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*The Bedfordshire Bird  
Report for 1996*



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# BEDFORDSHIRE BIRD CLUB 1996

(Established 1993)

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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. 51 (1996) – part 2**

**Edited by R.A. Brind**

**Assistant Editors: Peter Smith and Barry Nightingale**

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**Front cover:** Storm Petrel, *Dave Odell*

**Acknowledgements:**

The Society would like to thank Bedford Borough Council for grants towards the publication of the Journal this year.

## REPORT OF THE BIRD CLUB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR 1996

After the small decline in membership of the club at the end of 1995, the General Committee continued to develop and publicise the club in 1996. This resulted in the club's highest membership, 273, since it was founded in 1993.

The AGM in February saw some major changes to the committee with David Kramer, Kevin Sharpe and Errol Newman all standing down from senior positions after four years. They were succeeded by Dr Tim Sharrock as President, Barry Nightingale as Chairman and Graham Goodall as Research Officer. Kevin Sharpe remained on the committee as an ordinary member and David Kramer was co-opted.

In March, the first of the club's two surveys started – one being the second year of the Lady Amherst's Pheasant Survey. The other survey is the very popular Winter Garden Bird Survey, now entering its fourth year.

There was continued correspondence with the Newhaven Bird Club in the USA and with Long Point Bird Observatory in Canada both of which are "twinned" with the Bedfordshire Bird Club.

On 23rd November, the 8th Bedfordshire Bird Conference took place. This successful event was held at Silsoe Agricultural College and was again ably organised by Paul Trodd.

The Bird Club continued its programme of meetings for members with nine indoor and seventeen field meetings. The latter included nine meetings in Bedfordshire plus a weekend trip to Portland Bill, Dorset in September.

Around Christmas, the third joint Christmas and New Year sponsored bird race took place, this time in association with the South Beds. RSPB members group. Half of the sponsorship monies raised went towards the RSPB Sky Lark Research Project.

The latter half of the year saw some further changes to the Committee with Andy Whitney, Graham Goodall and Lindsay Puddephatt having to stand down for a variety of reasons. Kevin Sharpe took over as acting Secretary and Assistant Treasurer whilst Phil Cannings became acting Research Officer.

The Committee wishes to thank everybody who helped throughout the year both in front and behind the scenes in all aspects of the Club's activities.

Hon. Acting Secretary

## PROCEEDINGS

### Indoor Meetings

- 28th Ordinary Meeting** 25th January, Aspley Guise, "The Brilliant Kingfisher" by Mr Barry Mason, a joint meeting with the BNHS. Chair: Miss S.Alliez.
- 29th Ordinary Meeting** 30th January, Maulden. "Club Members Evening". Chair: Mrs B. Matthews.
- 4th Annual General Meeting** 27th February, Maulden. Chair: Mr D. Kramer, followed by our "President's Address" by Mr D. Kramer.
- 30th Ordinary Meeting** 26th March, Maulden. "The Language of Birds" by Mr John Wyatt. Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 31st Ordinary Meeting** 24th September, Maulden. "Thrice Bittern in Poland" by Mr John Wyatt. Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 32nd Ordinary Meeting** 29th October, Maulden. "European Seabirds" by Dr Peter Evans. Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 8th Bedfordshire Bird Conference** 23rd November, Silsoe. Chair: Mr P.Trodd.
- 33rd Ordinary Meeting** 26th November, Maulden. "Making Birdwatching Count" by Mr Richard Bashford. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.
- 34th Ordinary Meeting** 17th December, Maulden. "Quiz Night", a light-hearted birding quiz. Chair and Quizmaster: Mr M.J. Palmer.

### Field Meetings

- Essex** 18th February. Wintering birds. Leader: Mr M. Williams.
- Gull Watch** 2nd March. Looking at wintering gulls in the Marston Vale. Leader: Mr D. Odell.
- Woburn Estates** 17th March. Looking at the local birds of the area. Leader: Mr P. Smith.
- Blows Downs** 21st April. Spring migrants. Leader: Mr R. Dazley.
- Maulden Woods** 5th May Dawn chorus. Leader: Mr P. Trodd.
- Dunstable STW** 8th May. Passage waders and other migrants. Leader: Mr P. Trodd.
- Sheppey and the North Kent Coast** 19th May. Waders and breeding birds. Leader: Mr A. Whitney.
- Wavendon Heath** 12th June. Local breeding birds. Leader: Mr B. Nightingale.
- The Brecks and North Norfolk** 23rd June. Species special to the areas. Leader: Mr D. Green.
- Maulden Woods** 14th July. A demonstration of bird ringing. Leader: Mr P. Cannings.
- Earls Barton GPs and the Nene Valley** 18th August. Passage waders. Leader: Mr T. Moon.
- Portland Bird Observatory** 27th to 29th September. Bird ringing and passage migrants. Leaders: Mr D. Green and Mr D. Odell.
- North Norfolk** 20th October. Waders and passage migrants. Leader: Mr K. Sharpe.
- Slimbridge, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Reserve** 10th November. BNHS Golden Jubilee visit. Leader: Mr D. Green.
- Priory CP and Willington GP** 15th December. Wintering birds. Leader: Mr K. Sharpe.

## BIRD REPORT FOR 1996 Report of the Recorders

### INTRODUCTION

As usual we are grateful to BBC and BNHS members and all those others who submitted records for 1996. As in 1995, around 2,500 record cards were received, many crammed with individual sightings. Please submit your records on the correct record cards rather than a list involving several species which then has to be transcribed on to 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 are 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.

The review of the year was written by Dave Odell, the species report compiled by Martin Palmer (non-passerines) and Dave Odell (passerines). As in recent years, we are pleased to extend our thanks to our small group of willing volunteers who helped in various ways with the preparation of this report. In particular, thanks are again due to Peter Almond who analysed and wrote onto record cards all the relevant entries from the log books kept at Rookery South CIP and, additionally, wrote onto record cards those submissions that were only submitted in list form, thus duplicating the effort needed to include them in this analysis. Peter Smith, Barry Nightingale and Tracy Buck also helped to conclude this, the largest bird report yet produced. 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, S.Alliez (SA), P.Almond (PA), D.Anderson, S.Augsberger, D.H.Ball (DHB), W.Barrett (WB), R.I.Bashford (RIB), 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, P.Cannings, L.Carman (LC), R.M.Catchpole (RC), M.Clark (MC), A.Cutts (AC), J.A.W.Davis, G.Dawes (GD), R.Dazley (RD), T.Donnely (TD), R.Dunham (RDD), L.G.R.Evans (LGRE), P.Fawcett, P.Ford, M.S.Garner (MSG), 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), S.Kinsey, J.P.Knowles (JPK), D.Kramer (DK), A.J.Livett (AJL), P.& R.Madgett, R.& B.Matthews (RM,BM), J.Mayhead (JM), D.Mellor (DM), 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'Neill (JO'N), K.Owen (KO), D.C.Palmer (DCP), J.C.Palmer (JCP), M.J.Palmer (MJP), D.Parsons, T.Peterkin (TP), M.Pocock (MP), A.Proud, A.Randall

(AR), M.D.Rayment (MR), T.Robson (TR), M.D.Russell (MDR), B.Scott (BS), E.M.Sharrock (EMS), K.M.Sharpe (KMS), J.T.R.Sharrock (JTRS), W.Siddons, P.& K.Sims (PFS), D.Smith, P.Smith (PS), R.A.Spain, B.R.Squires (BRS), A.N.Stephens (ANS), M.J.Stevens (MJS), J.D.Swann (JDS), C.Tack (CT), J.B.Temple (JBT), R.R.Toomes (RRT), J.K.Trew (JKT), P.Trodd (PT), K.R.& M.Weeden (KR&MW), J.Whinnet, A.Whitney (AW), P.G.Wilkinson, M.Williams, S.G.Williams (SGW), 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 1996

1996 will long be remembered as an excellent year for birds and birdwatching in Bedfordshire. The start of January saw a Red-crested Pochard and an Eider remaining from 1995 at Rookery South CIP. On New Year's Day, a Wood Lark, a rare wintering record, and a Kittiwake was found by the same team of birders participating in the Bird Club's Bird Race. At least three Glaucous Gulls, three Iceland Gulls and a Mediterranean Gull were all found in the massive brick pits roosts. Good numbers of sawbills were located as the weather turned colder, including a county record of 44 Goosanders at Grovebury SP. Also seven Smew flew over Priory CP. A Dark-bellied Brent Goose, a White-fronted Goose and a Grey Plover were all found at Radwell GP and five Whooper Swans flew over Houghton Regis. A Bittern, in the now regular site at the west end of Brogborough Lake, was occasionally seen well. At least five Waxwings during the month were the forerunner of an influx of these delightful birds. A few Common Buzzards were seen, mainly in the "raptor triangle" near Old Warden. Increasing numbers of Cormorants were found including a staggering 141 counted at Harrold-Odell CP at the beginning of February.

In February, up to three Shags and four Red-breasted Mergansers were at Stewartby Lake. Another Dark-bellied Brent Goose was also seen at this site. Nearby 16 Waxwings were at Marston Moretaine and another 35 were found at Flitwick, with a minimum of 95 Waxwings in the county during the month. Another Red-necked Grebe was at Brogborough and a Great Northern Diver spent some days at Stewartby Lake. A first-winter Scaup, by contrast, was at this site for only a few minutes. 2,450 Common Gulls were counted at the Stewartby Lake roost. A Razorbill found on a road at Clifton was part of a wreck of seabirds that was recorded in adjoining counties. Two Tundra Bean Geese delighted local birdwatchers at Radwell GP.

Fifty more Waxwings were seen in March, wintering Ring Ouzels were at Houghton Regis and Luton and another Red-necked Grebe was at Brogborough Lake. A dog returned from its walk in Millbrook Woods with a Puffin in its mouth. A large area of set-aside in the north of the county attracted a Hen Harrier and other raptors. A Slavonian Grebe was at Priory CP, a Kittiwake at Tiddenfoot WP and a Pink-footed Goose near Kempston. Common Scoter typically moved through with 17 at Brogborough Lake. Fifty Tree Sparrows were at Boughton End and a Firecrest was at Ampthill. The first passage Wheatears and Black Redstart were seen from mid month onwards. The Wood Larks returned to a site in the west of the county.

April saw a Green-winged Teal at Dunstable STW and 11 Waxwings were still in the county. A Spotted Crake was glimpsed at South Mills, five Pied Flycatchers were found

and an early Swift was at Priory CP on 17th. May saw an Osprey also at Priory CP and another was seen at Rookery South CIP and later at Old Warden. Red Kites were rumoured to be in the Chicksands area. Wood Warblers were seen at two localities but Willow Tits were only regularly observed at Tiddenfoot WP. Common Buzzards bred again at last year's site. Lady Amherst's Pheasants appeared to be in serious decline in their British stronghold. Grasshopper Warblers were also difficult to locate in 1996, another once common bird that is decreasing.

June saw a Nightjar at Aspley Heath. Long-eared Owls bred successfully there and at a few other sites on the Greensand Ridge and on the chalk downland. Two Quail called south of Biddenham. Four Black-tailed Godwits during the month were the forerunner of an unprecedented influx of this elegant wader, up to 100 being recorded during the autumn passage. Unseasonal June reports included a Firecrest at Langford and a Kittiwake at Priory CP. July saw the first of the autumn's Marsh Harriers at Rookery CIP. More Red Kites were located and Black Redstarts bred at a Luton factory.

August was fairly quiet in the county with the highlights being a Knot and a Peregrine at Rookery South CIP, and at Knocking Ho two Pied Flycatchers. September, by contrast, was a very exciting month for Bedfordshire's birdwatchers. At least two Curlew Sandpipers and Spotted Redshanks delighted the wader enthusiasts. An influx of Little Stints occurred with a record nine being seen together. The first Red-backed Shrike for 18 years was at Priory CP. A Black-necked Grebe was at Willington GP, a Kittiwake at Stewartby Lake and three Sandwich Terns at Rookery South CIP. A long-staying Wryneck at Rookery South CIP was extremely popular and attracted an appreciative audience. The excitement continued into October when a Spoonbill was found at Rookery South CIP, the only previous record being in 1916. Another Red-backed Shrike spent a few days near Sandy. After strong gales, a Grey Phalarope and a Storm Petrel were found at Stewartby Lake and some very elusive Bearded Tits were found at Brogborough Lake. Another Hen Harrier and up to five Short-eared Owls stayed in the north of the county and three Black Redstarts were at Flitwick.

November saw two Shags, a late Black Tern and a Gannet at Stewartby Lake, a Fulmar flew over Luton and a Peregrine was seen at Rookery South CIP. Additional Red-necked Grebes were found at Priory CP and Stewartby Lake. December saw an exceptionally late Little Stint at Rookery South CIP. A few white-winged gulls were noted in the brick pit roosts, three Smew and a Red-breasted Merganser were at Grovebury and a Knot was at Stewartby Lake. Cormorants continued to increase in numbers, much to the annoyance of anglers, and 191 were counted at Harrold-Odell CP, 142 at Stewartby Lake and 130 at Brogborough Lake.

In summary, a total of some 199 species were accepted as occurring in the county during 1996 which is rather better than during other recent years. The Razorbill was the third county record but the first to be seen alive! The Bedfordshire county list remains as a post-war total of 269 and the complete total at exactly 280 which includes Feral Pigeon and Yellow-legged Gull but excludes, for the present, Snow Goose.



## SYSTEMATIC LIST FOR 1996

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 by which breeding population levels of common birds are monitored in the UK.

\* 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.

## Non-passerines

### Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

A rare winter visitor. One stayed at Stewartby Lake from 22nd February until at least 6th March (PS, PT *et al*). On 10th March, it was reported from Rookery South CIP flying towards Stewartby Lake (KO per Rookery log).

### Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

This common species remains widespread throughout the county's wetlands but also remains generally under recorded. Breeding was proved with young seen at Brogborough Lake, Houghton Regis ChP, Rookery South CIP, Southill Lake and Willington GP. Breeding season presence was also noted at Manor Farm Lakes, Lower Caldecote. Winter maxima included eight at Blunham Lake in January and ten at Stewartby Lake in January followed by 12 in February. Eighteen were counted there on 31st December. The highest site count of the year came from Rookery South CIP on 30th August with 28 adults and a single juvenile (PA). On 4th February a "brick-pit count" totalled 44 (SGW).

Monthly maxima at selected sites:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo		5+ n/c	3+	6	5	n/c	n/c	n/c	5	n/c	n/c	0
Rookery South CIP	n/c	n/c	8	4	6	6	n/c	29	21	10	n/c	n/c

### Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

This is a common breeding bird. Often to be found in large numbers, in severe weather, on deeper waters.

Confirmed breeding at Felmersham NR, Langford Lakes, Priory Business Park, Bedford, Priory CP, Southill Lake, Tiddenfoot WP, Willington GP and Woburn Park. Breeding season presence at Coronation CIP, Dunstable STW, Luton Hoo, Rookery North CIP, Rookery South CIP, Steppingley Reservoir, Manor Farm Lakes and Warren Villas NR near Lower Caldecote.

Peak winter counts were from Stewartby Lake with 171 on 5th February (PA), c.55 on 13th November (PA) and 144 on 29th December (MW). Three at Bromham Lake NR on 3rd April were the first record for this site (PA). The only other notable count, away from those sites tabled, was a gathering of 22 at Radwell GP on 17th November (MDR).

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coronation CIP	2	4	6	5	5	7	6	6	6	2	2	2
Luton Hoo	11	4	13	11	9	n/c	n/c	n/c	2	n/c	2	0
Priory CP	16	30	23	18	15	19	23	16	16	18	37	17
Rookery North CIP	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	0	1
Rookery South CIP	n/c	n/c	48	n/c	24	25	23	n/c	n/c	9	n/c	n/c
Stewartby Lake	74	171	41	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	15	6	c55	144

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

A rare winter visitor. There were six records in 1996. A winter plumaged adult was at Brogborough Lake on 3rd–22nd February (RDD, MW *et al*) with possibly the same at Chimney Corner North CIP on 2nd (DJO) and 23rd March (RAN). A partial summer plumaged adult was at Priory CP from 17th to 28th November (DK, PA, TP *et al*). Another, considered a darker individual, was at Stewartby Lake on at least 13th (JB) and 28th November (PA). Two were at Stewartby Lake on 26th December (RAN), one remaining until 30th (RAN, PS).

**Slavonian Grebe** *P. auritus*

A scarce vagrant. After a blank 1995, there were at least four in 1996. A winter-plumaged adult was at Stewartby Lake spasmodically from 4th–28th February and then on 2nd and 6th March (KMS, PT, SGW *et al*). A duskier individual was at Priory CP from 28th February until 6th April when it was assuming summer plumage (ECN, DK, TP, ANS *et al*). On 4th October, a winter-plumaged adult was at Rookery South CIP (PA). The same, or another was at Priory CP on 7th–8th October (ECN) and possibly the same at the same location and in similar plumage on 13th November (ECN). Lastly, a winter plumaged adult was at Stewartby Lake on 26th December (RAN, PN, MJG).

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

A scarce migrant. Recently less regular. Only one in 1996, a presumed juvenile that was elusively present at Willington GP from 8th to 14th September (PS, TP *et al*).

**Fulmar** *Fulmaris glacialis*

One over Waller Avenue, Luton on 12th November was the seventh county record (RD), and the first since 1989.

**Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus*

With only one previous record this century, at Brogborough Lake in 1983, one at Stewartby Lake early on 29th October remained to be seen by many observers throughout the day. It became increasingly moribund, drifting pathetically the following morning and harassed by a Black-headed Gull on a number of occasions before being taken into care mid morning on 30th. A photograph by Dave Odell adorns the front cover of this report (PT, DJO, MJP, ANS, PS *et al*).

**Gannet** *Sula bassana*

A seabird which rarely reaches Bedfordshire, there were only seven records between 1946 and 1981. An adult found at Stewartby Lake on the morning of 13th November remained until 15th November, also visiting Brogborough Lake on 14th but returning to Stewartby Lake to roost (RAN, DHB *et al.*).

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant. The highest counts included 68 on 21st March and 63 on 13th December at Priory CP; c.50 at Brogborough Lake on 3rd February and 44 on 5th March; 144 at Harrold-Odell CP on 29th February, then 191 on 26th November and 148 to roost on 14th December; c.80 at Stewartby Lake on 4th February and 176 on 29th December; 68 on 10th February at Rookery South CIP; 17 on 18th February at Southill Lake; 17 on 21st February at Radwell GP and 31 on 29th January at Bromham Lake NR.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bromham Lake NR	31	7	8	6	3	1	2	2	2	6	7	6
Coronation CIP	9	8	3	4	1	1	3	1	1	2	4	2
Dunstable STW	2	3	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	17	3	3	4	4	4
Harrold-Odell CP	133	144	51	17	2	n/c	4	10	50	50	191	148
Priory CP	30	68	54	12	9	8	8	3	3	6	24	63
Rookery South CIP	20	68	34	n/c	7	7	14	19	29	23	14	7

The greatest numbers occurred at either end of the year with populations centred on Harrold-Odell CP and Stewartby Lake. The paucity of counts from Brogborough Lake was again disappointing as this is one of the main roost sites in the county. The mid-winter population is around 400. A colour-ringed juvenile seen at Battlesden Lake on 28th July had originally been ringed at Abberton Reservoir, Essex as a chick. Further ringed birds were seen at Harrold-Odell CP, one bearing a red ring no.7 on 10th February. It was seen again on 16th when a "*sinensis*" present bore a red ring B on its right leg. This latter bird was seen again on 22nd February. On 11th April a, first-summer bore FJ in white on a black ring on the left leg and another J3 in black on a red ring on the left leg. On 13th and 19th October, at Bromham Lake NR, a Cormorant present bore a white 75 on a black ring on the left leg and a BTO ring on the right leg. Feedback on the likely origins of these birds would be welcomed. Birds showing characters of the continental race, *P.c.sinensis*, were seen, particularly at Priory CP, with one regularly in January, at least five during February, peaking at ten on 20th, then eight during March. One was at Harrold-Odell CP on 16th February – see above – and another was at Southill Lake on 21st February. Four were at Stewartby Lake on 7th February and one on 3rd March then possibly the same four were at Rookery South CIP on 10th February.

**Shag** *P. aristotelis*

A scarce, almost annual visitor. At Stewartby Lake, up to three on 4th February (PT, KMS *et al.*) and two on 13th November (PT). An adult was photographed at Brogborough Lake on 4th December (RAN).

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*

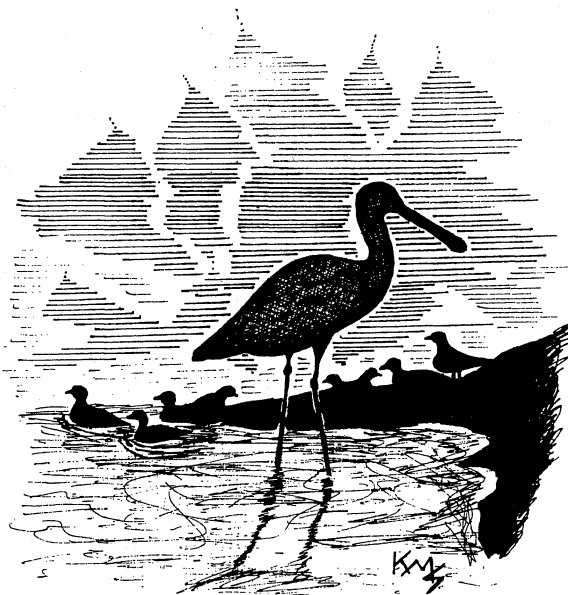
This species was formerly a rare winter visitor to Bedfordshire but has recently been annual. Brogborough Lake was again the favoured locality with one on 27th–28th January (PS, TR *et al.*), perhaps the same as in previous winters. A report of its presence on 21st January was not documented – see Appendix A.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

This is a common and widespread primarily resident species. The four heronries in the county all had successful seasons. The largest at Southill Lake had a maximum of 17 nests occupied. At Luton Hoo there was a maximum of 13 occupied nests. They also bred successfully at Harrold-Odell CP, there being one nest occupied, and at Bromham Hall two nests were occupied. Grey Herons were present throughout the year at Priory CP, numbers peaking in the summer with 15 on 12th June. They were also present throughout the year at Dunstable STW, though never more than eight were seen. The highest count received from Harrold-Odell CP was of nine on 8th June. Small numbers were regular at Coronation CIP and Rookery South CIP although the peak counts were only of six in February at the former and five on 3rd November and 9th December at the latter.

**Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*

Nationally 1996 was an excellent year for this species but the occurrence of a first-winter bird at Rookery South CIP on 1st October was nonetheless remarkable. It remained until around 07.45 on 2nd October before flying off high west but had been enjoyed by many of the county's birders (RAN, PS *et al*). The only previous record in Bedfordshire concerned a party of three at Renhold on 24th March 1916.



Spoonbill

Kevin Sharpe

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*

This species is widespread about the county's wetlands and rivers. Breeding was noted at Battlesden Lake, the R. Ouse at Bedford and Bromham, Brogborough Lake, Dunstable STW (where all six young were predated by foxes), Felmersham NR, Harrold-Odell CP, Langford GP, R. Ouzel near Leighton Buzzard, Manor Farm Lakes, Lower Caldecote, Priory CP area (five sites), Rookery South CIP, Stewartby Lake, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Steppingley Reservoir and Tiddenfoot WP. Attempted breeding was also reported from

Bromham Weir, Felmersham NR, R. Ouse at Kempston, Willington GP and Woburn Park. There was no breeding again at Luton Hoo and no breeding reports were received from Chalton STW, Chimney Corner CIP, Coronation CIP, East Hyde, Houghton Regis ChP, Millbrook Pillinge, and R. Ouse, Oakley. Apart from those tabled below, large gatherings involved up to 53 at Harrold-Odell CP between 26th and 29th December, 81 at Radwell GP on 19th May, 76 there on 8th June, 45 there on 17th September and 89 along the R. Ouse, Bedford on 7th August. At Rookery South CIP, one carrying an orange leg ring with the number 280 on 25th May and another, numbered 265, on 23rd August.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coronation CIP	15	10	10	11	6	6	6	9	16	10	12	11
Rookery South CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	39	40	22	47	74	77	77	73
Stewartby Lake	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	74	78	42	11	6	11	12
Woburn Park	43	36	31	23	10	n/c	5	8	8	9	32	42

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

A scarce but fairly regular winter or passage visitor, there were three records in 1996. Four flew east over Priory CP on 2nd January one of which bore a blue neck collar indicating that it had been trapped on its breeding ground on the Nenetki State Game Reserve, north-west Russia before 1995 (DK). Up to 42 were alongside the R. Ouse at Radwell GP on 26th February (SGW, DJO, JDS, MJP, PS *et al*) but flew off north before dusk. Sixteen, including a grey juvenile, were at Harrold-Odell CP on 29th December between 08.15 and 09.05 before heading off north (JM).

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

There were no fully acceptable records of this less than annual winter visitor to Bedfordshire but see Appendix A.]

**Bean Goose** *Anser fabalis rossicus*

Two fully described Bean Geese found at Radwell GP on 26th February (SGW, PS, DJO, MJP, JDS *et al*) and remaining until at least 29th March constitute the first record of the race *rossicus* for the county. (See article on page 88).

**Pink-footed Goose** *A. brachyrhynchus*

This is a rare winter visitor. A single at Chimney Corner North CIP and later seen at the nearby Kempston "Borrow Pits" on 24th March (PN, MJP) was seen again in this vicinity on 31st March (PS).

**White-fronted Goose** *A. albifrons*

A scarce winter visitor, there were six records after a blank 1995. One was with Greylags at New Road GP, Sandy on 14th January (TR). At least one of a party of four grey geese over Priory CP on 22nd February was accepted as this species (ECN). One was seen with Greylags at Radwell GP on 17th–23rd February (JB, RD *et al*). Another was with Greylags at Southill Lake on 17th March and 21st April (BJN). Possibly the only truly wild sighting concerned two adults and four immatures over Priory CP on 14th December (DK).

**Greylag Goose** *A. anser*

A fairly common feral resident widespread throughout suitable waters in the county. Breeding was noted at Brogborough Lake, Southill Lake, Langford Lakes, Harrold-Odell CP and Felmersham NR. It is probable that breeding occurred at other sites but was not recorded. Large gatherings included c.300 at Harrold-Odell CP on 21st and 225 on 25th January and c.500 there on 26th September. At Felmersham NR, 45 were counted on 20th April. At Radwell GP, c.200 were present on 21st February and 375 on 19th

October. Sixty were at Southill Park on 18th February and 17th March and 130 were there on 15th December. On 1st September, 102 were at Langford Lakes, 48 were at Coronation CIP in September and autumn counts at Rookery South CIP ranged from 35 on 15th August to 71 on 3rd November, peaking at 78 on 22nd September.

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

Hybrids were recorded from Harrold-Odell CP with one or two present on various dates between 3rd January and 4th July. One was seen at Stewartby Lake on 7th February, a single was seen at Rookery South CIP on four dates in August and one was near Great Barford bridge on 6th December.

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

A common but feral resident species with breeding noted at Barton-le-Clay, R. Ouse, Bedford, Bromham Lake NR (failed), Coronation CIP, Dunstable STW, Felpersham NR, Luton Hoo, Priory CP, Rookery South CIP, Southill Park, Willington GP and Woburn Park. No breeding reports were submitted for East Hyde, Harrold-Odell CP or Langford Lakes, sites where Canada Geese were successful in 1995.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coronation CIP	173	39	35	39	47	40	36	75	368	53	11	n/c
East Hyde	315	378	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	241	468	450+	n/c	n/c
Luton Hoo	91	107	117	c60	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	0	48
Priory CP	98	79	38	27	56	61	54	38	162	167	82	164
Rookery North CIP	n/c	n/c	2	2	4	10	25	31	74	31	n/c	n/c
Rookery South CIP	53	n/c	n/c	n/c	32	37	148	450+	233	n/c	n/c	n/c
Southill Park	70	47	72	32	41	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c
Stewartby Lake	n/c	139	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	117	n/c

Selected high counts about the county away from the tabled sites included 121 at Chimney Corner CIP in November and 47 in December, 46 at Dunstable STW on 15th August, c.50 at Harrold-Odell CP on 21st January, 170+ on 26th September and 108+ on 29th December, 65 at Woburn Park on 21st July, 49 there on 26th August and 55 on 16th November. No spring counts were received from Radwell although this remains a regular site for the species as witnessed by 414 present there on 19th October and 426 counted on 17th November!

**Barnacle Goose *B. leucopsis***

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 with confirmed breeding at Harrold-Odell CP where a pair were seen with four goslings on 13th May and from near Barton-le-Clay where a pair with one youngster was seen on 23rd June. A pair with one well grown young was at Rookery South CIP on 16th August. No count reached double figures. A maximum of six were in the brick-pits area, six were in the Harrold-Odell-Radwell complex, and one or two were noted elsewhere. The Bedfordshire population trundles along in single figures. Culling of the Canada Goose population from time to time restricts any expansion as a few Barnacle Geese are probably also shot.

**Dark-bellied Brent Goose *B. bernicla bernicla***

A rare winter visitor which has become increasingly regular since the 1980s in line with a dramatic expansion in the world population. One at Radwell GP from 21st-31st March (JB *et al*), probably different from one seen on 2nd February at Stewartby Lake (JG) and briefly at Coronation CIP and later Millbrook Pillinge CIP, Stewartby Lake and Rookery South CIP on 4th February (RAN, DJO, SGW *et al*).

**Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

A regular but uncommon winter visitor and scarce breeder. At Grovebury SP a pair, displaying on 28th April, had two downy young by 9th June. Five other non-breeding adults were present. One of the youngsters survived to flying stage by 30th June and by 21st July was two-thirds the size of its parents (PS). At Dunstable STW, after regular sightings from January onwards, with a peak of five in March, a pair were noted during the breeding season (including copulating) and the female disappeared for several weeks and possibly bred on site although no firm evidence was obtained (PT). The first for the year at Rookery South CIP 3rd January. Five at Priory CP on 25th January and ten at Rookery South CIP. In April five at Willington GP 16th, and three at Priory CP on 20th, and then two over there on 8th May and again on 16th May. One at Rookery South CIP on 15th May, the same day as two at Coronation CIP. In June singles at Priory CP on the 5th and 11th. In August, two at Radwell GP on 4th, ten at Rookery South CIP on 15th, including four immatures, then up to three between the 16th and 25th. The only September record was of an immature at Rookery South CIP on 3rd. In October, one at Priory CP on 24th then two at Rookery South CIP on 29th. Five at Brogborough Lake on 22nd December then nine on 30th when one over Priory CP.

**Mandarin** *Aix galericulata*

It is difficult to assess numbers of this secretive resident. Confirmed breeding reports came from Luton Hoo and Woburn Park. At Stockgrove CP, a maximum of 16 in January up to nine in March, 14 in October and 19 in November. Along the R. Ouse through Bedford one to four drakes between 17th February and 19th April and two drakes had returned there by 29th October but no females were seen at all. A drake was at East Hyde on 1st January and a female on 5th October. At Eversholt Lake, a maximum of about 20 in January and 12 in February. A pair there on 11th May. At Kempston Mill, a maximum of three drakes along R. Ouse several times during January and February. Single drakes at this location on 20th October and 2nd November and two drakes on 27th October and 21st December. At least six pairs were reported breeding in Woburn Park by the head gardener. (per BJN). Counts from this locality included up to seven in March, up to three in May, two in August, nine including three immatures in September and 16 in October. The November population was estimated at c.40. In Luton Hoo, a maximum of three in March and April, and seven adults and seven young – perhaps representing two broods – on 9th July, then five on the 3rd November. At Dunstable STW, where they are rare, two on 17th April. At Twin Bridges, a pair on 12th and 13th April, the drake remaining until the 14th. A pair at Great Barford on 1st June and a female at Bromham Lake NR on 26th June. Three drakes at Southill Lake on 15th September and a pair on the R. Flit at Clophill on 29th December.

**Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

The highest count of the year was 400 at Radwell GP on 29th March (PT). Other counts from this underwatched site were 29 on 15th February, four on 8th, six on 17th and 35 on 24th September then 179 on 17th November and about 20 on 28th December. Inevitably, the tabled figures here do not reflect the true population of this widespread winter visitor to Bedfordshire. At Harrold-Odell CP, the last in spring were two on 11th May and high counts here were 338 on 10th February, 260 on 26th September and 262 on 4th October. At Rookery South CIP, the highest counts were 165 on 3rd February and 129 on 21st September with the last in spring on 8th April and first in autumn on 15th August. At Priory CP, the last in spring was on 3rd April and the first of the autumn were ten on 5th September with the highest count of the year there being 59 on 24th November. On 9th February, 104 were grazing by Manor

Farm lakes, Lower Caldecote. At Chimney Corner CIP the maximum count was 27, and counts of less than 20 were received from Bromham Lake NR, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Luton Hoo, Rookery North CIP, Southill Lake, Stewartby Lake, Tiddenfoot WP and Woburn Park. The foregoing proves the northerly bias of this species within the county and preference for larger shallower waters with relatively undisturbed adjacent grazing.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coronation CIP	71	25	57	6	0	0	0	3	33	40	31	53
Harrold-Odell CP	100+	338	24	19	1pr	0	0	n/c	260	262	165	186
Priory CP	25	34	25	n/c	0	0	0	0	27	6	59	10
Rookery South CIP	80	165	86	16	0	0	0	6	129	70+	c98	90+
Willington GP	n/c	n/c	163	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	3	40+	80+

During October to December, c.50-80 at Willington GP included one individual apparently showing some white on the underwing. This was possibly the putative hybrid drake American Wigeon seen at this site in adult plumage in early 1997 (DHB).

**Gadwall** *A. strepera*

Records came from 22 sites for this common winter visitor. Successful breeding was recorded at Luton Hoo and Dunstable STW, the former site holding the maximum count of the year with 105 on 29th September (AJL). Other good counts were 76 at Luton Hoo on 7th April and c.60 at Rookery South CIP on 16th November.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	32	40+	35	76	16	n/c	n/c	n/c	105	n/c	53	37
Dunstable STW	12	16	26	17	3pr	3pr	n/c	maximum	Aug to Dec = 27			
East Hyde	4pr	35	11pr	9pr	3pr	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c
Rookery South CIP	n/c	n/c	18	2	10	14	n/c	15	9	16+	60	14
Priory CP	10	8	6	2	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	2
Stewartby Lake	n/c	22+	n/c	2	n/c	n/c	n/c	6	12	12	16	10
Coronation CIP	7	4	2	0	0	0	0	5	10	4	20	6
Woburn Park	11	12	7	n/c	1	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	3	9	4
Harrold-Odell CP	n/c	15	n/c	3	1	n/c	n/c	n/c	3	n/c	19	n/c

Records from 12 other localities were received, with the highest counts of 20 at Radwell GP in November and 18 at Willington GP in March.

**Teal** *A. crecca*

A fairly common winter visitor and a scarce breeder, this species was reported from 18 sites but, for the second year, no breeding was reported. Furthermore no records were received from Priory CP or Willington GP.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chimney Corner CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	11	19	21	15
Coronation CIP	87	76	17	6	n/c	n/c	n/c	39	46	51	62	58
Dunstable STW	41	35	28	21	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	27	25	25	31
Harrold-Odell CP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	2	n/c	7	8	8
Luton Hoo	54	4	n/c	3	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	11	n/c	37	14
Rookery North CIP	51	14	12	4	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	10	23	37	40
Rookery South CIP	n/c	20+	35	n/c	n/c	2	5	10	70	n/c	125	27
Southill Lake	8	6	21	1pr	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	3	4	13	12

Additional reports came from ten other sites. In the first winter period, up to five at



East Hyde, seven at Brogborough CIP, nine at Bromham Lake, six at Eversholt and 30 at Radwell GP. Fifteen were along R. Ouzel at Leighton Buzzard 1st April. In the second winter period, one at Basin Pond, Woburn on 14th September and nine at Stewartby Lake in November.

A drake showing the characters of the North American race *A. crecca carolinensis*, known as the **Green-winged Teal**, was discovered at Dunstable STW on 2nd April and remained there until 16th April (PT *et al*). It was seemingly accompanied by a female Teal though whether this was a partner from North America or Europe cannot be certain. This drake represents the third county record of this race.

### **Mallard** *A. platyrhynchos*

A very common, mainly resident species. Breeding, though undoubtedly widespread, was only reported from five sites. About 20 pairs bred at Dunstable STW with the first ducklings on 12th May. Two broods at Brogborough Lake on 27th May. A brood of three at Coronation CIP in May and several broods at Luton Hoo in August. At Priory CP, 15 pairs produced 67 young of which 24 survived – the cold May resulting in a poor breeding season. Females with young were also at Rookery South CIP.

#### *Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chimney Corner CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	17	24	19	21
Coronation CIP	42	24	23	14	18	21	22	37	52	42	26	32
Dunstable STW	112	85	81	75	n/c	n/c	n/c	71	82	129	141	132
Felmersham NR	29	25	4	2	4	0	12	14	14	31	79	51
Luton Hoo	120+	51	c50	c50	32	n/c	n/c	n/c	198	n/c	96	c25
Millbrook P. CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	11	17	25	30
Priory CP	92	84	21	22	17	44	84	88	86	129	51	46
Rookery North CIP	47	26	8	10	20	32	44	46	52	49	47	37
Southill Lake	51	31	19	16	8	n/c	33	150	96	129	18	20
Stewartby Lake	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	59	65	71	64
Woburn Park	156	121	81	73	26	n/c	37	53	67	125	143	240

Despite being so well watched, there was insufficient data from Rookery South CIP to tabulate. There were 187 along the R. Ouse between Kempston and Bedford on 8th January. A pair on joint-recorder Dave Odell's small pond on 16th March were his garden birds of the year!

### **Pintail** *A. acuta*

An uncommon but regular visitor during both winter periods but invariably in small numbers. There were more records in 1996 than for a number of years. As in 1995, a good series of records came from Rookery South CIP with a pair on 6th and 13th January then four males and a female on 14th. A drake on 31st January and 3rd February and three there on 15th. In March two on 6th and 7th, four on 17th, through to 3rd April. In September four on 8th followed by singles on 9th and 10th, three on 15th, increasing to five on the 25th, eight by the 27th, but just two on 30th. Two on 2nd October then regularly to the end of October with a maximum of six on the 7th. In November present until the 10th with a maximum of eight on the 3rd. Reports came from 12 further localities. Three at Lower Drakelow Pond, Woburn Park on 1st January followed by a pair on 7th January, a drake on 17th February and a drake and two females on 9th March. A pair at Coronation CIP on 2nd January. Six males on Blunham GP on 27th January and a pair there on 28th December. A drake at Grovebury SP on 28th January and 10th March was a new site record. Three at Dunstable STW on 4th February followed by two on 9th March and four on 7th April. A pair at Stewartby Lake on 5th February,

when a drake was at Millbrook Pillinge CIP, and a pair at Brogborough Lake on 18th February. A female at Willington GP on 26th February and a single on 22nd September. Two pairs on floodwater at Radwell GP on 27th February, singles at Coronation CIP on 8th September and 27th October and a drake at Luton Hoo on 3rd November.

**Garganey** *A. querquedula*

An irregular but usually annual scarce migrant. The first of the spring a drake at Southill Lake on 17th March (BJN). On 23rd March, a pair on the north-west pit at Radwell GP (JB). A pair at South Mills NR on 3rd-4th April (GG&CG, RM&BM *et al*). Possibly the drake of this pair was at Blunham Lake also on 3rd April (JTRS). The last in spring was a drake at Rookery South CIP on 27th April (RM&BM *et al*). The only autumn record was one at Rookery South CIP on 9th September (MJP).

**Shoveler** *A. clypeata*

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant. Recorded from 19 sites but except at Rookery South CIP, Southill Lake and Woburn Park, counts did not exceed 20. No records were received from Brogborough Lake, Priory CP or Willington GP.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coronation CIP	9	4	6	0	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	6	6	n/c
Harrold-Odell CP	1	n/c	n/c	1	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	6	7	13	n/c
Luton Hoo	5	n/c	n/c	1	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	15	n/c	7	5
Rookery South CIP	19	20	32	1	0	4	0	9	10	38	43	5
Southill Lake	n/c	n/c	2	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	6	28	23	8
Woburn Park	2	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	4	25	4	6

Rookery South CIP held good numbers in both winter periods, the highest tallies being 24 on 2nd and 32 on 3rd March then ten on 7th September followed by an excellent series in October and November with 26 on 6th, 32 on 26th and 38 on 27th October and 43 on 3rd, 24 on 5th and 27 on 16th November. At East Hyde ten drakes and eight females flew north on 28th February. Single figure counts came from Luton Hoo on five dates and from East Hyde on nine dates including a pair on 24th June. Eighteen drakes and two ducks was the peak of five spring counts at Blunham Lake where the only winter records were of a drake on 27th January and four drakes on 30th December. Numbers were poor all year at Dunstable STW with the only double figure count not occurring until December. In January, three at Fenlake Meadow, Bedford on 5th, a female at Bromham Lake NR on 8th and two drakes at Felmersham NR on 21st January. In February, two pairs at Stewartby Lake on 7th, three at Radwell GP on 15th, two at Langford Lakes on 18th and a pair on floodwater by the R. Ouse near Bromham Hall Wood on 27th. A single at Ledburn Road SP between 17th and 21st March and a pair at South Mills NR on 6th April. Twelve at Radwell on 17th November and three drakes there on 27th November. Three at Tiddenfoot WP on 28th November.

**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 choose here to publish all records unless the individual is obviously from captive origins. A drake at Rookery South CIP from 3rd to 11th then 28th January (JB, RD, *et al*) had been present since November 1995 and was presumed to be the same bird returning from the previous winter. It reappeared again in December, being reported on five dates between 1st and 15th (JB, MKB, MJP, PS) and it is quite likely that this same bird was that present at Priory CP on 12th then 22nd and 23rd December (RB, DK, TP).

**Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

Numerous in the winter months. Three figure counts during January included c.250 in Rookery South CIP on 6th, 134 at Priory CP, also 134 at Coronation CIP and 118 at Woburn Park, where 151 were counted in February. Only Harrold-Odell CP and Priory CP held good numbers in the second winter period with 112 in November rising to a year high of 297 on 25th December at the latter and 111 counted at Harrold-Odell CP on 26th December. Despite our appeals, no one regularly counted Pochard (or several other duck species) at Blunham Lake, Brogborough Lake, Langford Lakes, Radwell GP and Willington GP.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chimney Corner CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	37	59	73	72
Coronation CIP	134	79	28	1	0	0	5	11	41	51	31	35
Dunstable STW	41	41	21	8	0	1	4	2	5	18	28	29
Harrold-Odell CP	12+	26	n/c	n/c	n/c	1	1	5	1	24	n/c	111
Luton Hoo	89	24	57	6	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	8	n/c	2	8
Millbrook P. CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	19	19	31	26
Priory CP	134	72	34	2	1	1	7	2	6	32	112	297
Rookery North CIP	13	9	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	27	26	5	10
Rookery South CIP	250	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	14	30+	n/c	n/c	n/c	63	146
Southill Lake	32	41	7	0	0	n/c	4	0	0	24	3	15
Stewartby Lake	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	15	31	33	42
Woburn Park	118	151	162	2	0	n/c	0	1	1	8	24	30

The 146 at Rookery South CIP on 8th December included a drake with almost white flanks. A drake on the R. Ouse by County Hall, Bedford on 3rd January was an unusual sighting there. Ten on 9th January was the highest of four reports from East Hyde and three pairs were at Whipsnade Zoo on 24th January. The peak at Tiddenfoot WP was 43 on 2nd February. Also on 2nd February, a site record of 35 at Bromham Lake NR where ten or more were present on ten counts made between 2nd January and 10th March. Counts of 40+ on 20th March and 75+ on 17th September at Willington GP. On 17th November, 87 at Radwell GP.

**Tufted Duck** *A. fuligula*

A numerous and common winter visitor and regular breeder in small numbers. Breeding records were only received from Rookery South CIP (at least two pairs), Southill Lake (two broods), Willington GP (c.5 pairs raised c.20 juveniles) and Luton Hoo (unspecified numbers). Three pairs were present at Manor Farm Lakes, Lower Caldecote on 16th June but there was no report of any breeding success. Again failed to breed at Dunstable STW after a run of 15 years to 1994. Although present in good numbers in the breeding season at Coronation CIP and Rookery North CIP, there were no breeding details for these sites. This species remains grossly under-recorded with records this year from only 16 sites and none received from Blunham Lake, Brogborough Lake, Langford Lakes and Radwell GP, (cf Pochard).

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bromham Lake NR	35	35	20	12	1	0	0	0	0	0	8	8
Chimney Corner CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	41	39	69	75
Coronation CIP	86	58	38	30	21	28	41	61	36	24	49	39
Dunstable STW	18	25	28	12	n/c	n/c	32	13	21	13	22	28
Felmersham NR	26	29	40	0	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	8	0
Harrold-Odell CP	n/c	37	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	30	n/c	205

Luton Hoo	69	16	65	76	22	n/c	n/c	n/c	22	n/c	5	11
Millbrook P. CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	28	5	57	60
Priory CP	18	27	10	1	4	2	2	1	2	6	20	28
Rookery North CIP	15	15	15	9	11	14	12	20	24	9	11	7
Rookery South CIP	n/c	n/c	44	n/c	19	27	12	12	n/c	n/c	117	n/c
Southill Lake	44	19	11	14	9	n/c	7	12	1	12	11	4
Stewartby Lake	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	37	51	67	59
Woburn Park	72	96	79	48	16	n/c	0	2	11	13	56	50

As can be seen from the table, there were only a few occasions when really good numbers were present. In the first winter period, the highest counts were of 86 at Coronation CIP and 72 at Woburn Park in January, 96 and 79 at the latter site in the ensuing two months then 76 at Luton Hoo on 7th April. In the second winter period, after 61 at Coronation CIP in August, there were no high numbers until 51 were counted at Stewartby Lake in October. November was better with 69 at Chimney Corner CIP, 67 at Stewartby Lake and 56 in Woburn Park and 117 at Rookery South CIP. Numbers reached 50 at five sites in December with a peaks of 75 at Chimney Corner CIP and the year high for the county at Harrold-Odell CP with 205 on 26th December reducing to 85 by 29th.

#### **Scaup** *A. marila*

An occasional winter visitor or passage migrant. A first-winter drake was briefly at Stewartby Lake on 23rd February (PT, PA, DJO). Two females were in Luton Hoo from 4th to 28th March (BRS, AJL). A female was at Radwell GP briefly on 15th December (JB).

#### **Eider** *Somateria mollissima*

The sixth county record, a female first identified on 11th December 1995, remained at Rookery South CIP until at least 14th January (MJP, TP, RD *et al*).

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

The only records of this scarce passage visitor concerned a party of 17, including at least nine drakes, at Brogborough Lake in the evening of 22nd March (DJO), a drake remaining on 23rd March (PS). A female was on the pits by the A1 trunk road at Lower Caldecote on 1st April (MDR).

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

Numbers were lower than in recent years for this regular winter visitor. Recorded this year at eight sites. As usual Brogborough Lake held the largest and the most regular numbers, in January, 13 on 6th and nine on 7th, in February, six on 14th, one on 22nd and three on 23rd. In March, four on 10th March, the year high of 35 on 23rd March (PA) and two on 31st then a lone female on 10th April. The next best site was Harrold-Odell CP with, in January, a maximum of three, in February a maximum of 12 (on the 21st) and in March, up to two, then three there on 19th April. Records from Radwell GP involved five on 21st February, five on 24th March, seven on 29th March and 23 on 6th April (JDS). At Stewartby Lake, in January, six on 1st and three on 19th followed, in February, by a maximum of 14 on the 7th. At Priory CP, singles on 4th and 19th January and a pair on 3rd April. At Rookery South CIP, a female on 6th January, two females on 30th March, three on 14th and a duck on the 15th April. The only other first winter period report was of a female at Coronation CIP on 27th January. The first for the second winter period was at Priory CP on 23rd October, with singles on 14th November and 13th, 14th and 23rd December. A female at Stewartby Lake on 1st November, two on 27th November and three on 15th December. Other December records were of three at Brogborough Lake on 4th and

14 on 15th, five were at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th, two on 15th and 17 on 26th, one was at Coronation CIP on 22nd and another at Chimney Corner CIP the same day.

#### **Smew** *Mergellus albellus*

There were several records of this scarce but delightful winter visitor during 1996 and not all were "red-heads". There were up to 18 individuals in the first winter period, although from the dates, movement between various sites seems more than probable. There were another nine in the second winter period. The first of the year were two red-heads at Rookery South CIP on 1st January (PA, SA). Also, from 1st to 6th January, a red-head at Coronation CIP (KMS *et al*) and at Priory CP, a red-head from 1st to 7th January (DK *et al*). On 2nd January, another red-head was at Tiddenfoot WP (GD *et al*). There were no further reports until 21st January when a red-head was at Radwell GP (PA, PS) with two there on 24th (JDS). The highest count of the year was seven, including a drake over Priory CP on 25th January (ECN). Two red-heads at Harrold-Odell CP on 28th January to 3rd February (ANS, PA, AG) and a red-head at Rookery South CIP on 28th January to 6th February (MW, TP, PS *et al*). A red-head at Brogborough Lake on 11th February (PS) and another red-head at Radwell GP on 17th February (JB) with two on 21st (RJB, PT *et al*). There were no more records until late December when a party of two adult drakes and four red-heads were at Harrold-Odell CP (JM). From 29th into early 1997, one drake and two red-heads were at Grovebury SP (PS, RDD *et al*).

#### **Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator*

A scarce winter visitor and passage migrant. A pair at Stewartby Lake on 4th February (JKT *et al*). Three drakes and a duck were there on 6th (RD, TP) and 7th February (PA, MW), one drake remaining to 14th (PA). On 29th December, a female at Grovebury SP (PS *et al*) a first for this site.

#### **Goosander** *M. merganser*

Present every winter but usually in small numbers, though occasionally influxes occur. 1996 was another good year for this species, with records from 20 sites. During the first winter period, records from Harrold-Odell CP involved a drake on 3rd January then, in February, up to five between 1st–21st, then four on 22nd and a red-head on 10th March. At Priory CP, in January, there were up to four between 3rd–6th, ten on 7th, and up to three between the 13th–21st. In February regular counts included a maximum of four on the 11th. A female over Bromham Lake NR on 2nd January, one at Willington GP on 6th and two by the R. Ouse near Bromham Hall on 7th. Two were at Dunstable STW on 6th January and again on 5th February then one on 10th. At Woburn Park in January five on 6th, 20 on 7th, ten on 12th, two on 14th, 11 on 16th, 13 on 20th and six on 28th. Between 17th–23rd February a maximum of seven, then six on 9th March and two on 17th March. Four over Woburn village on 3rd March. At Rookery South CIP, four red-heads on 7th January and a drake and two red-heads on 11th. At Radwell GP, ten on 21st and 12 on 24th January, seven on 10th February, up to 13, 15th–18th February, five on 23rd, ten on 26th and five on 27th February then two on 3rd March, five on 8th, three on 18th and two on 23rd March. A red-head at Tiddenfoot WP on 13th January and at Eversholt Lake there were eight on 21st January. A drake was seen on the R. Ivel at Blunham on 27th January. Records from Grovebury SP involved 24 on 28th January, 18 on 4th and 27 on 10th February, a county record high of 4 on 10th March, ten on 17th March and a late red-head, the last in spring, was seen on 28th April. A drake was at Stewartby Lake on 7th January and 11th February. Eight red-heads at Southill Lake on 18th February and six there on 17th March. Two at Luton Hoo on 4th March and three on the R. Ivel by Twin

Bridges GP on 14th. Records were fewer in the second winter period. Six red-heads over Bideford Green, Linslade on 26th October. Two red-heads at Rookery South CIP on 8th November. At Priory CP, singles on 23rd and 28th November and 14th, 25th and 28th December, but five on 21st December. Seven at Woburn on 1st December, 14 on 2nd and 14th then nine on 22nd. Two red-heads at Chimney Corner CIP on 22nd December. At Grovebury SP 32 on 29th December was an excellent count. On the same day, a red-head at Harrold-Odell CP, two over Houghton Regis ChP and two flew north along the R.Ivel at Biggleswade Common.

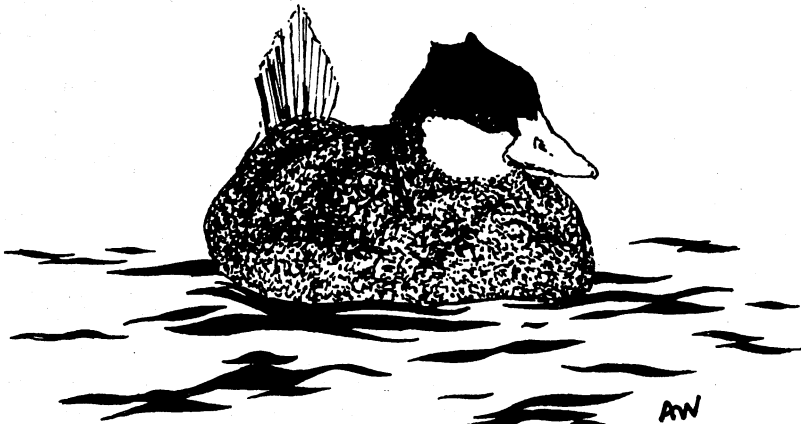
**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Since the first county record in 1980, this enigmatic little duck has become a fairly common resident in small numbers. There is now evidence of additional birds visiting the county in winter. Records came from nine sites in 1996 and this species now breeds in small numbers. The recorders hope that despite recent intentions nationally to cull this species it may prosper in Bedfordshire. Successful breeding was recorded at the same three sites as in 1995. At Southill Lake, one pair with six young on 21st July. At Rookery South CIP, at least two pairs bred, two juveniles on 10th August and a brood of six on 31st August. At Luton Hoo, an unspecified number of broods on 13th August.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	n/c	n/c	12+	11	12	n/c	7	11	11	n/c	n/c	3+
Rookery South CIP	20	29	24	14	6	2	7	11	23	22	39	38

The highest counts were at Rookery South CIP, as tabled, including a county record of 39 on the 3rd November (MJP). Southill Lake produced five on 21st April, two drakes on 19th May, eight noted above on 21st July and a juvenile on 18th August. At Brogborough Lake, two on 7th January, eight on 3rd and seven on 10th February. After eight on 1st January, Stewartby Lake held good numbers in early February with c.17 on 4th, 21 on 5th, 29 on 7th and 25 on 10th but just one on 14th. The only other sighting here was of a drake on 2nd July. Priory CP had a pair on 27th–28th February then singles on 12th August, 7th October and 13th November. Other singles were at Harrold-Odell CP on 28th January and 1st February, Dunstable STW on 9th February and Radwell GP on 29th March.



Ruddy Duck

Andy White

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

A rare vagrant to Bedfordshire, with the current picture clouded by the re-introduction programme. The majority of these are wing-tagged and observers are asked to supply as much detail as possible. Records for 1996 concerned two near The Lodge, Sandy on 22nd July (MDR) and one at Moleskin Hill, Streatley on 25th July (GB).

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

A rare passage migrant. A heavily moulting second calendar year female at Rookery South CIP on 17th July (PS). On 11th and 12th August a first-summer female was at this site (RAN, PN, KO). Another female, thought likely to be a second year bird, was seen at this site on 19th August (DJO, PS).

**Hen Harrier** *C. cyaneus*

Two records for the year of this scarce visitor were of a male at Knotting Green "set-aside" on 15th and 16th March (DJO, JDS *et al*) and a ring-tail at the same site, usually coming in to roost, irregularly seen on nine dates from 23rd October into 1997 (JDS, MJP, PS *et al*).

**Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*

The first of only two accepted records this year for this rare resident was one seen at Knotting Green on 15th March (DJO). A pair was located along the Greensand Ridge in the west of the county along the border with Buckinghamshire on 30th March – further sightings were noted throughout the year (RAN, PS, DJO). Observers are reminded of the rarity of this species in Bedfordshire and hence the need for a very complete description.

**Sparrowhawk** *A. nisus*

Bedfordshire's widespread resident population continues to be at a healthy level from the sightings submitted. At Priory CP, a further increase in records with sightings on 186 bird days compared to 147 in 1995, 121 in 1994 and 139 in 1993. Breeding was confirmed at Bramingham Wood, Charle Wood, Kempston, Marston Thrift, Millbrook Wood and another Greensand Ridge site, Pegsdon Hills and Thorn Wood. Five pairs were in Luton Hoo and food carrying was witnessed at Biggleswade Common and East Hyde.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

Another excellent year. Following successful breeding last year at Southill Park, breeding was confirmed at this site in 1996 with two pairs each raising single young (WS per BJN). An unsubstantiated report suggests breeding also took place at Park Wood, Harrold. Twenty-six observers submitted reports of 56 sightings endorsing the continued expansion of the species in Bedfordshire. These sightings were much more widespread than in previous years with fewer reports from the Old Warden "raptor triangle". Indeed, Common Buzzards were seen in all months of the year, from Luton and Whipsnade in the south round to Pegsdon in the south-east, Sandy in the east, Harrold in the north, Turvey in the north-west and Leighton Buzzard and Woburn in the west as well as many other localities in between.

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

There were two records of this rare but annual passage migrant. One was seen over Rookery South CIP on 11th May (KMS, RAB *et al*) and again on 12th before heading off east (DJO, KO). It was probably the same that was seen later on 12th May by Warden Little Wood (DHB).

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

Common resident. One diligent observer sent in details of 109 sightings throughout the year, which included proven breeding at Bromham Lake NR (PA). Kestrels were noted to be less common than Sparrowhawks at Pegsdon Hills (JCP).

**Merlin** *F. columbarius*

A rare winter visitor and passage migrant. On 6th January, a male at Church Lane, Hockliffe (KMS, DG & MG). On 7th January, a female or first-winter at Rookery North CIP and seen twice more to 15th January (RAN). An adult male at Rookery South CIP on 10th February (KMS). A female over fields to the north of Ampthill Park on 16th February (PH). Another immature or female type at Stopsley Common on 17th February (JCP) and another at Barton Hills NR on 19th February (MC). A male at Knotting Green on 15th March (DJO, JDS) and a female or immature at the same site the next day (BF & RF). A female over "Fountains", Blunham on 18th March (JTRS). In the second winter period, one at Knotting Green on 21st October, 28th and 29th December (JDS), and an adult male in Woburn Park on 13th December (RAN, PN). One at Great Oak Farm, Turvey on 27th December (JM).

**Hobby** *F. subbuteo*

Thirty-five record cards were received, indicative of the small but widespread summer and passage population. The first of the year was on the early date of 18th April over Blows Downs. The next were at Coronation CIP and near Charle Wood on 27th April with the main influx arriving from 4th May. Breeding was reported from Charle Wood with probably two young raised and from Thorn Wood where the results were unknown. Fewer sightings than recently were noted in Kempston and at East Hyde. However, judging from the extensive entries in the Rookery South CIP log, they were regular in that vicinity with a maximum of four on 21st May. The last in autumn were singles at Coronation CIP on 23rd September then Dunstable STW and Bury Farm, Studham on 24th.

**Peregrine** *F. peregrinus*

A rare, usually autumn or winter visitor. Only four were accepted in 1996. One on 6th August at Knocking Hoe NNR (GB, IS) and an adult at Willington GP on 1st September (ANS). On 3rd November, at Rookery South CIP, a female stooped on, carried off to the shore and devoured a Pochard, the act being witnessed by several observers (RAN, RDD, SN, PS *et al*). The same female was seen there again on 5th (RAN, PA) and 25th November (RAN). Lastly, a bird with a missing primary was twice seen over Grovebury SP on 30th December (MJP).

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

A widespread common resident. The largest group reported was of 75 together near Briar Stockings on 30th December. Other highs were 20 at Pegsdon Hills on 1st and 8th September, parties of 24 and 52 at Luton Hoo on 29th September, 16 along Flitwick Road, Maulden on 5th October and 14 near Biddenham Church on 1st December. Smaller numbers were seen across the county and, although no records were received for either March or July, this simply indicates that most observers do not note this species. Confirming the thoughts expressed last year that the ban on introductions of **Chukar** *A. chukar* and hybrids in recent years was having an effect, there was only one report of an individual showing characteristics of this close relation in 1996, a single adult seen near Toddington on 19th April (MDR).

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix*

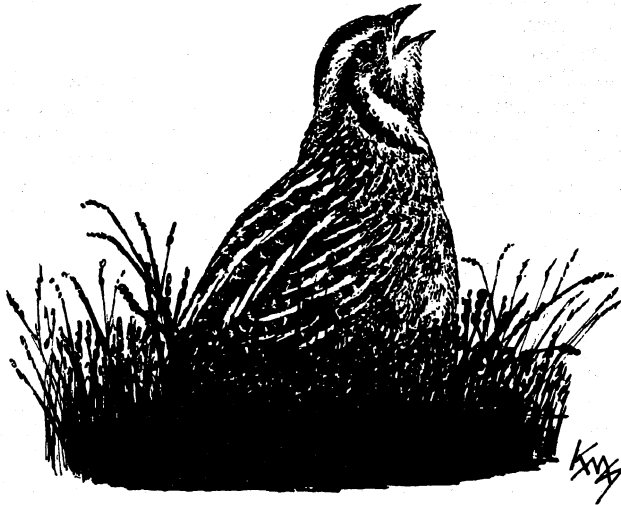
Although a still declining resident species, 20 observers submitted records. In the county stronghold for this species, breeding was confirmed at Stopsley Common, Butterfield Green, Warden Hill, Galley, Ickniel Way and Pegsdon Hills. At the first four sites, 15 to 20 pairs were estimated and six pairs for the two latter sites. The "Christmas Count" for the first five of these sites was for 192 in Bedfordshire with a further 46 over the Hertfordshire border on 26th December. On 6th January, 155 at Stopsley



Common, Butterfield Green, Warden and Galley Hill was considered a typical winter count. Numbers declined as winter coveys broke up through February with c.70 on 23rd March being a typical spring count. Autumn counts included 75+ around the Stopsley Common area on 17th September and a total of 80 were around Warden and Galley Hills on 16th November (JCP,LRJ). Elsewhere, the highest counts received were of 16 at Great Oak Farm, Turvey on 15th January and 20 at Willington on 13th December. Other confirmed breeding sites were Dunstable STW, Grovebury SP and Blue Lagoon, Arlesley. Other localities where the species was recorded included Barton, Chalton, Cockayne Hatley, Coronation CIP, Eaton Bray, Harlington, Ledburn Road SP, Lower and Upper Gravenhurst, Sewell, Dyer's Hall Farm and Field Farm near Stewartby, Totternhoe and Whipsnade Zoo.

**Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*

An irregular summer visitor and occasional breeder. Calling birds were located at only three sites in 1996, well down on 1995. A male was heard in fields west of Queen's Park and south of Biddenham next to R. Ouse from north Kempston on 5th June (DCP). A pair were confirmed on 8th – the male actually seen (MJP). Also on 8th June two males were heard (PS) but by 13th a single male was now almost half a mile west of its original field, much nearer to Kempston Mill. The bird continued to be heard regularly, mostly in the evening, until at least 11th July (DJO). A male heard in suitable breeding habitat at Knotting Green on 17th June (JDS), and on the 30th June one was heard calling at Blunham.



Common Quail

Kevin Sharpe

**Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

Remains a very common resident species with releases making it difficult to assess populations and trends.

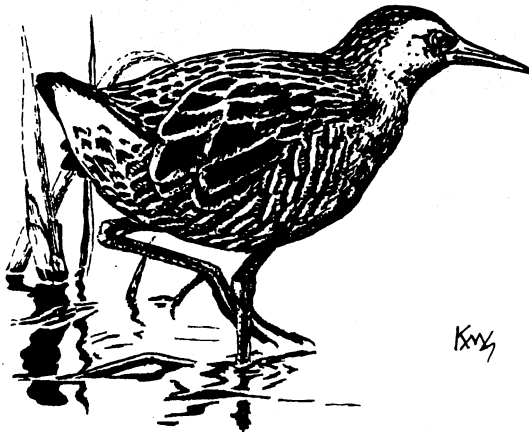
**Lady Amherst's Pheasant** *Chrysolophus amherstiae*

Details of the ongoing population survey of this introduced resident will be published in due course but reports for 1996 were fewer than in 1995. At Luton Hoo, a stronghold of the species, keepers' comments suggest a population of 15 to 20 with a ratio of

about five males to one female. Perhaps a combination of lack of females and resulting over-attention by males is a contributory factor to the species' declining breeding success – zero for 1996 – but there has also been extensive clearance of dead leaves and undergrowth there (AJL). Reports from elsewhere were as follows: four males and up to seven females in Kingshoe Wood during January and February but much of the habitat has now been felled and cleared; a male and three females along the roadside of Breakheart Hill on 1st January; a male at New Wavendon Heath on 14th January; two males at a Greensand Ridge site on 4th February and three or four there on 25th February, one on 13th May and two on 2nd June; eight males on 5th April along the Beds/Bucks border at Nun Wood and Buttermilk Wood; at least three calling at Charle Wood on 28th April and two males located at this site in July; four males calling at Maulden Wood on 5th May and three on 6th; five males calling by Lower Drakelow, Woburn on 18th May – single males had been seen there on 6th January and 24th April – and five others from other Woburn Park areas calling on 19th May. This suggests a male population of about 35 away from Luton Hoo but females were only seen at Breakheart Hill and Kingshoe Wood. This compares to 1995 when a county total of just over 60 birds was estimated of which under 20% were females.

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

Under-recorded due to its secretive nature, it is mainly a winter visitor but also a rare breeder. Records received from 12 sites. At Priory CP one or two were present throughout the first-winter period, with three on 18th February and occasional singles to 4th May, and then three on 11th November, one or two into December with three again on 28th December (DK *et al*). At Flitwick Moor, they again probably bred, recorded every month with a peak of five on 29th December (JPK). Most other reports in the winter periods came from Brogborough Lake where four wintered in the south-western corner being seen and heard on many dates (RAN). Elsewhere, seen or heard at Coronation CIP – singles on 27th January, 11th and 17th February then two on 3rd March; East Hyde – one on 11th February; Eaton Bray – one on 17th February; Harrold-Odell CP – singles on 1st and 22nd February; Rookery North CIP – one from 10th to 18th July and the same or another reported on 7th, 10th and 11th August; R. Ivel South Mills – one on 1st January; Stewartby Lake – one on 1st January, four on 4th February,



Water Rail

Kevin Sharpe

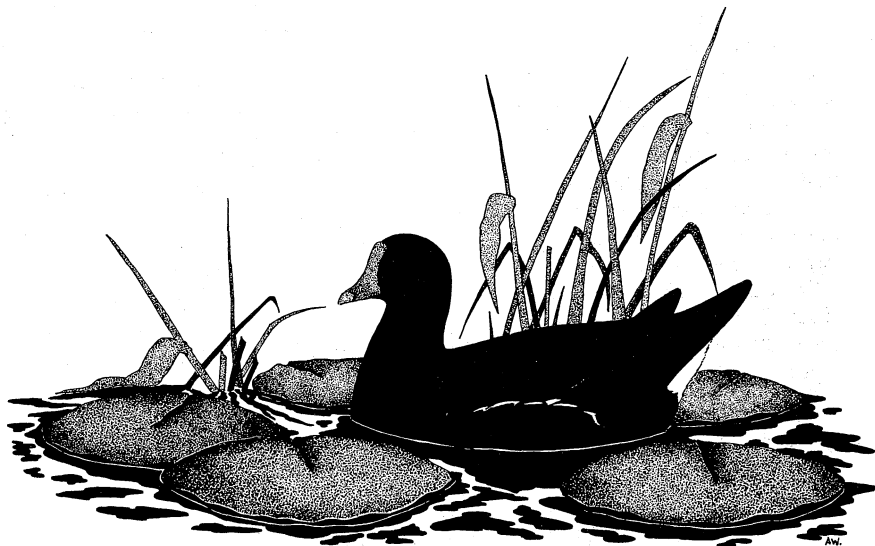
then singles on 14th February, 3rd March, 29th October, 27th November and 31st December and, lastly, at Willington GP – one on 30th November. At Houghton Regis ChP two heard on 7th January with singles on 27th January, 10th March and 1st April. The last record at this site was of a dead bird found decapitated in a reed-bed.

**Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana*

The seventh county record since 1946, but, surprisingly, our first in spring, appeared at South Mills NR from 7th–9th April (SA,MW).

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

A common and widespread resident. The largest counts came from Luton Hoo with monthly high counts of 74 on 28th January, c.60 on 15th February, c.85 on 3rd March, c.30 on 21st April, c.75 on 29th September, c.65 on 3rd November and c.75 on 15th December. Elsewhere, the largest count was 31 at East Hyde on 8th January. At Coronation CIP, upwards of eight were recorded monthly with a post-breeding peak of 21 in August. At Dunstable STW, eight pairs bred and the maximum winter count was 18 in January.



Moorhen

Andy White

**Coot** *Fulica atra*

A common breeder and winter visitor, often present in large numbers. At Dunstable STW, five pairs nested, down from ten last year, but again not one young or egg survived the local Carrion Crows.

*Monthly maxima at selected sites:*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Chimney Corner CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	49	47	41	37
Coronation CIP	145	106	93	73	46	44	79	101	97	85	104	n/c
Harrold-Odell CP	126	136	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	132+	282	280	430
Luton Hoo	58	63	c100	44	c30	n/c	n/c	n/c	190	n/c	109	67
Millbrook P. CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	81	54	71	66
Rookery North CIP	11	9	18	16	20	26	41	52	59	57	31	27

Rookery South CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	36	68	n/c	n/c	460	c600	660	n/c
Southill Park	22	11	22	12	13	n/c	11	7	6	11	13	15
Stewartby Lake	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	119	96	121	123
Woburn Park	77	95	58	30	40	0	23	51	58	77	98	87

Away from these sites, at least 172 were at Willington GP 13th September with 85 there on 27th October, and 113 at Radwell GP 17th November. No other site count reached 25. No counts were received from Brogborough Lake.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

A regular but uncommon visitor. At Priory CP there were ten during the year, all singles and occurring on 23rd February, 19th March, 14th, 16th and 29th April, 5th May, 26th and 28th June, 19th July and 19th September. One at Harrold-Odell CP on 20th March and, on 31st March, one at Manor Farm Lakes, Lower Caldecote followed by a pair there on 7th April. At Willington GP singles were seen on 3rd, 19th and 28th April and a pair were seen there on 24th April and 5th May. There could have been some duplication of sightings at Willington GP and nearby Priory CP. Singles at Radwell GP on 28th April and 26th May. One over "Fountains", Blunham on 17th April and one at Coronation CIP on 29th May. The only other spring records were one at Rookery South CIP on 21st April and two on 9th May. Autumn records at this site involved two on 16th August, which were also seen flying over Stewartby Lake, and one on 16th September. Elsewhere in autumn, two at Coronation CIP on 12th August and one over Biggleswade Common on 13th August. The latest passage record was one at Grovebury Farm SP on 27th October after strong winds.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

This species is a scarce breeder but regular passage migrant in small numbers. Successful breeding this year came only from Dunstable STW and Rookery South CIP. The first was a single arriving at Dunstable STW on 23rd March. The passage maximum at this site was ten counted on 7th April. Five pairs bred but raised only one juvenile to flying stage – the failures being due to flooding and predation by crows. The last of the year was at this site on 28th August. Two arrived at Ledburn Road SP on 27th March and there were five present by 10th April with a pair mating on 25th April but breeding was unsuccessful. Four at Willington GP on 2nd April and two there on 3rd, 7th and 9th April then 12th May. One at Laporte Way, Luton on 25th March and another at Whipsnade Zoo on 2nd April followed by a pair on 18th April and two again on 4th June. One by a pool near the A6 north of Barton on 3rd, 18th and 24th April but this area was too dry to permit a repeat of last year's successful breeding. One at Radwell GP on 6th April and 12th May. Four at Coronation CIP on 7th April and a pair from 26th April through May with one still there on 9th June but no breeding outcome was established. Singles at Manor Farm Lakes, Lower Caldecote on 13th April and 16th June. Three at Houghton Regis ChP on 17th April but no further reports received for this site until July, when two to four were present on seven dates between 7th July and 2nd August. Two pairs had established breeding territory at Grovebury Road SP by 28th April with a pair on eggs noted on 9th June but, by 30th, this nest had been disturbed and the adults gone. All the other records during the year came from the very well-watched Rookery South CIP with the first arrival on 3rd April and the next on 13th. Birds were present regularly from 20th April to 4th August with two pairs raising one and two or three young respectively.

**Ringed Plover** *C. hiaticula*

A regular migrant and uncommon breeder. The majority of records were from Rookery South CIP with the first on 28th February, with presence noted on 101 dates

through to the last sighting, one on 2nd October. Probably four pairs bred with varying success but one pair at least raised three young. The monthly maxima were six on 31st March, 12 on 13th April, eight on 21st and 26th May, nine on 1st June, 20 on 7th July with 12 still there on the 24th. Five on 12th was the highest for August and four on 23rd and 25th was the highest for September. The only report from Rookery North CIP was one on 8th May, and at Stewartby Lake the highest was 11 on 30th March. The first two of the year at Dunstable STW arrived on 22nd March. One pair bred unsuccessfully at the site and the last was there on 13th September. At Willington GP, the first two also arrived on 22nd March and one or two were seen on seven dates to 19th April with a peak of six on 7th April. Elsewhere, records from six other sites. One over Priory CP on 21st March and two at Radwell GP on 23rd March then three on 31st and one on 19th May. Two at Laporte Way, Luton on 25th March and two at Manor Farm Lakes, Lower Caldecote on 31st March. Two at Harrold-Odell CP on 27th April and 29th August and one was near Barton Mill on 12th May.

### **Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant – reports received for 26 sites. Regular in the first winter period at Willington GP, including 100+ on 4th January, 225+ on 20th March and 127 on 9th April. Nearby, 175+ at Cople on 27th February, over 120 at Priory CP on 4th January and 44 on 23rd March then 25 next day. The largest flocks of the year were at Radwell GP with c.1200 present on 21st January and c.800 next day. In February, 206 at this site on 10th and 339 on 15th followed by 476 on 18th March reducing to c.100 by 30th and 40 on 6th April. At Dunstable STW, around 200 during January to March and c.150 in a nearby field adjacent to the A5 on 5th April. The last in spring were two at this site on 5th May. At Stopsley Common and Butterfield Green, the monthly peaks reached 63 on 6th January, 33 on 10th February, up to 50 on 16th March and c.130 over on 2nd April then c.125 on 13th. Twenty at Galley Hill on 23rd March and 40 at Warden Hill on 29th March. Elsewhere, in the first winter period, ten over Stewartby Lake on 1st January, 22 over Bromham on 6th when 20 at Rookery South CIP and 110+ on fields by the adjacent Millbrook Pillinge CIP. On 13th January, c.200 near Coronation CIP and on 30th, 20+ over Whipsnade Zoo. Twelve over Coronation CIP on 24th March, one over Cockayne Hatley on 1st April, c.150 by the Sandy Road near Shefford on 4th April and c.30 north of Hexton STW on 8th April.

The first in autumn were two in summer plumage at Rookery South CIP on 28th August. One here on 11th September and two on 30th were followed by 15 on 2nd October and five on 9th. A flock of 20+ over Bison Hill, Whipsnade on 3rd September, 12 at Cockayne Hatley on 16th with one over on 22nd. At Warden Hill, c.60 on 8th September, three on 6th and 12 on 13th October then 75 on 16th November. At Galley Hill, c.148 on 5th, then c.45 on 16th November. At Stopsley Common, 23 on 20th October, at Willington GP 12 on 27th September and, by 1st November, the flock had reached 500+ and then further increased to over 800 by 13th December. At Cople, 300+ on 9th October and 4th December. At Priory CP one on 29th September with the only other counts there being 21 north-east on 26th November and 90 over on 12th December. Eleven at Bidwell on 3rd October rising to c.50 on 5th then up to 200 in the Dunstable STW area through November and December. Forty at Cranfield Aerodrome on 12th October and over 100 at Henlow Airfield on 27th–29th October and the same number next day were just south of Stotfold. By 2nd November, the Henlow Airfield flock had increased to over 280 and reached c.700 on 6th then 800+ on 18th November. On 4th November, over 100 at

Eastcotts near Bedford, eight in flight near Sundon on 23rd November, five over Knotting Green on 1st December and c.20 over Sundon Park on 18th December. On 22nd December, 39 briefly at Barnfield Grange and 13 with numerous Wood Pigeons at Stagsden West End the same day. At Radwell GP, c.300 on 8th December and 150 there on 21st. Seven flew east at Langford on 26th December.

**Grey Plover** *Psquatarola*

A slightly better year for this scarce migrant and rare winter visitor, the following comparing well with only two records in 1995. One at Radwell GP on 23rd February (PA, DJO), with one over Priory CP on 8th March (ECN), and an adult in partial summer plumage was at Coronation CIP on 7th April (KMS). One on 3rd May at Rookery South CIP (RAB) and there was a partial summer-plumaged adult and full summer-plumaged adult present at this site next day (KMS). Another full summer adult at Rookery South CIP on 14th–15th May (DJO *et al*). The last for the year was over Coronation CIP on 26th October (KMS).

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

A fairly common resident, and winter visitor. Breeding was noted at the following localities; Dunstable STW – two or three pairs raised three young to flying stage, East Hyde – five pairs, Luton Hoo – 15+ pairs, Pegsdon Hills NR – two pairs, Stopsley Common – four or five pairs. Additionally, young were noted at Badgers' Hill, Luton in mid May and four were displaying in suitable breeding habitat at Cople on 6th April. Young were seen regularly at Rookery South CIP from 27th April but there was no estimate made of how many pairs were involved. The highest counts at Priory CP were c.400 on 20th January and c.180 on 17th February then c.350 on 11th November rising steadily to c.700 by 25th November. The highest monthly counts at Coronation CIP were of 63 in January, 554 in March, 57 in August and 105 in November. At Rookery North CIP, the highest counts came in March with 139 and October with 68. Other flocks of 40 or more included the following; 173 at Stopsley Common on 21st January; 217 at Radwell GP on 15th February; 350+ at Pegsdon Hills on 16th March; 1000 at Rookery South CIP on 19th July; 65 at East Hyde on 29th July; c.250 at Cockayne Hatley on 25th August reducing to c.150 there by 7th September then to c.60 by 22nd; up to 500 in the vicinity of Dunstable STW in September and c.200 nearby at Thorn on 1st October; 85 at Stopsley Common on 21st September; c.500 at Rookery South CIP on 25th September and 501 there on 28th when c.50 were at Maulden; 77 at Warden Hill on 12th October; 40 at Harlington on 9th November; 165 at Warden Hill on 16th November; 200+ south of Ampthill on 25th November; 850+ at Cople on 24th November and 300+ at Willington on 13th December.

**Knot** *Calidris canutus*

There were three records of this rare passage migrant. On 13th January, six over Priory CP (DK). A moulting adult was found at Rookery South CIP on 6th August (DJO, PA, PS *et al*) and one in winter-plumage at Stewartby Lake on 31st December (MW).

**Sanderling** *C. alba*

There were up to nine individuals of this scarce but nearly annual passage migrant. One in partial summer plumage at Dunstable STW on 23rd–24th April (PT) and another here on 18th May (JBT *et al*). All the other records came from Rookery South CIP, mostly during May, with one on 2nd May (TM), which was presumably the adult in summer-plumage on 4th (KMS). Another on 9th (TM, PH) then one in partial summer-plumage on 11th (RAN, RAB *et al*) and two the next day (KMS). A single on 14th–15th (KMS, PS, MKB *et al*) and the last in spring on 20th May (KMS).

Surprisingly there were two records in December, a single on 13th (RAN, PN) and then two were present on the frozen lake at Rookery South CIP on 28th (RAN *et al*).

**Little Stint** *C. minuta*

After two poor years, 1996 was excellent for this scarce passage migrant. There were no spring reports, nearly all the records coming in September and the great majority from Rookery South CIP. The first at this site was on 6th September (KO, DJO), with three briefly present next day (MJP, KO) then a further one on 8th (DJO *et al*). The next were three on 13th (TR, MJP *et al*), one on 14th–15th (RAN) then six on 18th (MJS, RAN). Three on 20th (PA, MJP), one adult and four juveniles on 21st (MJP) and nine – the highest count ever in the county – on 22nd (PS). At least one still present next day (RD, RM) but none were seen on 24th. One on 25th (RM, PA) then, after two blank days, four juveniles were found on 27th (MJP, RAN). One remained to 28th–30th October (PS, PH, MKB). Although there are many wide spaces at this site for a stint or two to hide in, such is the observer coverage that a total of around 27 migrants is considered likely. Elsewhere, two at Chimney Corner North CIP on 15th September (MJP, DJO) with three there on at least 16th (RAN). Four on 20th September at Dunstable STW (RD, PT), just one on 21st then four again on 23rd (PT). A juvenile was at Stewartby Lake on 28th September (PS). A first-winter was unusual at Rookery South CIP on 7th–8th December (RAN *et al*) so rounding off a superb year for this species.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *C. ferruginea*

Scarce, mainly autumn passage migrant. There were at least four individuals, all juveniles and all at Rookery South CIP. The first was on 21st August (DJO), the next on 12th–13th September (RAN, MJP, DJO *et al*) with two on 14th–15th September (RAN, DJO, MJP) and another on 4th October (PA).

**Dunlin** *C. alpina*

This is a fairly common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor. Occurred in all months of the year except June, mostly between mid March and 27th May then 7th July through to late October. The majority of the records came from Rookery South CIP – The first two on 3rd January, the next on 7th March and one or two on five further dates that month. In April, six on 3rd, up to 16 on 7th, then one to three on 11 other dates plus five on 21st. Single figure counts were recorded on 23 dates in May with a peak of six on five dates and seven on 19th. The first autumn migrants were three on 7th July then one to three on 11 more dates plus seven on 14th, five on 16th and six on 25th. One or two on ten dates in August. Passage picked up in September when there were eight on 9th and 12th and seven on 13th with one to four on 12 other dates. One or two on nine dates to 27th October then singles on 9th November and 8th, 15th and 28th December with three on 13th December. At Priory CP, two on 16th January, two on 5th and one on 6th September then six on 16th November. At Radwell GP, three on 21st, two on 22nd and five on 26th January then one on 15th and 21st February and one on 8th March. The first at Dunstable STW was on 3rd March with three on 22nd and one on 24th. In April, one to three on 13 dates with highs of eight on 7th and five on 13th. Singles on six dates in May then on 19th July, 20th and 23rd September, two on 2nd October and the last at this site was on 22nd October. At Coronation CIP, one on 30th March, five on 7th and four on 22nd April, three on 15th and two on 29th May. At Willington GP, there were five on 16th March, two on 9th and one on 10th April then four on 29th May. One at Whipsnade Zoo on 12th April and one at Harrold-Odell CP on 29th August.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*

A regular but uncommon migrant, the first was on 22nd January at Radwell GP. Two males accompanied Lapwings on 7th March at Whipsnade Zoo. At Priory CP, two on 10th April and a pair briefly on 3rd September and another pair on 3rd November. A single at Dunstable STW between 4th to 12th September but all the other records came from Rookery South CIP. After a single on 20th April, the next arrived on 9th May and remained until the following day. A pair on 11th and 12th May included a stunning black male. Return passage began with one on 9th July which remained next day, 16 on 11th July (DT *et al*) with one remaining on 12th. In August, a male on 28th then two on 29th and three on 31st. A single on 3rd September and three males and a female on 7th–9th. Five on 10th and one to three most days up to the last of the year, one on 29th September.

**Jack Snipe** *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Another good year for this scarce, generally winter visitor with 24 day sightings from 11 sites. One on 1st January by the A6 at Barton remained from 1995 (MJP, DJO). Between the 7th January and 1st April one or two at Houghton Regis ChP. At Coronation CIP singles 21st January and 25th February (KMS). One at East Hyde on 6th February (PT) and again on 20th February (MDR). One at Cockayne Hatley on 6th and 7th February. Singles at Stewartby Lake on 7th February and 27th November (PA) and at Bromham Lake NR on 10th February, 13th April and 24th September (PA). At Willington GP one on 11th February (JB) and one on 21st October (ANS). Two at Dunstable STW on 23rd September then singles 24th to 26th September (PT, JBT, PS). One at the west end of Brogborough Lake on 30th October (RAN, DJO) and singles at Ledburn Road SP on 6th and 25th November (GD). The last for the year was flushed at the New Cut, Priory CP on 29th December (ECN).

**Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

A winter visitor and passage migrant. In January the highest count was 18 at Rookery South CIP on 14th, with eight at East Hyde on 21st and eight at Coronation CIP throughout the month. Up to five at Dunstable STW through to March, and one or two at Millbrook Pillinge CIP, Radwell GP and Rookery North CIP. In February no double figure counts, with records from Radwell GP (two), Stewartby Lake (two), East Hyde (maximum six), Cockayne Hatley (four), Bromham NR (one), Rookery South CIP (one), Willington GP (three) and Coronation CIP (three). Evidence of passage in March at Bromham NR with 12 on 10th, then up to seven in the latter part of the month, eight on 10th at Houghton Regis ChP, six at East Hyde on 27th, and at Dunstable STW with 11 between 23rd March and 6th April. Up to ten were at Coronation CIP throughout March, and 12 were along R. Ivel at Sandy 31st March. In April numbers dropped, the maxima being ten Dunstable STW 7th–14th, five Luton Hoo 21st April and smaller numbers from nine other sites. In May singles were at Dunstable STW, Coronation CIP and Rookery South CIP. June records from just Rookery North CIP with up to four and then the first in autumn from Dunstable STW with one on 22nd July, increasing to ten from September to the end of the year. Elsewhere between August and December maximum reports were of five from both Rookery South CIP and Houghton Regis ChP, with singles at East Hyde, Luton Hoo, Bromham NR, Stewartby Lake and Stagsden. There were no breeding records.

**Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola*

A local resident and winter visitor. Breeding season records came from Arlesey, Aspley Heath, Charle Wood, Maulden Woods, Northill Home Wood, Warden Great Wood, Warden Little Wood (involving at least six to seven) and Whipsnade Zoo. A "big



influx" was noted by the keepers at Southill Park on 20th January (WS per BJN). Other records outside the breeding season were received from Charle Wood on 9th January, Willington Woods on 18th January, Luton Hoo on 21st January, Whipsnade Zoo on 12th February and 11th November, A505 by-pass, Luton on 4th February, Knotting Green on 24th March, Pratt's Quarry, Leighton Buzzard on 7th April, The Lodge, Sandy on 2nd September, Priory CP on 25th September, Kempston on 9th November, Chalton Spinney (two) on 16th November, Houghton Regis ChP on 7th December, Felmersham NR on 15th December and Brogborough Lake on 28th December. This species is still under-recorded both in and out of the breeding season.

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

1996 was the best year ever in the county for this regular but uncommon passage migrant. A single at Willington GP on 16th March was followed there by 12 in breeding plumage on 24th March (TP). At Dunstable STW, singles were seen on 10th July, 15th and 24th October (PT). At Priory CP, two flew north-east on 12th August and two arrived with two Ruff on 3rd September (DK). There were two at Willington GP on 1st September (AG) which flew towards Bedford, possibly the same as the Priory CP duo. One in winter plumage at Rookery North CIP on 3rd April (SGW). All the other records came from Rookery South CIP commencing with 12 in various transitional plumages on 10th April (PS). Two on 13th May (RAB, KMS) and four there briefly on 29th June (RAN). In July, a summer plumage adult on 5th (KO) and 12 on 9th (DJO). There were none on 10th and 11th but 11 summer adults stayed briefly on 12th (PT) and two more were present later that day (RAN, DJO). On 21st July 19 occurred (PS, RAN) following one earlier in the day (DJO). Eight in summer plumage visited this site on 1st August (KO) and six in moult on 7th August (JB, DJO). One on 22nd August (RAN), another flock of 19 over on 24th following a squall, and a single on 27th (RAN). Finally two juveniles on 3rd-4th September (RAN, RM), possibly the same as those at Priory CP.

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

A scarce passage migrant. One in summer plumage was briefly at Rookery South CIP on 19th May (JB). Again at Rookery South CIP a juvenile on 12th-13th September (RAN) and one in winter plumage on 1st October (RAN *et al.*).

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

A regular but uncommon passage migrant. The first was one at Rookery South CIP on 20th April (KMS). On 21st April, one was seen by several BNHS field trip members at Blows Downs (RD *et al.*). Eight over Coronation CIP on 22nd (KMS) and one over Stewartby Lake on 23rd (KMS), was later seen in Rookery South CIP (KMS) and remained next day (RAB). Ten over Priory CP landed briefly at Fenlake on 26th April (RB per ECN). Another single at Rookery South CIP on 27th April (PS, RAN *et al.*) and six over Willington GP calling (GG&CG). The last in spring were 11 over Harrold-Odell CP on 10th May (JDS). The first in autumn was one at Rookery South CIP on 12th July (JB, RAN) followed by one south over Priory CP on 29th July (ECN). A flock was heard calling over Cople at 11.00pm on 1st August (ANS), one was heard over Kempston on 5th (DJO) and six flew east over Rookery South CIP on 6th August (MJP, DJO, PS). One flew south-west over Priory CP on 25th August (DK).

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

A regular passage migrant and scarce winter visitor, there were no breeding records this year. The first of the year were in January with two over Priory CP on 3rd, two at Fox Covert Farm, Flitwick on 7th and two at Southill Park the same day. Two at Willington GP on 26th February, one was heard at Harrold-Odell CP on 12th March, one flew

north-east at Priory CP on 16th and one at Rookery South CIP on 31st March. Two at Coronation CIP on 16th April and, possibly the same two, later flew into Rookery South CIP. One was heard calling after dark on 27th April over Turvey Abbey and one was seen briefly at Rookery South CIP on 14th May. The last in spring were two north-east over Priory CP on 2nd June. In July, four at Rookery South CIP on 3rd then a single on 14th and five on 28th. In August, two visited Rookery South CIP on 3rd, two flew south there in the evening on 4th and singles were present on 8th, 18th, 25th and 30th plus a single at Coronation CIP on 27th. In September, five over Rookery South CIP on 5th and one north over Priory CP on 18th. Single fly-overs at Priory CP on 28th November and north-west over Stewartby Lake on 28th December.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

All records of this scarce passage wader came from Rookery South CIP. A moulting adult on 7th August (KO), followed by a juvenile on 7th September (DJO, MJP), joined by another the following day (DJO, PS *et al*). One flew off north-east on 17th November (PH).

**Redshank** *T. totanus*

A common passage visitor and scarce breeder. January records involved one over Priory CP on 25th and another next day followed by two at Stewartby Lake and two at Coronation CIP on 27th. One at Stewartby Lake on 4th February then two Rookery South CIP on 17th February. Spring passage commenced in early March with one at Dunstable STW on 1st, one at Chimney Corner North CIP on 2nd and two at Radwell GP on 3rd. Passage continued with records from the above sites and the following; Wood End, Cople, Manor Farm Lakes, Lower Caldecote, Rookery North CIP, South Mills NR and Willington GP. The peak count at Dunstable STW was 11 on 4th April and eight on 21st June. Two pairs bred there but predation by crows resulted in just one youngster being raised. One was present at Coronation CIP through May until 30th June but there was no suggestion of breeding. Likewise, a pair were around in June in Grovebury SP but again no breeding activity was noted, also a pair were seen at Manor Farm Lakes on 16th June. Alarm calls raised when a Kestrel disturbed a Redshank at Willington GP suggested that young might have been in the area. Four pairs were seen at Rookery South CIP during April and spring peak counts there reached ten on 20th, 21st and 29th April, 12 on 8th May, nine on 19th June and 18 on 21st June. How many pairs bred at this site was not established but the first juvenile was seen on 2nd June and was well grown by 3rd July, thus this and Dunstable STW were the only successful sites in 1996. Most had left the county by late August. At Dunstable STW one on 2nd September, at Willington GP one on 9th and two on 19th September and singles on 4th, 24th and 30th September at Rookery South CIP. The only second winter period record came from there with one seen accompanying a Spotted Redshank (cf) on 17th November.

**Greenshank** *T. nebularia*

A regular passage migrant, more often recorded in autumn than in spring. Singles at Biggleswade Common on 10th May, Cockayne Hatley on 16th July, Chimney Corner North CIP on 9th August and Cople on 27th August. At Willington GP, there were singles on 28th April and 6th May then, in autumn, one on 27th August, four on 1st and one on 17th September. The peak count at Coronation CIP was five on 18th August and singles there on 16th May, 11th July, 17th-27th August. At Priory CP, passage was noted on six dates in August, with a peak of seven on 24th, five dates in September including three on 3rd and 12th then, in October, three on 2nd-3rd with one on 5th October. At Dunstable STW a single on 12th May, and after one on 13th

July, one or two, were present between 13th August and 7th September. At Rookery South CIP the highest count was 11 on 5th May (PS, KMS *et al*). Three on 10th May and singles on 7th, 9th and 16th May, the latter flying to Coronation CIP. Autumn passage started on 16th July with a single on three other dates that month then one or two most days (39 dates) throughout August and to 27th September including three on 15th August and 5th September.

#### **Green Sandpiper** *Tochropus*

A regular but uncommon visitor. Present in every month, with records from ten sites. In the first winter period over wintering individuals at Dunstable STW, Priory CP and Willington CP, with a single at East Hyde on 20th February. There were up to four at Dunstable STW in March and singles by A6 north of Barton-le-Clay 1st April, Lower Drakelow Pond, Woburn 20th April and Rookery South CIP 11th May. In June singles at Rookery South CIP 18th June and Dunstable STW the next day. In July four were at Rookery South CIP on 10th and five at Willington GP on 27th. Main autumn passage was during August and was noted at Coronation CIP, including eight on 18th, Dunstable STW with up to six, Rookery North CIP, Rookery South CIP, Willington GP and Priory CP, including four on 10th, and Whipsnade Zoo. September records included three at Dunstable STW, and three at Willington GP, and in October from Rookery South CIP and Whipsnade Zoo. Second winter period records came from Woburn 3rd November, Priory CP with one on five dates from 11th November to the year end and Dunstable STW with one throughout October to December.

#### **Wood Sandpiper** *Tglareola*

A good year for this scarce migrant. At Dunstable STW three on 3rd April (PS). Next was one in partial summer plumage at Rookery South CIP on 14th–19th May (KMS), with two there on 18th (PS). In August, singles at Rookery South CIP on 11th (RAN, KO) and briefly on 24th (PS *et al*).

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

A common passage migrant, widely recorded. The first was one at Priory CP on the early date of 3rd April with the next on 15th April at the same site. Dunstable STW had its first on 16th April and there was one by the R. Ivel near South Mills NR on 17th. Thereafter spring passage continued to 21st May at Rookery South CIP and 24th May at Dunstable STW with the highest count being four at Luton Hoo on 19th May. Return passage began with two at Priory CP on 1st July followed by singles at Stewartby Lake on 3rd and Rookery South CIP on 7th July. Peak numbers at Dunstable STW were eight in late August, Rookery South CIP with six on 12th and 25th August and Radwell GP with the year's high of ten on 25th August (PH). The last of the year were two at Dunstable STW on 3rd October.

#### **Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

A better than average year for this scarce but increasingly regular passage species with up to 16 individuals. The first was at Priory CP on the unusual date of 25th January (DK, ECN). One was at Willington GP on 11th May (TP), but all the rest were at Rookery South CIP. The first on 16th April (KMS, TM), between four and five 2nd–4th May (TP, KO, JB *et al*), and two on 5th May (PS). A single on 9th May (JF, PH, TM), one on 14th, and four on 15th May (KO, JB *et al*). One on 24th July (RM) and, finally, two on 28th August (AW).

#### **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius*

A rare vagrant to the county, one was seen briefly at Stewartby Lake on 29th October when the Storm Petrel and Black Tern (cf) were also found (PT, PS *et al*). This is only the fourth for the county in modern times.

### **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*

Four, possibly six individuals brings the county total to around 49–51, all since the first in 1982. A number of records were lost due to paucity of substantive detail. At least two adults and one moulting from second-winter to second-summer were present early in the year. An adult was at Stewartby Lake on 10th–11th February (JB, RAN, MJP *et al*). On 25th February, the moulting second year was seen by several observers (JB, RAN, PS *et al*) and an adult was seen briefly there (RAN). Probably the same adult was relocated at Stewartby Lake on 3rd March (RAN) with another adult, still in transitional moult, on Stewartby village green on 9th March (KMS). There was one record in autumn – an adult in winter plumage at Rookery South CIP on 26th and 29th September (RAN, KO, PS). Two others reported at this site appear in Appendix A.

### **Little Gull** *L. minutus*

A scarce but annual passage migrant. The first record was of three in different plumages at Rookery South CIP on 3rd April. At Priory CP un-aged singles on 12th and 14th April, three adults on 16th April and single adults on 19th–22nd. A first-summer there on 28th April. Two summer-plumaged adults at Stewartby Lake on 17th April, followed by daily maxima of up to three adult and two first-summers from 20th to 28th April. A first-summer at Rookery South CIP on 21st April then, in May, a first-summer on 11th then two adult and five in first-summer plumage on 14th and a single first-summer remaining to 21st. At Stewartby Lake in May, there were maxima of three adult and two first-summers 3rd to 5th with a first-summer remaining to 6th and then another on 18th. Autumn records were, as often, far fewer with an adult at Rookery South CIP on 11th August and an immature there on 25th. A juvenile at Priory CP 23rd–24th September. There was one winter record, an adult at Brogborough Lake on 21st December (RAN).

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

Abundant in winter and during passage and breeds in small numbers. About 50 pairs produced around 50 young at Rookery South CIP (PS, RAN) and, at Willington GP, between five to ten pairs attempted to breed but deserted through unknown disturbance (DHB). There were no reports of breeding received from Coronation CIP this year. At Willington GP, a flock of 50+ on 7th July included several juveniles. A corpse found at Dunstable STW on 9th October had been ringed in Lithuania on 9th June 1991 as a nestling (PT). Several thousands were present at the roosts at Brogborough Lake, Stewartby Lake and Rookery South CIP in both winter periods. Probably the same albino as last year was noted at Rookery South CIP on 6th August (RAN) and a white-mantled first-winter plumaged individual was seen there on 22nd September (MJP *et al*). A count of 231 in October was the late year peak at Millbrook Pillinge CIP as likewise was 151 at Chimney Corner CIP in the same month and 131 in September at Rookery North CIP. The peaks at Coronation CIP were 255 in February, 175 in March and 163 in August.

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

A common winter visitor and passage migrant. The only winter roost estimate was the 2000+ counted at Stewartby Lake on 15th February (SGW). The last in spring at Radwell GP on 15th May. At Rookery South CIP two adults on 9th July were the first to return, 95 were there on 6th August and 210+ on 3rd November. At Stopsley Common, c.200 on 14th January and, although numbers were generally below 100 during the first winter period, c.300 were estimated on 29th March. At Priory CP, 208 on 13th January, 145 on 17th January and 124 on 24th March but the highest second winter period count there reached just 62 on 26th December.

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

An abundant passage migrant, uncommon around the start and end of the year. Mostly, *L.f.graellsii* are involved but there is also a good passage of *L.f.intermedius*. At Rookery South CIP at least three pairs bred raising two young to flying stage. On 15th August, 280+, c.100 on 12th September with 900+ on 3rd November. Two juveniles on 1st September carrying rings, were ringed as pullii at the Europort Rotterdam and in Suffolk. No reports were received from Brogborough Lake, Elstow CIP, Priory CP or Stewartby Lake.

**Yellow-legged Gull** *L.cachinnans*

A scarce visitor, usually in late summer but is being found with increasing regularity as the subtle identification differences from Herring Gull become better known. Only two records were accompanied by a description – an adult present at Rookery South CIP on 20th July (MJP) and an adult between Cardington and Cople on 25th September (ANS). Several were logged at Rookery South CIP, but they cannot form part of the accepted record as inadequate descriptions accompanied the reports. We have chosen however to include the logged reports here as taken together they do form a pattern of occurrence. Any observer who saw any of these is asked to submit their notes. The first was on 23rd March, then a male was seen mating with a Lesser Black-backed Gull on 5th May. Single, un-aged but presumably adults in May on six dates, then 1st June, and three dates in July. Sightings continued through August with an adult on 11 dates. A third-summer was also present on 17th August. In September, singles between 1st–12th and two on 3rd and 27th. Singles on 13th and 18th October, 2nd November and 13th December.

**Herring Gull** *L.argentatus*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant. As last year, no winter roost counts were received from the clay pits although numbers are probably stable. One to two pairs bred at Rookery South CIP raising at least one young to flying stage (RAN, PS). The mixed pair of Lesser Black-backed Gull *L.f.graellsii* and Herring Gull *L.a.argenteus* nested at Rookery South CIP as they had in 1995. Copulation was observed in early May and a juvenile was raised to flying stage by early August. Although closer to Lesser Black-backed Gull in appearance, it could be confused with Yellow-legged Gull, if it returns in future years.

**Iceland Gull** *L.glaucoides*

A rare but recently annual visitor in the winter months. At least three were recorded in 1996, (five in 1995) from Brogborough Lake and vicinity, Rookery South CIP and Stewartby Lake. Descriptive detail on some of these sightings was particularly scant. The first was an adult at Stewartby Lake on 28th January (KMS), possibly the same seen at this site on 25th December. Presumably the same was in the roost at Stewartby Lake on 11th February (JB, MJP, PS *et al*) and again on 17th, 24th and 25th February (JB, RAN, PS *et al*). Probably this same individual was at Brogborough Lake on 18th February (RAN) and at Coronation CIP on 25th February (KMS). This adult was last seen on 2nd March at Brogborough Lake during a Bedfordshire Bird Club field trip. A first-winter was identified in the roost at Stewartby Lake on 24th February (RAN) and was possibly that described as a second-winter at Brogborough Lake on 22nd February (JBT). In the second winter period, a first winter was roosting at Stewartby Lake on 26th November (RAN) and presumably this same individual was seen again there on 10th December (RAN).

**Glaucous Gull** *L.hyperboreus*

A rare but annual visitor in the winter months. At least four were seen in 1996 com-

pared to five in 1995. An adult was seen at Pegsdon Hills NR on 14th January (JCP) but otherwise all reports came only from the clay pit sites of Brogborough Lake and adjacent fields, Coronation CIP, Rookery South CIP and Stewartby Lake. Two adults on 7th January, one with a "scruffy, heavily streaked" head plumage at Brogborough Lake and the other with a "clean" head pattern at Stewartby Lake (RAN, PS). Potentially a different adult in the roost at Brogborough Lake on 14th January (RAN, PS) and one of the adults was seen at Coronation CIP on 27th January (KMS). Possibly one or other of these adults flew over Priory CP in misty weather on 1st February (ECN). The individual with the "rather dirty looking head and neck" was seen on 17th February (JB *et al*). It is likely that these adults were those recorded at the end of 1995. In the second winter period, an adult flew into the roost at Rookery South CIP on 2nd November (RAN) and it was probably the same adult there on 22nd November. Two additional entries from the Rookery South CIP log – a second-winter present on 15th March and another second-winter there on 15th November (KO).

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

Clouding the issue for yet another year was the confounding, virtually all white, gull which has featured in previous reports. It is still considered unsafe to attribute this bird to any species in particular. On 11th February, it was at Brogborough Lake roost and on 22nd February, it was at Stewartby Lake (MJP). It was at Rookery South CIP on 13th October and then on 2nd and 22nd November and could also have been responsible for some of the rejected claims of the two white-winged large gull species appearing in Appendix B.

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

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant. The highest count at Coronation CIP was 241 in March. At Stewartby Lake some 214 were recorded in December. No count reached 40 at Chimney Corner CIP, Millbrook Pillinge CIP or Rookery North CIP. The highest number at Rookery South CIP was 20+ on 3rd November.

**Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*

A scarce winter visitor and passage migrant. One at Stewartby Lake on 1st January (DJO, MJP *et al*), and an adult at Tiddenfoot WP on 29th March (GD). Another adult at Priory CP on the unusual date of 24th June (DK). An adult in winter plumage at Stewartby Lake on 19th–20th September (RAN) and a juvenile/first-winter at Priory CP on 29th October (JM).

**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandwichensis*

A scarce passage migrant. An adult was at Priory CP briefly on 8th April (RAB, PH, ECN, DSW). On 10th September, a single at Stewartby Lake circled calling (SGW). On 22nd September, three adults stayed much of the day at Rookery South CIP (RAN, PS *et al*).

**Common Tern** *S. hirundo*

This common passage migrant and regular breeder was recorded at 17 sites between 4th April (Priory CP) and 7th September (Dunstable STW). One pair raised three young from a second clutch at Dunstable STW (PT). One pair raised two young at Rookery South CIP (PS). A pair at Bromham Lake NR had two young in June but they were lost presumably due to predation (PA). At Harrold-Odell CP, a pair had three young but whether they fledged is unknown (PA). At Willington GP, numbers in May were comparable to 1995 with a maximum of c.40 but the site was deserted by early June presumably due to human rather than natural disturbance (DHB). Four pairs raised six young at Manor Farm Lake, Lower Caldecote. The pairs at Bromham Lake NR and Harrold-Odell CP were using rafts for breeding which is encouraging. At

Priory CP five passed through on 4th April and the last was one on 6th September. Peak counts included 24 on 24th April and 48 on 30th July. The highest count at Stewartby Lake was c.50 on 4th May with 30 present next day. Other high counts included 12 at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th July, 17 at Rookery South CIP on 23rd July and 15 at Southill Lake on 18th August.

**Arctic Tern** *S.paradisaea*

Passage of this regular migrant occurred between 11th April and 20th May. There were no autumn records. At Priory CP, three on 11th and 12th April reducing to two on 13th then one on 16th, eight on 17th and a peak of 13 on 19th. The next two were on 27th with three the following day with three on 9th May. At Rookery South CIP the first was on 16th April with two on 23rd then, in May, eight on 3rd, three on 14th and four on 19th. One at Dunstable STW on 25th April and two at Blunham Lake on 19th May. All the other records came from Stewartby Lake with one on 20th April and two on 23rd April. At least 100+ "Commic Terns" on 3rd May, the majority of which were this species (CT) but thereafter there were only six on 4th, two on 5th, four on 6th and two on 20th May. Including the large flock at Stewartby on 3rd May, this gives a total passage of 150.

**Little Tern** *S.albifrons*

As in 1995, there was only one instance of this scarce passage migrant, an adult at Priory CP on 24th April (ANS).

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

A regular spring and autumn passage migrant. The first were three at Stewartby Lake on 20th April. Eleven at Priory CP on 21st April. Between five and eight at Rookery South CIP on 22nd April. Next came an adult at Priory CP on 1st May, then at Stewartby Lake up to 12 on 6th, and one on 12th May, before it moved to Rookery CIP. On 15th, five at Priory CP and two at Rookery South CIP. One at Stewartby Lake on the unusual date of 2nd July. In August, seven at Stewartby Lake and up to 15 at Rookery South CIP on 6th, but it is likely that duplication occurred between these two adjacent sites, then two on 7th and one on 10th. One at Priory CP on 15th August and one at Rookery South CIP on 11th September. Lastly one at Stewartby Lake from 29th October (cf Storm Petrel and Grey Phalarope) until 10th November, equalling the latest date in Bedfordshire.

**Razorbill** *Alca torda*

A first-winter bird was picked up from the A507 Clifton by-pass on 21st February. Only the third county record, it was successfully released at Minsmere two days later (PC, BS *et al*). The previous two records were of a stuffed specimen labelled "Razorbill from Fenlake" known to Steele-Elliott, and a corpse, dead about a week, found at Stewartby Lake on 23rd February 1983.

**Puffin** *Fratercula arctica*

A corpse was found at Millbrook Wood by a dog on 3rd March and thereafter resided in the recorder's freezer to the year end (per DJO). This was the first in the county since another dead specimen was found, at Woburn, on 17th February 1983.

**Feral Rock Dove** *Columba livia*

There were no significant reports this year, although it remains numerous in and around the county's conurbations.

**Stock Dove** *C. oenas*

A common resident. At Priory CP, selected high counts included 67 on 1st January and 51 on 20th, 67 again on 24th February, 44 on 3rd March and 60 on 3rd November. Twenty were near Cooper's Farm, Clifton on 24th January. At Ledburn Road SP, the

highest count was of 31 on 12th February and the highest count at Bromham Lake NR. was of 25 on 1st July. The only count from Willington GP, a stronghold for this species, was of 50+ on 7th July.

**Wood Pigeon** *C. palumbus*

A very common resident throughout the county. At Priory CP late year movements included 992 south in 30 minutes on 8th November and c.200 next day, then c.1500 south on 20th December. "Hundreds" were noted at new workings behind Biddenham and in fields along the adjacent R. Ouse with numerous Feral Rock Doves on 1st December. There were no other significant reports.

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

The top count at Stanford was 46 on 8th October. At Priory CP, 54 moved south on 24th December. No details of the winter roosts of this common resident in Bedfordshire were received.

**Turtle Dove** *S. turtur*

The first for spring of this seriously declining summer visitor were two at Dunstable STW on 18th April. Two pairs bred at this site and the last for the year there was on 6th September. The next earliest sighting was on 1st May at Willington GP, followed next day by one at Biggleswade Common. One at Butterfield Green Road on 4th May and three to five at Pegsdon Hills through May, June and July, peaking there at ten on 11th August and the last on 25th August. Four at Stewartby Lake on 5th May. A pair at Felmersham NR. on 18th May and one there again on 16th June. Two at Tiddenfoot WP on 25th May and one at Potton on 26th May and another on 2nd June. At least two at Totternhoe Knolls on 2nd June and one at Rookery South CIP the same day. Further singles at Rookery South CIP on 30th July, 10th and 19th August with two on 30th. A pair at Whipsnade Zoo on 4th June and one calling there on 27th. Two flew west over East Hyde on 11th June and two on wires around Brogborough Lake on 15th. Also on 15th June, a juvenile at Wigmore Valley Park, Luton and an adult and a juvenile were seen there on 24th. One heard near Bromham Lake on 17th June and singles at Warren Villas NR, Lower Caldecote on 16th and South Mills NR. on 20th. Two to four at Ledburn Road SP on 13th July could have included two juveniles. Two at Husborne Crawley on 18th July and one heard at Barton Hills on 28th. Other breeding season records were at Sewell and Toddington. The last record of the year was from Bison Hill, Whipsnade on 24th September. All the records for 1996 have been listed as the fortunes of this pretty little dove are causing concern. Please continue to submit every sighting of this species.

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

The individual regularly visiting an Edworth garden since about February 1995 remained throughout the year and into 1997 (PS, MJP). An adult was seen at Flitwick Moor on 31st May (KMS). Observers are again reminded to submit supporting identification details with records of this species to rule out other similar species that might escape or be free-flying in the county, (see list of "Exotica").

**Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

The first arrivals of this common summer visitor were on 16th April, at Stewartby Lake and Whipsnade Zoo. Next day, one heard at Bromham Lake NR. and two at Willington GP on 19th. On 20th, the main arrival was recorded from Blows Downs, Blunham, Coronation CIP, Dunstable STW, Harrold-Odell CP, Priory CP and Rookery South CIP. Widespread during May and early June. Immatures on autumn passage at Ledburn Road SP on 17th and 27th August, Dunstable STW on 21st August and Priory CP on 31st August and 3rd September – the last for the year.



**Barn Owl** *Tyto alba*

A scarce resident, breeding was confirmed at Willington Dovecote and also at Knotting Green where two pairs had seven and two young. Sightings were regular at this site throughout the year. Ten young were ringed in the county this year. Reported from about 40 sites (up to 37 by PC and from four other sites – Barton, Elstow, Hatch and Whipsnade).

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*

A common species, widely recorded from all parts of the county throughout the year. Records from 43 sites, suggest a very healthy population.

**Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco*

Records from 29 sites for this common resident from both urban and woodland locations.

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

A rare resident and scarce winter visitor but probably under-recorded in the summer. Breeding was recorded at five localities; at least three juveniles fledging from Pegsdon Hills, two at Moneypot Hill, three at Millbrook Warren, at least one at Aspley Heath and up to four at Galley Hill. Elsewhere, during the breeding season, a single sighting came from Knotting Green on 10th July. There were no reports of any winter roosts.

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

A scarce visitor to the county. A single was at Cardington Airfield on 16th March and four were near Gate 8 at Thurleigh Airfield on 7th December (WB). All other records came from Knotting Green from mid-October into 1997. From plumage and moult differences, at least five were present (JDS *et al*). This species shows a preference for set-aside and all large areas of such could be worth checking at appropriate times of the year.

**Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*

After a blank 1995, one was seen and heard "churring" over Aspley Heath from 3rd to 7th June with two males there on 6th June (JBT, PS, RD *et al*).

**Swift** *Apus apus*

The first arrival of this common summer visitor was on 17th April at Priory CP. Small groups were seen at a variety of locations from 24th April to the month's end with the main influx occurring in early May. On 18th May, c.2000 at Stewartby Lake. On 19th May, a partial albino with white rump and two white bars on the flanks and belly was at Rookery South CIP and remained in the vicinity until 27th (RAN *et al*). The last were two over Priory CP on 5th September.

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*

Fairly common, it was well recorded throughout the year from most of our river systems and still waters. Reports from 29 locations, but only two successful breeding records, from Bromham and near Willington.

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*

Remains widespread across the county. At Priory CP, the recent increase continues, being recorded on 367 bird days, with a peak of five in mid-June, as compared to 247 bird days in 1995 and just 21 bird days in 1990 (DK). At least eight males were calling between Basin Pond and Lower Drakelow Pond, Woburn Park in May.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus major*

This species is probably the commonest woodpecker to be found in Bedfordshire with a widespread distribution. Breeding recorded at Priory CP, for the second known time.

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

This is the hardest to find and the least numerous of our resident woodpeckers. Recorded from 16 sites and may well be in decline. All 1996 reports are listed in

alphabetical site order. Two at Ampthill Park on 23rd March, one holding territory on 24th March and one there on 27th May. A pair in Aspley Wood on 27th September. One at Village Road, Bromham on 22nd January and one at Bromham Lake NR on 26th April. In the Bromham Park area, noted from 27th February until 15th May. At Blunham, a male calling at "Fountains" on 17th June and for about a week thereafter. One at Cople on 17th March, a pair at Charle Wood in May and one heard at Felmersham NR. on 18th May. One at Langford Lakes on 29th September. A male accompanying a flock of Long-tailed Tits at Maulden Woods on 7th January. In Millbrook Wood a single sighting in July. There were further single sightings at Priory CP in March, May, July, August, September and December. A pair at Swiss Gardens, Old Warden on 17th March, were seen at a nest hole in May. One at Willington GP on 18th March and was drumming on 26th April and a male in a Woburn garden on 5th August. There were no sightings in Luton Hoo in 1996.

#### **Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*

A rare migrant, one was very well-watched at Rookery South CIP from 9th to 13th September (TP, MJP *et al*). It was usually to be found foraging ant mounds along a ditch behind the "hide".

### **Passerines**

#### **Wood Lark** *Lullula arborea*

This rare breeding species was present at the same site in the west of the county from which breeding was proven last year and suspected in 1994. A singing male was located from 16th March with two males present from 19th March into July (RAN, DJO). One of these males moved to a nearby site. A pair at the initial site raised at least three fledglings. There was probably a second brood as the male was seen with food in late July (RAN *et al*). A male was located at another location on the Greensand Ridge but there was no evidence of a female being present (RAN). We once again repeat our plea for observers knowing the breeding site to take great care and avoid disturbing this nationally rare breeding species. On 1st January, one was found near Millbrook Station during a bird race (MJP, DJO, JDS *et al*), a rare winter record.

#### **Sky Lark** *Alauda arvensis*

A widespread but declining species. Eighty near Meadow Lane, Bedford STW on 1st January, 86 near Brogborough Lake on 27th January, 70+ at Willington GP on 31st January and 130+ at Clifton on 21st February. The highest counts for the second winter period were 200+ at fields near Biddenham on 23rd November – large numbers wintered in this substantial area of abandoned crops north of the R. Ouse between Biddenham, Kempston and Kempston Church End. At Sandy Heath 80 on 11th December, at Cople, 210+ on 22nd December and c.132 at Langford on 26th December.

#### **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

A common passage migrant and localised breeding species. The earliest report was one at Tiddenfoot WP on 18th March. On 24th March 50+ at both Harrold-Odell CP and Blunham, six at Radwell GP, five at Coronation CIP and Dunstable STW. The highest counts for the year with c.300 recorded at Priory CP in late April and early May. Breeding was confirmed at seven localities: c.100 pairs at Ledburn Road SP; 150 used two sites at Willington GP; 200+ at Potton SP; three colonies at Grovebury SP had 170 pairs; the A5 pit near The Fox and Hounds PH, Woburn held 70 pairs; Pratt's Quarry, Leighton Buzzard had 90 pairs in two colonies and Munday's SP, Heath and

Reach had 150 pairs. Thus about 750 pairs bred raising in some cases two or three broods, much better than in 1995 and adults were still feeding young into September (PS *et al*). However, formerly occupied sites at Double Arches SP and Vandyke Road SP were not used this year. The main autumn passage was from late August with, for example, hundreds passing over Dunstable STW on 24th throughout the day in groups of up to 50. The last of the year was over Priory CP on 4th October.

**Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

A common summer visitor, the first to arrive was at Tiddenfoot WP on 28th March. The highest count of the spring was c.250 at Priory CP on 23rd April. There were c.50 at Tiddenfoot WP also on 23rd April and 53 at Coronation CIP on 28th April. In autumn, 200+ moved over Stopsley Common in one hour on 26th September and c.300 at Luton Hoo on 29th September. The latest was at Langford Lakes on 20th October.

**House Martin** *Delichon urbica*

A common passage migrant and summer visitor. The first was at Radwell GP on the early date of 24th March. The next earliest was on 4th April at Priory CP. High counts at this site included c.100 on 2nd May and c.200 on 8th May, then 120 on 26th September, 130 on 28th, then 91 on 3rd October. There were 83 at Coronation CIP on 15th May, c.500 at Dunstable STW on 25th May, 150+ at Willington GP on 23rd August and c.120 at Stopsley on 15th September. The last for the year were two over Kempston on 16th October. Reports in the Bedford and Kempston area at least, indicate that the breeding population is declining and the recorders would welcome correspondence on the breeding status of this species in Bedfordshire.



House Martin

Steve Halton

**Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*

A localised summer visitor, recorded at just ten sites during the summer. Passage noted at Blows Downs on 21st April, Stopsley Common on 24th April and Priory CP on 2nd May. The earliest for the year was at The Lodge, Sandy on 18th April; three singing there on 23rd April and still there on 28th June. Other breeding records came from Aspley Heath (three pairs bred), Charle Wood (one pair bred), three singing at Coopers Hill, Ampthill, Lowes Wood (one pair seen on 4th May), Maulden Woods (one seen on

2nd June), Millbrook Woods (one pair bred) and Crawley Lodge, Woburn Park (one singing male on 2nd June). No reports of return passage were received. This species is declining in the county and observers are reminded to please submit all records.

**Meadow Pipit** *A. pratensis*

A common migrant and winter visitor but uncommon breeder. In the spring c.50 at Knotting Green on 23rd March, 50+ at Cradle Spinney near Caddington on 24th March, 30+ at Turvey and 109 flew north-east over Priory CP on the same date and 80+ at nearby Priory Business Park on 27th March. There was notable passage through Blows Downs on 28th March including a group of 29 heading west. On 30th March, 55 at Priory CP and 70+ at Radwell GP. Next day, c.200 at Harrold-Odell CP, the largest count of the year. On 11th April, 73 at Moat Farm, Turvey. Generally, only small numbers were reported later in the year but there were 78 at Priory CP on 28th September, 20 at Rookery South CIP on 6th October and 53 at Bedford STW on 5th December and 30 at Sandy Heath 9th December. The only breeding reports came from Rookery North CIP where four pairs bred and from Coronation CIP where three pairs bred (RAN).

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava flavissima*

A common passage migrant and local breeder. The first to arrive was at Stewartby Lake on 8th April and the last to depart was at Dunstable STW on 29th September. Spring passage was rather poor, the exception being 100+ at Radwell GP on 28th April, with the only other count to reach 20 being at Dunstable STW on 14th April. Autumn passage counts were larger, the highest being c.30 at Ledburn Road SP on 12th August, 51 at Stopsley Common on 27th August and 80-100 at Biggleswade Common on 7th September. Breeding occurred at Bedford STW (one pair), Biddenham fields, Coronation CIP (one pair), Dunstable STW (two pairs), Grovebury SP (one/two pairs), Harrold-Odell CP (food carrying) and Rookery South CIP (three pairs), but is clearly under-recorded.

Birds showing the characters of the nominate **Blue-headed Wagtail** *M.f.flava*, a scarce but annual passage migrant through Bedfordshire, were seen at Dunstable STW on 25th and 26th April (PT) and at Ledburn Road SP on 30th April (GD).

**Grey Wagtail** *M. cinerea*

This somewhat local species was recorded from 32 sites. Bred at Bromham Mill, Twin Bridges, Blunham, Dunstable STW and Southill Lake, and was probably successful at Duckmill Weir, Bedford. The pair attempting to breed at Ledburn Road SP lost their nest. Breeding was also attempted at Church End STW, Arlesley where presence was noted all year.

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

A winter roost of this common Bedfordshire resident at Cranfield reached 200 on 26th January, 222 on 7th February and 205 on 13th March. Other good counts included 37+ at Marston Moretaine STW on 19th January, 30 at Chalton STW on 29th January, 47 at Radwell GP on 30th March and c.50 at Harrold-Odell CP next day. There were c.20 at Ledburn Road SP on 5th October and a similar number with cattle at Bromham Park on 5th November. There was a count of 180+ in the reed bed by the R. Ouse at Queens Park on 21st October.

Birds showing characters associated with the near-continental nominate form, *M.a.alba*, the **White Wagtail**, were seen at Whipsnade on 3rd April (CT), East Hyde on 10th April (MKB) and another on 26th (MDR), Willington GP on 16th April (JB) and three at Harrold-Odell CP on 7th and 19th April then 11th May (JM).

**Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus*

An irregular and irruptive winter visitor, the early months of 1996 brought exceptional numbers to Britain. Bedfordshire enjoyed its fair share, numbers exceeding by far the total of some 103 individuals seen from 1947 to 1995. These were the first in Bedfordshire since 1991. Although many of the following were submitted unaccompanied by supporting details, in the circumstances all records are published. The first was a single over Priory CP on 20th January (DK) and the next day one at Brogborough Lake. Another was near Great Barford on 25th, one at Sharpenhoe Clappers and another at Streatley (IB). Two at Brogborough Lake on 27th January (PS) and another near there on 4th February (KMS) and 16 by the A421 at Caulcott, Marston Moretaine on 4th February were seen by several observers (BJN, PS, MJP *et al*) before moving quickly through although two were seen close by next morning (PT). One at Woburn on 10th February (BJN) and three at Priory CP on 12th (TP). On 17th February, one at Sedbury Close, Luton (DP). Seven at Cotton End (SGW) – up to 12 had been reported there – and two at Turnpike Drive, Luton (DS) all on 19th. On 20th, 15 at Maulden Woods, five at Norse Road, Bedford on 23rd February, reducing to two on 9th March. (PA, MJP, SGW *et al*). Three at Crawley Green Road, Luton also on 23rd February. A county record count of 35 were highly mobile, roving around Flitwick from 27th February, with 22 present next day and 13 staying until 6th March (JPK, RAB, PT *et al*). Thirteen at Millbrook GC on 1st March (AH), one at Priory CP on 2nd and 5th–6th, two at Engayne Avenue, Sandy (BS). On 9th March, four at Quest Clp, Stewartby (KMS) and on 14th, three at The Lodge, Sandy. On 24th March, 28 at Half Moon Lane, Dunstable. There were still several sightings into April including one on 6th at Queen's Park, Bedford (TP) and nine on 20th at Arbour Close, Luton of which seven remained the next day (DG, DJO, BF, RF). Nine at Barton Hill, Bramingham Park (JKT) could have been some of these. One over Dunstable STW on 20th April (PT) but the last were seven near Sainsbury's on the Bramingham Wood Estate, Luton on 21st April (MW). Of the 172 reported, with some duplication up to 160 could have been involved, as a roving group may have occurred in different localities. There were no reports from the north and only a few from the east of the county so many could have gone undetected.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A common resident. At Priory CP, 43 males held territory indicative of the very stable breeding population for the last six years (DK).

**Duncock** *Prunella modularis*

A common resident. At Priory CP, eight males held territory and the breeding population has remained stable there since 1991 (DK).

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

A common resident. Twenty-two males held territory at Priory CP, a significant increase on the previous five years (DK). There were 27 at this site on 6th October.

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

The first arrival of this scarce summer visitor was at Priory CP on 18th April (DK) followed on 22nd by one at Tempsford level crossing (BM). At Santa Pod, near Odell Great Wood, one on 11th May (JM). Two males sang at Northill Home Wood from 13th May into June (ANS, DJO). A male at the western end of Brogborough Lake stayed from 11th May until 21st July but there was no proof of breeding (RAN, PS, DJO *et al*). At Priory CP, after the first noted above, two on 27th April. By 15th May four males were present; at least one pair bred successfully, young being seen on 22nd June (DK, ECN). One singing at Willington Poplars 27th May (SGW).

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

An annual spring migrant rarely on autumn passage. Breeding was confirmed at IBC, Kimpton Road, Luton. Five eggs were laid and four young fledged in early June (DM, BP, MH, RK per RD). At Blows Downs, a first year male from 29th March until 10th April and was twice observed in song (RD, PS *et al.*). It was joined by an immature male 5th to 7th April (RD, RJB) and female types were seen here on 31st March, 2nd, 7th, 19th and 21st April (RD, RJB, PT, MKB *et al.*). Following rain, one arrived in the garden of 15 Index Drive, Dunstable on 30th April and stayed overnight (RD). A female was at Galley Hill on 17th March (JCP) and at Cockayne Hatley a male on 28th March and a female on 7th–8th April (RSKB). One at Linslade on 7th April (KJ). An adult male along the R. Ouse at Bedford on 14th May (SGW). In Flitwick, a male on 26th October, was joined by two juveniles on 31st, the last staying until 8th November (JPK, DJO, RAB *et al.*).

**Common Redstart** *Pphoenicurus*

Spring passage for this regular migrant and scarce breeder was once again concentrated on Blows Downs. From 11th to 24th April probably four to five were involved. Other passage records included singles at Whipsnade Zoo on 10th April and 14th May, a male at Ledburn Road SP on 11th April and a female there on 23rd April, and single males at Priory CP on 27th April, Langford Lakes and Flitwick Wood on 12th May. Two pairs bred at Aspley Heath. A male and a female/immature at Barton Hills on 1st September. Singles at Whipsnade Zoo on 2nd, Whipsnade GC, Pegsdon Hills and Priory CP on 8th September. A male at Galley Hill and singles at Pegsdon Hills and Blows Downs on 16th followed by three first-winters at Galley Hill on 17th and one at Whipsnade Zoo Common on 18th September. A male at Coronation CIP 12th–13th October was a late date for this species.

**Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*

A regular, non-breeding migrant. The first for the year were two males at Pegsdon Hills on 27th April followed by singles at Aspley Heath on 28th April, Priory CP on 4th May, Willington GP on 11th May, Rookery North CIP on 12th May, Ledburn Road SP on 20th May and Dunstable STW on 30th May. Autumn passage was stronger commencing with three at Happyland Farm, Stopsley Common on 20th August then singles at Moat Farm, Turvey on 22nd, Dunstable STW on 26th and Flitwick Allotments and Chiltern Green on 28th August. Singles Priory CP on 8th and 9th September, two on 14th and one on 15th. Between three to seven passed through Ledburn Road SP during 31st August to 12th September, with three there from 31st August to 3rd September. Two at Dunstable STW on 4th September, two at Galley Hill on 7th and 16th September and two at Willington GP from 8th to 15th September. Continually present on Blows Downs from 30th August through to 23rd September with seven on 12th, 15th and 17th. Singles at Flitwick Wood on 15th September, Steppingley Reservoir on 22nd, Rookery South CIP on 24th and Yelnow New Plantation by Odell Great Wood on 26th September. Three at Stopsley Common on 28th and 29th September and the last of the year was in the paddocks at Blows Downs on 1st October.

**Stonechat** *S. torquata*

This irregular passage migrant and winter visitor was recorded in smaller numbers in 1996 than in recent years, with reports of 16 individuals. One in January, a female, at Thrupp End, Lidlington on 12th (PT). A female followed an earth digger at Coronation CIP on 3rd–4th February (KMS, DJO) and, on the latter date, one was at Grovebury SP (PT). A female at Houghton Regis ChP 2nd March (DM). Two males on 16th March, one at Aspley Heath (BJN) and one at Stopsley Common (TG, JCP), with a

female there on 29th March (JCP). One at Knotting Green on 24th March (JBT), with two on 27th, one at Dunstable STW (PT) and a female that stayed for approximately ten days at Aspley Heath (RAN). A pair was at Pratt's Quarry, Page Park, Leighton Buzzard on 7th April (PL). In autumn, one at Ledburn Road SP from 12th to 16th September (GD) and a male at Blows Downs from 27th September until 1st October (AR, PS *et al.*). A male at Higham Gobion on 9th October (JKT) and two at Knotting Green on 27th October (DJO).

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

Spring passage of this regular migrant and rare breeder was average for recent years. The earliest was on 11th March, a male found just south of Staploe. There were no more sightings until 17th March when two males were found at Galley Hill followed on 21st by a male at Laporte Way, Luton. The main spring passage ran from 23rd March until a pair on Pegsdon Hills on 25th May with reports coming from a further 25 sites across the county. The highest site counts were six at Dunstable STW on 27th March, six at Galley Hill on 2nd and 21st April, four at Willington GP on 3rd April and 12 at Blows Downs on 28th and 29th March, nine on 31st March and seven there on 19th April. Return passage was lighter and lasted from 11th August until 13th October. The highest counts were five at Happyland Farm, Stopsley Common on 21st and 22nd August and 12 on Pegsdon Hills on 26th August with singles on four dates at Blows Downs. The last for the year were singles on 13th October, between Flitwick and Steppingley, and near Bromham.

“Greenland Wheatears”, *O. a. leucorhoa* at Caddington GC with five on 1st May and at Dunstable STW on 25th April and 26th August (PT).

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

It was a poor year for this now regular spring passage migrant. One in Houghton Regis ChP on 2nd March, two on 3rd until 1st April may have over-wintered (PT, DM). On 31st March, a male was at Caddington GC, a male in a paddock by the Little Chef on the A1 at Sandy (MDR) and another male near Dolton's Farm, between Woburn and Woburn Sands (RAN, PS). Two at Barton Hills NR, a male on 2nd and 3rd April and another on 14th (MW). At Blows Downs, the traditional stronghold of this species, there were males on 9th, 10th and 19th April and a female on 16th (RD, KRW). In autumn a male was at Dunstable STW on 10th October (PT) and a single at Blows Downs on 14th October (JBT).

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

A very common resident and autumn passage migrant. At Priory CP, there were 54 on 1st January reducing to 40 by 27th January and 41 on 11th March. Fourteen males held breeding territory at this site and 36 here on 15th November. Other counts of interest came from Coronation CLP with 19 on 14th January and over 50 at Willington Woods on 25th November following an overnight movement of thrushes.

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

A common winter visitor and passage migrant. The highest counts came from the northern half of the county. Over 100 at Turvey Abbey on 3rd January increasing to 120 a month later. There were c.300 at Stopsley Common on 6th January and 100+ at Pegsdon Hills on 7th. Over 200 at this site on 13th January reducing to 150 on 3rd February. Also on 13th January, 257 at Rookery North CLP and c.200 at Bromham Lake NR on 22nd January. On 7th February, c.500 near Cardington with the highest first winter count of 1130 between Stopsley Common and Galley Hill on 10th February (JCP). Two hundred at Luton Hoo on 11th with 150 there on 15th February. On 10th February, over 100 near Henlow and over 300 at Henlow Camp on 12th.

One hundred over Kempston on 16th February, 120 at Southill on 18th and 470 at Haynes Park the same day. Near Radwell, 150+ on 23rd February and 250+ on 24th. On 29th February, 150 at Great Oak Farm, Turvey increasing to 500 a week later. On 9th March, 150 at Woburn Park. Return passage was apparent on 24th March when over 500 east over Pegsdon Hills NR, 300-400 over Eversholt, c.150 at Radwell GP, 200+ at Flitwick and 280 at Turvey Abbey. On 4th April, 323 in the Turvey area, c.450 still at Radwell GP on 6th and c.100 still at Turvey on 11th. Most had departed by mid April, the last migrant in spring a single at Blows Downs on 20th April. The first in autumn was at Clifton on 22nd October. On 25th October, up to 100 at Cleat Hill, Bedford and on 30th, 164 west over Brogborough. At Priory CP 229 south-west on 31st October, 233 on 8th November and 732 in the same direction on 9th November. On 4th November, c.100 at Cardington Airfield, c.100 west over Toddington on 8th and, on 24th, 300+ at Cople. On 28th November, 205 at Great Oak Farm, Turvey and in December large flocks included 200+ near Brogborough on 15th, 400 by R.Ivel, north of Biggleswade on 17th and 200+ at Galley Hill on 26th.

**Song Thrush** *T.philomelos*

A widespread but declining species. Six males held territory at Priory CP.

**Redwing** *T.iliiacus*

Large numbers of this common winter visitor and passage migrant were found in both winter periods. Regular counts at Stopsley Common produced a peak of c.300 on 6th January with still over 100 there on 28th March. About 200 at Luton Hoo on 1st January and 11th February. On 7th January, 196 at Coronation CIP and "several hundred" between Barton and Pulloxhill. Around 100 near Clifton on 10th January, 196 at Rookery North CIP on 13th and 150+ at Chalton STW on 29th January. About 1000, the largest flock reported this year (PS), were in fields at Woburn Park on 26th March following strong north-easterly winds, with still c.100 there on 5th April. At Tiddenfoot WP, c.70 on 14th March. Last of the spring were singles at Blows Downs on 25th April and at Whipsnade Zoo on 4th May. The first in autumn was also at this site, on 24th September. The largest second winter period counts were c.150 at Woburn and c.100 at Chalton on 2nd November, 200+ at Rookery South CIP on 15th December and c.120 at Tiddenfoot WP on 17th December. This species was widespread by the year's end.

**Mistle Thrush** *T.viscivorus*

A widely distributed resident species. Present all year at Pegsdon Hills NR and Stopsley Common, the largest group at the latter site was ten and a post-breeding flock of 28 were at Pegsdon Hills NR on 30th June. Two flocks of over 30, at Amptill Park on 30th July and at Haynes Park in August were noteworthy.

**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*

There were 17 site records of this local and decreasing summer visitor. After the initial flourish of migrants they proved difficult to find. The first on 20th April at Dunstable STW was followed on 21st by six in a new plantation adjacent to Charle Wood. They moved on almost immediately. A single pair bred in this vicinity. Also on 21st April, two arrived at Coronation CIP where one could be heard singing from May through to July, the last sighting on 1st August. At least a single brood was reared before work started in the pit. On 23rd April, a singing male at Tempsford and on 28th, one was at Brogborough Lake, the same day as one, but possibly up to three, were heard at Charle Wood. Two heard at Home Wood, Northill 27th April. The first at Willington GP was in song on 29th April staying to at least 9th July. One was heard on 30th April at Stewartby Lake and on 4th May at Lowes Wood and Harrold-Odell CP. A male was



heard on 5th and 6th May at Maulden Woods. Also in May, a male was singing near Peartree Farm, Elstow on 13th and at Priory CP on 27th, the latter site holding the same or another on 19th June. On 4th June, one was heard at Knotting Green with two there on 17th June into July. Four were heard on 3rd and 12th July, seemingly the best breeding site in the county. A further pair bred adjacent to a small fenced plantation in Rookery North CIP. Two between Harrowden and Cardington on 13th and 20th June and a singing male near Arlesey on 27th. The last for the year was one at Steppingley Reservoir on the late dates of 18th and 19th August.

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

A locally numerous summer visitor. The first in spring were two at Priory CP 3rd April. Good breeding concentrations included 21 pairs at Dunstable STW and 47 males holding territory at Priory CP, where the last of the year were recorded on 1st October.

**Reed Warbler** *A. scirpaceus*

The first arrival of this common summer visitor was, as usual, at Priory CP, on 21st April. Breeding numbers at Priory CP decreased from last year with 38 singing males compared to 49 in 1995. It is difficult to summarize whether there was an overall decline in the county as the species is undoubtedly under-recorded with reports coming from only 12 sites in the breeding season. Three plus breeding pairs were noted at Langford Lakes and the same population was recorded at Ledburn Road SP. Five pairs bred at Rookery North CIP, four pairs at Rookery South CIP, two pairs at Coronation CIP and four or five pairs bred at Luton Hoo. Other sightings came from Dunstable STW, Harrold-Odell CP, Southill Lake where five males held territory, Warren Villas NR, Lower Caldecote and Willington GP. The last for the year was seen at Priory CP on 10th October.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*

The first spring record of this common summer visitor and autumn migrant was at Priory CP on 23rd April. By mid May it was recorded from another ten sites. Up to three pairs bred successfully at Tiddenfoot WP, 12 males held territory at Priory CP. Additional reports in June came from Barton Hills, Caddington and Wigmere Valley Park, Luton. September records included one at Barton Hills on 1st, one at Willington GP on 3rd, eight at Priory CP on 5th, one at Barton Hill Road on 15th, three at Ledburn Road SP on 17th, three at Pegsdon Hills NR on 18th and the last for the year, on 25th September, was at Priory CP.

**Common Whitethroat** *S. communis*

The first sighting of this common migrant was noted on 15th April at Rookery South CIP. Records came from 19 sites. At Priory CP 22 males held territory compared to 29 in 1995. That compares to the previous highs of nine and eight in 1992 and 1994 respectively. A leucistic individual was at Pegsdon Hills NR on 26th August (JCP). The last for the year was at Priory CP on 22nd September.

**Garden Warbler** *S. borin*

The first spring arrival of this common summer migrant was at Coronation CIP on 20th April followed by singles at Blows Downs, Harrold-Odell CP and Priory CP on 21st. Territories at Priory CP were about average with 16 singing males compared to 13 in 1995 and 20 in 1994. Coronation CIP held four pairs, additional sightings through the summer came from 11 further sites. Singles in September at Stopsley Common on 16th and Priory CP on 24th-26th.

**Blackcap** *S. atricapilla*

A common summer visitor. Between January and March reports were received from 34 gardens. In addition over-wintering individuals, mostly males, were found at Priory

CP, Legrave Marsh, Chalton SW, and Swiss Gardens, Old Warden. In this first winter period the total probably exceeded 50 individuals. The first male in song was at County Hall, Bedford on 18th March, with another at Blows Downs on 29th. Seven pairs were at Coronation CIP and 23 males held territory at Priory CP being two up on the previous two years. There were a few sightings through October and one was at Shillington on 1st November. Two or three at a Luton garden from 20th November to 5th December and a male at "Fountains", Blunham on 21st November and a female there on 15th December. A female at Priory CP on 21st November and a male on 6th December. The last for the year was a male at Barton 25th–29th December.

**Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

A scarce summer visitor. The first arrivals were at Bellows Hill, Eaton Bray and Aspley Heath on 27th April. Breeding probably took place at the latter site, the only regular locality in the county, with the male present to June at least. A male was also at Deepdale Wood, Potton during May. No reports this year from Coopers Hill, Ampthill.

**Chiffchaff** *P. collybita*

A widespread passage migrant and summer visitor. In the first winter period, two at Priory CP, one in a Kempston garden on 19th February and another in a Barton garden on 22nd February. Probably the first summer migrant was one singing at Tiddenfoot WP on 19th March and by the end of the month singing males had been noted at Blows Downs, Blunham, Brogborough Lake, Dunstable STW, Priory CP, Radwell GP, Rookery South CIP, Whipsnade Zoo and Willington GP. Amongst the breeding reports, there were good numbers at Tiddenfoot WP and Ledburn Road SP and five males held territories at Priory CP. Departing migrants were noted to the end of October. In November and December, up to three at Priory CP and singles at Felmersham NR, Harrold–Odell CP, Ledburn Road SP and Tiddenfoot WP. One at Priory CP on 5th September was a grey individual with a call like that of *P. abietinus*. It arrived the same day as the Red-backed Shrike, cf, and was considered by the observers to be four to six weeks earlier than normal for this race (ECN, DJO).

**Willow Warbler** *P. trochilus*

A common migrant and summer visitor. The first arrival was on 28th March, at Tiddenfoot WP, most arriving during early April. Numbers were steady at Pegsdon Hills NR with about 20 pairs present. At Priory CP, 31 singing males on 15th April and 24 males held territory during the breeding season, six down on last year. Fifteen at Coronation CIP during May and June. After heavy overnight rain on 23rd August, there were c.100 Willow Warblers at Willington GP (ANS). The last to depart was seen at Priory CP on 16th September.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

This species remains common and widespread in suitable habitat. Out of range birds were noted at Priory CP, where two were present in mid March, and at Pegsdon Hills NR where there was an influx of 20+ on 3rd November.

**Firecrest** *R. ignicapillus*

A scarce passage migrant. A female at Ampthill Park on 16th March (RAN) which stayed until 18th March (PS). A male visited Whipsnade Zoo 31st May – 3rd June (CT) and another male was at Langford Lakes on 9th June (MJS).

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*

A declining summer visitor, so it was encouraging to receive records from 44 sites in the county. The first of the year at Whipsnade Zoo on 30th April. Breeding confirmed at Blunham, Bramingham Wood, Dunstable Cemetery, Eaton Bray Churchyard, Haynes Church End, Houghton Priory, Icknield Way, Luton Hoo, Northill Cemetery and

Tingrith Church. Breeding possibly took place at Ampthill Park, Jubilee Park in Bedford, Addison Howard Park and The Manor, Kempston, Turvey Abbey and Woburn Park. The last in autumn were singles in September at Blows Downs on 17th, Langford Lakes on 22nd and at Priory CP on 12th and 23rd.

**Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Another good year for this scarce passage migrant with eight reports. The first was a male at Barton Hills NR on the early date of 13th April (MW), another was there on 23rd (MC per MW). Another male on Blows Downs on 17th April (RD) and a female at Swiss Gardens, Old Warden on 24th April (WB). The last in spring was a female around the Finger Lakes at Priory CP on 28th April (DK). In August, a female or immature was in a garden in Wigmore Lane, Luton on 12th August (TG), followed by one in similar plumage at Happyland Farm near Milton Bryan on 23rd (TG). Lastly, one in the paddocks at Blows Downs on 16th September (RD).

**Bearded Tit** *Panurus biarmicus*

A female/juvenile of this irruptive visitor was at Brogborough Lake on 30th October (RAN, DJO) with two present later in the day (RAN, PS). The next morning a party of four were found, two adult males and two adult females, in the same area of reedbed at the western end of the lake (MJP, PT). They were calling and afforded very close views for some minutes but then moved swiftly away across the reedbed to the north-west. A single female was seen in this area on 18th December (RAN). Whether this was one of the original group is not known. These were the first records in the county since a male at Tiddenfoot WP on 9th November 1993.

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

A common resident. The only large flocks reported were 30 at Blue Lagoon, Arlesey on 10th June and c.25 at Stewartby Lake on 3rd September.

**Marsh Tit** *Parus palustris*

A fairly common resident. Records were received from; Aspley Heath, six sites in and around Bromham, Charle Wood, Cockayne Hatley, Duck Wood, Drakelow Pond Woburn, Felmersham NR, Hanger Wood near Bromham, How Wood, Maulden Woods, Old Warden, Pegsdon Hills NR, Radwell GP and Stockgrove Park. Three pairs bred at Pegsdon Hills NR.

**Willow Tit** *P. montanus*

All records of this scarce resident species are included. Ten observers submitted reports of this species from nine locations in the county. One at Moneypot Hill on 1st January (SA) and on 16th one at Maulden Woods (MKB). One at Harrold-Odell CP 31st March (DSW), one at Barton Hills on 14th April (AC) and at Blows Downs singles on 20th and 30th April (BRS) then 23rd September (PT). One near Caddington on 21st June and another at Barton Hill Road on 15th September (AC). The only site providing regular sightings was Tiddenfoot WP where one pair bred (GD, PS *et al*). Two at Ledburn Road SP on 26th August (PL) were probably wanderers from the last site. As the decline of this species continues, please send in all records accompanied by a brief description to confirm separation from Marsh Tit.

**Coal Tit** *P. ater*

A locally very common resident species, the population remaining reasonably stable. Reports of note concerned the first record for Bromham Lake NR on 24th September and a pair nesting in a garden at The Links, Kempston.

**Blue Tit** *P. caeruleus*

A very common resident. The largest post breeding flocks were at Coronation CIP with 23 in July, 33 in August and 28 from September – November.

**Great Tit** *Pmajor*

A very common resident. The largest flock was of 11 adults and 14 juveniles at Coronation CIP in August whereafter numbers declined to 19 in November–December.

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*

A locally common resident. One at Dunstable STW on 14th September was the first site record. A pair constructing a nest site in an old woodpecker's hole on Barton Hills on 18th and 20th April was only the second time the observer had seen the species at this site in 20 years

**Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

This remains a common if unobtrusive species and is certainly under-recorded.

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

Many of Bedfordshire's birders were able to enjoy the first county record of this species for 18 years when a juvenile was found at Priory CP on 5th September (TP, ECN, ANS, PS *et al*). This arrival followed easterly winds and the shrike was often observed catching bumble bees. Remarkably, birders from The Lodge, Sandy discovered a different juvenile along the R. Ivel south of Beeston on 7th October which stayed until 9th (MJP *et al*).

**Jay** *Garrulus garrulus*

A widespread and fairly common resident. Five, including three juveniles, were at Stopsley Common on 7th July. Four at Ledburn Road SP on 17th August were a site first and stayed until mid October. Evidence of passage included two at Coronation CIP on 1st September and another at this site on 3rd November, three at Rookery South CIP on 26th September, five over Bromham Lake on 28th September, six over High Street, Kempston on 13th October and two over Felmersham NR the same day. As in 1995, a pair were regular in gardens at The Links, Kempston from November until the year end.

**Magpie** *Pica pica*

The largest groups of this common and widespread resident species were 37 at Flitwick Moor on 21st January increasing to 62 by 4th February, 29 near Radwell GP on 10th February and up to 36 at Priory CP on 7th August. Other counts included 15 at Harrold–Odell CP on 29th February and ten at Blows Downs on 10th March. The range of this species continues to expand and, for example, it is now seen regularly around Kempston where only a few years ago it was a scarce visitor.

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*

A common resident. There was the usual large roost in both winter periods at Bromham Hall Wood and, as noted in previous years, large flocks accompanying Rooks passed to and from roost over Kempston. On 8th October, 910+ were counted over Stewartby, c.60 at Ledburn Road SP on 13th October and "hundreds" of Jackdaws and Rooks at the new workings south of Biddenham on 1st December.

**Rook** *C. frugilegus*

A common resident. At Steppingley Hospital crossroads, 48–50 nests were noted on 20th April. Apart from the large mixed December gathering noted under Jackdaw, few other counts of feeding parties or details of rookeries were received.

**Carrion Crow** *C. corone*

A common resident. Twenty on 4th February was the highest count at Stopsley Common and 26 visited Bromham Lake NR on 14th November. The highest counts came from Priory CP where there were 20–45 regularly in May rising to 80 on 2nd June, 87 on 13th July, 88 on 29th July and 89 on 2nd October with seven pairs breeding at this site. Birds with white in their wings were reported from Bromham, Kempston and Luton.



Starling

Andy White

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

An abundant species. At Ledburn Road SP, c.3000 estimated at a roost on 1st July and "several thousand" roosted in Rookery South CIP in early November. Predation of roosts by Sparrowhawks was noted at Kempston and Rookery South CIP (DJO). Elsewhere, c.350 at Henlow Camp on 19th July, c.250 in Henlow Village on 22nd September and c.300 at Shillington on 26th September. Large pre-roost flights are commonplace about the county.

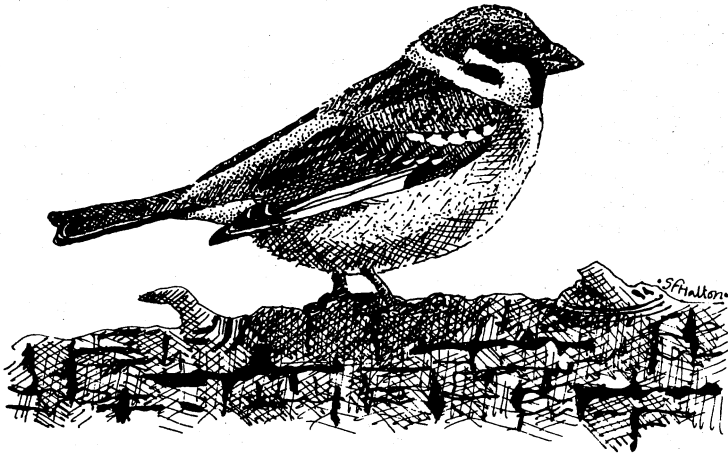
**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

An abundant but declining resident. The largest flock was c.100 at Langford Lakes on 11th August. A roost of c.50 in conifers at The Links, Kempston was regularly used in both winter periods but was often predated by the local Sparrowhawks.

**Tree Sparrow** *Pmontanus*

A resident species in serious decline. All records of this species are requested. Up to five at the well-watched Boughton End site in January (PA, AC *et al*). Four with a finch flock at Coopers Farm Meadow, Clifton on 31st January and two–six near Clifton from early February to early March (RM). One at Brogborough Lake on 4th February (PT) and two in a sweetcorn field at Millbrook Pillinge on 23rd March (PS). Seven, the highest count of the year, at Odell Great Wood on 19th April and one at Harrold-Odell CP on 11th May (JM). One at Dropshort Marsh on 9th June (PT) and two at Happyland

Farm paddocks, Milton Bryan on 20th August (TG). None were reported after this date in the county and the only breeding reported was of a pair at Eaton Bray (PT).



Tree Sparrow

Steve Halton

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

A very common species across the county. In the first winter period, a flock of over 250 at Pegsdon Hills NR fed on the excellent Beech-mast crop. At Luton Hoo, there were c.100 on 1st January, c.75 on 15th February and 30 on 3rd March. Sixty fed at Station End, Turvey on 9th January increasing to 160 by 1st February. At Southcourt Stud, Linslade, 150+ on 9th January, c.100 at Ampthill Park on 20th January, 80+ at Sharpenhoe Clappers on 26th January and at least 30 at Bush Wood, Luton on 10th March. In the second winter period, over 100 at Whipsnade Zoo in October, up to 70 at Tiddenfoot WP on 26th November, 60+ at Heath and Reach on 2nd December and 60 at Station End, Turvey on 27th December.

**Brambling** *F. montifringilla*

A reasonably good year for this regular winter visitor. A flock at Ampthill Park peaked at ten on 15th February. Two at Legrave Marsh on 5th January, increasing to five by the 28th. At Pegsdon Hills NR, 12 on 7th January and this flock remained until 24th March when five were still present. A flock at Charle Wood reached 30 on 14th January. One at Sharpenhoe Clappers on 26th January was with 80+ Chaffinches and at Whipsnade Zoo, there were up to six during January with one male still present on 23rd April. Two at Barton Hill Farm on 28th January and one at Priory CP on 4th February. At Luton Hoo, three on 15th February and two on 3rd March. Nine at Bluebell Wood, Linslade on 17th February and at Woburn Park, two – three on 21st February and one on 17th March. At Priory CP in October, one on 2nd, three on 8th, four flew south-west on 31st then, in November, two on 16th and 23rd and one on 24th and 27th. At Whipsnade Zoo, the first of autumn on 3rd October and then up to five accompanying 100+ Chaffinches later in the month. At Millbrook Pillinge, two males on 16th November and another on 1st December. A male at Turvey on 24th November and up to four at Tiddenfoot WP on 26th. Finally, a flock of 20+ stayed at Sandy Heath from 21st December into 1997.

**Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*

A common species across the county. The highest counts were c.75 at Luton Hoo on 1st January and, at Priory CP, 44 on 14th September rising to 180 on 5th–6th October then falling to 70 by 23rd November.

**Goldfinch** *C. carduelis*

Common and widespread. The following flocks were of note, c.30 at Luton Hoo and 12 at Felmersham NR on 21st January and 40 at Priory CP on 25th, 20+ and 30+ were near Caddington on 24th March and 25 on set-aside at Sharpenhoe on 9th May. Counts of c.80 were achieved at Priory CP on 12th August, Dunstable STW in September and at Ledburn Road SP on 5th October. At Priory CP, 200+ on 10th September, falling to 65 on 13th then 50 on 2nd October, 40 on 23rd November and 50 on 30th November.

**Siskin** *C. spinus*

A winter visitor in varying numbers. Scarcer this year in the first winter period than in the second. Double figure counts included ten Flitwick Moor 1st January, ten Stockgrove Park 31st January, ten Eversholt lake 11th February, 20+ The Lodge Sandy 17th February, ten Swiss Gardens, Old Warden 18th February and ten Stewartby Lake 16th March. The last of the spring was on the 17th March at Priory CP, where regular observations were made during January, February and March. The first in autumn were six at Whipsnade Zoo 4th September, followed by 15 Odell Great Wood 26th September, ten Flitwick Moor 28th September with 20 there on the 6th and 12th October, ten Ampthill Park 12th October, 15 Church End, Kempston 2nd November and 15 Priory CP 24th November. The largest flock of the year was 80+ Eversholt Lake 2nd December with other double figure counts in December including c.15 The Lodge, Sandy on 7th, 20 Southill Park 15th, c.30 along R. Ivel, Clifton 26th, c.20 Priory CP, 30+ near Millbrook Pillinge CIP and 50 Eversholt lake all on 29th and 20+ Flitwick Moor 30th. Single figure counts were received from Blunham, Bromham, East Hyde, Leagrave Marsh, Luton, Luton Hoo, Woburn and Woburn Park.

**Linnet** *C. cannabina*

A common resident. As usual, quite difficult to locate in the early weeks of the year. Few reports of breeding were submitted – more confirmed breeding records next year please. Counts of 30 or more came from 14 sites during the year. On 2nd January, c.170 were feeding near Clifton reducing to c.60 by 14th. Nearby, at Coopers Farm, c.40 were present on 31st January rising to 130 by 14th February. Over 50 at Galley Hill on 6th January and again on 28th March. On 6th February, 70 at Boughton End and a flock present all winter at Pegsdon Hills NR peaked at 200+ on 24th March. A flock at Bromham Lake NR in April reached 55 on 18th and c.30 were still at Harrold-Odell CP on 3rd May. In September c.650 at Warden Hill on 7th exploited a recently cut rape crop but numbers there reduced thereafter to c.250 on 14th and c.150 on 16th. Elsewhere in September, 80+ at Whipsnade Zoo on 10th and 120 at Priory CP on 28th. In October, c.50 feeding on weed seeds north-west of Bromham on 14th and 100+ in fields near Biddenham on 20th with over 200 by 23rd November. Also in November, 45 at Priory CP on 9th then 115 on 16th and 80 at Grindstone Hill, Turvey on 21st. On 15th December 100+ at Rookery South CIP.

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

A declining species and all records should be submitted please. Reports from only 14 sites in 1996 compared with 27 in 1995. At The Lodge, Sandy, 35 on 2nd January and at Stockgrove Park, over 60 present on 4th January increasing to c.100 by 13th January.

Ten at Ampthill Park on 15th February included an individual showing characters associated with the nominate race **Mealy Redpoll** *C.f.flammea* which is a scarce winter visitor to Bedfordshire (PT). A "pale" individual resembling this race was noted amongst a flock at Swiss Gardens, Old Warden on 18th February (RD). One Lesser Redpoll over Bromham Lake NR on 22nd February and another over Aspley Heath on 23rd. At The Lodge, Sandy, c.50 on 24th February and, at Whipsnade Zoo, 30+ over giraffes on 12th March and 28 passed over the "hippos" on 27th. The largest flock of the year was c.200 at The Lodge, Sandy on 16th March. On 19th March, six at Ampthill Park followed by 19 on 27th and 30+ on 7th April. The only record of the year from Priory CP was a single on 30th March. Three over Whipsnade Zoo on 11th April and another three on 14th and at "Fountains", Blunham, where this species used to be recorded daily, one in song on 12th April, was the first of the year. None were seen in Kempston where this species was also at one time quite common. In the late spring and early summer, the only reports were of singles at Ampthill Park on 26th May and at Millbrook on 2nd June. In August, one - three over a Flitwick garden between 11th-14th and two seen and heard at Steppingley Reservoir on 26th August. Another four at Steppingley Reservoir on 13th October and, on 25th October, a single over Bromham calling. The only other record of the second winter period was 24 at Stewartby Lake on 27th December.

**Common Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*

The only sighting of this irregular visitor to the county was one over Bluebell Wood, Whipsnade Zoo on 7th September (CT).

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A declining resident. Outside of the breeding season the largest flocks were 12 at Turvey in February and November, 10 Priory CP in January and 10 at Felmersham NR in December.

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Former breeding woods on the southern clay-with-flints from Studham to Caddington were checked on ten visits without any success (PT). Indeed, the only record of this scarce and elusive species in the county was of a pair accompanying Greenfinches at Woburn Park between 25th and 30th November (RAN).

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

A common and widespread resident. The largest flocks were of c.100 at Southcourt Stud, Linslade on 9th January, 30 at Millbrook Station on 16th November and 30 near Bromham on 5th December.

**Reed Bunting** *E.schoeniclus*

A fairly common but probably declining species. Eight males held territory at Priory CP representing a 43% decline on the average for the previous six years. Twelve at Coronation CIP in July with the only other flocks of any size being ten or more at Coopers Farm, Clifton on 24th January then 20+ there on 14th February and up to 15 at Ledburn Road SP on 16th September.

**Corn Bunting** *Miliaria calandra*

This species continues to decline as a locally common resident breeder. Singing males were at 16 sites as follows; Biddenham to Kempston fields - eight, Bromham - five at one site and two nearby, Chaul End, Caddington - one, Cockayne Hatley - at least four, Cople - one, East Hyde - one, Flitwick area - up to four, Langford - one or two, Potton - four, Steppingley - one, Stopsley Common, Warden and Galley Hills area - at least eight, Totternhoe Knolls - nine and Willington - two or three. At Totternhoe, Eaton Bray and Sewell, this species was still numerous during May and June but at



Dunstable STW, where about three pairs used to breed, it was only seen on three occasions and there were no breeding pairs for the fifth year in succession. At Priory CP, the winter roost attracted a maximum of 19 in the first winter period and 48 in the second, on 9th December. Ten at South Mills NR. on 1st January, 25 at Clifton on 14th January followed by 21 there on 17th January. Over 20 seen and heard at Steppingley on 22nd February and eight at Biggleswade on 16th April. Twelve were roosting at Stopsley Common on 28th September and 20 at Biddenham fields on 20th October and 12 on 23rd November. At Steppingley, 22 were opposite the "Drovers Arms" PH on 24th November and 40 south of Stotfold on 25th November, increasing there to 70 by 16th December. At Houghton Regis ChP, one on 22nd October, 12 on 14th December and eight on 29th. Lastly, counts from Knötting Green reached 35 on 15th December and 30 on both 25th and 28th December.

### MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS

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

#### **Black Swan** *Cygnus atratus*

Ten of the released birds were at Basin Pond, Woburn in January with nine still remaining at the end of the year (BN).

#### **Whooper Swan** *C. cygnus*

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

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

A single bird was at Harrold/Odell CP on 12th May – too late for it to be considered as a wild bird (PT).

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

One at East Hyde from 1st January to 7th March (MDR). A single seen sporadically throughout the year at Radwell GP which also frequented Harrold/Odell CP (MJP *et al*). One at Rookery South CIP on 18th/19th August. One at Dunstable STW on various dates between 1st March and 1st September, which was probably the same bird that was seen at Houghton Regis ChP on 2nd and 3rd March and at Grovebury SP on 17th December (PT & PS). There was a maximum of 2 and possibly 3 individual birds in the county during the year.

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

One white-morph over Kempston which later landed with 73 Greylag Geese at Rookery South CIP on 14th January. A blue-morph at Dunstable STW on 21st March and 4 white-morphs were seen over the same locality on 2nd October (PT). Five white-morphs over Whipsnade WAP from 1st October. "Snow Goose types" on various dates at Stewartby Lake, Rookery South CIP and Harrold/Odell CP.

#### **Emperor Goose** *A. canagicus*

One at Stewartby Lake with 117 Canada Geese and one Barnacle Goose on 5th November (PA).

#### **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).

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

Five were noted in a collection at Willington on 6th December (PA).

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

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

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*

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

**Muscovy Duck** *Cairina moschata*

A pair bred at East Hyde and raised nine young. Others were seen at South Mills, Harrold/Odell CP, Swiss Gardens, near Haynes, between Ridgmont and Woburn, by Brogborough Lake and at Clophill during the year.

**Ringed Teal** *Callonetta leucophrys*

A female 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).

**Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa*

An adult male on 21st January on the R. Ivel downstream from Blunham was associating with a female Speckled Teal (JTRS, EMS). A female on a pond near Thomas Moore School, Bedford on 1st April (AG). One in eclipse along the R. Ouse, Bedford on 6th-15th August (SGW).

**Mandarin** *A. galericulata*

Five noted in a collection at Willington on 6th December (PA).

**Chiloe Wigeon** *Anas sibilatrix*

Two 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** *A. flavirostris*

A female associating with a male Wood Duck on the R. Ivel at South Mills on 21st January (JTRS, EMS). One at Dunstable STW on 12th September (AW).

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

A drake noted in a collection at Willington on 6th December (PA).

**Hooded Merganser** *Lophodytes cucullatus*

The male from 1993 was still present on the R. Ivel at South Mills at various dates throughout the year (SA, MJP, JTRS).

**Gyr Falcon** *Falco rusticolus*

A pale phased immature beside the R. Ivel at Sandy on 14th January; bells were seen attached to the rump and jesses on the legs. It was later discovered the bird had escaped from Sandy.

**Peafowl** *Pavo* 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, Peafowl 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.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

Two noted in a collection at Willington on 6th December (PA).

**Eastern Rosella** *Platycercus eximius*

One at Manor Road, Barton on 2nd April (BRS) and another in a Woburn garden on 18th June (BJN).

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

Unidentified single parakeet species at Bromham Lake NR on 6th July (DG per PA), Lower Stondon on 17th July (AB, MB) and another visited a Bedford garden on 1st August (AG).

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

The following is a list of scarce birds reported during 1996 for which no adequate descriptions were received. Any observer able to submit suitable details for consideration by the Rarities Panel from this list is requested to do so, so that the record is not lost. Please also refer to last year's report to check if you have any information on the 1995 Appendix A list. It was disappointing not to have received confirmation of any of the following birds last year.

Bittern	Brogborough Lake	21st January
Whooper Swan	Ickwell Bury	24th Feb. – 6th March
Whooper Swan	Five at Houghton Regis ChP	January
Bean/Pink-footed Goose	Millbrook Pillinge CIP	5th March
Bean/Pink-footed Goose	Rookery South CIP	6th–8th March
Common Scoter	14 at Stewartby Lake	22nd March
Common Scoter	Brogborough Lake	23rd March
Marsh Harrier		January
Goshawk	Swading Hill, Sandy	8th May
Osprey	Priory CP	3rd May
Merlin	Dunstable STW	1st October
Merlin	Marston Moretaine STW	November
Peregrine	Priory CP	6th February
Peregrine	Priory CP	20th September
Peregrine	Rookery South CIP	30th August
Peregrine	Rookery South CIP	22nd September
Bar-tailed Godwit	Five at Coronation CIP	6th August
Whimbrel	Six at Rookery South CIP	7th August
Mediterranean Gull	Rookery South CIP	27th August
Mediterranean Gull	Rookery South CIP	13th October
Yellow-legged Gull	Several Rookery S.CIP	throughout year
Iceland Gull	Rookery South CIP	23rd February
Iceland Gull	Rookery South CIP	13th December
Glaucous Gull	Rookery South CIP	15th March
Glaucous Gull	Rookery South CIP	15th November
Kittiwake	Dunstable STW	13th July
Kittiwake	Stewartby Lake	13th November
Sandwich Tern	Dunstable STW	13th April
Firecrest	Stewartby Lake	16th November

**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.

Regrettably, there has been a recent tendency for some reports of birds rare to the county to be accompanied by only the scantiest of descriptive detail and, as a consequence, the panel have had no choice but to reject several records that would have quite possibly proved acceptable had more detail been forthcoming. 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.

Black-necked Grebe	Priory CP	28th February
Fulmar	Priory CP	6th November
Gannet	Priory CP	21st September
Red-breasted Merganser	Six at Harrold-Odell CP	7th April
Honey Buzzard	Two at Coronation CIP	28th April
Peregrine	A603 east of Bedford	9th February
Grey Plover	Radwell GP	22nd January
Iceland Gull	Brogborough Lake	14th January
Iceland Gull	Woburn Park	11th February
Iceland Gull	Brogborough Lake	11th February
Glaucous Gull	Woburn Park	21st January
Glaucous Gull	Priory CP	1st February
Moustached Warbler	Priory CP	5th May
Great Grey Shrike	Cardington Mill	23rd November
Little Bunting	Stopsley Common	28th September

#### Appendix C: Pending Records (1996 unless noted)

Goshawk	Beds/Bucks border	2nd April'95
Goshawk	Charle Wood	9th April'95
Goshawk	Warden Little Wood	15th May'95
Goshawk	Brogborough Lake	9th December'95
Merlin	Rookery South CIP	12th November'95
Merlin	Rookery North CIP	2nd December'95
Black Redstart	Old Linslade	7th April
Snow Bunting	Six at Harrold-Odell CP	5th November

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.

MARTIN PALMER and DAVID ODELL

## **BIRDS IN BEDFORDSHIRE IN RETROSPECT 1971–1995**

by Peter Smith and Barry Nightingale

### **Introduction**

Henry Key wrote a very informative paper in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* No. 26 (for the year 1971) entitled “Birds in Bedfordshire – 25 Years in Retrospect” which covered the period 1946–1970. A further 25 years has now passed and this article takes the opportunity of reviewing the changes that have occurred since Key’s paper.

With some knowledge of the picture today, a mere glimpse through the bird report of 1971, the first report following the end of Key’s survey period, will give an indication of many of the changes that have occurred. Like most things in the “Modern World”, the rate of change of the birds and bird watching in Bedfordshire has been faster in the last 25 years than at any time previously. In 1971, for instance, full field descriptions were still needed to support observations of Cormorant and Sparrowhawk, species that can now be seen on a daily basis. Species that were not even listed in the main systematic report, perhaps because they were too commonplace, included Grey Partridge, Barn Owl and Willow Tit. Red-backed Shrike still bred in Bedfordshire, Corn Buntings were described as “widespread and common”, and Tree Sparrows were “remarkably widespread and common in the county”. Change in the status of species nearly always stems from habitat change and the wading species’ accounts in 1971 were filled with mention of the sewage farms at Bedford and Dunstable. There was no mention of Rookery clay pit in the 1971 report, nor of Radwell gravel pits, which quickly came to prominence during the last 25 years, and then as quickly became less suitable for waders. As an indication of how productive Radwell was, a total of 22 species of waders were seen in a six week period in autumn 1981.

The change, too, is seen in the number of observers and observer coverage. There are just seven contributors to the 1971 report who, by 1995, were apparently still active in the county, but whole new generations have taken up the hobby, and this is one of the more healthy aspects of change.

For all those readers without access to Key’s account in 1971 the original paper is repeated here.

## **BIRDS IN BEDFORDSHIRE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN RETROSPECT**

by Mr. Henry A. S. Key

This article is not intended as, nor could be, a comprehensive survey of the bird life of the county during the period since the re-formation of the Society, but I felt that the time was opportune for a summary to be made of the excellent progress that has been achieved during the past twenty-five years, in the study of the occurrences and distribution of various species.

When, as the Society’s first Recorder of Birds, I wrote a brief account of the ‘Birds of Bedfordshire’ in the first issue of the Journal, I remarked that: “With the formation of the new Society, and the consequent stimulus to study our bird life more closely, I have no doubt that the next few years will see many important additions to our

County list" and went on to indicate the reasons for this assumption, based not only on local factors but on a consideration of the distribution in contiguous counties, as well as on national reports.

An inland county could not be expected to show any phenomenal changes during this period, but the results achieved so far have exceeded expectations, due mainly to the efforts of a group of enthusiastic field workers. Their standard of reporting has greatly improved during recent years, and if this trend continues, a still more interesting and accurate knowledge of the birds of the County will be available to increasing numbers not only of our own members but of the interested public as well.

There are still many whose interest in the subject is less enthusiastic but whose observations are still of value and one hopes that they can be encouraged to note down what they see and forward reports to the Recorder of Birds. Details of the commoner species are no less welcome and will assist in a better assessment of distribution.

Before we deal in details with the various families and species, some consideration must be given to factors affecting fluctuation of population and distribution, such as urban developments, changes in agricultural systems, the excavation of mineral deposits and not least the widely-varying effects of weather, which have produced some notable extremes during the period considered.

I will deal firstly with urban expansion. Everyone is aware of the spread of our larger towns, with their expanding populations and industries. An increasing amount of the countryside is being built over and, to some extent, this has an adverse effect on the species which normally nest in the fields and hedgerows. The encroachment in the Luton-Dunstable area towards the downs, for example, appears to be affecting certain species, not only because of land use, but mainly through recreations activities over a wide area. Some woodlands are either becoming increasingly accessible, or are gradually being absorbed in building projects.

So-called 'green belts' remain as such for a relatively short period before becoming eroded by civic expansion and one wonders where it will all end. Yet the picture is not wholly black, for it is found that where planning has allowed for sufficient garden space especially on the new estates, many of the commoner species find nesting sites in the shrubs and ramblers that are planted. Interesting surveys could be undertaken into the status of species in these localities and some remarkable data would probably be forthcoming. One new arrival to the County – the Collared Dove – has already shown its preference for urban habitats and become well established therein. Parks with their shrubberies and lakes are often merely accepted without investigation.

Town services also provide one further field of study in the form of sewage farms, the types and systems of which vary from the compact pre-processing station at Luton, to the more open irrigation schemes at Bedford and Dunstable, with their variety of flooded 'pans'. The records of past observations in the Journal will show in detail many species that may be encountered by the observer who chooses to walk in 'these salubrious precincts' as a former President of the Society, the late Duke of Bedford so aptly phrased it to me. Many villages now have their own disposal works, where a variety of birds can be observed feeding in the sprinkler filters.

Turning to the various processes of extraction there is no other county in which, related to its area, the effect of these processes is more widely felt. The materials excavated include chalk, clay, gravel, sand and to a minor extent stone. The chalk quarries in the south of the County are a familiar sight, if not actually an eyesore, but as they are essential to industry, our only regret is that the processes of excavation and improvement fall far short of the ideal. Some quarries have a tendency to flood and the resultant pools can be very dangerous, being hemmed in by steep cliffs, so that there is probably no option but to infill these with refuse and overlay with top soil, to return them to agricultural use.

During the process of dumping of urban waste, such pits attract a variety of species, among which the commoner types of gulls predominate, such as Lesser-Backed, occasionally Greater Black-Backed, Common and Black-headed. It is almost certain that the first breeding record of the latter species in the County occurred on one of these sites at Houghton Regis (see Journal No. 9—1954). These scavengers have gradually extended their range inland to feed on urban dumps and it is probable that they spread originally from flocks in the Thames basin, moving northwards along the valley of the River Lea.

There are other and choicer sites such as in the Sundon area where the worked-out sections could be left untouched to be colonised gradually by representative chalk flora, thereby forming a habitat for Whinchats, Pipits and associated species to form a nature sanctuary. I understand that some consideration is already being given to this ideal, and we hope that some fruitful action will result, before yet another opportunity is lost.

The net (sic) consideration is of clay workings. There are numerous deep pits in the Oxford Clay, chiefly in the Marston Valley area, which provide some potentially interesting habitats. These excavations are initially kept dry by pumping during extraction and the overburden was formerly tipped in conical heaps — grey peaks in a sombre wilderness. When these pits are worked out, there is a tendency for them to flood, and gradually the taller mounds became islands, until most of them disappear under the rising waters. When in the optimum 'island' state these mounds hold an interesting nesting population of several species. At one time Stewartby Lake had upwards of a hundred nests of Black-headed Gull with many of Great-crested Grebe, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Mute Swan and Coot and others. Another pit yielded a further County breeding record in 1968, when several pairs of Lesser Black-back Gulls nested. The flooded workings are also the roosting areas of large flocks of gulls in the winter months. A disappointment to ornithologists is that, to date, not one of the many excavations has become a nature reserve, in part or wholly. There is an abundant subject here for educational and ecological study and some effort should be made by all interested organisations to secure one such habitat while there is yet time. Pressure to provide amenities for the public has so far ordained that these pits should become the basis for yachting and associated water sports but many of us hope that some compromise can be reached at an early date.

Next for consideration is the extraction of gravel. Such workings are in river valleys and consequently are flooded from the beginning. The earlier systems resulted in ridges being left above water as the work progressed and these islands were soon

overgrown with aquatic and other plants and willows. The irregular ridges produced a number of bays and occasionally there remained exposed shallow spits of sandy shingle. Many wading birds and wildfowl are attracted to them and they become in consequence veritable Meccas for bird-watchers.

Several additions to the County list have resulted from these localities chiefly of waders as might be expected and one of these, the Little Ringed Plover, bred for the first recorded time with us. Not only did the Black-headed Gull extend its range to Wyboston pit but an exciting discovery was made in 1963 when a pair of Common Terns nested. In subsequent seasons the numbers of nesting birds of this species rose to a maximum of five pairs. Again, the demand for water sports has meant that most of these localities have been earmarked for 'improvement', but some co-ordinated action by all Societies interested in nature conservation could surely result in positive action being taken, to secure at least one suitable habitat with the necessary seclusion for breeding birds. The Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Naturalists Trust is to be complimented on its admirable management of the Felmersham gravel pits, which are mainly a haunt for wildfowl. Readers are referred to my article in the No. 13 (1958) Journal outlining the nature and potential of such workings.

Sand pits are of relatively less significance unless they have a few shallow pools of water where waders may be encountered and the Little Ringed Plover may breed. Usually these workings are relatively dry and apart from possibly Pipits, Wagtails and Buntings with the addition of Finches and Warblers attracted by scrub growth, the most outstanding feature will probably be the colonies of Sand Martins which excavate their nesting holes in the abandoned 'cliff' faces. As, however these dry sites are ideal for infilling with town refuse and eventual reclamation for agriculture, the ornithological interest may be short-lived.

Changes in agricultural systems are the next consideration and there are one or two prominent features. Firstly everyone must be aware of the removal of hedgerows and the creation of relatively large areas of uninterrupted crops. Some reduction in the number of passerines is apparent, though it is yet too early to ascertain the true situation and future surveys may reveal that the species concerned have adapted themselves to changing environment. Some will be driven to the cover afforded by woodlands, but as many of these are decreasing in area or quality, the whole question is for the time being undecided.

Neglected woodlands tend to become overgrown with blackthorn and have dark interiors with a comparatively sparse ground flora. These are little more than roosts for crows and wood pigeons. Alternatively under severe management most of the old timber suitable for nesting sites is removed, and the pattern now is to plant closely with conifers which when mature, achieve much the same effect as with the original neglected woods leaving few nesting sites for Warblers etc. On some estates a better balance is maintained, and well managed woodlands, such as Odell Great Wood, have, in consequence a richer variety of bird and plant life. Although mainly engaged with economic forestry, the Forestry Commission shows a well informed approach to the various aspects of the problem in the woodlands under their care. Those who have followed the well-laid out nature trails at Maulden Woods will appreciate these remarks.



Rivers and lakes must receive some consideration. Drainage schemes associated with the main waterways have influenced the distribution of some species through the removal of reed-beds and other vegetation. This was discovered during a riverside survey some years ago, but by now I hope that my fears were ill-founded. There is urgent need to repeat the investigation in the near future. The pollution of some streams has been responsible for the poisoning of fish which form the main food of some species.

The Great Ouse River Authority has by careful management succeeded in improving greatly the quality of its waters so that the threat may now have passed; at any rate it is gratifying that the number of Kingfishers appears to be increasing. The various lakes in the private grounds have maintained their standard and being relatively free from public access, the sanctuary they afford should enhance the breeding population of these reserves.

Of the former marshes of the County, the only one of note remaining is Flitwick Moor. Here the excavation of the peat has resulted in a water-logged area of ornithological and botanical significance. Now that extraction has ceased, this area should progressively mature under the management of the Trust to become one of the County's more interesting reserves and a habitat for variety of plants and birds. Already the Water Rail appears to have established itself there. There is a hope that the old timber in adjoining Folly Wood will not be removed; this will provide an ideal feeding ground as well as nesting sites for tits and woodpeckers.

The vagaries of the weather are our final consideration. Although our average rainfall is less than in some other areas, certain wet summers have had adverse effects on the breeding of game birds and other ground nesting species. There have been several extremes during the period of the last twenty-five years. The disastrous effects of the winter of 1946/47 were reported in my article which appeared in the Journal of the latter year (No. 2) but fortunately the next few summers were relatively mild so that breeding populations were restored, yet not all losses were made good as since that time, for example, Green Woodpeckers appear to be scarcer than before.

Gale force winds in the Spring of 1950 caused a 'wreck' of Little Auks, one of which was picked up in the County and similar conditions in the Autumn blew a Manx Shearwater to us. Two years later another Autumn gale was responsible for the arrival of no less than five Leach's Petrels. The following year had such a fine Autumn that the late departure of migrants was not noticeable. The year 1954 began with storms and this resulted in more interruptions of coastal species; several Shags, a Cormorant and a Puffin were noted. This was repeated with cold east to north-east winds early in 1958 when there was an invasion of Shags during January and February (see special bird note in the Bird Report of that year).

The end of December 1961 provided sharp contrast when the freeze-up of waterways caused the disappearance of nearly all ducks, driven to find open pools and feeding places elsewhere. The following year ended similarly, and the conditions carried over into 1963, when the severe wintry conditions closed all but a few stretches of the River Ouse, open pools being mainly adjacent to the power stations at Bedford and Little Barford, due to the outfall of warm water. From these localities were reported up to seventy White-fronted Geese, some uncommon species of

duck such as Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser as well as Whooper and Bewick Swans. Among the visiting passerines were larger flocks than usual of Fieldfares and Redwings and parties of up to thirty Bramblings. As a result of such arctic conditions, there was a noticeable absence later in the year of Lapwings and Snipe among others. These effects were, therefore similar to those experienced in 1946/47, though less severe.

Let us turn finally to more specific details concerning the various families, conscious of the fact that only a broad outline can be envisaged within the scope of this article and the reader should consult past issues of the Journal for more comprehensive data.

A five year venture known as the BTO Atlas Project began in 1968 in which it is hoped to survey and record from the ten kilometre squares of the County map, all the species occurring in these areas, in order to build up gradually a comprehensive account of the birds of the county and to contribute to a better picture of the national coverage. Details of this scheme have appeared elsewhere in the Journals. Of course, even the completed report will not be final but the data assembled will be useful locally and nationally for reference and to assist conservation.

When the Society was re-formed in 1946, a letter by 'Touchstone' (Chris Carter) in his column of the 'Bedfordshire Times' stated:

"But I fear that they (i.e. the members of the re-formed Bedfordshire Natural History Society) will not see some of the denizens of the woods and moorland that were once familiar in Bedfordshire. The late Mr. A. S. Covington, the well-known taxidermist and naturalist, who was born in Bedford in 1847, had handled such rare birds as the Great Spotted Cuckoo; the Great Black Woodpecker; the Little Bittern; the Rough Legged Bustard (sic); several Great (sic) Bitterns (now practically extinct); the Hen harrier; the Honey Buzzard and the Bearded Tit.

Among Mr. Covington's own collection were a Buzzard Hawk, which was shot at Putnoe Wood when he was a boy – a splendid Kite, the last one killed in Bedfordshire in 1822; a Peregrine Falcon from Colmworth; the rare Purple Heron – and a Great Bittern from Flitwick Moor."

It is highly improbable that some of the species in this article (occasionally incorrectly named), originated in the County but among the possibility of 'natives' however, it is now of interest to report that several have occurred during the period considered. These include Purple Heron, Bittern, Buzzard, Rough Legged Buzzard, Kite, Honey Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon and Bearded Tit.

During the past quarter century twenty-six species or sub-species have been added to the County list, while other records confirm previous occurrences, that for some reason, were of doubtful authenticity. The new ones are:

Black-necked Grebe, Purple Heron, Night Heron, Little Egret, Marsh Harrier, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Great Snipe, Purple Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, Great Skua, Iceland Gull, White-winged Black Tern, Sandwich Tern, Collared Dove, Bearded Tit, Rock/Water Pipits, Blue-headed Wagtail, Lapland Bunting.

In addition the following seven species bred in the county for the first time as far as we know: Garganey, Little Ringed Plover, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-headed

Gull, Common Tern, Collared Dove and Short-eared Owl.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the new records were obtained from marsh or water habitats, which confirms previous remarks concerning the more popular haunts of bird-watchers. It is hoped many members will increasingly visit the less spectacular areas of the countryside for the Atlas surveys so that overall investigations will yield authentic and representative data.

The Black-throated Diver has been recorded on at least one occasion and the Red-throated on at least eight. Both Great-crested and Little Grebes are well established as breeding species, while the other members of this family represented were Red-necked, seen in three years and the Black-necked (a newcomer) which occurred in at least seven instances. Winter storms drove maritime species into Bedfordshire as follows (the figures refer to the number of years recorded): Leach's Petrel 2, Manx Shearwater 4, Gannet 5, Cormorant – on at least 17, Shag at least 6, Great Skua 1 (a new record), two probable Arctic Skuas, Little Auk 1 and Puffin 3.

Common Herons still occupy heronries at Bromham and Southill Parks where they are afforded protection though former small colonies have been abandoned. Other members of this group encountered have been Purple Heron – at least twice with single instances of Night Heron and Little Egret, all three species being new to the county. Most surprising has been the frequent visits of the Bittern, observed in no less than twelve years.

In consequence of the development in number and variety of pools during recent years, there has been a noticeable increase during Autumn and Winter months of flocks of both wildfowl and gulls. Among the former Mallard, Teal, Tufted and Pochard have been the most common in decreasing numerical order, with combined parties of several thousands. The largest recorded party of Mallard (c2500) was on the clay pits in October 1967, with up to a maximum of 500 at Wyboston gravel pits, Teal show some preference for Barker's Lane gravel pit, Bedford – maximum here c450 in November 1961, Bedford Sewage Farm and Wyboston – maximum c350 in 1968.

Among the diving ducks, both Tufted and Pochard frequent chiefly the Stewartby and Wyboston areas as well as occurring in reasonable numbers at Southill Lake. The size of Stewartby Lake tends to attract the largest Winter parties, where Tufted reached a maximum of c450 on 20th December 1967 while Wyboston holds the record for Pochard with c340 on 29th October 1967 and only slightly fewer both here and at Stewartby in 1968.

Mallard are by far the commonest breeders and although Teal are widely distributed, the only positive records of nesting came from Southill in 1948 and Felmersham in 1952. Garganey have turned up in most Summers and the first proved nest was at Bedford Sewage Farm in 1948 with only one since. Evidence of breeding of Tufted has been obtained in nineteen Summers and of Pochard in thirteen.

Wigeon, Pintail and Shoveller have been regular visitors, but only the latter species has bred at Southill in 1964 and 1965. Gadwall have been less frequent.

The remaining 'divers' have been observed in the following number of years: Scaup 8, Ferruginous Duck 1, Long-tailed Duck 4 and Common Scoter 11. 'Sawbills' have been represented by Red-breasted Merganser 9, Goosander 18, and Smew 16. Shelduck have been recorded in almost every year.

Winter roosts of mixed species of gulls reached an all-time peak at Stewartby Lake on 9th March, 1968 when a total of 38,000 was estimated. The previous best has been a flock of 24,172 recorded during a gull count there on 5th January 1966. Black-headed Gulls predominated with at times parties of some three thousand each of Herring and Lesser Black-backs and half that number of Common. Greater Black-backs were recorded in most years and increased to one hundred in parties at Elstow clay pit on 10th January 1967 and similarly here in January 1968. A gathering of about this size was also present in the same month and year at Dunstable Sewage Farm.

Other species of gull recorded were one Iceland on 18th March 1962 (a new record for the County), Little Gull in nine years and Kittiwake in twelve.

The first authenticated breeding of Black-headed Gulls was at Dunstable Sewage Farm in 1955 and came as no surprise following the inconclusive evidence at Houghton Regis in 1954. The species soon spread to Stewartby Lake. Here in 1959 James Ferguson Lees and I counted 107 occupied nests on the sole remaining island. From various sources an estimated total of c100 nests was recorded in 1963, 130 in 1964, 250 pairs of birds in 1965 but the number of nests was probably less and c200 nests estimated in 1961. The birds eventually spread to the gravel pits at Wyboston where three pairs bred in 1968 and four pairs in 1970. When a pair of Lesser Black-backs was seen displaying in the Brogborough pit in 1966, the possibility of breeding was suspected but this was not proved in the 'clay' area until 1968 when three pairs nested in one locality to form yet another breeding record. This was not repeated subsequently.

On Spring and Autumn migration, Black Terns were variously reported in almost every year and single instances of the White-winged Black Tern from Stewartby Lake on 16th–17th May 1961 and in 1967 form an addition to the County list. Mixed parties of Common and Arctic Terns were attracted to the various waters in the majority of seasons during passage but a surprise discovery was made at Wyboston pits in 1963 when a pair of 'Commons' nested for the first time in the County. The fortunes of this species have fluctuated since with up to five nests in one year but owing to disturbances the successes have proved to be disappointingly few. Other species of Terns recorded have been little observed in eight years and reported in each of the last four – as well as Sandwich – a newcomer in 1967 and seen again in both 1969 and 1970.

The occurrences of diurnal birds of prey have been somewhat erratic with Kestrel a reasonably common resident species. The Hobby has been seen in most Summers but nests are seldom discovered though no doubt overlooked. The Sparrow Hawk is now seemingly very scarce with hardly ever a record of breeding. (Both these species should be afforded every protection). Other species recorded (together with the number of years observed) have been: "Golden Eagle" – an unconfirmed report from Woburn in 1954, Buzzard (species) almost every year, Rough-legged Buzzard 1, Goshawk 1 definite and a 'probable', Kite – similarly, White-tailed Eagle 1, Honey Buzzard 1, Marsh Harrier 1, Hen Harrier 2, Montagu's Harrier 4 and unconfirmed harriers 5, Osprey 3, Peregrine Falcon – at least 10, and Merlin 4 with further probables.

Pheasant, Common and Red-legged Partridges are common residents, with fluctuating populations somewhat influenced by the weather conditions which prevail at the critical stage of breeding, but the summer-visiting Quail is not heard every year, though recorded in fourteen seasons.

Of the Crakes, the Water Rail is seen in most years and has been known to nest; the Spotted Crake has been observed once. Both the Moorhen and Coot are common residents, whilst Corncrake was heard in eight years.

The Waders form a relatively large group and no less than thirty-seven species were recorded during the period under review. These are classified under the following headings according to their relative occurrence; those marked \* are new county records.

(a) Species recorded virtually every year:

The commonest resident is the Lapwing whose numbers are augmented by migrants outside the breeding season. The same remarks (in lesser degree) apply also to the Common Snipe and Woodcock.

Both the Little Ringed Plover\* and Redshank occur as summer visitors in small numbers and the first recorded occurrence of the former was in 1951 when the nest was found.

The remaining passage migrants or winter visitors in this group are: Ringed Plover; Golden Plover; Jack Snipe; Curlew; Green, Wood and Common Sandpiper; Greenshank; Dunlin and Ruff.

(b) Species of infrequent occurrence but probably overlooked:

Oyster Catcher; Turnstone\*; Whimbrel; Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits; Spotted Redshank; Knot; Little Stint; Curlew Sandpiper; Sanderling and Stone Curlew. The latter species has been heard during eight summers in suitable haunts without proof of breeding.

(c) The remaining species have, in the main, been recorded in single occurrences and are, in consequence, of limited ecological significance:

Kentish Plover\*; Grey Plover\*; Great Snipe\*; Purple Sandpiper\*; Temminck's Stint; Pectoral\*; Sharp-tailed\* and Baird's\* Sandpipers; Avocet\* and Wilson's Phalarope\*.

A probable additional species was an unidentified Phalarope seen in 1968.

Readers must refer to the annual reports for more complete details.

Stock Dove, Woodpigeon and the migratory Turtle Dove are of regular occurrence, with very large flocks of Woodpigeon in most winters. The Collared Dove, since its first sighting in 1961, has spread to become relatively common. In every summer the Cuckoo is seen and heard.

Among the Owls, the commonest species encountered is the Tawny, with apparent decrease in both Little and Barn Owls. Long-eared, by their habits, are probably overlooked, as only in twelve years have records been submitted, but the Short-eared has been observed fairly regularly in past winters and a pair bred for the first time in 1949.

Nightjars are reported annually, though their numbers remain very small, Swifts are regular Summer visitors and the Kingfisher appears to be increasing, while Hoopoes have been seen in eleven years.

Green, Great-spotted and Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers have all been reported annually with no statistic; more exact data would be welcomed, especially concerning the first and last of these species. Wrynecks have only been observed in four years.

Woodlarks are not reported every year and no breeding records are available but the Skylark is a well distributed resident.

In every Summer, Swallows, House and Sand Martins are widely distributed visitors. A Golden Oriole was reported on one occasion only, without confirmation unfortunately.

Of the Crows, the Carrion Crow, Rook, Jackdaw, Magpie and Jay are all residents – but my own impression is that the number of Magpies is decreasing. The Hooded Crow has been seen in fourteen years.

Next comes the family of Tits. The Great, Blue, Coal, Marsh and Long-tailed occur regularly, but the Willow Tit has received little attention in the past and been noticed only in 13 of the past 15 years. Bearded Tits confirmed very old doubtful records by positive appearances during an interruption in the Winter of 1965–66.

Nuthatch, Tree Creeper, Wren, Mistle Thrush and Blackbird are residents in varying numbers with Fieldfares and Redwings as regular Winter visitors. The Ring Ouzel has been seen on migration in nine years. Wheatears, Stonechats, Whinchats and Redstarts are met with annually only the two latter species being proved to breed during the period under review. The Black Redstart has only definitely been seen in six years.

Two species recorded regularly have been the Nightingale (a decreasing Summer visitor) and the Robin, common in all areas.

Among the Summer visiting Warblers, the following are reasonably well distributed: Grasshopper, Reed, Sedge, Blackcap, Garden, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow, Chiff-chaff and Wood the latter species being represented by only a very few pairs.

Goldcrests are seen at all seasons and have nested but the Firecrest appeared only once in 1968. Spotted Flycatchers turn up each Summer but the Pied Flycatcher has been seen passing through in only eleven years.

Dunnocks are widely distributed, Meadow and Tree Pipits are both regular with Rock and Water Pipits (both new records of sub-species) recorded in five years.

Pied, White, Grey and Yellow Wagtails all occur annually but the Blue-headed sub-species (a new record) was observed for the first time in 1948 and again two years later.

In ten winters Waxwings were noted and Great Grey Shrikes in fourteen. Although reported annually, the Summer visiting Red-backed Shrike seems to be decreasing as a breeding species only one or two pairs being recorded in infrequent years.

Starlings are common at all seasons and widely spread with vast roosts in the Winter months.

Almost every season the following species of Finches are reported: Hawfinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Redpoll, Bullfinch and Chaffinch. All these breed with us in varying numbers with the Hawfinch (again an overlooked species due to its secretive habits) the least common. Both Siskins and Bramblings are regular winter visitors and the Twite has been seen in eight years. Crossbills turn up in most winters and have remained to breed on a few occasions.

Corn Buntings are reasonably well spread nesters but the Cirl Bunting which reaches the limit of its range with us has been recorded only twice and not for the last twenty-three years, though a keen look out has been kept for it. Reed Buntings breed somewhat sparsely in suitable habitats but the Lapland Bunting is a newcomer seen for the first and only time in 1965. Single Snow Buntings were seen at both ends of the County in January 1970. House and Tree Sparrows are of course well distributed.

This ends the catalogue, in which I have endeavoured to avoid undue repetition. I hope that the information given may stimulate increasing interest and participation in the County Atlas Surveys, thus working towards a better and more complete knowledge of Bedfordshire birds.

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— This is the end of the report by H.A.S. Key —

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### **Land Use, Habitats and Weather**

Bedfordshire is one of the smallest counties with an area of just over 125,000 ha (300,000 acres). The greatest length from north to south is 36 miles and the average width is 15 miles. Bedfordshire is the sixth most densely populated county in England with 4.4 people per hectare (ha). The 1947 population of the county was 292,810, in 1971 it was 464,277 and by 1995 it had reached 545,700. The overall population increase from 1947 to 1995 was 252,890 a rise of 86%.

Bedfordshire's land uses are agricultural (76%), urban and other (17%), woodland (6%) and water (1%). The coverage of woodland is much lower than the national average of 10%. In 1947, a survey was carried out by the Forestry Commission which identified 5,161 ha of woodland in the county which was equivalent to 4.3% of the county's area (this however is likely to be an underestimate as woodland under two ha was not included). In 1991/92 it was calculated that the total area of woodland had risen to 7,041 ha but this increase was largely due to the planting of commercial conifer plantations. The amount of semi-natural or ancient woodlands remained depressingly low at 3% of the county's area.

In Bedfordshire each year 120–150 ha of land are lost to new buildings or roads. Mineral workings since 1945 have created 500 ha of open water. Unfortunately, during the 1970s, Dutch Elm Disease killed over 300,000 hedgerow Elms. Nearly one third of the county's hedgerows have been cleared since 1945. The first county based study of hedgerow loss was published in 1980 by taking a random sample of rural Bedfordshire; the hedgerows of 1945 and 1976 were compared by reference to aerial photographs and it was found that 33 miles (24%) of hedgerows had been removed. A more recent survey showed that between 1976 and 1991 a further 3.75 miles (3%) of additional hedgerows were also lost. Hedgerow habitat is particularly important for such species as Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, Linnet and Grey Partridge which breed and feed along the edges. The Marston Vale Community Forest Project gives some hope for the future as it is one of the twelve community forests approved by the Government and will cover an area of some 60 square miles. Over 700 ha of land in the Marston Vale have been affected by clay extraction for brick manufacture and a further 600 ha remains with

planning consent. In 1995, there was 6 million tons of waste disposed of in the landfill sites in the county compared with 850,000 tons in 1985; 77% of this waste was imported from outside Bedfordshire. 75% of the landfill sites are within the Marston Vale. One of the benefits to birdwatchers is the now regular occurrence in winter of Glaucous Gull, Iceland Gull and Mediterranean Gull which feed on the landfill sites during the day and roost on the lakes at night.

Set-aside farmland was not a feature during the period covered by Key but is of considerable importance for birdlife today. The total amount of set-aside in the county in 1991/92 was 3,300 ha or 4% of Bedfordshire's agricultural land. Bedfordshire is also one of only six counties where a further payment of £110 per ha is payable to farmers who are willing to enter into five year agreements where it can be shown that the land is primarily managed for the benefit of wildlife and or landscape. The set-aside at Knotting in the north of the county is a prime example of how this scheme can benefit wildlife; in recent years Short-eared Owl and Hen Harrier have been regular winter visitors and there are two pairs of resident breeding Barn Owls. The set-aside also provides valuable food and cover for such birds as Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Corn Bunting and Yellowhammer.

A more recent agricultural practice of extensively sowing winter corn has undoubtedly had a devastating effect on some of our breeding birds. The practice is to grow a summer crop then, shortly after harvesting in August, to plough the land and set the winter crop. This intensive type of agriculture gives no chance of breeding success for such species as Lapwing, Skylark and other ground nesting birds. There is the added disadvantage of the loss of stubble and grain spills left over the winter period for finches and sparrows. Haystacks were a common feature in the rural landscape of Bedfordshire during the 1950s and '60s but unfortunately they have now all but disappeared having been replaced by the massive silage storage hoppers. The modern practice of cutting grass for silage sometimes as early as June has had a major impact on the breeding success of ground nesting birds such as Lapwings, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits, their nests, eggs and young being lost under the grass cutting machinery. Also this practice means that the ripened grass seed heads have been lost as food for sparrows and finches.

Residential development has had a major impact on the county with the number of households growing from 92,100 in 1951 to 193,500 by 1991. In the 40 years from 1950 to 1990, the number of hectares covered by urbanisation grew from 12,500 to 21,100. Whilst the loss of natural habitat is regrettable, there may be some benefit for garden breeding birds such as Blue Tit, Great Tit, Robin and Blackbird, although this would be partly offset by the increase in road traffic casualties and to some extent by the increase of introduced predators such as cats. MAFF estimated in 1939 that 99,800 ha were under agricultural use in the county but this had declined to 90,000 ha by 1991, a loss of nearly 10%. Even more alarmingly, over the same period, the loss of grassland due to increased cereal production fell from 54,000 ha to just 13,600 ha and the number of cattle in the county between 1982 and 1991 had declined by 34%. The loss of grassland and cattle has undoubtedly had a serious effect on some bird species such as Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Song Thrush and Starling, and even species such as Snipe and Redshank. A detailed study carried out at Pegsdon/Deacon Hill proved,



with the help of aerial photographs, that the loss of chalk grassland from 1946 (459.6 ha) to 1991 (295.7 ha) was 164 ha or 35%. The pressure on land remaining undeveloped in the county will continue as Bedfordshire is required to provide 49,300 new dwellings between 1991 and 2011.

Air pollution is now a major consideration with growing concern over the effects of the "green house gases", the main ones being carbon dioxide, ozone, methane, nitrous oxide and chlorofluorocarbons. The growing problem of air pollution is undoubtedly affecting bird populations but much more research needs to be carried out on this subject. Poor air quality may well have led to less aerial insects being available for Swifts and hirundines. Another pollutant is the massive increase in the traffic using our roads over the last 25 years. Traffic flow in the county had increased by 50% between 1980 and 1992 and is likely to increase further. The number of private vehicles registered in the county between 1978 and 1988 had increased by almost 40%. In the period between 1983 and 1987, car ownership per person had increased by 14%. More encouragingly, between 1985 and 1990, during the rush hour between 7 and 9 a.m. the number of passengers departing from railway stations on the St. Pancras line increased by 32%.

Bedfordshire is one of the driest counties in Britain with an average rainfall of 600 mm compared with a national average of 940 mm per year. During the period 1988-1992 Bedfordshire's rainfall was below the south-east regional average, resulting in the most prolonged period of drought since the early 1930s. By September 1992 the cumulative effect resulted in the water table levels in the county being at their lowest for the summer since 1902. This was aggravated by unusually hot summers resulting in higher rates of evaporation. In addition, economic and population growth increased public demand for water by 28% during the period 1976 to 1990. The period of drought which lasted for 45 months between August 1988 and April 1992 was the longest this century and the cumulative effect of this drought was the equivalent to the loss of more than nine months of rainfall. Between 1980 and 1989 the highest and lowest temperatures recorded at Silsoe were 34.9°C on the 3rd August 1990 and minus 18°C in January 1982. On average Bedfordshire has warmer summers but colder winters than the national average.

In his paper, Key mentioned several examples of unusual birds blown into the county by gales. During the last 25 years there have been other instances of this phenomena, as follows:

October 1978	Leach's Petrel, Stewartby Lake.
September 1980	Manx Shearwater, Sharnbrook.
April 1981	Two Gannets, one Fulmar, large numbers of Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns.
February 1983	Puffin, Razorbill, five Little Auks, Great Northern Diver.
September 1983	Storm Petrel, Leach's Petrel and Manx Shearwater.
October 1983	Leach's Petrel, Kempston.
September 1987	Manx Shearwaters at Wyboston and Bedford.
October 1987	Sabine's Gull, nine Great Skuas and Grey Phalarope.
September 1988	Shags, Leach's Petrel and Arctic Skua
September 1989	Fulmars at Brogborough and Priory Country Park.
October 1989	Leach's Petrel, Brogborough.

Key also mentioned that during periods of severe freeze-ups, particularly that of 1962/63, then the majority of wildfowl would leave the county. During the last 25 years, the water levels at Brogborough and Stewartby Lake have risen sufficiently that even in the worst winters some water invariably remains ice free. The effect can be dramatic and provides some of the most exciting birdwatching to be enjoyed in our county. This happened particularly during the following winters, and we mention here some of the more interesting species that were involved:

- 1979 (Jan–Feb) Two Red-throated Divers, two Red-necked Grebes, Slavonian Grebe, Bittern, 34 Bewick's Swans in various locations, 21 Pink-footed Geese, two Ring-necked Ducks, Ferruginous Duck, record numbers (for then) of the three 'Sawbill Ducks' and four Puffins.
- 1982 (Jan) Bittern, two Whooper Swans, 17 White-fronted Geese and three Smew.
- 1985 (Jan–Feb) Black-throated Diver, 240 Great Crested Grebes, four Red-necked Grebes, Slavonian Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, two Bitterns, up to 40 Bewick's Swans, two Whooper Swans, six Bean Geese, at least four Red-crested Pochards, six Scaup, a minimum of 12 Smew and four Red-breasted Mergansers.
- 1987 (Jan–Feb) 121 Great Crested Grebes at Stewartby Lake, three Red-necked Grebes, Slavonian Grebe, 46 Bewick's Swans, 25 White-fronted Geese and three Smew.
- 1991 (Jan–Feb) 307 Great Crested Grebes at Stewartby Lake (the highest single count in the county), Black-necked Grebe, 11 Bewick's Swans, Whooper Swan, 17 White-fronted Geese, 10 Brent Geese, a minimum of five Red-crested Pochards, eight Scaup and up to 10 Smew.

### Birdwatching Trends

Birdwatching as a hobby enjoyed phenomenal growth between 1971 and 1995. To illustrate this, the RSPB has kindly supplied the following information from their membership profile since the end of the Second World War.

Year	National Membership Total	Total number of Members in Beds.
1946	6,000	(Information not available)
1971	71,177	1,000 (1.4%)
1995	864,330	12,620 (1.46%)

Significantly, in 1997 the membership of the RSPB passed the one million milestone, and this surge of interest has helped to further our knowledge of bird life. Locally, from a small band of observers in the 1940's and 1950's, the number of contributors to the Bedfordshire Bird Report by the mid 1960's had increased to about 70. This rise in observer coverage has seen a corresponding increase in the number of species seen each year, and subsequently in the additions made to the county list. In 1965, just 139 species were reported in Bedfordshire. During the 1970's the average number of contributors was 62 finding, on average, 162 species for those years, but by the 1980s, the number of observers had grown to an average of 89 and the species each year to

181. Between 1990–95 the contributors had increased to an average of 117 and the species to 192 for those years.

Perhaps one of the most important developments during the last 25 years was the establishment in 1993 of the Bedfordshire Bird Club, which by the end of 1997 had 263 members.

### Changes to the County Bird List

In the 'Bedfordshire County Checklist' (*Bedf. Nat.* 49 (2)) Odell and Palmer listed 268 species that had occurred in the county between 1946 and 1994, with a further 11 that occurred prior to 1946. In 1995, Common Crane was accepted, thus bringing the total to 280 species.

This compares to about 214 that Steele-Elliott would have recognised at the start of this century. Between 1904 and 1946 the county list increased by just nine species to a total of 223. By the end of Key's survey period another 20 species had been added. Incidentally some of the species that Key had considered to be additions to the county list between 1946–70 had occurred previously, according to new information in *The Birds of Bedfordshire* (Trodd and Kramer 1991). The authors of this paper concur with their findings. During the next 25 years following an upsurge in the observer coverage as mentioned earlier the rate of additions accelerated. Between 1971–80 ten more species were added, then from 1981–90 the list increased by a further 17, and from 1991–95 by another ten to the current total of 280.

The additions made between 1971 and 1995 were:

White Stork (1983)	Ring-billed Gull (1989)
Egyptian Goose (1978)	Yellow-legged Gull (1992)
Mandarin Duck (1971)	Glaucous Gull (1972)
Blue-winged Teal (1987)	Caspian Tern (1976)
Ring-necked Duck (1972)	Ring-necked Parakeet (1983)
Eider (1982)	Yellow-billed Cuckoo (1990)
Velvet Scoter (1983)	European Bee-eater (1991)
Ruddy Duck (1980)	Roller (1990)
Black Kite (1989)	Red-rumped Swallow (1992)
Goshawk (1978)	Water Pipit (1986)
Red-footed Falcon (1992)	Bluethroat (1987)
Golden Pheasant (1971)	Dartford Warbler (1993)
Lady Amherst's Pheasant (1971)	Subalpine Warbler (1986)
Common Crane (1995)	Radde's Warbler (1992)
Collared Pratincole (1983)	Penduline Tit (1992)
American Golden Plover (1991)	Woodchat Shrike (1972)
Arctic Skua (1987)	Serin (1984)
Mediterranean Gull (1982)	Arctic Redpoll (1992)
Sabine's Gull (1987)	

It should be noted here that some of these 'additions', for example Lady Amherst's Pheasant, were as a result of species being added to the official British list whilst others such as Water Pipit resulted from them being recognised as a full species by the appropriate national authorities.

A study of the new species found during Key's survey period shows that of the 20 species, ten were wading birds, some of which are still sought after national rarities such as Wilson's Phalarope, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Baird's Sandpiper. Of these ten new waders, three were found at Bedford Sewage Farm and two at Dunstable Sewage Farm. Following modernisation, the era of the old sewage farms has passed into ornithological folk lore. Bedford is no longer suitable for waders and changes have been made at Dunstable but despite collaboration between Anglian Water and the BNHS, it has yet to recapture the magical attraction it once had – time here will tell. Other sites attractive to waders in the 1950s and 1960s included the gravel pits at Wyboston, Stanford, Cople, Barkers Lane and Harrold. Water sports activities, afforestation and the somewhat sanitised policy that is 'Country Parks' have made these sites unsuitable for waders.

By comparison, of the 37 species added between 1971–95, only two were waders but five were gulls. This not only emphasises the growth in the use of our clay pits for landfill, an attractive habitat for gulls, but also the relatively new trend for birdwatchers to show more interest in our gull roosts.

Key mentioned the "disappointment to ornithologists in that, to date, not one of the many excavations has become a nature reserve". Twenty-five years on, the situation has changed little, although access to Stewartby Lake has opened up with its change of status to a Country Park, but its suitability for wildfowl has disappeared (in all but the hardest weather) with the intrusion of water sports interests.

It is likely that, in the near future at least, local birdwatchers will, like gypsies, have to move their attentions from site to site as the attractiveness to wildlife waxes and wanes.

## **The Breeding Birds**

Since 1971, the following birds bred in the county for the first time.

### **Greylag Goose**

The first pair bred at Girtford Gravel Pits in 1971.

### **Canada Goose**

The first record of successful breeding came from Luton Hoo in 1971 when three young were raised.

### **Barnacle Goose**

A pair raised a single gosling at Rookery South Clay Pit in 1990.

### **Shelduck**

A record of one pair raising young at Millbrook Pillinge Clay Pit was submitted in 1972. There was then a gap of nine years before another pair successfully raised one duckling at Grovebury Sand Pit in 1981.

### **Mandarin**

The Mandarin was added to the British and Irish list in 1971 when a self-supporting feral population had become established. During the first Atlas study (1968–77) breeding was recorded at Woburn Park, Eversholt, Blunham and Linslade. The earliest breeding record was of a pair raising five ducklings at Linslade in 1973.

### **Gadwall**

In 1979 the first record of successful breeding in the county came from Luton Hoo where a pair raised three young.

### **Ruddy Duck**

The Ruddy Duck was not even mentioned by Harding but in Dazley and Trodd it was noted that eight were released at Blunham in 1981. The first confirmation of breeding was at Battlesden Lake in 1984 where a pair successfully raised one young.

### **Goshawk**

Another species not mentioned by Harding (1979). Breeding was confirmed at one sight (no dates given) by Dazley and Trodd during their Atlas period (1988–92).

### **Buzzard**

The Buzzard was mentioned as a potential re-colonist by Dazley and Trodd. A pair bred for the first time this century in 1995 raising one young at Southill Park.

### **Golden Pheasant**

The Golden Pheasant was added to the British and Irish list by the BOU in 1971. According to Harding, breeding was proved at Maulden Woods in the first Atlas period in 1974 as well as being suspected at other localities. Unfortunately, this species has now been lost to the county.

### **Lady Amherst's Pheasant**

Like the preceding species, Lady Amherst's Pheasant was added to the British and Irish list in 1971. Although it undoubtedly bred in the county prior to 1971, it could be argued that it officially became a new breeding species when added to the list.

### **Ringed Plover**

The first confirmed record of breeding was in 1971 when a pair nested at Wyboston Gravel Pits.

### **Curlew**

Following their presence in earlier years, a pair bred and successfully raised three young at Thurleigh Airfield in 1992.

### **Herring Gull**

For the first time a pair successfully raised young in 1971 at Brogborough Clay Pit.

### **Wood Lark**

The Wood Lark was reported in the county spasmodically between 1946–1970 and possibly bred intermittently although there are no proven records. A pair did successfully breed on the Greensand Ridge, in the west of the county in 1995 raising three young.

### **Black Redstart**

The first breeding attempt was in 1972 when a female was found with five eggs at a Luton factory, no male was seen and the eggs did not hatch. Fortunately, the following year at the same site a pair raised four young.

### **Firecrest**

There were four breeding season records during the first Atlas period including a probable recently fledged young at Aspley Heath. In 1984 a pair bred at The Lodge, Sandy raising three fledged young, and this remains the only confirmed breeding record in the county.

### **Crossbill**

As Dazley and Trodd aptly commented there is a difference between suspecting breeding of this species following eruptions and proving it. Whilst breeding was suspected in 1957 and 1964 it was not until 1971 that a confirmed breeding pair were found at Aspley Guise and again in 1977 at The Lodge, Sandy.

### Changes in Breeding Populations

Our knowledge of our breeding birds has been richly enhanced during the past 25 years by the publication of two major works. Firstly the *Bedfordshire Bird Atlas* (Harding 1979) mapped the breeding presence of birds from 1968 to 1977 and secondly, *The Breeding Birds of Bedfordshire* (Dazley and Trodd 1994) surveyed the period 1988–1992. The latter work was able to draw some useful comparisons and listed the species showing the greatest changes between the two periods. One species whose increase was most obvious was the Magpie. That species has also been blamed for some of the decreases of other species, although opinion still seems divided on that issue, whether expert or emotive. Many of the species that have decreased are those associated with our farmland, probably caused by herbicides which have wiped out the weed seeds which provided valuable feed during the winter and early spring, along with insecticides which have decimated the insect populations on which birds feed. Changes in agricultural practice, as mentioned earlier in this paper, for instance to autumn sown cereals, has meant that weedy stubble fields have all but disappeared from our countryside. Hedgerows, providing shelter, food and song posts continue to disappear at an alarming rate, as detailed earlier, although new legislation should help to solve this problem.

The decline in some of our once familiar farmland birds has been dramatic and has been well documented elsewhere. Nationally, numbers of some species fell by nearly 90% in the last 25 years, and we have experienced similar declines locally. For data on this we can draw on the results of a long term study, part of the BTO Common Bird Census (CBC), which was carried out from 1973–94 on 74.5 ha of mixed woodland and farmland near Old Warden (Sharrock and Nightingale – unpub.). The purpose of the CBC is to monitor changes in the number of breeding territories for each species present.

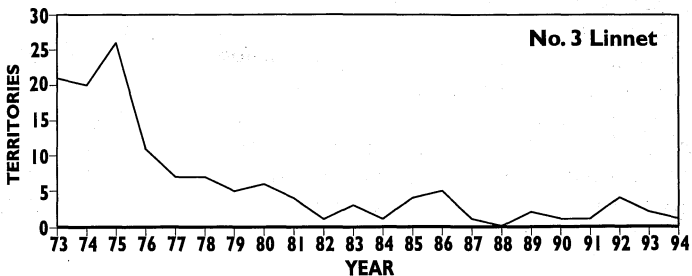
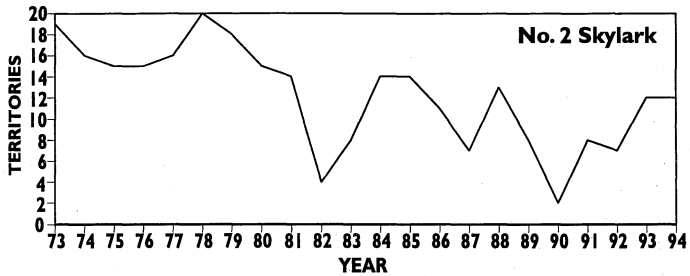
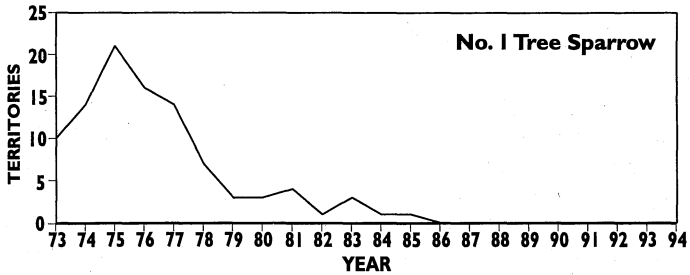
Tree Sparrows have suffered a dramatic decline nationally, numbers falling by 89%. At Old Warden the species disappeared from the site in 1986 after peaking during this period with 21 pairs in 1975. Skylarks have declined, falling 58% nationally and at Old Warden by 38%, whereas Linnets have declined nationally by 52%, and at Old Warden by 90%. The number of territories of Bullfinches, perhaps one of our most attractive finches, fell by 68% at Old Warden and 76% nationally. These changes are shown on the graphs 1 – 5. Song Thrushes have decreased by 73% nationally and by 86% at Old Warden (graph 6). Graph 7 shows the fluctuations in the fortunes of one of our most widespread residents, the Wren. After the bad winters of 1978/79, 1981/82 and 1985/86 the populations dived, only to recover again within two or three years.

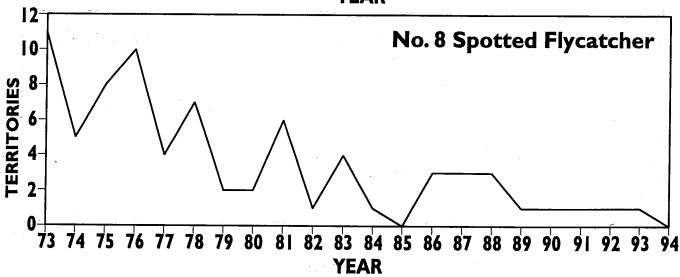
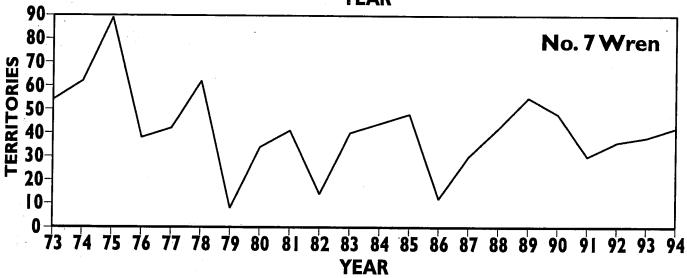
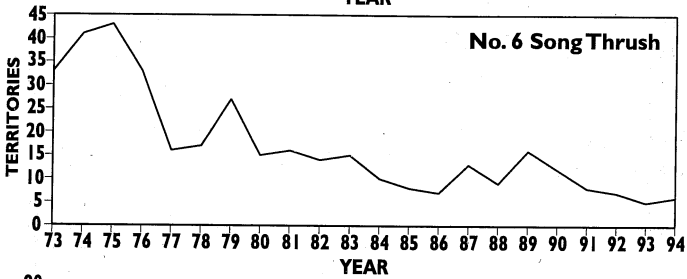
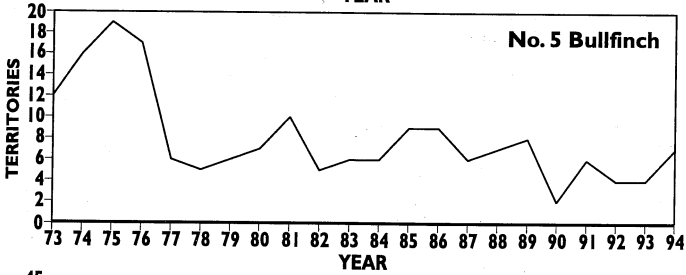
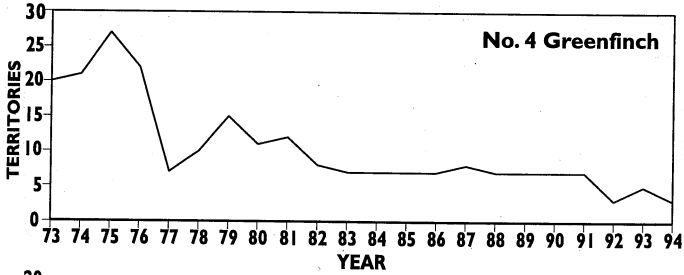
It is not just our resident species that have declined. Both Spotted Flycatchers and Turtle Doves, once widespread summer migrants have become scarcer during the last 25 years (graphs 8 and 9). For the reasons we must look beyond our shores as well as at home. The numbers of Willow Warblers, after increasing slowly between 1973 and 1985, then fell dramatically in southern England. The local situation is well illustrated on graph 10, where breeding territories at Old Warden fell from a peak of 36 pairs to just eight pairs in 1994. Chiffchaff, on the other hand showed a very gradual increase during the 25 year period (graph 11).

It has not all been doom and gloom in the period under review when it comes to our breeding birds. Dazley and Trodd identified 38 species whose breeding distribution increased between the two atlas periods. They included just one finch, the Chaffinch, but three from the tit family, five species of warbler, two species of wagtail, four species of raptor and nine species of wildfowl. Mention should also be made of the Grey Heron as, in 1993, a fourth heronry was established in our county at Harrold Country Park, to join those long standing heronries at Southill Park, Luton Hoo and Bromham Park. This again reflects the national trend, with Grey Heron breeding populations currently reaching record levels.

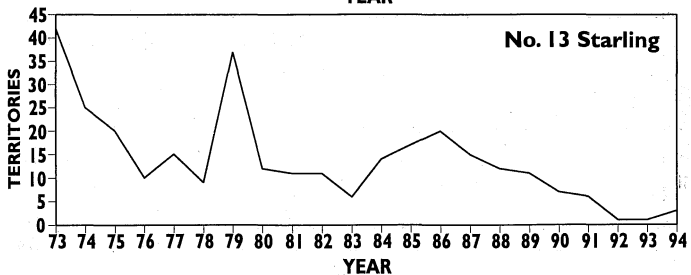
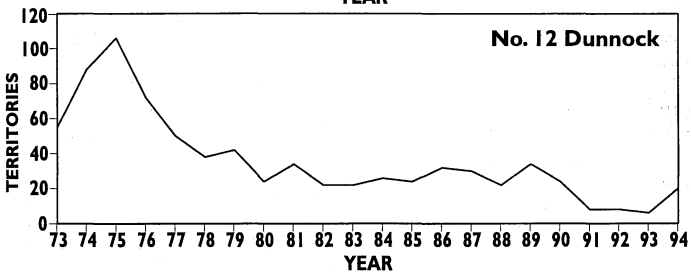
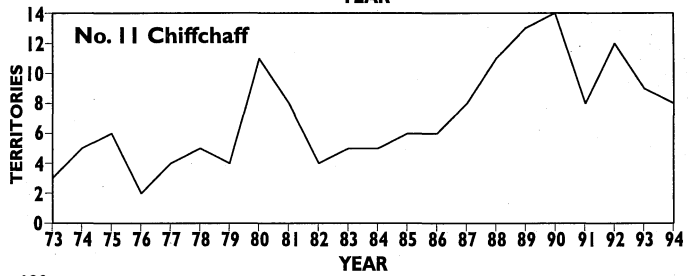
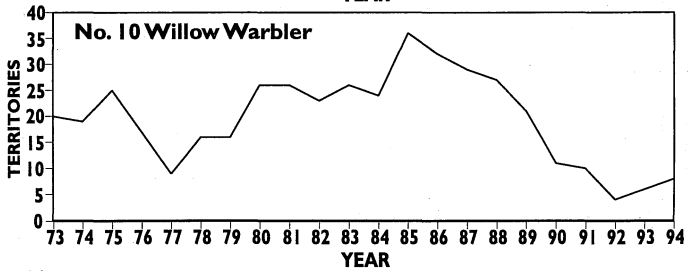
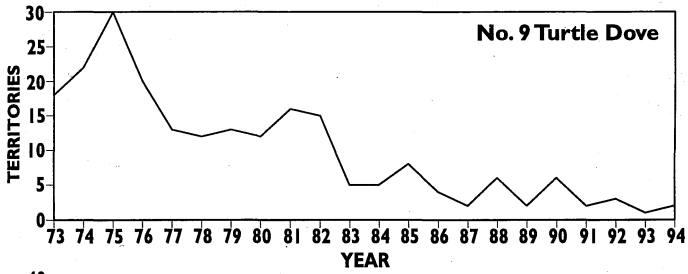
We would urge those who want to learn more about the recent fortunes of our breeding species to refer to Dazley and Trodd.

**BREEDING TERRITORIES 1973-1994  
OLD WARDEN CBC**









The following list of species are considered lost to the county as breeding species although it has to be said that only Whinchat and Red-backed Shrike were regular breeders:

#### **Golden Pheasant**

Unfortunately, this beautiful introduced pheasant species bred in the county after it was accepted onto the British and Irish List during the period under review but is now lost.

#### **Stone Curlew**

It was reported by Harding that Stone Curlew may have bred regularly up until about 1960. This is contradicted by Key, who stated that it was heard during eight summers in the county between 1946 and 1970 but there was no proof of breeding. It can now be categorically stated that Stone Curlew is no longer a breeding bird in the county.

#### **Short-eared Owl**

The first record of breeding in the county was in 1949. The only record since that time was of a pair acting in an agitated manner at a suitable breeding site in 1976.

#### **Whinchat**

The last two pairs bred in 1972 although breeding was suspected at Dunstable in 1981.

#### **Stonechat**

The last authenticated record was of a pair raising young at Houghton Regis Chalk Pit in 1978.

#### **Wheatear**

Dazley and Trodd considered this species lost to the county following the last breeding record in 1987.

#### **Red-backed Shrike**

Sadly this beautiful shrike was lost to the County as a breeder after the last recorded pair in 1975 raised three young. A male was however reported on suitable breeding habitat in 1981 but there was no confirmation of nesting.

Speculating on what might happen in the next 25 years if current trends continue it is possible that the following species will be lost as breeding birds: Lady Amherst's Pheasant, Turtle Dove, Grasshopper Warbler, Willow Tit, Tree Sparrow, Hawfinch and Corn Bunting. On a more positive note we may gain Cetti's Warbler and Siskin as breeding birds.

#### **The Wintering Birds**

As already mentioned, one of the benefits of the landfilled sites and clay pits in the Marston Vale has been to attract three species of gulls that were unrecorded or extremely rare in Key's survey period.

The first record of Mediterranean Gull was of a first winter bird on the playing fields at Pirton Hill School, Luton on the 6th February 1982. The next record was of a single bird at Brogborough Clay Pit (No. 2) on the 29th March 1984. Then, from 1986, the species has been recorded annually as follows; 1986 - 1, 1987 - 4, 1988 - 2, 1989 - 6, 1990 - 5, 1991 - 4, 1992 - 9, 1993 - 3, 1994 - 5 and 1995 - 6. Some 47 individual birds have been recorded in the county since the first record in 1982.

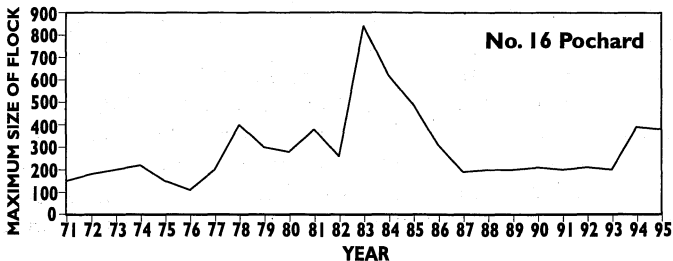
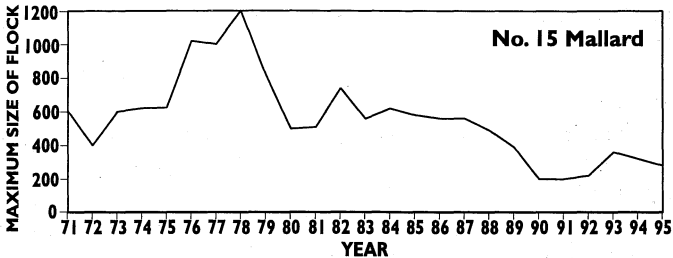
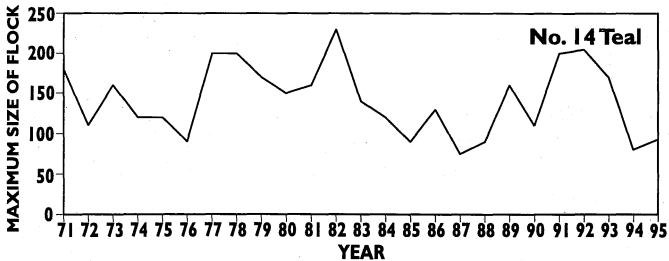
Remarkably the first record of Iceland Gull was recorded in the county as early as 1962 when a second-winter bird was seen at Bedford Sewage Farm on the 18th March. The species was not recorded again until a first-winter bird was found at Brogborough Tip in November 1985. Another first-winter bird was seen at Elstow Tip in January

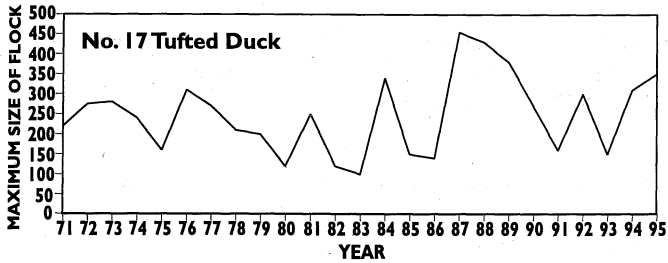
1987 and from then onwards the species was recorded annually as follows; 1988 – 1, 1989 – 4, 1990 – 6, 1991 – 4, 1992 – 1, 1993 – 3, 1994 – 5 and 1995 – 5. The species has been recorded 32 times in the county since the first record in 1962.

The first county record of Glaucous Gull was of an adult at Harrold Gravel Pit on the 19th November 1972. The next record was in 1974 when another adult was seen at Biggleswade on the 1st December. There were no more records in the county until a first-winter was seen flying over Priory Country Park on the 19th November 1983. Since 1983 the species has been recorded annually in the county as follows; 1984 – 3, 1985 – 5, 1986 – 4, 1987 – 6, 1988 – 3, 1989 – 6, 1990 – 6, 1991 – 5, 1992 – 3, 1993 – 2, 1994 – 4 and 1995 – 4. Allowing for some overlapping between years there have been a minimum of 50 individual birds recorded in the county since the first record in 1972.

We have also looked in detail at the records for the main wintering species of duck in our county, Teal, Mallard, Pochard and Tufted Duck between 1971 and 1995. In the latter years, between 1989–1995, we have also included Gadwall (no graph provided). Whilst the mix of species has changed over the years, it is probable that there are now less wildfowl wintering in Bedfordshire than during the 1970s and 1980s.

The maximum individual flock size per year of the four species show some very interesting trends over the 25 year period.





By looking at the above graphs, several interesting trends are apparent. Teal peaked in January 1982 with a flock of 227 at Barkers Lane gravel pits (now Priory Country Park) but on five occasions was just below a flock size of 100. This small attractive duck will continue to be found in moderate numbers in the future but never in large flock sizes. Mallard has shown a significant decline from the high numbers recorded in the late 1970s which peaked with 1,200 at Brogborough Lake in October 1978. Sadly, in the last six years, the maximum flock size has not exceeded 400. The flock sizes for Pochard are more erratic over the 25 year period. There was an amazing count of 842 Pochards at Brogborough Lake in October 1983 but in most years the flock sizes have been between 200 and 400 birds. As with Teal, the recording of Tufted Duck does not show the dramatic peaks and troughs of Mallard and Pochard but displays a more regular up and down pattern from year to year. The largest flock of 458 Tufted Duck was counted at Brogborough Lake in December 1987 with a low of 99 at Blunham Lake in 1983. Regular Gadwall counts were only started in 1989 when the peak number of 110 was recorded in October at Luton Hoo. In the following six years, flock sizes varied from between 62 and 71, all recorded at Luton Hoo apart from in 1994 when a flock of 71 was seen during October at Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works. It is very important that the winter wildfowl counts continue in our county in order to monitor future trends.

The wintering numbers of many of our farmland species follows the same downward trends as their breeding fortunes. Fieldwork was carried out locally for the national Wintering Atlas of birds from 1981 to 1984. If we sample some of the counts made by Sharrock and Nightingale in TL14 we find reference to 216 Tree Sparrows found in 3 hours 10 minutes in January 1983, 250 Linnets on the same day, 38 Bullfinches in 3 hours 36 minutes in November 1981, 491 Chaffinches on the same day and 40 Song Thrushes in 3 hours 25 minutes in December 1982. In thirteen field trips made to a wide variety of habitats during the winters of 1981/82 and 1982/83 Tree Sparrows were found on nine visits, Bullfinches on each visit, Linnets on ten, Yellowhammers on all but one and Reed Buntings on eleven. By 1995, all these species had become progressively more difficult to find during the winter.

It is clear that the future wintering populations of passerines in Bedfordshire, and indeed elsewhere in Britain, will depend largely on changes in land use and agricultural practices.

## Summary

By comparing the period covered by Key (1946–70) we have clearly shown some of the dramatic changes that took place between 1971–95 which have affected bird populations and occurrences in Bedfordshire.

## Publications

Books published on the county's avifauna between 1971–1995 were:

*Bedfordshire Bird Atlas*

Harding BNHS (1979)

*Bedfordshire Wildlife*

Nau, Boon & Knowles Castlemead Productions (1987)

*The Birds of Bedfordshire*

Trodd & Kramer Castlemead Publications (1991)

*The Vertebrate Fauna of Bedfordshire*

Steele-Elliott (2nd Edition) BNHS (1993)

*An Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Bedfordshire 1988–1992*

Dazley & Trodd BNHS (1994)

The Bedfordshire Bird Reports 1971–1995 in *The Bedfordshire Naturalist*

County Recorder BNHS (1971–1995)

Apart from the annual bird report there were no new publications on Bedfordshire's birds during the period from 1946 to 1970. Prior to 1946, the only publication of note was the first edition of Steele-Elliott's work which was published in a series of five booklets between 1897 and 1901.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Clearly our task as authors of this paper was made easier by being able to draw on the wealth of information contained in the above publications. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge their valuable contribution to the recording of ornithology in our county. Key gave praise "to the efforts of a group of enthusiastic fieldworkers". His prophecy that "a still more interesting and accurate knowledge of the birds of the county will be available" has come true, and we would thank the growing band of enthusiasts who submit their records each year to the County Recorder and continue to support the various surveys that are carried out. Finally, we would like to thank John Comont for supplying us with a wealth of information on the county, Boo Matthews for the RSPB membership figures, Martin Palmer for suggesting the idea of the Paper in the first place and for proof reading it and Christine Rowell for her patience in typing the paper.

We hope that our paper will inspire others to repeat the next 25 year review in 2020.

**The Occurrence of Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, Pectoral Sandpiper  
*Calidris melanotos* and Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* in Bedfordshire  
since 1946**

**By Peter Smith**

It is ten years since Trodd and Kramer completed the mammoth task of producing their book *The Birds of Bedfordshire* so I considered an up-date of the occurrence in the county of these three nationally rare waders worthwhile. I also thought the review would be of interest to both experienced and new county birdwatchers alike. All three species undertake a migration in the spring and autumn to and from their northerly breeding grounds and their occurrence in the county is largely affected by weather conditions during those migration periods. Bedfordshire is about 100 miles from the nearest coastline, but there is a wide variety of wetland habitats which regularly attract waders on migration.

**Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii***

This is the only species of the three under consideration to have bred in the United Kingdom. In Scotland in 1993 two pairs were confirmed breeding at one locality and in 1994 two males were seen displaying and one pair probably laid eggs but failed. There is a more detailed paper on the history of breeding by Temminck's Stints in Britain (Mudge and Dennis, 1995). This excellent paper details the spasmodic proven breeding records, all of which occurred in Scotland apart from a nest which failed in central Yorkshire in 1951. It is conceivable that Scottish breeding birds could fly over Bedfordshire during their spring and return migrations. The breeding range of Temminck's Stint extends from Scotland through Scandinavia, across the Arctic region to North East Siberia. Most birds winter in the northern tropics with smaller numbers wintering in Europe, occasionally as far north as England. There have been eight records involving nine birds in the county since 1946 and they are:

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1952 | 23 July–5 August one at Bedford Sewage Farm.                          |
| 1978 | 4 June one at Harrold Gravel Pit.                                     |
| 1979 | 19–20 August one at Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works.                 |
| 1982 | 13 May one at South Mills Nature Reserve.                             |
| 1992 | 19 May one at Rookery Clay Pit.                                       |
| 1992 | 29 May one summer plumage adult at Coronation Clay Pit.               |
| 1995 | 14 July one adult showing signs of moult at Houghton Regis Chalk Pit. |
| 1998 | 11 May two in summer plumage at Dunstable Treatment Works.            |

There is also one interesting pre 1946 record.

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1942 | 9 July–2 August one at Bedford Sewage Farm. |
|------|---|

Adults can leave their breeding grounds in July even before the young are fully fledged. It is therefore reasonable to assume that birds seen from July onwards are on their return passage. Using this criteria, of the nine records in Bedfordshire six birds were on their spring passage, the earliest date being 11 May and the latest 4 June. The other four records were of birds moving south from their breeding grounds, the earliest being 9 July and the latest 20 August. It would appear from the records so far that there is an equal chance of this delightful wader occurring in the county in either its spring or autumn passage.

**Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos***

The breeding range of the Pectoral Sandpiper is in Northern Siberia and the far north of North America. It is believed that the majority of the Siberian breeders join those of North America and migrate to South America via a circular route over the Western Atlantic. Small numbers also regularly winter in Australia and New Zealand. Adults begin moving south in late June with juveniles beginning in early August. Those birds still present on their breeding grounds in August and September are nearly all juveniles. Westerly storms in the autumn regularly bring juvenile birds to Britain and Europe. There have been eight records accepted in the County since 1946 and they are:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1956 | 14 October one at Dunstable Sewage Works was the first accepted County record.   |
| 1973 | 29 September – 6 October one at Dunstable Sewage Works.  |
| 1978 | 15 September – 8 October involving two individuals at Bedford Sewage Works. The first arrived on 15 September which was joined by a second on 1 October. Both remained until 4 October with one present until 8 October. |
| 1981 | 19–24 September one at Dunstable Sewage Works.   |
| 1989 | 22 September – 3 October a juvenile at South Mills Nature Reserve.   |
| 1991 | 15–16 September an immature female at Coronation Clay Pit.   |
| 1992 | 11–15 September a juvenile at Coronation Clay Pit.   |

Not surprisingly all the county records are in the autumn and are probably of juvenile birds on every occasion. Unfortunately, the earlier records did not distinguish between adult and juvenile plumage birds. The detailed description in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* 11 (page 44) of the first accepted record in 1956 mentions some features indicating it was a juvenile. The earliest bird arrived on 11 September and the latest left on 14 October, a pattern which is in line with the national picture. It seems remarkable that this species has occurred eight times in our small inland county.

**Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius***

The Grey Phalarope breeds across the Arctic Ocean on marshy tundra near the coastline. In contrast to all other waders the migration routes of this species are entirely oceanic, leaving their breeding grounds in an easterly direction and then moving south east across the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans to reach their major wintering grounds off Chile or West Africa. The Grey Phalarope normally appears as a vagrant inland following severe storms. The pre 1946 dates mentioned in Trodd & Kramer (1991) are typical:

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1866 | 22 September one killed Elstow brook.                           |
| 1879 | 2 October one killed whilst swimming on a farm pond at Beeston. |
| 1928 | 21 October one present on an artificial lake at Bedford.        |

There were also occurrences in 1875 and 1885 but no specific dates were given. Since 1946 there have been five records in the county.

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1987 | 21–22 June one at Stewartby Lake in probable first year non-breeding plumage or possibly a moulting male. |
| 1987 | 17–22 October following the “great gale” a winter plumage bird was present at Blunham Lake.               |

- 1994 15–17 September a single winter plumage bird at Stewartby Lake. Several other Grey Phalaropes were seen in other Midland counties at around the same date.
- 1996 29 October following severe gales one in winter plumage was found at Stewartby Lake along with Storm Petrel and surprisingly Black Tern.
- 1997 09 October following gale force winds another single bird was found at Stewartby Lake early in the morning.

With the exception of June 1987 all the records in the county have occurred in the autumn, all following severe weather conditions, the earliest autumn record being 15 September and the latest 29 October.

### CONCLUSION

I am hopeful that in future years there will be many more occurrences of these three interesting wader species in the county. However, for the first two species covered in this summary future observers will have to hope that we retain suitable marsh type habitat – water with muddy fringes, whereas the rather more involuntary visits of Grey Phalarope could bring them to almost any area of open water.

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*Address: The Old Rectory, Hills End, Eversholt, Milton Keynes MK17 9DR.*



## **DUNSTABLE SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS**

**Review of 1996**

**by Paul Trodd (BNHS Honorary Warden)**

During 1996 two of the main settlement lagoons were drained, to allow the sediment to be removed, resulting in large quantities of disposable spoil, ideal for constructing an island on the larger number four lagoon. Measuring approximately 20m x 5m and lined with polythene, and shingle-capped, it soon became popular with wildfowl, waders and breeding Common Tern; a pair of which deserted the tern raft to nest successfully on the new island just days after its completion. Consideration was given to the position of the island such that it could be viewed from the hide.

With generally low water levels it was a reasonable year for waders with 17 species recorded, the highlights being: Bar and Black-tailed Godwits, Sanderling, Little Stint and Jack Snipe, with Greenshank, Dunlin and Ruff featuring well on autumn passage. Redshank, Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers and Lapwing all bred but most failed to fledge young due to corvid predation.

The duck population remained about the same as last year with only Mallard and Gadwall breeding but the decline in Coot numbers gave cause for concern. Pintail, Mandarin and Ruddy Duck were the pick of the wildfowl and two wild grey geese flew over in March.



No. 4 island completed July 1996, Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works

*Paul Trodd*

A full breeding survey was carried out with the results held by the honorary warden. Two new additions to the site list were a migrant Waxwing in April (no real surprise after the winter influx) and, at long last, a Nuthatch, found in an autumn tit flock. Full details of the year's sightings are featured in the main body of the bird report.

Permit holders remained at 40 with a small turnover at the end of the year review. Several work parties were arranged to clear vegetation on the scrape while the construction of the new island was funded by Anglian Water Conservation. Thanks are due to the staff at Dunstable and Cambridge for their support towards yet another eventful year at Dunstable STW.

*Address: 186 West Street, Dunstable, LU6 1NX*

**“Tundra” BEAN GEESE IN BEDFORDSHIRE**  
**by Martin Palmer**

Bean Geese *Anser fabalis* are very rare visitors to Bedfordshire. There were a few 19th century records and only five more recent records of which three were doubtful as to their truly wild origins. The two most recent wild origin records concern a party of six passing west over Brogborough Lake on 12th January 1985 during hard weather (MJP *et al*) and two at Radwell GP on 4th February 1989 (DHB, DSW). The Brogborough record was not assigned to a race but were probably nominate *A. fabalis*, now often referred to as “Taiga” Bean Goose. The description of the 1989 record fits well with “Taiga” Bean Geese. Opinion on the status of the different races of Bean Geese is currently under debate by various authorities. Two Bean Geese that were found at Radwell GP by Steve Williams on 26th February 1996, and which stayed until at least 29th March 1996, were of the race “*rossicus*”, known as the “Tundra” Bean Goose, and were the first confirmed report of this race in Bedfordshire.

## 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.

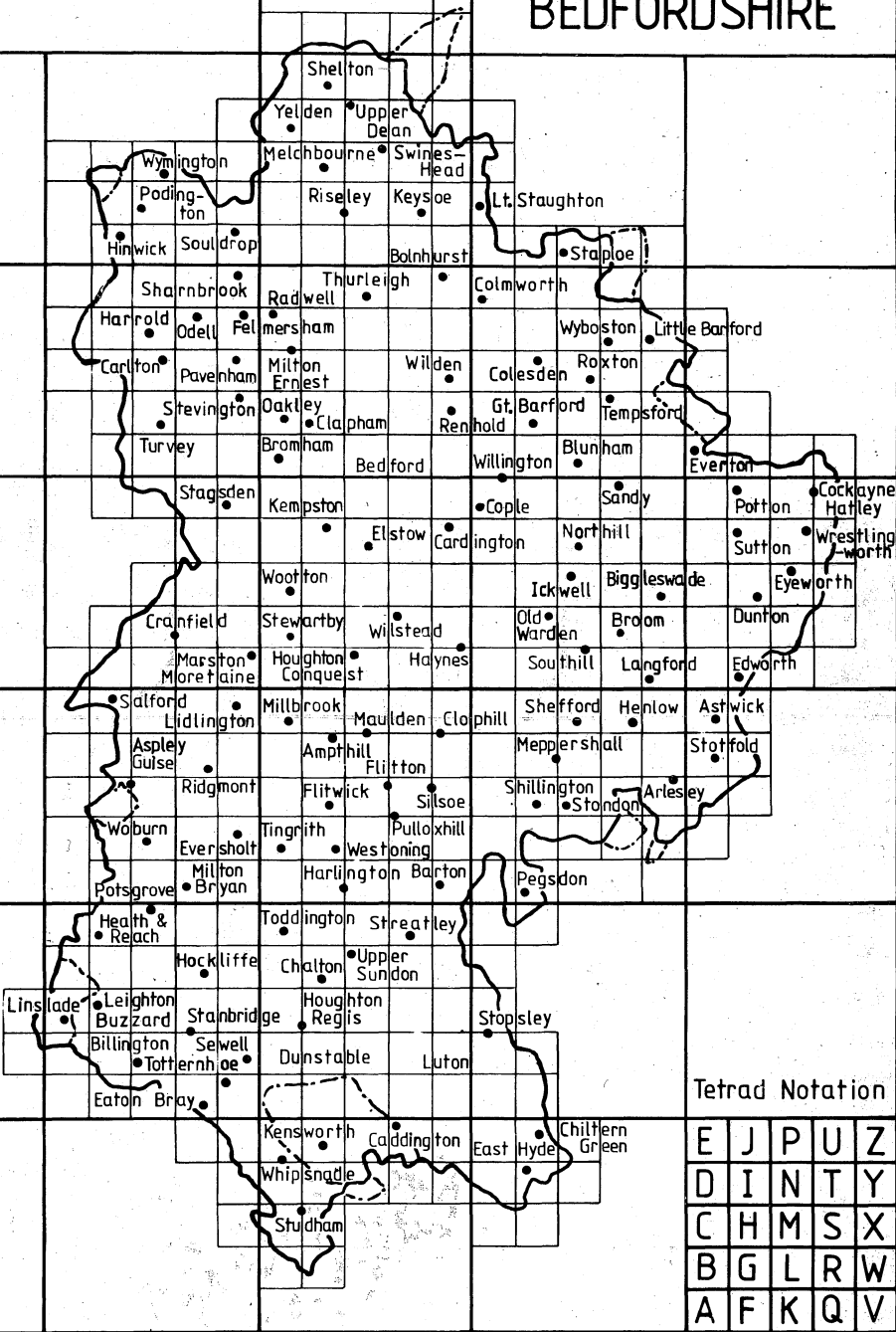
Editorial address:

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

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