

# Bedfordshire Bird Report 2023





# Bedfordshire Bird Report

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This journal is dedicated to the memory of **Terence Ilott**  
a key member of our editorial team, who sadly died suddenly during  
the final stages of putting this edition together

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**Front Cover:** Grasshopper Warbler reeling from scrub at Marston Thrift, April 2023

*Ben Andrew*

**Inside Front Cover:** Little Owl, Wyboston, June 2023

*Ben Andrew*

Lapwing, Broom GP, April 2023

*Steve Blain*

**Back Cover:** Little Bunting, Broom East, October 2023

*Steve Blain*

Short-eared Owl, Thurleigh, January 2024

*Lisa King*





Buzzard, near Bromham, January 2023

*Roy McDonald*



Redwing, Maulden, November 2023

*Richard North*

# Review of the birding year 2023

*Barry Nightingale*

After a relatively quiet 2022, there was more variety during 2023. Making the headlines were just our second records of Radde's Warbler and Little Bunting, one or possibly two Purple Herons and a Ferruginous Duck. Other highlights were our first Red-backed Shrike since 2013, an elusive Great Grey Shrike, Nightjars at two sites, a Ring-necked Duck, three Wood Warblers, a Wryneck, two Yellow-browed Warblers and a Night-heron.

Of great significance was confirmation that a pair of Marsh Harriers raised three young at MCP Wetlands NR, the first successful breeding record in the county. Up to three pairs of Bitterns probably bred, with several birds observed undertaking feeding flights, and Peregrines bred at three sites. However, some of our other species, notably waders, performed less well, including no confirmed breeding records for Redshank and Ringed Plover. Some species that have been fairly regular in the past were totally absent, including Knot and Little Stint, and remarkably it was our first blank year since 1959 for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and the first blank year since 1985 for Turnstone. Surprisingly too, there was no Black Redstart, nor Brent Goose (the first blank year since 2007), Smew (the first blank year since 2009) or White-fronted Goose (the first blank year since 2015). Avian influenza was also apparent, affecting Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns in particular.

**January** in the UK was predominantly wet and windy, with a series of deep Atlantic depressions during the first half of the month. With the winds coming mostly from a south-westerly direction, temperatures remained mild. There was, however, a cold spell mid-month, and it turned into a month of two halves, with much drier and colder weather from then on. It was a particularly sunny January, with sunshine hours in England 140% of average (measured against the period 1991 to 2020). Rainfall in England was 109% of average whilst the mean temperature was 0.8°C above.

With birding in December 2022 finishing very quietly, the New Year continued in much the same way. Despite the keenest birders being out on the opening day, struggling to get their year lists off to a good start, the best they could manage were a Firecrest in Maulden Wood, Chiffchaffs at eight sites, seven Goosanders in Woburn Park, 395 Teals at Black Cat GP and 600 Golden Plovers at Broom East, with a Merlin in that area too. On the 2nd there was another Firecrest, at Flitwick Manor, and at least 18 Woodcocks at Abbey Farm, Old Warden. By the end of the month that species would be found at 24 different sites. There was a Red-crested Pochard at Broom East on the 3rd and 200 Fieldfares there the next day, and then on the 6th a Scaup, presumably the long-stayer from 2022, was at Brogborough Lake. A thermal-imaging camera located the first Jack Snipe of the year, at Broom East, also on the 6th. There were 13 Goosanders at Harrold-Odell CP on the 7th and a Firecrest at Priory CP on the 8th, the same day as a Short-eared Owl at Houghton Brook Pools, with another at MCP Wetlands NR the next day. The situation stayed quiet for a few days, with 110 Greenfinches at Broom East on the 9th being the best of the year, up to 350 Chaffinches in a mixed finch flock at Bushmead

on the 11th, and a couple of good counts of Pied Wagtails, with 110 at Bedford WTW on the 11th and 165 at Harrowden WM on the 12th. In what was to be a quiet first half of the year for them, 60 Lesser Redpolls at Sandy Heath on the 12th also stood out. A Kittiwake showed well at Stewartby Lake on the 12th and there were two decent counts in Woburn Park on the same day, with 52 Red Kites and 15 Goosanders. The first Caspian Gull of the year was at Stewartby Lake on the 13th, Kittiwakes there had increased to two and Teals reached 280 at MCP Wetlands NR. On the 15th there were three Great White Egrets at Biggleswade Common, the most we would get together all year, whilst at Stewartby Lake there were 101 Great Crested Grebes, again the highest count of the year, along with 3,500 Black-headed Gulls, a decent count but one that would be exceeded as the year went on.

Although the weather then turned colder it didn't seem to make birding any more exciting. Diligent counting of some of the more common species in the second half of the month gave some noteworthy results however, including 256 Tufted Ducks at Stewartby Lake, 450 Linnets at Sandy Heath and then a Black-tailed Godwit at Broom East, all on the 20th. On the 21st there were 1,500 Herring Gulls at Brogborough Lake, not only the largest gathering all year but the largest for some years, along with 800 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. There were also 80 Gadwalls at Blunham Lakes and 355 Wigeons at Radwell Lakes, again the best count of the latter all year. More impressive totals included 200 Siskins at Eversholt Lake on the 22nd, 500 Linnets, one of the best counts of the year, and 100 Yellowhammers, both at Sandy Heath on the 26th. A site record total of 385 Mallards at Woburn Park on the 27th was to be the highest of the year anywhere in the county, 200 Chaffinches at Barton Hills on the 28th were



Kittiwake, Stewartby Lake, January 2023

Rod Pattison

impressive, whilst a count of 165 Stock Doves at Tithe Farm, Potton, also on the 28th, wouldn't be exceeded as the year went on. Meanwhile a Long-eared Owl at Flitwick Plantation on the 24th was the only one of the year. An Oystercatcher at Broom East on the 30th was the first for the year, followed by another on the last day of the month, along with two Red-crested Pochards at Priory CP and 187 Skylarks, the best count of those in the year, at Gypsy Lane West at Broom.

**February** in the UK was remarkable for its dryness, being the driest February since 1993, with rainfall across England just 23% of average. It was also a mild month, despite colder spells from the 5th to 9th and from the 23rd onwards, with mean temperatures 1.9°C above average across England. It was also a sunnier than average month for central and eastern England, with sunshine hours 110% of average across England. High pressure was very much the dominant feature of the month, being firmly situated either to the south or east of the UK, the resulting winds being from a mild southerly or westerly direction.

After a fairly uneventful January, February started well, with four Waxwings in Cranfield on the 1st and 2nd. Over the next few days there was a noticeable arrival of Oystercatchers and they would be found at 20 sites by the end of the month. There was a Scaup at Harrold-Odell CP on the 3rd, and then a Greenshank, the first of the year, at Broom East the next day. Red-crested Pochards at Priory CP had increased to three by the 5th, when there was a Water Pipit at Broom South Quarry and 43 Red Kites at Wigmore Valley Park. A count of 104 Gadwalls at Longholme Lake in Bedford on the 8th was to be the best of the year, whilst a Redshank the next day at Meadow Lane GP was the first for 2023. Two good counts on the 11th were 100 Reed Buntings at Water End, Bedford, the highest of the year, and 3,000 Black-headed Gulls at Stewartby Lake, but there were a lot more of those to come. A particularly astute bit of birding occurred at Potton, also on the 11th, when two Redwings of the race *coburni* were identified. There were two decent totals of Lapwings on the 12th, with 850 at Grovebury SP and 800 at Octagon Farm GP, followed by eight Pintails at Brogborough Lake on the 13th, by far the highest count of those in the year. The next day saw two more impressive totals, with 210 Siskins, the highest in 2023, at Sandy Smith NR and 500 Linnets at Henlow Grange, a total that would be equalled but not exceeded as the year went on. More good counts in the next few days included 58 Goldeneyes, the year's peak count, at Brogborough Lake on the 17th, and then two more highs for 2023, with 3,000 Common Gulls and 6,000 Black-headed Gulls at Stewartby Lake on the 18th. At Woburn Park, seven Bewick's Swans were an excellent find on the 19th, but they would only stay for a day, and there wouldn't be many more as the year progressed. One species that is occurring more often is Bearded Tit, and the first of the year were four at Rookery North CIP on the 21st, whilst a Curlew at Grovebury SP on the 22nd was also the first. The long-staying Scaup at Brogborough Lake stayed until the 24th, and would be the last until the autumn (and there wouldn't be many then), but two Ringed Plovers at Broom South Quarry on the 26th were the first to arrive. It was a rather busier day on the 27th, with two Firecrests at Stotfold and one in Ampthill Park, a Red-crested Pochard at Peacock's Lake at Broom, 140 Stock Doves at Meadow Lane GP and two Ringed Plovers at Broom East, all doing their best to bring a rather quiet month to a decent end.



Bewick's Swans, Woburn Park, February 2023

*Josh Matthews*

**March**, overall, was unsettled, wet and dull. The month began colder than normal across the UK, with southern areas in particular having notably low daily minimum temperatures. However, the cool weather was replaced with milder weather for much of the rest of the month, and across England the mean temperature was 1.4°C above average. Overall though, the weather was unsettled, with a succession of frontal systems bringing rain and wind. By mid-month, several counties in the south-east had already experienced their whole-month average rainfall, and then continued to be soaked throughout the rest of the month. Across England the rainfall was 162% above average, and it was the wettest March since 1981, with sunshine hours only 80% of average.

The month opened with seven Jack Snipes at Grovebury SP on the 1st, with 200 Redwings at Water End and 250 Fieldfares at Higham Gobion on the 3rd. At Cranfield there were two Waxwings, presumably long-stayers from the group there in early February. A Great Grey Shrike was found on the 4th at Eyeworth, where it would stay until the 29th, although it could be rather elusive. More Fieldfares were gathering, with 400 at Thurleigh Airfield on the 5th. Also there on the 5th was a Curlew, later increasing to three pairs, two lingering into June, but although they showed some signs of nesting, they were not successful. Also on the 5th were 39 Snipes at Tetworth Hall Estate. A Dunlin at Broom East on the 7th was the first of the year and 135 Yellowhammers at Broom South Quarry on the 9th was the highest count of those in 2023, whilst on the same day 366 Golden Plovers at Grovebury SP were gathering to leave.

So far, temperatures had been low, with significant snowfalls in the north of England, but then the first sign of a change took place around the 9th as high pressure drifted away towards Greenland and was replaced with a series of Atlantic depressions finally making inroads towards the UK. The cold northerlies were replaced by westerlies or





Waxwing, Cranfield, March 2023

*Richard North*

southwesterlies, and that was to be the pattern for almost the rest of the month. It had a noticeable effect on migration too. The best on the 12th were two Black-necked Grebes at Arlesey Blue Lagoon, three Dunlins at Grovebury SP and five Green Sandpipers at Broom South Quarry and then, as temperatures started to rise, the floodgates opened. On the 14th, at Grovebury SP, there were two Curlews and 422 Golden Plovers and one of the first Sand Martins, with another six at Broom East, whilst at Broom South Quarry there was the first Little Ringed Plover, and Green Sandpipers increased there to seven. The next day saw the first Wheatears, at Blows Downs, together with eight Stonechats, a Wheatear at Broom South Quarry and a Little Ringed Plover at Grovebury SP. By the 16th, Stonechats at Blows Downs had increased to 15 and Wheatears to two, whilst there was an Avocet at MCP Wetlands NR, the first Swallow of the year, at Broom East, and a Stone-curlew and two Curlews no-migrated over Biggleswade. Wheatears at Blows Downs increased to five on the 17th, with another at Harrowden WM on that day, and there was a marked arrival of Chiffchaffs, with peaks of eight at Priory CP, and eight at Octagon Farm GP and six at Meadow Lane GP over the next couple of days. On the 18th, 35 Snipes dropped into Broom East, a Red-crested Pochard was at Black Cat GP and there were 26 Sand Martins at Bedford WTW. Going the other way at Black Cat GP, though, was the last Jack Snipe until the autumn.

More mixtures of arrivals and departures occurred over the next few days, with Swallows at Grovebury SP, the last sighting of the long-staying Waxwings at Cranfield and a gathering of 400 Fieldfares at Thurleigh Airfield. The only Rock Pipit of the year

flew over Broom East on the 20th and then there was a brief respite for a couple of days, until the 22nd, when a White Stork was at Priory CP. For a few days three Whooper Swans had been lurking on the Buckinghamshire side of the border, but on the 22nd they switched allegiance and relocated to Harrold. Also, by the 22nd, Chiffchaffs at Priory CP had increased to 14. The next day the same White Stork, or possibly another, was at Blunham and the first White Wagtail was at Potton. Chiffchaffs had increased to 19 at Priory CP by the 24th, and the next day there were at least two Common Scoters nocmiggied over Meppershall, surprisingly the only record of the year, and a Kittiwake at Broom East. A Firecrest was at King's Wood, Heath & Reach on the 27th and two White Wagtails were at Broom South Quarry on the 28th. There was then a bumper end to the month with, on the 29th, the first Common Tern of the year, at Priory CP, and the first House Martins, with 15 at Grovebury SP and 30 at Manor Farm, Beeston. Also on the 29th the first Osprey was at Broom South Quarry, and the first Willow Warblers were at Priory CP, Stewartby Lake, The Lodge and MCP Wetlands NR. Against the incoming tide, the last Woodcock of the spring was at The Lodge on the same day. A pause for breath and then another worthwhile day followed, with the first Yellow Wagtail, at Great Barford Lake, 36 Snipes and 380 Fieldfares still at Tetworth Hall Estate, six Black-tailed Godwits at MCP Wetlands NR and Little Ringed Plovers at five sites. A rewarding month came to a close with the first Little Gull of the year, at MCP Wetlands NR, and 20 Chiffchaffs at Strawberry Hill Farm, but the weather ended on an unsettled note, with widespread showers and strong winds.

**April** was predominantly an unsettled month, with little in the way of consistent warmth, though it was more settled for a time around mid-month. That was followed by a return to rather chilly and unsettled conditions until just before the month end. Temperatures fluctuated somewhat, but averaged out at 0.3°C below average across England. Rainfall was close to average overall for the UK, but with regional variations, with southern and eastern parts of England being rather wet. Across England, rainfall was 114% of average, whilst sunshine hours were 98% of average.

With high pressure centred either to the east or north of the UK for most of the month, winds were mostly from the east or north. At the start of the month, temperatures were subdued and frosts were evident in sheltered parts. Not to be discouraged though, rewarding birding continued as March had finished. On the 1st there were Common Terns at Stewartby Lake, Broom East and Priory CP, 11 Dunlins at Wixams, ten Ruffs at Rookery North CIP and a Kittiwake at Stewartby Lake, whilst the long-staying Whooper Swans at Harrold put in their last appearance. The next day the first Ring Ouzel was at Pegsdon Hills, together with 1,000 Golden Plovers, the last big flock until the autumn, a Firecrest was at The Lodge, Yellow Wagtails were at Rookery North CIP and Broom South Quarry, 150 Sand Martins were at Stewartby Lake and there were still 230 Fieldfares at Thurleigh Airfield. On the 3rd there were Firecrests at Leighton Buzzard WTW and The Lodge, with also the first Woodlark of the year, at Sandy Heath. The 4th was marked by the first Redstart of 2023, at Blows Downs, a Firecrest at King's Wood, Heath & Reach and 50 Siskins at The Lodge, not the last this spring, but the last decent flock. The first Sedge Warbler was found on the 5th, at Fenlake Meadows, an Osprey flew over Broom East and, only the second daily record in a slow arrival, there were two House Martins at Luton Hoo, with another at Broom East. The first Garganeys arrived on the 6th, at Broom East and Fenlake Meadows, and six Ruffs were at Broom East too.



Whitethroat, Brogborough Tip &amp; Pools, April 2023

*Richard North*

On the 7th there was a late, but not the last, Redwing at Pegsdon Hills, and two White Wagtails at Broom South Quarry. There was then another impressive arrival on the 8th, including a Black-tailed Godwit at Black Cat GP, five Little Gulls at Grovebury SP, an Osprey at Broom East, a Redstart at Potton and two Ring Ouzels at Barton Hills, with another at Pegsdon Hills. More Ring Ouzels arrived on the 9th, at Blows Downs and Brogborough Hill, whilst more firsts for the year were a Nightingale at MCP Wetlands NR and Whitethroats at Grovebury SP and Duck End NR, Maulden. Spring migration continued in full flow on the 10th, with the first Grasshopper Warbler, at The Hill House near Biggleswade, a Garganey at Meadow Lane GP, and eight Wheatears, including six of the Greenland race, and eight Yellow Wagtails at Broom South Quarry.

A significant weather depression affected the UK from the 11th to 14th, producing high winds, with the strongest on the 12th. Most parts of the UK saw gusts above 50mph, with gales being reported widely along the coast. The conditions didn't seem to deter new arrivals on the 11th though, with the first Common Sandpiper of the year, together with a Little Gull and 20 Common Terns at Priory CP, Redstarts at Blows Downs and Pegsdon Hills and three Ring Ouzels also at Blows Downs. Also on the 11th, there were Sedge Warblers at Dunstable WTW, Poppy Hill Lakes and Twin Bridges, Blunham, together with a Whitethroat there, with another of the latter also at Stewartby Lake. The 12th saw more arrivals of Wheatears, including ten at Pegsdon Hills, and Sedge Warblers, at Meadow Lane GP and Fenlake Meadows, then an Osprey over Blows Downs and a Common Sandpiper at Gamlingay. Two Goldeneyes at Blunham Lakes, also on the 12th, were getting late. The 13th was rather good for more Redstarts, including four at Blows Downs, Wheatears, including ten at Pegsdon Hills, and Yellow Wagtails, including 15 at Broom South Quarry. Two species making their

entrance to the year list on the 14th were a Cuckoo at Harrold-Odell CP and a Lesser Whitethroat near Chawston, whilst at Stewartby Lake there were 450 Sand Martins and 18 Willow Warblers to add to those already here. The first Arctic Terns arrived the next day, with two at Grovebury SP, but the total passage of those would be very light and short-lived, and the first Garden Warblers arrived, with three at South Mills.

As high pressure began to re-establish itself from the 16th, winds turned briefly to come from the south allowing the temperatures to rise, in some areas reaching 21°C. More Cuckoos made themselves heard on that day, at Sandy Smith NR and Wyboston Lakes. There was a late Brambling at Stewartby Lake, along with 20 Willow Warblers, and five Little Ringed Plovers and eight Yellow Wagtails were at Broom South Quarry. The first Reed Warblers arrived on that day too, with two at Willington GP and another at MCP Wetlands NR, and Wheatears made their mark with eight at Thurleigh Airfield, including five of the Greenland race, and four at Pegsdon Hills. On the 17th Common Terns were found at six sites, there were six Green Sandpipers at Brogborough Tip & Pools and there were six Nightingales at Stewartby Lake. Winds then backed to an easterly from the 18th, resulting in eastern and central counties being hit with showers and thunderstorms, probably responsible for a mini-fall of Bar-tailed Godwits, with ten at Stewartby Lake and seven at Broom East. It was a reasonable day too for Common Terns, with at least 25 at Priory CP (along with an Arctic Tern), and nine at Meadow Lane GP. The 19th saw two Common Cranes heading north-east over Biggleswade, and the first Hobby of the year, at Coronation CP, together with three Little Gulls, three Black-tailed Godwits, 30 Bar-tailed Godwits and four Little Gulls, all at Stewartby Lake, and yet more Bar-tailed Godwits, with 13 at Fenlake Meadows and 54 at Broom South Quarry. The next day saw the first Wood Sandpiper of the year, at East Hyde, whilst the last Redwing until the autumn was at MCP Wetlands NR.



Grey Plover, Wixams, April 2023

Steve Blain





Black-necked Grebe, Brogborough Tip &amp; Pools, April 2023

Steve Blain

Weather conditions turned unsettled and cool from the 21st, with all parts subject to showers or longer spells of rain up to the end of the month. That didn't put off the first Swifts making it though, with 28 at Broom East, together with 32 Bar-tailed Godwits moving through, but the star of the day was a Hen Harrier there, the only one for the year. A good mix of comings and goings on the 22nd included the last Golden Plovers until the autumn, with 17 at Grovebury SP, together with five Greenshanks and 100 House Martins there, and 12 Curlews at Rookery North CLP. Also on the 22nd there were 30 Fieldfares at Pegsdon Hills, the last Arctic Tern of the year, at Stewartby Lake, the first Whinchat, at Shortstown, and two Wood Sandpipers at Wixams, which also attracted a Grey Plover on the 23rd. On the 25th a Common Crane was at Broom East, there were four Whinchats at Chimney Corner CLP, seven Hobbies at Coronation CLP, and the first Turtle Dove of the year, at Lidlington. A Black-necked Grebe at Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 26th was well watched until the 29th, but it would be the last of the year. The last Merlin until October was at Broom East on the 27th and the first Whimbrel of the year was at MCP Wetlands NR on the 28th. An Avocet flew over MCP Wetlands NR on the 29th, the last Brambling until October was at Flitwick Moor, whilst the last Whinchat until August, after a very short spring passage period, was at Brogborough Tip & Pools. Finally, on the 30th, to round off a very satisfactory month, there was a Firecrest at King's Wood, Houghton Conquest and 61 Common Terns, the largest group of the year, at Willington GP.

The start of **May** was quite settled and fine, but the weather soon turned much more unsettled from the south-west, with widespread spells of rain between the 4th and 11th. There were, though, widespread regional differences, with the monthly rainfall across England being 68% of average, and sunshine hours being 113% of average across the

month. Temperatures were above expectations for the majority of the time, and across England for the month they were 0.7°C above the mean.

May opened with a bang, with a Hoopoe in a private garden in Maulden from the 1st until the 4th. Like many of the scarcer species in 2023 though, it was the only one of the year. The last Ring Ouzels, two at Bison Hill, and the last Whimbrels of the spring, two at Priory CP, were on the 2nd, whilst a Fieldfare at Pegsdon Hills was late but was not the last. There were to be very few Black Terns through the county in 2023, with the first of these at Coronation CLP, with two on the 3rd, together with nine Dunlins there. The next day was rewarding, with four Common Sandpipers at Lodge Farm, Chicksands and three at Priory CP, three Greenshanks, two Ruffs and a Wood Sandpiper at Wixams, and two Black Terns at Harrold-Odell CP. There was another Greenshank and a Red-crested Pochard at Black Cat GP, where the latter would stay until 2nd June, two Wood Sandpipers at Broom East and a singing Woodlark at The Lodge, where it would perform until the 16th. All that though was trumped on the 5th by a Golden Oriole at Legrave Marsh, and there were to be two more as the weeks panned out. Hobbies increased to 12 at Coronation CLP and the first Spotted Flycatchers of the year were at Cooper's Hill and Ampthill Park. But then we had a run of departures, with the last Osprey of the spring circling over Woburn on the 7th, and on the 8th the last spring Lesser Redpoll, at Broom East, and the last Snipe, at Meadow Lane GP. On the 9th there were heavy thunderstorms and locally torrential rain, causing flooding in many southern and eastern areas of England, and not much new was found. On the 10th there were nocturnal recordings of Dunlin and Quail over Sandy and a Night-heron over



Hoopoe, Water End, Maulden, May 2023

Richard North



Black Terns and a Common Tern at Coronation CIP, May 2023

*Peter Nash*

Biggleswade. The next few days saw some positive movements of aerial feeders, including Sand Martins, with 120 at Grovebury SP and 170 at Broom East on the 11th, and Swifts, with 90 at Priory CP on the 12th. There were more Sand Martins too, with 250 at Grovebury SP, also Swallows, with 300 at Grovebury SP and 100 at Priory CP, and yet more Swifts, with 120 at Coronation CIP, all on the 13th. On the same day there were two Firecrests at Flitwick Manor and a Redstart at The Lodge. A visit on the 14th to Strawberry Hill Farm yielded some incredible counts, with 43 singing Blackcaps, 52 Whitethroats and 59 Willow Warblers. Also on the 14th, there were 18 Reed Warblers at Priory CP, the highest count of those in the year, and the first Crossbill of the year, at King's Wood, Heath & Reach. The 15th saw high counts too, of Sedge Warbler, with eight at Dunstable WTW and 11 at Fenlake Meadows.

Towards mid-month things settled down, with high pressure building. This period was also rather sunny for many areas, in contrast to much of the rest of the spring, with the fine and settled weather lasting for the rest of the month. A Glossy Ibis at Harrowden WM on the 16th, the only one of the year, no doubt enjoyed the settled weather, but it didn't stay. There was a Firecrest at Cooper's Hill and a late female Goldeneye at Blunham Lakes, where they have bred in the recent past, both on the 18th. With most of the summer visitors now settling in, and the wintering species mostly gone, birding activity started to slow down. On the 21st there was a pair of Garganeys at Priory CP, three Ruffs at Broom East and a Firecrest at Lowe's Wood, whilst on the 22nd the last Redstart until August at least was at Toddington, and a Quail was nocmiggged over Sandy. Sightings on the 23rd were rather an odd mix, with the last Fieldfare, at Old Warden, 120 Swifts at Priory CP, a Crossbill at The Lodge, a Wood Warbler at Deepdale, Potton and a Great Black-backed Gull at Rookery North CIP. An Avocet was nocmiggged over Meppershall on the 24th, our second Golden Oriole of the spring was in Deepdale Woods on the 26th and the last Goosanders until October flew over Priory CP on the

27th. On the same day there were seven Black Terns, the largest flock of the year, at Harrold-Odell CP, but even more impressive was a count of 27 Hobbies at Coronation CIP. The wind then moved around to the north-east and it turned cold. The two Garganeys at Priory CP stayed until the 28th, and were the last until September, and then the month ended with an interesting selection of waders, including a Grey Plover at Grovebury SP, a Sanderling at Broom East and a Greenshank at Houghton Brook Pools, all on the 29th, plus a Black Tern at Black Cat GP, with three more at Priory CP on the 30th. There was then a Greenshank at Henlow Grange and a Sanderling and 14 Ringed Plovers at Wixams, all on the 31st, to end what had been another good month.

**June** began fine and settled, with temperatures around average, but from the 9th it became warm and humid, and rather less settled, with thunderstorms breaking out in many areas. It remained very warm or hot for most of the rest of the month, but cooled down again in the final few days. Across England the mean temperature was 2.3°C above average, making it the warmest June in a series from 1884. Rainfall was below normal in many areas, with East Anglia particularly dry, and for England overall rainfall was 63% of average. Sunshine was above normal everywhere, with 138% of average across England, making it the fourth sunniest June in a series since 1910, and the sunniest since 1954.

Attention in June focussed on breeding species, the highlight of which was confirmation that Marsh Harriers bred for the first time in the county. Bearded Tits almost certainly bred, in at least one site, and Pochards and Gadwalls bred successfully. Our waders, though, had another poor breeding season. In addition, avian influenza seriously affected some species, particularly Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns.

In what is sometimes a rather dull migration month, on the opening day a Golden Oriole – what a great year it was for them – was in Sandy, before it headed towards Biggleswade Common and then The Lodge. There was a noticeable movement of Swifts too, with 100 at Broom East and 90 at Priory CP, whilst at Wixams there were still ten Ringed Plovers. On the 2nd there were single Crossbills at The Lodge and Myers Farm, Potton, whilst the long-staying Red-crested Pochard at Black Cat GP was last seen on this day. A Nightjar was recorded at the New Heath, The Lodge, firstly on the 3rd, then subsequently on the 13th and 23rd. By the 4th there were probably four pairs of Little Ringed Plovers at Broom South Quarry. Swifts continued to move through, with at least 100 at Priory CP for several days, before peaking at 160 there on the 6th. A Crossbill was at South Mills on the 10th and then a Nightjar was at Stotfold on the 11th. At The Lodge a Siskin on the 15th was on an intriguing date, followed by a Quail at Melchbourne on the 16th. Then on the 17th, just like buses, two excellent rarities turned up on the same day, with a Red-backed Shrike at Quest CIP and a Purple Heron at Rookery North CIP, which would linger around the clay pits until the 26th, visiting Coronation CIP and Quest CIP during its stay. Another late Siskin was at Henlow on the 18th, and an even later Goldeneye was at Brogborough Lake on the 19th. There were two Green Sandpipers at Broom East on the 20th and two at Broom South Quarry on the 24th. Common Sandpipers were evident too, with singles at Houghton Brook Pools on the 22nd, and at Dunstable WTW on the 23rd, which would then stay to the end of the month. There were also two Little Ringed Plovers at Dunstable WTW on the 23rd, with then four on the 27th. There was a Curlew at Broom South Quarry on the 24th, a Crossbill at King's Wood, Heath & Reach the next day and then an impressive count of Whitethroats, 14





Purple Heron, Coronation CIP, June 2023

Steve Blain

at Houghton Brook Pools, on the 26th. The last Nightingale of the year was on the 30th, at Coronation CIP, although no doubt others lurked unseen and unheard somewhat later than that.

**July** was an unsettled month, often cool, dull, windy and with a lot of rainfall, in stark contrast to June. Through the month, a succession of frontal systems made regular west to east progress across the UK. The mean temperature for the month was 0.4°C below average across England. Rainfall was well above average throughout the UK, in fact it was the wettest July ever recorded, and for England was 181% of the mean, the largest positive divergence in the year. Sunshine was below normal, and across England was 79% of average.

A rather quiet start to the month, during some dismal weather, included a Black-tailed Godwit at MCP Wetlands NR and a Crossbill over Wixams on the 2nd, and 200 Sand Martins at Broom East the next day. The last Cuckoo of the year was at Priory CP on the 4th and then a Curlew was nocomigged over Meppershall on the 5th. Although there was a brief very warm spell around the 7th to 9th, that soon broke down with thunderstorms, some severe. The jet stream had generally shifted much further south than in June, with the weather often rather autumnal in character, so any hints of drier and warmer weather proved short-lived. It did, however, spark a bit more birding interest, with a Greenshank at Priory CP on the 7th, followed on the 8th by a Whimbrel at MCP Wetlands NR, a Wood Sandpiper at Broom South Quarry and 50 Common Terns at Stewartby Lake. More waders were coming through, with a Ruff and four Common Sandpipers at Grovebury SP, six Green Sandpipers at Broom South Quarry and at least two Whimbrels nocomigged over Meppershall, all on the 9th. The 10th



Grey Heron with Brown Rat, New Cut, Bedford, July 2023

*Rosemary Brind*

registered three Greenshanks at Lodge Farm Lake, a Wood Sandpiper at Dunstable WTW and a Dunlin at Grovebury SP. Two Quails made their presence heard near Bolnhurst on the 11th, before things fell quiet again. A Black-tailed Godwit and four Common Sandpipers were at Dunstable WTW on the 13th and a Whimbrel was at Upper Caldecote on the 15th. Grovebury SP then had a couple of fairly rewarding days, with a Wood Sandpiper on the 18th and an Osprey, the first this autumn, and a Black-tailed Godwit on the 19th. A Crossbill was at Upper Caldecote and a Greenshank was at Broom East on the 21st, with then 200 Sand Martins at Grovebury SP on the 22nd. There were five Common Sandpipers at Grovebury SP on the 24th, followed by 51 Yellow-legged Gulls there on the 25th, whilst elsewhere the first Snipe of the autumn appeared, together with a Greenshank, at Broom East. Black-tailed Godwits increased to two at Dunstable WTW and a Wood Warbler was at Broom East on the 27th. Both Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits were at Broom East on the 28th, whilst a Curlew was at Wrest Park on the 30th. A rather disappointing month finished with a Wood Warbler at Henlow Grange and 100 Swifts at Dunstable WTW on the 31st.

**August** was a rather mixed and unsettled month, continuing the theme of July. Low pressure systems mostly dominated the weather, with any brief spells of high pressure, bringing settled weather, generally short-lived in nature. Summer warmth was mostly confined to southern and eastern areas, with the average across England 0.1°C less than the mean for the month. Two named storms, Antoni on the 5th and Betty on the 18th to 19th, brought unseasonably wet and windy weather to many parts of the UK, although across England rainfall was 96% of average. Sunshine was below average across England, with 93% of the mean.



Chiffchaff, Sandy Smith NR, July 2023

*Richard North*

The first week was quiet, with the last two Black-tailed Godwits of the year at Broom South Quarry, and 100 Swallows at Poppy Hill Farm, on the 1st. There were four Common Sandpipers and three Green Sandpipers at Dunstable WTW on the 2nd, and then more Common Sandpipers on the 3rd, with one at Meadow Lane GP and two at Broom East. On the same day there were two Green Sandpipers at Broom South Quarry and the first Wheatear of the autumn, at Houghton Brook Pools. On the 5th there was a Common Sandpiper at MCP Wetlands NR and a Snipe at Broom East. There were still 30 Yellow-legged Gulls at Grovebury SP on the 6th, but that day was most noticeable for a decent haul of waders at Broom South Quarry, with two Common Sandpipers, two Dunlins, three Green Sandpipers and a Snipe. Then on the 8th there were three Crossbills at Biggleswade Common and 1,000 Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Broom South Quarry. More of those were to follow. On the 9th, 16 Whitethroats at Sandy Heath was a decent count and there were two Wheatears at Pegsdon, as birders started to search the hilltops. The list for the 10th was rather more satisfying, with 47 Yellow-legged Gulls and five Curlews at Grovebury SP, two Cattle Egrets at Broom East and two impressive counts of Mallard, with 172 at Priory CP and 210 at Broom East. On the 11th there were six Green Sandpipers at Dunstable WTW. More noteworthy counts on the 13th included 850 Canada Geese at Grovebury SP, the highest total for the year, a pre-roost gathering of 1,500 Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Broom South Quarry and 38 Little Grebes at Southill Lake, the best count of those all year. At least two Whimbrels were nocmiggged over Meppershall on the 14th, when there were eight Green Sandpipers at Broom South Quarry and five Caspian Gulls at Grovebury SP. On the 15th there were two Sandwich Terns, the only ones of the year, at Grovebury SP, the first autumn Redstart was at Chicksands, a Wheatear was at Pegsdon Hills and a pre-roost gathering

of 300 Swallows was at Rookery North CLP. A warm southerly airflow established on the 16th, when the highlight was a Honey-buzzard at The Lodge, not surprisingly the only one of 2023. On the 18th there were three Black Terns at Stewartby Lake (there would be very few this autumn), a Tree Pipit at Pegsdon Hills and seven Common Sandpipers at Grovebury SP. On the 20th there were more Common Sandpipers, with five at Broom South Quarry, plus the first Golden Plovers of the autumn, with at least two nocmiggled over Meppershall, and four Wheatears at Thurleigh Airfield.

Into the last ten days of the month, the pace started to pick up. There was a Spotted Redshank, the only one in 2023, at Broom East on the 21st, whilst on the next day there was a Ruff at Broom South Quarry. On the 23rd a Pied Flycatcher, remarkably the only one of the year, was at Ampthill Park, and there were Redstarts at Myers Farm, Potton and Bradgers Hill, Luton. The next day, the last Little Ringed Plover of the year departed Broom South Quarry, and two Crossbills were noted over Luton during a visible migration session. Single Cattle Egrets appeared at Grovebury SP and MCP Wetlands NR on the 25th, while on the 26th the first autumn Siskin and two Redstarts were at Pegsdon Hills and the last Wood Sandpiper of the year was at Cuckoo Bridge Lake. A Greenshank at Houghton Brook Pools, seven Crossbills at Priory CP and 20 Yellow Wagtails at MCP Wetlands NR were the highlights of the 27th, but then a Purple Heron, maybe the same as earlier in the year, took the honours, appearing at Willington GP on the 28th.

During **September** high pressure influenced the UK's weather for the first ten days, bringing fine, sunny, dry conditions and the most significant spell of warmth since June. From the 4th to 10th, the UK experienced a significant heatwave with temperatures exceeding 30°C somewhere in the UK for seven consecutive days, a September record. The second half of the month saw an abrupt change to much more unsettled and autumnal weather with Atlantic low-pressure systems bringing westerly winds and significant rain. Maximum and minimum temperatures for the month overall were well above average, particularly across the southern half of England, with the average temperature across England 2.7°C above the mean. For England and Wales this was the warmest September on record. Sunshine hours were 112% of average, whilst rainfall was 131% of average.

After a rather stop and start previous month, September would provide a steadier stream of interesting sightings. On the 1st, Garden Warblers at Harrold-Odell CP and Myers Farm, Potton were almost the last of the year, apart from an outlier lingering to November, whilst two Curlews and a Whimbrel were nocmiggled over Meppershall, the latter being definitely the last. The next day saw the last Common Terns of the year, with 11 at Stewartby Lake. A Curlew was at Heath & Reach and 50 Yellow Wagtails were at Broom East on the 6th, with the last Sedge Warbler of the year, at Houghton Brook Pools, on the 7th. A lingering Greenshank at Myers Farm, Potton on the 8th would be the last until the end of October. The last Redstart of the year was at Brogborough Hill on the 10th and, while a group of 100 Swallows at Jordans Mill on that day was not the last, it was one of the last big gatherings of the year. Clearly the best of that day though was a party of 18 Cattle Egrets at Grovebury SP, the largest flock ever in the county. One of those would linger until the 12th.

Weather fronts moving south-east across the UK on the 11th to 12th brought heavy rain and thunderstorms, with much local flooding. On the 11th, two Black Terns at





Lesser Redpoll, The Lodge, September 2023

Steve Blain

Stewartby Lake were the last in what had been a poor year for them, but nine Lesser Redpolls at The Lodge were the first to return, in what would be a good autumn for them. What would be, for many, one of the highlights of this season was a Wryneck found at Pegsdon Hills on the 12th, where it would linger until the 16th. A precise count of 131 Goldfinches at the same location on the 12th was the highest of the year. There was a definite emphasis though on departing summer visitors, with 30 Blackcaps at MCP Wetlands NR, the last Turtle Dove, at Water End on the 12th, and the last Swifts, two at Wigmore Valley Park on the 13th. On the same day there were eight Dunlins at Priory CP, the highest autumn count. Two Reed Warblers at Houghton Brook Pools on the 14th were getting late, but were not the last, but a Tree Pipit at Fenlake Meadows on that day was. Noddy recording at Meppershall on the 15th picked up an Oortolan Bunting and a Curlew, whilst a Cattle Egret was found at MCP Wetlands NR, where it would stay until the 22nd. The first Garganey of the autumn was at MCP Wetlands NR and 22 Blackcaps were moving through at Brogborough Hill, all on the 17th, whilst steady coverage at MCP Wetlands NR turned up the only Curlew Sandpiper for the year on the 19th, staying until the 21st.

The second half of the month saw wind and rain impacts from Atlantic low-pressure systems, with more flooding, particularly in Wales on the 19th and in Scotland and the north of England on the 20th. The last Lesser Whitethroat of the year was at Broom East on the 21st, and whilst 100 Sand Martins at Priory CP on the same day were not the last, it was a decent late count. The next day, at Meadow Lane GP, the last Grasshopper Warbler, the latest ever in the county, and the last Reed Warbler were making their exits. On the 23rd there were 98 Cormorants at Coronation CIP, the best of the year, 23



Whinchat, Broom South Quarry, September 2023

Steve Blain

Yellow Wagtails at MCP Wetlands NR and a single Red-crested Pochard at Rookery North CIP. Three counts on the 24th were not the highest in the year, but were nonetheless noteworthy, with 520 Canada Geese at Grovebury SP, 274 Mallards at Woburn Park and 635 Greylag Geese at Broom East, whilst five Garganeys at Luton Hoo was the latest and largest count of those. More species making their last appearances were a Willow Warbler at MCP Wetlands NR and a Redshank at Gypsy Lane West, Broom, both on the 26th. Storm Agnes affected the UK from the 27th to 28th, bringing more strong winds and heavy rain. A Spotted Flycatcher at The Lodge on the 28th was the last. On the last day of the month and of what had been an interesting period, there were 50 Swallows at Thurleigh Airfield, and then over The Pinnacle, during a vismig session, there were 147 Meadow Pipits, five Great Black-backed Gulls and six Lesser Redpolls, with others of the latter also over Luton and Blows Downs.

In the first half of **October** England and Wales were influenced by high pressure over the near-continent, with a particularly warm and sunny spell of weather from the 6th to 10th, reaching 25°C in the south-east during the 7th to 10th, more than 8°C above average for the time of year. Fronts sweeping across the UK from the 12th to 13th brought widespread wet and cooler weather, and a final end to any lingering late summer warmth, and then the second half of the month was unsettled and very wet at times. Overall, across England, the rainfall was 163% of average, sunshine hours 92% of average and the mean temperature 1.5°C above average, and for the UK as a whole it would be the warmest October ever recorded.

Thunderstorms crossing the east of England on the 1st resulted in power cuts to thousands of properties and some flooding, but birdwise the month opened in some style with a Ferruginous Duck on the 1st, our first since 2015, at Broom South Quarry. It would stay until the 10th. Also on the 1st the last Sand Martins and last Whitethroats of the year were at Sandy Heath, and there was a Common Sandpiper at Gypsy Lane West, Broom, which would stay until the 3rd. Other than that, it stayed quiet, with most of the activity, not surprisingly, focussed on Broom South Quarry where, over the next few days, the list included 100 Golden Plovers on the 5th, 1,200 Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the 6th and the last Hobbies of the year, two on the 7th. Replacing departing summer visitors were some of the first winter arrivals, with 16 Bramblings at Sandy (there would only be a few others), 30 Fieldfares at Broom East and a widespread influx of Redwings, with 78 over The Pinnacle, 70 at Broom South Quarry, 50 at Sandy, 45 at Priory CP and 31 at Meppershall, all on the 8th. On the same day the last Ringed Plover and Ruff of the year were at Broom East, and then a remarkable flock of 44 Mandarin Ducks was at Southill Lake – where did they come from, and where did they go to? On the 9th, the last Wheatear was at Pegsdon Hills, a House Martin at Potton was getting late, but was not the last, and there were 485 Redwings there too, with another 200 at Upper Caldecote. A late Whinchat was at Houghton Brook Pools on the 10th, with the last at Shefford on the 11th, but then to balance that the first Goosander arrived on the 12th, at Harrold-Odell CP, the same day as the year's largest flock of Greylag Geese, 1,050 at Broom East. A Cattle Egret was at Meadow Lane GP on the 13th, with 150 Barnacle Geese the next day at Willington GP being the highest count of those for the year. The 15th saw a mix of arrivals and departures, with the last House Martin, at Broom GP, and the last Osprey, one heading south over Haynes West End, countered by the first Merlin of the autumn, at Clophill. Two decent counts on the 16th were 110 Skylarks at Totternhoe and 500 Linnets at Sandy Heath. There were more high totals the next day too, with a strong passage of Redwings: 741 over The Pinnacle, 177 at Potton and 138 at Priory CP. More Fieldfares were arriving, with a peak of 98 over The Pinnacle, but perhaps the highlight for the watchers there were two Hawfinches. Single Pintails dropped into Broom South Quarry and Harrold-Odell CP on the 18th, the same day as a Merlin at Strawberry Hill Farm. The only Scaup of the autumn, at Brogborough Lake on the 20th to 21st, was followed by the first returning Goldeneye there on the 21st, together with 595 Tufted Ducks.

October is a month of high expectations, although so far it had been rather disappointing. But then, also on the 21st, came only our second-ever Radde's Warbler, found at King's Wood, Houghton Conquest. Typical for the species though, it showed only briefly. Elsewhere, on what was a good day, were two Whooper Swans at Dunstable WTW, a Firecrest at Houghton Hall Park and two Crossbills over The Pinnacle. The first autumn Ring Ouzel was at Potton on the 22nd, the last Greenshank of the year was at Sandy Heath Quarry, the last Swallows were at Stewartby Lake and 44 Snipes were at Broom East. On the 23rd a Yellow-browed Warbler was found dead at Upper Dean after it had flown into a window, the last Yellow Wagtail was at Dunstable WTW, whilst some respectable counts included 130 Siskins at Sandy Smith NR and 175 Teals at Grovebury SP, alongside a Red-crested Pochard there. The last autumn Ring Ouzel was nocommited over Meppershall on the 24th and then it all went rather quiet again. Two Cattle Egrets flew over Willington on the 26th. The next day a Shag, a scarce visitor to the county



Radde's Warbler, King's Wood, Houghton Conquest, October 2023

*Paul Wright*

these days, was at MCP Wetlands NR, where it would please the crowds until 11th November. There were 200 Golden Plovers at Beeston on the 28th. Another major highlight was found the next day at Broom East, with only our second-ever record of Little Bunting. Some extra lucky observers also had a Short-eared Owl being mobbed by corvids whilst they were watching the bunting. Elsewhere, at Thurleigh Airfield, there was a Cattle Egret and a Merlin also on the 29th. So the month, which had been a bit stop and start at times, came to a respectable end.

The first half of **November** was unsettled and stormy at times, with the ongoing influence of Atlantic low-pressure systems, strong winds and heavy rain of most note. Named storms contributed to mounting rainfall accumulations through a very wet autumn in some areas, with 30 to 50mm of rain falling across southern England from storm Ciarán. In contrast, the second half of November saw rather quieter autumnal weather with a continued mild Atlantic influence until the last week. However, from the 24th, a northerly airflow introduced drier but much colder weather, with some hard frosts and some wintry precipitation, particularly in the north and east. Rainfall in England was 120% of average, with sunshine hours 116% of average, and the mean temperature 0.2°C above average.

Apart from the stormy weather, November opened very quietly, with just seven Crossbills and 100 Lesser Redpolls around the New Heath at The Lodge on the 1st. There were 615 Tufted Ducks at Brogborough Lake, the highest count of the year, on the 3rd,



and good numbers of Black-headed Gulls too, with 2,250 there on the 4th, followed the next day by a Yellow-browed Warbler at Blunham. It was well watched but would only stay for the day. At Thurleigh Airfield, also on the 5th, there were 727 Fieldfares and a Merlin, which would show regularly there into December. On the 6th a Garden Warbler, seen and photographed at The Lodge, was not only late but was our latest ever. A mixed bag elsewhere included 800 Coots, the highest count for the year, at Brogborough Lake, 1,590 Fieldfares and 3,400 Woodpigeons over The Pinnacle and a Short-eared Owl at East Hyde. There was a similar picture on the 7th, with 1,400 Woodpigeons and 1,425 Fieldfares over The Pinnacle, and 550 Herring Gulls at Brogborough Lake. The last Dunlin of the year was at Henlow on the 10th, there were still 100 Siskins at Sandy Smith NR and a Short-eared Owl was at Staughton Moor. The 11th saw Merlins at Poppy Hill Lakes and near Biggleswade, the first autumn Woodcock, at Brogborough Hill, and Golden Plovers, with 300 at Grizzly's Café fields near Beeston and 250 over The Pinnacle, and yet more Woodpigeons there, with 2,300 over. On the 12th there were two Short-eared Owls at Thurleigh Airfield; they would remain, and be joined by others, until the month end. Respectable counts of winter thrushes on the 14th included, at Strawberry Hill Farm, 400 Fieldfares and 150 Redwings, along with a Merlin, whilst at Battlesden there were 300 Fieldfares and 300 Redwings. It was then the turn of Golden Plovers to impress, with 700 at Grizzly's Café fields on the 15th, 910 at Upper Caldecote on the 16th, and then, building to 2,000, the highest count of the year, at Grizzly's Café fields on the 18th. On that day too, the first Jack Snipe of the winter was at Broom East, whilst at Thurleigh Airfield Short-eared Owls had increased to three.

Storm Babet on the 18th to 21st resulted in the most severe and widespread disruptive weather impacts of 2023 so far, with multiple severe flood warnings issued. A roost of Red Kites at Exeter Wood had been increasing as the month went on, and reached 60



Canada Goose, Harrold-Odell CP, November 2023

*Richard North*



Tufted Ducks, Harrold-Odell CP, November 2023

*Richard North*

by the 21st, whilst another impressive gathering was of 19 Little Egrets at Henlow on the 24th, the largest site count of those in the year. Flooding problems continued for the remainder of the month, including across parts of southern and eastern England, from the prolonged wet weather. Single Woodcocks were at Folly Wood and The Lodge on the 23rd, and a Merlin was near Maulden on the 25th. Some more variety occurred on the 26th, with a Bewick's Swan, a moribund Kittiwake and still 660 Coots at Brogborough Lake, seven Cattle Egrets near Battlesden, and the last Common Sandpiper of the year, with one at Broom South Quarry. At Brogborough Lake on the 28th the earlier Bewick's Swan was replaced by three Whooper Swans, accompanied by 2,000 Black-headed Gulls. A slightly underwhelming month was brought to a close with a count of 998 Redwings in the area of Brogborough Tip & Pools and single Woodcocks at Priory CP and Luton Hoo on the 30th.

The cold snap in late November extended through the first week of **December**, with some very hard frosts. The cold weather was swept away on the 9th to 10th by storms Elin and Fergus which brought very wet, windy and disruptive weather, but much milder Atlantic air, including some exceptionally mild nights. Thereafter, the weather continued very mild through most of the month, but dull and wet at times with persistent rain from a succession of Atlantic fronts and mounting rainfall accumulations. The average temperature across England for the month was 2.1°C above the mean, with sunshine hours just 58% of average and rainfall 158% of average, whilst across the UK it was the wettest month ever recorded. The month ended with a spell of very unsettled, turbulent weather.

After a rather disappointing November, hopes for a more eventful December were high. It started well, with 21 Waxwings at Silsoe on the 2nd, some of which would linger to the 4th. At Priory CP there were three Ruddy Ducks briefly on the 3rd, whilst eight Bewick's Swans flew over Langford Mill and then over Priory CP, also on the 3rd, but



Goosander, Harrold-Odell CP, November 2023

*Richard North*

they weren't seen to land anywhere. At Brogborough Lake, still on the 3rd, 340 Pochards was the largest count of the year. It was going to be a decent month too for Lesser Redpolls, starting with 100 at The Lodge on the 4th, and Priory CP continued its good run, with a Ring-necked Duck on the 6th. It would stay until Christmas Eve. A hard-weather movement of Lapwings on the 7th included 600 at Priory CP, 360 at Grovebury SP and 110 at Broom East, and then, in what had been a poor year for them, 25 Bramblings were at Pegsdon Hills. There were 300 Fieldfares at Old Warden Tunnel on the 8th, and then 200 in the Meppershall area two days later, when also movements of Redwings included 200 at Brogborough Hill and 115 at Wrest Park. At Harrold-Odell CP there were 14 Goosanders on the 11th, the best count in this half of the year, followed the next day by more Waxwings, with one at Pegsdon and two at The Lodge. A Whooper Swan was at Chimney Corner South Lake on the 13th. The month was settling into a pattern, with 250 Fieldfares in the Meppershall area on the 15th and 300 at Sandy Smith NR, over 500 at MCP Wetlands NR, 700 at Totternhoe and 706 moving south-west over Houghton Brook Pools on the next day. More Waxwings were being found, with two in Bedford on the 15th, three at Potton on the 16th and 18 at Thurleigh Airfield on the 17th. Lesser Redpolls were still making their mark too, with 250 at King's Wood, Heath & Reach on the 16th being the largest flock of the year, the same day as six Crossbills were at Aspley Heath. There was a Merlin at Galley Hill on the 17th, and 23 Goldeneyes at Brogborough Lake on the 20th, the best count of those in this half of the year, along with 743 Coots. By the 22nd the Waxwing flock at Potton had increased to nine, and then to 13 the next day. At The Lodge, on the 22nd, there were 150 Lesser Redpolls, whilst at Priory CP observers continued their rewarding month with two Red-crested Pochards on the 23rd. On the 25th there was a Merlin at Henlow Grange, with one at



Coal Tit, Maulden, November 2023

*Richard North*

Broom South Quarry on Boxing Day, when there were also 304 Fieldfares at Thurleigh Airfield and eight Waxwings in Sandy. Noteworthy counts on the 28th included 120 Snipes, the highest total of the year, and six Jack Snipes at Wixams, nine Cattle Egrets at Grovebury SP and 300 Fieldfares near Old Warden. There were 2,000 Common Gulls and 3,000 Black-headed Gulls at Stewartby Lake on the 29th, when ten Waxwings were found at Ampthill and 18 Waxwings were near Leighton Buzzard. The last day of the year brought matters to a close with four Whooper Swans at Broom South Quarry, still 11 Waxwings at Leighton Buzzard, where they stayed into 2024, 90 Reed Buntings at Broom East, still nine Cattle Egrets at Grovebury SP and some decent flocks of Lesser Redpolls, with 40 at Ampthill Park and 70 at Broom South Quarry.

So ended a real mixed bag of a year, sometimes exhilarating with some long-awaited county rarities. But often there were some uneventful periods, and rather concerning was the absence of former regular species and some further declines for some of our resident birds, including Bullfinch, Marsh Tit and Little Owl, all of which are becoming much more difficult to find. In addition, avian influenza still cast its shadow. On the positive side we received records for 2023 from over 700 contributors, and many impressive counts of the more common species included in the species accounts are the result of many diligent observations from those birders. In addition, they participated in our Garden Bird Surveys, a Winter Woodcock Survey, the Christmas Bird Hunt, and then various BTO-related surveys, including the Breeding Bird Survey, the Heronries Census, the Nest Record Scheme, the Summer Woodcock Survey and the Wetland Bird Survey. For that level of commitment and involvement, in what is a small, inland county, we are very fortunate. In total there were 198 species found in the year, four more than in 2022.



# First and Last Dates for Migrants

	Earliest record since 1946 (1) (exc. 2023)	10 year average earliest 2013–2022	Earliest 2023	Latest record since 1946 (1) (exc. 2023)	10 year average latest 2013–2022	Latest 2023
Garganey (2)	11-Mar-64	06-Apr	06-Apr	22-Nov-09	02-Oct	24-Sep
Swift	07-Apr-11	19-Apr	21-Apr	29-Oct-48	15-Sep	13-Sep
Cuckoo (1)	01-Apr-90	13-Apr	14-Apr	15-Oct-93	24-Aug	04-Jul
Turtle Dove	10-Mar-90	23-Apr	25-Apr	20-Oct-81	15-Sep	12-Sep
Lt. Ringed Plover	05-Mar-22	14-Mar	14-Mar	05-Oct-13	12-Sep	24-Aug
Common Tern	24-Mar-97	04-Apr	29-Mar	04-Nov-14	09-Oct	02-Sep
Arctic Tern	02-Apr-08	17-Apr	15-Apr	07-Nov-16	20-Sep	–
Black Tern	01-Apr-17	23-Apr	03-May	10-Nov-76	13-Sep	11-Sep
Hobby	27-Mar-64	17-Apr	19-Apr	29-Oct-08	11-Oct	07-Oct
Sand Martin	02-Mar-00	16-Mar	14-Mar	27-Oct-61	30-Sep	01-Oct
Swallow (3)	25-Feb-90	24-Mar	16-Mar	30-Nov-86	26-Oct	22-Oct
House Martin (3)	05-Mar-19	30-Mar	29-Mar	08-Dec-48	17-Oct	15-Oct
Willow Warbler	12-Mar-90	30-Mar	29-Mar	30-Nov-97	03-Oct	26-Sep
Sedge Warbler	27-Mar-64	07-Apr	05-Apr	16-Oct-94	16-Sep	07-Sep
Reed Warbler	07-Apr-60	13-Apr	16-Apr	01-Nov-15	07-Oct	22-Sep
G'hopper W'bler	31-Mar-98	14-Apr	10-Apr	03-Sep-99	24-Jul	22-Sep
Garden Warbler	07-Apr-11	16-Apr	15-Apr	10-Oct-10	13-Sep	06-Nov
Lesser W'throat (2)	30-Mar-14	12-Apr	14-Apr	18-Oct-75	25-Sep	21-Sep
Whitethroat (2)	28-Mar-89	10-Apr	09-Apr	30-Oct-10	29-Sep	01-Oct
Ring Ouzel (1)	28-Feb-81	30-Mar	02-Apr	05-Nov-12	27-Oct	24-Oct
Spot. Flycatcher	11-Apr-65	30-Apr	05-May	21-Oct-98	23-Sep	28-Sep
Nightingale (1)	06-Apr-11	15-Apr	09-Apr	31-Aug-92	21-Jun	30-Jun
Black Redstart (2)	05-Mar-83	17-Mar	–	08-Dec-15	27-Nov	–
Redstart	23-Mar-86	07-Apr	04-Apr	05-Nov-19	27-Sep	10-Sep
Whinchat	10-Mar-90	20-Apr	22-Apr	22-Nov-61	07-Oct	11-Oct
Wheatear	05-Feb-67	19-Mar	15-Mar	19-Nov-11	15-Oct	09-Oct
Yellow Wagtail	10-Mar-03	01-Apr	30-Mar	03-Nov-02	04-Oct	23-Oct
Tree Pipit	25-Mar-67	15-Apr	–	13-Oct-87	23-Sep	14-Sep

(1) where the earliest or latest date relates to more than one year; only one year (the first) is listed.

(2) excludes wintering individuals

(3) excludes Jan 1993 records for these species

*Barry Nightingale was born in Bedfordshire, where he has been actively birdwatching for over 60 years. The county has added more species to his British life list than any other (e.g. Leach's Storm-petrel, Collared Pratincole and Yellowhammer), but he enjoys the occasional visit to North Wales, Scilly, Fair Isle and, of course, Norfolk where it all started on a trip there in July 1964.*

# Systematic List for 2023

## Names and status

In this bird report we follow the sequence and scientific names according to the IOC List v14.1. For English names we have used the vernacular names used in the BOU British List for our journal and all other Bird Club communications.

The Systematic List includes all species recorded during 2023 and also those species which were absent, but which occurred in at least three of the previous ten years. They are shown in square brackets.

For the description in the species status bar, we have used the following definitions:

**Scarce** – has appeared in low numbers in seven to ten of the last ten years

**Rare** – has appeared in four to six of the last ten years

**Very Rare** – breeding one to ten pairs or has appeared in one to three of the last ten years

**Vagrant** – an out-of-range species.

Where there have been 20 or fewer modern-day (1946 to 2023) records in the county, the number of records in that period is also included in the status bar. In addition, we have shown the status where the species is either Red-, Amber- or Green-listed, according to the fifth review of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC5) (Stanbury *et al.* 2021) and the addendum for seabirds BoCC5a (Stanbury *et al.* 2024). The listing criteria include global conservation status, historical population decline, recent population decline, European conservation status, rarity, localised distribution, and international importance of populations.

Red-list species are those that are globally threatened according to the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) criteria; other criteria include those whose population or range has declined severely between 1800 and 1995 and has not shown a substantial recovery; severe decline in the UK breeding population, of more than 50% over 25 years; severe decline of the UK non-breeding population, of more than 50% over 25 years.

Amber-list species are those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately (25–49%) in the last 25 years; those whose population has declined historically but has made a substantial recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.

Species included in the review that fulfil none of these criteria are Green-listed.

We have used the BTO breeding codes to recognise Possible, Probable and Confirmed Breeding within the species accounts.

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the text: BBRC – British Birds Rareties Committee; BBS – Breeding Bird Survey; BoCC5 – Birds of Conservation Concern 5; BOU – British Ornithologists' Union; BOURC – British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee; BTO – British Trust for Ornithology; ChP – Chalk Pit; CIP – Clay Pit; CP – Country Park; CWS – County Wildlife Site; FCA – Farm Conservation Area (at Upper Caldecote); GC – Golf Course; GP – Gravel Pit(s); IOC – International

Ornithological Community; JNCC – Joint Nature Conservation Committee; L – Lake(s); MCP – Millennium Country Park; nocmig – nocturnal migration; NR – Nature Reserve; R – River; Resr – Reservoir; RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; SP – Sand Pit(s); vismig – visible migration; WeBS – Wetland Bird Survey; WM – Water Meadow; WP – Water Park; WTW – Water Treatment Works.

The following abbreviations have been used in tables where no count is shown: + (recorded but no count made); – (no records submitted).

Initials of observers (the key is shown in the list of contributors on page 117) are shown for ‘full-description’ species, for those species where there were fewer than six records in the year, ‘large’ flocks and other notable records.

## Population trends

### Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)

To gain a consistent measure of population trends, we use statistics from the Breeding Bird Survey, which was launched in 1994 to monitor common and widespread terrestrial birds. As such, we have included relevant statistics for the species accounts, where appropriate, for the East of England trend. In some cases where the East of England population is no longer large enough for the trend to be calculated (for example Little Owl and Marsh Tit), we have included the trend for England (Heywood *et al.* 2024). Where the BBS Survey considers the trend to be statistically significant the % trend is followed by an asterisk \*.

The Breeding Bird Survey is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, JNCC and RSPB, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers.

### Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

The national monitoring scheme for (mainly) non-breeding wildfowl is the long-running Wetland Bird Survey, active nationally in various formats since 1947 (Calbrade *et al.* 2025). Coverage in the county included data from 36 sites in 2023. The methodology requires a monthly count to be made on a pre-selected date (to avoid duplicate counting) of all wildfowl, gulls, waders and other wetland specialists at each site.

Taking part in the Wetland Bird Survey is a rewarding experience, meaning you not only contribute to a long-running national survey but you stand a good chance of finding something good too! Most people take part online via the BTO website where you can enter your counts and view old counts from previous years – some site counts go back to the 1960s. A recent development means that surveyors can record their sightings using the excellent BirdTrack app, highlighting the visit as a WeBS count. The surveyor can then record a full species list while they undertake their WeBS count. The relevant waterbirds can then be imported from that list via the WeBS online website.

The Wetland Bird Survey is a joint scheme of the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, in association with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

Thanks to all those volunteers taking part in WeBS in Bedfordshire. There are still some county sites without coverage, so if you are interested in taking part, please contact Richard Bashford, 6 Brook Road, Eaton Ford, St Neots, PE19 7AX; email [ribashford@gmail.com](mailto:ribashford@gmail.com).

## BirdTrack

Many contributors now submit their records via BirdTrack. One of the facilities within that process is the option to enter a list of species. A complete list is everything that has been detected and positively identified – by sight and/or sound – on a single birdwatching visit to a site. Complete lists are extremely valuable in the analyses because the proportion of lists containing a given species provides a good measure of how frequently that species is being detected at any point in the year. This in turn helps to monitor arrival and departure times of migratory species, whilst also providing fascinating insights into the within-year changes in detectability of ‘resident’ species such as Skylark. We have used BirdTrack complete list data to provide extra context within species accounts and the graphs detailing the percentage of records within complete lists for the first time now include eBird data. Specifically in these graphs, the shaded cells below the x-axis show all periods when the species was recorded via any means (i.e. casual records or complete lists) and the bars show reporting rates for periods where the species was detected on at least one complete list. This combination of information helps to show how abundance/detectability changes through the year, whilst also showing periods when a species might be very scarce and missed by complete lists (e.g. at the start of spring and end of autumn for a migrant).

## Place names

In this report we have used ‘The Lodge’ to describe the RSPB reserve at Sandy (also known as Sandy Warren). ‘The Pinnacle’ refers to the site at Sandy used mainly as a visible-migration watch point. The site previously known as Gypsy Lane East is now Broom East CWS but records in this report are shown under Broom East. Records from other areas in the Broom complex are shown just as Broom GP or specifically in a few cases as G&M Growers Pit, Gypsy Lane West or Peacock’s Lake. What was previously known as ‘Marston Vale CP’ is called ‘Millennium CP’. ‘Marston Vale CP’ was used in the bird reports up to the 2015 edition to describe those areas of The Pillinge and the Wetlands Nature Reserve that are within the country park. From the bird report of 2016 those areas are referred to as ‘MCP Wetlands NR’. Despite the fact that ‘Stewartby Lake’ was part of ‘Marston Vale CP’ (and is now part of ‘Millennium CP’) we will continue to treat it as a separate recording area, and so in our bird reports will continue to refer to it as just ‘Stewartby Lake’. Aspley Heath, as used in this report, includes Old Wavendon Heath, New Wavendon Heath and Aspley Wood. Derek White’s Eggs GP is also known as Ivel Farm GP and Elm Farm GP, but all references in this report are for Derek White’s Eggs GP (shown as DW Eggs GP). Meadow Lane GP is also known as Castle Mills GP and 100 Acre GP, but all references in this report are for Meadow Lane GP. Stopsley Common includes Bradgers Hill and Hay Wood, Woburn Park Lakes include Basin Pond and the Drakeloe Ponds and smaller pools within Woburn Park. Parrish’s Farm Lake is referred to as Lodge Farm Lake in this report. Stockgrove CP is now called Rushmere CP. Knotting Green is now shown as Strawberry Hill Farm, Knotting but shortened in the text to Strawberry Hill Farm. Sewage Treatment Works (STW) appear to have been renamed Water Treatment Works (WTW), so we have used that abbreviation in site names in the Gazetteer and also in this report.





Pink-footed Goose, MCP Wetlands NR, January 2023

William Stephens

Regarding place names, please refer to the Gazetteer at the end of this journal that gives up-to-date names and OS grid references for the main birdwatching sites in the county. Observers are urged to use these names wherever possible when submitting records, and if you use a site name not listed in the Gazetteer please also supply the grid reference. This is particularly important when using just the name of a farm, as there are many farms in the county with the same name.

### [Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

**Scarce winter visitor.** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, the first blank year since 2007.]

### Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

**Common resident. Included in 31.1% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +29%.**

The first occupied nest was at Poppy Hill Lakes on 3rd April, with the first goslings (8) of the year on 20th April at Longholme Lake. Most of the larger bodies of water across the county supported breeding pairs and other records came from smaller sites such as Caddington GC and Myers Farm, Potton. The largest creche was on the R Ouse through Bedford with 59 individuals on 12th June. Priory CP also had large groups of young in excess of 30. Supplementary feeding by the public may be the reason for the breeding success at these sites.

As in 2022, Grovebury SP had the highest recorded number, with 850 on 13th August, a significant increase on previous years (i.e. 424 in 2022), with Wardown Park once again sustaining a large flock over the winter months. Most of the major sites held their largest numbers in the August to September period, as can be seen in the following table.

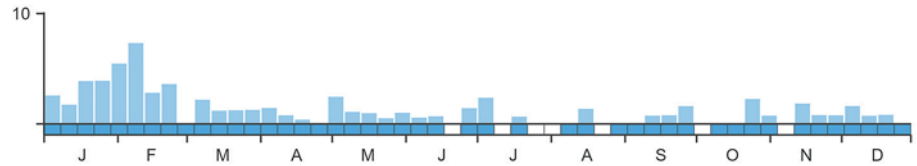
Monthly maxima at sites that held 100 or more on at least one date

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Dunstable WTW	–	+	4	6	7	+	2	390	31	100	+	+
East Hyde	107	–	147	96	+	87	–	–	77	32	8	–
Grovebury SP	9	42	38	7	4	120	200	850	520	660	–	360
Harrold-Odell CP	30	53	7	26	29	–	100	5	+	260	115	30
Henlow Grange	9	12	8	7	23	14	34	–	164	–	17	30
MCP Wetlands NR	18	64	57	35	26	51	43	178	200	100	10	52
Priory CP	164	96	90	59	131	182	160	131	303	254	90	110
Radwell Lakes	14	22	10	7	2	–	+	–	180	–	+	–
R Ouse thro' Bedford	110	112	84	73	88	183	121	56	10	110	135	112
Rookery N CIP	–	5	19	16	11	3	30	140	100	+	–	–
Rookery S CIP	2	4	13	7	14	30	50	165	40	–	–	–
Wardown Park	280	179	50	34	44	345	323	+	–	280	264	234
Willington GP	8	12	22	6	8	+	+	+	250	8	–	+
Woburn Park	179	39	40	26	18	–	–	–	–	100	130	145

+ = recorded but no count made; – = no records submitted

**Barnacle Goose** *Branta leucopsis*

**Established naturalised resident.** (Amber list but only for non-naturalised birds)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird



Greylag Geese, Harrold-Odell CP, April 2023

Roy McDonald

No breeding records or reports of family groupings were received. There has been a decline in numbers of this species across the county for several years now. As recently as 2019, counts of 200 or more were at Gadsey Brook, Roxton Lakes, Willington GP and Meadow Lane GP, with the peak count in that year of 311 at the latter site. Roxton Lakes and Willington GP continue to be the favoured locations for the highest flocks through the winter months.

#### Monthly maxima at the main county sites

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Blunham Lakes	2	1	29	27	5	16	2	–	–	–	–	–
Meadow Lane GP	63	23	20	–	–	–	–	–	–	10	1	–
Priory CP	29	21	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	21	–
Roxton Lakes	98	–	124	31	15	2	–	–	–	–	–	–
Willington GP	66	113	–	–	–	–	+	–	120	150	–	100

#### Note

In February 2023 a census of naturalised Barnacle Geese showed that the population in Britain and Northern Ireland was an estimated 5,800. Although the population in Bedfordshire has declined over the last few years, our county population is still significant. The highest county numbers in the 2023 survey showed that most were in Lincolnshire (with 2,038), followed by Co. Down (657), Norfolk (509), Suffolk (488), Cumbria (297), Gloucestershire (280), Merseyside (277) and Bedfordshire (206). Of those 206, 113 were at Willington, which made up 1.9% of the total British and Northern Irish population.

There are now several colour-ringing schemes operating, both in the UK and the near Continent. From that a small number of birds colour-ringed in Bedfordshire have been recorded in France. It is considered that over 38% of the naturalised population is now colour-ringed and birders are asked to check for colour-marks (yellow leg rings, blue leg rings and white neck collars) and report these to [www.waterbirdcolourmarking.org](http://www.waterbirdcolourmarking.org).

Extracted from Brides *et al.* 2025.

### Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

**Common resident. Included in 32.2% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +176%\*.** (*Amber list, referring only to the native population*)

The first occupied nest was at MCP Wetlands NR on 9th April and the first fledged young were at Broom South Quarry on 13th April (7 in one brood). Other sites not listed below where breeding occurred were Blunham Lakes, Coronation CP, Harrold-Odell CP, Harrowden WM, Quest Pit, Radwell Lakes, Shuttleworth, Willington GP and Wrest Park. The largest creche contained 55 young at Priory CP on 15th May. Brood size ranged from one to 16 goslings on 6th May at Priory CP with most holding two to five young. The high numbers at Broom GP, following the main breeding season, were similar to those in 2022, but were a significant increase from 2021, suggesting that there has been at least some recovery from avian influenza. Regular reports of up to 400 from Henlow Grange illustrate the importance of winter feeding grounds such as recently harvested beet fields.

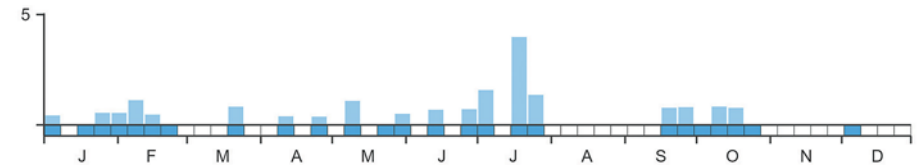
#### Monthly maxima at sites that held 200 or more on at least one date

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Broom GP	360	200	120	80	116	75	300	420	635	1050	420	200
Gadsey Brook	3	2	12	34	45	42	40	1	220	270	1	260
Grovebury SP	74	28	47	10	6	2	27	200	360	320	–	580
Henlow Grange	400	373	120	37	133	61	18	3	135	–	1	28
Lodge Farm Lake	45	15	120	70	80	120	110	80	–	–	300	–

MCP Wetlands NR	45	2	6	5	7	44	60	134	245	230	–	25
Meadow Lane GP	257	8	25	30	16	16	22	240	332	12	+	1
Old Warden	350	200	34	5	8	–	–	–	–	+	–	–
Rookery N CIP	9	24	4	6	15	9	11	200	6	73	+	65
Rookery S CIP	–	–	2	5	5	1	1	270	+	–	106	–
Southill Park	497	43	133	59	98	149	550	20	8	48	–	81

Occasional high counts were also at Cuckoo Bridge Lake, with 200 in August, at DW Eggs GP, with 300 in January, at Girtford, with 320 in October, and at Ickwell, with 300 in January.

**Pink-footed Goose** *Anser brachyrhynchus*  
**Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant.** (Amber list)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

As in 2022, just singles were at numerous sites across the county. On 3rd February singles were at Harrold-Odell CP and Meadow Lane GP, seen just two hours apart. Again, on 9th March, two singles were found at Meadow Lane GP and Rookery North CIP, suggesting they were two different birds. Individuals were found in every month except August. They were usually seen associating with Greylag Goose flocks. Long-stayers were at MCP Wetlands NR, Old Warden, Priory CP and Southill village.

**[White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons*  
**Scarce winter visitor.** (Red list)

There were no records in 2023, the first blank year since 2015.]

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*

**Common resident. Included in 34.2% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +250%\*. (Green list)**

The first positive breeding sign was from Southill Lake on 5th April with two occupied nests. By 4th May, at DW Eggs GP, a pair with three juveniles were on the nest. By 15th May at Meadow Lane GP nests with up to six cygnets occurred; thereafter nests were found holding up to eight young from sites across the county including Blunham Lakes, Broom village lake, Coronation CIP, Dunstable WTW, Great Barford Lake, MCP Wetlands NR, Octagon Farm GP, Poppy Hill Lakes, Priory CP, the R Ouse through Bedford, the R Ouse at Roxton, Rookery North and South CIPs, Willington GP and Woburn Park.

The largest count of adults throughout the year was 71 at Priory CP on 10th December.

A pair found on the R Ivel, Langford in February featured a female that had been ringed in September 2016 at Blunham Lakes.

Monthly maxima at sites that held 50 or more on at least one date

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Priory CP	11	12	13	12	38	32	40	39	43	51	63	71
R Ouse thro' Bedford	50	58	52	46	54	44	51	41	39	31	30	43



**Bewick's Swan** *Cygnus columbianus***Rare winter visitor.** (*Red list*)**Bewick's Swans, Langford, December 2023****Steve Blain**

There were seven at Woburn Park on 19th February (MBi *et al.*), one at Brogborough Lake on 26th November (PW, NW), eight over Langford Mill (SCB, SW) and then Priory CP (DK) on 3rd December.

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus***Scarce winter visitor. Free-flying introduced birds in the county now presumed extinct.** (*Amber list*)

Three ringed adults were in the Harrold-Odell CP area from 22nd March to 1st April (MJP *et al.*). Two were at Dunstable WTW on 21st October (JPL), with the same there again on 28th October and 5th November. Two flew over Clifton on 24th November (BC), three were at Brogborough Lake on 28th November (PW), one was at Chimney Corner South Lake on 13th December (MJP) and four were at Broom South Quarry on 31st December (SB).

**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiaca***Increasing resident, first bred in the county in 2008. Included in 11.2% of BirdTrack lists.**

The first goslings were on the R Ouse through Bedford, with nine on 2nd March. That was an early brood, with the next report of a brood in Woburn Park, with three on 17th April. Other breeding locations included the R Ivel at Girtford Bridge, Grovebury SP, MCP Wetlands NR, Old Warden, Priory CP, Rookery North and South CIPs, Southill Lake and Willington Lock Quarry.

The largest winter gathering was 24 at Priory CP on 17th October, contrasting markedly with the peak count of 84 at Little Barford in September 2022.

**Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna***Regular winter visitor and migrant with more or less annual records of breeding.** (*Amber list*)

The only confirmed breeding record came from Grovebury SP, with a pair and ten young on 21st May. Four of the young survived to 20th July at least. Two or more birds were also seen at another nine sites in the April to June period, but with no evidence of breeding.

The first of the year was at Rookery South CIP on 12th January. In the first three months, further records came from another 11 sites, including nocmig records over Meppershall, and were mostly of three birds or fewer. Records of four came from Broom South Quarry on 4th March, Dunstable WTW on the 20th and Grovebury SP on 29th March. During July, apart from the family party at Grovebury, up to two were at Dunstable WTW and one was at Rookery South CIP. From August onwards there was a dramatic drop in records, with just one at Broom South Quarry on 8th August, and then a long gap until a pair returned to Grovebury SP on 29th–30th December, with also a pair at Dunstable WTW on 30th December.

### **Mandarin Duck** *Aix galericulata*

#### **Introduced breeding resident.**

Confirmed breeding took place at Lodge Farm Lake, Chicksands (a brood of 12), the R Ouzel floodplain, Leighton Buzzard (a brood of 3) and Southill Lake (a brood of 5).

The largest flock was a remarkable 44 at Southill Lake on 8th October, after just one there in September. The previous site high was 11, in January 2005 and August 2018. Other decent counts included 16 in Woburn Park on 19th February, 14 at Cainhoe Lakes on 7th August and 11 on the R Ouzel, Leighton Buzzard on 7th October.

### **Garganey** *Spatula querquedula*

#### **Irregular but annual scarce migrant and a very rare breeder. (Amber list)**

The first were singles at Broom East and Fenlake Meadows on 6th April, with then another at Meadow Lane GP on 10th April. There were two at Broom East on 7th May, and two at Priory CP during 21st–28th May. In autumn, there was one at MCP Wetlands NR on 17th–21st September, then five at Luton Hoo Lake on 24th September (PB).

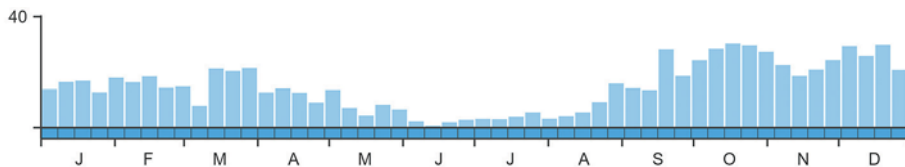


Shelduck, Broom South Quarry, March 2023

Rod Pattison

### Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

**Regular winter visitor and passage migrant, and has bred on very rare occasions. Included in 15.3% of BirdTrack lists. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

There were no breeding records, although it was suspected at Fenlake Meadows. Away from there, birds were at 12 sites in the May to July period, but with no evidence of breeding.

In the first winter and early spring period virtually all the larger counts came from Broom East, with a peak there of 56 on 11th March. Elsewhere, there were highs of 24 at Dunstable WTW on 9th March and 23 at Radwell Lakes on 2nd April. It was a similar pattern in the August to December period, with most of the larger counts again from Broom East, peaking at 45 on 24th December. Other counts of more than 20 were 34 at Dunstable WTW on 21st October, 26 at Broom South Quarry on 20th October, 24 at Harrold-Odell CP on 19th October, also 24 at Priory CP on 4th December and 21 at MCP Wetlands on 21st November.

### Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

**Fairly common winter visitor; breeds in small numbers. Included in 26.5% of BirdTrack lists. (Amber list)**

Confirmed breeding took place at Blunham Lakes (3 young), Broom East (4 young), Broom South Quarry (2 young), MCP Wetlands NR (5 young) and Priory CP (4 broods, of 1, 4, 6 and 8 young).

In the first winter and early spring period, counts of 50 or more came from Longholme Lake with 104 on 8th February, Blunham Lakes with 80 on 21st January, Broom East with 70 on 26th January, Wrest Park with 54 on 5th March, and Meadow Lane GP with 52 on 22nd January. In the May to July period the highest counts were 40 at Blunham Lakes on 27th June and 30 at Dunstable WTW on 12th May. From August onwards good numbers were slow to establish, with counts of 50 at Broom East on 7th September, then regularly at that level into November, before peaking at 64 on 4th December. There were highs of 50 at Radwell Lakes on 17th September, 68 at Dunstable WTW on 21st October, 61 at Longholme Lake on 7th December and 67 at Priory CP on 28th December.

### Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

**Numerous winter visitor that has increased in recent years. Included in 11.1% of BirdTrack lists. (Amber list)**

In the first winter period most of the larger counts were in January, with 250 at MCP Wetlands NR on the 13th, 200 at Quest ClP on the 15th, 355 at Radwell Lakes and 120 at Blunham Lakes on the 21st, 200 at Meadow Lane GP on the 23rd (and again on 24th February) and 171 at Woburn Park on the 27th. Also in February there were 150 at Priory CP on the 21st. On 24th January at Blunham Lakes there were at least five with green-coloured rings. Peak counts in April were all on the 2nd, as birds were departing, with 83 at Radwell Lakes, 40 at Broom East and 34 at Priory CP. In June there was an interesting set of records from Blunham Lakes, with a female

on the 26th, two females on the 27th, and a pair and a male on the 29th. In July there were two females on the 5th, a pair on the 18th, three birds on the 26th, with one remaining until the 31st. Elsewhere, there was a male at Black Cat GP on 1st July. In August there were three at Ampthill Park on the 6th, four at Blunham Lakes on the 9th, increasing to six by the 23rd, two at Cuckoo Bridge Lake on the 20th, two at Broom South Quarry also on the 20th and one at Priory CP on the 22nd. Records were more widespread in September, from a total of ten sites, with peaks of 14 at Priory CP on the 8th, 35 at Radwell Lakes on the 17th, 12 at Broom East on the 20th and 12 at Woburn Park on the 25th. In the October to December period the only three-figure counts were 100 at Woburn Park on 27th December and 100 at Gadsey Brook on 30th December.

### **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

**Common resident but declining. Included in 51.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is stable+/-0%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -6%. (Amber list)**

The first noted ducklings were a brood of 13 at Potton on 29th March. By 6th April only four of those remained alive. Further broods were noted at another 27 sites, although as a species they were still under-recorded. At Priory CP a total of 25 broods hatched, totalling 159 young.

In the first winter period the largest count was 385 at Woburn Park on 27th January, the site's highest ever. Most of the other large counts came from Priory CP, with a peak there of 220 on 25th January. That picture at Priory CP continued through April to July, with the highest count in that period of again 220, on 23rd July. During August and September the largest numbers were 274 at Woburn Park on 24th September, 212 at Priory CP on 30th September and 210 at Broom East on 9th August. Again, most of the other larger records were from Priory CP. In the second winter period the highest counts were 231 at Woburn Park on 11th November, 180 at Battlesden Lake on 19th November and 170 at Priory CP on 27th December.



Mallard with 16 chicks, River Ivel, Biggleswade, April 2023

Richard Southan



### Pintail *Anas acuta*

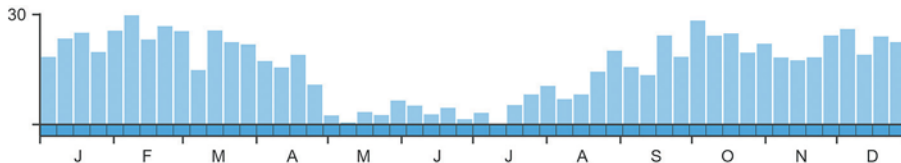
**Uncommon but regular winter visitor.** (*Amber list*)

An impressive group of eight was at Brogborough Lake on 13th February, with two at Blunham Lakes on 15th February and one at Stewartby Lake on 7th March. Two were at Octagon Farm GP on 23rd July. From September onwards all further records were of singles, at Cuckoo Bridge Lake on 22nd September, and then in October at Willington Lock Quarry on the 6th, Broom South Quarry on the 18th–20th, and Harrold-Odell CP on the 18th. One was also at Brogborough Lake on 24th November.

The long-staying individual of dubious origin in Woburn Park, first seen there in March 2022, was there again during January to May, and then again from September to December (and into 2025). It seems very likely that the same bird was involved in the unseasonal records of one at MCP Wetlands NR on 19th and 26th June, 8th and 29th July and perhaps 27th August.

### Teal *Anas crecca*

**Fairly common winter visitor, sometimes in large numbers; a very rare and infrequent breeder. Included in 17.4% of BirdTrack lists.** (*Amber list*)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Birds were present at nine sites during May and June, but with no suggestions of breeding activity.

The year opened with some impressive counts, including 395 at Black Cat GP on 1st January, 200 at MCP Wetlands NR on the 2nd, then 280 there on the 13th, 253 at Radwell Lakes on the 21st, 160 at Woodbury Park Estate, Everton on the 23rd and also 160 at Meadow Lane GP on the 24th. Numbers then dropped, with the only three-figure count to the end of March being 100 at Black Cat GP on 18th February. During April there were 40 at Broom GP on the 2nd, 34 at Battlesden Lake on the 7th and also 34 at Dunstable WTW on the 11th. From May to August the best counts were 24 at Broom GP on 27th August and 23 at Broom South Quarry the next day. There was a slow increase in numbers from September onwards, with the only sites holding 50 or more being Grovebury SP, peaking at 175 on 23rd October, MCP Wetlands NR, reaching 145 on 16th December, Broom South Quarry, with 57 on 31st December, and Priory CP, with 50 on 1st November.

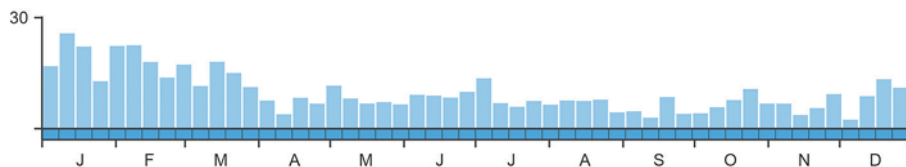
### Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

**Most records are of captive origin or from established introduced populations.**

One was at Broom East on 3rd January, with then two at Priory CP from 31st January to 13th February, rising to three on the 5th and 6th. Singles were at Meadow Lane GP on 14th February (perhaps one of the Priory birds), Peacock's Lake, Broom on 27th February and Black Cat GP on 18th March. Another was at Roxton on 8th April, with one at Black Cat GP on 4th May that stayed until 2nd June. There was a female at Rookery North CIP during 23rd–29th September and at MCP Wetlands NR during 23rd September to 1st October. A female type, or maybe an eclipse male, was at Grovebury SP on 23rd October and a pair were at Priory CP on 23rd–24th December.

## Pochard *Aythya ferina*

**Numerous winter visitor that has bred, but may be doing so less frequently. Included in 10.7% of BirdTrack lists. (Red list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Confirmed breeding took place at Broom East (2 broods), with also single broods at Coronation CIP, Quest CIP, MCP Wetlands NR and Stewartby Lake. Birds were at another 12 sites during April to July but with no other signs of breeding.

During the first winter period virtually all the larger counts came from Priory CP, peaking at 172 on 28th February. The next highest was of 60 at Southill Lake on 12th March. Numbers then dropped, with the largest in the April to August period being just 25 at Quest CIP on 2nd July.

Numbers slowly increased from September, with 44 at Grovebury SP on the 7th, building to 59 on the 26th and then 83 by 5th October. There were 70 at Brogborough Tip & Pools on 14th October, and 140 at Brogborough Lake by 21st October. From November onwards virtually all the decent counts were at Brogborough Lake, with 249 on 17th November, 300 on the 28th, and then into December with 340 on the 3rd. Numbers then decreased, leaving just 18 there on 29th December. On the same day there were 92 at Grovebury SP.

## Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

**Very rare winter visitor – 17 records 1946–2023.**

One at Broom South Quarry during 1st–9th October was our first since 2015 (SCB *et al.*). At the time of writing this record awaits acceptance by BBRC.

## Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

**Rare – 12 records 1946–2023.**

A well-watched drake was at Priory CP during 6th–24th December (DK *et al.*). This species has appeared in the county during the last five years, so the possibility of returning individuals cannot be ruled out.

## Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

**Numerous winter visitor and regular breeder. Included in 30.5% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**

Confirmed breeding took place at Blunham Lakes (9 broods), Broom East (2 broods), Broom South Quarry (1 brood), MCP Wetlands NR (1 brood), Priory CP (at least 9 broods) and Southill Lake (1 brood). Birds were at another 24 sites during the June to August period but with no evidence of breeding.

In the first winter period (January to March) most of the larger counts were in the first half of January, with 154 at Priory CP on the 3rd, at least 200 at Brogborough Lake on the 7th, and 147 at Rookery North CIP and 140 at Blunham Lakes on the 12th. The highest count in this period was of 256 at Stewartby Lake on 20th January. During the late spring and summer months the highest counts were 103 at Priory CP on 5th April, 110 at Blunham Lakes on 28th April and 123

at MCP Wetlands NR on 8th August. Numbers started to build up slowly in September, although 179 at Grovebury SP on the 7th was the exception. In October there were 52 at Southill Lake on the 8th, 55 at Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 14th and 53 at MCP Wetlands NR the next day, but typically the largest counts came from Brogborough Lake, with the first of these in this period being an impressive 595 on the 21st. That number had crept up to 615 by 3rd November and would be the best count of the year. There were 212 at Brogborough Tip & Pools on 5th November, perhaps part of the same group. In December the highest counts included 610 still at Brogborough Lake on the 3rd, 120 at Grovebury SP on the 7th, 160 at Woburn Park on the 18th, and then 100 at Stewartby Lake and still at least 500 at Brogborough Lake on the 29th.

### **Scaup** *Aythya marila*

**Winter visitor and passage migrant in variable numbers.** (*Red list*)

In a quiet year there was one, presumably the long-stayer from 2022, at Brogborough Lake from 6th January to 9th February (MJP *et al.*), with it or another there during 19th–24th February (JPL *et al.*). A drake was at Harrold-Odell CP during 3rd–6th February (RNo *et al.*). The only record in the second half of the year was at Brogborough Lake on 20th–21st October (BirdGuides, SCB).

### **Common Scoter** *Melanitta nigra*

**Scarce visitor, most often in spring, recently noted as uncommon overflying nocturnal spring migrant.** (*Red list*)

The only record was of at least two, and perhaps a small flock, nocmiggied over Meppershall on 25th March (JP).

### **Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

**Regular winter visitor in moderate numbers.** (*Red list*)

In the first winter period, typically all the larger counts came from Brogborough Lake, including 24 on 7th January, an impressive 58 on 17th February, and with still 43 on 4th March. Elsewhere the next highest were just five at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th January and 6th February, with smaller numbers at another eight sites in the January to March period. There were late spring records at Blunham Lakes, where they have bred in the past, with a male on 6th April, two birds on 12th April and a female on 18th May. There was an intriguing record of a female at Brogborough Lake on 19th June.

During the autumn and second winter period all the larger counts again came from Brogborough Lake. The first was one on 21st October, increasing to seven by 2nd November and then to 12 by 28th November. Numbers there peaked in December, with 23 on the 20th and still 14 on the 28th. Elsewhere in this period there were just singles at another three sites.

### **[Smew** *Mergellus albellus*

**Scarce winter visitor, sometimes occurring in larger numbers in hard weather.** (*Red list*)

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2022.]

### **Goosander** *Mergus merganser*

**Regular winter visitor, usually in small numbers, and at traditional sites.** (*Green list*)

In the period January to March the largest counts all came from Harrold-Odell CP, peaking at 13 on 7th January, and Woburn Park, where there was a maximum of 15 on 12th January. Smaller numbers were at another 12 sites. The only record in April was a single at Harrold-Odell CP on the 14th, and then in May there were three at Turvey on the 1st and two over Priory CP on the 27th.

The first in autumn were in October, with one at Harrold-Odell CP on the 12th, increasing to six there by the 24th, and then in November seven there. Along with seven at Priory CP on 30th November, they remained the largest counts in the second winter period, until there were 14 at Harrold-Odell CP on 11th December, with still ten there on the 30th. Away from those two sites there were smaller numbers at another 11 localities.

### [Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

**Very rare winter visitor and passage migrant.** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2021.]

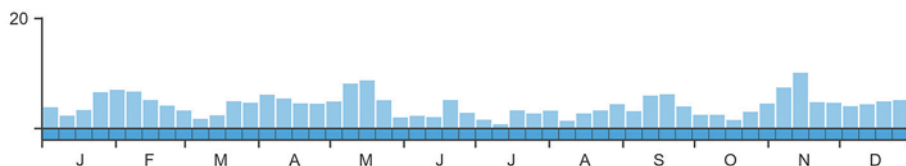
### Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

**Naturalised introduced species. Very few remaining in Britain because of the control programme.**

The only record was of three at Priory CP, briefly on 3rd December, consisting of a male and two female types (DK).

### Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

**Declining resident, with numbers bolstered by released birds. Included in 4.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -61%\*. (*Red list*)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

The earliest record of a juvenile was from Myers Farm, Potton on 13th June. Other locations with recently fledged young included the FCA at Upper Caldecote, Cardington Cross, Manor Farm Beeston, and Poppy Hill, all between July and August.

Compared with 2022, much smaller coveys were reported, with the largest being at least 30 at Manor Farm, Beeston on 20th September.

### [Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae*

**Former naturalised species now considered extinct in UK.**

The last record was in 2016. See also Appendix I.]

### Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

**Common with the population supplemented by releases for shooting. Included in 30.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -18%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +17%.**

The first evidence of breeding came with 'eggshells and used nest' on 20th April at Haynes village. The largest count came from Beckerings Park Farm at Steppingley, with 100 on 19th October.

### Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

**Scarce, but annual summer visitor in variable numbers.** (*Amber list*)

The first were nocmig records over Sandy on 10th and 22nd May (PN). A female was at Melchbourne on 16th June (HW), and two were at Bolnhurst on 11th July (RIB), one staying until 12th July (SCB, PN).

**Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*

**Widespread and common species, with the population supplemented by releases for shooting. Included in 6.9% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -30%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -38%.**

Under-recorded as a breeding species, the only breeding record was of a juvenile with an adult pair at Myers Farm, Pottton on 5th September. Large coveys of between 30 and 50 were at Streatley and Beckerings Park Farm at Steppingley between mid-September and mid-October and 100 were at Tempsford Aerodrome on 20th November.

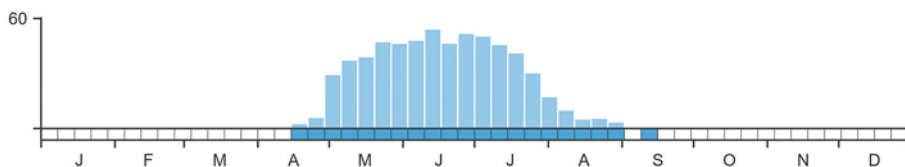
**Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*

**Rare summer migrant. (Amber list)**

One was recorded at New Heath, The Lodge on 3rd, 13th and 23rd June (SCB), whilst another was at Stotfold on 11th June (NS).

**Swift** *Apus apus*

**Common summer visitor and passage migrant. Included in 12.1% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -52%\*. (Red list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

The first were at Broom East, with at least 28 moving through on 21st April. By the end of the month they had been seen at another 12 sites, but with all double-figure counts from either Broom East, with a maximum of 30 on the 30th, or Priory CP, with ten also on the 30th. Numbers remained fairly low until an influx during 12th–13th May brought 90 to Priory CP, 120 to Coronation CIP, at least 50 to Broom East and 40 to Grovebury SP. There were 95 at Dunstable WTW on 30th May, but then most of the larger counts to the end of June were from Priory CP, with a peak of 160 on the 6th and several of 100 or more, Broom East with 100 on the 1st–2nd and Meadow Lane GP with 70 on 7th June. Large numbers started to build again at the end of July, including 70 over Leighton Buzzard on the 29th and 100 at Dunstable WTW on the 31st. It was a similar picture in August, with the best being 60 at Dunstable WTW on the 2nd and 50 over Dunstable on the 9th, after which flock sizes dropped significantly. There were only two records in September, both of two, at Dunstable WTW on the 1st and the last at Wigmore Valley Park on 13th September.

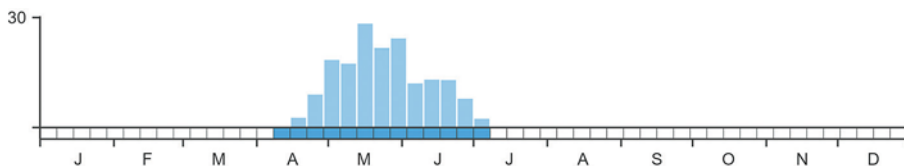
**Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

**Declining summer resident. Included in 3.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -67%\*. (Red list)**

The first was on 14th April at Harrold-Odell CP, a day later than the 10-year average for 2013–2022.

There was a noticeable absence of records from the south and south-west of the county. There was just one from Heath & Reach and none from the Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable, Luton or Woburn areas. Courtship display was seen at Broom South Quarry and Willington GP on 27th May, at Rookery North CIP on 17th June, whilst a male and female were at Priory CP on 26th





Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

June. There were no records of females 'bubbling', nor were there any records of juveniles. During the month of June there were 129 records submitted compared with 143 in 2022.

The last record was on 4th July at Priory CP, which was very early when compared with last dates of 15th August in 2022 and 11th August in 2021.

### Rock Dove *Columba livia*

**Common resident but declining in some town centres. Included in 15.1% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +3%. (Green list)**

Recorded across the county, the greatest concentrations were in the south around Luton and to a lesser extent Bedford; the highest count was 400 by the R Lea at East Hyde on 20th May. Wardown Park had a flock numbering between 150 and 215 on 22nd and 23rd March respectively.

### Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

**Widespread resident. Included in 35.2% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +35%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +169%. (Amber list)**

Birds were recorded in 31% of sites covered by the Summer Garden Bird Survey. The first display flights came on 20th March at Henlow Grange. Only one positive breeding record was submitted, of an adult pair with a recently fledged juvenile at Sandy on 13th May, although clearly breeding records are grossly under-recorded. The highest count was from Tithe Farm, Potton on 28th January with up to 165.

### Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

**Very common resident and winter visitor. Included in 88.6% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +21%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +9%. (Amber list)**

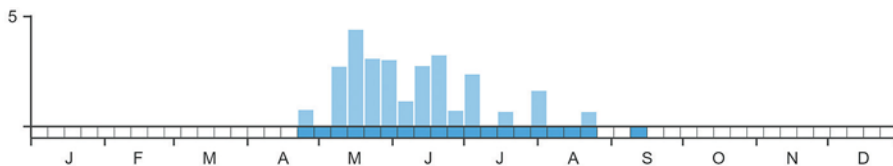
This is the most commonly reported species on BirdTrack in our county. As usual, during the Summer and both Winter Garden Bird Surveys covering 2023, they were recorded in all gardens. A fledgling was at Meppershall on 4th December, illustrating the long breeding season of this species.

During early morning vismig sessions at The Pinnacle, flocks totalling 2,800 and 3,400 on 5th and 6th November respectively flew south. Octagon Farm GP and Henlow Grange had flocks of 1,000, feeding at the latter site on barley stubble and in the wild-bird winter food crop.

### Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

**Fast declining summer resident. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -97%\*. (Red list)**

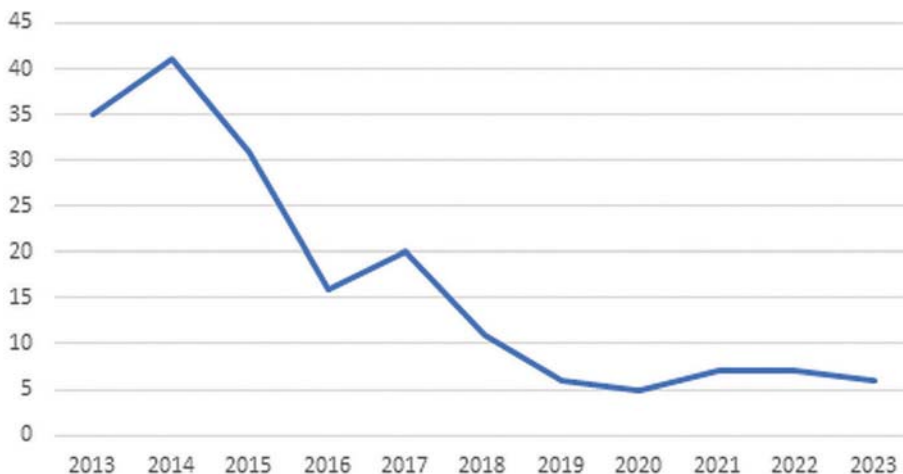
The first was one at Lidlington on 25th April. It was joined by a second on the 26th and the pair stayed until 27th April. By 2nd May three were in the Marston Moretaine area which became a stronghold for them, as numerous reports throughout May, June and into July were received of



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

purring birds at MCP Wetlands NR, Stewartby Lake and the Rookery Pit complex. Other locations across the county with breeding season records included Arlesey, Coronation CP, Myers Farm at Potton, Strawberry Hill Farm (at least 4 territories), Tempsford and Waterloo Thorns. No nest sites or juveniles were reported in the county.

In total just six sites across the county produced records of purring males, between 25th April and 2nd August. Annual numbers of sites are shown in the following graph.



The last of the year was on 12th September at Water End.

## Note

The huge drop in Bedfordshire's Turtle Dove population, as shown in the above graph, has been seen across Europe. The species shares the fate of several formerly widespread species which have been continually disappearing from European farmland. Breeding numbers show an overall decline, especially in Western Europe, including the UK. In 2015 the species was added to the IUCN Red List as Vulnerable. In response, the RSPB led the formation of an International Single Species Action Plan for Turtle Dove. This identified three main threats, present in different combinations in the different flyways used to move between the winter and summer quarters: habitat loss (primarily due to agricultural intensification), unsustainable levels of hunting, and illegal killing, the latter of lower significance for the Western Flyway. Data were used to create models predicting the population's future development under various conditions, and in the case of the Western Flyway these calculations have been possible, in large part, thanks to the UK BBS, which has the longest tradition in Europe and generates high-quality data. The ban on Turtle Dove hunting in the Western European Flyway came into force in 2021, and it already seems that the hunting restrictions have positively affected Turtle Dove numbers. Breeding-pair estimates in Europe have slightly increased in the last three years, and the 2023 estimate is the highest in the last ten years. The most up-to-date data from the UK helped to monitor the recent situation in the Western Flyway and

model the species' future. The huge efforts of UK fieldworkers, alongside projects such as the RSPB-led Operation Turtle Dove partnership, will hopefully contribute to this species' recovery. It is also a superb example about how taking part in local survey work, such as the BBS, can lead to more targeted actions to help our species that are under threat.

(Adapted from Heywood *et al.* 2024)



Turtle Dove, Tempsford, May 2023

Steve Blain

### **Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

**Common resident. Included in 33.7% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +13%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -21%. (*Green list*)**

Birds were reported from 92% of gardens that were covered by the Summer Garden Bird Survey, continuing the decline seen during the last ten years. Display flights were first noted in Henlow on 2nd February and these continued into early September. The largest flock was of 47 at the Wigmore Lane allotments in Luton on 30th November.

### **Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

**Probably an under-recorded visitor, mainly in winter, with usually a small breeding population at two or three sites. (*Green list*)**

Confirmed breeding took place at Houghton Brook Pools, with an adult and three active juveniles there on 31st August, with then two juveniles staying through to 8th October, and adults to the end of the year (JCP). In total, during May there were six records from four sites, in June four records from four sites, in July three records from two sites and in August two records from two sites, and across that period records from eight separate sites.

Apart from Houghton Brook Pools, the most favoured areas in both the first and second winter periods were MCP Wetlands NR (including a maximum of three on 2nd January), Dunstable WTW and Priory CP. Including those already mentioned, records were received from 18 sites during the year. In addition there were four nocmig records from Biggleswade in March and April, and two from Meppershall in March and August.

### [Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana*

**Very rare passage migrant – 13 records 1946–2023.** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2021.]

### Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

**Common and widespread resident. Included in 40.4% of BirdTrack lists.** (*Amber list*)

The highest count was at East Hyde, with 52 on 21st January. There were counts of 20 or more from another six sites, which are included in the following table.

Monthly maxima at sites that held 20 or more on at least one date

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bedford Park Lake	20	14	10	14	24	12	12	20	16	20	13	20
Broom East	14	14	14	12	10	7	15	11	22	20	15	18
East Hyde	52	–	–	–	+	–	–	+	14	8	14	–
Houghton Brook Pools	8	9	9	9	7	6	19	11	20	23	10	9
Priory CP	19	14	19	14	3	5	10	20	14	14	11	11
R Ouse thro' Bedford	24	12	18	7	6	9	10	20	12	24	16	11
Wardown Park	16	14	8	9	7	2	5	+	–	14	21	16

### Coot *Fulica atra*

**Common breeder and very common winter visitor. Included in 36.7% of BirdTrack lists.** (*Green list*)

Typically, the largest numbers were at a few favoured sites in both winter periods and autumn. In January there were at least 408 at Brogborough Lake on the 7th, 190 at Stewartby Lake on the 20th and 135 at Broom East on the 21st, and then in February 110 at Priory CP on the 2nd. Numbers started to build again in September, with a good early count of 312 at Grovebury SP on the 7th. Into October, there were 374 at Grovebury SP on the 5th, 241 at Broom East on the 19th and 200 at Stewartby Lake on the 23rd. Numbers peaked in November, with 260 at Brogborough Lake on the 3rd, increasing rapidly to 800 on the 6th (the highest count of the year), with at least 660 still there by the 26th. In December there were still 236 at Broom East on the 4th and 743 at Brogborough Lake on the 20th, before numbers dropped sharply, with only 250 at the latter site on the 29th, but 200 were at Stewartby Lake, probably part of the same basic group, also on the 29th. On the same day, though, there were only 86 at Grovebury SP.

Monthly maxima at sites that held 50 or more on at least one date

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Blunham Lakes	70	40	–	35	10	22	12	30	3	40	45	50
Brogborough Lake	408	40	55	26	+	7	–	–	–	–	800	743
Broom East	135	100	70	60	40	52	77	100	144	241	230	236
Grovebury SP	+	73	44	11	6	47	118	199	312	374	–	142
MCP Wetlands NR	60	34	30	8	8	19	27	31	50	55	31	30

Priory CP	126	110	29	10	11	48	89	108	128	173	140	75
Roxton Lake	95	41	22	+	2	2	–	–	–	1	–	+
Southill Lake	6	63	63	23	35	25	43	54	26	19	–	26
Stewartby Lake	190	65	32	8	8	11	+	34	2	200	160	200
Wyboston Lakes	–	66	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

### Common Crane *Grus grus*

**Scarce visitor, with an increasing frequency – 29 records 1946–2023. (Amber list)**

Two flew low over Biggleswade on 19th April heading north-east, before rising and turning west, then drifted towards Potton (MB). One was at Broom East on 25th April (SB).

### Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

**Common and widespread species. Included in 19.5% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**

Confirmed breeding took place at Broom East, Dunstable WTW, Houghton Brook Pools, Lodge Farm Lake, Myers Farm at Potton, Southill Lake and Wixams Estate, and birds were also present during the breeding season at another 26 sites. The three highest counts were all from Southill Lake, with 38 in August (site record), 37 in September and 35 in October. Elsewhere, the highest was 23 at Brogborough Tip & Pools in September.

#### Note

The recent rise in numbers of Little Grebes at Southill Lake has been surprising. During the 1980s the maximum count there was three, in the 1990s it was five, in the 2000s it was six and in the 2010s it was 14. In November 2020 a major technical problem caused most of the water in the lake to drain away and, apart from a feeder stream, by June 2021 the lake area was dry. From March 2021 to March 2022 there were no Little Grebes, or hardly any other wetland species, present. Repair work was carried out in October 2021 and the water level was back to normal by January 2022. From September 2022 counts of Little Grebes started to increase to unprecedented levels for the site, with 32 in that month being the highest anywhere in the county for 2022. Numbers dropped at the start of 2023 but then increased again, to 38 in August, 37 in September and 35 in October. As mentioned above, they were the three highest records for the county in 2023.

### Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

**Relatively common breeder, usually more numerous as a winter visitor particularly in hard weather. Included in 27.1% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**

Confirmed breeding took place at Black Cat GP, Broom East, Broom Village Lake, Coronation CIP, DW Eggs GP, Girtford, Grovebury SP, Lodge Farm Lake, MCP Wetlands NR, Meadow Lane GP, Poppy Hill Lakes, Priory CP, the R Ivel between Blunham and Sandy, Rookery North CIP, Rookery South CIP, Southill Lake and Stewartby Lake.

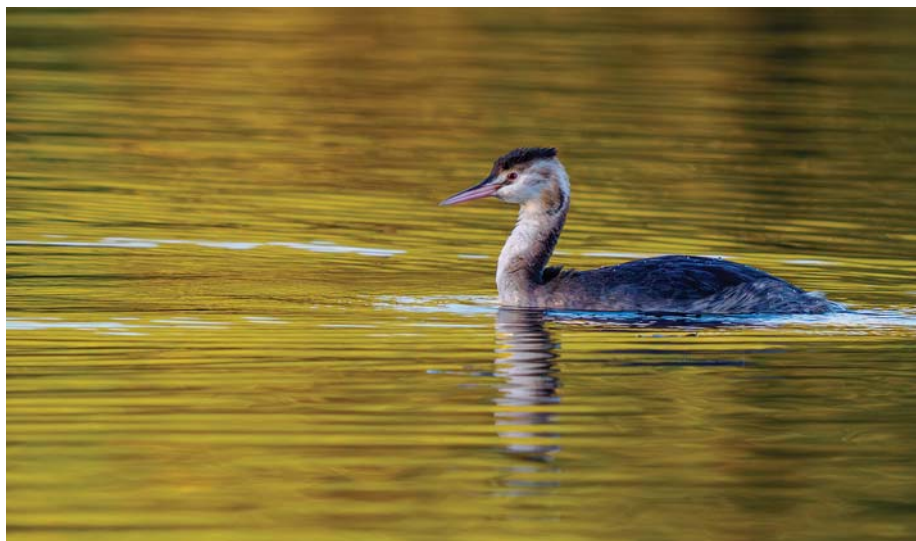
The highest count for the year was 101 at Stewartby Lake on 15th January. Good numbers elsewhere included 45 at Grovebury SP on 28th January, 42 at Brogborough Lake on 20th December and 37 at Luton Hoo Lake on 24th September.

Two sites held most of the largest flocks, and these are shown in the following table.

**Monthly maxima at sites that held 50 or more on at least one date**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Priory CP	5	12	11	14	14	15	21	46	33	28	68	70
Stewartby Lake	101	45	44	18	34	10	1	12	20	49	43	73





Great Crested Grebe, Harrold-Odell CP, November 2023

Richard North

### [Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auratus*

**Rare migrant occurring as a winter visitor and passage migrant. (Red list).**

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2020.]

### Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

**Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor. (Amber list)**

Two were at Arlesey Blue Lagoon on 12th March (JB) and another was at Brogborough Tip & Pools during 26th–29th April (TM *et al.*).

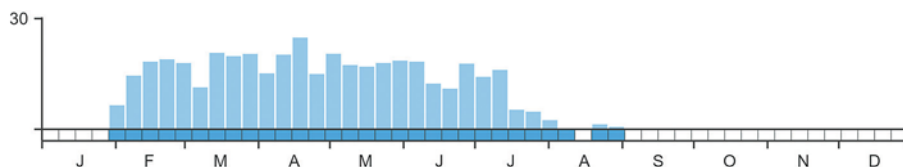
### Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*

**Rare visitor on spring migration. (Amber list)**

One was recorded on nocturnal migration over Biggleswade on 16th March (SCB). That compares with five nocmig records in 2022.

### Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

**Regular passage migrant, an increasing, but still scarce breeder. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Successful breeding occurred at MCP Wetlands NR, with two pairs raising five young, at Grovebury SP, where a pair had two young, and Rookery North CIP, also where a pair had two young. Probable breeding took place at Broom South Quarry and Octagon Farm GP.

The first of the year was one at Broom East on 30th January. The highest count was nine at MCP Wetlands NR on 14th May. The last of the autumn was a nocmig record over Meppershall on 27th August.

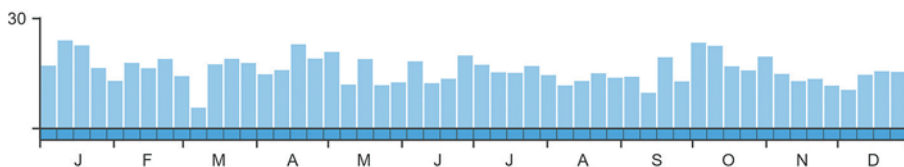
### Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

**Scarce but increasing passage migrant.** (*Amber list*)

One was at MCP Wetlands NR on 16th March (MJG *et al.*), followed by another over the same location on 29th April (NW). The last of the year was one sound recorded over Meppershall on 24th May (JP).

### Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

**Declining breeder, common passage migrant and winter visitor. Included in 17.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -50%\*. (*Red list*)**



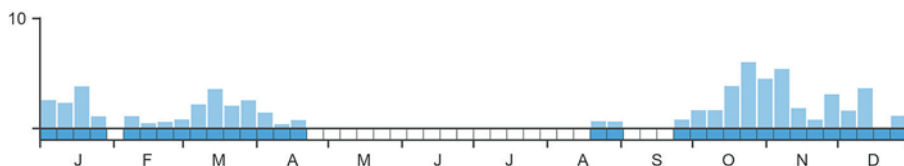
Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Confirmed breeding was reported from nine sites but the majority of the nests were predated before successfully fledging. Displaying adults were also seen at several other sites but there was no further proof of breeding.

In January high counts were 550 at Broom East on the 7th and 420 at Octagon Farm GP on the 11th, and in February 800 at Meadow Lane GP on the 1st, 850 at Grovebury SP and 800 at Octagon Farm GP on the 12th and 320 at Whipsnade Zoo on the 16th. There were 500 at Grovebury SP on 5th March. Notable counts in the second winter period were 320 at Grizzly's Café fields near Beeston on 19th November, 600 at Priory CP on 7th December and 400 at Grovebury SP on the 30th.

### Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

**Regular winter visitor and passage migrant.** (*Green list*)

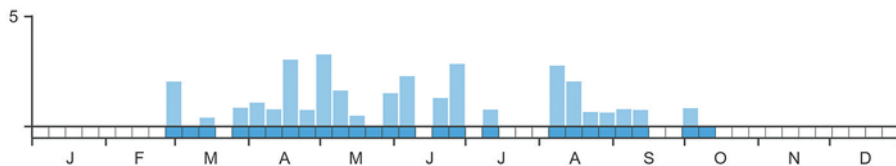


Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

In the first winter period the highest counts were 600 at Broom East on 1st January, 500 at Upper Caldecote on 16th January, 422 at Grovebury SP on 14th March and 1,000 at Pegsdon Hills on 2nd April. The last of the spring was a flock of 17 at Grovebury SP on 22nd April. Autumn passage began with two nocmiggied over Meppershall on 20th August, followed by high counts of 910 at Upper Caldecote on 16th November and 2,000 at Grizzly's Café fields near Beeston on 18th–19th November.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola***Rare passage migrant.**

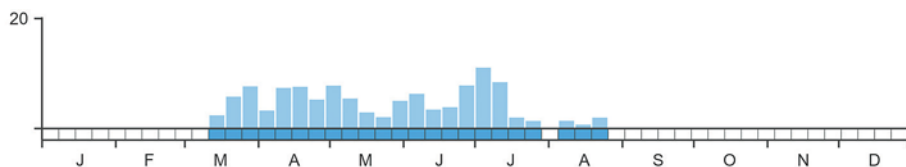
An adult in summer plumage was at Wixams on 23rd–24th April (AG *et al.*), followed by another at Grovebury SP on 29th May (LGRE). These were the first records since 2020.

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula***Regular passage migrant and uncommon localised breeder. (Red list)**

Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

There were no signs of any breeding activity reported.

The first of the year were two at Broom South Quarry on 26th February followed by two the next day at Broom East. At Wixams there were seven on 4th May, then building up to the highest count of the year, with 14 there on 31st May. Other multiple counts included three at Broom South Quarry on 16th March, three at Upper Caldecote on 2nd April, and five at Broom South Quarry on 29th May. The last of the year was one at Broom East on 8th October.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius***Regular passage migrant and uncommon localised breeder. (Green list)**

Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Confirmed breeding records came from Great Barford Lake, Broom East, Broom South Quarry, Wixams and Lodge Farm, Chicksands. Possible breeding was reported from DW Eggs GP and Grovebury SP.

The first of the year was one at Broom South Quarry on 14th March. High counts were 12 there, including fledged young, on 1st July and ten at Wixams on 21st May. The last of the year was a juvenile at Broom South Quarry on 24th August.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus***Scarce but annual passage migrant. (Red list)**

The first of the spring was one at MCP Wetlands NR on 28th April, with then two over Priory CP on 2nd May. The autumn passage began with one at MCP Wetlands NR on 8th July followed by at least two the next day nocmiggged over Meppershall. One flew south-east over Upper Caldecote on 15th July, followed by nocmig records over Meppershall, with at least two on 14th August and one on 1st September.

### **Curlew** *Numenius arquata*

**Regular passage migrant, scarce winter visitor and very rare breeder. (Red list)**



Curlew, Thurleigh Airfield, May 2023

Steve Blain

Three pairs were present in suitable habitat at Thurleigh Airfield during the breeding season but, although nest building occurred, they were not successful in raising any young. One arrived there on 5th March, with then three males and a pair on 12th March, with three pairs from 9th April. The last there were two on 25th June. There were no reports of breeding from elsewhere.

The first of the year was one at Grovebury SP on 22nd February. The highest count by far was 12 at Rookery North CLP on 22nd April, with five at Grovebury SP on 10th August. The last of the year was one recorded over Meppershall on 15th September.

### **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica*

**Scarce passage migrant, virtually annual. (Amber list)**

All spring records occurred between 18th–22nd April, remarkably over only a matter of five days. The first were on 18th April, with ten over Stewartby Lake and a maximum of seven at Broom East. On 19th April a flock of 54 were at Broom South Quarry, 30 were at Stewartby Lake and 13 were at Fenlake Meadows. Three flocks, of 23, five and four, flew north-east over Broom East on 21st April, with one there the next day, being the last of the spring. The only record in autumn was one at Broom East on 28th July.

### **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

**Scarce passage migrant, occurring every year since 1988. (Red list)**

There was a single winter record of one at Broom East on 20th January. Spring passage began with six at MCP Wetlands NR on 30th March, followed by one at Black Cat GP on 8th April and three at Stewartby Lake on 19th April. The last of the spring was one at Grovebury SP on 22nd

April. The autumn passage began with one at MCP Wetlands NR on 2nd July, with then one at Dunstable WTW on 13th July. There was one at Grovebury SP on 19th July, two at Dunstable WTW on 27th July and one at Broom East on 28th July. The last of the year were two at Broom South Quarry on 1st August.

**[Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

**Scarce passage migrant.** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, the first blank year since 1985.]

**[Knot** *Calidris canutus*

**Rare migrant.** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2021.]

**Ruff** *Calidris pugnax*

**Annual passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.** (*Red list*)

The spring passage started impressively with a group of ten at Rookery North CIP on 1st April, followed by six at Broom East on 6th April. Singles were at Broom East on 24th April and at Wixams on 26th April, with two there on 4th–5th May, followed by three at Broom East on 21st May. The autumn passage began with one at Grovebury SP on 9th July, then a gap of 44 days before one was at Broom South Quarry on 22nd August, with a juvenile there on 24th August. At Grovebury SP there was another juvenile from 24th September until 1st October, with a female there on 5th October. The last of the year was one at Broom East on 8th October.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*

**Rare passage migrant.** (*Amber list*)

There was just one record of this rare visitor with a juvenile at MCP Wetlands NR on 19th–21st September (SDN *et al.*). It was the first county record since 2020.

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba*

**Annual passage migrant, but in small numbers.** (*Amber list*)

It was a poor year, with just one at Broom East on 29th May (SCB *et al.*) and one at Wixams from 31st May to 1st June (ACu).

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

**Common passage migrant and scarce winter visitor.** (*Red list*)

The first of the year was one at Broom East on 7th March followed by three at Grovebury SP on 12th March. Notable counts during the spring passage were 11 at Wixams on 1st April and nine at Coronation CIP on 3rd May. The last of the spring was one at Broom GP on 5th June. The first of the autumn passage was one at Grovebury SP on 10th July, with two there on 30th July, and then two at Broom South Quarry on 6th August. The highest autumn count was eight at Priory CP on 13th September. The last were one recorded over Meppershall on 8th November and one at Henlow on 10th November.

**[Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*

**Scarce passage migrant.** (*Green list*)

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2021.]

**[Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos*

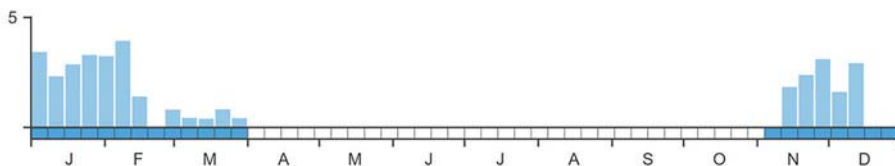
**Very rare migrant – 16 records 1946–2023.**

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2021.]



## Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Winter visitor, perhaps no longer breeds. (Red list)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

The largest counts during the first winter period were from Abbey Farm, Old Warden, with at least 18 on 2nd January, 15 on the 4th and 12 on 21st January. Elsewhere there were five at Woodbury Hall Estate on 21st January, eight at The Lodge on 29th January, and five at Sandy Smith NR on 7th February. The last of the spring was one at The Lodge on 29th March. The first of the autumn was one at Brogborough Hill on the late date of 11th November. The only counts above one during the remainder of the year were all from The Lodge, with three on 11th and 18th December and five on 21st December.

## Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor. (Green list)

There were only two multiple counts during the first winter period, with three at Stratton Park Balancing Pond on 21st February and seven at Grovebury SP on 1st March. The last of the spring was one at Black Cat GP on 18th March. The first in the second winter period was one at Broom East on 18th November and the largest count was six at Wixams on 28th December. There were only three records during the entire second winter period.

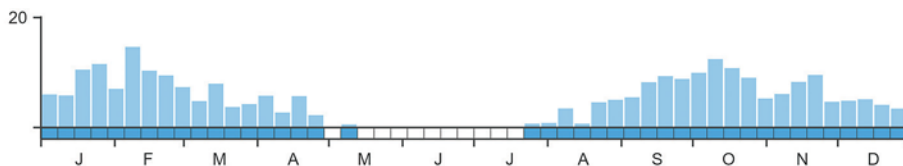


Snipe, Langford Water Meadows, January 2023

Rod Pattison

## Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

**Regular winter visitor and passage migrant.** (*Amber list*)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

The largest counts during the first winter period were 39 at Tetworth Hall Estate on 5th March, 36 there on 30th March, 35 at Broom East on 18th March, 27 at Meadow Lane GP on 5th February, 20 at Black Cat GP on 18th February and 16 at Grovebury SP on 1st March. The last of the spring was one at Meadow Lane GP on 8th May. The first of the autumn was one at Broom East on 25th July. High counts during the rest of the year were 44 at Broom East on 22nd October, 14 at Dunstable WTW on 27th October and an impressive 120 at Wixams on 28th December.

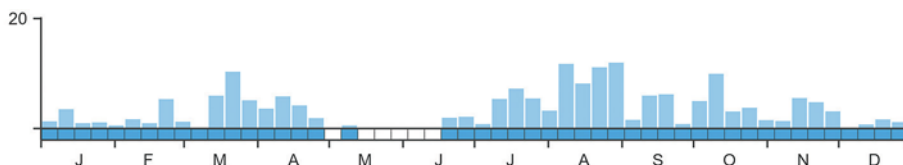
## Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

**Common passage migrant sometimes overwintering in small numbers.** (*Amber list*)

The first of the year was one at Priory CP on 11th April, followed by singles at Gamlingay on 12th April, and Broom South Quarry on 13th April. Notable counts during the year were three at Henlow Grange on 3rd May and four at Lodge Farm, Chicksands and three at Priory CP on 4th May. There were good counts at Grovebury SP, with four on 9th July, five on 24th July and seven on 18th August, and at Dunstable WTW, with four on 13th July, four on 2nd August, and then at Broom South Quarry, with five on 20th August, three on 10th September and then lastly one there on 26th November.

## Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

**Annual passage migrant, with increasing numbers overwintering.** (*Amber list*)

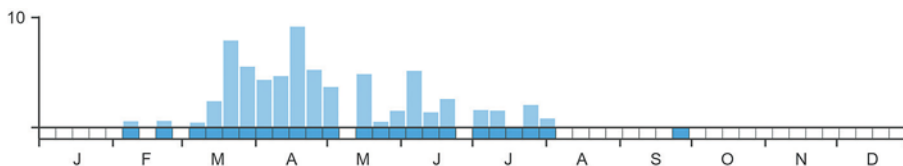


Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

As usual, birds were recorded in every month of the year. During the first three months the highest counts were from Broom South Quarry, where there were five on 12th March, seven on the 14th, six on the 16th–19th and three on 21st March. In April there were three there on the 11th, whilst elsewhere there were six at Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 17th and three at Harrowden WM on the 19th–23rd. In July there were counts of six at Broom South Quarry on the 9th and again on the 16th. In August there were four at Dunstable WTW on the 4th, six there on the 11th, eight at Broom South Quarry and five at Dunstable WTW on 14th August, and six at Broom South Quarry on 19th–24th and 28th August. In September there were six at Dunstable WTW on the 12th and four at Broom South Quarry on the 14th and the 16th. During the last three months of the year the highest counts were of three at Broom South Quarry on 11th, 14th and 18th October, and again on 18th November and 28th December.

## Redshank *Tringa totanus*

**Common passage migrant, scarce breeder and winter visitor.** (*Amber list*)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

There were possible breeding attempts at Harrowden WM and Wixams but no fledged young were seen.

The first of the year was one at Meadow Lane GP on 9th February with another there on 21st February, followed by one at Harrowden WM on 5th March. The highest counts, as in 2022, all came from Harrowden WM, with eight on 22nd–23rd April and various counts of seven between 24th March and 9th June. The last of the year was one at Broom East on 26th September.

## Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

**Scarce passage migrant, recorded every year since 1986.** (*Amber list*)

The first of the year was at East Hyde on 20th April, followed by two at Wixams on 22nd April. One lingered there until 4th May and, with two at Broom East on the same day, was the last of the spring. The autumn passage began with singles at Broom South Quarry on 8th July, then at Dunstable WTW on 10th July, at Grovebury SP on 18th July and, the last of the year, at Cuckoo Bridge Lake on 26th August.

## Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

**Scarce migrant.** (*Amber list*)

There was just one record of this scarce wader, with one at Broom East on 21st August (DD, SB).

## Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

**Scarce spring but regular autumn migrant.** (*Amber list*)

The first of the year was one heard over Broom East on the early date of 4th February. The first spring record was an impressive five at Grovebury SP on 22nd April. In May there were three at Wixams on the 4th–6th, one at Black Cat GP on the 4th, four at MCP Wetlands NR on the 26th and singles at Black Cat GP and Broom South Quarry on the 27th, Houghton Brook Pools on the 29th and Henlow Grange on the 31st. In June singles were at Tetworth Hall Estate on the 2nd and at Broom South Quarry and Harrowden WM, both on the 4th. The first of the autumn passage was one at Priory CP on 7th July. Three were at Lodge Farm Lake on 10th July, with two at Broom South Quarry on 5th September. One was at Myers Farm, Pottton from 3rd–8th September and the last of the year was one at Sandy Heath Quarry on 22nd October.

## Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

**Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant.** (*Red list*)

An adult was at Stewartby Lake on 12th January (MJG), with two on the 13th–14th, but the original bird died on the 15th with the additional adult remaining until 17th January. Other adults were discovered at Broom East on 25th March (JP) and Stewartby Lake on 1st April (NW), with the last of the year being a moribund adult at Brogborough Lake on 26th November (NW).

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

**Abundant in winter and during passage; recently more regular as a breeder. Included in 58.1% of BirdTrack lists.** (*Amber list*)

Confirmed breeding occurred at Priory CP (approximately 250 pairs but see comment below by DK), Broom East (2 pairs), DW Eggs GP (3 nests) and pools by A6, Biddenham (6 pairs). Avian influenza had a major impact on this species during 2023 with many dead birds found in the county. This was highlighted best by a comment describing the situation at Priory CP on 17th June – “28 young today. So far we’ve had over 180 corpses with probably quite a few additional ones on the island. Doubtless quite a few will have died away from the park. The colony has declined to about 120 adults so far from about 500. This is about a month earlier than the ‘natural’ decline which normally takes place after the breeding season. Last year [in 2022] over 280 young were produced so this year [2023] there has been a roughly 80% decline in the number of young produced” (DK).

The highest count of the year was 6,000 roosting at Stewartby Lake on 18th February, with other high counts being 3,500, also at Stewartby Lake, on 15th January and 11th March, 2,000 at Grovebury SP on 28th January, 2,250 at Brogborough Lake on 4th November and 2,000 there on 28th November.

**Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

**Passage migrant in erratic numbers and rare winter visitor.** (*Green list*)

The first of the year was at MCP Wetlands NR on 31st March. The next were five at Grovebury SP on 8th April, one at Priory CP on the 11th, three at Coronation CLP and four at Stewartby Lake on the 19th and 21st and one at Grovebury SP on the 20th.

**Mediterranean Gull** *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

**Increasing visitor, occurring mainly in winter.** (*Amber list*)



Mediterranean Gull, Dunstable WTW, June 2023

John Lynch

January records from Stewartby Lake included two on the 14th (adult and first-winter), with adults also on the 15th, 27th and 29th, with an additional adult at Woburn Park on the 27th. Records in February started with one at Priory CP on the 5th, two (first-winter and second-winter) at Stewartby Lake on the 11th, four (two adults, a second-winter and a first-winter) there on the 18th and a second-winter at Meadow Lane GP on the 19th. In March there were birds at Grovebury SP on the 4th, Stewartby Lake on the 18th, and two (first-summer and second-summer) at Stewartby Lake and an adult at Grovebury SP on the 25th. There were three records in April, with an adult at Stewartby Lake and another bird at Broom East on the 1st, and two again at Broom East on the 17th. There were no records in May. In June a pair flew along the R Ouse dropping into Fenlake Meadows on the afternoon of the 7th, perhaps drawn in by the large Black-headed Gull colony on the adjacent Priory CP. A first-summer was at Dunstable WTW on the 29th. In July, adults were at Grovebury SP on the 2nd, 9th, 15th, 19th, 20th, 23rd and 24th, with a juvenile at MCP Wetlands NR on the 17th, an unaged bird at Harrold-Odell CP also on the 17th, and adults at Stopsley Common and Dunstable WTW on the 26th. In August one was at Grovebury SP on the 25th, with three on the 28th, and a second-winter was at Rookery South CIP on the 30th. The only September record was a first-winter at Broom East on the 22nd. There were two records in October, with a first-winter at Broom South Quarry on the 1st and an adult at Grovebury SP on the 5th. During November, adults were at Brogborough Lake on the 2nd, 4th, 7th (along with a first-winter) and 28th, and at Stewartby Lake, with one bird on the 11th–12th and two on the 24th. In December, birds were at Stewartby Lake on the 23rd, 28th and 29th and Brogborough Lake on the 25th.

### **Common Gull** *Larus canus*

**Common winter visitor and passage migrant. Included in 15.8% of BirdTrack lists. (Red list)**

The highest counts were typically all from Stewartby Lake, with 1,500 on 11th February, 3,000 on 18th February, 1,500 on 11th March, 2,000 on 25th March and 2,000 on 29th December. Away from Stewartby Lake the largest numbers included 800 at Grovebury SP on 28th January, 170 at Water End on 22nd April, with 500 at Brogborough Lake on 6th November and 200 there on 28th November.

After regular records throughout April there were only three for May, with one at Broom East on the 1st, three at Harrowden WM on the 16th and one at Meadow Lane GP on the 31st. Two were at Broom East on 4th June and there were four at Houghton Regis on the 22nd, before an uptick in records during July, August and September at various locations, becoming widespread throughout October, with a peak count of 91 at The Riddy, Sandy on the 31st.

### **Great Black-backed Gull** *Larus marinus*

**Regular winter visitor and passage migrant. (Red list)**

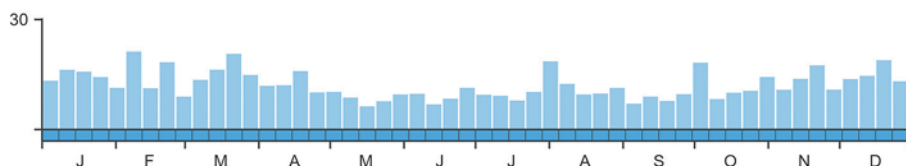
A similar number of records (65) to 2022 were submitted. The highest counts of the year were four over Priory CP on 23rd January, four over Brogborough Hill on 5th February, and five from The Pinnacle on 30th September. The only month without a record was July. During the first winter period two regularly roosted at both Stewartby Lake and Grovebury SP, with another regular at Brogborough Lake. Singles were also at a variety of locations during this period, including MCP Wetlands NR, Priory CP, Woburn Park and Meadow Lane GP. Spring records came from Fenlake Meadows, Santa Pod, Rookery North CIP, Coronation CIP and Broom South Quarry. The only June record was from Blunham on the 27th. In August and September up to two were regularly at Grovebury SP. By November birds were also regular in the roosts at Brogborough Lake and Stewartby Lake, with up to two present, with additional birds being



recorded from Myers Farm, Potton, Barton-le-Clay and Priory CP. In December the only record away from either Brogborough Lake or Stewartby Lake was one at Thurleigh Airfield on the 17th.

### Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

**Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant, with small numbers in summer; in most years a few pairs breed. Included in 13.3% of BirdTrack lists. (Red list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

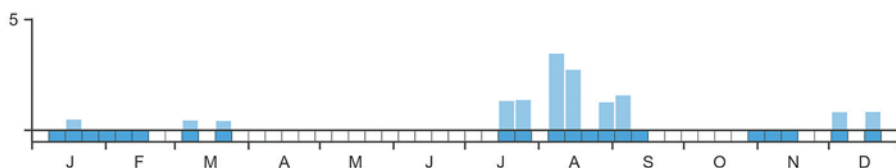
The only confirmed breeding again occurred at Grovebury SP, with one nesting pair. The mixed Herring Gull/Lesser Black-backed Gull pair were also present again at Grovebury SP but it is unclear whether they nested. As in previous years there were regular records of this species over our large towns such as Dunstable, Luton and Bedford throughout May and June, so it is likely this species is being overlooked as a breeding bird.

The highest count of the year was 1,500 roosting at Brogborough Lake on 21st January. It coincided with a count of 800 Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the same night and was the highest count of Herring Gulls for many years, and almost three times that of the next highest count of 550, also at Brogborough Lake on 7th November.

Away from Brogborough Lake notable flocks included 80 at Grovebury SP on 28th January, 70 at Stewartby Lake on 18th February, 120 at Houghton Brook Pools on 20th February, and then at Grovebury SP 73 on 29th March, 30 on 22nd April, 55 on 25th July, 35 on 10th August and 35 on 26th September. There were also 61 at Broom South Quarry on 24th October, and 74 at Grovebury SP on 29th December.

### Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

**Since the first county record in 1999, sightings have been annual, apart from 2012 and 2016. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

During the first winter period there was a regular third-winter bird at Stewartby Lake from mid-January up to at least 25th March. The only other birds reported during this period were a fourth calendar-year and a second calendar-year bird at Grovebury SP on 12th February, with one bird at the same site on the 18th. A second calendar-year bird was at Grovebury SP on 11th June before the regular late-summer surge of records. The first of those was a regular returning adult from 17th July, with presumably the same bird last recorded there on 29th October. During August, other records included two at Grovebury SP on the 6th, an adult at Broom South Quarry



Caspian Gull, Stewartby Lake, December 2023

Steve Blain

also on the 6th, a juvenile also there on the 11th, two again at Grovebury SP on the 12th, a second calendar-year at Broom South Quarry on the 13th, five at Grovebury SP on the 14th, four there on the 25th and three on the 28th, and another juvenile at Broom South Quarry on the 29th. There were only three records for September, with a second calendar-year bird at Grovebury SP on the 1st, a juvenile there on the 7th, and two there on the 11th. In October a juvenile was at Grovebury SP on the 23rd, and a first-winter and an adult were at Brogborough Lake on the 31st. The Brogborough Lake roost was well watched in November, with at least three individuals (two first-winters and an adult) regularly roosting. Other birds were seen at MCP Wetlands NR on 4th and 19th November and at Broom South Quarry with two on the 25th (an adult and a second-winter). At Stewartby Lake during December the bird from the previous winter (now in fourth-winter plumage) had returned by the 2nd and could regularly be seen on its favoured white buoy in the middle of the lake throughout the month. Also during the month reports dwindled from Brogborough Lake, with records on the 1st, 8th, 9th, 12th and 19th only.

### **Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*

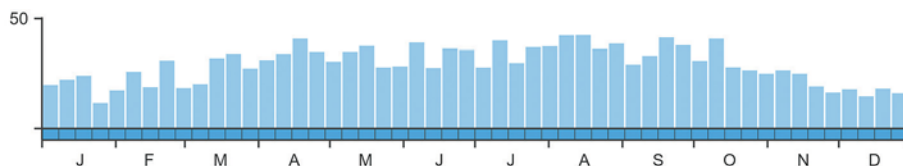
**An increasing visitor, and more numerous than Herring Gull in late summer.** (*Amber list*)

During the first four months of the year very low numbers were recorded, with the peak count being two birds together on various dates, all from the roost at Stewartby Lake. The records suggested at least five different birds were involved during this period with doubtless a few more present. Other sites recording birds during January to April included Brogborough Lake, Grovebury SP and MCP Wetlands NR, all with singles on various dates. There were no records in May, with a pick-up in June with singles at Grovebury SP, Houghton Brook Pools, Wrest Park and Black Cat GP. As usual, the peak counts came in the summer months with numbers rapidly building at Grovebury SP from two on 6th July to a year-high of 51 there on 25th July. No other site came close to having these numbers, with the next highest being eight at Broom South

Quarry on 8th August. There were very few September records, with seven at Grovebury SP on the 1st the best count, before dropping to only one there on the 7th. During October the peak counts were five at Broom South Quarry on the 6th and at Grovebury SP on the 31st. By November the focus had switched to the Brogborough Lake roost, with five there on the 4th and 17th. During December there were regularly two adults roosting at either Brogborough Lake or Stewartby Lake, with a peak of three birds at the last site on the 29th, which included a bird showing characteristics of 'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' *Larus m. atlantis* (JR).

### Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

**Abundant passage migrant, summering in small numbers with a small but increasing breeding population; becoming uncommon in mid-winter. Included in 31.5% of BirdTrack lists. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Confirmed breeding occurred at MCP Wetlands NR (5 nests, 21 juveniles) and Grovebury SP (11 nests, 5 juveniles). Regular counts of around 30 adults were made from Houghton Brook Pools throughout May and June, near the north Luton industrial estates site, with at least two juveniles accompanying them on 27th July, so it is very likely that breeding occurred at the Luton site too, as in previous years.

Monthly peak counts were as follows: 800 at Brogborough Lake on 21st January; 190 at Stewartby Lake on 18th February; 54 at MCP Wetlands NR on 30th March; 125 over the north Luton industrial estates on 3rd April; then at Grovebury SP 182 on 11th May, 72 on 20th June, 183 on 25th July; then at Broom South Quarry 1,500 on 13th August, 150 on 4th September, 1,200 on 6th October, 700 on 12th and 16th November; 51 at Woburn Park on 15th December.

### Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

**Scarce passage migrant. (Amber list)**

The only record of the year was of two at Grovebury SP on 15th August (DB).

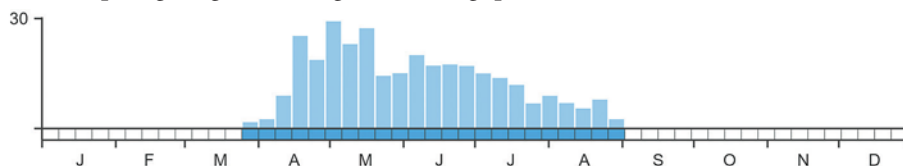
### [Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

**Scarce passage migrant. (Amber list)**

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2021.]

### Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

**Common passage migrant and regular breeding species. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Confirmed breeding occurred at Black Cat GP (3 pairs), DW Eggs GP (1 pair) and Willington GP (6 pairs). It is unclear if any other pairs in the county nested elsewhere during 2023.

The first of the year was at Priory CP on 29th March, with a widespread arrival of small numbers over the coming week. The first substantial count of the year was 20 at Priory CP on 11th April. The highest count of the year was 61 at Willington GP on 30th April, with 50 also there on 2nd May, and then 50 on 8th and 11th July at Stewartby Lake. Overall numbers appeared down everywhere in Bedfordshire with the effects of avian influenza apparent at several breeding locations where dead birds were recorded around nesting individuals, e.g. two birds apparently sitting on nests on a raft at Black Cat GP along with five dead birds on 29th May. The last record of the year was of 11 at Stewartby Lake on 2nd September.

### **Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea*

#### **Regular spring and autumn passage migrant.** (*Red list*)

2023 was a very poor year for this species with only three records, all spaced over seven days in April. There were two at Grovebury SP on the 15th (DB), one at Priory CP on the 18th (DOM), and one at Stewartby Lake on the 22nd (SCB).

### **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

#### **Regular spring and autumn passage migrant.** (*Green list*)

The first of the year were two at Coronation CIP on 3rd May, followed by two at Harrold-Odell CP on 4th May, seven at the same site on the 27th, one at Black Cat GP on the 29th, and three at Priory CP on 30th May. The only autumn records were three at Stewartby Lake on 18th August, and two also at Stewartby Lake on 11th September.

### **[Great Northern Diver** *Gavia immer*

#### **Scarce visitor, mainly in winter** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, the last being in 2021.]

### **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*

#### **Very rare visitor, with the status confused by occasional escapes, and free-flying birds in two local collections.**

One was at Priory CP on 22nd March (MM), with almost certainly the same at Blunham the next day (PE).

### **[Gannet** *Morus bassanus*

#### **Rare visitor** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2020.]

### **Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

#### **Common winter visitor, passage migrant and breeder. Included in 35.1% of BirdTrack lists.** (*Green list*)

There were two nests at Blunham Lakes on 21st March, increasing to seven by 2nd May with at least one of those holding young. At Harrold-Odell CP there were at least five nests by 14th May, but more were probably hidden away. At Coronation CIP there were seven occupied nests on 17th June.

The highest count was of at least 98 at Coronation CIP on 23rd September, with other large counts including 89 at MCP Wetlands NR on 15th September, 65 at Grovebury SP on 2nd July and 60 at Broom East on 31st August. The long-staying brown-variant individual continued to be seen at MCP Wetlands NR and Stewartby Lake between February and October.



Cormorant, Harrold-Odell CP, November 2023

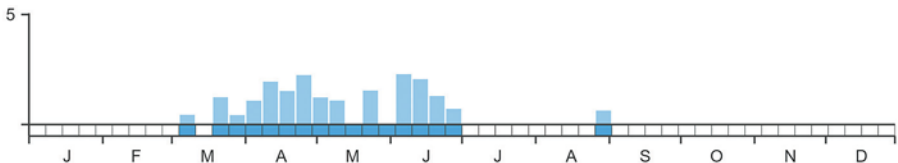
Richard North

**Shag** *Gulosus aristotelis***Rare, normally storm-driven visitor.** (*Red list*)One was at MCP Wetlands NR from 27th October to 11th November (MJG *et al.*).**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus***Rare visitor, increasing in frequency – eight or nine records 1946–2023.**

One was at Harrowden WM briefly on 16th May, before flying off east (DOM).

**[Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia***Scarce visitor – 17 records 1946–2023.** (*Amber list*)

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2021.]

**Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris***Rare breeder and scarce winter visitor.** (*Amber list*)

Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

It is likely that at least two pairs bred, and probably three pairs. Booming was first heard at Rookery North CIP on 19th March, and then regularly at Rookery North/South CIP, with two males booming from 16th April through to 10th May. There were three birds on 17th June with at least one to 26th June. One, and occasionally two, were seen making feeding flights to MCP





Bittern, Rookery North CIP, June 2023

Steve Blain

Wetlands NR on several dates from 3rd April to 23rd June, and singles were also seen at Stewartby Lake during 23rd April to 23rd June. In addition one was seen at Quest CIP on 17th June. One flew north over Broom East on 8th June and nocmig flight calls were recorded over Meppershall on 10th March and 31st August.

### **Night-heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

**Very rare – seven records 1946–2023.**

One was nocmigged over Biggleswade on 10th May (SCB).

### **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*

**Rare visitor, increasing in frequency. (Amber list)**

There were two at Broom East on 10th August (TP *et al.*), then singles at Grovebury SP on the 12th–15th (SR, DB *et al.*), also 25th August (MBi), and MCP Wetlands NR on 25th–31st August (SDN *et al.*). There was a remarkable flock of 18 at Grovebury SP on 10th September (SR *et al.*), with 12 remaining to the 11th and one to 12th September. There was one at MCP Wetlands NR on 15th–22nd September (BH *et al.*) and one at Meadow Lane GP on 13th October (JB). Two flew over Willington GP on 26th October (PG) and there was one at Thurleigh Airfield on 29th October (MB, PN). There were seven near Battlesden on 26th November (DH) and nine at Grovebury SP during 28th–31st December (BirdGuides *et al.*). In total, these were an unprecedented set of records.

### **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

**Common resident, typically breeding at a handful of traditional sites. Included in 27.7% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**

Adults made their returns to old nest sites from late January, with the first sightings of hatched chicks at Priory CP on 11th March. However the cold weather in early March may have caused

some nests to be abandoned. By 29th March, 17 nests at Priory CP were occupied. Breeding activity across the county appears to have been completed by the end of May. Other active nests were at Blunham Lakes (3), Coronation CIP, Rookery North CIP, Rushmere CP, Southill Park (5 in February but dropping to 4), Woburn Park (4) and Wyboston Lakes. The highest count, outside the breeding season, was 15 at MCP Wetlands NR on 26th December.

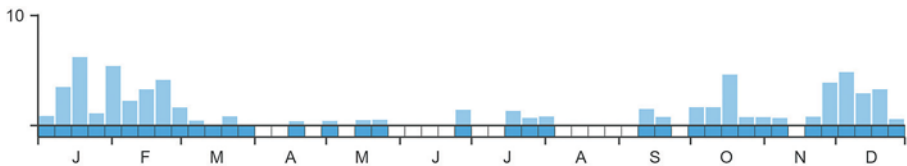
### Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

**Very rare – eight or nine records 1946–2023.**

A first-summer individual was at Rookery North CIP during 17th–26th June (PN *et al.*). During its stay it also visited Coronation CIP (during 17th–24th June) and Quest CIP (17th June). It or another was at Willington GP on 28th August (AC).

### Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

**Scarce visitor, with an increasing frequency. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Most records were in January to March and October to December, with few during the summer months, as the following table shows:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Days recorded	17	14	9	1	4	1	5	1	4	13	5	17
Sites recorded	8	10	5	1	4	1	4	1	3	8	3	9

Most were singles, except for three at Biggleswade Common on 15th January, then twos at Grovebury SP, Meadow Lane GP, Priory CP, Radwell Lakes and Willington Lock Quarry.

### Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

**Regular visitor, rare breeder since 2014. Included in 14.8% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**

Breeding took place at two traditional sites. On 5th April Blunham Lakes held at least three occupied nests with a further four potentially to be completed, and by 12th April there were eight occupied nests. By 10th June seven nests had young, ranging from fully fledged to very small chicks. At Southill Lake five young fledged from two or three nests (all nests hidden amongst tree cover). At Priory CP, on 16th April, there was a brief display from one pair.

Away from the two main breeding sites, double-figure counts were from the Henlow area, with 19 in November, at Clifton, with 16 in December, at Priory CP, with 12 in March, at Broom South Quarry, with 12 in November, and Rookery South CIP, with 11 in July.

### Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

**Annual and regular migrant, recorded every year in the county since 1988. (Amber list)**

The first was on 29th March at Broom South Quarry, with the next on 5th April at Broom East and there again on the 8th. Another was over Blows Downs on 12th April and the last of spring was over Woburn on 7th May. During the summer months there were singles at Grovebury SP

on 19th July, over the Kempston Hardwick/Wixams area on 12th August and then over Haynes on 26th August. The last of the year was in the Haynes area on 15th October.

**Honey-buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*

**Very rare summer visitor.** (*Amber list*)

One over The Lodge on 16th August, being pursued by a Buzzard, was the first since 2018 (DLB).

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

**Widespread resident. Included in 9.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -27%\*. (*Amber list*)**

Breeding activity was reported at 22 sites, and was confirmed at five, probable at 11 and possible at six. With over 1,000 records covering all months, despite a national population reduction, this is still a widespread raptor.

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

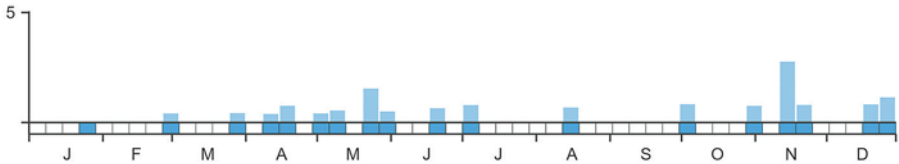
**Scarce, but recorded in the county every year since 2000. Bred in the county for the first time in 2023.** (*Amber list*)



Marsh Harrier, Rookery North CIP, June 2023

Steve Blain

Up to two males and a female ranged widely over various former clay pits in the Marston Vale area, and breeding was eventually confirmed, for the first time in the county, at MCP Wetlands NR.



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

During the year there was a total of 167 records, with, unsurprisingly, almost 75% from the Marston Vale. The first was on 1st January and the last on 31st December, so quite a change from the 1980s when it was 'a very rare, mainly spring, passage migrant'. Away from the Marston Vale there were 44 records, all of singles. About 65% of those were from the well-watched sites in the Broom complex.

### **Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*

**Almost annual visitor, in very small numbers, mainly in winter. (Red list)**

A male, heading north, was seen distantly from Broom East on 21st April (MI *et al.*).

### **Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

**Widespread resident and a rare breeder since at least 2007. Included in 46.3% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**



Red Kite, Broom South Quarry, March 2023

Richard North

Widespread, conspicuous and recorded almost daily throughout the year, it was easily the most frequently recorded raptor with some 42% of raptor records (over 5,300) being of this species. Just ten years ago there were fewer than 500 records and 20 years ago every occurrence was noted in the bird report. Breeding was confirmed at eight sites with probable breeding at a further 22.

There were 12 counts of 30 or more birds. In January there were at least 35 at Southill Park and at least 30 at Warden Great Wood on the 2nd, 34 were near Chicksands on the 4th, 52 at Woburn Park on the 12th and 35 at Barton-le-Clay on the 28th. In February there were 35 at Wigmore Valley Park on the 1st, 43 on the 5th and 37 on the 20th. Post-breeding, there were 37 there on 10th July. The largest count was 60 at Exeter Wood on 21st November. At Barton-le-Clay, there were 33 on 29th November and 32 on 10th December.

**[White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla*

**Vagrant – one record in 1946–2020. Birds from the reintroduction Isle of Wight scheme – one record 2020, one record 2021, three in 2022.**

There were no records of the reintroduced birds in 2023.]

**Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

**Common resident. Included in 30.8% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**



Buzzard, Broom South Quarry, March 2023

Richard North

Breeding was confirmed at ten sites with probable breeding at a further 27. Most counts were in the range of one to five, with only three counts of ten or more, with ten at Wigmore Valley Park on 9th January, 12 at Broom South Quarry on 16th September and 11 at Upper Caldecote on 8th October.



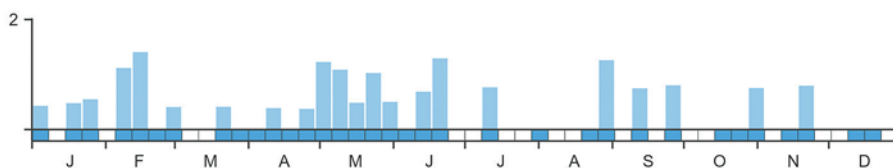
## Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

**Uncommon but widespread resident. The England long-term trend is increasing +221%. (Green list)**

187 records were submitted from around 93 locations. In terms of breeding pairs, there were 23 boxes occupied out of 64 in the Ivel Valley Barn Owl Project (AP). The total number of pulli in those boxes was 28, with 24 of those ringed. Also, at Willington a pair had three chicks. Elsewhere there were only three confirmed breeding records, from Bolnhurst, Priory CP and King's Wood at Houghton Conquest, with two birds at five additional sites suggesting pairs. Several birds were recorded on nocturnal over suburban settings in Biggleswade and Meppershall.

## Little Owl *Athene noctua*

**Uncommon but widespread introduced resident. The England long-term trend is decreasing -73%\*.**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Around 80 records were submitted from just 21 sites across the county, a drop from 29 sites in 2022. Records came from Ampthill Park, Clipstone, Colesden, East Hyde, Galley Hill, Girtford, Henlow, Henlow Grange, King's Wood at Houghton Conquest, Marston Thrift, Meppershall, Potton, Sandy Heath, Sandy Smith NR, Sutton, Thurleigh, Upper Shelton, Water End, Whipsnade Zoo, Willington Lock Quarry and Wyboston. Almost every record was of single birds, with the only pairs being seen at Ampthill Park, Girtford and Sandy Smith NR but no young were observed. If this downturn in records continues at the same rate we could lose this charismatic species in Bedfordshire in just a few years.

## Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

**Very rare breeder, possibly overlooked, scarce in winter. (Green list)**

The only record of the year was one at Flitwick Plantation on 24th January (PS).

## Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

**Scarce but annual winter visitor. (Amber list)**

There were only two records for the first winter period, with one at Houghton Brook Pools on 8th–9th January, and another at MCP Wetlands NR also on 9th January.

The first in the second winter period flew over Broom East on 29th October, with the next at East Hyde on 6th November. Others occurred at Staughton Moor on 10th November, King's Wood at Houghton Conquest on the 17th, Houghton Brook Pools on the 24th, and Dunton on 4th December. Thurleigh Airfield held up to three from 12th November through to the end of the year.

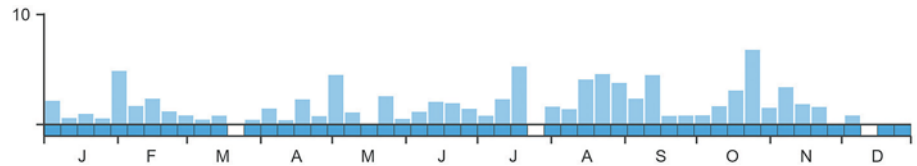


Short-eared Owl, Thurleigh Airfield, January 2024

Lisa King

**Tawny Owl** *Strix aluco*

**Common resident. The England long-term trend is decreasing -34%\*. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

270 records were submitted from around 97 sites across the county. The highest counts were four from Warden Farm and Southill Lake. However, the only confirmed breeding records came from Galley Hill, Willington (2 chicks), Whipsnade Zoo and Meppershall. There were over 50 records of two or more birds calling from scattered locations, highlighting how overlooked this species is as a breeding bird.

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*

**Rare migrant.**

One was in a private garden in Maulden on 1st–4th May (JS *et al.*).

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*

**Local resident. Included in 6.2% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**

During the May to July period it was recorded at 29 sites, and at 58 sites during the whole year.

**Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla***Rare migrant.**

One found at Pegsdon Hills on 12th September (GN *et al.*) was well watched until 16th September.

**[Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *Dryobates minor***Very scarce resident, declining. (Red list)**

There were no reports in 2023, the first blank year in the county since 1959.]

**Note**

This is an unobtrusive and elusive species, mostly foraging on small branches high in the canopy, and so has probably always been under-recorded. In the first Bedfordshire breeding atlas (covering 1968 to 1977) it was found in 20% of the county tetrads. A decline was noted in 1983, when the number of pairs on one common bird census plot dropped from five to one. However, in the second county breeding atlas (covering 1988 to 1992) it was found in 24% of our tetrads. In the 1996 Bird Report further signs of a decline eventually led to a county-wide survey in 2004 (for this species and Willow Tit), covering all the major and many smaller woodlands. It found only 15 Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers (Sharrock *et al.* 2005). In the last 15 years there has been a gradual reduction in the number of sites, although conversely, where these sites have been publicised, it has led to an increase in reports. The last confirmed breeding in the county was in 2013. According to the 'Rare breeding birds in the UK in 2022' report (Eaton *et al.* 2024) there was a maximum of only 104 breeding pairs in the whole of South East England. That was comprised mostly of 17 in Essex, 43 in Kent and 26 in Sussex. There were none in Bedfordshire, and in our neighbouring counties there were only two in Buckinghamshire and five in Hertfordshire.

The following table shows the decline in the number of sites in Bedfordshire since 2010:

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sites	6	11	11	6	7	11	6	8	6	3	6	4	8	0

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major*

**Common resident. Included in 22.9% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +80%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +16%. (Green list)**

Breeding status codes were only included for 136 records (5% of all records; 17% of spring records). Nesting was reported from nine sites, including two nests in Maulden Wood, and juveniles noted from another eight sites. Breeding was probable at a further 25 sites and possible at another 14. Drumming (probable breeding) was reported from 12 sites, markedly fewer than in recent years, e.g. from 21 sites in 2022 and 25 sites in 2021, and as in those years all records were from the southern half of the county. Breeding was subsequently only confirmed from three of these sites. Drumming was noted from 1st January to 2nd June and was most frequent in March and April. The highest counts were eight at The Lodge on 24th June and seven at Blunham Bridges on 9th August.

**Green Woodpecker** *Picus viridis*

**Common resident, increasing. Included in 30.9% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +41%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +55%. (Green list)**

Breeding codes were only included on 49 records, about 3% of spring/summer (March–July) records. Juveniles were reported from eight sites: Henlow, Henlow Grange, King's Wood at Houghton Conquest, Myers Farm at Pottton, Priory CP, Sandy, The Lodge and Whipsnade Common. Probable breeding was noted from a further five sites and possible breeding from another 14 sites. The maximum recorded count was ten in Wrest Park on 26th March.



Great Spotted Woodpecker, Maulden, January 2023

Richard North

### **Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

**Widespread resident, but declining. Included in 18.6% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -15%. (Amber list)**

Breeding was confirmed at 12 sites with probable breeding at a further 12. Birds were recorded almost daily, with 2,003 records, an encouraging increase over 2021 (1,684) and 2022 (1,896).

### **Merlin** *Falco columbarius*

**Annual and increasing winter visitor and passage migrant. (Red list)**

The first was in the Broom East/Broom South Quarry area on 1st January.

A female, perhaps the returning winterer, was regularly seen in the Broom/Stanford/Southill area up to 27th April, which was the last record for the first half of the year. Elsewhere, they were at Stotfold on 15th January, Wixams on 18th January, a male at Myers Farm, Potton on 24th February and again on 8th March, at Lodge Farm, Chicksands on 2nd March, and a female at Thurleigh Airfield on 5th March.

The first of the autumn was at Clophill on 15th October, with another at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 18th and, at Thurleigh Airfield, a female on the 29th, where it would show regularly until 26th December. Further records came from Biggleswade and Poppy Hill Lakes on 11th November, Strawberry Hill Farm on 14th November, Tetworth Hall Estate on 22nd November and 1st December, between Maulden and Flitwick on 25th November, with a Christmas Day male at Henlow Grange and one at Broom South Quarry on Boxing Day.

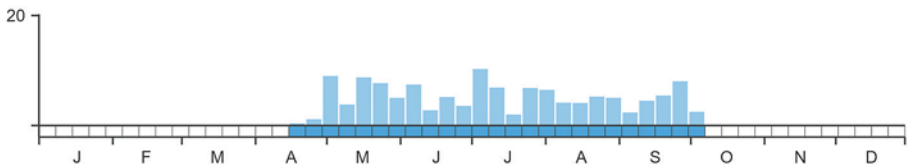


Kestrel, Broom East, April 2023

Peter Nash

### Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Scarce, but under-recorded breeding species and regular summer migrant. (Green list)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Breeding was confirmed at one site, with possible breeding at up to three more sites. In the July to August period birds were at a total of 29 different sites.

The first was one at Coronation CIP on 19th April, two days later than the 10-year average arrival date. Numbers there built up impressively, with seven on 25th April, 12 on 5th May, then peaking at 27 on 27th May, with 13 at Rookery North CIP on the same day. There were three records in October, with two at Broom East on the 2nd, one there on the 3rd and finally two at Broom South Quarry on the 7th, four days earlier than the 10-year average latest date of 11th October.

### Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

Resident and increasing, with a small breeding population. (Green list)

Breeding was confirmed at three sites: Luton town centre, plus new sites in Dunstable and around Potton/Sandy Heath/Deepdale. Unfortunately, whilst breeding was confirmed, there were no records of fledged young. Probable breeding was recorded at four sites.



The first day of the year saw the first records, with singles at Broom South Quarry, Houghton Brook Pools and Rookery North CP, and the last records, also singles, were at Rookery North and Broom South Quarry on 31st December. Birds were seen far and wide throughout the year with records received from many sites and including all the major towns.

### **Ring-necked Parakeet** *Psittacula krameri*

**Local escapes or wanderers from populations derived from introduced origins, probably now breeding.**

As in 2022, there were no confirmed breeding records. There was just one report of probable breeding when a pair was noted 'prospecting a nest hole' at Stockwood Park, Luton on 1st March.

Of the 108 records, 64 were from Luton, with the majority from the area around Wardown Park. Counts of over ten were all from nearby Wychwood Avenue, including 11 on 15th and 23rd June, 14 on 16th July, 15 on 21st June, 17 on 18th July and, the largest count, 23 on 24th June. Perhaps, as an early nester, these are family parties from unknown nearby nesting. Away from Luton, there were records from all parts, but generally favouring urban areas with garden-feeding opportunities. Counts of note included ten near the centre of Dunstable on 8th December, eight at Willington on 23rd October and six at Priory CP on 9th November.

### **Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*

**Very rare.**

One, the first since 2013, was at Quest CP on 17th June (TD *et al.*).

### **Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor*

**Scarce, mainly winter visitor.**

One was at Eyeworth during 4th–29th March, the first since 2020 (AR, MI *et al.*).

### **Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*

**Rare summer visitor – 19 records 1946–2023.**

2023 was a good year, with three records. The first was at Leagrave Marsh on 5th May (PSe), another was at Deepdale Woods on 26th May (MBa), with the third at Sandy, before it headed towards Biggleswade and then The Lodge, on 1st June (AS *et al.*).

### **Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

**Widespread and fairly common resident. Included in 17.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +30%\*. (Green list)**

Although most records were of one or two, there were 77 records of four or more. The highest counts were eight at Broom GP on 28th September, ten at Linslade Wood on 20th January and 11 around Marston Thrift and Brogborough Tip & Pools on 28th September.

There were records from 25% of gardens in the Summer Garden Bird Survey (compared to 31% in 2022) and 23% in the Winter Survey for the second winter period (compared to 21% the previous winter). In both surveys they showed a preference for rural locations.

### **Magpie** *Pica pica*

**Very common resident. Included in 73.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +40%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +31%. (Green list)**

There were 332 records of ten or more, including seven records of over 30. Maxima in the first half of the year were 45 at Slaughter's Wood, Luton (24th January) and 50 at MCP Wetlands NR (30th March), followed in the second half of the year by 32 at Priory CP (9th November) and 55



Magpie, Willington, May 2023

Steve Blain

at Fenlake Meadows (23rd December). Breeding was confirmed at 15 sites, although was undoubtedly under-recorded.

Records were received from 97% of gardens in the Summer Garden Bird Survey (compared to 90% in 2022), and 96% in the Winter Survey for the second winter period (compared to 92% the previous winter), making it the most regular garden visitor of the crow family.

### **Jackdaw** *Coloeus monedula*

**Very common and increasing resident. Included in 66.5% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +174%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +166%. (Green list)**

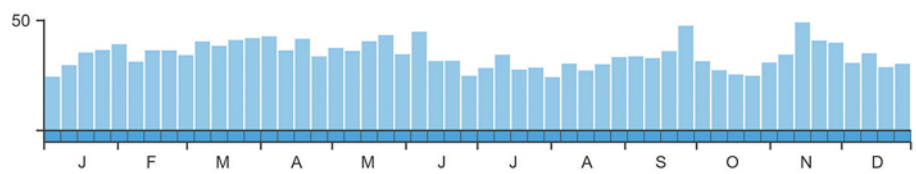
The winter roost at Priory CP held maxima of 450 in January and 2,500 in December. There were 2,000 at Broom South Quarry in August and again in November, whilst there were 1,000 at Thurleigh Airfield in October. Confirmed breeding was noted at nine sites, although it was clearly under-recorded.

There were records from 73% of gardens in the Summer Garden Bird Survey (compared to 72% in 2022) and 67% in the Winter Survey for the second winter period (compared to 65% the previous winter). Rural locations were clearly preferred in both surveys.

### **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*

**Common resident. Included in 40.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +11%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -57%. (Amber list)**

The annual rookery survey recorded 5,083 nests, the highest count since the original survey in 1945, and in 205 rookeries. There was no obvious reason for this increase, although the cold spring may have delayed leaf burst, allowing more late season counts. The largest rookery was at



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird



Rook, Wixams, April 2023

Steve Blain

Nunswood at Meppershall (113 nests). Three other rookeries exceeded 100 nests: Poppy Hill and Stockbridge Farm (both 109 nests) and Hinwick Dungee (101 nests). A further 18 rookeries held more than 50 nests, including Cotton End with 98 nests. Most rookeries consisted of 25 or fewer nests while most nests were in rookeries of 25–50 nests. Average rookery size was 24.80, bucking the trend of slowly declining rookery size, and 17 rookeries were reported for the first time. At least eight rookeries were abandoned in 2023.

Survey Year	Rookeries	Nest count	Average colony size	Tetrad s
1945	312	9,945	31.88	151
1975	202	4,436	21.96	122
1980	134	3,756	28.03	84
2013	134	3,740	27.91	97
2014	169	4,688	27.74	109

2015	180	4,484	24.91	113
2016	181	4,418	24.41	116
2017	174	4,470	25.69	114
2018	181	4,622	25.54	120
2019	187	4,317	23.09	120
2020	168	3,223	19.18	112
2021	213	4,857	22.80	127
2022	172	3,561	20.70	112
2023	205	5,083	24.80	127

During the pre-breeding season, three flocks of 100 or more were reported: 122 on 1st January flying from the roost in King's Wood, Heath & Reach; 150 on 4th January at Broom East; and 117 on 15th January at Wrest Park. In the post-breeding period, 13 flocks of 100 or more were reported from eight sites, including two flocks of 200 at Thurleigh Airfield on 29th October and 17th December. The above report from King's Wood was the only count from a roost. Other roosts were reported from Cricket Bat Wood, Langford and Cityfield Farm, Henlow but with no counts.

### **Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone*

**Very common resident. Included in 77.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +106%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +28%. (Green list)**

There were counts of 50 or more throughout the year, including 18 of 70 or more. The highest count was of over 230 at Deepdale on 15th August. Other large counts were 100 at Biggleswade Common (31st January), 116 at Thurleigh Airfield (25th June), 100 at Grovebury SP (25th July), 100 at Rookery North CIP (28th August), and several counts of 100 or more at Totternhoe from October to December. Breeding was recorded in 14 locations although was clearly under-reported.

There were records from 67% of gardens in the Summer Garden Bird Survey (unchanged from 2022), and 62% in the Winter Survey for the second winter period (something of a recovery compared to the rather low 56% recorded in winter 2022/23).

### **Raven** *Corvus corax*

**A former extreme rarity; a resident population is now established. Included in 5.9% of BirdTrack lists. The England long-term trend is increasing +29%. (Green list)**

Birds were recorded across the county and throughout the year. Whilst most counts were of four or fewer, the highest count was of up to 20 adults at Toddington on 3rd September. Other high counts were eight at Blows Downs (10th August) and The Lodge (11th October), and nine at Houghton Brook Pools (20th October) and Beckerings Park near Steppingley (22nd October). Breeding was recorded in two locations, at Ampthill Park and Battlesden, although was probably under-reported.

### **Waxwing** *Bombus garrulus*

**Scarce and irruptive winter visitor. (Green list)**

There were four at Cranfield during 1st–2nd February, then two there during 3rd–19th March. In December there were 21 at Silsoe on the 2nd, with four remaining to the 4th. One was at Pegsdon and two went over The Lodge on the 12th, and there were two in Bedford on the 15th. Then, in the Potton area, there were three on the 16th, then nine on the 22nd, 13 on the



Waxwing, Cranfield, March 2023

William Stephens

23rd–24th, nine to the 26th and then 15 on 28th December. Elsewhere, there were 18 at Thurleigh Airfield on the 17th, eight at Sandy on the 26th, 18 in the Leighton Buzzard/Grovebury SP area on the 29th, with 16 to the 30th and 11 to the 31st, whilst ten were in Amptill on 29th December.

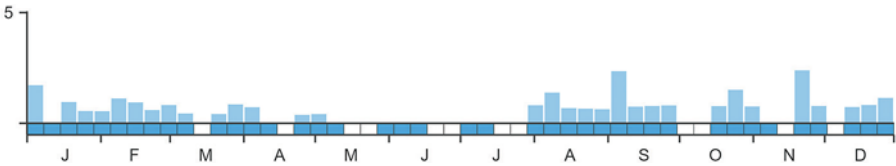
**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater*

**Common resident. Included in 12.6% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -14%. (Green list)**

The largest count, of 15, came from Maulden Wood on 2nd April, with other double-figure counts of 12 from King’s Wood at Heath & Reach on 1st January and 1st July, 12 from Aspley Heath on 25th December and ten from The Lodge on 24th June.

**Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris*

**Local and declining resident. Included in 0.6% of BirdTrack lists. The England long-term trend is decreasing -49%\*. (Red list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

There were 89 reports from a total of 28 sites, the same number of sites as in 2022. Over 55% of the reports came from just four sites, at Wilstead Meadows, Maulden Wood, King’s Wood at Houghton Conquest and Chicksands Wood.



**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus*

**Very common resident. Included in 73.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +28%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +25%. (Green list)**

The maximum count was of at least 80 in the Potton area on 30th August. Of the 34 other counts of 20 or more, the majority came from the same general area and the same diligent observer (DOM). Elsewhere, there were 27 at Wrest Park on 29th January and counts of 23 at Sandy Heath on 20th January, at The Lodge on 28th February and at King's Wood at Houghton Conquest on 30th April. It was recorded in all participating gardens in the Summer Garden Bird Survey.

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

**Very common resident. Included in 63.2% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +9%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +4%. (Green list)**

The largest counts were from Wrest Park with a peak of 22 on 12th February, Priory CP with 18 on 26th January, Myers Farm at Potton with 17 on 2nd January, The Lodge with 17 on 31st January, and Deepdale, Potton with 17 on 21st October. It was recorded in 98% of gardens in the Summer Garden Bird Survey.

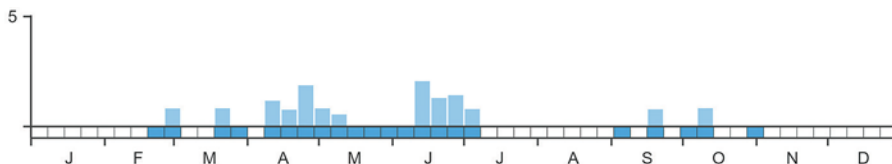
**[Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus*

**Very rare – 6 records 1946–2023.**

There were no records in 2023, with the last in 2017.]

**Bearded Tit** *Panurus biarmicus*

**Rare breeding resident, scarce migrant and winter visitor. (Green list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Most of the records were from Rookery North CIP, from 21st February through to 2nd November. Probable breeding took place there with nest building and then food carrying seen on at least two occasions, with the cumulative evidence strongly suggesting that confirmed breeding had taken place. Up to eight were present on several occasions, with a maximum of at least nine on 10th October. Other records came from MCP Wetlands NR on 4th June and also Quest CIP, with three pairs during June and July.

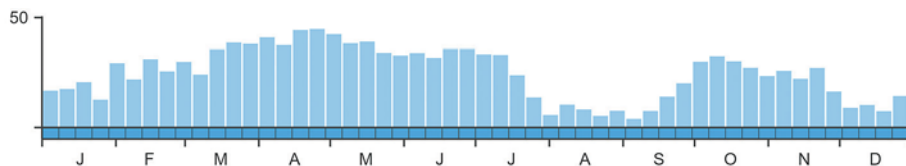
**Woodlark** *Lullula arborea*

**Scarce migrant and very rare breeder. (Green list)**

There were 11 reports in the spring, all from the Sandy Heath area. The first was on 3rd April, and then birds were in song over New Heath, The Lodge during 4th–16th May.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*

**Widespread resident, common passage migrant and winter visitor. Included in 28.5% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -20%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -1%. (Red list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

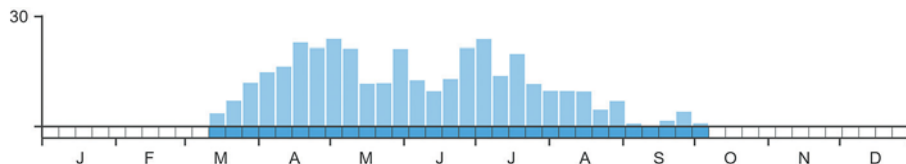
Breeding was confirmed at only three sites: Henlow Grange, Houghton Brook Pools (adults carrying food) and Myers Farm, Potton (fledged young). Probable breeding was noted at a further 11 sites. Singing was reported from 34 sites, from New Year's Day at Henlow Grange and Broom East until early August, including several singing at Henlow Grange while it snowed on 8th March.

Where counts were entered, most were of less than 30. In the first winter period only three flocks of 50 or more were reported: 52 at Henlow Grange on 17th January; 187, the largest flock of the year, at Gypsy Lane West on 31st January; and 60 at Broom East on 28th February. There were nine other flocks of 40 or more recorded.

Autumn movements were noted from only a few sites, and in small numbers of usually less than ten and mostly heading south-west or west. The largest movements were both on 30th October, with 36 south-west at Blows Downs and 33 west at Myers Farm, Potton. There were few large flocks in the autumn/second winter period, with the largest at Totternhoe, peaking at 110 on 16th October with still 60 on 15th November. There was only one other big flock of 100 between Maulden and Flitwick on 2nd December. There were only six other flocks from six other sites of more than 30.

### **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

**Common summer visitor and passage migrant. Included in 7.7% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

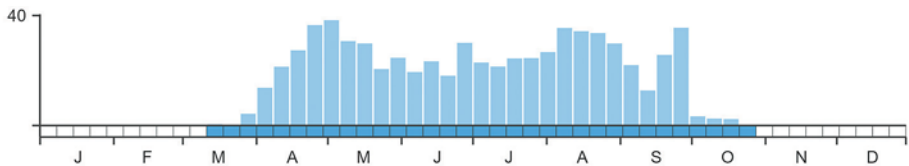
Only four breeding colonies were reported: at Great Barford, Bedford Embankment (at least 2 active nests), Grovebury SP (at least 66 occupied nests) and MCP Wetlands NR (at least 5 occupied nests in the artificial 'Sand Martin wall').

The first were on 14th March, at Broom East and Grovebury SP. They were recorded daily from 16th–23rd March at 11 sites in small numbers, with the largest flock of 26 at Bedford WTW on the 18th. Larger flocks were reported from 25th March, with 40 at Coronation CIP and 25 at MCP Wetlands NR on that day, 55 at Priory CP on the 28th, with 70 there and 40 at MCP Wetlands NR on the 31st. That continued into April, with 40 at Stewartby Lake and 70 at Priory CP on the 1st, 150 at Stewartby Lake and 70 again at Priory CP on the 2nd, and 60 at Willington GP and 70 at Grovebury SP on the 3rd. There was then an influx during 14th–15th April, with the largest counts from Stewartby Lake, with 450 on the 14th and 250 on the 15th. Another influx

brought 53 to Dunstable WTW and 80 to Broom East on the 23rd, 75 to Broom East, 100 to MCP Wetlands NR and 110 to Priory CP all on the 24th, and 100 to Priory CP on the 25th. Other flocks of 100 or more were 100 at Meadow Lane GP on the 27th and 150 at Willington Lock Quarry on the 29th. Smaller numbers were reported from many wetland sites in May, with larger numbers at breeding colonies, e.g. 250 at Grovebury SP on 13th May. Numbers began building from early July when flocks of 200 were reported from Broom East on the 3rd and 4th. The only other large groups were 200 at Grovebury SP on 22nd July and 100 at Broom East on 16th July. There were 16 reports from 12 sites in September, the highest of which was 100 at Priory on 21st September. The last were six at Sandy Heath on 1st October.

### Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

**Widespread breeder and passage migrant. Included in 14.6% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -31%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -44%. (Green list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird



Swallow, Maulden, May 2023

Richard North

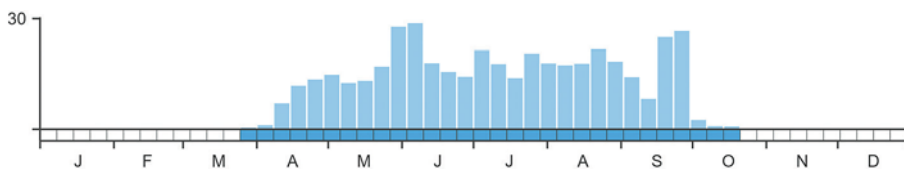
Breeding was confirmed at only six sites. Young in the nest were at Ring Croft Farm near Cranfield, and adults accompanied by juveniles were at Bedford WTW, Henlow Grange, Potton, Steppingley and Tetworth. Probable breeding was noted at another eight sites: Cardington Cross, Everton Heath, Hill Farm (Langford), Mill Lane (Potton), Tithe Farm (Potton), Upper Stondon, Whipsnade Zoo and Woodbury Park Estate.

The first was one on 16th March at Broom East. They were reported daily from 28th March, with the largest count of 12 at Dunstable WTW on 31st March, and then became more widespread in early April, with records from 50 sites, the largest flock being 36 at Grovebury SP on 2nd April. Passage was probably continuous until late May but with mainly single or double-figure counts, with only 16 records of 40 or more. In April there were 50 at Stewartby Lake on the 14th–15th, 45 at Dunstable WTW on the 15th, 45 at Ring Croft Farm on the 17th, 40 over Poppy Hill WTW and at Priory CP on the 21st and 50 at Grovebury SP on the 22nd. At Dunstable WTW there were 42 on 23rd and 76 on 27th April. In May there were 100 at Grovebury SP on the 7th, and then on the 13th there were 40 at Coronation CLP, 100 at Priory CP and, the largest flock of the spring, 300 at Grovebury SP.

Only 15 flocks of 40 or more were reported in the autumn. In July there were 50 at Dunstable WTW on the 11th, and 60 were in a mixed flock of hirundines hawking low over barley at Poppy Hill Farm on the 27th. In August there were 100 over Poppy Hill Farm on the 1st, 50 at Blunham Bridges on the 9th, and 300, the largest flock of autumn, going to roost at Rookery North CLP on the 15th. There were also 40 over Broom South Quarry on the 20th and 65 at Dunstable WTW on the 31st. In September, there were 84 at Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 7th, 100 at Jordans Mill on the 10th, 40 over Poppy Hill WTW on the 22nd, 50 over Woburn Park and 60 at Henlow Grange on the 24th. There were 93 flying south-west over Blows Downs on the 27th, 41 over Everton Heath on the 28th and 50 over Thurleigh Airfield on the 30th. There were 24 records in October from 16 sites, with the last being two over Stewartby Lake on 22nd October.

### House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

**Passage migrant and declining breeder. Included in 8.9% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -64%\*. (Red list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

House Martins are declining in the south of England and are included on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern. Please submit all House Martin breeding records (with appropriate BTO breeding code) for inclusion in future bird reports. Breeding records were received from 20 locations and confirmed at 13, an improvement on the last two years. Nests containing chicks were reported from Arlesey (Station Road), Bedford Town Centre, Eversholt (The Old Rectory, see below), Henlow, Henlow Camp, Potton WTW and Shillington (Hanscombe End Road). Fledged chicks were reported from Eversholt (The Old Rectory), Everton, Potton WTW and Willington.

The first in the county were 15 over Grovebury SP and 30 over Manor Farm, Lower Caldecote on 29th March. Next was one at Broom East and two at Luton Hoo on 5th April, after which they were reported widely and daily, although mostly in single figures. There were 21 flocks of ten or more and six flocks of 50 or more. There were 100 at Grovebury SP on the 22nd, 70 at Priory CP and 50 at Broom East on the 23rd, and again there on the 27th, when there were 55 at Dunstable WTW, staying to the 28th. Numbers remained low in May with 26 flocks between ten and 40, with three flocks of 60 or more: 60 at Priory CP on the 12th, 100 at Grovebury SP on the 13th and 70 at Dunstable WTW on the 30th.

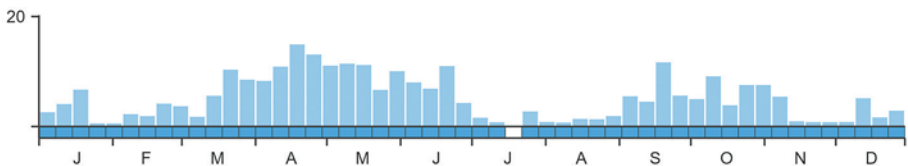
Autumn flocks were noted from early August with 60 over Dunstable WTW on the 2nd, then 80, mostly juveniles, over Woburn Park on the 8th, 50 over Pegsdon Hills on the 26th and 50 at Sandy Smith NR on the 28th. In September there were 14 flocks of 30 or more, including four flocks of 100 or more. These were 100 over Jordans Mill on the 10th, 110 over Priory CP on the 21st, 129 flying north in small groups over Sandy on the 24th and 100 over Myers Farm, Pottton on the 26th. There were only six reports in October with the last on the 15th at Broom GP.

#### Note

At The Old Rectory, Eversholt, the first two birds began prospecting around 14 artificial nest boxes on 7th April but it was not until 29th April that a pair started entering a nest box and showed serious signs of breeding. (April had been particularly cold with not a lot of insect activity.) On 7th May a maximum of four pairs had established nests, and by 22nd May that had risen to seven pairs, including a pair which had built their own nest. On 7th July a party of 20 adults and recently fledged young were actively feeding in the area of the nests, but it was also clear that some nests had been abandoned, including the naturally built one. The last two birds left the nest area on 14th October. Some pairs possibly attempted second broods. Overall, 2023 can be considered to be a poor year for breeding House Martins, largely influenced by the weather but also undoubtedly the intense nature of the farming around Eversholt with spraying of the fields affecting the number of aerial insects available (PS).

### Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

**Localised resident and rare breeder. Included in 6.3% of BirdTrack lists. The England long-term trend is increasing +934%\*. (Green list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

The only confirmed breeding record was from Sandy WTW, where a family group was seen on 16th June. Probable breeding records originated from eight sites, with possible breeding occurring at a further eight. The incidence of breeding activity is probably much higher than this, with breeding season records originating from 38 sites, but with no breeding codes assigned to many of the records from this period.

Number of sites with records of Cetti's Warbler and highest site count

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of sites	9	8	16	24	24	17	4	5	11	11	9	8
Highest site count	2	3	4	6	6	5	1	2	2	2	3	3





Long-tailed Tits, Maulden, January 2023

Richard North

### **Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus*

**Common resident. Included in 39.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is stable. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -23%. (Green list)**

Breeding was confirmed at 12 sites, with probable breeding at a further 16 and possible breeding at four, although the prevalence of successful breeding in the county is under-recorded. Records were received during the breeding season from 83 sites across the county.

Birds were recorded in 77% of gardens in the Garden Bird Survey for the first winter period and 73% in the summer period. The largest flocks were 44 at Myers Farm, Potton on 28th July, 40 at Roxton Lakes on 16th November and 40 at The Lodge on 22nd December. There were ten records of counts in the range 30–39 and 45 records of counts in the range 20–29.

### **Wood Warbler** *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

**Scarce passage migrant. (Red list)**

Following a blank year in 2022, there were three records during 2023. The first was of a singing male at Deepdale, Potton on 23rd May (MG). A juvenile was at Broom East on 27th July (SCB), which was soon followed by another at Henlow Grange on 31st July (RH).

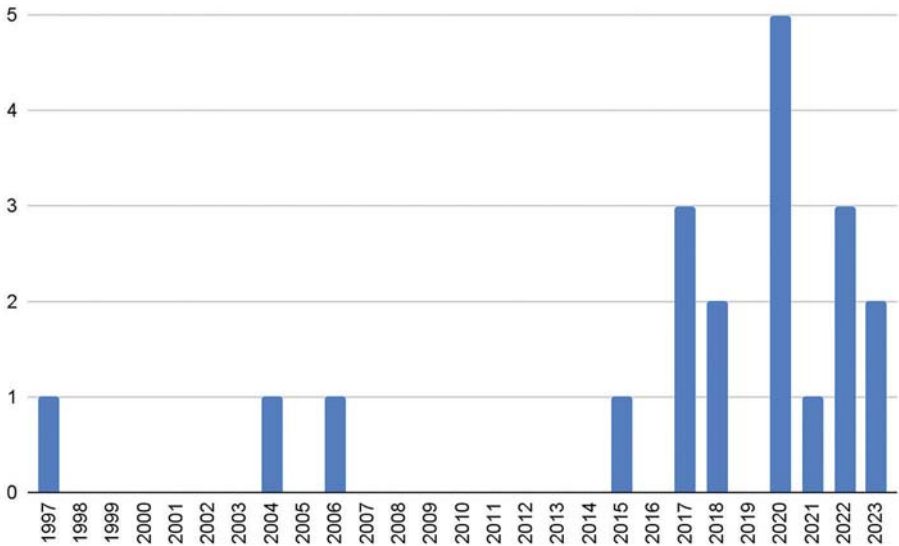
### **Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

**Scarce migrant, recent increase in records – 20 records 1946–2023. (Amber list)**

One was found dead (flew into window) at Upper Dean on 23rd October (AB) and another was at Blunham on 5th November (PG).

**Note**

After the first county record on 17th October 1997, a bird trapped and ringed at Priory CP, there was a long wait for many county birders to have the opportunity to see the next: a widely admired bird at King's Wood, Houghton Conquest on 23rd October 2004. In keeping with the national trend of birds being found inland and away from coastal hotspots, there have now been 20 records of this charismatic bird. The following chart shows how many occurred each year.



### Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

#### Vagrant – two records 1946–2023.

The county's second record was found at King's Wood, Houghton Conquest on 21st October (PW) and was a wonderful reward for a dedicated patch worker. The first county record was one trapped and ringed at Priory CP on 12th October 1991.

### Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

**Widespread but declining summer visitor. Included in 8.7% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -87%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -85%. (Amber list)**

Breeding was confirmed only at MCP Wetlands NR and Lidlington old brickworks, with probable breeding at a further seven sites, illustrating how this species is rapidly attaining the status of scarce breeder within the county.

The first were on 29th March, with singles at MCP Wetlands NR, Stewartby Lake and The Lodge, and two at Priory CP. Arrivals continued throughout the first half of April, with the first significant arrivals, ten at Priory CP on the 13th and 18 at Stewartby Lake on the 14th, rising to 20 at the latter site by 16th April. The latter was the peak count for April, with the only other significant count away from Stewartby Lake during the month being 14 at The Lodge on the 29th. During May, 20 were at MCP Wetlands NR on the 3rd, with numbers at Stewartby Lake dwindling



Willow Warbler, Rookery North CIP, May 2023

*William Stephens*

to nine on the 5th. There then followed the highest count of the year, with an astonishing 59 singing males counted during a complete survey of Strawberry Hill Farm on 14th May. Unsurprisingly, that was the highest count of the year. Strawberry Hill Farm accounted for the only other double-figure counts during May, with ten on 15th and 18th May. During June, records and numbers of birds dropped significantly, with highest counts of four at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 13th and four at The Lodge on the 24th. In July, the first breeding records arose, with juveniles seen at Houghton Brook Pools on the 23rd and at Henlow Grange on the 26th. The highest count for the month was of three at Henlow Grange on 26th July. August brought an increase in records, with post-breeding dispersal most likely accounting for counts of six at Potton on the 7th, four at Henlow Grange on the 9th, four at Dunstable WTW on the 11th, five at Cooper’s Hill on the 26th and five at Streatleybury on the 27th. As would perhaps be expected, the only counts during September were of singles, with the last being seen at MCP Wetlands NR on the 26th.

Mixed singing individuals were present (interspersing song with phrases of Chiffchaff) at Broom East from 2nd–12th May, and at Octagon Farm GP on 30th April.

Number of sites with records of Willow Warbler and highest site count

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
No. of sites	5	73	66	34	15	32	16
Highest site count	3	20	59	4	3	6	1

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

**Common summer visitor with a small wintering population. Included in 36.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +197%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +158%. (Green list)**

Breeding was confirmed at Henlow Grange, MCP Wetlands NR, Myers Farm Potton, Priory CP, the R Ouzel at Leighton Buzzard and Tetworth Hall Estate. There were 18 records of probable breeding, although records were received from 203 sites during the breeding season.

During January, overwintering Chiffchaffs were noted from 27 sites (21 sites during January 2022), with the highest counts being seven at Baulk Wood, Langford on the 1st, six at the same site on the 8th and five at Henlow WTW on the 2nd. In February, records were received from 17 sites, compared with ten sites during February 2022. The highest February counts were ten at Bedford WTW on the 20th, six at Baulk Wood on the 25th and six at Sandy WTW on the 27th.

The first presumed migrants began to appear at sites away from those known to hold overwintering birds from around 12th March, perhaps a week later than during 2022. The highest counts for the month were 20 at Strawberry Hill Farm on 31st March, 19 at Priory CP on the 24th (with seven further counts in the range 10–15 during the month), 11 at King's Wood, Heath & Reach on the 30th, and ten at Houghton Brook Pools, also on the 30th. In April, the high counts were 29 at Willington GP on the 16th, 19 at Octagon Farm on the 17th, 15 at Wrest Park on the 9th and 15 at Wyboston Lakes on the 15th. During May, the high counts were 26 at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 14th, 17 at Octagon Farm GP on the 17th and 12 at Wrest Park on the 7th. Unsurprisingly, numbers of records and highest counts decreased considerably during June, with the only double-figure counts being ten at Stewartby Lake on the 1st and ten at Wrest Park on the 4th.

**Number of sites with records of Chiffchaff and highest site count**

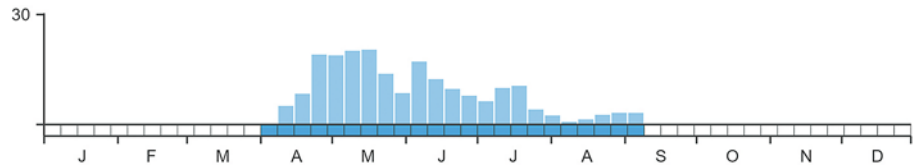
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of sites	27	17	92	191	154	101	75	82	87	42	14	15
Highest site count	7	10	20	29	26	10	18	12	35	9	3	6

During July, higher numbers were recorded as newly fledged birds became evident. The highest counts were 18 at The Lodge on the 25th, 16 at Myers Farm, Potton on the 26th, 12 at Wrest Park on the 9th and 12 at Houghton Brook Pools on the 25th. During August, the only double-figure counts were 12 at Myers Farm, Potton on the 1st and 8th, and 11 at Priory CP on the 19th and 31st. In September, the highest count of the year was obtained, with 35 at Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 28th; other double-figure counts were 14 at Amptill Park on the 11th, 12 at Houghton Brook Pools on the 7th, 12 at Meadow Lane GP on the 22nd, 12 at Myers Farm, Potton on the 4th, 11 at Priory CP on the 23rd and 11 at Wrest Park on the 10th. October's highest counts were nine at Brogborough Hill on the 14th, eight at Whipsnade Common on the 3rd and seven at Priory CP on the 5th. In November, five were at Priory CP on the 26th, three were at Dunstable WTW on the 3rd, and three were at Broom East on the 17th, 28th and 29th. December's high counts were six at Dunstable WTW on the 1st and six at Priory CP on the 13th.

Examples of the Siberian race *Phylloscopus c. tristis* were observed at two sites, with one at Bedford WTW on 22nd February (DOM), and one at Sandy WTW on 26th–27th February (DLB).

**Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

**Locally common summer visitor. Included in 5.0% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -14%. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Breeding was confirmed at Fenlake Meadows and Houghton Brook Pools, with probable breeding at five sites and possible breeding at a further four. Records were received for the breeding season from 51 sites.

The first of the year was at Fenlake Meadows on 5th April, two days ahead of the 10-year average of 7th April. The next records were on 11th April, with singles at Blunham Lakes, Dunstable WTW and Poppy Hill Lakes. Thereafter, records became more frequent and widely dispersed as migrants arrived. The high counts for April were 15 at Dunstable WTW on the 24th and ten at Broom East on the 29th. During May, 11 were at Fenlake Meadows on the 15th, with ten there on the 19th, and nine at South Mills on the 27th. In June, nine were at Fenlake Meadows on the 23rd, eight at South Mills on the 10th and seven at Houghton Brook Pools on the 19th.

During July, the highest single site count was of four at Houghton Brook Pools on four dates.

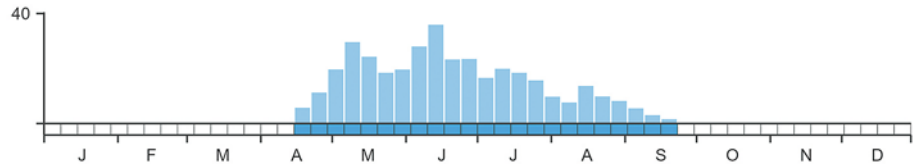
Number of sites with records of Sedge Warbler and highest site count

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
No. of sites	40	45	29	16	8	2
Highest site count	15	11	9	4	4	3

August witnessed a further decline in records, as birds began their migration. The highest counts for August and September both originated from Houghton Brook Pools, with four on 31st August and three on 5th September. The last record of the year was one at Houghton Brook Pools on 7th September.

**Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

**Locally common summer visitor. Included in 7.7% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +20%. (Green list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Breeding was confirmed at Houghton Brook Pools, MCP Wetlands NR, Poppy Hill Lakes, Priory CP and Sundon ChP. Probable breeding occurred at four sites, with possible breeding at a further 18. Records were received from 41 sites during the breeding season.



The first records of the year were of a single at MCP Wetlands NR and two at Willington GP on 16th April, three days later than the 10-year average arrival date. More records were then received during 17th–21st April, when records became more frequent and geographically widespread. April's highest counts were 14 at Willington GP on the 30th and eight at Dunstable WTW on the 24th. During May, 17 of the 20 highest counts came from Priory CP, with 18 on the 14th and 12 further counts in the range 10–15. Away from Priory CP, there were 11 at MCP Wetlands NR on the 9th, ten at Meadow Lane GP on the 31st and eight at Dunstable WTW on the 15th. In June, 17 of the 20 highest counts again originated from Priory CP, with 16 on the 10th and 11th. At MCP Wetlands NR there were 18 on the 1st and at Houghton Brook Pools nine on the 4th. During July, the only double-figure counts were at Priory CP, with 16 on the 13th; there were 17 other counts in the range 10–15. In addition, seven were at Houghton Brook Pools on the 14th and seven at MCP Wetlands NR on the 8th. Records decreased dramatically during August, as birds became less vocal. The highest count was 12 at Priory CP on the 8th. Counts were received from four sites during September, with five at Houghton Brook Pools on the 2nd–3rd. The last record of the year was a single at Meadow Lane GP on the 22nd.

**Number of sites with records of Reed Warbler and highest site count**

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
No. of sites	24	42	48	24	18	4
Highest site count	14	18	18	16	12	5

**Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia*

**Local but regular summer visitor, but declining. The England long-term trend is decreasing -9%. (Red list)**

Unsurprisingly for such an unobtrusive species when not heard singing, there were no confirmed breeding records, although birds apparently holding territory were recorded at 16 sites during the breeding season.

The first of the year was at The Hill House near Biggleswade on 10th April, four days before the 10-year average arrival date. The next was at Marston Thrift on the 16th, then at Ampthill on the 21st. The number of records increased from 22nd April, with nine other sites holding singing birds by the end of the month. The year's highest count occurred in May, with four at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 14th and three there on the 29th. No other sites recorded multiple birds during the month. There were only four records received during July, with none at all in August. The last of the year was a very late individual at Meadow Lane GP on 22nd September – 61 days after the penultimate record of the year.

**Number of sites with records of Grasshopper Warbler and highest site count**

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
No. of sites	12	10	3	3	0	1
Highest site count	2	4	1	2	0	1

**Note**

The record at Meadow Lane GP on 22nd September becomes the latest date of the species in the county. Following a review of the earliest and latest dates for this species, the record of 6th December 1993 at Flitwick Moor has been removed from the county record as no longer acceptable.

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

**Common summer visitor, increasing as a wintering species. Included in 26.5% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +129%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +123%. (Green list)**

Breeding was confirmed at Henlow Grange, Houghton Brook Pools, Myers Farm at Potton, Priory CP, Sandy and Tetworth Hall Estate, with probable breeding at a further four sites, although birds were recorded at 166 sites during the breeding season.

Overwintering birds were found at 25 sites during January. Although the records received did not always indicate a precise location, it was likely that at least 20 of those originated from observers' gardens. Reports were received for 29 days during the month, compared with 27 days during January 2022. There were two records of three together, from gardens in Sandy and Wilstead. In February, records were received for 27 days, compared with 28 during February 2022. During March, the number of sites holding singing birds increased from mid-month, although it was difficult to ascertain whether those related to overwintering or summering individuals. However, four at Priory CP and three at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 31st seemed to indicate the first-reported multiple arrivals. With continual arrivals throughout April at widely dispersed sites, numbers peaked from mid-month, with 20 at Priory CP on the 22nd, 17 there on the 25th and 16 on the 24th. There were counts of 15 from Octagon Farm GP, Pegnut Wood, Priory CP and Stewartby Lake. In May, the highest counts were 43 at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 14th with 20 there on the 18th, 18 at Pegnut Wood on the 14th, 17 at Priory CP on the 1st, 13th and 17th, and 17 at Octagon Farm GP on the 17th. During June, the highest counts were 17 at Stewartby Lake on the 1st and 15 at Priory CP on the 27th. Of the 18 other double-figure counts during the month, 14 originated from Priory CP. There were also counts of 11 from Octagon Farm GP and Wrest Park, and ten at Houghton Brook Pools and The Lodge.

In July, the highest counts again came from Priory CP with 16 on the 2nd, 12 on the 12th, 11 on the 1st and ten on the 4th and 18th. The only other double-figure count was of ten at Houghton Brook Pools on the 4th. During August, the highest count was of nine at Myers Farm on the 1st and 9th. In September, 30 were at MCP Wetlands NR on the 12th, 22 at Brogborough Hill on the 17th, with ten at the latter site on the 10th, with the only other double-figure count being ten at Pegsdon Hills on the 10th. In October, the number of records decreased dramatically, but not unexpectedly, with occasional, regular records until the 18th. There was then a hiatus until the next record on the 27th – the longest gap between records of the year. During November, only eight records were received, from six sites. That increased to 40 records in December, as overwintering birds started to be seen with greater regularity in gardens.

Number of sites with records of Blackcap and highest site count

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of sites	25	18	37	151	145	100	38	45	39	13	6	18
Highest site count	3	2	4	20	3	17	16	9	30	2	1	2

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*

**Fairly common summer visitor. Included in 5.5% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -31%. (Green list)**

Breeding was confirmed at Myers Farm, Potton where at least two dependent juveniles were observed. Probable breeding occurred at Fenlake Meadows, Knotting Green, MCP Wetlands NR, Octagon Farm GP and Pegnut Wood, with possible breeding at a further 19 sites. Records originated from 56 sites during the breeding season.

The first of the year were three at South Mills on 15th April, one day ahead of the 10-year average arrival date. There were then records from Octagon Farm GP on the 17th, Stewartby Lake on the 18th and King's Wood at Heath & Reach on the 23rd, before the main arrival on the 24th, when birds began to be reported from multiple sites around the county. April's high count was of four at three sites, at Priory CP on the 29th, Stewartby Lake on the 30th and Waterloo Thorns on the 30th. New arrivals continued throughout May, with 30 singing males at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 14th, nine at The Lodge on the 10th and nine at Willington GP on the 27th. During June, numbers decreased as migrants passed through and breeding birds established territories; the month's high counts were eight at South Mills on the 10th and five at Sundon ChP on the 15th.

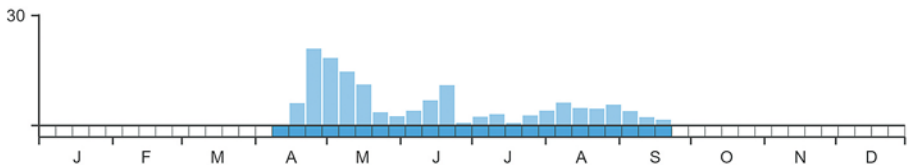
#### Number of sites with records of Garden Warbler and highest site count

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
No. of sites	30	73	47	14	10	2	0	1
Highest site count	4	30	8	3	3	1	0	1

July's high count was of three at Myers Farm on four dates, with three also there on 8th August. During September, singles were at Harrold-Odell CP and Myers Farm. There was then an astonishing gap of 66 days until the last of the year, when one was photographed at The Lodge on 6th November; that eclipses by some distance the previous latest accepted record of 10th October 2010.

#### Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca*

**Fairly common summer visitor. Included in 3.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +14%. (Green list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Breeding was confirmed at Myers Farm, Potton, with probable breeding at three sites and possible breeding at a further 26 sites. Records were received from 48 sites during the breeding season.

The first of the year was near Chawston on 14th April, two days after the 10-year average arrival date. The next was at Linslade on the 15th, followed by three at Harrowden WM on the 17th and three at Priory CP on the 18th. It was not until the 22nd that there was a significant increase in records, and this peak period of passage lasted until early May. Five at Stewartby Lake on 30th April was the highest count of the month. Records became more widely distributed during the first week of May, with five at Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 7th, four at Broom South Quarry on the 11th, four at Old Warden on the 17th and four at Strawberry Hill Farm on the 18th and 21st. In June, as expected, the number of records and their geographical spread declined as the breeding season progressed. There were three at Church Farm, Dunton on the 19th and three at Waterloo Thorns on the 23rd.

Number of sites with records of Lesser Whitethroat and highest site count

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
No. of sites	50	57	33	9	15	8
Highest site count	5	5	3	2	3	3

During July, the only records of multiple birds were of two at Dunstable WTW on the 3rd and two at Myers Farm on the 25th. There was some evidence of autumn migration between 9th August and 15th September, with three at Houghton Brook Pools on 15th September, three at Myers Farm on 9th August and 8th September, and three at Streatleybury on 27th August. The last of the year was at Broom East on 21st September.



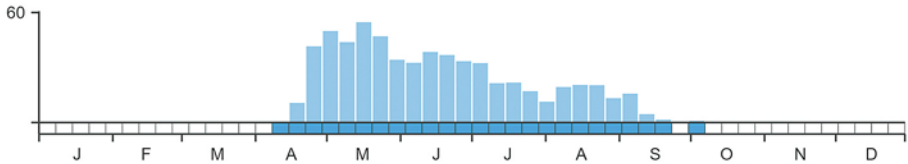
Whitethroat, Rookery North CIP, June 2023

William Stephens

**Whitethroat** *Curruca communis*

**Common summer visitor. Included in 13.0% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +12%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +14%. (Amber list)**

Breeding was confirmed at Bedford WTW, Cardington, Fenlake Meadows, Henlow Grange, Houghton Brook Pools, Myers Farm at Potton, Octagon Farm GP, Tetworth Hall Estate and Warden Abbey, with probable breeding at a further ten sites and possible breeding at 33 sites. During the breeding season, records were received from 142 sites.



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

The first of the year were on 9th April, at Duck End NR and Grovebury SP, one day ahead of the 10-year average arrival date. They were followed by singles at Stewartby Lake and Twin Bridges at Blunham on the 11th, with the next not until the 15th at Chawston Lake. From 16th April, records became much more frequent and geographically dispersed, until the highest count of the month was received on the 30th, of 12 at Houghton Brook Pools. During May, arrivals continued and numbers increased until the 14th, when 52 singing males were recorded during a complete survey of Strawberry Hill Farm; the next highest counts were 13 at Wilstead on the 11th, and 12 from Octagon Farm GP on the 17th, Stotfold on the 21st and Twin Bridges at Blunham on the 22nd. In June, 14 were at Houghton Brook Pools on the 26th, 12 were at East Hyde on the 3rd and 12 were at Waterloo Thorns on the 23rd.

#### Number of sites with records of Whitethroat and highest site count

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
No. of sites	88	129	91	55	39	16	1
Highest site count	12	52	14	14	16	8	1

In July, 14 were at Houghton Brook Pools on the 18th, 12 at Myers Farm on the 26th and ten at The Lodge on the 2nd. During August, migration began, with 16 at Sandy Heath on the 9th, nine at Myers Farm on the 1st and eight at Henlow Grange on the 8th. In September, eight were at Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 7th and six were at Myers Farm, also on the 7th. Records then began to dwindle, until the last of the year with two at Sandy Heath on 1st October.

#### **[Dartford Warbler** *Curruca undata*

**Scarce migrant, recent increase in records – 21 to 23 records 1946–2023.** (*Amber list*)

There were no records during the year, the last being during 2022. 2023 was the first blank year since 2012.]

#### **Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapilla*

**Scarce passage migrant and very rare breeder.** (*Green list*)

In the first winter period singles were at Maulden Wood on 1st January, Flitwick Manor on 2nd January, then at Priory CP from 8th January through to 16th March. One was at Flitton Moor on 23rd February; another was at Ampthill Park and two were at Stotfold, all on 27th February. Potential spring migrants were noted at King's Wood at Heath & Reach on 27th March and 4th April, The Lodge on 2nd–3rd April, Leighton Buzzard WTW on 3rd April, King's Wood at Houghton Conquest on 30th April and Upper Caldecote on 3rd May. Two at Flitwick Manor on 13th May and one at Cooper's Hill from 18th to 23rd May hinted at possible breeding while one on the county boundary at Lowe's Wood on 21st May was adjacent to known breeding territories in Buckinghamshire.

Autumn reports were limited to singles at Chicksands on 6th September, Houghton Hall Park on 21st October, Sharpenhoe on 21st November and Millbrook on 25th–26th November.



### **Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

**Common resident, also occurring as a passage migrant. Included in 12.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +44%\*. (Green list)**

The only confirmed breeding report was of an adult feeding young in Henlow in August, but clearly this species is totally under-recorded as a breeding species.

Peak numbers were recorded in the winter months, included at least 12 at Rushmere CP on 1st January, with nine at Maulden Wood the same day and eight at The Lodge on the 18th. There were records from 27% and 32% of gardens in the Winter Garden Bird Surveys for the first and second winter periods, reflecting a gradual decline in the reporting rate from 48% in 2015/16 and 2017/18.

### **Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

**Very common resident. Included in 59.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +32%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -2%. (Amber list)**

One of the most widespread birds, it was recorded across the county and throughout the year. Counts of 20 or more were at four locations, with the largest single count being 34 in Flitton on 25th May. There was, however, a fall in the numbers reported in the Garden Bird Surveys, with sightings in only 84% of gardens in the Summer Survey (the lowest since 2014), and 86% in the survey for the second winter period (the lowest since winter 2018/19).



Wren, MCP Wetlands NR, January 2023

Richard North

**Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea*

**Widespread resident, increasing. Included in 6.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +186%\*. (Green list)**

Most records came from the woods along the west-east escarpment of the Greensand Ridge. Other records were predominantly from the scattered areas of mature woodland and parkland in the east and south of the county and the woods of the north-west. Counts of five or more came from Ampthill Park, Rushmere CP, Woburn Park, The Lodge, Galley Hill, Maulden Wood, West Park, Marston Thrift and Wilstead Wood. The latter location recorded the highest single count of the year, with 12 on 25th February. There were records from 19% of gardens in the Summer Garden Bird Survey (compared to 20% in 2022) and 16% in the Winter Survey for the second winter period (down from 20% in the previous year).

**Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

**Widespread resident. Included in 5.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +10%. (Green list)**

Most sightings came from the main woodland belt of the Greensand Ridge and from wetter woodland sites in the Flit, Ivel and Ouse valleys. Maximum counts were eight from The Lodge on 24th June, six from Sandy Heath on 31st May, and six from King's Wood at Houghton Conquest on both 2nd April and 4th June. There were records from 8% of gardens during the Summer Garden Bird Survey (up from 5% in 2022) and 7% in the Winter Survey for the second winter period (down from 8% in the previous year).

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

**Widespread resident but in decline. Included in 47.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -42%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -65%. (Red list)**

Birds were noted in 94% of gardens during the Summer Garden Bird Survey and 87% in the Winter Survey for the second winter period. The largest count of the year was over 4,000 near Willington on 26th October. Other high counts included 2,500 at Blunham Lakes on 28th December, over 2,200 at Thurleigh Airfield on 5th November, and over 2,000 at Stewartby Lake on 11th March. Murmurations were reported at Battlesden Lake (on 2nd January and 11th March) and Rookery North CIP (13th September and twice in December).

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*

**Common resident and winter visitor. Included in 31.0% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is stable +/-0%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +18%. (Amber list)**

Birds were widespread throughout the year but generally reported in small numbers. The highest daytime counts were 18 around Blunham Bridges on 6th February, 16 at Priory CP on 8th March and 26 at Harrold-Odell CP on 10th November.

On 17th October, 23 were noted passing Blows Downs on a visible migration watch while nocturnal records over Meppershall peaked on 26th, with about 11, and 27th October, with about ten.

### **Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*

**Widespread resident, decreasing. Included in 7.1% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -68%\*. (Red list)**

Birds were well distributed in the county throughout the year but generally only recorded as singles or pairs, the exception being 13 at Wrest Park on 15th January, the only significant count before birds took up territories prior to beginning their early breeding season. After the breeding season, no major accumulations were noted, with the largest count also being 13 at The Lodge on 20th June.

### **Redwing** *Turdus iliacus*

**Widespread winter visitor and passage migrant. Included in 15.2% of BirdTrack lists. (Amber list)**

Records were received from throughout the county early in the year, with flocks of 100 or more at four different locations, including 200 at Water End on 3rd March. A few birds lingered into April, including 12 still near Potton on the 2nd, but there were just two records after the 7th, with singles at Henlow Grange on the 19th and at MCP Wetlands NR on the 20th.

The first of the autumn were not until 8th October, when small groups were noted moving over Biggleswade (27), Broom South Quarry (70), Meppershall (31), Priory CP (45) and The Pinnacle (78). More arrivals on the 9th included 485 at Myers Farm, Potton, 200 at Upper Caldecote and 77 at Houghton Brook Pools. Visible migration watches provided the opportunity to see some larger flocks moving, peaking at 741 on 17th October over The Pinnacle. In November, there were 300 at Battlesden on the 14th and 998 in the area of Brogborough Tip & Pools on the 30th.

Two at Everton Heath on 11th February showed characteristics of the Icelandic race *coburni* (DOM).

### **Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

**Very common resident with numbers increased by wintering migrants. Included in 71.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -6%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -13%. (Green list)**

The largest single site count consisted of 38 at Wrest Park on 18th June, with six other records from there of 25 or more in the year. Of note was that, in a count of 32 at Houghton Brook Pools on 20th November, 16 were first-winter males, indicative of some winter immigration. A “noticeable increase in numbers” was added as a comment in a report from Meppershall on 7th December.

### **Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*

**Widespread winter visitor. Included in 10.5% of BirdTrack lists. (Red list)**

Birds were widespread at the start of the year, with flocks of 200 or more reported on 14 different occasions across six sites, including a highest count of at least 400 at Thurleigh Airfield on both 5th and 19th March and then at least 380 at Tetworth Hall Estate on 30th March. Birds lingered to the end of April, with 30 still at Pegsdon Hills on the 22nd. Two unusually late records were of singles at Pegsdon Hills on 22nd May and Old Warden the next day.

The first of the autumn were on 8th October, from when on birds became widespread in small flocks through the month. Visible migration watches at The Pinnacle recorded high counts of 1,590 on 6th November and 1,425 the following day. The largest flock elsewhere was at least 727 at Thurleigh Airfield on 5th November. A significant movement on 15th and 16th December was evident with counts of over 500 at MCP Wetlands NR, 700 at Totternhoe and 706 moving south-west over Houghton Brook Pools on the latter date.



Blackbird, Maulden, January 2023

Richard North

### Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

**Scarce but regular spring migrant, recently increasing in autumn. (Red list)**

The vast majority of records came from two regular locations, at Blows Downs in the earlier part of April and Pegsdon Hills in the latter part of April. The first spring migrant of the year was on 2nd April at Pegsdon Hills, with another there on the 8th, with then two at Barton Hills also on the 8th. The first at Blows Downs was on 9th April, with subsequent daily records from there until the 15th, including three on the 11th and two on the 13th and 15th. Another on 18th April was the last record there for the spring.

New birds arrived at Pegsdon Hills from 16th April and were recorded daily until the 25th, peaking at four on the 22nd. Elsewhere singles were noted at Brogborough Hill on 9th April, Rookery North CIP on the 20th, Shortstown on the 21st, Elstow on the 25th and at Wigmore Valley Park on the 27th–28th. Two late migrants were at Bison Hill at Whipsnade on 2nd May, being the last of the spring.

The return passage in autumn produced just two records, with one at Pottton on 22nd October and a nocmig record over Meppershall on 24th October.

### Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

**Declining summer migrant. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -68%\*. (Red list)**

Breeding was confirmed at 11 sites (up from only nine in 2022): Amphill Park, Cooper's Hill, Flitwick Manor Park, Flitwick Moor, Ickwell Green, King's Wood at Heath & Reach, King's Wood at Houghton Conquest, Old Warden, Renhold, Tempsford and Whipsnade Zoo. Probable breeding was observed at a further four sites.



was on the same date at The Lodge when 28 individuals were noted. An autumn build-up at Houghton Brook Pools resulted in 27 there on 30th September, with the observer noting that Robins were “seemingly in every bush”.

### **Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

**Scarce and declining summer visitor. The England long-term trend is decreasing -40%\*. (Red list)**

Following the first of the year on 9th April at MCP Wetlands NR, records were received from ten sites, suggesting up to 45 singing birds. A big contributor to that figure was 30 at Strawberry Hill Farm and up to eight around Stewartby Lake, including five along the eastern side adjacent to the railway line.

Elsewhere singing birds were at Lidlington, Coronation CIP, Quest CIP, Octagon Farm CIP, Hawkesbury Meadows, Biggleswade and Wrestlingworth. A lack of records of probable or confirmed breeding is likely a reflection on the difficulty of obtaining evidence of this skulking bird once singing subsides around the start of June. The last record of the year was at Coronation CIP on 30th June.

### **Pied Flycatcher** *Ficedula hypoleuca*

**Scarce passage migrant. (Amber list)**

One at Amphill Park on 23rd–24th August was the only record (PW).

### **[Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

**Almost annual but scarce migrant that has occasionally bred. (Amber list)**

There were no records for 2023 despite regular visits to check for birds in the territories occupied in Luton in 2022. It was the first blank year since 2017.]

### **Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

**Regular passage migrant in small numbers; probably lost as a breeding species in the county. (Amber list)**

Although considered as extinct as a breeding species in the county, a male found singing on 13th May at The Lodge was the second consecutive year with a mid-May record there. The bird was noted only on that date and not subsequently. Another was at Toddington on 22nd May.

Spring passage began with a male at Blows Downs on 4th April, followed by daily records there from the 7th to 15th, including four on 13th April. Elsewhere, birds were at Potton on 8th April, Pegsdon Hills from the 11th to 13th, Willington Lock Quarry on the 18th, Bedford WTW on the 19th, and Broom South Quarry on 22nd April.

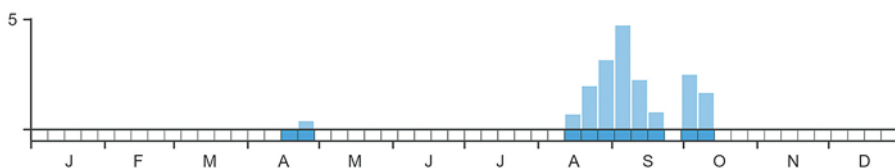
Autumn passage began at Chicksands, with one on 15th August, Potton and Bradgers Hill, Luton on the 23rd, followed by two at Pegsdon Hills on 26th August. Two were also at Pegsdon Hills on 5th–6th September. The only other reports were from Brogborough Hill, with one on 1st September and another on the 10th being the last of the year.

### **Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*

**Regular spring and autumn migrant in small numbers. (Red list)**

Spring passage consisted of four records of eight birds, with the first at Shortstown on 22nd April. A male was at Rookery North CIP on the 24th, with two males there the next day. Four were at Chimney Corner North CIP, also on the 25th, with the last of the spring on 29th April at Brogborough Tip & Pools.





Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

As expected, autumn passage was significantly more extended than that of the spring with many more individuals, including a number of juveniles. The first record was at Luton Hoo on 13th August, with then five there on the 21st. Other sites recording multiple birds in August were Henlow Grange, Poppy Hill Farm, the FCA at Upper Caldecote and Pegsdon Hills, the latter two sites each hosting three on 30th August. In September singles or pairs were noted from Brogborough Tip & Pools, Broom South Quarry, Henlow Grange, Houghton Brook Pools, Pegsdon Hills and Poppy Hill Farm, all in the first two weeks of the month. Subsequently only Houghton Brook Pools retained birds, with two there on 6th October, with one remaining until the 10th. The last of the year was at Shefford on 11th October.

### Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

**Annual passage migrant and winter visitor.** (Green list)

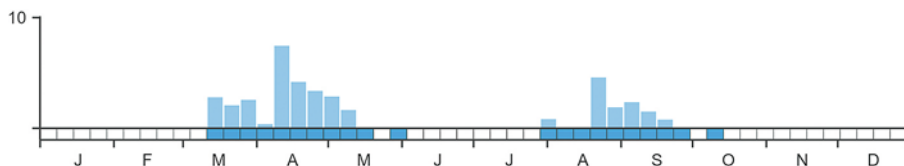
No incidents of breeding were recorded.

In the first winter period, reports were widespread from a minimum of 17 sites in January, the vast majority being pairs. In mid-March, an increase in numbers at some sites, concurrent with an absence from sites previously occupied, was evidence of a spring migration. At Meadow Lane GP there were seven on the 7th, and at Blows Downs a peak of 15 on the 16th, reducing to eight on the 17th, after which the only other records in the first half of the year were at Pegsdon Hills on 29th April and Sandy on 2nd June.

Other than three records, with one at Broom on 11th September and pairs at Dunstable WTW on the 12th and Pegsdon Hills on the 21st, autumn passage did not get underway until the end of September. After that numbers increased rapidly and birds were once again widespread in small numbers, with singles and pairs at over 20 sites, often those favoured in the first winter period.

### Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

**Fairly common migrant, has bred on rare occasions.** (Amber list)



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Birds were more numerous in the spring than on the autumn return passage.

The first of the year were at Broom South Quarry and Blows Downs on 15th March.

Numbers then increased rapidly, with five at Blows Downs on 17th March, seven there on the 30th, eight at Broom South Quarry on 10th April, including six of the Greenland race, ten at Pegsdon Hills on the 12th–13th and eight at Thurleigh Airfield, including five of the Greenland



Wheatear, Broom GP, April 2023

Steve Blain

race, on 16th April being the largest counts. The last report of the main spring passage was of four at Thurleigh Airfield on 7th May, apart from two late individuals at Broom South Quarry on 29th May and Warden Hill on 1st June.

Other individuals of the Greenland race in April not mentioned above were singles at Rookery South CLP on the 11th and Blows Downs on the 12th, two at Brogborough Lake on the 20th, five at Chimney Corner North CLP on the 25th and three at Broom East on 30th April.

Return passage began on 3rd August with one at Houghton Brook Pools, then two at Pegsdon Hills on the 9th. Other than four at Thurleigh Airfield on 20th August and three at Luton Hoo on the 21st, all reports were of singles or pairs with just two records after the middle of September, with a pair at Rookery South CLP on 29th September and a single at Pegsdon Hills on 9th October.

### **Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*

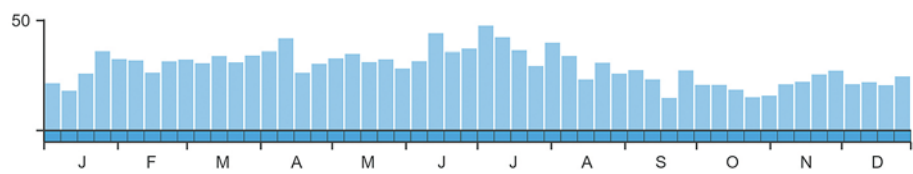
**Once common resident, has declined dramatically. (Red list)**

There were two in Steppingley on 15th October (WS), eight were at Deepdale on 22nd October (LP) and an undefined number were also reported at Keysoe on 16th April (BB).

### **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

**Once abundant resident, now in decline and very local. Included in 32.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -31%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -24%. (Red list)**

There were just three counts of 50 or more, with 72 at Dunstable WTW on 23rd April, 58 at Wixams Estate on 5th July and 50 at Deepdale on 15th August. In addition, counts of 20 or more were at another 17 sites. During the Summer Garden Bird Survey they were in 84% of rural



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

gardens and 97% of urban gardens, which was an improvement over the previous summer. In the first winter period they were in 83% of gardens, the highest since 2012/13. In the second winter period that dropped slightly, to 81% of gardens.

**Dunno** *Prunella modularis*

**Very common resident. Included in 51.5% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +7%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -5%. (Amber list)** Most of the largest counts came from Houghton Brook Pools, where regular visits during the January to April period gave an average count of 14 birds per visit. For the rest of the year the average was 8.6 per visit. A similar pattern was seen at Priory CP where, in the January to April period, the average per visit was 9.75, and for the rest of the year was just five. The only other double-figure counts away from those two sites were 15 at MCP Wetlands NR on 1st March, 14 at Deepdale on 4th March and 11 at Myers Farm, Potton on 12th April.

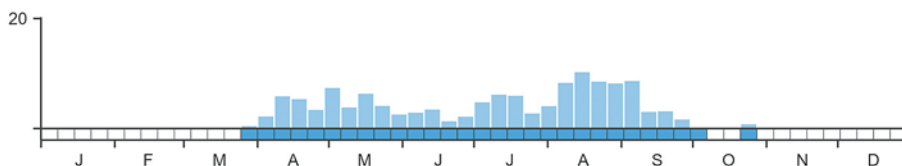


House Sparrow, Stotfold, May 2023

Rod Pattison

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

**Regular passage migrant and localised breeder. Included in 3.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -44%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -37%. (Red list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

The first to arrive was at Great Barford on 30th March, with the next at Rookery South CIP and Broom South Quarry on 2nd April. Regular counts at the latter site reached eight on 10th April, by when they were more widespread. Most counts were of one or two, but there were seven at Great Barford on the 12th and 15 at Broom South Quarry on 13th April, which was the highest count in the period until 16 at the same site on 18th August. From then on multiple counts in August included 20 at MCP Wetlands NR on the 27th and 13 at Myers Farm, Potton on the 31st. In September the peaks were of about 50 at Broom East on the 6th (flushed by a Kestrel), 16 at Henlow Grange on the same day, 16 also at Pegsdon Hills on the 9th and 23 at MCP Wetlands NR on the 23rd. There were only two records for October, with one at Grovebury SP on the 5th and the last, at Dunstable WTW, on the 23rd.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

**Resident and localised breeder, winter visitor and passage migrant. Included in 7.2% of BirdTrack lists. (Amber list)**

Breeding was confirmed at Biggleswade Common, Dunstable WTW, Girtford, Henlow Grange, Priory CP, New Road in Sandy and Wardown Park. Presence was noted during the breeding season at another 24 sites. The highest counts during the year were at Henlow Grange, with eight on 1st December, at Meadow Lane GP, with seven on 19th February, at East Hyde, with five on 29th April, and at Wrest Park, with five on 17th September.

**Pied/White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

**Common and widespread resident. Included in 22.5% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -7%. (Green list)**

Typically there were some large gatherings in the January to March period. These included 88 at Harrowden WM on 10th January and 110 at Bedford WTW the next day. By the 12th, numbers at Harrowden had increased to 165, but had dropped to 47 just two days later. There were 55 at Poppy Hill WTW on the 20th and then 58 there on the 27th. During February there were 60 at Priory CP on the 1st, 100 in the Meadow Lane GP area on the 4th, 70 at Biggleswade Common the next day and 72 at Poppy Hill WTW on the 12th. In March the largest gathering was 87 in the A1 Retail Park at Biggleswade on the 28th. Numbers dropped after that, with the highest count in the April to July period being just 12 at Thurleigh Airfield on 16th July.

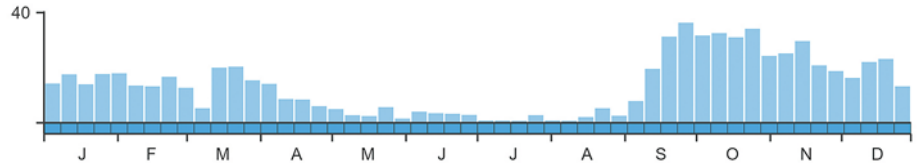
Flock sizes increased from August onwards, with 26 at Thurleigh Airfield on the 20th, and then in September with 35 at Swiss Gardens on the 18th, 77 at Wigmore Valley Park on the 19th and 34 at Dunstable WTW on the 22nd. There were 47 at Wrest Park on 15th October and then

40 at Poppy Hill WTW on 11th November, 100 at Biggleswade WTW on 25th November and then 80 at Poppy Hill WTW on 1st December.

The first White Wagtail of the spring was at Potton on 23rd March, with the next at Broom South Quarry, with two on 28th March and two on 7th April. There were just two in the latter part of the year, with singles at Stewartby Lake on 23rd October and at Broom South Quarry on 11th November.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

**Common migrant and local breeder. Included in 13.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -69%\*. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Singing birds and display flights were reported from Wixams Estate, Pegsdon Hills, Broom GP, Henlow Grange and near Ampthill.

In the first winter period the largest counts were 45 at Cranfield on 19th February and 40 at Biggleswade Common on 15th January. There were another 13 reports of 20 or more in that period. During the autumn the highest numbers in September were 100 at Willington GP on the 24th, and 90 at Thurleigh Airfield and 147 over The Pinnacle, all on the 30th. In October there were 51 over The Pinnacle on the 7th and 60 at Renhold on the 26th. In the latter part of the year



Meadow Pipit, Pegsdon Hills, April 2023

Steve Blain



the biggest counts were 22 at Brogborough Tip & Pools on 5th November and 40 at Broom East on 20th November.

### Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

**Scarce passage migrant, probably no longer breeds in the county. (Red list)**

All records were during a positive early autumn passage. In August there were singles at Pegsdon Hills on the 18th, Myers Farm, Potton on the 23rd and 29th, over Luton on the 24th and over Maythorns Estate, Biggleswade on the 31st. During September there was one over Blows Downs on the 8th, two at Everton Heath on the 12th and one at Fenlake Meadows on the 14th. In addition there were nocmig records over Meppershall on the 16th, 22nd and 26th August. That was the best set of records since 2020.

### Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

**Rare passage migrant and winter visitor. (Amber list)**

One was at Broom South Quarry on 5th February (PN).

### Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

**Scarce passage migrant. Most are thought to involve the race *A. p. littoralis*, the Nordic and Russian race. (Green list)**

One flew over Broom East on 20th March (SCB).

### Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

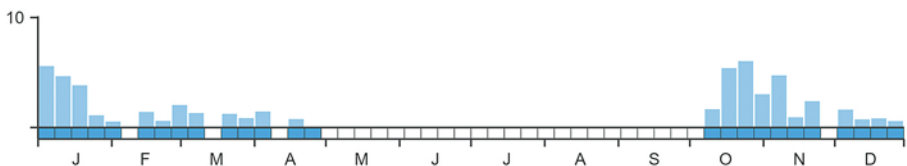
**Very common resident and passage migrant. Included in 37.1% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -50%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -67%. (Green list)**

There were 3,839 submissions, of which 87% were for counts of five or fewer. The first winter period accounted for the vast majority of flocks containing 50 or more, from eight main sites. Persisting from 2022, there were up to 100 at Broom GP around the Gypsy Lane area in early January. The month produced further significant counts from Lodge Farm, Chicksands, with at least 50 there on the 6th, before a huge gathering five days later of up to 350 in a mixed finch flock at Bushmead, by far the best count of the year. On 28th January there were 200 at Barton Hills and on the 30th a further 100 at the FCA at Upper Caldecote. Flocks at Henlow Grange (60), Lodge Farm (50) and Manor Farm, near Hulcote (70) endured for the rest of the period, with one more significant report of 80 at Kensworth Church on 16th March.

In a very quiet second winter period, it was vismig sessions from The Pinnacle that provided collective counts of 85 on 17th October and 52 a day later. November held the last two high counts, both of 50, north of Woburn on the 12th and Lodge Farm on the 26th.

### Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

**Regular winter and spring visitor. (Green list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird



It was a very poor year for the species with only 116 reports submitted, representing a 49% reduction on 2022. In the first winter period there was only one double-figure count, when a smaller flock of just ten at Lodge Farm, Chicksands remained from the previous December. Further east, most of the submissions referred to a group of up to seven in January around Broom East, with then a maximum count of eight at Potton in February. In the latter stages of the period, numbers dwindled further, with no more than three at any site, the last of which was of a late single at Flitwick Moor on 29th April.

Autumn started well with a group of 16 at Stratford Road, Sandy on 8th October, but that was to be one of just two double-figure counts for the whole period. There were no more than three seen in any one day during vismig vigils at The Pinnacle and Sharpenhoe Clappers and it wasn't until November that five were at Potton on the 6th. Reports of ones and twos at various sites continued for the remaining weeks, with the exception of one notable flock of 25 at Pegsdon Hills on 7th December, the year's highest count.

### **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

**Scarce, with occasional winter influxes, but annual since 2008, except 2016. (Red list)**

There were two on 17th October during a vismig session at The Pinnacle. The birds flew separately west at 7.27 and 8.39am, the latter seen a minute earlier at The Lodge by a separate observer!

### **Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

**Widespread but thinly distributed species. Included in 3.1% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -68%\*. (Amber list)**

Although there were 329 reports from many different sites throughout the county, 95% of them were of three or fewer. There were groups of five or more recorded at Swineshead Wood, Stotfold, Strawberry Hill Farm and Myers Farm, Potton. The largest gathering (7) was found at the latter site on 10th December.

### **Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*

**Common resident but declining. Included in 36.8% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -58%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -72%. (Red list)**

There were 3,371 reports, of which 70% were from the first six months of the year. Counts of five or fewer made up 91% of the total, and in the first winter period all but one of the submissions concerning 30 or more individuals involved a single gathering at Broom East. Numbers varied throughout January, with eight high counts associated with the site, the best being 110 there on the 9th. Away from east Bedfordshire, there were 32 at Fenlake Meadows on 16th February.

In a disappointing second winter period, there were flocks of ten or more from just 11 sites. In September, there were 14 at Houghton Brook Pools and 16 in a garden in Sandy, the best count of the month. In October, a vismig count produced 14 at The Pinnacle on the 17th, whilst the largest flock of the season was of 21 at nearby Old Bedford Road, Potton on the 30th. The last two months, in a very quiet end to the year, saw no flocks above 13.

### **Linnet** *Linaria cannabina*

**Locally common resident and summer visitor. Included in 20.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -7%. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +18%. (Red list)**

Of the 1,966 reports there were 27 involving 200 or more in the first winter period, mainly from well-watched, traditional sites. Numbers were far lower than in 2022, but flocks persisted at Black



Linnet, Shefford, April 2023

Rod Pattison

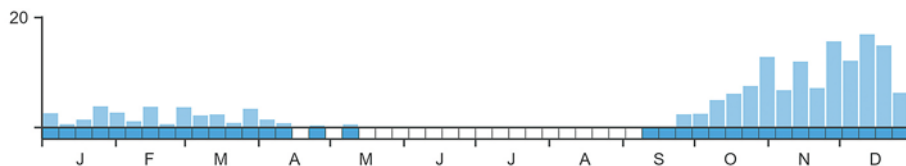
Cat GP (300) and Lodge Farm, Chicksands (200). However most of the notable submissions were from east Bedfordshire. In January, there were up to 300 at Broom East and, towards the end of the month, there were 500 at Sandy Heath and 350 at Henlow Grange. In February, 400 were at Broom South Quarry and this site, along with Henlow Grange, retained good numbers until the end of March, the latter site still holding 500 as late as the 23rd.

A quiet post-breeding period made up around a quarter of the total records and there were just 11 reports of 200 or more and, again, no huge flocks. As early as 4th September, the Henlow Grange gathering began to expand and there were up to 400 throughout the second winter period. Like earlier in the year, the Sandy Heath flock grew to a season's best of 500 and, further afield, there were 200 at Barton Hills on 29th October and 200 at Stotfold, a site that has held far greater numbers in the past, by 17th December.

### **Common Redpoll** *Acanthis flammea*

#### **Scarce winter visitor in erratic numbers.** (*Amber list*)

After an absence in 2022, there were 17 accepted reports involving individuals from four main sites, the majority (12) coming from the Broom area. The first though was at Myers Farm, Potton on 21st November where presumably the same bird was relocated on 28th November and 5th December. At the same time, a party of up to five were still present until mid-December at Broom East. Later that month, there were two at Brogborough Hill on the 25th and a single at Amptill Park on the 31st.

**Lesser Redpoll** *Acanthis cabaret***Probably no longer breeds in the county, winter numbers erratic from year to year. (Red list)**

Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

After a poor end to 2022, there was a notable increase in numbers during January, mainly from traditional sites in east Bedfordshire. Flocks persisted in the Broom area and Pegnut Wood, Potton, where there were flocks on the 1st (12) and 3rd (26) respectively. On the 12th an impressive gathering of 60 was at Sandy Heath, the highest count of the season by some margin. In a quieter February there were still up to 30 at Pegnut Wood, though numbers elsewhere were generally low. On 4th March 48 at Brogborough Tip & Pools was an anomaly, as low numbers continued to be observed at most sites throughout the county, with the exception of Pegnut Wood, which retained a diminished flock of 17 until the end of the month. From April, there were just 11 more submissions, all concerning low numbers, before the last, with a late single at Broom East on 8th May.

A much improved second winter period supplied 70% of the records. The first to return were nine at The Lodge on 11th September and there were another eight reports during the month, including ten at The Lodge on the 28th. Modest numbers were reported from many sites during October, with double-figure counts at The Lodge (14), Harrold-Odell CP (13) and Flitwick WTW (22). A large increase in submissions from November saw flocks of 20 or more from 13 sites. The Lodge gathering increased to 100 on the 1st. Away from the Sandy/Potton area there were 45 at Boughton End on the 4th, 25 at King's Wood, Heath & Reach on the 11th and, a day later, 30 at Flitwick Moor. Towards the end of the month, 29 were at Meadow Lane GP whilst the Broom area supplied seven reports of up to 40, mainly around Gypsy Lane. In a very productive December, there were 20 entries of 40 or more, 14 of which were from east Bedfordshire. The well-watched Broom flock had increased to 70 by the 11th and that at The Lodge to 150 by the 22nd. Away from there, there were at least 40 at both Lidlington CLP and Meadow Lane GP before the year's highest count of 250 at King's Wood, Heath & Reach on the 16th, a huge gathering by recent standards. Numbers remained buoyant until the year's end and on the 31st there were still 70 at Broom South Quarry and 40 at Amptthill Park.

**Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra***Irregular visitor, sometimes invading the county in large numbers and a rare breeder. (Green list)**

It was an improved year with 33 reports, compared to just seven in 2022. Despite that, it wasn't until May when the first arrived. There were five at King's Wood, Heath & Reach on the 14th, after which they were recorded in every remaining month, though flocks were generally small. Of the eight submissions in June and July, all referred to singles and were mainly from east Bedfordshire. There were no further multiple entries until August, with three at Biggleswade Common on the 8th, two over Luton on the 24th and, three days later, seven at Priory CP, a presumed family party. After just one in September, the majority of the reports centred around

Sandy, with up to seven throughout October and November, with the last record of the year, of six at Aspley Heath on 16th December.

### **Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

**Very common resident. Included in 66.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +114%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is increasing +101%. (Green list)**



Goldfinch, Maulden, November 2023

Richard North

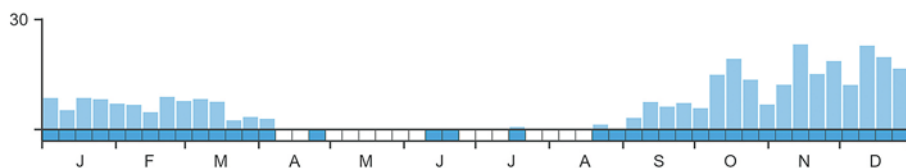
Widespread and reported from hundreds of sites, there were 6,457 records submitted, though 81% were of parties of five or fewer. In the first winter period, there were 11 reports of flocks containing 50 or more from seven sites, the best of which were 80 at both Woburn and Henlow Grange, as well as a season's highest of 100 at Luton Airport on 3rd March.

Post-breeding flocks became apparent from July, but numbers were disappointing, with just 33 reports concerning flocks of over 50, compared to 75 such submissions in the previous year. Unusually, there were only two triple-digit gatherings during the period, at the Henlow Grange/Poppy Hill area and Pegsdon Hills, with maximum counts of 100 and a year's highest of 131 respectively. The former flock was still present until 12th December at least.

### **Siskin** *Spinus spinus*

**Mainly a winter visitor and late spring migrant, has possibly bred. Included in 5.9% of BirdTrack lists. (Green list)**

The first winter period accounted for 40% of the records and there were 37 flocks holding 20 or more. After a very poor end to 2022, sizeable gatherings started to appear towards the end of



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

January with triple-digit flocks found at King's Wood, Heath & Reach (120), Eversholt Lake (200) and Flitwick Moor (100). In February, a season's highest count of 210 was at Sandy Smith NR and there were still at least 70 at King's Wood before numbers began to dwindle. In early March, Sandy Smith NR still held 50 and there were also 50 at Manor Farm Fishing Lakes as well as 40 at Henlow Grange. By the end of the month, the long-standing King's Wood flock still stood at 50, whilst at The Lodge there were 50 on 4th April. After none in May, two reports in June, at The Lodge on the 15th and at Henlow on the 18th, were a possible indicator of local breeding, though there was no further evidence.

An early party of six found at Flitwick Moor on 28th August heralded an improvement on the second winter period in 2022. After a slow build-up during late summer, there were 21 submissions involving groups of 30, with 64 at Blows Downs as part of a vismig vigil over a three-hour period on 27th September. Modest numbers continued to be logged throughout October, with the exception of Sandy Smith NR, which held a season's highest count of 130 on the 23rd, after a much smaller group was reported there earlier in the month. A further influx from November saw good numbers at ten sites. There were 40 at The Lodge from the 2nd and the Sandy Smith NR group was still at least 100 strong. There were also 90 at Flitwick Moor on the 12th, 45 at King's Wood on the 26th and, three days later, 30 at East Hyde. These main flocks persisted throughout December, with others found at Flitton (35) on the 1st, Priory CP (31) on the 22nd and at Danish Camp, Willington (at least 40) on the 30th.

### Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

**Once locally common but has since declined. Included in 4.4% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -28%. (Red list)**

After a positive end to 2022, unsurprisingly it was the first winter period that held the best numbers, with east Bedfordshire at the forefront of the reports. From early January, there were 30 at Poppy Hill and Henlow Grange, down from 150 in the previous December. Concurrently, a well-watched flock in the Broom area held up to 100 and further south there were 50 at Houghton Regis on 26th January and 60 at Kettledean Farm, Pegsdon on 19th February. The last of the larger flocks was at Stotfold, where 30 were still present on 17th March. Between April and July, territories were noted at many locations, with the highest concentrations submitted from four main sites. Broom South Quarry, Studham, Henlow Grange and the nearby Hill Farm, Langford all held double-figure counts, with an impressive 12 singing males reported from Galley Hill on 16th June.

In a disappointing second winter period, there were just nine double-figure counts from five sites. From September there were 11 at Henlow Grange and 30 at Hill Farm, Langford. Fields between Staploe and Duloe held 16 and in the north of the county, there were up to 26 at Thurleigh Airfield. The last was at Begwary village, with 12 on 25th December.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citrinella*

**Widespread resident that has suffered some recent declines. Included in 15.1% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is decreasing -24%\*. The long-term trend for Bedfordshire is decreasing -26%. (Red list)**



Yellowhammer, Steppingley, March 2023

William Stephens

Of the 1,508 submissions, groups of five or fewer made up 82% of the total and there were 66 reports of flocks containing 30 or more from 17 locations throughout the county. Most of the large flocks occurred in the first winter period, following a late influx in the previous year. In January, groups containing 40 or more were at Meadow Lane GP (50), Toddington (40), Henlow Grange (40) and Sandy Heath, the latter site holding 100 on the 26th. By the 30th, there were at least 50 at the FCA at Upper Caldecote and, a day later, 59 at Gypsy Lane West, Broom. In early February, the Meadow Lane GP flock had risen to 100 and there were further groups of 50 at Meppershall, Broom South Quarry and Podington later that month. Numbers for the rest of the period remained strong and, in March, the Broom flock reached a year's highest total of 135 on the 9th. Later that month, there were still 56 at Meadow Lane GP and 70 at Stotfold, with the last significant report of 70 coming from the long-staying Broom South Quarry gathering as late as 12th April.

Comparatively, the post-breeding period was disappointing, with just 15 reports involving flocks of 30 or more from just six sites. Myers Farm, Pottton held the highest count of the season, with 50 there during the last three months of the year.



**Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*

**Only records from nocturnal sound recording – five records 1946–2023.**

One was sound recorded during nocturnal migration over Meppershall on 15th September (JP).

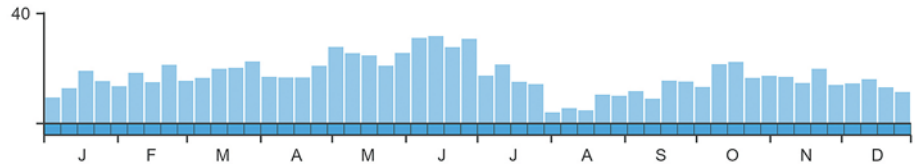
**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*

**Very rare – two records 1946–2023.**

One was at Broom East during 29th–30th October (SCB *et al.*), only our second after the first in 2017.

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

**Fairly common resident showing signs of recovery after earlier declines. Included in 20.3% of BirdTrack lists. The East of England long-term trend is increasing +19%. (Amber list)**



Records shown by month as a percentage of complete lists per week on BirdTrack and eBird

Widespread and reported from hundreds of sites, there were 1,892 records submitted, though 89% accounted for groups of five or fewer. Larger flocks of over 20 in January were reported exclusively from east Bedfordshire and were mainly from the Broom GP complex, though the most numerous gathering was found at the FCA at Upper Caldecote (50) on the 30th. In February, and away from the east, sizeable flocks were found at Meadow Lane GP (40), Lodge Farm, Chicksands (25) and Haynes Church End (25), as well as an exceptional group of 100 found at Water End on 11th February. The last notable count of the season was of 90 at Mill Road, Stanford on 9th March.

There were just 31 reports in the second winter period involving counts of ten or more, and groups numbering 20 or more were limited to just two sites. Broom East supplied all but one of the reports, with 40 there on 30th October, but was well watched for the rest of the year. Deepdale produced the only other, with 20 there on 29th November, whilst a final count of 90 at Broom East on 31st December was a season's best total.

## Appendix I – Category D and E species and known escapes

### Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

#### Central Asia

There were four long-stayers from 2022 at Grovebury SP from 15th March, increasing to six on 10th July, then five still on 5th October with one remaining to 7th December. Five at Dunstable WTW on 6th August were presumably part of the same group.

### Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

#### North America

Singles were at Harrold-Odell CP on 8th January and 19th October. There were three blue-phase birds at Radwell Lakes on 3rd November, “with one looking a little less than pure” according to the observer.

### Muscovy Duck *Cairina moschata*

#### Texas to Argentina

At Wixams Estate there were four on 5th July and three on 13th September.

### Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*

#### Asia and Australasia

At least one was at Flitwick Moor on 7th April.

### Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*

#### Africa

Two were near Warden Little Wood on 1st January, one was at Cainhoe Lakes on 7th June, four were at Sandy on 2nd July and three long-stayers were at Southill Park throughout.

### Reeve's Pheasant *Syrnaticus reevesii*

#### China

One was seen at Tempsford on four dates in April, presumably the long-stayer from 2020.

### Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*

#### China

Three were at Swineshead Wood on 9th April with singles there on 4th and 18th May.

### Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae*

#### Myanmar, Tibet, China

The garden escape from 2022 was at Flitwick Manor Park until 28th January.

### Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

#### India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

One was at Waterloo Thorns on 30th April, a long-staying individual was in The Lodge area in May and June, and presence was noted at Swiss Gardens in May and Biggleswade Common and Haynes in June.

### Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*

#### Australia

One was at Deepdale on 7th October.

## Appendix II – Hybrids

For some hybrid waterfowl it is very difficult to ascertain the true parentage of birds in the field. For completeness, however, we list here all such reports, including the observers' opinions of the breeding background.

### Canada Goose x Barnacle Goose *Branta canadensis x B. leucopsis*

One was at Willington GP on 24th March.

### Ross's Goose x Barnacle Goose *Anser rossii x Branta leucopsis*

One was at Blunham Lakes on 21st March.

### Ross's Goose x unknown *Anser rossii x unknown*

One was at Blunham Lakes on 28th and 30th March and 2nd May.

### Snow Goose x Barnacle Goose *Anser caerulescens x Branta leucopsis*

One was in fields at Blunham on 23rd March.

### Snow Goose x unknown *Anser caerulescens x unknown*

One was at Willington GP on 26th January, with two there on 19th February. One was in fields at Blunham on 6th April, and there were three that resembled Blue Snow Geese at Harrold-Odell CP on 19th October.

### Greylag Goose x Canada Goose *Anser anser x Branta canadensis*

This is the most common hybrid goose. Records were from Priory CP on 12th February and 7th April, Bedford on 5th July (2), Rookery South CIP on 17th August, Broom South Quarry on 28th August and 8th September, Willington GP on 22nd September (5), Broom East on 13th October and Harrold-Odell CP on 19th October (4).

### Greylag Goose x Snow Goose *Anser anser x A. caerulescens*

One was at Biggleswade on 4th January.

### Greylag Goose x domestic-type 'farmyard goose' *Anser anser x unknown*

Singles were at Radwell Lakes on 19th March and at Gadsey Brook from 17th September to 17th December.

### *Anser x Branta* hybrids of undefined parentage

One was at Blunham Lakes on 23rd March and 5th and 12th April. One was at Wardown Park on 21st May, there were two at MCP Wetlands NR on 23rd September and one was at Willington GP on 12th December.

### Black Swan x Mute Swan *Cygnus atratus x C. olor*

One was at Broom East on 29th June.

### Chiloe Wigeon x unknown *Mareca sibilatrix x unknown*

The long-stayer was still at Blunham Lakes on 24th October.

### Wigeon x Gadwall *Mareca penelope x M. strepera*

Up to two long-stayers were at Blunham Lakes to 9th November. During January at least one had some resemblance to an American Wigeon *Mareca americana*. A male hybrid was at Black Cat GP on 1st and 4th May and was paired with a female Wigeon.

**Mallard x unknown** *Anas platyrhynchos x unknown*

One was at Black Cat GP on 18th March.

**Tufted Duck x Pochard** *Aythya fuligula x A. farina*

At Brogborough Lake there were two on 2nd December and singles on 9th and 28th December.

**Caspian Gull x unknown** *Larus cachinnans x unknown*

A Caspian Gull-type hybrid was at Broom South Quarry on 3rd October.

**Appendix III – Bedfordshire Nest Records in 2023**

Nest Record Scheme (NRS) participants gather vital information on the breeding success of Britain's birds by following the progress of individual nests. Every year, almost 750 NRS participants monitor over 35,000 nests of different bird species in a variety of habitats. Thanks to the dedication of these volunteers, the BTO and other scientists can use the NRS's unparalleled long-term dataset to assess the impacts that changes in the environment, such as habitat loss and global warming, have on the productivity of wild birds. The data for Bedfordshire, below, have been downloaded from the BTO website (Robinson *et al.* 2024).

**Table 1 Nest Record totals for Bedfordshire in 2023 sorted by species**

Canada Goose	2	Barn Owl	14	Chiffchaff	1
Mallard	1	Tawny Owl	1	Blackcap	2
Great Crested Grebe	1	Magpie	1	Whitethroat	1
Red Kite	2	Jackdaw	2	Nuthatch	1
Moorhen	1	Rook	57	Blackbird	2
Coot	7	Carriion Crow	4	Song Thrush	1
Oystercatcher	2	Blue Tit	86	Spotted Flycatcher	2
Lapwing	1	Great Tit	47	Robin	1
Little Ringed Plover	1	Swallow	3	House Sparrow	5
Lesser Black-backed Gull	4	Long-tailed Tit	1	Dunnock	2
Stock Dove	2	Willow Warbler	1	Grey Wagtail	2
Woodpigeon	2				
Total number of records submitted: 263					

**Table 2 Nest Record totals for Bedfordshire in 2023 sorted by count**

Blue Tit	86	Stock Dove	2	Lapwing	1
Rook	57	Woodpigeon	2	Little Ringed Plover	1
Great Tit	47	Jackdaw	2	Tawny Owl	1
Barn Owl	14	Blackcap	2	Magpie	1
Coot	7	Blackbird	2	Long-tailed Tit	1
House Sparrow	5	Spotted Flycatcher	2	Willow Warbler	1
Lesser Black-backed Gull	4	Dunnock	2	Chiffchaff	1
Carriion Crow	4	Grey Wagtail	2	Whitethroat	1
Swallow	3	Mallard	1	Nuthatch	1
Canada Goose	2	Great Crested Grebe	1	Song Thrush	1
Red Kite	2	Moorhen	1	Robin	1
Oystercatcher	2				

Anyone can participate, whether it's by following the progress of a few nests in your local area, erecting and monitoring boxes or becoming a highly skilled nest finder. As with all BTO surveys, the welfare of birds comes first and all participants are expected to follow the Code of Conduct, a set of precautions designed to ensure that monitoring a nest does not harm or put it at risk.

The Ringing Scheme is funded by a partnership of the British Trust for Ornithology, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of: Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland)), The National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ireland) and the ringers themselves. The Nest Record Scheme is funded by a partnership of the British Trust for Ornithology and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of: Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland)).

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In the 'Review of the birding year', we have included details of the weather in the UK for each month, the information being 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). More details of the weather in Bedfordshire for 2023 can be found in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist*.

Once again, our partnership during the year with the Bedsbirds Email Group was very strong, but we remind observers that they should submit their records (electronically or on paper) separately to the Bird Club, preferably via BirdTrack, even if their observations have been posted on the Email Group. We would especially like to thank Darren Oakley-Martin once again for the many hours he spent entering records into the electronic database from various sources.

We would like to remind observers of the need to submit a description where requested – we must adhere to this discipline in order to maintain the credibility of our reports for future generations, and indeed failure to follow these guidelines may result in otherwise good records not being published. Details of the species that require a description can be found in the guidelines on page 144 of this journal.

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Ring-necked Duck, Priory CP, December 2023

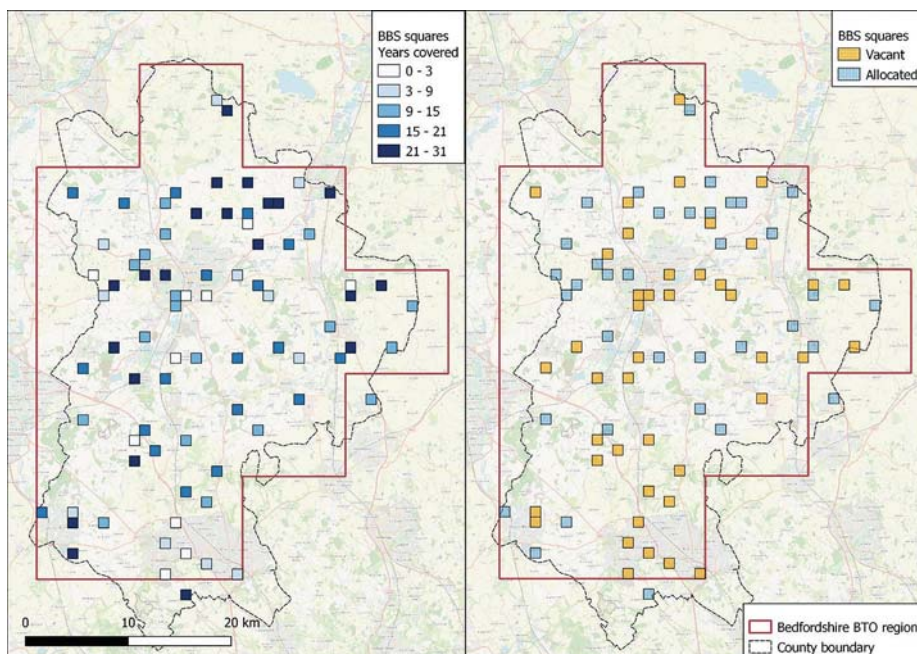
Steve Blain

# The Breeding Bird Survey 2023

*Peter Nash & James Heywood*

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) provides a useful context for the population status of our common and widespread terrestrial birds. Since the survey started in 1994, volunteers have visited a randomly generated selection of 1x1km squares, recorded the main habitats and walked two 1km transects across the square in early and late spring. The low time-commitment required means that many more people have been able to volunteer for this important survey.

Thirty years on, the BBS has grown in coverage substantially. In 2023 – the thirtieth year of fieldwork – 3,931 squares were covered by 2,751 volunteers (plus some professionals in Northern Ireland) across the UK. In Bedfordshire, a high of 50 squares was covered in 2007, though this level has declined steadily since that time. In 2023, 33 squares were covered, back to the levels seen in year one. The maps below provide graphic illustrations as well as current vacant squares.



One of the staggering observations from these 30 years is just how many people have surveyed for every year of the BBS. Across the UK 103 volunteers have contributed data from at least one square in each of the 30 years (in a handful of cases, only foot-and-mouth disease and Covid-19 could prevent an unbroken time series). In Bedfordshire, Richard Moon (TL1152, Great Barford), Amanda Proud (TL0730, Barton-le-Clay),

Peter Holden (TL1356, Colesden) and Roger Buisson (TL2047, Millhouse Fen) have all surveyed for 30 years. As well as the amazing efforts of volunteer surveyors, the BBS (like so many BTO surveys) relies heavily on volunteer coordinators at a regional level, BTO's Regional Network. Twelve members of the Network have been running the BBS in their counties for the full 30 years too.

BBS volunteers are routinely thrown challenges – a barbed-wire fence erected here, a fallen tree there. For some, the challenges are routine – a five-mile slog climbing hundreds of metres in challenging upland terrain, just to arrive at the square. Twice, the challenges have been felt by the scheme as a whole – in 2001 and 2020, very large proportions of the volunteer base were grounded by foot-and-mouth and Covid-19 respectively.

The 2020 BBS report in particular gave an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the scheme over its then 27 years of operation (Harris *et al.* 2021). It makes for impressive reading, distilling the vital outputs of the BBS, ranging from regular Official Government Statistics, contributions to the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS) and periodic use in setting conservation priorities, in the form of the regular Birds of Conservation Concern assessments. On top of this are frequent and impactful contributions to research, particularly those that relate directly to land use policies. The BBS is routinely used to assess the effectiveness of agricultural policies that are designed to benefit wildlife, and more recently has been put to work assessing the benefits of areas designated for wildlife. Other areas where BBS data have been used include to shed further light on the impacts of climate change and the role of disease in the declines of some of our most common birds.

The survey monitors a sample of the birds present – a volunteer cannot expect to record all birds present in a square, but using the same methodology year in, year out, results can be compared over time and population trends calculated.

It is of course the long-term population trends which are most useful. The BBS provides welcome information about the most widespread birds such as Wren and Woodpigeon (found in 90% of all squares across the UK) for which we otherwise, understandably, receive very little information.

We can also play our part in contributing to the overall UK statistics producing scientifically robust results underpinning future conservation efforts. While we may all 'know' species like Cuckoo and Skylark are declining and Great Spotted Woodpecker and Goldfinch are increasing, it is vital to have robust scientific studies to monitor these changes.

The BTO is able to provide Bedfordshire trends for a small number of common species. These are provided in the relevant species account, alongside the trend from the East of England. Table 1 shows the percentage of squares that the main terrestrial species have been recorded in during 2005–2023 in Bedfordshire (excluding 2020). Population trends for Bedfordshire are also summarised over a longer period for a smaller number of species in Table 2.

Whilst the main 'business' of the BBS is the monitoring of population trends for more common and widespread breeding birds (119 species for the current UK report), BBS surveys still provide us with records of a number of rare species, the data for which can be included in the Rare Breeding Birds Panel reporting when relevant. In

Bedfordshire, 150 species have been recorded on BBS visits, with 23 species being recorded in only a single year, including Crossbill, Little Ringed Plover, Brent Goose and Hawfinch. Firecrest, another species in that category, is surely set to be observed more and more as its spread from the south and east continues at a rapid rate.

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, and to get Bedfordshire back up to the heady heights of 2007 and even to surpass 50 squares! If you are interested in taking part, please contact [bbs@bto.org](mailto:bbs@bto.org). For more information about the scheme and other BTO organised surveys, visit [www.bto.org/bbs](http://www.bto.org/bbs).

Table 1 Percentage of squares that the main terrestrial species have been recorded in during 2005–2023 in Bedfordshire (excluding 2020)

Year	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	21	22	23
No. squares	49	49	50	48	41	42	47	46	45	44	43	43	46	46	44	42	36	33
Red-l. Partridge	57	49	48	48	51	43	55	54	47	55	47	43	43	50	43	28	24	
Grey Partridge	31	20	18	29	10	17	17	28	20	11	16	26	11	22	23	17	8	6
Pheasant	86	86	86	77	68	76	74	76	84	91	88	91	87	91	91	90	86	84
Swift	31	49	28	33	44	38	36	30	40	32	21	23	35	22	30		11	27
Cuckoo	29	20	14	19	22	17	30	26	16	23	19	16	15	15	14	17	11	15
Feral Pigeon	22	16	16	17	20	21	17	17	20	11	23	16	20	15	18	12	28	18
Stock Dove	45	43	40	29	41	38	45	46	40	52	47	47	48	54	48	52	64	58
Woodpigeon	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	98	98	98	93	96	100	100	97	97
Collared Dove	65	73	66	67	66	67	68	54	76	61	58	56	52	54	52	52	53	55
Turtle Dove	12	10	2	6	7	7		7	7	2	2	2	2	2				
Moorhen	37	31	30	27	36	38	34	35	27	16	19	26	24	22	20	14	19	18
Lapwing	29	16	16	25	27	29	19	11	22	14	21	16	15	11	23	2	11	12
Sparrowhawk	22	20	16	3	17	17	9	11	13	11	16	16	13	4	11	2	6	18
Buzzard	18	22	24	25	29	19	48	39	49	55	51	67	61	61	73	33	75	58
G. Sp. Woodp'r	51	59	50	52	54	57	49	52	51	61	56	47	43	52	52	43	42	52
Green Woodp'r	67	69	64	65	61	60	62	72	73	57	74	65	61	61	52	52	44	52
Kestrel	31	31	28	44	27	38	19	43	24	27	35	35	41	30	34	17	36	21
Jay	10	20	14	13	22	19	30	35	24	20	23	5	24	35	34	7	31	18
Magpie	74	76	74	81	76	76	68	78	80	77	77	74	67	63	75	71	81	79
Jackdaw	76	73	72	75	73	67	72	72	82	82	84	81	83	87	82	81	94	94
Rook	67	69	60	48	68	64	55	54	64	61	49	56	54	54	61	33	61	55
Carriion Crow	98	98	96	98	100	98	98	100	98	95	98	93	98	100	98	90	97	97
Raven							2	2	4	2	2	7	4	7	5		11	6
Coal Tit	10	18	24	19	29	26	11	24	13	16	23	26	26	26	23	17	17	18
Marsh Tit	6	2	12	2	2	5		2		2	2		2	2	5	2	3	
Blue Tit	92	94	96	94	93	95	96	91	93	91	93	91	93	93	100	98	94	94
Great Tit	94	86	90	81	83	98	94	96	91	93	93	86	89	98	95	93	89	100
Skylark	84	86	88	88	85	88	92	91	93	91	93	95	93	93	95	90	94	91
Swallow	76	67	70	65	59	67	64	59	76	66	67	67	70	63	57	17	44	45
House Martin	22	37	18	21	22	26	17	20	24	18	16	12	15	20	16		17	12
Long-tailed Tit	49	47	46	54	59	55	49	57	53	48	53	51	57	57	59	38	47	39
Willow Warbler	33	35	36	38	27	38	34	37	38	43	33	35	28	28	25	19	14	15
Chiffchaff	59	53	60	67	54	67	66	85	69	80	84	84	85	78	84	88	92	88
Blackcap	71	86	72	65	80	83	87	93	84	93	84	88	80	78	91	90	92	88
Garden W.	27	20	18	13	15	19	23	15	18	25	23	19	15	17	20	14	14	15



Year	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	21	22	23
No. squares	49	49	50	48	41	42	47	46	45	44	43	43	46	46	44	42	36	33
L. Whitethroat	37	29	13	31	34	31	36	30	24	23	26	28	28	26	41	29	22	24
Whitethroat	76	86	82	86	83	81	87	91	93	91	79	74	83	91	82	76	89	76
Goldcrest	29	22	14	23	12	14	25	24	24	20	37	28	41	24	34	21	33	27
Wren	90	90	98	92	93	93	87	91	91	89	91	86	91	89	89	93	94	91
Nuthatch	2	6	4	6	2	10	6	4	9	5	7	7	7	22	11	19	22	18
Treecreeper	6	10	8	2	5	7	2	4	2	7	7	9	11	7	11	7	6	9
Starling	78	76	68	75	78	62	60	65	60	66	63	58	65	50	50	43	61	55
Blackbird	100	98	96	100	100	100	100	98	100	100	98	100	96	100	100	98	100	100
Song Thrush	80	80	78	83	85	88	79	87	82	89	86	93	93	89	91	90	94	88
Mistle Thrush	33	33	30	27	32	29	40	28	33	34	33	26	30	26	25	24	17	15
Spt. Flycatcher	12	8	6	4	5		2	4	4	9	5	2			5	2		
Robin	94	94	94	94	100	95	89	95	89	95	91	98	91	91	95	95	97	100
House Sparrow	71	59	64	54	73	71	66	61	60	70	67	53	63	59	57	62	53	55
Duncock	88	90	84	88	93	93	89	93	89	89	84	88	91	89	82	88	94	85
Yellow Wagtail	31	24	12	15	29	19	23	28	20	27	28	33	24	17	23	21	17	12
Pied Wagtail	61	49	46	48	41	48	36	41	31	32	35	44	30	30	32	43	42	33
Meadow Pipit	12	12	10	19	17	14	13	17	18	14	14	5	9	11	11	14	6	9
Chaffinch	100	100	100	100	100	100	98	100	100	100	98	98	93	91	89	86	83	82
Bullfinch	27	24	10	21	22	31	30	33	27	16	33	33	26	22	23	10	8	3
Greenfinch	90	92	84	88	95	76	81	85	78	73	74	65	59	80	57	50	64	61
Linnet	49	59	36	38	44	50	52	72	58	61	65	58	65	54	48	43	39	48
Goldfinch	74	73	72	77	85	76	83	80	91	84	86	79	87	91	86	93	92	97
Corn Bunting	12	10	12	19	10	19	17	20	22	25	16	19	15	17	20	14	14	18
Yellowhammer	69	76	70	73	76	76	79	78	80	86	63	79	80	74	80	57	67	67
Reed Bunting	35	39	34	29	39	36	23	33	42	30	30	40	35	28	39	24	19	21



Broom East looking south-east, June 2023

Peter Nash



**Table 2 Breeding Bird Survey population trends for Bedfordshire 1994–2023.** All-time (27-year), 10- and 5-year trends are calculated on the basis of smooth indices and truncate the end years. The 1-year change is calculated on unsmoothed indices. Only the average sample size for the 10-year trend is given for brevity.

	27-year (1995–2022)			10-year (2012–2022)			5-year (2017–2022)			1-year (2022–2023)			Sample
	Change	95% CI		Change	95% CI		Change	95% CI		Change	95% CI		
Blackbird	-13*	-25   -2		-22*	-30   -14		-23*	-31   -16		-2	-13   9		49
Blackcap	123*	76   187		17*	6   31		0	-8   10		-19*	-35   -1		43
Blue Tit	25*	2   53		11	-3   27		12*	0   23		16	-2   41		47
Buzzard	–	–		26	-4   74		-1	-20   18		-12	-41   21		29
Carrion Crow	28	-7   77		-10	-28   14		3	-13   20		-1	-22   28		48
Chiffchaff	158*	81   280		22*	5   42		3	-9   15		-1	-15   19		41
Collared Dove	-21	-40   2		-35*	-50   -22		-13	-31   9		-6	-38   36		28
Chaffinch	-67*	-73   -59		-72*	-77   -67		-55*	-62   -46		-5	-22   26		46
Duncock	-5	-29   23		-23*	-36   -6		-15	-28   3		-13	-34   18		44
Gr. Woodpecker	55*	2   127		-49*	-64   -35		-36*	-51   -23		33	-15   99		30
Goldfinch	101*	47   165		-9	-28   11		-12	-28   5		5	-21   37		43
Greenfinch	-72*	-80   -63		-62*	-71   -53		-36*	-55   -13		-2	-36   41		33
GS Woodpecker	–	–		-31*	-45   -12		–	–		11	-30   88		25
Great Tit	4	-14   25		-11	-20   0		-9	-19   2		-11	-28   12		46
House Sparrow	-24	-48   7		-10	-32   20		2	-19   36		48	-6   118		29
Jackdaw	166*	99   296		-6	-25   20		3	-21   29		-11	-37   28		42
Linnet	18	-35   97		-1	-37   41		–	–		-11	-66   185		27
Long-tailed Tit	–	–		-40*	-55   -21		–	–		-23	-62   53		25
Mallard	–	–		37	-19   94		–	–		60	-25   162		26
Magpie	31	-5   70		20	-9   55		-1	-16   16		9	-14   32		38
Pheasant	17	-14   54		17	-4   52		6	-9   22		-18	-38   1		43
Robin	14	-6   38		0	-11   13		0	-10   11		11	-9   35		47
Rook	-57*	-79   -18		-36	-56   0		4	-33   57		-45	-70   0		28
Skylark	-1	-18   23		-1	-18   20		5	-7   16		-7	-23   8		46
Stock Dove	–	–		86*	41   169		36*	3   95		23	-21   96		25
Starling	-65*	-79   -51		-27*	-49   -7		-34*	-59   -13		-23	-53   16		29
Swallow	-44*	-66   -13		-40*	-64   -10		-34*	-62   -1		89*	4   196		31
Song Thrush	18	-12   50		-6	-24   16		-8	-22   9		-3	-26   28		44
Whitethroat	14	-16   49		-30*	-42   -16		-11	-26   5		-5	-28   18		41
Woodpigeon	9	-14   38		-25*	-43   -4		-1	-14   15		-2	-23   26		49
Wren	-2	-18   16		23*	10   36		-9*	-18   0		-16*	-29   -3		45
Yellowhammer	-26*	-54   0		-21*	-43   -3		-8	-31   17		-21	-37   1		37

Significant declines and increases are indicated by \*, and colour coded by the size of the decrease (red) or increase (blue). These are categorised as small (increases 0–50%, decreases 0–33%) and large (increases 50% or more, decreases 33% or more).

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Sparrowhawk, Maulden, December 2023

Richard North

# Ringling report for 2023

Alan Garner

With a total of just 4,084, the number of birds ringed in the county continues to fall, although it was less than 3% down compared with 2022. Blue Tit and Starling continue to dominate the charts, with 908 and 900 respectively, way above Great Tit, which lies in third place with 322. Other changes in the top ten saw Tufted Duck move up from seventh to fourth and Chiffchaff from ninth to sixth. Losers in the rankings included Long-tailed Tit, which fell from fifth to ninth, and Goldfinch which, surprisingly, dropped out of the top ten entirely. The rankings for 2023 are as follows (2022 rank is shown in parentheses):

1 – Blue Tit (2); 2 – Starling (1); 3 – Great Tit (3); 4 – Tufted Duck (7); 5 – Blackcap (4); 6 – Chiffchaff (9); 7 – Robin (6); 8 – House Sparrow (8); 9 – Long-tailed Tit (5); 10 – Wigeon (14).

Table 1 on the next page shows all the birds ringed in Bedfordshire during 2023.

In Figure 1, we can see how the number of birds ringed in Bedfordshire has changed over the period 2010–2023, and how this compares with the national picture. While the trends for the county and the UK look broadly similar, the annual percentage fall compared with the average for the previous five years has been significantly greater in Bedfordshire for most of the last few years. Clearly, the number of birds ringed will be affected by the size of the population and the nature of the ringing undertaken (time

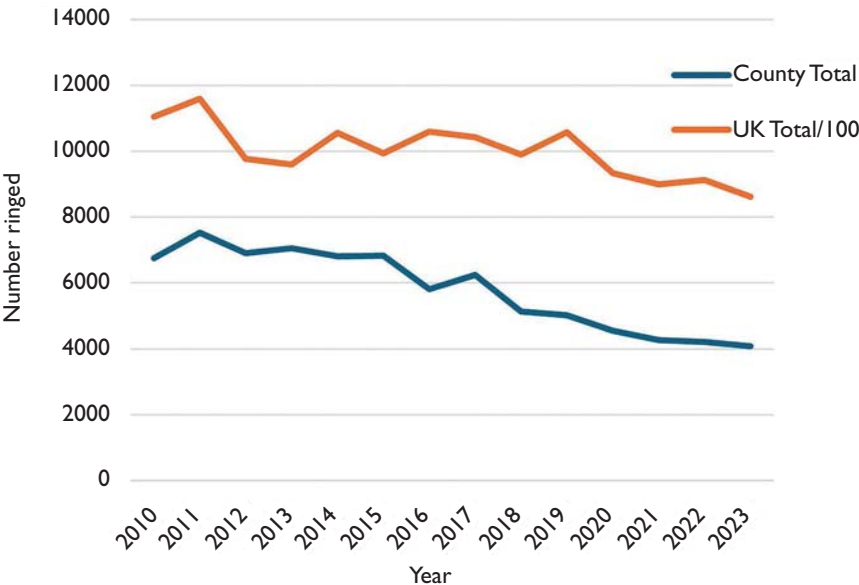


Fig. 1 Number of birds ringed annually between 2010 and 2023

Table 1 Bedfordshire ringing totals 2023

Species	Total	Species	Total
Mute Swan	6	Long-tailed Tit	93
Mandarin Duck	1	Willow Warbler	21
Gadwall	13	Chiffchaff	134
Wigeon	92	Sedge Warbler	4
Mallard	1	Reed Warbler	35
Pintail	1	Blackcap	183
Teal	8	Garden Warbler	31
Pochard	1	Lesser Whitethroat	13
Tufted Duck	222	Whitethroat	53
Stock Dove	3	Goldcrest	35
Woodpigeon	3	Wren	72
Moorhen	10	Nuthatch	11
Coot	54	Treecreeper	9
Oystercatcher	1	Starling	900
Barn Owl	44	Song Thrush	16
Tawny Owl	5	Redwing	15
Great Spotted Woodpecker	6	Blackbird	45
Green Woodpecker	1	Robin	108
Kestrel	1	House Sparrow	102
Ring-necked Parakeet	2	Duncock	90
Jay	2	Grey Wagtail	14
Magpie	1	Pied Wagtail	26
Jackdaw	22	Meadow Pipit	2
Coal Tit	13	Chaffinch	22
Marsh Tit	1	Bullfinch	14
Blue Tit	908	Greenfinch	37
Great Tit	322	Lesser Redpoll	85
Sand Martin	10	Goldfinch	78
Swallow	27	Yellowhammer	6
House Martin	22	Reed Bunting	27

spent and habitat chosen). It is most likely that this unrepresentative percentage fall is due mainly to a reduction in the amount of ringing carried out, rather than an abnormal decline in bird populations in the county. Note that although this chart shows the trend over a 14-year period, for the sake of simplicity, all subsequent graphs will be limited to changes over a seven-year period.

In previous reports, I have illustrated changes in the numbers of certain reedbed species and the more common finches ringed and I'm pleased to say that the fortunes of some of these do seem to have improved in 2023. Figures 2 and 3 show the changes in the reedbed species and Figures 4 and 5 address three of the finches.

So, although the numbers of Reed Warblers, Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings caught nationally have fallen, 2023 has seen a level of recovery in all three species in Bedfordshire. It seems likely that this is due to increased attention to wetland habitats by the county's ringers. Despite this, there were, surprisingly, no Cetti's Warblers ringed in 2023 in the county.

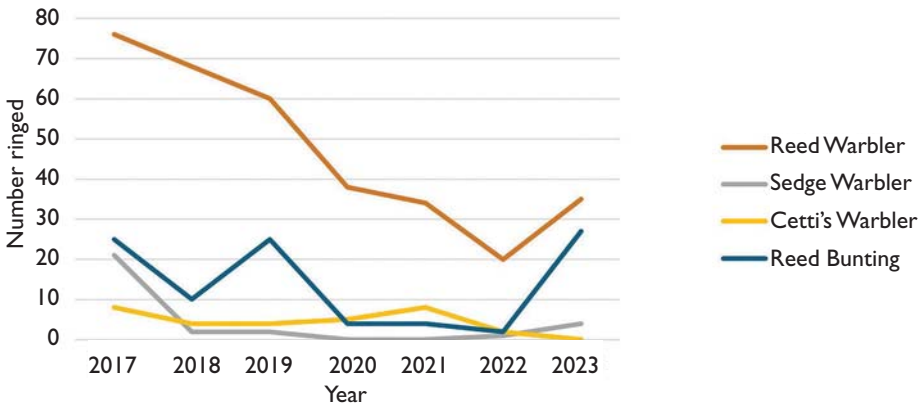


Fig. 2 Key reedbed species ringed in Bedfordshire (2017–2023)

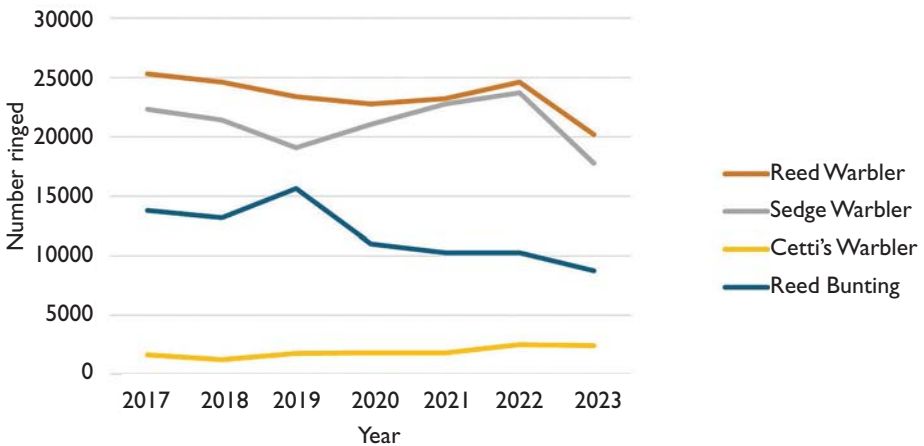


Fig. 3 Key reedbed species ringed in the UK (2017–2023)

Perhaps the biggest surprise, given its huge population increase over the last couple of decades, is the fall in the number of Goldfinches ringed nationally. This does not seem to be the case in Bedfordshire, where the number of birds ringed has remained relatively stable. Unfortunately, Greenfinches are continuing to show a downward trend locally, but the number of Chaffinches ringed has been slowly increasing over the last couple of years.

The final group for which I want to examine annual trends concerns the commoner *Sylvia*, *Curruca* and *Phylloscopus* warblers. For convenience, I will refer to this group loosely as 'Scrub Warblers' and it comprises Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler. Figures 6 and 7 show the numbers ringed in Bedfordshire and the UK respectively.

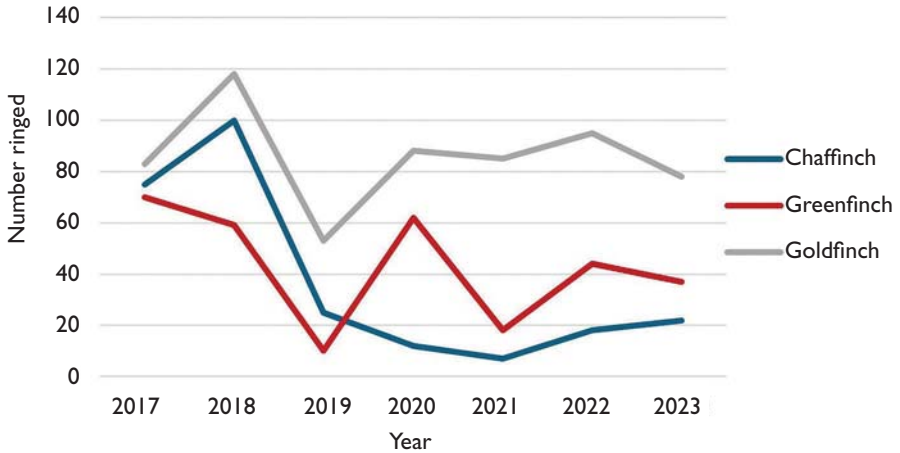


Fig. 4 Common finches ringed in Bedfordshire (2017–2023)

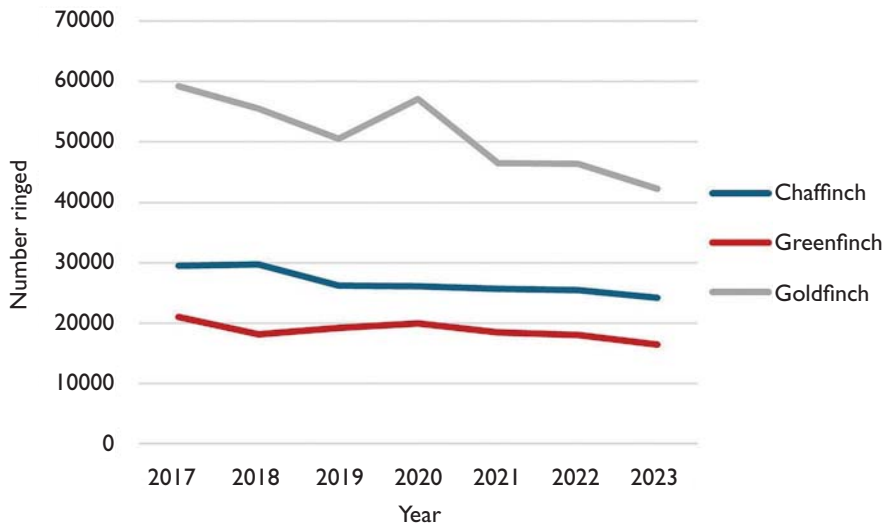


Fig. 5 Common finches ringed in the UK (2017–2023)

It looks as though Chiffchaffs probably had a poor breeding season back in 2018, as the numbers ringed both nationally and locally fell by around 50% from the previous year. Overall, though, the national figures for this group have remained relatively stable, despite some peaks and troughs in the number of Blackcaps caught. Within the county, the trends for Garden Warbler and Willow Warbler broadly reflect the national picture. However, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Whitethroat numbers have all declined to almost half the levels they were at in 2017.



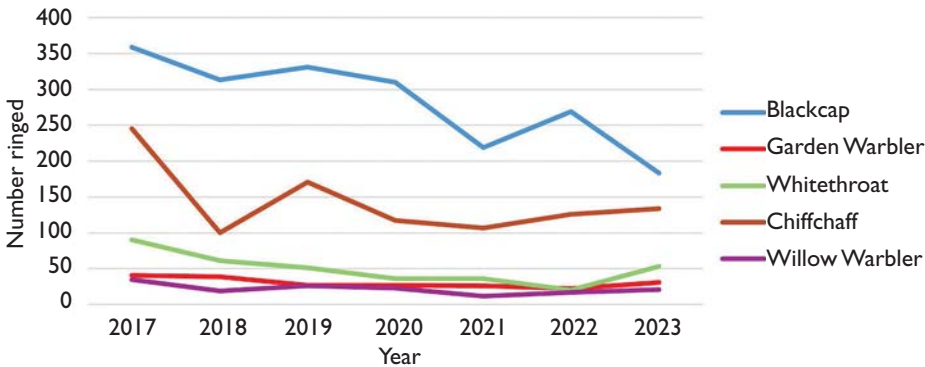


Fig. 6 ‘Scrub Warblers’ ringed in Bedfordshire (2017–2023)

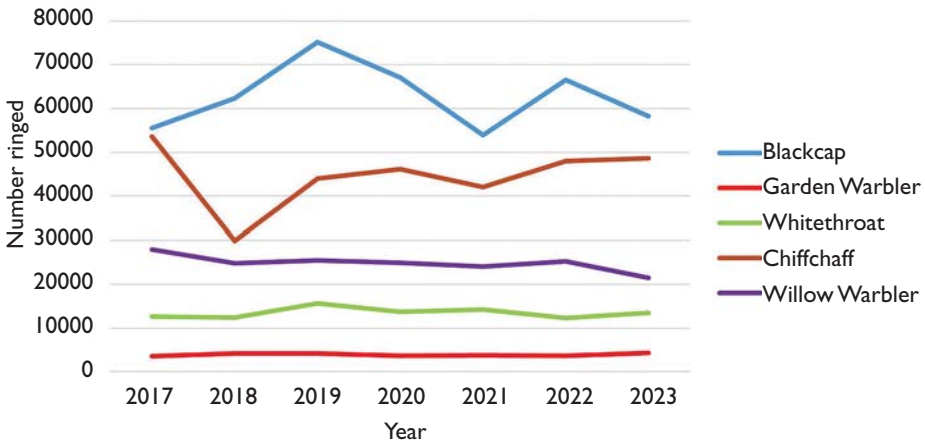


Fig. 7 ‘Scrub Warblers’ ringed in the UK (2017–2023)

For many years, Bedfordshire has been a key county for ringing waterfowl and 2023 was no exception. The 222 Tufted Ducks ringed here accounted for 86.4% of the national total, while 22% and 20.8% respectively of the country’s Gadwall and Wigeon were also ringed in the county.

Many ringers like to spend at least some of their time ringing in their gardens, although I doubt whether many of them are as successful as Chris Keens was in 2023. In his garden in the south of the county, he caught a total of 471 birds of 24 species. As well as the usual garden species, his list included Chiffchaff, Bullfinch, Redwing, Goldcrest and Stock Dove. All in all an enviable selection of species, although I suspect most garden ringers would not envy him the two Ring-necked Parakeets, which are reputed to pose a major risk to a ringer’s fingers!

An important aspect of ringing is the recoveries and sightings of ringed birds away from their place of origin. As usual, waterfowl ringed at Blunham Lakes accounted for some of these, with a Wigeon, ringed in February 2023 and shot in France 197km away

in December 2023, and a Pochard, ringed in February 2009, also shot in France in December, but 330km away. Fortunately, not all the reports are of birds that have been killed. A Coot that was ringed at Blunham Lakes in November 2020 was first seen in Durham (309km away) the following May and then again in western France (742km away in the opposite direction) in January 2023.

It is not uncommon for colour-ringed gulls, ringed on the Continent, to turn up in the UK and, sometimes, to be recorded in successive years. One such bird is a Caspian Gull that was ringed as a nestling in Poland in June 2020 and recorded in Leicestershire & Rutland and Grovebury SP alternately in May 2021, June 2021, May 2022 and August/September 2023. One might speculate that it had remained in the UK as a non-breeding bird but would, perhaps, return to the Continent on reaching sexual maturity. Another gull that was probably only here as an immature bird was a Yellow-legged Gull that was ringed as a nestling in the south of France in June 2021 and seen at Leighton Buzzard in August and September 2023. However, this is not likely to be the case for a Black-headed Gull ringed as an adult in Poland in June 2020. This bird was recorded at Broom in November 2020, July 2022 and again in February 2023. This species is known to breed at two years old (occasionally not until three years old), suggesting that it was probably breeding locally.

2023 brought to light an interesting fact about Common Terns. In 2005, some Common Tern chicks were ringed at Willington GP. Nothing more was known about them until, in August 2021 and again in April 2022, one of these birds (ring SR25146) was seen at Walthamstow Wetlands in Greater London. Then, in May 2023, a ringed Common Tern was found dead at the same wetland site. Its ring number was SR25145, presumably a sibling of the bird seen the year before. It seems amazing that these siblings had managed to still be 'together' after 18 migrations totalling in the region of 300,000km!

Many birds are known to be generally faithful to their breeding sites, returning from their migration year after year. An exception to this was a Chiffchaff that was ringed at Priory CP in April 2022. At that point it was a young adult male and so presumably was breeding locally. In early June 2023, right in the middle of the breeding season, it was seen in northern France, 607km away. Another example, although less dramatic, is of a Sand Martin that was ringed as a juvenile at MCP Wetlands NR in July 2022 and then recaptured at Woolston Eyes (Cheshire & Wirral) in April 2023 – clearly it had not returned to its natal site to breed.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks go to all of Bedfordshire's ringers and to anyone who has reported a ringed bird during 2023. Thanks also to the BTO for the online National Ringing Report (<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports>), from which most of the information for this report was gleaned.

*An A-permit holder, Alan moved to Bedfordshire in 2017, having trained with the Merseyside Ringing Group. These days, his ringing activities involve helping out at ringing sites at MCP Wetlands NR and Bromham Mill. He also rings in his garden and in a small woodland in Willington, and is a keen nest recorder and pullus ringer.*

# Bittern – a new breeding bird for Bedfordshire

Peter Nash

## Background

The history of Bittern, *Botaurus stellaris*, in the county extends back to the 1850s when the first record was noted as of one being shot at Blunham (Steele-Elliott 1897–1901). Up until about 1900, about 30 individuals found their way into the hands of taxidermists, having also suffered a similar fate. After a “remarkable” 1899–1900 winter influx of Bitterns, for which there were exasperatingly no specific details recorded, they were noted in the county on only a handful of occasions up until the mid-20th century, almost always in winter. From 1946 to 1987, Bitterns occurred in 21 years, probably involving about 23 individuals, substantially, although not exclusively, during the winter months (Trodd & Kramer 1991). A bird which was first seen in May 1970 at Langford GP, staying into May the following year, was, however, a sign of what was to come. Birds were seen with increasing regularity during the winter months in most years up and into the 21st century.

## Breeding signs

In 2003, a winter visitor to Warren Villas began to boom in early March, before apparently disappearing. That was the first booming record noted in the county. However, there were to be several more blank years before the ‘Bittern scene’ changed dramatically during the winter of 2010/11, due, undoubtedly, to the very cold and extensive winter weather. As the 2010 Bird Report noted at the time, “There were remarkable and record-breaking influxes, associated with the severe, freezing weather. Although there might have been some movement of birds between Stewartby and Brogborough it seems at least nine were in the county in the first winter period and at least ten and possibly 12 in the second. We can only guess at just how many others might have lurked unseen in the county during both winter periods.”

Another precursor of the spread of the species generally was detailed in a footnote to the 2011 Bird Report, which stated: “During the last three years there have been, on average, nine ‘new’ county records of Bittern each year, compared to an average of just over one per year for the period 2000 to 2008. Whilst that remarkable increase is undoubtedly weather related it could also reflect the recent increase in the British breeding population, with the number of booming males in England reaching 100 in 2011 (*A double century for Bitterns in Brit. Birds* 104). A study by Wotton *et al.* (*Eurasian Bittern distribution and abundance in the UK during the 2009/10 winter in Brit. Birds* 104) considered that the UK population reached a minimum of 598 Bitterns in winter 2009/10, of which it was estimated that 35% were residents, with the rest being immigrants from continental Europe.”

From 2013, booming males were heard from the Marston Vale, Rookery North CLP and Coronation CLP area of the county, typically where reedbeds had been created or become established in former brick pits. Bitterns were also heard booming at Willington GP and were latterly recorded flying over the county by nocturnal recorders, illustrating the increase in the numbers of these birds.



Bittern, MCP Wetlands NR, June 2022

Neil Wright

### *Breeding*

The first successful breeding record was to come in late May 2022 when, following signs in 2021 of a female flying over reedbeds possibly with food, a dedicated effort was made by a small number of observers at Rookery North CLP and MCP Wetlands NR to try to prove breeding. However, as with many such efforts, it is often luck that plays a crucial part in providing the evidence being sought. On 26th May, Paul Wright was due to paint a house in Marston Moretaine and, upon arrival, discovered that the plastering done previously had not fully dried and therefore his work needed to be postponed. Faced with a free day, he decided, having had an inkling he might not be working and so having taken both binoculars and telescope with him, to nip into the nearby MCP Wetlands NR to see what he could see on a pleasant late spring day. Inevitably, he spent some time in the Tower Hide, which gives a panoramic view of the reedbeds and surrounding countryside, and was pleased to see and photograph a rufous-coloured female Cuckoo. Having spent some time in the hide and thinking it was, perhaps, time to move on elsewhere, a sudden low movement to his left caught his eye, just above the reeds. Surely he had just seen a Bittern flying across and dropping in? A further half-hour passed before the bird flew out of the reedbed and over the railway line into

Rookery North CIP. As readers may be aware, it is rare to see Bitterns flying in daylight unless they are feeding young, which continues day and night, generally becoming more frequent as the young get older and demand more food. To put the event into context, the total number of sightings of Bitterns flying in daylight in the county during the breeding season up until this point would probably not have been even into double figures! Paul, however, wanted to be sure he had actually seen a feeding flight and therefore waited patiently for the bird to return – it did so, but almost another three hours passed before it flew back. Elated at finally being able to prove breeding, he was quickly on the phone to let me know. Over the next week or so, feeding flights were regularly observed. It was particularly satisfying for the Forest of Marston Vale which owns the Country Park as one of the main aims they had set out in the initial years when the Park was created was to attract breeding Bitterns, Marsh Harriers and Bearded Tits.

### A 2023 footnote

The following year, Bitterns were regularly seen performing feeding flights during the summer months over Rookery North CIP and MCP Wetlands NR and, whilst it was not possible to pinpoint the nest location(s) on these occasions, it is likely that at least two pairs, and, in all probability, three pairs, bred in the county.

In conclusion, with the successful breeding and increasing population of these birds generally, we anticipate that Bitterns will continue to breed in the county, perhaps in increasing numbers, dependent on the continued availability of suitable habitat, a good food supply and protection from disturbance during the breeding season.

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*Peter Nash is the Bedfordshire Bird Recorder and has been watching birds since his schooldays. A member of the Bird Club Committee and Records and Research Panel, and Zoom Co-ordinator for the winter meetings programme, he also helps with the production of the annual Bird Report and collates data for the Club and for local and national returns. Married to June, he lives in Sandy with their three Belgian Shepherd dogs and a Terrier.*

# Bedfordshire rookeries

## 2022 and 2023

*Roger K. Hicks*

These were the tenth and eleventh years of the annual Bedfordshire Rookery Survey. Methodology was as in previous years (Hicks 2014, Hicks 2024) with a rookery defined as any nest or group of nests more than 100m from the next nearest group. Similar methodology was used in previous national rookery surveys (Sage & Vernon 1978) and many other local surveys (e.g. Bland 2016, Denton 2008, Jardine & Maguire 2018).

As in previous years, a Google map was prepared for the start of the 2022 (<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2022>) and 2023 (<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2023>) rookery seasons. All recently active rookeries were shown with yellow markers (rookeries used in the previous year) or pale pink markers (rookeries not used in the previous year). As the survey progressed the markers of rookeries that were active were changed to green and those where there were no nests or nesting activity were changed to red, allowing the survey's progress to be monitored online. Nest counts were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. The survey was advertised on the Bedfordshire Bird Club website, BedsBirds email group and via the BNHS Facebook group. Regular updates were sent to each of these sites.

Table 1 Rookeries and nests by survey year

National surveys	1945	1975	1980									
Rookeries	312	202	134									
Nests	9945	4436	3756									
Average	31.88	21.96	28.03									
Tetrads	151	122	84									
Survey years	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Rookeries	134	169	180	181	174	181	187	168	213	172	205	
Nests	3740	4688	4484	4418	4470	4622	4317	3223	4857	3561	5083	
Average	27.91	27.74	24.91	24.41	25.69	25.54	23.09	19.18	22.80	20.70	24.80	
Tetrads	97	109	113	116	114	120	120	112	127	112	127	

## 2022

Incomplete coverage of the county and fewer late season visits, mainly due to a brush with Covid-19, resulted in fewer rookeries (172) and nests (3,561) than might have been expected, i.e. 24% (61/258) of recently used rookery sites were not checked.

Fifteen rookeries were reported for the first time, including one at Church End, Haynes which had been used previously although not in the last ten years. At least three rookeries were abandoned in 2022. A consequence of fewer late season visits was that more than 50% of the nest trees remained unidentified. Tree identification is easier once the trees are in leaf. Ash was the most commonly recorded nest tree.



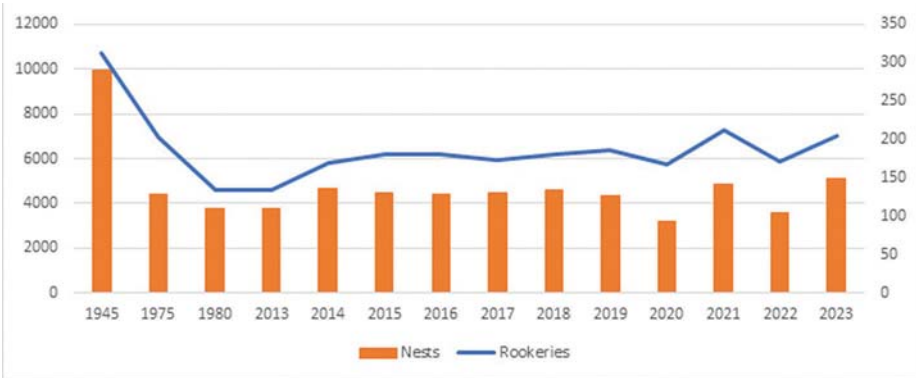


Fig. 1 Rookeries and nests by survey year

Colony size ranged from one nest (three rookeries) to 114 nests at Poppy Hill. Two other rookeries exceeded 100 nests: Nunswood, Meppershall with 112 nests and Cotton End with 105, while one other exceeded 75 nests: Millow Hall (78 nests). A further eight rookeries held more than 50 nests. Most rookeries consisted of 25 or fewer nests and most nests were also in rookeries of 25 or fewer nests. Average colony size was 20.70 nests, probably reflecting fewer late season counts rather than declining rookery size.

## 2023

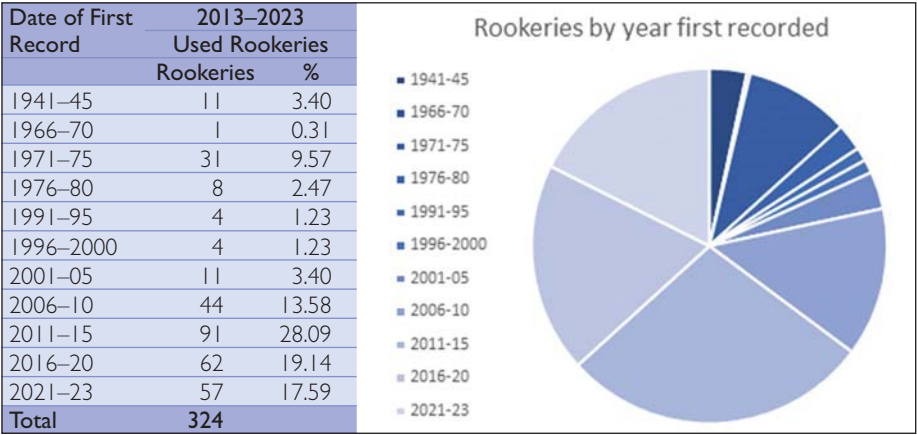
More complete coverage of the county recorded 205 rookeries and 5,083 nests. A further 50 sites which had previously held rookeries were also checked. This is the second highest rookery count (after 2021) and the greatest nest count since the original survey in 1945. Four rookeries held more than 100 nests, including three within 5km of each other: Nunswood, Meppershall with 113 nests, Poppy Hill and Stockbridge Farm both with 109 nests. The other was Hinwick Dungee in the north of the county with 101 nests. Another three rookeries held more than 75 nests, including Cotton End with 98, and a further 15 rookeries held more than 50 nests. Seventeen rookeries were reported for the first time. At least eight rookeries were abandoned in 2023. The majority of rookeries (60%) consisted of 25 or fewer nests although most nests (40%) were in rookeries of 26–50 nests. Average rookery size was 24.80 nests, an increase on recent years. Ash was the most commonly recorded nest tree, accounting for 38% of nests, although a similar proportion remained unidentified.

All rookery data collected in 2022 and 2023 has been entered on BirdTrack and a spreadsheet of the raw data has been deposited with the Bedfordshire Bird Club.

Over the 11 years of the current survey (2013–2023) rookeries have been recorded from 324 sites. Near complete coverage was achieved in eight of the 11 years. Coverage was incomplete in 2013 (the first year of the survey), 2020 (Covid-19 lockdown) and 2022 (personal brush with Covid-19). 120 rookeries were used in more than eight years and only 56 in all 11 years. Conversely, 126 rookeries were recorded in three or fewer years, of which 55 were only occupied in one year (including the 17 rookeries reported for the first time in the latest survey), most of which were small rookeries of fewer than ten nests.

The turnover of rookeries was much greater than I had anticipated when I started the survey (Table 2). This can be explained, in part at least, by the 100m rule used in this survey. Some other studies, e.g. Caithness in 2007 (Sellers *et al.* 2008) and West Cumbria 2005–2012 (Sellers 2013) define a rookery as any nest or group of nests more than 500m from the next nearest group as that is a better reflection of Rook ecology and how Rooks use their rookeries (Griffin & Thomas 2000; Mason & MacDonald 2004). For this study I will probably continue using the 100m definition as it has the advantage of being relatively easy to apply in the field and hence repeatable both between years and observers. A consequence of this definition is that a single rookery may be spread over a large area or an area with many nests could consist of several rookeries. For example, there were no rookeries in Henlow village until 2018 when a small rookery appeared in a single oak tree in Groveside; in 2020 another nest appeared in a tree behind the bowls club; in 2022 there were no nests in Groveside but that behind the bowls club expanded. At the same time two more rookeries appeared: one in another single oak tree behind the village stores and another beside Coach Road in the corner of the sports ground and school playing field. In 2023 the bowls club and Coach Road rookeries expanded further and other nests appeared in trees bordering the sports ground. If I had first found these nests in 2023, I would probably have recorded them as one rookery.

Table 2 Rookeries by year first recorded (in five-year blocks)



Another part of the explanation is the dynamic nature of rookeries. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of rookeries (64.8%) were first recorded since 2011, the period which includes the start of this survey in 2013, but of the 134 rookeries recorded in that first survey, 45 (33.6%) were no longer occupied in 2023. Only seven of the rookeries used in 2023 and 11 of the rookeries used in at least one year since 2013 were also used during the first national survey in 1945, although that does not imply that these rookeries have been in continuous use since then. For example, the rookeries at The Gatehouse, Box End, Goldington Green and Wardown Park, Luton were not recorded between 1945 and the current survey (2013–2023). In contrast, the longest known continuously occupied rookery in Bedfordshire is one at Green End, Renhold

which has been in use since at least 1969 (A. Whitfield pers. comm.). A rookery at Flitwick Manor was reported in the owner's diaries with the earliest from 1834 and again from the 1920s. It was not recorded in the 1975 and 1980 national surveys. The rookery has probably moved around the park during this time as a substantial number of oak trees have been lost since the Second World War along with all the elms (research by I. Cook).

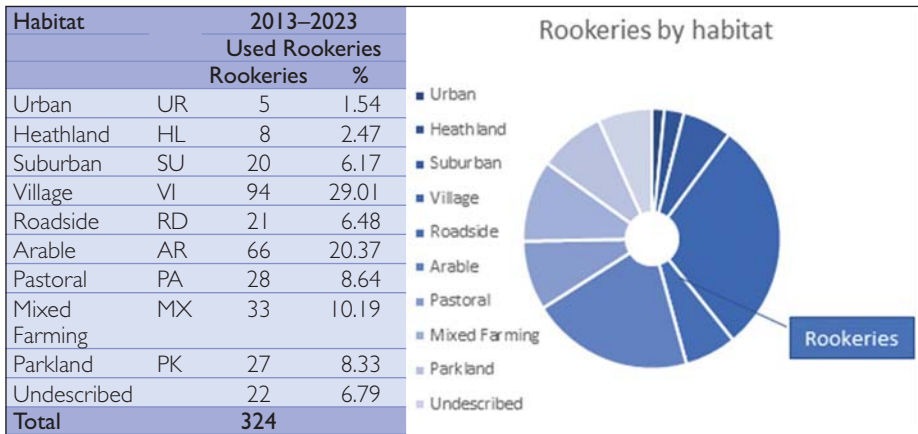
During fieldwork for the most recent breeding bird atlas (2007–2011), Rooks were confirmed breeding in 179 tetrads in Bedfordshire, although some of these rookeries are in neighbouring counties, e.g. where the county boundary passes through a tetrad as at Holwell in Hertfordshire, Slapton in Buckinghamshire, Tilbrook in Huntingdonshire and Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire. Excluding these 'county-edge' colonies reduces the number of occupied Bedfordshire tetrads to 150, similar to the 155 tetrads occupied during the current survey (maximum 127 in any one year). Rookeries were present in 114 tetrads during fieldwork for the atlas and the current survey, were absent from 40 tetrads where breeding was confirmed during 2007–2011 but were present in 36 tetrads where breeding was not recorded during atlas fieldwork. The atlas noted breeding as probable in a further 11 tetrads; five of these tetrads held rookeries during the current survey, further highlighting the turnover of rookeries.

It was not always possible to determine why any of the rookeries, large or small, were abandoned. There was evidence of shooting at some Bedfordshire rookeries, with cartridges found under nesting trees at various sites, e.g. Lower Dean and Pumpkin Park (Woburn), but I only know of one rookery that has been shot out in the county (at Broom gravel pits) and that occurred before the current survey started. The nest trees at four rookeries were cut down (Bedford South, Gibraltar, Grovebury Road (Leighton Buzzard) and Sandy Heath). The year after the Grovebury Road nest trees were cut down, a new rookery appeared in trees beside the A4146, c.150m to the south; after the rookery at Warren Plantation was abandoned, a new rookery appeared at Haynes Church End, c.500m to the west and a site that had previously been occupied before the current survey (D. Parsons pers. comm.). After the colony wood at Sandy Heath was cut down to allow expansion of the sand quarry, numerous smaller rookeries appeared around the edge of the heath, e.g. Everton Road, Deepdale Lodge, Quarry gateway and The Lodge, all between 1.0km and 1.5km from the original site. When the Deadman's Spinney (Sharnbrook) rookery was abandoned, dwindling from 99 nests in 2014 to none in 2021, several smaller rookeries appeared between 500m and 750m surrounding the original site, e.g. Lower Furlong, Mill Road, Park Street, etc. It is tempting to speculate that these new rookeries were built by birds from the original colonies but, in the absence of marked birds, there is no evidence to support this.

Over the course of the current survey, more rookeries, mostly of fewer than 20 nests, have appeared in village locations, e.g. as detailed above for Henlow but also in Riseley, Sharnbrook and Wrestlingworth. In Wiltshire most rookeries now seem to be in and around villages or alongside roads and railways (P. Castle pers. comm.) while in west Cumbria more than half the rookeries were associated with large country residences (Sellers 2013), possibly because these locations also afforded the Rooks some protection. In an attempt to quantify the location/habitat of Bedfordshire rookeries, I devised nine location/habitat categories and attempted to allocate each rookery to one of these categories based on the habitat immediately surrounding the rookery (Table 3). Some

of these categories may be ambiguous, e.g. parkland rookeries could equally be placed in one of the farmland categories (arable, pastoral or mixed) while some village locations could be termed suburban. Most rookeries (94) were placed in the village category. Approximately half (51.5%) the rookeries were in locations that afforded them some protection from being shot out, i.e. those in urban, suburban, village, roadside and parkland categories.

Table 3 Rookeries by habitat



Over the period of the survey and years where coverage of the county was near complete, the number of rookeries has varied from 169 to 213 and the number of nests from 4,317 to 5,083 (Table 1, Fig. 1), suggesting a fairly stable population of between 4,500 and 5,000 pairs. The long-term trend for the East of England (1995–2022) is +11%, which is not statistically significant (Heywood *et al.*, 2024). However, Marchant & Gregory (1999) caution against inferring too much from local surveys as the turnover of rookery sites and mobility of the species can result in considerable variation of counts between consecutive years even at the county level.

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### Appendix I: Links to Google Maps

Google maps have been produced for the previous surveys and these can be viewed online:

<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries1945>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries1975>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2013>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2014>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2015>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2016>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2017>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedfordshireRookeries2018>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2019>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2020>  
<http://tinyurl.com/BedsRookeries2021>

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A big thank you to all the Bedfordshire Bird Club and BedsBirds email group members who supplied rookery information: David Anderson, Stefan Baltruschat, Andy & Melissa Banthorpe, Graham Bellamy, Michael Bird, Steve Blain, Terry Brown, Dave Buckingham, Martin Butler, Ian Cook, Alan Cutts, Lee Evans, Alan Garner, Tony Gill, Andy Grimsey, Peter Holden, Lawrence Jarrett, John Kirkham, Judith Knight, Dave Kramer, Tim Mason, Neil Mckillop, Mark Newman, Darren Oakley-Martin, Dave Odell, Jonathan Palmer, Martin Palmer, Dave Parsons, John Pitts, Jim Porter, Jon Powell, Jamie Proud, Tony Revill, Michael Russell, Peter Smith, Tony Squire, Aidan Whitfield and Sonnie Wing. Apologies to anyone inadvertently left off the list. And last but not means least, special thanks to my wife Jenny.

*After working abroad for several years (in Sweden, Papua New Guinea and Australia), Roger Hicks and his family returned to the UK in 1999 and eventually settled in Henlow. He is a keen participant in survey work and has organised the Bedfordshire Rookery Survey since 2013. He has served on both the General Management and Records and Research Committees.*

# Scott Stalham

## 1972–2023

*The Stalham family*



Scott was born with a keen interest in the natural world. This began at an early age with his love of dinosaurs. His Mum quickly figured out that this love would become a big interest when the names he was giving to each of his dinosaurs were actually their factual names. Not only did he surprise his Mum with his knowledge, he surprised his teachers by expressing his desire to become a palaeontologist at the age of four.

On his early family holidays, Scott would look forward to visiting a collector of fossils at Corfe Castle and finding ammonites or trilobites. He was blessed with an excellent memory – once read, always remembered.

An interest in birds was a natural progression and lifelong passion. Junior school age saw him joining the local branch of the Young Ornithologists Club ('YOC'), where those in charge were surprised with the accuracy of his knowledge.

His eye for detail with dinosaurs standing him in good stead with identifying the subtle differences in bird species, be it a call or flight pattern, a wing bar or eyebrow colouring, words like supercilium and scientific names started to enter his conversations.



He enjoyed many trips with the YOC to various places and was soon examining owl pellets, to check their diet, and retrieving rings from dead birds found along the way.

Around our family home there were lots of signs of Scott's passions. His brother Daniel remembers Scott looking after a friend's terrapins and whilst caring for them he managed to burn a hole in his bedroom carpet. I had a VHS of my fourth birthday, which soon had a bird programme accidentally recorded in the middle of it.

Everything that Scott did he did with love, care and passion. He brought people together and gave everyone he met his time. He enjoyed talking to people and sharing with them an insight into what was going on in his local town, the wildlife around them, any changes and how we could protect local wildlife.

He loved to share his extensive knowledge. His passion was infectious and this led him to be involved in many projects to protect the natural wildlife in his local area. He set up 'Friends of Wigmore Park' and supported 'Stop Luton Airport Expansion.' His caring nature carried through into his work life, where he was put forward and encouraged by his co-workers to become a union rep. Scott was hugely respected in all areas of his life and had lots of circles of friends.

Scott's wife, Sian, supported and became a big part of all Scott's hobbies and interests; from birdwatching, to music, to exploring parts of the UK, Sian was by his side along with their dog Sasha. Scott introduced Sian to birdwatching on their second date. She'd never met a birder before and from then on most of their weekends, day trips and holidays centred around an RSPB reserve, a favourite bird hide or a sighting of a rare bird – the latter often involved the immediate leaving of the house! The binoculars and spotting scope always went everywhere that they went.

Scott wished that he had chosen a profession that involved the full-time studying and monitoring of birds and he had decided that when he retired he was going to work at an RSPB reserve giving talks and bird tours to the younger generation so that they too could enjoy a lifetime of birds just as he did.

His brother Gary remembers a particular holiday in 2017, when his young family were joined by Scott and Sian in the Stalham favourite holiday destination of Swanage, Dorset. It felt special being with Scott once more, at a location we probably hadn't visited in each other's company since our childhood. Gary loved going for walks along the Jurassic coastline with his wife and young children accompanied by Scott and Sian, revelling in the nostalgia. Scott was sporting a rather expensive looking set of binoculars and Gary recalls him involving his children in identifying the local bird population and providing them with the usual associated facts.

Scott had such a strong connection with so many people that his name lives on and on. He was loved by so many and as a family we were overwhelmed with the amount of messages, shared stories, notes of sympathy and the people who reached out, wanting to include us in memorials, workstreams and continuations of work.

A lady who lived on Scott's postal round dedicated her garden to Scott as he always complimented her on how lovely it was. We managed to get a memorial bench placed in the peace garden at Wigmore Valley Park, a place that was dear to him. This also led to a change in the council's policy to allow people who had dedicated their life to local nature to have a memorial bench placed in their memory. There is also a plaque on the Tree of Life at The Lodge in Sandy.

Scott was a husband, son, brother, uncle and stepdad, and a friend. He achieved so much, made people feel special and wow what a legacy he's left.

### *A footnote from the Bird Recorder*

When I learned the sad news that Scott had passed away in March 2023, I sent an email to Bird Club members and email group subscribers which really expresses the sadness of the news, but also Scott's wonderful contribution to wildlife and particularly birds. It is reproduced here:

"I learned today that Scott Stalham aged 50, passed away last night having lost his brave fight with cancer. Throughout his illness, he was positive and always thinking of others and the world will be a much poorer place without Scotty in it. Our sympathies and condolences go out to his wife, Sian. Whilst I did not know Scott as well as some, we encountered each other when out birding from time to time and he held a special talent as a wonderfully engaging man, full of enthusiasm, commitment and drive.

Scott was a postman who lived and worked in Luton. Those of you who are Bird Club members will be able to read about his work with the breeding Black Redstarts that he has monitored in his home town for many years, when his article is published later this year in the 2021 Bird Report. In no small part, he has worked with the local authorities in the town to help monitor and record their nests, keeping the birds as safe as possible. I hope we will be able to continue with his work as I know he was really looking forward to the 2023 season and to see or hear the first singing male and their hoped-for subsequent breeding attempts.

I was with Scott in June last year on an early Sunday morning visit to see the Black Redstarts and we were privileged to witness three young birds being fed by a parent. During our visit, Scott had to deal with several 'characters' who wanted to know what we were doing, the sort of people you would probably avoid if you came across them on your own! Scott was brilliant with each of them, treating them as he did everyone, with friendship and respect and engaged them in the world of Black Redstarts. By the time they moved on, they had completely forgotten about the spirits they had been consuming in their brown paper bag when they first met us! I think it was his openness and ability to engage with whoever he encountered that won him so many friends – he was kind and always had time to chat, especially if the subject was bird, or Black Redstart related!

We all lost a friend yesterday, and I will miss our chats terribly, but Scott's legacy will live on long in our hearts and minds – and every time I see or hear a Black Redstart in future, the pleasure will be tinged with a little sadness."

Rest in Peace, dear friend.

*Peter Nash*

# Guidelines for the submission of records

*Peter Nash*



Birders at the Little Bunting twitch, Broom East, October 2023

*Peter Nash*

The following categories indicate the species that require a full description.

## *All records of national rarities*

National rarities are assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) and require a full description. Description forms can be accessed from the BBRC website [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk), our own website [www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk](http://www.bedsbirdclub.org.uk), or from the County Recorder. All national rarity descriptions should be sent to the County Recorder who will collate them and forward them to BBRC.

## *County rarities requiring a full description*

Description forms can be obtained from the Bird Club website or the County Recorder. Any species new to the county list also requires a full description to be submitted. Where a photograph can be submitted, these are welcome and preferred for challenging species such as Water Pipit, for example.

Nocturnal migration recordings ('nocmig') are welcome and should (ideally) contain a minimum of three calls.

**Species**

Barnacle Goose (suspected wild origin only)  
 Taiga Bean Goose  
 Tundra Bean Goose  
 Bewick's Swan  
 Whooper Swan  
 Garganey (records Nov–Feb only)  
 American Wigeon  
 Green-winged Teal  
 Ring-necked Duck  
 Eider  
 Velvet Scoter  
 Long-tailed Duck  
 Red-breasted Merganser  
 Ruddy Duck  
 Golden Pheasant  
 Alpine Swift

Corncrake  
 Spotted Crake  
 Common Crane  
 Red-necked Grebe  
 Slavonian Grebe  
 Black-necked Grebe  
 Stone-curlew  
 Black-winged Stilt  
 American Golden Plover  
 Kentish Plover  
 Dotterel  
 Temminck's Stint  
 Purple Sandpiper  
 Pectoral Sandpiper  
 Red-necked Phalarope  
 Grey Phalarope  
 Sabine's Gull  
 Ring-billed Gull  
 Glaucous Gull  
 Iceland Gull  
 Caspian Gull (away from Grovebury SP)  
 Roseate Tern  
 White-winged Black Tern  
 Great Skua  
 Pomarine Skua  
 Arctic Skua  
 Long-tailed Skua  
 Little Auk  
 Guillemot

**Status**

Wild origin very rare  
 Vagrant – one record, in 2010  
 Vagrant – last in 2013  
 Rare  
 Annual  
 Annual, but often single records  
 Vagrant – one record, in 2021/22  
 Very rare – last in 2022  
 Rare  
 Vagrant – last in 2018  
 Very rare – last in 2021  
 Very rare – last in 2014  
 Very rare – last in 2021  
 Rare  
 Vagrant – last in 1977  
 Vagrant – two records, in 2006 and 2021  
 Vagrant – last in 1998  
 Very rare – last in 2021  
 Scarce  
 Very rare – last in 2018  
 Rare  
 Scarce  
 Rare  
 Vagrant – last in 2008  
 Vagrant – last in 1995  
 Vagrant – one record, in 1967  
 Very rare – last in 2017  
 Very rare – last in 2019  
 Vagrant – last in 1993  
 Very rare – last in 2021  
 Vagrant – last in 2015  
 Very rare – last in 2018  
 Vagrant – one record, in 1987  
 Vagrant – last in 2013  
 Vagrant – last in 2014  
 Vagrant – last in 2011  
 Scarce  
 Vagrant – last in 2012  
 Vagrant – last in 2015  
 Very rare – last in 2019  
 Vagrant – last in 1999  
 Vagrant – last in 2009  
 Vagrant – one record, in 1997  
 Vagrant – last in 2022  
 Vagrant – last in 1973

## ***Species***

Razorbill  
 Puffin  
 Red-throated Diver  
 Black-throated Diver  
 Great Northern Diver  
 European Storm-petrel  
 Leach's Storm-petrel  
 Fulmar  
 Manx Shearwater  
 White Stork  
 Gannet  
 Shag  
 Glossy Ibis  
 Spoonbill  
 Night-heron  
 Cattle Egret  
 Purple Heron  
 Honey-buzzard  
 Goshawk  
 Hen Harrier  
 Montagu's Harrier  
 Black Kite  
 White-tailed Eagle  
 Rough-legged Buzzard  
 Long-eared Owl  
 Hoopoe  
 Bee-eater  
 Wryneck  
 Red-footed Falcon  
 Red-backed Shrike  
 Great Grey Shrike  
 Woodchat Shrike  
 Golden Oriole  
 Hooded Crow  
 Willow Tit  
 Penduline Tit  
 Woodlark (away from The Lodge)

Shore Lark  
 Red-rumped Swallow  
 Wood Warbler  
 Yellow-browed Warbler  
 Radde's Warbler

## ***Status***

Vagrant – last in 2002  
 Vagrant – last in 1996  
 Very rare – last in 2018  
 Vagrant – last in 2007  
 Scarce  
 Vagrant – last in 2004  
 Vagrant – last in 2013  
 Vagrant – last in 2009  
 Vagrant – last in 2011  
 Rare – last in 2023  
 Rare  
 Rare  
 Rare  
 Scarce  
 Very rare – last in 2023  
 Rare  
 Very rare – last in 2023  
 Very rare – last in 2023  
 Very rare – last in 2019  
 Scarce  
 Vagrant – last in 2020  
 Vagrant – one record, in 1989  
 Very rare – last in 2022  
 Very rare – last in 2019  
 Scarce  
 Rare  
 Vagrant – one record, in 1991  
 Rare  
 Vagrant – last in 2013  
 Very rare – last in 2023  
 Scarce  
 Vagrant – one record, in 1972  
 Rare  
 Vagrant – last in 2007  
 Vagrant – last in 2009  
 Very rare – last in 2017  
 Annual, although often nocmig  
     records (typically annual at  
     The Lodge)  
 Vagrant – last in 2010  
 Vagrant – last in 2007  
 Scarce  
 Scarce  
 Vagrant – two records, in 1991 and  
 2023

**Species**

Marsh Warbler

Barred Warbler

Dartford Warbler

Rose-coloured Starling

Bluethroat

Red-flanked Bluetail

Red-breasted Flycatcher

Pied Flycatcher

Dipper

Tree Sparrow

Richard's Pipit

Tree Pipit (spring passage only)

Water Pipit

Hawfinch

Common Rosefinch

Twite

Common Redpoll

Arctic Redpoll

Serín

Lapland Bunting

Snow Bunting

Ortolan Bunting

Cirl Bunting

Little Bunting

**Status**

Vagrant – two records, in 1917 and 2020

Vagrant – one record, in 2014  
Annual, but often single records

Vagrant – last in 2016

Vagrant – one record, in 1987

Vagrant – one record in 2020

Vagrant – last in 2008

Scarce

Vagrant – last in 1900

Annual but declining

Vagrant – two records, in 2018 and 2022

Annual but declining

Rare

Scarce

Vagrant – one record, in 2018

Vagrant – last in 2017

Scarce

Vagrant – last in 2011

Vagrant – last in 2010

Very rare – last in 2017

Very rare – last in 2019

Rare – all records via nocmig

Vagrant – last in 1947

Very rare – two records, in 2017  
and 2023

**Peter Nash, County Recorder supported by Andy Grimsey**

Mobile phone numbers: 07753 411786 (PN) 07402 429312 (AG)

Email: recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk



# Bedfordshire Natural History Society

Registered Charity No. 268659

Established 1946

## *Bedfordshire Natural History Society*

The BNHS promotes the study of all branches of natural history in the county. We are here to help, encourage and support those with an interest in wildlife, and we record the occurrence and distribution of the fauna and flora. Our county Recorders cover a number of species groups as well as geology, palaeontology and meteorology, and their annual reports are published in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist*. The Society also produces a more informal newsletter, *Wild About Beds*, and has a varied programme of indoor and outdoor meetings. During the winter months there are illustrated talks, which are generally held at Maulden village hall, or remotely by Zoom. There are also field meetings to sites of natural history interest within the county and occasionally out of county, plus opportunities, through workshops and conferences, to learn more about identifying and recording various species. Membership is open to everyone and the Society uses annual subscriptions to carry out its work, as all officers are honorary.

The *Bedfordshire Naturalist* is the annual journal of the BNHS, and forms an important record of the botanical and zoological knowledge of the county. The journal, covering the years since 1946, is noted for its original papers on all aspects of natural history, especially distribution, status, population, habitat and field ecology. It caters for the professional and amateur alike and aims for the middle ground.

The Society has an excellent record of publications which are based on the extensive fieldwork undertaken by our Recorders, supported by the general membership. These include *Bedfordshire Wildlife* (1987), *The Butterflies and Moths of Bedfordshire* (1997), *Wild Bedfordshire* (2000), *Dragonflies of Bedfordshire* (2004), *Flora of Bedfordshire* (2011) and *Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire* (2015). The Society's most recent book, *Bedfordshire – our changing habitats and wildlife*, was published in spring 2020.

## *Bedfordshire Bird Club*

The Bird Club was formed in 1992 by birdwatchers to cater for their specialist needs, and is a specialist Section of the BNHS. Its main functions are to record and document the birds found in the county and provide a forum for local birdwatchers. It has a very active core of its membership participating in both locally and nationally organised surveys. The Club produces the annual *Bedfordshire Bird Report* and members also receive *The Hobby*, the Club's newsletter, and a programme of indoor and outdoor meetings. The winter meetings are held on the last Tuesday of the month between September and March at Maulden village hall, or remotely by Zoom. Field meetings are equally spread between venues with a bird interest within the county and further afield.

The *Bedfordshire Bird Report* is the annual report of the Bird Club, including all articles relating to birds. Bird reports were first published as part of the 1946 BNHS journal and later, following the creation of the Bird Club, more extensive reports began to be published separately.

There have been two bird atlases – 1968 to 1977 and 1988 to 1992 – which mapped the distribution of breeding birds within the county. The results of fieldwork identifying the breeding distribution for the period 2007 to 2011 are available at <http://atlas.bedsbirdclub.org.uk/>.

### *Annual reports and records*

The annual reports described above give summaries of recording efforts and records during the year. Further details of records for research purposes may be requested via the county Recorders.

Papers on the natural history of the county are welcomed and guidelines are obtainable from the editors. Authors should study the current issues and follow the style of presentation. Photographs and line drawings are also required to complement each issue. The editors will be pleased to discuss inclusion of any articles or images.

Editorial Team, *Bedfordshire Naturalist*  
email: [bedsnaturalist@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:bedsnaturalist@bnhs.org.uk)

Editorial Team, *Bedfordshire Bird Report*  
email: [editor@bedsbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:editor@bedsbirdclub.org.uk)

Hon. Editor BNHS – Rosemary Brind  
email: [journal@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:journal@bnhs.org.uk)

### *Membership*

For membership details of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and the Bedfordshire Bird Club, including joint membership, please visit the Membership page on our website [www.bnhs.org.uk](http://www.bnhs.org.uk) to find out further information, and where you can join the society and purchase publications.

email: [membership@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:membership@bnhs.org.uk)

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

# Support your birding in Bedfordshire with the **all new** Bird Club website



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Bird Club

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About Us

Membership

## Welcome to Bird Club

Join the Club – deepen your birding knowledge through our events and publications. Explore our favourite birding sites and record what you see.



Location or site name

SEARCH

Spotted in May



Nightingale

### News & Upcoming Events



WALKS

#### Paxton Pits

Sunday 18th May • Led by Richard Bashford



WALKS

#### Millennium Country Park Wetlands Nature Reserve

Saturday 7th June • Led by Bob Hook & Neil Wright

Where to go birding | What to see when  
Walks and talks | Research and surveys

[bedsbirdclub.org.uk](https://bedsbirdclub.org.uk)

## Report of the General Management Committee for 2023

2023 saw life returning to almost normal post-pandemic, though Covid-19 is ever-present in the background. Our membership has now increased to 354.

Indoor meetings continued as a mix of Zoom and face-to-face meetings in Maulden village hall. Due to the difficulties in finding speakers prepared to travel, this pattern is likely to continue. We have, however, enjoyed meeting both new and old members on our field trips. Attendance at the seven indoor meetings averaged 71. Thanks to Opticron's continued sponsorship, our speakers this year included Dr Alex Lees on Vagrancy in Birds, Dr Sam Franks on the BTO's Work with Waders, Andy Sands on Ancient Trees and Woodlands, Mark James Pearson on the Seabirds of Bempton and Filey, and Greg Conway on Nightjars. Richard Bashford treated us to two reviews of the birding year – 2022 in February, and 2023 in December.

A programme of 13 field meetings took place, to mainly local sites, attended by an average of 13 members, including several of our new members. There was also a 10x10 Challenge held over the early spring bank holiday weekend. We would like to thank the leaders/organisers of these trips. Andy Banthorpe organised the 22nd Christmas Bird Hunt, which managed to find 107 species in the county, with the best birds being Waxwings and a wintering Marsh Harrier.

The AGM in February was held at Maulden village hall, attended by 75 members. Roger Hicks stood down from the Committee, which left us with a vacancy going forward. Mary Sheridan completed her term as President, and Peter Smith was elected as President for 2023–2025. Other officers and committee members were unchanged, and during the year Tom Jackson and Mike Bird were co-opted onto the committee.

The website and *The Hobby* continued to inform members of Bird Club activities, with links to various blogs and photo galleries, whilst the WhatsApp groups and the independently run Beds Birds email group provided up-to-date information on sightings. Thanks are due to Peter Nash, Richard Bashford and Steve Blain for maintaining these, and to Andy Grimsey for keeping the website updated.

Members continued to participate in the BTO's Wetland Bird Survey and Breeding Bird Survey. Our own Winter and Summer Garden Bird Surveys and the Rookeries Survey also continued. Prior to the BTO Woodcock Survey in the summer, we ran our own Wintering Woodcock Survey, which attracted new participants. More volunteers for surveys are always welcome.

The temporary volunteer team that has produced the Bird Report over the last few years has been really struggling to produce the 2021 Report, which will not be published until early 2024. We would like to place on record our sincere thanks for all the hard work put in by Peter Nash and Andy Grimsey and their team, but are hopeful that some new volunteers will be able to take over the production of the Report and enable us to produce the 2022 and 2023 Reports in a shorter time.

Thank you to those members who submit their records promptly via BirdTrack. Any outstanding 2023 records should be submitted as soon as possible, preferably via BirdTrack, from where the Recorder can download them.

Finally, the Committee would like to thank all members for their continued support. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis and the effects of climate change are a continuing reminder that our hobby can be very beneficial to our mental health.

S. Alliez

Hon. Secretary, Bedfordshire Bird Club

## Proceedings 2023

### *Remote Meetings (all held via Zoom)*

**189th Ordinary Meeting** 24th January. 'Vagrancy in birds' by Dr Alex Lees

**190th Ordinary Meeting** 14th March. 'Working towards a brighter future for waders' by Dr Sam Franks

**192nd Ordinary Meeting** 24th October. 'Bempton Cliffs & Filey Bay – seabird Nirvana' by Mark James Pearson

**193rd Ordinary Meeting** 28th November. 'Nightjars' by Greg Conway

### *Indoor Meetings (held at Maulden Village Hall)*

**31st Annual General Meeting** 28th February, followed by 'Review of the Year [2022]' by Richard Bashford

**191st Ordinary Meeting** 26th September. 'Ancient trees and woodlands' by Andy Sands

**194th Ordinary Meeting** 19th December. 'Review of the Year' by Richard Bashford

### *Field Meetings and Events*

**Maulden Wood**, 12th February. Leader: Terry Osborn

**Rutland Water**, 11th March. Leader: Sheila Alliez

**Pegsdon Hills**, 16th April. Leader: Terry Osborn

**Dawn Chorus at Priory Country Park**, 6th May. Joint meeting with Bedford RSPB Local Group. Leader: Pete Marshall

**10x10 Challenge**, 6th to 8th May. Organiser: Peter Nash

**Ampthill Park**, 14th May. Leader: Paul Wright

**John O'Gaunt Golf Club**, 30th May. Leader: Steve Thompson

**Paxton Pits (north end)**, 11th June. Leader: Richard Bashford

**Sandy Smith NR**, 20th June. Joint meeting with BNHS. Leaders: Stefan Baltruschat and Sue Raven

**Northill**, 9th July. Leaders: Stefan Baltruschat and Greg Nunn

**Clifton Bury Farm**, 13th August. Leaders: Terry Osborn and Kathy Blackmore

**Frampton Marsh**, 10th September. Leaders: Malcolm and Carolyn Hawkes

**Broom East CWS**, 15th October. Leader: Matt Burgess

**Poppy Hill, Langford**, 11th November. Leader: Greg Nunn

**Great Christmas Bird Hunt**, 24th to 31st December. Organiser: Andy Banthorpe

## Report of the Records and Research Committee for 2023

### *Rooks*

2023 was a bumper year for Rooks in the county with 5,083 nests counted from 205 rookeries. This was the highest number of nests since the current survey started in 2013 and since the original survey in 1945 (when 9,945 nests were recorded). Four rookeries held over 100 nests and a further three more than 75. The survey will hopefully be run again in 2024.

### *Woodcocks*

The BTO organised a national Woodcock Survey for the summer of 2023. Surveyors were asked to record the number of roding (display flight) male Woodcocks at various sites. Roding was last recorded in Bedfordshire in 2007 and, sadly but not unexpectedly, none were recorded in the county during the national survey. Winter surveying was also done at a local level over the winter of 2022/23 and the results published in *The Hobby*. This survey is being repeated during winter 2023/24.

### *Broom East CWS*

The sluice mechanism has been replaced so it is now a dynamic system and water levels can be controlled to aid waders and breeding habitat. A management meeting with Tarmac, Shuttleworth and the grazier was held and agreement reached for some supplementary feeding for the cattle which would be going in during the winter months before coming out in March 2024. An access agreement is in the final throes of being documented so that selected Bird Club personnel can enter the site to operate the sluice and also to enable Bird Club working parties to control the scrub, once contractors have been in to remove the majority of the overgrowth at the northern end scheduled for February 2024.

### *Local Nature Recovery Programme*

A meeting was attended at the Greensand Trust HQ in Maulden Wood with representatives of Natural England (NE), the Wildlife Trust and the Central Beds Planning Officer among others. The project is being led by Liz Anderson (NE) to get the public involved in reporting wildlife, concentrating on flagship species that can be easily recognised (various taxa).

### *Strawberry Hill Farm*

Surveys had been conducted by the Wildlife Trust to check for breeding birds with Bird Club members involved. Surveys would be reviewed to establish what areas would be concentrated upon for improvements to habitat.

### *Millennium CP*

Graham White (GW, an expert on Bitterns) has been reviewing Bittern breeding sites for NE to assess habitat conditions and Millennium CP has been included given recent breeding. GW has visited and assessed the site and provided feedback accordingly.



### *Audiomoth Recorders*

Three of these devices were purchased by the Bird Club in 2022 and were used to listen for Nightjars at The Lodge in 2023. Birds were recorded churring on three separate, non-consecutive nights and the intention is to try and do more in 2024.

### *Thurleigh Airfield*

Since the last weekend in February, Thurleigh Airfield had been checked for Curlews during the breeding season with three pairs recorded and two nests located but both quickly predated. There has been a long-standing presence here and in 2024 there is a plan to protect the nests if the birds return and settle down to breed.

### *East Hyde*

Thames Water approached the Bird Club to see if the habitat could be improved and a meeting was held on site with Allan Cutts, Peter Nash and Thames Water representatives. A plan is to be drafted and this will hopefully lead to some action to clear some of the encroaching scrub and provide better habitat for birds and wildlife.

### *Quest Pit*

The Bird Club had objected to the planning proposal for a film studio and a decision was finally made in the autumn to approve the development but with the condition that a 75 hectare biodiversity gain alternative site be sourced and conditions agreed before a start could be made on the development. This is still in progress and the Bird Club remain actively involved to try and ensure these conditions are honoured.

### *Southill Estate*

Representatives of the Bird Club and BNHS are due to meet at the Southill Estate to discuss how they can help with some of the surveying for the rewilding project planned to start here in 2024. This provides an exciting opportunity to help support the creation of some excellent habitat in Central Bedfordshire.



Waiting for Woodcocks at The Lodge, January 2023

Peter Nash

## Committees 2023

**President**  
**Vice-Presidents**

Peter Smith  
David Kramer  
Barry Nightingale

**General Management Committee Officers**

**Chair**  
**Secretary**  
**Assistant Treasurer**  
**County Recorder**  
**Research Officer**  
**Bulletin Editor**  
**Meetings Secretary**

Kathy Blackmore  
Sheila Alliez  
Sonnie Wing  
Peter Nash  
Phil Cannings  
Andy Grimsey  
Stuart Elsom

**Committee Members**

Richard Bashford  
Alan Garner  
Steve Thompson  
Mike Bird (co-opted)  
Tom Jackson (co-opted)

**Membership Secretary (BNHS)**

Kathryn Hindley

All Officers and Members serve the Club in an honorary capacity.

**Records and Research Committee**

Steve Blain  
Roger Hicks  
Peter Nash

**Rarities Panel**

Matt Burgess (Sec.)  
Steve Blain  
Andy Grimsey  
Peter Nash  
Simon Nichols  
Stuart Warren

The Bedfordshire Bird Club is the ornithological section of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society. All enquiries should be directed to the Hon. Secretary (BBC), 61 Adamson Court, Adamson Walk, Kempston, Bedford MK42 8QZ.

**Bird Recorder:** Peter Nash. Email: recorder@bedsbirdclub.org.uk, supported by Andy Grimsey

**Ringling Co-ordinator:** Alan Garner. Email: beds.ringing@yahoo.com

**BTO Regional Representative:** Roger Hicks

**Bird Report Editor:** position vacant

# Gazetteer of Bedfordshire sites

The inclusion of a site in this list of the main birdwatching sites in the county does not imply right of entry, and all members should consult OS maps or other authoritative sources for information on access.

Amphill Park	TL026385	Leagrave Marsh	TL060250
Aspley Heath	SP930340	Lodge Farm Lake	TL114398
Astral Park	SP936236	Longholme Lake	TL059493
Barton Hills	TL090300	Lowe's Wood	SP928325
Battlesden Lake	SP957287	Luton Hoo	TL104186
Bedford WTW	TL085499	Marston WTW	TL004420
Begwary Brook NR	TL168564	Maulden Wood	TL070390
Biggleswade Common	TL195470	MCP Wetlands NR	TL004417
Black Cat GP	TL164554	Meadow Lane GP	TL086504
Blows Downs	TL040218	Octagon Farm GP	TL092500
Blunham Lakes	TL158512	Pegnut Wood	TL225480
Box End Park	TL013485	Pegsdon Hills	TL120295
Brogborough Hill	SP967386	Poppy Hill Lakes	TL182394
Brogborough Lake	SP975395	Priory CP	TL073493
Brogborough Tip & Pools	SP965395	Putnoe Wood	TL067527
Broom East	TL179434	Quest CIP	TL030420
Broom GP	TL175445	Radwell Lakes	TL010585
Broom South Quarry	TL173421	R Ouse through Bedford	TL051495
Cainhoe Lakes	TL095377	Rookery North CIP	TL017417
Carthagena GC	TL213480	Rookery South CIP	TL015407
Chalton WTW	TL028275	Roxton Lakes	TL157535
Chicksands Wood	TL100400	Rushmere CP	SP916291
Chimney Corner North CIP	TL035456	Sandy Heath (Quarry)	TL203493
Chimney Corner South Lake	TL035448	Sandy Smith NR	TL15393
Cooper's Hill	TL028378	Sharpenhoe Clappers	TL066303
Coronation CIP	TL027430	Shuttleworth College Lake	TL143444
Cuckoo Bridge Lake	TL119509	Southill Lake	TL145428
Deepdale Quarry	TL212488	Southill Park	TL140420
Dunstable Downs	TL005195	Stewartby Lake	TL008425
Dunstable WTW	TL002243	Stopsley Common	TL098247
DW Eggs GP	TL184463	Stratton Park Bal. Pond	TL212438
East Hyde	TL129171	Strawberry Hill Farm, Knotting	TL008622
Elstow CIP	TL047456	Swiss Gardens	TL149446
Eversholt (Linden) Lake	SP980323	Tempsford Airfield	TL185525
Felmersham NR	SP990584	Tetworth Hall Estate	TL217528
Fenlake Meadows	TL074486	The Lodge	TL188478
Flitwick Moor	TL046354	The Pinnacle	TL183494
Flitwick WTW	TL038365	Thurleigh Airfield	TL045605
Gadsey Brook	TL111506	Tithe Farm Reservoir	TL144577
Galley Hill	TL092269	Toddington Services Pools	TL033288
Great Barford Lake	TL131508	Totternhoe Knolls	SP985222
Grovebury SP	SP924232	Warden Great Wood	TL110430
Harrold-Odell CP	SP960570	Warden Hill	TL091261
Henlow Bridge Lakes	TL189381	Wardown Park	TL088228
Henlow Grange	TL183384	Warren Villas	TL179476
Hollington Marsh	TL064366	Waterloo Thorns	TL181519
Houghton Brook Pools	TL042246	Whipsnade Zoo	TL005172
Houghton Regis ChP	TL008235	Wigmore Valley Park	TL130220
John O'Gaunt GC	TL218478	Wilden Reservoir	TL13555
Kempston Bypass Pools	TL033462	Willington GP	TL100505
King's Wood, Heath & Reach	SP930300	Woburn Park	SP960325
King's Wood, H. Conquest	TL045400	Woburn Road Wetlands	TL020458
Knocking Hoe	TL130310	Wrest Park	TL090355
Langford Common	TL181407	Wyboston Lakes	TL177575

