



THE HOBBY

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the January 2014 edition of the Hobby. This bulletin is put together while a seemingly relentless series of heavy rain and storms crosses our county and the thought of getting out to find and observe birds is put off maybe for another day. Even the feeders seem quiet with no sign of a cold spell and the bounty of a good autumn still in the countryside. Thoughts turn to the spring and summer and to help with this, Barry Nightingale has once again put together a comprehensive review of the data captured during the 2013 Summer Garden Bird Feeding Survey with an emphasis on the changes that this long running survey has begun to clearly highlight. For those of us thinking about the possible bird list for 2014, Peter Smith looks back at the vintage year of 1972; maybe 2014 will match or exceed that and with a Glossy Ibis found on 4th January, this year is off to a good start! Good birding to all for 2014...

Andy Grimsey

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2013 BIRD NEWS

Contributors: please phone Steve Blain on 07979 606300 or email recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk with any news or records. Records are preferred via the online system BirdTrack, using the Excel file found on the Bird Club Website, singly using the online form (<http://tinyurl.com/2v6oweh>), or on paper.

November 2013

Bewick's Swan - Two flew over Priory CP on 4th.

Whooper Swan - One was at Radwell Lakes on 10th-23rd and another four were at Derek Whites Eggs pit on 19th.

Pink-footed Goose - One was at Radwell Lakes on 10th (RIB), with the injured bird still at Harrold and Odell CP.

White-fronted Goose - Two juveniles were present around Broom GP all month.

Pintail - One at Woburn Road Wetlands on 4th, with another at Broom GP on 29th.

Hen Harrier - An adult male was around Aspley Heath on 16th-17th.

Merlin - Regular adult males were seen around Galley Hill and Broom GP, with a female also present at Broom GP on 6th.

Mediterranean Gull - An adult in the Stewartby roost on 2nd-3rd.

Rose-ringed Parakeet - One flew over Dunstable on 28th, and another flew over Stopsley on 29th.

Great Grey Shrike - The Streatley individual was still present intermittently all month.

Common Chiffchaff - One Siberian Chiffchaff was at Broom GP until 2nd. Two more Siberian Chiffchaffs were at Marston SW into December.

Dartford Warbler - A male was present at Aspley Heath from 10th (NW)



Common Stonechat - One was on Sandy Heath on 15th, another at Willington on 23rd.

Rock Pipit - One was at Broom GP on 9th, and another at Radwell Lakes on 10th (RIB).

Hybrid Wigeon x Gadwall - Three birds were still at Blunham Lakes all month.

December 2013

Whooper Swan - Five flew over Woburn then later over Leighton Buzzard on 3rd. Another was at Radwell Lakes on 22nd-27th.

White-fronted Goose - The two Broom birds were also seen at Southill and Langford.

Mallard - An intersex female returned to Blunham Lake from 13th.

Pintail - One was at Cuckoo Bridge lake on 14th, with another at MVCP on 18th.

Greater Scaup - A female was at Harrold and Odell CP on 15th-22nd. Another was at Willington GP on 24th.

Common Scoter - An immature was at Brogborough Lake from 7th.

Great Northern Diver - A juvenile arrived at Stewartby Lake on 19th and stayed in to the New Year (MJP)

Shag - A juvenile was at Priory CP on 22nd-23rd (DK, TP)

Eurasian Bittern - One was on The Pillinge, MVCP on 16th.

Hen Harrier - A male flew over Sandy Smith NR on 7th.

Merlin - The male was around Broom GP all month, with others over Henlow on 7th, at Deepdale on 10th, Clifton on 26th.

Common Crane - One flew over Sandy on 26th (PS)

Jack Snipe - One in a horse paddock in Southill on 15th was an unusual location.

Short-eared Owl - Three were at Thurleigh Airfield on 1st, with two there on 8th.

Great Grey Shrike - The Streatley bird was last seen on 14th.

Common Redpoll - One was with a flock of Lessers at East Hyde on 7th (AG)

Common Crossbill - 16 were at Warden Great Wood from 2nd, and up to 20 were at The Lodge.



Shag at Priory CP, November 2013

Observers:

Andy Grimsey – AG; Dave Kramer – DK; Neil Wright – NW; Peter Simpson – PS;
Richard Bashford – RIB; Steve Blain – SCB; Tony Ploszajski - TP

We thank all contributors who have submitted their records directly to the Recorder, or via
Bedsbirds Email Group as well as other sources.

Compiled by Steve Blain
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PROGRAMME MATTERS

We certainly ended 2013 on a high as far as our monthly meetings are concerned. Richard's end of year production was simply superb, including some sequences which will live long in the memory, especially the Lesser Spots feeding young at the nest hole. If you missed it you can still buy a copy of the DVD at our January meeting.

Forthcoming indoor meetings

Tuesday 28th January. ‘Birds and People: bonds in a timeless journey’. Unfortunately our published speaker, Dr Nigel Collar, has to travel abroad for Birdlife and cannot make it. We are however very fortunate that **Adrian Long**, co-author of the book with Nigel on which this talk is based, will step in with the same talk. Ade, as he is known, is Head of Communications at Birdlife International and is no stranger to Bedfordshire, having been raised in the Leighton Buzzard area. He did some of his earliest birding at Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works with the encouragement of Bill Drayton. This talk is a celebration of our relationship with birds and should have wide appeal. You can be assured of top images from around the world.

Tuesday 25th February. Note!! Early starting time of 7.45pm. Bird Club AGM followed immediately with a talk by Conor Jameson on the subject of his recent books ‘*Silent Spring Revisited*’ and ‘*Looking for the Goshawk*’. Most members will be familiar with Conor's regular column in the RSPB magazine and will recognise him as the fortunate finder of the recent Golden Oriole, an event he so beautifully describes in the *2012 Bird Report*. Look forward to a memorable presentation after the very brief but necessary AGM.

Tuesday 25th March. We conclude this winter session with a visit from Roger Lucken who will travel up from the Somerset Levels to give us a first-hand account of ‘**The Great Crane Project**’ with which he has been actively involved. This successful reintroduction programme will be welcomed by most birders especially if it means more visits from this iconic species to our own county!

Don Green

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to the Bedfordshire Bird Club:

Colin Campbell, Potton
Robert Feaviour, Edlesborough
James Harding-Morris, Potton
Roz Kearey, Dunstable
Roger Millard, Letchworth Garden City
David Murray, Wootton

We hope you will enjoy many years of membership with us.

Mary Sheridan

SIBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF - *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*



Illustrated beautifully here is one of two birds identified of being of this form that have been at Marston STW near Stewartby in December. This sub-species *tristis* (or species dependent on which list you follow) is subtle in identification and the two birds have generated much debate as the features look good according to latest criteria while the few calls that have been recorded are not the same as those that had classically been identified with this form. Interesting indeed and there seems to be much to learn about the source of our wintering Chiffchaffs.

More images can be found on the blog at <http://bedsbirds.blogspot.co.uk/> and on the flickr site for Bedfordshire bird photos at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/bedsbirds/>

1972 – A VINTAGE YEAR

On researching my article about county listing during the last ten years I delved into The Bedfordshire Natural History Society journal for 1972 No.27. The reason for doing so was that two of my best county lifers occurred in that year, Woodchat Shrike on 17th July – 29th August (a first county record) and Wilson's Phalarope on 12th – 16th September (second county record).

In 1972 the journal included both Parts 1 and 2 of the annual journals of the BNHS and ran to all of 54 pages. The two parts combined for 2011 run to 276 pages and the Bird Report alone is 156 pages, how things have changed!

I couldn't help noticing that in 1972 I audited the annual accounts (I knew that maths O level would come in useful) and I was also on the committee. Alan Outen was the recorder for Bryophytes and David Anderson the recorder for Mammals. Those contributing to the bird report included, D Ball, G J Buss, D Green, B J Nightingale, J T R Sharrock, B Squires and myself as well as such luminaries as L A Batten, Dr C J Cadbury, M J Everett, I J Ferguson-Lees, B D Harding, P N Holden, R F Porter and D W Snow.

Two species recorded in the 1972 report that didn't even warrant a specific mention in the main body of the bird report, were Willow Tit and Tree Sparrow as they were considered to be commonly distributed!

On the 31st December a Red-necked Grebe was at Blunham GP, a drake Ring-necked Duck at Luton Hoo on the 7th May was a first county record, a Glaucous Gull at Harrold GP on 19th November was also a county first, under the entry for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker the comment was "localised records were received from only 13 localities", there were two records of Hooded Crow, the first known breeding record for Black Redstart came from Luton and also the first breeding record for Firecrest. 1972 was described as a poor year for breeding Red-backed Shrike with only a male being seen at a traditional site, and a migrant at The Lodge (RSPB Sandy) on 16th August and there were several records for Hawfinch including two pairs in suitable breeding habitat. A Snow Bunting was at Harrold GP on 10th December the third modern day record.

What a year and was it only forty-two years ago!

Peter Smith

THE GARDEN BIRD FEEDING SURVEY – SUMMER 2013

Introduction

Here are the results of our 16th Summer Garden Feeding survey, which covered the period 10th March to 5th October, 2013. We received a total of 75 returns (plus two that were received after this article was submitted), three less than the previous summer survey, comprising 42 from rural gardens and 33 from urban gardens. In total, for the 75 gardens, there were almost 28,000 records submitted, at an average of over 370 records per garden, so once again our thanks go to all those who took the time to do that.

The gardens in rural areas recorded an average of 31 species feeding or foraging (two more than in the previous two summers), whilst the gardens in urban areas recorded, on average, 21 species per garden, one more than in Summer 2012.

The Results

Each of the 78 species recorded in the gardens covered by the survey during the summer of 2013, and indeed all species during all summers since 1998, are shown in Table 1. As a change to some of our previous reports that table has been simplified, to show the average percentage of gardens each species occurred in for the summers of 1998 to 2004, and the average from 2005 to 2011.

During last summer just four species appeared in all of the gardens surveyed – Blackbird, Blue Tit, Wood Pigeon and, for the first time since 2005, Collared Dove. In addition, the Robin, Dunnock and Chaffinch were reported from all rural gardens and Great Tit from all urban gardens. A strong feature of this summer was the large number of gardens recording Lesser Redpoll and Siskin.

POS		2013	2012	average 2005 - 2011	average 1998 - 2004	POS		2013	2012	average 2005 - 2011	average 1998 - 2004
1=	BLACKBIRD	100	100	100	99	54=	SPOT FLYCATCHER	7	8	7	15
1=	WOOD PIGEON	100	100	100	97	54=	RED L PARTRIDGE	7	9	9	7
1=	BLUE TIT	100	100	100	100	54=	BLACK H GULL	7	1	1	2
1=	COLLARED DOVE	100	97	98	98	54=	GREY WAGTAIL	7	6	7	7
5=	GREAT TIT	99	100	98	97	54=	TREECREEPER	7	6	9	8
5=	ROBIN	99	100	100	98	59=	HOBBY	5	6	4	6
5=	DUNNOCK	99	100	98	96	59=	MARSH TIT	5	3	6	7
8	CHAFFINCH	96	100	99	95	59=	LINNET	5	3	5	15
9	STARLING	95	95	95	99	62=	KINGFISHER	4	3	4	5
10	GOLDFINCH	93	94	91	71	62=	COMMON REDPOLL	4	0	0.1	0
11=	GREENFINCH	91	94	95	98	64=	SAND MARTIN	3	3	0.7	0.7
11=	MAGPIE	91	90	90	82	64=	COMMON RAVEN	3	1	0	0
13=	HOUSE SPARROW	87	87	91	98	64=	LSR BLACK-B GULL	3	0	0.3	1
13=	WREN	87	83	86	89	64=	TREE SPARROW	3	3	2	0.4
15	LONG TAILED TIT	81	79	71	60	68=	REED WARBLER	1	3	2	2
16	SPARROWHAWK	68	67	69	56	68=	LSR WHITETHROAT	1	1	4	4
17=	SONG THRUSH	67	72	76	83	68=	YELLOW WAGTAIL	1	1	2	2
17=	JACKDAW	67	65	53	43	68=	GARDEN WARBLER	1	6	6	5
17=	BLACKCAP	67	44	34	31	68=	BARN OWL	1	5	1	0.3
20	GT SP WOODPECKER	65	56	57	51	68=	TURTLE DOVE	1	3	2	4
21	CARRION CROW	64	62	61	49	68=	LITTLE OWL	1	3	3	4
22	COAL TIT	60	64	68	59	68=	COMMON REDSTART	1	1	0.7	1
23	SWIFT	47	40	18	14	68=	BLACK REDSTART	1	0	0.4	0.1
24	SISKIN	45	9	16	18	68=	LSR SP W'DPECKER	1	0	1	2
25	GREEN W'DPECKER	41	42	38	33	68=	CANADA GOOSE	1	0	0.1	0.9
26=	SWALLOW	35	35	23	24		CUCKOO	0	5	2	6
26=	BULLFINCH	35	33	24	23		COMMON CROSSBILL	0	3	0	0.3
28=	CHIFFCHAFF	33	40	29	30		SEDGE WARBLER	0	3	0.9	1
28=	JAY	33	27	23	14		LITTLE GREBE	0	1	0.3	0
30	PHEASANT	32	28	35	27		GREY PARTRIDGE	0	1	0.7	0.6
31=	ROOK	31	32	25	19		MANDARIN	0	1	0.1	0.1
31=	GOLDCREST	31	29	24	27		CORMORANT	0	1	0	0
33	LESSER REDPOLL	29	5	3	2		CETTI'S WARBLER	0	1	0	0
34	PIED WAGTAIL	28	23	26	36		PIED FLYCATCHER	0	0	0.4	0.1
35	HOUSE MARTIN	24	26	24	15		WAXWING	0	0	0.4	0
36	REED BUNTING	23	13	6	1		CORN BUNTING	0	0	0.3	0.3
37	WILLOW WARBLER	21	22	21	27		WRYNECK	0	0	0.1	0
38=	STOCK DOVE	20	22	13	6		HERRING GULL	0	0	0.3	0
38=	COMMON BUZZARD	20	4	2	0.6		PEREGRINE	0	0	0.1	0
40=	NUTHATCH	19	22	13	10		SKY LARK	0	0	0.6	2
40=	MALLARD	19	24	18	14		N'THERN WHEATEAR	0	0	0.1	0.3
42	FERAL PIGEON	17	18	18	16		TUFTED DUCK	0	0	0.3	0
43	TAWNY OWL	15	14	10	10		MUTE SWAN	0	0	0.3	0.9
44	KESTREL	13	9	13	15		COMMON TERN	0	0	0.3	0.9
45=	MISTLE THRUSH	12	18	18	24		LITTLE EGRET	0	0	0.1	0
45=	MOORHEN	12	8	11	9		R-N PARAKEET	0	0	0	0.3
45=	RED KITE	12	8	2	0		MEADOW PIPIT	0	0	0	1
45=	REDWING	12	3	5	4		COMMON GULL	0	0	0	0.1
49=	COMMON W'THROAT	11	14	10	9		COOT	0	0	0	0.1
49=	BRAMBLING	11	3	8	5		COMMON SNIPE	0	0	0	0.1
51=	FIELDFARE	9	4	1	1		GREYLAG GOOSE	0	0	0	0.7
51=	GREY HERON	9	12	13	9		WILLOW TIT	0	0	0	0.1
53	YELLOWHAMMER	8	12	8	7						

Table 2 shows the frequency of the 'Top 20' species in our summer gardens. This is measured by calculating how many weeks in total each species was recorded (all gardens), and comparing it with the maximum possible number of weeks, in the case of 2013 this being 2,250 weeks (75 gardens x 30

weeks). Jackdaw occurred at the highest level of frequency since our summer survey started, at 29%, but there were more lows than highs in this table, with House Sparrow, Starling, Greenfinch, Song Thrush and Coal Tit all appearing at the lowest level since the summer survey began in 1998.

POS		2013	2012	average 2005 - 2011	average 1998 - 2004	percentage point change 1998-2004 to 2013
1	WOOD PIGEON	90	91	86	67	+23
2	BLACKBIRD	89	92	88	87	+2
3	BLUE TIT	82	86	84	82	=
4	ROBIN	77	81	80	72	+5
5	DUNNOCK	73	78	73	66	+7
6	COLLARED DOVE	71	73	75	75	-4
7	GREAT TIT	68	72	69	64	+4
8	CHAFFINCH	65	69	67	62	+3
9	HOUSE SPARROW	60	65	69	79	-19
10	GOLDFINCH	59	60	52	23	+36
11=	STARLING	55	60	64	77	-22
11=	GREENFINCH	55	57	66	68	-13
13	MAGPIE	46	45	42	37	+9
14	JACKDAW	29	27	22	14	+15
15	WREN	28	32	31	35	-7
16	GT SP WOODPECKER	23	25	21	17	+6
17=	LONG-TAILED TIT	19	21	15	11	+8
17=	SONG THRUSH	19	20	23	28	-9
17=	CARRION CROW	19	20	19	15	+4
20	COAL TIT	18	20	21	18	=

Summer – a long time coming

The first three weeks of the survey period were part of a very cold March that was dominated by easterly winds. Temperatures for March were well below average everywhere, with the UK mean temperature at 2.2°C, or 3.3°C below the 1981-2010 average. It was the coldest March since 1962, and the equal second-coldest in the series from 1910. It was especially cold during the second half of the month, with substantial late-season snowfalls between the 6th and the 27th (snow lay in my Woburn garden in the weeks starting 17th and 24th), but there was also a lot of cold, dry weather. March was the coldest month of the 'extended winter', the first time this has happened since 1975, and the coldest calendar month since December 2010. Probably as a result of this very cold period many winter visitors seemed reluctant to move on and these are dealt with in the following section.

The Species

The following comments cover the more significant events seen in Summer 2013, and major changes seen since the summer survey started in 1998.

Sparrowhawk

The Sparrowhawk is the most regular raptor in our survey, recorded in 68% of gardens in Summer 2013. Compare that to the average for the first seven summers and the result is an increase of 12 percentage points. The high point in the 16 summers was in 2011, in 74% of gardens, with the low in 1999, in 45%.

Pigeons, Cuckoo and woodpeckers

Last summer the Wood Pigeon was recorded in all gardens that took part, and was the most frequent visitor too. Even in the first year of our summer surveys it was seen in 94% of gardens, but the most significant change has been in the frequency of the visits, up from an average of 67% in the first seven summers to 90% last summer (and 91% in 2012). That is an increase of 23 percentage points.

The Cuckoo has never been a widespread garden visitor (although in 10% of gardens in 2001) but for the first time since our summer survey started in 1998 it was not reported from any of the gardens that were covered.

By comparison there is a much more positive story for the Great Spotted Woodpecker. Last summer it was recorded in 65% of the gardens, the highest since our summer survey started, and a 14 percentage-point increase compared to the average of the first seven years. It much prefers rural gardens, in 83% of those, compared to 42% of urban gardens. Last summer the Green Woodpecker was recorded in 41% of the gardens, compared to an average of 33% for the period 1998 to 2004. It has a much stronger preference for rural gardens, in 67% of those, whilst it remains a fairly scarce visitor to urban areas, in just three of those gardens.

Crows

Between them, members of the crow family are widespread and very regular visitors to our gardens, with three crow species included in the 'Top 20' most frequent visitors. Several contributors commented on the increasing numbers. Martin Lowe, from his Cranfield garden, added "Jackdaws had replaced Starlings on the fat balls, now displaced by Carrion Crows, and now Rooks – and Jackdaws – and Magpies. Basically a lot of corvids." Similarly Dave Parsons, from Haynes, wrote "I stopped putting out fat balls for a few weeks as the Jackdaws were getting through at least eight a day. It started to get a bit expensive!" And Lawrence Jarrett, from Luton, commented that "a flock of some 30 Jackdaws has appeared in the neighborhood – always alert for any bread thrown out. Perhaps as a result the local pair of Carrion Crows now seldom seen."

One of the biggest increases across all species has been for the Jackdaw, up an impressive 24 percentage points in gardens between last summer and the average of the first seven. During Summer 2013 it was in 67% of the gardens taking part, the highest level yet, compared to a low of 29% in 1998. The frequency of appearances is also growing strongly, at 29% last summer compared to 14% for the period 1998 to 2004. Another member of the crow family that is becoming more familiar in our summer gardens is the Jay, in 33% last summer (the highest since our survey started), compared to 14% for the first seven summers. The Carrion Crow has also increased in our gardens, although the largest jump was between the periods 1998 to 2004 and 2005 to 2011, since when the rate of increase has slowed. The Magpie remains the most obvious member of the crow family in our gardens, at a frequency level of 46% last summer. It appeared in 91% of the gardens, and was just as likely to be found in both urban and rural gardens.

Goldcrest and tits

The Goldcrest appeared in 31% of gardens last summer, the highest level since 35% in 2003. There have been some ups and downs with this species over the 16 summers, no doubt caused by the state of the preceding winter weather. A different story last summer was for the Coal Tit, which in 60% of the gardens was the lowest since 53% in 2006. Again, though, the results have never been stable from one summer to the next. As can be seen in Table 1, however, from a low average of 59% in the period 1998 to 2004, the proportion of gardens increased to 68% in the next seven summers, only to fall back again since then. By comparison the results for the Long-tailed Tit are showing steady progress, the level of 81% of gardens last summer equaling the previous high in 2011. The number of gardens it has appeared in has jumped an impressive 21 percentage points between the first seven summers and last summer. It has also become a more frequent visitor since those earlier summers, up from an average of just 11%, to 20% for the last two summers.

Wren and Starling

The Wren appeared in 87% of gardens last summer, the highest since 90% in 2008, but compared to the first seven summers of our survey there are signs of a decrease, both in the number of gardens supporting this species and also the frequency of appearances. This is no doubt due to the run of recent cold winters.

The Starling is suffering a more long-term decline. Although the number of gardens holding this species has held up fairly well since 2005, the frequency of appearances continues to drop. In the first

seven summers the average frequency was 77%, falling to an average of 64% in the next seven summers, to 60% in 2012 and then to 55% (the lowest since our survey started) last summer. It was entirely absent throughout the 30-week period of the survey from four of the gardens covered last summer.

Thrushes and Spotted Flycatcher

With reports from just 67% of the gardens last summer, the results for the Song Thrush dropped to a new low point, and were 16 percentage points lower than the average for the period 1998-2004. It was entirely absent from 25 of the gardens covered. The Mistle Thrush also hit a new low, with the results since 2006 being rather erratic. In just 12% of the gardens last summer, that is half the average level for the period 1998 to 2004.

Although the Fieldfare is a winter visitor of course, it was recorded in 9% of the gardens of the last summer period, all in the early weeks of our very cold spring. The previous high points had been 4%, in 2012 and 2008. The Redwing, another winter visitor, also lingered, and was reported from 12% of gardens, another record high (the previous high being 8% in 2009).

The Spotted Flycatcher was recorded in just 7% of gardens last summer – compare that to a high of 20% of gardens in 1999. It was not seen in any of the urban gardens surveyed last summer, and in the five gardens that did attract them it was only seen in one of those for more than three of the weeks.

House Sparrow and finches

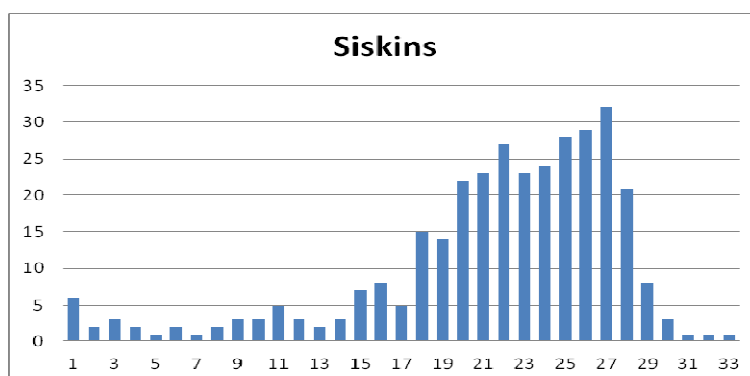
Although the number of summer gardens holding House Sparrow has been fairly consistent since 2009, the frequency of appearances last summer reached a new low of 60%, and that was across gardens in both rural and urban areas. Consider that in the period 1998 to 2004 (when the species was already in serious decline) the average frequency was 79%. Judith Knight, from Linslade, commented that “Not a single House Sparrow! Haven’t they seen my sparrow box?” I also put up a House Sparrow nest box on my house in Woburn (House Sparrows are very rare in my garden). The box was ignored by sparrows, but was adopted by a pair of Coal Tits, that successfully raised a brood.

Probably the most interesting set of results, highs and lows, from last summer involved the finches. Starting with those that hit the low points, the Chaffinch appeared in 96% of gardens, equaling the previous low set in 2005. Of more concern are the results for Greenfinch, as we’ve reported before in these summaries. Last summer they were reported in 91% of gardens, equaling the previous low of 2010. What is worrying is to reflect that the average for the period 1998-2004 was in 98% of gardens. Over that same time frame the frequency of appearances has dropped, from an average of 68%, to 55% last summer. John Seal, from his Langford garden, commented “the Greenfinch has disappeared completely!”

The situation for the Bullfinch paints a more positive picture. Last summer it was recorded in 35% of the gardens, a record high, and in sharp contrast to the average of the period 1998 to 2011, when in 24% of gardens. David Withers found a dead Bullfinch in his Ampthill garden, his first garden record since our surveys started in 1993 (when the first of our winter surveys commenced). The Goldfinch too, continues to show well in our gardens, in 93% last summer, not a record, but maintaining the recent high level. Consider that for the first seven summers it showed in ‘just’ 71% of our summer gardens.

Like the winter thrushes that lingered well into spring, there were two (mainly) winter finches that behaved the same as well, both setting new, and extreme, records. Firstly consider the Siskin. The high points for three of the previous summers covered by our survey were 30% of gardens (in 2008), 29% (in 2006) and 28% (in 1998). In 2013 they were reported from 45% of gardens, mostly in the early weeks of the summer period. Appearances started to increase in early February 2013 (covered by

our winter survey), increasing again in the middle of that month, and then staying at a high level until the end of April 2013, as the following graph shows.

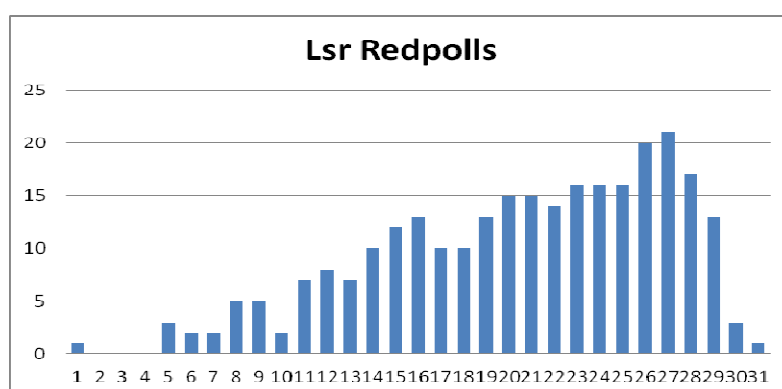


The percentage of gardens attracting Siskins from October 2012 to end May 2013.

Note: October = periods 1-4; November = periods 5-8; December = periods 9-13; January = periods 14-17; February = periods 18-21; March = periods 22-25; April = periods 26-30; May = periods 31-33. Note that the mix of gardens changed after period 22, when the source of information changed from the winter survey to the summer survey (with different gardens).

The peak number of gardens in which Siskins appeared was 24 in period 27. Sheila Brooke, from Toddington, added “more Siskins than ever before. Nice to have Redpolls too – it is possibly only the second time in the garden. Even nicer, a great surprise to have juvenile Siskins on 13th-15th June on the nyger.” Whilst it is possible that these Siskins bred locally, we know from ringing recoveries (e.g. from Fair Isle) that by June juvenile Siskins may have already migrated many miles from their breeding areas.

Even more remarkable perhaps was the result for Lesser Redpoll. Prior to Summer 2013, the previous high for any of our summer surveys was appearances in 8% of the gardens, in 2009. Last summer they appeared in 29% of our gardens. As the following graph demonstrates, the number of gardens holding Lesser Redpolls started to increase earlier than for Siskin, but then peaked and then declined at about the same time.



The percentage of gardens attracting Lesser Redpolls from October 2012 to end May 2013.

Note: October = periods 1-4; November = periods 5-8; December = periods 9-13; January = periods 14-17; February = periods 18-21; March = periods 22-25; April = periods 26-30; May = periods 31-33. Note that the mix of gardens changed after period 22, when the source of information changed from the winter survey to the summer survey (with different gardens).

The peak number of gardens in which Lesser Redpolls appeared was 16 in period 27, the same peak period as for Siskin.

Reed Bunting

In a similar way to Lesser Redpoll and Siskin, the Reed Bunting also broke new records. It appeared in 23% of the gardens – the previous high was 13% in 2012, and the four best results have been in the last four summers, so maybe this species is starting a new trend. The average number of summer gardens attracting this species for the period 1998-2004 was just 1%.

Other highlights

A Black Redstart visited Steve Heath's Southill garden in April, and a juvenile Common Redstart visited Christopher Deary's Harlington garden in mid-August. As well as good numbers of Lesser Redpolls, Common Redpolls were reported from three gardens. Br. John Mayhead had a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker visit the grounds of Turvey Abbey in August, the first in our summer survey since 2009.

Summary

Our winter and summer surveys are both long-running, the summer survey for 16 years, and the winter survey now in its 21st year. Once again we have to thank the enthusiasm of our members for supporting our garden feeding projects, with many of you taking part since their inception. As usual, with the results from Summer 2013, we can see both worrying and pleasing trends, and I'm sure that picture will continue into the future. A copy of the form for the forthcoming summer is available with *The Hobby* for those of you who receive a postal copy, or can be downloaded from the Beds Bird Club website. Go to the home page, under 'research projects' and follow the link. We look forward to seeing the results from your garden in due course.

Barry Nightingale

THE DISAPPEARING BIRDS

As a regular contributor to the Garden Bird Survey I have often wondered what the ticks on the chart don't reveal in the excellent analyses produced by Barry Nightingale. For example, when I tick a starling - on 8 weeks of the last 30 - there is no way of knowing whether it is one or a large flock. In my case it is one or two once or twice in a week as a contrast to the flocks of fifty I used to have on my lawn when I first moved here 30 years ago.

But I come to the point of recent events in my garden's bird life. I have a large garden about half way between Dunstable town centre and Blows Downs. I am aware that at the end of August and early September the birds are 'in hiding' due to moulting or juveniles are leaving the nesting areas. My normal bird life includes a flock of about 30 house sparrows and several families of blackbirds and woodpigeons. My record for w/b 25th August shows ticks for magpie and carrion crow only. This was one magpie and one crow at the same time on the Tuesday morning feeding on the lawn. No other bird was seen feeding the whole week and very few - mainly pigeons - were seen around. The following week was a little better with a magpie on the Monday, one each of great tit, collared dove and blackbird on the Tuesday and two each of c. dove, pigeon and blackbird on Wednesday. Nothing for the rest of the week. The w/b 8th Sept. saw one blackbird on each of the first three days and a few sparrows the rest of the week. The following week was not much better, but things began to look up from 22nd Sept when a flock of about 20 goldfinches arrived on the scene. Although I have not kept similar records for previous years I have noted such an extremely low 'turn out' of birds at this time of year. I wonder if other 'garden birders' have recorded a similar absence of birds, or is there something about this part of Dunstable? Incidentally, as I write this on a warm but very wet October 21st, I haven't spotted a single bird in the garden today!

Andrew Milne

IMAGES:

Steve Blain: Chiffchaff, Dartford Warbler

Robin Edwards: Shag



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