



THE HOBBY

Website: www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the July 2018 production of The Hobby. Included this month is Barry's comprehensive writeup of the Winter Garden Bird Feeding Survey along with various notes including an invitation to take part in this autumn/winter BTO survey – "Project Owl". Good birding to all for the autumn...

PROGRAMME MATTERS

Programme of Indoor Meetings 2018 / 19

Meeting dates have been confirmed for our Winter Programme which begins on 25th September at 8pm in the usual location of Maulden Village Hall. The full programme is not yet available for publishing and will appear on the website in August and included as a hard copy in the next edition of The Hobby to be distributed in the first half of September. Follow-up dates in 2018 with guest speakers are Tuesdays 30th October and 27th November and our normal Christmas review of the Year with Richard Bashford on 18th December. Please put these in your diary!

Outdoor Meetings

Our next outdoor meeting on Friday 10th August is an evening visit to Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works for a variety of wetland species. Meet in Birdwatchers' car park, off Thorn Road, (TL004242) at 7.00pm. This will be led by Pete Marshall. Note that, for Bird Club members only, this site will be open to all members on the first Sunday of each month between 8.00 am and noon (except November to February when it is 9.00am opening)

Our next meeting out of the county is to a fantastic location which will be familiar to many members. On Sunday 9th September, Carolyn & Malcolm Hawkes will lead a group on the North Norfolk Coast looking for passage migrant birds. The meeting will start in the Car Park at Titchwell RSPB, PE31 8BB, (TF750438) at 9.00am. but maybe could end up anywhere.

Contact Kevin Sharpe (07827 440394) if lifts are required or with any queries regarding attendance of events in the outdoor programme.

Details about the entire summer outdoor meetings program are also included on our website at bedsbirds.org.uk

MAY – JUNE 2018 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. Another option for recorded is now available on the internet; If you only have one or two bird records to send us (or if you're not keen on trying the rather fabulous BirdTrackwebsite) please use the iRecord form at <http://bedsbirdclub.org.uk/irecorderbirdrecord/>

May 2018

Pink-footed Goose - One was at Roxton Lakes on 31st.

Garganey - A drake was at Broom GP on 15th.

Common Goldeneye - A female with two ducklings was found in mid-Beds during the month. This was the first confirmed breeding record for the county.

Common Quail - One was found near Wrestlingworth on 17th.

Northern Gannet - An adult was seen at several sites along the Ouse valley at the end of the month, including at Wyboston Lakes on 30th May and Great Barford Lake on 1st June.

Great White Egret - One was at Priory CP on 6th.

Black-necked Grebe - One in summer plumage was at Brogborough Lake on 11th-12th.

Sanderling - Four were at Grovebury SP on 26th, two there on 28th, and one there on 29th, and nine on 30th.

Little Stint - One was at Grovebury SP on 26th.

Greenshank - One was at Grovebury SP on 24th, one at Biggleswade and one at Broom GP on 27th.

Wood Sandpiper - One was at Broom GP on 22nd-24th

Turnstone - One was at Priory CP on 13th and another at Grovebury SP on 27th.

Black Tern - One was at Broom GP on 5th, six at Southill Lake on 21st, two at Grovebury SP and two at Broom GP on 24th, one at Southill Lake and seven at Stewartby Lake on 25th, four at Radwell Lakes on 26th, and two at Grovebury SP on 30th.

Arctic Tern - Ten were at Southill Lake on 1st, and ten at Stewartby Lake on 19th.



Turtle Dove - Birds were located at Marston Thrift, Brogborough Tip, Octagon Farm, MVCP, Knotting Green, Eyeworth and Tempsford. Please don't forget to add any sightings you have to BirdTrack.

Golden Oriole - One was heard singing at Langford Meadows on 28th (GC, PM)

Firecrest - One was singing at the Lodge early in the month. One of very few recorded in Beds this spring.

Spotted Flycatcher - The first was reported at Coopers Hill on 5th but very few others have been located in the county this year.

Black Redstart - An immature male sang in Biggleswade for two days mid-month

Whinchat - Four were at Meadow Lane GP on 1st and one there on 2nd. One was at Brogborough 'Tip' on 2nd, and one at Dunstable SW on 4th.

Tree Pipit - One was reported singing at Sharpenhoe Clappers on 5th (MR)

Common Crossbill - Up to nine were at the Lodge.



Common Rosefinch – Bedfordshire's first was found in a Dunstable garden on 25th May. Unfortunately it was in an area without easy access and was only briefly seen (but very well!).

June 2018

Gadwall - Two broods were found at Blunham Lake. Please report any you see in the county.

Common Quail - One was at Meadow Lane GP on 1st

Little Tern - Two were at Priory CP on 26th

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - One was in a Woburn garden on 29th.

Common Crossbill - Several were at the Lodge mid-month

Observers:

MR - Mark Rayment; GC - Gen Carpenter; PM - Pete Marshall

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

PROJECT OWL – BTO SURVEY AUTUMN WINTER 2018/19

Despite being widespread, surprisingly little about is known about our Tawny Owl population. The BTO's core monitoring schemes do suggest a recent decline, but as they are daytime surveys, they cannot show the full picture. From mid-August to mid-October the BTO will be running a national structured survey on Tawny Owls. Following on from comparable national surveys carried in 1989 and 2005 this survey will be used to examine long-term population and occupancy trends. This survey

involves volunteers visiting random pre-selected tetrads (2x2km squares). In total there will be over 6,000 tetrads available at the start of the survey (25 in Bedfordshire), of which approximately 2650 were surveyed previously in 1989 and/or 2005. The BTO want to survey as many of these as possible and depending on local interest expand this over the course of the survey. The first survey period will run from August 15 until October 15 2018. During this time, you should make one to three (ideally at least two) short evening visits to your chosen tetrad within as short a period as possible. The whole process is planned to be repeated between mid-February and mid-March 2019, and (funding permitting) in autumn 2019/spring 2020.

Relatively few of the randomly pre-selected tetrads are in Bedfordshire, If you would like to take part and cover a tetrad nearer to your home, please get in touch (see below) as extra tetrads may be released over the course of the survey.

At the end of September and running until the end of March there will be a Tawny Owl Calling Survey. This is a weekly 20-minute survey that can be carried out from the comfort of your own home or pretty much anywhere else you can visit multiple times.



If you would like to participate, please go to the BTO Project Owl web page <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl> and follow the links to sign-up for the survey. I will be happy to help if further information is required.

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FOUND A DEAD BIRD OF PREY ?

In December, when driving up the A6 just north of Silsoe early on a Sunday morning (going birding of course!), I noted a freshly deceased Tawny Owl at the side of the road. I picked it up and put it in the car and a few hours later took it home where my wife was very pleased for me to leave it in the freezer with the family food...

The bird was in good condition, with fully intact and un-degraded feathering and appeared most likely to have been killed sometime the previous night. The only notable damage was around the one side of the face and one eye, and a broken neck which is much what I would have expected from an impact with a vehicle.

I passed an email around on the bedsbirds.group.io in order to gather some information from others about what I could do with it. It seemed a shame to waste the opportunity of getting some benefit or interest from the unfortunate demise of the bird.

I had a few responses, two of which I would wish to share here in case other members find a bird in similar circumstances and I am grateful to all who replied.

On this occasion following advice passed on, I contacted the Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (<http://pbms.ceh.ac.uk/>).

To quote from their website:

“The Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme (PBMS) is a long-term, national monitoring scheme that quantifies the concentrations of contaminants in the livers and eggs of selected species of predatory birds in Britain.

We monitor the levels of contaminants to determine how and why they vary between species and regions, how they are changing over time, and the effects that they may have on individual birds and on their populations.”

From the website, I filled in a form about the circumstances and location of discovery of the owl. They subsequently sent me a box, suitably marked, and with freepost return labels in order that I could send of the bird to them for further study and post mortem. They have advised that following their studies a report will be compiled and details will also be shared with me.

Alan Outen also contacted me with regards to the condition of the bird and whether it was carrying any parasites or similar that would be worthy of study. On this occasion I could not see anything so packaged it up and sent it for analysis with the PBMS. I await their response and post mortem info with interest.

Andy Grimsey

THE GARDEN BIRD FEEDING SURVEY – WINTER 2017/18

INTRODUCTION

For the survey for last winter, covering the 22-week period from the beginning of October 2017 to early March 2018, we received returns from 75 gardens in Bedfordshire. That was only a slight drop from the previous winter (when we received 77) but a significant change was the mix between rural and urban gardens. For the winter of 2016/17 the split of returns was 58% from rural and 42% from urban gardens. For last winter the split was 65% for rural and only 35% for urban gardens. That will artificially inflate the results for species that prefer rural gardens, such as Coal Tit, Song Thrush, Sparrowhawk, Pied Wagtail, Goldcrest, Common Pheasant, Mistle Thrush, Jay, Bullfinch, Grey Wagtail, Tawny Owl and probably Carrion Crow, whereas the results for those species that prefer urban sites, including the gulls, House Sparrow and Feral Pigeon, will be deflated. That should be remembered when reading the species comments in the main text.

The average number of species recorded in the surveyed rural gardens was, at 28.5, the highest since our winter survey started in 1993/94, whilst in urban gardens it was 21.3, the highest since 2012/13.

Table 1 Average number of species per garden - winters 2010/11 to 2017/18

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Rural gardens	26.8	25.6	27.2	24.3	26.1	26.3	27.1	28.5
Urban gardens	21.4	20.1	23.3	18.1	19.1	20.1	20.3	21.3

The total number of species in the gardens last winter reached 69, the highest in any one winter since our survey started.

Table 2 includes all species that have been recorded in our winter gardens since the winter of 2012/13. In addition there are another 18 species which have not been recorded in our winter surveys since then, but were recorded during at least one winter since 1993/94. As can be seen in Table 2, there were four

species that were recorded in all participating gardens last winter – Blackbird, Blue Tit, Wood Pigeon (also our most frequent garden visitor last winter) and Robin. In addition the Dunnock, Great Tit, Wren and Collared Dove were reported from all urban gardens.

TABLE 2 PERCENTAGE OF GARDENS THAT EACH SPECIES WAS RECORDED IN - WINTERS 2012/13 TO 2017/18															
position		%	%	%	%	%	%	position		%	%	%	%	%	%
17/18		17/18	16/17	15/16	14/15	13/14	12/13	17/18		17/18	16/17	15/16	14/15	13/14	12/13
1st=	Blackbird	100	100	100	100	100	100	43rd=	Grey Heron	16	16	15	15	10	14
1st=	Blue Tit	100	100	100	100	100	100	43rd=	Reed Bunting	16	9	17	16	11	26
1st=	Robin	100	100	100	100	100	100	45th=	Black-h Gull	13	18	10	7	9	19
1st=	Wood Pigeon	100	100	100	99	99	99	45th=	Chiffchaff	13	22	12	10	9	12
5th=	Great Tit	99	96	99	97	100	99	47th=	Treecreeper	11	6	9	10	2	6
5th=	Wren	99	97	96	94	81	90	47th=	Mallard	11	9	6	6	6	3
7th	Dunnock	97	99	100	97	99	99	49th=	Kestrel	8	10	15	7	6	9
8th	Magpie	95	88	96	90	88	92	49th=	Red-l Partridge	8	4	1	1	2	2
9th=	Collared Dove	93	92	94	91	93	92	51st=	Kingfisher	7	6	4	7	4	1
9th=	Goldfinch	93	91	88	90	91	88	51st=	Y'hammer	7	8	7	12	6	15
11th	Chaffinch	92	92	96	97	94	99	51st=	Moorhen	7	6	12	10	6	10
12th	Coal Tit	91	75	89	79	64	74	54th	Marsh Tit	5	3	4	3	1	7
13th	Long-t Tit	89	90	93	84	84	92	55th	Little Egret	4	4	1	1	1	1
14th	Starling	84	87	85	84	84	91	56th=	Common Raven	3	1	1	3	0	2
15th=	House Sparrow	73	75	77	81	79	85	56th=	Barn Owl	3	3	1	0	0	0
15th=	Song Thrush	73	68	56	56	46	65	56th=	Cormorant	3	0	1	0	0	0
17th	Sparrowhawk	71	60	74	68	69	65	56th=	Lapwing	3	0	0	0	0	0
18th=	Greenfinch	68	68	83	85	83	83	60th=	Common Gull	1	1	2	1	1	3
18th=	Fieldfare	68	30	22	19	16	71	60th=	Little Grebe	1	1	0	1	0	0
20th=	Jackdaw	63	66	62	56	51	51	60th=	Greylag Goose	1	1	0	0	0	0
20th=	C Crow	63	66	56	62	51	55	60th=	Gadwall	1	1	0	0	0	0
22nd=	Redwing	57	44	24	28	30	43	60th=	Swallow	1	0	1	0	0	1
22nd=	Gt Sp Woodpecker	57	66	66	60	53	66	60th=	Peregrine Falcon	1	0	1	0	0	0
24th	Pied Wagtail	56	51	27	32	23	47	60th=	Mute Swan	1	0	0	1	0	0
25th	Goldcrest	48	43	48	25	27	40	60th=	Lesser B B Gull	1	0	0	1	0	0
26th	C Pheasant	43	32	35	32	32	33	60th=	Woodcock	1	0	0	0	0	2
27th	Blackcap	39	43	29	38	26	53	60th=	Lesser Sp W'pecker	1	0	0	0	0	0
28th	Mistle Thrush	33	26	20	13	20	24		R-ringed Parakeet	0	3	1	1	0	0
29th=	Siskin	31	13	32	6	14	37		Herring Gull	0	1	0	0	0	0
29th=	Green Woodpecker	31	42	32	37	26	34		Water Rail	0	1	0	0	0	0
31st	Jay	29	22	24	38	17	44		C Snipe	0	1	0	0	0	0
32nd=	Bullfinch	25	18	20	26	16	23		Little Owl	0	1	1	1	0	1
32nd=	Lesser Redpoll	25	5	23	10	9	24		Wigeon	0	1	0	0	0	0
34th=	Stock Dove	20	18	20	18	16	19		House Martin	0	0	1	1	0	0
34th=	Grey Wagtail	20	18	13	13	11	12		Tree Sparrow	0	0	1	3	0	5
34th=	Red Kite	20	17	10	12	6	9		Linnet	0	0	1	1	0	1
34th=	Common Buzzard	20	10	11	12	10	7		Yellow Wagtail	0	0	0	1	0	0
38th=	Feral Pigeon	19	19	18	10	15	19		Waxwing	0	0	0	1	0	5
38th=	Brambling	19	4	12	1	9	21		Black Redstart	0	0	0	0	1	0
38th=	Rook	19	25	17	24	15	15		Meadow Pipit	0	0	0	0	0	1
38th=	Tawny Owl	19	13	17	16	12	13		Common Redpoll	0	0	0	0	0	1
42nd=	Nuthatch	17	14	17	19	11	21								

Several species were recorded in the highest proportion of the gardens since our winter survey started in 1993/94, including Wren, Goldfinch, Coal Tit, Mistle Thrush, Lesser Redpoll, Grey Wagtail, Common Buzzard and Red Kite, but remember the comments about the change in the proportion of returns between rural and urban sites. At the other end of the spectrum the House Sparrow appeared in the lowest percentage of gardens, but again that result might have been artificially deflated.

Table 3 shows the 'Top 20' species that were 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 75 gardens). Of the Top 20 species, the Wood Pigeon (in top spot), Goldfinch, Magpie and particularly Long-tailed Tit, appeared at the highest level since the survey started, whilst Collared Dove appeared at the lowest level of frequency.

Table 3 Frequency of occurrence winters 2012/13 to 2017/18							
Position		17/18	16/17	15/16	14/15	13/14	12/13
1st	Wood Pigeon	92	91	90	89	87	91
2nd	Blue Tit	91	91	91	92	89	91
3rd	Robin	90	92	88	91	84	91
4th	Blackbird	88	91	88	91	89	94
5th	Great Tit	79	75	80	81	74	77
6th	Dunnock	78	83	77	79	72	77
7th	Goldfinch	66	62	62	61	57	59
8th	Chaffinch	65	64	68	71	69	77
9th	Magpie	63	60	61	59	51	53
10th	Collared Dove	60	64	63	66	64	68
11th	Starling	57	58	47	55	50	61
12th	House Sparrow	52	54	52	59	55	63
13th	Coal Tit	50	35	52	36	24	32
14th	Long-tailed Tit	47	39	41	30	26	35
15th	Wren	40	46	39	37	22	32
16th	Greenfinch	39	33	48	44	47	49
17th	Jackdaw	33	33	34	32	22	24
18th	G S Woodpecker	24	23	29	22	20	27
19th	Carrion Crow	22	25	20	22	19	20
20th	Song Thrush	16	18	14	14	10	13

THE WEATHER

Across the UK, the winter of 2017/18 was one of great contrast. During October the mean temperature was 1.8°C above the 1981 to 2010 average. Sunshine for East Anglia was 11% below average but it was dry, with rainfall in our district some 66% below average. In November most of the month had westerly-type weather interspersed with short-lived northerlies. In East Anglia the mean temperature was 6.9°C, slightly above average, with sunshine hours 29% above but rainfall 31% below. December began cold and frosty, with snow in many parts of the UK around the middle of the month. Certainly many species became more apparent in our gardens during the week starting 10th December (as can be seen in the figures later in this article). Judith Knight in particular, from her Linslade garden, noted 'a great peak of species and numbers' during that week. It turned generally mild and unsettled during the second half. In East Anglia the mean temperature was 4.7°C, just above the average level, with sunshine hours 36% above and rainfall 65% above.

January started mild and changeable but it was cold in the second week. The second half of the month saw a generally westerly type of weather. In East Anglia the average temperature was 5.4°C, some two degrees warmer than normal, with sunshine hours 14% above and rainfall 5% above.

In February the first half was unsettled with temperatures below average. The last few days of the month steadily became colder and snow was an issue in many areas by month end, and that became the most talked about weather feature of the whole winter period. The 25th started with a widespread moderate frost, with persistent cloud around the north-east of the UK, and almost unbroken sunshine everywhere else. Wintry showers in eastern regions of the UK on the 26th gradually spread westwards during the day. The 27th was very cold with widespread snow showers, heaviest across eastern districts,

and it was bitterly cold with sunshine and frequent snow showers on the 28th, the showers heavy at times and locally thundery in the north and east. There was a minimum temperature of minus 11.7°C at South Farnborough (Hampshire), and a maximum of only minus 4.8°C at Spadeadam (Cumbria). The particularly harsh weather in that last week of the survey had a dramatic effect on the birds, with an unprecedented influx of some species into our gardens, including Fieldfares (see Fig. 2), Redwings (Fig. 3) and even Northern Lapwings.

For the month as a whole, in East Anglia the average temperature was just 2.7°C, almost a degree colder than average. Sunshine hours were 49% above normal and rainfall was 8% more. (source: adapted with permission, from Crown copyright data supplied by the Met Office).

THE MAIN RESULTS

Waterfowl, Game Birds, Herons, Raptors, Waders and Gulls

Of the gardens surveyed the Mallard appeared in seven rural areas and one urban site. Other wildfowl making the list for last winter were Greylag Goose, Gadwall and Mute Swan, all as you can imagine from the larger gardens in the survey that have extensive water features or are adjacent to waterways.

The Common Pheasant was the most regular game bird, in 43% of gardens, mostly in rural areas, with Red-legged Partridge in 8%. As in recent years there were no garden records of Grey Partridge, with the last record in this survey being in 2006/07.



Grey Herons appeared in 16% of gardens, average for the previous three winters, and Little Egrets were recorded in three gardens, and in two of those during five of the weeks in each. Marion Hession was quite understandably ‘amazed’ to have one perched alongside her Great Barford garden for ten minutes on 1st March.

This bird was perched on a stump looking longingly into the pond in Andy Grimsey’s garden in Luton

Sparrowhawks are the most regular raptor to feature in this survey, in 71% of gardens, an improvement after the drop we saw in the winter of 2016/17. Other raptors appearing in the list are Red Kite and Common Buzzard (both in 20% of gardens), Kestrel (in 8%) and even Peregrine Falcon, from one very fortunate garden surveyor.

Lapwings appeared in two of the gardens, both in Sandy, and both were in the last, snowy week of the winter period. Sadly one of the birds was found dead on 3rd March. A Woodcock was also recorded in one of those same gardens.

Typically, the most reported gull was the Black-headed, in ten gardens, with eight of those in urban gardens. Other gull species to feature last winter were Lesser Black-backed and Common Gulls, but both in only one garden each.

Pigeons, Owls, Kingfisher, Woodpeckers and Crows

The Wood Pigeon was one of four species that were recorded in all gardens last winter and, with a frequency of 92%, that put it top of the frequency table too. It was only slightly less frequent (90%) in

urban gardens as in rural sites (93%). Collared Doves were in 93% of gardens, average for the last few years, but was at the lowest level of frequency since our winter surveys began, and follows a decline that we've seen since 2010/11. The other members of this family in our list for last winter are the Stock Dove (in 20% of gardens) and Feral Pigeon (in 19%), with the former showing a preference for rural gardens and the latter for urban gardens, much as expected.



The Tawny Owl was the most recorded species in that family, in 19% of gardens, all but one in rural areas, and Barn Owl appeared in two and, as might be expected, both rural. The Kingfisher too, shunned urban sites, with records from five rural gardens. The woodpeckers also prefer rural plots, with Green Woodpecker in 19 rural, but only four urban gardens, the Great Spotted Woodpecker in 22 rural and just six urban sites and the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in just one, rural, garden. The latter was the first in our winter survey since 2011/12.

The Jackdaw and Carrion Crow both appeared in 63% of gardens, both showing a preference for rural sites, with Carrion Crow in 70% and Jackdaw in 73% of those gardens, and the Jay even more so, in 37% of rural gardens but in only 15% of urban areas.

Goldcrest, Tits and Warblers

The Goldcrest was found in 48% of gardens, maintaining the increase that we've seen since 2014/15, but only time will tell if they suffered during the icy blast at the end of February. Certainly those in my Woburn garden survived, often feeding on dropped scraps beneath my garden feeders. One in John Kirkham's Silsoe garden in the second half of February was a garden first for him.

The Blue Tit maintained its position at or near the top of both tables for last winter, appearing in all gardens and in second place in terms of frequency. The Great Tit was only missing from one (rural) garden and was fifth in the highest frequency measure. Showing a good recovery from the previous winter was the Coal Tit, in 91% of gardens after just 75% in 2016/17, and apart from the dip in that winter continues an upward, if somewhat erratic trend. The results for the Long-tailed Tit are more stable in terms of the number of gardens in which it showed, but the level of frequency reached a record high. Both of these last two species show a slight preference for rural sites, both in 96% of those gardens, but are also strongly represented across the county gardens.

As usual, the Blackcap was the most-often reported warbler in our winter gardens and, typically, showed a preference for urban sites, in 42% of those compared to the somewhat colder rural gardens (in 37% of those). In Peter Almond's Bromham garden, surely one of the most regular gardens to hold this species in the winter, he recorded a male on 83 days between 3rd December and 10th March.

There was a sharp increase in the number of gardens attracting Blackcaps from January onwards, reaching a peak during February. The vast majority of Chiffchaff records, by contrast, occurred in the first four weeks of the survey period.

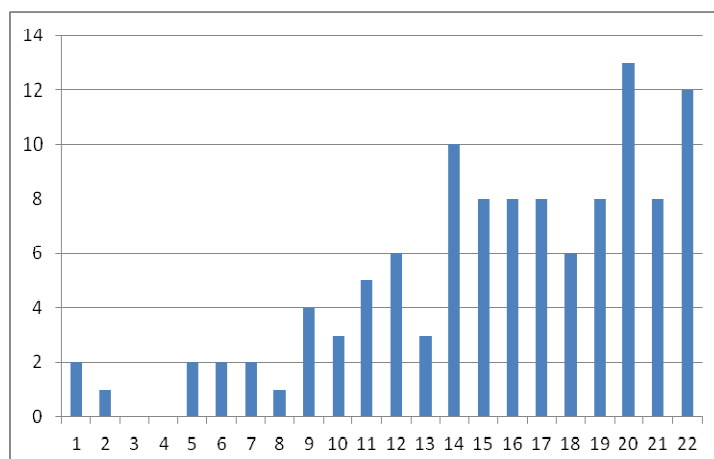


Fig. 1 The number of surveyed gardens with Blackcaps in winter 2017/18
Oct=wks 1 to 5; Nov=wks 6 to 9; Dec=wks 10 to 13; Jan=wks 14 to 18; Feb=wks 19 to 22

Wren, Starling and Thrushes

The Wren was recorded in 99% of the gardens last winter, the highest since our winter surveys started, missing from just one rural garden. By contrast, the Starling was in only 84% of gardens, equal lowest since our surveys started. In the first ten winters of our survey they were in an average of 99% of gardens.



Needless to say, the Blackbird was found in all gardens and the frequency of its appearances was also typically high, and was the same for both urban and rural sites. Many gardens, including my own in Woburn, noticed a sudden increase in numbers during the last, very cold week of this winter period.

After a steep decline during the winters of 2010/11 to 2015/16, the Song Thrush is staging a recovery, in 73% of our gardens last winter. Bear in mind, however, that this is a species that shows a very strong preference for rural sites, in 92% of those, compared to urban gardens, in just 38% of those. The results will be affected by the change in the mix of rural and urban gardens for last winter. It just about retains its place in the Top 20 most frequent garden visitors, holding off Sparrowhawk in 21st place. The Fieldfare was the third most widespread thrush last winter, appearing in 68% of gardens. It was one of the species that sought shelter in our gardens during the severe weather during February and in particular in that last snowy week, as shown in Figure 2. In Peter Nash's Sandy garden the flock reached 32 on the last day of this winter period, whilst two in Andrew Budd's Ampthill garden were a garden first.

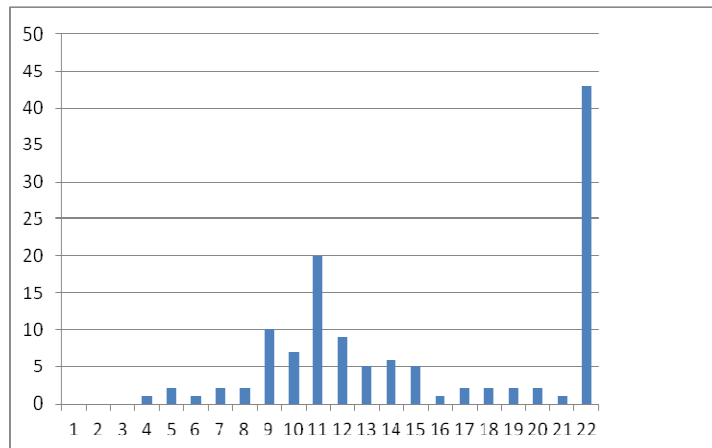


Fig. 2 The number of surveyed gardens with Fieldfares in winter 2017/18
Oct=wks 1 to 5; Nov=wks 6 to 9; Dec=wks 10 to 13; Jan=wks 14 to 18; Feb=wks 19 to 22

There was also a peak during week starting 10th December (week 11 in the figures) and that was also a cold and windy week, with snow in many areas of England.



The pattern for the Redwing is similar, with a big influx into our gardens in week commencing 10th December and then again during the last week, as shown in Figure 3. Overall they were found in 57% of gardens, the highest since the winter of 2009/10.

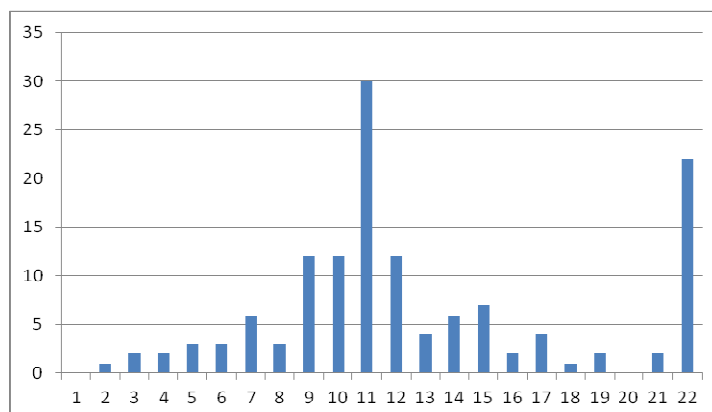


Fig. 3 The number of surveyed gardens with Redwings in winter 2017/18
Oct=wks 1 to 5; Nov=wks 6 to 9; Dec=wks 10 to 13; Jan=wks 14 to 18; Feb=wks 19 to 22

The Mistle Thrush, in 33% of gardens, was at its highest level since our surveys started, but with the strong preference for rural gardens, the results too would have been affected by the change in the mix of gardens.

Dunnock, Sparrows and Wagtails

The result for the Dunnock was about average, with appearances from 97% to 100% of the gardens each winter since the winter of 2003/04. In my Woburn garden they are ever present, with normally two or three seen each day, but in the last snowy week numbers increased to six.

Still in decline, though, is the House Sparrow. In only 73% of gardens last winter, that was the lowest since our surveys started. Just consider that in the first three winters of our survey, from 1993/94 to 1995/96, they were found virtually in all gardens. It is, though, a species that prefers urban sites, so again the results could have been deflated as a result of mix change. One species clearly in decline is the Tree Sparrow – there have been no records in our winter survey since 2015/16.



A species with one of the most erratic historical patterns in this survey is the Pied Wagtail. Between 1993/94 to 2009/10 the results were fairly stable, but then it went from 73% of gardens in 2010/11, to 23% three winters later, to 56% of gardens last winter – it is difficult to understand the reasons. It does show a strong preference for rural gardens, in 65% of those last winter compared to 23% of urban gardens, but beyond that I find it puzzling to figure out much else. What is clear though is that the Grey Wagtail is on an upward slope, appearing in 20% of gardens last winter, the highest level since our winter surveys began.

Finches and buntings

The story of the Goldfinch remains very positive and, in 93% of gardens last winter, was the highest since our survey began. Consider that for the first three winters it was only recorded in an average of 37% of gardens. The frequency of appearance last winter was also at an all time high. Not so the Chaffinch, which seems to be slowly going in the opposite direction. In 92% of gardens last winter, equal to the previous low the winter before, the frequency was also low compared to the winters prior to 2016/17. A similar and too familiar pattern for the Greenfinch continued, appearing in just 68% of gardens for the second winter in a row – as recently as 2006/07 it was found in 99% of our gardens.

Of the so-called winter finches, the Siskin was encountered most often, appearing in 31% of gardens. As can be seen in Figure 4 the number of gardens attracting this species increased as winter progressed, and was probably a combination of the increasingly cold weather and birds that had spent most of the winter farther south starting to move north again.

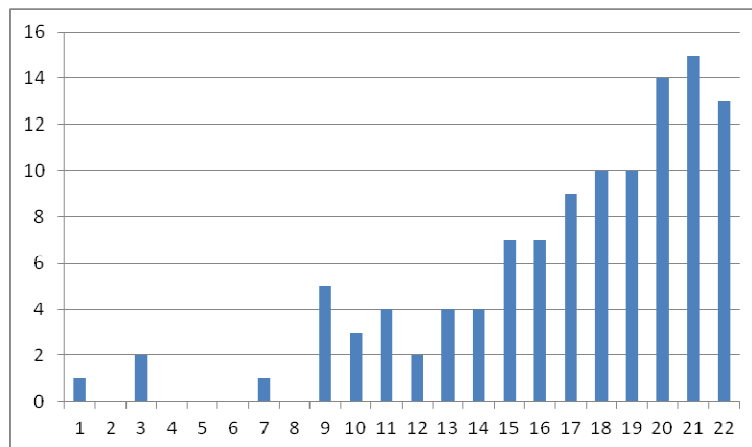


Fig. 4 The number of surveyed gardens with Siskins in winter 2017/18
Oct=wks 1 to 5; Nov=wks 6 to 9; Dec=wks 10 to 13; Jan=wks 14 to 18; Feb=wks 19 to 22



A similar picture can be seen in Figure 5 for the Brambling, with overall appearances in 19% of the gardens. Like Redwing and Fieldfare, it peaked in the week commencing 10th December (week 11 in the figures) – one in Sheila Brooke’s Toddington garden in that week was her first ‘for years’. The number of gardens then rose again in the middle of January and then finally in the last week of February. Peter Nash ‘had another excellent year’ for this species. High counts for his garden in February and March peaked at 52 on 28th February and remained in the high 20s and 30s through to mid-March. Betty Cooke, in her Clifton garden, also did well, with at least six Bramblings feeding on sunflower hearts every day for the last 14 weeks of the survey period.

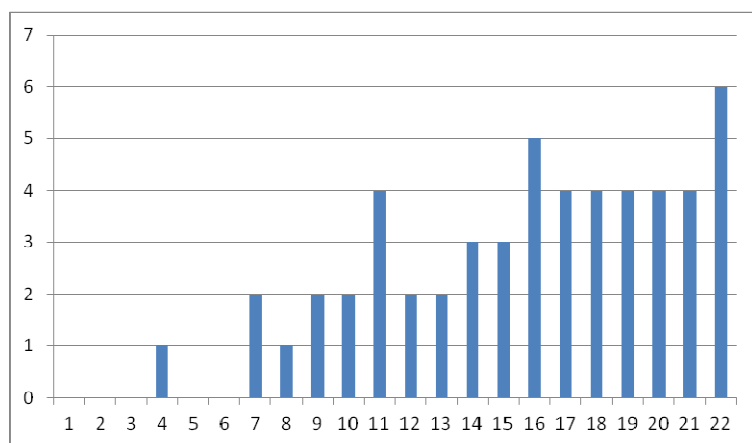


Fig. 5 The number of surveyed gardens with Bramblings in winter 2017/18
Oct=wks 1 to 5; Nov=wks 6 to 9; Dec=wks 10 to 13; Jan=wks 14 to 18; Feb=wks 19 to 22

The third so-called winter finch, the Lesser Redpoll has, like the previous two species, an erratic history as a garden visitor. Last winter it was in 25% of gardens, the highest level since our winter surveys started. The first small influx started at the end of November, continued to increase through to the end of January, before dropping away (Figure 6). A flock in Terry Osborn’s Clifton garden peaked at 17 on 1st January and in Peter Nash’s garden reached 16 on 6th February.

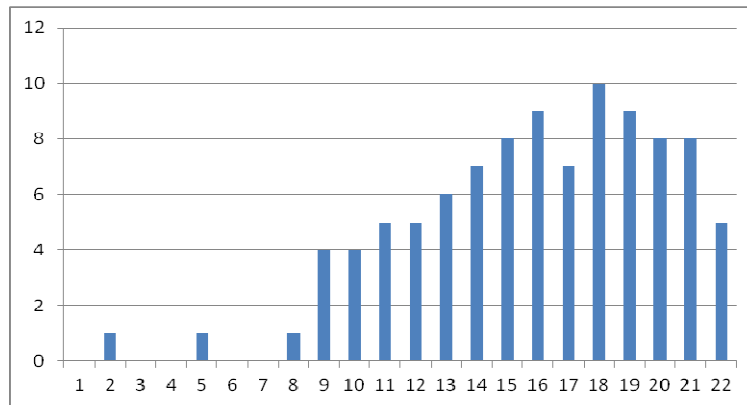


Fig. 6 The number of surveyed gardens with Lesser Redpolls in winter 2017/18
Oct=wks 1 to 5; Nov=wks 6 to 9; Dec=wks 10 to 13; Jan=wks 14 to 18; Feb=wks 19 to 22

The Reed Bunting was in 16% of gardens, about the recent average and, as expected, showed a strong preference for rural gardens. One in Terry Osborn's garden was a garden first for him.



SUMMARY

There were over 22,000 records submitted from the 75 gardens surveyed during last winter, a tremendous effort from those persons who took part, so our thanks go to them. It was also the 25th winter that we have surveyed our gardens and in that time we have built up a good knowledge of what is increasingly becoming a valued and important wildlife habitat, right outside our kitchen windows. We look forward to receiving your feedback for future winters – what further stories will emerge over the next 25 years?

Barry Nightingale

RECORDING OF OTHER TAXA WHILE BIRDING IS QUIET

With relatively quiet birding in the summer and our attention drawn to moths, butterflies, dragonflies and other insects etc, please ensure that your records are compiled in the appropriate fashion for sharing with the noted county recorder.

The list of recorders can be found on the BNHS website at:

<https://www.bnhs.co.uk/main/html/contacts.htm>

SWIFT SURVEY – CONTINUES 2018

A reminder that this continues and we would wish to have as many records as possible particularly on breeding activity. A shame that these birds will be mostly gone within three weeks of publication of this edition of The Hobby.

Please let the Bedfordshire Swift group know if you have screaming swifts via graham@gcbellamy.plus.com and/or fill in the RSPB survey www.rspb.org.uk/swiftsurvey#.

More information about swifts can be found on the RSPB website or from Swift Conservation www.swift-conservation.org

Graham Bellamy

ACCEPTED COUNTY RARITIES

Following review by the Rarities Committee, the following records have been accepted for autumn and winter period of 2017. Note that the 70 Hawfinch records have been omitted due to lack of space !

Table supplied by Matt Burgess

Species	Location	Date	Number	Observer
Ortolan Bunting	Devon Drive, Biggleswade	02/09/2017	1	Steve Blain
Woodlark	Myers Farm, Potton	11/09/2017	1	Darren Oakley-Martin
Yellow-browed Warbler	Biggleswade Common	27/09/2017	1	Steve Blain
Yellow-browed Warbler	Pegnut Wood	30/09/2017	1	Dave Buckingham
Tree Pipit	The Lodge	30/09/2017	1	Nathan Pickering
Stone-curlew	Blows Downs	15/10/2017	1	John Lynch
Caspian Gull	Grovebury SP	18/10/2017	1	John Lynch
Yellow-browed Warbler	Chicksands Base	21/10/2017	1	Jim Porter
Caspian Gull	MVCP	11/11/2017	1	Paul Wright
Great White Egret	A421 nr. Swan Roundabout	13/11/2017	1	Dave Odell
Siberian Chiffchaff	Bedford STW	18/11/2017	1	Darren Oakley-Martin
Great White Egret	Meadow Lane GPs	18/11/2017	1	Patrick Giles
Great White Egret	Blunham Lake	26/11/2017	1	Richard Bashford
Great White Egret	Harrold CP	29/11/2017	1	Terry & Judy Wood
Great White Egret	Riverside House SP9556	17/12/2017	1	John Woolner
Great White Egret	Priory CP	19/12/2017	1	Geoff Glazebrook
Penduline Tit	Dunstable STW	19/12/2017	1	John Lynch
Great White Egret	MVCP	21/12/2017	1	Steve Northwood
Great White Egret	Harrold CP	24/12/2017	1	Emily Roberts
Great White Egret	Brogborough Lake	28/12/2017	1	Chris James
Red-throated Diver	Brogborough Lake	28/12/2017	1	Chris James
Great White Egret	MVCP	28/12/2017	1	Richard Phillip Balnaves
Siberian Chiffchaff	Meadow Lane GPs	30/12/2017	1	Jim Porter

ILLUSTRATIONS BY:

Andy Grimsey: Grey Heron; Stock Dove; Reed Bunting (all taken in garden)
Sean D'Arcy: Fieldfare; Pied Wagtail
Steve Blain: Tawny Owl; Turtle Dove; Brambling
Stuart Elsom: Wren

Common Rosefinch supplied to Steve Blain by the finder



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*The Bedfordshire Bird Club is the ornithological section of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society
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