 85 on 10th September; Millbrook Pillinge CIP, 78 on 21st January and 60 on 12th August; Radwell GP, c.50 on 26th November; Rookery South CIP, 107 on 11th March then 173 on 9th September rising to 262 on 14th October, 348 on 12th November and 324 on 9th December; Stewartby Lake, 152 on 8th October and 135 on 5th November; and, lastly, Woburn Park with 83 in January and 86 in December.

**Common Crane** *Grus grus*

One north-east over R. Ouse near Queen's Park, Bedford early morning on 23rd May is the first fully accepted record for Bedfordshire (SGW). An account of this occurrence appears elsewhere in this report.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

A regular but uncommon visitor, the earliest record was of an individual bird near Bromham Lake NR on 23rd March and the last was also a single bird at Priory CP 3rd December. Display and attempted mating was seen at Radwell GP on 7th May with display also being observed at South Mills on 28th May. At least 22 individual birds were recorded during the year, which was five up on the low figure of 17 seen in 1994. There were 14 records of single birds and four of two birds together.

**[Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

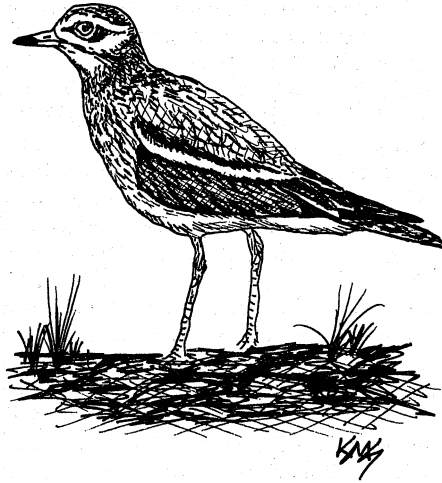
The only record of this rare passage migrant was of a single bird present at Roxton GP from at least 6th to 17th September. The bird was very approachable and a brass coloured ring was noted on one of the legs. Its origins are considered suspect (PT, AW, RM, BM).]

**Stone Curlew** *Burhinus oedipnemus*

A very rare passage migrant to Bedfordshire, a single bird was found on Stopsley Common on 3rd September (TG). This was the first county record of Stone Curlew since one was heard at Pegsdon Hills on 30th March 1990.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

This species is a scarce breeder but regular passage migrant in small numbers. The first records of 1995 were of a single bird at Grovebury Farm SP 22nd March with two on the same day at Dunstable STW. The last record was of a single bird at Priory CP 27th August. The maximum count of individuals was eleven at Houghton Regis ChP on 8th and 9th July. Breeding, or attempted breeding accounts were as follows: five pairs at



Stone Curlew

Kevin Sharpe

Dunstable STW raised only five young out of 12-16 chicks which were heavily predated by Magpies and Carrion Crows; a pair hatched four eggs in a flooded area off the A6 north of Barton and raised four young; a pair with three chicks at Houghton Regis ChP were seen on 14th July, two chicks were seen on 16th but no young were present by 22nd; a pair was present throughout the breeding season at Rookery South ClP; a pair successfully raised three young from a nest north of Barton but two other nests were unsuccessful; attempted nesting at Ledburn Road SP, Leighton Buzzard took place but there was no proof that the four eggs hatched.

Elsewhere, an adult at Whipsnade Zoo on 9th and 10th July was the first record for this site. Spring passage sightings were recorded at East Hyde, Laporte Way, Luton, Priory CP, Radwell GP, Manor Farm A1 GP, Coronation ClP, South Mills NR and Willington GP.

### **Ringed Plover** *C. hiaticula*

A regular migrant and uncommon breeder which produced a very good batch of sightings for 1995. The first record for the year was of eight at Rookery South ClP and one at Dunstable STW 18th February. Two were present at Stewartby Lake on 26th February followed by five on 2nd March rising to nine the next day. An astonishing 23 were at Rookery South ClP on 7th July and 21 on 21st. The last record for the year was of a single bird at Priory CP 1st October. A pair attempted to breed at Dunstable STW but the eggs were taken by Corvids. Three pairs were noted during the breeding season at Rookery South ClP with one pair raising three fully fledged young from four chicks and another pair raising two young. Two further fluffy young seen on 23rd July were presumed to be a second brood from one of the earlier successful pairs. A pair laid four eggs at Laporte Way, Luton but unfortunately there were no signs of successful hatching. A pair displayed at Grovebury SP but due to disturbance did not breed. Non-breeding, mainly spring passage reports came from Coronation ClP, Harrold-Odell CP, Houghton Regis ChP, Ledburn Road SP, Priory CP, Radwell GP, Rookery North ClP and Willington GP.

### **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica*

A single juvenile bird was seen very well at Willington GP on 21st October. It was

later seen briefly on a field between Cambridge Road and Harrowden Road, Bedford. Full descriptions were submitted by the observers (DHB, SGW, JB) which have now been accepted by the BBRC. This is the second record of this transatlantic species for Bedfordshire, the first being a well-watched individual at Cranfield Airfield from 16th to 30th November 1991 (*British Birds* 86:477, *The Bedfordshire Naturalist* 46:46).

### **Golden Plover** *Papricaria*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant, large flocks in the first winter period included c.1000 at Grovebury SP during January and a similar number in the Bidwell, Dunstable STW and Sewell area between January and March. A total of 424 flew over Priory CP on 22nd January. About 1400 were at Cople on 25th January and 1200+ on 7th March. Some 500 to 700 were near junction 11 of the M1 between 19th and 23rd February. Around 1600 were at Sewell on 1st April and the last birds of this flock left on 6th May. Smaller numbers were also recorded at eight other sites in the first winter period. The earliest autumn sighting was a single bird with Lapwings at Willington GP on 14th August but the next sightings were not until two were at this site on 2nd September, one at Priory CP on 7th, three at Dunstable STW on 21st then 150 north-east of Great Barford on 23rd. The largest flocks in the second winter period included c.2000 near Dunstable STW during October/November, 450–500+ at Cople on 17th and 18th October, 254 at Warden Hill on 30th October, 450 at Cardington on 6th November, up to 650 by the A1 near Biggleswade on 9th November, 304 at Luton Hoo on 8th December and, finally, 400+ on 24th October at Willington GP increasing to c.1000 on 25th December. Flocks of up to 250 were seen at 17 more sites.

### **Grey Plover** *P.squatarola*

A poor year for this scarce migrant and rare winter visitor with only two records compared with 13 individuals recorded in 1994. An adult summer plumaged bird was at Rookery South CIP on 1st and 2nd May (RD, KO *et al*) and a single bird in winter plumage with a flock of Lapwings was at Willington GP on 8th October (AS).

### **Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

A fairly common resident, breeding species, common passage migrant and winter visitor for which over 30 observers submitted records. Breeding was noted at suitable localities throughout the county. Two to three pairs attempted to breed at Dunstable STW but all their chicks were predated by Corvids. Three pairs nested at Whipsnade Zoo and produced several chicks but none were known to survive. Five pairs with young were seen at Pegsdon Hills. Two pairs with four young were noted at Stopsley Common and one pair with two well grown young was at Butterfield Green. Up to six fledged young were seen on fields at Barton-le-Clay. Six pairs raised ten young at Rookery South CIP and one pair raised one young at Grovebury SP. Seven pairs were present at Luton Hoo but success was not determined. Two young juveniles were with an adult at South Mills NR on 21st May. At least four pairs bred at East Hyde and there were 55 birds including 31 fledgelings present there on 19th July. During the first winter period a flock of c.1000 was present near Dunstable STW, c.400 were by the A1 near Sandy on 13th January, c.2000 were at Grovebury SP on 14th January, 710 was the peak first winter count at Priory CP on 15th January and 500+ to 600+ were at Willington GP and nearby Cople from mid January to the end of February. Similar numbers were present there from mid August to late October. Over 2500 were at Willington GP on 12th November. Elsewhere, during the second winter period, c.300 were at Cockayne Hatley on 13th and 14th October, at least 2000 were at Rookery South CIP on 28th October, c.370 were at Church End, Arlesey on 12th November,

c.200 were at Radwell GP on 26th November, c.1200 were at Dunstable STW on 15th November, numbers at Priory CP peaked at c.900 on 3rd December and c.350 were at Woburn Park on 8th December.

**Knot** *Calidris canutus*

There were three accepted records of this rare passage migrant in 1995, all in autumn. An adult in summer plumage was present at Rookery South CIP from 8th to 12th August (KMS, KO *et al*) and had been reported on 7th. A juvenile bird was present at the same locality between 3rd and 7th September (RAN, RM *et al*). Finally, a single bird dropped in briefly at Priory CP on 21st December (DK).

**Sanderling** *C. alba*

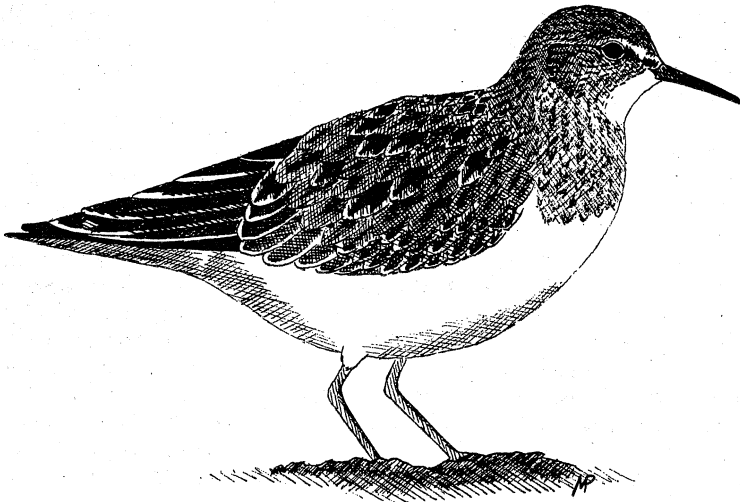
There were up to 11 records of this scarce passage migrant in 1995 and all were from Rookery South CIP. The first was a single in non-breeding plumage on 23rd April (PS, KO, RAS). Another single was present from 11th to 14th May (KO, AW *et al*). A summer plumaged adult was present on 19th May (KO, MJP). A flock of five were present early on 20th May, one remaining until late afternoon (PS, RAN *et al*). Two moulting birds were seen on 18th July (JB). The final record was of yet another single, in winter plumage on 17th September (RAN, PN, PS, MJP *et al*).

**Little Stint** *C. minuta*

Like 1994, another poor year for this scarce, mainly autumn passage migrant with only five individuals being recorded. The first was at Rookery South CIP on 4th and 5th May (PT, RD, KMS *et al*). During the autumn passage, a juvenile was at Rookery South CIP on 1st September (KO) and another on 11th September (KO) then a moulting adult on 16th September (PS, AW *et al*). The final record was of another juvenile bird, this one at Dunstable STW on 19th September (CT, AW, TD).

**Temminck's Stint** *C. temminckii*

A single adult bird showing signs of moult was found at Houghton Regis ChP on 14th July and was seen by many observers (LC, PS, PT *et al*). This individual was the seventh acceptable record for the species in the county since 1946.



Temminck's Stint

Michael Pocock

**Curlew Sandpiper** *C.ferruginea*

The only 1995 record of this scarce, mainly autumn passage migrant was of a remarkable flock of 17 birds which called in briefly at Rookery South CIP on 8th September (KO, JB). This number easily exceeds the previous county record for a single group which was of eight at Chimney Corner CIP on 16th September 1988.

**Dunlin** *C.alpina*

This is a fairly common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor in Bedfordshire. Interestingly, no records were received for the months of February and June and there was only one record for the months of October and December. Whilst some birds are recorded during the winter period in each year, it is not a common phenomena and movements into the county are obviously affected by weather. High counts at Rookery South CIP were 18 on 6th January, 10 on 12th March, 14 on 8th May, 10 on 13th May, 17th and 19th July. One was taken by a Hobby on 13th May (JB) at this site. Records from other localities in the county included one to three birds at Dunstable STW on twenty dates between 24th March and 27th May and then from 29th July to 1st October. Seven were present at Coronation CIP on 7th September. Reports of one to two birds came from eight other sites about the county. The high flock numbers of 1994 were not repeated this year.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*

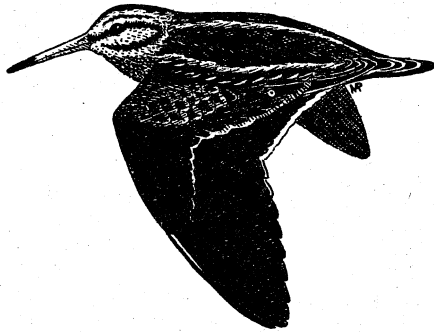
A regular but uncommon migrant, the spring passage started with ten birds at Rookery South CIP on 2nd April followed by records of between one to six birds on a further 12 dates to the 20th. A single was seen here on 5th to 9th May. The return passage at this site started with a single bird on 25th June but the main movement did not start until five males were seen in summer plumage on 1st July. Other records from this locality were three on 8th July, one on 29th July, one on 10th August, three on 26th August, one on 29th August and then on 4th and 5th September, five on 14th September and the last record was of two on 15th September. At Grovebury SP, there were eight on 8th April followed by singles on 9th and 12th. At Dunstable STW, two were present from 6th to 12th May then one on 6th September. One flew over Kempston on 18th August and four flew over Ickwell on 29th. One was at Willington GP on 2nd September, two flew south-west over Priory CP on 8th and one was at Manor Farm Lake, Sandy on 16th.

**Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus*

A better year than 1994 for this scarce but regular winter visitor with at least 16 individuals recorded. One to three birds were present at Houghton Regis ChP between 1st January and 1st April. Away from this favoured site, one was at Grovebury SP on 1st and 14th January, two were at Brogborough Lake on 10th January, one was at Rookery North CIP on 15th January and 18th February, one was at Willington GP from 25th February and 5th March and one was at East Hyde on 16th March. In the second winter period, the first record was of an individual at Houghton Regis ChP on 22nd October with up to two birds present until the end of the year. Singles were seen at Willington GP on 21st November, Biggleswade Common on 9th December, Ledburn Road SP, Leighton Buzzard on 11th to 15th December, at Grovebury SP on 10th December and by the A6 at Barton-le-Clay at the year's end.

**Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

A common winter visitor but the only confirmed breeding took place at Rookery North CIP where two nests with eggs were located. Three young hatched from four eggs in one but there was no proof of successful hatching from the other nest which



Jack Snipe

Michael Pocock

had three eggs (PS, RAN). Snipe were recorded in all months of the year at Rookery CIPs with peaks of five on 12th March, seven on 15th September, 16 on 14th October and 12 on 12th November. Up to three were at Dunstable STW from January to May then maximum numbers of nine in August, ten in September, 13 in October, ten in November and 20 in December. High numbers recorded elsewhere in the county included 14 at Willington GP on 19th February, 17 at East Hyde on 15th March, 13 at Luton Hoo on 26th March, seven at Biggleswade Common on 7th September, nine at Coronation CIP on 24th September, eight at Grovebury SP on 22nd October, 16 at Willington GP the same day, ten at Houghton Regis ChP on 26th November and up to 15 at Biggleswade Common on 6th December. One to four were reported from 14 other sites during the year.

**Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola*

A local resident and occasional winter visitor, roding was recorded at Aspley Heath, Bramingham Wood, Charle Wood, Flitwick Moor, Kings Wood Heath and Reach, Maulden Woods, Millbrook Plantation, Nun Wood, Pegsdon Hills, Sheerhatch Wood and Warden Little Wood. One was seen being chased by a Sparrowhawk at Rookery South CIP. Records outside the breeding season were received from Potton, Priory CP, Steppingley Wood, Stewartby Lake, Moat Farm Turvey, Southill Park, Odell Great Wood, Galley Hill and Luton. This species is probably under-recorded both in and out of the breeding season.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

The first records for the year of this regular but uncommon passage migrant were of a single over Priory CP (DK) and three at Rookery South CIP (CT) on 22nd March. Apart from the single at Priory CP, all the other records in Bedfordshire came from Rookery South CIP. One was present on 16th May (MJS), then, in autumn, a magnificent flock of 21 birds arrived on 3rd August (KO, PH, MJP) with up to two remaining until 5th August. Five more were seen on 20th August (AW), then three on 23rd August (KO) and, finally, two on 2nd September (RAN, MJP *et al*). A good year for this large attractive wader.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *L. lapponica*

A quite good spring in the county for this rare passage species but there were no autumn records. There was only one record away from Rookery South CIP which was a single bird in winter plumage at Radwell GP on 30th April (PH). The first record at

Rookery South CIP was also of a single bird but in partial summer plumage on 23rd April (PS *et al*), followed by another single bird but still in winter plumage on 25th April (KO) which was joined by a second bird on 28th April which had earlier been seen flying over Stewartby Lake (KO,CT). A further single bird was present from 9th to 14th May (RAN, JB *et al*).

### **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*

There were only eight records of this regular but uncommon passage migrant during the year totalling 14 birds. The first record was of four at Dunstable STW on 27th April (PT), followed by a single at the same locality on 29th April (per PT). Also, three flew over Blows Downs on 29th April (LGRE). One was at Stewartby Lake on 1st May (SGW,AW) and the last spring passage bird was seen at Priory CP on 11th May. The return passage comprised two birds at Rookery South CIP on 16th July (DJO, MJP *et al*) followed by a single at Dunstable STW on 17th August (PT) and a single bird flying over Cople on 4th September (AS).

### **Curlew** *N. arquata*

Although a fairly common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor, there were no records of any breeding attempts within the county this year. The first record for 1995 was a single at Rookery South CIP on 25th March followed by one over Dunstable STW on 27th March. There was another single at Dunstable STW on 11th April then none until four on 29th December. At Priory CP, there were three on 1st May followed by singles on 19th June, 15th July and 15th December. The last county record for 1995 was of four south-west over Priory CP on 30th December. The main spring passage took place during April and early May with no particularly high concentrations of birds. On the return passage, seven birds were at Rookery South CIP on 25th June, four were at the same locality staying from 2nd to 14th September and the highest count for the year was again from Rookery South CIP with nine on 27th October with four remaining next day. One to three birds were recorded at this site on 14 other dates and one to two birds were reported on passage from ten other sites.

### **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

Only three records for this rare passage wader were received this year. Two birds arrived at Dunstable STW late on 23rd June and stayed until 24th until flushed by fishermen. One bird was in full and the other in partial breeding plumage (PT, AW *et al*). The second record was of an adult pair already in winter plumage at Rookery South CIP on 26th August (PS *et al*) and, finally, a single juvenile was seen at Rookery South CIP on 1st September (KO, JB).

### **Redshank** *T. totanus*

Redshanks are common passage visitors and scarce breeders in Bedfordshire. Unfortunately, the two pairs that displayed and attempted to breed in the field adjacent to Dunstable STW had their three chicks predated by corvids (PT). A pair produced three chicks at Rookery CIP seen on 29th May of which two survived to the fully fledged stage (PS). A pair was seen in July with three well grown young at South Mills NR (PRO). The earliest record for the year was of a single at Houghton Regis ChP on 19th February and the latest was another single at Willington GP on 3rd December but the main passage period was from 9th March (four at Willington GP) until 17th August (two at Rookery South CIP) followed by singles at Priory CP on 2nd September and Willington GP on 2nd November. High counts for the year included ten at Rookery South CIP on 24th and 25th March, 1st and 3rd April but 15 were counted on 2nd. Ten were at Dunstable STW 3rd and 4th April and 12 were at

Willington GP on 8th April. Smaller numbers were at eight other sites including one on 26th April at Whipsnade Zoo where they are less than annual.

### **Greenshank** *T. nebularia*

A fairly common passage migrant more often recorded in autumn than in spring, this species was recorded on 49 bird days this year, being slightly lower than the 58 for 1994. Nevertheless, this was a good showing with the first record of three birds at Radwell GP on 23rd April followed by two staying at Dunstable STW from 26th to 30th April. As usual, the main spring passage took place in May with single birds being recorded at several different localities, the bulk of the reports coming from Rookery South CIP. The return passage started with a single bird at Grovebury Farm SP on 8th July with the main movement taking place in the next two months. The last for the year was a single at Priory CP on 23rd September. No large flocks were recorded, the maximum number being only three. Records came from a total of 13 sites but there were no reports outside April, May, July, August and September.

### **Green Sandpiper** *T. ochropus*

This is a regular but uncommon non-breeding visitor to the county. As usual, there were no records for May, but the species was present in every other month of the year visiting 15 sites. Overwintering birds for both winter periods were reported from Bedford STW, Dunstable STW and Willington GP. During the first winter period a maximum count of five were at Willington GP on 28th January and 25th February. A light spring passage took place during March and April with a maximum number of five birds at Willington GP on 9th and 18th March and four at gravel pits by the A1 between Sandy and Biggleswade on 23rd April. The last spring passage record was of a single bird at Dunstable STW on 27th April. The return passage started with a single bird again at Dunstable STW on 15th June. The bulk of the passage taking place throughout the county during August before fading out towards the end of September. A maximum of six birds were at Dunstable STW during July and August and also at Rookery South CIP on 20th August. Apart from the two previous sites and Willington GP, none of the other 11 sites held more than three birds.

### **Wood Sandpiper** *T. glareola*

A better year than 1994 for this scarce migrant species with at least five birds. The first was recorded at Willington GP on 9th May (AS). Another single was at Rookery South CIP on 12th May (JB, KO), which was joined by another on 13th May (PS, AW, PA). Both birds were in breeding plumage and one was still present the following day (KO, KMS). The return passage started with a dull non-breeding adult at Rookery South CIP on 29th July which stayed until 31st (PH, PS). The final bird of the year was a juvenile at this site on 15th September (AW, KO).

### **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

As usual, this common passage species was widely recorded from a total of 20 suitable habitats throughout the county. The first arrivals were of a single at Priory CP on 21st April and one at Rookery South CIP the same day. The next site to be visited was Dunstable STW with one on 26th April. During the spring passage, groups of three were present at Rookery CIP 27 April, Luton Hoo and Priory CP on 11th May, all other reports were of one or two birds. The return passage began with two at Coronation CIP on 16th July and one at Rookery South CIP on 21st. The last bird of the year was at Rookery South CIP on 2nd October. Peak numbers during the return passage were recorded at Dunstable STW. There were ten on 28th July to 1st August reducing to five by 17th August and lower numbers thereafter till the last on 1st October. The largest group at Rookery South CIP was five on 27th August.



**Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

An average year in the county for this scarce but increasingly regular passage species with up to ten individual birds being recorded. The first record was of an adult summer plumaged bird at Priory CP on 30th April (DK, DJO). A long staying individual was present at Rookery South CIP from 3rd to 9th May (KMS, KO *et al*). One was at Dunstable STW on 11th and 12th June (PT). The return passage birds were all recorded from Rookery South CIP where there were two on 15th July (JB) and one on 17th (AW, RAN), a single adult bird in breeding plumage appeared on 3rd August (KO, MJP), another single was seen on 14th August (RM) and the last record of the year was of two on 20th August (KO, RAN).

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*

A very rare vagrant to the county, a single bird was present briefly at Dunstable STW on 31st August and was seen by just one fortunate observer (JO'N). A full description was submitted to the rarities panel and accepted. This record represents only the second for the county in modern times, the previous one being of a female in breeding plumage at Priory CP on 30th May 1991. There is an old record of a juvenile being shot at Houghton Conquest on 1st June 1890. Additionally, two phalaropes were seen distantly at Stewartby Lake on 12th to 13th September 1969 and were considered by at least one reliable observer to be this species.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*

The frequency of occurrence continues with at least six further records in 1995 bringing the county total to around 45, all since the first in Bedfordshire on 6th February 1982. Descriptive notes are required to substantiate all records of this species. Once again this year a number of records are lost due to paucity of substantive detail – see appendices. At least one adult and one first-winter were present early in the year. A first-winter bird flew into the roost at Brogborough Lake on 15th January (MDR, RAN) and was possibly the same as later observed that day at Stewartby Lake (RAN, MJP). Further first-winter sightings were described at Stewartby Lake on 21st (RAN, KMS, MJP) and 22nd January (MJP) then 5th February (MJP) and also near Elstow Tip on 31st January then again on 3rd February (KMS). An adult was at Stewartby Lake on 4th and 21st February (KMS) and the same or another adult was on fields near Brogborough Lake on 12th February (MJP). The same or another first-winter bird was seen at Stewartby Lake on 11th (PS, RD *et al*), 17th (KO) and 18th March (KO, MJP) then not again until 4th April (MJP).

In the early autumn, an adult was present there on 7th August (RAN). Winter roost watching produced three more records. A first-winter was described at Rookery South CIP on 2nd October (KO), and the same or another was logged in fields at Millbrook Station on 5th October (LC). An adult was described at Coronation CIP on 15th October (KMS) and the last for the year was a first-winter bird at Brogborough Lake roost on 2nd December (RAN).

**Little Gull** *L. minutus*

Records were submitted by 15 observers for this scarce but annual passage migrant, all but two reports concerning birds at Stewartby Lake or nearby Rookery South CIP. An adult and a first-winter were at Stewartby Lake on 1st April (KO). A first-winter bird was at Rookery South CIP on 13th April (JB, KO). Two adults were at Dunstable STW on 21st April (PT). A first-winter and an adult were at Stewartby Lake on 23rd April, an adult on 24th and one on 26th. An amazing 24 adults and 4 younger birds were seen at Stewartby Lake on 28th (KO), twelve adults and one younger bird on 29th and

up to 15 including two immatures on 30th April (KO, CT, BJN *et al*) when three more were at Rookery South CIP (KO). Twelve reducing to a single adult were still present at Stewartby Lake on 1st May (PT, PS). An immature was seen at Priory CP on 6th May (DK). Autumn records were far fewer with a juvenile at Rookery South CIP on 11th August (JB), a first-winter at Rookery South CIP then Stewartby Lake on 19th September remaining to the next day (RAN, JB) when an immature was at Priory CP early morning (DK). Last for the year was a first-winter bird seen in the roost at Stewartby Lake on 30th December (KO).

### **Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus***

This species is abundant in winter and during passage and breeds locally in small numbers annually. Approximately 40 pairs produced around 50 young at Rookery South CIP (PS) and 12 occupied nests were noted at Coronation CIP on 1st May (PT). Breeding was suspected but not proven at Willington GP. A leucistic individual was present at Stewartby Lake on 3rd February (KO, MJP) and, on 4th, an albino was in the roost (MJP). Several thousands are present at the roosts at Stewartby Lake, Brogborough Lake and Rookery South CIP in both winter periods, many arriving so late as to make sensible approximation of numbers impossible. At Dunstable STW, c.200 were roosting from January through to March. At Priory CP, c.250–400 were generally present in January and February with spring movement noted in March peaking at 411 on 11th and 356 on 12th. About 800 flew west-south-west in a hour on 21st September and c.1200 were on the lake during fog on 31st December. Autumn counts included a record 320 at East Hyde on 5th August, 610+ at Rookery South CIP on 28th August, c.500 at Dunstable STW on 10th September and c.500 at Pegsdon Hills on 22nd September. Other noteworthy counts came from Willington GP with over 1500 on 12th November and from Radwell GP with c.500 on 26th November. September to December weekly counts at Coronation CIP ranged from 56 to 197.

### **Common Gull *L. canus***

A common winter visitor and passage migrant for which unfortunately no assessments were made of numbers roosting on the flooded clay pits in either winter period. However, numbers were considered to be similar to 1994. At Priory CP, the highest first winter period counts were 90 on 8th January and 95 on 4th February. One or two adults were seen here throughout July. Twenty-eight were counted on 19th August and the highest second winter period counts at this site were 104 on 12th November and 100+ on 31st December. Common Gulls were seen regularly in both winter periods at Stopsley Common with peak counts of c.1000 on 29th January and c.100 on 3rd December. The last in spring here were six on 14th April and the first returnee was an adult on 16th July. Light passage of ten to twenty was noted during March and April at Dunstable STW. Twenty-two were at Houghton Regis ChP on 12th March and 30+ were over Dunstable Downs on 13th March. At Bromham Lake NR, the last spring migrant was on 16th April but there were no more until 1st November. Other returnee dates were 17th July at Rookery South CIP and 22nd July at Chalton STW. A count of 32 at East Hyde on 14th August was the observer's record for that site. Numbers were low but regular from September until the end of the year at Coronation CIP with a peak of 27 on 24th September.

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus***

This is an abundant passage migrant but is uncommon around each end of the year. Mostly, *L.f.graellsii* are involved but there is also a good passage of *L.f.intermedius*. Only three estimates of roosting numbers in the clay pits were made – maybe 1000–2000 at

Stewartby Lake on 4th April and 240+ at Rookery South CIP on 29th July and 28th August – though numbers were consistent with recent years. Forty-one moved south at Priory CP on 1st January and 34 likewise on 2nd. Twenty-five moved north-east on 11th March and 22 next day. In autumn, 25 moved south-west on 20th August and 52 roosted on 28th of which 23 were adult *L.f.intermedius*. Two *L.f.fuscus* were seen at Priory CP on 1st January and three on 8th, one on 15th January then one on 18th March, two on 1st October, six on 14th December, one on 16th and, lastly, two on 17th December (DK). At least one, probably three, were present at Rookery South CIP on 14th September. Also at Rookery South CIP, a partial albino was present on 17th November (KO) with white primaries and a patchy mix of black and white on the upper parts. September to the year end counts at Coronation CIP peaked at 101 on 24th September reducing to 21 on 16th December. About 240 were noted at Rookery South CIP on 28th August and 102 on 12th September. Over 65 were noted on passage on 22nd September at Pegsdon Hills and 79 were at Well Head, Totternhoe on 18th October.

A mixed pair of Lesser Black-backed Gull *L.f.graellsii* and Herring Gull *L.a.argenteus* nested at Rookery South CIP. Incubation of two eggs was witnessed on 20th May and the pair were accompanying a young chick on 18th June which was ready to fly by 17th July (RAN, PS).

#### **Yellow-legged Gull *L. cachinmans***

This is a scarce visitor to Bedfordshire, usually in late summer but is being found with increasing regularity as observers learn its subtle identification differences from Herring Gull from which it has only been recently split by British Birds and other leading authorities on the genus. At least seven individuals were identified in 1995. A third-winter bird was recorded in a field next to Brogborough Tip on 21st January (MJP) and an adult was described there on 26th August (RAN). A third-winter individual was at Stewartby Lake on 18th March (MJP). All the other records came from Rookery South CIP, mostly between 2nd August and 24th September with at least four different individuals involved. Firstly, an adult was seen there on 2nd August (AW, JB), 5th (MJS), 6th (JB), 11th (KO, DJO) and 12th (PS, MJP). One or two were reported on 16th (SGW), one on 20th (AW, DG, PS) and one on 23rd (KO). On 18th August, two adults and two third-winter birds were present (MJP, DJO) and it was presumably these same four that were recorded next day (KO). Two adults were present on 1st September (JB), two adults were roosting with 202 Lesser Black-backs on 12th (LGRE) and one adult was present on 14th (RAN, MJP), 16th (PS) and 24th (KO). Lastly, two adults were present on 3rd November (KO). Descriptions must be provided with records of this species, not all the above were sufficiently detailed but together form a pattern of autumn passage.

#### **Herring Gull *L. argentatus***

A common winter visitor and passage migrant, there were no winter roost counts from the clay pits though numbers were similar to those experienced in recent years. Counts are in fact extremely difficult to achieve in mid winter for this species and our other four numerous gull species as many of the birds are still arriving from various directions at dusk. Also, numbers will vary from one night to another and from one roost to another depending on weather conditions and tipping at nearby land infill sites. Moreover, the few regular gull watchers in the county are usually attempting to find one or more of the white-winged species and are not separately watching Rookery South CIP, Stewartby Lake and Brogborough Lake on the same night to attempt individual species counts.

A single pair bred at Rookery South CIP, first noted on 20th May, the pair had chicks by 18th June (RAN, RD). Five were present here on 17th July and three adults and two juveniles were seen on 3rd August. The first autumn returnee at Priory CP was on 4th August, passage numbers then increased from 35 on 23rd September to 63 on 17th December. At Coronation CIP, September to the year end counts peaked at 93 on 24th September then decreased gradually to 11 on 16th December.

### **Iceland Gull** *L. glaucoides*

A rare but recently annual visitor in the winter months following the first county record on 18th March 1962. There were probably at least five different individuals recorded in 1995 from Brogborough Lake and Tip and the adjacent fields, Rookery South CIP, Stewartby Lake and Woburn Park. Descriptive detail on some of these sightings was particularly scant. Please do submit at least basic age, structure and plumage detail when claiming either this species or the next.

At Brogborough Lake, a first-winter bird was seen on 1st January (KMS) and again on 8th (MJP) and 15th (JB, DG, MDR). An adult was present on 7th (PS, RAN, MJP *et al*) and 8th January (RAN, MJP), 19th (MJP, RAN) and 26th February (RAN). A second-winter bird was identified on 8th and 11th January (RAN). An adult on fields by Brogborough Tip on 18th February (JB, MJP) was almost certainly that seen earlier in the day at Woburn Park (BJN, PS).

At Stewartby Lake, a dingy first-winter bird was present on 14th and 21st January (MJP *et al*) and an adult was present on 28th (KO, RAN, MJP) and 29th January (MJP) then on 24th to 27th February (KO, RAN *et al*) with two on 28th (RAN) and again on 1st March (RAN), and one or other on 3rd to 5th (KO, RAN, KMS, MJP *et al*), 18th and 19th March (KO, MJP). A first-winter bird was at Stewartby Lake on 11th February (RAN) and 28th March (KO) and a first-summer bird was seen on 12th March (KO, AW, MJP) which had earlier visited Rookery South CIP (RAN, AW, MJP). At Rookery South CIP, two adults were present on 25th February (MJP), then single adults on 4th (RAN), 5th (RAN, PN, MB) and 20th March (RAN). The first-summer bird was logged again on 18th (LC, MJS).

The only second winter period report was of an adult present at Stewartby Lake on 25th December (RAN).

### **Glaucous Gull** *L. hyperboreus*

A rare but annual visitor in the winter months following the first on 19th November 1972, there were at least four individuals in 1995. Reports came only from the clay pit sites of Brogborough Lake and adjacent fields, Coronation CIP, Rookery South CIP and Stewartby Lake.

At Brogborough Lake, an adult was present on 1st January (RAN), 2nd (RD, KRW, RAN), 11th and 14th (RAN) with a different plumaged bird present on 8th (RAN, MJP). A first-winter bird was seen here on 4th (JB, MJP), 7th (LGRE, PS, AW, RAN) and 15th January (JB, DG) then on 10th, 19th (MJP), 21st and 25th February (RAN). It was adjacent to the landfill site on 12th February (MDR) and 5th March (MJP). An adult was also present on the 25th February and the first-winter had earlier been seen by the nearby landfill tip and also at Coronation CIP (RAN). A first-winter bird was seen at Rookery South CIP on 5th (KMS, RAN *et al*), 25th (MSG) and 29th March (AW). At Stewartby Lake, a first-winter bird was present on 15th (MJP, PN, RAN), 28th (KO, RAN, MJP) and 29th January (RAN) and 3rd February (MJP). An adult was seen on 26th (KO, RAN, MJP), 28th February (RAN) and 3rd March, a smallish individual, (KO, MJP) and 31st March, a larger individual (KO, JB).

In the second winter period, an adult was seen on 8th December (KO) and a different

adult was seen on 22nd and 24th (KO). One or other of these was seen at Brogborough Lake on 25th (RAN). These two birds were conceivably returnees from the first winter period.

#### **Gull sp. *Larus* sp.**

Clouding the issue for another year was the confounding virtually all white gull which has featured in previous reports. It is considered unsafe to attribute this bird to any particular species but MJP would welcome any observers written considerations as to its identity. It was seen at Brogborough Lake on 7th, 8th and 12th January, 19th and 24th February, at Stewartby Lake on 3rd March and 26th and 29th December and at Rookery South CIP on 14th and 27th October (MJP, KO *et al*). These dates are suggestive of Herring Gull rather than potential small Glaucous as pondered in last year's report (MJP). This bird was probably that attributed to one or other of the preceding species at Stewartby Lake on 29th January and at Rookery South on 11th March.

A partial albino adult, probably Herring Gull *L.a.argentatus*, with white primaries and medium grey mantle was in the Stewartby Lake roost on 10th March and 6th April (but might have been a hybrid Herring x Glaucous Gull) (KO, MJP).

#### **Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus***

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant for which just five record cards were received. Despite there being little documented evidence of clay pit roost numbers just under 400 were on fields near Brogborough Lake and Tip on 5th February and 890 were counted at Stewartby Lake on 29th December (MJP) – their status seems stable. January passage was observed at Priory CP with 48 north on 2nd and 33 on 7th. The last in spring at Rookery South CIP was an adult on 20th May and a first-summer bird had returned by 29th July. At Coronation CIP, September to the end of the year counts produced a peak of 37 on 24th September but then numbers gently decreased to just 20 by 16th December.

#### **Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla***

There were four records of this scarce winter visitor and passage migrant to the county in 1995. An adult was at Dunstable STW on 12th January (RMC). One was seen at Stewartby Lake in the roost on 12th February (MJP, RAN). A first year bird was at Rookery South CIP on 29th March (AW) and an adult was at Priory CP on 10th April (DK).

#### **Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandwichensis***

There were three records of this scarce passage migrant in 1995. Three were at Rookery South CIP on 12th September mid morning (CT, RMC) and one was there mid afternoon (LGRE). Presumably, these same birds then moved nearby to Stewartby Lake as four adult winter plumaged birds were seen there in the evening (KO). On 17th September, two flew over Dunstable STW calling (DG, PT).

#### **Common Tern *S.hirundo***

This common passage migrant and regular but localised breeding species was recorded at 24 sites between 8th April and 13th September. Successful breeding was confirmed at Bromham Lake NR, Dunstable STW, Harrold-Odell CP and Willington GP. The first to arrive were seven at Priory CP on 8th April where Common Terns were seen regularly and increased to 18 on 25th and 52 by 29th – the largest count of the year. The first arrivals at Stewartby Lake were on 23rd April, where there were 30 on 30th, then 24th at Rookery South CIP and 26th at Dunstable STW. On 1st May at Brogborough Lake, two birds were present showing features associated with first-

summer 'portlandica' plumage – a description and photograph were supplied (PT). By 9th May, 20+ were nesting on islands at Willington GP with several young noted by 27th June (AS). Breeding progress of two pairs at Bromham NR and Harrold-Odell CP was regularly recorded with four young and one young produced respectively (PA). Three young were produced to flying stage from the one nest at Dunstable STW and the last of the year there were seven on 31st July (PT). In July, peak counts were of 29 at Priory CP on 23rd and ten at Rookery North CIP on 29th. In August, last site sightings included seven at Southill Lake, two at Grovebury SP and two at Bromham Lake NR on 13th, two at Langford GP and one at Chimney Corner North CIP and another at Stewartby Lake on 20th, and one at Rookery South CIP on 23rd. The last for the year were three at Priory CP on 13th September.

**Arctic Tern** *S.paradisaea*

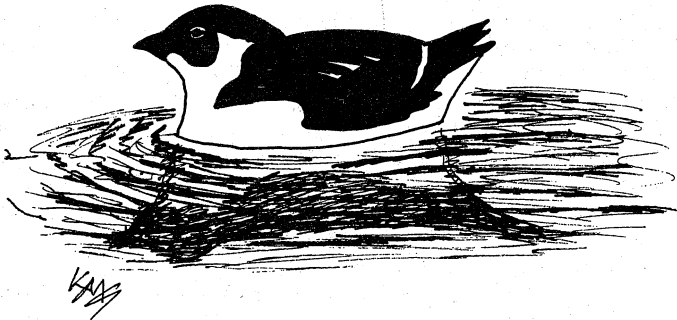
Passage of this regular, predominantly spring, migrant occurred between 24th April and 2nd May then a single on 13th May involving a maximum of 277 birds. There were no autumn records. About 40 were at Stewartby Lake on 24th April (KO) then 15 on 26th (TD), 19 on 27th (PA), six on 29th and 30th (PS) and one on 1st May (BJN, MKB). At Rookery South CIP, there were c.15 on 24th April, 16 or 17 on 26th (WB, AW, TD), eight on 29th (PS), five or six on 30th (PS, KO) and two on 1st May (KO), then one on 13th May (JB, KO). At Priory CP, up to 35 passed through on 26th April followed by 59 on 27th, five on 28th, three on 29th (DK) and then three on 2nd May (MJS). Elsewhere, there were 15 at Houghton Regis ChP on 26th April (TD) and four at Dunstable STW the same day (PT, LB, TD) and a single at the latter site on 28th (PT).

**Little Tern** *S.albifrons*

There was just one record of this scarce passage migrant in 1995. An adult was seen on 15th July at Stewartby Lake (JB, BRS, DG, CT, MJS) and later at Rookery South CIP (KMS, PN, TM).

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

A regular spring and autumn passage migrant, all records this year were in spring between 26th April and 24th May. The first record was of a single at Rookery South CIP on 26th April (WB). Next came an adult to Stewartby Lake on 28th (KO), three being seen there on 29th April (RAS) and four on 1st May (DJO, PS, BJN, SGW, AW, PA). Three were at Brogborough Lake late afternoon on 1st May (PT) and one was at Priory CP on 2nd May (DK, AS, MKB). Four were at Rookery South CIP on 4th May (TM, DG), one on 5th (KMS), 20 on 6th (RAN, PN, KO), one on 8th (LC, KMS), 13th (PS, JB), 16th (JB, KO) and 17th (KO). Lastly, a single was at Priory CP from 22nd to 24th May (DK).



Little Auk

Kevin Sharpe

**Little Auk** *Alle alle*

A rare visitor to Bedfordshire, usually after autumn gales, a single bird was found adjacent to Priory CP on 3rd November (RB) – see also appendix A.

**Feral Rock Dove** *Columba livia*

There were no significant reports in 1995, although this species is undoubtedly numerous in and around the county's conurbations.

**Stock Dove** *C. oenas*

A fairly common resident, Stock Doves were reported from 16 localities across the county. Breeding records came from Bromham Hall, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Ledburn Road SP, Maulden Woods, Priory CP, Stockgrove CP and Willington GP. High counts were 190 at South Mills in November, 80 at Willington GP in August, 50 at Rookery South CIP in April, 48 at Priory CP in February and a roost of 43 at Kingsmead in November. This species remains generally under-reported.

**Wood Pigeon** *C. palumbus*

This species remains a very common resident throughout the county. At Priory CP, 250–400 roosted in January and up to 500 were present in February. Autumn passage peaked at 483 on 3rd October (DK). Elsewhere, up to 1000 were in the Barton Hills area in February and c.500 at Cople on 17th October.

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

At Priory CP the winter roost of this common resident in Bedfordshire peaked at 85 on 28th January. Other counts reported included 70 plus at Radwell on 3rd January, 101 at Stanford on 17th September, 60 at Silsoe on 25th November and 32 at Langford GP on 17th December.

**Turtle Dove** *S. turtur*

The first for spring of this fairly common but declining summer visitor were two at Coronation CIP on 28th April. This was followed by a widespread arrival during early May, most notably on overhead power lines around Stewartby Lake and Brogborough Lake. Reports came from over 35 locations across the county. Of note were 12 together at Biggleswade on 17th July, up to six 'purring' at Pegsdon Hills in May and the BBS recorded breeding in nine survey squares. Autumn passage was less evident than in spring and the final migrant was at Dunstable STW on 16th September. This species is in serious decline and all records for 1996 are requested. A number of observers reported far fewer sightings for 1995 and breeding ceased at both Priory CP and Tiddenfoot WP. The species was reported as absent along the R. Ouse between Kempston and Bedford.

**Ring-necked Parakeet** *Psittacula krameri*

One was seen at Blows Downs again, but this year it was only reported on 4th, 13th, 17th and 24th April (RD, AW). There were five other reports. One was a regular visitor to an Edworth garden from about February 1995 and was still present in November 1996, (per PS, MJP). Two were near Clophill on 30th May and one was at Hollington on 22nd July (KMS). Two were near Toddington motorway services on 9th September (MJS). One flew over Houghton Regis ChP on 17th December (RD). Observers are reminded of the need to submit supporting identification details with records of this species to rule out other species that might escape or be free-flying in the county, such as Monk or Quaker Parakeet, (see list of "Exotica").

**Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

The first arrivals of this common summer visitor this year were on 21st April at Dunstable STW, Millbrook Station and Priory CP followed by records from 12 other

sites by the month's end. Cuckoos were widespread during May and June. Immatures on autumn passage were noted at Willington GP on 19th August, Priory CP on 4th September and, finally, at Dunstable STW on 11th September.

**Barn Owl** *Tyto alba*

A scarce resident, breeding was confirmed at four traditional sites: Willington Dovecote, Shuttleworth, Silsoe and Knotting Green. In total, Barn Owls were reported from some 45 localities around the county, from 15 of these by one observer (PC). Two roadside corpses were reported, one just east of junction 13 of the M1 and the other at TL082325 on 17th February where a ringed bird had originated from Weston Turville, Buckinghamshire.

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*

A fairly common species, widely recorded from all parts of the county throughout the year. Breeding was confirmed at Red Cow Farm, Bidwell, Park Farm, Eaton Bray, Houghton Regis ChP, Luton Hoo (two/three pairs), Old Warden, Shuttleworth Park, Whipsnade Zoo (four pairs) and Woburn Park where five sitting on a fence on 9th September was of note.

**Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco*

Following last year's appeal, records were received from about 30 widely distributed localities for this fairly common resident. Many of these were in urban areas and within earshot of birders' homes during the vocal autumn period. How many went unrecorded about the county's woodlands? Roosts were discovered at Bramingham Woods and at Priory CP where Tawny Owls were noted on 30 dates with a maximum of three roosting birds during the autumn (DK). Of interest was one sitting on a Woburn garden bird table just twelve feet from the kitchen window very early one August morning (BJN).

**Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus*

A rare resident and scarce winter visitor but probably under-recorded in the summer. Breeding was recorded at two localities on the chalk downs with at least three juveniles fledging from Pegsdon Hills and two from Galley Hill. Blows Downs was also checked but without success. On 22nd March, one was noted at Moat Farm, Turvey and on 4th April, one was found dead beside the A421 north of Stewartby. Elsewhere, during the breeding season, single sightings came from SP934338 near Woburn on 20th May and at Wymington Meadow, where an injured owl was found on 15th May but later died in captivity. Finally, two were at a roost on 17th November and 26th December in the south-east of the county.

**Short-eared Owl** *A. flammeus*

Nowadays a scarce visitor to the county often as not as a winter visitor but in 1995 the only record was of a well-watched pair which were present from 30th March until at least 23rd May near Sewell in a large area of set-aside. Evidence of breeding was noted including food passes but no young were seen. Regrettably, the site has now been ploughed rendering it unsuitable for immediate future use (RAN, PT *et al*).

**[Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Suitable sites along the Greensand Ridge were checked during the breeding season for this rare summer visitor but without success.]

**Swift** *Apus apus*

The first arrivals of this common passage migrant and summer visitor were two over Luton Hoo on 23rd April followed by the main arrival on 8th May when hundreds were noted at Dunstable STW, Luton town centre, Priory CP and Stewartby Lake. In



the Marston Vale, counts of c.200 over Stewartby Lake and Brogborough Lake were witnessed in May and June whilst c.300 were present over Rookery South CIP on 30th July. A light September passage was noted at nine localities with the final three over Dunstable STW on 21st.

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*

This fairly common if localised species was well recorded throughout the year from most of our river systems and still waters. Interesting records included one or two present on 26 out of 73 visits along the R. Ouse through Bedford, sightings during 18 walks out of 51 along the R. Ivel around Blunham, a pair successfully breeding along the R. Ouse at Priory CP with a second pair nearby, a dead Kingfisher was found at Dunstable STW on 4th January but two immature birds were regular from July to September whilst four at Tiddenfoot WP in April and five at Biggleswade Common on 7th September were noteworthy.

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*

This common and vocal species remains widespread across the county being recorded from over 30 localities. The increase continues with, for example, "Yaffles" reported on 247 days at Priory CP in 1995 compared to just 21 bird days in 1990 and residency was taken up for the first time in Bramingham Wood in recent years.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus major*

This species is still the commonest woodpecker to be found in Bedfordshire with a widespread distribution. Breeding was successful at Priory CP for the first time. In Kempston, a family regularly visited a bird-feeder through June to August while at Barton one was noted feeding on the seed head of a 'Red-hot Poker'.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *D. minor*

This is the hardest to find and the least numerous of our resident woodpeckers. All the 1995 records are listed in alphabetical site order. One was seen at Red Cow Farm, Bidwell on 30th July. At Billington Bridge, drumming and alarm calls were noted on five dates between 10th April and 22nd July. A female was at Bramingham Wood on 21st January and 14th March. One was at Bromham Hall Wood on 19th February and 11th March and one was drumming in Bromham Park on 30th March. In Bromham Village, a pair nested in an orchard and a male was near Bromham Lake NR on 30th November. One was heard at "Fountains", Blunham between 11th and 20th June. At Felmersham, adults were seen feeding young on 17th June. One was drumming at Ickwell on 1st January and two were drumming on 12th. One was seen at Maulden Woods on 2nd April. Singles were at Priory CP on 23rd April then on five dates between 3rd September and 20th December. A male was in Southill Park in June and one was at TL150444 Shuttleworth on 19th September. A pair nested at Swiss Gardens, Old Warden but the hole was attacked by a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Two were seen at Turvey Abbey on 20th June and one was at Abbey Park, Turvey on 11th September. A female was at Warren Villas NR on 30th September and one was at Willington on 19th March. A male was present at Speedwell Belt, Woburn Park on 12th February and a male was seen in a Woburn garden on 16th May.

**Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*

A rare less than annual migrant to Bedfordshire, the only record was of a single in a Toddington garden on 10th September (SB).

## Passerines

### Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

A rare visitor, this species was only recorded from the same site in the west of the county from which breeding was suspected last year. Reports came from some fifteen observers with sightings between 12th March and 20th May involving a pair which raised three young and an additional singing male (BJN, RAN, AW, PS *et al*). We must repeat the plea made in our last report that observers having knowledge of this location are requested to keep it to themselves and avoid disturbance to this nationally rare breeding species. Please avoid year tick and bird race visits. One Bedfordshire observer had to remonstrate with out of county visitors, one of whom actually encouraged another with the words "the best way to see them is to walk back and forth across their territory"!!

### Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

Just ten record cards were received for this once very common species. Some 300 were at Bedford STW in a field near Meadow Lane on 1st and 2nd January and also on the 2nd c.350 were at Stopsley Common of which one was taken by a Merlin. Smaller groups of 10+ to 62 were noted in several locations during the first winter period. The only high counts for the second winter period were of 70 at Willington GP on 10th October and 14 to 35 around Turvey later in this month. Only one breeding record was submitted, a nest with eggs found on 18th May was the first proved breeding record for the Meadow Lane area of Bedford STW to the observer's knowledge. This species has been suffering a drastic national decline over recent years and observers are requested to submit more details for 1996 onward in order to monitor the position in Bedfordshire.

### Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Records this year of this common passage migrant and localised breeding species were received from 25 observers with the earliest reported being one at Harrold-Odell CP on 19th March and one at Tiddenfoot WP the next day. By 5th April, 67 were flying low over Brogborough Lake and, on 8th, 130 were about Willington GP. A party of 25 flying over Steppingley Reservoir on 30th June was considered unusual by the observer. The highest count at Priory CP was 450 on 1st July. Breeding was confirmed at seven sites: 170 pairs were at Grovebury SP, 150 nest holes were counted at Willington GP, 120 pairs were at Mundays Quarry, Leighton Buzzard and 60 occupied nest holes at Mentmore Road SP, Leighton Buzzard. The last sightings of the year were of four at Dunstable STW on 1st October and then one flying south over Priory CP on 8th October.

### Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

A widespread and abundant passage migrant and summer visitor, the first to arrive were five birds at Priory CP on 24th March. One flew over Biddenham on 31st March and one was at Dunstable STW on 2nd April. Roosting birds in August included 600-700 at Priory CP, c.300 in the reedbeds at Rookery South CIP and c.250 at Dunstable STW at the end of the month. About 200 were at Lower Caldecote on 22nd August and c.600 were recorded at Priory CP on 16th September. After reports from three other sites on the 8th October, Swallows were still seen at Priory CP on 9th, 11th and 15th. However, the last for the year was one at Brogborough Lake on 26th October. Although only two observers reported breeding records for this common summer visitor, the population is believed to be fairly stable.

**House Martin** *Delichon urbica*

A common passage migrant and summer visitor, the first arrival this year was a single at Dunstable STW on 2nd April followed by two at Priory CP on 3rd. Spring counts included c.200 passing through Dunstable STW on 27th May and 200 were at Stewartby Lake on 29th. In the autumn period, 200 was the year high at Priory CP on 31st August, c.400 were at Rookery South CIP and c.300 at Stewartby Lake on 24th September. The last sighting for 1995 was one at Dunstable STW on 22nd October. Breeding reports came only from Linslade, Willington and Luton Hoo for this common summer visitor with no reports of numbers varying up or down from recent years. Observers views on the relative abundance from one year to another of migrant and resident breeding species are always welcome.

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*

A localised summer visitor and passage migrant, this species was recorded at just nine sites during the summer by ten observers. The earliest was one at Nun Wood on 15th April. One was singing at Lowes Wood on 18th April and two males were at Cooper's Hill, Amptill on 1st May. One was at Blows Downs on 5th and 27th May and one was at Charle Wood on 29th May and 18th June. Three were in an area opposite The Lodge, Sandy, two of which were singing on 18th May. Singles were recorded on a few dates at Barton Hills on 28th April and between 26th May and 5th July. Up to five males were present at Aspley Heath between 30th April and 4th June. The last submitted was from Streatley on 27th August. No confirmed breeding records were received but it is likely that at Aspley Heath at least they did so. This species could well be declining in the county and observers are asked to check likely habitat and report all occurrences in future years.

**Meadow Pipit** *A. pratensis*

A common migrant and winter visitor but uncommon breeder, rather small numbers were recorded during the first winter period except for 65 counted at Willington GP on 25th February. Small groups were also recorded during the second winter period when the highest counts received were of 53 at Priory CP on 30th September, 65+ at Pegsdon Hills on 30th September and 52 near the golf course at Blows Downs on 19th October. Breeding pairs were noted at Coronation CIP, Sewell ChP, Blows Downs, Pegsdon Hills and Potsgrove.

**Water Pipit** *A. spinoletta*

This scarce passage migrant to the county was represented by a bird in summer plumage at Dunstable STW from 21st to 22nd March (PT *et al*) – see also appendix A.

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava flavissima*

A common spring and autumn passage migrant and local breeder, the first to arrive was on the early date of 23rd March at Dunstable STW and the last to leave were at Rookery South CIP on 27th and Biggleswade Common on 30th September. Twenty-three were counted at Stewartby Lake on 21st April with 25 at Lower Caldecote on 30th July, 24 at East Hyde on 3rd September and 27 on Stewartby village green on 17th September. Breeding birds were recorded from Coronation CIP, Rookery CIP, Dunstable STW and Grovebury SP.

A bird showing the characters of the nominate **Blue-headed Wagtail** *M. f. flava*, a scarce but annual passage migrant through Bedfordshire, was at Willington GP on 8th April (JB). One was at Dunstable STW on 21st April with a different individual there next day (PT). Another was at Stewartby Lake also on 21st April (KO).

**Grey Wagtail** *M. cinerea*

This regular quite common but somewhat local species was recorded from about 35 sites. A pair bred at Dunstable STW and reared three young, the first breeding record for this site, as was a pair breeding at Southill Lake which went on to rear a second brood. Breeding was also noted along the R. Ousel at Leighton Buzzard and recently fledged young were being fed by adults at Bromham Mill and at Grovebury SP. A young bird was seen at Duck Mill Weir, Bedford on 2nd August and young were also seen at Priory CP in late August.

**Pied Wagtail** *M. alba yarrelli*

A regular winter roost of this common resident was recorded in a reedbed along the R. Ouse at Bedford and totalled 212 birds on 2nd February with 153 on 22nd October and 133 on 24th November. Other quite high counts were of 63 roosting at Priory CP on 28th January and 85+ at a roost at Flitwick Moor on 26th September. Breeding records for this common species came from at least six sites, Stopsley Common, Tiddenfoot WP, Ledburn Road SP, Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable STW, Priory CP and Jubilee Park, Bedford. Five to six pairs nested at Dunstable STW site but unfortunately nearly all were spoiled by Carrion Crows.

Birds showing characters associated with the near-continental nominate form, *M. a. alba*, the **White Wagtail**, a regular spring and scarce autumn migrant to the county, were seen at Priory CP on 2nd, 3rd and 8th March, Blows Downs on 13th, 24th and 25th March, Dunstable STW on 11 dates from 24th March to 30th April with two present on 31st March, Radwell GP on 29th March, Willington GP on 8th April, two at Stewartby Lake on 21st April and, lastly, three at Whipsnade Zoo on 24th August.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

This delightful little bird remains very common. Good numbers were recorded at Maulden Woods. Forty-five males held territory at Priory CP compared with 44 in 1994 and four to five pairs were noted at Stopsley Common. An adult with three young was reported near the Leighton Buzzard by-pass on 19th June. CES records indicated a slight drop in adults this year but juveniles were 75% down after a good year in 1994. No large winter roosts were reported.

**Duncock** *Prunella modularis*

A party of 13 of this very common resident were in an area of about nine square metres on 26th August at Priory CP. Eight males held territory at this same site whilst c.10 pairs were at Tiddenfoot WP and Ledburn Road SP area. Four to five pairs were at Stopsley Common throughout the year. No change of status was suggested for this species by any observer. CES records indicated a slight adult increase but 30% lower juvenile productivity at Waterloo Thorns and Priory CP census sites, but still higher than in 1991 at both sites.

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

A very common resident species for which the CES figures from Waterloo Thorns and Priory CP were down on 1994 but were still good on long term average. At Priory CP, the number of territories fell slightly to 13. Autumn high counts, passage influxes, were of 20+ at Pegsdon Hills on 9th September, 33 at Priory CP on 30th September and 20+ at Felmersham NR on 7th October.

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

The first arrival of this scarce summer visitor was at Priory CP on 24th April, a day later than last year's very early date. Eventually two pairs bred at this site which also held the last record for the year on 31st August, again one day later than last year.

Other singing males were recorded from Coronation CIP (2), the north end of Biggleswade Common, Coppice Wood TL06H, Parsonage Wood SP96Q, Potton Wood, Home Wood, Northill (1-2) and Barton Hills, the latter having its first record for several years when a singing male was found on 28th June. On the downside, there were no records this year from the Waterloo Thorns CES site.

### **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

This is an annual spring migrant to Bedfordshire which has occasionally bred and also occurs rarely on autumn passage. Once again, Blows Downs dominated the spring passage with at least five different birds between 20th March and 1st May (TD, AW, PS, RD *et al*). Elsewhere, there was a male on Warden Hills on 23rd March (MC), one at Bison Hill, Whipsnade on 29th March (AJL) and one at Dunstable STW on 11th April (SH per PT). Of potential breeding interest was a singing first-summer male in Bedford from 21st April until 15th June (SGW, DJO *et al*). It apparently could not attract a mate but the site seems worth watching in the future. Return passage was noted with a male at Houghton Regis ChP on 2nd August (AW) and a female was seen at Biggleswade Common on 6th (PFS *et al*). Another was at Galley Hill, Luton on 14th and 16th September (IB) and on 15th October one was at Bideford Green, Linslade (GD). A winter report concerns a male at Ravensden on 3rd December but must appear in appendix A due to lack of any supportive description.

### **Common Redstart** *Pphoenicurus*

Spring passage for this regular migrant and rare breeder was observed mainly on Blows Downs with the first reported on 5th and last on 29th April with a peak of five birds coinciding with a BNHS field trip and including views of a first year male in the hand. Other spring records came from Priory CP on 25th April and 19th May, Home Wood, Northill on 27th April and Waterloo Thorns on 30th April. Once again, the only breeding record was of a pair at Aspley Heath which reared two broods. Returning birds were noted from 26th August when two were found at Galley Hill, Luton. The majority of autumn records came from the chalklands of south Bedfordshire with the Galley Hill/Warden Hill/ Stopsley Common range giving the more predictable Blows Downs and Whipsnade Zoo some competition. Away from these locations, the only records were at Priory CP and Biggleswade Common on 28th August and Odell Great Wood on 23rd September. The final records for 1995 came from Stopsley Common on 1st and Galley Hill on 3rd October.

### **Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*

A relatively quiet spring passage for this regular migrant started dramatically with individuals at Blows Downs, Rookery South CIP, Dunstable STW and Brogborough Lake all on 30th April with that at the latter staying on until 1st May. In the next week, singles were seen at Ledburn Road SP, Leighton Buzzard on 2nd, Barton Hills on 5th and Pegsdon Hills on 6th and 7th with the last in spring reported from Rookery North CIP on 13th May. Return passage commenced on 7th August with two at Dunstable STW after which this species was reported more or less daily until mid-October with records from Stopsley Common, Pegsdon Hills, Galley Hill, Millbrook, Ledburn Road SP, Whipsnade Zoo, Coronation CIP, Bromham Lake NR where three birds on 16th September were the first site record, Bedford, Biggleswade, East Hyde, Blows Downs and Bedford STW. Autumn peaks were reported of five at Dunstable STW on 20th August, 5th and 9th September, four at Pegsdon Hills on 3rd September, five at Blows Downs on 18th to 20th September, seven at Bedford STW on 3rd, five on 12th and six on 21st September. The last for the year lingered at Stopsley Common until 16th October.

### **Stonechat** *S. torquata*

Another good start to the year for this irregular passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers began with birds present at Dunstable STW, Bedford STW, Grovebury SP, Willington GP, Blows Downs and near the A1 north of Biggleswade within the first two weeks of January. January and February records mainly concerned single birds although three sites had two birds present and Dunstable STW hosted three on 26th February and 8th March. Singleton February records also came from Ledburn Road SP on 19th and 24th and Dunstable STW held the only March records apart from one at Kensworth on 6th, Millbrook Station on 21st and Boughton End on 22nd. One was at Sewell on 5th April and there was a female at Aspley Heath on 8th. The latest in spring was a male at Blows Downs on 25th April. As with the last species, there were no breeding records. Autumn sightings began on 26th August with a female at Galley Hill, Luton. A singleton stayed overnight at Dunstable STW on 16th/17th September and a male frequented the paddocks at Blows Downs from 18th to 20th. On 23rd, one was at Pegsdon Hills and on 29th September three birds were found at Chaul End, Caddington, and the year finished strongly with October sightings at Warden Hill on 11th, Stagsden on 13th and Stopsley Common on 21st. A male was at Ledburn Road SP on 1st November, one was near Bedford STW on 4th and another male was in Luton Hoo on 9th. Apart from a female near Bedford STW on 16th December the only other end of year record was of two at Coronation CIP from 20th October until 5th November with a first winter bird remaining into 1996.

### **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Spring passage of this quite common migrant and occasional breeder was as strong as usual with numerous records from 12th March, when one was found at Willington GP, through to 20th May when the last in spring was seen at Pegsdon Hills. Northern Wheatears pass through Bedfordshire on a broad front and it was not surprising that records came from a wide range of locations but the bias was from the well-watched sites such as Blows Downs, Dunstable STW, the Whipnade Zoo area and Rookery CIP. The highest spring counts at Blows Downs were of eight on 25th March rising to 18 on 2nd April. Four were on Biggleswade Common on 25th March, six were at Grovebury SP on 26th March, four were at Pegsdon Hills on 30th March, eight were in the vicinity of Whipnade Zoo on 29th March, four were at Ledburn Road SP on 30th/31st March, four were south-west of Biddenham on 31st March, 13 were at Grovebury SP on 2nd April and five were at the Rookery CIPs on 28th April. Autumn birds were noted from 3rd August, when one was found at Biggleswade, after which the chalk highlands dominated reports. Numbers peaked at five on 20th August at Stopsley Common, four on Blows Downs on 11th September and five on 8th October at Pegsdon Hills and the last for the year was at Stopsley Common on 9th October.

### **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*

Away from the usual stronghold of Blows Downs for this scarce but regular spring passage migrant came the following records; a female on 4th April opposite Ampthill Park House and the first record for Dunstable STW the same day; Stockwood Park on 14th April when also two females on Pegsdon Hills; two males on Galley Hill on 22nd and 29th April with one on Barton Hills on 28th; a male in fields north of Maulden Woods on 30th April and a male at Dunstable STW on 2nd/3rd May completed the picture. Passage through Blows Downs began on 4th April with three males and two females, six birds were present next day followed by four on the 6th, two on the 8th and 9th, singles on 10th, 15th, 17th, 18th and 22nd, two on 23rd, three on 24th, one on 25th, six on 26th, one on 27th, five on 28th and, lastly, two on 29th April. There

were two autumn records this year, one at Dunstable STW on 30th September and one at Blows Downs on 21st October.

An unusual spring record concerned a partial albino found at Blows Downs by RD on 24th April which head-on appeared normal but side-on there was much white to the hind neck extending up onto the crown. On 27th it was seen again by AR who described the bird as "looking as if it had been splashed with a paintbrush across the whole of its head". The white was not a clean white and showed a fair degree of mottling, there was, however, a clean blob on either side of the body. It was last seen on 28th down to c.30m by RD, AR and LC when occasional white feathers were noted down the back as far as the rump. *Birds of the Western Palearctic* makes no reference to albinism in this species (RD *et al.*).

### **Blackbird** *T. merula*

Only five record cards were received for this very common mainly resident species but each contained valuable information. In January, 25+ were at Willington GP on 4th and 35 were at Priory CP. At Stopsley Common early year numbers were constant with similar numbers in the summer producing four to six pairs. CES figures from Waterloo Thorns and Priory CP suggest the populations there are stable although 1995 did not appear to be a particularly good breeding season with juvenile numbers down at both sites. An all white plumaged male reported from Swiss Gardens in November was still present on 26th December. This species is rather prone to all or partial albinism and it would be interesting to receive other reports from across the county to see just how commonplace these birds are. At Priory CP, 32 present on 9th and 26th November increased with the late December freeze up to 51 on the last day of the year.

### **Fieldfare** *T. pilaris*

There were several counts exceeding 40 in the first winter period for this common winter visitor and passage migrant, the majority from the north of the county. Over 50 were at Cople on 1st January rising to 100+ by 9th with around that number still present on 17th February: 70+ were north-east of Rowney Warren on 1st January; 50 were at Willington on 8th January and 70 at Biggleswade Common on 13th; 68 were at Odell on 18th January and 40 were at Bromham Hall Wood on 5th February; 100+ were at Carlton and 75 were at Abbey Park, Turvey on 16th February and 150 were at the latter site on 13th April; c.40 flew over Aspley Heath on 12th March and c.140 were at Biggleswade Common on 21st; c.40 were by R. Ouzel, south of the Leighton Buzzard bypass on 23rd March; 175 were at Bagden Farm, Turvey on 29th March and 250 were at Turvey Abbey on 31st; c.250 were at Biggleswade Common on 2nd April and c.100 were at Tiddenfoot WP on 3rd; 80+ were noted moving slowly north low across Biggleswade Common on 7th April and 50+ were at Harrold; c.50 were by R. Ouzel, south of Grove on 10th April. The last spring sightings were of singles at Blows Downs on 30th April, Coronation ClP on 1st May and Biggleswade Common on 6th.

Autumn sightings commenced with 32 at Priory CP on 21st October followed by 37 near Turvey amongst 590 Redwings the next day, when ten were also at Dunstable STW. The first returnees at Whipsnade Zoo were six on 30th October and 90 moved south through Priory CP on 31st followed by 250 west on 4th November. The only other high November count was of 110 at Sandy Heath, Potton on 2nd. Several observers commented on this species' comparative scarcity in the latter part of the year and the only high December counts were of 250 at Odell on 15th, 450 at Abbey Park, Turvey on 25th, c.75 at Eversholt Lake on 26th and 150 at Grovebury SP on 27th. This end of year influx reached the south of the county with 40% of c.1500 thrushes

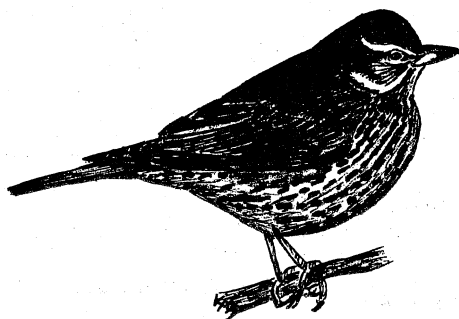
seen between Blows Downs and Caddington on 27th being this species and 60% Redwings.

### **Song Thrush** *T.philomelos*

Increases were reported for this formerly abundant species at only three sites and the fact that observers considered it worthwhile documenting single pairs breeding here and there reflects how the fortunes of the species have changed in recent years. Seven territorial males at Priory CP represented a very low figure and, although adult numbers were not dissimilar from 1994, CES results from the two regular sites suggest a 75% overall drop in juvenile numbers which must bode ill for the future. Only ten record cards were received which is more likely proof of the continued decline rather than any apathy by observers and, as with Turtle Dove and Sky Lark, all records for 1996 and beyond are requested to monitor the situation.

### **Redwing** *T.iliacus*

There were no large numbers reported of this common, sometimes abundant, winter visitor and passage migrant from the first winter period with only the following counts reaching double figures; 50+ at Whipsnade Zoo on 15th February followed by 10 at Stopsley Common on 19th, 30 over Aspley Heath on 12th March and 10 at Willington on 13th then 25 at Turvey Abbey on 17th March and 24 on 23rd. The last report for the spring was also of double figures, 11 at Blows Downs on 16th April. The first returnees of the second winter period were two south-west of Biggleswade Common on 25th September and a single at Bedford High School on 4th October. A total of 590 moved west through Turvey in small flocks in an hour from 08.30am on 22nd October. On 2nd November 1200 moved west in 90 minutes over Kempston, 330 moved west at Priory CP, 350 were present at Turvey Abbey and 1000 roosted at Warden Hill. Groups of 20 to 100 were reported from widespread locations to the end of the year with additional notable counts being 186 at Coronation CIP on 23rd, c.300 at Hexton on 26th, 110 at the Old Rectory, Eversholt on 27th when some 900 were between Blows Downs and Caddington and, lastly, 415 at County Hall, Bedford on 28th December.



Redwing

Kevin Sharpe

### **Mistle Thrush** *T.viscivorus*

As noted last year, this is a much under-recorded widely distributed resident species with only 20 records reported away from 17 received for Stopsley Common through the year plus a further 20 records provided for various sites by the recorder. It would be useful if a few observers would submit records of every Mistle Thrush they saw so



as to attempt to achieve a better idea of the annual population. The only breeding record submitted came from the Old Rectory, Eversholt where a pair raised three young. Reports of post-breeding groups included 17 at Barnfield College, Luton on 16th July, 18 at Turvey Abbey on 25th August and about 20 on Stopsley Common on 18th September. There were ten at Biggleswade Common on 4th November and up to ten birds in Dunstable Cemetery between October and December.

**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*

The first spring arrivals of this local but regular summer visitor were on 24th April at Bidwell Ditch and Flitwick Moor. By the end of April, reeling males had been heard in Bromham Park, Brogborough Lake, Maulden Woods and Willington GP. Probable passage birds were reported from Sundon Hills CP, Husborne Crawley and Biggleswade Common. Breeding season records were received from Coronation CIP where two young fledged, Charle Wood with three males singing, Willington GP where perhaps four males were present during May to August, Rookery North CIP and Rookery South CIP, Heath and Reach where they probably bred, Knotting Green where three singing males were present, Priory CP, Stewartby Lake and Aspley Heath where two broods were raised. There were no reports beyond mid-August.

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

The first of this locally numerous summer visitor and passage migrant returned to Priory CP on the early date of 6th April. The main arrival occurred across the county between 13th and 16th April. At Priory CP, 30 territories were held, a significant reduction from 41 in 1994. Other breeding records were received from Rookery North CIP with three pairs, Battlesden Lake with two pairs, Dunstable STW with eight pairs and Luton Hoo with around 12 pairs. CES data indicated a 30% decrease in adult numbers and a very low productivity of young, down by 80%. Departure in autumn was generally early with the last straggler being seen at Priory CP on 29th September.

**Reed Warbler** *A. scirpaceus*

The first arrival of this locally common summer visitor and passage migrant was, as is often the case, at Priory CP, this year on 23rd April. Breeding numbers showed a small increase over last year with 49 singing males at Priory CP after 44 in 1994, 20 pairs at Houghton Regis ChP, 10 singing males at Southill Lake following just three or four there in 1994, three males at Chalton STW, four at Battlesden Lake and three pairs at Rookery North CIP and at least one singing male at Rookery South CIP. Single pairs were noted at Ledburn SP, Luton Hoo and song was also noted at A1 Manor Farm GP and Bromham Lake NR. CES results implied that both adults and juveniles were down by 50% which seems to conflict with local counts. Success levels with later broods fared better. A single at Blows Downs on 1st May was a scarcity for this well watched site. The main departure from Priory CP took place on 2nd September with a late bird still at Priory CP on 18th October.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*

The first spring record of this fairly common summer visitor and autumn migrant was at Willington GP on 24th April, a day later than the county's first in 1994. By 30th April birds had been seen at Blows Downs, Bromham Lake NR, Tiddenfoot WP and Priory CP. Autumn passage was reported from a variety of localities from 3rd to 23rd September with the last lingering at Warden Hill until 8th October. CES results from Waterloo Thorns showed a further decrease with the population there only 25% of the 1988 level. Juveniles appeared to have a good year with productivity up following low levels in 1994.

### **Common Whitethroat** *S. communis*

Return spring passage of this common and widespread summer visitor was early with the first arrivals noted on 9th April from Willington GP and Meadow Lane, Bedford STW. An arrival on 30th April was noticeable at Stewartby Lake, with eight singing males, and also between Blunham and Tempsford the same day to be followed on 3rd May by five on Blows Downs. Indications of an increase in the breeding population came from Priory CP where 29 males held territory, the previous highest for this site being nine in 1992 and eight in 1994. Also, at Bramingham Wood, two in May were reported as the first there for eighteen years. CES results showed no overall change in the adult population and a reduction in juvenile numbers by 60%. An obvious, wide-spread movement was reported from many localities during September, including some through urban gardens. The last in autumn was at Rookery South CIP on 23rd September.

### **Garden Warbler** *S. borin*

Dates for the spring arrival of this fairly common summer migrant were about average with the first sightings occurring on 16th April at Barton Hills NR, on 20th at Pegsdon Hills and Ickwell and on 23rd at Priory CP and Luton Hoo. Breeding numbers at Priory CP fell, from 20 in 1994 to 13 territories, but maybe this was due to habitat change. CES results showed a continuing decline of adults of about 15% per annum and a very poor year for juveniles. The perception from at least one observer was that this species was outnumbered by Blackcaps by as much as 50:1 (BJN). September records came from Chequers Cottages, Whipsnade Zoo on 10th and Biggleswade Common on 16th.

### **Blackcap** *S. atricapilla*

Continuing the recent trend for this common summer visitor and passage migrant species to overwinter, 12 observers noted Blackcaps in their garden during the early months of the year. Most of these were in the larger towns with three in Dunstable, two each in Bedford and Biggleswade and singles in Luton, Toddington and Barton. One was in a Bromham garden on 25th February and one or two in Clifton during January and February. At County Hall, Bedford, a male was in song on 30th January, it was joined by a female on 2nd February which stayed until the 10th with the male seen regularly until 6th April. The first probable migrants were noted at Blunham, Priory CP and Harrold-Odell CP on 1st April, Blows Downs on 3rd April and by 4th the species was widespread. CES results indicated that at Waterloo Thorns and Priory CP, the number of adults was down by 50%, although observers considered numbers were at least stable. However, at Waterloo Thorns no juveniles were trapped at all! At Priory CP, 21 males held territory, the same as in 1994. In autumn, most breeding birds had moved out by early October but then passage was noted again in November. At Priory CP, a male was trapped on 18th November and by the end of the year a further six were seen there. At Fountains, Blunham, a male on 12th November was joined by another and two females on 26th. Up to three were then present through to 1995 mainly feeding on spindle berries. Elsewhere in November, singles were at Arlesey, Biggleswade, Bedford, Warden Hill, two were at Willington GP and up to three were at Whipsnade Zoo. In December, there were up to two in a Luton Garden and singles in Aspley Guise, Dunstable, Ampthill, East Hyde, Kempston and at two localities in Bedford. As earlier in the year, many of these winter records were in observers' gardens.

### **Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

There were only four 1995 records for this scarce summer visitor and rare passage migrant. Breeding was confirmed at Cooper's Hill, Ampthill, where a male was seen

singing on 7th May whereafter two birds were present from 12th when seen mating. The nest was found on 30th containing maybe three to four day old chicks. Food carrying was still evident on 4th June (KO, SGW). At Apsley Heath, the first was noted on 30th April and by 4th May there were two males and a female (KMS, PT). A pair bred here but full details were not submitted, the last date given being 4th June (PS). A male was in song at Fairfield, Biggleswade on 10th May (SDH). On autumn passage, a single was at Priory CP on 7th September (ECN).

### **Chiffchaff** *P.collybita*

This is a widespread species in Bedfordshire primarily as a passage migrant and summer visitor but some overwinter with us. In the first winter period there were up to three at Priory CP and singles in two observers gardens in Houghton Regis and Dunstable in January followed by singles at Potton Brook on 4th and at Tiddenfoot WP on 19th February. The earliest probable migrants were in Bedford and at Ickwell on 11th March and at Maulden Woods on 12th. Reports from four other localities were received for 14th to 17th March and from another seven sites between 19th and 26th. From a small sample, CES indications were that both adults and juveniles were down on 1994. At Priory CP, autumn passage was noted from 20th August when there were 12 present through to 30th when 25 were there decreasing by 4th September to 13. A further influx took place on 16th September when 21 were present and there were still 19 there on 21st September. There were several reports from a wide range of sites during October then, in November, from Bromham Lake NR, Whipsnade Zoo, and Ledburn Road SP. In December, reports came from Dunstable STW and at Priory CP where five wintered.

On 17th September, a single showing the characters associated with *P.c.abietinus* was present at Priory CP remaining until 8th October. The observer considered that two birds may have been present on 27th September and 5th October. Besides one seen, the distinctive calls of two more may have been heard on 7th October (DK).

### **Willow Warbler** *P.trochilus*

The first arrivals of this very common migrant and summer visitor were in Luton on 25th March and at Tiddenfoot WP on 31st. However, they remained scarce until a fall on Blows Downs on 4th April, then, at Pegsdon Hills, about 12 were seen on 8th April when 23 were also at Priory CP. There were between ten and 15 along 300m of hedgerow at Stewartby Lake on 16th April. At Priory CP, 30 males held territory, much the same as in 1994 and this was confirmed by CES data from there although Waterloo Thorns results showed a 50% decrease with the population dropping to just 30% of the 1988 level. At both Priory CP and Waterloo Thorns, catches of juveniles indicated a 50% drop compared to last year. Slight changes of nesting habitat probably affected the data somewhat but the decline mirrors the general picture across southern Britain. The last in autumn were at Pegsdon Hills on 20th September and at Priory CP and Dunstable STW two days later.

### **Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

Little indication of any influxes were reported and neither was any breeding status information received. The species remains common and widespread, particularly along the Greensand Ridge and in our parklands. Up to eight were at Priory CP at the end of the year.

### **Firecrest** *R.ignicapillus*

1995 was quite a good year for this delightful but scarce passage migrant species to Bedfordshire with five records. One was at Stewartby Lake on 21st February (KMS),

one was briefly at Blows Downs on 27th April (RD), a male was in song along the Icknield Way, Pegsdon Hills on 29th April (JCP), another was singing at Bluebell Wood, Whipsnade Zoo on 14th May (CT) and, lastly, a male and a female were at Priory CP on 6th September (DK).

#### **Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*

A summer visitor that was locally common but is being recorded less often in recent years. The first of the year was at Blunham on 6th May and the last was at Stopsley Common on 1st October. This species would appear to be continuing to decline in the county from comments of several of the 26 observers submitting records from many locations across Bedfordshire. Breeding was confirmed at Biggleswade Common, Clophill, Leighton Buzzard, Little Staughton, Southill Park and Whipsnade Zoo (at least five pairs in 500+ acres).

#### **Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca*

A good year for this annual spring and autumn scarce passage migrant with five accepted reports concerning six birds. The first was a very well watched female at Blows Downs on 29th April (MJS, LC *et al*) and a male was at the top of Rock Lane bridlepath, Bideford Green, Linslade the following day (GD). Two juveniles were at Hay Wood, Stopsley Common on 13th August (JCP, TG). A moulting bird was at Sharnbrook on 13th and 14th August (DVM *et al*) and a well marked first-winter individual was at Camestone Park, Kempston on 21st September (SGW, JB).

#### **Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus*

With the continuing run of mild winters, good numbers of this common resident were reported throughout the county. Not surprisingly, observers recorded their largest counts for this species in the second winter period. The maximum count received concerned a flock of 45 plus at Priory CP on 26th November. At the CES sites, however, adult and juvenile numbers were generally very low.

#### **Marsh Tit** *Parus palustris*

Reported from over 20 locations, this fairly common resident bird can be found in most suitable habitat throughout Bedfordshire.

#### **Willow Tit** *P. montanus*

All records of this scarce resident species are included this year in attempt to monitor its possibly precarious position in the county. Our comments regarding care in identification of this species from Marsh Tit published last year still apply – not one of the following records here came with any details of confirmed identification. One was at Maulden Woods on 2nd January and 2nd April with a pair reported there on 13th April. Singles were noted at Blows Downs on 8th January and 4th April, four were seen there on 20th April and one, maybe two, pairs may have bred but there was no proof of this (RD). Two were seen by the A5065 Skimpot roundabout at Blows Downs on 20th September. At Tiddenfoot WP, one or two were present from 21st January and, although not seen on every visit, they were noted each month of the year and may have bred (GD). One was at Hudnall Corner, Studham on 27th January, another was by the Caulcott footbridge at Stewartby Lake on 12th February and one was seen along the south side of Brogborough Lake on 23rd February. Near Chequers Cottages, Whipsnade Zoo, up to five were seen on 13th and 14th March with three or more present on 27th June, a singleton present from 13th to 15th November and three were seen together on 27th November. RMC commented that “this species has featured every winter at my bird table for at least 15 years but only in ones and twos for last four to five years. Previously there were as many as four to five birds. They were

only seen sporadically in the summer although frequently heard – Marsh Tit has never occurred in my garden”. Elsewhere, one was at Swiss Gardens on 5th March, one was reported from Daintry and Washers Woods on 29th April and an undated breeding season report came from Flitwick Moor. Two were at Priory CP on 24th and 26th July, and singles were seen there on 19th and 30th August and 10th and 14th September. One was at Hangar Wood, Stagsden on 10th September and one was reported as seen carrying food for fledged young at Old Warden on 23rd September. Lastly, one was at Southill Lake on 10th December. The foregoing would suggest a southern chalkland bias toward this species with wanderers being seen elsewhere occasionally in the county. The paucity of reports from former strongholds for this species of Maulden Woods and Flitwick Moor is of concern.

#### **Coal Tit** *P. ater*

Away from the plantations, for which no estimates of any population changes or trends were received for this locally abundant resident species, one was an unusual find at Priory CP on 2nd February. SGW commented that “this species seems to be present in the smallest of areas containing conifers in Kempston and along the R. Ouse to Bedford”.

#### **Blue Tit** *P. caeruleus*

Priory CP and Waterloo Thorns CES results for adults were stable for this very common resident but juveniles showed a 50% decrease. Many broods in nest boxes failed in whole or in part to fledge at these two sites.

#### **Great Tit** *P. major*

After serious decline of this common resident in 1990, adult numbers at the two CES sites have remained remarkably stable. 1994 was the worst recorded for juveniles so it is encouraging that a 25% increase was evidenced at Priory CP and Waterloo Thorns. The only other report received was from Stopsley Common where the species was noted as common all year with an estimate of three to four pairs breeding.

#### **Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*

A mere 21 reports from 15 sites on seven record cards fails to indicate this often noisy species' widespread presence in Bedfordshire in suitable habitat. Away from the Greensand Ridge, records included sightings from Odell, Harrold, Turvey, Stagsden, Bromham and Blunham. Observers are requested to submit all records of this species and the next to improve the picture given here.

#### **Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

Seven submitted record cards gave details of just 18 reports from only ten sites. Breeding season records came from Swiss Gardens, Old Warden, Maulden Woods, Aspley Heath and Flitwick Moor. This is undoubtedly a common species in small numbers in all suitable habitat but due to its habits and quiet voice it is under-recorded.

#### **Jay** *Garrulus garrulus*

No autumn movements were reported for this widespread and fairly common resident but of some minor interest were two site firsts; one in the joint recorder's garden in Kempston on 4th February with two on 5th April (DJO) and one at Bromham Lake NR on 22nd April (PA). It was disappointing to receive a total of only 30 record cards for the five members of the crow family seen in Bedfordshire in 1995.

#### **Maggie** *Pica pica*

The largest groups reported for this common and widespread resident species were of c.60 going to roost at Double Arches SP on 3rd February, 62 at Harrold-Odell CP on 18th February, 41 in a pre-roost group at Flitwick Moor on 25th February and 25 there on 18th March and, lastly, 30 at Radwell GP on 26th November.

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*

Only four record cards were received for this common resident species in no way illustrating this species' abundance in the county. Fifty-four were reported at Rookery South CIP on 28th August and 20+ were at Stopsley Common on 8th January and 13th August. A large roost of both Rooks and Jackdaws was noted during both winter periods at Bromham Hall Wood and, as reported last year, regular flocks go north over Kempston most evenings accompanying Rooks.

**Rook** *C. frugilegus*

This resident species remains numerous and common. Active nests were noted as being 2% up in the Bedford area and over 13% up in the Tempsford area. The following end of March active nest details were received thanks to the efforts of one diligent observer: 85 Howbury Park west, 14 Howbury Park east, 59 'Canvins', Cardington, two A603, Cople, 42 Wyboston Lakes, seven Wyboston Village, 58 Great Barford House, A428, 80 Potton Church, 97 Tempsford A1 crossroads, 59 Tempsford Anchor PH, 29 Little Barford (ECN). Additionally, 58 nests were counted opposite the Hanson Brick lorry park, Stewartby on 16th April (PA) and 41 nests were counted along R. Ouse at Harrold on 24th April (TS). Rookeries were noted in Poplars, Sycamores, Ash and Elm.

**Carrion Crow** *C. corone*

This very common resident corvid is probably increasing but the paucity of records renders any assessment impossible. Of interest were numbers at winter roosts at Priory CP with maxima of 90 on 1st and 8th January, 100 on 9th February, 172 on 19th November and 193 on 16th December (DK). Gatherings of 35 and 28 were noted adjacent to the R. Ouse in Kempston on 12th June and 3rd December respectively.

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

As usual, very few records were submitted for this abundant species. At Ledburn Road SP, Leighton Buzzard c.1000 were estimated at a roost on 23rd June increasing to c.3000 on 26th July. About 1500-2000 were gathered near Kempston Police headquarters over the A421 on 29th July. Stopsley Common held c.8000 feeding on the playing fields on 19th September reducing to c.3000 the next day. Lastly, an entry in the Rookery South CIP log was for between 8000-10000 at dusk on 9th November.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

In welcome contrast to previous years, several record cards were received for this species, once considered by most to be too common to be worth recording but which has surely declined in recent years. It was noted as not common on Stopsley Common, with only a few pairs at Manor Farm and around the car park, and this probably reflects its status in most rural and semi-rural areas. Quite large groupings were noted from several observers' gardens, whilst 50-60 attracted to Birchen Grove, Luton from adjoining allotments is a good count by today's standards.

**Tree Sparrow** *P. montanus*

Still resident but in decreasing numbers, the population in Bedfordshire needs to be monitored fully and all records of this species are requested. Breeding has, for example, been reported as ceasing at both Tilsworth and Dunstable in the last five years or so. Single pairs were recorded breeding, however, at Potsgrove and Stagsden West End. There were three or four adults and two juveniles at Eaton Bray in May and June, three at Kempston Mill on 3rd June and at least three adults and two juveniles at Chaul End Golf Course in late September. In the first winter period, this declining species was only recorded at New Road GP Sandy, Chaul End Golf Course and Biggleswade.

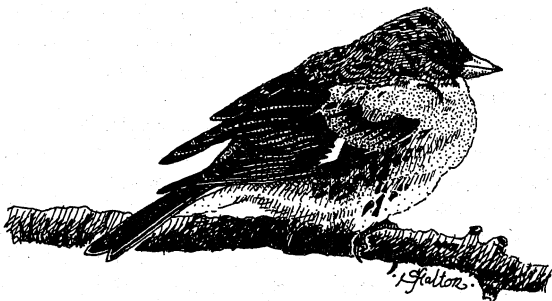
In the second winter period it was found at Stopsley Common, Langford and Dunstable STW in October then at Felmersham NR and east of Bedford STW in November. All of these records were of three or fewer birds. The only reasonable flock recorded all year was 20-30 at Boughton End in December.

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

This is a very common bird across the county and, although no counts of breeding numbers were received, subjectively, this species would seem to be maintaining its population rather better than other seed-eating passerines. In the first winter period, the peak count at Priory CP was 71 on 20th February and, in the second winter period, the largest flocks were in November with 100+ at Ampthill Park on 16th and 160 at Sandy Heath, Potton on 2nd.

**Brambling** *Emontifringilla*

Brambling are a regular winter visitor to Bedfordshire but numbers tend to vary. In the first winter period, they were recorded from near Rowney Warren where there were three on 2nd January; there was one on 18th January at Legrave Marsh; one was at The Lodge, Sandy on 29th January then 27th March and 3rd April; one was seen on 8th February at Faringdon Road, Luton; two were present on 12th February at Harrold-Odell CP; East Hyde had ten on 22nd February; a male was at Biggleswade on 22nd March; six were near The Lodge on 11th March after 12 on 1st March at Sandy Heath. There were a number of late March and April records with one at Maulden Woods on 24th March, four males and three females there on 27th, two at Whipsnade Zoo on 2nd April, one at Langford GP on 9th April and one at Aspley Heath on 14th April. The last in spring was at Fairfield, Biggleswade on 20th April. In autumn, there was a surprisingly early report of a female described at Stewartby Lake on 9th July. More typical autumn arrivals began with a female at The Lodge on 17th October followed by three at Galley Hill and one at Warden Hill on 20th, building up to 20 plus there by 19th November. Two were at Langford GP on 21st October and two were near Cople on 22nd. Two or three were with Chaffinches at Whipsnade Zoo from 28th October with 30 plus present there on 2nd November and smaller numbers till the end of the month. Three were seen at Priory CP on 30th October. Later, small flocks also built up on Pegsdon Hills where there were five on 4th November then 40+ on 12th, 20+ on 18th and five plus on 26th. At Stopsley Common there were five or so present on 5th November then two or three on 11th and five plus on 19th. At Ampthill Park there were ten on 16th November but these reduced to a few by the start of December. Charle Wood held three on 26th November and Barton Hill Farm had three or four on 26th December.



Brambling

Steve Halton

### **Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*

A common species across the county, no significant counts were received for the winter periods. At the CES sites, however, indices showed little change in numbers of adults but improved productivity of juveniles compared with 1994. It was considered that there was an exodus of local breeding birds in October from these sites with an influx of wintering birds from more northerly populations not noted until December (ECN).

### **Goldfinch** *C. carduelis*

A common and widespread species in the county throughout the year with largest numbers not surprisingly being reported outside the breeding season. In the first winter period, the maximum flock reported was 58 at Priory CP on 26th March. Goldfinches were more widely recorded in the latter half of the year. At Priory CP, 100+ were present on 13th August rising to 220+ by 30th September, twice the 1994 autumn peak at this site, but numbers then fell to 90 by 11th November and to 44 by 22nd December. Over 20 were at Ledburn Road SP on 30th July then c.50 on 1st October and c.40 were at Dunstable STW on 22nd August. Eighteen were at Pegsdon Hills on 2nd September then c.50 on 3rd and 17th. At Great Oak Farm, Turvey, 45 were present on 11th September then 46 at Blows Downs on 22nd and 50+ were at Rookery South CIP on 24th September. Ledburn Road SP had c.50 on 1st October, 23 flew over Station Road, Flitwick on 14th October, East Hyde had 30 on 15th October, c.30 were seen at Grovebury SP on 17th October, c.20 were at Bromham Lake NR on 30th November and 80+ were at Willington GP on 3rd December.

### **Siskin** *C. spinus*

Generally a winter visitor to Bedfordshire but in varying numbers from year to year, Siskins were widely recorded in good numbers in the first winter period. The largest parties were all reported in early January, with c.140 in Clophill and c.120 at Flitwick Moor on the 1st, 160+ at Eversholt on 4th falling to c.150 on 7th and c.80 at Drakelow Ponds, Woburn on 8th. Elsewhere during that month, there were records of smaller parties of 20 to 50 birds at Sundon Marsh, Stewartby Lake, Southill Park, Swiss Gardens, Blunham Weir, Kempston Church End, Woburn Park and Felmersham NR. In February, similar groups were at Priory CP, Flitwick Moor, Eversholt and Bromham Lake NR and in March at Aspley Heath whilst c.30 remained in Potton from 17th January until 6th March. Smaller numbers were widely recorded feeding on nuts in gardens. Birds stayed into April at several sites with 12 at Aspley Heath on the 1st and 30 at Jackdaw Hill and 25 at Maulden Woods on 2nd, at The Lodge on 3rd, at Cockayne Hatley on 9th and at Whipsnade Zoo until 10th April. Singing males were noted at Woburn and Blunham in the first week of April, but small parties found near Turvey during BBS field work in May and June were more suggestive of possible breeding activity though none was confirmed.

In autumn, the first was a single at Warden Hill on 16th September with another at Whipsnade Zoo on 21st. In general, this species was less widely recorded and in smaller numbers in the second winter period with the largest flocks being 14 at Dunstable STW on 19th November, a maximum of 19 at Priory CP on 13th December and c.30 at Eversholt Lake on 26th December. Smaller numbers were also recorded at Flitwick Moor, Stewartby Lake, The Lodge, Swiss Gardens, Blunham and the Ouse in Bedford.

### **Linnet** *C. cannabina*

This common resident is sometimes fairly scarce in the early weeks of the year. Its numbers seem fairly stable with no significant population trends reported. The largest



flocks were all in the second winter period with 255 near Bedford STW on 1st October, c.220 at Church End, Arlesey on 26th November and 100 at Odell Great Wood on 15th December. Smaller flocks of up to 80 were recorded near Bedford STW in the first winter period and there were also parties of 20 to 50 near Potton and Brogborough Lake. In the second winter period, similar parties were at Pegsdon Hills, Stopsley Common and Double Arches SP whilst Blows Downs, Dunstable STW and Tiddenfoot WP held groups in both winter periods.

**Lesser Redpoll** *C. flammea cabaret*

A request for records following the poor showing of this declining resident in 1994 produced a reasonable crop of about 20 record cards. However, almost all records were of single figures with no large flocks. There were reports on only two dates at the well watched Priory CP of four on 16th February and one on 5th April and just a single on 18th September at Whipsnade Zoo. The largest parties were 12 at Potton on 4th February, reducing to 6 on 27th, and 15 at Maulden Woods on 2nd April. Breeding season records came only from Studham when four were displaying on 23rd April, from Aspley Heath where a male was singing on 1st May, and along the R. Ouse in Bedford, where only one male was noted in song flight compared to three or four in previous years. None were noted in Kempston where the species formerly bred in small numbers regularly in suitable gardens. Elsewhere, the species was also recorded, in single figure numbers and normally on only one or two dates during the winter periods, at Aspley Heath, Buttermilk Wood, Houghton Regis ChP, Leagrave Marsh, Sundon Marsh, Bramingham Wood, Barton Hill Farm, Linslade, Tiddenfoot CP, Eversholt Lake, Flitwick Moor, Swiss Gardens, The Lodge, Cockayne Hatley, Rookery South CLP, Stewartby Lake, Bedford Hospital, Bromham Village, Felmersham NR and Bromham Hall Wood.



Lesser Redpoll

Kevin Sharpe

**Common Crossbill** *L. curvirostra*

There were only two records of this species in the county in 1995, a low point even for such a fluctuating and generally scarce visitor to our county. A female was seen at Aspley Heath on 2nd April (AW) and a single was heard then seen flying over Kempston on 11th August (DJO).

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

This is another resident bird to Bedfordshire which appears to be declining. There were only ten record cards received, but more next year will permit a better assessment of its status. The combined CES indices showed slight decreases in both adults and juveniles from 1994, but the species was recorded regularly from a number of sites,

including Stopsley Common, Tiddenfoot CP, Willington GP and Felmersham NR, whilst c.15 at Pegsdon Hills on 1st September, 13 at Turvey on 7th December and 10+ at Odell Great Wood on 15 December were all good counts. This species could never have been described as numerous, though it was always widespread, and any decline has probably been less dramatic than those of species such as Greenfinch or Linnet which formerly occurred in large flocks at many sites.

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

This is a scarce and elusive bird in Bedfordshire nowadays and, after the encouraging slight upward blip in 1994, there was only one record of this species in 1995, a single flying over Wilden on 13th May (WB). Former breeding woods on the clay-with-flints in the south of the county were again checked without success (PT).

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

Relatively few records were submitted for this fairly common and widespread species and those received did not include any breeding season accounts. In winter, the largest flocks reported were two each of c.50 birds near Heath and Reach on 3rd February and at Boughton End on 10th December. There were also c.30 near Henlow on 8th January and 34 at Gridstone Hill, Turvey on 19th November.

**Reed Bunting** *E. schoeniclus*

This fairly common resident species was far better recorded than Yellowhammer during the year. A good number of breeding season reports were received. Counts of one to eight birds were received from 18 BBS sites and birds holding territory at a further eight sites. Five plus pairs at Luton Hoo and about five pairs in the Tiddenfoot CP/Ledburn Road SP areas were the largest concentrations. Only two pairs bred at Dunstable STW, well down on previous years, and combined CES results were down 50%. In winter, the largest group recorded was an estimated 70% of a mixed flock of c.100 Reed Buntings and Yellowhammers near Henlow on 8th January with the next largest groups of double figure counts including 10 near Blows Downs on 8th January and 10 at Priory Business Park, Bedford on 15th January, 15 at South Mills NR on 30th September, 18 at Warren Villas NR on 15th October, ten on this date at Coronation CIP increasing to 21 on 12th November then 19 on 16th December. Though this species remains widespread in small numbers, it has declined in a similar fashion to most other seed-eating passerines.

**Corn Bunting** *Miliaria calandra*

This species continues to decline as a locally common resident breeder in Bedfordshire. However, traditional breeding concentrations of singing males for which reports were received included up to eight between Kempston and Biddenham, eleven at Stopsley Common, Galley and Warden Hills and nine at Sewell Quarry. These figures almost exactly parallel those for 1994 at these sites. Other singing males were noted at R. Ivel Sandy, Langford (3), Grovebury SP (3), Cockayne Hatley (c.6), Sutton, Cople/Willington and Stagsden (2). Habitat changes at Willington GP caused the small colony breeding in grassland there to disappear during the breeding season. As with Reed Bunting, the species was well recorded at BBS sites, with records from fourteen one kilometre squares including a remarkable 16 birds at Ashwell Road, Guilden Morden just over the county boundary and 13 including 9 singing males NW of Bromham. In winter, counts were submitted for two traditional roosts with maxima at Priory CP of 36 on 24th January and 45 on 22nd December and an autumn peak of 84 at Houghton Regis ChP on 21st October. The largest winter flocks recorded elsewhere were 30 at Sheepwalk, Potton on 15th January, c.30 near Priory Business Park on 22nd January,

presumably those from the nearby roost, 43 by the Ivel in Biggleswade on 4th March, 25 at Cockayne Hatley on 27th March and 28 at Langford on 14th October.

## MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS

“**Exotica**”: The following records relate to escapes and other occurrences believed to be of feral origin.

### **Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*

A feral bird was at Tempsford Mill on 2nd January (MJP).

### **Black Swan** *C. atratus*

12 were released at Woburn Lakes on 24th June and were still present at the end of the year (BJN, LGRE).

### **Snow Goose** *A. caerulescens*

A blue-morph was at Dunstable STW on 21st March (PT). An adult white-morph was at Brogborough Lake on 29th December but, although full-winged and unringed, it was very approachable (JB, TR, MJP). Additionally, one or two white *Anser* superficially resembling this species were seen on several occasions through the year at Harrold-Odell CP and Woburn Park but were probably no more than aberrant feral **Greylag geese** *A. anser*

### **Bar-headed Goose** *A. indicus*

Singles, probably relating to one in the north and one in the south of the county, were reported throughout the year. One was at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th January (MJP) and 9th February (PA) and at Radwell GP on 23rd September (MJP). One was at Dunstable STW on 23rd March, 2nd, 13th to 14th, 28th to 29th May, 14th and 20th June, 1st, 4th and 10th September (PT). Probably the same bird was seen at Houghton Regis ChP on 1st April, 4th May, 2nd June and on five dates between 8th October and 26th November (DM) and, lastly, one was at Grovebury SP on 17th December (PS).

### **Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis minima*

Three of one of the small dark breasted races, probably *minima*, often referred to as “Cackling” Canada Geese frequented Rookery South CIP from time to time between 21st July and 5th September and were also seen at Radwell GP on 23rd September (MJP).

### **Red-breasted Goose** *B. ruficollis*

Two were added to the collection at Woburn Park on 15th August (BJN). Two were seen in a collection at Moggerhanger in January and three were present on 16th December. Several were in a collection at Willington on 5th August (MJP).

### **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*

A female was at Woburn Park on 5th and 11th February (MJP, MDR, DJO) and a pair were at Dunstable STW on 25th June (PT).

### **Muscovy Duck** *Cairina scutulata*

A pair bred at East Hyde and raised nine young. Others were seen at South Mills, Swiss Gardens, near Haynes, between Ridgemont and Woburn, by Brogborough Lake and at Clophill during the year (MJP).

### **Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa*

A female was on a pond near Thomas Moore School, Bedford on 1st April (AG). One in eclipse was present along the River Ouse, Bedford on 6th–15th August (SGW).

**Chiloe Wigeon** *Anas sibilatrix*

Two were present on 19th September at Priory CP (RRT). The two adults present at Dunstable STW on 23rd June 1994 (PT) were not, as reported, in eclipse plumage – this species has no such plumage.

**Speckled Teal** *Anas flavirostris*

One was at Dunstable STW on 12th September (AW).

**Ringed Teal** *Callonetta leucophrys*

A female was on "Riverside" near Priory CP and at Priory CP intermittently between 8th and 18th February (DK) and was then reported on the R. Ouse near The Embankment, Bedford on 19th February (JB).

**Hooded Merganser** *Lophodytes cucullatus*

The male from 1993 was seen fairly regularly on the R. Ivel at South Mills between at least 2nd April and 21st June (JTRS) then again on 16th December (MJP).

**Peacock** *Pava* sp.

A number of farmers in the area around Swiss Gardens, Old Warden have peafowl and none of these are pinioned. Six were introduced to the gardens four years ago and they have bred every year since. Elsewhere, Peacocks had been frequently heard calling in the vicinity of Park Road, Toddington in the early part of the year. On 6th August, one was calling north of Sundon Hills, on 5th September two were calling in the grounds of Aspley Hall and on 29th October one was seen walking along a Lidlington street!

**[Golden Pheasant** *Chrysolophus pictus*

There were no records of this species at all in 1995, and neither were there in Northamptonshire, which is probably good news for the pureness survival of our Lady Amherst's Pheasant population.]

**Cockatiel** *Nymphicus hollandicus*

One was seen at Hillgrounds Road, Kempston on 16th May (MJP) and one was at Waller Avenue, Luton on 3rd August (RD).

**Parakeet** sp. *Psittacula* sp.

Ten parakeets near Haynes on 29th May were subsequently identified as Quaker Parakeets and are free-flying local birds (RM, BM). Six parakeet sp. over Ickwell on 16th August were possibly Ring-necked Parakeets (WB). Lastly, a parakeet sp. was seen in fog at Southill Lake on 10th December (BJN).

**Budgerigah** *Melopsittacus undulatus*

One was seen in Kempston on 12th and 16th August (DJO).

**Appendix A: Unverified Reports – A Request For Records**

The following is a list of scarce birds reported during 1995 for which no adequate descriptions were received. Any observer able to submit suitable details for consideration by the rarities panel of any occurrence from this list is requested to assist so that the record is not lost. Please also refer to last year's report to check if you have any information on the 1994 Appendix A list.

Little Egret	Herts/Beds border	August
Bewick's Swan	Rookery South CIP	3rd January
Egyptian Goose	Radwell GP	26th November
Red Kite	Park Wood, Harrold	25th August
Marsh Harrier	Priory CP	28th April
Osprey	Blows Downs	October

Osprey	Eaton Bray	October
Merlin	Radwell GP	26th November
Avocet	Coronation CIP	April
Knot	Rookery South CIP	20th September
Black-tailed Godwit	Rookery South CIP	6th May
Bar-tailed Godwit	Rookery South CIP	21st June
Wood Sandpiper	Rookery South CIP	3rd September
Mediterranean Gull	Brogborough Lake	2nd January
Mediterranean Gull	Stewartby Lake	April
Mediterranean Gull	Rookery South CIP	2nd August
Little Gull	Dunstable STW	4th July
Little Auk	The Lodge, Sandy	November
Nightjar	Priory CP	May
Wryneck	Odell	September
Water Pipit	Dunstable STW	1st April
Black Redstart	Ravensden	November
Firecrest	The Lodge, Sandy	February
Sacred Ibis	Luton	January

### Appendix B: Rejected Records

A number of records of rare or unusual birds were submitted to the recorders for circulation amongst the rarities panel that unfortunately proved inadequate to satisfy the panel beyond reasonable doubt that the identification was 100% certain. In the past these records have not been listed. However, this year we have decided to include them in the hope that the standard of submissions will improve. All too often rare bird submissions comprise a few scant details and a statement to the effect that the observer knows it was whatever species it is claimed to be. For the archives, proper identification reasoning must be given, preferably in comparison to other species present as well as some detail as to the circumstances of the sighting. Appropriate forms are readily available upon request from the recorders. However, we must emphasise that the list below is not intended as an admonishment of those submissions, rather, in the great majority of cases, the evidence submitted for consideration was simply insufficient for identification to be fully established. In only a very few instances did the panel feel satisfied that a mistake in identification had been made. Of course, if any observer is able to pen additional details for re-circulation we would be delighted to receive them.

White Stork	Brogborough Lake	14th May
Little Egret	R. Ouse, Harrold	8th/10th May
Little Egret	Bromham Mill	15th November
Red Kite	Sandy Hills	6th February
Red Kite	Lower Gravenhurst	c.5th May
ringtail Harrier	Priory CP	21st August
Goshawk	Whipsnade Zoo	19th March
Goshawk	Biggleswade Common	23rd September
Goshawk	Priory CP	3rd December
Osprey	Biggleswade	9th September
Merlin	Biggleswade Common	1st April
Merlin	Willington GP	5th November
Red-footed Falcon	Biggleswade Common	9th May (BBRC reject.)

Iceland Gull	Rookery South CIP	14th May
Golden Oriole	Maulden Woods	20th May

### Appendix C: Pending Records

Goshawk	Beds/Bucks border	2nd April
Goshawk	Charle Wood	9th April
Goshawk	Warden Little Wood	15th May
Goshawk	Brogborough Lake	9th December
Merlin	Rookery South CIP	12th November
Merlin	Rookery North CIP	2nd December

Additionally, various reports of e.g. Yellow-legged Gulls in first and second year plumages from 1993 onwards are held on file pending better understanding of their identification criteria.

### Additional Record for 1966

#### Ashy-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava cinereocapilla*

A Yellow Wagtail showing the characters associated with this race was present at Dunstable Sewage Farm from 15th to 21st May 1966. This record was unfortunately omitted from Trodd and Kramer's *The Birds of Bedfordshire* and is therefore published here (AJL *et al*).

### Additional Record for 1975

#### Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

Two were present at Noon Hill, Pegsdon on 19th January 1975 (AJL).

### Additional Record for 1981

#### Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

A male was in breeding habitat at Luton on 9th July 1981 (AJL).

### Additional Records for 1994

#### Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

The individual from December 1993 was still present at Brogborough Lake on 2nd January (CT).

#### Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae*

A late report concerns a male found dead at Kingshoe Wood on 6th April which had a ten centimetre gash in its neck which may have been the result of a fight with other males (FC).

#### Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Two adults were present at Tiddenfoot WP and the adjacent Grand Union Canal at Linslade on 23rd and 24th April (GD, JO'N).

MARTIN PALMER and DAVID ODELL

**The Occurrence of Knot *Calidris canutus*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* and Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* in Bedfordshire during the period 1946–1995  
by Peter Smith**

**Introduction**

I have enjoyed bird watching in Bedfordshire since the early 1960s. My first published record in the Bedfordshire Naturalist was of a **Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus* I had found dead under telegraph wires at Stratton School, Biggleswade on the 2nd October 1961. As my enthusiasm for bird watching grew, I developed a particular interest in **waders**. Luckily for me, both Bedford Sewage Farm and Wyboston Gravel Pits were within cycling distance of my parents' home in Goldington.

It is quite clear from reading all the county bird reports during the study period that many wader species regularly fly over Bedfordshire during their spring and autumn migrations. The essential ingredients for persuading waders to stop off in the county are suitable habitats and appropriate weather conditions. During the fifty years from 1946 to 1995, the changes to wader habitats have been fairly dramatic. In the earlier part of the period, the majority of records came from sewage farms such as Bedford, Dunstable and East Hyde. The methods for treating sewage disposal changed during the 1970s which resulted in the almost total loss of suitable habitat at Bedford. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of Paul Trodd and others, and the generous co-operation of Anglian Water Authority, a small amount of habitat still remains at Dunstable. The loss of the sewage farm habitat coincided with the growth of mineral and clay extraction in Bedfordshire. The gravel pits at Wyboston, Barkers Lane (Bedford) and Felmersham along with Stewartby Clay Pit were among the front runners of this developing habitat in the 1960s. In recent years, apart from at Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works, nearly all the county wader records come from the wetlands created by mineral and clay extraction, particularly Rookery Clay Pit South near Stewartby.

On choosing three wader species to study, I looked for those which were relatively rare in the county and would provide an interesting pattern of occurrence over the fifty year period.

**Knot *Calidris canutus***

A total of 74 individual birds were recorded over the fifty year period. There are a total of five historic records referred to in *The Birds of Bedfordshire* by Trodd and Kramer but reports have become more numerous in recent years. The first record during the study period was of a single bird found at Dunstable Sewage Farm on 10th August 1952. The species then occurred sporadically with maximum yearly totals of three, until eleven were recorded in the county during 1993. That total included a flock of six adults arriving at Rookery Clay Pit during a heavy shower on the 8th May. 1994 was another good year with a total of 28 individuals being recorded with the largest flock ever of 23 birds occurring at Priory Country Park on 23rd January. As can be seen from Table 2, the species has occurred in every month of the year apart from, for some inexplicable reason April. The large flock at Priory Country Park distorts the figures for January with most of the regular passage taking place during May.

Knot, *Calidris canutus*  
1946 to 1995

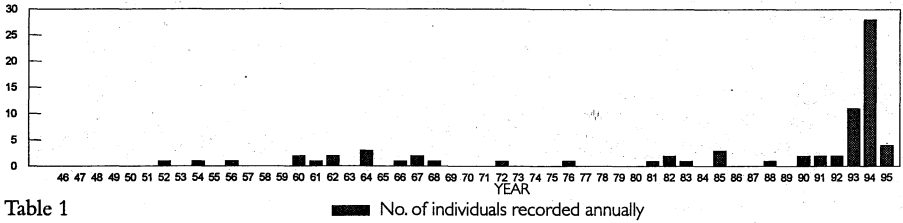


Table 1

Knot, *Calidris canutus*  
1946 to 1995

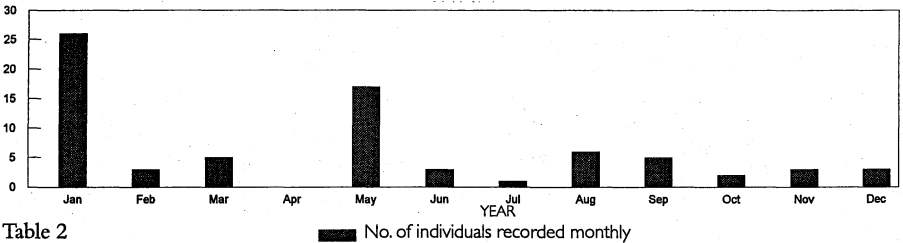


Table 2

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

This has been the most numerous of the three species under consideration although there was only one record quoted by Steele-Elliot; a male shot at Thurleigh in May about 1875. The next reliable record was of a single at Bedford Sewage Farm which stayed from the 11th to 27th August 1948. There were only five years from 1948-1995 when the species was unrecorded in the county (see Table 3). The best year was 1991, when sixteen individuals were seen. The total number of individuals seen over the entire study period was 193 which differs slightly from the individual monthly totals in Table 4 as some of the birds overlapped two consecutive months and have therefore been counted twice. As can be seen from Table 4, the spring passage mainly takes place in May and the much heavier return movement during August, with 50 per cent of all records being reported in this month. Indeed, the highest number of birds seen together were seven on the 11th August 1968 at Bedford Sewage Farm. The earliest spring record was from Willington Gravel Pits on 15th April 1993 and the latest record from Bedford Sewage Farm on 7th November 1967. As one might expect, there are no records in the county for the months of January, February, March and December.

**Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

The first record for the county did not occur until a single bird was found at Bedford Sewage Farm in 1955 which stayed from the 8th to 10th May. As can be seen from Table 5, the species was not recorded each year from 1955 to 1970. From 1971 to 1995, Turnstones were recorded in every year except 1975 and 1985. The largest number of individuals recorded in one day at a locality were five, or possibly six, at



Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola*  
1946 to 1995

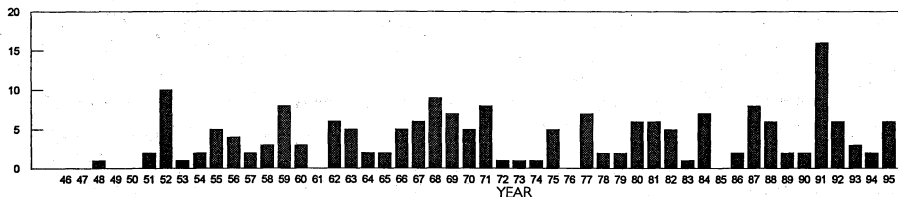


Table 3

■ No. of individuals recorded annually

Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola*  
1946 to 1995

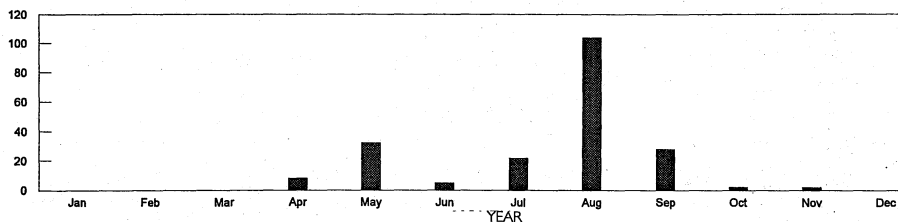


Table 4

■ No. of individuals recorded monthly

Bedford Sewage Farm on the 7th to 10th August 1961 and five at Coronation Clay Pit on the 8th May 1993. As can be seen from Table 5, 1993 was an outstanding year with a total of 20 individual birds recorded. A total of 126 individuals have been recorded in the county since 1955. It is obvious from Table 6 that May is the peak passage month

Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*  
1946 to 1995

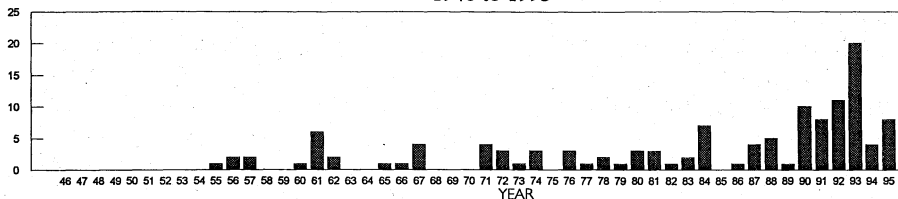


Table 5

■ No. of individuals recorded annually

Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*  
1946 to 1995

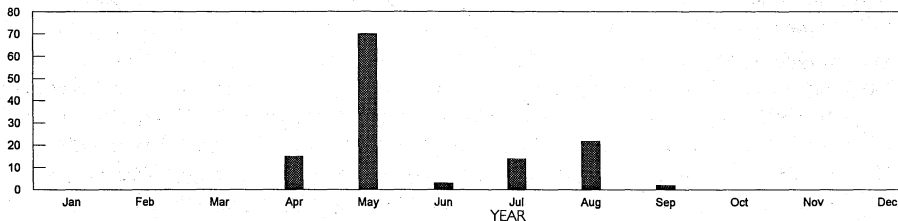


Table 6

■ No. of individuals recorded monthly

and with a total of 70 birds, it represents over 55 per cent of the total number of birds recorded from 1955 to 1995. No records have ever been reported outside the months of April to September. The earliest record is of a single bird at Stewartby Lake on the 20th April 1983 and the latest, again a single bird, which stayed at Rookery Clay Pit from the 12th to 13th September 1990.

### Conclusion

Two of the species under consideration, **Knot** and **Turnstone** have been recorded more frequently in recent times, particularly since 1990. The recording of **Wood Sandpiper** is more evenly spread over the 50 year period. Regular watching at Rookery Clay Pit during the last ten years has undoubtedly added greatly to the number of waders recorded in the county but unfortunately we are shortly to lose this valuable habitat for landfill purposes. The growth of bird watching as a hobby during the last few years has also resulted in greater observer coverage. It is not therefore surprising that the number of wader records being submitted to the County Recorders is growing considerably year by year. Whilst writing this paper I have idly speculated as to the next new wader species that might be discovered in the county; could it be Black-winged Pratincole, Pacific Golden Plover, a Sociable Plover amongst one of our Lapwing flocks, White-rumped Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper or Marsh Sandpiper? Whatever happens I personally look forward to many years more wader watching in Bedfordshire.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Barry Nightingale for his comments and for kindly reading the proof of this paper.

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## DUNSTABLE SEWAGE WORKS

### Review of 1995

by Paul Trodd (BNHS Honorary Warden)

It is now a little over three years since the wader scrape was created at Dunstable STW as part of a multi-million pound redevelopment scheme. Controlling plant growth on the scrape islands has been an ongoing problem. Therefore, during the autumn, a substantial amount of the south island was removed leaving a small ridge which has subsequently been shingle-capped. The result has been to increase the area of mud on the scrape while still retaining a stony bar for nesting plovers. In total the three major work parties during the year concentrated on plant cutting and island capping. Anglian Water funded the machinery to re-contour the island and monies from the Spotted Crake

twitch went towards plastic sheeting, shingle and wooden planks. A member of the Bird Club kindly supplied an information sign which is now *in situ* by the main gate.

A major gain this year was the agreement with Anglian Water to lower number three settlement lagoon, adjacent to the hide, from April to September, thus giving increased mud and shingle for waders to feed and nest.

During 1995 site visits were recorded on all but 32 days, with the majority in spring and autumn and the blank days in the winter months. The site is now wardened on the first Sunday morning of each month to allow access to one and all and has proved popular not only for birdwatching but also as a social occasion to catch up on local bird news and gossip. There were several organised visits during the year involving bird clubs, scouts and a church group.

### **Bird highlights of 1995**

A total of 125 species were recorded on or over Dunstable STW during the year, with four additions to the site list – Buzzard, Red-crested Pochard, Sandwich Tern and Red-necked Phalarope. Other highlights included Merlin, Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Black Redstart, Ring Ouzel and probably the bird of the year, a Spotted Crane, which occurred in August, 20 years to the day after the first record in 1975! The ensuing twitch allowed about 250 birders to appreciate this bird at close range from the hide.

For reasons unknown it was a poor year for waders with only 17 species recorded and numbers generally low. The first returning Redshank on 18th February was followed by a Little Ringed Plover on 22nd March and a meagre spring wader passage with only Whimbrel and Ruff of any note. Two Spotted Redshanks (the first for ten years) and a Turnstone in June were noteworthy as was an all too brief Red-necked Phalarope on the last day of August (third county record). Only Common Sandpipers appeared in any numbers during the autumn, when conditions were ideal with plenty of exposed mud, and the wader year ended strangely with four Curlews in December and the ubiquitous Green Sandpiper.

A breeding survey recorded 35 species, including for the first time a pair of Grey Wagtails which nested successfully on the filtration plant. The waders and wildfowl had a torrid time suffering repeated predation from Carrion Crows and Magpies; Coot and Mallard lost almost all their eggs and young to corvids, as did both species of partridge. Due to the gravel shoreline along number three lagoon a record five pairs of Little Ringed Plover bred, but only five chicks fledged. Redshank, Lapwing and Ringed Plover all laid clutches but failed to bring off chicks to flying stage because of crows. However, all was not total doom and gloom as a single pair of Common Terns reared a full brood of three young, due mainly to the adults vigilance and ferocious defence of their nesting raft from marauding crows. It really was stirring to witness and on at least one occasion a Carrion Crow was seen to be driven into the water by persistent mobbing.

As always thanks are due to the staff of Anglian Water, both locally – Pete, Steve, Derek and Barry – and Nina Sage at Compass House for their help and assistance during 1995.

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## BIRDS NEW TO BEDFORDSHIRE – 1995

by S.G. Williams

### **Common Crane** *Grus Grus*, a sub-adult near Queen's Park, Bedford, 23rd May 1995

During the early morning of 23rd May 1995, I set off from my house in Kempston to go to work at Bedford Prison. My route takes me along a stretch of the River Ouse between Queen's Park and the Star Rowing Club, Bedford, a walk that I have completed hundreds of times. This morning, like many others, I was in a "semi wake up mode", but, on crossing the Queens Park footbridge, I became aware of a single honking call. Expecting to see the pair of Canada Geese that had taken up territory here since early spring, I was naturally amazed to see this huge shape coming towards me from the direction of Kempston. It seemed to see me at the same time and began to lift and gain height sufficiently to change direction and head off north passing low over the roof tops of the Charles Wells brewery. Originally, it was level with me and may well have been resting in the meadow to the west of the bridge. It called on one more occasion as it disappeared from view. The whole event lasted for little more than a minute. After brief celebration, during which a local postman must have questioned my sanity, I hurried on to work where I immediately telephoned Dave Odell to spread the news.

The open areas to the north of Bedford were searched but the Crane was not relocated in the county. However, almost certainly the same individual was found two days later in Buckinghamshire and it later spent several days in Northamptonshire.

*Description: massive size, fairly long sweeping wings with distinctive fingers, fully extended neck and legs protruding beyond the tail made the identification easy. It was "escorted" by a diminutive looking Carrion Crow. The plumage was a fairly dull grey with some retained brown immature feathers, particularly along the scapulars. The white line along the neck was pronounced and easily visible, even with the naked eye. The bill was straight and pale in colouration. The underwing appeared two-tone created by the darker primaries and some secondaries contrasting with the remainder.*

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The local rarities panel unanimously accepted this record as constituting the first acceptable record of Common Crane for Bedfordshire (MJP).

The 1996 Buckinghamshire Bird Report has accepted this bird as a sub-adult. It was present at Little Horwell on 25th and 26th May 1995 (per A. Harding). The 1996 Northamptonshire Bird Report accepts this individual as a third-summer bird present at Maidwell between 1st and 4th June 1995, occurring over Charwelton on evening of 1st and being seen over Hertfordshire later on 4th (per Bob Bullock).

There have been two previous fly-over claims of Crane in Bedfordshire in the 1980s, but neither the two over Aspley Guise nor the two over South Mills NR were seen well enough or documented sufficiently to be accepted as the first record of Common Crane for Bedfordshire. Additionally, an escaped **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropides virgo*, which is quite similar to Common Crane in flight, was seen at Stewartby Lake and Rookery South CIP on 2nd October 1993. It had previously been seen in Humberside (per MJP).

## THE GARDEN BIRD FEEDING SURVEY – WINTER 1995/1996

by Barry Nightingale

### Introduction

The Bedfordshire Bird Club winter garden survey has now run for three consecutive winters, covering a 22 week period from November to March. Last winter 98 correspondents took part, compared to 101 in 1994/95 and 84 in 1993/94. That represents a tremendous involvement from the Club membership.

Many people commented on the low numbers of birds in their garden last winter, particularly in the first few weeks of the survey. This was also noted nationally and was discussed in the BTO Newsletter 202 (Jan–Feb 1996). The conclusion was that the cause was the result of a combination of a mixed breeding season in 1995, a very mild autumn and a super-abundance of tree and hedgerow fruits. Mention was made of the record level of beech mast which, judging on past studies, would have meant that Coal Tits in particular did not have to resort to artificial food.

Whatever the reason for the apparent drop in numbers, the variety of species held up, increasing in rural gardens from an average of 22 species during 1994/95 to 24 in 1995/96, and in urban gardens remaining constant at 18 species.

### The Results

Sixty-five different species were recorded last winter feeding in our gardens. Two species not included in either of the two previous winters were Merlin, seen in three gardens, and Black Redstarts seen in two. Conversely, two species seen in 1994/95 were not recorded – Corn Bunting and Sky Lark. Blackcaps increased their presence, from 19% of the gardens in 1994/95 to 35% last winter, and Sparrowhawks maintained their garden activity, being recorded from 47% of gardens compared to 45% in 1994/95.

There were significant increases for three other species: Wood Pigeon from 69% in 1994/95 to 77%; Long-tailed Tits from 60% to 77% and Redwings from 18% to 51%. That mirrored the national picture when enormous numbers of Redwings were to be found throughout the country. On the other hand, Siskins were very scarce in Britain throughout the autumn and winter and this too was reflected in the results of our survey. After being recorded in 50% of the gardens in 1994/95, they were only seen in 8% during last winter. Of a more worrying trend is that for Coal Tits, whose activity in our winter gardens has been progressively dropping during the last three winters, from 67% in 1993/94, to 48% last winter. Is that only to do with the beech mast crop?

Considering the record invasion of Bohemian Waxwings into the country last winter, and into Bedfordshire, it is surprising that nobody was fortunate enough to be able to include them in their survey results.

Table 1 shows all the species, now totalling 70, which have been included in the three years of the survey. It details the position of each species for each of the three years and also the percentage of gardens from which they were recorded. For the last two winters, the species in the "Top 20" have been the same but with one exception in that last winter Siskin dropped out (from 17th position to 37th) and Redwing leapt in (from 29th to 17th). It is clear by looking at the results from the three winters that the Blue Tit is the most consistent and frequent of visitors to our winter gardens.

**Table 1: List of species feeding in Bedfordshire gardens in winter**

Species	Position			% of gardens		
	1995-96	1994-95	1993-94	1995-96	1994-95	1993-94
BLUE TIT	1	1=	1=	100	100	99
HOUSE SPARROW	2=	1=	1=	99	100	99
STARLING	2=	1=	1=	99	100	99
BLACKBIRD	2=	4=	1=	99	99	99
ROBIN	5	4=	1=	97	99	99
GREAT TIT	6=	8=	7=	93	91	93
GREENFINCH	6=	7	6	93	94	95
CHAFFINCH	6=	6	7=	93	97	93
DUNNOCK	9=	8=	9=	91	91	92
WREN	9=	10	9=	91	90	92
COLLARED DOVE	11	11	11	90	87	83
SONG THRUSH	12	12	12	80	83	81
WOOD PIGEON	13=	13	14	77	69	69
LONG-TAILED TIT	13=	15	17	77	60	57
MAGPIE	15	14	13	71	66	75
PIED WAGTAIL	16	18=	16	54	45	61
REDWING	17	29	23=	51	18	24
COAL TIT	18	16	15	48	55	67
SPARROWHAWK	19	18=	27=	47	45	21
GOLDFINCH	20	20	25=	43	44	23
BLACK-HEADED GULL	21=	27	23	37	20	24
GREAT SPOT WOODPECKER	21=	21	20	37	34	29
CARRION CROW	23=	24	19	36	29	36
MISTLE THRUSH	23=	22	21	36	30	26
BLACKCAP	25	28	27	35	19	21
GOLDCREST	26	22=	22	32	30	25
JACKDAW	27	26	25	27	22	23
FIELDFARE	28	32	30	26	13	18
PHEASANT	29	30	34=	23	17	10
BULLFINCH	30	25	29	21	26	19
GREEN WOODPECKER	31	31	33	16	16	11
TREECREEPER	32=	34=	34=	14	11	10
ROOK	32=	34=	37=	14	11	8
YELLOWHAMMER	34	38=	37=	11	9	8
MOORHEN	35=	51=	46=	10	3	4
MALLARD	35=	41=	46=	10	6	4
NUTHATCH	37=	34=	37=	8	11	8
TAWNY OWL	37=	49=	46=	8	4	4
SISKIN	37=	17	18	8	50	42
JAY	37=	33	31	8	12	17
REED BUNTING	37=	44=	34=	8	5	10
GREY WAGTAIL	42=	41=	41=	7	6	6
LINNET	42=	53=	46=	7	2	4
GREY HERON	42=	44=	41=	7	5	6
KESTREL	45	37	46=	5	10	4
FERAL PIGEON	46=	40	32	4	8	15
MARSH TIT	46=	49=	43=	4	4	5
STOCK DOVE	46=	51=	46=	4	3	4
COMMON REDPOLL	46=	44=	43=	4	5	5
RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE	46=	44=	57=	4	5	1
LITTLE OWL	46=	44=	46=	4	5	4
COMMON GULL	46=	-	53=	4	0	2
WOODCOCK	53=	58=	57=	3	1	1

BRAMBLING	53=	41=	43=	3	6	5
MEADOW PIPIT	53=	53=	-	3	2	0
MERLIN	53=	-	-	3	0	0
CHIFFCHAFF	57=	38=	37=	2	9	8
COMMON SNIBE	57=	58=	57=	2	1	1
LESSER SPOT.WOODPECKER	57=	58=	53=	2	1	2
BLACK REDSTART	57=	-	-	2	0	0
PEAFOWL	61=	53=	-	1	2	0
WATER RAIL	61=	57	-	1	1	0
COOT	61=	58=	-	1	1	0
WILLOW TIT	61=	53=	53=	1	2	2
GREY PARTRIDGE	61=	58=	-	1	1	0
CORN BUNTING	-	58=	53=	0	1	2
SKYLARK	-	58=	-	0	1	0
GOSHAWK	-	-	57=	0	0	1
BARN OWL	-	-	57=	0	0	1
TREE SPARROW	-	-	57=	0	0	1

The total number of weeks that each species was recorded has also been calculated. The "Top 20" is shown in Table 2. This is an attempt to identify the most regular visitors, but not necessarily the most numerous. Table 2 also shows the numbers of records in each of the three winters as a percentage of the potential number of records, considering the different number of gardens which were covered in each winter. For example, 98 gardens were surveyed in 1995/96. The survey lasted for 22 weeks, so potentially each species could have been recorded  $98 \times 22 = 2156$  times. Blue Tits were recorded 1,993 species/weeks from the 98 gardens, or 92% (as a proportion of the potential 2156). Similar figures have been calculated for the previous two winters and the percentages shown indicate the relative increase or reduction in the frequency of appearance.

**Table 2: The top 20 most regular species winter 1995-96**

Position	Species	Number of records 95-96	% of potential records		
			95-96	94-95	93-94
1	BLUE TIT	1993	92	88	89
2	HOUSE SPARROW	1959	91	91	91
3	BLACKBIRD	1879	87	88	92
4	STARLING	1851	86	86	91
5	ROBIN	1697	79	78	79
6	DUNNOCK	1558	72	73	74
7	GREENFINCH	1447	67	61	68
8	CHAFFINCH	1402	65	63	67
9	COLLARED DOVE	1360	63	58	54
10	GREAT TIT	1340	62	64	67
11	WREN	887	41	43	43
12	MAGPIE	779	36	30	28
13	WOOD PIGEON	695	32	32	34
14	SONG THRUSH	606	28	34	32
15	LONG-TAILED TIT	436	20	13	14
16	COAL TIT	408	19	22	26
17	GREAT SPOT.WOODPECKER	273	13	13	10
18	PIED WAGTAIL	267	12	8	13
19	CARRION CROW	226	10	10	10
20	PHEASANT	209	10	7	3

Significant decreases are shown for Blackbird, Starling, Great Tit, Song Thrush and Coal Tit. Significant increases are apparent for Collared Dove, Magpie, Long-tailed Tit and Pheasant. Siskin is no longer in the "Top 20" but it is worth mentioning that it was only recorded on 1% of the potential opportunities in 1995/96 compared to 11% in 1994/95 and 9% in 1993/94.

### **Species Accounts – Herons to Rails**

Grey Herons were seen in just seven gardens and Mallards in ten. Rural gardens with ponds, are, not surprisingly, the preferred choice.

Sparrowhawks were seen in 47% of gardens in the last winter, a dramatic increase from the winter of 1993/94 when they were seen in 21% of gardens. Even so they are probably still under-recorded, a forlorn pile of feathers left on the lawn often being the only suggestion that they have paid a visit. Of the 46 gardens that attracted Sparrowhawks, 22 were in urban areas, confirming the very widespread nature of this species in our county. Prey species noted included Blackbird, Redwing, Collared Dove and House Sparrow. The addition of Merlin to our garden bird feeding list was a surprise, particularly as they were recorded from three gardens, from Blunham and Biggleswade in March and Ickwell in November.

Both partridge species maintain just a tenuous hold as garden feeding birds with Red-legged seen in 4% and Grey Partridge in only 1%. It is extremely unlikely they will ever become more frequent than that but Pheasant is increasing its presence, seen in 23% of our gardens, compared to just 10% in 1993/94. Moreover, their frequency is increasing, up from 3% of potential occasions in 1993/94 to 10% last winter. Perhaps because of the more severe weather last winter, Moorhens were more obvious, seen in 10% of the gardens and Water Rail, normally that most secretive of feeders remained loyal to the waterside garden along the River Ivel, where it was again photographed by the lucky owner of the garden.

### **Waders to Woodpeckers**

Waders, not surprisingly, are extremely unusual visitors to our gardens, and only Woodcock and Common Snipe figure on the list. Similarly, two species of gull were recorded: Common Gulls returned after a bleak winter in 1994/95 and Black-headed Gulls increased their presence, appearing in 37% of gardens and moving up to 21st position in Table 1.

Wood Pigeons are very much on the increase in our gardens, from 69% in 1994/95 to 77% last winter. As noted previously, they are more frequent in our urban gardens, in 82% compared to 71% of rural gardens. They are also amongst the most regular of our visitors, as are of course Collared Doves which are firmly placed in the "Top 10" of most regular species. Seen in 90% of our gardens, they are almost equally distributed between urban (88%) and rural (92%) sites.

Both Tawny and Little Owls appear in our gardens in winter, although in the bottom half of the list, but Barn Owl has still to appear on the list after three winters, reflecting the scarce status of this species in the county.

The last three winters have seen a small but steady increase in the percentage of gardens from which the Great Spotted Woodpecker has been reported, from 29% to 34% and, most recently, 37% in 1995/96. Green Woodpeckers are reasonably familiar in 16% of gardens with a distinct bias towards rural gardens but Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers remain extremely uncommon visitors.

### **Wagtails to Thrushes**

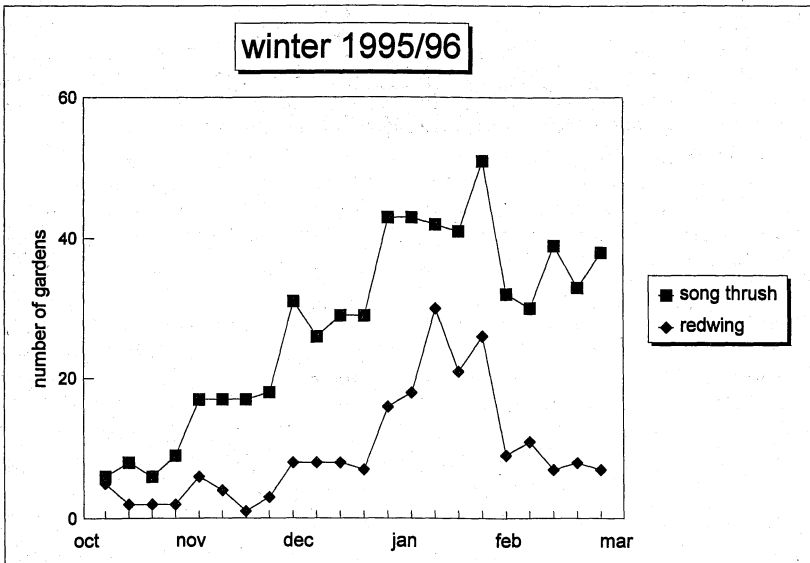
Grey Wagtails appeared in one urban and six rural gardens whilst Pied Wagtails remain



much more widespread being recorded in about half the gardens during the three winters with a small preference for urban sites.

The status of the Wren in our gardens has remained very stable for the last three winters, consistently appearing in the "Top 10" of garden visitors, as has the Dunnock. The latter was the sixth most frequent feeder in our gardens last winter. Both species show a small preference for rural gardens. Often considered to be the most typical of our garden birds, the Robin has slipped from first place in 1993/94 to fifth, but was still seen in 97% of all gardens, and was in fact seen in all the rural gardens taking part. The Blackbird too remains an integral part of our garden scene, appearing in 99% of the gardens in each of the three winters. However, the percentage of appearances compared to the potential has fallen, from 92% in 1993/94 to 88% a year later and to 87% last winter (Table 2).

Much has been written about the decline of the Song Thrush and we can only ponder on what results we would have seen if we had started this survey several years earlier. At least the status over the last three years has been stable, appearing in around 80% of our gardens. Again there is a preference for rural gardens, seen in 88% compared to 72% of urban sites. Perhaps all is still not well, as it only appeared on 28% of the potential occasions, which is less than half that of Great Tit, for example. They were also rather scarce in the first part of the winter, being recorded in less than 20 gardens in each of the first eight weeks of the survey. That is clearly shown in Graph 1, which would also seem to indicate a build up during the winter in line with the increasing records of Redwings. This might indicate that many of "our" Song Thrushes were in fact winter visitors from farther afield. Mention must go again to the Redwing, seen in 51% of our gardens in 1995/96, including 42% of our urban gardens, and this reflects the very large flocks which roamed our countryside last winter. Almost as surprising were the appearances of Fieldfare, found in 26% of all gardens including 43% of rural sites.



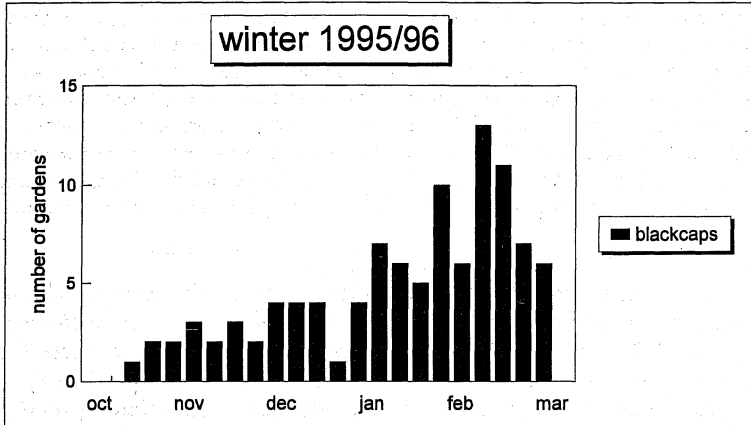
Graph 1: Number of gardens recording Redwing and Song Thrush, Winter 1995/96

### Warblers to Treecreeper

Perhaps the most pleasing result from the survey so far has been the confirmation of the significant status of the Blackcap as a winter feeder in our gardens, recorded last winter from 35% of gardens taking part. This indicates a dramatic increase over the previous two winters. Rural gardens are more favoured, appearing in 42%, spurning to some degree the extra warmth and shelter in urban gardens. Unlike the previous winter, where appearances peaked during December and early January, numbers built up gradually in 1995/96 as the winter continued, the peak occurring between mid-February and mid-March (Graph 2).

The Chiffchaff is the only other warbler to appear on the list, and it took a relatively dramatic drop, seen in only 2% of gardens compared to 8% and 9% in the previous two winters. Conversely, Goldcrests increased their presence in our gardens, recorded from 32% during last winter, compared to 25% in 1993/94 and 30% in 1994/95.

One of the positive developments in the survey has been the increase in frequency of Long-tailed Tits feeding in our gardens. Five observers noted this may well be a new phenomenon. Long-tailed Tits are now 13th in Table 1, seen in 77% of gardens last winter. The number of occurrences also increased, from 13% of the potential in 1994/95 to 20% in 1995/96.



Graph 2: Number of gardens recording Blackcap, Winter 1995/96

The Coal Tit is becoming less apparent in our gardens, from 67% of gardens in 1993/94 to 48% in 1995/96. Blue Tits remain in number one spot whichever way we analyze the results, being seen in all gardens for the last two winters, the only species to have done so. Great Tits too remain consistent as a feature around our bird feeders, particularly in rural gardens where they were seen in all of those covered during last winter. Both Marsh and Willow Tits remain scarce as garden visitors, particularly the latter, again reflecting their general status in Bedfordshire.

Nuthatches were seen in eight gardens, mostly on the Greensand Ridge, but records were also received from the Ivel Valley at Blunham and from the Luton and Studham areas. Treecreepers were seen in 14 gardens, all except two in rural areas.

### Crows to Starlings

The Magpie maintained its high profile, seen in 71% of gardens, showing little preference for rural over urban sites. It has appeared more frequently over the three winters, from 28% of the potential in 1993/94 to 30% in 1994/95 and now to 36% in 1995-96. The Carrion Crow

is the next most regular corvid to visit our gardens, being seen in 36% last winter and showing only a slight preference for rural sites. (Incidentally, long-term studies in Kensington Gardens, London, show that Carrion Crows are more numerous there than House Sparrows!).

Whilst both Jackdaws and Rooks appeared in more gardens last winter than in the previous two, Jays are becoming scarce in our gardens, seen in only 8% during last winter.

Starlings remain a very widespread visitor to our winter gardens, seen in at least 99% of gardens through each of the three winters. After a drop in the number of records between 1993/94 and 1994/95, the situation levelled out for last winter.

### **Sparrows to Buntings**

According to the results from the three winters, the regularity and spread of House Sparrows throughout our gardens has changed little. Our survey does not attempt to measure how many of each species visit each garden, but casual observer comments indicate that over the three year period the numbers of House Sparrows have declined.

Two members of the finch family, the Chaffinch and the Greenfinch, appear in both Tables 1 and 2 with about equal status. There has been no significant change for either species over the three winters. During 1995/96, both appeared in 88% of urban gardens and 98% of rural sites.

After a dramatic increase between 1993/94 and 1994/95, the status of the Goldfinch has stabilised. In contrast, the numbers of gardens visited by Siskins last winter fell dramatically, from 50% in 1994/95 to 80% in 1995/96. That reflected the national picture for this delightful finch, which was absent from many areas throughout the autumn and winter.

Linnets, Lesser Redpolls and Bramblings all remain scarce visitors to our gardens. Of the buntings, the most regular is the Yellowhammer but was seen in only 11% of the gardens. Reed Buntings are less regular still and, not surprisingly, Corn Buntings disappeared from the list of species seen last winter after managing only token appearances for the previous two.

### **Conclusion**

We continue to be indebted to the willing band of bird club members who took the time to complete the survey forms. After three years many interesting patterns are emerging and it is our intention to continue with the survey into the future. One regret is that we did not start collecting this data say twenty years ago. We can only wonder what changes may have occurred over that time in our winter gardens.

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## **COMMON BUZZARD BREEDING IN BEDFORDSHIRE**

**by Barry Nightingale**

On 26th February 1995, during one of my regular visits to the Southill Estate, I watched a Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo* hunting back and forth for about ten minutes. Two more Common Buzzards then appeared higher in the sky and one started doing a "roller coaster" display flight. They continued to circle higher until almost lost to sight, then dropped lower with one (the male) swooping down with wings partly closed whilst the other (the female) continued to soar. Whilst this was going on I was joined by the head gamekeeper, Mr W. Siddons, and we discussed, as we had before, the possibility of them breeding nearby.

On my next visit, on 19th March, I had just a single sighting of a solitary Common Buzzard. On 16th April there were no sightings of this species at all.

On 24th April 1995 Mr Siddons, whilst cutting back brambles within the Estate area, heard a Common Buzzard calling softly nearby. The next day he was working in the same area and he saw two Common Buzzards close by, and noticed what he thought could have been a nest site. After contacting me we made arrangements to both visit the site on 6th May.

As we approached the area I noticed a Common Buzzard dropping quietly out of a tree. Through a telescope it was clear that there was indeed a nest. The tree was a spruce about 18 metres high, in a mixed copse of birch, ash and sweet chestnut with an understorey of hawthorn and brambles. The nest was three metres from the top of the tree, was about 60cms wide and about 30cms deep and was not as large as I expected it to be. It was built close to the trunk, and despite it being in a rather spindly tree was surprisingly difficult to see. After photographing the site we left to avoid further disturbance.

My next visit was on 4th June. Two Common Buzzards flew away from the copse as I approached. There was a brief display flight with one circling above the other, lasting for about ten minutes. They were calling continuously and they then broke off and started to hunt. I decided not to approach any closer.

I had agreed with Mr Siddons that we should avoid visiting the actual nest site during the incubation period. My next visit therefore was on 25th June when I estimated that, if the breeding cycle was continuing, then any eggs would have already hatched. As I approached the copse two Common Buzzards were calling anxiously about 400 metres away. The nest was somewhat bulkier than I could recall from my previous visit. Through my binoculars I was able to see some white feathers around the rim of the nest and what looked like a large brown lump near to the tree trunk. Through my telescope the "lump" turned out to be a fully grown juvenile Common Buzzard. It was basically dark brown in colour with some fluffy white down around the top of the bill, and a few downy feathers on the crown. Somewhat elated at this I left the site.

On 16th July there was no sign of the young in the nest, although I could hear Buzzard calls from a nearby copse. On subsequent visits the young Common Buzzard was seen flying singly and with its parents within the near vicinity of the nesting copse.

This constitutes the first proved breeding of Common Buzzard in Bedfordshire this century.

### **Status of Common Buzzard in Bedfordshire**

In *The Birds of Bedfordshire* (Trodd and Kramer 1991) the Common Buzzard is described as a regular, mainly autumn visitor and potential occasional breeder. They made reference to confirmed breeding in Putnoe Wood, where a female was shot on the nest, and at Oakley where a female met a similar fate, both these reports coming from the second half of the nineteenth century.

During the last 20 years or so Common Buzzards have been reported more regularly in our county, mostly from the large estates at Woburn, Luton Hoo and in particular Southill. Indeed, the area between Warden Great Wood, Old Warden and Chicksands Wood has gained the popular tag of the "Raptor Triangle" by local birders.

In 1986 an immature Common Buzzard was seen during July and August with two

adults in the Battlesden area and it was thought probably to have bred in the area.

On the Southill Estate, Common Buzzards have long been a regular autumn and winter visitor. For instance, in 1983 up to five were present from October to December. During 1994 Common Buzzards were seen virtually all year and by the autumn there were probably seven present in the Estate, with five seen together at one time. It is quite probable that they have bred in the Southill area on previous, recent occasions.

### **Status of Common Buzzard nationally**

Nationally, Common Buzzard breeding densities are greatest in areas with pasture, hedgerows and small woods which provide plenty of small mammal and rabbit prey. The Southill Estate has plenty of this type of habitat, although we were concerned that the current dearth of rabbits on the Estate might have precluded the Buzzards from successfully rearing young.

The main concentrations in the UK are in Scotland, away from the Central Lowlands, in Wales and in England west of a line from the Solent to Avon, and Cumbria. There are very few breeding pairs east of a line drawn between The Wash and London, and in the new breeding Atlas possible breeding took place in only seven of the 10Km squares in East Anglia during 1988–91 (Gibbons, Reid and Chapman 1993). Since the first national breeding atlas survey in 1968–72 there have been some gains along the eastern edge of the population range, although it is thought possible that continuing persecution by some gamekeepers is still a limiting factor on their ability to spread. For example, a Common Buzzard was found shot at Studham in October 1992, although it was not discovered who the culprit was. Fortunately the Southill Estate employees do not share this prejudice.

Currently the British population of Common Buzzards is estimated at 12–17,000 territorial pairs.

### **Status of Common Buzzard in counties bordering Bedfordshire**

In *The Birds of Hertfordshire* (Gladwyn and Sage 1986) the Common Buzzard was described as a regular visitor with probably one or two pairs breeding at least intermittently. However, this was based on circumstantial evidence. In *The Breeding Birds of Hertfordshire* (Smith, Dee *et al* 1993) it was stated that “the bird’s status as a breeding species can be no higher than possible”. In Buckinghamshire, since the late 1970s there have been records of possible breeding activity in most years involving one locality with up to three pairs attempting to breed or hold territory (Lack and Ferguson 1993). Incidentally, the Buckinghamshire record was the most easterly breeding record in the new Atlas.

There are no recent breeding records from Cambridgeshire.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank The Southill Estate, firstly for informing me about the nest site, and secondly for allowing me full access. I should also place on record their enlightened attitude towards an avian predator which, ironically, has chosen to nest within a game rearing area.

## SUMMARY

During the summer of 1995 a nest site for Common Buzzard on the Southill Estate was periodically monitored. One young Common Buzzard was successfully reared, which constitutes the first proven breeding record for Bedfordshire since the second half of the nineteenth century.

## REFERENCES

- TRODD and KRAMER 1991 *The Birds of Bedfordshire*  
GIBBONS, REID and CHAPMAN 1993 *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988-1991*  
LACK and FERGUSON 1993 *The Birds of Buckinghamshire*  
SMITH, DEE, et al 1993 *The Breeding Birds of Hertfordshire*  
GLADWYN and SAGE 1986 *The Birds of Hertfordshire*

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## CORMORANT – ATTEMPTED BREEDING IN BEDFORDSHIRE

by Barry Nightingale

During my January visit to Southill Lake I noted that 23 Cormorants, *Phalacrocorax carbo* were present, a high count for this site, and most were adults.

On my next visit on 26th February 1995 I was somewhat surprised to see a pair of Cormorants using one of last year's Grey Heron nests. The male, as it turned out to be, was sitting on the nest, displaying frantically to a female standing close by.

The two birds were easily recognisable, as the male was a *sinensis* type, that is to say the head and upper neck were covered in silver-grey feathers, except for a narrow band of black surrounding the bare face patch, and a short, black crest rather like a Mohican haircut. This does not necessarily mean however that this bird was of the race *sinensis*. The female was typically a *carbo* type.

Display involved vigorous throwing back of his head, with the bill almost touching his back. The tail of the male bird was pointed straight up in the air and fanned out wide. Once, when the female flew around the island, the male responded dramatically by holding his tail up, and "flapping" his wings but whilst holding the primaries close in to his body. The head was thrown back, and was also shaken from side to side. When the female landed she climbed onto the nest where a great deal of affectionate (if you can call a cormorant that) mutual neck and head rubbing took place.

The male was seemingly annoyed by live twigs of the Ash tree in which the nest was built, that were growing up through the edge of the nest. Several attempts were made to break these off. He also took pieces of Ivy, and after shaking them furiously, placed them around the edge of the nest. The female also engaged in placing greenery around the nest edge.

After more bill intertwining, and with the male taking hold of the female's bill, copulation then took place, lasting about three seconds. After the male dismounted the female threw her head back once, and then both birds continued with enthusiastic

twig re-arrangement and placement of greenery, passing it between them before placing it around the nest.

Once, the male left the nest but quickly returned with new twigs which, after a brief tug-of-war between male and female, were added to the nest structure by the male. Mutual preening followed and when I left the site two and a half hours later the male was still frantically displaying.

According to Graham Ekins, who has extensively studied the large nesting colony of Cormorants at Abberton (Essex) the behaviour suggested that egg-laying was perhaps just two or three days away. Certainly at that time 180 pairs of Cormorants were already sitting on eggs at Abberton Reservoir.

On my next visit, on 19th March 1995, there were no adult Cormorants present, just two sub-adults loafing around. Curiously, a pair of Grey Herons had regained the nest that the Cormorants had been using. The nest site incidentally was the highest and most dominant on the island.

Although unsuccessful (for whatever reason) on this occasion, this seems a forerunner of things to come. There are now over 1000 pairs nesting inland in Britain and we are situated on the fly lines between the major colonies at Rutland Water, Little Paxton, the London reservoirs and Abberton. Numbers on the continent are also increasing by 20% each year so it seems that, unless there is sustained intervention by man, the prophecy in the recent *Breeding Birds of Bedfordshire* will come true. That is to say that "it is surely only a matter of time before the Cormorant is confirmed to breed within the county boundary".

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## **BIRD RINGING REPORT 1995**

### **Report of the Co-ordinator**

The year produced a much reduced total than that of the previous year, not due necessarily to downward population trends, although Willow Warbler totals were low, but more due to low ringing activity and adverse weather conditions. A total of 2611 birds of 62 species were ringed. Species of note included Great Crested Grebe, Nuthatch, Grey Wagtail and Stonechat. Nice to see was the total of 53 Siskin caught at Stockgrove Park, a species, up to now, not caught in any great numbers in the county.

Looking at the recoveries received for the period, the highlights once again go to those Trans-Saharan migrants, where recovery rates are low but when received can be spectacular. The Blackcap KK09005 ringed at Priory on the 13th September 1994 and recovered approximately 1 month later at Taaunate, Fes, Morocco, shows not only the route but timing and speed of this species, covering 1982 km in 32 days. The Sedge Warbler J272949 ringed at South Mills on the 6th July 1995 and recovered a month later in France fits well into the species migration patterns, using France as a stopping off point to fatten up having crossed the channel. The Reed Warbler H597935 once again shows the value of ringing effort put in at the wintering ground of Djoudj, Senegal. Interesting to note the date of capture of this individual, 3rd April 1994, in relation to that of H460744 which was caught at Priory on the 28th of April 1995, an early date for Reed Warbler return to the county.

**RINGING TOTALS FOR 1995**

Great Crested Grebe	1	Grey Wagtail	1	Goldcrest	37
Mute Swan	60	Pied Wagtail	37	Long Tailed Tit	183
Mallard	3	Wren	89	Willow Tit	1
Sparrowhawk	4	Duncock	86	Marsh Tit	1
Kestrel	5	Robin	77	Blue Tit	148
Moorhen	1	Nightingale	2	Great Tit	135
Lapwing	6	Redstart	2	Nuthatch	2
Redshank	1	Stonechat	1	Treecreeper	9
Wood Pigeon	4	Blackbird	79	Magpie	2
Collared Dove	6	Song Thrush	26	Carrion Crow	1
Cuckoo	1	Redwing	13	Starling	29
Little Owl	2	Mistle Thrush	2	Chaffinch	90
Kingfisher	2	Grasshopper Warbler	6	Greenfinch	107
Green Woodpecker	4	Sedge Warbler	172	Goldfinch	39
Great Spotted Woodpecker	5	Reed Warbler	148	Siskin	53
Skylark	4	Lesser Whitethroat	40	Linnnet	11
Sand Martin	106	Whitethroat	65	Redpoll	7
Swallow	182	Garden Warbler	42	Bullfinch	58
House Martin	44	Blackcap	79	Yellowhammer	10
Tree Pipit	2	Chiffchaff	46	Reed Bunting	122
Yellow Wagtail	2	Willow Warbler	108	<b>Total</b>	<b>2611</b>

Other recoveries of note, relating to summer migrants, show the southerly migration of Sand Martin and Sedge Warbler with recoveries in Icklesham, from Cumbria, and Dartford in Kent respectively. The Whitethroat seen on the Isles of Scilly on return migration shows the value of colour ringing to aid recovery rates.

Moving to some of the winter migrant recoveries, Siskin showed well, with K0J4624 ringed at Linslade on the 18th of February 1995, retrapped at Stockgrove on 1st April 1995 and found subsequently dead in Denmark on the 22nd April 1995. The other Siskin recovery is that of H871497 ringed at South Mills on the 8th November 1994 and controlled on 10th May 1995 in Highland, Scotland. These two recoveries give some indication of the origin of our wintering Siskin population.

Of note longevity wise are the Swift, SA60547, and Mute Swan, Z49600, 11 and 10 years respectively. Mute Swans are long lived birds, often the case with a species of that size; the Swift however is of particular note considering its journeys to and from Southern Africa in the intervening years – quite incredible.

Once again my thanks go to those active ringers for the submission of their records without which this report would not be possible, providing us with an insight into the movement and origins of some of the counties species. Even with the lower ringing totals the year has still proved to be an interesting one.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

G. Buss, E.C. Newman (Ivel Ringing Group), J. Rimes, P.J. Wilkinson.

DUNCAN WOODHEAD



**SELECTED LIST OF RECOVERIES & CONTROLS****Age (Euring Notation)**

- 1 nestling or chick not yet flying  
 2 fully grown, year of hatching not known  
 3 hatched during calendar year of ringing  
 4 hatched before calendar year of ringing, exact year unknown  
 5 hatched during the previous calendar year  
 6 hatched before the previous calendar year, exact year unknown  
 7 hatched two years before the calendar year of ringing

**Sex**

- M sexed as a male on plumage or cloaca  
 F sexed as female on plumage, brood patch or cloaca  
 J birds which are still recognisable in juvenile plumage

**Manner of recovery**

- v caught or trapped & released with ring  
 vB breeding when caught  
 vv ring number read in field (includes colour rings)  
 + shot or killed by man  
 xF found dying or freshly dead  
 xL found long dead  
 // manner of recovery unknown  
 = sexed on recovery

Species	Ring Number	Age Rec	Ring/Rec Date	Recovery Location	Distance (km)	
Grey Heron	212890	1	17.05.94	Hornso, Jylland, Denmark		
			xF	01.07.95	Nr East Hyde	768km
Mute Swan	Z49600	6M	09.02.85	Bedford		
			vv	17.12.95	Priory Park	
	Z70048	1	24.02.90	Bedworth Slaughts, Warks		
		v	29.01.95	Bedford	80km E	
	Z76669	1	15.05.92	Rolleston Park, Staffs		
Greylag Goose	5175504		v	29.01.95	Bedford	113km SE
		3JM		26.06.93	Harrold CP	
			x	18.11.95	The Mere, Deeping St James, Lincolnshire	56km N
Kestrel	ES64940	1	31.05.95	Coleshill, Amersham, Bucks		
			vP	24.08.95	Dunstable SW	29km N
Swift	SA60547	4	26.05.84	Harrold GP		
			v	14.06.95	Marston Sewage Works, Lincolnshire	85km N
Sand Martin	K075034	3	05.08.95	Jericho Moss, Mawbray, Cumbria		
			v	06.09.95	Priory Park	355km
	J497172	3F	16.07.94	Ledburn Quarry		
			v	16.08.95	Icklesham, Sussex	145km S
House Martin	J781675	3	02.10.94	Sandwich Bay Estate, Kent		
			vF	05.08.95	Nr East Hyde	136km
Sedge Warbler	H460357	3J	21.06.92	Priory Park		
			v=M	30.06.93	Priory Park	
			v	18.06.94	Priory Park	
			v	08.07.95	Priory Park	

	H460589	4M	25.07.92	Priory Park	
		v	16.07.93	Priory Park	
		v	18.06.94	Priory Park	
		v	16.06.95	Priory Park	
	J272949	3J	06.07.95	South Mills	
		v	19.08.95	Et de Trunvel, Finister, France	551km SSW
	J511100	3J	05.08.95	South Mills	
		v	09.08.95	Icklesham, Sussex	153km SSE
	J511104	3J	05.08.95	South Mills	
		v	12.08.95	South Mills	
		v	03.09.95	Dartford P.Stn, Kent	85km SSE
<b>Reed Warbler</b>	H460744	5M	07.08.92	Priory Park	
		v	28.04.95	Priory Park	
	H597935	3J	19.08.92	Houghton Regis ChP	
		v	03.04.94	Parc du Djoudj, Senegal	4185km SSW
<b>Whitethroat</b>	J030.....	3	(03.08.93)	Waterloo Thorns	
		vv	01.05.95	St Agnes, Scilly Isles	492km WSW
<b>Blackcap</b>	KK09005	5F	13.09.94	Priory Park	
		xF	(15.10.94)	Taounate, Fes, Morocco	1982km S
<b>Chiffchaff</b>	3S4629	P	24.05.93	Halton, Bucks	
		v=M	30.03.95	Priory Park	43km NNE
<b>Willow Warbler</b>	7X4984	3	15.08.91	Icklesham, Sussex	
		v=M	27.06.93	Waterloo Thorns	
		v	30.04.95	Waterloo Thorns	152km NNW
	3S8974	3JM	17.07.93	Waterloo Thorns	
		v	20.04.94	Portland Bill BO, Dorset	236km SW
	8X6791	3J	21.07.93	Kenfig Pool, Mid Glamorgan	
		v=M	01.05.94	Priory Park	238km ENE
<b>Goldcrest</b>	5W7814	3	18.10.94	South Mills	
		v	14.01.95	Little Marlow STW, Bucks	70km SSW
<b>Long Tailed Tit</b>	5F8024	4F	11.08.91	Priory Park	
		v	11.04.93	Priory Park	
		v	12.03.94	Priory Park	
		v	21.10.95	Priory Park	
<b>Great Tit</b>	VK17413	P	25.05.94	South Mills	
		//	11.04.95	Ligate, Suffolk	57km E
<b>Greenfinch</b>	VH63586	3F	17.11.90	Limbury, Luton	
		xF	02.10.94	Winchmore Hill, Gtr London	37km SE
<b>Siskin</b>	H871497	3M	08.11.94	South Mills	
		v	10.05.95	Logie Hill, Highland	669km NNW
	H759414	6M	04.02.95	Flitwick, Beds	
		v	02.04.95	Stockgrove Park	92km
	J674137	5F	15.02.95	Capel, Surrey	
		V	01.04.95	Stockgrove Park	92km
	K014624	6M	18.02.95	Grasmere Way, Linslade	
		v	01.04.95	Stockgrove Park	
		xL	22.04.95	Ikast, Jylland, Denmark	796km

## BIRD RECORDERS

Mr Martin J. Palmer, 48 Gilbert Close, Kempston, Bedford, MK42 8RN  
Mr Dave Odell, 74 The Links, Kempston, Bedford, MK42 7LT

Answer-phone (for incoming messages only): 01234 857149

### THE BIRD CLUB

The Bedfordshire Bird Club was set up in 1993 by birdwatchers, from both inside and outside the Society, to cater for their specialist needs. Its main functions are to record and document the avifauna within the county and to provide a forum for local birdwatchers. Members receive the annual bird report as Part 2 of the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* and also receive a bi-monthly newsletter, *The Hobby*, and programmes of indoor and outdoor meetings. The winter meetings are held on the last Tuesday of the month between September and April at Maulden Village Hall. Field meetings are equally spread between venues with a bird interest within the county and much further afield. The Club has a very active core of its membership participating in both locally and nationally organised surveys.

For membership details, write to: Hon. Membership Secretary (BBC), 28 Chestnut Hill, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, Beds. LU7 7TR.

### THE SOCIETY

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society was formed in 1946 and its main function is to record the flora and fauna of the county. For this purpose it has over twenty active Recorders who cover most branches of natural history study and whose annual reports are published in Part 1 of this Journal. Members also receive a quarterly newsletter, *The Muntjac*, and programmes of meetings. These latter include field meetings to sites having a natural history interest within the county and occasional meetings further afield. During the winter months there are illustrated lectures, normally held at one of the following places: Bedford, Dunstable, Luton, Aspley Guise or Flitwick. The Society depends on the annual subscriptions which are devoted entirely to carrying out its work, as all officers are honorary. Membership is open to anyone, whether resident in the county or not.

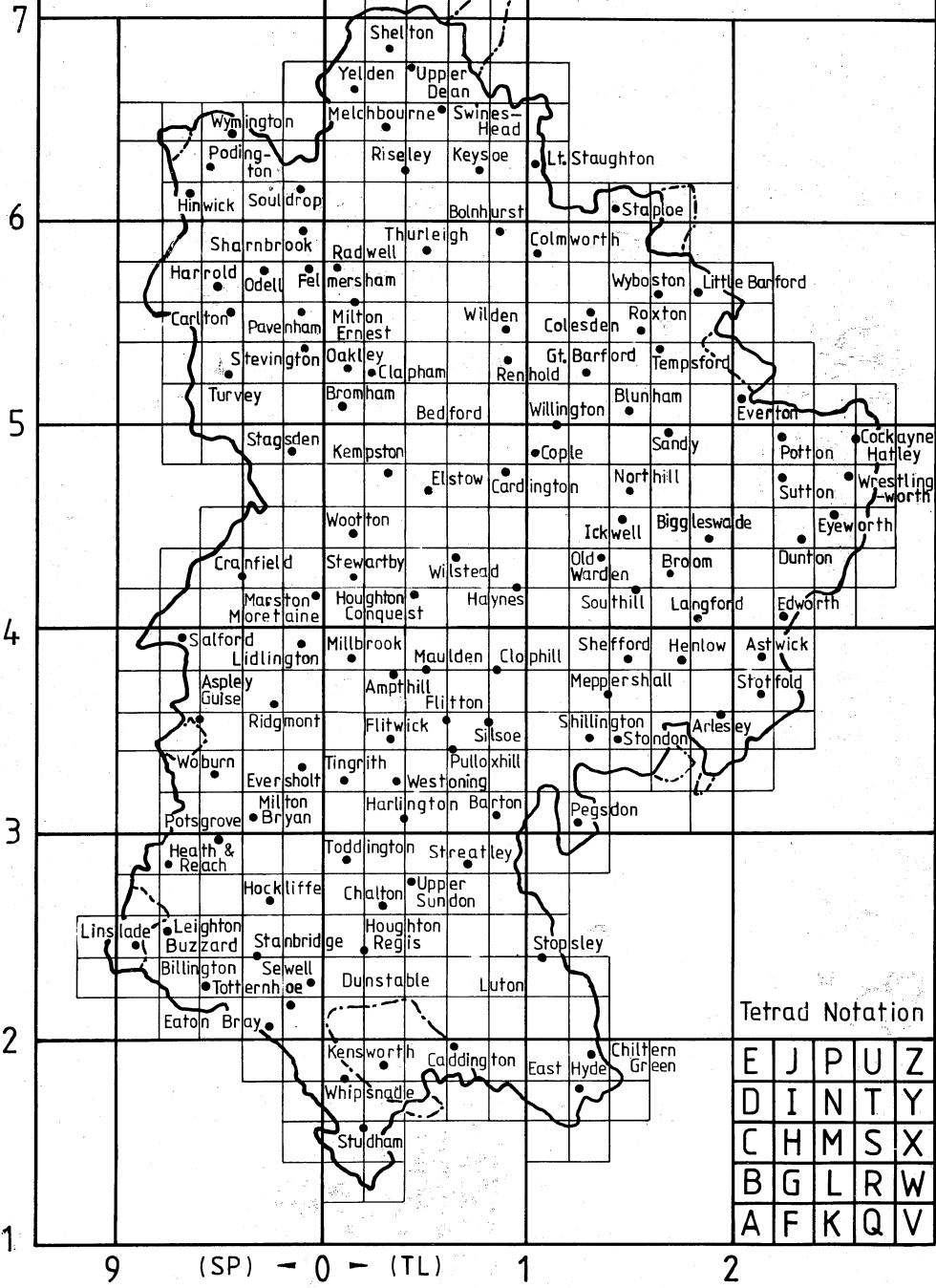
The *Bedfordshire Naturalist* is the official journal of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society, a body which has been the prime contributor to botanical and zoological knowledge of the county. Published since 1946, the journal is noted for its original papers on all aspects of natural history, especially distribution, status, population, habitat and field ecology. It caters for the professional and amateur alike and aims for the middle ground. Guidelines are obtainable from and relevant papers are welcomed by the Editor.

Editorial address:

BNHS, c/o Bedford Museum, Castle Lane, Bedford, MK40 3XD

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# BEDFORDSHIRE



## Tetrad Notation

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