



THE HOBBY

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EDITORIAL

After a quiet year for rare birds, but anecdotely a very good one for breeding birds, October proved very exciting for anybody who takes particular interest in our more unusual visitors. A first for the county and another that is a first modern-day confirmed record, contributed to the feeling that the exclusion zone may have, temporarily at least, been dismantled. An indication of breeding success this year can be seen in the report from John Tomlin on the nest boxes he has been monitoring at Dunstable STW. In view of the season, we also have a look at the changing history of records of divers in the county, as we come to the prime time for finding them. Good winter birding to all!

Andy Grimsey

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 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.

September 2014

Pintail - A drake at Broom GP on 5th, and another at Priory CP on 24th.

Garganey - One at MVCP on 18th-28th.

Honey-buzzard - One flew over Warden Hill on 7th (SW)

Marsh Harrier - One at Broom GP on 5th.

Harrier sp. - A ring-tail was seen from a train just south of St Neots on 18th (RP)

Little Stint - A juvenile was at Grovebury SP on 9th.

Eurasian Curlew - Two at Broom GP on 2nd.

Mediterranean Gull - An adult was near Shefford on 18th.

Caspian Gull - A juvenile was in the Stewartby Lake roost on 12th (MJP)

Black Tern - One on Stewartby Lake on 12th.

Wryneck - One was video'ed in gardens in Henlow Camp on 16th.



Barred Warbler - A juvenile was found at Blows Downs on 27th and stayed until 5th October. A brilliant first for the county, found by John Lynch.

Fieldfare - The first was over Sandy Heath on 28th.

Redwing - The first reported was over Wilstead on 16th (SA)

Common Redstart - A male was ringed at MVCP on 6th, another was on Warden Hill on 9th.

Whinchat - One at Deepdale Quarry on 3rd-5th, three at Southill and on at Sandy Smith NR on 6th, seven at Blows Downs on 7th, with three the next day, eight on Biggleswade Common on 8th and five on 9th, one on 10th, and one on 12th. Three on Warden Hill on 8th, with two there next day, and three on 10th. One at Blows Downs on 9th, three at Pegsdon Hills on 12th, one there on 16th. One near Potton and three on Sandy Heath on 18th. Two on Sandy Heath on 27th-28th, and one at Southill on 27th.

Autumn 2014 was excellent
for Stonechat passage



Common Stonechat - One on Biggleswade Common on 12th, and one on Sandy Heath on 22nd, three at Blows Downs on 27th. Eight on Sandy Heath and two at Southill on 27th, with seven on Sandy Heath, eight at Blows Downs and three at Brogborough Tip on 28th. Four at Ridgeway Wood on 29th.

Yellow Wagtail - Counts of over 50 were made from Biggleswade Common and Sandy Smith NR.

Tree Pipit - One at Brogborough Tip on 6th

Hawfinch - One was a surprise find on Biggleswade Common on 17th (RIB)

October 2014

Whooper Swan - Two were at Priory CP on 23rd.

Pintail - Four were at Broom GP on 7th.

Greater Scaup - A female was at Brogborough Lake on 21st.

Goosander - Five female-types were in Chimney Corner South CIP on 29th.

Leach's Storm-petrel - A probable was seen all-too-briefly at Stewartby Lake on 21st (MJP)

Northern Gannet - A juvenile was at Stewartby Lake on 14th (TD, AG, et al)

Great Cormorant - The leucistic bird was still around the brick pits all month.

Merlin - The regular wintering male was back around Broom GP from 12th, with another on Everton Heath on 29th.

Dotterel - Singles were found amongst Golden Plovers at Radwell Lakes on 12th (RIB, et al) and at Broom on 15th-16th (MJS, SCB, et al)

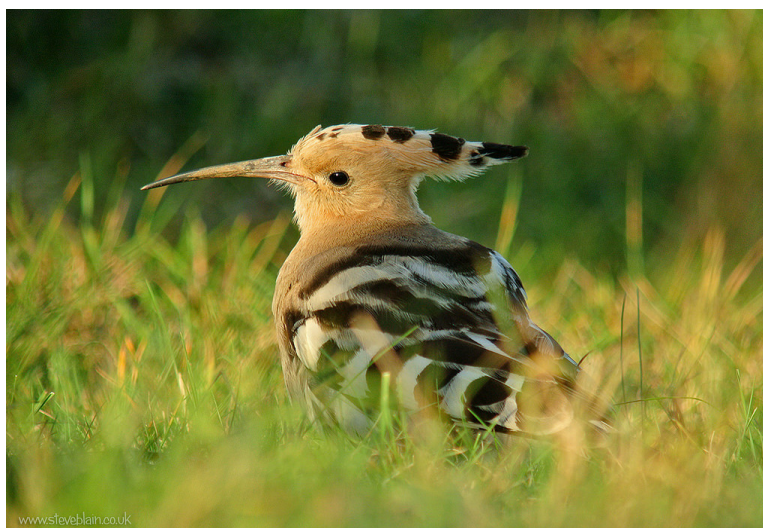
Great Skua - Singles were found on Brogborough Lake on 14th (BN, et al), and Sandy (RIB, SCB).

Mediterranean Gull - A first-winter was at Stewartby Lake on 13th, with two present in the Broom GP roost on 23rd.

Little Gull - Three were at Stewartby Lake on 13th.

Ring-necked Parakeet - Twelve flew south along Warden Hill, Luton on 30th

Short-eared Owl - One flew over Blows Downs on 19th, with perhaps the same at Cowslip Meadow, Luton later the same day.



Hoopoe - A wonderfully confiding individual was found in Cople on 3rd before being relocated at Willington from 5th-10th (SH, RE, et al)

Lesser Grey Shrike - The first record in around 100 years was on Biggleswade Common on 10th. It was enjoyed by many birders throughout its day long stay (P&KS, MJP. et al) – for more on the previous records of this species, see article later in this edition of The Hobby

Great Grey Shrike - The first of three was back at Streatley from 16th (JP, et al), another was found on the BIGmig at Boughton End on 19th (BH) and another at Sandy Smith NR from 25th (JA et al)

Firecrest - One was at The Lodge on 21st.

Bearded Tit - At least 18 were seen in Rookery South CIP on 5th.

Wood Lark - Singles flew over Blows Downs on 4th (JL), Sharpenhoe Clappers on 5th (SW), and Sandy Heath on 23rd (DOM).

Waxwing - Seven were reported flying over The Lodge on 30th.

Ring Ouzel - One was at Pegsdon Hills on 19th with another at Kings Wood on 25th.

Whinchat - One on Sandy Heath on 3rd.

Common Stonechat - Three on Sandy Heath on 3rd, five at Pegsdon Hills on 4th, one at Southill and one in Rookery South CIP on 5th. Two were on Biggleswade Common on 8th. Four were still around Sandy Heath on 19th. Three at Broom GP from 21st.

Tree Sparrow - The first of the winter was at Southill on 5th. Two flew over Streatley on 18th, one near Potton on 28th, and up to three near Upper Caldecote from 29th.

Rock Pipit - One was at Broom GP on 7th.

Lapland Bunting - One flew over Galley Hill on 10th (JP)

Observers:

RP - Richard Patient; RIB- Richard Bashford; MJP - Martin Palmer; TD - Tony Donnelly;
AG - Andy Graham; MJS - Martin Stevens; SCB - Steve Blain; SH - Steve Halton;
RE - Robin Edwards; P&KS - Peter and Kath Simms; JP - Jonathan Palmer;
BH - Bob Hook; JA - Jean Abbott; JL - John Lynch; SW - Stuart Winter;
DOM - Darren Oakley-Martin

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
recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk

PROGRAMME MATTERS

Forthcoming Indoor Meetings

Tuesday 25th November 'Inglorious Busters and their Conservation' by Dr Nigel Collar, Leventis Fellow in Conservation Biology at Birdlife International. Just a reminder as details of this talk were given in the last issue. Nigel is a hugely experienced speaker with an in depth knowledge of his subject so you can look forward to a most interesting evening.

Tuesday 16th December 'The Birding Year – 2014'. Our Chairman, Richard Bashford, will present his ever popular video review of the birds of the county of Bedfordshire recorded this year. Richard will sell copies of his video and we will hold our bi-annual raffle, both in aid of club funds so come prepared. If you can offer a contribution for the raffle please let me know in advance. Come along and enjoy the free seasonal refreshments and socialise.

Tuesday 27th January 'Amazing Colombia' by Stuart Elsom. Colombia's 440,000 square miles are the richest area for birds on the planet with some 1,870 species having been recorded. On this whistle-stop tour Stuart will give us a taste of the incredible birdlife to be found here, including 73 endemics. For many years this country was closed to birders but things have changed. It's now relatively safe to travel this remarkable birding paradise – start packing!

Enjoy our events,

Don Green

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new members to the Beds Bird Club:

Richard Knock, Pirton, near Hitchin
Ann May, Linslade
Greg Nunn, Henlow
Justin Tilley, Peterborough

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

Mary Sheridan

LESSER GREY SHRIKE IN BEDFORDSHIRE

The discovery of a Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius Minor* at Furzenhall Farm, Biggleswade on 10th October was one of the highlights of the year but though this was the first record of modern times, the historical records state that this is not a “first” for Bedfordshire.

The previous records do leave an element of doubt however; the first in terms of identification, the second in case of the unusual date and the unavailability of the mentioned specimen.

With reference to The Birds of Bedfordshire (Trodd & Kramer 1991):

“Steele-Elliott (1904) records a probable sighting of this nationally rare species at Woburn in the first week of September 1894. The information came via Lord Linford from the Duchess of Bedford:

Lord Linford considered the record worthy of mention but ‘with a mark of interrogation’.

There is only one other record of a corpse found along the River Ouse on 25th January 1907 (Gardner 1907-8).”

Further detail is provided in the background to the 1894 record.

In 'The Vertebrate Fauna of Bedfordshire' (1897-1901) Jannion Steele-Elliott writes 'The addition of this rare visitor into our county list is taken from information kindly sent to me by the late Lord Lilford, who wrote 16th March, 1895.

"The Duchess of Bedford wishes me to inform you that she and a gentleman staying at Woburn saw there, in the first week of September 1894, a bird that they have little hesitation in considering as a specimen of Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*). They arrived at the opinion from a reference to the figure of that species in my work, and I may add that from the original letter of the Duchess to me, with description, I feel sure that they were not mistaken. Although you cannot of course mention the occurrence of the Lesser Grey Shrike in Bedfordshire as an established fact, I think the note is well worthy of insertion with a mark of interrogation. The only other British species for which it could possibly be mistaken is *Lanius excubitor*, and the date of its occurrence at Woburn puts this supposition almost out of the question."

(The book to which Lord Lilford refers was 'Birds of Northamptonshire and Neighbourhood' (1895) which Lord Lilford himself wrote.)

In respect of the second listed bird of 1907, there is widespread doubt around this record. It is the only January record of Lesser Grey Shrike in the UK. After the recent bird, a request has been made to formally reassess this record. The reference is taken from British Birds 'Lesser Grey Shrike in Bedfordshire', Vol. 1. page 147.



Andy Grimsey with input from David Kramer and Steve Blain

THE BIRDS OF BEDFORDSHIRE – TRODD & KRAMER

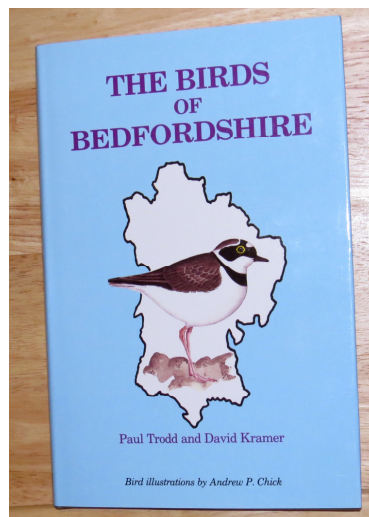
The Bird Club has been able to purchase some outstanding copies of this 1991 Avifauna from a London bookseller who obtained last copies from the publisher. The fascinating 350-page, partly illustrated hardback book gives full details about the birds of Bedfordshire covering records up to the end of 1989. It is from this book that the first excerpt on Lesser Grey Shrike has been taken.

Alongside the species accounts covering all records can be found a chapter dealing with the Bedfordshire environment, habitat, climate and geology and appendices, maps of distribution and full bibliography.

For anyone with an interest in the history of birds and their occurrence in the county, this is a valuable resource and a reminder of the ever changing status of our local avifauna.

To obtain a copy, please let myself or any other member of the committee know and we will get one to you for the bargain price of £12, (+postage if required) with funds going to the bird club.

I will bring a copy to the next bird club meeting for anyone that wishes to browse.



Andy Grimsey

DIVER SPECIES IN BEDFORDSHIRE

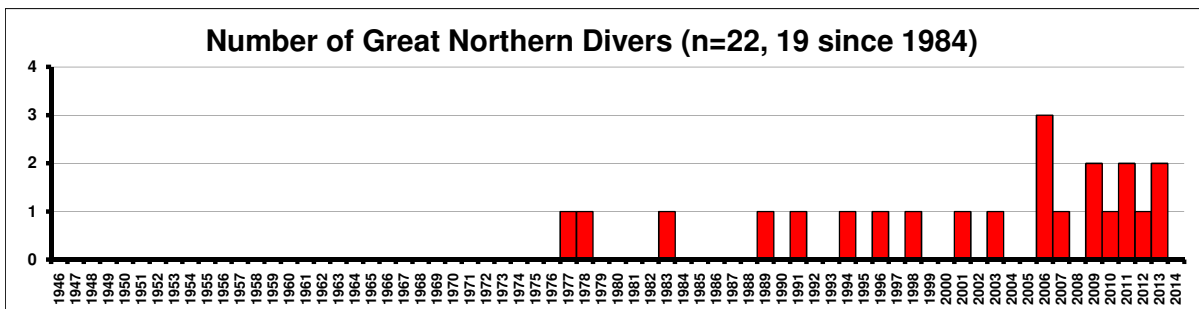
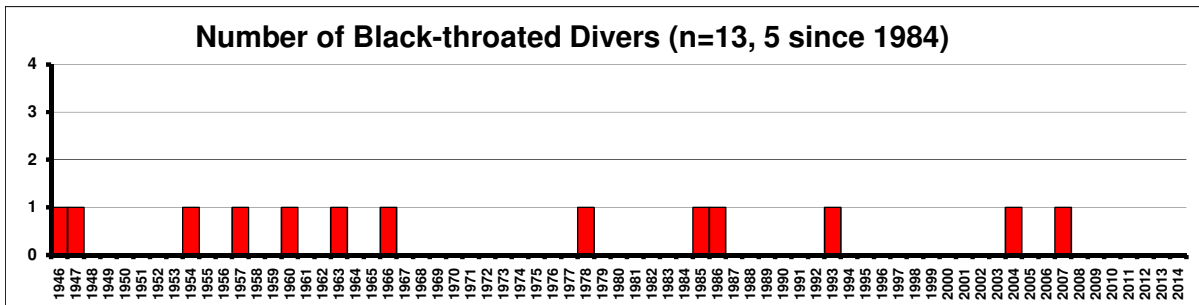
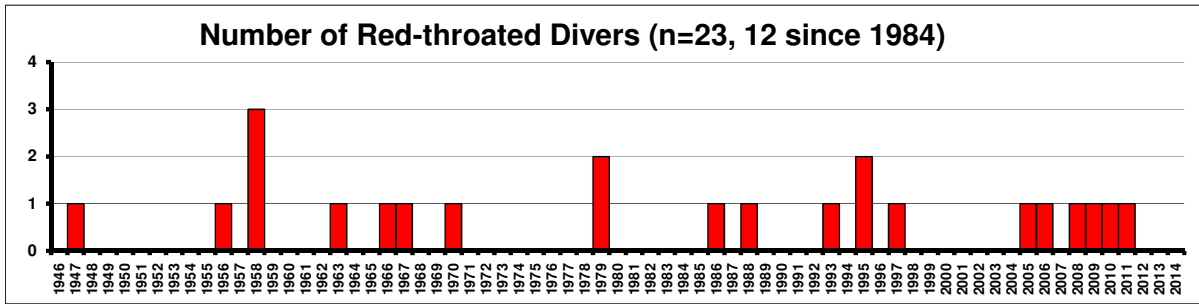
On 22nd February 2014, I had the good fortune to find a Great Northern Diver from the roadside viewpoint over the Chimney Corner South clay pit. This was the first diver I had found in Bedfordshire though I had been able to get good views of others previously found by others. With subsequent investigations, this was most likely to be a bird that had been seen a number of times at Stewartby Lake and it seemed that it may have moved here in response to disturbance from boats. I later observed the same bird at this location on 8th March and presume the same was also seen on occasions on Rookery North pit until its departure from the area later that month.

In recent winters, Great Northern Divers have proved to be regular visitors to the larger brick pits but looking at the data for the species, this is a new status for this bird in the county. There has been a significant increase in sightings in the last twenty years of Great Northerns which is not reflected in records of the its Red-throated and Black-throated relatives.

The first Great Northern Diver was shot at Biddenham in December 1876 and the second did not occur until a century later at the end of November 1977 when a bird at Arlesley Blue Lagoon was present at the same time as an apparent influx in the south of England.

Great Northern Diver could almost be listed now as an annual visitor (though previously the rarest) whereas Red-throated Diver is now considered the second most common diver and Black-throated Diver is at “Mega” status with a recent occurrence record average one every ten years.

The graphs below show the change in status of the three divers with data relating to the date that a bird was first discovered.

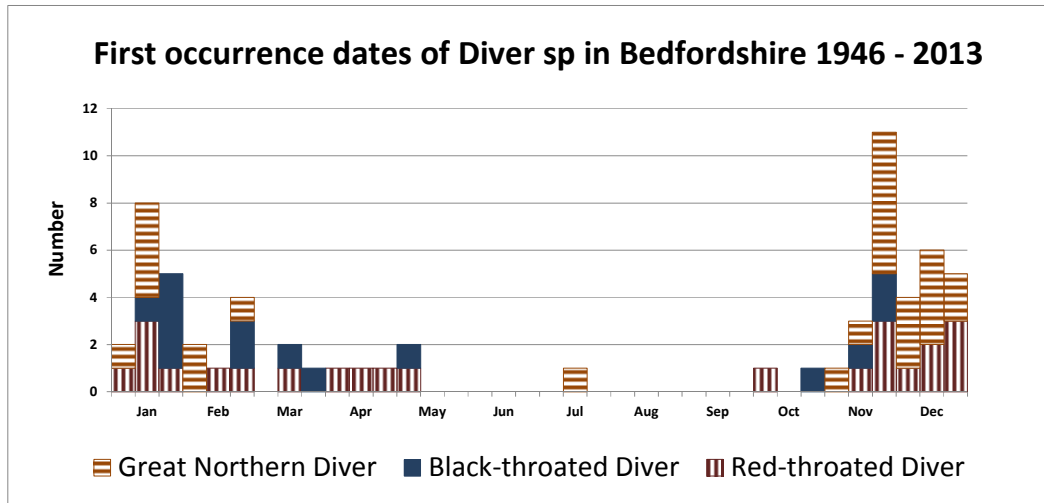


So what maybe behind the status of this change ? The recent Bird Atlas 2007-11 does suggests an increase in wintering birds in the south-east of England, around the Thames and Essex estuaries, though also comment is made about better coverage of the potential sites contributing to this data. In Bedfordshire, it could also be suggested that the availability of suitable waters may also be a factor.

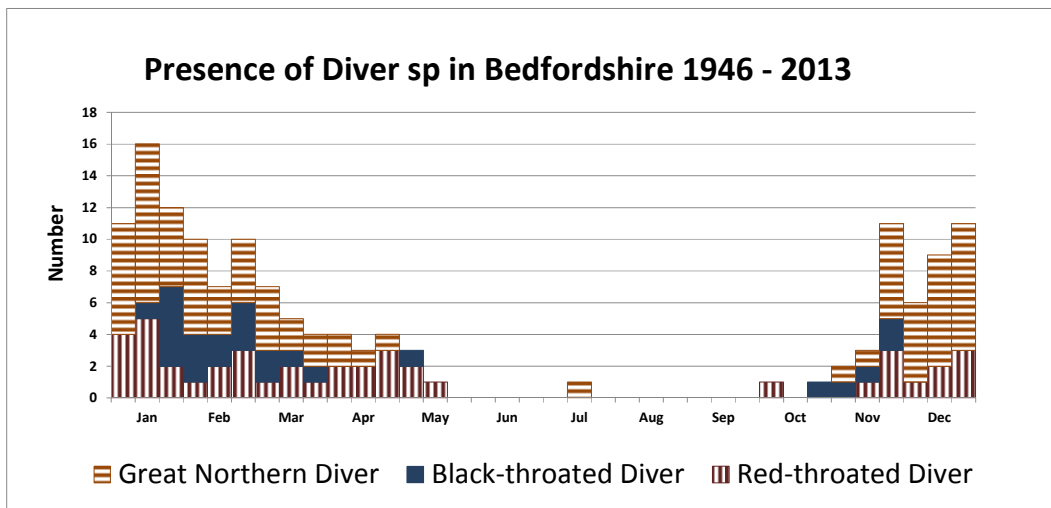


Red-throated Diver at Brogborough Lake
18th December 2005

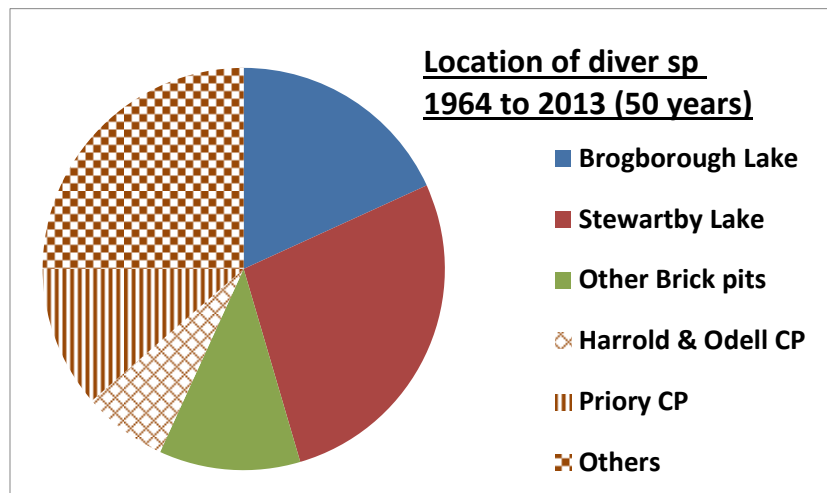
As might be expected from the species national status, divers are winter visitors into Bedfordshire, often staying for a number of days and on occasion have been present for a few months from initial arrival into spring. Arrival might be expected in the last two weeks of November and into December for Great Northern Diver but the data would also suggest a possibility of early spring movements for Red-throated and Black-throated. The graph below includes arrival times for all three divers together in ten day periods.



Reflecting the extended stay of birds, a graph of presence is influenced particularly by the extended stays of recent Great Northern Divers into the early spring period.



As might be expected of a family that is predominantly a coastal winter visitor, the majority of records are of birds located on the largest bodies of water with Stewartby and Brogborough most favoured. If you want to find a diver in Bedfordshire, then the best opportunity would seem to be a visit to one of these two lakes when a cold spell hits the east of England around the end of November.



Andy Grimsey

CORN BUNTING SURVEY 2014

The results of the survey were rather disappointing in that not many Corn Bunting were found;

In June: 104 singing males, 29 'others' (calling and seen birds, either sex).

In July: 62 singing males, 29 'others'. Fewer tetrads were surveyed in July.

Trying to estimate a county population is going to be difficult and assumptions will have to be made; eg. detectability; ie. the percentage of CB recorded. Also, how many females did each male have? 0, 1, 2, or 3? What about non-breeding birds?

We - myself and Andrew Tongue - plan to carry out an analysis in the new year and I hope to have a paper ready for publication in the 2014 Bird Report. A big thank you to all members who took part.

Graham Goodall

COLLARED DOVE SHOWERING

The predicted storms had largely passed Henlow by, although the surrounding villages had received a soaking which was a shame as the our garden could have done with the rain. A downpour duly arrived at about 16:00. During the heaviest show a Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* landed on the crook from which we hang our peanut and seed feeders. As the rain continued to fall the Collared Dove stretched its left wing above its back and leaved well over to its right so that its underwing was completely exposed to the rain. It held this position for about 15 seconds before sitting upright, closing its wing and shuffling its body feathers. After a few seconds it repeated these actions with the other wing, leaning over to its left with the right wing fully open so the underwing got wet. Again it held this posture for about 15 seconds then sat up, closed its wing and shuffled its body feathers before flying off. It did not preen after wetting either underwing.

Roger K. Hicks

NEST BOX RECORDING AT DUNSTABLE SEWAGE TREATMENT WORKS

Most of you will be aware that for the last 6 years I have monitored almost 50 nest boxes on the Dunstable Anglian Sewage Treatment site. Since 2009 most years have been very successful although only Blue and Great Tits have been recorded using them – current total recorded 738. Last year's cold and wet spring was however the exception and many young birds died prior to fledging with a very low total of 83 finally leaving their nests against 167 in 2012 (exactly 50% down). This year was somewhat better with 130 young birds fledging still down on the 2012 high of 167. I prepare the annual records in various formats most of which I submit to the BTO as part of the "National Nest Record Scheme" along with their official record card.

Included here is a summary chart of 2014 which shows a significant improvement in breeding success compared with 2013 for both Blue Tit and Great Tit, though no other species recorded.

Other more detailed analyses have been prepared of the timings and contents of each of the individual boxes that can be shared at request should they be of interest. Many thanks to Gen Carpenter and Pete Marshall for their help once again with this year's surveys.

John Tomlin

Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works Nest Box Use Report 2014.

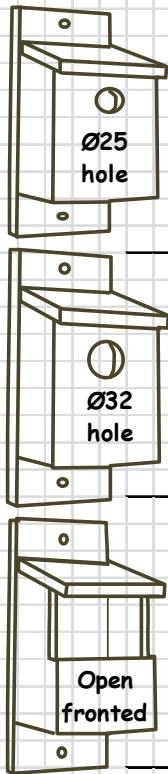
A better year for the nest box inhabitants on the Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works Reserve resulting in a significant improvement compared with the very poor 2013 breeding season. The initial use of 32 of the 46 boxes (70%) was similar to 2013 (31 & 67% respectively), with an encouraging 25 (21 in 2013) of them going on to have eggs totaling around 192 (208 in 2012 - 167 in 2013), average clutch size 7.68 slightly down on last years 7.95 from 21 boxes. However only 20 boxes went on to produce fledged young. High counts were box 15 Great Tit with 8 of the 10 eggs fledging and box 23 (on the hide) Blue Tit also with 10 eggs but unfortunately deserted with 7 chicks dead & 3 unhatched eggs. Box 28 - Blue Tits was overall highest with 11 eggs of which at least 8 fledged. Of the 25 boxes initially with eggs, 2 - 14 & 42 - were deserted with 3 & 6 eggs respectively and in addition to box 23, number 33 was also deserted with the loss of 3 chicks and box 36 with the loss of 8. In addition some infertile eggs were found in vacated nests and numerous clutches lost one or two hatched young prior to their siblings fledging. 19 eggs observed on earlier surveys unaccounted for on completion of surveys.










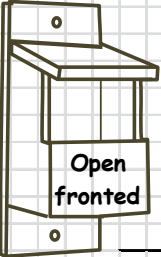
FINAL OVERALL SUMMARY: 20 boxes fledged 130 young birds, 21 died prior to fledging (45 in 2013), 22 unhatched/deserted eggs (21 in 2013) (plus 19 unaccounted for from initial surveys) total >192 eggs laid. These records have been submitted to BTO as part of the "National Nest Record Scheme". Many thanks to Gen Carpenter and Pete Marshall for their help once again with this year's surveys. For further details, including a map of the site, refer to the following pages.

Nest Box Statistics.

John Tomlin 11/7/14

Box Styles



	Total number of boxes	Number used for nest building	Boxes not used for nest building	Nests not completed	Completed nests not used	Nest used for egg laying	Nest deserted with egg(s)	Nests deserted with young	Nests from which young fledged	Overall total boxes on site
	22	15 	7	3	0	12 + (1)	0	2	10 + (1)	46
	20	(1)  17  (16)	3	4	0	(1)  13  (12)	2	1	(1)  10  (9)	
	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	

<u>2014</u>	75 Blue Tits fledged from 11 boxes - average brood size 6.82
<u>Summary</u>	55 Great Tits fledged from 9 boxes - average brood size 6.11

<u>2013</u>	47 BTs from 9 = 5.22 ave.
<u>compariso</u>	36 GTs from 6 = 6.0 ave.
<u>n</u>	

BEDFORDSHIRE GALLERY

At the Bedfordshire Bird Club meeting at Dunstable STW on 24th August 2014, a ringing session allowed some superb views of birds in the hand. Ringing by Graham Buss, images by Sean D'Arcy.



Female Sparrowhawk



Wren and Song Thrush



Great Grey Shrike – three birds were located in the county in October, a returning bird at Streatley, a fly-by at Lidlington and this bird at Sandy Smith NR which is still present at the time of writing, November 6th. A typical view of this bird captured here:



IMAGES

Andy Grimsey: Red-throated Diver
Sean D'Arcy: Sparrowhawk(2), Wren, Song Thrush
Steve Blain: Great Grey Shrike, Hoopoe, Lesser Grey Shrike, Stonechat, Barred Warbler



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