



THE HOBBY

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PROGRAMME MATTERS

Welcome to the October 2023 edition of The Hobby. Winter is not far away and the last summer migrants have already left and with the changeover of the season and favourable weather for birds further north so far, many of our winter visitors have yet to arrive.

In this edition, along with Bird News from the recent three months of the year and some information on bird club events, is some detail about a survey that we are conducting in the winter to understand more about the population and distribution of Woodcock. This follows on from some informal observations made last year to look at birds at a handful of known roost sites.

This species has disappeared as a breeding bird from our county, and the chance to see birds leaving a roost in the winter is one of the only opportunities to catch up with birds in the year unless they are driven out of hiding by a severe spell of weather.

At the time of publication, we have now concluded the first two meetings of our Winter Programme and look forward to the next on November 28th. The program started on September 26th when we welcomed 40 members in Maulden to hear from Andy Sands about Ancient Trees and Woodlands. The photography was an amazing backdrop as Andy took us on a tour of his favourite woodlands in our area and introduced us to the complex and rich biodiversity which thrives in these pockets of our heritage which have been saved from development and change. Our second talk followed this week on October 24th with Mark Pearson talking on Zoom to over 60 members about the birds of the coastal stretch of Yorkshire from Filey to Flamborough Head.

Many thanks go to Stuart Elsom for arranging these for us, and we look forward to seeing many more of our members on the upcoming planned events, especially the pre-Christmas gathering in Maulden on 19th December

The next outdoor meeting is to Area around Poppy Hill Farm near Henlow, a great site for potentially catching up with flocks of wintering birds in setaside and wild bird strips around the farmland areas with Henlow Lakes nearby.

Full details of the program of Indoor and Outdoor Meetings for the winter 2023/24 is published on the "Events Programme" tab on our website.

We hope you will enjoy your birding through the coming season.

We would also invite any members who would like to get involved with our Committee to contact one of the committee members for more information. We also welcome any support to our activities including contributions to The Hobby and the production of our annual Bird Report. Thank you !

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2023 BIRD NEWS

July 2023

Pink-footed Goose - one around Priory CP for most of the month

Shelduck - one pair bred at Grovebury SP, one regularly at Dunstable STW and a lone juvenile in Rookery North on 22nd

Quail - one near Thurleigh on 11th and 12th

Turtle Dove - birds seen at Marston Moretaine, Tempsford Airfield and near Arlesey

Whimbrel - one at MCP Wetlands NR on 8th. one on nocmig over Meppershall on 9th, one over Upper Caldecotte on 16th

Curlew - one on nocmig over Meppershall on 5th, another reported from Wrest Park on 30th

Black-tailed Godwit - one at MCP Wetland NR on 2nd, another at Dunstable STW on 15th, one at Broom East CWS on 28th identified to the "islandica" race

Dunlin - one at Grovebury SP on 16th, two there on 30th

Wood Sandpiper - one at Broom South Quarry on 8th, another at Grovebury SP on 18th

Greenshank - one at Priory CP on 7th, three at Lodge Farm Lake on 10th

Mediterranean Gull - reported at Grovebury SP on five dates in the month, also birds at MCP Wetlands NR on 15th, Harrold-Odell CP on 17th, Stopsley Common playing fields on 26th and Dunstable STW for ten days towards the end of the month

Caspian Gull - one at Gadsey Brook on 7th, a regular adult at Grovebury SP from 17th

Yellow-legged Gull - the Grovebury SP roost peaked at 51 birds on 25th

Osprey - one reported at Grovebury SP on 19th

Marsh Harrier - three young hatched from a nest at MCP Wetlands NR

Ring-necked Parakeet - birds present for all of the month in the Old Bedford Road area of Luton, with a peak count of 17 on 18th

Wood Warbler - one at Broom East CWS on 27th, another at Henlow on 31st

Crossbill - single birds noted in flight over Wixams on 2nd and over Upper Caldecotte on 21st

August 2023

Pintail - one at MCP Wetlands NR throughout the month

Ringed Plover - one Broom South Quarry on 6th, one at Grovebury SP on 15th, another at Broom East CWS on 31st. Recorded on nocmig over Meppershall on 15th and 22nd

Whimbrel - minimum two birds together on nocmig over Meppershall on 14th

Curlew - five around Grovebury SP on 10th

Black-tailed Godwit - two at Broom South Quarry on 1st

Ruff - one at Broom East CWS on 22nd

Dunlin - two at Broom South Quarry on 6th

Wood Sandpiper - one at Cuckoo Bridge Lake on 26th

Spotted Redshank - one at Broom East CWS on 21st



Greenshank - one at Houghton Brook Pools on 27th (image by Andy Grimsey)

Mediterranean Gull - groups of three counted at two sites in the month: Whipsnade on 6th and Grovebury SP on 28th, another at Stewartby Lake on 30th

Great Black-backed Gull - two at Grovebury SP on 14th, recently very uncommon in the county

Caspian Gull - five at Grovebury SP on 14th with others in the month, elsewhere recorded at Broom on 6th, 11th, 13th and 29th

Sandwich Tern - two at Grovebury SP on 15th

Black Tern - three at Stewartby Lake on 18th

Cattle Egret - two at Broom East CWS on 10th, one at Grovebury SP on 12th, 14th, 15th and 25th, another at MCP Wetlands NR on 25th to 27th

Purple Heron - one reported at Willington GP on 28th, the second county record in 2023

Honey-buzzard - one reported over The Lodge RSPB on 16th

Wood Warbler - one reported in Ampthill Park on 30th

Spotted Flycatcher – a better autumn for records than many recently; up to six at Pegsdon Hills, ten at Wrest Park, ten in Kings Wood Ampthill and eleven at Ampthill Park during the month

Pied Flycatcher - one at Ampthill Park on 23rd and 24th

Redstart - singles at Bradgers Hill Luton and Myers Farm, Pottton on 23rd. Two at Pegsdon Hills on 26th

Tree Pipit - just five sight records and three nocmig records in the month of this increasingly rare species

Common Crossbill - five records in the month included a group at The Lodge RSPB on 8th and a party of seven moving south over Priory CP on 27th

September 2023

Garganey - one at MCP Wetlands NR from 17th to 21st

Red-crested Pochard - a female around Rookery CP from 23rd to 29th

Ringed Plover - one at Broom South Quarry on 4th

Whimbrel - one on nocmig over Meppershall on 1st

Curlew - recorded on nocmig over Meppershall on 1st and 15th. one flew over Broom GP on 2nd

Ruff - one at Grovebury SP on 24th to 26th

Curlew Sandpiper - one at MCP Wetlands NR on 19th to 21st

Dunlin - eight at Priory CP on 13th, one at Broom East CWS on 19th, one at MCP Wetlands NR on 21st

Greenshank - one at Myers Farm, Pottton from 3rd to 8th, two at Broom South Quarry on 5th

Black Tern - two at Stewartby Lake on 11th

Cattle Egret - 18 roosted at Grovebury SP on 10th, one at MCP Wetlands NR on 19th to 22nd

Marsh Harrier - one near Leighton Buzzard on 10th

Wryneck - one at Pegsdon Hills

from 12th to 16th

(brilliantly captured in this image
from Graham Trew)



Grasshopper Warbler - one near Meadow Lane GP on 22nd, an unusual autumn record. Only two have been noted in September previously, likely because of this species being extremely difficult to observe when not reeling.

Yellow Wagtail - flock of around 50 near Broom on 6th

Ortolan Bunting - one sound recorded on nocmig over Meppershall on 15th

We thank all contributors who have submitted their records directly to the Recorder, or via Bedsbirds Email Group as well as other sources. Our recorder, Peter Nash welcomes all records by email to 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

UPCOMING INDOOR MEETING - 19TH DECEMBER – REQUEST FOR INPUT

This will be hosted by Richard Bashford and, as has become traditional, will feature a compilation video of highlights and interesting events of the birding year in Bedfordshire.

Richard does a great job of putting this together and presenting but relies on members to provide the vast majority of the material, and we would ask you to look through what you have for the year that can be shared as part of this meeting and get it across to Richard as soon as is practical.

Any offerings can be sent via Dropbox or Wetransfer for free - or you can post a memory stick.

Whatapp appears to work well as long as the film is not too long.

Although it is called “Bedsbirds”, film of any other county wildlife is welcome and anything unusual in neighbouring counties.

This end of year film is not possible without your support and means we can have a nice social at Maulden Village Hall on 19th December. Please contact Richard on ribashford@gmail.com

REPORT FROM BROOM EAST CWS FIELD TRIP - 15TH OCTOBER

We had a brilliant walk at Broom East County Wildlife Site on what was certainly a very seasonal and beautiful autumn morning. Thanks go to Matt Burgess for leading and sharing his expertise, enthusiasm and knowledge of the site, thanks also to those who carried and shared telescopes to help us all get the best views of the birds. There were 16 of us; it was great to bird together!

We had a fairly quick walk to the east side of the lake to get the sun behind us to view the birds on the lake. We saw good numbers of snipe which were a highlight for many and were treated to several hundred greylag geese wheeling and calling as they came into land on the lake. We saw a late Swallow and a House Martin but failed to see any winter thrushes, Siskins or Redpolls in spite of our best efforts. We did see quite a few farmland birds including Yellowhammer, Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and Reed Bunting although many were difficult to identify by sight as they were silhouettes against the bright sky. We saw a grand total of 60 species although this does include a Dunlin reported by Matt which arrived on the WhatsApp before we got home to Clifton, so I felt it was fair to include it especially as it got us to a nice round 60! Matt completed his WeBS on the way home and added Dunnock, Siskin over the village pit, and Tufted Duck which did not find their way onto my list. A great morning was rounded off with coffee and biscuits at the end – next time I will try to remember the milk!

Kathy Blackmore

NEW MEMBERS

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

Julie Campbell and John Wall, Clifton
Adrian Day and Penny Cosher, Lidlington
Jane Harrison, Campton

Amelia Kirk, Dunton
Deborah Maggs, Campton
Justin Milne, Westoning

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

THE WINTER WOODCOCK SURVEY 2022 TO 2023

Following the announcement of the BTO's 2023 summer Woodcock Survey in late 2022, I thought it might be more interesting for members to be able to get involved with counting numbers during the winter period, Woodcock long being absent as a breeding or summering bird in our County.

Whilst we did not manage to start our survey until late January, we also had the benefit of reviewing BirdTrack records for the full period which have been assessed in compiling this report.

Migratory Woodcocks start arriving in the UK from late October, although the majority arrive on the full moon in November building up to a peak in late December and early January before disappearing again (at least from Bedfordshire) from early March onwards. These birds are usually from Fennoscandia and the Baltic states, although a few do come from as far afield as Russia, discerned from ringing data assessed of those birds unlucky enough still to be shot. The birds are also prone to turn up in strange places when they first arrive overnight, especially when the weather is poor or foggy and have even been known to fly into or land on high-rise buildings. I once encountered a bird that had become completely disorientated and was wandering down a sidewalk in Bishopsgate, London as I arrived for work early one November morning and also remember a colleague (braver than me) rescuing one from a window ledge on the 36th floor of a tower in Moorgate !

Participation in our winter survey was far greater than anticipated and 66 sites were surveyed, the data reviewed below being from the period 22nd October 2022 until 29th March 2023 with 104 sightings of birds recorded (36 in 2022 and 68 in 2023). The highest numbers from any one location recorded were 18+ flying out of their roost at Warden Great Wood on 2nd January 2023, with 15 noted there a couple of days later. The highest count noted from The Lodge, a traditional wintering site for the species was eight on 29th January when a group of 13 observers gathered to count them leaving their roost late evening after sunset. Whilst it is difficult to provide any degree of accuracy when assessing the population involved, there were a minimum of 110 birds noted at different sites collectively around the County.

The table at the end of this article provides details of the highest counts at the sites where most birds were surveyed, albeit there were many sites where only one or two birds were observed. This doesn't necessarily mean that there were only one or two birds on site, as the birds tend to fly fast and relatively low and in random directions out to their feeding sites which might be in different and multiple locations from their roost. Equally, birds may also vary their feeding areas at night, making it difficult to count exact numbers, given they tend to fly out at the very last tinge of light in the sky, often over a very short period of time. It seemed to this observer at least, that the best time to view Woodcocks was about 40 minutes after sunset and to be facing in the direction of where the sun had set, on a calm, clear and settled evening, then concentrating hard for 20 minutes or so, to stand the best chance of picking up a sighting. Binoculars were not particularly helpful, more so the keen eye, capable of quickly picking up the fast flight of an emerging bird.

Birds were not always noted in woodland areas though, with one observer having the bizarre experience of seeing a bird flying out of a former school in Bedford before disappearing. There were also good numbers of Tawny Owls and a few bats noted during observations, all of which is valuable information. My thanks to everyone who volunteered to help survey a local wood or potential likely space for the species during last winter and to all of you who added your own observations to BirdTrack. Nearly 60 people provided sightings and the results have been very interesting.

I intend to repeat the survey again this year to try and gauge whether winter 2022-23 was an exceptional year for wintering Woodcock, as there seemed to be birds in many locations, but this may, perhaps, be a result of the excellent level of participation and keen observers' eyes. If you wish to take part, the survey

will be running from 1st November 2023 until 31st March 2024 although if you are lucky enough to see a bird outside of these times, please either add your record to BirdTrack or send me an email to recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk or a WhatsApp message to 07753 411786. I know that the Google form used last year was not everyone's cup of tea and I am thinking about an easier way of providing details - albeit the information provided on the Google form was excellent and what was required. The full moon in November this year will be on the 27th so perhaps a good day to mark your diaries.

Location	Date	No of Woodcocks	Time window	Comments
Warden Great Wood	02/01/2023	18+	16:30 to 17:05	All flew out of the wood around dusk heading east
Warden Great Wood	04/01/2023	15	16:30 to 17:05	As above
RSPB The Lodge	29/01/2023	8	16:50 to 17:40	Mainly flying out of woodland heading E and NE
Sandy Smith NR	07/02/2023	5	17:10 to 18:00	Seen singly flying south or south-east.
Pegsdon Hills	15/12/2022	4	N/K	-

Peter Nash, County Recorder

50 YEARS AGO – BEDFORDSHIRE BIRD REPORTS

I thought it would be interesting to share some memories of the birds found in the County during 1973 from the annual report. There were some notable firsts for the County, some familiar species were quite rare and, sadly, some have now ceased to be present as breeders and are only occasional passerines in 2023. The County also saw several feral and exotic records, the latter of which must be assumed to have been escapes – similar, perhaps to some of today's sightings, if not so frequent or exotic ! The following are extracts from the report:

During the summer, Black Redstarts bred successfully in the county for the first time, and Canada Geese and Ringed Plovers continued to spread as breeding birds. On the other hand, there were no breeding records of Firecrest and Red-backed Shrikes seem to have permanently deserted us.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* - one was picked up exhausted at Biggleswade Common on 4th September and released on the Norfolk coast the following day.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* - an adult was found shot at Caddington in August (date unknown); the head was preserved.

Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* - one at Wyboston GP on 9th December had almost certainly escaped from captivity; it had gone by the following morning.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* - one at Pegsdon Hills on 26th October coincided with a large influx on the east and south coasts.

Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae* - about ten pairs of feral birds in Luton Hoo Park raised a total of five young. Up to three males, including a young bird, seen in Charle Wood. Also known to be present in Maulden Wood and the Old Warden area.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* - reported during March – July at seven localities; several pairs bred at Maulden Wood and three pairs at Sandy Lodge (at least one successful). Up to six shot in a day on

autumn shoots at Luton Hoo Park. The bird shot near Toddington in December 1972 had been ringed as a juvenile on 5th November 1972, at Kaergard Plantage (Jutland), Denmark

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* - single pairs bred at three localities on the greensand belt, and two birds were heard churring on several dates at a fourth site; records extended from 30th May to 26th July.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* - at the 1972 site in Luton, a pair hatched four young, but two died. The two surviving young emerged from the nest on 16th June and the family left the site about two weeks later. This was the first county record of successful breeding. A singing male was later reported in the centre of Luton in July but this could not be confirmed and it is not known whether there is any connection with the breeding birds.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* - records were received only from Old Warden, where four males were recorded on 6th May and four pairs subsequently held territories in 200 acres. It is hoped that this lack of records does not indicate a marked decrease. All records for 1974 are required.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* - what appears to have been a male was reported at Stagsden the manager of the Bird Gardens from 23rd to 26th December; however, without written notes this can be regarded only as a 'probable'. The observer had some previous experience of this species and his verbal description was convincing. Albino sparrow ruled out by black primaries.

Peter Nash, County Recorder

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