



# THE HOBBY

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

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## **PROGRAMME MATTERS**

Welcome to the July 2022 edition of The Hobby. Listening to Swifts screaming overhead while compiling this edition, it is easy to forget how concerned that many birders have felt at the low numbers of some of our summer visitors this year. We have received many reports of absence or low numbers of House Martin and Swallow particularly and many comments also that those that are here seem to have arrived late. In this edition of The Hobby, some analysis of the records from Priory CP is provided that appears to support these observations. Spotted Flycatchers also have been very few and far between in the county this spring and again just a handful of Turtle Doves have been noted at locations where they have been in previous summers.

Fortunately, it's not all bad news as at the end of June the team at Millennium Country Park were able to announce the first record of Bittern breeding at the reserve since its creation; a species that was one of the targets to attract from the initiation of the project. One or two booming birds have been heard in the brick pits area since 2013 but this year was the first when any evidence of breeding activity was noted.

Also in this edition of The Hobby, along with Bird News from the Spring period, and other notes, is included a comprehensive report of the Winter Garden Bird Feeding Survey for 2021/22.

A Zoom program of Indoor Meetings is planned to commence on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> September. Meetings will run in the same format as last year's program on the evening of the last Tuesday of the month though we still continue to look at the possibility of including some face-to-face meetings within our program should circumstances allow. We will share more updates in The Hobby and (as soon as they are available) on the website when a program is confirmed and thank you for supporting these meetings.

We also continue to put together a program of outdoor meetings both locally and further afield, details are on our website with the next planned being to the fantastic RSPB Frampton Reserve on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September.

With autumn movements already started, we hope you enjoy your birding through the coming season.

## APRIL – JUNE 2022 BIRD NEWS

### April 2022

**White-fronted Goose** - one reported from Meadow Lane GP on 4th and 15th

**Garganey** - one at Priory CP until 4th, one at Battlesden Lake on 3rd, one at MCP Wetlands NR on 9th  
(photo by Adrian Coleman)



**Pintail** - two at Broom East CWS on 1st to 12th, one remaining to 17th

**Ring-necked Duck** - two noted initially at Radwell GP on 13th, only one remaining later in the day that stayed until 19th

**Scaup** - one at Derek White Eggs Pit on 5th to 30th

**Common Scoter** - nocmig record of birds over Biggleswade on night of 9th

**Stone Curlew** - nocmig records of birds over Biggleswade on night of 9th, Eaton Bray on night of 13th, another over Biggleswade on night of 26th

**Whimbrel** - one at Derek White's Eggs Pit on 20th, seven early morning at Grovebury SP on 23rd, singles at both Brogborough Tip Pools on 25th and at MCP Wetlands CP on 26th, one flew through Broom East CWS on 28th

**Curlew** - nocmig record of birds over Biggleswade on night of 9th, also noted at Grovebury SP and Thurleigh Airfield

**Bar-tailed Godwit** - thirteen through early morning at Grovebury SP on 22nd, with two there later next day and one on 24th, another on 28th

**Ruff** - one at Grovebury SP on 17th

**Sanderling** - one Grovebury SP on 23rd

**Dunlin** - four at Grovebury SP on 2nd, another on 16th and two on 23rd

**Wood Sandpiper** - one at Broom East CWS on 19th, another on 25th and 26th, two on 27th, three near Bedford on 29th

**Spotted Redshank** - one at Black Cat GP on 28th

**Greenshank** - three at Grovebury SP on 23rd, one there on 28th, singles at Broom East CWS on 23rd and 29th

**Kittiwake** - one at Broom East CWS on 4th and 5th

**Little Gull** - four at Priory CP on 11th, a minimum of 25 in a flock through Stewartby Lake on 23rd, and eight at Priory CP on the same day, one at Grovebury SP on 28th

**Caspian Gull** - two at Grovebury SP on 23rd

**Sandwich Tern** - one at Grovebury SP on 6th

**Arctic Tern** - 29 at Stewartby Lake during afternoon of 19th, three at Grovebury SP on 22nd, one at Black Cat GP on 28th

**Black Tern** - one at Broom East CWS early morning on 29th

**White Stork** - one over Maulden on 21st

**Cattle Egret** - five near Henlow until 16th at least

**Great White Egret** - surprisingly only one reported in the month at MCP Wetlands NR on 18th - 19th

**Osprey** - one at Battlesden Lake on 6th, another over Kempston on 9th

**Marsh Harrier** - a female-type noted regularly in the brick pits through the month

**White-tailed Eagle** - tagged bird G486 from the IoW scheme was reported from tracking data to have passed through the county near Woburn on 21st, another bird had also been reported roosting near Pavenham on 6th/7th also from tracking data

**Siberian Chiffchaff** - one at Broom East CWS on 14th and 15th at least, singing

**Ring Ouzel** - One at Caddington GC on 7th, one at Barton Hills on 15th, a pair at Warden Hill Luton on 16th. Pegsdon records included ten on 13th, six on 14th, five on 15th, two on 29th

**Wheatear** - three at Galley Hill Luton on 1st, other multiple counts of six at Pegsdon on 19th, with five there on 24th. One noted of Greenland ssp at Pegsdon on 29th

**Black Redstart** - one at Blows Down on 3rd. also recorded in Luton town centre

**Redstart** - one at Pegsdon on 10th, another there on 12th, one at Blows Down on 12th to 14th, one at Meadow Lane GP on 17th, one at Houghton Brook Pools on 28th

**Whinchat** - seen at Pegsdon on 14th and 18th, one at East Hyde on 16th, two at Broom Quarry on 17th

**Richards Pipit** - one at Brogborough Tip on 17th and 18th was only the second record for the county, a bird far more regularly encountered as a very scarce migrant in the autumn in the UK

## May 2022

**Garganey** - one at Priory CP on 2nd, a pair at Coronation CIP on 4th, a male at Wixams on 7th, one at Dunstable STW on 12th, one at Meadow Lane GP on 16th and 17th

**Quail** - one picked up on nocmig recording over Meppershall on night of 15th

**Turtle Dove** - records at Arlesley, Dunton, Knotting Green, Lidlington, MCP Wetlands NR, Tempsford

**Avocet** - two at Rookery CIP on 7th, one at Grovebury SP on 14th

**Ringed Plover** - one at Grovebury SP on 12th to 15th, birds at Broom East CWS throughout the month including five on 13th and four on 14th, 19th and 24th

**Whimbrel** - singles through Grovebury SP on 1st and 10th, two singles there on 14th. One passed Stewartby Lake on 15th

**Bar-tailed Godwit** - one at Broom East CWS on 3rd

**Sanderling** - one at Grovebury SP on 1st

**Dunlin** - two at Grovebury SP on 1st and 2nd, another there on 14th. Single birds at Broom East CWS and neighbouring wetlands on most dates from 3rd to 14th likely included a number of records of the same individual, another noted there on 21st

**Wood Sandpiper** - one at Harrowden on 2nd, one at Broom East CWS on 2nd and 3rd

**Spotted Redshank** - one at Black Cat GP on 7th

**Greenshank** - one at Black Cat GP on 7th, singles at Grovebury SP on 8th and 14th, another at Broom East CWS on 29th

**Black Tern** - one at Broom East CWS on 6th

**White Stork** - one around Broom and Langford on 3rd and 4th is considered to be an individual that has been touring around the south-east for some time being reported recently in both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, This bird had spent the winter at Sandwich Bay in Kent; it's origin is unknown

**Glossy Ibis** - one at Broom East CWS on 3rd, three there on 5th, and another there on 29th and 30th  
(photo by Steve Blain)



**Cattle Egret** - three at Broom East CWS on 2nd, two at Grovebury SP on 15th  
**Osprey** - one over Whipsnade on 12th, another past Broom East CWS on 19th  
**Marsh Harrier** - a female again seen on a few occasions in the brick pits, elsewhere migrants were noted at Tetworth on 8th, Broom on 10th and Grovebury SP on 22nd  
**Merlin** - one at Broom East CWS on 1st  
**Firecrest** - one noted at Black Cat GP on 7th, another singing at The Lodge RSPB on 10th  
**Ring Ouzel** - a late migrant at Blows Down on 1st  
**Redstart** - one at The Lodge RSPB on 18th and 19th  
**Whinchat** - one at Grovebury SP on 1st, another near Stopsley Common on 10th, and singles at both Blows Down and Broom East CWS on 11th  
**Wheatear** - a few records at the start of the month, including eight at Galley Hill Luton on 10th  
**Willow Warbler** - one mixed singer at Broom often included Chiffchaff song in its repertoire

## June 2022

**Quail** - three near Little Staughton on 21st, one near Keysoe on 22nd  
**Shoveler** - a rare breeder in the county, a brood of nine ducklings was noted at Broom East CWS  
**Avocet** - two at Harrowden on 6th and 7th  
**Curlew** - one over Priory CP on 30th  
**Black-tailed Godwit** - one of the limosa race (which nests in the Ouse and Nene Washes) was noted at Broom East CWS from 5th to 12th - this is only the second recent confirmed record of this subspecies in the county. Elsewhere there were seven at Grovebury SP on 24th early morning  
**Ruff** - three flew over Priory CP on 13th  
**Dunlin** - two at Broom East CWS on 6th  
**Wood Sandpiper** - one at Broom East CWS on 6th, two at Grovebury SP on 24th  
**Mediterranean Gull** - one first-summer at Broom East CWS on 20th to 23rd

**Great Black-backed Gull** - two adults in roost at Grovebury SP on 30th; one was noted to have been ringed originally in Weymouth and returning for a third summer

**Yellow-legged Gull** - up to 11 in the roost at Grovebury SP at the end of the month

**Black Tern** - one at Broom East CWS on 5th

**White Stork** - reported near Everton on 20th

**Stonechat** - two breeding pairs noted in the county

We thank all contributors who have submitted their records directly to the Recorder, or via Bedsbirds Email Group as well as other sources. For 2022, Peter Nash has been confirmed as County Bird Recorder and all records are welcomed by email to [recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk) or preferably via the online system BirdTrack. Of course anything of real interest we would welcome a phone call or whatsapp so news can be shared with others in case they may want to see a specific bird

Compiled by Andy Grimsey

## NOTES OF SWALLOWS AND HOUSE MARTINS AT PRIORY CP

The following info was shared by Dave Kramer on the email group during June, and updated since for The Hobby and documents the concern on the numbers of hirundine species seen in many locations in the county this spring. The numbers for Sand Martin, House Martin and Swallow indicate significant reductions compared with 2021 while those for Swift suggest that numbers were back up to the same levels as last year by June but there had been a late arrival and low volumes in the initial weeks of passage.

**Sand Martins** were recorded on 10 days in April and May 2022 compared with 51 days in 2021 - a 90.4% reduction.

70 Sand Martins were recorded in April and May 2022 compared with 1152 in 2021 - a 94% reduction.

In June, there were 12 birds on 8 days in 2022 compared with 7 birds on 12 days in 2021.

Historical records from 2012, ten years ago, show that year had 460 birds on 22 days.

**Swallows** were recorded on 9 days in April and May 2022 compared with 32 in 2021 - a 72% reduction.

19 Swallows were recorded in April and May 2022 compared with 312 in 2021 - a 94% reduction.

There were no records in June 2022 or June 2021 as birds are breeding elsewhere and not at this site. Ten years ago, in 2012, there were however 32 birds were recorded across 10 days.

**House Martins** were recorded on 2 days in April and May 2022 compared with 15 in 2021 - an 87% reduction.

7 House Martins were recorded in April and May 2022 compared with 109 in 2021 - a 93.6% reduction.

There were no records in June 2022, and just two on one day in June 2021 as birds are breeding elsewhere and not at this site. Ten years ago, in 2012, there were however 211 birds were recorded across 24 days.

**Swifts:** There were none recorded in April 2022 and first bird was noted recorded on 8th May with birds recorded all month after that date at an average of 11 birds per day.

In 2021, first recorded on 27th April with seven birds in the month, then seen on all dates in May with a total of 1424 birds, an average of 47 birds per day.

At Priory Swifts were recorded on 27 days in June 2022 and 2021.

451 Swifts were recorded in June 2022 and 417 in June 2021 - so more or less the same (actually 8% more in 2022) so unlike the hirundines it does appear that numbers have finally matched last year. Again looking back ten years to June 2012, there were 2004 birds recorded on 30 days.

Notes and Data source: Dave Kramer and Birdtrack

## **RECORDING OF RARITIES FOR 2022**

During the most recent meeting of the Rarities Committee, the Species on the Bedfordshire list were reviewed to ensure that appropriate categorisation for each was in place to reflect their current status in the county. A few updates were made reflecting the changing status of birds in the county so for example we would request full details for assessment or Tree Pipits in Spring, but no longer require full details for White-fronted Goose in the county or Caspian Gulls at Grovebury SP where they are quite regular, but would ask for details of any recorded elsewhere. Also updated for example are the status of Bewicks and Whooper Swan as they have become more scarce and are also potentially confusable, and Ruddy Duck following the near extermination of the species in the UK.

A link to all species and their determined status is on the Birdclub website and can be accessed from the menu on the left hand side of the Homepage, "The Bedfordshire List". There is also a link at the bottom of the list for a reporting form that we hope that you get the opportunity to use following the finding of something good ! (<http://bedsbirdclub.org.uk/the-bedfordshire-list/>)

### **Waders at Stewartby Lake by Martin Green (Little Ringed Plover and Oystercatchers)**



## **THE GARDEN BIRD FEEDING SURVEY – WINTER 2021/22**

### **INTRODUCTION**

For the survey for last winter, covering the 22-week period from the beginning of October 2021 to the end of February 2022, we received returns from 65 gardens. That was a decrease of 11 gardens from the previous winter and was one of the lowest since our winter surveys started, but with the split between rural and urban sites about the same.

The average number of species recorded in the rural and urban gardens was 26.4 and 19 respectively, as the following table shows:

Table 1 Average number of species per garden - winters 2015/16 to 2021/22

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Rural gardens	26.3	27.1	28.5	25.9	26	26.2	26.4
Urban gardens	20.1	20.3	21.3	19.2	19.6	20.3	19

The total number of species in the gardens last winter was 68, four less than the record level in the previous winter.

Table 2 includes all species that have been recorded in our winter gardens since the winter of 2015/16.

		%	%	%	%	%	%	%			%	%	%	%	%	%	%
		21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19	17/18	16/17	15/16			21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19	17/18	16/17	15/16
1st=	Blackbird	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	44th	Mallard	11	8	10	5	11	9	6
1st=	Blue Tit	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	45th=	Fieldfare	9	26	10	31	68	30	22
1st=	Robin	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	45th=	Moorhen	9	9	8	8	7	6	12
1st=	Woodpigeon	100	99	100	100	100	100	100	47th=	Lesser Redpoll	8	12	7	8	25	5	23
1st=	Dunnock	100	97	99	97	97	99	100	47th=	Grey Wagtail	8	14	24	15	20	18	13
6th	Great Tit	98	96	100	98	99	96	99	47th=	Treecreeper	8	8	11	9	11	6	9
7th	Magpie	97	92	93	91	95	88	96	50th	Kingfisher	6	5	8	3	7	6	4
8th	Wren	94	99	92	85	99	97	96	51st=	Reed Bunting	5	8	6	12	16	9	17
9th	Goldfinch	92	96	90	91	93	91	88	51st=	Herring Gull	5	4	0	0	0	1	0
10th	Collared Dove	88	92	85	92	93	92	94	51st=	Red-l Partridge	5	3	4	8	8	4	1
11th	Starling	85	87	81	88	84	87	85	54th=	Ring-n Parakeet	3	4	3	0	0	3	1
12th=	House Sparrow	78	78	78	74	73	75	77	54th=	Little Egret	3	0	0	2	4	4	1
12th=	Chaffinch	78	86	85	88	92	92	96	56th=	Gadwall	3	1	1	2	1	1	0
14th	Long-tailed Tit	77	84	90	85	89	90	93	56th=	Raven	3	1	0	2	3	1	1
15th=	Greenfinch	66	72	75	72	68	68	83	58th=	Cormorant	2	3	3	0	3	0	1
15th=	Jackdaw	66	66	61	62	63	66	62	58th=	Barn Owl	2	3	1	3	3	3	1
17th=	Sparrowhawk	62	70	65	57	71	60	74	58th=	Mute Swan	2	3	1	2	1	0	0
17th=	Coal Tit	62	67	92	80	91	75	89	58th=	Marsh Tit	2	1	8	3	5	3	4
19th	Carrion Crow	60	68	60	52	63	66	56	58th=	Little Grebe	2	1	1	2	1	1	0
20th	Blackcap	57	50	29	35	39	43	29	58th=	Lesser B-b Gull	2	0	1	0	1	0	0
21st	Gt Sp Woodpecker	52	51	63	54	57	66	66	58th=	Greylag Goose	2	1	3	2	1	1	0
22nd	Jay	48	25	36	18	29	22	24	58th=	Mandarin	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
23rd	Red Kite	42	32	26	23	20	17	10	58th=	Little Owl	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
24th=	Song Thrush	37	53	49	58	73	68	56	58th=	Yellow Wagtail	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
25th	Pied Wagtail	35	30	21	42	56	51	27	58th=	Grey Partridge	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
26th	Pheasant	34	38	39	31	43	32	35		Common Gull	0	3	1	2	1	1	2
27th	Goldcrest	31	30	38	37	48	43	48		Yellowhammer	0	3	0	6	7	8	7
28th=	Redwing	26	47	25	32	57	44	24		Canada Goose	0	1	3	3	0	0	0
28th=	Tawny Owl	26	16	21	14	19	13	17		Swallow	0	1	3	2	1	0	1
30th=	Feral Pigeon	25	22	19	17	19	19	18		Wigeon	0	1	1	2	0	1	0
30th=	Green Woodpecker	25	26	26	25	31	42	32		House Martin	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
32nd	Stock Dove	23	22	25	22	20	18	20		Willow Warbler	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
33rd	Siskin	22	26	4	25	31	13	32		Woodcock	0	1	0	3	1	0	0
34th	Nuthatch	20	14	19	11	17	14	17		Peregrine	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
35th=	Chiffchaff	17	13	14	8	13	22	12		Water Rail	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
35th=	Buzzard	17	21	15	14	20	10	11		Lesser Sp W'pecker	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
35th=	Kestrel	17	8	7	6	8	10	15		Tree Sparrow	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
38th=	Rook	15	18	18	18	19	25	17		Teal	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
38th=	Brambling	15	5	4	5	19	4	12		Ring Ouzel	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
40th	Grey Heron	14	5	13	11	16	16	15		Lapwing	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
41st=	Black-headed Gull	12	14	13	15	13	18	10		Snipe	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
41st=	Mistle Thrush	12	13	18	18	33	26	20		Linnet	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
41st=	Bullfinch	12	9	22	17	25	18	20									

As can be seen in the table, there were five species that were recorded in all participating gardens last winter – Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin, Woodpigeon and Dunnock. Several species reached new highs since our winter surveys started in 1993/94, with Magpie in 97% of gardens, Blackcap in 57%, Jay in 48%, Tawny Owl in 26% and Feral Pigeon in 25%. Some species, however, dropped to record lows, with Chaffinch in only 78%, Greenfinch in 66%, Song Thrush in 37%, Mistle Thrush in 12% and Fieldfare in only 9%. Peter Nash, from his Sandy Garden, commented that “overall a disappointing winter with a lack of Redwings, Fieldfares and the usual crop of Reed Buntings, Lesser Redpolls, Bramblings and Siskins were all missing or very scarce”.

		21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19	17/18	16/17	15/16
1st	Woodpigeon	96	93	92	91	92	91	90
2nd=	Robin	92	90	88	86	90	92	88
2nd=	Blue Tit	92	90	92	90	91	91	91
4th	Blackbird	91	90	90	89	88	91	88
5th	Dunnock	79	72	69	73	78	83	77
6th	Great Tit	74	76	80	76	79	75	80
7th	Goldfinch	67	65	55	62	66	62	62
8th	Magpie	64	67	63	58	63	60	61
9th	Starling	57	50	49	52	57	58	47
10th	Collared Dove	56	63	58	62	60	64	63
11th	House Sparrow	53	60	53	55	52	54	52
12th	Chaffinch	47	49	52	55	65	64	68
13th	Jackdaw	41	37	38	32	33	33	34
14th	Wren	37	40	34	29	40	46	39
15th	Greenfinch	36	35	35	37	39	33	48
16th	Long-tailed Tit	32	34	42	36	47	39	41
17th	Coal Tit	28	31	47	38	50	35	52
18th	Carrion Crow	25	24	22	19	22	25	20
19th	G S Woodpecker	23	28	27	20	24	23	29
20th	Feral Pigeon	17	15	14	12	11	10	11

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 that each species is recorded and comparing that to the maximum possible total (i.e., 22 weeks x 65 gardens). Topping this table for last winter is the Woodpigeon, at 96%, whilst Goldfinch at 67%, Jackdaw at 41% and Feral Pigeon at 17%, were all at the highest levels for those species since our surveys began. The latter species pushed the Sparrowhawk (at 15%) out of the Top 20. Sadly, the Chaffinch and Collared Dove are at their lowest levels of frequency since our winter surveys began.

### The Weather

Across England, much of October was unsettled, with some spells of heavy rain, although from the 6th to 17th it was drier. Temperatures were broadly above average, especially during the 6th-10th and 17th-19th. The mean temperature was provisionally 1.4°C above the 1981-2010 long-term average.

Much of November was on the mild side in England, but it became much colder towards the end. There was plenty of settled weather, with only limited amounts of rainfall, especially in the south. The mean temperature was provisionally 0.5°C above the 1981-2010 long-term average. Rainfall was broadly below average, especially further south, with many places in the south and south-east having less than a quarter of the average rainfall total for the month. Sunshine hours were about 10% above average in the majority of places.

The first ten days of December in England were unsettled, rather chilly, and often windy, but it became milder after this, with high pressure building around mid-month. It turned colder for a few days, but by Christmas it became much more unsettled again. The last few days of the month were unusually mild, with temperature records broken at numerous sites. It was a notably dull month but with rainfall totals near average. The mean temperature was provisionally 1.1°C above the 1991-2020 long-term average, with southern areas being warmest relative to average. Frosts were few and rainfall was broadly close to

average, with sunshine hours well below average in almost all places, with an overall figure of 60%, making it provisionally England's eighth dullest December in a series from 1919.

The first ten days of January were unsettled, and after a very mild start it became rather cold with some hard night frosts. High pressure developed towards mid-month, so the remainder of the month was mostly dry. The mean temperature was provisionally 0.2°C above the 1991-2020 long-term average, whilst rainfall was well below average, with less than a quarter of average in parts of the east, south-east and Midlands. Across England it was provisionally the ninth driest January in a series from 1862. It was also a sunny month, with 146% of average overall making it provisionally the sunniest January in a series from 1919.

It was mild in February for most of the time, and the monthly mean temperature for England was provisionally 1.9°C above the 1991-2020 long-term average. Frosts were fewer than average and it was England's fifth warmest February in a series from 1884. Rainfall was well above average in most areas and sunshine was above average in eastern areas of England.

The information about the weather was adapted, with permission, from Crown copyright data supplied by the Met Office, and we are grateful to them (© Crown copyright, published by the Met Office).

## **THE MAIN RESULTS**

### **Gamebirds, Waterfowl, Doves and Pigeons**

The Pheasant was recorded in a third of the gardens last winter with, as you might expect, the majority of those in rural areas. The Red-legged Partridge was found in three gardens and the Grey Partridge, the first in this survey since 2006/07, was found in one.

There are five species of waterfowl on the list for last winter, all in rural gardens, with the most frequent being Mallard, in 11% of gardens. Of the other four species, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Mandarin were all in one garden each, whilst Gadwall was in two.

No surprise to see that the Woodpigeon tops all the lists for last winter, being found in all gardens, and at a record level of frequency. In fact, in 86% of the gardens it was recorded in every week that those gardens were covered (i.e., excluding holiday weeks). In my Woburn garden they are ever-present, and peaked at 19 daily during January. In the first winter of this survey, in 1993/94, the frequency level was just 34%, so a staggering increase since then. Although the Collared Dove was in 88% of gardens, not far below the average for the last few winters, the frequency of its appearances was the lowest since our survey started in 1993/94, with the results across rural and urban gardens about the same. It was entirely absent from five rural and three urban gardens.

The Feral Pigeon was recorded in 25% of the gardens, most of those being in urban areas. That is the highest level for this species since our winter survey began. As recently as 2014/15 they were only in 10% of gardens. Just below the Feral Pigeon in Table 2 is the Stock Dove, showing in 23% of gardens, about average for the species.



### **Rails, Gulls, Herons, Raptors and Owls**

Moorhens were recorded in 9% of gardens, the average level, and were all in rural areas, as might be expected. Of the three gull species that occurred in our gardens last winter, typically the Black-headed Gull was the most widely reported, in 12% of gardens, slightly lower than average. The Grey Heron was in 14% of gardens, an increase after the drop in the previous winter. They were nearly all in rural gardens, but in none of them were they regular. Little Egrets were found in two of the gardens, and were the first in this survey since winter 2018/19.

As usual, the Sparrowhawk was the most often reported raptor in our gardens, being seen in 62%, of which slightly more were in rural areas than urban gardens. In reality, they can be seen dashing through virtually anywhere. Next in this series is the Red Kite, seen from 42% of gardens, mostly rural, and I suspect most often seen soaring over. They seem to be as curious of us as we are of them. Both the Buzzard and Kestrel were recorded from 17% of gardens, and almost all of both species were in rural gardens.

The Tawny Owl was reported from 26% of gardens, the highest since our survey started. All but two of those gardens were in rural areas. Both the Barn Owl and Little Owl were recorded in one garden each.

### **Kingfisher, Woodpeckers, Parakeet and Crows**

The Kingfisher was recorded by four lucky garden owners, and in one of those gardens it was present in almost every week. The Great Spotted Woodpecker was in 52% of gardens, split between 68% of rural sites and 27% of urban areas. As you would expect, the Green Woodpecker also prefers rural areas, in 29% of those gardens compared to 15% of urban sites. Overall, it showed in the lowest proportion of gardens since 1998/99. Of a similar hue, the Ring-necked Parakeet showed in just two of the gardens covered.

The Magpie was recorded in 97% of gardens, the highest level since our survey started. For the first two winters in our survey, they were in 71% of gardens, but since the winter of 2003/04 they have been mostly around the 90-93% mark. Cementing its place in the list is the Jackdaw, in 66% of gardens for the second winter in a row. They show a strong preference for rural gardens, in 79% of those, compared to 46% of urban sites. Oddly, they remain absent from my own garden in Woburn, despite the fact that they fly over almost every day. Appearances for the Carrion Crow fell back last winter, to 60% of gardens, but

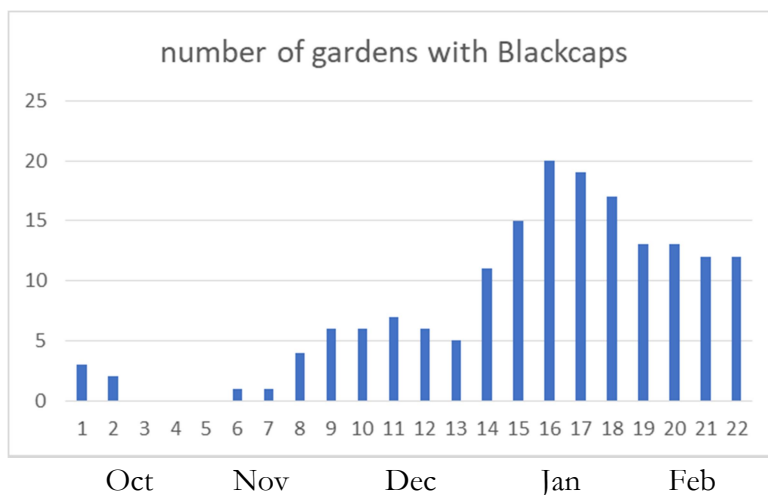
the results for this species have been somewhat erratic over the years. Unlike the previous species, they are just as likely to be found in urban as well as rural gardens. Another of the crow family with a good result last winter is the Jay, and in 48% of gardens was the highest since our survey began. Like the Carrion Crow though, the results for this species have been very erratic over the years. At a slightly more stable level is the Rook, but last winter, appearing in only 15% of gardens, was the lowest since 2013/14. Completing this family, the Raven was recorded in two gardens.

### Tits, Warblers, ‘Crests, Wren, Nuthatch and Treecreeper

The Blue Tit was seen in all gardens, and was only beaten to the top spot in the frequency list by the ever-present Woodpigeon, whilst the Great Tit was seen in all of the rural sites and was missing from just one of the urban gardens. Looking back at previous winters, results for the Long-tailed Tit have been somewhat up and down, but last winter the result was the lowest since 2007/08. The drop, compared to the previous winter, was from both rural and urban areas. Consequently, the frequency was also down, and was the lowest since 2014/15.

In my report for the previous winter, I mentioned that the results for the Coal Tit were “very disappointing...and we await the results for next winter with interest”. Unfortunately, the picture didn’t improve. Found in only 62% of gardens last winter, that was the lowest since the level of 56% of gardens in 2006/07. Compared to the recent high in 2019/20, when they were in 92% of gardens, the reduction was evident in both rural and urban sites. It follows then that the frequency also dropped, and was the lowest since 2013/14. Continuing this rather gloomy picture, the Marsh Tit was recorded only in one garden, albeit in five of the weeks.

The Blackcap was found in the highest level of winter gardens since our survey began (and as a percentage of gardens, more than in our Summer 2021 survey!). Terry Osborn, in his Clifton garden, had his first Blackcap for five years, and Sheila Brooke, in her Toddington garden, had her first Blackcap “in ages”. Peter Nash, in his Sandy garden, commented “wintering Blackcaps were good though – up to four (3 males and a female), often three birds and usually two present through January to March”. As the following graph shows, the peak weeks were in January, then holding up fairly well through to the end of February. They were in 63% of rural gardens and 50% of urban gardens, which in itself is unusual, as more often they are more likely to be found in the winter in urban areas that have a slightly warmer micro-climate, but overall of course last winter was rather mild throughout.



The other warbler in our winter list is the Chiffchaff, found in 17% of the gardens. Just over 77% of the records last winter were in the first two weeks of the survey period (weeks starting 3rd and 10th October), so were likely to be late autumn migrants rather than wintering birds.

The Goldcrest was in 31% of gardens, about the same as the previous winter, but much lower than in the five winters prior to that. It has a preference for rural sites, and has a much higher frequency in those gardens than those in urban areas. The Wren was in 94% of gardens, with that and the measure of frequency down compared to the previous winter, but again this is a species whose results go up and down, susceptible as it is in cold winters.

The Nuthatch was in 20% of gardens, only bettered by 21% in 2012/13. As expected, it is almost exclusively found in rural gardens. Similarly, the Treecreeper was only found in rural gardens last winter, and in 8% of those.

### **Starling to Thrushes**

Since the winter of 2013/14 the results for the Starling have held up fairly well, averaging around 85% of gardens in that period. However, in the first ten winters of this survey they were, on average, found in 99% of gardens. Last winter they showed in about the same percentage of both rural and urban gardens, although the frequency of appearances in rural sites was somewhat higher.

As usual, both the Robin and the Blackbird were found in all gardens, and had a very similar frequency level. Unfortunately, the results for the Song Thrush were dreadful and, in only 37% of all gardens, was the lowest since our winter survey began. As recently as 2003/04 they were in 87% of gardens. They were in 47% of rural gardens last winter, but in only 19% of urban sites. Of the latter, the highest number of weeks that any of those gardens held Song Thrush was just three. At a frequency of just 10%, that was lower than Pheasant, Blackcap and Jay.

Both the Redwing and Fieldfare showed in fewer gardens than usual, and in fact for the Fieldfare it was the lowest percentage of gardens since our survey began in 1993/94. Of more concern is that the results for the Red-listed Mistle Thrush are on a slippery slope and, in only 12% of gardens, that was also the lowest since our survey began. Although the results have been erratic from year to year, as recently as 2017/18 they were in 33% of gardens. They are almost completely absent now from urban gardens.

### **Sparrows, Dunnock, Wagtails, Finches and Buntings**

The House Sparrow was recorded in 78% of gardens, the same level now three winters. They show a slight preference for urban gardens, but made a small improvement in both rural and urban areas last winter. The frequency was down, though, compared to the previous winter.

The Dunnock was seen in all gardens and was at the highest frequency level since the winter of 2016/17.

Each time I write these summaries, I mention that the results for Pied Wagtail are without a clear trend, but at least (for now) it has enjoyed a steady increase in the percentage of gardens for the last two winters, but is still 21 points below the level of 2017/18. As usual, they show a strong preference for rural sites. The result for Grey Wagtail is disappointing, and is at the lowest level since 2009/10. All the gardens that recorded it were in rural areas.

The Goldfinch continues to hold its own and, although the results were down a bit compared to the previous winter, the long-term trend shows an increase. In addition, the frequency level was the highest since our survey began. As recently as 2007/08 the frequency was at 49%, and is now at 67%. I had a peak in my Woburn garden of 29 during February, all furiously eating sunflower hearts.

Unfortunately, the Chaffinch is going in the opposite direction and, in only 78% of gardens last winter, that was the lowest level since this survey began. As recently as 2012/13 they were in 99% of gardens, so the rate of decline is very steep. The frequency level is also at the lowest ever – in 1999/2000 that level was 79% compared to just 47% now. The biggest drop has been in urban gardens, where the frequency is now just 34%, less than half of what it was in 2007/08. Andrew Budd, from his Ampthill garden, saw Chaffinch on just three occasions, by far his worst record. Lawrence Jarrett, from his Luton garden, failed to record Chaffinch at all, compared to the previous five winters when he recorded them, on average, during 17 weeks in each winter survey period.

Going the same way, although perhaps not quite as fast, is the Greenfinch. In only 66% of gardens, that was the lowest since our survey began – it was in 99% of gardens as recently as 2006/07. Again, the biggest drop has been in urban gardens. Trevor and Elizabeth Askew, from their Luton garden, commented that “most notable is the complete absence of Greenfinches”. Lawrence Jarrett recorded them during just four weeks, the same as the previous winter, but well down on 2017/18 when he had them every week. But then Andrew Budd said that he was pleased to see “a good number of Greenfinches”, so clearly the situation is somewhat patchy. The Bullfinch was in 12% of gardens, with a small preference for rural areas, and although that was an improvement on the previous winter, it is still well down compared to earlier years.

Of the winter finches, the Siskin was found in 22% of gardens, and was fairly scarce anywhere in the county last winter, Lesser Redpoll was in 8%, which is around the recent average, and the Brambling was in 15%, the highest since 2017/18.

There are usually two species of bunting on our winter list, but this time only one, with Yellowhammer being completely absent. The Reed Bunting was only recorded in three of the gardens, and in only one of those for more than one week. That was the worst showing since 2006/07.

## **SUMMARY**

We thank all 65 garden watchers for submitting nearly 19,000 records on their survey forms. Although the number of participants was down, it is clear that those who took part did so with a high level of enthusiasm and interest. It continues to be important that we monitor what is a valuable habitat in our county and I look forward to receiving your completed returns for future garden surveys.

Barry Nightingale

Photos by Andy Grimsey – Stock Dove and Sparrowhawk

## NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to the Beds Bird Club since the last edition:

Andy Bates, Ampthill  
Vic Brown, Liddington  
Geoffrey Cave, Clapham  
Dean Cornish, Hitchin  
Denise Girdleston, Flitwick  
Michael Hammond, Henlow  
Josh Matthews, Husborne Crawley

Neil McKillop, Kempston  
Csaba-Gabriel Mikehazi, Shortstown  
Hester Plumridge, Berkhamsted  
Steve Pritchard, Broom  
Christopher Wood, Gamlingay  
David Worth, Flitwick

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