



# THE HOBBY

Website: [www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk](http://www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk)

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## PROGRAMME MATTERS

Welcome to the January 2021 edition of The Hobby. With the continuing and increased restrictions remaining in place at the moment, this edition will be published and distributed in electronic form only initially. In this edition we include notices relating to Club activities, and Barry's comprehensive writeup of this Summer's Garden Bird Feeding Survey.

After a successful start to our Zoom program of Indoor Meetings in October, November and December, we are delighted to announce the details of the next three meetings for your diary. These meetings are noted below. Unfortunately we are not able to put together a program of outdoor meetings while lockdown and social distancing restrictions remain in force but will review that coming into the summer months if the situation allows.

**Tuesday 26th January 2021** – The Amazing Biodiversity of Bolivia by Rich Hoyer. **8pm**. Bolivia is one of the least visited birding destinations in the tropics, and this is perhaps the reason is that Bolivia is still relatively unknown in birding circles. But the country holds magnificent birds, and with a list of 1452 species it is the sixth country with the largest number of birds after Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Indonesia, and Ecuador. Our speaker Rich Hoyer is a professional tour guide who has led hundreds of birding tours across North, Central and South America, and joins us using the power of zoom from his home state of Oregon in the Pacific northwest of USA.

**Tuesday 23rd February 2021** – Birds by Habitat by Carl Chapman. **8:30pm**. Birds are linked to their habitat even when they occur out of range. We explore by way of an illustrated presentation (via zoom) the occurrence and spread of some species occurring in the UK and beyond. Carl resides in Norfolk, UK from where he runs Wildlife Tours and Education, a company specialising in the provision of birdwatching breaks for experts and beginners alike. He is the Norfolk Cetacean recorder and Chairman of Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists Society.

**Tuesday 23rd March 2021** – The Land of the Long White Cloud : New Zealand by Mike Read. **8pm.**  
New Zealand is a wonderful place to visit for a wildlife holiday or to photograph the locations and wildlife, not least for the spectacular albatrosses and other sought-after seabirds. Our speaker for this evening is a freelance nature photographer specialising in birds, flowers, mammals and other wildlife as well as landscapes. He lives on the western edge of the fabulous New Forest National Park in southern England and has a wide range of images of wildlife, traditions and views from this unique area.

If you are not currently setup on the list for permanent invitation and are interested in joining the Zoom, please send an email quoting your name and email address to Peter Nash or myself and we will send out an invitation with the appropriate link to click on over the weekend ahead of the meeting including a few specific details as to how the process will work.

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We hope you can still enjoy your birding in this continuing difficult period. Stay safe...

## **NOTIFICATION OF BIRD CLUB AGM – FEBRUARY 2021**

As full Covid-19 restrictions will still no doubt be in place in February, the Committee has taken the decision to hold the AGM via a Zoom link on Tuesday 23rd February at 7.45pm. It will be setup as a separate link from the scheduled talk that evening ('Birds by habitat' by Carl Chapman), which will now start at 8.30pm. Members wishing to attend the AGM will need to register their intention by emailing [peternash2@sky.com](mailto:paternash2@sky.com) and specifying 'AGM'.

The official Notice of the AGM accompanies this edition of The Hobby, and will also be available on the website. It includes a nomination form for Officers and Committee members. Nominations may be made by printing out this form, filling it in, and posting it to the Honorary Secretary to reach her by 9th February 2021.

Sheila Alliez

## **BEDFORDSHIRE BIRD REPORT 2019**

The Bird Report has been completed and is with the printers for production and distribution to all members. We expect this to be posted out around the start of February. Many thanks to all involved in putting it together. The role of Bird Report Editor is not yet filled and we would welcome contact from any member who wishes to be involved in the 2020 report to come forward as that process will begin in the next few months once the records from the year are collated and discussions begin on the content.

## **OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2020 BIRD NEWS**

### **October 2020**

**Gannet** - six passed west over Bedford area on 12th !

**Spoonbill** - eight at Grovebury SP on 3rd

**Great White Egret** - a bird noted around Priory CP on a number of dates through the month. Three at Harrold CP on 9th, one at Eversholt Lake on 14th. There were at least two birds in the Ouse Valley east of Bedford on 17th, one at Priory CP, another nearby at Meadow Lane GP, also report from Cuckoo

Bridge Lake on same day (a third individual?). Another has been noted hanging around Stewartby Lake on a number of dates.

**Pintail** - seven at Grovebury SP on 3rd, 14 on 4th, one at Cuckoo Bridge Lake on 17th, one recorded on a few occasions at Dunstable STW

**Red-crested Pochard** - one on Brogborough Tip Pools on 16th and 24th, also at Brogborough Lake on 31st at least

**Aythya hybrid** - one thought to be a Tufted x Pochard hybrid but resembling a Scaup in colouration was at Grovebury SP on 10th to 25th at least

**Ring-necked Duck** - a male at Willington GP on 24th to 29th was potentially last winter's bird returning

**Goldeneye** - one at Stewartby Lake on 3rd was first returning bird of the year

**Ringed Plover** - six on Thurleigh Airfield on 4th

**Dunlin** - two at Grovebury SP on 3rd, five on Thurleigh Airfield on 4th, two at MCP Wetlands NR on 11th

**Knot** - one at Grovebury SP on 3rd

**Ruff** - one at Grovebury SP on 3rd, five on flooded field near Girtford on 7th/8th

**Mediterranean Gull** - 1st winter at Broom East CWS on 4th, another there on 17th. Two at Girtford on 11th, one in roost at Stewartby on 30th

**Caspian Gull** - up to two regularly roosting at Grovebury SP

**Hen Harrier** - one near Grovebury SP on 3rd

**Short-eared Owl** - one at Priory CP on 17th

**Merlin** - one at Henlow on 12th, two birds seen on visible migration watches on 14th: one at The Pinnacle, Sandy, another went through heading westwards at Sharpenhoe, another bird at Houghton Brook Pools on 16th

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** - one in Woburn Park on 14th

**Swift** - six reported over Stopsley on 1st were late

**Ring-necked Parakeet** - three around Wardown Park Luton at the start of the month and seven at Blows Down on 1st, five over Warden Hills on 26th, birds also seen during the month in Bedford, Sandy

**Woodlark** - one at The Lodge RSPB on 17th

**Yellow Wagtail** - one that showed characteristics of some of the eastern races was present on flooded fields near Girtford on 7th

**Swallow** - last reported on 27th

**Ring Ouzel** - one past Sharpenhoe early morning on 11th, another near Meppershall on 12th

**Redwing** - a strong passage on the morning of 11th included counts of 3725 over Sharpenhoe, and 7200 over The Pinnacle Sandy, both by 10:30.

**Wheatear** - three late migrants at Pegsdon on 7th at another at Streatley on 11th

**Whinchat** - one at Meadow Lane GP on 2nd. two at Henlow up to 9th were the last of the year

**Stonechat** - minimum of eight at Blows Down on 1st

**Black Redstart** - one in Luton town centre on 1st

**RED-FLANKED BLUETAIL** - A county first was seen briefly near Biddenham on 18th and showed occasionally on 19th and 20th

**Dartford Warbler** - remained at Blows Downs from September until 5th, one at Sandy Heath from 14th, another at The Lodge from 19<sup>th</sup>. The last two birds continued to be reported throughout the following months and appeared to be wintering and with increased reports in the area it has to be hoped that there will be breeding attempts in the near future as the habitat continues to develop

**Yellow-browed Warbler** - one near Staploe on 6th, one at Upper Caldecotte from 26th to 28th, one at Brogborough Hill on 25th and 31st brings total for the year to four



**Firecrest** - two at Ampthill Park from 25th to end of month, one at Henlow on 26<sup>th</sup>. Photo of one of the Ampthill birds by Anthony Cunningham

**Rock Pipit** - one at Broom East CWS on 3rd

**Crossbill** - around 50 noted at The Lodge RSPB on 12th as well as other reports in the area of up to seven birds. Twenty noted at Stockgrove CP on 21st. Birds also noted on vismig watches including 12 over Eaton Bray on 22nd

**Hawfinch** - single birds seen on visible migration watches at The Pinnacle Sandy on 5<sup>th</sup>, 12th and 17th and another at Sharpenhoe on 18th

**Goldfinch** - one reported in Wootton as being 98% white

### November 2020

**Whooper Swan** - two at MCP Wetlands NR on 28th

**White-fronted Goose** - a juvenile associating with the Greylag flock around Broom from 16th into December. Ten at Meadow Lane GP from 30th

**Ruddy Shelduck** - two at MCP Wetlands NR were likely a pair that has been around the county and some neighbouring sites in Northamptonshire for at least a year

**Aythya hybrid** - a bird resembling a Scaup at Grovebury SP from the start of the month was identified on close views as a Tufted Duck x Pochard hybrid

**Slavonian Grebe** - one at Stewartby Lake on 4th, another at Harrold CP on 25th and 26th

**Great White Egret** - one throughout the month at Stewartby Lake, two together at Priory CP on 26th

**Black-headed Gull** - a bird at Broom GP was carrying a colour ring that had been applied on 15 May 2019 as an adult at Lubczyna in western Poland, on the edge of the Szczecin Lagoon, which joins up with the Baltic Sea

**Caspian Gull** - a regular adult in the roost at Grovebury SP on a few dates from 8th, a first winter there also on 1st

**Marsh Harrier** - one seen on a few occasions around the brick pits in the month, one also at Broom on 8th

**Red Kite** - a roost at Southill Park on 19th attracted 47 individuals

**Hoopoe** - one well watched in Northhill from 8th until 15th at least, having apparently been in the area from at least 4th according to local residents.

Photo by Graham Goodall



**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** - one at Coopers Hill on 8th, another at Ampthill Park on 20th

**Merlin** - one near Old Warden on 11th

**Short-eared Owl** - one near Broom on 17th

**Black Redstart** - one in Wootton on 19th

**Stonechat** - a good number of records of potentially wintering birds, many reported as pairs

**Firecrest** - two at Ampthill Park from October throughout the month, one by the River Lea in suburban Luton on 29th and 30th

**Yellow-browed Warbler** - one at Brogborough Hill on 8th

**Dartford Warbler** - at Lodge from October until 19th at least, another at Sandy Heath from October until at least 2nd, another at Aspley Heath on 22nd

**Brambling** - few reported, two birds near Henlow on 6th, one in Beeston

**Crossbills** - 40 at The Lodge on 2nd with more reported throughout the month. also a minimum of 22 at there on 4th and at least 20 at Warden Warren, 25 at Aspley Heath and birds also noted at Maulden Woods on 22nd

**Redpoll** - following higher numbers than usual on vismig in October a few good size groups have been found; at least 20 at The Lodge on 5th, up to 100 reported on Biggleswade Common on 4<sup>th</sup>

### December 2020

**White-fronted Goose** - within a large influx into the south-east of England, 10 at Meadow Lane GP continued from November on 1st, 19 at Broom East CWS and an increase to 29 at Meadow Lane GP both on 2nd, 14 there on 3rd, also one at Grovembury SP from 2nd for a few days, 17 near Southill on 8th - 9th, 32 near Begwary Brook on 14th, then at Wyboston on 15th and, then counted as at least 33 near Little Barford on 18th - 20th, three at Radwell on 19th, one at Meadow Lane GP on 23rd, nine at Radwell on 27th

**Pintail** - four at Broom East CWS on 1st, a male at Woburn on 17th, three at Meadow Lane GP on 31st

**Red-crested Pochard** - eight on Gypsy Lane West pit at Broom on 25th and 26th

**Common Scoter** -one at Brogborough Lake on 24th

**Goldeneye** - very few reports away from Brogborough Lake where there were 29 on 12th

**Goosander** - six at Felmersham on 11th, three at Blunham on 27th, three at Woburn on 31st

**Smew** - three at Meadow Lane GP on 31st, two at Brogborough Lake also on 31st, both groups only present on the one day

**Great White Egret** - five at Meadow GP on 30th, four over Blunham GP same day potentially the same birds, otherwise ones and twos regularly reported in the Ouse Valley and one at Stewartby Lake throughout the month



**Cattle Egret** - two south of Henlow from 17th, one still present there on 31st, the other bird relocated to Langford from 23rd. Photo (with a Little Egret) by Graham Goodall

**Glossy Ibis** - one near Norse Road in eastern Bedford on 11th

**Snipe** - a flock of 37 noted at Meadow Lane GP on 18th

**Short-eared Owl** - one at Broom East CWS on 2nd, one near Sandy on 27th

**Ring-necked Parakeet** - up to 12 recorded in Wardown Park Luton where the species is now resident

**Dartford Warbler** - at Astral Park from 17th near Leighton Buzzard until the end of the year

**Siberian Chiffchaff** - one near Bedford STW on 31st

**Firecrest** - one in Luton from November until 2<sup>nd</sup>, birds still in Ampthill Park

**Crossbill** - groups noted at Aspley Heath, Lidlington Woods and The Lodge

We thank all contributors who have submitted their records directly to the Recorder, or via Bedsbirds Email Group as well as other sources. Please note that we currently have no official appointed County Bird Recorder and that this role is being supported in the interim by Peter Nash and Andy Grimsey. Records are welcomed to the email address below, and any questions, requests or reports otherwise can be directed to Peter on 07753411786 or Andy on 07402429312.

Records are preferred via the online system BirdTrack,

Compiled by Andy Grimsey  
recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk

## LOCKDOWN BIRDING

We're in strange times for sure. As I write this, we're in our third national lockdown battling with a highly transmissible Covid-19 variant. Restrictions on travel and movement are in place meaning our birdwatching can only be done as part of our daily exercise and this should be local. These restrictions are unlikely to ease in the short term - they could even be tightened.

So what birdwatching can we do?

Certainly, honeypot sites are well worth avoiding - so many people, but I appreciate some people do not have the choice if they live in the middle of Bedford for instance. I've always liked birding away from the popular sites, or at least underwatched sites - which means it's pretty unusual to find something rare, but then you are watching and recording birds which no one else has recorded. So the records you collect are far more valuable than another record of the same Great Grey Shrike everyone else has seen and reported.

I live in Eaton Ford, just in Cambridgeshire. But I'm really a Beds birder so a five minute bike ride takes me across the county boundary and into some pretty normal farmland north of the villages of Duloe and Staploe. I've never seen another birder there but it's not too bad. It's a good area for Corn Buntings, there are regularly 2-3 Stonechats alongside the farm tracks. Grey Partridges are everywhere. There is a good spot for finch and bunting flocks near a game strip - I was amazed to hear and then see a Yellow-browed Warbler here in October!

When the first lockdown was announced, my wife Katie and I got a taste of retirement and got into a really fulfilling and enjoyable habit of checking the OS map, finding a local footpath route, getting in the car, driving to a layby and walking the route. Most of these walks were about 2-3 miles away - Honeydon, Begwary, Colesden, Colmworth. Again, never saw anyone else birding and hardly ever saw another walker. And then back home by 8.30 for work! So all my bird records were new and perhaps the first record of a species in that particular square ever! I didn't see anything too amazing but I got some good exercise (essential to counterbalance the lockdown fridge browsing!), and entered numerous complete lists to BirdTrack using the fabulous BirdTrack app.

So if you want to make your birding count, while doing your daily exercise, and avoid the crowds, I'd recommend it!

Richard Bashford

A lot of what Richard talks about here resembles by own recent birding habits, walking in underwatched and more obscure locations which for me at the moment are the fields between the Chiltern ridge and the edge of Luton and the River Lea in the top of the town. Not so lucky as to find a Yellow-browed Warbler but a Firecrest was my recent reward (and better looking in my opinion!). There's birds out there...

Andy Grimsey

## **THE GARDEN BIRD SURVEY – SUMMER 2020**

### **Introduction**

Here are the results of our 23rd Summer Garden Bird Survey, which covered the period 8th March to 3rd October 2020. I hardly need say that it was a summer like no other.

### **“Lies, damn lies and statistics”**

Benjamin Disraeli once said that there are three kinds of lies – lies, damned lies and statistics. Whilst there are no ‘lies’ here, some of the statistics need explaining, so bear with me for a moment or two. One of the ‘golden rules’ of statistical analysis, when comparing two lots of data (for example the results from this summer to the previous one), is that there should ideally be only one variable. The obvious variable here is the time period – Summer 2020 and Summer 2019 (and all the previous ones). Each summer there is also another variable, with different numbers of observers taking part from either rural or urban gardens.

Usually, those differences are small and have little significant effect on the results. However, inexplicably for Summer 2020, there was a big change in the mix of returns. The number received for rural gardens dropped by 22% (from 46 to 36 gardens) whilst those from urban gardens increased by 19% (from 27 to 32). What that means is that the results for those species that show a preference for rural gardens will be artificially depressed (species such as Song Thrush, Wren, Jay, Tawny Owl, Coal Tit, the woodpeckers, Nuthatch, Pheasant, Treecreeper, Buzzard and Carrion Crow for example), whilst those that prefer urban gardens will be artificially inflated (such as House Sparrow, Feral Pigeon, the gulls and to some extent Starling). I've looked back as far as 2003 and we did not receive lower than 36 results from rural gardens in any of those years. The nearest was in 2014 when we received 37 rural returns and a glance at Table 2 will show some similarities between that summer and 2020. We need to bear that in mind when reviewing the results.

### The results

The gardens in rural areas recorded an average of 30 species feeding or foraging, whilst the gardens in urban areas recorded, on average, 21 species. Generally, the levels have stayed fairly consistent over the last few years, as can be seen in Table 1, which shows the average number of species per garden per year since 2011, and the number of contributors.

|              | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Rural        | 30   | 29   | 30   | 29   | 31   | 30   | 29   | 31   | 30   | 29   |
| Urban        | 21   | 22   | 22   | 21   | 21   | 20   | 19   | 21   | 20   | 21   |
| Contributors | 68   | 73   | 69   | 72   | 76   | 76   | 66   | 75   | 78   | 77   |

In total, for the 68 gardens, there were 27,652 records submitted, at an average of 407 records per garden, which is a tremendous response. Our thanks go to all those who took the time to do that.

### Tables 2 and 3

A total of 82 species was recorded in our 'summer gardens' in 2020, and these, with all the other species that have been recorded since our summer surveys began in 1998, are shown in Table 2.

| POS | Species       | Summer surveys - % of gardens |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |  |
|-----|---------------|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--|
|     |               | 2020                          | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 |  |
| 1=  | BLACKBIRD     | 100                           | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  |  |
| 1=  | WOOD PIGEON   | 100                           | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  |  |
| 1=  | BLUE TIT      | 100                           | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  |  |
| 1=  | ROBIN         | 100                           | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 100  | 99   | 100  |  |
| 5   | GREAT TIT     | 99                            | 97   | 99   | 96   | 100  | 97   | 100  | 99   | 100  |  |
| 6=  | DUNNOCK       | 97                            | 97   | 100  | 100  | 100  | 99   | 98   | 99   | 100  |  |
| 6=  | GOLDFINCH     | 97                            | 96   | 94   | 96   | 95   | 99   | 97   | 93   | 94   |  |
| 8   | MAGPIE        | 96                            | 93   | 97   | 94   | 95   | 96   | 92   | 91   | 90   |  |
| 9   | STARLING      | 94                            | 92   | 86   | 94   | 93   | 97   | 94   | 95   | 95   |  |
| 10= | COLLARED DOVE | 93                            | 95   | 93   | 96   | 97   | 96   | 97   | 100  | 97   |  |
| 10= | CHAFFINCH     | 93                            | 89   | 93   | 93   | 95   | 95   | 94   | 96   | 100  |  |

| POS | Species           | Summer surveys - % of gardens |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |  |
|-----|-------------------|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--|
|     |                   | 2020                          | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 |  |
| 12  | HOUSE SPARROW     | 91                            | 86   | 86   | 85   | 84   | 88   | 88   | 87   | 87   |  |
| 13  | WREN              | 90                            | 93   | 86   | 94   | 93   | 89   | 79   | 87   | 83   |  |
| 14  | GREENFINCH        | 84                            | 84   | 86   | 76   | 89   | 89   | 86   | 91   | 94   |  |
| 15  | LONG TAILED TIT   | 76                            | 81   | 86   | 86   | 80   | 83   | 65   | 81   | 79   |  |
| 16  | SPARROWHAWK       | 72                            | 55   | 72   | 67   | 63   | 71   | 62   | 68   | 67   |  |
| 17  | JACKDAW           | 69                            | 68   | 77   | 71   | 75   | 66   | 67   | 67   | 65   |  |
| 18  | G'T SP WOODPECKER | 66                            | 68   | 59   | 60   | 61   | 63   | 58   | 65   | 56   |  |
| 19= | COAL TIT          | 63                            | 81   | 74   | 78   | 72   | 70   | 62   | 60   | 64   |  |
| 19= | CARRION CROW      | 63                            | 70   | 68   | 67   | 68   | 70   | 65   | 64   | 62   |  |
| 21  | SONG THRUSH       | 60                            | 66   | 71   | 76   | 68   | 61   | 55   | 67   | 72   |  |
| 22  | BLACKCAP          | 54                            | 53   | 45   | 49   | 58   | 47   | 41   | 67   | 44   |  |
| 23  | CHIFFCHAFF        | 43                            | 42   | 28   | 44   | 42   | 28   | 38   | 33   | 40   |  |
| 24  | SWIFT             | 40                            | 33   | 32   | 35   | 37   | 41   | 41   | 47   | 40   |  |
| 25= | GREEN W'DPECKER   | 32                            | 40   | 39   | 38   | 41   | 43   | 41   | 41   | 42   |  |
| 25= | FERAL PIGEON      | 32                            | 27   | 22   | 26   | 22   | 21   | 23   | 17   | 18   |  |
| 25= | ROOK              | 32                            | 26   | 36   | 25   | 25   | 24   | 29   | 31   | 32   |  |
| 28  | HOUSE MARTIN      | 31                            | 27   | 30   | 33   | 33   | 38   | 33   | 24   | 26   |  |
| 29  | PIED WAGTAIL      | 29                            | 22   | 38   | 32   | 28   | 29   | 21   | 28   | 23   |  |
| 30= | STOCK DOVE        | 28                            | 29   | 33   | 28   | 32   | 28   | 24   | 20   | 22   |  |
| 30= | SWALLOW           | 28                            | 25   | 22   | 29   | 30   | 33   | 30   | 35   | 35   |  |
| 32  | GOLDCREST         | 26                            | 30   | 39   | 40   | 39   | 29   | 27   | 31   | 29   |  |
| 33  | JAY               | 25                            | 38   | 26   | 22   | 29   | 25   | 29   | 33   | 27   |  |
| 34= | PHEASANT          | 24                            | 40   | 36   | 31   | 28   | 28   | 23   | 32   | 28   |  |
| 34= | GREY HERON        | 24                            | 26   | 19   | 18   | 20   | 17   | 14   | 9    | 12   |  |
| 36  | BULLFINCH         | 22                            | 21   | 29   | 33   | 22   | 20   | 29   | 35   | 33   |  |
| 37  | RED KITE          | 21                            | 26   | 25   | 18   | 16   | 20   | 14   | 12   | 8    |  |
| 38  | MALLARD           | 19                            | 21   | 22   | 19   | 25   | 24   | 20   | 19   | 24   |  |
| 39  | NUTHATCH          | 18                            | 23   | 14   | 15   | 17   | 16   | 18   | 19   | 22   |  |
| 40= | TAWNY OWL         | 16                            | 30   | 39   | 21   | 22   | 20   | 26   | 15   | 14   |  |
| 40= | MISTLE THRUSH     | 16                            | 15   | 17   | 18   | 16   | 20   | 14   | 12   | 18   |  |
| 40= | WILLOW WARBLER    | 16                            | 14   | 22   | 22   | 26   | 21   | 15   | 21   | 22   |  |
| 44  | KESTREL           | 15                            | 8    | 9    | 11   | 7    | 11   | 9    | 13   | 9    |  |
| 45= | RED L PARTRIDGE   | 10                            | 18   | 19   | 17   | 12   | 7    | 11   | 7    | 9    |  |
| 45= | COMMON W'THROAT   | 10                            | 8    | 9    | 11   | 14   | 9    | 11   | 11   | 14   |  |
| 47= | COMMON BUZZARD    | 9                             | 18   | 16   | 17   | 13   | 16   | 15   | 20   | 4    |  |
| 47= | REED BUNTING      | 9                             | 8    | 22   | 10   | 14   | 12   | 8    | 23   | 13   |  |
| 47= | LSR BLACK-B GULL  | 9                             | 1    | 1    | 3    | 0    | 3    | 2    | 3    | 0    |  |
| 50= | GREY WAGTAIL      | 7                             | 11   | 10   | 8    | 8    | 8    | 6    | 7    | 6    |  |
| 50= | TREECREEPER       | 7                             | 11   | 10   | 7    | 7    | 5    | 8    | 7    | 6    |  |
| 50= | KINGFISHER        | 7                             | 10   | 7    | 7    | 7    | 3    | 3    | 4    | 3    |  |
| 50= | MOORHEN           | 7                             | 7    | 10   | 7    | 8    | 11   | 9    | 12   | 8    |  |
| 50= | HOBBY             | 7                             | 7    | 10   | 7    | 8    | 7    | 3    | 5    | 6    |  |
| 55= | SISKIN            | 6                             | 21   | 36   | 13   | 46   | 3    | 9    | 45   | 9    |  |
| 55= | GARDEN WARBLER    | 6                             | 12   | 3    | 6    | 7    | 5    | 5    | 1    | 6    |  |
| 55= | LSR WHITETHROAT   | 6                             | 4    | 0    | 3    | 7    | 3    | 5    | 1    | 1    |  |
| 55= | SPOT FLYCATCHER   | 6                             | 5    | 9    | 1    | 5    | 5    | 5    | 7    | 8    |  |
| 59= | FIELDFARE         | 4                             | 1    | 4    | 3    | 1    | 7    | 3    | 9    | 4    |  |
| 59= | SAND MARTIN       | 4                             | 1    | 1    | 1    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    |  |
| 60= | YELLOWHAMMER      | 3                             | 7    | 12   | 6    | 7    | 9    | 15   | 8    | 12   |  |
| 60= | LESSER REDPOLL    | 3                             | 5    | 13   | 3    | 20   | 8    | 9    | 29   | 5    |  |
| 60= | MARSH TIT         | 3                             | 4    | 6    | 1    | 3    | 1    | 3    | 5    | 3    |  |
| 60= | COMMON RAVEN      | 3                             | 4    | 4    | 1    | 0    | 4    | 2    | 3    | 1    |  |
| 60= | CUCKOO            | 3                             | 3    | 3    | 6    | 4    | 0    | 5    | 0    | 5    |  |
| 60= | REED WARBLER      | 3                             | 3    | 1    | 3    | 5    | 0    | 2    | 1    | 3    |  |
| 60= | BARN OWL          | 3                             | 3    | 6    | 1    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 5    |  |
| 60= | REDWING           | 3                             | 1    | 4    | 6    | 7    | 5    | 2    | 12   | 3    |  |
| 60= | YELLOW WAGTAIL    | 3                             | 1    | 1    | 3    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 1    |  |
| 60= | ROSE-R PARAKEET   | 3                             | 1    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |  |
| 60= | SEDGE WARBLER     | 3                             | 0    | 0    | 1    | 4    | 3    | 0    | 0    | 3    |  |
| 60= | LSR S. WOODP'CKER | 3                             | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 0    |  |
| 60= | LITTLE EGRET      | 3                             | 5    | 4    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    |  |
| 73= | MUTE SWAN         | 1                             | 3    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    |  |
| 73= | MANDARIN          | 1                             | 1    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    |  |
| 73= | BRAMBLING         | 1                             | 1    | 17   | 1    | 8    | 1    | 2    | 11   | 3    |  |
| 73= | BLACK H GULL      | 1                             | 1    | 4    | 3    | 3    | 4    | 3    | 7    | 1    |  |
| 73= | CORMORANT         | 1                             | 0    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    |  |
| 73= | LITTLE OWL        | 1                             | 0    | 1    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 2    | 1    | 3    |  |
| 73= | TURTLE DOVE       | 1                             | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 3    |  |
| 73= | COMMON CROSSBILL  | 1                             | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 3    |  |
| 73= | CETIT'S WARBLER   | 1                             | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    |  |
| 73= | GRASSHOPPER WBLR  | 1                             | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |  |

During the summer of 2020, four species appeared in all of the gardens that were surveyed – Blackbird (in all gardens since 2002), Blue Tit (in all gardens since 2004), Wood Pigeon (in all gardens since 2005) and Robin (in all gardens since 2007, except in 2013 when in 99%). Dunnock, Great Tit, Chaffinch and Magpie were seen in all rural gardens. Grasshopper Warbler appeared in our garden surveys for the first time, whilst noticeable absentees included Tree Sparrow (no Summer garden records since 2016) and Linnet (the first year of absence since 2014).

Table 3 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 that with the maximum possible number of weeks, in the case of 2020 this being 2,040 weeks (68 gardens x 30 weeks). For the eighth summer in a row the Wood Pigeon was the most frequent visitor to our gardens. House Sparrow made an upward leap from 60% to 70% of frequency and Starling from 51% to 60%. Feral Pigeon makes the Top 20 for the first time (but bear in mind what said about those “damn statistics”, to paraphrase Disraeli).

| POS | FREQUENCY OF THE TOP 20 SPECIES - SUMMER |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----|------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|     |                                          | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 |
| 1   | WOOD PIGEON                              | 96   | 92   | 90   | 92   | 90   | 90   | 90   | 90   | 91   |
| 2   | BLACKBIRD                                | 91   | 88   | 85   | 87   | 89   | 88   | 88   | 89   | 92   |
| 3   | BLUE TIT                                 | 90   | 86   | 82   | 85   | 86   | 83   | 84   | 82   | 86   |
| 4   | ROBIN                                    | 88   | 84   | 80   | 85   | 84   | 81   | 79   | 77   | 81   |
| 5   | DUNNOCK                                  | 74   | 69   | 72   | 74   | 75   | 75   | 73   | 73   | 78   |
| 6=  | GREAT TIT                                | 73   | 74   | 70   | 72   | 73   | 71   | 71   | 68   | 72   |
| 6=  | GOLDFINCH                                | 73   | 65   | 64   | 65   | 65   | 63   | 61   | 59   | 60   |
| 8   | HOUSE SPARROW                            | 70   | 60   | 60   | 59   | 61   | 61   | 59   | 60   | 65   |
| 9   | COLLARED DOVE                            | 67   | 62   | 58   | 63   | 66   | 69   | 65   | 71   | 73   |
| 10  | MAGPIE                                   | 61   | 58   | 56   | 57   | 57   | 55   | 53   | 46   | 45   |
| 11  | STARLING                                 | 60   | 51   | 50   | 56   | 57   | 56   | 56   | 55   | 60   |
| 12  | GREENFINCH                               | 49   | 40   | 45   | 42   | 51   | 48   | 51   | 55   | 57   |
| 13  | WREN                                     | 44   | 41   | 34   | 41   | 39   | 32   | 28   | 28   | 32   |
| 14  | CHAFFINCH                                | 43   | 43   | 51   | 59   | 64   | 63   | 63   | 65   | 69   |
| 15  | JACKDAW                                  | 40   | 39   | 37   | 37   | 38   | 35   | 33   | 29   | 27   |
| 16  | GT SP WOODPECKER                         | 26   | 26   | 23   | 22   | 24   | 23   | 19   | 23   | 25   |
| 17  | LONG-TAILED TIT                          | 25   | 24   | 29   | 24   | 26   | 20   | 17   | 19   | 21   |
| 18  | CARRION CROW                             | 24   | 24   | 22   | 23   | 23   | 24   | 21   | 19   | 20   |
| 19  | COAL TIT                                 | 23   | 29   | 28   | 23   | 28   | 25   | 20   | 18   | 20   |
| 20  | FERAL PIGEON                             | 19   | 14   | 13   | 10   | 11   | 9    | 7    | 7    | 7    |

## The Species

### *Game birds to ducks*

The Pheasant was recorded in 24% of gardens, all of which were in rural areas. The Red-legged Partridge was in just 10%, again all rural. For both species the results were very similar to those in 2014. There have been no Grey Partridges found in this survey since 2018.

Both Mute Swan and Mandarin Duck were each recorded from single rural gardens. Mallards were seen in 19% of gardens, almost all from rural areas, and more or less in line with the previous three summers.

### *Swift, Cuckoo and doves*

Swifts were registered in or over 40% of the gardens, with a slight preference for rural gardens, the highest level since 2015, whilst the Cuckoo was in just 3% of gardens, all rural, the same level now for three summers.

As usual, the Wood Pigeon was seen in all gardens. At a frequency level of 96% it was also the most regular visitor to our gardens, and at a record level of any species since our summer surveys started. Last summer 56% of our surveyed gardens recorded them during every week. The Collared Dove was in 93% of gardens, equally spread across rural and urban sites, but at the highest frequency level since 2015. Even so, they were totally missing from four rural gardens, including my own in Woburn where there are very few Collared Doves, and also one urban garden.

One species whose result benefitted from the quirky mix of garden returns was the Feral Pigeon which, in 32% of all gardens, was at a record level. It also jumped into the Top 20 most frequent garden visitors, replacing Song Thrush and Sparrowhawk. Conversely, I would have expected the results for the Stock Dove to have been depressed by the mix of gardens, as it prefers rural sites, but the results were very similar to 2019. A welcome return to this survey was the Turtle Dove, albeit from just one garden, but it was the “garden lockdown highlight” for Betty Cooke in her Clifton garden.

#### *Rails, gulls and herons*

The Moorhen was found in five gardens, all in rural areas, which was about average. Typically, there are two species of gull in our summer garden list. Making a big jump up the charts was the Lesser Black-backed Gull, in 9% of gardens, all but one in urban areas. The one garden that attracted Black-headed Gull was also urban.

Recorded across rural and urban sites, the Grey Heron was in 24% of gardens whilst the Little Egret was in 3% of the gardens, the latter all in rural areas.

#### *Raptors and owls*

The Sparrowhawk remains the most regular raptor in our survey, in 72% of gardens last summer, which was a return, after the low figure in Summer 2019, to a more typical level. It was found in almost as many urban gardens as those in rural areas, although it was more frequent in the latter.

The Red Kite was seen in, or over, 21% of gardens, mainly in rural areas. It was a similar picture for the Kestrel, from 15% of gardens, but that was a big increase on previous years. Swapping places in our tables was the Buzzard, and from only 9% of gardens was the lowest since 2012. As much as anything that was a result from the change of the mix of gardens, preferring as they do rural areas. The Hobby was recorded from 7% of gardens, mostly in rural areas, and was about the level that we would expect.

The Tawny Owl, one species that shows a very strong preference for rural areas, fell victim to the mix of gardens, falling from an average level of over 26% of gardens, to just 16%. All but two of the gardens were in rural areas. Both the Barn Owl (in two gardens) and Little Owl (in one), just about cling on to their places in our survey; all were in rural areas but in none of them were recorded during more than two of the weeks.

#### *Kingfisher, woodpeckers and Rose-ringed Parakeet*

The Kingfisher was recorded from 7% of gardens, about average. All the gardens attracting them last summer were in rural areas, which is typical.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker was in 66% of gardens, a good result and only slightly down from the peak in Summer 2019. Rural sites are much preferred, in 94% of those, compared to 34% of urban gardens. They were only missing from two rural gardens and so the result would have been depressed because of the change in the mix. They also retain their place in our 'Top 20' most frequent garden visitors. The Green Woodpecker was in 32% of gardens, the lowest level for many years, but again that figure would have been affected by the mix of returns, as it shows an even stronger liking for rural sites. After an absence of three summers in our surveys, it was pleasing that the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was recorded from two gardens, with both, as we would expect, in rural areas.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Rose-ringed Parakeet hasn't yet established itself as a regular visitor to our gardens, last summer appearing in only two of those surveyed, but in one of those it was almost ever-present.

### *Crows*

The Magpie is the most obvious member of the crow family in our gardens, and during last summer was found in 96% in total, in all of the rural gardens covered and all but three of the urban sites. In terms of frequency, the appearances were at the highest level since our summer survey started, split by area into 70% in rural gardens and 51% in urban sites. Second in our list of the crow family is the Jackdaw, in 69% of gardens last summer. It shows an even stronger preference for rural sites, so another species where the result would have been depressed. Coming up a close third in this sequence is the Carrion Crow, in 63% of gardens, quite a drop from the last few years and close to the result for 2014, when again there was a low response from rural gardens. All three of these species retain their places in our list of most frequent garden visitors.

The Rook was recorded in 32% of gardens, about average, again showing a preference for rural sites, although it was almost ever-present in two of the urban gardens. The Jay was reported from 25% of gardens, a big drop from Summer 2019 but again, with their strong preference for rural sites, the result would have been depressed. The Raven was recorded in 3% of the gardens.

### *Tits and hirundines*

As usual, the Blue Tit was seen in all gardens, and in last summer, at a very high level of frequency. The Great Tit just missed out on a full house, being absent from just one garden. The frequency level, at 73%, was about average.

The results for the Long-tailed Tit no doubt suffered with the change of mix in the returns. It fell to the lowest level since 2014, the summer when there was a similar drop in the number of rural gardens surveyed. It was missing last summer from four of the rural gardens (11%) and 12 of the urban sites (38%). I can say the same about the results for the Coal Tit too, again the lowest result since 2014. The declining Marsh Tit was recorded in just two gardens, and in both for only one week. How long before it disappears from our summer garden surveys altogether?

Of the hirundines, the House Martin is the most often-seen species in or over our gardens, and last summer was recorded from 31%, about average. The Swallow was reported from 28% of gardens, again about average. Both show a preference for rural areas. To complete this group, Sand Martins were recorded from three gardens, all in rural areas.

### *Warblers, Goldcrest and Wren*

There are, remarkably, ten species of warbler in our lists for last summer, including Grasshopper Warbler that appears for the first time. As usual, the Blackcap was the most widespread, appearing in 54% of the gardens. They show a strong preference for rural sites, in 72% of those compared to 34% of urban gardens. Chiffchaffs were in 43% of all gardens. In the 22 rural gardens where they were recording, they were present between 11 and 26 of the weeks, suggesting that they bred in or nearby to those gardens. By contrast, the Willow Warbler was reported for no more than in six weeks in any of the gardens. For all the other warblers on our list, all the gardens were in rural areas, and judging by how many weeks they were reported in, all would have been just passing through.

The Goldcrest, which also has a strong preference for rural sites, was recorded in just 26% of all gardens, and would have been affected by the change in the mix of gardens. Perhaps not so the Wren, for 90% of gardens was about average for the last few years. It was missing from just one rural garden, and six of the urban sites.

### *Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Starling*

I suspect that the result for Nuthatch was affected by the mix change, and in 18% of gardens last summer was on the low side, but not desperately so. All but two of the 12 gardens that it was found in were in rural areas. Peter Nash, in his Sandy garden, was pleased to log his second and third garden records for this species. Similar comments regarding the mix change too for the Treecreeper which, in 7% of gardens (all rural) was the lowest level since 2017.

The Starling was found in 94% of gardens which, if we ignore Summer 2018, was about average for the last nine years. The frequency of 60% was the highest since the same level in 2012, and that frequency was the same in rural and urban gardens last summer. It was only missing from one of the latter, and from three rural gardens. Andrew Budd, from his Ampthill garden, was pleased to report a regular flock of at least 25 visiting his feeders during the summer.

### *Thrushes, Robin and Spotted Flycatcher*

The results for the Blackbird are very consistent – recorded in all gardens and at a high level of frequency. Not so for the Song Thrush, but here I can only imagine that the results were affected by the change in the mix of gardens. After being found in 66% of all gardens in Summer 2019, that level dropped to 60% last summer. It has a strong preference for rural sites – it was in 78% of rural gardens in 2020 (and in 80% of those in Summer 2019) compared to just 44% of urban sites, so obviously a big drop in the number of rural gardens covered in the survey would mean an apparent drop in the overall level for this species. The frequency was also down (to 15%) so it drops out of the ‘Top 20’ most frequent visitors (it was in fact in equal 22nd position, along with Sparrowhawk).

Results for the Mistle Thrush were at an average level despite the fact that it is another species with a strong preference for rural gardens. In fact, of the 11 gardens that attracted this species, only one was in an urban setting.

The Robin was one of four species found in all gardens, so not much change there. It also appeared at a very high frequency level, so seems to be doing OK in our gardens. Not so the Spotted Flycatcher, which

has muddled along at much the same level for the past ten years or so. It was found in just four rural gardens, and in no more than three weeks in any of them.

#### *Sparrows, Dunnock to wagtails*

At first glance the results for House Sparrow are extremely encouraging, appearing in 91% of gardens, the highest since the same level in Summer 2011. Similarly, the frequency of 70% was the highest since 72% in Summer 2007. The House Sparrow much prefers urban gardens and so almost certainly the numbers have been skewed with the change in the mix of returns for last summer. Having said that, in my own (rural) garden they have moved from being a rare sight to being an almost daily visitor. Stephen Brewer was pleased to report “a healthy flock of 40 to 50 birds” in his Flitton garden. Andrew Budd enjoyed up to 30 in his garden, and after a 12-month absence they also returned to Terry Osborn’s Clifton garden in May, staying until August. In Lawrence Jarrett’s Luton garden, he recorded them during 25 weeks this summer, compared to just three weeks in Summer 2019. So maybe I’m being unduly pessimistic and they really are climbing back.

Typically, the Tree Sparrow failed to make it onto our summer lists, with the last record in this survey being in 2016.

The results for Dunnock were about the same as Summer 2019, which itself was on the low side, and they were completely missing from two urban gardens.

Three species of wagtail appear on our list for last summer, with Pied Wagtail in 29% of gardens (up from 22% the previous summer, but typically very erratic), the Grey Wagtail in 7% (undoubtedly affected by the mix change), and Yellow Wagtail, recorded in two gardens.

#### *Finches to buntings*

The Goldfinch maintained its high level in our summer results, being in 97% of gardens last summer, the highest since Summer 2015. In terms of frequency, it reached 73%, a record high for the species, split between 74% in rural gardens and 71% in urban sites. In my own Woburn garden, they were often the most common species, with up to 25 regularly during August and September.

The problems with the Chaffinch population, which the BTO is now investigating, can be seen in the results here. Although in 93% of gardens, which is the average for the last three summers, that is low when compared to the history. Although they were recorded in all rural gardens, they were missing from five in urban areas. In Summer 2012 they were in all gardens. In terms of frequency, 43% was the same as the previous summer, but well down compared to earlier years. In 2012 the frequency was 69%. The Greenfinch is also suffering, perhaps all due to the same reasons, last summer being found in 84% of gardens, the same as the previous summer. But again, as recently as 2012 they were in 94% of gardens. Last summer they were completely missing from three rural and eight urban gardens.

The Bullfinch has a preference for rural gardens, so the results here were probably affected by the mix change. Even so, they were in 22% of gardens, slightly up on the previous summer, but down on the two prior to that. The word ‘erratic’ springs to mind. Other finches that make an appearance in our lists are Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Brambling and Crossbill.

The buntings never make a strong showing in our summer lists, with Reed Bunting in 8% of gardens and Yellowhammer in 3%, both perhaps affected by the mix change.

### Summary

Our summer garden surveys have now been running for 23 years, although with the different challenges we have all had to face this summer, this has been the strangest of all. Once again, we have to thank the enthusiasm of our members for supporting our garden surveys, taking the time this summer to log nearly 28,000 records. Many of you took the advantage of the lockdown, if I dare say that, of spending more time noting the birds in or over our gardens. Peter Nash was one enthusiastic example of that, and he managed to extend his record garden day-list (including flyovers) to a very impressive 53 species. A Black Tern was his 100th 'from garden' species. We look forward to receiving further records from your gardens for next summer, hopefully under much better circumstances.

Barry Nightingale

### BOOKS AVAILABLE

Members who have attended our indoor meetings in Maulden will know that there are generally a selection of books on the table at the back of the room that are available for purchase with proceeds going to Bird Club and BNHS funds. Recently I have come into possession of a handful of items from a few members and have listed these below. If anybody would like to bid for one of these titles then please let me know at [editor@bedsbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:editor@bedsbirdclub.org.uk) and I can get them to you at the cost of your "bid" plus minimum second class postage with all profits being passed on to the Club.

If any member has any others that they would like to pass on in this way please let me know, even if there are minimal proceeds from them at least they are potentially going to a good home...

The Birds of Bedfordshire: Trodd & Kramer; Castlemead Publications 1991

Top Birding Spots in Britain and Ireland: David Tipling; Collins 1996

Birdwatchers Britain: John Parslow; Pan Books/Ordnance Survey 1983

Birdwatchers Site Guide to Britain and Ireland: John Gooders; Grisewood & Dempsey 1992

Birds of Kenya & Northern Tanzania: Zimmerman et al; Helm 1999

Birds of Eastern Africa Illustrated Checklist: Van Perlo; Harper Collins 1996

Photographic Guide to Birds of Peninsular Malaysia & Singapore: GWH Davison; New Holland 1995

Photographic Guide to Birds of Borneo: GWH Davison; New Holland 1996

Photographic Guide to Birds of The Himalayas: Birkam Grewal; New Holland 2004

Photographic Guide to Birds of The West Indies: Flieg and Sander; New Holland 2000

Hawaii's Birds; Hawaii Audobon Society 1986

RSPB Birdfeeder Guide: Robert Burton; DK 2003

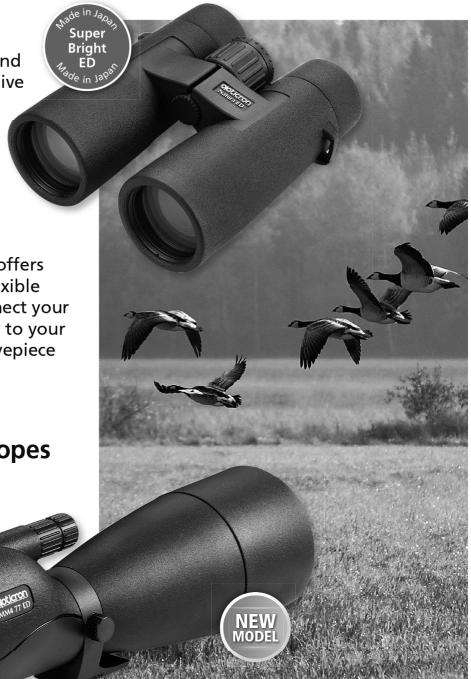
Field Guide in Colour to Butterflies & Moths: Ivo Novak; Octopus 1980

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