

# *The Bedfordshire Naturalist 52 (Part 2)*

*The Bedfordshire Bird  
Report for 1997*



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# **BEDFORDSHIRE BIRD CLUB 1997**

**(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. 52 (1997) – Part 2

Edited by R.A. Brind

Assistant Editor, Bird Report: Dave Ball

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**Front cover:** Cetti's Warbler *Andy Chick*

\*The original, specially commissioned and unframed pen & ink drawing of this picture is for sale in a postal auction. The original artwork measures 160mm by 125mm. Send your bid (no money at this stage) to "Cover Bid", Kevin Sharpe, Hon. Assistant Treasurer, 22 Russett Close, Stewartby, Bedford MK43 9LG to arrive by 31st January 1999. If your bid is the highest, and it exceeds the artist's reserve price, you will be asked to pay the sum you bid (plus £1.50 for post and packing if necessary).

#### Acknowledgements:

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

## REPORT OF THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR 1997

1997 saw the Committee continuing to develop and consolidate the Club. Membership totalled 263, a slight decrease from a high of 273 in 1996.

The AGM in February saw more changes to the Committee, with Sheila Alliez being elected as Honorary Secretary, Kevin Sharpe as Honorary Assistant Treasurer, and Phil Cannings as Honorary Research Officer. Jonathan Palmer also joined the Committee. In recognition of his work in founding the Bird Club and as its first President, Dave Kramer was elected as Honorary Vice President, a lifetime position.

In March, the Lady Amherst's Pheasant survey entered its third year, while the winter Garden Bird Feeding Survey continues to go from strength to strength. In May, two teams, one led by Paul Trodd and the other by Barry Nightingale, entered the 1997 Birdwatch UK Bird Race. Paul Trodd's team distinguished itself by recording 109 species, and winning a special prize for the best handicap performance. The Christmas/New Year bird race did not take place this year, but instead a pilot survey of winter finch flocks was launched.

The Bird Club continued its programme of meetings throughout the year, with 8 indoor and 14 field meetings, 10 in Bedfordshire. In the autumn, the Matrix was revised and relaunched.

A Special General Meeting was held in October to approve an increase in subscriptions, the first increase for four years.

In November, after much delay, the Marston Vale Community Forest learned that it had won funding from the Millennium Fund to create a new wetland area between Stewartby and Millbrook. The Committee hopes to become more involved with this project, which will create valuable habitats for waders and wildfowl in the next few years.

The committee wishes to thank everybody who helped throughout the year, whether up front or behind the scenes, in whatever capacity. We appreciate that without such help the Club would not function so well.

B. Nightingale, Hon. Chairman  
S. Alliez, Hon. Secretary  
Bedfordshire Bird Club

## PROCEEDINGS

### Indoor Meetings

- 35th Ordinary Meeting** 28th January, Maulden, "The Search for Sylvia" by Mr D. Cotteridge. Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 5th Annual General Meeting** 25th February, Maulden, followed by "Birding in Costa Rica" by Mr M. Palmer and Mr D. Odell. Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 36th Ordinary Meeting** 25th March, Maulden, "Club Members' Evening".  
Organiser and Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 37th Ordinary Meeting** 30th April, Maulden, "Springtime in Spain" by Mr M. Wilkes. Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 38th Ordinary Meeting** 30th September, Maulden, "A Tale of Six Birds" by Mr P. Cannings. Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.
- 39th Ordinary Meeting** 28th October, Maulden, "The Agony and the Ecstasy – of Seawatching" by Mr T. Marr. Chair: Dr. J. T. R. Sharrock.
- 40th Ordinary Meeting** 25th November, Maulden, "Focus on Owls" by Mr C. Shawyer. Chair: Mr. P.Wilkinson.
- 41st Ordinary Meeting** 16th December, Maulden, "Members' Evening".  
Organiser and Chair: Mr B.Nightingale.

### Field Meetings

- Rutland Water** 19th January. Wintering birds. Leader: Mr P.Almond.
- Lea Valley**, 16th February, Wintering birds. Leader: Mr T. Donnelly.
- Gull Watch** 2nd March, Looking at the wintering White-winged Gulls in the Marston Vale. Leader: Mr D. Odell.
- Blows Downs** 20th April, Spring migrants. Leader: Mr R.Dazley.
- Maulden Woods** 4th May, Dawn chorus. Leader: Mr P.Trodd.
- Dunstable STW** 7th May, Passage waders and other migrants. Leader: Mr P.Trodd.
- Minsmere** 18th May, Breeding birds and passage migrants. Leader: Mr G. Redgewell.
- Wavendon Heath** 11th June, Species special to the area. Leader: Mr D. Odell.
- Pegsdon Hills** 25th June, An evening walk. Leader: Mr S. Halton.
- Maulden Woods** 20th July, A demonstration of bird ringing. Leader: Mr P.Cannings.
- Marston Vale Brick Pits** 17th August, Migrant Waders. Leader: Mr K. Sharpe.
- North Norfolk** 14th September, Passage birds. Leader: Mr D.Green.
- Paxton Pits** 2nd November, Wintering birds. Leader: Mrs B. Matthews.
- The Lodge, Sandy** 7th December, A morning walk. Leader: Mr P. Soper.

## **BIRD REPORT FOR 1997**

### **Report of the Recorder**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

As usual we like to thank all those BBC and BNHS members and all others who submitted records for 1997. The recorder and bird report editor would be very grateful if observers could submit records on the correct record cards rather than as a list involving several species, which then requires transcription onto record cards for preparation of the report and ultimate filing. Please use each record card for only one species – a different species on each side of a card has sometimes caused confusion and must be transcribed for filing under species. Where appropriate for scarce and rare species, rarities description forms rather than a letter should be used for each individual occurrence. Batches of record cards and rarity forms are freely available on request from the Recorder, 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 Recorder, D.H.Ball, B.J.Nightingale, J.T.R.Sharrock, P.Smith and S. G. Williams, who has joined the panel in 1997 in keeping with our policy to rotate membership of the rarity committee to bring in fresh blood.

The review of the year was written by Dave Odell, the species accounts compiled by Dave Ball (Divers to Ducks and Finches to Buntings), Dave Odell (Raptors to Coots and Skuas to Terns), Paul Trodd (Waders and Pigeons to Woodpeckers) and Rob Dazley (Larks to Sparrows), and the report edited by Dave Ball. 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. We would once more particularly like to single out Peter Almond who again analyzed and wrote onto record cards all the relevant entries from the log books kept at Rookery South CIP and, additionally, wrote out onto record cards those submissions that were unfortunately only submitted in list form. Without the work of Peter, preparation of this report would have been a longer and more difficult task. Finally, our thanks go to our editor, Rosemary Brind, who proof-read and checked the entire report to her by now familiar excellent standard.

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

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## REVIEW OF 1997

1997 was another excellent year in Bedfordshire for both vagrant birds and bird-watchers. The frozen conditions at the beginning of January resulted in good numbers of Smew and Goosander. A Bittern spent most of New Year's Day out on the ice of Brogborough Lake; this was probably the returning bird from previous winters. A Scaup, a Red-necked Grebe and two Slavonian Grebes were at an icy Stewartby Lake and high counts of Great Crested Grebes and Cormorants were seen. A Fulmar was at Stewartby for an afternoon. A fortunate birdwatcher taking a lunch-time stroll by the River Ouse at Great Barford found an Arctic Skua by the iced-up river.

Three Firecrests were found in the month and two Peregrines roamed the county. At a large area of set aside in the north of the county a Hen Harrier, a Merlin and several Short-eared Owls were seen. White-winged gulls included four Mediterranean Gulls, two Glaucous Gulls and three Iceland Gulls in the first winter period. A Whooper Swan flew over Bromham, an Egyptian Goose was briefly at Grovebury, and an unseasonable Little Stint at Willington. "Percy" the Ring-necked Parakeet stayed at Edworth and at the end of the month two Waxwings spent a few days at Ampthill but there was to be no major influx this year.

February saw a Cetti's Warbler at Priory CP; this was an addition to the county list. At least one other bird was present in the park, and later in the year a pair was discovered in breeding habitat further along the Ouse Valley. More Bitterns were reported, three Red Kites roamed the county, three Twite were discovered at Willington and a record count of Goosander were at Woburn.

March started with the discovery of a Ring Ouzel at Houghton Regis; this had probably overwintered nearby rather than being an early migrant. March is usually a good month for Red Kites in the county and at least five were reported. A Merlin flew through Bedford STW. A few Long-eared Owls were located at traditional roosts. Woodlarks were only brief visitors to the county this year; our birds probably bred just over the county boundary. Goshawks were present at two sites. An elusive Water Pipit was seen occasionally at Dunstable STW. Expected early migrants included Black Redstarts, Wheatears, Garganey and Common Scoter. A very early Common Tern was at Priory CP.

A drake Ring-necked Duck at Warren Villas NR was only the fifth county record. Seven Red Kites were reported during April. Fieldworkers/participants in the Lady Amherst's Pheasant Survey found a concentration of seven calling males; the female population continues to decline. Waders at Rookery included Little Stint, Black-tailed Godwit, and Turnstone. The draining of this site started later in the year and Bedfordshire's main wader habitat has now been lost.

A high count of 70 Black Terns were at Rookery at the beginning of May and five Little Terns were also found during the month. Ospreys included a long staying bird at Priory CP and a Marsh Harrier was at Rookery. A singing Firecrest was at Whipsnade WAP and Wood Warblers returned to two sites. At least three singing Redstarts were located. Shelducks bred at Grovebury and a pair of Nightjars occupied territory at Aspley Heath. Willow Tits were extremely difficult to find, Lesser Whitethroat and Grasshopper Warbler were probably declining but Common Whitethroats appeared to be increasing. Common Sandpipers displayed at Dunstable STW.

With the probable breeding of Cetti's Warbler, three new species were added to the list of those breeding in the county this year, with Cormorants raising young at Harrold-Odell CP and Oystercatchers breeding successfully at two sites, for the first time ever in Bedfordshire.

In June a few Red Kites were still located. A Common Scoter was at Harrold. A major influx of Crossbills occurred with a flock of over 100 in the Old Warden area and other smaller groups reported from several sites. July saw another Little Egret in the Stewartby area. The return wader passage was quiet. Two Honey Buzzards, two Ospreys, another Peregrine, and a Marsh Harrier were reported. Good numbers of Buzzards continued to be seen. Fifty Black Terns were at Stewartby. An influx of Siskins occurred in September.

A Red-crested Pochard was a brief visitor to Willington, and a very late Swift was seen at the end of September.

October was an exciting month in the county. A few Crossbills were still around, an adult Glaucous Gull had returned to the brick pits and another Peregrine was seen. Strong winds produced a brief Grey Phalarope at Stewartby and a Manx Shearwater on a school tennis court at Wootton. A Long-tailed Skua, at Stewartby CP, was an addition to the county list as was a Yellow-browed Warbler at Priory CP. Another Peregrine was found near to the county boundary and other birds were seen at the now rapidly diminishing Rookery and Dunstable STW in November. A late House Martin was seen in mid month. Gull watchers reported Mediterranean and Glaucous Gulls in the second winter period but no Iceland Gulls were located. Priory CP attracted two Chiffchaffs, one of which was probably an eastern (*tristis*) individual. A Rough-legged Buzzard flew north over Warden/Galley Hills in early December. A roosting Long-eared Owl delighted our Membership Secretary in her Linslade garden. A Little Egret was a brief visitor to Brogborough and an oiled Red-throated Diver spent the end of the year at Stewartby Lake.



## SYSTEMATIC LIST FOR 1997

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. Where appropriate, or to avoid confusion, as in the case of Wigeon, *Anas penelope*, where a hybrid bird showing some characters of American Wigeon, *A. americana*, was recorded, the 'new' name from the "*British Birds*" list of *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1992) has been used, in this case 'Eurasian Wigeon'.

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, ClP – Clay Pit, CP – Country Park, GC – Golf Course, GP – Gravel Pit, NR – Nature Reserve, SP – Sand Pit, STW – Sewage Treatment Works, WBS – Wetland Bird Survey, WP – Waterside Park, Zoo – generally used to refer to the Wild Animal Kingdom at Whipsnade. Place names for mineral excavations follow those by Nightingale (*Bedf. Nat.* 39 73–74) except that for Barkers Lane GP which is now generally known as Priory CP.

\* CBC – the Common Birds Census is the BTO's main scheme whereby breeding population levels of common birds are monitored by 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.

In tables of wildfowl numbers, sites are listed in rough geographic sequence from south to north of the county, and counts are the maxima for each month from all observers, not monthly wildfowl counts. When a count was made but no birds were present, the figure zero is used, when it is thought that no count took place this is indicated by 'n/c', and when it is uncertain which of these applies, a dash is used.

### Non-passerines

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

A rare visitor, mainly in winter.

A single adult bird in winter plumage was present at Stewartby Lake from 24th December to the year end (CH, DJO *et al*). The bird showed slight oiling on arrival but was believed to make a full recovery.

#### Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

A common and widespread species and perhaps under-recorded.

Breeding was proved with young seen at Brogborough Lake (2 pairs), Rookery ClP (4 pairs), Stewartby CP (2 pairs), Willington GP and Southill Lake and birds were also present in the breeding season at East Hyde where two clutches were robbed by Carrion Crows, at Chalton SW, Warren Villas NR and Blunham GP, and at Dunstable SW and Tiddenfoot WP, though breeding definitely did not occur at the latter two sites. Highest post-breeding count was 28 at Rookery ClP on 26th August, and in winter there were 16 on the Ouse at Priory CP on 2nd January.

*Monthly maxima of Little Grebes at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Brogborough Lake	-	-	-	4	4	4	8	2	-	-	-	2
Stewartby CP	17	4	4	4	4	2	6	4	2	-	6	4
Chimney Corner CIP	2	2	2	2	2	4	4	-	4	4	4	2

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

A common breeding bird, and usually even more numerous as a winter visitor.

Breeding was confirmed at Tiddenfoot WP, where it was believed that two clutches were lost to Red-eared Terrapins before a successful attempt took place, and at Jones's SP, Battlesden Lake, Lower Drakelow Pond Woburn, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Rookery CIP, Swiss Gardens, Southill Lake, Blunham GP, Willington GP, Priory CP, Bromham Lake LNR, Felmersham NR and Harrold-Odell CP. Also present in the breeding season at Brogborough Lake, Stewartby CP, Manor Farm Biggleswade and Radwell GP, and at Dunstable STW and Luton Hoo, where breeding did not occur.

The highest counts in the first winter period were all at Stewartby CP in January, with 160 on the 3rd, 110 on the 5th and 87 on the 14th, and there were also 32 at Priory CP on 20th and 21st February. Post-breeding there was a peak of 36 at Rookery CIP on 3rd August, and in the second winter period maxima recorded were 34 at Priory CP on 31st October and 33 at Stewartby CP in October with 32 there on 26th December.

*Monthly maxima of Great Crested Grebes at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coronation CIP	-	1	5	2	4	9	9	2	2	2	2	2
Priory CP	10	32	27	31	22	27	29	26	30	34	26	24
Rookery North CIP	-	-	2	2	2	2	6	2	2	3	2	-
Stewartby Lake	160	18	6	6	5	6	8	10	20	33	29	32

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

A rare winter visitor.

One or possibly two winter-plumaged adults were reported remaining at Stewartby CP from 1996 until 2nd January (RAN). Another winter-plumaged bird was at Priory CP on 30th December (DK, PS).

**Slavonian Grebe** *P. auritis*

A scarce vagrant occurring as both a winter visitor and passage migrant.

In the first winter period, two elusive birds, a winter-plumage adult and a first winter were at Stewartby CP between 7th and 11th January, with the first-winter remaining until the 14th (PA, BN, RAN, AW *et al*). In the second winter period a single was at Brogborough Lake on 21st December (PS).

**Fulmar** *Fulmaris glacialis*

A very rare vagrant.

A single was at Stewartby CP on the afternoon of 4th January (RIB, KMS *et al*). There are seven previous county records, the most recent in 1996.

**Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus*

A rare vagrant, usually after autumn gales.

One landed on hard tennis courts at Wootton Upper School on 9th October and was taken into care and subsequently released at Southend-on-Sea. This is a very typical record for this species, which seems to rigorously avoid inland lakes and instead turns up in all sorts of improbable places (per PA).

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant which successfully bred for the first time in 1997.

A full account of the pair which bred at Harrold-Odell CP is included elsewhere in this Journal. In the first winter period generally most numerous at Harrold-Odell CP and Stewartby CP, as shown in the table, but a remarkable record of 130 flying west at Willington GP on 17th January was the highest count of the year. A record of 70+ at Brogborough Lake on 22nd January was also of note as was the maximum of 82 at Rookery CIP on 22nd February.

In the second winter period generally rather less numerous, except for the very high count of 111 at roost at Harrold-Odell CP on 21st November. Counts of 42 at Basin Pond Woburn on 28th September and 26 at Southill Lake on 14th December were good for these sites, whilst the fact that numbers at Rookery South CIP peaked as early as August was due to the draining of the site.

This species is scarcer in the south of the county, with a maximum count of 30 in September at Dunstable STW, but generally less than ten there in most months, and single figures recorded at Luton Hoo and Whipsnade Zoo and flying over Stopsley Common.

Birds showing characters of the continental race, *P. c. sinensis*, were recorded at Priory CP from 16th January into April, with a maximum of twelve on 26th–28th February, and at Rookery CIP from 8th February to 22nd March, with eight on 22nd February.

*Monthly maxima of Cormorants at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rookery South CIP	-	82	25	4	9	7	22	34	10	2	-	-
Stewartby CP	106	21	8	7	3	-	-	7	7	2	2	10
Coronation CIP	5	5	2	2	-	-	-	5	3	7	2	1
Priory CP	9	55	62	13	11	8	4	6	6	4	23	42
Bromham Lake LNR	-	2	8	2	-	2	4	2	n/c	2	4	3
Harrold-Odell CP	58	89	45	13	8	11	n/c	n/c	22	95	111	72

**Shag** *P. aristotelis*

A rare visitor, usually during the winter months.

The only record in 1997 was of a single first winter at Stewartby CP briefly on the morning of 24th December (DJO, PT).

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*

A rare winter visitor which has occurred more regularly in recent years, perhaps showing a return to its earlier status after a period in which it had become very infrequent.

In 1997 the only record was again at the favoured site of the reed-beds at the western end of Brogborough Lake, where one was seen standing on ice on the afternoon of 1st January. This was perhaps the returning bird of January 1996 and previous years, though it had not been seen in the second winter period of 1996. Presumably the severe weather of the following days caused it to leave the site (BN, DJO *et al.*).

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

A formerly extremely rare visitor which has begun to occur more frequently in recent years.

One first found in Rookery South CIP on the afternoon of 25th July remained in the Rookery CIP/Stewartby CP area until at least 3rd August. This was an interesting individual showing dark grey tips to some scapulars and tail feathers, raising speculation in some quarters that these could be signs of hybridization with Western Reef Heron

*E. gularis*, though this has not been substantiated (RAN, PS *et al*). Another was at Brogborough Lake on 6th December (RAN).

### Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A common resident.

Breeding season records were received for four heronries. At Southill Lake there were 25 occupied nests and two unoccupied on 9th March. At Luton Hoo there were 11 occupied nests and four unoccupied on 6th April, and on the 27th ten of the nests were seen to contain young. At Bromham Hall there were five occupied nests on 8th February, and at Harrold-Odell CP three occupied nests on the 9th.

Elsewhere relatively few records were submitted. Fourteen sheltering in the lee of a hedge at Octagon Farm near Willington on 8th November was a good count. The species sometimes feeds in dry fields near rivers in autumn, and this locality is in the area where the Elstow Brook approaches the Ouse. Numbers at Rookery South CIP peaked in August with ten on the 16th, the period of post-breeding dispersal coinciding with the point at which the partially complete drainage of this site made it more suitable for this species.

### Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

A common resident.

Successful breeding was recorded from Tiddenfoot WP, Lower Drakelow Pond Woburn, Rookery South CIP, R. Ivel Jordan's Mill, Willington GP, Willington Lock, Priory CP (five pairs out of six were successful, with 24 young), R. Ouse Prebend Street, Bromham Hall, Bromham Bridge, Radwell GP and Felmersham NR. Nest building was noted at Stewartby CP but there was no record of the outcome, a pair failed at East Hyde, and there was no breeding at Luton Hoo.

*Monthly maxima of Mute Swans at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Woburn Lakes	47	32	33	23	n/c	n/c	5	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c
Brogborough Lake	-	-	-	7	6	6	9	6	8	6	4	5
Coronation CIP	-	12	6	5	13	7	6	6	7	5	6	5
Rookery South CIP	-	-	-	28	41	-	-	52	66	58	-	-
Stewartby CP	26	2	6	4	4	28	32	6	8	25	27	6
Chimney Corner CIP	2	4	6	5	5	8	7	8	16	18	10	4
Radwell GP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	55	n/c	118	100	103
Harrold-Odell CP	55	50	n/c	n/c	n/c	52	24	31	21	n/c	n/c	16

In addition to the counts tabulated above, 45 adults and 17 juveniles were counted on the Ouse in Bedford on 2nd January.

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

A scarce but fairly regular winter or passage visitor.

Unusually, there was only one record in 1997 despite hard winter weather early in the year. A party of twelve adults flew from south-east to north at Harrold-Odell CP on the morning of 3rd January (JM). These may have been part of a party of 15 adults and one juvenile present at the same site on 29th December 1996.

### Whooper Swan *C. cygnus*

A rare winter visitor, with feral birds present at two sites.

There was a fascinating record of a first-winter individual with a white neck collar flying south over Bromham Lake LNR on the afternoon of 23rd January (PA). Unfortunately the inscription on the collar could not be read, but the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust informed the observer that collars of this type have been fitted by Bjarke Lauber of Denmark, mainly on breeding grounds in Finland with a few on wintering

birds in Denmark. There were also two records of introduced feral birds, one remaining on the Ivel at Blunham, whilst a pair at Wardown Park Luton fledged three young.

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

A rare winter visitor and passage migrant, of more or less annual occurrence. Though feral birds may occur, it seems likely that most records refer to wild vagrants.

It is believed that many records of this species in Bedfordshire in 1997 relate to the presence of a confusing individual showing a combination of the features of this species and Bean Goose *A. fabalis*, though superficially appearing quite close to this species.

One was with two Greylag Geese *A. anser* by the Ivel in Blunham on 29th May (JTRS), and one also with Greylags at Harrold-Odell CP on 18th December (JM). The hybrid bird was present on meadows beside the Ouse west of Harrold for some days from 6th April (TP, PA), with presumably the same individual appearing intermittently at Rookery South CIP between 26th August and 9th October (DHB, MJP *et al*), and probably also at Radwell GP 31st August (MDR).

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

A scarce but usually annual winter visitor and passage migrant. Though feral birds may occur, it seems likely that most records refer to wild vagrants.

There were four records in 1997, all in the first winter period. Two adults were with Greylag Geese *A. anser* at Southill Lake on 1st January (BN), with perhaps the same two at New Road GP Sandy on the 5th (PS). A single juvenile was at Willington GP on 22nd March (RD *et al*), and finally one adult was again at Southill Lake on 6th April (BN).

**Greylag Goose** *A. anser*

A common feral resident which might occur very occasionally as a wild vagrant, though it is impossible to be certain of this.

Breeding was noted only at Southill Lake, where there were 156 including ten well grown young on 29th June, Roxton Lock and Harrold-Odell CP, but it seems certain that unrecorded breeding occurred at many other sites. It was noted in the 1996 Report that less reports were received for 1996 than in 1995, and there seems to have been a further deterioration in 1997. Please record those fluffy little yellow goslings, don't just go 'Aaah!' or 'I reckon they would be nice dipped in batter and deep-fried'.

In the first winter period the largest parties noted were 113 at Southill Lake on 16th February and 350+ at Harrold-Odell CP on 5th January. Larger parties were noted at more sites in the post-breeding and second winter periods, with 123+ at Harrold-Odell CP on 24th August rising to 147 on 29th October, 475 at Radwell GP on 31st August, declining to 348 on 18th October and 127 on 6th December, 200+ at Warren Villas NR on 30th September, a maximum of c. 200 at West Willington GP on 28th September, and 138 at Southill Lake on 16th November rising to 228 on 14th December.

An individual with a white ring on the left leg bearing the legend '6BU' in black was noted at Harrold-Odell CP on 6th April.

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

Hybrids between these two introduced species are noted regularly in small numbers.

There were records of a single at Stewartby CP on 14th January, one or two at Harrold-Odell CP between 9th March and 24th August, and one on the Ouse in Bedford on 4th June, but doubtless small numbers were also present at other sites.

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*

A common feral resident, it seems highly unlikely that wild vagrants from North America have ever occurred.

Breeding was noted at East Hyde, Southill Lake, Rookery South CIP, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Chimney Corner CIP, R. Ouse Great Barford Bridge and Prebend Street Bedford, Priory CP, Bromham Lake LNR and Harrold-Odell CP, with possible breeding at Felmersham NR. As with Greylag Goose, this seems likely to be a considerable under-recording of breeding in the county.

*Monthly maxima of Canada Geese at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
East Hyde	75	n/c	55	33	18	38	230	n/c	n/c	n/c	221	
Luton Hoo	n/c	132	121	132	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	157	n/c	n/c	n/c
Southill Park	3	77	50	n/c	n/c	70	59	n/c	n/c	n/c	103	48
Brogborough Lake	-	-	-	8	6	21	17	-	39	4	-	-
Rookery North CIP	-	2	2	6	-	-	21	350	179	79	11	5
Rookery South CIP	-	-	-	-	23	-	-	39	285	-	-	-
Millbrook Pill. NR	-	137	101	7	20	-	-	72	-	-	-	12
Stewartby CP	240	2	-	-	-	21	40	74	-	-	-	2
Coronation CIP	-	14	24	11	15	36	26	219	162	18	-	-
Priory CP	167	69	34	25	99	84	78	127	110	156	95	130

Away from the sites tabulated above, notable counts were 300+ at Harrold-Odell CP on 1st January declining to 120 on the 5th and 65 on the 19th, with 112 there 29th June and 190 on 23rd November, a maximum of 333 at Octagon Farm GP on 30th August, 120 on the Ouse at Tempsford on 22nd November, and 36 at Tiddenfoot WP on 6th December was the highest count ever at that site. At Radwell GP c. 300 on 5th January included an individual of one of the small races referred to as 'Cackling Goose', appearing to be most similar to *minima*, and there were 65 at the same site on 31st August, 272 there on 18th October and 261 on 6th December. There are occasional records of birds of the small races in the county, and in some areas of Britain these have accompanied flocks of wild geese and have been thought to possibly be of trans-Atlantic origin, but it seems most likely that any occurring in Bedfordshire are feral birds.

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

A scarce resident feral breeding species, birds from the wild migratory populations probably also occur as rare or very rare vagrants. The BTO does not yet recognise a feral breeding population of this species in Category C, as it does for Greylag Goose, *Anser anser*, but as a self-sustaining population seems to be developing in the midlands and home counties, all records are published in the main body of the report.

It is believed that all records this year relate to feral birds. Unusually, no breeding was reported in the county in 1997. There have been losses in the clay-pits flock in which breeding formerly occurred; this has probably happened during culling of Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*.

Once more a flock of up to 26 were at Willington GP from 16th February to 2nd March, with 22 or 23 again there from 17th to 25th August. It seems likely that the regular records of parties of 20–30 birds at Willington relate to a flock released at Roxton GP some years ago, and there were c. 20 at Roxton on 8th February and again 21 there on 7th December. A flock of 28 or 29 at Harrold-Odell CP from 1st to 5th January might well relate to hard weather movement of feral birds from neighbouring counties, and there were also eight at Radwell GP on 5th January, and seven there on 16th December. Four or five at Harrold-Odell CP during March and April, and four at Radwell GP on 31st January, 6th April and 18th October were more typical numbers

for those sites, and up to four were recorded in the Stewartby CP/Rookery CIP area throughout the year. Elsewhere ones or twos were noted at East Hyde, Luton Hoo, Dunstable STW, Woburn Park, Coronation CIP, Chimney Corner CIP, Octagon Farm GP and Priory CP.

**Brent Goose** *B. bernicla*

This species is a rare winter visitor which has become increasingly regular in the last two decades in line with a dramatic expansion in the world population.

There was one record in Bedfordshire in 1997, a single individual of the dark-bellied race with Canada Geese, *B. canadensis*, at Stewartby CP on 24th December (DJO).

**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

A self-sustaining feral population of this species has long been established in North Norfolk and in recent years has begun to increase and spread. Given that occasional Bedfordshire records have occurred since 1978 concurrent with this increase, it seems probable that these records relate to wandering individuals or small parties from the Norfolk population, though there is no proof of this.

There was a single record of this species in 1997, of two flying over Grovebury SP on 26th January (PS).

**Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

A scarce but regular winter visitor and migrant, with more or less annual records of breeding or attempted breeding.

At Grovebury SP there were two pairs on 23rd March, ten were present on 13th April with display noted and two pairs bred, with young seen on 22nd June but not present on 7th July. At Dunstable STW birds were present throughout the year with up to nine in late April, and two pairs bred but raised no young due to predation. A pair first recorded at Willington GP on 25th March and on other dates to 25th May may also have been those seen intermittently at Priory CP during April and to 5th May, and though there was no proof of breeding at either site, an immature bird was present at Priory CP and Octagon Farm GP from 21st to 30th August. At Rookery South CIP birds were seen from 18th March, with a pair intermittently present throughout April and May to 3rd June, and a maximum of seven on 9th May, an immature was present on 30th August with two on 8th September, seven, not aged, were present on 19th September, and there was a single first winter on 28th December.

Elsewhere there were relatively few records, with one over Ledburn Road SP on 6th April, a pair there on the 11th, and one on 9th June, a male at Manor Farm Trout Fishery/Warren Villas NR on 7th April, two at Houghton Regis ChP on 6th June, two at Coronation CIP on 29th August, and one in Woburn Park on four dates from 19th July to 14th December, with two there on 5th September and three on the 13th.

Finally, an introduced pair at Wardown Park Luton raised a brood of five.

**Mandarin** *Aix galericulata*

A scarce and secretive resident species, with the main breeding areas in the west and south of the county, though scattered non-breeding records occur throughout the county and there is no reason why it should not breed anywhere that it finds its preferred habitat of secluded lakes with old trees containing suitable nest-holes nearby.

Breeding was reported at Stockgrove CP, where there were eight adults and eight downy young on 15th June, Basin Pond Woburn where there were six juveniles on 22nd June, and Eversholt Lake where there was a pair with ten young on 9th June. Breeding was not recorded at Luton Hoo, though six were present there on 6th April and a peak count of nine was noted on 17th September. A remarkable record was of a pair mating

at Upper Drakeloe Pond Woburn on 22nd December, presumably encouraged by the unseasonably mild winter.

In the first winter period there were a series of records of high numbers at Stockgrove CP, with the peak counts being eight males and eleven females there on 1st January, nine males and nine females on the 5th, ten males and nine females on the 26th and finally 20 males and nine females on the 29th. Four pairs were still present there on 6th March, and there were two pairs on the Woburn Lakes on the 8th.

Away from the main sites, a male was seen on the Ouse at Kempston Mill on five dates between 5th January and 14th February, and in the spring passage period a male was at Rookery South CIP on 16th March, with another on the Ouse at Bromham Hall on the 29th and a pair on the Ivel south of the Twin Bridges, Blunham on 9th April. One of these or another was recorded in the same area in the summer, and in the autumn an eclipse male was at Great Barford Lock on 28th July, a female at Willington GP on 6th September, and a male at Harrold-Odell CP on 29th October.

In the second winter period there was a report of c. 40 at Stockgrove CP in December, and five males and a female were at Speedwell Pond Woburn on 14th December, with also a male on Upper Drakeloe Pond on that date.

### **Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

A fairly numerous winter visitor which has probably increased in recent years.

In the first winter period the largest numbers were at Radwell GP and Harrold-Odell CP during late January and February, though there is probably some movement between these sites, with birds feeding at Radwell and roosting at Harrold. Away from the sites tabulated, smaller numbers were also recorded at Luton Hoo, Dunstable STW, Tiddenfoot WP, Woburn Park and Stewartby CP.

The last record in spring was of ten at Radwell GP on 6th April, and the first in autumn was a female at Luton Hoo on 27th July. In the second winter period there were records away from the sites tabulated at Luton Hoo, Dunstable STW, Tiddenfoot WP and Bromham Lake LNR. Numbers at these other sites were mostly in single figures in both winter periods, and this is normally a species which occurs in large flocks at a few favoured localities.

#### *Monthly maxima of Wigeon at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Millbrook Pill. NR	-	42	19	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	-	12
Rookery South CIP	65	33	5	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	4	29	75	25	32
Coronation CIP	-	29	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	103	53
Chimney Corner CIP	21	35	-	-	-	-	-	-	51	67	-	95
Willington GP	100+	20	53	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	5	9	47	4
Priory CP	47	101	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	-	-	-
Radwell GP	480	n/c	8	10	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	286	n/c	270
Harrold-Odell CP	390	420+	200+	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	20	n/c	80	128	435

A drake showing some characters intermediate between Eurasian Wigeon and American Wigeon *A. americana*, and presumably a hybrid between the two species, was at Willington GP on 26th (RD, MJP, DHB *et al*). It was considered by this group of observers that though this male was very obviously strange, one or two other individuals were also not typical Eurasian Wigeons, though presumably the same bird was reported on 5th February as a Chiloe Wigeon *A. sibilatrix* x Eurasian Wigeon or Chiloe x American Wigeon (RIB).

### **Gadwall** *A. strepera*

A not uncommon winter visitor and irregular breeder in small numbers.



Breeding was recorded only at Luton Hoo, where there were several broods. There was again no breeding at the well-watched Dunstable STW.

Away from the sites tabulated below, birds were recorded in eight other localities. There were up to 25 at East Hyde in January, with a maximum of 52 there in February, and two were recorded in February, March and September at Millbrook Pillinge NR, and two also from February to April at Chimney Corner CIP with two at Brogborough CIP in April. Birds were also noted at Rookery North CIP with two in April, eight in September and six in October. In the second winter period there were 19 at Willington GP in November and 18 there in December, there were also records of small numbers at Tiddenfoot WP with six there in December a record high count for the site, and two males were at Warren Villas NR in December.

*Monthly maxima of Gadwall at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	3	47	27	76	n/c	n/c	bred	n/c	86	n/c	103	85
Dunstable STW	25	12	4	4	13	2	8	15	18	21	27	28
Woburn Park	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	3	4	n/c
Rookery South CIP	n/c	6	4	n/c	14	9	n/c	14	27	4	-	-
Stewartby CP	20	6	6	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	27
Coronation CIP	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	4	2	-	6	6
Priory CP	36	20	18	2	6	2	0	0	1	2	2	6
Radwell GP	17	n/c	4	4	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	26	n/c	45
Harrold-Odell CP	35	60+	10	4	4	n/c	n/c	6	14	22	17	27

#### **Teal** *A. crecca*

A fairly common winter visitor, sometimes occurring in quite large numbers, and an occasional breeder.

There were again no breeding records in the county in 1997, and the species was not reported at all in May.

Away from the sites tabulated below, the species was noted in nine other localities, but the only flock of any size was c. 60 at Willington GP on 13th January, a high count for this site. Elsewhere in the first winter period ten were at the Woburn Lakes on 18th January, and 13 at Millbrook Pillinge NR in January with single figures there through February and March. Single figures were also recorded at Ledburn Road SP, Radwell GP and Felmersham NR.

The last dated record in spring was two at Rookery South CIP on 27th April, with the earliest return seven at the same site on 12th June. In the second winter period single figure counts were recorded at Tiddenfoot WP, Steppingley Reservoir, Woburn Lakes, Willington GP, Octagon Farm GP and Radwell GP.

*Monthly maxima of Teal at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	20	4	4	8	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	22	n/c	31	n/c
Dunstable STW	45	20	10	4	-	-	2	13	21	18	22	28
Southill Lake	2	15	30	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	7	2	n/c	n/c	4
Rookery North CIP	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	15	21	15	5	-
Rookery South CIP	40	43	2	5	n/c	7	4	25	163	284	27	46
Coronation CIP	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	5	9	11	36	39
Stewartby CP	26	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Chimney Corner CIP	6	19	-	-	-	-	-	21	44	55	17	112
Priory CP	22	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	8	2
Harrold-Odell CP	15	35	7	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	2	3	6	17	28

# **Mallard** *A. platyrhynchos*

A very common mainly resident species, generally under-recorded due to over-familiarity.

Breeding was little reported, but doubtless occurs throughout the county. Odd birds can often be seen in the breeding season in areas which contain only small ponds or brooks and are remote from the main wetlands. Detailed records of breeding success were noted for Priory CP, where 30 out of 78 young from eleven broods survived, a rate of 38%. Elsewhere breeding was reported at Luton Hoo with several broods, Dunstable STW, Rookery South CIP, R. Ouse in Bedford, Felmersham NR and Harrold-Odell CP. Away from the sites tabulated below, the largest counts were 64 at Radwell GP on 5th January, 92 at Octagon Farm GP on 31st August and 80+ at Eversholt Lake on 29th December.

*Monthly maxima of Mallard at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	19	20	18	40	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	55+	64	30	30
Dunstable STW	84	71	78	62	18	21	42	87	105	121	131	156
Woburn Park	327	111	96	83	n/c	26	46	78	106	145	153	134
Southill Lake	108	21	11	9	n/c	29	43	74	34	26	49	18
Millbrook Pill. NR	4	16	6	2	2	2	8	6	19	18	5	8
Brogborough Lake	-	-	-	15	18	15	16	15	17	14	23	31
Rookery South CIP	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	65	43	25	23	32
Rookery North CIP	14	6	15	6	6	2	4	21	32	74	37	39
Stewartby CP	138	36	15	14	12	11	9	16	4	5	7	17
Coronation CIP	38	14	9	7	4	13	14	21	29	25	36	69
Chimney Corner CIP	8	16	11	10	12	8	10	21	21	19	27	12
Priory CP	136	46	26	22	26	42	50	102	116	83	49	52
Felmersham NR	0	32	8	5	9	8	6	27	9	19	75	33

# **Pintail** *A. acuta*

An uncommon but regular winter visitor.

This species is scarce enough for all records to be listed here. The vast majority of records were from Rookery South CIP. In the first winter period two females were there on 5th January and there were five males on 19th January. In autumn there was a long series of records at this site between 20th July and 24th October. On 20th July there was one female, with two on the 21st and a female and an eclipse male on the 22nd. One female was then present on 23rd July and 3rd August, and probably a different bird on 24th and 31st August. On 3rd September there were four, and then there was one bird present on 5th, 10th, 12th, 16th and 18th September, noted as a female on the 5th and a juvenile on the 16th and 18th. Counts between 20th September and 19th October are probably best shown by the tabulation below, the last was a single on 24th October.

*Pintails at Rookery South CIP, September – October 1997:*

20/9	21/9	24/9	25/9	27/9	28/9	30/9	2/10	3/10	4/10	5/10	7/10	9/10	10/10	12/10	18/10	19/10
3	3	3	3	11	5	5	3	7	3	7	2	5	3	2	2	3

Elsewhere, in the first winter period a drake was at Dunstable STW on 21st and 22nd February and a pair were at Harrold-Odell CP on 1st March. In the second winter period there was a drake at Luton Hoo on 7th September and another at Coronation CIP on 23rd November.

# **Garganey** *A. querquedula*

An irregular but usually annual scarce migrant, has bred.

The first record was of a pair at Willington GP on 22nd March, and these remained until at least the 30th, raising unfulfilled hopes of breeding in the county. The next was a male at Priory CP on 21st April, and there was then another male, considered by some observers to be a first summer, at Rookery South CIP on eleven dates between 22nd May and 22nd June, by which time it was in moult.

There were then no further records until 13th August, again at Rookery South CIP, where there was then a series of records relating to at least two birds, an eclipse male and a juvenile, with the last sighting on 7th October. Both birds were seen at the same time on 25th September and 3rd and 5th October, though it had been suspected that two were present before the first of these dates. Though this site is very well watched, it is also vast, and it may be possible that the male was the bird from June which had over-summered, either here or at a less well covered site in the same area.

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

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant, has bred on occasion.

Breeding occurred at Willington GP with a pair present in early May and a female seen with two unfledged juveniles later in the summer.

As can be seen from the table, Rookery South CIP was the most important locality, with a maximum of 37 on 18th September. Away from the tabulated sites, in the first winter period there was a maximum of 15 at Stewartby CP on 11th January, with smaller numbers on two other dates in that month, and a drake at Radwell GP on the 12th. At Dunstable SW less than ten were present in any month and breeding did not occur. A pair were at Radwell GP on 6th April and single drakes at East Hyde on 15th April and 22nd June. Small numbers were noted at Rookery North CIP in April and October and at Millbrook Pillinge NR in October and December, and a pair were at Radwell GP on 18th October.

*Monthly maxima of Shoveler at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	n/c	2	7	5	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	11	8
Woburn Park	3	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	4	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c
Southill Lake	n/c	n/c	n/c	2	n/c	n/c	n/c	1	8	2	18	6
Rookery South CIP	2	9	12	2	-	-	6	11	37	9	7	4
Coronation CIP	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	2	11	9
Priory CP	6	2	14	4	2	-	-	3	6	6	5	2
Harrold-Odell CP	3	-	-	-	-	-	2	16	1	-	4	-

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

An annual visitor, usually appearing during migration periods or in winter. The species is very popular in collections but, though there can be no certainty as to the origin of any individual, it seems likely that some are wild vagrants or wanderers from established feral populations. All records are published in the main body of the report unless the individual is obviously from captive origins.

A female was at Harrold-Odell CP on 20th January (TP), and there were two males at the Blue Lagoon, Arlesey on 26th February (RM). Another was at Rookery South CIP on 17th and 18th May (KO *et al*).

In autumn, a single, age and sex not recorded, was at Rookery South CIP on 24th August (LC), and a female was at Radwell GP on 17th September (TP) with another, or possibly the same, at Priory CP on the 21st (DK). Finally, a female was recorded at Battlesden Lake on 12th October and 13th and 30th November (PS), and was presumably present throughout this period at this little-watched site.

### Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A numerous winter visitor, it has bred but may now be doing so less frequently.

No records of confirmed or probable breeding were received, though birds, sometimes including pairs, were present at Rookery South CIP throughout May and June. No records were received for Dunstable STW.

Priory CP and Brogborough Lake remain the main wintering sites for this species, with the highest count of the first winter period 238 at the former site in January. Away from the tabulated sites, the only notable count in the first winter period was 100+ at Willington GP on 14th February.

In the second winter period, Brogborough Lake remained important until December, though the highest count was a remarkable 222 at the by then largely drained Rookery South CIP on 5th October. The only counts for sites not tabulated were again from Willington GP, with a maximum of 51 on 1st November, and Radwell GP with 21 on 6th December.

Monthly maxima of Pochard at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	n/c	13	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	21	7
Dunstable STW												
Woburn Park	85	85	21	0	n/c	0	0	0	0	18	9	26
Southill Lake	0	2	12	0	n/c	2	2	12	2	0	6	9
Brogborough Lake	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	35	162	185	101	13
Millbrook Pill. NR	15	6	9	2	-	-	-	19	6	33	34	41
Stewartby CP	50	8	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	-
Rookery North CIP	16	14	3	-	-	-	3	3	5	4	-	5
Rookery South CIP	70	-	-	4	4	18	-	23	-	222	-	-
Coronation CIP	-	21	14	-	-	-	9	7	4	16	32	21
Chimney Corner CIP	12	32	2	-	-	-	-	37	31	-	32	-
Priory CP	238	138	38	0	1	1	1	2	1	38	51	106
Harrold-Odell CP	39+	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	2	n/c	5	25	n/c	50+	110

### Ring-necked Duck *A. collaris*

A very rare trans-Atlantic migrant.

An adult male in perfect breeding plumage was at Warren Villas NR from 2nd April to 18th April. Not surprisingly it was seen and enjoyed by many observers (NB, TR, PS et al). This was the fifth county record.

### Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*

A numerous and common winter visitor and regular breeder in small numbers

Recorded as breeding only at Luton Hoo (several broods), Rookery South CIP (2pairs), R. Ouse TL130511 and Willington GP (2 pairs), though doubtless also bred elsewhere. No records where received for Dunstable STW.

As can be seen from the table, the largest count in the first winter period was 165 at Harrold-Odell CP, with, apart from this, only the 98 at Stewartby CP in the hard weather in January approaching 100, and most having relatively small numbers. At sites not tabulated there were 33 at Radwell GP on 5th January and small numbers at Tiddenfoot WP, Bromham Lake LNR and Felmersham NR in this period. Rather curiously, counts for the Kempston Bypass Pools note the species as present only from April to August, with a maximum of 15 in April dropping steadily to five in August, and with no record of breeding.

As can be seen in the table, in the second winter period counts were submitted for Brogborough Lake, which proved the most important site with 183 birds in November

and over 100 from September to December. Numbers at other tabulated sites in this period were again on the low side, with only Rookery South CIP and Millbrook Pillinge NR in August and Harrold-Odell CP in December having substantially over 50. The coincidence of the counts of 81 for the adjacent sites of Rookery South CIP and Millbrook Pillinge NR suggests inter-site movement. At other sites there were 65 at Willington GP on 5th October with single figures there in November and December, 41 at Radwell GP on 18th October and 59 there on 6th December, and a record of presence at Bromham Lake LNR.

*Monthly maxima of Tufted Ducks at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
	n/c	57	28	48	38	n/c	n/c	n/c	9	n/c	19	26
Luton Hoo												
Dunstable STW												
Woburn Park	69	68	58	44	n/c	0	4	2	4	32	32	56
Southill Lake	0	16	13	4	n/c	2	14	28	5	3	11	21
Brogborough Lake	-	-	-	14	15	14	18	49	136	107	183	161
Rookery North CIP	8	17	4	-	-	-	2	8	10	9	2	-
Rookery South CIP	-	-	-	-	16	-	7	81	17	-	-	-
Millbrook Pill. NR	12	38	17	4	6	4	64	81	25	24	35	51
Stewartby Lake	98	12	27	19	16	10	10	-	-	9	10	10
Coronation CIP	3	27	16	19	12	19	39	21	39	19	64	47
Chimney Corner CIP	18	34	28	27	29	36	29	23	27	19	37	42
Priory CP	46	20	17	14	8	2	0	2	2	16	8	24
Harrold-Odell CP	165	n/c	n/c	9+	6	n/c	40+	40+	49	n/c	48	90

**Scaup** *A. marila*

A winter visitor or passage migrant, alternating between periods of regular occurrence, as recently when it has been more or less annual, and other periods when it has been less frequent.

There were three records of this species in 1997. A first winter male was at Stewartby CP for about five days from 4th January (RAN, TP, PS), a female or immature was at Dunstable STW from mid-day on 5th October (RJB, PM per PT), and finally a smart adult male was at Priory CP all day on 19th December (DK, TP).

**Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

A scarce and irregular, but normally annual, visitor, mainly on passage and particularly in spring.

A male at Dunstable STW on March 23rd (RJB, PT, AW) was a first for that site, and another male was at Harrold-Odell CP on 1st June (PA, PH). A late March or early April date is typical for spring passage, and records in early June are also surprisingly frequent, and may be returning failed breeders.

**Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

A regular winter visitor in moderate numbers.

In the first winter period there were unusually high numbers at Stewartby CP in the hard weather in January, with 12+ on the 2nd, 16 on the 9th, c. 21 on the 5th, c. 20 on the 11th and c. 15 on the 12th. This species is irregular at Stewartby CP but a flock is normally present at Brogborough Lake, and this reached particularly high numbers this year with maxima of 32 on 27th January, a record 57 on 21st February and 38 on 7th March. A pair were noted mating at this site on 19th February, but courtship displays are not unusual amongst birds about to migrate. Also in the clay-pits there was a male at Chimney Corner CIP on 12th January and two males and a female there on 9th February, and a series of records at Rookery South CIP in March and April, with twelve

on 9th March and then from one to three females on six dates until a last single on 4th April. Elsewhere there was a single male at East Hyde on 5th January and a female at Luton Hoo on 16th February, one or two at Priory CP in January, and in the north of the county the species was regularly recorded at Harrold-Odell CP with maxima of 13 in January, 13+ in February, and finally three on 21st March, and at Radwell GP, with maxima of four in January and seven in March, and finally 13 on 6th April which were the last in the county in spring.

In the second winter period generally smaller numbers were recorded. The first was at Priory CP on 21st October and there were maxima of three there in November and two in December. In the north of the county there were 13 at Harrold-Odell CP on 23rd November and 11 there on 14th December, and up to 13 at Radwell GP in December, and a female was at Bromham Lake LNR on 30th November, whilst in the south one was at Dunstable STW on 19th November. In the brick pits there were singles at Coronation CIP in October and December and at Rookery North CIP in October, but again highest numbers were at Brogborough Lake with maxima of five in October, 17 in November and 18 in December.

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

**A scarce winter visitor, sometimes occurring in larger influxes in hard weather.**

The first winter period in 1997 was a particularly good one for this species. All records are published.

At Grovebury SP the drake and two red-heads from 1996 remained until 1st January, and a drake was at Millbrook Pillinge NR on the same date. At Stewartby CP there were two red-heads on 2nd January, increasing to three red-heads and a drake on the 3rd, with a single red-head remaining on the 7th, 9th, 11th, 12th and 14th January. At Rookery North CIP there was a drake and two red-heads on 5th January, quite possibly three of the four birds from Stewartby CP.

At Harrold-Odell CP there was a red-head on the Ouse on 9th January and again on the 16th, on the 19th there was one on the main lake, followed by four on the 23rd and three on the 24th and 26th, four red-heads again on the 31st January reducing to three on the 2nd and 5th February, and to two on the 8th and a single on the 9th, 13th, 14th, 23rd and finally 27th February. At Priory CP there were two red-heads on 20th January and again from 25th–27th January, and another on 9th March. Two red-heads at Tiddenfoot WP on 20th January stayed to the 26th. At Brogborough Lake there were two red-heads on 30th January and one on 2nd February.

At Rookery South CIP the first record was a red-head on 8th and 9th February, with two on the 11th, 15th, 21st and 22nd. There was then a single on 7th and 8th March and two on the 9th and 10th, this being the last recorded date for this influx. There was also a single red-head at Coronation CIP on 9th February, and another single red-head was at Chimney Corner CIP on 7th March.

In the second winter period the species was rather less numerous, though with an excellent party at Brogborough Lake. Two red-heads were at Priory CP on 20th December, and two at Radwell GP on the same date. There were five red-heads and a drake at Brogborough Lake on the 21st December, with three red-heads remaining on the 24th and 27th. Two drakes were at Warren Villas NR on the 25th December.

#### **Red-breasted Merganser** *M. serrator*

**A rare winter visitor and passage migrant, of less than annual occurrence.**

There were only three records of this species in the county in 1997. The red-head present at Grovebury SP from the end of 1996 remained until at least 1st January (RD, DJO, BN, PT), a male was on the Ivel on 8th January (SDH), and lastly a red-head was

briefly at Stewartby CP on 24th December (DJO, PT).

**Goosander** *M. merganser*

A regular winter visitor, usually in small numbers though with occasional larger influxes.

The species was more widespread and numerous in the first winter period than in most years. There was probably some movement between sites, particularly Grovebury SP and Woburn Park, making it difficult to assess total numbers, but it seems likely that approaching 100 birds were present in the county during much of February.

On 1st January c. 20 including at least eleven males were at Grovebury SP, making a complete set of the regular Western Palearctic sawbills at that site on that date. Four males were recorded there on the 5th, and there were ten on the 26th, whilst February brought dramatic numbers at this site with 35 including ten males on the 9th, increasing to an exceptional count of 44 on the 23rd.

At Harrold-Odell CP a red-head on the Ouse on 1st January was the first of an excellent series of records, with three on the lakes there on the 5th and 9th, increasing to nine including one male on the 16th, and maxima of seven males and 17 red-heads on the 24th and 44 on 31st January. There were still nine males and 25 red-heads on 5th February, six males and 15 red-heads on the 14th, and eleven red-heads on the 27th. A red-head on 1st March was the last record at this site.

Priory CP also had many records, with some present on most dates in January, February and March. One on 2nd January was the first of the year, rising to seven on the 4th and ten on the 5th. Other high counts at this site were ten flying north-east on the 12th, ten on the 26th, eleven on 2nd February, nine on the 22nd, and a maximum of five in March with one on the 23rd the last.

Woburn Park was the other main site, with the first record 21 on 12th January, with 15 there on the 18th and seven males and seven red-heads on 1st February. A flock of 55 there on 15th February was probably the highest ever count in Bedfordshire.

Elsewhere high counts were of six flying over the R. Ivel on 1st January, 13 at New Road GP Sandy on 3rd January, eight flying over Stewartby CP on 12th January and seven at Radwell GP on 31st January, and smaller numbers were also recorded at East Hyde, Dunstable STW, Warren Villas NR, on the Ivel, at Stanford Lock on the Ivel navigation, Shuttleworth College Lake, Southill Lake, Rookery South CIP and Willington GP.

The last record in spring was of a red-head on the Ouse at Radwell GP on the late date of 9th May.

In the second winter period generally smaller numbers were recorded. The first was a red-head at Lower Drakelow Pond Woburn on November, with seven there on 14th December, c. 14 on the 22nd, at least ten males on the 27th and eight males and 13 red-heads on the 28th. At Harrold-Odell CP there were three males and two red-heads on 14th December, four males and five red-heads on the 18th, one male and three red-heads on the 20th and a male and a red-head on the 27th. Radwell GP had a male and a red-head on 20th December, Priory CP a male from 21st to 31st December excepting the 23rd and 30th. Finally the largest flock of the second winter period was 31 including seven males at Grovebury SP on 28th December.

**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis*

An introduced species breeding regularly in small numbers, with evidence of additional birds visiting the county in winter.

Breeding was noted only at Rookery South CIP, where two pairs and an unpaired male were present and display noted on several dates from late April to early June, and

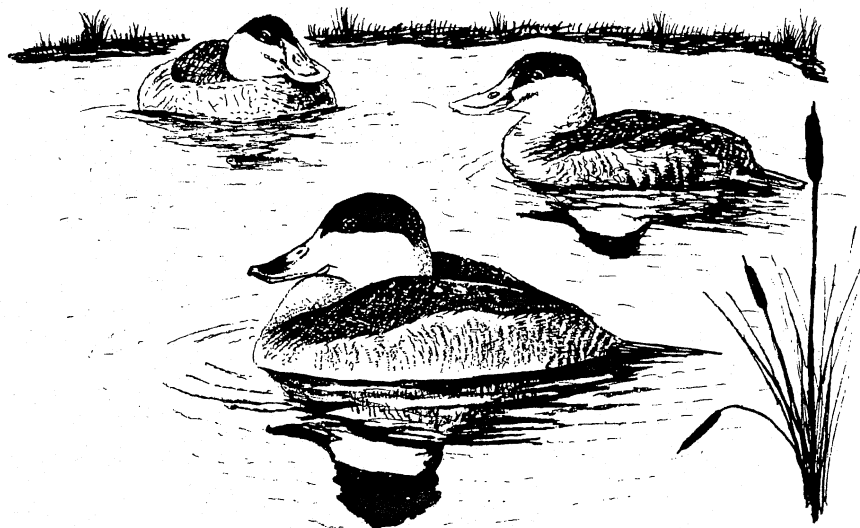
a female with three young was seen in late July and early August, and at Southill Lake, where there were three males on 6th April and six adults on 29th June, and two or three pairs raised young. It remains to be seen to what extent the partial draining of the former site will affect breeding there.

In the first winter period a count of 41 by two separate observers at Stewartby CP on 11th January was exceptional, and following the hard weather this flock transferred to Rookery South CIP, which has always been attractive to this species, where there were 35 on 11th February, 18 on 2nd March and still 26 on 6th April before numbers fell to more normal levels by the end of that month. These large numbers obviously represented a hard weather influx of birds from outside the county remaining until the approach of the breeding season.

Away from the sites tabulated below, one was at Dunstable STW on 17th January, a female at Radwell GP on 18th January, and a male at Priory CP on 6th and 11th April. A pair in the Biggleswade Common area from 27th to 29th April were probably those at Manor Farm Trout Fishery on 12th May, a male was at Harrold-Odell CP from 10th to 22nd May, and a male and female there on 7th August. Two females or immatures were at Priory CP on 23rd September, and finally a female was at Radwell GP on 6th December.

*Monthly maxima of Ruddy Ducks at selected sites (see note under Systematic List):*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Luton Hoo	n/c	2	7	11	n/c	n/c	10	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c	n/c
Rookery South CIP	4	35	18	26	9	5	4	5	6	7	-	-
Millbrook Pill. NR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	5	-	-	-
Stewartby CP	41	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-
Chimney Corner CIP	2	2	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	2	-	-



Ruddy Duck

*KMS*  
Kevin Sharpe



**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

An increasingly regular visitor due to the presence of re-introduced populations in neighbouring counties.

With only eight records between 1946 and 1989 this was a former rarity in the county. The Red Kite's current status is clouded by the re-introduction programme in England, a healthy population occurs in Oxfordshire and no doubt many of Bedfordshire's records are of birds following the downs to return to Oxfordshire. The majority of these birds are wing-tagged.

As in previous years most of 1997's records were in early spring. One flew north over Bury Farm, Houghton Conquest on 9th February. Another flew over Warden/Galley Hills on the 16th February. One was reported in the West Wood area by a local farmer at the beginning of March. Another flew over Whipsnade WAP on 13th March. One was reported at The Lodge, Sandy on 10th April. A wing-tagged bird flew SW over Dunstable STW on 11th April and perhaps the same bird was at Aspley Heath on 15th April. One at Warden Street, Old Warden was present from at least 21st to 29th June but could be very elusive at times; it wandered into other sites in the Raptor Triangle. There were no records from the second half of the year.

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

A rare passage migrant.

There were three records in 1997. May appears to be the best month for this raptor in the county and there were two reports in this month, a female at Pegsdon on the 11th (JP) and a male at Rookery South CLP and Millbrook on the 25th (RN, PN, TR *et al*). On 7th August a juvenile was at Coronation CLP (KMS) and the final record of the year was a female or immature at Rookery South on 12th September (CH).

**Hen Harrier** *C. cyaneus*

A rare visitor, mainly in winter.

The only record of the year was a ringtail at Knotting Green. This was first seen at the end of 1996 and it stayed until at least 12th January 1997.

**Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*

A rare resident, often surprisingly difficult to locate for such a large and impressive species.

Probably three pairs attempted to breed in the county in 1997. At a site on the Greensand Ridge, in the west of the county, display was noted on several occasions. Breeding was not confirmed but a male was noted food carrying nearby on 12th July. At a site in the north of the county, display was noted but breeding was not confirmed here either. Display was also noted at a site in east Bedfordshire.

Away from these traditional sites one was at King's Wood, Houghton conquest on 9th September and was seen well at Millbrook next day.

**Sparrowhawk** *A. nisus*

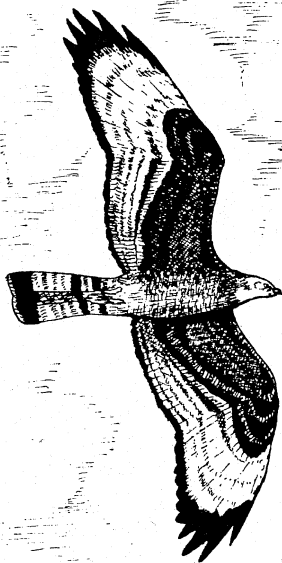
A widespread resident.

There is a healthy population of this species. At Luton Hoo four pairs bred, and a pair nested again in a Kempston garden raising two young. Other breeding sites were Bidwell Fields, Bramingham Wood, Bromham Hall, Chiltern Green, Church End, Kempston, East Hyde, Leagrave Marsh, the Raptor Triangle, Sharpenhoe Clappers, Stopsley Common and Whipsnade Heath. No doubt there were many other pairs present in the county. A female was observed plucking a Wood Pigeon at Chicksands Wood on 14th September, and a Redwing was taken at Haynes on 12th October.

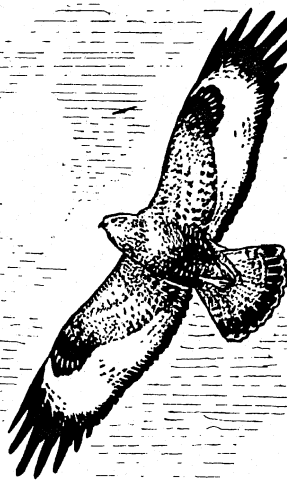
**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

A scarce but widely recorded and increasing resident and rare breeder.

1997 was another excellent year for this species in Bedfordshire. 34 record cards were submitted with the majority of sightings being at the traditional sites of Luton Hoo, the Raptor Triangle and Woburn Park. One observer could not submit all of his sightings of this species because there were too many to fully document. Buzzards first bred in Bedfordshire in 1995 and in 1997 breeding records came from four localities. At Eversholt a pair was present all summer and display was noted on several occasions. At Luton Hoo three or four were present all year round but there was no proof of breeding. At Southill Park four to five were present all year and two pairs almost certainly bred, one young was raised. At Pedley Hill, Studham display was noted on 18th June.



Honey Buzzard



Rough-legged Buzzard

Kevin Sharpe

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

A very rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

The seventh for the county was one on the 5th December at Warden Hill. This is the first record since one at Pegsdon Hills in 1995.

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

A rare, but annual, migrant.

The first of the year was reported by a fisherman at Grovebury SP on the 27th April (per PS). On 13th May one was seen flying north over Luton (BN) and possibly the same bird flew over Blunham later in the same day (JTRS). One which stayed at Priory CP from 25th to 29th May was welcomed by many Bedfordshire birders; it

was also seen near Haynes on the 24th and at South Mills on the 31st May, although the latter record may possibly have been a different bird. The only autumn record was one at Sandy GP on 18th September which was fully described by a local angler.

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

A common resident.

There appears to be no change in the status of this species.

**Merlin** *F columbarius*

A rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

More records of this in Bedfordshire were received in 1997 than in the previous year. A male was at Cople on 1st January. At Knotting Green up to three birds, one of which was a male, were seen on several occasions from 11th January to 5th February. One, a female, at Brogborough Lake on 3rd February was also seen at Stewartby CP on 7th February. A male was at Stopsley on 15th March and another male was at Bedford STW on 23rd March. Possibly seven different birds were involved in this series of records. The only record for the second winter period was a female or immature at East Hyde on 23rd December.

**Hobby** *F subbuteo*

A scarce breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

Several observers again commented that there was another decline in sightings in 1997 of the small but widespread summer and passage population in Bedfordshire. It was considered that there were fewer birds over the well-watched areas of Kempston, Leighton Buzzard and Priory CP this year. The first of the year was flying north over Sandy on the very early date of 12th April; the last of the year flew south-east over Priory CP on 3rd October. At least three pairs bred, in the south of the county, in the brick pits (where a crow's nest in a line of poplars was used) and near Woburn. This latter site was the only one where breeding was successful with two or possibly three young being raised.

**Peregrine** *F peregrinus*

After a long period of extreme rarity, a rare but now annual visitor, usually occurring in winter or autumn.

There were at least five records of this species. A female was at Dunstable STW on 1st January (PT) and then reported at Grovebury on 5th January. A juvenile was well described south of Willington on 2nd January (ANS). A female was at Rookery CIP on 11th January (DJO). A male was seen at Rookery South CIP on 25th January (KMS). An adult male also at Rookery, or Millbrook, was seen on 9th August (PS, PH), 1st (PS) and 30th November (DJO). This bird stayed into 1998. Finally, a female was seen over Barker's Lane, Bedford on 10th December (SDH).

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

A widespread and common resident.

The largest coveys of this species were 34 at Luton Hoo on 12th and 32 there on 30th January, and 31 were near Eversholt in January too. Three pairs bred at Dunstable STW; all the young were predated. At Stopsley Common this species was only seen occasionally and it was far outnumbered by Grey Partridge sightings. Once again no **Chukar** *A. chukar* or hybrids were reported.

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix*

A declining resident species.

The largest coveys were ten near Broom on 1st January, 20 at Galley Hill on 5th January and 40 there on 19th October, 16 at Barton Hill Farm Road on 9th January, 25+ at Abbey Farm, Old Warden on 29th November and 19 at Wood Lane, Willington

on 29th December. At Pegsdon Hill possibly five pairs bred. At Stopsley Common this species was common throughout the year and the highest count was 82 on 14th December. However, JCP's traditional Boxing Day count was his lowest ever total; he could only locate 30 birds.

**Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*

**An irregular summer visitor and rare breeder.**

Calling males were heard near Sutton on 6th and 14th May, 7th and 15th June, possibly more than one bird was involved at this locality. On 22nd June one was heard at Biddenham Fields and another at Grovebury. At Cople males were heard on 7th July and 6th August. Other calling birds were recorded at Little Staughton on 15th July, Lower Farm, Millbrook on 20th July, Stratton Farm, Biggleswade on 22nd July, Potton Ridge on 1st August and Potton Bury Farm on 13th August. Many of these are traditional Quail sites. An interesting record concerns one heard at night as it flew over Sandy on 7th June. How many birds were involved in this small influx is difficult to assess.

**Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

**A very common species with the population reinforced by the release of birds for shooting.**

Following the cold wet spell in June gamekeepers at Southill Park picked up 400 dead young birds; this is an indication of the effect a cold summer can have on a ground nesting species like this one. All white birds, prized as markers by the shooting fraternity, were at Rookery South CIP in May and Stopsley Common in June.

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

**A scarce, local and elusive resident with a population which is almost certainly declining.**

The Bedfordshire Bird Club's survey into this enigmatic introduced species continues in 1997. The results of this will be published in a future *Bedfordshire Naturalist*. In Luton Hoo only one female was located; the number of males at this site was estimated at twelve birds. Although it bred successfully here, only two young were seen by the gamekeepers, and due to the lack of females this species will probably be extinct at this former stronghold in the future. Sites which still held numbers of this declining bird were on Greensand, where five males and two females were found, Maulden Woods, when five calling males were heard in May, Moneypot Hill, where it was estimated that there were eight males and two females, and Woburn Park where four males and three females were located. The only other sites where any birds could be found during fieldwork were Eversholt, Steppingley and Woburn Woods. These sites all held single cock birds. The only other female was seen at Flitwick Plantation although they are still present in some of the other aforementioned localities.

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

**An under-recorded visitor, mainly in winter, with one localised breeding population.**

In the first winter period birds were recorded at Chalton STW, Harrold-Odell CP, Kempston Mill and Stanford Lock. Up to five were at Priory CP during January's freezing conditions and the last of the spring there was on the late date of 15th April. At Flitwick Moor this species was recorded every month of the year with a maximum of four calling birds. It was suspected to have once again bred at this site when adults appeared to be calling to chicks and the chicks replying in August. In the second winter period there were birds at Harrold-Odell CP, Kempston Mill, Priory CP (up to five), Stewartby CP and Willington.

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

**A common and widespread resident.**

The highest counts submitted were 46 at Luton Hoo on 16th February, c. 70 there on 26th October increasing to c. 100 there on 26th November. At Priory CP there were 28 on 6th January.

**Coot** *Fulica atra*

**A common breeder and very common winter visitor.**

At Priory CP an estimated 15 pairs bred, an increase in the breeding population. At Woburn Park on 21st June one had white in the primaries on both sides. At Bromham Lake NR one young bird was watched being taken by a pike on 16th May. Selected maximum counts at Brogborough were 201 in August, 253 in September, 246 in October, 293 in November and 283 in December. At Harrold-Odell there were 550 on 3rd, 450+ on 5th, 350+ on 16th and 400+ on 19th January. 107 were counted at Luton Hoo on 16th February. At Millbrook there were 331 in January. Radwell held 199 on 18th October and 248 on 6th December. At Rookery there were 108 on 15th March, 173 on 3rd August and 364 on 16th September. There were 131 at Stewartby CP in January and 111 at Willington GP on 5th October.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

**A regular but uncommon passage migrant with the first ever proven breeding record in 1997.**

First of the year was one at Grovebury SP on New Year's Day followed by one at Stewartby Lake on 3rd and two at Wyboston GP on 11th March.

At Willington GP birds were noted from 16th March to 27th July with a maximum of four in June; breeding was confirmed on 28th June when a pair was seen with two young and eventually three young were fledged (for full details see separate article). A pair also bred and raised young at Tempsford. These are the first records of breeding by this species in Bedfordshire.

Elsewhere a total of 24 birds was noted at seven other sites with 60% in the April/May period – Roxton, Coronation CIP, Rookery CIP, Beeston, Radwell, Tempsford and at Priory CP where the last bird was recorded on 15th October.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*

**A regular passage migrant and rare localised breeder.**

First of the year was at Dunstable STW on 11th March with a peak of eleven in early April; elsewhere lesser numbers noted at 16 other wetland sites, mainly in the Bedford clay pits and Ouse Valley gravel pits. Breeding records from: Dunstable STW, five pairs reared only one chick due to corvid predation; Rookery CIP, at least two pairs, young noted; Whipsnade Zoo, a pair throughout spring; Houghton Regis ChP, two pairs attempted; Radwell GP, one pair plus four juveniles; Willington GP, one pair reared four young. Autumn passage was light with the final migrant at Harrold-Odell CP on 26th August.

**Ringed Plover** *C. hiaticula*

**A regular passage migrant and rare localised breeder.**

One over Priory CP on 17th February and four at Rookery CIP on 28th were the earliest, followed by a steady spring passage from all the county's wetlands; particularly from the well-watched Rookery CIP where small numbers were present from March to September with maxima of 18 on 24th May (including several colour marked birds from the Thames Estuary) and 16 on 20th September. Breeding noted at: Dunstable STW, one pair failed; Willington GP, one pair; Rookery CIP, up to three pairs with young seen. The final autumn migrants were from the latter site on 2nd October.

**Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant.

Very scarce during the first winter period with the only large flocks at: Priory CP, c. 300 over; Cockayne Hatley, c. 200; Thorn/Sewell, up to 200 with c. 600 over Houghton Regis on 1st March; Harrowden, c. 300; Willington/Cople up to 400 in March. Spring migrant were widely scattered across the county's farmland with a bean field at Pegsdon having a good run of birds in April and a maximum of 205 on 7th. Cockayne Hatley had c. 350 on 3rd April and Stopsley Common 270 with the final migrant at Pegsdon on 25th April.

Return passage was first noted from Rookery CIP on 2nd September, with up to 300 by December. Larger numbers were recorded during the second winter period, maxims as follows: Sewell/Thorn, c. 200; Radwell, c. 1000 in December; Willington/Cople, c. 1200; Biggleswade, c. 800; Henlow Airfield, c. 100; Warden Hills, c. 300.

**Grey Plover** *P. squatarola*

A scarce, mainly spring passage migrant.

All records from Rookery CIP: 14th–16th May, one in breeding plumage; 17th, groups of six, three and two were all considered to be different birds; 18th, one; 27th–29th, four; 30th, one; 2nd–3rd June, two; 8th, one. The only autumn sighting was also from Rookery CIP, on 28th August. (RAN, PA, SB *et al*) In total a remarkable run of 22 birds from this one very important wetland site, which is soon to disappear.

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

A declining breeder, common passage migrant and winter visitor.

Breeding was recorded at: Pegsdon Hills, four pairs; Ledburn Road SP, one–two pairs; Galley Hill; Butterfield Green, ten plus adults displaying, young seen; Stopsley Common, three–four pairs; East Hyde, two pairs raised four young; Rookery CIP, six pairs, young seen in May–June; Whipsnade Zoo, three pairs, but no young; Dunstable STW, a single pair nested on adjacent farmland raising one chick to flying stage, the worst performance in living memory.

Due to a combination of autumn sowing (making spring corn too tall to nest in) and intensive management (some fields are sprayed and rolled five or six times from drill to combine) the future of this species looks uncertain in our county. However, one ray of hope was noted at a site near Thorn where a 20 acre field of maize (which is spring sown) held twelve pairs of Lapwings in the short patchy sward, and despite corvid predation many young fledged.

During the first winter period large flocks were note at: Cardington, 500–600; Rookery CIP, 593 and c. 400 in February; Thorn/Sewell, c. 150. Return passage was noted as early as 30th May at Dunstable STW and at Willington with 259 on 28th June.

The usual sites had the following end of year maxima: nr Bedford StW, 1100 in November; Warden Hills area, 390 in November; Leighton Buzzard area and east to Dunstable STW, 600–700 November/December; Willington GP, 1200 plus in December; Radwell GP, c. 515 counted in December; East Hyde, record count of 350 in December; and Rookery CIP where regular watching recorded hundreds throughout the period the top counts were, August – 556, September – 595, October – c. 750, November – 1160, December – 536.

**Sanderling** *C. alba*

A rare, mainly spring, passage migrant.

All records from Rookery CIP: the first positive sighting was one in non-breeding plumage on 4th May followed by singles (or the same bird) on, 11th, 16th–17th and 20th; two and four were noted on 21st, four on 22nd, three on 23rd, four on 24th and

finally one on 25th. There was just one autumn record, also from Rookery CIP on 30th August. (RAN *et al*).

Two calidrids at Rookery CIP on 19th March were possibly Sanderling (RM).

**Little Stint** *C. minuta*

A scarce passage migrant.

A winter record from Willington GP on 17th January was unusual (ANS), as was an early migrant there on 13th April. At Rookery CIP one from 11th–13th and 16th–20th April probably involved a single bird, with another from 8th–12th May and 14th. A poor autumn with just two records, also from Rookery CIP, on 28th July and 3rd September (RAN, PA, PS *et al*)

**Curlew Sandpiper** *C. ferruginea*

A rare passage migrant.

Recorded on four dates from Rookery CIP: 8th, 10th–11th June and, more typically, a moulting adult on 24th August (KMS, RAN, KO, PS, *et al*).

**Dunlin** *C. alpina*

A common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.

Due to ideal wader habitat and extensive coverage Rookery CIP attracted a remarkable run of records. The first was three on 28th February and the last a flock of eleven on 27th December; in between it was noted in all months, including a solitary June record, with the spring peak in May and late August/early September autumn high. Throughout the period several hundred birds were recorded, mostly involving flocks of less than ten. (PA *et al*). Elsewhere in the county multiple sightings came from Dunstable STW and Coronation CIP, with one-off dates from a further four locations.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*

An annual passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.

One at Stewartby Lake intermittently from 4th–21st January was the only winter record, with singles at Willington GP on 9th and 22nd March, and at Dunstable STW from 12th–17th. In the spring Rookery CIP had singles on 19 dates between 12th March and 23rd April (including a black male) and a flock of 17 briefly on 1st May.

Return passage at Rookery South CIP was noted from 28th July–16th October on 26 bird days, with a maximum of three on 30th August. Special mention must go to a single bird at Tiddenfoot WP, Leighton Buzzard on 25th September which constituted a first for the site (GD).

**Jack Snipe** *Limnocyptes minimus*

A scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

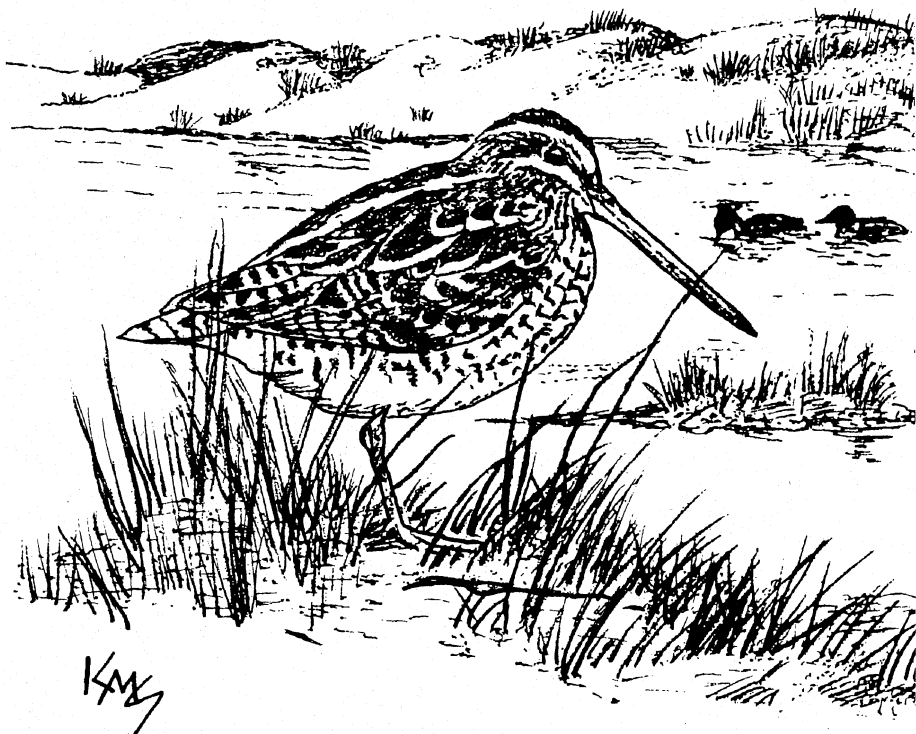
A poor year for this elusive wader with records from only six sites: Mentmore Road, Linslade, one flushed from canal overflow on 2nd January; Biggleswade Common, one on 5th January; Stewartby Lake, one on 12th January; Dunstable STW, one on 24th March, two on 28th September with one staying until 5th October, all birds showed well from the scrape hide; Radwell GP, a single on 26th October; and, at its former county stronghold, Houghton Regis ChP, singles from 2nd February–1st March and, intermittently, from 30th November–13th December. Sadly, due to the low water table, the latter site may not be suitable much longer.

**Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant, and a rare and declining breeder.

Recorded from 14, mainly wetland sites, during the winter and passage periods with only Willington GP, 25 on 13th December, and Dunstable STW, ten in September, noting double figures.

Rookery CIP had smaller numbers throughout the year with two birds 'drumming'



Snipe

Kevin Sharpe

in the spring; at least one pair raised three young in the north basin. A 'drumming' bird at Dunstable STW amounted to nothing, and June records at Coronation CIP hinted at possible nesting in an otherwise grim year for this rapidly declining wader.

**Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola*

An occasional winter visitor and localised breeder.

Singles flushed from cover were noted during the first winter period at: The Lodge, Felmersham NR, Leagrave Marsh, Whipsnade Heath, Houghton Regis ChP and Marston Thrift and during the second winter period at Whipsnade Zoo, Blows Downs and The Lodge.

Evidence of breeding from roding birds came from the Greensand Ridge at: Lowes Wood, Aspley Heath, Stockgrove CP, Home Wood, Shuttleworth. A displaying bird at Galley Hill, Luton was unusual.

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

An uncommon passage migrant.

First of the year was one at Willington GP on 2nd February (TP). At Rookery CIP there followed an astonishing total of 35 bird days between 8th April–15th May in the spring and 4th July–26th September in the autumn, involving up to 100 individuals. Many were in breeding plumage and a flock of 13 on 21st April and one on 14th August were considered to be of the Icelandic race *L.l. islandica*. Other large counts at



Rookery were: 15 on 4th July, 14 on 28th August and nine on 10th September (RAN, PA, PS, KO *et al*). A lone bird over Dunstable STW on 13th September (PT) was the only other site record.

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

**An uncommon passage migrant and rare winter visitor.**

A very poor year with only three records as follows: Coronation CIP, one flushed by dog on 12th April (KMS); one flew north-west over Priory CP on 1st May (DK); and a summer-plumaged bird was at Rookery CIP on 17th May (KO *et al*).

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*

**An uncommon passage migrant.**

A poor year with only seven single records as follows: Rookery CIP, 18th and 20th March and 16th May; Radwell GP, 9th and 10th May; Stewartby Lake, 9th May; and over Bedford on 27th August.

**Curlew** *N. arquata*

**A regular passage migrant, scarce winter visitor and rare breeder.**

The only winter records were two at Millbrook CIP on New Year's Day and one at Rookery CIP on 16th January. The latter site then had 13 bird days from 13th April–11th August involving mainly singles and a high of four on 2nd September. Elsewhere, Priory CP and Cople had single fly-overs in March, and Dunstable STW and Willington GP likewise in April. Migrants were noted on return passage at Cople and Coronation CIP in August and September, and in November one over Bedford on 5th was followed by an exceptionally large flock of 23 flying north-east over Biggleswade Common on 16th. The only evidence of breeding was from a site in the north of the county where displaying was noted.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

**A rare, mainly autumn passage migrant.**

Apart from one at Coronation CIP on 27th August (KMS) all records were from Rookery CIP. A bird in partial breeding plumage on 22nd April was the only spring record, followed by 13 bird days from 19th August–28th September involving about a dozen individuals, mainly juveniles (RAN, PS, RM *et al*).

**Redshank** *T. totanus*

**A common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor and breeder.**

Winter records were noted from Stewartby Lake, Priory CP, Dunstable STW, Houghton Regis ChP and Harrold-Odell CP in January and February. During the spring records were received from 13 wetland sites, mainly in the Bedford Clay Pits and along the river valley mineral pits. Peak passage was in April with only Dunstable STW and Rookery CIP recording double figure counts of up to ten during the month.

Confirmed breeding was noted only at: Dunstable STW, three pairs raised one young to flying stage, the rest were predated by corvids; Rookery CIP, at least three pairs raised three juveniles. Evidence of breeding also came from Radwell GP, Coronation CIP, Chimney Corner CIP and Willington GP. By the end of August most birds had returned to their wintering quarters on the east coast. November/December records came from Rookery CIP and Willington GP.

**Greenshank** *T. nebularia*

**A scarce spring and regular autumn migrant.**

Spring records were thin on the ground with the first ones at Rookery and Coronation CIPs on 17th April followed by singles at Ledburn Road SP on 21st and 29th, Dunstable STW on 3rd and 30th May and over Maulden Woods during the annual BNHS Dawn Chorus meeting on 4th! Rookery CIP continued its good run of

spring wader records with eleven Greenshank days between 22nd April–3rd June and a maximum of three birds on 31st May.

Predictably, the first to return was noted at Rookery CIP on 10th July followed by an almost continuous presence throughout the autumn until 18th October; peak numbers were in August and September with birds on a near daily basis, involving small groups, typically of three or four, but up to nine on occasions. Elsewhere, birds were noted at six other sites: Dunstable STW, 15 dates between 13th July and 11th September, peak of five on 9th August; Coronation CIP, seven dates peaking at six birds on 4th August; Willington GP, one in August; Priory CP, singles over in August, September and October; Octagon Farm Pits, Bedford, 11th, 12th and 19th October; and Radwell GP, September. There was one winter record, at Rookery CIP on 7th December.

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

**A regular passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.**

Recorded in every month of the year with only a few birds in June between passage periods. At Dunstable STW one or two noted up to 27th April and again from 5th July to the year's end with a passage peak of five in August. Rookery CIP had two records from 13th May–3rd June before returning birds from 4th July through to 4th September, with a high of eleven on 26th August; there was one December record. Elsewhere small numbers (less than ten) noted widely across the county's wetlands, mainly from July–September and during the second winter period at Priory CP and nearby Octagon Farm Pits. Of special note was one at Whipsnade Zoo in July and two on a flooded field near Maulden in December.

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

**A scarce passage migrant.**

A better than average year for this superb wader due to the conditions at Rookery CIP, where it was noted on 13 dates: in the spring from 27th May–1st June, involving probably one/two birds; one 3rd–5th August and another on 11th, a party of four 11th–12th August and singles on 17th, 19th, 21st and 24th (RAN, KO, *et al*). Singles also recorded at Stewartby Lake on 9th May, Coronation CIP on 18th August (KMS) and Dunstable STW on 29th June and 5th July (PT).

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

**A common passage migrant.**

Recorded widely across the county's wetland sites. The first spring record came from Dunstable STW on the early date of 17th March followed by others from a more normal 8th April and elsewhere in the county from mid-month until the last spring bird on 6th June at Dunstable STW.

One at Willington GP on 17th July was probably the first returning migrant and heralded the much stronger autumn passage period through to September. Rookery CIP had a steady flow of birds with a maximum of seven in August, and similarly at Dunstable STW which peaked at ten the same month. At Willington a late migrant lingered until the year's end.

Hopes of breeding were briefly raised at Dunstable STW where a pair displayed and copulated from 14th May–8th June, but without any further progress.

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

**A scarce passage migrant.**

Apart from one at Stewartby Lake on 3rd May all other records were from Rookery CIP: one 29th April and 5th May, up to seven birds on 2nd–3rd May, and one on eight dates between 6th–25th May with two more on 25th; one on 11th July, one 2nd August, three on 3rd and finally four on 12th August.

**Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius*

**A rare storm blown vagrant.**

Following strong south-westerly gales one was briefly seen on the morning of 9th October at Stewartby Lake (PT).

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus*

**A very rare vagrant.**

A first-winter bird was found on the frozen River Ouse at Great Barford on 2nd January. This extremely rare visitor to Bedfordshire, there are only two definite county records, unfortunately died later that evening. After an initial debate about its identity, an examination of skins at the Natural History Museum, Tring, and correspondence from Dr J.T.R. Sharrock and B. Scott, it was confirmed as an Arctic Skua (RD, DJO, PS *et al*).

**Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus*

A dark phase first-winter bird was located at Stewartby CP on 20th October. It was still present in the morning of the 22nd. Most observers considered that it was a Long-tailed Skua, the long-awaited first county record, though it was an unusually dark individual. However, some observers raised doubts and favoured identification as Arctic Skua. The Rarities Panel have now accepted this record as a Long-tailed Skua and a full account of this decision will appear in the next Bird Report.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus*

**A scarce visitor, occurring mainly in winter.**

All of 1997's records of this species were from Brogborough Lake, Rookery South CIP or Stewartby CP. An adult in winter plumage was found on the ice of the latter site on 3rd January and this stayed in the area until 15th March. A first-winter was present from 15th March to 25th April, mainly at Rookery CIP. A second-summer bird was found on the 16th March at this site. The only summer record was an adult at Rookery on 22nd July.

The first bird of the autumn was a second-winter at Rookery on 26th September. A first-winter and an adult bird were found at Stewartby CP on 27th and 28th December, respectively, and both remained into 1998.

**Little Gull** *L. minutus*

**A scarce, but annual, passage migrant and rare winter visitor.**

First recorded in 1997 at Priory CP on the early date of 31st March. This was aged as a first-summer bird. The next were two birds, an adult and a first-summer, at Stewartby CP on 9th and 10th April. On 12th April six (un-aged) were present at the same site. Two adults were found there on 16th April. At the nearby Rookery CIP eleven, including nine adults, were present on 1st May. A first-winter at this site stayed from 4th to 10th May. The only other bird recorded in the spring was a first-winter at Priory CP on 5th May.

Autumn birds concerned probably only two fairly late birds. A first-winter at Stewartby CP on 20th October was joined next day by a second bird of the same age. Both of these were still present on 26th October. Probably one of these then moved to Priory CP where there was a first-winter on 27th October, the last record of the year.

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

**Abundant in winter and during passage and breeding annually in small numbers.**

At Stewartby CP 1320 were counted in January, 500 in February and 1590 in December. At Brogborough Lake 554 in August had increased to 1430 by November. 1450 were at Rookery on the 20th September. At Priory CP 1000 were on the iced up lake on 5th January. An albino was noted at Rookery South CIP on 3rd August.

100 nests were counted at this site on 25th May, but by 16th July only nine pairs were on eggs of the 30+ pairs present.

**Common Gull** *L. canus*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant.

Only seven record cards were submitted for this species. At Stewartby CP there were 430 in January and 336 in December. These were the highest counts in Bedfordshire in 1997.

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

An abundant passage migrant which summers in smaller numbers with a few pairs breeding irregularly, and becomes uncommon in mid-winter.

Only seven record cards were submitted for this species. Mostly *L. f. graellsii* are involved but there is also a good passage of *L. f. intermedius*. There were at least three nests at Rookery South CIP. The highest count of the year was 880 also at Rookery South on 3rd August.

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

A scarce visitor, usually in late summer. Not all authorities recognise this form as a separate species.

A second-summer was reported from Rookery South on 4th and 21st May. An adult was reported from the same site on 26th July and 28th September. Observers are reminded of the need to submit adequate details of this species.

**Herring Gull** *L. argentatus*

An migrant winter and passage migrant, and occasional breeder in small numbers.

No record cards were submitted for this species, a classic case of under-recording. Presumably the status has not changed since the 1996 report.

**Iceland Gull** *L. glaucoides*

A rare but recently annual winter visitor to the county.

Three different birds were seen in the first winter period, but none were reported in the second winter period.

A first-winter was present in the brick pits, usually coming in to roost at Stewartby CP, from the beginning of the year until at least 3rd February. Two adults were seen at Stewartby CP on 16th and 23rd February and one stayed until at least 8th March.

**Glaucous Gull** *L. hyperboreus*

A rare but annual winter visitor.

There were at least five individuals in 1997. Two first-winter birds were present in the brick pits in the first winter period with one being seen up until 3rd March. An adult in the second winter period was seen on 26th October and 1st November at Stewartby CP, and 2nd and 9th November at Brogborough Lake. Another smaller adult and a first-winter were at Stewartby CP on 18th December.

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

Once again the virtually white gull which has featured in previous reports was reported in the county. It is considered unsafe to attribute this gull to any particular species but it has been reported as any one of four!

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

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant.

The highest counts received were of 120 at Stewartby CP in January and 97 there in December. 160 were feeding in a ploughed field at Cockayne Hatley on 16th August.

**Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*

A scarce winter visitor and passage migrant.

There were just two records of this species in the county. A first-winter was photographed at Stewartby CP on 11th August (RAN).

Another first-winter was briefly at Stewartby CP on 20th October, shortly before the controversial dark phase Skua was found.

**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandwichensis*

A scarce passage migrant.

All of the records were of spring birds. One was at Rookery South CIP on 22nd April (RN) and three adults were there on 26th April (RN). Two over Ledburn Road SP on 1st May (GD) had possibly been seen nearby the previous day. The final record of the year was one present in the afternoon of 3rd May at Priory CP after rain.

**Common Tern** *S. hirundo*

This is a common passage migrant and regular breeding species.

One at Priory CP on 24th and 25th March was the earliest ever in the county. The maximum count at this site was 29 on 26th April. At Dunstable STW of the two pairs that held territory, one bird was killed by fishing line and the second pair failed. At Warren Villas NR a new breeding colony was established. Four pairs bred at Willington GP. At Rookery South CIP over 30 birds were counted on 12th August. Two young were observed being fed here. The last bird of the year was at Rookery South on 22nd September.

**Arctic Tern** *S. paradisaea*

A regular, predominantly spring migrant.

Passage occurred from 16th April to 17th May. There was only one autumn record in 1997. The first of the year were two at Priory CP on 16th April. The main passage was at the end of April when four were at Rookery South CIP on the 26th, 15 at Stewartby CP, four at Brogborough CIP and four at Priory CP on the 28th. The last of the spring were three reported at Coronation CIP on 17th May.

The only autumn birds were two at Stewartby CP on 28th July. With an estimated total of c. 46 birds, passage of this attractive long distance migrant was very light in 1997.

**Little Tern** *S. albifrons*

A scarce passage migrant.

There were four records in 1997. On 23rd April two were reported at Dunstable STW (per PT). On 3rd three at Rookery South CIP arrived with 70 Black Terns (PS, RAN). One was reported at this site on 17th May. An adult at Priory CP on 26th May was seen briefly at 11.00 (DJO). It was then reported at Stewartby CP later in the afternoon before being disturbed by water skiers.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

A regular spring and autumn passage migrant.

The first of the year was on 25th April when there was one at Priory CP. A major influx in southern England occurred on 3rd May and Bedfordshire had good numbers of this species on that day. Seventy-one at Rookery South CIP was the highest flock; 53 at Stewartby CP might have contained some of these birds. Eighteen were at Harrold-Odell CP and eight at Priory CP on the same day. The last of the spring was at Stewartby CP on 17th and 18th May.

Autumn passage was from 2nd August at Stewartby CP until one at Priory CP on 6th September. Apart from a flock of 22 at Stewartby CP on the 3rd September, the autumn passage involved only approximately seven birds.

**Feral Rock Dove** *Columba livia*

A common resident.

Difficult to assess any population changes as only three observers submitted records. However, a decline was noted at Priory CP.

**Stock Dove** *C. oenas*

A common resident.

Numbers appear to be stable across the county. The winter roost at Priory CP peaked at 130 in November, and 75 and 50 were noted at Luton Hoo and Bromham Park respectively.

**Wood Pigeon** *C. palumbus*

An abundant resident and winter visitor.

Large counts received as follows: 400–500 in January/February feeding on sprouts near Priory CP, where ten pairs bred and c. 350 were at roost in December (DK); c. 1,000 feeding on oil-seed rape in February at Gravenhurst; and c. 250 on Sandy Heath the same month.

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

A common resident.

Few records received, but this natural coloniser continues to increase across the county; 53 at Stanford in November was of note.

**Turtle Dove** *S. turtur*

A rapidly declining summer migrant.

It was good to receive records of this 'Blue Riband' farmland species from over 30 locations across the county submitted by 26 different birders; the bad news is, the decline seems to be accelerating, due mainly to a combination of spring migrants being shot on the continent and the intensively farmed Bedfordshire arable lands.

Most observers noted it infrequently, typical comments were: "Where have they all gone?" (BN); "The only sighting in this area (Leighton Buzzard) was by P. Soper who saw one at Ledburn Road SP on 22nd September" (GD); Dunstable STW, "four records all summer and none breeding for the first time in 20 years, a terrible situation. Totternhoe Knolls none bred this year." (PT). Numbers were down at Pegsdon Hills NR (JCP) and elsewhere along the chalk downs.

As usual a few were seen around the clay and gravel pits perched on overhead wires. The first migrant was at Stewartby Lake on 19th April but most arrived during the first week of May. Last out in the autumn was the one at Ledburn Road SP on 22nd September. Please continue to send all records of this species, with comments, so the decline can be monitored for posterity.

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

May occur as an occasional visitor from the established feral population in the London area, or as an escapee from local aviaries. It is normally impossible to decide which applies to any individual, and all records are published in the main body of the report.

Only one record in 1997, the long staying individual at Edworth in the east of the county (DJO).

**Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

A widespread summer visitor and passage migrant.

Two observers noted a paucity of records from their local patches, Dunstable STW and Ledburn Road SP. The first bird of the year was one at Sutton on 2nd April but the main arrival was in early May. There were no late autumn records.

**Barn Owl** *Tyto alba*

**A scarce resident.**

Well reported from about 20 sites across the county. At Knotting Green noted throughout the year hunting the set-aside, two pairs hatched eggs but failed to raise young. Confirmed breeding at Willington Dovecote where a pair fledged young. Most other records were from roadside sightings as owls hunted verges and ditches, and a dead bird near Junction 13 of the M1 highlighted the dangers this lightweight owl faces from vehicles. Some of the above birds were probably of captive bred origin, but the percentage is unknown.

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*

**A widespread resident.**

Widely reported across the county's farmland, due mainly to this owl's diurnal habits. Breeding was confirmed at Knotting Green, Pegsdon Hills, Ampthill Park, Galley Hill and Eaton Bray but no doubt many of the other records related to breeding birds. The strangest occurrence of the year was one perched on the porch of a house in wooded Woburn (BN).

**Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco*

**A reasonable common resident.**

Noted at 24 locations across the county's woods and marginal wooded habitat. The majority of records were typically heard only and breeding was confirmed at Maulden Woods, Bramingham Woods, Pegsdon Hills, Cople, Bromham Hall, Houghton Conquest, Chicksands Wood, Galley Hill and Dunstable Cemetery. A mid-afternoon sighting in June on a BNHS field trip to Totternhoe Knolls was of note and a day time owl at Stewartby Lake attracted the attention of eleven species of passerines!

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

**A rare resident and winter visitor.**

On the chalklands at least two young were raised at each of the traditional sites of Pegsdon Hills NR and Galley Hill, with the former site attracting one or two wintering birds. The only other records were of roosting birds near Pulloxhill in January, Willington in March, and Linslade in December, and rumour of a breeding pair on the Greensand. A poor year for this species.

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

**A scarce winter visitor.**

Up to three on the set-aside at Knotting Green throughout January and February were the only records in what was another poor year for this owl.

**Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*

**A rare summer visitor.**

A pair probably bred at Wavendon Heath, where 'churring' was noted throughout May and June, with another pair present on the Beds./Bucks border at Ramamere Heath (PS *et al*).

**Swift** *Apus apus*

**A common passage migrant and summer visitor.**

First of the year were two at Dunstable STW on 23rd April with the main county-wide arrival in early May. No large numbers were reported during the summer and by mid-August most birds had returned south. An interesting observation at Dunstable STW between 28th August-7th September was the appearance, just before dusk, of groups of up to ten hawking over the lagoons. The final migrant was at Langford Lakes on 28th September.

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*

**A localised resident.**

Well recorded across the county's river systems and still waters. Duplicate records received from a number of well-watched sites during the breeding season, included Stewartby and Brogborough Lakes, Bromham Bridge, South Mills, Tiddenfoot WP, Twin Bridges GP, Harrold-Odell CP and Radwell GP. Of note was a regular garden visitor at Potton in the first winter period, and at Dunstable STW where two more were found trapped and dead in sluices. However, it would appear that following a run of relatively mild winters the Kingfisher population is at least consolidating and maybe even increasing slightly.

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*

**A widespread resident.**

Noted across the county's woodlands, particularly along the Greensand Ridge, and also at marginal habitats such as the clay pit shelter belts and Dunstable STW where a pair bred for the first time in the A5 cutting. There were several garden records and two pairs bred on the chalk at Sharpenhoe Clappers. Special mention must go to two observers who recorded this species in 1997; 56 times in and around the Bromham area (PA), and at Priory CP where the increase continues (DK).

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus major*

**A widespread resident.**

No change in status with records from woods and gardens throughout the year.

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

**A scarce resident.**

As ever a tricky species to find with the best chance in early spring when drumming is at its height. All records received are published as follows: Swiss Gardens, confirmed breeding and noted throughout year; Fountains, Blunham; drumming and regular sightings from March-July; The Lodge, regular sightings; Battlesden Lake, one drumming in March; Woburn Park, five records including Eversholt Lake and a town garden; and singles noted at Ampthill Park, Southill Park, Maulden Woods, Briars Stocking, Bromham Park, Bromham Hall Wood, Biggleswade, Ampthill, Stockgrove CP, Moggerhanger, Marston Thrift and Whipsnade Zoo.

**Passerines**

**Wood Lark** *Lullula arborea*

**A very rare breeding bird which has only recently begun to recolonise the county, even more unusual outside the breeding season.**

This species was noted at two sites, one on a single date in autumn. The first site, in the west of the county, is where breeding activity has been observed in the previous three years. Despite several visits from various observers the only reports were of passage birds on half a dozen different dates between the beginning of March and the middle of May. This would seem to suggest that the change in habitat, combined with the disturbance in the area suffered from both general public and visiting birdwatchers, has taken its toll and displaced the birds (RAN). The only other record was a single bird seen on 23rd September near Sandy.

**Sky Lark** *Alauda arvensis*

**This widespread and common resident species is probably in decline.**

The fact that concern is being expressed about Sky Lark nationally was probably the spur for more than usual interest from observers around the county.



In the first winter period flocks of over 50 were noted at Kempston Mill, Henlow Airfield, Sandy Heath, Willington, Caldecott and Cople, with the last site hosting a flock of 230 birds on 16th and 18th January (ANS).

Varying fortunes were reflected during the breeding season with only one singing bird found during a six mile walk at Turvey, while the chalk hills of the south held "plentiful" and "noticeably abundant" populations on the northern fringe of Luton. Twelve pairs bred at the Sharpenhoe Clappers BBS.

Toward the end of the year flocks were much smaller with maximum figures being 40 counted at Stopsley on 26th October and Rowney Warren on 29th November.

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

**A widely seen passage migrant and localised breeding species.**

The first sightings came on 27th March with three at Priory CP and two at Willington GP, a date which is about a week later than normal. Typically, new arrivals are noted at bodies of standing water where they gather to feed. Numbers built up through April with flocks of 180 at Priory CP on 11th, 113 at Willington GP on 13th and c. 300 noted at Dunstable STW on 27th.

Breeding at Willington GP took place with 24 occupied nest holes counted at the end of July. At the same time there was, in modern terms, a huge colony of 409 nest holes reported from the Octagon Farm GP, Bedford (DK). A survey of nest sites around Leighton Buzzard on 9th June found a total of 330 occupied nest holes at five sites (PS). This figure did not include any birds at Ledburn Road SP, where the nesting colony was still deserted at the end of June. Two weeks later the same site had c. 130 occupied nest holes prompting the question "where had they been?" There were still young being fed there into September with the last sighting being three on 18th September (GD).

At other sites a more usual departure pattern was noted with c. 70 birds around Willington GP on 21st July, c. 100 at Harrold and Odell CP on 29th August and 300 at Priory CP on 31st. The last report came from Harrold and Odell CP with one on 12th October (TP).

#### **Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

**An abundant passage migrant and widespread breeding summer visitor.**

The first sighting this year was a little later than normal coming on 30th March from Blows Downs. The first wave of sightings across the county refer to the week commencing 2nd April and from that point on birds could be found widely. The only reports of large numbers came from Priory CP where there were 150 present on 20th and 25th April, Dunstable STW also on 25th April and the Rookery CLP on 6th May when those two sites each held about 100 birds and Radwell GP on 11th May when there were about 400 birds present,

There were very few records concerning breeding pairs and none at all regarding roosts this year.

Towards the end of September numbers dropped as birds moved away, leaving small passage groups and young birds to be reported through October. The last sightings were of a single over Silsoe College on 5th November (GG) and four days later the final one at Lothair Road, Luton (MB).

#### **House Martin** *Delichon urbica*

**A common passage migrant and summer visitor.**

The first arrival this year was a single bird seen at Great Barford on 9th April (GW), followed by two at Potton the following day (GW). Scattered sightings through the rest of April preceded the main arrival in early May.

A decrease in the breeding population around Linslade was commented upon with two or three pairs present compared with over 20 a few years earlier (GD). A pair was found nesting on a house only a third of a mile from Luton town centre while another discerning pair chose to breed on a pub in Leagrave!

The only large counts this year were c. 300 in Rookery CIP on 27th August (KO), 220 at Priory CP on 3rd September (DK) and c. 300 over The Lodge, Sandy on 25th September (JH).

Normally the last of the hirundines to leave us, this year saw an October movement with three widely separated reports on 10th–12th October. The final record for 1997 were two birds seen at Blunham GP on 1st November.

#### **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*

**A localised summer visitor and passage migrant.**

There were only 14 reports from eleven observers during 1997. The first sighting was on 12th April at Sundon Hills followed closely by Sandy Heath and Wavendon Heath, then two passage birds were seen at Radwell on 19th. The Lodge, Sandy had its first record on 27th April and a passage bird found at Ledburn Rd SP, Leighton Buzzard was a site first on 30th. The only other multiple reports came from Maulden Wood and Coopers Hill with three being the maximum! There was no mention either way of breeding status on a species which must surely be under-recorded despite requests in this Journal for more diligent reporting.

#### **Meadow Pipit** *A. pratensis*

**A common migrant and winter visitor but uncommon breeder that seems to be under-recorded.**

Less than 20 cards were submitted for 1997. Flocks of 20+ were reported from Bedford STW, Blows Downs, Manor Farm Biggleswade and Priory CP during the spring, and Galley Hill Luton, Hockliffe, Octagon Farm GP Bedford, Pegsdon Hills NR, Priory CP, Steppingley and Wigmore Park Luton in the autumn; the highest count being the c. 100 around Galley Hill on 28th September. Other than the sites mentioned above records were centred upon the chalk areas in the south and the brick pits in the centre of the county.

Breeding was noted at Sharpenhoe Clappers where seven pairs were considered to have bred and presence was recorded at Coronation CIP, Grovebury SP, Knotting Green and Rookery CIP, during May suggesting breeding activity.

#### **Water Pipit** *A. spinoletta*

**A scarce passage migrant.**

Seen only at Dunstable STW where an elusive single bird was present between 30th March and 4th April (AW, JBT), then presumably the same individual was seen between 6th and 8th April (PT).

#### **Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava flavissima*

**A common spring and autumn passage migrant and local breeder.**

The first sighting was at Priory CP on 4th April. Numbers were considered poor by a couple of observers and the only places to hold flocks of more than 20 birds were Radwell GP with c. 40 on 19th April (MDR), Priory CP with 22 on 24th (DK) and the sailing club area at Stewartby Lake where up to 50 birds could be found between the same two dates (PS).

Breeding records came from Barton, Biggleswade Common, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Grovebury SP, Octagon Farm GP, Rookery CIP and Stopsley Common.

The only reported autumn flock was about 50 strong and was seen by the River Ivel at Biggleswade where they were seen feeding on insects disturbed by a group of horses

on 15th September (JKT). The last record of the year was of two birds at Rookery CIP on 16th October.

Birds showing the characters of the nominate **Blue-headed Wagtail** *M.f.flava* were a male seen at Dunstable STW on 20th April (PT), a male at Priory CP on 10th May (DK) and two birds in the flock at Stewartby Lake (RD).

A bird showing the characters of a **Sykes's Wagtail** *M.f.beema* was also in the flock at Stewartby (PS, RAN, MJP) and if accepted would be the first record for the county.

**Grey Wagtail** *M. cinerea*

A regular and quite common species encountered far more frequently outside the breeding season than during it.

In the first third of the year birds were seen at 13 sites and in the last third at 18 sites with the predictable continuity at places such as sewage treatment plants and water mills. In January one individual had learnt that gardens often produce food and was regularly visiting a property in Bromham.

Breeding season presence was noted at Dunstable STW, Grovebury SP, Harrold-Odell CP, Priory CP, Rushmere and Stewartby Lake but, although seen, there was no evidence of any breeding activity. At Bromham Bridge, Radwell and Southill Lake breeding was proven. The two juveniles that visited Priory CP in June and July may well have come from the pair that were suspected to be breeding at Duckmill Weir in Bedford. At Potton Brook and Houghton Regis ChP breeding was also considered to have been probable.

A partial albino at Priory CP on three dates in April was unusual – the bird showed a pure white head, throat, neck and breast and made a striking impression (DK).

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

A common and widespread resident with a habit of communal roosting outside the breeding season.

This year a roost of up to 157 was noted during February and March at Cranfield, up to 44 were at Barnfield College, Luton in February, between 100 and 200 at the Flitwick Tesco store in September into October, 30 at Leighton Buzzard railway station in October and 62 at Biggleswade STW in December. A group of 36 birds at Harrold-Odell CP was the peak count at a site that has good numbers present throughout the year.

Breeding was confirmed at Tiddenfoot WP, Stopsley Common and Dunstable STW with ten pairs located at the latter site.

Nine birds showing the characters of **White Wagtail** *M.a.alba* were reported. Four were seen at Dunstable STW in spring, two at Radwell GP on 19th April, one at Stewartby Lake on 22nd, one at Priory CP on 24th and in the autumn another at Dunstable STW on 12th October.

**Waxwing** *Bombycilla garrulus*

An irregular eruptive winter visitor in small numbers.

There was only one report, a pair of birds found in a front garden at Ampthill were seen on 29th January (RN), although they were present for a couple of days prior to that date.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A very common and widespread species.

This is a bird that is hugely under-reported, there being only five record cards submitted for the year. Breeding was confirmed at Bowel's Wood, Bromham, and Stopsley Common, Luton where five or six pairs bred. At Priory CP the population dropped to 32 territorial males compared with the previous six years' average of 42.8 males.

**Duncock** *Prunella modularis*

A very common resident which can easily be overlooked due to its unobtrusive lifestyle.

Only four record cards were received making any comments on population status unreliable. An estimated six pairs bred in the Stopsley Common area and seven males held territory at Priory CP.

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

A very common and widespread species that tends to go unreported.

Breeding was confirmed in a Luton garden and West Wood, Souldrop but obviously goes unmentioned all across the county.

At Priory CP 18 males were found holding territory a figure that was down on 1996 but still better than the average of the last six years. At Felmersham NR at least 20 were counted singing in September and October, a period when a slight passage was noted at Priory CP.

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

A scarce summer visitor.

First reported singing at Priory CP on 23rd April. By the 1st May there were three males present and a female was trapped and found to be "in egg". Despite this, breeding was not conclusively proved for the site this year (DK). A bird was found singing near Biggleswade Common on 27th April and the site subsequently produced two fledged young (JE). The Home Wood complex hosted up to four singing males from mid-May into June but there was no indication of breeding success (DJO *et al*). The only other records were a singing male for three days during late May in Kempston (DJO) and a single on 2nd June at Willington (ANS).

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

An annual, but scarce, spring migrant to Bedfordshire which has occasionally bred and also occurs as a rare migrant in autumn.

This was a quiet year for the species with only seven birds reported, four of which were, predictably on Blows Downs. The first was a female at Amptill Park on 12th March (AW, RM) which was followed exactly a fortnight later by one seen on the paddocks at Blows. The Downs then had singles on 29th March (RJB), 1st April and 20th April (LC, RD, AR). Interspersed with these were a single at Dunstable STW on 30th March (PT) and a female at Caddington on 31st (RJB).

There were no autumn reports this year.

**Common Redstart** *P. phoenicurus*

A regular passage migrant and rare breeding visitor.

Noted on passage at three sites from 13th April onwards. The first sighting was a male on Blows Downs which is now an established site to see the species as they migrate north and west; there were a further seven days when birds were present there with the highest count being four on 23rd (RD, PT). Elsewhere one was seen in a Luton garden on 16th April (KRW) and a female was in a Biggleswade garden. This same garden played host to a juvenile bird on 5th July – had it bred nearby perhaps? (CG, GG).

Once again the only area that held breeding birds was Wavendon Heath where three males were reportedly holding territories. Of these one pair raised young, possibly, from two broods. Another three pairs were in the general area but probably fell just on the Buckinghamshire side of the boundary (RAN *et al*).

Autumn migrants were found on 11th September with one at Dunstable STW (AW) and another near Streatley (DT). On 19th a male and female were found in a

Dunstable back garden (TD). A female type bird was found at Galley Hill near Luton on 21st September (JCP), and the final sighting of the year was of a male and female on Blows Downs on 30th September (TD).

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

**A regular spring and autumn migrant.**

Spring passage was particularly good this year. The first report came from Blows Downs on 23rd April where a male was found, the same site then held up to two birds until the end of the month plus two present on 5th May and one on the 11th (RD). Elsewhere passage birds were found at Dunstable STW on 25th April, 4th to 10th and 29th May (PT). At Priory CP four birds were found on 26th and there were still three on the 30th (DK). The following sites recorded single sightings between 25th April and 7th May: Whipsnade Zoo, Butterfield Green, Whitehill Wood, Willington, Clophill, Ledburn Rd SP, Coronation CIP, The Lodge, Sandy and Chawston. Worthy of individual note was the area of set-aside farmland at Knotting Green where the acreage of developing grassland had a good run of sightings from 28th April, and hosted up to four birds in early May (JDS).

The autumn passage often appears to involve more birds than spring although this may be influenced by birds remaining for longer in one place. However, there were sightings from 18 locations this year. The first returning birds being a pair and a juvenile at Knotting Green on 11th July, a second juvenile was seen with the group five days later. The question "were they really migrants or had they bred at this impressive area of set-aside?" is a tantalising one. The site produced an impressive string of records through to the end of September by which time there were seven birds present (JDS). Priory CP had a good run with birds present on many days between 25th August and 5th October with the peak being four on 27th September. At nearby Octagon Farm GP birds were seen on odd days from the 31st August through until 7th September, with three present on this last date. One off sightings came from between Barton and Pulloxhill on 9th August, Coronation CIP on 11th, Rookery CIP on 20th, Cople on 21st. Singles were seen at Clophill on 30th August and then again on 6th September with others at Sutton, Ledburn Rd and Houghton Regis ChP later in the same month. Other multiple sightings came from the two well watched southern sites – Dunstable STW had a single on 12th August, 1st September and then from 10th to 13th September (PT) while Blows Downs had three birds on the paddocks on 9th September which increased to seven on 13th and gradually tailed off to the final bird of the year which was last seen on 7th October (RD).

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

**A normally annual passage migrant and winter visitor in small numbers, which is subject to considerable fluctuation.**

There was another change of fortunes this year with no records from the first winter period or spring passage. The first migrant of the autumn was a single seen at Bedford STW on 21st September and again on the 27th (DK). This was followed by a bird at The Lodge, Sandy on 23rd September. On 29th a pair of birds were discovered at Knotting Green, a site where they then stayed to the end of the year (JDS). During October birds were present at four sites; Blows Downs held a single male from 4th to 12th, two birds were at Clophill from 6th to 12th and singles were found at Rookery CIP and Willington GP on 18th and 31st respectively. A record from Willington on 7th December may relate to the same bird as they can go missing for quite long periods given suitable cover (RDu).

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

**A quite common migrant and occasional breeder.**

The first record was on 12th March at, predictably, Blows Downs in the south of the county (LC). There was about a week before the next sighting and then widely spread records came from 19 sites across the county through into mid-May. The highest count came from Blows Downs where numbers peaked at 12 birds on 6th April (AR). There followed a lull before the next wave of birds started to appear at the end of the month with some of the Greenland race *O.o.leucorho* amongst their ranks. Four individuals consider to be of this larger and brighter race were noted, they were seen at Blows Downs, Eaton Bray, Luton Airport and Pegsdon Hills NR.

The only summer sighting was a male on Stopsley Common on 1st June (JCP).

Autumn movement began with the discovery of two birds at Coronation CIP on 10th August with six there the following day (KMS). Small numbers then passed through over the next six weeks. This was far from a vintage autumn with 13 sites recording a total of 31 birds. Multiple sightings came from Barton Hill farm, Cockayne Hatley, Coronation CIP, East Hyde and Houghton Regis ChP. Most birds had passed through by October but a laggard was at Grovebury SP on 5th (PS) and the final sighting was a single at Stopsley Common on 26th October (TG).

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

**A scarce but regular spring passage migrant, much rarer in autumn.**

Predictably Blows Downs dominated the records for this species, although, not unusually, it did not claim the first sighting. That honour fell to Houghton Regis ChP where a bird was seen on 1st March (PT). On 31st March a female was seen on Pegsdon Hills NR followed by a male there on the 5th April (JCP), a date on which a bird was found at Stevington in company with Fieldfare! These two species came together again, this time at Pegsdon, when four Ouzels were found with Fieldfare on 20th April (DT). A male was found at Milton Ernest on 20th April in the north (KWC) while back on the chalk hills of the south Whipsnade Zoo recorded its only record of the spring on 27th April when a male was seen in the evening (CT).

Blows Downs, which tends to claim the most occurrences for the species started its account with a female on 26th March and held four more birds before the end of the month. In April 24 birds were recorded over 14 different days, they were typically elusive but staged a late rally between 20th and 23rd, with four birds present on the last date, by when most people had managed to see one. The last spring sighting for the site was a single on 27th April (RD).

The species is quite rare in autumn but this year two were found. One at Coronation CIP on 11th August seemed to have arrived in the same conditions that had bought six Wheatear and a Whinchat to the site (KMS). The other bird was a female found on 28th September at Langford Lakes.

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

**An abundant resident in almost all habitats.**

Typically, for very common species few record cards are submitted, and this is certainly true of Blackbird. The six cards that were received considered numbers to be quite good with terms such as "common" featuring. An increase in numbers at Stopsley Common throughout the winter months was remarked upon (TG). Priory CP reported between 30 and 35 birds being seen regularly through January, but the nine males holding territory was a decrease on the last six year's average figure of just over twelve. Autumn passage was also noted at Priory CP at the end of September with a peak of 33 birds counted on 2nd October (DK).

Partial albinos were recorded from Blows Downs, one bird looking superficially like a Ring Ouzel if seen from the side.

**Fieldfare** *T. pilaris*

**A common winter visitor and passage migrant.**

Although this is a common winter visitor, numbers can vary according to prevailing weather conditions. In the first winter period numbers were relatively high with flocks of over 100 birds reported by 13 observers from widely spread locations. The largest flocks were 350 at Southill on 16th February (BN) and 500 at Pegsdon Hills NR on 8th March (JCP). Most birds had left by the middle of April, the last sightings coming from Pegsdon Hills NR where a party of 50 were seen on 20th (DT) and then a single at Whipsnade on 25th wound up the spring (CT).

A bird at East Hyde was seen carrying nesting material between 6th and 9th April but presumably then left the area to continue migration as no further sightings were submitted (SFH).

Birds started to arrive for the second winter period from 12th October when a party of 39 flew over Priory CP (DK). Following this small numbers arrived through the month with the first substantial flock being c. 180 at Warden Hill, Luton on 27th October (LRJ). The number of birds around up to the end of the year was variable with some sites remarking on low numbers while other places did well. The flock at Stopsley Common, Luton peaked at c. 450 at the beginning of December (JCP) while the 700 plus at Cople on Boxing Day was the highest count of the second period and just reward for the effort of a post Christmas walk (ANS).

**Song Thrush** *T. philomelos*

**A common, but formerly abundant, resident and partial migrant.**

That the number of cards submitted for this species was so high reflects the concern that many observers feel for it. The fact that single breeding records and sightings of single birds were submitted shows that as far as some people are concerned this is an increasingly rarely encountered bird. Submissions of breeding are welcomed especially when comparisons can be drawn with previous years. This is where BBS and CBC work is at its most valuable; at Priory CP there were seven males holding breeding territory which is the same as in 1995.

On Stopsley Common, Luton, an arrival of winter thrushes on 12th October coincided with an increase in Song Thrush numbers suggesting that they were probably also migrants. About a week later at nearby Pegsdon Hills NR approximately ten were noticed on site again suggesting something of an influx.

**Redwing** *T. iliacus*

**A common winter visitor and passage migrant.**

At the beginning of the year small flocks were found quite widely. There were four reports of flocks numbered in three figures; these came from Luton Hoo on 16th February and Sandy Heath, Potton and Southill Park all on 9th March. By the first week of April most individuals had left the county with the last stragglers reported from Blows Downs on 23rd.

Two records were submitted regarding singing birds – one at Ampthill Park was heard on 2nd March (PT), the other was at Blows Downs on 22nd March (RJB).

Returning birds first appeared on 5th October with six noted at Bramingham Wood, Luton. These were followed by a flock at Stotfold on 10th then about 100 at Potton on 11th. This vanguard preceded an enormous, widespread movement on 12th and 13th with small groups streaming over the country on a broad front. Counts from ten separate observers reflected the scale of the westward passage with 650+ counted on

the northern fringes of Luton, "several hundred" over Kempston, c. 300 over Stopsley and an impressive 2500 over Priory CP. Further movement was recorded at Priory CP on 26th October with another 250 birds going west.

On the ground a group of c. 300 birds feeding with Fieldfare at Felmersham on 16th November was worthy of note. Toward the end of December numbers started to build up with counts of 50–100 at Stopsley and Pegsdon.

**Mistle Thrush** *T. viscivorus*

A widely distributed resident.

Interest reflects the increased concern that many observers feel about the more familiar species. A February record of 18 birds together on Sandy Heath was unseasonal (BS).

Breeding was reported at Ledburn Road SP, Leighton Buzzard, Harrold-Odell CP, Stopsley Common, Pegsdon Hills NR and Cuckoo Bridge GP.

Post breeding groups start to build up from August onwards with 21 reported at Turvey Abbey on 19th (JM). In September 22 were again at Turvey on 5th and on 28th groups of nine and ten were present at Barton Hills (LRJ) and Galley Hill (JCP) respectively. The largest flock of the year was at Luton Hoo where an extraordinary 57 birds were seen together on 17th September, a group which is amongst the largest ever Bedfordshire counts (AJL).

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

A long awaited addition to the list of species recorded within Bedfordshire.

The first in what proved to be a series of records was received from Priory CP on 4th January (EN). Remarkably the bird was observed to be wearing a ring. This prompted a successful attempt to trap it. The bird was a female and had been ringed three months earlier at Beachy Head, Sussex (see article on page 68).



Cetti's Warbler

Steve Halton



On 1st February another, this time unringed bird, was found in a different area at Priory CP. This bird was found to be a male and the following day it was heard singing. Incredibly a second male was found to be in the same area during February and it is possible that there were actually three birds together on 15th February. Reports of single birds continued intermittently from Priory CP up to the 6th April but there was no evidence to suggest any breeding attempt.

Not satisfied with this dramatic county debut there was a further series of records from another site in the Ouse valley. From the first report of a briefly singing bird on 31st January (PT), a singing male was heard regularly from March (MDR) and present through until May with the final report being on the 14th. Two birds were seen together at this site on 31st March (DJO), and as this seems a clear case of a paired male holding territory, it must be considered as a probable breeding record. Unless fledged young are seen, proof of breeding can be very difficult for this species.

No negative records were received so it is unclear if the birds left these areas or people stopped looking for them.

Yet another report of a singing bird came from further along the Ouse on 4th June but this was not heard in the area subsequently. Possibly the same individual sung for a week a couple of miles away, still on the Ouse, from 5th June.

A single report on 31st October at a site along the River Ouse gives cause for optimism for the future of this species within our county boundary.

#### **Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*

**A local but regular summer visitor.**

The first returning bird was found at Knotting Green on 13th April in an ideal area of habitat that eventually held six singing males during the course of the summer (JDS). The main arrival seems to have taken place from 18th with birds being reported from a further eight sites before the beginning of May. The individuals found at Stewartby CP, Dunstable STW and possibly at Brogborough Lake were probably migrants, while those at Coronation CIP, Rookery North CIP, Willington GP, Flitwick and Fenlake stayed longer and probably tried to breed. Elsewhere Bromham LNR registered the first and second site records with a bird heard on 1st May and another heard on 11th. Home Wood, Lowes Wood and Maulden Wood are all traditional sites that had birds present in May but from which no further records were submitted.

By June birds should have established a territory so those heard at Ampthill Park, and Tempsford during the month could have been struggling to attract a mate although it is just as likely they may have been between broods. Breeding was confirmed at three sites for this notoriously difficult to observe species: Charle Wood, Coronation CIP and Rookery CIP (RAN).

Birds should be starting to disperse during July which makes it difficult to know what to think about the singles noted at Dunstable Tidy Tip on 20th or the singing bird by Yelnow New Wood on 26th. The last bird of the year was heard at Flitwick Moor on 8th August (LRJ, JPK,) but with such a secretive species one has to wonder how many others linger later but in staying silent avoid detection.

#### **Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

**A locally common summer visitor and passage migrant in all types of waterside habitat with dense vegetation.**

The first record came from the well watched Priory CP on 7th April (DK). Small numbers arrived across the county through the month, with birds widespread by the beginning of May when two migrants were found out of habitat, singing on Blows Downs on 5th.

Breeding numbers were down at Priory CP where there were 31 territorial males compared to 41 in 1996 (DK), and at Coronation CIP a 25% drop from last year resulted in a maximum count of six singing birds (KMS). At Dunstable STW birds colonised new habitat and the final tally was of 20 breeding pairs (PT) while smaller numbers were reported from Battlesden, Rookery CIP and Tiddenfoot CP. At the River Ivel WBS site 25 birds were counted (JTRS).

Final sightings were noted in September again from two of the more intensely watched sites – Dunstable STW and Priory CP with last dates being 13th and 23rd respectively.

**Reed Warbler** *A. scirpaceus*

A locally common summer visitor and passage migrant, though normally confined to areas containing *Phragmites* reed beds.

The first spring record often comes from Priory CP; this year was no exception with 22nd April recording the first returning bird (DK). Further along the River Ouse there were three singing birds at Radwell GP on 27th with the first bird back at Rookery CIP on the same day. Arrivals continued into May when the bulk of our breeding birds arrived. At Dunstable STW four pairs bred (PT), while at Rookery CIP and at Battlesden Lake five pairs raised young (PS). Elsewhere, no doubt, other breeding attempts went unreported. Numbers at Priory CP continued their decline with 30 territorial males constituting an eight pair reduction on 1996 (DK).

Final sightings came into October from Priory CP with a very late bird being seen on 17th and 18th (DK, TP).

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*

A moderately common summer visitor and autumn migrant, though quite often absent from apparently suitable habitat.

The first sighting came from Marston Thrift on 6th April (KRW). Apart from that individual the consensus from observers was of a late arrival with the next report not coming until 25th from Stopsley Common, indeed the only other April records were of singletons at Blows Downs on 27th and Blunham on 30th.

One week into May reports had come in from five sites suggesting a reasonable, albeit delayed, arrival.

Scattered records through the breeding season reflected the species' widespread status but again numbers were considered lower than usual. The BBS square at Sharpenhoe Clappers and the CBC square at Whipsnade Heath each held only a single breeding pair (SFH).

Birds drifted away through August and September with the final sightings coming from Pegsdon Hills NR (JCP) and Blows Downs (RD) both on 20th September.

**Common Whitethroat** *S. communis*

A common and widespread summer visitor.

The first returning individuals were seen on 12th April at Dunstable STW (PT) and Ledburn Rd SP, Leighton Buzzard (GD). From this date birds arrived steadily through into May with widespread reports being received.

Breeding was reported widely across the county with increased numbers remarked upon at some sites.

Departing birds were still seen into September with the final sighting for the year coming on 24th September from Priory CP (DK).

**Garden Warbler** *S. borin*

A fairly common summer visitor.

At Priory CP an early sighting came on 16th although the main arrival for the

species was over three weeks later (DK). Birds were reported from six other sites during May. The fact that some submitted reports, including one on a very early date for this species, referred to "heard only" records prompts the reminder to all that this species can be very difficult to separate on song from Blackcap, and observers should try and verify their identifications visually. Whilst the full song of Blackcap is usually much louder and clearer than that of this species, its sub-song or initial song phrases can be much quieter and closer in quality to the song of Garden Warbler.

On Pegsdon Hills NR over ten birds were counted on 11th May which could still refer to passage birds as the date corresponds with a bit of an influx noted from Priory CP. At the later site 19 males were found to be holding territories (DK) while at Coronation CIP a lower count of eight birds present in May indicated the population levels to be the same as in 1996 (KMS).

The fact that only two autumn dates were submitted reflects how elusive the species can become once it stops singing. The last sighting of the year was on 17th September at, once again, Priory CP (DK).

**Blackcap** *S. atricapilla*

A common summer visitor and passage migrant, and increasing as a wintering species.

In keeping with the changing winter status there were ten January records, mainly from back gardens.

Reports built up throughout March with singing birds noted from 13th March onwards suggesting they may have been returning migrants. Passage birds arrived widely from then into April with particularly high numbers noted at Priory CP.

Breeding season records came from Ampthill Park, Radwell GP, Stopsley Common, Sharpenhoe Clappers and Totternhoe Knolls although no doubt these were just the tip of the iceberg. At Priory CP 26 males held territory (DK) while at Coronation CIP a maximum count of 20 birds was an increase of 10% over the previous year (KMS).

October records came from Leagrave and Priory CP with later birds being seen in gardens around the Luton area.

**Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Another long awaited addition to the county list.

An individual trapped and rung at Priory CP on 17th October was thought by the observer to be an adult male (EN). It was not re-located after release later the same day. This was the first record for the county (see article on page 69).

**Wood Warbler** *P. sibilatrix*

A scarce summer visitor and rare passage migrant.

Records were only submitted from six sites. The first sighting was of a record breaking early passage migrant on 9th April on Biggleswade Common. This individual was some three weeks earlier than the average and three days earlier than the previous record of a bird found on 12th April 1953. A singing bird at Fountains, the Blunham home of the British Birds' editor, could not have chosen a better place to show off on 8th May. Potentially breeding birds were located at Chicksands Wood where a pair held territory from May through into June. Another pair were found at Aspley Heath in a traditionally favoured area where song was heard throughout June. As the area was checked in May with no success, it is possible that a bird which was found singing at nearby Danesborough on 26th May could refer to a different individual.

The last sighting of the year was of a returning migrant that stopped in a Dunstable back garden on 29th August (TD).

**Chiffchaff** *P. collybita*

A widespread species occurring primarily as a passage migrant and summer visitor but with some overwintering.

At Priory CP one or two birds were regularly observed through January with a single bird still around into February. Another wintering single was seen at Potton STW on 2nd February.

There seems to have been something of an arrival on 8th March with singing birds noted at Priory CP (2), Stewartby Lake (2), Tiddenfoot WP (2) and Dunstable STW. Numbers increased over the next couple of days at Priory CP and reports from elsewhere in the county built up so that by the month's end birds could be found widely.

Proven breeding records came from Bromham Hall, Priory CP, Stopsley Common, Tiddenfoot WP and Whipsnade Heath although the species is obviously under-recorded in this respect.

It is difficult to distinguish between individuals that are late departing in autumn and those that are going to overwinter, but generally speaking numbers fell away throughout September with most sites having lost their birds by the end of the month. Four sites actually had birds present in October – Coronation CIP, Langford Lakes, Stewartby Lake and Whipsnade Zoo. An individual was seen in a garden at Potton on 7th and 12th December, when it was watched foraging in leaf litter.

Apart from the above once again the end of year interest focussed on Priory CP where up to two birds stayed into December, one of which was a very grey bird and was considered by many observers to be of the subspecies *P. c. tristis*, which may be a potential split from the breeding nominate form.

**Willow Warbler** *P. trochilus*

A very common migrant and summer visitor.

First reported for the year on 31st March when singing birds were found at Dunstable STW, Priory CP and Rookery CIP. A further arrival on the 4th April saw birds reported from Blows Downs, Harrold and Odell CP and Leighton Buzzard. High counts came from Stewartby Lake on 16th April when over 50 were noted and Houghton Regis ChP where a fall appeared to have taken place in poor weather on 27th when 20 birds were counted in a very restricted area.

Breeding records were submitted from Bradgers Hill, Galley Hill, Pegsdon Hills NR, Priory CP, Sharpenhoe Clappers, Stopsley Common, Warden Hills and Whipsnade Heath. At Priory CP 21 males held territory (DK) and on the hills to the north of Luton the breeding populations were considered to be fairly stable (LRJ, JCP).

The majority of birds left through August with stragglers hanging on into September at a handful of sites and by the end of the month even Priory CP had lost its birds with the final report being a singing bird on 25th. A very late bird was seen at Leagrave Marsh on 4th October (AC) but even this was eclipsed by a report from Houghton Regis ChP of a bird present on 30 November (DM).

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

A common resident in woodland, also occurring as an autumn migrant at other sites.

As with many of our common and widespread species there was little submitted information for 1997. Other than The Lodge and Maulden Wood on the Greensand Ridge, Pegsdon Hills NR and Stopsley Common on the southern chalk and the Bromham area the only record was from a Luton garden!

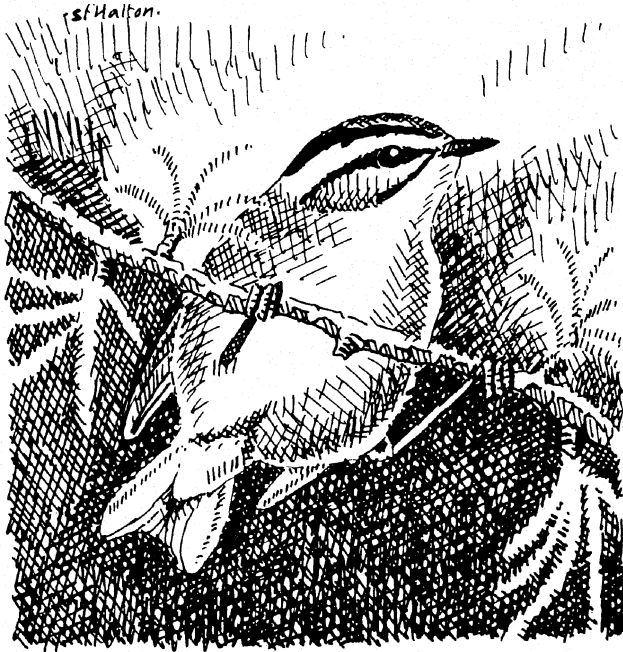
Breeding was noted at two of the above sites but this is clearly a vast understatement for a species that can be found at almost any suitable wood in most of the county.

**Firecrest** *R. ignicapillus*

A scarce passage migrant and occasional breeding species.

There were five individuals noted during the year. Four of these occurred in the first winter period with a male seen at Briar Stocking on 10th and 11th January (CT, PS). Elsewhere, Priory CP had a female present around the Finger Lakes also on 11th January (DK), while an unsexed bird was seen at Kingshoe Wood on 27th February (RAN). The last of the winter reports concerned a dead male found at Ampthill Park and taken to the recorder for confirmation of identity on the 8th February (ACa, DJO).

The only bird to arrive during the more predictable spring passage was a male at Whipsnade Zoo on 9th May with the observer bagging his second of the year (CT).



Firecrest

Steve Halton

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*

A localised summer visitor decreasing in numbers.

This species' decline is evidenced by 27 observers considering it appropriate to submit record cards including, ominously, negative sightings. Several people had only a couple of encounters with the species throughout the summer and at the well watched Priory CP there were no records at all for the spring and early summer, the first report not coming until 21st August (DK).

The first bird back by a week was at Whipsnade Zoo on 24th April, in fact it was the earliest ever site record for the Zoo by six days (CT). In general first sightings came throughout May as is predictable for the species.

Breeding was noted in Aspley Heath, Bedford, Bramingham Wood, Bromham, Dunstable, Eaton Bray, Linslade, Pottton, Sandy, Toddington and Woburn.

Departing birds were seen through August from various sites but the last reports came in September with singles at a Dunstable back garden on 16th, Blunham and Priory CP on 20th and finally two on Pegsdon Hills NR on 21st (JCP).

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

As a common resident species this is a bird that is often met with in its roving feeding parties.

Reports came in from widely separated localities covering much of the county. The largest flock of the year was a party of over 50 birds observed at Brogborough Lake on 18th May, a date which seems very early for such a group to have gathered (RAN). At Priory CP numbers built up to a peak of 45 seen around the park in November to the end of the year, although the largest single group was 32 on 19th December (DK).

Breeding was confirmed at Bromham, Felmersham, Harrold-Odell CP, Rookery CIP, Souldrop and Tiddenfoot WP.

Interestingly for a species not normally associated with peanuts, this species was seen at nut dispensers in gardens in Stotfold and Bromham on 12th and 15th January respectively. Was the weather harsh at the time or is this the development of a new feeding technique?

**Marsh Tit** *Parus palustris*

A fairly common resident species which requires careful separation from the very similar, but scarcer, Willow Tit.

Only seven record cards were submitted but they covered records from 17 locations mainly in the north of the county. The range of this species is a bit patchy as demonstrated by the bird which visited a Blunham garden, this being only the second or third garden sighting in 21 years of residence (JTRS).

Breeding was confirmed at Bromham Hall Wood, Felmersham NR, Hanger Wood Stagsden and West Wood Souldrop.

**Willow Tit** *P. montanus*

A scarce resident species.

Reported from twelve sites around the county. Caution has to be the watchword when deciding whether a bird is of this or the previous species with even experienced observers preferring to confirm their identification by hearing the diagnostic calls.

Breeding was proven at Sharpenhoe Clappers, Tiddenfoot WP and at West Wood Souldrop although no doubt many more went either undetected or unreported. Observers are reminded that all records are requested for both breeding activity and normal sightings of this species.

**Coal Tit** *P. ater*

A common and even locally abundant species, mainly in woodland, especially coniferous plantations.

The common status of this species results in few people submitting record cards. Easily found in the conifer plantations of the Greensand Ridge by those who know the "weetsa weetsa" call, it is also widely distributed through the county's deciduous woods.

No data was submitted to allow any assessment of current population trends so we must assume they are stable.

**Blue Tit** *P. caeruleus*

A very common resident.

A species that once again attracts little in the way of submitted record cards. Breeding was proven at West Wood Souldrop and Knotting Green.

**Great Tit** *P. major*

**A common resident.**

This species had only three record cards submitted for it. In the absence of any census detail it is not possible to make any comment of how the species is faring.

From the received cards we know it is regularly seen at Luton, Potton and Sandy and that it bred successfully in West Wood Souldrop.

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*

**A vocal species that is both widespread and increasing within the county.**

Presumably the fact that observers encounter it regularly is the reason for only five cards being submitted for 1997.

Breeding was confirmed at Whitehill Wood but no doubt was noted elsewhere and not reported.

At Priory CP the species is still something of a rarity so that the one seen on 27th September was of interest, possibly a bit of post breeding dispersal?

**Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

**A common resident in suitable habitat.**

This unobtrusive little bird is easily overlooked by those who are not aware of its high pitched call. As is often the case with the more familiar species few records were submitted as observers tend to take the species for granted. One exception to this rule submitted nearly 30 sightings for the year in the north-west of the county easily eclipsing all the other cards combined (PA). Elsewhere the species was observed widely along the Greensand Ridge with breeding noted at Tiddenfoot WP and Priory CP where four pairs held territories.

**Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*

**A very rare spring visitor.**

One flying between two woods on the southern edge of Southill Park on 29th June (PN, RAN).

**Jay** *Garrulus garrulus*

**A widespread and fairly common resident that can be surprisingly elusive for such a large, brightly plumaged bird.**

In the first winter period up to four frequented Biggleswade Common where a pair regularly visited a nearby garden bird table to take peanuts. Around the same time birds were being seen in Kempston, an area where they are quite rare.

The highest count of the year was of six birds at Pegsdon Hills NR. on 13th September, a time of year at which the species is known to undertake movement. This could explain the two birds at Biddenham Fields in September, an area where the species is not known to have occurred in the previous twenty years (DJO).

**Magpie** *Pica pica*

**A common and widespread resident that can evoke quite strong views.**

Birds increasingly exploit gardens as a food source with reports coming from Stotfold and also Potton where the species has been unusual in the past. At Priory CP three or four pairs were thought to have raised young.

High counts came from Bromham Park (8), Bradgers Hill, Luton (17) and Flitwick Moor where 47 came to roost on 29th November (JPK).

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*

**A common and gregarious resident that is often encountered feeding in mixed flocks with other corvids.**

Roosts were noted at Bromham Hall, Stopsley and Priory CP; at the latter site although numbers peaked at 180 in mid-February this is well down on past counts.

**Rook** *C. frugilegus*

A commonly encountered species which remains numerous, although probably at lower levels than it has attained historically.

At Priory CP up to 400 were noted passing over the site during January and February heading west toward an unknown roosting site, possibly Bromham Hall where a large roost occupied the wood there (PA).

Rookeries were noted at Butterfield Green (5 nests), Luton Crematorium (6), Luton Railway Station (8), Maulden village (c. 100) and Steppingley Hospital (58).

In late summer numbers built up with 1000 noted feeding in a huge mixed corvid flock at Bromham Lake NR on 18th July (PA), while at Priory CP 600 were seen on Kingsmead on 16th August with 400 there again the following day (DK).

**Carrion Crow** *C. corone*

A very common resident that can be found throughout the county.

Few records are submitted for this species making population estimates unreliable. A couple of birds showing albinism were observed in the Bromham area where a group of 15 was noted on 15th February. Larger groups were present elsewhere the biggest being 100 birds on 1st February at Priory CP. This last site had four breeding pairs present and, outside the breeding season, there were often 30 – 40 birds present around the park (DK).

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

Although still considered an abundant resident there does seem to have been a decline in recent years.

There were flocks of 200 birds at Priory CP during January and February but outside those months the largest group was generally around 25 birds. More than one observer commented on the apparently reduced numbers although this is a little subjective without any quantitative data.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

Another once abundant species that now seems to be declining.

With only five record cards submitted the apparent decline of this species remains in dire need of more data. The largest number reported was of 50+ using a roost at Flitwick Railway Station (JPK), there were no reports of flocks away from the immediate vicinity of housing.

**Tree Sparrow** *P. montanus*

This resident species seems to be declining ever more rapidly.

Despite the well known concern regarding its status only five cards were submitted suggesting no other birds were seen. A small well watched group at Boughton End were seen by three different observers with two reports of two and one of 20+ in the first three months of the year. The only other sightings were two near Tilsworth on 11th May, one near Chalgrave on 14th May and one at Dunstable STW on 12th July.

It is either prudent to remind all observers that all records for this species are required or possibly this was all records and the species is actually teetering right on the brink of disappearing from our region.

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

A very common resident.

As usual with the most abundant species, very few records were submitted, though subjectively one would say that this species has probably declined less in recent years than most other primarily seed-eating passerines, and remains widely distributed. Records were submitted for two BBS survey squares, with a maximum of eight in Biddenham and five in Potton. There were 19 territories at Priory CP, though no large



flocks were recorded at that site. Only one large flock was in fact reported, with 130 at Sandy Heath on two dates in February, and smaller numbers at the same site from January to March, but this certainly represents under-recording rather than low numbers, although the very large flocks of hundreds of birds seen in former years have vanished. Hopefully the BBC winter finch flock recording scheme will generate more records.

### **Brambling** *Emontifringilla*

**A regular winter visitor.**

In the first winter period the only large flocks were at The Lodge, where 30+ on 14th January increased to a maximum of 80 on 28th February, and there were still 60 there on 25th March, and at Deadman's Cross at the north end of Rowney Warren where there were c. 40 on 22nd January and still c. 20 on 6th March. Elsewhere in January and February there were only small numbers at Boughton End, Priory CP and in a Bedford garden.

Records were much more widespread in March and April, particularly the first of these two months, when small numbers were recorded at the same two sites in Bedford, and at Whipsnade Zoo, Dunstable STW, Pegsdon Hills, Charle Wood, Ampthill Park, Biggleswade and Stewartby CP. This was presumably a return passage of birds forced further south-west by the severe weather. The last in spring were a male and at least two females at The Lodge on 22nd April.

In autumn the first was at Whipsnade Zoo on 27th September, and this was the only record in that month. Birds were more widespread in October and November, with records of small numbers from Whipsnade Zoo again, Pegsdon Hills, Dunstable STW, Tiddenfoot WP, Ampthill Park, The Lodge and Priory CP, the highest numbers being five at Whipsnade Zoo during October and five at Priory CP on 17th October. There was only one December record, at Pegsdon Hills on the 13th, and the lack of records at well-watched sites suggests that the birds had moved on rather than observers had stopped looking for them.

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

**A common resident.**

As with Chaffinch, this still widely distributed, though nowhere abundant, species remains under-recorded. No counts of territories for the breeding season were received. The largest flocks reported were both in the second winter period, with maxima of 40+ at Butterfield Green, c. 100 at Warden Hill, c. 100 at Wandwood Lane, c. 60 at Colesden and c. 40 at Cockayne Hatley. This species also formed part of a mixed flock of c. 80 birds at the last of these sites in February, together with Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings.

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

**A common and widespread resident.**

Perhaps because of its attractive appearance, this species always seems to be better recorded than Chaffinch or Greenfinch. In the first winter period the largest flock was at Sandy Heath, peaking at 220 on 17th March, and other flocks noted were c. 50 at Pegsdon Hills on 1st February, numbers at this site being considered low as they were around Tiddenfoot, with c. 40 in Leighton Linlade on 14th January. At Priory CP the first winter period peak was 59 in the second half of February.

In the second winter period the maximum at Priory CP was c. 50 in September, but numbers at Pegsdon Hills were considered to have improved with 100+ there on 13th September, and there were also 33 at Harrold-Odell CP on 14th October.

**Siskin** *C. spinus*

**Generally a winter visitor for which breeding has been suspected in recent years.**

In the first winter period the largest flocks reported were as follows: Woburn *c.* 70 on 15th January, Aspley Heath *c.* 100 on 30th March, Flitwick Moor *c.* 120 on 8th January and Southill Park *c.* 100 on 9th March. Elsewhere flocks of more than 20 were recorded at Legrave Marsh, Swiss Gardens, Sandy Heath, Bromham Hall Wood, Felmersham NR and Harrold-Odell CP, and smaller numbers at Luton Hoo, Whipsnade Zoo, Albion Court Luton, Chicksands Wood, The Lodge, Potton Brook, Blunham, Stewartby CP, Kempston, Priory CP and Bromham Village.

The last dated records in spring were ten on 31st March at Aspley Heath and a single in Biggleswade on 12th April, but along Potton Brook the species was reported as present into May.

There were two very early autumn records which might possibly relate to undetected breeding activity, two flying over Ashen Grove Studham on 14th July, and a singing male at Aspley Heath on 22nd July. Elsewhere the earliest autumn dates were 25th August Potton Brook, 31st August Blows Downs, 2nd September Dunstable STW, 8th September Whipsnade Zoo, and 9th September Priory CP. A flock of *c.* 60 at Wigmore Valley Park Luton was the largest party in the second winter period, and elsewhere flocks of over 20 were recorded at Legrave Marsh, Albion Court Luton, Upper Drakeloe Pond Woburn, Eversholt Lake, Flitwick Moor, Potton Brook, Stewartby CP, Priory CP and Felmersham NR, and smaller numbers at Whipsnade Zoo, East Hyde, Luton Hoo, Harlington, Aspley Heath, Woburn Village, Southill Park, Old Warden, Sandy, Maulden Woods, Kempston, Bromham Village, Bromham Lake LNR, Radwell GP and Harrold-Odell CP.

**Linnet** *C. cannabina*

**A common resident.**

This was the best reported of the resident finch species. In the first winter period largest flocks reported were 200 – 300, mainly this species, at Pegsdon Hills on 9th March and 120 near Bedford STW on 8th March, with over 50 also recorded at Warden Hill, Bromham Lake LNR and Radwell GP.

There was a loose breeding colony of *c.* 10 pairs at Pegsdon Hills and breeding was also noted at Galley Hill, Luton South Farm College and Ledburn Road SP.

In the autumn and second winter period there was a remarkable flock, by today's standards, of *c.* 500 birds at Warden Hill on 7th September, which then declined steadily to *c.* 25 by 18th October with only small numbers from then until the year end. Other large flocks were 100+ at Butterfield Green on 23rd August, 100+ at Pegsdon Hills on 13th September and 100+ near Bedford STW on 12th October, and flocks of 50 or more were also noted at Cockayne Hatley, West Willington GP and Bromham Lake LNR.

**Twite** *C. flavirostris*

**A rare winter visitor.**

A party of three birds were at Willington GP on 22nd and 23rd February (TP, PT *et al.*). A party of four birds probably of this species were reported at the same site on 14th February (ANS), and it seems likely that this record was indeed of this species and related to the same party. This site has previously attracted Twite in late winter/early spring, and could possibly turn up other birds usually associated with the coastal habitats favoured by the species, such as Shore Lark, or Snow or Lapland Buntings.

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

Rare and declining, possibly even extinct, as a breeding species, and more widespread but still very scarce in winter.

A total of 14 record cards more or less matched the 13 received in 1996 and, as for that year, all records are published. In total the species was recorded at 21 sites in 1997 compared with 14 sites in 1996 and 27 in 1995. It occurred at nine of those sites in the first winter period, four in May and 13 in the second winter period, so at least it seems to have been more widespread in the second half of the year, though in small numbers.

In the first winter period there was a large flock of 100 at Eversholt Lake on 2nd February, but elsewhere numbers struggled to reach double figures, with three males at Tiddenfoot WP on 3rd February and a male and two females there on the 7th, c. 10 at Leagrave Marsh on 2nd February, four at Stewartby CP on 15th February, four at Maulden Woods on 2nd March, two at Priory CP on 3rd March, one at Flitwick Moor on 8th March, two at Aspley Heath on 30th March, one at Dunstable STW on 3rd April and one at Aspley Heath on 9th April.

Three in the Aspley Heath area on 14th May were late enough to possibly be in breeding territory, and two were seen in the same general area on the 24th. These were the only breeding season records from this site, where breeding was formerly widespread. The only other breeding season records were one over The Links in Kempston, where the species was formerly regular, on 22nd May, and singing males in display flight over the Kimbolton Road/Goldington Road junction in Bedford on 15th May and over the Twin Bridges at Blunham on 28th May.

In the second winter period regularly recorded at Priory CP with one to three in the first half of October and through November and December, but with four on 2nd November, six on 20th December and nine on the 29th. Elsewhere there was one at Bromham on 16th September, three at Maulden Woods on 28th September, three at Blows Downs on 4th October, one at Dunstable STW on 11th October and two there on 2nd November, one at Woburn on 19th October, one at Bromham Park on 22nd October and two at Bromham Lake LNR on the same date, with two in Bromham Village on 1st November. Later in the winter there were a minimum of ten at Tiddenfoot WP on 24th November and 6th December, four at Bell Farm Colesden on 29th November, a party of eight were reported at Southill Park in early December, two were at Felmersham NR on 14th December and two at Harrold-Odell CP on the same date and three were at Birchen Grove, Luton on 14th December with four there on the 29th. A flock of 20 at Bell Farm, Colesden on 31st December was the largest of the second half of the year.

**Common Crossbill** *L. curvirostra*

An irregular eruptive visitor and very occasional breeder.

This species occasionally erupts into the county in large numbers, and 1997 was a good Crossbill year, with many records from June onwards, though the first record was of eleven birds including five adult (red) and one immature (pink) male at Woburn on 15th January (LB).

At The Lodge the first were heard on 18th June, with 25 there on the 27th, and they were recorded regularly from then on with later a second maximum of 16 on 26th November (NW *et al*).

At Whipsnade Zoo the first were four on 24th June, and they were then recorded in all months during the rest of the year, with a maximum of 15 in November (CT).

At Warden Warren a flock of 18+ found on 28th June increased to c. 100 birds on the

29th, including two showing white wingbars which raised some excitement, but all observers finally concurred that both were Common Crossbills showing this feature rather than Two-barred Crossbills. This flock had declined to c. 25 on 30th June, and there were also eight at Rowney Warren on 29th June (RD, BN, DJO, PS, PT *et al*). One bird only was seen on 12th July (DJO).

Maulden Woods had a flock of c. 20 on 30th June, with one on 30th July and finally eight on 11th November (TP).

Later in the year smaller numbers were recorded as follows: Aspley Heath one on 13th July (DJO) and one on the 21st (SFH), Kempston two on 19th July and two on 11th October (DJO), Sharnbrook three on 23rd August (MDR), Galley Hill ten on 27th July (JCP), Briar Stockings six on 19th September (CT), Dedmandsey Wood five on 24th September (CT), Priory CP five on 4th October (DK), Studham three on 22nd October (CT), Chicksands Wood eleven on 7th December and seven on the 31st (JA), Southill Park one on 14th December (BN), Warden Great Wood twelve on 19th December (TP), and finally Everton twelve on 20th December (ANS).

### **Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

**A widespread but possibly declining resident.**

Records were received from ten observers, an improvement over the six cards in 1996.

Breeding was reported at Whipsnade Heath (one pair), the Hay Wood, Bradgers Hill, Butterfield Green and Galley Hill area (perhaps six – eight pairs in total), Pegsdon Hills (four – five pairs), Sharpenhoe Clappers (three pairs), Tiddenfoot WP (two–three pairs) and Hanger Wood where a pair were seen copulating. Elsewhere birds were noted at Mountfield Road Luton, Milton Bryan, Potsgrove, Ampthill Park, Maulden Woods, Stewartby CP, Turvey Abbey, Great Hayes Wood, Saleem Thrift Bromham, Bromham Hall Wood, Bowels Wood Bromham, Bromham Lake LNR, Felmersham NR, Harrold-Odell CP, Odell Great Wood and Yelnow New Wood, though the apparent concentrations in the south-east and north-west of the county suggested by these sites are probably due to observer bias.

Large parties of this species are unusual, and 30 at Priory CP on 27th February and again on 30th December were of note.

### **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

**A very rare resident declining to virtual extinction.**

The only record was of the remains of a male, apparently a victim of Sparrowhawk predation, found at Breakheart Hill in the Millbrook Plantations on 28th July. This suggests that though this species has become too rare and elusive for birders to find it, its principal predator still can.

It has been suggested that the decline in small passerines is due in part to the rise in Sparrowhawk numbers since 1980, and that Hawfinch may be more vulnerable than some because of its habit of feeding high in trees. Though the extinction of a species by predation is not a normal outcome in balanced ecological systems, several generations of prey species must have passed with virtually no Sparrowhawks present. Possibly in that timescale instinctive responses to its hunting methods became less effective, and as Hawfinch already had small and localised populations in the county, the individuals of which must have been naive to the hunting tactics of the re-appearing Sparrowhawk, this could have been a factor in its decline. If this hypothesis is true, one would expect to see a decline in prey species concurrent with a peak in Sparrowhawk numbers, followed by a decline in the predator and then a recovery in (perhaps only some of) the prey species.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

A fairly common and widespread resident which has probably suffered some recent decline.

Eleven record cards from ten observers was an improvement on the six for 1996. Breeding numbers were assessed at Whipsnade Heath (one pair), Sharpenhoe Clappers (three pairs), the Stopsley Common, Butterfield Green, Warden Hill and Galley Hill area (ten singing males), Pegsdon Hills (c. 15 singing males), in BBS square SP9748 (four) and Felmersham NR (two singing males).

The only reported flock in the first winter period was 50+ at Pegsdon Hills on 2nd February which was considered a typical number of wintering birds for the site this year.

In the second winter period the only flocks of any size noted were c. 40 in the Stopsley Common area on 16th October and 24 at Bell Farm Colesden on 29th November.

In the Turvey area a total of six records through the year with a maximum of four on 14th June was rightly considered 'pretty meagre' by the observer, and this species probably has become scarcer in the north of the county than in the south.

**Reed Bunting** *E. schoeniclus*

A fairly common resident but again probably declining.

As for Yellowhammer, more records were submitted than in 1996, though still under-recorded and the species is certainly far more widely distributed than this account would suggest.

Breeding numbers were assessed at Ledburn Road SP (four – five pairs), on the Ivel WBS (five), Priory CP (eight males holding territory) and in BBS square SP9748 (three). Also noted in the breeding season at Sundon Springs, Cockayne Hatley, Rookery South CIP, Bromham Lake LNR and Felmersham NR.

The only report of significant winter numbers were for the roost at Priory CP in the first winter period, which peaked at 104 on 1st February.

**Corn Bunting** *Miliaria calandra*

A locally common but declining resident.

Interest continues in this species, with the county probably now in the core area of the declining British population.

Estimates of breeding numbers were reported from Eaton Bray (five pairs), Totternhoe Knolls (ten pairs), the Stopsley Common, Butterfield Green, Warden Hill and Galley Hill area (nine singing males), Pegsdon Hills (one or two singing males), Grovebury SP (only one singing male), Steppingley (four singing males), Dunton (four – five pairs on one farm), the Biddenham Loop (eight singing males), and BBS squares TL0249 (four singing males, down from seven in 1996), TL0051 (four singing males) and SP9748 (four), and also present at Houghton Regis ChP, Barton Hill Farm, Stotfold, Potton, Sutton, Cockayne Hatley, Stagden, Kempston West End, Cople, Willington, West Willington GP and Bedford STW in the breeding season.

In the first winter period larger flocks noted were c. 70 near Stanford on 2nd January, c. 70 near Stotfold on 5th January, c. 40 near Arlesey Station on 5th January, 30 at Barton Hill Farm Road on 7th January, 54 at Houghton Regis ChP on 11th January, 100+ at roost at Priory CP on 27th January, a maximum of 80 at Knotting Green on 2nd February, 40 near Cardington Airfield on 17th February, 59 at Flitwick Moor on 8th March, and 23+ at Biddenham 22nd April, and also recorded in the Stopsley Common – Galley Hill area and at Clifton.

In the second winter period there were 20+ at Biggleswade Common on 18th October, c. 25 at Cockayne Hatley on 13th and 31st December, c. 40 at the Blue

Lagoon Arlesey on 14th December, 20 at Flitwick Leisure Centre on 14th December and 15 on the Steppingley – Eversholt road on 26th December and also recorded at Houghton Regis ChP, Biggleswade Common, Willington and Kempston Mill.

## MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS

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

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

Eight were present at Basin Pond, Woburn Park all year.

### **Snow Goose** *Anser caerulescens*

One was at Harrold-Odell CP most of the year. It was occasionally joined by a second bird. Four adults and a juvenile flew across the A1 south of the Black Cat roundabout towards St Neots on 31st January. Three of these adults and the juvenile were east of the A1 at Roxton Bridge on 8th February. Four were at Priory CP on the 29th May.

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

Singles probably relating to one in the north of the county and another in the south of the county were reported throughout the year.

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

Four were at Rookery South CIP on 16th September.

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

A pair bred at East Hyde and raised one young.

### **Ringed Teal** *Callonetta leucophrys*

A drake was at Priory CP from 1st to 6th September.

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

A very tame female was at Tiddenfoot WP from 13th July to the end of the year.

### **Peacock** *Pava* sp

A male was present for a week from the 16th June in a Woburn garden. One was calling at Sharpenhoe on 3rd August.

### **Golden Pheasant** *Chrysolophus pictus*

A male was heard on 13th June near Woburn.

### **Cockatiel** *Nymphicus hollandicus*

One at Bromham on 4th September.

### **Parakeet** *Psittacula* sp

Unidentified parakeets were seen on three occasions in Bromham in September.

### **Parakeet or Cockatiel** sp

One at Bromham Lake on 3rd May.

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

The following is a list of scarce birds reported during 1997 for which no adequate descriptions were received. Any observer able to submit suitable details for consideration by the rarities panel of any occurrence from this list is requested to assist so that the record is not lost.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* One over Bromham in May.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* A flock of 21 at Priory CP in 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. Unfortunately, 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.

**Velvet Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* One at Stewartby CP 10th January.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* One near Woburn 17th June (rejected by BBRC).

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* One over the M1, Junction 13, 6th July.

**Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus* One at Dunstable STW 30th November.

**Kumlien's (Iceland) Gull** *Larus (glaucoides) kumlieni* One at Brogborough Lake 4th January.

**Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* One at Priory CP 6th September.

## Appendix C: Pending Records (1997 unless noted)

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.

DAVID ODELL (RECORDER) and DAVID BALL (REPORT EDITOR)

# **WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TOTALS 1997** **by Kevin Sharpe (Wetland Bird Survey Organiser)**

The following table records the species totals recorded on the Wetland Bird Survey for the Marston Vale Pits (Brogborough Lake, Chimney Corner CIP, Coronation CIP, Kempston Bypass Pools, Lidlinton CIP, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Rookery North CIP, Rookery South CIP and Stewartby CP).

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Little Grebe	10	8	16	10	10	10	18	15	17	6	6	8
G. C. Grebe	44	40	30	29	33	44	63	87	53	70	64	49
Cormorant	18	36	27	27	36	31	33	52	30	29	24	19
Little Egret	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Grey Heron	4	8	5	5	6	10	3	9	2	5	7	2
Mute Swan	49	37	35	31	38	66	64	75	53	67	56	22
Greylag Goose	1	7	16	45	20	12	29	111	86	32	9	-
Canada Goose	137	184	162	62	144	162	165	769	701	101	11	106
Barnacle Goose	4	5	2	2	2	-	-	4	-	-	-	-
Shelduck	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Wigeon	27	117	21	-	-	-	-	-	63	179	149	187
Gadwall	25	19	14	12	8	4	4	18	38	10	8	23
Teal	97	47	39	9	-	-	-	41	126	138	80	101
Mallard	270	124	89	85	86	101	91	169	168	185	160	212
Pintail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	-	-
Garganey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
Shoveler	18	11	9	7	10	10	6	6	32	16	18	16
Pochard	98	105	57	39	-	2	24	124	208	238	234	80
Tufted Duck	320	257	156	123	113	117	187	263	237	192	331	334
Goldeneye	33	17	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	17	19
Smew	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ruddy Duck	20	12	10	11	8	10	6	8	8	5	4	-
Water Rail	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Moorhen	15	25	24	21	19	23	27	37	13	29	29	25
Coot	555	406	346	217	151	237	246	553	421	373	559	509
L. R. Plover	-	-	-	8	6	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ringed Plover	-	-	12	10	10	8	5	-	16	-	-	-
Golden Plover	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	217	362
Lapwing	-	197	55	39	47	74	43	924	659	583	1674	825
Dunlin	-	-	-	6	9	-	2	2	1	5	3	2
Ruff	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Jack Snipe	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Snipe	3	5	4	2	2	4	3	7	8	4	5	7
Woodcock	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Curlew	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Redshank	-	1	17	22	17	14	1	-	-	-	1	1
Greenshank	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	1	-	-
Green Sandpiper	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	6	-	-	-	1



Wood Sandpiper	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Common Sandpiper	-	-	-	3	4	-	4	5	1	-	-	-
Turnstone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Med. Gull	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
B. H. Gull	1645	1120	419	463	199	73	161	924	1847	1026	3039	2322
Common Gull	568	169	51	49	36	5	9	33	54	67	267	486
L. B. B. Gull	31	11	5	3	-	-	-	2	13	16	301	5
Herring Gull	465	276	91	43	51	47	59	69	113	164	1438	757
Iceland Gull	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glaucous Gull	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
G. B. B. Gull	133	88	25	11	3	-	9	4	11	7	179	163
Common Tern	-	-	-	20	22	16	12	54	-	-	-	-
Arctic Tern	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kingfisher	3	2	4	3	5	3	3	4	3	3	1	3
Buzzard	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sparrowhawk	-	1	1	3	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	-
Kestrel	3	2	5	6	4	8	1	5	4	1	3	1
Hobby	-	-	-	-	6	3	1	2	4	-	-	-

The following table records the species totals recorded on the Wetland Bird Survey for the whole of Bedfordshire (the Marston Vale pits as listed above, plus Bromham Lake LNR, Dunstable STW, Felmersham NR, Harrold-Odell CP, Woburn Park Lakes, Priory CP, Southill Lake, and Tiddenfoot WP).

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Little Grebe	11	10	17	12	12	11	22	19	20	9	9	14
G. C. Grebe	46	76	79	69	51	75	102	129	103	119	110	78
Cormorant	21	54	57	49	45	35	43	65	62	44	45	60
Little Egret	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Grey Heron	19	27	39	38	10	33	20	25	21	24	27	14
Black Swan	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	8	6
Mute Swan	109	86	77	65	70	81	79	104	86	93	83	49
W. F. Goose	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Greylag Goose	63	121	27	89	37	171	57	115	91	59	149	228
Canada Goose	163	288	273	150	251	269	259	849	901	297	269	237
Barnacle Goose	4	5	2	2	2	-	-	4	-	-	-	-
Shelduck	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	2	1	1	1
Wood Duck	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1
Mandarin	-	-	4	2	-	-	-	2	1	-	3	7
Wigeon	35	129	29	-	-	-	-	-	71	187	157	187
Gadwall	48	31	21	16	10	12	23	39	59	32	30	52
Teal	147	87	79	15	-	-	2	62	147	172	114	130
Mallard	789	364	288	245	196	206	232	514	490	530	605	576
Pintail	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	-	-
Garganey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
Shoveler	33	19	15	10	10	12	9	15	48	24	45	30
Pochard	211	225	233	51	1	5	28	149	238	280	274	148

Tufted Duck	427	381	267	199	161	149	278	337	274	262	421	489
Goldeneye	33	17	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	17	19
Smew	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Goosander	15	55	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7
Ruddy Duck	20	12	10	14	10	16	6	11	8	8	5	4
Water Rail	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Moorhen	55	53	53	47	44	53	66	80	54	82	86	74
Coot	721	641	479	322	244	312	344	654	545	503	699	744
L. R. Plover	-	-	2	14	14	9	2	1	-	-	-	-
Ringed Plover	-	-	12	10	10	8	5	-	16	-	-	-
Golden Plover	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	349	362
Lapwing	12	200	71	46	59	90	60	924	801	599	2774	885
Dunlin	-	-	-	6	9	-	2	2	1	5	3	2
Ruff	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Jack Snipe	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Snipe	5	9	6	2	2	4	3	9	12	12	7	12
Woodcock	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Curlew	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Redshank	-	3	21	30	25	20	3	-	-	-	1	1
Greenshank	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	1	-	-
Green Sandpiper	1	1	2	2	1	1	6	10	3	2	2	1
Wood Sandpiper	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Common Sandpiper	-	-	-	7	6	2	12	18	15	3	-	-
Turnstone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Med. Gull	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
B. H. Gull	1828	1496	479	477	289	95	265	1024	1991	1757	3693	2486
Common Gull	691	183	78	61	39	5	9	35	59	112	391	516
L. B. B. Gull	31	14	7	4	-	-	-	8	19	16	357	5
Herring Gull	475	291	106	55	60	47	59	69	125	171	1651	989
Iceland Gull	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glaucous Gull	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
G. B. B. Gull	155	97	36	20	11	-	9	4	15	17	201	184
Common Tern	-	-	-	24	29	28	58	63	-	-	-	-
Arctic Tern	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Little Tern	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Kingfisher	4	3	5	3	7	3	6	5	5	6	1	4
Buzzard	-	1	1	2	-	1	1	1	1	-	1	-
Goshawk	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Sparrowhawk	-	1	1	4	-	-	1	2	2	3	-	-
Kestrel	3	2	4	3	4	6	3	4	1	1	3	2
Hobby	-	-	-	-	6	3	1	2	4	-	-	-

With thanks to: P.Almond, P.Dove, D.Kramer, B.Nightingale, M.Sheridan and P.Trodd

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## **DUNSTABLE SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS**

### **Review of 1997**

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

Conservation work continued apace with more earth-moving on the wader scrape to create additional mud and shingle islands for the Little Ringed Plovers. Work parties were carried out during the year to clear vegetation, move shingle and tidy up the tern raft and the island on number four lagoon. The 10th Dunstable Cub Pack also contributed by making 12 open fronted nest boxes suitable for Pied Wagtails. The monthly open mornings continued to be successful and various groups visited throughout the year.

The birding year started off on New Year's Day with a site first, a splendid Peregrine, with the only other red letter day of 1997 coming in March when a drake Common Scoter briefly appeared on the lagoons. Other rarities included a single Barnacle Goose, two Little Terns, Water Pipit and a wing-tagged Red Kite in April, followed by a ringtail harrier in September and an October Scaup.

It was a poor year for passage waders with both variety (only 14 species) and numbers low, despite plenty of autumn mud on the lagoons and scrape. However, Wood Sandpipers and Jack Snipes both showed well from the hide, whilst Greenshank and Common Sandpiper, though never numerous, both had an extended run well into September. The breeding season was a disaster for all three regular species – Little Ringed Plover, Redshank and Lapwing – due to a combination of corvid predation and, for the latter two birds which prefer to nest on surrounding farmland, an increasingly hostile habitat. Only one chick of each species was reared to flying stage. On the bright side both Snipe and Common Sandpiper briefly raised hopes by displaying, but eventually came to nothing.

The Common Terns failed to breed due to an adult becoming entangled in fishing line and dying, but more encouragingly two pairs of Shelduck probably nested, judging from their omnipresence throughout the spring. Sedge and Reed Warbler and Whitethroat had a good season as the habitat generally became more warbler friendly, and a pair of Green Woodpeckers showed off their young, fledged from an ash tree nesting site in the A5 cutting.

Summer passerines worthy of mention for all the wrong reasons were: Yellow Wagtail, a maximum of only ten in April; Cuckoo a handful of records; and worst of all Turtle Dove which was noted on less than ten days throughout the May–September period, and did not breed for the first time in recent memory – our trans-Saharan migrants are truly having a tough time.

In summary, 116 species were recorded in 1997 with 41 species breeding. All bird records are submitted to the County Recorder and are included in the main body of the bird report, while the hide log and breeding bird survey results are held by the Honorary Warden.

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## **BIRD RACE 1997**

**by Paul Trodd**

Bird racing, or "Big Days", was conceived in the USA about 30 years ago, the idea being for small teams of birders to compete against one another to record the maximum amount of species in a given time period, normally 24 hours, and within a stated boundary, e.g. county or site. Sponsored teams now raise thousands of pounds annually by way of the UK Bird Race, and the New Year's Day Birdcount has a valuable scientific benefit when lists are analysed down the years. No other type of birding is as intense as spending 24 hours in the field amassing as many species as possible, and providing the team is compatible it can be great fun too, as well as raising money through sponsorship for an allotted charity.

May is the main Bird racing month in the UK as potentially it allows for the maximum species count, as both summer visitors and resident birds are actively breeding and passage migrants are passing through the country. On 7th May 1985 Dave Ball, John Swann and myself broke the 100 barrier as we recorded 105 species in Bedfordshire in a 24 hour calendar day. Various other teams followed on scoring around the 100 mark but in 1989 a team led by Barry Nightingale reached a 109 tally. The gauntlet was firmly thrown down and the first half of the 90s saw several attempts at the record all fall short by one or two species; plainly, some serious planning was in order to achieve a 110 plus score.

A team from the south of the county consisting of Stuart Winter, Andy Whitney, Pete Marshall and myself started finding breeding bird territories in April, and in some cases nest sites in preparation for the Big Day on 14th May 1997. Information was vital and was drawn from many sources across Bedfordshire. We had to have several options for the trickier species, so two 'heavyweights' were recruited for the final push in the week leading up to the event in the form of Rob Dazley and Barry Nightingale; their contribution to the eventual outcome was highly significant, along with further frantic networking right up to the evening before the event.

The weather forecast was good: warm, dry and sunny with light airs. We were off just after midnight with the first bird of the day a Tawny Owl at Pegsdon. A Barn Owl on the Maulden by-pass was the first of three seen during the day and a 'sharming' Water Rail performed to order at Flitwick Moor. A steady drive north to Northill and a key site, Home Wood; Nightingale, Woodcock and Grasshopper Warbler went onto the list – and we even had time to scan the heavens on this fantastically clear morning, picking out the various constellations and man-made satellites. A Little Owl was added to the list at Shuttleworth making a near clean sweep of the nocturnal birds. We headed south feeling well and truly satisfied.

Maulden Wood is always a key site on any Bird race day and by the time we arrived at just before 0500 hrs the dawn chorus was well under way; the next two hours were going to be critical. Many common passerines were in full song as we walked down the main ride, and the list rose steadily: Lady Amherst's Pheasant, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Pipit, Jay (seen only at Maulden), Sparrowhawk, Bullfinch (only one all day!), Nuthatch, and best of all, both black-capped tits, making a score of 53 species. A Badger in full daylight by the pond was the star mammal of the day. Along the

Maulden by-pass an area of set-aside brought a flurry of newcomers, including both species of partridge and Yellow Wagtail.

With the morning pressing on it was next stop Woburn. On Wavendon Heath, Redstart, Redpoll and Spotted Flycatcher all performed, and were the only ones all day, with Mandarin and Turtle Dove in the Park. A couple of tricky ones next, but I had confirmed their location the day before – Tree Sparrow at an old ash tree nest site near Chalgrave, and Corn Bunting at Totternhoe.

Meadow Pipit, Cormorant and Shelduck were quickly found at Grovebury SP, and as we dashed back down the Leighton by-pass to Dunstable STW the conversation predictably returned to our 1993 Big Day when the works yielded Black Tern and plenty of waders. Sadly, this year mud was only limited to the scrape; however, Little Ringed Plover, Redshank and a Common Sandpiper, low over the lagoons on bowed wings, made the stop worthwhile. A golf course at Caddington obliged with a pre-staked Greenland Wheatear, and after 12 hours in the field and just about as far south as we dare venture a grand total of 91 species had been achieved, without even touching the Marston Vale!

It was a hot, tired, car load of birders that set off north again up the A6 for the Raptor Triangle and a pair of key breeding species. The pre-match reccies by our two 'heavyweights' was as true as their word as Buzzard and the near mythical Lesser Spotted Woodpecker fell to the black marker pen in less than five minutes at each site. Kingfisher was next, in the Ivel Valley from a road bridge, followed by a ternless Priory CP a couple of good gulls at Elstow and breeding Barnacle Geese at Chimney Corner CIP, bringing up 99 species by mid-afternoon.

We arrived at Stewartby Lake with no obvious overland tern passage occurring and could only hope for better things ahead in Rookery CIP – we were not to be disappointed. Into the pit and Snipe brought up the 100th species for the day; at last respectability. The tension mounted as we approached the main water to scan for waders, it was make or break time; Hobbies hawking insects (101), an adult Grey Plover (our rarity for the day), breeding Ringed Plover and a trilling Dabchick brought us right back on target. Further scanning found Ruddy Duck, a first-summer Common Gull (always difficult in May), a pair of Pochard and to bring up 108 species an adult Dunlin. We were now in uncharted territory as none of us had been past 107 species in Bedfordshire before.

The record was looking assailable after Rookery but there was no time to slacken off. A quick drive to Bromham Mill and Grey Wagtail was in the bag to equal Barry's record, at 109 species, just after 1800hrs. A flat period was to follow as we failed miserably to find the predicted Whinchat and Curlew at Knotting. Thankfully, a singing Cetti's Warbler in the Ouse Valley performed to order, thus giving us the new record of 110 species at 1924 hrs, and the Farmland Birds Appeal charity about £400 in sponsorship money.

After congratulations all round and a brief parley it was decided to head for home, as there was virtually nothing left to go for. We arrived back in Dunstable around 2100 hrs absolutely shattered having travelled 220 miles across Bedfordshire in our successful quest for the 'Blue Riband of Beds Birding'.

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

## BIRDS NEW TO BEDFORDSHIRE – 1997

by Errol Newman

### **Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*, at Priory Country Park, Bedford, 14th January 1997**

During an afternoon warden's round, I approached the Finger Lakes from the direction of Priory Lake at about 1520 GMT. As I went down the bank to the wooden bridge which leads to "the crescent", I heard a 'puick' call and a large, robust and dark-looking warbler flitted across the fishing swim just in front and to the right of me, disappearing into the vegetation further along. A rear-end glimpse of the bird showed a long, round-ended tail and I immediately thought of Cetti's Warbler. In the past, I have had considerable experience of these birds whilst ringing at Stodmarsh NNR in Kent. I moved cautiously along the path, which was screened from the lakeside vegetation by low growing (coppiced) willows *Salix* spp. The brash from previous cuttings had been stacked between the coppice and the bankside vegetation. The bird was foraging low to the ground both in the stacks of wood and the encompassing vegetation, calling loudly from time to time, especially when it was about to move. All this time, I only caught the odd glimpse of a dark shape as it strode through the dense vegetation. Fortunately, it was a sunny day with a very light westerly breeze.

In the near vicinity (behind me) were Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*, and Reed Bunting, *Emberiza schoeniclus*, possible confusion species, the first on colour and activity and the latter on call. At last the bird had to "jump" a gap and flew out and up into a stand of Reed Sweet-grass, *Glyceria maxima*, turning sideways on in full sun as it did so, giving me a perfect view only three metres away at most.

I returned to the Visitor Centre and telephoned Dave Kramer. Dave arrived on the site later but managed to get a glimpse of the bird in flight in the twilight and hear it call. In conjunction with my superiors, we decided not to let knowledge of this bird out since it was in a potential breeding site. Also, the area was sensitive to disturbance and unsuitable for large numbers of visitors, notwithstanding the fact that there had been a fatal drowning at this very spot six months earlier.

The weather on the following day was thick fog but early on the day after, the 16th, the same bird (presumably) was heard briefly and seen to fly off into an inaccessible area. On the 24th, I found another (or the same) Cetti's calling at the bottom of the New Cut, where it joins the river Great Ouse; this is 1,000 metres from the original sightings. The following day, the 25th, Dave Kramer and Tony Plosjowski found a Cetti's close to the original sighting. However, careful study revealed that it was bearing a ring; this fact was conveyed to me at home. I checked the Ringing Scheme rulings on whether I was allowed to attempt to catch it and finding this was a rightful action, I took my ringing gear to site straight away. Within ten minutes of setting a net, the bird was passively caught; it was a second-year female that had been trapped originally at Beachy Head, West Sussex during mid-October 1996. On 1st February, the bird near the sewage farm bridge was "rediscovered" and put on the Club Matrix, allowing many birdwatchers to view and hear this "new for county" warbler over the next four weeks.

*Description: Sturdily built warbler with short, rounded wings and a long tail with only ten retrices. Dark, rufous above and greyish-white below. Short, white supercilium, partial eye-ring*

(below eye), pale vinous legs, under-tail coverts barred grey. Frequently flicked tail. The ringed bird (female) had a wing of 57.5 mm and a weight of 11.7 gm.

This report has been accepted by the BBC Rarities Committee as the first occurrence for Bedfordshire.

**Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, at Priory Country Park, Bedford, 17th October 1997**

I had agreed to have an extended break from work and decided to do some ringing with my free time. At about 1230 pm I went along to the main ringing site in the 'Rough' scrub area close to Fingers Lake and set up a line for the nets. Shortly thereafter, a mixed "tit flock" appeared in the area, heading for the nets. As well as the expected Blue Tits, *Parus caeruleus*, Great Tits, *P. major*, and Long-tailed Tits, *Aegithalos caudatus* in the ensuing catch at 1315, there were two juvenile Treecreepers, *Certhia familiaris*, a first-year male Goldcrest, *Regulus regulus*, a first year female Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus collybita*, and a male Yellow-browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*, of indeterminate age. The latter was put in a bag for processing until I could find somebody with a camera to photograph it.

The battery on my mobile phone was down so I returned to the office on foot in order to ring various people. It turned out that they were, with one exception, unavailable or unobtainable. Instead, I asked one of our rangers to go home to get his compact camera so that I could obtain some record shots at the very least.

Returning to the site, I began to process the bird. It had a wing of 59.5 mm, weighed 8.0 gm, a tail length of 43 mm, the first primary projected 6mm beyond the primary coverts and the bold supercilium had a length of 21 mm. The following wing formula was taken: emarginated to P6, wing point P4 and P2=P8. The bird was as small as a Chiffchaff but much slimmer and greener. There was a very faint crown stripe that only became apparent from photographs. The breast was suffused with a lemon-yellow wash but the two creamy wing-bars were distinctive. The tertials were edged pale yellow with dark centres. Sheila Hunt witnessed the bird in the hand. The bird was released immediately after processing because there was little likelihood of other people arriving within a reasonable time. As it flew off at approximately 1400 into the "long hedge", it uttered a sharp, shrill 'sweeoo' call.

This report has been accepted by the BBC Rarities Committee as the first occurrence for Bedfordshire.

*Address: 29 Norse Road, Goldington, Bedford MK41 0NR.*

## **FIRST CONFIRMED BREEDING RECORD OF CORMORANT IN THE COUNTY by Peter Almond**

As stated in my Heronry report for 1997, I observed (19th April) what appeared to be the start of a small nest. It looked as if it comprised of vegetation rather than twigs with an adult Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo*, standing nearby. I pointed out the position to Bill Thwaites (Countryside Ranger) who had come into the hide whilst I was in there. (So much for felling some of the trees). The position was between two of the Heron's nests and slightly higher. The Cormorant did not have any white thigh patches or cheek patches so I had reservations about any breeding possibilities. However, when I next visited the site on 28th April there was an adult sitting on a much larger nest. It stood up, preened and then sat down again. Later, as I was leaving the Country Park, I saw a second bird standing by the nest. Neither bird showed any sign of breeding patches.

On 3rd May the nest was even larger and the sitting bird was busy doing maintenance whilst another stood nearby. This latter bird then approached the nest and both birds did a lot of head raising and lowering. The standing bird seemed as if it wanted to sit on the nest. It looked into one side of the nest but the other stayed put. Were there eggs in the nest?

10th May: an adult was sitting on the nest and preening.

16th May: an adult still sitting with a second standing nearby and a third further away. Meanwhile a fourth flew in and landed near the one standing close to the nest. This latter one started making threatening signs at the intruder so it finally moved near to the third. After this a juvenile flew in which also decided to join the third and fourth where it decided to start displaying and begging. (Quite an interesting time).

22nd and 30th May, and 1st June: an adult still sitting but very tight on the latter day.

4th June: adult still sitting but very restless; it kept turning around, preening, doing maintenance and looking into its nest. Later, its mate arrived and the pair changed over, this new bird did a lot of poking around in the nest before settling down. It did not appear to feed any young and I did not hear any calling.

16th June: an adult was sitting on the nest and then appeared to feed young because each time after it had put its head into the nest it held it skywards and swallowed. Later it kept putting its beak down into the nest, lifting its head and vigorously shaking it from side to side as though it was trying to throw something away, its bill was very dirty. The bird appeared very uncomfortable and restless but it did not stand up.

22nd June: an adult was sitting and then two very small heads appeared from under its breast. After a lot of calling the adult fed each one of the chicks. One of them had more white on its crown, cheeks and neck than the other.

29th June: an adult was standing on the nest and the two chicks were clearly visible and very vocal. They were fed by the adult but this did not keep them quiet for long. One of the young still had a much whiter crown than the other.

19th July: the two now large dark brown young were standing in the nest with an adult standing nearby, all three birds were busy preening. One of the young then sat down and the other began pulling at its sibling's tail and wing feathers. The sitting one began poking at the nest surrounds, after which the other one also sat down and did likewise. Finally the first to sit down attempted to feed the other.



26th July: the two young were asleep in the nest and no sign of an adult being present.  
2nd and 8th August: on both days one young one was standing outside the nest and one on it.

15th August: both young were standing in the branches near to the nest.

24th and 29th August: the nest was empty so the young had fledged and presumably left the site. On 7th September there was a young, very brown Cormorant with a very large white breast and belly standing on the island and I would like to think that it was one of the two from the nest.

*Address: 22 Nothampton Road, Bromham, Bedford MK43 8PE.*

## REFERENCES

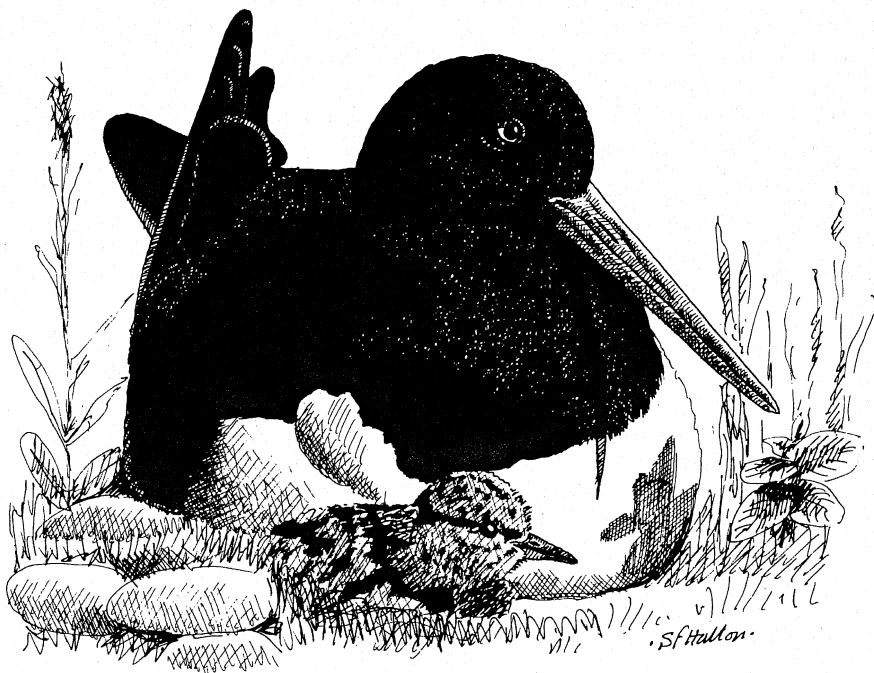
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The Hobby: Issue 32, Page 2, Published July 1997.

The Hobby: Issue 33, Page 1, Published September 1997.

## FIRST CONFIRMED BREEDING RECORD OF OYSTERCATCHER IN THE COUNTY

by Dave Ball



Oystercatcher

Steve Halton

During the summer of 1996, a pair of Oystercatchers, *Haematopus ostralegus*, spent several months at Willington Gravel-pits. On several occasions during June the birds were observed behaving in a way that suggested they were distraction-displaying to draw attention away from small young, but no young were seen. It seems likely that breeding was attempted in that year but that if any young were hatched, they were taken by predators at an early age.

In 1997, a pair were again present at the site from March, and were seen flying around together calling on numerous occasions through April and May, particularly when other Oystercatchers put in an appearance. By May, the pair seemed to have settled in the vicinity of a small circular grassy island with a ring-like shape surrounding a shallow central pool, which was situated at the eastern end of the larger lake. A pair of Garganey also frequented this area for a week or so in early May, and with the possibility of both species breeding, care was taken to minimise disturbance. By late May the Garganey had unfortunately departed, but one of the Oystercatchers always seemed to be sitting in one spot on the island. From a distance it was not possible to see whether the bird was on a nest, and on approach it always got up and walked a few metres away, often calling. This behaviour made it difficult to determine the exact site of the probable nest and to look for it from relatively close range. The obvious unease of the adult bird discouraged long examination, though once I moved away, it always returned quite quickly and sat down in what appeared to be the same spot. No attempt was made to reach the island to search the ground for a nest.

In late June the adults began distraction-displaying. After a week or so, one adult displayed on the narrow spit of land between the two main lakes, only 50–100 metres from the probable nest site. The other adult was walking around on the island, and I followed the displaying bird, but concentrated my attention on the island. Eventually the adult on the island was seen to feed a worm to a small, all-dark chick with a bill about the length of its head, from its size perhaps a few days to a week old. Over the next few weeks first two and then three young were seen, one distinctly smaller than the other two. Finally in late July the party of three fledged young with both adults were seen flying around the lakes on two occasions, the young easily distinguished by their smaller size and dull bare parts.

Apart from the Willington pair, during 1997 another pair of Oystercatchers also bred and raised young at Warren Villas just north of Biggleswade. Two other birds were observed copulating at Wyboston Gravel pits in late May, though there was no other evidence of breeding at that site, so perhaps this record related to one of the breeding pairs.

*Address: 43 Dudley Street, Bedford MK40 3TA..*

## BIRD RECORDER

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 *The Bedfordshire Naturalist*. 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: Toddington, Elstow, Haynes and Maulden.

The Society depends on the annual subscriptions which are devoted entirely to carrying out its work, as all officers are honorary. Membership is open to anyone, whether resident in the county or not.

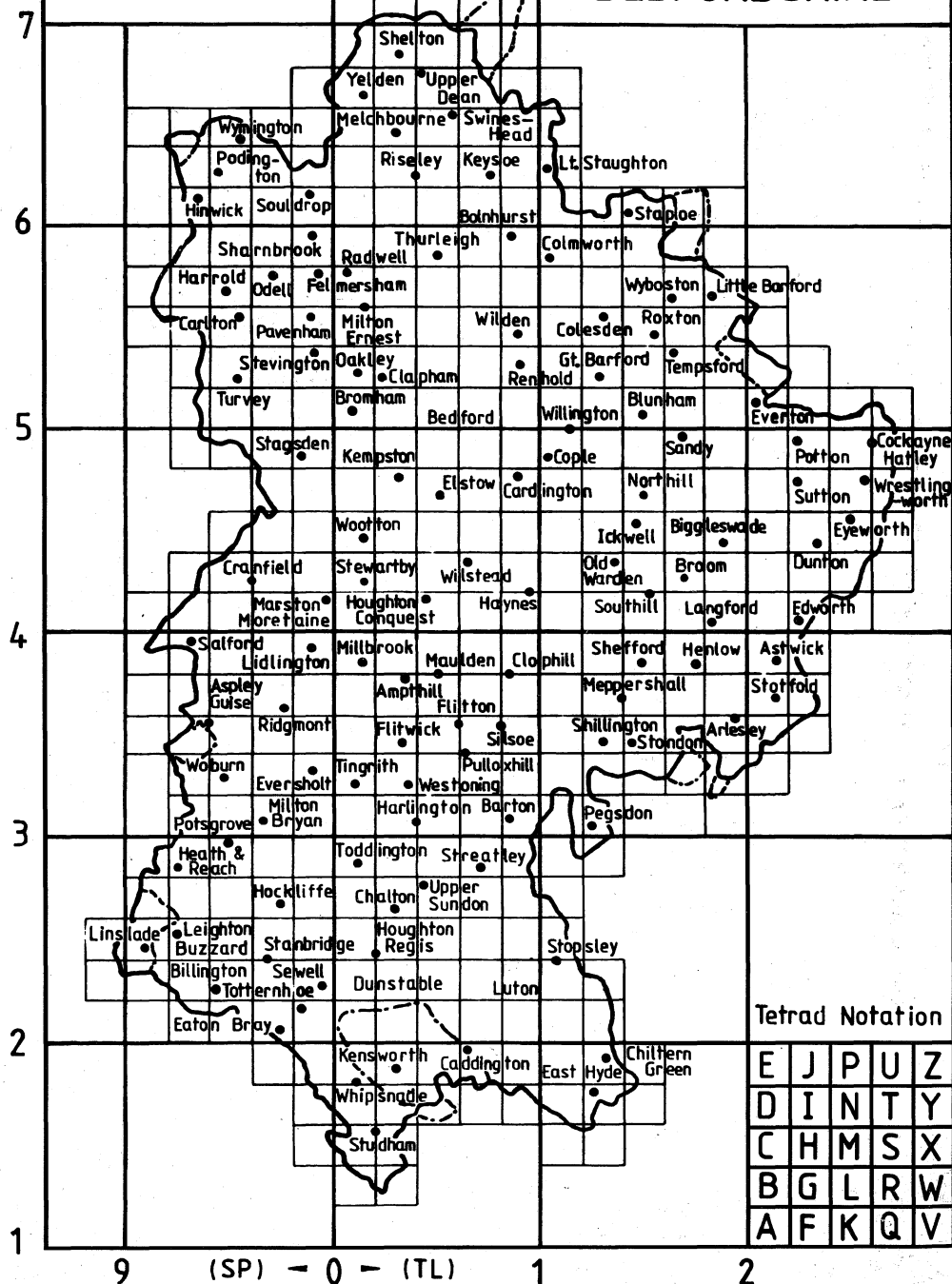
The *Bedfordshire Naturalist* is the official journal of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society, a body which has been the prime contributor to botanical and zoological knowledge of the county. Published since 1946, the journal is noted for its original papers on all aspects of natural history, especially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

Editorial address:

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

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# BEDFORDSHIRE



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