



THE HOBBY

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EDITORIAL

The month of July represents probably the quietest period in our county birding scene, but no longer has the spring passage finally petered out in June, than the return begins for the extended autumn movement, with no doubt some returning waders at least already back in the area. There are still birds to find however and it is pleasing, though not unexpected, to see in the news of our county's first record of breeding Little Egret, along with more summering Marsh Harriers and presumed breeding of Bearded Tits. Turtle Doves and Spotted Flycatchers have again been hard to find and we welcome all records of our increasing and decreasing breeding species to help understand the changes that continue the trends shown in the Atlas activity from a few summers ago. Good birding and here's looking forward to a great autumn migration...

Andy Grimsey

MAY - JUNE 2014 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.

May 2014

Garganey - A drake was at MVCP on 1st. Another drake was at Broom GP on 15th, 20th, and again on the 24th.

Common Pochard - Breeding was confirmed at Harrold and Odell CP, and MVCP with summering birds in many of the brick pits

Long-tailed Duck - The bird from April remained at Radwell Lakes until 4th at least.

Common Scoter - Five were at Grovebury SP on 31st.

Glossy Ibis - Bedfordshire's third was a brief visitor to MVCP on 3rd (KR)

Little Egret - one or two birds recorded throughout the month at Meadow Lane GP and in the brick pits, with one ever present at East Hyde



(image: Richard Bashford)

Eurasian Spoonbill - One spent a day at Meadow Lane GP on 28th (RIB)

Honey-buzzard - Two were reported flying over The Lodge on 16th (AS)

Marsh Harrier - At least three were in the Marston Vale.

Osprey - One flew over Broom GP on 1st, with another over MVCP on 18th, and a bird over Moggerhanger on 24th.

Avocet - Two were present at Broom GP on 17th.

Sanderling - One at Broom GP on 16th, with three at Grovebury SP on 22nd.

Dunlin - Up to 13 were at Broom GP on 1st, with 20 there on 11th with a further eight at Meadow Lane GP on the same date.

Bar-tailed Godwit - 14 flew through Broom GP on 1st. Another was at Broom GP on 6th.

Whimbrel - Four through Broom GP on 1st, and another there on 11th. At least two flew over Bedford calling at night on 15th.

Eurasian Curlew - Three pairs were at Thurleigh Airfield with another pair in the south of the county.

Greenshank - One at Broom GP on 2nd-3rd. One at Meadow Lane GP on 6th-9th. Another was at Broom GP on 15th

Wood Sandpiper - One was at Meadow Lane GP on 6th-11th.

Little Gull - One was at Broom GP on 6th.

Little Tern - One was typically brief at Broom GP on 19th.

Black Tern - One was at MVCP on 17th, with another at Brogborough Lake on 30th.

Arctic Tern - Up to nine were at Broom GP on 1st, with one there on 2nd. One was at Grovebury SP on 8th.

Golden Oriole - One was a brief visitor to Willington GP early morning on 30th (PG)

Firecrest - A singing male was present in mid-Beds.

Dartford Warbler - One was reported from MVCP on 15th (GC)

Ring Ouzel - One was at Totternhoe on 3rd.

Spotted Flycatcher - The first reported was at Bush Wood, Chaul End, Caddington on 11th.

Common Redstart - A singing male was present on the Greensand Ridge bordering Bucks.

Whinchat - A male was at Blows Downs on 10th-11th.

Pied Flycatcher - A male was present at The Lodge on 20th with another seen in a Bromham garden on 27th.

Siskin - Several were present in birders gardens during the month, hinting at breeding attempts locally. Please report any summer Siskins you see.

June 2014

Whooper Swan - An out-of-season bird was present at Radwell Lakes on 2nd.

Egyptian Goose - Pairs bred successfully at Woburn Park, Wyboston Lakes, and Southill Park.

Eurasian Wigeon - Small numbers summered with birds present at Radwell Lakes and Blunham Lake.

Gadwall - Broods were seen at Blunham Lake (2), Broom GP (1), MVCP (1), and Dunstable SW (1)

Garganey - A drake was at Radwell Lakes on 2nd.

Common Pochard - Up to seven broods were recorded at MVCP.

Common Scoter - The Grovebury SP five remained until 1st.

Common Quail - One was found at Sandy Smith NR on 1st, with two from 2nd. Another was near Barton Hill Road from 10th.

Eurasian Bittern - Three booming birds were heard.

Little Egret – Bedfordshire's first breeding record was confirmed with three fledged juveniles.

Osprey - One spent a few days in the Ivel Valley early in the month.

Mediterranean Gull - An adult was at MVCP on 22nd.

European Bee-eater - One was heard over Potton on 13th (DOM). This would be Bedfordshire's second ever after one at Priory CP on 29th June 1991.

Bearded Tit - Presumed breeding occurred at two sites.

Black Redstart - One was reported at The Lodge on 23rd.

Observers:

Andy Schofield – AS; Darren Oakley-Martin (DOM); Richard Bashford – RIB; Patrick Giles – PG; Kev Roy – KR; Geoff Cave - GC

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

As always in the July edition I give details of the first indoor meeting of the Winter Programme as the September issue may not be received in time. The full programme of both indoor and field events will be published with the September edition of *The Hobby*.

Date: **Tuesday 30th September 2014** starting at 8.00pm.

Venue: Maulden Village Hall (MK45 2DN)

Subject: **'Stray Feathers and Tall Tales – 50 years of the BBRC'** by Adam Rowlands who is the long-time Chairman of the British Birds Rarity Committee.

In addition to holding the Chair of this prestigious committee Adam's day job is RSPB Suffolk Coast Reserves Manager which includes responsibility for Minsmere of course. For the uninitiated, BBRC is the organisation that adjudicates records of species of rare occurrence in Britain and publishes its annual report in *British Birds*. You can expect a most interesting and humorous talk to kick off our season. It will have wide appeal so please try not to miss it.

Don Green

REPORT OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE BIRDS RARITIES COMMITTEE

Apologies for the delay in reporting back to everyone who has completed a rarity description during 2013. Seventy four records were accepted and only a handful rejected - or more accurately, not proven. Included in these were three Great White Egret claims which did not rule out the white Grey Heron seen around the Stotfold, Clifton area early in the year. A small number were rejected simply because there was no description; thankfully, a small number.

But for the accepted records, it was a fairly good year with a Leach's Petrel at Brogborough (J Lynch), more rossicus Bean Geese at Radwell (P Rose), a welcome Ring-billed Gull at Stewartby (N Wright), Hoopoe at Clipstone (E Nicholas), another Green-winged Teal at Meadow Lane (R Bashford), Spoonbill at Derek White's Eggs GP (M Lawrence), a Red-backed Shrike found by an observer undertaking a BBS near Stotfold (T Bennett), a Red-footed Falcon over MVCP (S Northwood), a Wryneck photographed in a Stagsden garden and posted in an online magazine (H Hadden), the very popular Spotted Crake at Bedford boating lake (R Brind) found while undertaking her WeBS count and a Dartford Warbler at Aspley Heath (N Wright).

Species	Location	Date	Last date	#	Finder
Caspian Gull	Stewartby Lake	01/01/2013		1	Steve Blain/Martin Palmer
Brent Goose	Woburn Road Wetlands	02/01/2013		1	Martin Palmer
Great Grey Shrike	Streatley area	05/01/2013	07/01/2013	1	David Aquith
Slavonian Grebe	Brogborough Lake	12/01/2013		2	Lol Carman, Roy Dunham
Great Northern Diver	Chimney Corner South Lake	13/01/2013	18/01/2013	1	Steve Blain/Darren Oakley-Martin
Brent Goose	Brogborough Lake	14/01/2013		15	Paul Wright
White-fronted Goose	Biggleswade Common	21/01/2013		23	Chris Bailey
Hawfinch	Eaton Bray	23/01/2013		1	Richard Woodhead
Slavonian Grebe	Stewartby Lake	26/01/2013	27/01/2013	1	Peter Smith
Caspian Gull	Stewartby Lake	27/01/2013		1	Steve Blain
Ferruginous Duck	Priority CP	27/01/2013	02/03/2013	1	Tony Ploszajski
Black-necked Grebe	Priority CP	28/01/2013	...	1	Dave Kramer
Mealy Redpoll	The Lodge	06/02/2013	24/02/2013	5+	Steve Blain/Mark Ward
Leach's Petrel	Brogborough Lake	08/02/2013		1	John Lynch
Bean Goose	Radwell (and Felmersham)	14/02/2013	31/03/2013	2	Peter Rose
Mealy Redpoll	Potton	21/02/2013			Darren Oakley Martin
Brent Goose	Broom GP	04/03/2013		3	Martin Stevens
Brent Goose	Roxton Lakes	11/03/2013		1	Richard Bashford
Great Grey Shrike	Streatley area	11/03/2013	24/03/2013	1	David Asquith
Ring-billed Gull	Stewartby Lake	14/03/2013		1	Neil Wright
Kittiwake	Stewartby Lake	14/03/2013		1	Paul Wright, Neil Wright
Kittiwake	Stewartby Lake	15/03/2013		2	Neil Wright, Martin Palmer et al.
Mealy Redpoll	Southill	18/03/2013		2	Steve Heath
Caspian Gull	Stewartby Lake	28/03/2013		1	Neil Wright, Keith Owen
Hawfinch	Woburn	29/03/2013		4	Barry Nightingale
Slavonian Grebe	Stewartby Lake	29/03/2013		1	Neil Wright, Steve Blain, Paul Wright Bob Hook

[Species list for January to March included – further months in the next issue of The Hobby – Ed]

Not bad at all. We're still waiting for American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup and Cattle Egret of course...maybe next year!

Richard Bashford (Secretary Bedfordshire Rarity Panel)

THE GARDEN BIRD FEEDING SURVEY – WINTER 2013/2014

Introduction And An Overview

What a difference a year makes! In my article covering the results of the cold 2012/13 winter there was much emphasis on record-breaking appearances by many of the species, taking refuge, and advantage of the food, in our gardens. For the winter of (the largely mild, but very wet) 2013/14 it was a completely different picture. During that winter there were several articles in the national press responding to fears from the general public that birds in their gardens seemed few and far between. The results from our survey indicate that appearances of most species were less frequent, and indeed the number of different species was much lower than we've come to expect. The average number of species in our gardens last winter was very low, comparable only to those in the 2006/07 winter, which in turn was very mild. In that winter rural gardens attracted, on average, 22.0 species and urban gardens 18.5 species, compared to an average of 24.3 species in the 45 rural gardens last winter and an average of 18.1 species in the 36 urban gardens.

Table 1 Average number of species per garden - winters 2007/08 to 2013/14

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/2014
Rural gardens	24.7	26.9	26.5	26.8	25.6	27.2	24.3
Urban gardens	20.4	21.7	20.6	21.4	20.1	23.3	18.1

In total, 57 species were recorded in the participating gardens last winter, again much lower than in any of the nine preceding years, during which there was an average of 62 species per winter (with a peak of 67 species in 2010/11). The number of individual records was also down compared to the previous winter, on average by about 13% for each surveyed garden. Several participants commented about the general lack of birds, with David Withers, from his Ampthill garden, noting "...a very standard period. No winter thrushes or Reed Buntings..." Mary Sheridan, from her Linslade garden, commented "Nothing exciting to report this time – no large flocks of Siskins this year; not even a single Siskin" Andrew Budd, also from Ampthill, mentioned "My bird numbers have been markedly down this year..." Lawrence Jarrett, from Luton, added "I suppose that the mild winter is responsible for lower numbers of some species though surprised not to see a single Wren or Coal Tit, and very few Greenfinches and Chaffinches" Lawrence, who has contributed every year since our garden surveys started, has made an interested analysis of the trends in his garden, and I have taken the liberty of repeating some of his findings later in this article.

As can be seen in Table 2, there were four species that were recorded in all participating gardens – Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin and Great Tit. In addition, Chaffinch and Wood Pigeon were in all rural gardens, and the Dunnock was recorded from all urban sites. However, many of the species were recorded in far fewer gardens than for some years, and in some cases in fewer gardens since our winter survey started in 1993/94. Those in the last category include the Starling, Wren, House Sparrow, Song Thrush and Pied Wagtail. Others in a lower level of gardens than recent years included Chaffinch and Pheasant (in both cases the lowest since 2001/02). The only species to break records in a positive sense were the Goldfinch, reported from 91% of gardens, and the Buzzard, in or more likely over, 10% of gardens.

TABLE 2 PERCENTAGE THAT EACH SPECIES WAS RECORDED IN - WINTERS 2004/05 TO 2013/14

position 13/14		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
		13/14	12/13	11/12	10/11	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05
1=	Blackbird	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	99	100
1=	Blue Tit	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	99	99	100
1=	Robin	100	100	100	100	99	100	100	100	99	100
1=	Great Tit	100	99	99	100	98	100	97	98	99	96
5=	Wood Pigeon	99	99	99	100	99	100	100	96	99	97
5=	Duncock	99	99	100	99	99	97	100	99	98	97
7	Chaffinch	94	99	95	96	97	99	100	98	99	96
8	Collared Dove	93	92	92	92	93	95	95	95	96	97
9	Goldfinch	91	88	89	88	84	86	89	80	79	68
10	Magpie	88	92	92	89	92	93	92	91	83	85
11=	Starling	84	91	88	92	92	92	93	92	92	92
11=	Long-t Tit	84	92	88	90	82	86	73	71	75	80
13	Greenfinch	83	83	91	88	91	95	91	99	99	98
14	Wren	81	90	93	89	91	97	95	90	95	96
15	House Sparrow	79	85	84	82	81	84	85	86	92	92
16	Sparrowhawk	69	65	64	71	66	62	73	71	70	75
17	Coal Tit	64	74	69	84	68	83	66	56	64	63
18	Gt Sp Woodpecker	53	66	48	59	56	53	55	46	53	52
19=	C Crow	51	55	53	56	54	58	57	39	54	48
19=	Jackdaw	51	51	47	42	50	49	43	33	38	35
21	Song Thrush	46	65	64	68	78	80	76	59	78	81
22	C Pheasant	32	33	33	38	39	43	43	40	48	40
23	Redwing	30	43	53	48	61	43	27	18	26	32
24	Goldcrest	27	40	29	29	17	44	24	22	31	41
25=	Green Woodpecker	26	34	39	35	44	36	34	24	36	32
25=	Blackcap	26	53	29	29	31	34	27	21	25	18
27	Pied Wagtail	23	47	39	73	57	51	44	28	59	55
28	Mistle Thrush	20	24	20	19	24	24	18	15	23	26
29	Jay	17	44	24	29	22	38	19	9	21	19
30=	Fieldfare	16	71	41	32	49	50	23	11	32	15
30=	Bullfinch	16	23	25	21	20	23	16	11	25	13
30=	Stock Dove	16	19	16	9	9	5	8	6	8	4
33=	Feral Pigeon	15	19	9	15	12	10	9	9	14	10
33=	Rook	15	15	21	21	22	20	23	14	19	18
35	Siskin	14	37	16	19	12	31	22	3	18	2
36	Tawny Owl	12	13	19	11	12	13	9	5	7	9
37=	Nuthatch	11	21	12	15	7	14	9	7	9	8
37=	Grey Wagtail	11	12	11	16	6	8	13	3	5	11
37=	Reed Bunting	11	26	18	18	18	12	7	5	6	3
40=	Grey Heron	10	14	12	16	21	19	15	8	18	8
40=	Common Buzzard	10	7	7	4	2	5	1	3	0	3
42=	Lesser Redpoll	9	24	13	11	8	5	3	2	2	0
42=	Brambling	9	21	4	19	8	20	26	10	17	1

Table 3 shows the ‘Top 20’ species that are the most frequent in our gardens. The frequency is calculated by taking the total number of weeks each species is recorded in and comparing that to the maximum possible total (i.e. 22 weeks x 81 gardens). As you might now expect, with the scene that I’m painting, all of the ‘Top 20’ species appeared at a frequency level lower than in the previous winter, and many were at their lowest level since 2006/07, which again was very mild. Some species,

however, dropped far more than the average, including the Chaffinch, House Sparrow, Starling, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Coal Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

TABLE 3	FREQUENCY OF OCCURENCE WINTERS 2004/05 TO 2013/14									
	13/14	12/13	11/12	10/11	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05
Blackbird	89	94	91	93	97	95	94	86	92	92
Blue Tit	89	91	91	94	94	91	90	88	89	92
Wood Pigeon	87	91	87	90	91	86	86	74	80	70
Robin	84	91	86	89	93	92	90	82	86	88
Great Tit	74	77	77	82	78	76	76	70	78	77
Dunnoek	72	77	77	81	84	82	79	74	82	80
Chaffinch	69	77	71	75	77	77	79	73	76	75
Collared Dove	64	68	69	68	76	76	75	74	78	81
Goldfinch	57	59	54	56	58	55	49	44	42	37
House Sparrow	55	63	61	61	60	59	63	66	74	80
Magpie	51	53	51	53	59	57	51	45	45	50
Starling	50	61	56	60	67	69	69	59	67	70
Greenfinch	47	49	51	52	54	66	66	69	69	73
Long-tailed Tit	26	35	37	39	30	35	22	19	20	26
Coal Tit	24	32	28	42	33	44	29	23	31	29
Wren	22	32	37	31	34	40	43	32	42	49
Jackdaw	22	24	22	21	25	21	19	14	16	14
G S Woodpecker	20	27	21	25	24	27	22	18	21	21
Carrion Crow	19	20	23	23	24	26	24	14	20	17
Pheasant	13	17	17	19	17	20	22	17	20	18

There were no new species recorded in the surveyed gardens last winter, so the total over the 21 winters remains at 96, and the top 43 are shown in Table 2. For space reasons I have restricted the data to the winters of 2004/05 to 2013/14

The Main Results

Waterfowl, Game Birds, Herons, Raptors and Gulls

Typically, the Mallard was the only wildfowl species reported from our gardens last winter, from just 6% of gardens, all of which were in rural areas. The Pheasant, one of our 'Top 20' most frequent garden visitors, appeared in 32% of the gardens last winter, the lowest since winter 2001/02. Just about hanging on as a garden visitor is the Red-legged Partridge, last winter featuring in just 2% of our gardens.

The Grey Heron appeared in 10% of gardens last winter, which along with many other species, was lower than the recent average. As a changing sign of the times Stefan Baltruschat managed to attract a Little Egret to his Henlow garden during four of the weeks and Chris Boon had a near miss, when one occurred just two metres outside his garden boundary.

Sparrowhawks are the most widely-reported raptor in our gardens, last winter from 69% of those covered, the highest since 71% in 2010/11. Three other raptors appear in our list for last winter - Kestrel, Red Kite and Common Buzzard.

The Black-headed Gull, from 9% of gardens, and as usual much preferring urban gardens, was at the lowest level since 2007/08, with the Common Gull reported from just one garden.

Pigeons, Owls, Kingfisher, Woodpeckers and Crows

For the last three winters the Wood Pigeon has been recorded from 99% of all gardens in our survey, and it has not been lower than that level since 2006/07. As Table 3 shows, it also remains in our top three most frequent garden visitors. The results for Collared Dove have been remarkably consistent during the last five winters, and are apparently stable after a reduction following the 2008/2009 winter. Last winter it was recorded from urban and rural gardens at about the same level, both in terms of numbers of gardens and frequency. Both the Stock Dove and Feral Pigeon fell back slightly after the highs of the previous winter.

The only owl to appear in the results for last winter was the Tawny, in 12% of gardens overall, and as expected, much preferring rural sites.

Like nearly all other species, the results for the Great Spotted Woodpecker last winter took a step back, but it remains one of our most frequent garden visitors, particularly in rural areas, where it appeared in 73% of gardens, compared to 28% of gardens in an urban setting. Much the same can be said for the Green Woodpecker, but the results for that species have fallen for the last two winters, so it remains to be seen as to whether that is part of a longer trend.

For the Magpie, despite a small drop in the number of gardens that it appeared in, the long-term results have stayed remarkably consistent over the last eight winters. Much the same can be said for the Carrion Crow, except that last winter it was more likely to be found in rural gardens (in 56% of those) compared to urban sites (in 44% of those), a return to the pattern we saw prior to the winter of 2012/13. Although the frequency for last winter dropped slightly, the species remains in our 'Top 20' visitors, as does the Jackdaw, which showed in 51% of gardens, the same as in the previous winter, but with the frequency down slightly. As usual, it showed a strong preference for gardens in rural areas, appearing in 67% of those, compared to 31% of urban gardens, although one for Mark Burnapp in urban Bedford was a garden first. Results for the Jay took a big tumble and, in only 17% of gardens (compared to 44% in the previous winter), was at the lowest level since the mild winter of 2006/07.

Goldcrest, Tits and Warblers

The Goldcrest appeared in 27% of our gardens last winter, a big drop compared to the previous winter. Typically we have seen that they move into more urban gardens in harsh winters, but with the mild weather of last winter they preferred rural gardens, in 33% of those, compared to 19% of urban sites.

The Blue Tit is one of our most familiar garden species, found in all surveyed gardens for the last seven winters, and at a high level of frequency. The Great Tit too remains at a high level in Tables 2 and 3, and last winter was recorded in all participating gardens, but with a frequency the lowest since the mild winter of 2006/07. Garden appearances of the Long-tailed Tit had been increasing steadily over the previous five winters, but last winter saw a big drop in frequency. They showed a strong preference for rural gardens, in 93% of those, compared to 72% of urban gardens.

Another species to show a big drop in results was the Coal Tit, down from 74% of gardens in the previous winter to 64%, again the lowest level since 2006/07. In keeping with other species, its preference moved away from urban gardens, being more likely to be found in rural sites (in 76% of those) compared to 50% of urban sites.

When I moved into my Woburn house 27 years ago I had both Willow and Marsh Tit as garden visitors. The Willow Tit then disappeared, but Marsh Tits remained throughout the year. A few years ago they then became winter visitors only, arriving in October and disappearing in April. Last winter, for the first time, they failed to show at all, and in fact Marsh Tits were only recorded in one of the 81 gardens covered.

After appearing in record numbers of gardens in the harder winter of 2012/13 the results for the Blackcap for last winter showed a return to pre-2007/08 levels.

Wren, Starling and Thrushes

Results for the Wren were disappointing, appearing in 81% of gardens, the lowest level since our survey started in 1993/94. Along with several other species the biggest drop came from urban gardens, down from 86% of those gardens in 2012/13 (which was in itself a low level) to 72% last winter.

Similarly, the result for the Starling (in 84% of gardens) was also at the lowest level since our survey started, 21 winters ago. The biggest drop was from rural gardens.

Continuing this story of record-low results is the Song Thrush, in just 46% of gardens by far the worst showing since our winter survey started. They were found in 67% of rural gardens, but in only 19% of urban sites (compared to 53% of urban gardens in the previous winter). The frequency dropped to just 10%, which makes it only our 35th most frequent garden visitor, less so than Stock Dove, Rook, Jay and Bullfinch!

The Blackbird has been recorded in all gardens covered by our survey for the last eight winters, and last winter it tied with the Blue Tit as our most frequent garden visitor. On the other hand the Mistle Thrush remains an uncommon visitor to most of our gardens, at an overall level of 20% last winter, but with a huge reduction in urban sites, being reported in only one garden out of the 36 urban gardens covered.

Both of the two winter thrushes that visit our gardens showed in far fewer last winter, the Redwing the lowest for six winters and the Fieldfare the lowest for seven

As expected, the Robin was reported from all gardens last winter, but with a lower frequency, close to the level in the winter of 2006/07.

Dunnock, Sparrows and Wagtails

The Dunnock was recorded from all but one of the surveyed gardens last winter, a picture that has been remarkably consistent but, along with nearly all other species, the frequency dropped.

After appearing in an increasing number of gardens for the previous three winters, the House Sparrow dropped back to the lowest level since our winter survey began. It typically showed a preference for urban gardens. Although it remains a rarity in my Woburn garden I was surprised, on 6th November, to see eight excitedly clamouring around some nestboxes. Unfortunately they only stayed for just a few minutes. The Tree Sparrow was not recorded in any of the gardens, so was absent from the survey for the first time since 2006/07.

One of the biggest drops during last winter was for the Pied Wagtail, from 47% of gardens to 23%, again the lowest since our survey started. Remarkably it was only recorded in one urban garden (out of the 36 covered).

Finches and Buntings

The most widespread finch in our gardens remains the Chaffinch, but last winter it only occurred in 94% of the gardens, the lowest since 2001/02. It was present in all rural gardens, but was missing from five of the urban gardens. In line with most other species the frequency dropped too.

Against the trends for almost all other species last winter, the Goldfinch continues its rise, being recorded in 91% of gardens, the highest since our survey began, also moving into the top ten in Table 2 for the first time. It showed a slight preference for rural gardens.

The Greenfinch, after dropping to a new low in the previous winter of 83% of gardens, at least maintained that level, but it is still well down compared to the results that we saw as recently as 2006/07. The frequency however fell to a new low.

After the major influxes of both Siskin and Lesser Redpoll in the previous winter, the appearances last winter fell back to a more normal level, that is if there is such a thing for these erratic winter visitors.

Similarly, after impressive showings for Reed Bunting and Yellowhammer in the winter of 2012/13, both fell back to much lower levels.

Summary

Across most species there was a certain consistency with the results, with many of them reported from fewer gardens since our winter survey started. If there is another common theme then it would seem that some species retreated from urban gardens. In the main they were those species which are more susceptible to cold weather, and that seek shelter in the slightly warmer micro-climate that urban gardens can provide.

After 21 continuous winters of recording our garden birds, once again we have to thank the tremendous and continued enthusiasm of our members for taking part, many of whom have supported this survey during its entirety. Clearly the results were once again affected by the weather, which means that each set of results is likely to be as interesting, intriguing and different compared to the last. We look forward to receiving your feedback for future winters. For those that receive The Hobby by mail the survey form for next winter will be included. Otherwise you can retrieve the survey form on the Bird Club website. If you have difficulty in finding it, then please contact me by email (barrynightingale154@btinternet.com) and I will forward a copy to you.

Barry Nightingale

LADY AMHERST PHEASANT

Two calling, presumably old male, birds remain in the county this year in a private location but for how much longer ?

With the permission of Mark Lawlor (aka. Gyrcrakes), I have reproduced his cartoon from his website that provides an amusing take on these birds.

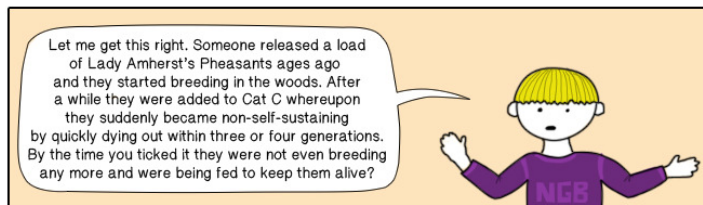
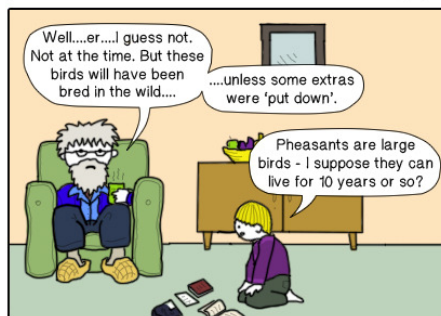
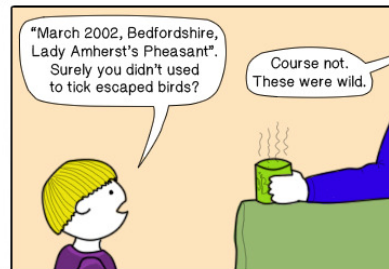
To see more similar quality output, visit his website at <http://lalarinho.webs.com/gyrcrakes.htm>

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HDF T 28xWW/38xWW £159

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