

*The
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53 (Part 2)*

*The Bedfordshire Bird
Report for 1998*



THE BEDFORDSHIRE NATURALIST

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Edited by R.A. Brind

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Front cover: Ferruginous Duck, Priory Country Park, *Richard Revels*

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BIRD REPORT FOR 1998

Report of the Recorder

INTRODUCTION

As usual we like to thank all those BBC and BNHS members and all others who submitted records for 1998. The recorder and bird report editors 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.

The review of the year was written by Dave Odell, the species accounts compiled by Dave Ball (Divers to Ducks and Finches to Buntings), Peter Almond (Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant and Grey Heron), 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. Phil Cannings assisted in preparation for publication. 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 analysed and wrote onto record cards all the relevant entries from the log books kept at Rookery South Clp 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.

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REVIEW OF 1998

1998 was another excellent year in the county for birdwatchers, with many vagrant birds to whet the appetite. However, many of our once common species are in serious decline, and some were very difficult to locate once again during the year. Tree Sparrows, Willow Tits, Starlings, Reed Buntings, Yellowhammers and Redpolls were found in reduced numbers. Lady Amherst's Pheasant, our exotic county bird, is surviving in only a few strongholds and one wonders how long it will last as a Bedfordshire species. Even the humble House Sparrow is probably in decline too. January saw a Red-throated Diver at Stewartby CP and a Slavonian Grebe at Brogborough Lake remaining from 1997. An overwintering Common Sandpiper at Willington GP probably returned at the end of the year. Stewartby provided exciting birding with a Shag, a Kittiwake, Mediterranean, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls during the month. Several groups of Crossbills, left over from the influx of the previous year, were still roaming around the coniferous plantations of the county. Good numbers of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs overwintered. Up to 50 Mandarins were at Stockgrove CP. Other exciting birds seen during the month were Pink-footed Geese, Smew and Short-eared Owls. A staggering total of 140 Cormorants roosted at Harrold-Odell CP at the end of the month.

February started with the first of several Red Kites. This species is an increasingly regular visitor to Bedfordshire due to the re-introduction programme in neighbouring counties. Goshawks displayed at two sites, Woodlarks made a welcome return to The

Lodge and they were briefly at two other locations. The first Wheatear, once again at Blows Downs, was on the 9th March. This migration watchpoint had another excellent spring passage. An early Osprey was seen at the end of the month, this is another species that is occurring more regularly in the county. A ring-tail Hen Harrier was at the well-watched set-aside of Knotting Green. Three Egyptian Geese were seen at Willington GP and Priory CP. On the last day of March Priory CP recorded a fall of migrants including an early Sedge Warbler and an exceptionally early Grasshopper Warbler.

April produced some amazing records. Blows Downs recorded many of their now regular passage migrants, Ring Ouzels, Redstarts and Black Redstarts and so on in good numbers, but the star bird of the year was the second county record of Dartford Warbler that was well received by many of the county's birdwatchers. Eighty-eight Black-tailed Godwits flew over Priory CP and two Spoonbills, only the third county record, were also fly-overs at Harrold-Odell CP. A long-staying wing-tagged Red Kite was a well watched bird; this was of Spanish stock and had originated from the Northamptonshire release scheme. Sixty-eight Mandarins on one lake at Woburn Park must have been an amazing sight.

Two Temminck's Stints, the first time in Bedfordshire that there have been two together, were at Dunstable STW in May. A late Goosander was seen on the River Ouse at Kempston. Good numbers of Arctic Terns passed through and a White Stork flew over Kempston. Nightjars returned to their heathland site and a Firecrest was paired with a Goldcrest at The Lodge. Oystercatchers bred at Willington GP again and up to five pairs of Common Buzzards were suspected of breeding in the county. Another recent colonist, the Cormorant, once again nested.

June started with a Cetti's Warbler briefly at Willington. An escaped Eagle Owl was watched in Clophill. A Corncrake crekked at Priory CP and another was reported in the north of the county. Numbers of Quail were low compared to recent years. In July the return wader passage produced good numbers of Black-tailed Godwits. Five Yellow-legged Gulls were reported, probably a sign of increased observer awareness of this difficult species. Several more Ospreys and more waders were located in August. A Little Egret was at Rookery CIP and at Knotting Green there was a unique event in Bedfordshire, a Hen Harrier and a Marsh Harrier at the same locality at the same time.

In September Spotted Redshanks, Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints were all seen at Rookery. Two Wrynecks were reported in gardens. A Little Egret, at Priory CP, stayed for several days. A Pied Flycatcher, in a Luton garden, was first seen on a birder's wheelbarrow. Yellow-legged Gulls continued to be identified, up to seven were in the brick pits. The county recorded at least three Great Grey Shrikes in 1998 and the first of these was at Dunstable STW in October. An Avocet flew over Luton and a Red-necked Grebe was at Willington.

A Ferruginous Duck at Priory CP from mid November was another well watched bird, and amazingly was followed by a second in December. A brief Great Northern Diver was also seen at this site and several Scaups were located. A Shag was at Bromham. Other Great Grey Shrikes were located at Bedford STW, Cardington and Knotting Green. Excellent numbers of Golden Plover were noted in December. A Common Sandpiper overwintered at Willington and three Firecrests, at Stewartby and

Aspley Guise, also did so. A Brent Goose was a reserve first at Dunstable STW and Short-eared Owls were at Cardington and Knotting Green. Forty-six White-fronted Geese flew over Radwell and a Slavonian Grebe, at Willington, stayed into 1999. Finally, another escaped Eagle Owl made the local news as it roamed central Bedford terrorising the pigeons.

SYSTEMATIC LIST FOR 1998

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, for example to avoid confusion, the 'new' name from the "*British Birds*" list of *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1992) has been used.

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

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

* 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.

The single adult bird in winter plumage which had arrived on 24th December 1997 remained at Stewartby CP until 16th January.

Great Northern Diver *G. immer*

A rare visitor, mainly in winter.

A single adult bird in winter plumage was at Priory CP on 25th and 26th November (LC, DK *et al.*).

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

A common and widespread species and perhaps under recorded.

Breeding was proved only at Luton Hoo and East Hyde, with birds recorded elsewhere in the breeding season only at Brogborough Lake, Stewartby CP and Rookery South CIP. Either this species had a very bad year in the county or recording of breeding was exceptionally poor. Breeding definitely did not occur at Dunstable STW.

Highest post-breeding counts were also low, suggesting a genuine decline, with maxima of ten at Luton Hoo on 17th September and seven at Stewartby CP in October. In the first winter period numbers were also low, with highest counts of at least eight at Blunham Lake on 1st January and twelve at Priory CP during March, though six at Bromham Lake LNR on 15th March was a highest ever count for that site. Eight at Priory CP in November was also a very poor highest count for the second winter period.

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 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | 3 | 4 | 2 | - | - | 2 |
| Rookery South CIP | - | 2 | 6 | 2 | - | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | - |
| Rookery North CIP | - | - | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 3 | - | - |
| Stewartby CP | 3 | 3 | - | 2 | - | 4 | - | 2 | - | 7 | 4 | 4 |
| Chimney Corner CIP | - | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| Coronation CIP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 1 |
| Priory CP | 8 | 10 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 6 |

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

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

Breeding was confirmed at Houghton Regis ChP, Dunstable STW (one pair nested three times but each clutch was predated by corvids), Tiddenfoot WP, Lower Drakelow Pond Woburn, Southill Lake (four broods), Manor Farm Trout Fishery Caldecote, Rookery North CIP (two pairs), Willington GP (four pairs), Priory CP (two pairs), Felmersham NR (first nesting attempt flooded out) and Harrold-Odell CP (three pairs). Also present in the breeding season at Luton Hoo (did not breed), Battlesden Lake, Brogborough Lake, Lidlington CLP, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Rookery South CLP, Stewartby CP, Chimney Corner CLP, Coronation CLP, Blunham Lake, Bromham Lake LNR (pair performed full weed dance and then disappeared from the site), and Radwell GP.

The highest counts reported in the first winter period were 21 at Willington GP on 4th January and 39 at Stewartby CP on 6th January, the latter figure is well below the 110 counted at the site on 5th January 1997. There were also c.40 at Stewartby CP on 14th February. The monthly maxima at selected sites are listed below. Post-breeding there were 28 at Willington GP on 20th June. Other second winter period counts reported were 21 at Southill Lake on 25th October, 28 at Willington GP on 4th November, 18 at Radwell GP on 15th November and 20 at Harrold-Odell CP on 19th November.

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 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Rookery North CIP | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 11 | 16 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 4 | - |
| Stewartby CP | c.40 | 22 | 35 | 18 | - | 4 | 22 | 15 | 24 | 36 | 22 | 19 |
| Priory CP | 25 | 25 | 32 | 14 | 11 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 19 | 15 |

Red-necked Grebe *P. grisegena*

A rare winter visitor.

One in winter plumage was at Willington GP on 10th October and again, possibly the same bird, on 3rd and 4th November (TPI, PT), whilst another (or even possibly again the same) was at Radwell GP on 6th December (PH).

Slavonian Grebe *P. auritis*

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

In the first winter period, one remained from 1997 at Brogborough Lake until 30th January (PT *et al*). In the second winter period a juvenile was at Stewartby CP on 7th November (PS), a bird retaining traces of summer plumage was at Priory CP on 16th November (DK), with possibly the same on 8th December (HH), and again possibly the same at Willington GP from 21st to 30th December (AG, R&BM, TPI).

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant which again bred in 1998.

A full account of the four pairs which bred at Harrold-Odell CP was given in Issue 41 of *The Hobby*, published January 1999. In the first winter period generally most numerous at Harrold-Odell CP and Priory CP, as shown in the table below. The night roost at the former site was 73 on 10th, 141 on 24th and 140 on 30th January. It then started to decline as birds began to return to their nesting colonies; it was 110 on 5th February and down to 89 on the 18th. No records were submitted for the only other known night roost in the county at Brogborough Lake. Other records of note were 31 on the sand suction pipe at Grovebury SP on 10th January, 37 at Southill Lake on 18th January and 17 at Rookery South CLP on 10th February. This species is still rare in the south of the county, with a maximum of 14 at Dunstable STW in August, and has declined at Luton Hoo. Individuals fed at East Hyde in both winter periods with three there from 5th to 7th January and three on 29th September.

In the second winter period generally less numerous with 73 in the roost at Harrold-Odell CP on 30th November and 81 on 13th December. Other records of note were 85 at Willington GP on 4th November, 67 at Radwell GP on 8th November, 57 at Shuttleworth College Lake on 14th November, 61 flying SW over Priory CP on 14th November, 36 on the sand suction pipe at Grovebury SP on 15th November and 42 at Radwell GP on 5th December.

Birds showing characteristics of the continental race, *P. c. sinensis*, were recorded at a number of locations including Priory CP, Harrold-Odell CP, Blunham Lake and Bromham Lake LNR. In fact it is most likely that the pair which nested at Harrold-Odell CP in 1997 were of that subspecies (see the article in Issue 36 of *The Hobby*, published March 1998) and also those which nested at the site in 1998.

In the Bedfordshire Bird Report for 1996 records of colour ringed birds were listed and it was stated that feedback on the likely origins of these birds would be welcomed. This information has been obtained and was reported in Issue 36 of *The Hobby*.

Further sightings have been made and are included in this Bird Report.

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

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Dunstable STW | 3 | - | 3 | 1 | - | - | 1 | 14 | 11 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Rookery South CIP | 1 | 4 | 3 | - | 3 | 9 | 14 | 8 | - | - | 4 | 4 |
| Stewartby CP | 14 | 9 | 5 | 3 | - | - | - | - | 4 | 5 | - | 6 |
| Coronation CIP | 6 | 1 | 5 | 2 | - | - | - | 13 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 11 |
| Priory CP | 19 | 12 | 26 | 19 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 12 | 21 | - |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|-----|----|----|----|
| Bromham Lake LNR | 13 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 11 | 12 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 50 | 74 | 30 | 15 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 9 | n/c | 55 | 65 | 51 |

Shag *P. aristotelis*

A rare visitor, usually during the winter months.

There were only two records, an adult was at Stewartby CP on 2nd January (KMS), and a juvenile at Bromham Lake LNR on 9th November (PA).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

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

A number of observers caught up with an adult at Rookery South CIP on the evening of 19th August (LC, KMS, PS), though the bird flew off at 20:00 and was re-located shortly afterwards at Coronation CIP (KMS). Subsequently another roosted at Priory CP on 21st and 22nd September and again, probably the same, from 6th to 24th October (DK, ECN), though this bird remained elusive throughout its stay.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A common resident.

Breeding records were received from four heronries. At Luton Hoo 21 birds were seen, with six nests occupied on 15th February, and there were 14 occupied nests on 12th April. It was not possible to ascertain the breeding success at this site due to difficulties in visiting the estate in 1998. At Southill Park 55 birds were seen, with 33 occupied nests and three unoccupied on 24th April. At Bromham Hall seven of the occupied nests had young in them and four were unsuccessful. The maximum number of young seen was 20 of which 19 were believed to fledge successfully. At Harrold-Odell CP five of the occupied nests had young in them and three did not. The maximum number of young seen was ten of which six were believed to fledge successfully.

Other sites at which birds were recorded either feeding or loafing were East Hyde (three on 10th January), Houghton Regis ChP, Brogborough Lake, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Stewartby CP, Coronation CIP, Chimney Corner CIP, The Lodge, Blunham GP, Priory CP, the pond at County Hall Bedford and Radwell GP. These sightings generally involved only one or two birds, but up to five were generally at Dunstable STW, with a maximum of ten in August, and eight were at Willington GP on 6th December. Those at Dunstable STW were noted taking a Mallard duckling and chasing Little Ringed Plover chicks.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

A very rare vagrant.

One flying over Kempston on 25th May was only the fourth accepted county record (PH). Unfortunately it was not relocated.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

A very rare vagrant.

Two flying west up the Ouse valley at Harrold-Odell CP at about mid-day on 20th April briefly circled and returned downstream (DHB). Despite extensive searching by the finder they were not relocated. This was only the third county record, after a party of three in March 1916 and a single in October 1996, and it is interesting that two of these records have involved more than one individual, perhaps due to a tendency for this species to migrate in small parties.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

A common resident.

Successful breeding was recorded from East Hyde, Luton Hoo, Dunstable STW, Houghton Regis ChP, Tiddenfoot WP, Battlesden Lake, Basin Pond Woburn, Manor Farm Trout Fishery Caldecote, Priory CP, where there were four pairs, three of which were successful, Felmersham NR, Harrold-Odell CP, and on the Ouse at Oakley Bridge. Unsuccessful breeding attempts took place at the Nissan offices at Cranfield and on the Ouse at County Hall and Bromham Hall, the nest at the latter site being washed away in the floods.

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 | 5 | - | - | 23 | - | 23 | - | 17 | - | 43 | 49 | 50 |
| Brogborough Lake | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Rookery South CIP | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 43 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | - | 4 |
| Rookery North CIP | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Millbrook Pillinge NR | 1 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 3 | - | 3 | 3 | 2 | - |
| Stewartby CP | 9 | 14 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 43 | 53 | 51 | 11 | 8 | 13 | 12 |
| Coronation CIP | 3 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 |
| Radwell GP | 6 | 4 | 4 | 52 | 40 | 44 | 53 | 15 | - | - | 55 | - |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 26 | - | - | - | 23 | 76 | 94 | 115 | 95 | 123 | 111 | 115 |

The 23 on Basin Pond Woburn in April were birds released from the Swan Rescue Centre, but by June only 14 adults remained there, with a brood of nine juveniles making the total equal the previous count. It seems likely that the high count at Rookery South CIP in June were birds displaced from Stewartby CP by watersports activities. Numbers at Harrold-Odell CP in the second half of the year were exceptional.

In addition to the counts tabulated above, 70 adults and 9 immatures were counted on the Ouse in Bedford on 4th January, and 18 at Tiddenfoot WP on 10th January. One of the pair which failed at Bromham was the same bird as in 1997, and the resident female bearing ring number 36E remained at Dunstable STW. There were no wire casualties at the latter site during the year.

Bewick's/Whooper Swan *C. columbianus/cygnus*

Bewick's is a scarce but fairly regular winter or passage visitor.

After only one record of Bewick's Swan in 1997, there were no definite records at all in 1998, though this species is usually a regular visitor and has occurred in some numbers. However, a flock of wild swans, not specifically identified, were heard passing over Biggleswade calling at 21:00 on 8th March (SDH). Though the record has been accepted as relating to either one or other of the two species, they are most likely to have been Bewick's, as from the sound there were judged to be at least 20 birds, and Whooper is much the scarcer species in the county.

Whooper Swan *C. cygnus*

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

It seems likely that all records during the year relate to introduced feral birds. On the Ivel at Blunham GP an adult was noted in March and June, with two adults and a juvenile on 24th August and one adult remaining in October (PHo). Two full-winged adults at Tempsford on 5th February (PHw) possibly originated from Blunham, though wild swans have occurred at this site in the past, and it also seems possible that an adult with Mute Swans at Willington GP on 28th December (HH) may have been from Blunham, or another feral bird, especially as a presumably feral bird was present on the Ouse in Bedford in late spring 1999. Three juveniles at Houghton Regis ChP

on 26th May (DM) could well have been those reared in Wardown Park, Luton, the previous year.

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.

There were two records during the year. A party of four seen twice on 14th January, first at Hardwicke Farm, Elstow (RAN), and later at Stewartby CP (CT), were almost certainly wild birds.

On 3rd October one was seen flying east over Blows Downs (RD). It might appear that this bird was flying in the 'wrong' direction for a newly-arrived migrant, but this could have been a local re-orientation on encountering the line of the downs, and though the date might be slightly early, it falls within the likely arrival period for this species. It seems probable that this too was a wild bird. Interestingly, a large party of Barnacle Geese passed east over Priory CP and Octagon Farm GP on the same date.

There were no records of the apparent hybrid between this species and Bean Goose *A. fabalis* reported in 1997.

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 1998, all of good-sized parties in mid-winter and therefore almost certainly all relating to wild birds.

In the first winter period, a group of eight, including both adults and juveniles, followed a flock of Greylags into Willington GP and briefly circled for a few minutes at about 11:00 on the morning of 17th January before heading back off north-east without landing (RD).

In the second winter period, twelve, including at least six adults but with some juveniles, were at Radwell GP on 5th December (MR), while 14, all adults, were there the next day (MR, NW). A party of 46, including juveniles, were seen flying south-east over the same site at about 14:30 on the 12th (KMS). The latter was an exceptionally large flock for the county, and presumably included the two earlier parties.

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.

Despite an appeal for breeding records in the 1997 report, breeding was noted only at Southill Lake (two broods), New Road GP Sandy, Chimney Corner CIP and Harrold-Odell CP. This may reflect a genuinely low rate of breeding for this species in the county compared to Canada Goose. Both species of feral geese appear to breed in relatively small numbers, given the very large flocks sometimes present. Might this be due to competition for suitable nest sites, with both preferring to use islands?

In the first winter period the largest parties noted were 200-300 at Radwell GP on 24th January, with c.200 there on 5th February and 350 at Harrold-Odell CP on 15th February. There were also 95 at Southill Lake on 15th February. These numbers were very close to those present at the same sites on similar dates in 1997.

In contrast to 1997, parties recorded in the post-breeding and second winter periods were generally smaller, though perhaps more widespread. Peak counts were 335 at Radwell GP on 20th September, with 175 there on 8th November and 176 on 5th December, 185 at Southill Lake on 14th June with 195 there on 6th December and 177 nearby at Old Warden on 18th November, and 192 at Coronation CIP on 26th

August. Apart from the high August Coronation CIP count, numbers recorded in the clay pits did not exceed 100, perhaps a reflection of persecution and the loss of habitat at Rookery South CIP.

In the south of the county a pair at East Hyde in April and a single at Dunstable STW on 13th March were the only records submitted for these well-watched sites.

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 two at Harrold-Odell CP on 15th February and 27th March, with one there on 6th April and again on six more dates to the year end. The bird on 6th April was accompanied by a bird thought to be possibly a hybrid Greylag x White-fronted *A. anser* x *A. albifrons*, though it should be noted that many feral Greylags show small white frontal blazes and odd bill colours, perhaps due to admixture of genes from other Anser species or domesticated stock. There is also a hybrid Canada x domestic goose with the flock of feral geese on the Ouse in Bedford.

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, Luton Hoo, Wardown Park Luton, Barton Mill, Southill Lake, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Rookery South CIP, Priory CP and Bromham Lake LNR. Five pairs at Dunstable STW all failed due to Fox predation. This is a considerable drop from the recording of breeding in 1997, particularly in the north of 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 | 221 | 20 | 26 | 15 | - | - | - | - | - | 47 | 54 | 111 |
| Luton Hoo | 92 | 194 | - | 79 | - | - | 77 | 135 | 75 | 106 | - | 250 |
| Southill Park | 75 | 43 | - | 26 | 21 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 20 |
| Brogborough Lake | - | - | 9 | 12 | 6 | 12 | 69 | 79 | - | 1 | - | 14 |
| Rookery North CIP | - | 1 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 15 | 10 | 3 | 72 | 11 | 29 | - |
| Rookery South CIP | - | - | 45 | 6 | 14 | 57 | 38 | 171 | - | - | - | - |
| Millbrook Pill. NR | 97 | 131 | 13 | 4 | 5 | 12 | - | 169 | - | - | 60 | - |
| Stewartby CP | 7 | 5 | 18 | 4 | 12 | 14 | 42 | 23 | - | 293 | 6 | 200 |
| Coronation CIP | 1 | 33 | 50 | 22 | 24 | 26 | 321 | 467 | 32 | 21 | 47 | 121 |
| Chimney Corner CIP | - | - | 12 | 4 | 11 | 23 | 32 | 29 | 252 | - | - | - |
| Priory CP | 174 | 136 | 51 | 26 | 59 | 81 | 115 | 110 | 252 | 200 | 107 | 52 |
| Radwell GP | 2-300 | 36 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 67 | 226 | - | - |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 171 | - | - | - | - | - | 20 | - | - | - | - | 182 |

Canada x Barnacle Goose *B. canadensis* x *leucopsis*

Hybrids between these two introduced species are much scarcer than Greylag x Canada hybrids, presumably due to the small numbers of feral Barnacle Geese present in the county.

One adult was at East Hyde on 10th January.

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.

As usual the bulk of the records this year probably relate to feral birds and are of singles or small groups. Again, no breeding was reported in the county in 1998.

Apart from the usual scatter of obviously feral birds, two parties were recorded which were larger than any in recent years. A flock of 55, in fields north of Blunham on 9th September with one Snow and one Canada Goose, were considered to be feral (PHo). On 3rd October a flock of 48 were seen in flight twice, passing east over Priory CP (DK) and then over Octagon Farm GP (West Willington GP) (TPI). This flock was larger than any of the feral groups recorded in the county prior to the Blunham party just mentioned, and interestingly, this was on the same date as the Pink-footed Goose over Blows Downs, which was also flying east. As a result, these would surely have been considered wild birds if it were not for the Blunham record. Proclaiming certainty over the provenance of any wild Barnacle Geese in the county is fraught with problems!

A party of 25 at Tempsford on 13th April may well have been those recorded at Willington GP in previous years and thought to relate to a flock released at Roxton GP. Apart from these records, no more than five were seen together, and birds were noted at East Hyde, Luton Hoo, Steppingley Reservoir, Rookery South CIP, Rookery North CIP, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Coronation CIP, Chimney Corner CIP, Priory CP, Radwell GP and Harrold-Odell 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 1998, a single adult of the dark-bellied race at Dunstable STW on 12th and 13th December (LC, PT, AW).

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.

A party of three at Priory CP early on 27th March (DK) were later relocated at Willington GP (TPI). This is a pattern which has occurred in previous years and at similar dates, and would appear to relate to a regular dispersive movement (or a regular release date!).

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

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

In the first winter period a single bird at Woburn Park during January was considered to be possibly released, though there were two there on the 3rd, with six at Stewartby CP on the same date and one at Rookery North CIP on the 25th. There was also one at Dunstable STW during January with five there in February and a male at Grovebury SP on 8th February.

The main arrivals occurred from March onwards, with as usual the bulk of the records from April and May. During this period birds were recorded at Dunstable STW, Houghton Regis ChP, Grovebury SP, Ledburn Road SP, Tiddenfoot WP, Woburn Park, Southill Lake, Rookery South CIP, Rookery North CIP, Priory CP, Willington GP, Roxton GP and Radwell GP. A remarkable 26, probably a county



Shelduck

Andy White

record number, were at Grovebury SP on 19th April. Breeding was attempted but failed at Dunstable STW and Grovebury SP, and was suspected at Ledburn Road SP and Roxton GP.

Numbers during post-breeding dispersal were relatively poor this year, though nine at Priory CP on 9th September was a good party for autumn. Additionally there were singles at Harrold-Odell CP on 25th July and at Dunstable STW during September and November with two there in October. Finally there were three at Grovebury SP on 29th November and one at Luton Hoo on 8th December.

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 was a female with seven young on 5th June and four pairs with ten young on 11th July. At Woburn there were 68 on Lord Robin Russell Pond in early April with an estimated 50–60 pairs on territory in the park and its surroundings, including seven pairs on Eversholt Lake and ten pairs in Hall Wood (*per* BJN). Breeding was also suspected at Horsemoor Farm, Aspley Heath where a male was displaying on 12th April. A further instance of suspected breeding was at Park Lane, Blunham, remote from the main breeding area in the county, with birds also noted displaying on the Ivel nearby.

In the first winter period there was again a series of records of high numbers at Stockgrove CP, with a peak count of 28 males and 22 females there on 31st January. Away from the main sites in the Leighton Buzzard/Woburn area, three were at Luton Hoo on 6th January, and a male and two females were at Ickwell Green on 19th January.

Later in the year a male was at Swiss Gardens on 13th May with ten males and seven females at the same site on 9th December. A female was at East Hyde on 28th April, and another at Priory CP on 30th September, whilst a male at Dunstable STW from 24th to 26th September was only the tenth record for the site.

In the second winter period the peak count was 14 males and eight females at Stockgrove CP on 30th December. A count of 27 at Luton Hoo on 22nd November was exceptional for that site.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

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

As can be seen from the table, the largest numbers in the first winter period were at Harrold-Odell CP, Radwell GP and Willington GP, though it is suspected that some movement takes place between Radwell and Harrold-Odell CP. Away from the sites tabulated, smaller numbers were also recorded at Luton Hoo, Dunstable STW, Woburn Lakes, New Road GP Sandy and Warren Villas NR.

The last party in spring were four at Rookery South CIP on 19th April, but single males, possibly injured birds, then overwintered at both that site and at Willington GP. The drake at Rookery South CIP was joined by a single female on 15th May, whilst the Willington GP bird was likewise accompanied from 12th July. To complete an interesting series of summer records, there were three at Dunstable STW on 19th June.

Apart from these unusual summer records, the first returnees were one at Dunstable STW on 29th August and two at Blunham GP on the 31st. Away from the sites tabulated, the second winter period saw small numbers at Luton Hoo, Dunstable STW, Houghton Regis ChP, Tiddenfoot WP and Southill Lake, whilst there were twelve at Basin Pond Woburn in November and 40 there in December. The near coincidence of the December peak counts for Radwell GP and Harrold-Odell CP supports the belief that birds commute between these sites, in general feeding at Radwell GP and roosting at Harrold-Odell CP.

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 | 51 | 121 | 84 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Rookery South CIP | 85 | 80 | 26 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Rookery North CIP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 48 | - | 27 |
| Coronation CIP | 33 | 4 | 22 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 16 | 92 | 23 |
| Chimney Corner CIP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 55 |
| Blunham GP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 62 | 142 | - |
| Willington GP | 70 | - | 192 | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | - | - | 40 |
| Priory CP | 21 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 42 | 8 | 11 | 27 |
| Radwell GP | 200+ c. | 150 | 10 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 80 | - | 486 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 370 | 192 | 11 | - | - | - | - | 4 | 60 | 295 | 159 | 483 |

Gadwall *A. strepera*

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

Breeding was recorded at Luton Hoo, where a female was seen with six ducklings, and at Dunstable STW, where two pairs bred, one fledging six juveniles. Mating was also observed at East Hyde, though breeding did not take place at that site, and it seems possible that the birds involved may have nested at Luton Hoo. Additionally, as can be seen from the table, there were birds in April, May or June at Stewartby CP/Rookery South/North CIPs, Blunham GP and Harrold-Odell CP, and there was also one at Houghton Regis ChP in April and four there in May. In the Blunham area birds were also noted in April and May at South Mills NR and Girtford South GP.

Away from the sites tabulated below, birds were recorded in seven other localities. In the first winter period small numbers were at Tiddenfoot WP, Woburn Park, Southill Lake, Warren Villas NR, Brogborough Lake and Millbrook Pillinge NR, and

in the second winter period at the same six sites plus Chimney Corner CIP.

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

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| East Hyde | 18 | 17 | 18 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 6 | - |
| Luton Hoo | - | 72 | - | 41 | - | 88 | 34 | 35 | - | 57 | 51 | - |
| Dunstable STW | 19 | 8 | 18 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 18 | 28 | 48 | 63 |
| Warren Villas NR | 12 | - | 10 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 17 | - |
| Rookery South CIP | 21 | 17 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 8 | - | - |
| Rookery North CIP | 2 | 4 | - | - | 2 | 2 | - | 2 | 8 | 12 | 10 | - |
| Stewartby CP | 8 | 12 | 16 | 2 | - | - | 4 | - | 8 | 16 | 18 | 23 |
| Coronation CIP | 3 | 6 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 8 | 20 | 10 |
| Blunham GP | - | - | 11 | - | 6+ | - | - | 60+ | - | 33 | 116 | - |
| Priory CP | 5 | 10 | 15 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 21 | 2 |
| Radwell GP | 4 | 20 | 2 | - | 10 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 41 | 50 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 46 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | 2 | 4 | 28 | 39 | 51 | 96 |

Teal *A. crecca*

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

Once more there were no confirmed breeding records in the county. Birds were present into April at Luton Hoo and Dunstable STW, though breeding definitely did not occur at the latter site, and in May and June at Rookery South CIP, where there was a single male on 1st and 24th May, with a pair on 30th May and two males on 27th and 28th June.

In general the species seems to have had a poor year everywhere in the county, with no counts reaching three figures, and either absent or only present in very small numbers at many sites through much of the year. Numbers in the second winter period were particularly disappointing. The only records received away from the sites tabulated were two at New Road GP Sandy in January, 41 at Radwell GP in November and 16 at Brogborough Lake in December.

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

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| East Hyde | 0 | 0 | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 0 | 5 | 2 |
| Luton Hoo | - | 19 | - | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 11 | - |
| Dunstable STW | 75 | 51 | 25 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 14 | 20 | 40 | 51 | - |
| Woburn Lakes | c.30 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 20 |
| Southill Lake | - | - | 12 | - | - | - | - | - | 21 | 14 | 2 | 50 |
| Rookery South CIP | 88 | 36 | 31 | - | 2 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 40 | 16 | 8 | 8 |
| Rookery North CIP | 11 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 | 18 | 13 | 24 |
| Stewartby CP | 7 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 10 | - |
| Coronation CIP | 29 | 4 | 15 | - | - | - | - | - | 9 | 23 | 36 | 34 |
| Chimney Corner CIP | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 18 | 11 |
| Priory CP | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 13 | 12 | 4 |
| Willington GP | - | 4 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 10 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 25 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | 10 |

Mallard *A. platyrhynchos*

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

Breeding was reported from Luton Hoo, the Lea in Luton, Leagrave Marsh, Pulloxhill, Woburn Park, Southill Lake, the Ivel in Blunham, Rookery South CIP,

Felmersham NR and Harrold-Odell CP, though this doubtless represents only a fraction of the places in which this versatile species succeeded in raising young. Unfortunately the comprehensive records usually available from Dunstable STW and Priory CP were not received.

Away from the tabulated sites, high counts recorded were 65 at Barton Mill Res. in January, 100 at Radwell GP in October with 44 there in December, 79 at Houghton Regis ChP in October with 102 there in December, and 190 at Eversholt Lake in December.

Due to the influence of various strains of domestic duck, this species can appear in a wide range of colour variants covering the full gamut from white to black. Pale buff individuals recalling the plumage tones of immature Glaucous Gulls can be particularly fetching. During the year a number of melanistic individuals were noted on several dates at Harrold-Odell CP. These black Mallards are unfortunately far more likely to occur in the county than the American Black Duck, though observers should not totally discount the possibility of the latter, which should be fairly easy to separate.

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

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--------------------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| East Hyde | 24 | 56 | 41 | 16 | 23 | 25 | 21 | 25 | 32 | - | 70 | 24 |
| Luton Hoo | - | c.80 | - | c.70 | - | c.30 | - | - | - | c.50 | 33 | - |
| Woburn Park | 128 | 93 | 51 | 59 | 45 | 92 | n/c | 131 | 141 | 243 | 167 | 213 |
| Southill Lake | 57 | 8 | 27 | 8 | 30 | 4 | n/c | 57 | 101 | 30 | 33 | 62 |
| Brogborough Lake | 48 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 19 | 11 | 18 | 41 | 11 | 25 | 25 |
| Millbrook Pill. NR | 36 | 16 | 10 | 12 | 8 | 14 | - | 51 | 9 | - | 6 | 25 |
| Rookery South CIP | 39 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 23 | 46 | 17 | 154 | 64 | 13 | - | - |
| Rookery North CIP | 34 | 8 | 4 | 12 | 7 | 19 | 12 | 37 | 141 | 117 | 69 | 42 |
| Stewartby CP | 43 | 23 | 14 | 10 | 6 | 19 | 37 | 22 | 21 | 13 | 25 | 22 |
| Coronation CIP | 37 | 12 | 17 | 7 | 9 | 17 | 16 | 21 | 29 | 14 | 36 | 35 |
| Chimney Corner CIP | - | 8 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 18 | 3 | 11 | 66 | 6 | 29 | 53 |
| Bromham Lake LNR | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 33 | 23 | 31 | 31 | 12 |
| Felmersham NR | 31 | 9 | 19 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 17 | 27 | 33 | 18 | 32 | 12 |

Pintail *A. acuta*

An uncommon but regular winter visitor.

After the excellent series of records at Rookery South CIP in 1997, this species had a quiet year in the county. Four males and three females were at Brogborough Lake on 3rd January (RAN). There was a male at Radwell GP on 25th January (LC, MR) and two at Rookery South CIP on the same date (KMS). A pair at Woburn Park from 5th April remained until the 25th with the male present until 13th June, but were very tame and considered to be of doubtful origin (BJN). In the second winter period two were at Coronation CIP on 13th September (KMS), and finally there was a female at Rookery North CIP on 9th November (TD).

Garganey *A. querquedula*

An irregular but usually annual scarce migrant, has bred.

The only record was of a female at Rookery South CIP from 17th to 19th May (KMS).

Shoveler *A. dypeata*

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

Though there were good numbers at Rookery South CIP in May and June, no proved breeding occurred in the county in 1998, and like several other ducks, this species seemed generally down in numbers. Away from the sites tabulated, also

recorded in very small numbers at East Hyde, Blunham GP, Chimney Corner CIP and Bromham Lake LNR, where there were eight in November, with three pairs nearby in April. Radwell GP recorded a maximum of 16 in September.

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 | 8 | 1 | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 12 | 8 | - |
| Dunstable STW | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Southill Lake | - | - | 14 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | - | - | - |
| Rookery South CIP | 2 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 14 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 6 | - | - |
| Rookery North CIP | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 14 | - | - |
| Coronation CIP | 7 | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | - | 4 | 8 | 6 | 8 |
| Priory CP | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 9 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | - | 2 | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | 1 |

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.

There were only three records of this species in the county in 1998. A female was at Radwell GP on 7th and 15th March (PH, MR), a male at the same site on 28th November (MR), and possibly the same male at Harrold-Odell CP from 6th to at least 24th December (PA, JM *et al.*).

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 males were present at Rookery South CIP and Brogborough Lake during May and June. Breeding definitely did not occur at Dunstable STW where this species has bred in the past.

As in 1997, Priory CP and Brogborough Lake remain the main wintering sites for this species. Priory CP held very high numbers in December with counts of 420, 289 and 217 during the month. Millbrook Pilling NR also figured well in the second winter period. Away from the tabulated sites, birds were recorded in the first winter period at Lidlington CIP, Warren Villas NR, Blunham GP and Willington GP.

In the second winter period, recorded from sites not tabulated at Blunham GP and Willington GP, where there were 50 on 25th December.

A number of sites held fewer of this species than in former years, notably Luton Hoo and the now largely drained Rookery South CIP.

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 | 22 | 6 | - | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | 11 | - |
| Dunstable STW | 27 | 35 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 18 | 20 | 21 | 15 | - |
| Woburn Park | 61 | 42 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | n/c | 1 | 1 | 14 | 34 | 38 |
| Southill Lake | 85 | 22 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | n/c | 3 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 27 |
| Brogborough Lake | 33 | 4 | 5 | - | 1 | 1 | 5 | 21 | 57 | 73 | 89 | 314 |
| Millbrook Pilling NR | 29 | 13 | 3 | - | - | - | 10 | 3 | 8 | 31 | 215 | 162 |
| Rookery South CIP | - | - | 5 | - | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| Rookery North CIP | 8 | 27 | 10 | - | - | - | - | - | 21 | 39 | - | 10 |
| Stewartby CP | 3 | 3 | 7 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 | - |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|
| Coronation CIP | 19 | 10 | 12 | - | - | - | 4 | - | 3 | 19 | 24 | 13 |
| Chimney Corner CIP | - | - | - | - | - | - | 13 | 16 | - | - | 32 | 35 |
| Priory CP | 189 | 213 | 120 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 127 | 420 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 60 | - | 12 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 5+ | 12 | 4+ | 19 |
| Radwell GP | - | 48 | 55 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 40 | 66 |

Ferruginous Duck *A. nyroca*

A very rare vagrant from Eastern Europe.

The first county records since 1986 were at Priory CP during November and December. A first winter male was present from 17th to 29th November.

Remarkably, a second bird, a female, positively identified as different by eye colour, with photographic support, was at the same site from 15th December into 1999.

These are the seventh and eighth records since 1946.

As with all rare waterfowl, there is a possibility of escapes from collections, and for this reason records of this species were not assessed nationally in recent years, but this has changed from 1998, and both records have been submitted to the BBRC.

Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*

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

Recorded as breeding at Luton Hoo (3 pairs), Dunstable STW, Battlesden Lake, Blunham GP (5 pairs), Willington GP and Radwell GP, though probably also bred elsewhere.

In the first winter period widely distributed in moderate numbers, with no three figure counts. Also recorded away from the sites tabulated at East Hyde, Tiddenfoot WP, Lidlington CIP, Warren Villas NR and the Kempston Bypass Pits in small numbers.

In the second winter period Brogborough Lake was the principal site with numbers peaking in December. Also recorded away from the sites tabulated at East Hyde, Lidlington CIP and the Kempston Bypass Pits.

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 |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Luton Hoo | - | 86 | - | 47 | - | 39 | 6+ | - | - | 57 | 28 | - |
| Dunstable STW | 36 | 29 | 16 | 14 | 16 | 16 | 21 | 19 | 20 | 14 | 18 | - |
| Woburn Park | 69 | 37 | 12 | 22 | 3 | 4 | n/c | 16 | 30 | 57 | 53 | 67 |
| Southill Lake | 26 | 12 | 24 | 8 | 5 | 7 | n/c | 4 | 2 | 7 | 11 | 0 |
| Brogborough Lake | 85 | 57 | 46 | 14 | 9 | 25 | 15 | 36 | 156 | 132 | 166 | 285 |
| Millbrook Pill. NR | 34 | 18 | 95 | 8 | - | 12 | 29 | 44 | 9 | 16 | 157 | 121 |
| Rookery South CIP | 7 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 28 | 11 | 12 | 10 | 6 | - | - | - |
| Rookery North CIP | 2 | 22 | 2 | 17 | - | 9 | 15 | 18 | 36 | 28 | - | 24 |
| Stewartby CP | 19 | 19 | - | 11 | - | - | - | 17 | 18 | 15 | 21 | 29 |
| Coronation CIP | 25 | 39 | 22 | 18 | 12 | 16 | 41 | 50 | 27 | 24 | 76 | 47 |
| Chimney Corner CIP | 34 | 47 | 28 | 16 | 8 | 18 | 69 | 62 | 32 | - | 37 | 19 |
| Blunham GP | - | - | 28 | c.45 | 30+ | 11 | 25 | c.20 | - | - | 46 | - |
| Priory CP | 26 | 23 | 16 | 12 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 3 | 11 | 22 |
| Bromham Lake LNR | 24 | 15 | 13 | 6 | 2 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 15 | 37 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | - | - | 50 | - | 22 | - | 4 | - | 8+ | 12 | 15+ | 23 |
| Radwell GP | - | - | 51 | - | - | - | - | 85 | - | - | 48 | 40 |

Tufted Duck x Scaup *A. fuligula* x *A. marila*

A female plumaged individual considered to be a hybrid between these two species and accepted as such by the county rarities panel was at Bromham Lake LNR on 15th November but had gone by the 20th (PA).

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.

A male was at Stewartby CP on 3rd January (AWH, SWH), with perhaps a different individual there on 10th and 11th January and also on 18th and 24th January (RJB, LC, AG, KMS, PS). A female was at Priors CP on 5th January (DK). Another female was at Bromham Lake LNR from 14th January to 2nd February, and though absent on 5th February returned on the 15th and remained until 28th March (PA).

In the second winter period an eclipse male was at Brogborough Lake on 11th, 12th and 14th December (LC, KBS, ST).

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

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

A typical small spring passage occurred in the second half of April, with a record from each of the two largest clay pits in the Marston Vale. Four males were at Stewartby CP on 17th April (LC, RAN) and three males and a female at Brogborough Lake on the 19th (LC, RM, RAN, PS). There was also a single male at Radwell GP on 16th May (MR).

In autumn a female at Dunstable STW on 27th September was the second site record (RD, PT).

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

A regular winter visitor in moderate numbers.

As usual, Brogborough Lake was the main site, with exceptional numbers in January and February, the maximum being 62 on 1st January. Away from the sites tabulated, in the first winter period there were up to twelve at Radwell GP in January, and two at Stewartby CP and two at Chimney Corner CIP on 18th January. On 5th February, 32 at Radwell GP was an excellent count away from Brogborough Lake. Small numbers were at Blunham GP, with a maximum of four in the first winter period, and as none were noted between April and November, these could be wild birds with the former released population no longer present. The last in spring were two at Harrold-Odell CP on 23rd April.

In the second winter period the earliest were four at Brogborough Lake on 11th October. Away from the sites tabulated, four redheads were at Bromham Lake LNR from 8th to 20th November and another at Millbrook Pillinge NR on the 16th. There was a small influx in the south of the county in late November, with one at Tiddenfoot WP on the 17th, a redhead at Dunstable STW on the 21st, and two at Luton Hoo on the 22nd. A male was at Lower Drakelow Pond Woburn on 29th November and 5th December. Seven were at Willington GP on 29th November and four were at Chimney Corner CIP on 6th December, and there was a single at Radwell GP on 11th December.

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

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Brogborough Lake | 62 | 56 | 28 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | 11 | 21 |
| Priors CP | 3 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 15 | 13 | 14 | 12 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | 12 |

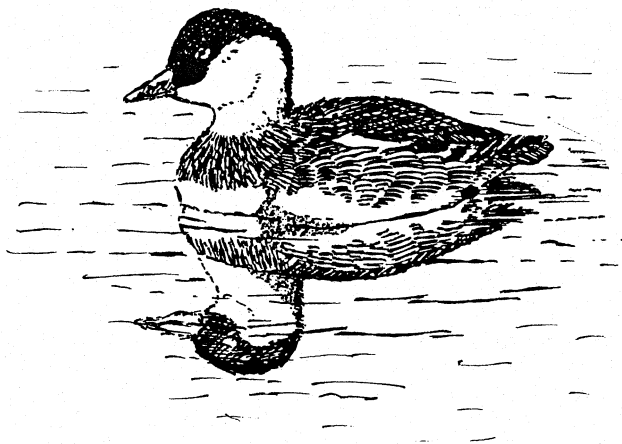
Smew *Mergus albellus*

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

As usual, all records are published.

In the first winter period two redheads were at Woburn Park on 1st January (LB). A male and two redheads were at Radwell GP on 24th January (RJB), and in the Ivel valley there were two males at New Road GP Sandy from 22nd to 27th January (NW), also recorded at Warren Villas NR on the 27th (R&BM), with one at that site on the 31st (R&BM) and two there on 1st February (SDH). Finally a male and a redhead were at Brogborough Lake on 12th February (PHw).

In the second winter period there were no records until December, when a small influx occurred, mainly at Priory CP (DK, TPl et al). The first was a redhead at that site on 4th December, remaining until the 7th. From the 8th to the 12th two redheads were present, with one remaining until the 20th. On the 21st one observer recorded a male and two redheads and another two males and one redhead. One of each remained until the 26th, after which a single redhead was present to the year end. Additionally there were two redheads at Willington GP on 6th December (R&BM) and a redhead at Radwell GP on 20th December (TPl).



Smew

Kevin Sharpe

Goosander *M. merganser*

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

Widely recorded in the first winter period with the largest numbers at Grovebury SP and Woburn Park. At the former site there were 25 on 1st January and 21 on the 11th, rising to a peak count of 26 on 25th January, and still nine on 15th March. At Woburn there were 15 on 1st January and eleven including four males the following day, and smaller numbers through the rest of the month until a maximum of 18 on 8th February, with three still present on 3rd March. In the same area also recorded at Eversholt Lake from January to early March with a peak of seven on 6th February, and also singles on the Grand Union canal at Linslade on 23rd January and Dunstable STW on the 24th.

In the east of the county there were about seven including a male at Blunham GP on 1st January, with smaller numbers there on other dates up to 28th March, and eight including two males at Warren Villas NR on 4th January, with four there on the

tenth and a male and four redheads on 5th March. At New Road GP Sandy there was also a peak count of eight, this time on 19th February, and these could well have been the same party. The last record at that site was three on 15th March.

The species was scarcer in the Marston Vale, with two redheads at Brogborough Lake on 5th January, two flying over the same site on the 11th and a male at Rookery CIP on the 6th the only records. At Priory CP small numbers were regularly present from 1st January to 21st March with the peak counts four on 18th January and five in early February, there was a male at Radwell GP on 11th January, and at Harrold-Odell CP small numbers were present throughout January and February to 22nd March, with the high counts five on the latter date, ten including four males on 30th January and twelve including three males on 5th February.

The final records in spring were of two over Blunham on 28th March, and a redhead at Radwell GP on 7th April, apart from an interesting record of a female on the Ouse at Church End Kempston on 13th May, which it was thought could have been prospecting for nest sites.

The first in autumn was at Grovebury SP on 8th November. The species was less widespread in the second winter period, but nearly as numerous at Woburn Park which was again the principal site with the first there two males on 21st November and a peak count of 21 including eleven males on 29th November. There were also up to four at Grovebury SP in this period. A single male was at Willington GP on 15th November, and after a male at Priory CP on 20th November there were three or four birds there for most of the rest of the year, with a peak count of ten including three males on 18th December. At Harrold-Odell CP the first returning bird was a male on 19th November and the highest count was four, all males, on 30th November.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

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

This species may become subject to control measures due to the possibility of it interbreeding with the rare and threatened White-headed Duck in Spain and Eastern Europe, but it seems that even without such measures the county population has declined notably following the drainage of the important site at Rookery South CIP. It was recorded with any regularity only at Luton Hoo, Southill Lake and Chimney Corner CIP, as tabulated below, and breeding was recorded only at Luton Hoo where there was a female with three young on 5th July. Elsewhere there was a female type at Blunham GP on 10th January, there having formerly been a released population at this site, and another at Harrold-Odell CP on 24th January. There were a scatter of April records with three at Eversholt Lake on the 16th, one at Warren Villas NR on the 24th, and two males and a female at Woburn Park on the 25th. A male was at Brogborough Lake on 10th May, two males at Radwell GP on 5th July, and a female type at Dunstable STW from 6th to 8th September was unusual at that site. Finally there were two more female types, at Willington GP on 10th October and Radwell GP on 15th November.

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 | - | 3 | - | 5 | - | 5 | 10 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 6 | - |
| Southill Lake | - | 1 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Stewartby CP | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | - |
| Chimney Corner CIP | - | - | - | - | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 4 |

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

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

The first of the year was one over The Lodge, Sandy on 27th March (BM). No wing-tags were seen by the observers. A well-watched bird wandered around the Old Warden area from 5th to at least 26th April (MS *et al*). This bird's wing-tags enabled it to be identified as being from Spanish stock and released in Northamptonshire in July 1997. Another flew over the well-watched Blows Downs on 16th April (LC).

There were more records in the second half of 1998 compared to other years. One flew over Houghton Regis on 27th August (RJB), another was at Sundon Park on 12th November (RJB). The final record of the year concerned one at Sutton on 14th November (GT).

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

A rare passage migrant.

There was one record for 1998, a female at Knotting Green on 31st August and 1st September. This was found by observers looking for the next species, a unique event for Bedfordshire of two species of Harrier being present at one site at the same time (LC, RAN, PS, JDS *et al*).

Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus*

A rare visitor, mainly in winter.

All of 1998's records come from the well-watched extensive area of set-aside at Knotting Green. A female was present from 8th to 22nd March (JDS), and a juvenile from 31st August to at least 21st September (JDS *et al*). The final record of the year was an excellent adult male present from 29th December into 1999 (TPI, JDS *et al*).

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

A rare resident, often difficult to locate and therefore under-recorded.

Birds were reported from four sites in the county, and probably two to four pairs attempted to breed. No breeding was confirmed but displaying birds were observed. Only one bird was reported away from the traditional sites, a migrant over Blows Downs on 23rd March (LC).

Sparrowhawk *A. nisus*

A widespread resident.

There is a healthy population of Sparrowhawks in the county and observers continue to report most sightings. At Luton Hoo four to five pairs bred and a pair nested again in a Kempston garden raising at least one young. Other breeding sites were East Hyde, Molliver's Wood, Bromham, and Odell Great Wood where four or five birds displayed on the 28th March.

At Priory CP there was a slight reduction of records in 1998 with birds being recorded on 148 bird days compared to 172 in 1997 and 186 in 1996. There were also very few records in the breeding season from Pegsdon Hills NR or Stopsley Common.

At Dunstable STW prey taken included Collared Doves, Moorhens, Starlings, Wood Pigeons, finches, thrushes, tits and wagtails. Some observers consider that this species is perhaps our commonest raptor; however, is this because birdwatchers submit details of Sparrowhawks but tend to neglect records of Kestrels?

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

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

1998 was another excellent year for this species in Bedfordshire. The majority of the

41 submitted record cards came from traditional sites. At Southill Park two pairs bred raising one young. Another pair bred at the nearby Shuttleworth Estate and a maximum of eleven individuals were seen in the Raptor Triangle in early October. Displaying birds were also noted at the nearby Exeter Wood.

At Potton Wood two juveniles and an adult were seen on the 27th July and at The Lodge, Sandy birds were recorded every month from March to December. A pair bred at Eversholt raising one young. At Battlesden another pair bred raising two young. Breeding was recorded also at Ravensdell Wood, Studham. Two adults and two juveniles were at Husborne Crawley from 5th August for a few weeks. Birds also probably bred at Briar Stockings. At Luton Hoo it is probably only a matter of time before they breed; up to four were present there on several occasions.

Passage birds included four at Davis's Spinney, Turvey on 3rd September and five at Barton Hills on 13th September. Common Buzzards were reported from at least another 17 sites, although there was some duplication of records for this well recorded species.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A rare, but annual, migrant.

The recent increase in records of this exciting species continues in 1998. One over Blows Downs on 5th April (SS) was also seen later at Rookery South CIP (PS). One flew north along the Great Ouse at Turvey on the 15th May (JM).

In the autumn one over Willington GP on the 16th August flew off westwards towards Priory CP (R.&BM). The last two records of the year came from the latter site, one on the 13th September (ECN) and another flying south to its wintering quarters on 1st October (DK).

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

A common resident.

There appears to be little change in the status of this species. At Priory CP a slight decline was noted, it was recorded here on 110 bird days in 1998, compared to 117 in 1997 and 130 in 1996. There were five to six pairs at Luton Hoo and the largest count of the year was of seven over cut fields and set-aside at Pulloxhill on 12th August.

Merlin *F. columbarius*

A rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

There were fewer records in 1998 than in the previous year. A male was at Rookery South CIP on 2nd January (KMS). Another male flew over Blows Downs on 7th April (LC), and yet another male was seen twice at the same site on the unusual date of 20th September (LC). One, not sexed, was typically seen briefly in Luton Town Centre on 7th October (JCP).

Hobby *F. subbuteo*

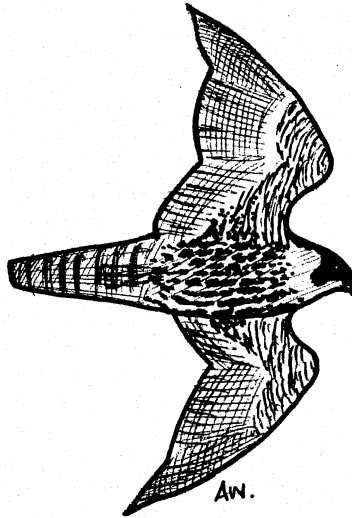
A scarce breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

This attractive species drew as much observer interest as ever. The first of the year was at Blows Downs on the 24th April; the last was at Brogborough on the 4th October. It was suspected of breeding at two sites. However, several experienced observers commented that they saw fewer in 1998 compared with previous years.

Peregrine *F. peregrinus*

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

A male in the Rookery CIP area was seen on 14th and 15th February (KMS, PT). A female was at the same site on 5th April (PH). One was at Moat Farm, Turvey on



Peregrine

Andy White

10th March (JM). Another, also unsexed, was over Blows Downs on 4th April (RD).

In the second winter period, a female was at Radwell GP on 28th November (MR), but full descriptions are awaited for two birds at Rookery South CIP in August and September.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

A widespread and common resident.

There appears to be little change in the status of this species. No Chukar *A. chukar*, or hybrids, were reported once again in 1998.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

A declining resident species.

The largest coveys reported were 17 on 18th August at Coronation CIP, 15 on 3rd September at Sundon Hills and 22 on 14th November at Briars Stocking. The well monitored population at Stopsley Common, Galley and Warden Hills continues to decline. In his traditional Christmas count JCP noted that the numbers observed were dismal.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

An irregular summer visitor and rare breeder.

The first for 1998 was heard at Pegsdon Hills NR on the early date of 27th April (MB). One was flushed west of Felmersham on 3rd May (MR). At Pegsdon Hills NR up to three birds were heard from 5th June until 19th July (MB *et al*). One was heard at Biggleswade Common on 16th June (GG) and just south of The Lodge next day (MJE). Finally, one was near Flitwick Wood from 16th to 18th July (JPK).

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

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

The largest group was of over 100 at Breakheart Hill on 10th October.

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 was finished in 1997; some areas that were still uncovered were surveyed in 1998. The results of this study can be seen elsewhere in this Bedfordshire Naturalist.

On the Luton Hoo Estate only three males and one female were seen. The gamekeepers report that they did breed successfully but, because of the lack of females, it will not be long before this species has disappeared from this former stronghold. John Adams has not heard any calling males in Chicksands Wood for three consecutive years, nor has the forest ranger.

Along the Greensand Ridge there were at least 41 at six sites. As most of these were calling birds, located during the spring, it is estimated that the population here is nearly 100 birds (KMS, PT and PC). At other sites there were at least three males and a female at Maulden Woods, a male at Charle Wood and three males at Wavendon Heath. A male near Eversholt on 23rd May was at a new location for this species.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

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

At Flitwick Moor birds were recorded in every month of the year apart from May. At Priory CP there was a maximum of four in the first winter period, the last one was present on 4th April, and three in the second winter period from 17th September onwards. Other sites which recorded birds in the first winter period were Brogborough, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Harrold-Odell CP, Luton Hoo, Rookery CP, Stewartby CP (2), Warren Villas NR and Willington GP. In the second winter period there were birds at Blunham, Dunstable STW, Houghton Regis, Southill Lake (2) and Stewartby CP (2).

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A common and widespread resident.

Of the ten pairs that bred at Dunstable STW most were predated. The highest count of 1998 was of 50 at Luton Hoo Estate on 15th February.

Coot *Fulica atra*

A breeder and very common winter visitor.

This species was also predated at Dunstable STW; of the eleven pairs that nested only four or five birds fledged. The highest counts for this species from selected sites were as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Luton Hoo | 226 on 25th October |
| Woburn Lakes | 104 in December |
| Brogborough Lake | 246 in November and 276 in December |
| Millbrook Pillinge NR | 125 in January |
| Stewartby CP | 106 in December |
| Blunham GP | 137 on 24th October |
| Harrold-Odell CP | 125 on 25th July and this increased to 397 by 3rd December |

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

A regular but uncommon passage migrant and recently a rare breeder.

First of the year was a pair at Willington GP on 8th March, where two pairs were present all summer. Although the only proof of breeding was two fledged young seen with one of the pairs on 2nd August, both pairs probably attempted to breed. The final record at this site was on 5th August.

Elsewhere in the Ouse Valley between one and three were noted monthly from 18th March–31st July at Priory CP, and near Roxton GP on 28th June and over Roxton on 1st July; these records may relate to the Willington birds. Singles were at Radwell GP on 7th and 18th April, Harrold-Odell CP on 18th April, and Rookery CIP on 14th and 25th May with three on 1st August.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

A regular passage migrant and rare localised breeder.

The first migrant of the year was at Dunstable STW on 20th March, with peak numbers on the late date of 24th May when nine were noted. Elsewhere during the spring lesser numbers were recorded from 13 widely scattered wetland sites; a single bird at Whipsnade Wildlife Park on 1st April was of note and at the well-watched Priory CP one on 29th March was the only record of the year.

Breeding records as follows: Dunstable STW, three pairs laid eggs, all predated, no young to flying stage for the first time since wader scrape established in 1993; Rookery CIP, at least two pairs raised four young; Houghton Regis ChP, two pairs probably bred, no young seen; Ledburn Road SP, Leighton Buzzard, a pair displayed; Willington GP, two pairs, four young noted; Radwell GP, Warren Villas NR and Manor Farm Trout Fishery Caldecote, presence only.

Autumn passage noted mainly at Rookery CIP, Willington GP, Houghton Regis ChP and at Dunstable STW where the final migrant was late, on 10th September.

Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula*

A regular passage migrant and rare localised breeder.

A poor year with records from only five sites. The main site, Rookery CIP started with three on 14th February, followed by a steady, mainly single figure spring passage with highs of 12 on 23rd April and 30 on 12th May; several birds summered but breeding was not recorded; a strong autumn passage peaked in July with a top count of 37 on 16th and the final migrant on 13th September.

Elsewhere, at Willington GP an early migrant on 14th February, with a pair raising two young on 30th May and the final sighting on 9th August. Dunstable STW had just four records all year between 2nd May and 10th September, and there were two August records each from Priory CP and Chimney Corner CIP.

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant.

The largest flocks during the first winter period were in the north of the county, with up to 2000 at Radwell in January and c.3000 at nearby Thurleigh Airfield, and 2000+ at Willington GP. Other flocks of note included: 1500+ at Cople, c.1400 near Bedford STW; c.1000 Rookery CIP; 465 at Shillington; 250 over Santa Pod Racetrack; 121 at Warden Hills. During the spring a flock of c.1000 in the Blunham area included many in summer plumage, but all had moved on by the end of April.

Early returning migrants were over Cople and over Dunstable STW on 27th August, followed by groups of c.50 into October. Numbers climbed to about 1300 by November near Bedford STW with c.2000 Beeston area the same month; the same flock moved freely along the Ivel Valley and peaked at 3000+ at Seddington on 30th December. Other second winter aggregations were as follows: c.500 Harrowden; 250 Stotfold; 240 Radwell GP; 140 Southill; 662 Cranfield Airfield. There were many other smaller flocks scattered across the county during both winter periods.

Grey Plover *P. squatarola*

A scarce, mainly spring passage migrant.

Once again Rookery CIP enjoyed a near clean sweep with a fine run of spring records, many in breeding plumage. First was one on 23rd April followed by three on 29th. During May as follows: 3rd, three; 11th–12th, one; 13th, one; 14th–15th, three; 16th–17th, two; and finally one on 23rd (PS, LC, KMS *et al.*).

The only other record was two adults in full breeding plumage at Dunstable STW on 27th April.(PT).

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

A declining breeder, common passage migrant and winter visitor.

Up to 2500 during the first winter period at Rookery CIP. Other large counts as follows: Willington, *c.*1000; near Bedford STW, up to 1000; Biggleswade area, *c.*1000; Grovebury SP and Radwell *c.*1000. Many other flocks, hundreds strong, were reported from across the county.

Breeding was reported from only ten locations, which is unrepresentative of the county population; 17 pairs at Luton Hoo and six pairs each at Northhill and Rookery CIP were the top counts. Several observers noted the continuing decline: breeding didn't occur at East Hyde, Dunstable STW and Stopsley Common due to the crops being too high following a mild winter.

During the second winter period numbers built up at the same districts as early in the year with the flock in the Ivel Valley peaking at *c.*2000 by December, while several flocks in the mid-hundreds were recorded around Cranfield and the Marston Vale CIPs.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

A rare passage migrant.

There was only one acceptable record; one in breeding plumage at Rookery CIP 11th–13th May (KMS, AW *et al.*).

Sanderling *C. alba*

A rare, spring, passage migrant.

The first two were at Rookery CIP on 7th May (KO) followed by eight on 20th and one on 21st (PS, KMS *et al.*). During the return passage, again at Rookery CIP a single from 16th July–5th August (KMS *et al.*). Finally one at Willington GP 13th September (KMS).

Little Stint *C. minuta*

A scarce passage migrant.

All records mainly from Rookery CIP: an adult 18th–21st May (AW, KMS *et al.*), followed by two on 23rd (PS *et al.*). In the autumn one on 20th July (KMS), an adult on 4th September (LC) and finally two juveniles on 5th (PT).

Temminck's Stint *C. temminckii*

A very rare passage migrant.

The first ever multiple county record occurred at Dunstable STW on 11th May, when two adults in breeding plumage gave first class views from the hide overlooking the wader scrape to *c.*20 county birders (TD, PT *et al.*). These were only the ninth and tenth county records since the first at Bedford STW in 1942. The only previous record at Dunstable was in 1979.

Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*

A rare passage migrant.

All records from Rookery CIP: one, 20th–24th July (KMS *et al.*); three, 29th–31st August and a flock of seven on 3rd September (PS, RAN, LC *et al.*).

Dunlin *C. alpina*

A common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.

Winter records from January–March involved up to five birds at Rookery CIP, Stewartby CP, Dunstable STW and Willington GP. At Rookery CIP there was a near continuous presence from April to the final bird on 30th September involving groups of up to 13 in the May peak and a high of 29 on 5th August (PA *et al*). Elsewhere noted as follows in the second half of the year: Dunstable STW, 13 dates until 22nd September including adult of the race *C. a. schinzii* in August; Coronation CIP, eight on 11th August; Willington, four on 13th September; Harrold–Odell CP, one on 26th August; Houghton Regis ChP, one on 31st October; and finally singles at Priory CP on 14th and 30th November.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

An annual passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.

Rookery CIP claimed the year's first on 19th March, followed by one on 27th, four on 4th April and one from 11th–13th May. In the autumn as follows: 4th–5th August, one; 6th, two; 26th, three; 29th, six; 30th, four; 31st, two; 3rd September, six; 4th, nine; 6th, eight; 13th, five; and 14th, four. Elsewhere in the Marston Vale, Coronation CIP had two on 26th August and four on 13th September, and at Stewartby CP two on 19th September and one on 3rd October.

Dunstable STW had a poor year with two March records and two in the autumn; extreme dates 23rd March and 24th September. Priory CP logged two over on 25th August and a party of ten flew over the nearby Octagon Farm GP on 13th September.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

A scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

During the first winter period the main site, at Houghton Regis ChP held only one bird in January. Singles were noted at Rookery CIP for two weeks from 1st January, at Willington GP on 21st January, East Hyde on 5th February, and at Wavendon Heath on 22nd March. A passage bird was on the wader scrape at Dunstable STW on 18th April.

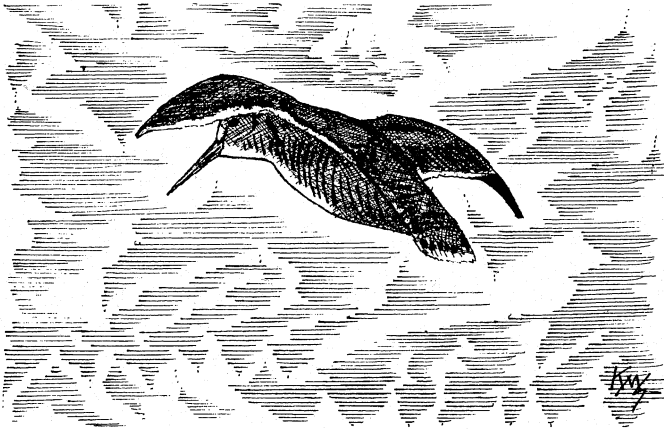
A single returned to Houghton Regis ChP on 24th October, where it was joined by a second bird in November into the New Year (DM). One and two were flushed from Grovebury SP on 1st and 22nd November respectively, and singles were at Warren Villas NR on 28th November and at Willington GP on 21st December.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

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

Another terrible year with only three sites recording double figure counts: Rookery CIP, 15 in January; Houghton Regis ChP, 12 in December, and Grovebury SP, 10 in March. Elsewhere noted in smaller numbers on more than one occasion at East Hyde, Willington GP, Dunstable STW, Knotting, Coronation CIP and Stewartby CP. Isolated records also from Ledburn Road SP, Pulloxhill, Caddington, Henlow, Dunton, Hollington Marsh, Bromham Lake LNR, Felmersham NR, Potsgrove and Linslade.

A pair held territory at Rookery North CIP during the breeding season and was the only record of the year. This species looks unlikely to survive as a breeding bird into the new millennium. Please submit all Snipe records in future.



Woodcock

Kevin Sharpe

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

An occasional winter visitor and localised breeder.

During the first winter period noted as follows: Coronation CIP, two in January; Odell Great Wood, one in January; Priory CP, one in March; Kidney Wood, Luton, one in March. In the latter part of the year, in November–December recorded at, Potton, Felmersham, Linslade, Biggleswade (flushed from garden), Coronation CIP, Houghton Regis ChP, Priory CP, and Turvey.

Evidence of breeding from roding birds at: Maulden Woods, Palmers Wood, The Lodge, Home Wood, Flitwick Moor, Wavendon Heath and Sheerhatch Wood.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

An uncommon passage migrant.

During the spring the first record was one at Rookery CIP on 26th March, followed by another on 2nd April and finally a summer plumage bird from 14th–16th May (KMS *et al*). On 17th April at Priory CP an extraordinary sight greeted one observer when a flock of 88 flew over the park from the NE (DK).

On the return passage all records were from Rookery CIP: 8th–9th July, one; 21st, one; 22nd, seven; 23rd, 20; 24th, four; 25th–28th, one; 29th, two; 31st, 12; 2nd August, two; 5th, three; 6th, one; (KMS, PS *et al*).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

An uncommon passage migrant.

A poor year involving only eight birds: Rookery CIP, four on 17th May, followed by singles in the autumn on 15th July and 6th September. At Houghton Regis ChP singles on 20th and 21st July.

Curlew *N. arquata*

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

The first spring record was at Rookery CIP on 20th March, followed by five on 21st, singles on five dates until 26th April and one on 26th June. Elsewhere in the clay pits singles at Coronation CIP in April, August and September, and finally at Stewartby CP on 17th September.

Away from the clay vale Harrold–Odell CP, Priory CP, The Lodge and Whipsnade Zoo all had single passage birds overhead, while Dunstable STW noted birds in April,

September and finally on 17th November.

There were no reports of breeding this year.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

A rare, mainly autumn passage migrant.

At Rookery CIP one on 22nd July was followed by singles on 2nd, 26th and 31st August and three 5th September (KMS, PS *et al*). A juvenile at Dunstable STW from 2nd–8th September showed well to many observers on the Sunday open morning, and was also photographed (AW, PT *et al*).

Redshank *T. totanus*

A common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor and breeder.

A bird wintered at Rookery CIP during January–February followed by a strong spring passage peaking to a double figure maximum of 11 in late March. At least three pairs breeding and young were seen. Most birds had left by late August and there was one December record and three at nearby Stewartby CP.

At Dunstable STW the first bird arrived on 22nd February with a peak passage of 12 on 29th March. Two pairs bred but failed to raise young to flying stage and all the adults had departed by early August.

Elsewhere passage was noted at eleven other wetland sites with evidence of breeding at Chimney Corner and Coronation CIPs, Manor Farm Trout Fishery Caldecote and Willington GP (two pairs, unfledged young seen). Late winter birds noted at Priory CP, Willington GP and four at Radwell GP on 28th November.

Even allowing for under recording the county breeding population is probably no more than 20 pairs, with a very poor success rate.

Greenshank *T. nebularia*

A scarce spring and regular autumn migrant.

The first spring record was at Rookery CIP on 23rd April with another on 5th May. Radwell GP had one on 2nd May, while at Dunstable STW a superb adult graced the wader scrape from 21st–25th May.

In the autumn one at Coronation CIP on 12th July was the first returning migrant, followed by 12 bird days until 1st September and a maximum of five on 5th August. At nearby Rookery CIP, where conditions were perfect, waders were noted on 25 days between 13th July and 30th September; late August was the peak period with a top count of nine on 15th. Dunstable STW logged three birds on 15 dates between 23rd July–6th September and a flock of six briefly on 10th August. At Willington GP one–three birds recorded between 4th August–22nd September, and at nearby Priory CP and Octagon Farm GP birds on eight dates until 9th October. Single records also received from Harrold–Odell CP, Houghton Regis ChP, The Lodge and finally at Warren Villas NR on 1st November.

Green Sandpiper *T. ochropus*

A regular passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.

Winter records from Rookery and Coronation CIPs, Willington GP, Radwell GP, Stewartby CP, Priory CP, Bedford and Dunstable STWs. Spring passage was light and noted from six sites, most probably late wintering birds.

More typical was a widespread return passage across the county's wetlands peaking in mid–August: at Dunstable STW noted from 16th June and a high of 12; a maximum of nine at Willington GP and five at Bedford STW were the only other notable counts. One flushed off the heath at The Lodge by a Sparrowhawk was at an unusual site, and one of a group of three at Willington in September had a dark rump!

Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola*

A scarce passage migrant.

A poor year with only two records: one at Dunstable STW on 12th August (RJB) and at Rookery CIP on 6th September (PS).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

A common passage migrant.

A wide spread of records from across the county's wetlands. One was at Willington GP in both winter periods, making probably the first migrant one at Dunstable STW on 14th April with records from 11 other sites. During the autumn a count of 11 was the maximum at Rookery CIP, with peaks of eight at Priory CP and Dunstable STW. The final migrant of the year was at the latter site on 31st October.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

A scarce passage migrant.

A lean year involving probably two birds at Rookery CIP from 24th April–3rd May (JB, RAN *et al*) and 12th–13th May (LC *et al*), and two together at Willington GP on 17th May (DHB).

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

A scarce visitor, occurring mainly in winter.

All of the records came from the brick pits. A first-winter was seen at Rookery CIP and Stewartby CP on 4th and 5th January (KO, PT). It reappeared at Rookery CIP on 25th March when it was aged as a first-summer (PS). An adult stayed in the same area from 10th January to 1st March (LC, KMS, MT *et al*).

In the second winter period an adult was at Stewartby on 8th November (PS). A first-winter in the Brogborough area on 27th November and 11th December was the last of the year (KBS).

Little Gull *L. minutus*

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

1998 was a very poor year for this species. A second-winter, at Stewartby CP on 4th January, was the only winter record. The only spring and early summer records were as follows. A first-winter and an adult at Stewartby CP on 3rd April and a second-summer and two first-summer on 10th May. On 29th June a first-winter and an adult were at Rookery CIP, next day the first-winter had moved to Stewartby CP. The only other record of 1998 was a first-winter at Priory CP on 8th October.

Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*

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

Away from the vast roosts in the brick pits 1500+ were at Barton Road, Luton on 30th August and 2900 were at Priory CP in the same month. At East Hyde 308 were counted in October, and 1084 were at Houghton Regis in November. Ten pairs bred at Coronation CIP raising ten to twelve young. A complete albino was in the roost at Stewartby CP on 15th January.

Common Gull *L. canus*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant.

The highest count of the year was 550 at Stopsley Common on 3rd January. The only records for July were three at Rookery CIP and one at Priory CP. In December there were 225 at Rookery South CIP, 239 at Brogborough Lake, 253 at Priory CP on the 12th and 400 at Stopsley Common on the 27th.

A partial albino was observed twice at Rookery South CIP in March.

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.

No high counts from the brick pits were submitted for this species. One at Rookery South CIP on 19th March was considered probably be of the fuscus race; it had a very dark mantle. Seventy south of Priory CP on 7th November was the highest count submitted to the recorder. No breeding birds were observed in 1998.

Yellow-legged Gull *L. cachinnans*

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

There were a number of reports of this species during the year, but no supporting details have been submitted and as a result no records have yet been accepted by the county rarities panel. An adult was claimed at Rookery South CIP in March and April. A maximum of eight were reported from the same site in August.

Herring Gull *L. argentatus*

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

For the third year running a Herring Gull paired with a Lesser Black-backed Gull bred at Rookery South CIP. Probably three eggs were laid, but the outcome of these is not known. In December 586 were counted at Brogborough, 519 at Stewartby, 348 at Rookery south CIP and 259 at Coronation CIP.

Iceland Gull *L. glaucoides*

A rare but recently annual winter visitor to the county.

An adult was present in the Stewartby area until at least 22nd March (LC, KMS, PS *et al*), two adults were at Rookery South CIP on 15th March (RAN, PN, PS). At Priory CP a first-winter was present on 25th April (DK). No birds were reported for the second winter period.

Glaucous Gull *L. hyperboreus*

A rare but annual winter visitor.

In a poor year for this species, there was a second-winter present at various sites in the brick pits until 28th February (LC, KMS, PS *et al*) and an adult on fields opposite Lidlington CIP on 25th January (KMS). The only other record for the year concerned an adult seen in the same area on 29th October (RJB) and 6th December (KMS).

Gull sp. *Larus* sp.

Once again the all white gull was seen at several sites in the brick pits. It continues to confuse observers.

Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*

A regular winter visitor and passage migrant.

The highest counts received were of 111 at Rookery South CIP, and 158 at Brogborough Lake, in December.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

A scarce winter visitor and passage migrant.

An adult was at Stewartby CP on 3rd and 4th January (LC, RAN, MT) and another adult was reported there on 2nd May (PS). The only other record for the year was of a first year bird at East Hyde on 24th October (MDR).

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandwichensis*

A scarce passage migrant.

One was present at Stewartby CP on 9th May (KMS). Four were reported at the same site on 23rd August, and four adults were at Priory CP on 27th September (DK).

Common Tern *S. hirundo*

A common passage migrant and regular breeding species.

The first of the year was at Priory CP on 6th April. This site also had the highest count of the year, 44 on 12th May.

At Bromham Lake LNR six pairs raised 15 young. Two pairs bred at Coronation raising five young and another two pairs bred at the nearby Rookery South CIP raising three young. At Dunstable STW three pairs attempted to breed but the five chicks were all taken. The only other site where breeding was recorded, although they no doubt bred at other locations, was Willington GP where two pairs bred. The last of the year was at Priory CP on 6th October.

Arctic Tern *S. paradisaea*

A regular, predominantly spring migrant.

The first record of the year was of four birds at Stewartby CP. On the 27th April three were at Priory CP. There was a heavy passage of this elegant species in early May. At Priory CP there were 20 on the 1st, 151 passed through on the next day including one flock of 99, there were twelve on the 3rd, four on the 4th, three on the 5th, eight on the 10th and six on the 12th. At Stewartby CP 60 present on the 2nd May had reduced to ten on the next day. Also on the 3rd May 26 were at the nearby Rookery South CIP.

Twenty-four at Dunstable STW on 11th May were later relocated at Rookery South CIP and Stewartby CP where they had increased by two additional birds. The only autumn report was of a juvenile at Radwell GP on 5th September.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

A regular spring and autumn passage migrant.

As usual the majority of the records were in May. Three were at Stewartby CP on the 3rd and 4th of the month. Three more were there on the 9th and 10th. On the 11th two were at Stewartby CP and Rookery North CIP and another was at Brogborough, perhaps this was the Stewartby bird from the previous day. Two at Priory on the 12th May were still present on the 13th. Two were at Rookery South CIP on the 14th, two at Willington GP on the 15th May and one at Harrold-Odell CP on the 17th May.

Records reported in August were one at Stewartby CP on the 3rd and two at Coronation CIP on the 11th. One was at Stewartby CP on 4th September and another at Priory CP on the 5th when there was also a juvenile present at Radwell GP. Eleven at Dunstable STW on the 6th were only present for two minutes. The last record of the year was of one at Radwell GP on 13th September.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

A common resident.

The only large counts reported were; 50–100 in Dunstable town centre; c.150 Dunstable Road, Luton, c.80 Hitchin Road, Luton; and c.50 St George's Square, Luton.

Hardly any were noted in the fields near Priory CP, where once up to 600 were noted.

Stock Dove *C. oenas*

A common resident.

Remains common across the county. Large counts as follows: Priory CP, a high of 54 at roost in January and 52 on neighbouring fields in November; Stopsley Common, 20 in December; and 19 at Biggleswade in March.

Wood Pigeon *C. palumbus*

An abundant resident and winter visitor.

Large counts as follows: January, c.600 Barton Hill Farm, Chalgrave c.300, Potton c.200 and up to 300 at Priory CP. More reports of large flocks across the county in the latter part of the year, plus passage over Priory CP (c.200) and Houghton Regis ChP (484) in November. Dunstable STW, c.300 on nearby fields; c.1000 in the Linslade area; 300 at Turvey; c.200 at Tempsford and Stopsley Common; and 500 at Biddenham Fields.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

A common resident.

Numbers seem to be increasing across the county. Large counts as follows: up to 200 at Stopsley Common in September; a maximum of 70 at Village Farm Stanford in December; and 48 at Dunstable STW in October.

Turtle Dove *S. turtur*

A rapidly declining summer migrant.

After last year's appeal it was good to receive records from over 40 observers. However, this species can now only be described as thinly spread across the county, with most birders noting one or two singing here and there through the summer.

First to arrive was at Stewartby CP on 10th April, followed by the main passage county wide during the first half of May. Several pairs probably bred around the clay pit margins (confirmed at Stewartby and Brogborough) and along the Ouse at Willington and Blunham.

Of the well-watched sites Priory CP had birds on just five days outside the May period (DK *et al*), and at Dunstable STW, (where it did not breed) despite daily coverage in the autumn passage period, incredibly, not a single dove was noted (PT *et al*).

The chalk downs, traditionally a stronghold for this species, had mainly ones and twos at: Barton Hills; Pegsdon Hills NR, maximum of six displaying in June (JCP); Bradgers Hill, Wigmore Valley Park, Whitehill Farm, Blows Downs (one pair), Whipsnade Zoo and Totternhoe Knolls (MW, TG, CT, AR, MP *et al*).

The autumn passage was virtually non-existent with September migrants from just three sites with the final record on 19th at Whitehill Farm near Luton.

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.

One at Flitwick on 23rd June probably originated from a local aviary (RH).

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

A widespread summer visitor and passage migrant.

The first migrant was recorded at Dunstable STW on 18th April with the main arrival across the county by the month's end. Most local patch observers commented on how scarce this species was in 1998 and it would appear that it is going the way of many of our trans-Saharan migrants, i.e. into decline. Autumn passage was virtually non-existent and there were no September records. Dunstable STW had the last one on 18th August.

Please submit all records in future.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

A scarce resident.

Recorded from about 26 sites across the county with the majority of records from the river valleys and particularly the A1 corridor (NW *et al*). Breeding was confirmed at Willington Dovecote, Knotting and probably at Northill; the true breeding picture is difficult to discern, but judging from the spread of records there may be around 20 breeding pairs in the county.

The only reported road casualty was at Brogborough in March. Oddly enough the vast majority of owls were noted in the winter months of January and December. Remains a rare bird in the south of the county with reports from only three locations.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

A widespread resident.

A good spread of records from across the county. Most sightings noted from vehicles, perched prominently on posts and dead trees. The most commonly seen owl in south Bedfordshire where regularly observed at Pegsdon Hills NR (two pairs), Warden Hills, Luton Hoo (two/three pairs) and at Red Cow Farm, Bidwell (DG).

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

A reasonably common resident.

Although notoriously difficult to observe it remains our commonest owl, being well reported across the county. Young noted at Wavendon Heath, Tempsford Airfield and Knotting, and up to three pairs at Pegsdon Hills NR. One sitting on the chimney of the Airman Pub on the A600 struck an unusual pose while other singles were well-watched at The Lodge, Legrave Marsh and Swiss Gardens. Up to four were calling at Priory CP in September and at Luton Hoo the Headkeeper described it as 'common' (*per AJL*).

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

A rare resident and winter visitor.

A pair was present all year at Pegsdon Hills NR but breeding was not confirmed (JCP *et al*). Elsewhere, one calling at Bromham on 28th March (PA). Another gloomy year for this most nocturnal of birds.

Short-eared Owl *A. flammeus*

A scarce winter visitor.

The only first winter period record was a single being mobbed by a crow at Everton in February. In December there appeared to be a mini influx with up to three birds each, seen by many observers, at Knotting Green and Cardington Airfield, both sites having acres of rough grassland suitable for hunting. Also in December, on 8th, a moribund owl was found at Cople and taken to Monks Wood Research Station where the cause of death was prescribed as starvation.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

A rare summer visitor.

A pair present 'churring' at New Wavendon Heath throughout the breeding season probably bred. A male also present at Ramamere Heath on the Beds/Bucks border. (PS *et al*).

Swift *Apus apus*

A common passage migrant and summer visitor.

First of the year was at Priory CP on 22nd April followed by migrants at Dunstable and Harrold on the 23rd with the main arrival in mid May. In the spring counts of up to 100 at Rookery CIP and Stewartby CP. August flocks included c.100 over

Dunstable town centre, Dunstable STW, Radwell GP and a peak of c.750 at Priory CP. September migrants reported from six sites; including Dunstable STW, where an evening passage was noted over the lagoons until the final bird on 14th.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

A localised resident.

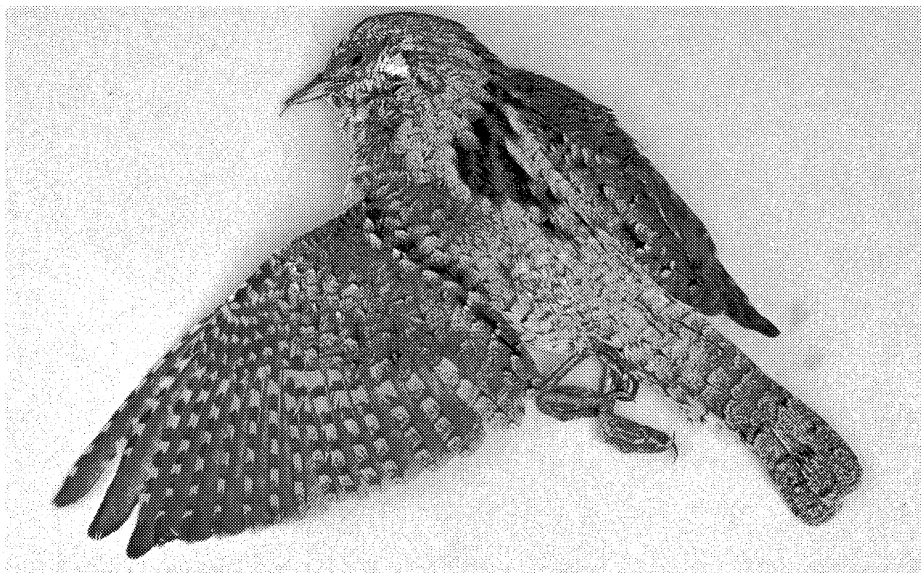
Widely reported from across the county's wetlands with breeding season records as follows: Priory CP (two young), Flitwick Moor, Potton Brook, Willington GP, East Hyde, Stewartby CP and Brogborough Lake, Rookery and Coronation ClPs, Old Linslade, Radwell, Bromham Lake LNR (young seen), Harrold-Odell CP, Radwell GP, Felmersham NR, Twin Bridges GP and South Mills. Many observers commented on the increase in sightings and it was well recorded during the winter months.

Good news for one of our most beautiful birds, which can probably be attributed to a combination of continuing mild winters and improving water quality.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

A very rare passage migrant

A corpse found in Dunstable on 7th September was photographed by the RSPB.



Corpse of Wryneck found in Dunstable

RSPB

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

A widespread resident.

Continues to be widely recorded throughout the county's woodlands, particularly on the Greensand and in parkland habitat. There seems little doubt that this spectacular bird is reaching peak numbers as marginal habitats, such as clay pit shelter belts are exploited. Several observers at well-watched sites commented on the rise in numbers: Priory CP, noted on 450 occasions in 1998 compared to 403 in 1997 and 367 in 1996; Pegsdon Hills NR, Stopsley Common and Luton Hoo, increased sightings; Bromham area, noted on over 50 dates.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

A widespread resident.

Like the previous species recorded across the county at woodland sites as well as on garden bird feeders. At Priory CP noted on 271 occasions, a slight drop on the previous year's 292.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *D. minor*

A scarce resident.

As always a difficult bird to record with the best period being February–March when actively drumming and prior to leaf cover. All records given as follows: Breeding Season – Swiss Gardens, Maulden Woods, Pegsdon Hills NR, Blows Downs, Potton Golf Course, Biggleswade, Bromham Hall Wood, Woburn Park and The Lodge. Also noted outside the nesting period at Potton, Tiddenfoot WP, Leighton Buzzard, Tilsforth Golf Course, Whitehill Wood, Butterfield Green, Willington and Luton Hoo.

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.

Recorded from two sites. At the first, on the eastern side of the county, two birds were found on 16th February. A singing bird was present until at least 23rd March but there was no evidence to suggest attempted breeding.

The second site was at the western end of the Greensand Ridge in the area where a recent, brief revival of the species county breeding status had occurred. There were three reports all of a single bird. Sadly it would appear that this phase now seems to have passed.

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

This widespread and common resident species is probably in decline.

Numbers were generally low in the first winter period, the only notable flocks being c.100 near Arlesey on 11th January and 40 near Yelnow Lane Sharnbrook on 22nd January.

Breeding season distribution is still widespread although rarely in any great density. The population on the chalk hills to the north east of Luton, where one might expect a stronghold, was estimated at 35 pairs. At Dunstable STW the numbers of pairs on adjacent farmland had fallen to two prompting concerns for the future.

A light passage was noted from the end of September through into mid October at Priory CP and around Dunstable. Larger flocks were located in the second winter period with over 100 at Biddenham on 23rd October. Around Luton c.150 were seen on Stopsley Common on 22nd November, the following week the flock had increased to about 250 birds. The only other three figure counts came on 6th December with c.100 at Tempsford and on 11th with 100+ to the east of Warden Hill, Luton.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

A widely seen passage migrant and localised breeding species.

The first two records for the year were slightly early with a single at Twin Bridges GP and two at Tiddenfoot WP on 16th March. By the end of the month reports had come from Dunstable STW, Harrold–Odell CP, Priory CP, Brogborough Lake,

Warren Villas NR and Ledburn Road SP; the first three all noting their first arrivals on 24th. The highest spring counts were of 150 birds at Priory CP on 26th and 30th April.

Breeding was noted at Aspley Heath (60 pairs), three Leighton Buzzard sand quarries (125 pairs total), Clophill Pit (100 nest holes), Manor Farm Trout Fishery Caldecote and Willington GP (both uncounted). Once again Octagon Farm GP near Cople held a huge colony with 424 nest holes counted in May.

Departing birds trickled away through August with reports from widely spread sites. In September the last flock of the year at Priory CP numbered c.100 birds on 10th. Two birds were seen at the same site on 27th and then the final sighting of 1998 was a single there on 8th October.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

An abundant passage migrant and widespread breeding summer visitor.

This year the first report was of a very early bird at Blows Downs on 7th March, this was followed a fortnight later by a single near Sandy. The first week in April saw a widespread, albeit thin, arrival but it was not until the last third of the month that any numbers were noted.

The 500 birds seen at Stewartby CP on 12th September were no doubt in the process of leaving the country. There were reports from nine sites of October birds with Dunstable STW claiming the final credits on 25th October.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

A common passage migrant and summer visitor.

A single at Shillington on 7th April was the first record of the year beating Priory CP by two days. The species then displayed its normal arrival pattern with singles reported from half a dozen sites prior to the main influx during May.

The only sizeable colony was reported from Wilden (although it was not counted), not far away numbers at Carlton were considered to be well down on previous years.

Flocks were seen at Wrest Park on 30th August and Stewartby CP on 12th September with 400 and 500 birds respectively. Predictably stragglers were still being found into October with the final report coming on 25th at Dunstable STW.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

A localised summer visitor and passage migrant that seems to be in decline.

An early first report concerned a displaying bird on 31st March at Wigmore Lane in Luton. This was followed at Wavendon Heath on 12th April, a site that eventually held up to ten singing birds. The well-watched area around The Lodge, Sandy had its first returning migrant on 14th April, the whole complex there held three different singing birds. The only other sites to report territorial behaviour were Coopers Hill, Lowes Wood and Sharpenhoe Clappers. There were no records from the old stronghold of Maulden Wood.

In autumn migrants were seen at Stopsley Common and Ampthill Park, with the final record at Battlesden on 20th September.

As last year there were no records of confirmed breeding.

Meadow Pipit *A. pratensis*

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

In the first three months of the year double figure flocks were observed at Bromham (13), Harrold (16), Coronation CIP (17), Rookery CIP (23) and Stevington (30). A county-wide passage was noted from 20th March with c.15 noted on Barton Hills,

c.20 at Palmers Scrubs, c.100 at Potsgrove, c.160 at Blows Downs, 24 near Harrold and then again a week later c.30 at Barton Hills and c.50 at Blows Downs.

Breeding was reported from Stopsley Common, Galley Hill, Pegsdon Hills NR, Houghton Regis ChP and Blows Downs; there were no breeding reports from the clay pits where, surely there must have been some birds?

Autumn movement was observed from September with a flock of 46 at Priory CP on 12th and 60 at Great Hayes Wood on 19th these were followed in October by c.120 at Galley Hill on 4th rising to c.150 a week later.

Groups lingered into November with up to 60 near Galley Hill until 7th and c.60 at Radwell GP on the 8th. With birds dispersed into the winter quarters a count of 13 at Radwell on 12th December was worthy of note.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flavissima*

A common spring and autumn passage migrant and local breeder.

For this species the year started with the appearance of one near Sandy Heath and two in Rookery CIP on 3rd April with a steady increase in reports over the next fortnight. Numbers were again depressed with only Stewartby CP holding a double figure group with a mere 12 on 10th and 17th prompting comments like "worst passage on record" from Priory CP and "I suppose we'll lose this one soon" from Dunstable STW.

Breeding was proven at East Hyde, Dunstable STW and Coronation CIP with suspicions at Chimney Corner CIP, Rookery CIP and Barton.

Post breeding movements started in July and built up into September with numbers being much healthier than spring. The largest flock gathered on Biggleswade Common with around 60 feeding amongst cattle on 7th.

The year finished with a late migrant on 2nd October which was seen at Dunstable STW.

Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*

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

Seen widely in both winter periods with records from 18 sites in the first three months of the year and at 20 locations from September to December.

Breeding was confirmed at five sites: Bromham, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Langford and Sandy Mill with other summer reports coming from Kempston, Priory CP and Southill Park.

Pied Wagtail *M. alba yarrelli*

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

Roosts of this confiding species were noted at 10 sites with numbers ranging from 21 at Barnfield College, Luton to c.200 at both Flitwick and Bedford town centre. The largest count at a roost was 278 at Luton Airport on 14th February. Elsewhere gatherings of over 50 were noted at Radwell GP in January and at Harrold-Odell CP in March on the flood meadows.

Breeding was confirmed at Dunstable STW, Houghton Regis ChP, Tiddenfoot WP and The Lodge, Sandy.

Birds showing characters of the nominate "White Wagtail" *M. a. alba* race were found on 13 occasions. The first was at Harrold-Odell CP on 24th March and the last were at Rookery CIP on 24th April. This last site was the only place to have multiple records with three birds on 19th April and four on 24th.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A very common and widespread species.

This species is so familiar that only seven record cards were submitted.

At Stopsley Common, Luton six or seven pairs bred which is slightly up on 1997. Numbers were also up at Priory CP with 37 territorial males compared with 32 last year; this is nevertheless still down on the 1991–96 average of 42.8.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

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

A species which familiarity causes to be hugely under-recorded, a mere six record cards being submitted for the year.

With an abundant bird such as this, rather than notes of sightings, it is comparisons that are the most valuable. These tend to come from well monitored sites such as Priory CP where the position was stable with seven territorial males being the same as last year. On Stopsley Common seven or eight pairs, thought to be breeding, were a slight improvement on 1997's seven. In the light of these two sites the population seems to be steady.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

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

In the Stopsley Common area about ten pairs were thought to be breeding. The recent increase in birds holding territory at Priory CP continued with 20 males reflecting a 10% increase from 1997.

Migrants were noticed swelling local numbers at the end of September at both Priory CP and Dunstable STW, these corresponded with "falls" on the east coast of Britain.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

A scarce summer visitor.

With no reports from Priory CP this year the first returning migrant was found near The Lodge, Sandy on 23rd April. On the 24th birds were discovered at Brogborough Lake, a site which eventually hosted two pairs. The following day another was found singing by the southern corner of Stewartby CP and a further bird was discovered singing in a farmland wood above Blows Downs. All of the above settled on territories for several weeks but it is not known if they managed to breed. An individual found in song at Tempsford on 26th was probably part of the same arrival, but there were no subsequent reports from the area.

The sixth location to hold these distinctive vocalists was Home Wood. This is currently our most regular site for the species and this year at least three birds were singing against each other.

The fact that the final record came on 29th June probably says more about how unobtrusive these birds become once they stop singing rather than their departure dates.

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.

A quiet year with the only records coming from the well-watched southern downlands. Four birds were seen on Blows Downs, the first was found on 31st March (LC) with a possible sighting the following morning. The next bird was found on 8th April (RJB) followed by two more on 23rd (RD) and 24th (LC, RD). The only other

record came from the nearby Dunstable Downs where an enterprising observer who had elected not to follow the crowd to Blows was rewarded by a single on 23rd April (PM). This coincides with one of the Blows records suggesting a slight passage.

There were no summer or autumn records.

Common Redstart *P. phoenicurus*

A regular passage migrant and rare breeding visitor.

Blows Downs hosted the first returning birds with two males found on the 3rd April, one of which stayed until the 6th. During a good April for the species the same site had a total of 30 bird days with the peak occurring on the 24th when four males and four females were seen.

Other passage birds were seen at Butterfield Green, Dunstable STW, Luton Hoo and Stewartby CP. An intriguing report of a singing male in Maulden Wood on 5th April may only have been a migrant but there is certainly potential for birds to evade observation in this complex of woodland.

Breeding was proven at Wavendon Heath with one pair confirmed and a second suspected. The status of a male found on 25th July at Sharpenhoe Clappers is unclear as it could have been a post breeding wanderer or an early return migrant.

A female found on 5th August at Warden Hill, Luton was the first obvious passage bird. Autumn movement was then noted with nine further sightings between 27th August at Blows Downs to 8th October when the final sighting was reported from a Dunstable garden.

There seems to have been a bit of a peak on the weekend of 5th/6th September with individuals at three sites and records elsewhere on the 8th and 10th.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

A regular spring and autumn migrant.

A quiet spring started with a pair on Blows Downs which were found on 19th April and therefore a little earlier than usual. The next records came in a flurry with a single on Blows from 22nd to 25th, four at Bedford STW on 23rd and 25th and one at Dunstable STW on 28th. May reports came from Radwell on 2nd, Dunstable STW on 13th and Blows Downs between 6th and 10th.

As expected with this species the autumn passage was reported on a much wider front with birds seen at eight sites. Blows Downs had birds around the paddocks, intermittently, from 12th August until 2nd October with a peak of four on 27th and 29th August. In the south of the county birds were found on the hills to the north of Luton from the end of the month through into October. Dunstable STW reported a very quiet passage with only three sightings. Singles were seen at Cardington and Bromham in September and four were found at Octagon Farm on 12th. In the north the area of set-aside at Knotting Green boasted three birds on 21st September and also claimed the final record of the year with a single on 10th October.

Stonechat *S. torquata*

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

The year started with a bird in Rookery CIP on 1st and 2nd January. Other wintering birds were found at Willington on 11th and Knotting Green on 27th January, with one present at the latter site again in mid-February. The only multiple sighting was of two birds on Blows Downs on 24th February and the first winter period closed with singles at Pegsdon Hills NR and Maulden Wood – both on 7th March.

There were no summer records but a very young looking juvenile was found on

Stopsley Common on 30th August where it remained until 11th September. Other reports involved four birds with Warren Villas NR and Bedford STW having September and November visitors respectively. Blows Downs held a single from 7th to 9th October and then claimed the final bird of the year – a female on 28th November, predictably, on the paddocks.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A quite common migrant and occasional breeder.

This year the first sighting came on 9th March at the intensively scoured Blows Downs, a single male was the early herald of what was to be an excellent season.

There were 34 record cards submitted reflecting a widespread passage across the whole of the county.

The first wave of birds peaked on 28th March when 21 on Blows Downs coincided with arrivals at Dunstable STW, Harrold–Odell CP, Pegsdon Hills NR, Potton, Stopsley Common and Willington. For the next three weeks numbers dropped to a trickle before peaking again on 22nd to 24th April. During this period there were at least 26 birds on Blows with an incredible 40+ on 23rd; this surge was also reported from 10 other sites, many with multiple sightings.

Late movers carried on through into May with the final report coming on the 19th at Rookery CIP.

The only reports of birds of the “Greenland” race came from Blows Downs on the 23rd April and 8th May and near the River Ivel in the Sandy area on 4th May.

Returning migrants were first seen on 12th August at, where else?, Blows Downs. The next couple of months saw sightings at 13 scattered locations but only in small numbers – three was the highest count. This prompted one observer to label the autumn passage as “terrible”.

The last reports came from the Galley Hill area on 23rd October and finally, three days later, between Priory CP and Willington on 26th.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

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

A very good year for this, often retiring, species with Blows Downs dominant as is now expected.

The first of the year was a male seen on 23rd March. This, with three on 28th at the same site were the only March records. Up to 21st April Blows had birds present on nine days while elsewhere singles were discovered at The Lodge, Sandy on 1st and Warden Hill, Luton on 15th. Both these sites had another bird on 22nd which coincided with arrivals on both Blows and Dunstable Downs. At the former site numbers rose to 13 present on 24th, these birds stayed in discreet groups and were still on site two days later. On 27th the tally was down to 11 with 10 the following day and only seven on 29th. Elsewhere Barton Hills logged its first of the season with a female on 27th.

Only three sites hosted Ouzels in May, Pegsdon Hills NR had up to three birds between 2nd and 4th. Barton Hills had two more singles on 5th and 8th. Needless to say Blows Downs was represented with daily sightings until the 8th, these peaked at five birds on 3rd.

The species is much rarer in autumn and the first of only three reports came on 3rd October from Dunstable STW, two days later a pair were seen on Blows which was the location of the final bird of the year – a single on 14th October.

So ended an exceptional year, the spring in particular was very exciting for the local watchers on the southern Downs.

Blackbird *T. merula*

An abundant resident in almost all habitats.

An unseasonal breeding record started the year with a recently fledged youngster seen at The Lodge, Sandy on 23rd January.

A count of over 10 singing birds in a small area near Blunham showed a high breeding density, while at nearby Sandy a male was singing in a manner halfway between the normal song and a Mistle Thrush.

On Stopsley Common 12 pairs held territory. At Priory CP the breeding population continued to slip with only seven males defending territories compared with nine in 1997 and 14 in 1996.

Autumn movement was noted at Blows Downs in September and at Priory CP from October through into December. Numbers peaked on 18th November when there were 35 birds counted around the Bedford site.

Fieldfare *T. pilaris*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant.

The numbers of this species that stay with us varies from year to year, this was quite a good first period with 17 reports of flocks numbering over 100 individuals. The largest single group consisted of 500+ at Cople on 9th January.

Most birds had left us by mid-April with the last reports being eight on 26th April at Gastlings and then the final sighting of one on Pegsdon Hills NR on 3rd May.

The first returning bird of the autumn was a single over The Lodge, Sandy on 1st October although few others were seen for another month. In the first week of November many passage birds were noted overhead with counts of 650 on 2nd and 809 on 7th made at Priory CP. At Sandy 500 moved WSW on 5th and on the same day 400 were seen near Odell Great Wood. By the third week birds were widely spread across the county with 220+ around Colmworth, 400+ at Cople and c.500 at Galley Hill.

Many of the birds involved in these counts passed through the area but there were still c.250 in the Galley Hill area and three figure counts at both Barton and Beeston before the years end.

Song Thrush *T. philomelos*

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

The concerns for this once common species are obvious amongst the county's birdwatchers with even reports of occasional back garden visitors being submitted, emphasising the dire straits people perceive the birds to be in.

One observer, who noted all his 1998 sightings, had seen these birds at only eight locations during the year. At Priory CP territory holding males dropped by one to six which continues a steady decline there.

Autumnal movement was noted at Stopsley Common and Priory CP during the first week of October, which corresponded loosely with other thrush species movement.

Redwing *T. iliacus*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant.

Flock sizes were down in the first winter period with the only three figure counts coming from the Abbey Park, Turvey (twice) and Woburn. Few birds were left by the beginning of April with the final report being a single over Blows Downs on 20th April which was a week later than its nearest rival.

There were two early sightings of return migrants, three on Blows Downs on 20th

September and two the following day at The Lodge, Sandy. Subsequent to the main passage in early October, when 147 were counted over Priory CP on the 10th, numbers stayed low in the county. The only exception being a count of 100+ birds at Felmersham NR on 8th November.

Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus*

A widely distributed resident.

This species was widely reported during the year although the only confirmed breeding record came from the Houghton Regis ChP area.

These birds form post breeding flocks which often attract attention, this year counts came from four locations: Luton Hoo (10–20 birds), Pegsdon Hills NR (14), Turvey Abbey (24) and Potton (28).

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

A recent but still very rare potential colonist.

Following last years long awaited discovery we might have hoped for more than the two records submitted for 1998.

A bird was found singing near the River Ouse to the east of Bedford on 19th June although there were no subsequent records from the area.

The second was located at Priory CP on 25th October but again there were no subsequent sightings.

It seems we will have to be patient for a while as far as this species is concerned.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

A local but regular summer visitor.

The year started with a record breaking early migrant on 31st March, beating the previous date, from 1977, by two days. The main arrival started with the next reports from 18th April onwards; in the following week the characteristic, reeling song was heard at a further seven sites.

This was a good year in terms of both distribution and numbers with the species found across the length and breadth of the county. There was a particularly good concentration at the set-aside grasslands of Knotting Green where six singing birds were counted on 21st June. In the Marston Vale, breeding was confirmed at Brogborough Lake (two pairs), Rookery CIP and Coronation CIP.

Most birds had faded away by the end of July although with a species which is so secretive it is hard to be sure of absence. However August reports came from only Centenary Wood, Coronation CIP and Rookery South CIP with the last date being the 3rd.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

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

As last year Priory CP claimed the first returning birds with two found on 31st March, a particularly early date.

These were followed by a surge of arrivals from 7th April with birds found at Blunham, Bromham, Dunstable STW and Langford Lakes. Most birds had arrived by mid-May although what was presumably a migrant was found singing on Blows Downs on 23rd. Another seemed to establish a territory on a small, overgrown pond near Cockayne Hatley demonstrating a pioneering spirit.

The only breeding records came from the well-watched duo of Dunstable STW and Priory CP. At the former 21 pairs bred which is slightly up on last year although at Priory the count of 22 territorial males was nine down on the 1997 count and

represents nearly a halving of breeders over the last two years. Elsewhere a juvenile was noted at Willington but it may not have bred there.

The final reports both came in September with Dunstable STW seeing its last on 6th while birds lingered at Priory until 29th.

Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus*

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

Once again the first returning bird was found at Priory CP, this year on 25th April. In the south Houghton Regis ChP recorded its first arrival on 28th April but these were the only sightings of the month and they were followed by the main appearance in May. Three reports of migrants in atypical habitat came from Blows Downs with another singing on an allotment in nearby Dunstable. Another (or possibly two) sung in a Woburn garden on 10th and 22nd June.

Birds in probable breeding areas were noted at 12 sites around the county with three pairs in Rookery South CIP, six pairs at Dunstable STW, six males at Southill and 12 males on territory at Houghton Regis ChP. At Ledburn Road SP a single male sung from mid-May and was seen carrying food in late July so was probably feeding young.

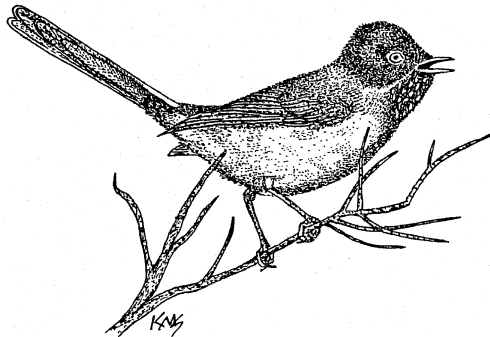
The slow decline in numbers at Priory CP continued with the 30 males of 1997 dropping to 27 in 1998.

Three sites still held birds into September with final sightings at Bromham on 6th and Dunstable STW on 27th. The last report of the year came from Priory CP where singles were sighted on 9th and 10th October.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

An extremely rare wanderer to the county, with the second ever record in 1998.

A single bird was found at the western end of Blows Downs mid-afternoon on 20th April (RD). It was seen by numerous observers up to 19:30 that evening, many of whom got soaked through by passing showers but nevertheless went away happy. The following day the bird could not be relocated despite a search of the area.



Dartford Warbler

Kevin Sharpe

Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca*

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

A general arrival of the species in the last week of April began at Priory CP on 23rd. Six other sites had noted returning birds by the 30th and a fortnight into May the dry, rattling song of this bird was widespread.

Breeding was noted at Priory CP where four males held territory, Pegsdon Hills NR held two pairs and Bradgers Hill hosted a single pair.

Departing birds were seen into September with the final report coming from Blows Downs on 19th September.

Common Whitethroat *S. communis*

A common and widespread summer visitor.

The year started with a report of a single in Rookery North CIP on 11th April but it was another five days before Priory CP claimed the next sighting. There seems to have been a major arrival on 23rd April with birds discovered widely on that, and the next two days.

Breeding season counts came from two well watched "local patches"; at Priory CP 16 males held territories while at Dunstable STW 18 pairs bred.

Departing birds were seen well into September while a single at Dunstable STW on 4th October claimed the honours as final sighting.

Garden Warbler *S. borin*

A fairly common summer visitor.

A singing bird near The Lodge, Sandy drew attention to itself on 22nd April and so became the first record of the year. Five other sites reported sightings before the beginning of May and the main arrival.

Breeding records were received from Hanger Wood, Stagsden and Dunstable STW where two pairs bred. At Priory CP nine males held territory, a figure which is dramatically down on last years count of 19.

Final sightings came from Dunstable STW on 30th August and Priory CP the following day.

Blackcap *S. atricapilla*

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

The apparently increasing numbers of birds overwintering rather blurs the picture as to whether birds are arriving or departing. Ten sites reported birds in January and February which it seems safe to label as wintering.

The bird seen on Blows Downs on 14th March and others subsequently are harder to attribute. Widespread reports were submitted for the first week in April indicating an arrival of summer visitors.

Breeding records came from six sites but this is obviously not representative for the county. At Priory CP where populations are monitored year on year the count of 22 males was down slightly on 1997's total of 26.

The breeding areas were deserted prior to the end of October so that subsequent reports are treated as birds that had arrived to winter locally. Eleven sites noted Blackcap in November and December with gardens in Blunham and Bromham both having records of male and female.

Wood Warbler *P. sibilatrix*

A scarce summer visitor and rare passage migrant.

The only record for the year was a migrant that paused conveniently in an ex-recorder's back garden in Dunstable. The bird was in the company of Willow Warbler and stayed for only a couple of minutes before continuing its journey (PT).

It is disappointing to record that there appears to have been no county breeding attempted during the year but given the precarious position the species occupies locally it is not altogether surprising.

Chiffchaff *P. collybita*

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

Overwintering birds at Priory CP in January included a bird of the race *P. c. tristis* which remained from 1997 (DK), it was seen up to 11th but not subsequently. Numbers of the nominate race *P. c. collybita* increased at the same time with single sightings in January growing to four in mid-February, about which time at least one started to sing. Other reports from the first winter period came from Dunstable STW where up to two birds were present and East Hyde, Stopsley Common and Willington which held singles.

Returning birds were noted from mid-March with a bit of an arrival apparent on 14th and by the end of the month singing birds were widely distributed.

Breeding was noted at Hay Wood (2), Pegsdon Hills NR (4) and Priory CP where 13 males held territories.

As autumn set in the summer visitors left us with a couple of sites keeping their last birds into the first half of October. At Dunstable STW, one of the sites where birds actually overwintered, an individual showing the characters of the race *P. c. abietinus* was noted on 26th September (PT).

By November the individuals which were still present were expected to remain into the new year. Ten locations recorded this species before the turn of the year with multiple sightings at Dunstable STW where up to four could be found and the remarkable Priory CP/Bedford STW complex which held up to eight birds.

Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*

A very common migrant and summer visitor.

As last year the first birds arrived on 31st March when they were seen at Blows Downs, Blunham and Priory CP. Others were found at various sites over the following week with a fall on 6th noted at a couple of places and then another surge on 12th.

Breeding was reported from seven sites with the ominously familiar tale from Priory CP, where numbers dropped from 21 territorial males in 1997 down to 16 this year.

Most birds had left by early September with only odd stragglers hanging on, the last record of the year was a single at Dunstable STW on 6th October.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

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

Widely reported during the year with some birds leaving breeding areas to join roving tit flocks during the winter.

Migration is not easily observed for such an unobtrusive species however at Kidney Wood on the outskirts of Luton double figures were noted on 20th March but had all disappeared by 22nd. A single seen on 16th May at Dunstable STW was unusual there and may well have been a migrant; as were the five plus birds seen on Stopsley Common on 3rd October.

Firecrest *R. ignicapillus*

A scarce passage migrant and occasional breeding species.

Three were seen during the year. The first, a male, was found singing at Pegsdon

Hills NR (JCP) on 16th March. At The Lodge, Sandy, a singing male was found on 16th April (MJE) and was monitored by staff until the last sighting on 21st June (R & BM). The bird was paired with a female Goldcrest which was seen nest building on 14th May (RES); there was no further information submitted regarding the outcome of this pairing.

On 7th December a wintering bird was found on the northern side of Stewartby CP (HH).

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

A still locally occurring summer visitor, but decreasing in numbers.

The first record this year came from Blows Downs where two were found on 23rd April, a date which is a couple of weeks earlier than normal. There was an arrival noticed on 8th May with records from Blunham, Sandy and Turvey with wider reports over the following fortnight.

Breeding season birds were noted at 11 sites: Aspley Heath, Blunham Hall, Clifton, Dunstable STW, Eversholt, Knotting, Linslade, Thurleigh and The Lodge, Sandy.

Previously expressed concerns for the future of the species resurface with only seven records all year at Priory CP, and other observers struggled to find birds locally.

Numbers dropped through September and most birds had left by mid-month. There was a report of a late individual moving through the hedgerows of East Hyde on 21st October.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

A scarce passage migrant.

This was a poor year with only a single record. A single female type took up residence in a Luton garden from 29th September to 3rd October, the owner kindly allowing visitors to view the bird during its stay (TD).

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

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

As with so many common species few people found reasons to submit records, only ten cards being received for the year. The only good sized flocks were 30 at Dunstable STW in October and 20 at Turvey in November.

Breeding was noted at Dunstable STW, Tempsford, Tiddenfoot WP and a Luton garden. At the latter the enterprising birds were collecting feathers from the corpse of a Blackbird killed by a Sparrowhawk.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*

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

The nine record cards submitted noted sightings from over 20 locations around the county.

Breeding activity was observed at Bowels Wood Bromham, Hanger Wood Stagsden, Maulden Wood, Pegsdon Hills NR, and Whitehill Wood.

Willow Tit *P. montanus*

A scarce resident species.

A tricky species that is best identified by call or song which was nevertheless found at 11 sites around the county.

In what is surely an example of under-recording, breeding was confirmed in only two areas – Blows Downs and Dunstable STW.

Coal Tit *P. ater*

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

The six record cards submitted for this species confirmed that it will visit bird tables although one observer felt a little less regularly than of old.

Birds are widely distributed along the Greensand Ridge and the southern chalk uplands.

Breeding was confirmed at Pegsdon Hills NR and Stopsley.

Blue Tit *P. caeruleus*

A very common resident.

The fact this species is so common and widely distributed results in few notable records being submitted. Of interest were the 30+ individuals in a large mixed passerine flock on Blows Downs in mid-September.

Great Tit *P. major*

A common resident.

Few remarkable records were submitted for this species. From the four record cards received we know birds bred in Stopsley and Colmworth although obviously this is an immense understatement.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

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

Reported from 16 sites during the year. Good numbers were reported from Luton Hoo and breeding was noted at Whitehill Wood and Stockgrove CP.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

A common resident in suitable habitat.

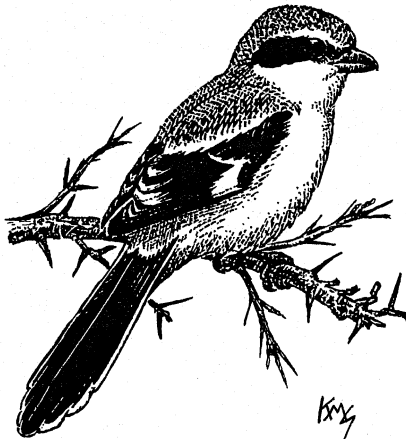
For such a retiring species this was widely recorded this year with reports submitted from over 25 sites the length and breadth of the county.

Breeding was noted at The Lodge Sandy, Pegsdon Hills NR and Whitehill Wood but obviously went unobserved elsewhere.

Reports from Luton Hoo indicate a healthy population there.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

A scarce winter visitor.



Great Grey Shrike

Kevin Sharpe

One found around the perimeter of Dunstable STW on 12th October (PTy) was the first since 1994. The bird stayed until 15th, and delighted the visitors who had rushed to see it by sitting in full view on power cables near the main gate.

In something of an influx subsequently a bird was located at Knotting Green on 18th October and seen intermittently until 7th December (JDS). Also found on the 18th was an individual at Bedford STW. This was seen again the following day and then probably the same bird was observed in the same area on 1st November where it lingered until 9th (DK).

To round off an excellent couple of months another individual was seen briefly on 20th December at Cardington Airfield (LB, AC, AS).

Jay *Garrulus garrulus*

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

Seen widely throughout the year at expected stronghold sites like Stockgrove CP and Maulden Woods with, this year, Stopsley Common and Blows Downs also featuring regularly.

The highest counts were of six at Odell Great Wood in January and a party of five or six near Turvey in October.

It is possible these last were migrants as birds were seen in areas where they are usually scarce during September and October, which coincided with east coast influxes.

What one bird was doing over Kempston in December is harder to explain but it was probably just a wandering migrant.

Magpie *Pica pica*

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

One of the few species that seem to be going from strength to strength with birds exploiting man and increasingly colonising the county's gardens.

At Dunstable STW the species is a serious pest, birds have been watched preying the young of Little Ringed Plover, Mallard and Coot with attacks on Common Tern only being thwarted by lusty parental defence.

High counts for the year peaked at 28 around Dunstable STW on 26th September, there were 49 at Priory CP on 30th November and at least 60 at a roost in Flitwick Moor on 27th December.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

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

Flocks were reported in both winter periods. In the first the high counts were 77 at Stopsley Common on 18th January and 200 on Kingsmead in Bedford on 5th January.

On 28th September 200 were counted going to roost around the Finger Lakes at Priory CP and on 19th December there were an estimated 500 in the Stopsley Common and Warden Hill area.

Rook *C. frugilegus*

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

Large numbers can gather at prime feeding areas; this was witnessed near Henlow Airfield on 9th February when over 800 birds were foraging in freshly drilled fields. On the same day a count of 450 at Cardington was thought to be influenced by the nearby Canvins rookery.

As breeding activity starts before the trees are in leaf rookeries are easily visible and

are reported accordingly. Counts were made at Luton Crematorium (2), Cranfield Airfield (10), Luton railway station (14), Pegsdon Common (25), Wilstead Hill (c.80) and Steppingley hospital (102).

Towards the end of the year large groups included 158 near Blunham on 22nd November and c.250 in the Stopsley Common and Warden Hills area.

Carrion Crow *C. corone*

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

Groups of what always used to be a fairly solitary creature are increasingly reported with over 20 counted near Sandy in March and Stopsley Common in April and July. By September there were over 60 in the same area at Sandy! At Priory CP the monthly maximum counts ranged from 36 in March to a huge 239 in December. Twelve pairs nested at the latter site which is double the number of five years ago and that itself is double the count of ten years ago.

At Dunstable STW the site was continually scoured by the two pairs that nested nearby. This attention contributed to a dismal breeding season with crows considered responsible for the disappearance of young and eggs of Mallard, Coot, Little Ringed Plover and Redshank. Birds were witnessed killing Rabbit, Wood Pigeon and Starling and one managed to rob a Grey Heron of a fish the larger bird had just caught.

Birds with partial albinism were reported from Blows Downs and East Hyde.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

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

Large flocks do still gather as seen on Stopsley Common on 4th January where 500 were foraging on a waterlogged playing field. Elsewhere 300 were seen near Tilsworth golf course on 26th January and 200+ had congregated near Turvey on 10th March.

Reports from Priory CP suggest a dramatic reduction in numbers over the last couple of decades, although there were counts of 150 around the site in both January and May.

Post breeding build-ups included 150 at Dunstable STW in late summer, then later in the year a flock of about 800 had gathered on Stopsley Common by 13th September.

A movement over Priory CP on 2nd November was noted with 675 counted heading west.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Another once abundant species that now seems to be declining.

Although most observers who reported this species indicated presence rather than absence numbers were generally referred to as low.

At Bromham a pair bred at one observer's house for the first time in many years. Counts around the Stopsley Common area peaked in mid-August with 60+ around the site of the old farm. A partial albino in Blunham on 24th May had also been seen during the previous winter.

Tree Sparrow *P. montanus*

This resident species seems to be declining ever more rapidly.

Increasingly difficult to locate, the discovery of this species is now enough to make any birdwatching day a good one. This was shown by one observer submitting a sighting on a minor rarity card.

New Year's Day searching produced three birds between Barton and Pulloxhill (BRS) while a group of seven were found near Marston Moretaine on 4th (KMS). Two were found on Biggleswade Common on 21st February and then the same observer had his Woburn garden graced by a single intermittently between 24th

March and 17th May (BJN). Two were seen by Nun Wood, Harrold on 28th March and 9th May (JM) suggesting the possibility of a small local population.

A wandering individual perched briefly in front of the honorary warden of Dunstable STW and made his day on 21st June (PT).

There is then a six month gap to the last record of the year when one or two birds were found near Aspley Guise on 30th December (DJO).

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

A very common resident.

There were 17 territories at Priory CP, a decline of two from 1997. However, probably in part due to the BBC winter finch flock recording scheme, there were more records of large winter flocks. In the first winter period there 250 at Odell Great Wood in January, then 200+ between Potton and Sandy and 70 on Biggleswade Common in March. In the second winter period the largest flocks noted were 200+ at Turvey Station End in December, 186 at Studham in November declining to 115 at the same site in December, and 40-50 at The Lodge in November. In addition there were records of smaller parties at Boughton End, Moneypot Hill, Sandy Heath, Blunham, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Rookery CIP, Coronation CIP, Wootton Green Farm, Marston Moretaine STW, Nun's Wood and Great Hayes Wood.

Brambling *F. montifringilla*

A regular winter visitor.

In the first winter period the only flock significantly greater than ten was one of 25+ between Southill and Old Warden on 28th February, though there were widespread records of small numbers from Whipsnade Zoo, Dunstable Cemetery, Legrave Marsh, Marsh Farm, Sundon Park, Barton Hill Farm Road, Pegsdon Hills NR, Linslade, Flitwick, Ampthill Park, near Warden Little Wood, Old Warden Tunnel, Stratford Road Sandy, Biggleswade Common, The Lodge, Potton and Stewartby CP, sites noticeably concentrated in the south and centre of the county.

As usual there were records from further sites in late March and April, suggesting spring passage. Singles were at Harrold-Odell CP on 15th March and between Sandy and Potton on 5th March, and there were five in Maulden Woods on the 29th. The first record of the year at Priory CP was on 1st April and there four further records there during the month. A flock of 20-30 were in Stockgrove CP on 11th April, and there was a series of records from a Luton Garden through the month, the last birds in spring being two males at that site and another at Priory CP, all on 20th April.

In autumn the first returning birds were at Potton on 7th October and calling over The Lodge on the 7th, 8th and 13th, then in a Dunstable Garden and at Pegsdon Hills NR on 10th October, Priory CP on the 15th and 20th, a Bedford garden on the 17th and Tiddenfoot WP on the 23rd and 26th. Birds continued to be seen in small numbers at Priory CP in November and at The Lodge in November and December, and there were other records in the second winter period from Warden Hill and Galley Hill, Linslade, Aspley Guise, a site near Warden Little Wood, Potton, between Blunham and Sandy, and Holcott Wood. In this period most records were of single birds, though there was a party of up to six in the Warden Hill area.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

A common resident.

There were no estimates of breeding numbers at any site, but as with a number of other finch species, recording of winter flocks was better than in previous years, probably due to the BBC winter finch flock recording scheme.

In the first winter period the only notable flocks were 30+ at Pegnut Wood Potton

and the same number at Stopsley Common in March. It is interesting that no large parties were noted at Priory CP in this period, suggesting that increased numbers recorded later in the year may have reflected a genuine increase as well as increased observer effort.

In late summer and the second winter period, the largest flocks were 200+ feeding on spilt rape seed at Wandswood Lane in August, 200+ in fields between Bedford and Biddenham in September, 300 between Flitwick Wood and Steppingley in October and 310 at Studham on 5th November with 120 at the same site on 7th December. There were up to 150 near Warden Hill in October, and counts at Priory CP peaked at 120 on 4th October, and a number of other flocks of less than 100 were recorded elsewhere. At most sites covered regularly, counts decreased toward the year end, suggesting either movement out of the county or mortality as conditions became more severe.

Goldfinch *C. carduelis*

A common and widespread resident.

There were breeding records from regularly monitored sites at Dunstable STW (four or five pairs) and Priory CP (at least one pair). In the first winter period the largest counts were two or three flocks totalling about 100 at Pegsdon Hills NR in January, 110 at Turvey Station End in March and 100 at Priory Business Park in March. In the second winter period *c.*200 were near New Road Bridge at Sandy in September. There were numerous other records of parties of less than a 100 throughout the county, and several notes of odd pairs breeding.

Siskin *C. spinus*

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

In the first winter period the largest flocks were *c.*200 at Eversholt Lake on 1st January, 80+ at Moneypot Hill and 60 at Woburn on the same date, and 55 at East Hyde on 18th January. Parties of 20 or more were recorded at Leagrave Marsh, The Lodge, Rookery North CIP, Stewartby CP, Priory CP, Bromham Village and Bromham Lake LNR. Smaller numbers were also recorded at East Hyde, Luton Hoo, Whipsnade Zoo, Bramingham Wood, Hart Hill Luton, Wigmore Luton, Mountfield Road Luton, St. Augustines Avenue Luton, Rylands Heath Luton, Houghton Regis ChP, Dunstable STW, Leighton Buzzard, Tiddenfoot WP, New Lane Pits, Stockgrove, Flitwick, Flitwick Moor, Steppingley Reservoir, Maulden, Stoffold, Kensworth, Northwood End, Swiss Gardens, Warden Warren, Warren Villas NR, Blunham, Kempston, Parkwood LNR Brickhill, Colmworth, Turvey Abbey and Harrold-Odell CP. Many of these widespread records of small parties or singles were of birds feeding on nuts in gardens.

A flock of *c.*30 at Aspley Heath on 13th April and 20 at Rookery South CIP on the 19th were quite late dates for such good numbers, but the last spring record was of two at The Lodge on 12th May, and there were no records appearing to relate to possible breeding activity.

In autumn the first records were a flock of 20 at Eversholt on 30th August and small numbers over Whipsnade Zoo on 28th September. In the second winter period much less numerous or widespread; the largest flocks were 90+ at Eversholt Lake on 30th December and 30 at Southill Park in November, and otherwise only a party of eleven near Shefford and smaller numbers at Potton, The Lodge, Blunham and Priory CP.

Linnets *C. cannabina*

A common resident.

Breeding was recorded at Stopsley Common, Bradgers Hill (15+ pairs), Wigmore

Valley Park (five pairs), Pegsdon Hills NR, Dunstable STW (two pairs), Rookery North CIP, Stewartby CP and Coronation CIP.

In the first winter period the largest flocks were 180–200 at Stewartby CP in January, c.110 near Galley Hill and c.140 at Pegnut Wood Potton in March, and 100 at Steppingley in April.

As with many finches, large flocks were more widely recorded in the second winter period, with up to 200 at East Hyde and 100 at both Great Hayes Wood and Podington in September, 150+ near Stanford in October, c.100 at Coopers Farm Clifton, c.150 at Galley Hill and c.250 at Stopsley Common in November, and c.250 at Whitehill and 100+ at Hazells Hall in December.

Lesser Redpoll *C. flammea cabaret*

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

The number of record cards received was an increase on recent years, but did not seem to reflect any great improvement in the status of the species, and again all records are published. In total the species was recorded at 31 sites in 1998 compared with 21 sites in 1997. It occurred at 24 of those sites in the first winter period, only one in May, at the beginning of the month, and 12 in the second winter period, so none of the records appear to relate to breeding activity despite the fact that it was considerably more widespread in the first half of the year than in 1997.

In the first winter period a flock of 18 were at Moneypot Hill on 1st January, and there were four between Barton and Pulloxhill on the same date. The species was recorded at The Lodge on 7th January and 4th February, and there were c.25 at Long Riding Sandy on 10th January. A party of five was recorded at Radwell GP on 11th January, and there was one at Bradgers Hill on the same date and five at Harrold-Odell CP on the 13th. Four were in Birchen Grove Luton on 28th January, with three at the same site on 8th February and two there on 12th March. One was in Mountfield Road Luton on 31st January and about six there on 14th February. There was a record of unspecified numbers at Warden and Galley Hills on 8th February. One was at Tiddenfoot WP on 9th February and one at Dunstable STW on the 14th, with the species also recorded at Stewartby CP on the same date, and one at Maulden Woods on the 15th, whilst also on the latter date two were at Bromham Lake LNR. Six were at Alma Farm Toddington on 12th March and one was at Pegsdon Hills NR on 21st March, and parties of three and five were seen at Whipsnade Zoo on the same date. Six were near Nun Wood on 28th March and one over Blunham on the same date, whilst a flock of 30 at Maulden Woods, also on 28th March, was one of the largest of the year. There was a record at Blows Downs on 31st March, with two more there on 28th April.

A flock of c.20 were near Sandy Transmitter on 3rd April. One was at Pegsdon Hills NR on 18th April, whilst six at the same site on 2nd May was the only May record. Three were over Dunstable Downs on 23rd April, with singles there on the 28th and 30th, but there were also two good sized flocks at the end of April, with 30+ at Dame Ellens Wood on the 28th and 12–13 at The Lodge on the 30th. None were recorded at Luton Hoo throughout the year.

The earliest autumn record was of three at Dunstable STW on 22nd August. In the second winter period singles flew over The Lodge on 14th and 19th October, and there was a series of records from Tiddenfoot WP with seven on 26th October and five the next day, eight on 7th November and four on the 25th. One was at Dunstable STW on 1st November and also on the 3rd, with three there on the 7th and 8th. One flew over Warren Villas NR on 1st November, two flew over

Bromham Lake LNR on the 8th, and there was one there the next day. Three were at Stewartby CP on 14th November, and also in November there was one at Willington GP, one at Bedford STW and three at Studham. On 13th December there was one over Harrold-Odell CP. Finally three were near Tebworth at the end of December and c.10 near Stanford Lock on the 30th of that month.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

An irregular visitor sometimes invading the county in numbers, and a very occasional breeder.

The second half of 1997 had seen an invasion of this species into the county, and this continued through the first half of 1998. Breeding was confirmed at Moneypot Hill, where newly fledged young were seen being fed on 9th May, and suspected at Aspley Heath, where two adults and two juveniles were seen on 25th May. Adults feeding fledged young were also seen at The Lodge on 22nd March, though it is always possible in the latter two cases that fledged young had moved some distance from the breeding site whilst still being fed. Breeding records are infrequent in the county, and always difficult to prove, so a full account of the Moneypot Hill record has been included elsewhere in this Bird Report.

The first records of the year were three at Old Warden, eight at Henlow Grange and 16 at Moneypot Hill all on 1st January. At Moneypot Hill there were further records of parties of 21 on 3rd January, 17 on 1st March and c.20 on 27th March, with three in the same area on 10th January, and breeding was subsequently proved at this site. A group of five including at least one male were at Harrold-Odell CP on 5th January.

There were numerous records from the Lodge, with the first a party of at least 14 on 6th January. Subsequently the species was recorded regularly at that site throughout the second half of January, and all of February and March. Most records were of parties of eight to fifteen birds, with the largest counts 16 on 23rd January and 18 on 18th March. As noted above, adults feeding young were seen on 22nd March. From April, records became more sporadic, though there were twelve on the 7th, two parties of 19 and 25 on the 14th, seven on the 23rd, c.20 on the 27th and finally parties of six and two on the 29th. In May there was a final large party of 14 on the 5th, followed by two on the 18th and one on the 19th. Four were nearby at Potton on 8th May. The final records at The Lodge were singles on 17th June and 16th July, the latter the last in the county for the year.

Elsewhere the species was also regularly recorded at Whipsnade Zoo, in the Aspley Heath area, and to a lesser extent between Old Warden and Maulden Woods on the central Greensand Ridge. At Whipsnade Zoo the first were eight on 9th January, followed by ten on 13th January, eight on 3rd February, 28th February and 22nd March, nine on 9th May, and finally 13 on 11th May.

At Aspley Heath there were 30 including about five males on 22nd January, five on 29th March, c.30 on 13th April, twelve on 27th April, 25 on 11th May, two parties of ten and 15 on 17th May, and finally two adults and two juveniles on 25th May leading to suspicions of breeding. In the same general area there were two at Kingshoe Wood Milton Bryan on 4th February, eight at Horsemoor Farm on 22nd February and about six at Charle Wood on 10th May.

In the Old Warden area there were three at Warden Great Wood on 26th January and six at Warden Warren on the same date, and a flock was heard in Warden Warren on 9th February. Not far off at Chicksands Wood there were two males and three females on 10th January and eight, including no males, on 4th May, whilst at Maulden

Woods there were *c.*20 on 19th February and 14 on 28th March.

Other sporadic records were twelve in a garden at Studham on 11th February increasing to 25 the next day, and two parties flying over the centre of Flitwick, four on 17th February and three on 26th March, the latter two parties probably stragglers from the flocks in the Millbrook Plantations.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A widespread but possibly declining resident.

This species continues to give cause for concern, but there was a further improvement in recording, with cards received from seventeen observers as against ten in 1997.

Breeding was recorded in the Hay Wood, Bradgers Hill, Butterfield Green and Galley Hill area (perhaps five plus pairs in total) and at Pegsdon Hills NR (four pairs). This compares with a total of 13–15 pairs at the same sites in 1997, an obvious decline. The species was also considered to have declined at Luton Hoo, but conversely numbers at Blows Downs in spring were thought to seem quite high. Fledged juveniles were noted at Bromham Lake LNR, and a family party at Felmersham NR.

Elsewhere birds were recorded at Mounfield Road Luton, Wigmore Valley Park Luton, Totternhoe Knolls, Houghton Regis ChP, Dunstable STW, Kensworth Quarry, Toddington, Maulden Woods, Stotfold, The Lodge, Stewartby CP, Blunham, Willington GP, Priory CP, Bromham village, Hanger Wood, Salem Thrift Bromham, Bowels Wood Bromham, Turvey Abbey, Harrold–Odell CP and Odell Great Wood. As noted in 1997, apparent concentrations in the south–east and north–west of the county are probably due to observer bias.

The largest party noted during the year was twelve at Pegsdon Hills NR on 7th February.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

A very rare resident declining to virtual extinction.

There were two records of this now very rare species in 1998, both at The Lodge, on 4th July (CB) and 27th December (SBa). As in previous years, former sites in the south of the county were checked with negative results (PT).

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

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

There was again an increase in record cards submitted. Breeding numbers were assessed at Dunstable STW (one pair), the Stopsley Common/Whitehill Farm/Wandswood Lane/Galley Hill area (15 singing males), Barton Hills (probably two pairs), BBS square SP9748 (four pairs), Bromham Lake LNR (one or two singing males) and Lower Farm Road Bromham (three singing males).

Probably due to the BBC winter finch and bunting flock recording scheme, there were records of more and larger winter flocks in 1998 than in 1997. In the first winter period there were 100–150 between Barton and Pulloxhill in January, with also two smaller parties of 30 and 15 in the same area, 60+ at Great Oak Farm Turvey also in January, and 38 at Stopsley Common and 35 at Biggleswade Common in February. In the second winter period there were *c.*80 in the Stopsley Common area in October increasing to *c.*100 by 7th November and still 80+ by 27th December, 50+ at Grindstonehill Turvey in November and *c.*20 by the Ouzel near Leighton Buzzard also in November. The flocks in the Turvey area were particularly encouraging as the same observer had only six records through the year, with a maximum of four on 14th

June, in 1997, and as the Stopsley Common area has previously been well-recorded, there may have been genuine increases there also.

Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus*

A fairly common resident but again probably declining.

Whilst most finch and bunting species were recorded more often and in greater numbers in 1998 than 1997, presumably due to increased observer effort and the BBC winter finch and bunting flock recording scheme, rather worryingly this does not seem to be the case with this species.

The only site at which breeding numbers were assessed was Dunstable STW (five pairs). Also noted in the breeding season at Houghton Regis ChP, Aspley Heath, on the Ivel in Blunham, Willington GP, Bromham Lake LNR and Radwell. There was a nil return for Luton Hoo where the species is considered to have disappeared both in the breeding season and in winter, and a note of decreased numbers in the Harrold/Chellington area.

Despite the winter flock scheme, the highest counts in the first winter period were 25 at Millbrook Pillinge NR, 19 at Biggleswade Common, 16 at Coronation CIP and 15 at Wootton Green Farm in February, and 16 at Stewartby CP in March. In the second winter period there were counts from three roosts, c.15 at Dunstable STW from October to December, c.10 at Bromham Lake LNR in December and 37 at Stewartby CP also in December. The last rather low figure was the highest count anywhere in the county this year, and apart from those listed, no other count of more than ten was recorded.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*

A locally common but declining resident.

Estimates of breeding numbers were reported from the Stopsley Common, Butterfield Green, Warden Hill and Galley Hill area (six singing males down from nine in 1997), the Biddenham Loop (six singing males down from eight in 1997, though there has been habitat loss in this area due to development), and BBS squares TL0051 (three singing males down from four in 1997) and SP9748 (two singing males down from four in 1997). Numbers were considered stable in the Eaton Bray and Totternhoe Knolls areas, but otherwise the counts submitted paint an unrelieved picture of continuing decline. Elsewhere also present in the breeding season at Pegsdon, Stotfold, Stanford, Clifton, Steppingley, Maulden, Cockayne Hatley, Blunham, Great Barford, Wyboston, Willington and Stagsden.

In the first winter period larger flocks noted were c.30 at Sutton on 10th January with c.40 there on the 31st, c.30 near the Blue Lagoon Arlesey on 11th January, 20+ at Barton Hill Farm on 21st January with c.35 there on the 31st, 50+ at Etonbury School Stotfold on 11th March and 53 at roost at Totternhoe Knolls on 14th March. The roost at Knotting Green peaked at 62 on 11th January with 35 there on 8th March. At Cockayne Hatley a flock fed on unharvested wheat from 1st February to 16th May, peaking at 60 on 22nd February. During this period the species was also recorded at Warden Hill, Streatley, Upper Caldecote, Pegnut Wood Potton, Wootton Green Farm and Biddenham.

In the second winter period there were 99 at Biggleswade Common on 15th November, 122 between Biggleswade Common and Langford on 7th December, 53 at roost at Knotting Green on 6th December with 25 there on the 21st, 45 near Henlow Camp on 10th December and a maximum of 34 at roost at Houghton Regis ChP on 24th December, and also recorded at Studham, Dunstable STW, Stopsley Common, Clifton Bury Farm, Brogborough Lake, Blunham and Bedford STW.

MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS

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

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*

Up to six were present at Basin Pond, Woburn Park again in 1998.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

One was at Harrold-Odell CP for most of the year, occasionally a second bird joined it. Another was at Blunham on 6th September. Four flew over Dunstable STW on 10th May. Two were seen near Tempsford on 13th November.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Two were at Rookery South CIP on 2nd April.

Muscovy Duck *Cairina scutulata*

One was at Felmersham NR on 8th November.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*

The tame female remained at Tiddenfoot WP until April.

Falcon *Falco* sp.

An escaped falcon with jesses at The Lodge on the 22nd April was thought to be possibly an immature Barbary Falcon (*Falco pelegrinoides*). An unidentified large falcon was also present at The Lodge on 26th May.

Peacock *Pava* sp.

One heard at East Hyde on 15th March.

Crowned Crane *Balearica pavonina*

An adult was at Slip End, Luton on 14th October.

Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*

Singles were reported at Houghton Regis ChP, The Lodge, Sandy and Upper Caldecote.

Parakeet *Psittacula* sp.

Two were at Sandy on two dates in March. Possible Ring-necked Parakeets were at Priory CP on 10th October and near Edworth on 25th August.

Peach-faced Lovebird *Agapornis roseicollis*

One was at Souldrop on 12th June.

CORRECTIONS TO THE 1996 REPORT

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

The three at Bromham Lake LNR on 3rd April were a record count for this small site and not as stated a first record there.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

The published figures for breeding at Bromham Hall and Harrold-Odell CP heronries were incorrect. At Bromham Hall seven out of 13 nests produced young, and a maximum of 17 young were seen of which 15 were believed to have fledged. At Harrold-Odell CP four out of six nests produced young, and a maximum of twelve young were seen of which eleven were believed to have fledged. A pair also attempted to breed at Felmersham NR, and were also reported to have attempted to breed in 1995.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

The record of three at Dunstable STW is incorrect; there were no birds on that date.

CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE 1997 REPORT

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

The published figures for breeding at Bromham Hall and Harrold-Odell CP heronries were incorrect. At Bromham Hall all eleven nests produced young, and a maximum of 28 young were seen of which 24 were believed to have fledged. At Harrold-Odell CP six out of seven nests produced young, and a maximum of 14 young were seen of which twelve were believed to have fledged. There was no repeat of the 1996 breeding attempt at Felmersham NR.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

One heard at Barton Hill Farm on 27th July (MW).

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

One in winter plumage briefly circled over Stewartby CP on the afternoon of 20th October, shortly before the Long-tailed Skua was found (DHB). In the excitement over the latter bird, submission of the record of the Plover was overlooked! A Kittiwake was also present briefly at the same site on that afternoon, completing a trio of coastal species moving inland in moderate North-east wind and low cloud – classic conditions for overland passage.

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

The first-winter Skua at Stewartby CP from 20th–22nd October, published in the 1997 report as Skua sp., was accepted as this species (DHB, RAN, DJO *et al*). Full details of this record are published elsewhere in this Bird Report.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

A late record was received for August 1997, when a female type was found at The Lodge, Sandy on 28th. (MJE).

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



WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TOTALS 1998
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 CLP, Coronation CLP, Kempston Bypass Pools, Lidlington CLP, Millbrook Pillinge NR, Rookery North CLP, Rookery South CLP and Stewartby CP).

| Species | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-------------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| Little Grebe | 5 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 16 | 14 | 12 | 13 | 8 | 9 |
| G. C. Grebe | 57 | 47 | 66 | 44 | 37 | 55 | 69 | 59 | 43 | 72 | 44 | 32 |
| Cormorant | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Little Egret | 40 | 43 | 29 | 8 | 3 | 16 | 14 | 34 | 1 | 20 | 22 | 34 |
| Grey Heron | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | - | 7 | 3 | 13 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 3 |
| Mute Swan | 32 | 31 | 33 | 36 | 31 | 69 | 72 | 71 | 39 | 31 | 5 | 37 |
| Greylag Goose | 19 | 41 | 4 | 13 | 18 | 26 | 29 | 95 | - | 6 | - | 161 |
| Canada Goose | 105 | 172 | 152 | 60 | 80 | 189 | 227 | 362 | 356 | 326 | 83 | 239 |
| Barnacle Goose | 2 | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| Shelduck | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Wigeon | 84 | 78 | 85 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 64 | 92 | 117 |
| Gadwall | 36 | 32 | 19 | 6 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 50 | 48 | 37 |
| Teal | 135 | 44 | 46 | - | - | - | 8 | 2 | 63 | 57 | 8 | 93 |
| Mallard | 230 | 91 | 68 | 59 | 60 | 162 | 96 | 291 | 366 | 176 | 180 | 210 |
| Pintail | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - |
| Shoveler | 9 | 8 | 8 | - | 11 | 11 | 12 | 10 | 16 | 28 | 6 | 8 |
| Pochard | 98 | 57 | 42 | - | 2 | 2 | 33 | 40 | 79 | 162 | 372 | 534 |
| Tufted Duck | 222 | 267 | 227 | 101 | 37 | 108 | 170 | 259 | 292 | 209 | 469 | 536 |
| Goldeneye | 27 | 21 | 11 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | 11 | 25 |
| Ruddy Duck | - | - | - | - | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Water Rail | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Moorhen | 15 | 25 | 24 | 18 | 17 | 41 | 33 | 36 | 36 | 28 | 21 | 40 |
| Coot | 535 | 396 | 326 | 207 | 131 | 194 | 247 | 435 | 488 | 485 | 519 | 606 |
| L. R. Plover | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ringed Plover | - | 3 | 4 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 11 | 1 | - | - | - |
| Golden Plover | 27 | 412 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 | - | - |
| Grey Plover | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Lapwing | 349 | 860 | 45 | 22 | 26 | 22 | 46 | 23 | 46 | 2377 | 687 | 414 |
| Dunlin | 1 | - | 2 | 4 | - | - | 10 | 14 | 2 | - | - | - |
| Ruff | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 9 | - | - | - |
| Snipe | 2 | 4 | 4 | - | - | - | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 7 |
| Redshank | 1 | 1 | 10 | 12 | 11 | 12 | 3 | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| Greenshank | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 3 | 2 | - | - | - |
| Green Sandpiper | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 2 | - | 2 | 2 |
| Common Sandpiper | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 2 | 5 | - | - | - | - |
| Turnstone | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Med. Gull | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Black-headed Gull | 1406 | 1376 | 1425 | 127 | 22 | 153 | 189 | 856 | 361 | 520 | 1357 | 2215 |
| Common Gull | 143 | 161 | 222 | 2 | - | - | - | 113 | 43 | 60 | 390 | 798 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| L. B. B. Gull | 5 | 32 | 81 | 7 | - | - | - | 11 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 2 |
| Herring Gull | 276 | 175 | 177 | 50 | 75 | 189 | 63 | 204 | 185 | 478 | 980 | 1896 |
| Iceland Gull | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Glaucous Gull | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| G. B. B. Gull | 29 | 23 | 79 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 36 | 33 | 150 | 287 |
| Common Tern | - | - | - | 10 | 12 | 18 | 27 | 40 | - | - | - | - |
| Black Tern | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Kingfisher | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Buzzard | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 1 |
| Sparrowhawk | - | 1 | - | - | - | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | - | 1 |
| Kestrel | - | 4 | - | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Hobby | - | - | - | - | 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 2 | - | - | - |

The following table records the species totals recorded on the Wetland Bird Survey for the North Bedfordshire area (Bromham Lake LNR, Elstow CIP, Elstow Bypass Pools, Felmersham NR, Great Barford GP, Priory CP, Radwell GP and Willington GP).

| Species | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Little Grebe | 4 | 10 | 11 | 4 | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| G. C. Grebe | 51 | 56 | 31 | 39 | 30 | 44 | 47 | 66 | 48 | 45 | 58 | 23 |
| Red-necked Grebe | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Cormorant | 23 | 62 | 22 | 19 | 11 | 14 | 18 | 11 | 25 | 22 | 93 | 13 |
| Little Egret | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Grey Heron | 12 | 8 | 10 | 13 | 18 | 11 | 16 | 14 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Mute Swan | 33 | 29 | 34 | 27 | 25 | 58 | 77 | 42 | 35 | 42 | 36 | 23 |
| Greylag Goose | - | 272 | 94 | 53 | 30 | - | 27 | 49 | 199 | 144 | 253 | 6 |
| Canada Goose | 483 | 188 | 109 | 99 | 80 | 93 | 152 | 98 | 104 | 348 | 204 | 138 |
| W-fronted Goose | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 46 |
| Barnacle Goose | - | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Feral/Hybrid Goose | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 7 | - | - |
| Wigeon | 39 | 44 | 26 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 62 | 60 | 39 |
| Gadwall | 10 | 16 | 5 | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | 7 | - | 6 |
| Teal | 41 | 8 | 31 | 11 | - | - | - | - | 11 | - | 8 | 26 |
| Mallard | 162 | 114 | 123 | 70 | 65 | 77 | 127 | 269 | 206 | 205 | 188 | 103 |
| Shoveler | 6 | 10 | - | - | - | - | 12 | - | 2 | 7 | - | - |
| Pochard | 273 | 222 | 66 | 6 | - | - | - | - | 9 | 59 | 100 | 240 |
| Ferruginous Duck | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Tufted Duck | 243 | 161 | 117 | 44 | 18 | 27 | 49 | 67 | 39 | 99 | 85 | 151 |
| Scaup | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Goldeneye | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | 4 |
| Smew | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Goosander | 4 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 |
| Water Rail | - | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 |
| Moorhen | 41 | 35 | 34 | 17 | 21 | 25 | 32 | 38 | 41 | 27 | 27 | 19 |
| Coot | 184 | 162 | 136 | 97 | 84 | 91 | 134 | 145 | 100 | 128 | 94 | 150 |
| Oystercatcher | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Little Ringed Plover | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|------|-----|------|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Ringed Plover | - | - | - | 8 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Golden Plover | 1350 | 656 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Lapwing | 840 | 360 | 224 | 50 | 17 | 21 | 26 | 20 | 45 | 6 | 48 | 18 |
| Sanderling | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| Dunlin | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | - | - | - |
| Snipe | - | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Woodcock | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Redshank | - | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Greenshank | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 3 | - | - | - |
| Green Sandpiper | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 5 | 2 | 2 | - | 1 |
| Common Sandpiper | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | - | - | - | - |
| Black-headed Gull | 239 | 350 | 1374 | 51 | 3 | 14 | 46 | 152 | 118 | 191 | 408 | 652 |
| Common Gull | 30 | 53 | 48 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 3 | 2 | 30 | 57 |
| L. B. B. Gull | - | 15 | 8 | 28 | 2 | 21 | 28 | 14 | 2 | - | 3 | 23 |
| Herring Gull | 9 | 8 | 31 | - | - | 10 | 35 | 23 | 18 | 12 | 6 | 10 |
| G. B. B. Gull | 1 | - | 13 | - | - | - | 4 | - | 5 | 1 | 2 | 24 |
| Common Tern | - | - | - | 12 | 26 | 26 | 38 | 37 | - | - | - | - |
| Kingfisher | 3 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Sparrowhawk | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Kestrel | 3 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Hobby | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - |

The following table records the species totals recorded on the Wetland Bird Survey for the South-west Bedfordshire area (Battlesden Lake, Chalton STW, Dunstable STW, East Hyde, Eversholt Lake, Houghton Regis ChP, Luton Hoo, Stockgrove CP, Tiddenfoot WP and Woburn Park).

| Species | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Little Grebe | 5 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 12 | 9 | 5 |
| G. C. Grebe | 13 | 14 | 21 | 7 | 15 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 7 | 15 | 14 | 8 |
| Cormorant | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | - | 2 | 13 | 12 | 18 | 10 | 13 |
| Grey Heron | 8 | 12 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 13 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 6 | 4 | 3 |
| Black Swan | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Mute Swan | 17 | 18 | 23 | 15 | 31 | 33 | 26 | 45 | 43 | 72 | 78 | 72 |
| Greylag Goose | - | - | - | - | 6 | - | - | - | - | 4 | - | - |
| Canada Goose | 19 | 170 | 104 | 149 | 147 | 79 | 52 | 55 | 154 | 255 | 202 | 186 |
| Shelduck | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Wood Duck | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mandarin | 48 | 17 | 15 | 18 | 10 | 25 | 28 | 19 | 32 | 40 | 8 | 39 |
| Wigeon | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 13 | 40 |
| Gadwall | 59 | 62 | 39 | 86 | 24 | 23 | 24 | 37 | 94 | 99 | 109 | 121 |
| Teal | 97 | 47 | 22 | 2 | - | - | - | 5 | 44 | 74 | 77 | 105 |
| Mallard | 522 | 380 | 272 | 257 | 220 | 322 | 404 | 572 | 716 | 708 | 514 | 644 |
| Pintail | - | - | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Shoveler | 12 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 2 | - | - | - | - | 8 | - | 4 |
| Pochard | 148 | 130 | 45 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 19 | 68 | 72 |
| Tufted Duck | 160 | 145 | 95 | 93 | 47 | 54 | 58 | 74 | 79 | 104 | 132 | 144 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Goldeneye | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 18 |
| Goosander | 33 | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 10 |
| Ruddy Duck | - | - | 2 | 7 | - | 2 | 2 | - | 6 | - | 10 | - |
| Moorhen | 151 | 135 | 94 | 60 | 49 | 52 | 86 | 102 | 144 | 167 | 177 | 142 |
| Coot | 206 | 194 | 152 | 113 | 111 | 121 | 162 | 201 | 216 | 261 | 185 | 235 |
| Little Ringed Plover | - | - | - | 6 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - |
| Jack Snipe | 3 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 |
| Snipe | 15 | 8 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | 15 |
| Woodcock | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Redshank | - | - | - | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Green Sandpiper | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 2 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Common Sandpiper | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 2 | 2 | - | - | - |
| Black-headed Gull | 536 | 239 | 279 | 45 | - | - | 30 | 411 | 195 | 487 | 926 | 1092 |
| Common Gull | 12 | 23 | 147 | 5 | - | - | 1 | - | 6 | 31 | 9 | 21 |
| L. B. Gull | - | - | - | - | - | - | 9 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 1 | 26 |
| Herring Gull | 11 | 23 | 6 | 4 | - | - | - | 2 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 1 |
| Common Tern | - | - | - | - | 4 | 4 | 10 | 7 | - | - | - | - |
| Kingfisher | 1 | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Buzzard | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Sparrowhawk | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Kestrel | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| Hobby | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |

The following table records the species totals recorded on the Wetland Bird Survey for the whole of Bedfordshire (the Marston Vale pits, the North Bedfordshire area and the South-west Bedfordshire area as listed above, plus Southill Lake).

| Species | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Little Grebe | 15 | 19 | 30 | 16 | 11 | 14 | 21 | 18 | 20 | 31 | 24 | 22 |
| G. C. Grebe | 125 | 126 | 112 | 91 | 87 | 143 | 141 | 132 | 106 | 153 | 126 | 48 |
| Red-necked Grebe | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Slavonian Grebe | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Cormorant | 104 | 108 | 62 | 28 | 18 | 32 | 36 | 58 | 52 | 63 | 129 | 61 |
| Little Egret | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Grey Heron | 52 | 57 | 56 | 72 | 39 | 43 | 34 | 39 | 28 | 30 | 29 | 24 |
| Black Swan | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Mute Swan | 92 | 78 | 90 | 77 | 87 | 160 | 165 | 158 | 117 | 145 | 148 | 132 |
| W-fronted Goose | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 46 |
| Greylag Goose | 19 | 313 | 98 | 107 | 154 | 211 | 113 | 144 | 199 | 155 | 253 | 362 |
| Canada Goose | 681 | 573 | 382 | 334 | 328 | 381 | 443 | 515 | 614 | 929 | 489 | 583 |
| Barnacle Goose | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| Feral/Hybrid Goose | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 7 | - | - |
| Shelduck | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Wood Duck | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mandarin | 48 | 17 | 15 | 18 | 10 | 25 | 28 | 19 | 32 | 40 | 8 | 39 |
| Wigeon | 124 | 122 | 111 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 126 | 165 | 196 |
| Gadwall | 109 | 110 | 63 | 92 | 34 | 35 | 34 | 47 | 114 | 156 | 157 | 170 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| Teal | 277 | 103 | 110 | 2 | - | - | 8 | 7 | 139 | 145 | 171 | 274 |
| Mallard | 973 | 593 | 491 | 394 | 375 | 565 | 650 | 1189 | 1389 | 1119 | 914 | 1025 |
| Pintail | 2 | - | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 | - | - | - |
| Shoveler | 27 | 22 | 23 | 6 | 13 | 11 | 14 | 24 | 18 | 38 | 13 | 22 |
| Pochard | 640 | 431 | 154 | 7 | 11 | 3 | 34 | 44 | 100 | 241 | 550 | 873 |
| Ferruginous Duck | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Tufted Duck | 651 | 585 | 463 | 246 | 127 | 196 | 284 | 404 | 412 | 419 | 697 | 831 |
| Scaup | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Goldeneye | 27 | 24 | 11 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | 15 | 47 |
| Smew | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Goosander | 37 | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 14 |
| Ruddy Duck | - | 1 | 10 | 13 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 12 | 5 | 15 | 4 |
| Water Rail | 1 | 4 | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | - | 1 |
| Moorhen | 210 | 202 | 157 | 98 | 91 | 119 | 154 | 183 | 238 | 235 | 231 | 207 |
| Coot | 961 | 789 | 653 | 427 | 333 | 409 | 550 | 800 | 810 | 874 | 799 | 995 |
| Oystercatcher | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Little Ringed Plover | - | - | - | 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - |
| Ringed Plover | - | 3 | 4 | 16 | 12 | 12 | 9 | 11 | 1 | - | - | - |
| Golden Plover | 1377 | 1068 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 | - | - |
| Grey Plover | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Lapwing | 1189 | 1220 | 269 | 72 | 44 | 45 | 72 | 43 | 91 | 243 | 735 | 432 |
| Sanderling | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| Dunlin | 1 | - | 2 | 4 | - | - | 10 | 14 | 6 | - | - | - |
| Ruff | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 9 | - | - | - |
| Jack Snipe | 3 | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 |
| Snipe | 17 | 16 | 5 | 1 | - | - | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 23 |
| Woodcock | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 |
| Black-tailed Godwit | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Redshank | 1 | 1 | 11 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 7 | 1 | - | - | - | - |
| Greenshank | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 4 | 5 | - | - | - |
| Green Sandpiper | 4 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 5 | 13 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Common Sandpiper | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 3 | 9 | 2 | - | - | - |
| Turnstone | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mediterranean Gull | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Black-headed Gull | 2196 | 1980 | 1653 | 223 | 25 | 167 | 265 | 1419 | 674 | 1027 | 2399 | 4018 |
| Common Gull | 185 | 1689 | 417 | 7 | - | - | 1 | 115 | 52 | 93 | 429 | 877 |
| L. B. B. Gull | 5 | 48 | 89 | 35 | 2 | 21 | 37 | 26 | 10 | 21 | 14 | 51 |
| Herring Gull | 296 | 206 | 214 | 54 | 75 | 199 | 98 | 229 | 212 | 500 | 998 | 1907 |
| Iceland Gull | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Glaucous Gull | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| G. B. B. Gull | 30 | 23 | 92 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 41 | 34 | 152 | 311 |
| Common Tern | - | - | - | 22 | 44 | 48 | 75 | 85 | - | - | - | - |
| Black Tern | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Kingfisher | 6 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 11 | 9 | 7 | 6 |
| Buzzard | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | - |
| Sparrowhawk | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|---|---|
| Kestrel | 7 | 11 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 8 | 7 |
| Hobby | - | - | - | - | 4 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 2 | - | - | - |

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

Address: 22 Russett Close, Stewartby, Bedford MK43 9LG.

DUNSTABLE SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS

Review of 1998

by Paul Trodd (BNHS Honorary Warden)

The many hours spent birdwatching at this tiny wetland site during 1998 by 40 observers produced 121 species of birds of which 44 species bred, including two newcomers: Great Crested Grebe and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

The breeding season was mixed with only the warbler tribe doing well, particularly Whitethroat (18 territories) and Sedge Warbler (21 territories), while both Gadwall and Tufted Duck reared young for the first time in several years. A pair of Grey Wagtails nested along the brook and at least two pairs of Shelducks attempted to breed around the lagoons. Despite three pairs of Common Tern hatching eggs on the island no young made it to the flying stage. Breeding waders suffered their worst season ever due, mainly, to the privations of the ever burgeoning corvid population: Little Ringed Plover and Redshank both failed to fledge young.

Even more sinister was, for the first time in living memory, the absence of nesting Lapwings on the surrounding arable land; indeed other farmland species such as Yellowhammer, Grey Partridge and Skylark struggled to breed in these chemical soaked fields. If it was bad for the resident birds then it was a disaster for the long haul migrants: Turtle Dove and Cuckoo were noted only a handful of times on passage and neither bred; spring Yellow Wagtails never got into double figures and Whinchats were recorded on only four dates. How long will it be before we lose these classic species altogether?

The wader passage was generally disappointing as we struggled to maintain mud levels in the wettest summer since the scrape was constructed in 1993. Although numbers were low 17 species were recorded, including the highlight of the year, a pair of summer plumage Temminck's Stints, that attracted a good county twitch one evening in May. Single Jack Snipe, Grey Plover and Wood Sandpiper all showed briefly, in contrast to a confiding autumn Spotted Redshank which stayed for about a week in September, to the delight of many local birders.

Of the rarities a well watched Great Grey Shrike in October was only the second site record, as was a splendid storm-blown Common Scoter in September. Falls of Arctic and Black Terns in the spring and autumn respectively were all too brief and a single Tree Sparrow in June was the only record of 1998. The year ended in fine style with a Brent Goose in the A5 Field (the first ever) and several Chiffchaffs scattered around the site taking advantage of the abundance of insects in the mild weather.

Conservation work during 1998 was centred on the wader scrape with work parties transporting shingle onto the islands and, in late summer, cutting and stacking vegetation. Another tern raft was constructed ready for positioning on Number 2 Lagoon and further nest boxes were erected courtesy of a local scout group.

The monthly open mornings proved popular and in September the car park was full of visiting birders from far and wide. Guided tours were arranged for various groups and were well received.

Survey work continued with the breeding bird survey and monthly wildfowl count statistics held by the honorary warden; the 1998 BTO-British Sugar Challenge for Business was entered into and Dunstable Sewage Works was well placed in the top two of the small wetland category at the time of writing. All bird sightings have been submitted from the site log to the county recorder and are included in the main body of the Bird Report.

On behalf of all the Dunstable birders I would like to pass on our thanks and appreciation to the staff at Anglian Water, including Andy Brown at Cambridge, and the staff at Dunstable, Steve Grace and Lee Beard, who are so supportive to the conservation cause.

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

BIRDS NEW TO BEDFORDSHIRE – 1997

by Dave Ball

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

On Monday 21st October 1997 I went out in mid-morning and checked Stewartby CP and Brogborough Lake as, with low cloud and a raw if only moderately strong NE breeze, weather conditions seemed good for seabird movement inland. I drew a complete blank at both sites, but after leaving Bedford in mid afternoon, I decided that it was worth checking the brick pits again, and looking at Stewartby gull roost. Arriving back at Stewartby CP about 16:20, I almost immediately found a small gull with extensive black on the primaries and paler mantle, being mobbed by a Black-headed Gull. For a moment I thought Sabine's Gull and rushed to get my scope out of the boot, but closer observation showed that that the bird was too large in relation to Black-headed for a Sabine's and that the mantle and wing-coverts were dark grey with a black bar across the secondaries, making it a juvenile Kittiwake. I followed it around the lake for several minutes as it tended to fly high and views of the upperparts were infrequent. As I did so I heard a half-familiar wader call, and scanning around with bins found a medium sized, greyish wader with a pale rump flying high over the lake. It did a couple of circuits and I managed to see the black auxiliaries confirming it as Grey Plover. I then transferred my attention back to the Kittiwake, which soon circled higher and flew off south, apparently disappearing into cloud base as it climbed away over Millbrook Pillinge NR. I looked at my car clock, noting the time as 16:35, and then scanned around the south of the lake with bins for a couple of minutes, wondering if the Kittiwake might come back in. As I did so I noticed some Black-headed

Gulls diving at a dark blob on the water. Quickly I scoped the blob and was able to see a small head being held down and a bit of primary extension sticking up at the rear – almost certainly a Skua. At this point I had no real idea of what species or even what size of Skua I was dealing with, and remembering my experience in 1994 when I drove off to inform other observers before getting good views of a bird, I thought 'No way this time!' and quickly drove round to the sailing club and hurried down to the slipway. Here the views were much better – the bird was side on, practically level with the slipway and much less than half way across the lake. It was obviously very small – it seemed almost shorter than the mobbing Black-headed Gulls. I waited until it flew a short way, seeing a small all dark Skua with white primary patches and a strongly keeled breast. At this stage I thought perhaps an Arctic, and drove into Stewartby to phone other observers including D.J. Odell. Returning to the same spot, I quickly got better flight views and realised that my first impression of quite extensive primary patches must have been due to views of the underwing, as the white on the upperwing was very restricted. Also the head was small and round and the bill small with a black tip and sharply contrasting blue-grey base. Surely it was a Long-tailed! I looked around for other observers arriving and eventually saw DJO and R. A. Nye watching the bird from the NE shore. I decided to join them to discuss the bird, though I felt my position gave better views. As I walked off Pete Almond and another birder arrived where my car was parked. I pointed the bird out to them, but we decided that it was better not to stay in the gated area with darkness approaching and drove round to join the others. There was general agreement that it was a Long-tailed, with only Tim Robson of those present expressing doubts. RAN had actually independently found it earlier from the NW shore, at about the same time as I had.

The next day I returned about 10:15, not knowing that the bird had been seen earlier. A quick scan of the lake failed to find it, and I left to check Brogborough Lake, Lidlington CIP and Rookery North CIP before returning to Stewartby CP and walking the SW side of the lake thinking the Skua might have drifted inshore. I walked right to the South Corner, failing to find it, before returning over the mounds at that corner I picked it up in flight over the NW side of the lake. I continued walking to get level with it and met RAN, who had seen the bird earlier but like me had only just relocated it. We watched it for about two hours with the sun directly behind us, during which time it flew several times at first, once coming to perhaps 200–250m distance, before settling down and drifting steadily down wind. As it drifted we moved our position to keep up with it, eventually ending up at the western end of the SW shore with the bird perhaps 150–200m distant. It then took off and flew back to the middle of the lake, and at that point I left.

Full description: A small Skua, barely the size of a Black-headed Gull though perhaps rather longer winged. When first seen sitting on the water, it actually looked shorter than Black-head Gulls mobbing it, but in flight it seemed about the same length and somewhat more robust, with a prominent strongly keeled breast. On the water the head was held down most of the time and then appeared small and rounded, with quite a small delicate bill. Primaries projected some way beyond tail tip when sitting on water. The central tail feathers projected slightly, and on a couple of occasions I felt fairly sure that their tips were rounded, but I did not see this feature well enough to be

100% certain. The legs and the base of the bill were blue grey, and the bill had a clearly demarcated black tip making up perhaps a third of its length. In the poor light on the 20th most of the plumage appeared virtually black, but in direct sunlight on the 21st it looked a cold mid to dark brown, definitely to me having no hint of rufous tones, though not strongly grey either. The water in direct sunlight, reflecting a blue sky, appeared a deep slightly greyish blue, and the plumage tones of the bird, though brown rather than blue, blended in with the water so that it was difficult to find and might have blended in well on a black and white photograph (whereas in poor light on the previous day it stuck out as black on near-white water). In direct sunlight with the bird sitting on the water, paler buffish fringes were visible on the mantle and scapulars and forming diffuse wing bars on the coverts, but no pale tips were visible on the flight feathers, which were a darker, blacker brown than the rest of the plumage. A times I thought the bird had a small dark cap or dark lores, but eventually I decided that these were shadow effects and that the head and face were rather concolorous. In flight there was a very restricted white flash on the upper primaries, with definitely only two white primary shafts visible on the best views, and perhaps a very small amount of white at the base of the third primary. There was a more diffuse but still quite restricted white flash on the underwing, extending over perhaps five to seven primaries, but not reaching much more than a third of the way up the exposed flight feathers at its maximum. There was no white on the underwing primary coverts.

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CONFIRMED BREEDING OF CROSSBILL IN BEDFORDSHIRE **by Roy Nye**

During the winter of 1997/98 we experienced a small invasion of Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra*. A number of flocks were located in most suitable areas, and one good sized flock was present in the Moneypot Hill area of the Millbrook Plantations. During late March and early April I had noticed a male singing from the same pine tree on several occasions. The area was adjacent to a collapsed barn in a clearing at the centre of the wood. Whilst checking the area on 9th May, I sat by the barn at about 08:00 and could clearly hear a Crossbill calling. After a few minutes I located a female. It flew to one of the pines at the edge of the clearing and, as it landed, two young birds appeared and began to beg for food. I was able to observe the young being fed for probably more than an hour. Both the male and the female fed the young at intervals of approximately ten minutes. The female appeared to do most of the feeding. I had excellent views of the young, which had pale heavy bills, not yet crossed, and a uniform buff ground colour to their plumage, heavily streaked darker brown, with the wing coverts, tertials and primaries plain dark brown. The legs were light brown. I was able to confirm that there were two juveniles, probably not more than a day or two out of the nest, as it was obvious that they could not fly properly.

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THE LADY AMHERST'S PHEASANT

by Phil Cannings

Introduction

The Lady Amherst's Pheasant, *Chrysolophus amherstiae*, is a resident breeding bird in Bedfordshire. Its status within the county has been unclear for some time now, and it was against this background that in 1995 the Records and Research Committee organised a survey of the species' distribution and numbers.

This report summarises the results of this survey, conducted from 1995 to 1999, and what is known of this beautiful and enigmatic bird.

Historical Perspective

The Lady Amherst's Pheasant, *Chrysolophus (phasianus) amherstiae*, Leadbetter, 1829, is a resident of isolated mountain ridges in south-west China, adjoining areas of south-east Tibet and northern Burma (Myanmar). The translation of its Chinese name is 'Flower Pheasant'.

World-wide there have been various attempts to introduce this ornamental pheasant. These were unsuccessful in Scotland, Hawaii, Columbia and New Zealand, however in England releases were successful and there is a now small and very local population centred mainly in Bedfordshire.

In England Lady Sarah Amherst first imported these pheasants in July 1828, although captive breeding proved difficult and it was not until 1871 that they first successfully bred in captivity.

During the 19th century there were two main releases in Britain, one by Robert Gordon of Bute at Mount Stuart, where the species was released in conjunction with other exotica including the Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*, and the second at Woburn Park in Bedfordshire.

Of the pheasants released by Gordon only the Golden Pheasants survived, the Lady Amherst's disappearing through hybridisation with the former.

From the initial release at Woburn park in 1890 the species gradually spread beyond the park bounds both east and west along the Greensand Ridge. This process was aided by further releases during the 20th century. The latest known release in Bedfordshire occurred in 1997 when six birds were released into a wood within the mid Bedfordshire area. Of these four were known to have been predated by foxes, and only one, a male, is known to still survive.

There were further releases at Beaulieu Manor Wood in 1925, Richmond Park in 1928-29, and again in 1931-32 (24 birds in total), and Whipsnade in 1930. Together with further releases at Elveden in the Suffolk Brecks in 1950, the Exbury Estate, Beaulieu in 1958, Stockley Wood, in the New Forest and at Halkyn Churchyard in Clwyd that resulted in localised populations which survived a number of years although all have now become extinct.

Hybridisation with the closely related Golden Pheasant has played a major role in the decline of the species with the latest records from Stockley Wood being of a hybrid in May of 1995, and the last record of pure Lady Amherst's Pheasant from Exbury estate being in 1988. In 1971 hybrid Lady Amherst's x Golden Pheasant were still being reported in Galloway.

Since 1988 apparently pure Golden Pheasant have continued to be recorded on Exbury estate, although even these birds seem to be declining in recent years.

At the time of the Elveden release Golden Pheasants were already established in the area as feral breeding birds and these quickly overcame the introduced Lady Amherst's Pheasants.

Within Bedfordshire the species would appear to have remained pure due to the absence of Golden Pheasant within the county. However at least one hybrid male is known to have been present for a number of years at Luton Hoo, and it would appear likely a number of misguided releases of Golden Pheasant have taken place in Bedfordshire this century.

The Lady Amherst's Pheasant was admitted to category C of the British and Irish list in 1971.

The Lady Amherst's Pheasant is included on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which means that it is an offence to release the species into the wild in the United Kingdom without a license issued by English Nature.

Survey Methodology

The Lady Amherst's Pheasant is a shy and secretive bird which is notoriously difficult to see, the male is however easy to detect during the breeding season from its far carrying, and distinctive tri-syllabic call.

The present survey was conducted from February to May in each of the years 1995 to 1998, and involved observers making at least three visits to each traditional site within the county together with adjacent suitable sites. In the final year visits were also made to all other suitable sites within the county.

On each visit calling males were identified and marked onto a site map. In 1999 a visit was made to every site containing Lady Amherst's Pheasants and the habitat was recorded. The presence or absence of reared pheasants and game-keeping was also noted.

Results

Analysis of the marked maps showed that calling males were remarkably faithful to particular sites and the number of sites remained fairly constant. Over the survey period a total of 85 separate territories were identified.

The territory locations remained consistent both within year visits, and between consecutive years, which would suggest that the birds are territorial. Observers reported males moving within a small, defined area that would indicate that the males select and defend a specific territory.

Insufficient data were obtained to accurately assess the number of females, however within their natural range they are polygamous, with each male having 2-3 females within their territory. Assuming this held true for the British population the theoretical total number of birds would therefore be in the range of 170-340 birds.

This total does not include non-breeding birds that do not hold a territory.

The higher end of this estimate may need to be considered with caution as there is some evidence, at Luton Hoo for instance, that there may be an imbalance with more males than females being present.

It was noticeable that those woods that were managed for pheasant shooting interests contained higher numbers of Lady Amherst's Pheasants than those that were not.

There was no apparent link between Lady Amherst's density and the level of disturbance within the wood with some of the higher densities of birds being within woods crossed by major footpaths.

A comparison of the occupied territories against the surface geology shows, with the exception of the isolated population at Luton Hoo, a direct correlation with the location of the exposure of Lower Greensand within Bedfordshire (Figure 2).

During the survey period Lady Amherst's Pheasants remained elusive, being heard far more often than seen. They showed a tendency to run or slip away into cover when disturbed in preference to flight.

Lady Amherst's Pheasants frequently tree roosted and were observed going to roost from 30 minutes before dusk. The males often called from a tree roost, both at dawn and dusk.

Distribution

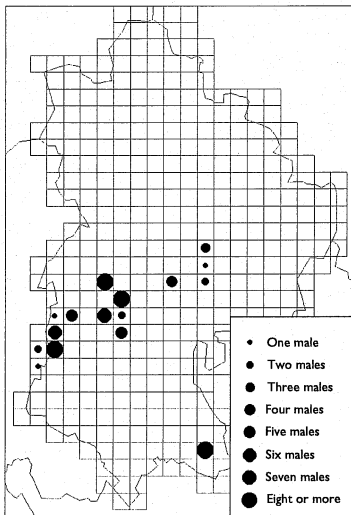


Fig 1. Density of males (average male count).

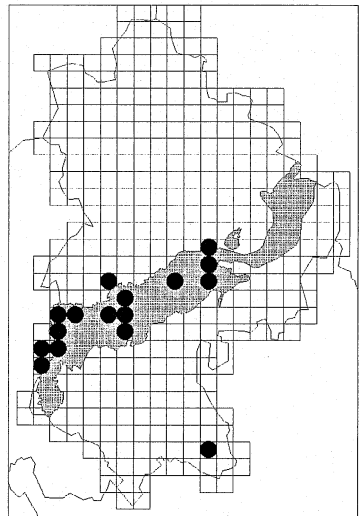


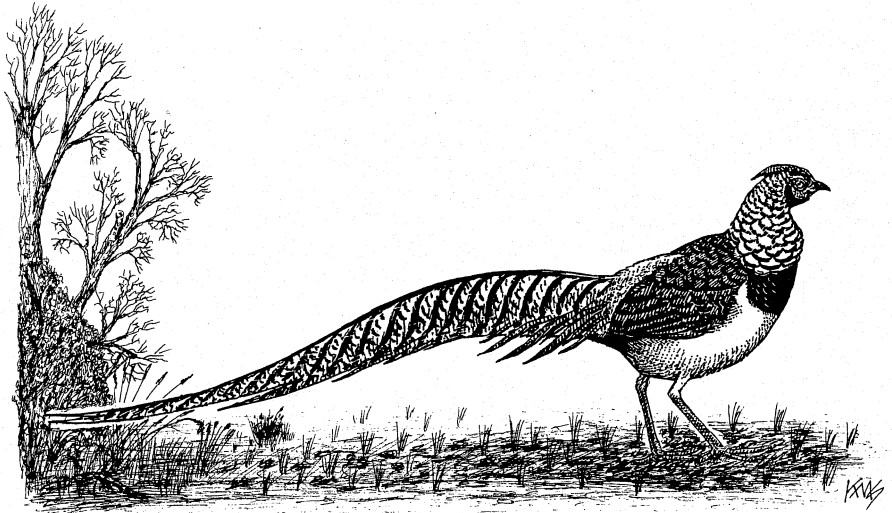
Fig 2. Comparison of distribution against Lower Greensand.

Habitat Preferences

In their native habitat the Lady Amherst's Pheasant is a bird of isolated mountain ridges and rocky slopes between 1,800 and 4,600 metres above sea level. The natural habitat is characterised by stunted vegetation consisting of tangled bamboo and rhododendron thickets.

The natural climate consists of harsh winters and wet spring and summers, so the British climate presents the pheasant with little discomfort.

In Bedfordshire the pheasant occurs in mixed plantations of Scots Pine, Ash and Oak, with lesser numbers of other species such as Beech, Sycamore, Sweet and Horse Chestnut. At some sites the bird was present in natural woodland adjacent to



Lady Amherst's Pheasant

Kevin Sharpe

plantations. The woodland was mature with a predominantly closed canopy.

With the exception of one site all the woodlands had a strong scrub layer, averaging 1 metre in height, and consisting of Bramble, Dog Rose, Hawthorn, and at three locations Rhododendron.

The soil type at all locations except Luton Hoo was noticeably sandy, with a litter layer of needles and fallen leaves, and at all location ferns and grasses were present.

Breeding Biology

Eggs are laid from April to May in a single clutch of 6–11 eggs. The eggs are broad oval, smooth and glossy and are buff or white in colour. The nest site is a shallow depression, lined with small amounts of vegetation.

In the wild in China the female alone incubates the eggs.

The incubation period is 22–23 days with the birds capable of precocious flight at 12–14 days.

Voice

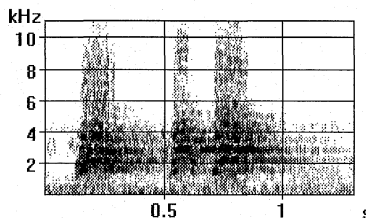


Fig 3. Sonogram of male's call.

The main call of the male Lady Amherst's Pheasant is a far carrying, hoarse three syllable call 'chek ker-chek', in which the second and third syllables are close together. The total call length is just over one second. Males would occasionally call with a single note.

The male calls from February through to early May and moves within a small area whilst doing so as if marking its bounds. The calls are made at dawn and dusk, with greatest calling at dawn, and last for two to three hours.

Observations showed males continue to call after going to roost at dusk, and will call from a tree roost for some time after dawn (up to an hour and a half was recorded).

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J. Abbott, J. Adams, A. Alliez, B. Barrett, P. Cook, L.G.R. Evans, R. Gerrard, D & M.H. Green, P. Housden, B. King, J. Knight, A. Livett, D. Mellor, E. Newman, B. Nightingale, M. Rayment, J. Robertson, K. Sharpe. J.T.R.S. Sharrock, M. Sherridan, J & D. Toomer, P. Trodd, A. Whitney, P. Wilkinson.

I would like to particularly thank Brian King for organising the observers and leading the fieldwork for this survey, and David Mellor who provided sound recordings of Bedfordshire birds.

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COLOUR-RINGED CORMORANTS IN BEDFORDSHIRE 1995-98

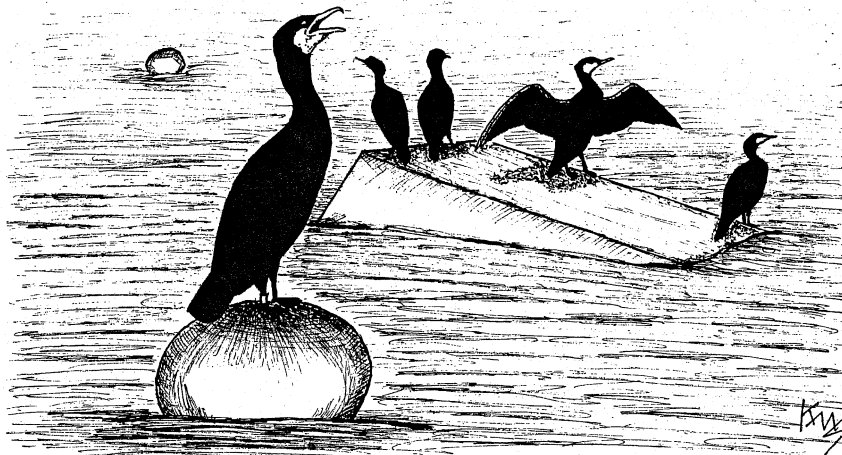
by Peter Almond

Details of sightings of colour-ringed Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* in Bedfordshire 1995-98

| Ringed at | Date | Darvic ring Leg Colour | Inscription | Metal ring Leg | Observation details Site | Dates |
|--|---------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| St. Margaret's Island, Tenby, Dyfed | 29/6/91 | R Red | White 7 | L n/a | Harrold-Odell CP | 10 & 16/2/96 |
| | | R White | Blank | | | 8/12/96 |
| Aberton Res., Essex | 5/91 | R Orange | White B | L 55 | Harrold-Odell CP | 16, 18 & 22/2/96 |
| | | | | | | 9/3/97 7 & 14/2/98 30/11/98 |
| Rutland Water, Rutland | 6/6/95 | L Dark Blue | White Fj & bar | R 5169991 | Harrold-Odell CP | 11/4/96 |
| Aberton Res., Essex | 29/5/95 | L Orange | Black J3 | R 5180523 | Harrold-Odell CP | 11/4/96 |
| Besthorpe, Notts | 26/5/96 | L Dark Blue | White TS & bar | R 5131439 | Bromham Lake LNR | 13 & 19/10/96 17/11/96 |
| St. Margaret's Island, Tenby, Dyfed | 6/7/86 | L White | Black J3 | R n/a | Harrold-Odell CP | 17/11/96 |
| St. Margaret's Island, Tenby, Dyfed | 18/7/95 | R White | Black 3 | L 5164789 | Priory CP (DK) | 16/10/95 |
| | | R Dark Blue | White J | | Stewartby CP Priory CP | 6/1/98 20/11/98 |
| Aberton Res., Essex | 27/5/98 | L Orange | Black Lj & bar | R 5204398 | Bromham Lake LNR | 22/8/98 |

Also a possible Dutch-ringed bird was seen at Harrold-Odell CP on 17th November 1996. All sightings by PA, except Dave Kramer as shown. All were birds ringed as nestlings; details of St. Margaret's Island birds thanks to Mr Robin Sellers, all others thanks to Mr Graham Ekins.

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REPORT OF THE BIRD CLUB GENERAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR 1998

During 1998 the Committee continued to develop and consolidate the Club. Membership at the end of the year was 253, a slight decrease from the 1997 total of 263.

The AGM in February saw Peter Almond step down from the Committee, to be replaced by Bob Foskett who, with Boo Matthews, would continue the task of publicising the Bird Club and its activities.

Following the resignation of Martin Palmer, Dave Odell took on sole responsibility for the post of Bird Recorder. To help with the production of the Bird Report, he then organised a small group of volunteers under Dave Ball (who was co-opted onto the Committee as Bird Report Editor). The result was that both the delayed 1996 Report and the 1997 Report were published before the year's end. In future, if all Members submit their bird records by the published deadlines, there should be no problems in getting the previous year's Bird Report out by the autumn.

The Rarities Panel was also reorganised to take some of the burden off the Recorder, with all reports now being submitted to the Secretary of the Rarities Panel, Pete Smith, which should speed up the decision-making process.

After three years, the fieldwork on Lady Amherst's pheasant was completed, and it is hoped the results will be written up for publication in the near future. The Winter Garden Bird Feeding Survey continues to attract more participants, and it was joined by a Summer Garden Bird Feeding Survey in 1998. The pilot Winter Finch Flock Survey resulted in details of 116 flocks from 116 observers, and was launched as a full survey for this winter.

Unfortunately no teams from the Bird Club took part in the 1998 Birdwatch UK Bird Race, but plans are afoot for an American-style Big Sit in 1999.

The Bird Club continued its programme of meetings throughout the year, with seven indoor and 15 field meetings; and *The Hobby* continued its regular bi-monthly appearance.

The autumn of 1998 saw some conflict between individual birdwatchers and the new owners of Rookery and other claypits. The leasing of the shooting rights meant that the unofficial access birdwatchers had enjoyed for many years was no longer available, and it proved necessary for the Committee to issue a notice to all Members requesting them to respect the lawful rights of the owners. The Committee is still hopeful that access may be negotiated in the future.

In December, the Bird Club was asked to survey the bird population on a farm near Beeston, and initial visits have shown this to be an important site for a number of wintering species, e.g. golden plover and finches. Further survey visits are proposed to map breeding species on the farm.

The Stewartby Millennium Park is currently under construction, and is due to open in February 2000. Committee members are currently involved in monitoring changes to bird populations on the site.

The Committee is currently discussing long term plans for the restoration of land near Bedford STW when the proposed gravel extraction is finished. This is an exciting opportunity for us to help create ideal wader habitat in the north of the county, and will go some way to replacing habitat lost at Rookery.

Finally, 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

- 42nd Ordinary Meeting** 27th January, Maulden, "Crossbills" by Dr A. Knox. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.
- 6th Annual General Meeting** 24th February, Maulden, followed by "A Travelogue" by Mr D. Odell. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.
- 43rd Ordinary Meeting** 31st March, "Birding in Churchill, Manitoba" by Mr B. Trevis. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.
- 44th Ordinary Meeting** 29th September, Maulden, "Birding in Washington State" by Mr D. Kramer. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.
- 45th Ordinary Meeting** 27th October, Maulden, "A Strange Name for a Bird" by Mr P. Fuller. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.
- 46th Ordinary Meeting** 24th November, Maulden, "A Study of Buzzards" by Mr R. Prytherch. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.
- 47th Ordinary Meeting** 15th December, Maulden, "A Evening of Entertainment" Organised by Dr. J. T. R. Sharrock and Mr B. Nightingale. Chair: Mr B. Nightingale.

Field Meetings

- Upper Ouse Valley** 11th January. Local wintering birds. Leader: Mr P. Almond.
- Ouse Washes** 1st February. Wintering birds. Leader: Mr P. Marshall.
- Gull Watch** 1st March. Looking at the wintering White-winged Gulls in the Marston Vale. Leader: Mr D. Odell.
- Blows Downs** 19th April. Spring migrants. Leader: Mr R. Dazley.
- Maulden Woods** 3rd May. Dawn chorus. Leader: Mr P. Trodd.
- Dunstable STW** 13th May. Passage waders and other migrants. Leader: Mr P. Trodd.
- Brecklands and NW Norfolk** 24th May. Breeding and passage birds. Leader: Mr D. Green.
- Little Paxton Pits** 3rd June. Local breeding and special species of the area. Leader: Mr T. How.
- New Forest** 14th June. Species special to the area. Leader: Mr K. M. Sharpe.
- Wavendon Heath** 24th June. Species special to the area. Leader: Mr P. Smith.
- Marston Vale Brick Pits** 23rd August. Migrant Waders. Leader: Mr T. Donnelly.
- Dungeness** 20th September. Migrant and passage birds. Leader: Mr M. Williams.
- North Norfolk Coast** 11th October. Migrant and passage birds. Leader: Mr K. M. Sharpe.
- Ouse Washes** 22nd November. Wintering wildfowl birds. Leader: Mr D. Green.

THE BEDFORDSHIRE BIRD CLUB 1998
(Established 1993)

President

Mr Barry Nightingale

Vice-presidents

Mr David Kramer

Dr Tim Sharrock

General Management Committee:

Officers

Chairman

Mr Peter Smith

Secretary

Miss Sheila Alliez

Assistant Treasurer

Mr Kevin Sharpe

County Recorder

Mr David Odell

Bird Report Editor

Mr David Ball

Research Officer

Mr Phil Cannings

Bulletin Editor

Mr David Odell

Meetings Secretary

Mr Don Green

Committee Members

Mr Robert Foskett

Mr Simon Knight

Mrs Boo Matthews

Mr Jon Palmer

Mr Tony Donnelly (co-opted)

Mrs Mary Sheridan

Membership Secretary (BNHS)

All Officers and Members serve the Club in an honorary capacity.

Rarities Panel

Mr David Ball

Mr Barry Nightingale

Mr David Odell

Dr Tim Sharrock

Mr Peter Smith

Mr Steve Williams

Records & Research Committee

Mr David Odell (Chair)

Miss Sheila Alliez

Dr Roger Buisson

Mr Rob Dazley

Mr Phil Cannings (Sec)

Mr Brian King

Mr David Kramer

Mr Errol Newman

Mr Barry Nightingale

Mr Tony Ploszajski

Mr Kevin Sharpe

Dr Tim Sharrock

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.

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

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

THE SOCIETY

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society was formed in 1946 and its main function is to record the flora and fauna of the county. For this purpose it has over twenty active Recorders who cover most branches of natural history study and whose annual reports are published in Part 1 of 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, Maulden, Haynes and Elstow.

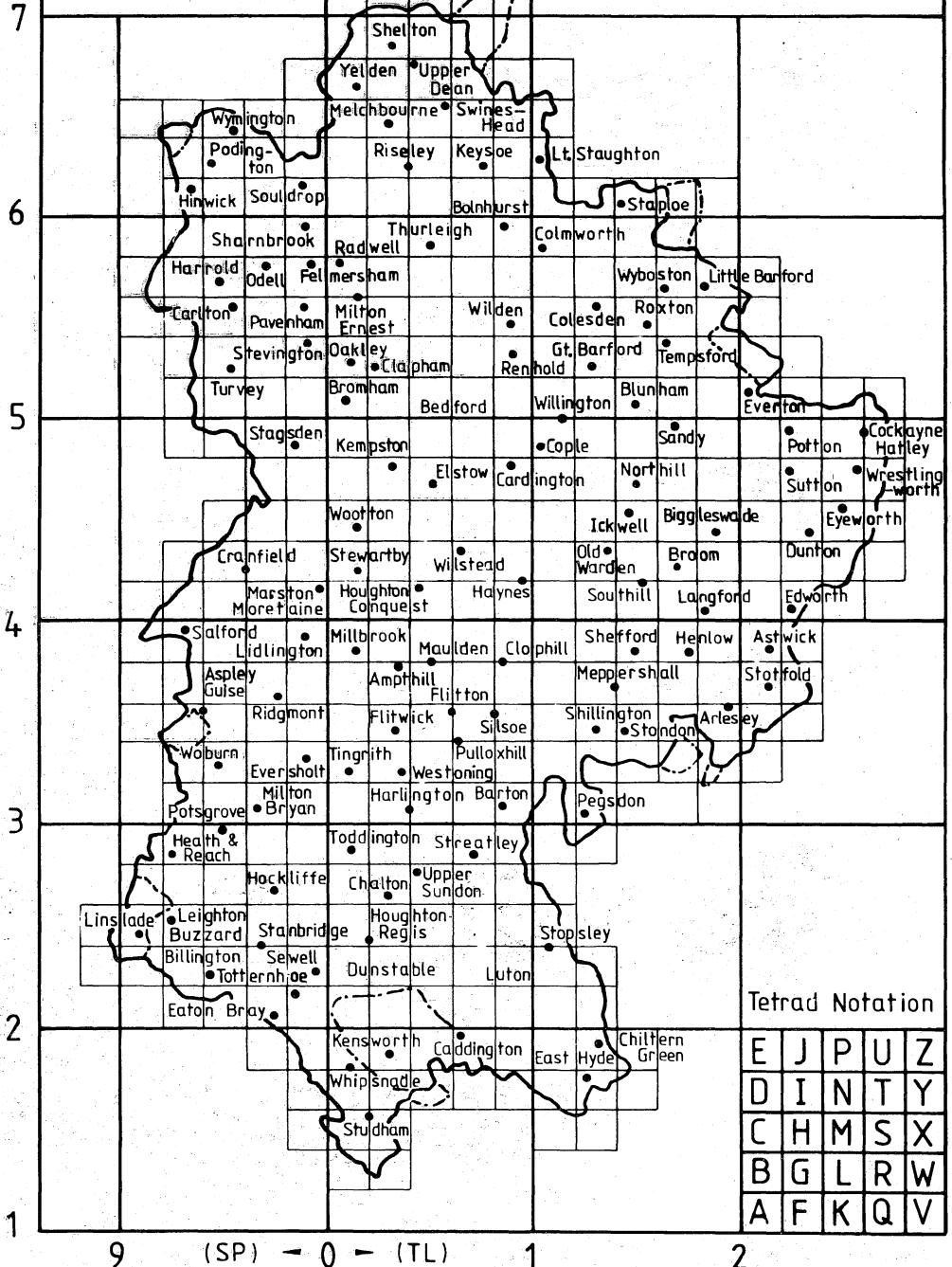
The Society depends on the annual subscriptions which are devoted entirely to carrying out its work, as all officers are honorary. Membership is open to anyone, whether resident in the county or not.

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

BEDFORDSHIRE



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