



# **SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**FOUNDED 1964**

## **2001 BIRD REPORT**

**Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes**



Red-rumped Swallow

**SECOS Recorder :  
Colin Lythgoe  
11 Waterloo Road  
Haslington  
Crewe  
CW1 5TF  
Tel: 01270 582642**

## CONTENTS

Page	Title
1	Editorial
2	Contributors/Abbreviations/Status Definitions
3	Map of SECOS Recording Area
4	Birding Sites
6	Systematic List
26	The First Proved Breeding for Hobby in the SECOS Area
28	Grey Phalarope at Railway Flash
29	Red-rumped Swallow at Watch Lane Flash
30	2001 SECOS Swift Survey
32	Birding in the Brereton Area
33	A Year at Crewe Business Park
35	Crewe Business Park Common Bird Census
36	Early and Late Dates for Summer Visitors

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the SECOS Annual Bird Report for 2001. As comprehensive as ever, there have been a few improvements, including the subtle but significant change to the front cover where the image of the Red-rumped Swallow is in colour.

The main body of the report is the Systematic List, which is slightly more detailed than before. There are the usual articles giving details of birdwatching sites in the SECOS area, with some new sites added this year, and the list of Early and Late dates for migrants, updated for 2001.

This year's site guide covers the Brereton/Bagmere/Brereton Heath country park area and once again has been written by Andrew and Angela Goodwin. There are articles on Red-rumped Swallow, Grey Phalarope and Hobby. Noel Stubbs has detailed his year of intensive birdwatching at Crewe Business Park, where he recorded the surprising total of 71 species. With other records there was a total of 75 species actually using the site plus another seven flyovers. Also at Crewe Business Park I have given details of the second year's results of a common bird survey there. The major survey undertaken by SECOS members during the year was the Swift survey and a detailed account of that is given.

Apart from a few sites, such as Sandbach Flashes and Crewe Business Park, opportunities for birdwatching were severely restricted as a consequence of the foot and mouth epidemic that swept the country from March to May, June or July in some places. Nevertheless 2001 has been quite a good year with 165 species recorded, including 28 wader species. There was one new species for the area, a Red-rumped Swallow that put in a brief appearance at Watch Lane Flash on 15<sup>th</sup> May and was seen by seven lucky observers – and incidentally also won the Sandbach Flashes New Species Sweep for Allan Perkins.

Other good birds in the year included a Temminck's Stint in May and a Grey Phalarope in October, only the second record for the area. Three Little Egret records this year, as last year. Another excellent year for raptors with a Honey-buzzard in May – part of a national influx – two Red Kite records, both Marsh and Hen Harriers and four Osprey records all helping towards a total of 12 different raptor species in the year.

Most surveys were cancelled or postponed due to the foot and mouth epidemic but one survey that was carried out was the Swift survey and that was well supported by SECOS members. Additionally the SECOS winter garden bird feeding survey is becoming increasingly popular with over 25 members now regularly contributing details of birds in their gardens. Incidentally, these records provide a valuable source of information for this report. We also continue to monitor the nest boxes at Quakers Coppice and Rode Pool.

Finally, many thanks to all contributors, without whose records there would not be a bird report. Special thanks to Joan and Keith Tilbrook for their help in typing, collating and checking this report and to John Thompson for his assistance.

Colin Lythgoe  
SECOS Recorder

## List of Contributors

M. Bailey	T. Dickinson	F. Malbon	J. Shone
M. Ball	P. Dobson	D. Meakin	B. Smith
J. Barker	A. Firth	I. Mumford	J. Smith
A. Battersby	A. Goodwin	L. Nixon	A. Soper
M. Billington	A. Goodwin	D. Norbury	J. Soper
R. Black	M. Green	P. Oddy	R. Stonier
R. Blindell	L. Greenough	A. Perkins	M. Stubbs
A. Booth	T. Halliday	B. Perkins	N. Stubbs
D. Bromont	A. Hearn	B. Poole	M. Sutton
R. Brown	P. Hill	A. Powell	D. Swaby
N. Carter	C. Hull	M. Powell	D. Taylor
H. Clowes	T. Jones	A. Pym	J. Tilbrook
D. Cookson	M. Long	A. Roberts	J. Wakefield
D. Cope	P. Lunt	J. Roberts	T. Waring
R. Crawford	C. Lythgoe	P. Roberts	P. Wilson

Doddington Log Contributors  
 Rode Pool Log Contributors  
 South Cheshire Barn Owl Group  
 Cheshire Swan Study Group  
 SECOS Garden Bird Feeding Survey  
 Plus other contributors with unknown initials

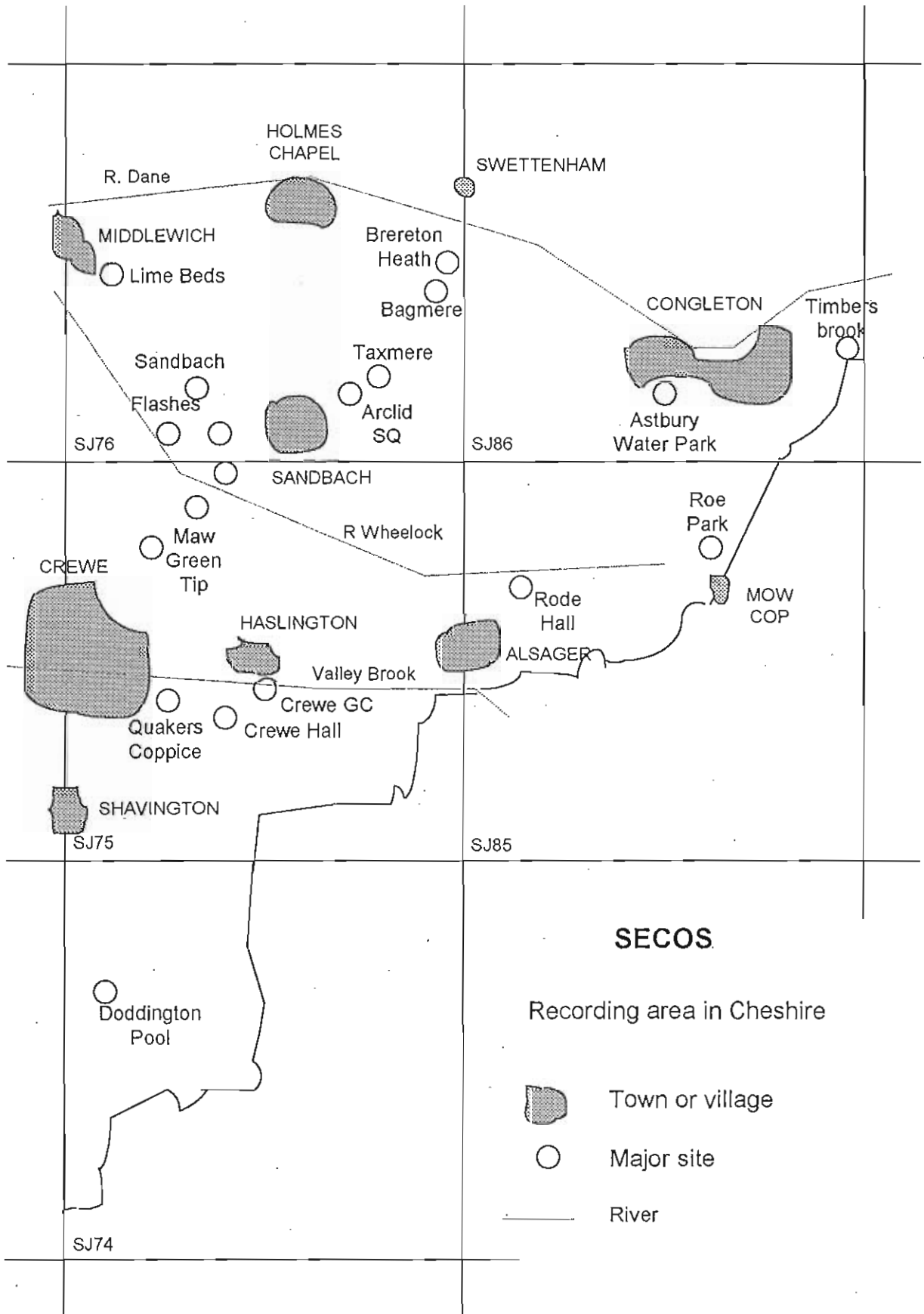
## Abbreviations Used

CF	Crabmill Flash	juv	juvenile
CP	Canal Pools	1stW	1 <sup>st</sup> Winter
EHF	Elton Hall Flash	2ndW	2 <sup>nd</sup> Winter
FF	Foden's Flash	3rdW	3 <sup>rd</sup> Winter
FFF	Fields Farm Flash	imm	immature
GF	Groby Flash	ad	adult
OF	Oak Tree Flash	m	male
PF	Plex Flash	f	female
PHF	Pump House Flash	c	approximately
RF	Railway Flash	max	maximum
SF	Sandbach Flashes	SQ	Sand Quarry
TLF	Tetton Lane Flash	WP	Water Park
WF	Warmingham Flash	CP	Country Park
WLF	Watch Lane Flash	BBRC	British Birds Rarities Committee
		BP	Business Park

## Status Definitions

The status of species within the area is given in a one-line entry after the species heading. These have been defined as follows:-

Abundant	Occurs in large numbers in suitable habitats and seasons.
Common	Occurs regularly or widely distributed in suitable habitats.
Fairly common	Occurs in moderate numbers in suitable habitats.
Uncommon	Occurs in small numbers.
Scarce	One or two records in each year, or restricted to specific habitats.
Rare	Occurs less than annually.
Very rare	Less than 10 records in the last 20 years.
Vagrant	Less than 2 records in the last 20 years.



## BIRDING SITES

I have listed below some of the more major sites for birding in the SECOS area, including a brief summary of the site and a grid reference of its approximate centre.

The level of access is denoted by the figure shown, in accordance with the following definitions:-

- <sup>1</sup> No public access
- <sup>2</sup> Access to SECOS members only
- <sup>3</sup> Some access or viewing from footpaths and roads
- <sup>4</sup> Public access

### **Doddington Pool SJ714464** <sup>2</sup>

Includes the large lake, woodland, the Hall and grounds.

### **Quakers Coppice SJ724546** <sup>4</sup>

A wood of six hectares on the south side of Crewe owned by Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council and operated as a Local Nature Reserve.

### **Crewe Business Park SJ720550** <sup>4</sup>

Primarily a Business Park but managed very sympathetically for wildlife. Adjacent to Quakers Coppice.

### **Crewe Hall SJ735544** <sup>1</sup>

A very extensive area of mixed woodland and farmland.

### **Crewe Golf Course SJ744546** <sup>3</sup>

Situated at Haslington. It also includes the Valley Brook and surrounding woods.

### **Rode Pool SJ815575** <sup>2</sup>

A 1300 metre-long lake with islands and extensive reed beds, surrounded by woods. The SECOS bird hide overlooks one end of the pool.

### **Lawton Woods SJ825559** <sup>3</sup>

Large area of woodland including a lake.

### **Mow Cop from SJ856573 to SJ873593** <sup>3</sup>

A sandstone ridge of moorland habitat giving extensive views over the Cheshire Plain and which forms the Cheshire/Staffordshire border.

### **Roe Park SJ858583** <sup>3</sup>

Large area of mixed woodland on side of Mow Cop, like Welsh hill valley habitat.

### **Sandbach Flashes** <sup>3</sup>

An all-embracing term used to describe the various flashes in the area to the west and south of Sandbach, and north of Crewe. These started forming in the 1930s after land subsidence following brine extraction. All flashes are now privately owned and there is no public access. However, most are watchable from public roads and tracks. Most of the flashes' area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are currently around fourteen flashes, but the most important are:-

#### **Elton Hall Flash SJ727596**

In two parts, with the River Wheelock flowing through the well-vegetated part, and very little vegetation on the saltpan.

#### **Pump House Flash SJ723595**

The site of the old brine pumping mechanism. Now silting up rapidly.

#### **Railway Flash SJ718585**

Currently two separate flashes with a marshy area between.

**Maw Green Tip SJ717577**

Not strictly in the flashes' area but inextricably linked for gulls and corvids. It is being greatly expanded and now butts right up to Railway Flash and Groby Flash. Just north of Crewe.

**Watch Lane Flash SJ727606**

Heavily disturbed by fishermen but with two small reed beds.

**Foden's Flash SJ730613**

Includes a large bed of bulrushes and the wood around and behind the flash.

**Warmingham Flash SJ719619**

Heavily disturbed by fishermen.

**Middlewich Lime Beds SJ711653 <sup>1</sup>**

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

**Arclid Sand Quarry SJ778623 <sup>3</sup>**

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings.

**Taxmere SJ780625 <sup>1</sup>**

Area of woodland and a pool just north of Arclid Sand Quarry.

**Bagmere SJ796643 <sup>3</sup>**

An overgrown mere still with some water and reed beds and a designated SSSI.

**Brereton Heath SJ798651 <sup>4</sup>**

A Cheshire County Council Country Park comprising a water-filled quarry and surrounding mixed woodland.

**Swettenham SJ801675 <sup>3</sup>**

Farmland and mixed woodland by the River Dane.

**Astbury Water Park SJ849624 <sup>4</sup>**

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings, now used for water sports and angling.

**Timbersbrook/The Cloud SJ896627 to SJ900635 <sup>3</sup>**

A small (but important in a SECOS context) area of upland moorland and conifer forest.

**Westlow Mere, Congleton SJ855644 <sup>3</sup>**

Previously known as Hulme Walfield Sand Quarry, now a Trout Fishery.

**When out in the countryside**, either general birdwatching or carrying out specific fieldwork, then observe the birdwatcher's code of conduct:-

1. The welfare of birds must come first.
2. Habitat must be protected.
3. Keep disturbance to birds and their habitat to a minimum.
4. When you find a rare bird think carefully about who you should tell.
5. Do not harass rare migrants.
6. Abide by the bird protection laws at all times.
7. Respect the rights of landowners.
8. Respect the rights of other people in the countryside.
9. Make your records available to the local bird recorder.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

Due to the foot and mouth epidemic, access to most parts of the countryside was not possible, or was severely restricted, from mid-March through to June or July. This means that records throughout the breeding season were very limited, and this should be borne in mind when reading the species accounts.

### Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Records from 7 sites in the first winter period. Generally only 1s or 2s but 7 at Doddington and 6 at Westlow. Breeding records were sparse, even considering the foot and mouth access restrictions, and success was poor. Juvs were seen at GF, CP, Doddington (2) and a local water in Congleton.

Doddington held a post-breeding concentration of 16 in August but numbers soon reduced to single figures. Recorded at 8 sites in the second winter period.

### Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

*Common resident.*

Flocks in the first winter period were at WLF (16), Arclid SQ (12) and Astbury WP (12) with smaller numbers at a further 7 sites.

At SF pairs with juvs were seen at FFF, PHF, CF (3 prs), WF, PF. Juvs were also seen at Rode Pool (3 broods), Arclid SQ (2 broods), Winterley Pool (2 broods) and Wybunbury SQ (1 brood). Pairs, but no juvs, were seen at Astbury WP, Brereton Heath CP, Doddington (5 pairs, no juvs) and Westlow Mere.

Although apparently a poor breeding season numbers built up at the two main wintering sites and peaked in mid-Nov with 42 at Doddington and 21 at WLF.

### Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

*Common winter visitor. Rare in summer.*

In the first winter period 27 at PHF in Feb was normal but 15 at Winterley Pool in Jan was exceptional, when usually only 1 or 2, if any.

The first records of the autumn were juvs in July at PHF and Aug at Arclid SQ.

Numbers were then normal with 24 at CF in Dec, single figure records from 5 other sites but an amazing 48 at Doddington on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov.

### Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

*Vagrant.*

The 2000 record of a 1<sup>st</sup> summer bird at EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> June has been accepted by BBRC.

### Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

*Very rare visitor.*

As in 2000 there were three records of this increasingly common species:-

An ad was at EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> Aug. First seen at 07.25 it flew off north at 08.00.

An ad was also at EHF on 18<sup>th</sup> Aug for 30 minutes from 12.05.

Finally an ad at EHF on 5<sup>th</sup> Sept was seen to fly off west at 10.15.

These records may all relate to the same bird, although there were no other sightings in the area during this period.

### Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

*Common resident*

Generally recorded daily at SF and regularly at many other waters, showing its widespread distribution when feeding.

No visits were possible to the Rode Pool heronry but estate staff considered that numbers were similar to 2000, when 37 pairs bred.



### Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Monthly max at the two main sites in the SECOS area:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Winterley Pool	129	98	88	80	89	71	71	80	80	80	85	115
Doddington	30	nc	39	31	51	30	19	18	8	12	14	22

Unusually no breeding attempts were noted at SF but successful breeding was recorded at Astbury WP (5 juvs), Doddington (6 juvs), Lawton Pool (5 juvs), Stowford (5 juvs), Westlow Mere (4 juvs), Wheelock Canal (5 juvs), Winterley Pool (4 juvs).

### Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

A very poor year for yellow billed swans, with the only record being of 4 ads + 1 imm flying high over Sandbach on 16<sup>th</sup> Nov, heading southwest. These could not be specifically identified and may have been Bewick's Swan or Whooper Swan.

### Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

See Bewick's Swan.

### Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

*Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.*

No over-flying winter skeins seen this year. Probable wild birds were 2 at WLF on 28<sup>th</sup> Jan, 8 at PHF from 9<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1 at Arclid SQ on 11<sup>th</sup> Feb.

Tame singles with Canada Geese were also recorded at Arclid SQ and Doddington.

### White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

*Rare winter visitor or feral.*

An adult at PHF from 24<sup>th</sup> Aug to 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept was presumed to be a feral bird, due to the dates.

### Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

*Rare winter visitor or feral.*

All records were presumed to be of feral birds. Up to 5 recorded at EHF, RF, OF, WLF, MGT in Feb, April, Sept and Dec. Also 1 at Arclid SQ on 17<sup>th</sup> March.

### Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

*Common resident.*

Max numbers in the first winter period were SF (509), Winterley Pool (245), Arclid SQ (206), Doddington (180).

Bred at many sites with, for example, 28 juvs at Doddington, 27 at Winterley Pool, 22 at SF, 22 at Arclid SQ, 10 at Rode Pool.

The main site for post-breeding/moulting flocks is Arclid SQ although numbers this year were only 330, down from 805 in 2000 and 829 in 1999. Also 450 at EHF in Aug.

Late winter flock numbers were 520 at Doddington, 380 at SF, 290 at Winterley Pool and 231 at Arclid SQ.

The total population is not known due to the mobility of these flocks between sites.

### Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

*Uncommon resident and winter visitor.*

A healthy resident population at SF with typical numbers of max 43 in the first winter period. Bred here with 3 broods of 10; 7 and 4.

Also bred at Doddington where a pair with 5 juvs were on a flooded field, not the main pool.

Max count in the second winter period was 32 at SF, with none at Doddington.

### Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*)

*Scarce visitor.*

A pair was seen by the Valley Brook/Wistaston Brook, Wistaston, Crewe, during March, and then seen with 7 juvs in May. A pair was also resident in Queen's Park, Crewe, and single males were at EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May.

**Wigeon** (*Anas penelope*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Peak numbers at SF in the first winter period were 599 at EHF/PHF on 20<sup>th</sup> Jan. Generally less than 10 at other sites e.g. Arclid SQ, Astbury WP, Doddington and Rode Pool, but an amazing 208 at Doddington on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb, the largest flock recorded there.

For the third successive year a few birds summered at SF (including one with a damaged wing) and one at Doddington.

Numbers at SF started to build up from 30<sup>th</sup> Aug and gradually increased to a peak of 707 in Dec. Low numbers as usual at other sites but at Doddington 143 were seen to fly in at dusk on 16<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Gadwall** (*Anas strepera*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

A similar pattern of occurrence to last year with 1 or 2 at SF in Jan and 4 on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. Then none until spring when 1 or 2 at EHF/PHF from 14<sup>th</sup> April to 9<sup>th</sup> June. Also 1 at Astbury WP in Jan and 1 at Rode Pool in Feb.

No records in the second winter period.

**Teal** (*Anas crecca*)

*Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.*

The high numbers at SF in late 2000 continued into 2001 when a co-ordinated count of all flashes on 14<sup>th</sup> Jan gave a count of 489.

Summered in small numbers but no evidence of breeding. In the second winter period a max of 570 at EHF/PHF in Dec.

Also in winter at Arclid SQ (30), Rode Pool (28), Doddington (24), Winterley Pool (8) and Astbury WP (4).

**Mallard** (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

*Common resident. Abundant in winter.*

Max counts in the first winter period were SF (357), Arclid SQ (371), Doddington (110), Winterley Pool (62) and Rode Pool (40).

Breeds commonly on most waters and post-breeding flocks in late summer were: SF (552), Arclid SQ (185), Doddington (205), Winterley Pool (70) and Rode Pool (80).

Max counts in the second winter period were SF (386), Arclid SQ (354), Doddington (65), Winterley Pool (75) and Rode Pool (50).

**Pintail** (*Anas acuta*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Only recorded from SF where present from the start of the year through to 4<sup>th</sup> April, with a max of 14.

The first returning bird was 1 at EHF on 30<sup>th</sup> Aug (1<sup>st</sup> Sept in 2000) and then present through to the year end with a max of only 9 (23 in 2000).

**Garganey** (*Anas querquedula*)

*Scarce summer visitor.*

A very poor year with the only record being of one elusive individual which moved between RF, PHF and EHF between 26<sup>th</sup> Aug and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept.

**Shoveler** (*Anas clypeata*)

*Uncommon winter visitor, scarce in summer.*

Recorded in all months at SF, with 1 or 2 summering.

A max of only 12 in the first winter period but higher numbers in the second winter period with up to 43 from Sept to Nov, decreasing to only 12 in Dec.

Occasional winter records from Rode Pool (up to 5) and Doddington (1 or 2).

**Pochard** (*Aythya ferina*)

*Fairly common winter visitor.*

Numbers seem to be decreasing at SF, with a max count of only 7 in Jan and 4 in Oct, and at Doddington, with a max of 30 in Jan and 21 in Dec. Also reported from Arclid SQ as 'probably the worst year yet' with only two records of singles.

However, numbers were up at Winterley Pool (max 54), Astbury WP (21) and Rode Pool (10).

**Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca***

*Not recorded yet.*

At Winterley Pool from 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> Dec a male Ferruginous Duck x Pochard hybrid was with the Pochards.

**Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)**

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Astbury WP	nc	25	20	26	nc	nc	8	nc	37	49	22	54
Doddington	57	72	nc	67	33	64	93	86	45	39	37	41
Winterley Pool	39	33	21	13	0	0	1	0	6	16	22	22
Sandbach	26	22	18	17	8	5	4	0	3	5	37	23

Pairs bred at Astbury WP (5 juvs), Doddington (broods of 9; 6; 6; 6) and CP (4 juvs). A typical year.

Also recorded at Bath Vale (26), Westlow Mere (72), Wybunbury (6) and Arclid SQ (6).

**Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)**

*Very rare visitor and passage migrant.*

At EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 3 flew in and landed at 12.05 but only stayed for a few seconds and then flew off north. The 15<sup>th</sup> record for the flashes and one that fits in with previous records.

**Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

The only site where present all winter is Doddington with a max of 17 at each end of the year. Also at Astbury WP with a female in the early winter, and 1 in Dec was joined by another on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec.

A pair at Arclid SQ on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb and 30<sup>th</sup> March. A single at Alsager South in Dec, the first for here. The only record from SF was a single at PHF on 13<sup>th</sup> March.

**Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Scattered records of low numbers in winter. At EHF on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan, 1 f on 29<sup>th</sup> March; Rode Pool 2 in Feb; Congleton 4 in Feb.

In the second winter period at Rode Pool 3 in Nov; Congleton 1 in Oct; Arclid SQ on 15<sup>th</sup> Nov and finally 13 flying along the R. Dane at Swettenham on 26<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

Records from both winter periods of up to 5 birds at RF, EHF, GF, WLF, PHF, Astbury WP, Doddington and Rode Pool.

A pair bred with 3 juvs at GF and 4 pairs were seen displaying at Doddington, but no juvs seen.

**Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)**

*Very rare.*

On 11<sup>th</sup> May one was reported on the pager network as heading east over Middlewich town centre.

This is only the third record for the SECOS area.

**Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)**

*Very rare visitor.*

Two records of flyovers this year, as last year. 1 over Crewe BP on 7<sup>th</sup> May and 1 over Middlewich Road, Crewe, on 8<sup>th</sup> Nov.

These are the fourth and fifth records for the SECOS area.

**Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)**

*Very rare passage migrant.*

An adult female flew over EHF on 10<sup>th</sup> May. The 8<sup>th</sup> record for the area and the first spring record since 1992.

On return passage on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug a female circled EHF and then flew off towards RF. The 9<sup>th</sup> record for the area.

**Hen Harrier** (*Circus cyaneus*)

*Very rare winter visitor and migrant.*

A ring-tail (female or imm) was seen hunting over the marsh at Coppenhall Moss on 8<sup>th</sup> Dec.  
The 8<sup>th</sup> record for the SECOS area.

**Goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*)

*Rare visitor.*

Two records this year with a male over Haslington on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct and a female over Crewe BP on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. Both records were supported by Rarity Forms and descriptions.

**Sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter nisus*)

*Common resident.*

Common throughout the area and recorded from 31 sites plus various flashes at SF, although breeding was only proved at one site. Also recorded from 12 gardens in the SECOS garden bird feeding survey.

Prey items recorded include Collared Dove and Tree Sparrow whilst at Rode Pool a Green Sandpiper – a rare visitor here – had a near miss when a Sparrowhawk chased it down the length of the pool but couldn't quite catch it up!

**Buzzard** (*Buteo buteo*)

*Uncommon resident.*

An abundance of records which can probably be summarised as around 28 breeding pairs, with breeding confirmed at Taxmere, Bagmere and Bradwall.

**Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

*Rare migrant.*

Another good year with four on spring passage and one on autumn passage. First was 1 over Wheelock on 31<sup>st</sup> March, then 1 over EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1 over Sandbach on 16<sup>th</sup> April and 1 over EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> April.

In autumn 1 was heading south over Sandbach on 25<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*)

*Common resident.*

Not as common as Sparrowhawk but still recorded from 21 sites plus 4 flashes at SF. Also recorded from 4 gardens in the SECOS garden bird feeding survey. Breeding only proved at one site, near Crewe BP and probable near Arclid SQ.

**Merlin** (*Falco columbarius*)

*Scarce migrant and winter visitor.*

Again only one record this year, with a male seen being mobbed by crows along the R. Dane near Holmes Chapel.

**Hobby** (*Falco subbuteo*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

The first records were of 2 singles through EHF on the late date of 15<sup>th</sup> May. Recorded here regularly until 19<sup>th</sup> Sept.

One of the highlights of the year was the discovery of a Hobby's nest in the Oakhanger area. This was watched extensively and 2 juvs ultimately fledged from this site. See the separate article for more details.

Also recorded from Bent Farm SQ, Crewe BP, Haslington, Hassall Green, Holmes Chapel, Sandbach, Shavington, Taxmere and Timbersbrook.

**Peregrine** (*Falco peregrinus*)

*Scarce resident and winter visitor.*

Now resident in the RF area, where birds fly over MGT, PHF and EHF as well as RF to hunt and feed. Up to 3 seen together in winter.

Also recorded from Arclid SQ, Alsager South, Coppenhall Moss, Crewe town and Crewe BP.

Prey items included Jackdaw, Stock Dove and Lapwing.

**Red-legged Partridge** (*Alectoris rufa*)

*Rare except where locally released.*

Scattered records, not all from the usual release sites. 19 at Checkley and 9 at Roe Park were released but more unusual records were 1 at Congleton and 1 at Sandbach walking round the observers' gardens! Also 1 at CF in Nov and 3 at North Rode in June.

**Grey Partridge** (*Perdix perdix*)

*Scarce resident.*

Max of 2 at Alsager South, the only regular site in the SECOS area. Also 1 of this species, or Red-legged Partridge, at Bagmere, 2 at Brereton and 1 at Shavington.

**Pheasant** (*Phasianus colchicus*)

*Scarce resident except where locally released.*

Very common where released for shooting, e.g. Checkley, Doddington, Rode Pool and Weston with 1s and 2s seen elsewhere.

Also 4 m and 6 f were regular at a garden feeding station near FF..

**Water Rail** (*Rallus aquaticus*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

In the first winter period there were records from WLF (2), PHF (2), FF (1), Taxmere (1) and in the second winter period from WLF (1), MGT (1) and Taxmere (1).

**Moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*)

*Common resident.*

The co-ordinated count of all flashes at SF on 14<sup>th</sup> Jan gave a total of 62 spread over 8 flashes (69 in 2000). Very widespread with small numbers on most waters.

**Coot** (*Fulica atra*)

*Common resident and variable winter visitor.*

The co-ordinated count of all flashes at SF on 14<sup>th</sup> Jan gave a total of 306 spread over 7 flashes (310 in 2000). Numbers generally were around the average except for Doddington in the second winter period where 516 in July grew to 823 in Aug, 1100 in Sept, 1150 in Oct and an amazing 1300 in Nov.

Other max counts of note were 54 at Winterley Pool, 45 at Astbury SQ and 37 at Westlow Mere.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	242	146	nc	nc	38	222	516	823	1100	1150	1300	1250
Winterley Pool	49	21	15	9	6	17	16	nc	29	41	31	54

**Oystercatcher** (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

*Scarce winter visitor and scarce summer visitor.*

Arrivals as usual from mid-Feb with 1 at Doddington on 16<sup>th</sup> and 1 at WLF on 17<sup>th</sup>. Up to 4 at various sites on spring passage but only regular at WLF, CF, EHF and Arclid SQ. At Arclid 1 pair stayed and bred successfully, fledging 2 juvs, and it was suspected that another pair bred somewhere to the east.

Autumn passage again of up to 4 from several sites with the last being 3 at EHF on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Little Ringed Plover** (*Charadrius dubius*)

*Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/autumn migrant.*

The first birds were 2 at EHF on 13<sup>th</sup> March with 1 on 15<sup>th</sup>. At EHF spring passage, breeding and autumn passage all merged with birds present virtually daily from end of March to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept. A low max of only 7 in spring but a typical 19 max in July. The heavy rain in spring washed out early nests but 4 juvs were seen in late June.

At Arclid SQ the breeding pair here were also washed out. However, as in recent years, there was successful breeding at the new quarry where a pair fledged 3 juvs.

The biggest surprise was at Doddington where the heavy spring rain created a flooded field and this was used by 2 pairs who each fledged 3 juvs. Also a record of 1 at Wall Hill SQ in June, another possible breeding site.

**Ringed Plover** (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

*Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.*

Only recorded from SF but records from EHF in every month from 20<sup>th</sup> Feb to 8<sup>th</sup> Oct. Generally less than 10 but an exceptional record of 33 present from 05.00 to 10.00 on 14<sup>th</sup> May, with several other unusual wader species numbers at the same time.

**Golden Plover** (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Most records from EHF were not regular in the early part of the year with max of 31 on 4<sup>th</sup> Jan, then only occasional 1s and 2s in Feb and March. Also 7 at Cranage.

More records in the second part of the year, starting with 5 at EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> Aug, then less than 10 regular to the end of the year, except for 24 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec. Also 15 over Arclid on 18<sup>th</sup> Dec and 9 flew over Crewe BP on 29<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Grey Plover** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

*Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.*

An adult in summer plumage at PHF on 12<sup>th</sup> May that only stayed for an hour is a very typical record for this species at SF.

**Lapwing** (*Vanellus vanellus*)

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

Max counts in the first winter period were EHF (1264), Arclid SQ (580) and Doddington (240).

Few breeding pairs were noted due to the foot and mouth restrictions but were seen at PHF, CF, Arclid SQ and Stowford.

More large flocks were recorded in the second winter period with EHF (1040), Arclid SQ (665) and Doddington (300). (Although these numbers seem high, in the 1970s flocks numbered between 5,000 and 7,000).

**Knot** (*Calidris canutus*)

*Rare visitor.*

Only one record this year of a single at PHF on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Sanderling** (*Calidris alba*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

Three records, all from EHF on spring passage, 3 on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2 on 28<sup>th</sup> May and 3 on 4<sup>th</sup> June.

**Little Stint** (*Calidris minuta*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

A good series of records in autumn from EHF with 1 from 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Sept, 12 from 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Oct and 2 from 10<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Oct.

**Temminck's Stint** (*Calidris temminckii*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

An adult arrived at EHF late on 8<sup>th</sup> May and stayed until 12<sup>th</sup> May. The first time since 1985 that one has stayed for longer than a day.

**Curlew Sandpiper** (*Calidris ferruginea*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

No records in spring as usual. Then in autumn at EHF 1 on 1<sup>st</sup> Sept, 2 juvs on 13<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1 on 14<sup>th</sup> Sept. Then 5 appeared on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, reducing to 2 by 8<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

At EHF very few records in the first winter period with singles on 31<sup>st</sup> Jan, 21<sup>st</sup> Feb, 18<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> March.

Spring passage from mid-April to mid-June was more normal with up to 4 birds regular. However, on 14<sup>th</sup> May a fall of wader species included 17 Dunlin. Return passage from early July through to Oct was better with birds present daily with a max of 9. In the second winter period also present daily with a peak in mid-Nov (as last year) giving a max of 20.

Also seen at Arclid SQ with 3 on 26<sup>th</sup> April and 2 on 28<sup>th</sup> April, and 1 at Weston on 7<sup>th</sup> May.

On 29<sup>th</sup> April two of the three birds present at EHF answered to the description of *C. a. alpina*.

**Ruff** (*Philomachus pugnax*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

Resident in Jan, Feb and March but with a low max of only 9. The last record in the early winter was 3 on 1<sup>st</sup> April. No records on spring passage.

1 bird was seen on 28<sup>th</sup> June but return passage really started on 15<sup>th</sup> July and birds were then present through to the year end. Return passage numbers built up to around 24 in late Sept/early Oct and then settled to around 15 residents in the second winter period.

No records from sites other than EHF.

**Jack Snipe** (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

In the first winter period there were records from MGT (2), WLF (1) and Alsager South (2).

In the second winter period MGT continued to be the best site with generally 2 here but 6 were flushed up on 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec. Also 2 at RF.

**Snipe** (*Gallinago gallinago*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.*

Lower numbers than usual in the first winter period at SF with max recorded of only 20 at EHF and 10 at RF.

Six scattered records of 1 or 2 during April, May, June and July. Then recorded from 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug to the year end, with more normal numbers, e.g. EHF (74), RF (50) and PHF (40) but no doubt seriously under-recorded as usual.

Occasional winter records also from Arclid SQ (9), Alsager (7), Alsager South (1), Bagmere (1), Coppenhall Moss (7), Crewe BP (1), Crewe GC (2), Doddington (3), Stowford (3) and Westlow Mere (1).

**Woodcock** (*Scolopax rusticola*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

3 were at FF in Jan and a single seen four times at Taxmere in the early winter.

More records from the second winter period, with singles at RF/GF, Taxmere, Crewe Cemetery (a regular site), Doddington, Quakers Coppice and Stowford.

Also one was found injured in a garden in Waterloo Road, Haslington with head injuries! It was taken to Stapely Grange RSPCA but had to be put down.

The last record that I have from the breeding season is of a roding male over Crewe Hall Woods in **1989**. Can anybody find me a breeding pair?

**Black-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa limosa*)

*Scarce migrant and rare winter visitor.*

All records from EHF and occurrence much reduced. Recorded on only 13 days (19 in 2000, 69 in 1999 and 61 in 1998). Spring passage involved 12 on 29<sup>th</sup> March; 1, 6 and 1 on 3 days in April; 1 and 2 in May, then a flock of 57 flew in late on 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

Autumn passage was records of 2 and 12 in July and 2 in Aug. There were four winter records with 2 in mid-Nov and 2 in early Dec.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa lapponica*)

*Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.*

1 was present at EHF from 4<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Whimbrel** (*Numenius phaeopus*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

Spring passage at EHF was 1 or 2 between 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May and 1 on 10<sup>th</sup> June.

Only one record in autumn with a single at EHF on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Curlew** (*Numenius arquata*)

*Uncommon resident and fairly common winter visitor.*

A max of around 60 in the usual evening roost at EHF in the first winter period.

Numbers reduced rapidly from mid-March as birds returned to their breeding sites and less than 10 were present during April, May and June.

Summer records only from Stowford, where 2 pairs probably bred, and Timbersbrook.

By mid-July numbers at EHF had built up to around 60 again and these were maintained to the year end.

**Spotted Redshank** (*Tringa erythropus*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

2 in summer plumage at EHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> June were seen to fly off south at 21.20.

**Redshank** (*Tringa totanus*)

*Uncommon visitor and migrant.*

Recorded in every month but with a different status. Resident in winter with a low max of only 8 to mid-March. Spring passage through April to mid-May but no more than 1 present on any day. Occasional singles in June. A light return passage in July (max 3) and Aug (max 1).

Finally becoming resident again from 1<sup>st</sup> Sept to the year end with numbers building up to max of Sept (2), Oct (4), Nov (6), Dec (8).

Also a passage bird at Arclid SQ on 11<sup>th</sup> July.

**Greenshank** (*Tringa nebularia*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Light spring passage at EHF with 4 on 13<sup>th</sup> May and a single on 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May.

Protracted autumn passage from 16<sup>th</sup> July through to 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. Recorded on 18 days as follows (Month/no. of days/max no. of birds) July 1/1, Aug 3/3, Sept 2/3, Oct 8/3, Nov 4/1.

Also at Doddington on 24<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Green Sandpiper** (*Tringa ochropus*)

*Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.*

As in last year spring passage consisted of only one bird, a single at Arclid SQ on 9<sup>th</sup> April.

Then as usual a long extended return passage starting with 2 at EHF on 25<sup>th</sup> June and finishing with 1 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct. Present continuously in between, with a max of 6. Also 1 at Arclid SQ on 17<sup>th</sup> Aug.

Winter records from CF (1 on 27<sup>th</sup> Dec), Rode Pool (1 on 9<sup>th</sup> Oct) – this bird was chased down the Pool and nearly caught by a Sparrowhawk – and Stowford (1 in Feb, 2 in Nov).

**Wood Sandpiper** (*Tringa glareola*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

The only record was of a single at EHF from 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Common Sandpiper** (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

This species has clearly defined spring and autumn passage periods. Spring passage was from 9<sup>th</sup> April through to 25<sup>th</sup> May with max of Arclid SQ (7), EHF (7), WLF (2). Also 1 or 2 in spring at Doddington, Westlow Mere and Weston. An unusual record was of the one on 29<sup>th</sup> April in Crewe Town Centre on the pavement outside shops at 06.00 after heavy rain.

Autumn passage was from 2<sup>nd</sup> July through to 16<sup>th</sup> Sept with a max of EHF (4) and Arclid SQ (4). Also at Rode Pool where 3 on 13<sup>th</sup> July perched on a T-bar in front of the hide.

**Turnstone** (*Arenaria interpres*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

The only record was on the 'good wader' day of 14<sup>th</sup> May when one was with 2 Sanderling that dropped in at 08.15 and left at 09.00.

**Grey Phalarope** (*Phalaropus fulicarius*)

*Very rare.*

An ad was found at RF on 13<sup>th</sup> Oct where it fortunately stayed until 16<sup>th</sup> Oct, giving many observers the chance to watch it.

Only the second record for the flashes. The first was an imm at EHF for one day on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 1997. (See separate note for more details).

**Mediterranean Gull** (*Larus melanocephalus*)

*Scarce visitor.*

2000 correction. The record 'At Arclid SQ 1 was regular in the gull roost during late Jan' should be at Astbury WP not Arclid SQ.

2 separate birds at EHF in early March and 1 in the gull roost at Doddington on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb.

In the second part of the year 1 at EHF on 13<sup>th</sup> July and a juv/1<sup>st</sup> winter at EHF on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug. At Doddington another ad was found in the gull roost on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov.



### **Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)**

*Abundant autumn and winter visitor.*

In both winter periods between 2000 and 3000 regular feeding on MGT, loafing in that area, and bathing/preening at PHF and EHF.

The winter roost at Doddington held high numbers with a max of 12,000 in Dec but the roost at Astbury WP was not counted this year.

Up to 500 at Arclid SQ but they do not roost here and fly off west at dusk (to SF?).

### **Common Gull (*Larus canus*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

Regular in low numbers (up to 30) in winter at MGT and EHF. Some evidence of the northward passage in March and April with 66 moving over EHF in four groups on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 113 on 14<sup>th</sup> April and 87 on 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

1s and 2s regular feeding in fields with winter flocks of Black-headed Gulls.

At Doddington the max number seen in the winter roost was 300 in Dec.

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

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

1999 Update: Three records of birds submitted as being of the Baltic race *L.f. fuscus* are still being considered by the BBRC Sub-species Committee.

The main site for this species continues to be the MGT/RF/OF area but few records from there this year. Max recorded in the first winter period from here is 50 (400 in 2000) and the max recorded during the spring passage period of March and April is 300 (2500 in 2000).

The autumn passage max was around 650 in Aug and then numbers settled down to a max of 345 in Nov.

At Doddington the max seen in the winter roost was 300 in Nov.

### **Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)**

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

Much lower than usual numbers from MGT with a max of only 750 in Jan (2500 in 2000). Numbers dropped to usually less than ten from April to Oct and then built up rapidly in Nov and Dec to a max of 1,200 (4000 in 2000).

Always rare in the gull roost at Doddington and a max of only 5 was recorded.

Birds showing characteristics of the Scandinavian race *L.a. argentatus* were recorded on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1<sup>st</sup> Sept, 7<sup>th</sup> Sept and 6<sup>th</sup> Oct.

Birds of the race *L.a. michahellis* (Yellow-legged Gull) were recorded frequently. Singles on 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Jan were unusual but in the usual late summer to late autumn period there were records on 43 days with a daily max of 6.

### **Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

No records until 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec when an ad was finally spotted amongst the gulls on MGT. Then a 1<sup>st</sup> W bird was seen here on 29<sup>th</sup> Dec and on 30<sup>th</sup> Dec it was seen again with a different ad – so three separate birds in the last week of the year.

### **Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

A 1<sup>st</sup> W bird seen at MGT on 20<sup>th</sup> Jan was later seen on EHF, and also on 21<sup>st</sup> there. An ad on EHF on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb, a 1<sup>st</sup> W again on 7<sup>th</sup> Feb and finally an ad on 16<sup>th</sup> March was watched on EHF before flying over to MGT.

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

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

The usual pattern of occurrence with records of less than 10 in all months from Feb to Nov and peaks in Jan, EHF (102) and Dec MGT (coincidentally also 102).

Singles at Arclid SQ on 14<sup>th</sup> Jan, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov and 30<sup>th</sup> Dec.

### **Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)**

*Rare spring passage migrant.*

On 16<sup>th</sup> March an ad flew into EHF at 12.55, stayed briefly and then flew off north. Then on 24<sup>th</sup> March an ad was seen briefly on the saltpan at 16.30.

15 previous records, most of them in Feb, March or April.

**Common Tern** (*Sterna hirundo*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Spring passage records on 14<sup>th</sup> May when 1 at WLF and 2 at EHF in the morning, and then 15 over EHF in the afternoon. Also 2 at WLF on 24<sup>th</sup> May and 2 at Doddington on 11<sup>th</sup> May.

Singles at WLF and EHF in mid-June may have been non-breeding sub-adults.

8 records on return passage starting with 4 at EHF on 8<sup>th</sup> July and finally 1 imm at WLF from 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Oct, the latest record ever for SF.

2 birds of this species or Arctic Tern were at Arclid SQ in early July.

**Arctic Tern** (*Sterna paradisaea*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

1 juv was seen at WLF at 19.00 on 15<sup>th</sup> Sept but not the next day.

**Little Tern** (*Sterna albifrons*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

At EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> May an ad was seen to fly in from the north, spent a few minutes there, then moved to PHF for five minutes and moved away at 18.40.

Only the 10<sup>th</sup> record for the flashes.

**Black Tern** (*Chlidonias niger*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

A juv seen briefly at EHF on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct, the latest ever date for SF.

**Feral Pigeon** (*Columba livia*)

*Common resident.*

Regular flocks in most town centres with, for example, 150 in Crewe town centre and 100 on Nantwich Road, Crewe. Also 97 at Arclid SQ.

**Stock Dove** (*Columba oenas*)

*Uncommon resident.*

At Quakers Coppice 9 pairs laid 21 clutches in nest boxes with 40 eggs laid, 19 hatched (47%) and only 7 young fledged (17%), a very poor year. Also bred at Taxmere, with 2 pairs.

Winter records of less than 10 birds from 14 sites.

**Woodpigeon** (*Columba palumbus*)

*Common resident.*

Winter feeding flocks of EHF (700), CF (450), Taxmere (575), Sandbach (450), Doddington (400) and Rode Pool (400).

A roost of 2000 in Crewe Hall Woods in Feb.

**Collared Dove** (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

*Common resident.*

Common and widespread, but grossly under-recorded. The only large flocks recorded were 44 in Haslington and 24 at EHF.

**Cuckoo** (*Cuculus canorus*)

*Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.*

The first records were not until May, with 1 at FF on 1<sup>st</sup> and 1 at Smallwood on 4<sup>th</sup>. Other single records in May from seven sites – Bagmere, Crewe BP, Doddington, Sandbach, Wybunbury, Clay Lane and EHF – and in June from Taxmere, where the observer's comment 'It can't get much worse for this species!' applies everywhere.

**Barn Owl** (*Tyto alba*)

*Scarce resident.*

A more accurate record this year, with records kindly supplied by South Cheshire Barn Owl Group.

There were six confirmed breeding sites this year with 2 around Blakenhall, 2 near Maw Green, Crewe, 1 at Wybunbury and 1 near Wistaston.

Sightings were also received from a number of other widespread sites and the total breeding population is undoubtedly higher.

**Little Owl** (*Athene noctua*)

*Common resident.*

Common in open farmland and recorded from 12 sites as well as six flashes and MGT in the SF area. However, although several pairs were recorded there was no proved breeding.

**Tawny Owl** (*Strix aluco*)

*Common resident.*

Common in more wooded area. Records this year from 14 sites and probably bred at all of these.

At Crewe GC on 5<sup>th</sup> July a fox cub was disturbed eating a dead Tawny Owl.

**Swift** (*Apus apus*)

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

A widespread arrival towards the end of April with the first being 1 over Crewe Road, Sandbach on 21<sup>st</sup>. Then 4 at WLF on 27<sup>th</sup>, 1 at Sandbach Heath on 28<sup>th</sup> and 1 over Congleton on 29<sup>th</sup>.

Big counts in the summer were 100 over Doddington in June and 800 high over Crewe in July.

The last birds were 1 over Crewe on 28<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1 over Sandbach on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug and finally 1 over EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept.

In 2001 18 SECOS members took part in a survey of breeding Swifts throughout the SECOS area. Sadly this proved what we had suspected – that numbers had decreased significantly; down from 1479 in 1995/6 to 920 in 2001, a reduction of 38%.

See separate article for details.

**Kingfisher** (*Alcedo atthis*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Recorded from 15 sites this year (16 in 2000) but with no proved breeding anywhere.

**Green Woodpecker** (*Picus viridis*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Recorded from 13 sites (16 in 2000), spread across the area. A pair fledged 2 juvs from a nest near to FF, the first confirmed breeding for this species at SF. Juvs also seen at Bath Vale Congleton, Crewe Green and Wybunbury.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos major*)

*Common resident.*

By far the commonest woodpecker, with records from many sites. Regular at the feeding station at EHF where a juv was seen in June and July. Bred in the usual Swettenham observer's garden, with 2 juvs. On 7<sup>th</sup> July a juv seen feeding along a grass verge in Haslington was the third juvenile in a week seen feeding in grass.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos minor*)

*Uncommon resident.*

A good year for sightings of this elusive species with records of 1 or 2 from eleven sites, FF, EHF (on the feeders), WLF, Brereton Heath CP, Bath Vale, Crewe (2 sites), Haslington, Quakers Coppice, Sandbach GC and Wistaston.

**Skylark** (*Alda arvensis*)

*Fairly common.*

Not a good year, but possibly due to foot and mouth restrictions, with 17 singing males reported from 9 sites. Light autumn passage noted in early Oct from EHF, Haslington and Arclid SQ.

Few winter flock records with 17 at WLF, 5 at MGT and 6 at Checkley.

**Sand Martin** (*Riparia riparia*)

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

Astbury WP was the location of the first birds this year with 3 on 17<sup>th</sup> March and 1 on 18<sup>th</sup> March.

Good coverage of breeding colonies at local sand quarries with Wall Hill (80 holes), Bent Farm (125 holes), Wybunbury (292 holes in three new faces, with many juvs at hole entrances), Arclid old (39 holes) and Arclid new (130).

The last record was of 3 over Crewe GC on 6 Oct.

### Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

*Common summer visitor.*

The first birds were 5 at EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> March and 5 at Arclid SQ on 29<sup>th</sup> March.

Breeds commonly throughout the area. No record of autumn roosts this year and passage only recorded at EHF where 100s over at the end of Sept.

The last 'normal' records were of 8 at EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct but 1 juv was seen flying over EHF on 25<sup>th</sup> Nov. Not quite the latest ever but it did make one wonder where it had been!

### Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*)

*Vagrant.*

On 15 May at WLF an adult was located in a group of 200 hirundines brought down by bad weather. Stayed for 1 hour 30 minutes and then moved off with the other hirundines as the weather improved.

This is the first record for the flashes and it has been accepted by BBRC.

The only previous record I can find for Cheshire is one passing Red Rocks on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1980.

See separate note for more detail.

### House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

*Common summer visitor.*

First record was 2 at WLF on 6<sup>th</sup> April then 1 at Arclid SQ on 7<sup>th</sup> April. Breeds commonly throughout the area.

As for Swallow there was some evidence of passage with 100s over EHF at end of Sept.

Last birds were 4 over EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct and 1 over Alsager South on 12<sup>th</sup> Oct.

### Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

The only spring record was 1 at Arclid SQ on 30<sup>th</sup> April. On autumn passage another here on 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug. Also singles heard over flying Sandbach Park on four dates from 18<sup>th</sup> Aug to 1<sup>st</sup> Sept.

### Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant. Scarce resident.*

A flock of 23 at MGT was the only double figure flock in Jan and Feb.

Spring passage noted on 15 April with 16 over EHF heading north, 30 at EHF and 15 at CF. No summer records.

Autumn passage from mid-Sept to mid-Oct with 40 over EHF, 22 over Arclid SQ and 11 at Crewe BP.

Numbers in the second winter period were MGT (41), Arclid SQ (14) and Haslington Hall (10).

### Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

*Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.*

First record was 1 at EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> April. Recorded from six sites in the breeding season but juvs only seen at EHF and Doddington.

### Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

*Scarce summer visitor and scarce winter visitor.*

Recorded from 23 widespread sites around the area in winter, but from only 2 sites in the breeding season. At Arclid SQ the autumn roost was established again this year (after failing in 2000) and peaked with 9 or 10 birds in the roost on 14<sup>th</sup> Nov.

### Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

*Fairly common resident.*

The only large roost recorded in the first winter period was of 200 in Congleton Town Centre. Numbers built up in March to 56 at EHF and in April to 110 at Arclid SQ.

The only proved breeding was at EHF and Doddington. In the second half of the year records from Congleton Town Centre (150 roost), Crewe Retail Park (40 roost), MGT (35 in Oct), Wheelock Sewage Farm (20) and Arclid SQ (46 in Aug down to 8 in Dec).

The continental White Wagtail *M.a. alba* was recorded from WLF on 22<sup>nd</sup> April (1 with 2 Pied Wagtails), EHF (1 on 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> May) and Arclid SQ (1 on 11<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> April).

**Waxwing** (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

*Very rare winter visitor.*

An influx into the country in the first winter period resulted in birds being seen at three sites in the SECOS area. At Congleton Town Centre 37 were first seen on 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. They stayed through to March and were down to 14 by 11<sup>th</sup> March. At Wistaston 1 was seen feeding on a rowan tree in a garden from 17<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> Jan. At Crewe BP 1 was seen briefly on 9<sup>th</sup> Jan feeding on berries.

**Dipper** (*Cinclus cinclus*)

*Scarce resident.*

2 seen regularly throughout the year at Bath Vale, Congleton and 1 on the R. Dane near Havannah, Congleton on 7<sup>th</sup> May, a regular breeding site.

**Wren** (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

*Abundant resident.*

15 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP, the same as last year.

**Duncock** (*Prunella modularis*)

*Common resident.*

13 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP. A max of 3 was recorded in a BTO winter bird survey at Checkley, where 10 last year.

**Robin** (*Erithacus rubecula*)

*Abundant resident.*

21 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP, where 19 last year. 25 pairs were noted in a BTO breeding bird survey in Congleton.

**Redstart** (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

*Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.*

Two records of passage birds with a male at Crewe BP on 29<sup>th</sup> April and a juv at Oakhanger on 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug.

**Whinchat** (*Saxicola rubetra*)

*Scarce migrant.*

Two autumn passage records with 1 at Crewe BP on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug and 1 at MGT on 27<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Stonechat** (*Saxicola torquata*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

A good series of records in both winter periods. A male was first seen on 27<sup>th</sup> Feb at Rookery Bridge near EHF. Seen daily until 4<sup>th</sup> March when the m was present and 2 f were also seen. Not seen after 10<sup>th</sup> March due to access restrictions.

From 16<sup>th</sup> Oct 1 f was at MGT and 1 m at FFF. Then during Nov and Dec there were several sightings of 1 m and 1 f along Fowle Brook, near MGT.

Also 2 were present at Stowford during Oct and Nov and finally a f was seen at Bagmere on 30<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Wheatear** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Only recorded from SF where the first record was of 2 at PHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and three more records in March. Scattered records of 1 or 2 on three dates in April and two dates in May, the last on 11<sup>th</sup> May.

On return passage the first bird was seen at EHF on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug. Then 7 other scattered records of singles with 3 records in Aug, 3 in Sept and the last on 9<sup>th</sup> Oct.

Single birds showing the characteristics of the Greenland race *O.o. leucorroha* were seen on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 4<sup>th</sup> May and 27<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Blackbird** (*Turdus merula*)

*Abundant resident and winter visitor.*

In breeding season surveys there were 31 pairs at Crewe BP and 32 pairs at Congleton (SJ8664). During winter BTO Surveys there were 32 at Haslington and 29 at Checkley.

**Fieldfare** (*Turdus pilaris*)

*Common winter visitor.*

Counts of winter flocks larger than 100 at either end of the year were seen at Alsager (170), Alsager South (160), Arclid SQ (250), Checkley (160), Haslington (150), Stowford (300) and EHF (130).

The first returning birds were noted on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct and were well spread by the end of Oct.

**Song Thrush** (*Turdus philomelos*)

*Fairly common resident.*

The recent slight increase in numbers seems to be being maintained with records from many sites, including Congleton – where an 8 mile walk gave 17 singing males, Congleton – 13 pairs in a BTO Survey, Arclid SQ (5) and Crewe BP (3).

**Redwing** (*Turdus iliacus*)

*Common winter visitor.*

Generally lower numbers than Fieldfare but this year numbers are similar with winter flocks of more than 100 seen at Checkley (100), Bath Vale, Congleton (200), Cranage (100), Haslington (100), CF (125), EHF (100) and WLF (300).

The first returning birds were noted on 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept over Crewe Road, Sandbach. Then over Crewe on 25<sup>th</sup> Sept but not widespread until early Oct.

**Mistle Thrush** (*Turdus viscivorus*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Breeds throughout the area but the only post-breeding flock of 10+ was 16 at Oakhanger in July.

**Grasshopper Warbler** (*Locustella naevia*)

*Scarce summer visitor.*

2000 Update – a late record of 1 m reeling in the hedge of a nursery near FF on one day only at the end of June. This doubles the records for 2000.

At the usual site of Bagmere there were 2 singing males on the normal date of 15<sup>th</sup> May.

**Sedge Warbler** (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

Early records were of 1 at PHF on 25<sup>th</sup> April and 1 at Crewe BP on 26<sup>th</sup> April and well spread quickly after. Records of singing males from 8 of the flashes at SF, Bagmere, Crewe BP and Doddington.

**Reed Warbler** (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

The first record was of 1 at WLF on 25<sup>th</sup> April. There is some uncertainty over the number of territories due to foot and mouth restrictions, but probable pairs were GF/OF (6), MGT (3), PHF (1), WLF (5), FF (2) and PF (1).

**Lesser Whitethroat** (*Sylvia curruca*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

2000 Update – 1 was seen at Fields Farm on the exceptionally early date of 21<sup>st</sup> March beating the previous earliest ever date of 21<sup>st</sup> April 1988.

Another early bird this year with 1 at Wistaston on 19<sup>th</sup> April and then several others before the end of April. Records from 7 of the flashes at SF and Arclid SQ, Congleton, Crewe, Haslington and Wistaston.

**Whitethroat** (*Sylvia communis*)

*Common summer visitor.*

As seems to be normal for this species there was a mass arrival towards the end of April with records on 28<sup>th</sup> April from FFF, Arclid SQ and Crewe BP, 29<sup>th</sup> April from Congleton and 30<sup>th</sup> April from Weston.

A common breeding species with, for example, 5 pairs at Arclid SQ, 5 along the railway embankment at FFF, 7 at WLF/FF/PF/CP and 3 at Brereton Heath CP.

**Garden Warbler** (*Sylvia borin*)

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

First record was 1 at Crewe BP on 28<sup>th</sup> April and then on 30<sup>th</sup> April at Arclid SQ, WLF and RL.  
Not particularly common with records from only 8 sites but probably 4 pairs at Arclid SQ.

**Blackcap** (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

*Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.*

The first record was of 1 at FF on 31<sup>st</sup> March. Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, 9 pairs at Crewe BP, 9 at Arclid SQ and 8 at Congleton in a BTO survey.

An abundance of winter records, mainly from gardens, with a total of 13 different birds in Jan to March from Alsager South, Bath Vale, Crewe, Rode Pool, Sandbach and Wistaston, and 7 different birds in Oct to Dec from Bath Vale, Crewe, Sandbach, Shavington and Wistaston.

**Chiffchaff** (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

*Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.*

Our earliest, and easiest to hear and identify, summer visitor. The usual mass arrival in mid-March with 1 at Wistaston on 14<sup>th</sup>, 1 at Arclid SQ and 1 at Crewe, King George's playing fields on 15<sup>th</sup> and 3 at Crewe BP on 17<sup>th</sup>.

Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, 8 pairs at Arclid SQ.

Two winter records with 1 at FFF on 15<sup>th</sup> Nov and 1 at Astbury WP on 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec.

**Willow Warbler** (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

*Common summer visitor.*

First records on 1<sup>st</sup> April with 1 at FF and 1 at Haslington, then 1 at Sandbach on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Although probably still our commonest warbler numbers seem to be significantly reduced this year with 9 pairs at Arclid SQ (14 in 2000, 15 in 1999), only 4 around FF and 5 in a BTO Survey at Congleton.

**Goldcrest** (*Regulus regulus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Winter records from 20 sites (15 in 2000) with generally 1s or 2s but 8 at Quakers Coppice, 6 at Crewe GC and 5 at FF.

Breeding season records of singing males from Queen's Park, Crewe (where juvs also seen), Crewe Cemetery, Crewe GC, Doddington and Haslington.

**Firecrest** (*Regulus ignicapillus*)

*Very rare winter visitor.*

On 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1 was trapped in a mist net in a Wistaston garden. It was ringed and released but not seen again.

**Spotted Flycatcher** (*Muscicapa striata*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

Only a slight dip on last year's record number of pairs with proved breeding at Arclid SQ, Congleton Park, Crewe Cemetery, Hough, Oakhanger and Sandbach, and probable at EHF, Brereton, St. Michael's churchyard Crewe, Shavington and Winterley.

**Pied Flycatcher** (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

*Very rare passage migrant and summer visitor.*

1 m was seen on passage at WLF on 20<sup>th</sup> April and a pair was at the usual breeding site near Timbersbrook in April.

**Long-tailed Tit** (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

*Common resident.*

Continues to be common and widespread. There seems to be many flocks of low numbers (10-15) but the only ones of 20+ were Crewe GC (38) and PHF (22). Breeds commonly with, for example, 6 pairs at Arclid SQ and 3 pairs at Crewe BP.

**Marsh Tit** (*Parus palustris*)

*Rare visitor.*

At Crewe BP a bird of this species (although initially thought to be a Willow Tit) was first seen on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept. Quite mobile when it first arrived, it settled down and was seen regularly on and around the

feeding station by the brook. Present to the end of the year – and into 2002 – it was a bonus for the local year listers!

**Willow Tit** (*Parus montanus*)

*Scarce resident.*

At SF there were no records from the usual site of FF but there was an unusual record of 3 at WLF on 4<sup>th</sup> May. Also seen at Bath Vale, Congleton and Arclid SQ at both ends of the year, Shavington in Oct and along the Wheelock Rail Trail in Dec.

**Coal Tit** (*Parus ater*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Recorded in winter from 16 sites and in the breeding season from 4 sites, but no proof of successful breeding season this year.

**Blue Tit** (*Parus caeruleus*)

*Common resident.*

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	21	?	?
Quakers Coppice	8	93	64
Rode Pool	6#	?	?

# Unable to confirm whether used by Blue Tit or Great Tit due to f & m restrictions.

At Quakers Coppice the average 1<sup>st</sup> egg laying date was 30<sup>th</sup> April (earliest 20/4, latest 20/5). This was a very late start and a much wider spread than usual due to the poor weather in April.

**Great Tit** (*Parus major*)

*Common resident.*

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	9	?	?
Quakers Coppice	6	40	22
Rode Pool: see Blue Tit			

The pressure on hole nesters to find a suitable nest site was shown by the pair of Great Tits that used a bat box at Crewe BP. They squeezed through a 12 mm slot many hundreds of times whilst raising 7 young!

**Nuthatch** (*Sitta europaea*)

*Common resident.*

Under-recorded, with records from 20 sites and no proved breeding. Additionally seen in 13 gardens in the SECOS garden bird feeding survey.

**Treecreeper** (*Certhia familiaris*)

*Common resident.*

Again not many records of this inconspicuous little bird. Recorded at 13 sites, with proved breeding from Quakers Coppice – behind the bark of a sweet chestnut tree – and Doddington – where a pair bred inside the bird hide for the second consecutive year and fledged 2 juvs.

**Jay** (*Garrulus glandarius*)

*Uncommon resident.*

More records than last year, with 17 sites recorded. Breeding proved at Taxmere/Arclid SQ (2 pairs) and Blakenhall.

**Magpie** (*Pica pica*)

*Common resident.*

Breeds commonly throughout the area, but the only flocks were 12 on a BTO breeding bird survey at Congleton and 10 at Alsager South in Jan. At Crewe BP 9 territories were recorded in a common bird census.



**Jackdaw** (*Corvus monedula*)

*Common resident and winter visitor.*

A common breeder with, for example, 30 pairs breeding round Doddington Hall and c10 pairs at Congleton on a BTO survey.

Winter flocks were 250 at Rode estate in Dec and 200 at Crewe GC in Nov heading west towards Crewe Hall where the longstanding roost still exists (not counted this year but usually around 2,500).

**Rook** (*Corvus frugilegus*)

*Common resident.*

The total of nests at regularly counted sites was:-

Site	2001	2000	1999	1998
Crewe/Alsager (9 sites)	566	539	524	469
Foden's Flash	n.c.	116	119	93
Arclid	82	69	53	59
Congleton area (3 sites)	111			

The usual winter roost at Crewe Hall still exists but not counted this year (usually around 2000 birds).

**Carrion Crow** (*Corvus corone*)

*Common resident.*

An almost totally ignored species with records received from only 4 sites!

**Raven** (*Corvus corax*)

*Scarce visitor and resident.*

Another surge this year with records from 12 sites (7 in 2000). These were mainly in autumn/winter but there were a group of records in the breeding season from Doddington/Walgherton/Wyburnbury area. Probable but not proven breeding near Timbersbrook where a pair bred for the first time last year.

**Starling** (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

The only recorded roost in the first winter period was 300 in Leylandii in a Wistaston garden. Few records in summer. Also few in winter but those involved a lot of birds. At least 1000 regular on MGT; a roost in Park Road, Haslington only developed in mid-Dec but numbered 2,500 by 31<sup>st</sup> Dec (c8,000 by mid-Jan 2002) and on 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec an incredible 20,000 over EHF.

**House Sparrow** (*Passer domesticus*)

*Common resident.*

Some regular autumn/winter flocks were recorded from Alsager (25), Bath Vale (50), Crewe (50), Haslington (40 and 50). The size of autumn/winter flocks needs to be recorded and monitored for this declining species.

**Tree Sparrow** (*Passer montanus*)

*Fairly common resident.*

An encouraging increase in numbers, with records from 21 sites in winter, including four gardens. Some large flock sizes, probably helped by the wet weather making it impossible to harvest maize, since the following flocks were reported feeding on maize in Jan, CF (88), Congleton (40), Sandbach (35). Other large winter flocks were at Checkley (24), Congleton (80) and Wheelock Heath (35).

Around the bird feeders at EHF there were up to 38 in winter and 2 pairs bred in nest boxes.

**Chaffinch** (*Fringilla coelebs*)

*Common resident and winter visitor.*

Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, winter flocks of Checkley (38) and Alsager South (21). In breeding bird surveys 14 pairs at Congleton and 6 pairs at Crewe BP. 34 ads and juvs feeding on a fairway at Crewe GC in July.

**Brambling** (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

A disastrous first winter period with only one record of one bird seen by one observer in Sandbach park on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. In the second winter period recorded in the SECOS garden bird feeding survey from gardens in Middlewich, Timbersbrook and Sandbach from mid-Nov to early Dec.

**Greenfinch** (*Carduelis chloris*)

*Common resident.*

In some areas now nearly as common as Chaffinch. Winter roosts of 108 at Crewe BP and 60 at WLF. A max of 51 at a garden feeding station in Haslington. 10 pairs in a common bird census at Crewe BP.

**Goldfinch** (*Carduelis carduelis*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Autumn/winter flocks of RF (40), FF (32), EHF (30), Alsager South (33) and Westlow Mere (30). This species favours niger seed in gardens and some numbers recorded in gardens were Crewe (30), Haslington (22) and Crewe (20).

**Siskin** (*Carduelis spinus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.*

A species that observers like to record! Winter flocks from EHF (50), Alsager South (40), Brereton Heath CP (35), Bath Vale (50), Crewe GC (35), Quakers Coppice (37) and Rode Pool (25). Recorded from 6 gardens in Jan to March but as usual no records in the Oct to Dec period.

No records from the possible breeding area on The Cloud due to foot and mouth restrictions.

**Linnet** (*Carduelis cannabina*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Autumn/winter flocks of EHF (76), MGT (25), Alsager South (55), Crewe BP (25 roosting with 100+ Greenfinch) Arclid SQ (22), Doddington (21) and Winterley Pool (40).

Breeding pairs noted at MGT, FFF railway embankment, and Astbury WP.

**Lesser Redpoll** (*Carduelis cabaret*)

*Uncommon resident and winter visitor.*

Frequently seen with Siskin flocks but in lower numbers, with records of up to around 10 birds in flocks from 17 sites, all in winter. One large flock of around 40 at Westlow Mere on 22<sup>nd</sup> March. Seen in 3 gardens in the SECOS garden bird feeding survey.

**Crossbill** (*Loxia curvirostra*)

*Very rare visitor.*

The only record was of 7 flying over Sandbach park at 07.00 on 4<sup>th</sup> June.

**Bullfinch** (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

*Uncommon resident.*

A wide spread of records from 25 sites across the area (20 in 2000, 16 in 1999) all of which are probably breeding sites for this sedentary species. Not more than four seen together anywhere.

3 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP.

**Hawfinch** (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)

*Vagrant.*

At Sandbach on 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 1 was seen at 08.15 in flight calling and then briefly perched before it flew off towards Congleton.

This is only the second recorded occurrence in the SECOS area, the first being 1 at Bath Vale Congleton on 18<sup>th</sup> Nov 1985.

**Yellowhammer** (*Emberiza citrinella*)

*Uncommon resident.*

The only flock with numbers into double figures was of 10 near MGT feeding on standing barley in Nov (flocks of 23, 20 and 18 in 2000).

Recorded from 7 sites in winter and 8 in the breeding season (13 and 11 in 2000).

**Reed Bunting** (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Winter flocks of MGT/RF (12), Checkley (12) and lower numbers at 11 other sites. Breeding season records of 8 pairs at Arclid SQ, 7 pairs in a restricted area of MGT/RF/GF and at 7 other sites.

**Corn Bunting** (*Miliaria calandra*)

*Uncommon resident.*

No winter records and singing males recorded at Bagmøre (1), Casey Lane Basford (3), Pym's Lane Crewe (1) and Doddington (1).

**Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes**

**Black Swan** (*Cygnus atratus*)

1 was at WLF on 17<sup>th</sup> May and probably the same at EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> May. Possibly the same bird was the one seen at Doddington on 22<sup>nd</sup> May.

Also at Doddington one was seen on 31<sup>st</sup> Oct and stayed through to the year end.

A pair were introduced to Haslington Hall pond in mid-Aug and were present through to the year end.

**Egyptian Goose** (*Alopochen aegyptiachus*)

On 5<sup>th</sup> Dec six birds were seen to fly in from the north at 10.20 and fly out at 10.40, heading north, agitated and calling.

**Ring-necked Parakeet** (*Psittacula krameri*)

One flew over Rode estate on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct, calling loudly as usual.

**Java Sparrow** (*Lonchura oryzivora*)

At Alsager South an escaped cage bird of this species was first seen on 29<sup>th</sup> July and survived through to the year end.

**Other animals**

Mink – one was seen by the road bridge at EHF on 4<sup>th</sup> May and then it swam down to PHF.

Terrapin – one by the dead tree on the saltpan on 29<sup>th</sup> July.

## THE FIRST PROVED BREEDING FOR HOBBY IN THE SECOS AREA.

### Introduction

It had been suspected that Hobbys had bred in the SECOS area for several years and in 2001 a nest with a breeding pair was finally located. From this site the pair fledged two young, the first proved breeding in the SECOS area.

### Recorded History in Cheshire

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Hobby was a rare summer visitor. Breeding was occasionally recorded, with the last two being pairs at Vale Royal in 1895 and Oakmere in 1898.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were only three records in Cheshire. However, numbers increased from the 1960s and since 1970 birds have been recorded annually. A further increase in numbers occurred during the 1990s. Breeding pairs have been suspected in the county since 1992 but it was 1998 before breeding was proved, when three pairs nested and two of them each fledged two young.

In 2000 single pairs bred successfully at five sites, with a further two probable breeding pairs. However, this species is very secretive and difficult to survey and it is considered that the county population may be double this figure, say around 15 pairs.

There have been more detailed observations within the SECOS area and these are given in the Summary.

### Breeding Site

Although quite an obvious bird when flying over, particularly if hawking prey, it is notoriously difficult to find the nest site. Having noted the flightline of birds leaving Sandbach Flashes when carrying prey, we suspected a breeding site to be in the area of Oakhanger, but despite much searching in recent years nothing had ever been found.

This year fate took a hand when I noted a pair displaying in that area and, after many hours searching, Andrew Goodwin was fortunate enough to hear the birds calling and see a food pass. After more hours of intensive searching a bird was seen on an oak tree and the nest site was found. Fortunately it was within 150 metres of a public road and all observations were made from there.

It was actually in an old Crow's nest in an oak tree in an area of mixed dairy and arable farming. This is apparently typical for breeding Hobbys north of the Wash with over 85% of pairs using this habitat. Unfortunately (for nest seekers) this habitat covers virtually all of south and east Cheshire! This fact, together with the distinct lack of activity of the breeding pair at the nest site, helps to explain why it is so difficult to find Hobby nest sites.

### Adult Activity

The female stayed in the nesting tree throughout the brooding period and was only seen when the male brought prey in and there was a food pass. She would then sit in an adjacent tree and eat the prey or take it directly to the nest. After food passes both birds were present at the nest site but were rarely visible. With no activity sometimes for several hours you could be forgiven for thinking that they were not present at all! Their secretive behaviour at the nest site is well documented and the extreme difficulty in finding nests is also well known!

When the young Hobbys were nearly fledged the female would be seen more regularly. She was often hawking insects but never very far from the nest (always within a few hundred metres). On one occasion she attacked a group of Swallows over a maize field and successfully caught one and took it straight to the nest. It was during this period that the male would take prey directly to the nest, but he would always call as he approached the nest. The begging calls of the young were first heard at this time.

Once the young had fledged the family moved further down the valley, but could still be seen from the nest site.

### Territorial Defence

This was very fierce within 100 metres or so of the nest site. The resident Kestrels were never tolerated and were attacked by the Hobbys on several occasions. Sparrowhawk, Mistle Thrush, corvids, Jays and even a Common Buzzard were mobbed and chased off.

However, one species that was tolerated was Woodpigeon. A pair were nesting at the bottom of the same tree that the Hobbys were using. Hobby and Woodpigeon nests are regularly found in close proximity due to the Hobby using the Woodpigeon as a defence mechanism (Woodpigeons often fly out when they feel threatened) and the Woodpigeon gaining some protection as the Hobby will attack any intruders.

### Description

The male was a very slim bird at rest with very blue/grey upperparts, very bright rufous trousers and prominent black moustachial stripe. It appeared very sleek in flight.

The female was a thicker set bird at rest with browner upperparts and the thighs being a lot duller orange. The moustachial stripe was not as prominent. However, in wet weather it was difficult to separate the birds. In flight the size difference was obvious.

The call of the male was a high pitched 'ki-ki-ki-ki' whilst the female had a slower 'ke ke-ke-ke' contact call.

The juveniles had brown upperparts and buffish underparts with no rufous trousers.



### Prey Items

These included : - Great Tit; Blue Tit; Swallow; House Martin; Swift as well as various insects.

This seems to be a typical Hobby diet. According to BWP, in general most birds rely on insects until the eggs hatch, thereafter taking mainly birds for themselves and young, returning to an insect diet after the young fledge.

### Diary of Events

20 May	a pair first seen displaying in the area.
June	several visits and many hours spent searching the area, including one spell of five hours cycling around the lanes, but without success.
1 July	Actual nest site nearly located (down to one of three adjacent trees!!).
6 July	Female Hobby chased a pair of Kestrels and a Sparrowhawk. My theory is that eggs are about to hatch or have just hatched.
18 July	Female attacks a male Kestrel, male Hobby appears and chases the Kestrel off. Female then turns her attention to several Mistle Thrushes on telegraph wires nearby. Still no idea which of the trees the nest is in!
20 July	No sign of the Hobbys at all during several hours watching the site.
21 July	As yesterday. The farmer had just silaged the field; had he disturbed them? Andy and I were very concerned.
22 July	Relief! Food pass seen at 08-25. Telephoned Andy with the news and we are delighted. Again territory defence is seen, this time Crows are chased as they fly overhead. The actual nest tree is finally located!
27 July	The squeaking calls of the juveniles are heard, but no idea how many.
29 July	A lot of activity with three food passes seen and the female hunting insects between food passes.
30 July	Andy sees two juveniles in the nest.
15 August	Juvenile seen in the nest, flapping wings constantly and probably near to fledging.
19 August	1 <sup>st</sup> juvenile seen in flight.
26 August	Both juveniles seen in the air together, being fed by the male.
September	Moved away from the nest site but stayed in the valley.
27 September	Last sighting of a bird in the area.

### Comments

Many thanks must go to local residents who, although wary at first, were very understanding about having strangers hanging about the lanes for many hours. Special thanks to Karl Moody for his informative chat and interest.

In particular thanks to Andrew Goodwin, firstly for actually finding the nest site and then for also watching the site and providing information.

Also it is worth mentioning the other breeding birds present in the area with Tree Sparrow, Spotted Flycatcher, Yellowhammer, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel being recorded. Little Owls were in abundance and heard regularly and an immature Common Redstart and Raven were also seen. It just goes to show what can be seen in one area when it is watched regularly.

### Summary

What is known as fact is that a pair of Hobbys nested in the Oakhanger area and fledged two young in 2001. However, there have been many more records in the SECOS area prior to that.

The first modern record was of a bird at Watch Lane Flash on 17 June 1974. It was then only recorded around a dozen times until the late 1980s. It became an annual visitor from 1989. During the 1990s there were many records from sites throughout the SECOS area. Probable breeding is indicated by clusters of records, with adults carrying away prey items and juveniles seen in September. These occurred at Oakhanger in 1996 and 1998 and at Blakenhall in 1999 and 2000. There have also been clusters of records but with no juveniles seen, therefore indicating possible breeding at these sites and also Bagmere/Wall Hill/Swettenham in most years since 1995.

Finally I hope that this year's adults will return to the same area next year and with any luck the young birds will survive their first winter and summer in Africa and return in 2003 to set up territory nearby. I felt very privileged to have watched and studied these birds in great detail and hopefully have learnt a lot. Come next spring I hope to be watching the Hobby again displaying over South Cheshire.

I can't wait!

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Mark Stubbs

### **GREY PHALAROPE AT RAILWAY FLASH 13<sup>TH</sup> TO 16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2001**

While walking around one of the outlying flashes I located a phalarope swimming on the shallow second pool of Railway Farm Flash. Its forehead and lores were white. Forecrown white with pencil thin black lines on the sides. Rear crown, centre of nape and centre of rear neck were black. Broad black eyestripe extending on to ear coverts separated from black crown by white supercilium. Sides of neck, throat and breast white. Small wash of yellow-buff on upper breast and lower throat. Rest of underparts white except for rather prominent grey breast side patches. Mantle, scapulars and closed wings plain clean light grey. Bill just shorter than width of head, all black. A strong flier when hassled by Black-headed Gulls, showing prominent white wingbar contrasting with dark wings and grey back.

Red-necked Phalarope was considered but eliminated by bill length and shape, the overall size of the bird and the uniform back colour.

I ran back to Elton Hall Flash to get other local birders, and fortunately the bird stayed for four days, allowing many locals to see it.

Andrew Goodwin

*This is the second record for Sandbach Flashes with the first being a juvenile at Elton Hall Flash on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1997.*

## RED-RUMPED SWALLOW AT WATCH LANE FLASH ON 15<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2001

Arriving at Watch Lane Flash at 11.40 to do a couple of hours local patch birding I was confronted with 200+ hirundines feeding low over the water. I had just started to do a complete scan of the water, and was checking the front edge of a distant reedbed, when a Red-rumped Swallow appeared in my field of view.

After recovering from the initial shock, I watched the bird flying away over the water, it showed a large square buffy red rump patch, jet black long tail, blue back quite dark, and a narrow chestnut collar still visible in my binoculars at 150 yards. It glided to the left, banked and then glided right in front of the reedbed showing pale buffy underwing coverts and white underparts also washed buff. I lost the bird as it went up an inlet only partly visible from where I stood.

I wanted to double-check all the features so I started to check through all the hirundines again. I still had not found the Red-rumped Swallow after a good five minutes searching; it was only when I looked at the reedbed adjacent to the inlet that I re-found it. It was hunting with large numbers of House Martins and Barn Swallows. I looked again at the long black tail and undertail coverts sharply demarcated from the buffy belly. The wings were long and broad-based, blacker than the back. It lacked the dark throat gorget of Barn Swallow being buff like the rest of the underparts with a chestnut face.

Happy with getting a good description of the bird I went to nearby Elton Hall Flash. Luckily A. Firth was there and he returned with me at approximately 12.10 where, after a frantic 10 minute search, we found the Red-rumped Swallow in its favourite inlet. We were later joined by five other local birders. We learnt that the best way of getting good views was by setting up the telescopes and training them on a fishing platform along the bank of the inlet. The Red-rumped Swallow would then pass through our field of view every 30 seconds or so as it went up and down the inlet. Using the scope we could at last see the narrow grey/buff streaking on the breast and belly. Also the edges of the rump patch were paler than the centre, almost pinkish at long range.

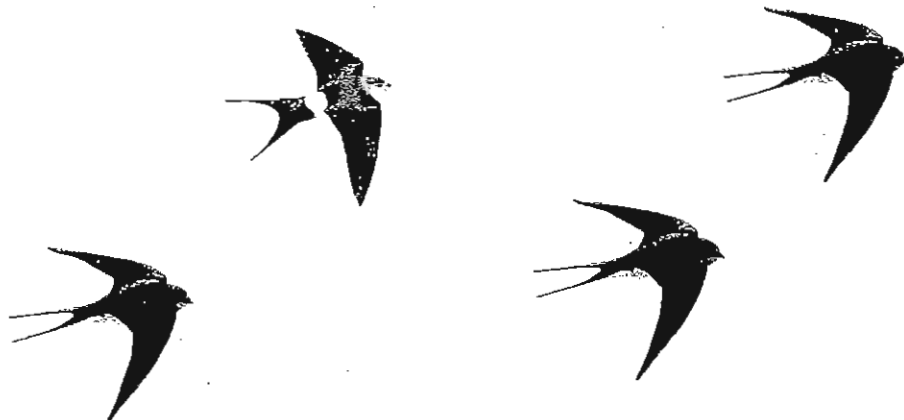
The weather improved rapidly at 13.20 and as we expected, the hirundines all rose up and were gone, taking the first Red-rumped Swallow for the SECOS recording area with them.

Andrew Goodwin

*This species is a national rarity and the record has been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee. As well as a first for the SECOS area it is only the fourth record for Cheshire and the first inland record.*

*Previous records are: -*

*3/5/80 Red Rocks; 28/9/86 Red Rocks; 7/5/88 Hilbre.*



## 2001 SECOS SWIFT SURVEY

Arriving late from their winter quarters, it is usually May before they are here in any great numbers, and they have mainly returned to southern Africa by the end of August. Whilst here they breed in inaccessible places and are very mobile. No wonder that the Swift *Apus apus* is a species that is not often surveyed.

However, in 1995 a survey was organised to try to determine the numbers of Swifts throughout Cheshire. Due to bad weather in June of that year the survey had to be completed in 1996. The results were duly published and gave a population in the SECOS area of 1479 pairs. The survey also formally recognised the existence of a colony in the west end of Crewe, which with a population of around 450 pairs, was amongst the largest in Britain. Because of this colony of Swifts the six streets in the area have been designated as a Site of Biological Importance, one of only two urban SBIs in Cheshire.

During the following years several members commented that the numbers of Swifts seemed to have declined and we decided to organise a follow-up survey covering the SECOS area. This was duly organised for 2001 using the same guidelines as the 1995/6 survey i.e.

- count screaming birds at colony sites
- only count in good weather (warm, little wind and no rain)
- only count after 9-00pm

This should enable the results of the two surveys to be directly comparable.

The survey was completed during the first three weeks of June as planned. This is considered to be the best time for such a survey since at this time one of each breeding pair should be out of sight sitting on eggs and no young would be free-flying. Each bird therefore should represent a pair. However, Swifts do not breed until two or three years old but some non-breeders return to their natal colony and may be in the screaming parties! This is now getting complicated and it is better to ignore these birds for comparison purposes!

18 intrepid members took part in the survey, walking the streets of towns and villages just as it was going dark, looking up at the eaves of houses and trying hard to make it obvious that they were not staring into bedrooms!

The results of the survey are given in Table 1.

It is immediately obvious that the numbers of Swifts have indeed gone down, and quite dramatically so, with an overall reduction of 38%. The supercolony in the west end of Crewe has had a massive reduction from 450 in 1995 to only 120 in 2001. More worrying is the fact that the reduction in numbers is spread across the whole area with virtually every colony showing some reduction. This means that the reduction is not due to local difficulties, such as building works restricting access to nesting sites under the eaves of houses, but some other unknown cause.

Colin Lythgoe





LOCALITY	STREET	MAX NO. OF BIRDS	MAX IN 1995/6	DIFFERENCE
Alsager	5 sites	22	36	-14
Basford	Larch Avenue	10	25	-15
Congleton	everywhere	212	248	-36
Crewe Central	Alton Street	80	50	+30
Crewe North East	3 sites	29	45	-16
Crewe North West	4 sites	55	97	-42
Crewe South West	9 sites	166	158	+8
Crewe West	West end	120	450	-330
Elworth	School Lane	15	18	-3
Elworth	Marsh Green Road	2	3	-1
Hasington	Cartwright Road	35	90	-55
Holmes Chapel	London Road	5	0	+5
Holmes Chapel	Macclesfield Road	0	12	-12
Middlewich	everywhere	130	142	-12
Sandbach	Town centre	20	22	-2
Scholar Green	Drenfell Road	0	6	-6
Wheelock Heath	Sandy Lane	7	31	-24
Willaston	Wistaston Road	0	16	-16
Wistaston	Church Lane	12	30	-18
<b>TOTAL IN 2001</b>		<b>920</b>		
<b>TOTAL IN 1995/6</b>		<b>1479</b>		

<b>PERCENTAGE REDUCTION</b>	<b>38%</b>
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2001 SECOS Swift Survey Table 1

## BIRDING THE BRERETON AREA

My suggestion for working this area is a rather long four-mile walk taking in all the best birding sites Brereton has to offer. This walk can be done at any time of the year, but spring and summer or a nice, frosty, mid-winter day are my favourite times, with an early start recommended.

Brereton Green is situated between Holmes Chapel and Arclid. Turn off the A50 into the village and park along the road close to the Bear's Head public house. Walk east for 50 yards, then turn left under the archway. Keep right after 200 yards and then, shortly after, a small stand of beautiful old beech trees on the right are worth checking for Nuthatch and other woodland species. After crossing the River Croco carry straight on. St. Oswald's Church is on your left, and a thorough search of this area may produce Spotted Flycatcher in the summer months. 200 yards past the cattle grid bear right and climb the stile near the cottage known as the North Lodge. Walk slowly along the bridleway listening for Corn Bunting singing. The peak times are from mid-May to early August, and in recent years the best area for this declining species has been the field on the left, either perched on the low hedge or on the wires crossing the field. You will have to listen carefully and be prepared to spend some time here or make repeated visits. If the fields on the right have been planted with cereal crops they may also sing on this side, along with Yellowhammer.

Continuing along the bridleway you pass the isolated 'Ley Cottage' and between here and the farm on the right, the scattered trees along the bridleway during the summer months often have a pair or two of Tree Sparrows.

You will soon reach a crossroads; cross the road and take the footpath on your right. As you climb the stile you will get a good view of Bagmere in front of you. This SSSI has great potential but is under watched. The footpath crosses the field although we prefer to follow the field edge to the right, this allows us to be closer to the marsh. Bagmere has the distinction of being the only regular site for Grasshopper Warbler in the SECOS area. They are difficult to see here because there is no access to the marsh. If you have good hearing you can try and locate them in the early morning or late evening from mid-May to mid-June. A pair seem to prefer the rough grazing meadow closest to the road, so if you hear one here you could try and locate it by using your telescope from the road.

You should also hear or see Whitethroats, Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings, especially if you are prepared to get as close as possible to the marsh edge. At the end of the field follow the footpath over two stiles and into the valley bottom. This area of wet woodland, rough grazing pasture and dyke offers good birding. Stay here awhile, in spring this area is alive with birds and may produce Cuckoo, Warblers (including some years another pair of Grasshopper Warblers) and Yellowhammer. Whitethroats are common. A thorough search of the same willow scrub may produce Willow Tit. Grey Partridge used to be in this area and may still persist. If you are here in the evening during the summer look out for Hobbys hunting over the marsh. Quail have been recorded here.

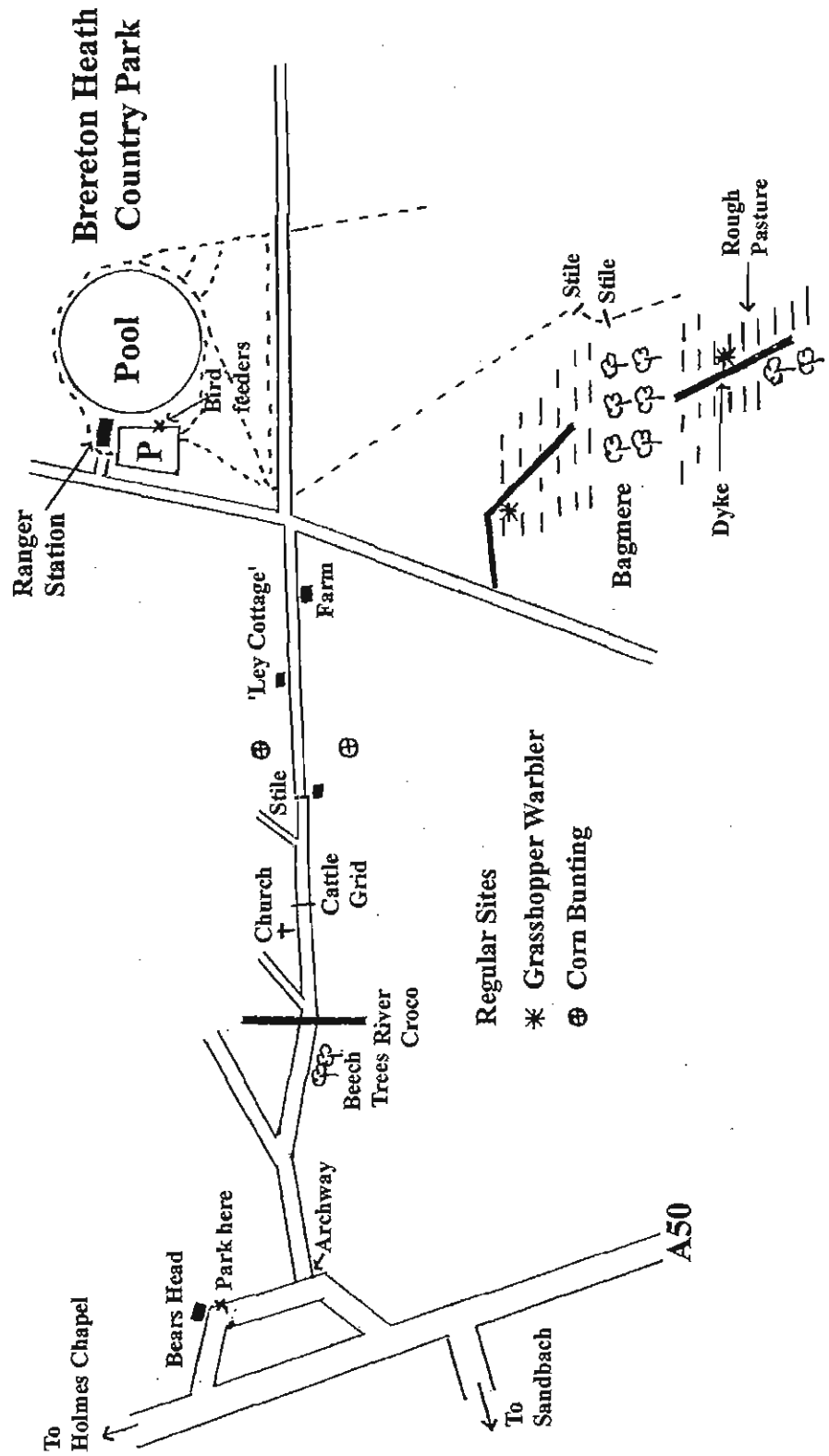
Retrace your steps back to the road. Cross over and enter the woodland. After 300 yards you will see a large pool on your left, follow the main path around the pool. In spring Garden Warblers, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs should be singing. The maze of paths through the birch woods on your right are heavily disturbed by dog walkers and seem to be best in the period January to April, especially if you can find a large mixed species feeding flock containing tits, Goldcrests, Treecreepers and, rarely, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. The lake has few species especially in summer when it is heavily disturbed. On the far side you will find the Brereton Heath Country Park Rangers' office, toilets and in summer an ice-cream van!

By the car park you will find a busy little bird feeding station. It may be an idea to bring a bag of nuts or mixed seed with you to top them up.

At the far end of the car park find the trail leading back to the crossroads (see map). Retrace your steps back to the car, by which time a drink and a bar meal in the Bear's Head might sound a good idea!

Andrew and Angela Goodwin

# BRERETON / BRERETON HEATH C.P. / BAGMERE



## A YEAR AT CREWE BUSINESS PARK

In 2001 I tried to see as many species of birds as possible at Crewe Business Park, having adopted this as my local patch whilst combining the birdwatching with walking my two dogs. Visits were usually made after work between 4-30 and 6-30 p.m. although afternoon visits at weekends were regular and longer!

**January** started off well with Buzzard, Tawny Owl, Bullfinch (regular), Siskin, Redpoll, Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel all sighted.

**February** saw a maximum of 137 Black-headed Gulls using the main pond and resting on the nearby office roofs! Pied Wagtail (9 together), Canada Goose (8), Common Gull and Grey Wagtail were noted. A pair of Mute Swans took up residence on the main pond. Three House Sparrows here on 25<sup>th</sup> were my first of the year.

**March** was a very busy month with a Kingfisher on 2<sup>nd</sup> which was most appreciated. Little Owl, Fieldfare, Redwing and an impressive finch roost using the laurel bushes by the main pond. It consisted of 108 Greenfinch, 28 Linnet and 1 Chaffinch. Two Meadow Pipits over whilst counting the roost were noteworthy. A Chiffchaff on 24<sup>th</sup> could have been an overwintering individual, although migrants had started to arrive nationally. 18 Stock Doves together and my first Collared Dove of the year on the 25<sup>th</sup>. A melanistic Pheasant in the field adjacent to Crewe Hall woods was unusual. Other highlights included Jay (4), Green Woodpecker (2), Mallard with young on the pond, and my fourth individual Buzzard sighting.

**April** and spring had finally arrived with a Willow Warbler on 4<sup>th</sup> and Blackcap on 10<sup>th</sup>. Flyovers included four Lapwing on 16<sup>th</sup>, Skylark and Sand Martin on 23<sup>rd</sup> and House Martin on 26<sup>th</sup> (which was also seen regularly throughout the summer.) A Sedge Warbler took up residence in a hedgerow from 26<sup>th</sup>. Raptors also took centre stage with Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk all displaying over the Business Park but probably breeding in nearby Crewe Hall estate; also a flyover female Peregrine. Garden Warbler on 28<sup>th</sup>, Swift, three together on 29<sup>th</sup> and a White Wagtail on 30<sup>th</sup>. My bird of the year so far was a cracking male Redstart seen briefly on 30<sup>th</sup>. A noteworthy record was a Cuckoo heard only on the 10<sup>th</sup>. This unfortunately is a sign of what is happening to this species throughout the area as the numbers continue to decline.

**May** was surprisingly quiet although the resident raptor species from Crewe Hall estate were very active over the park with two separate pairs of Buzzards identifiable, including a very pale phase individual. The Green Woodpeckers were often seen. A flyover Black-tailed Godwit on 13<sup>th</sup> could have been heading for Sandbach Flashes.

**June and July** as expected were not very productive although the commoner breeding species were very active. Kingfishers were seen by the main pond including a pair together on one date. News of the Green Woodpeckers breeding successfully nearby probably relates to the birds that I have been seeing. A pair of Canada Geese raised two young on the main pond.

**August** and a male Whinchat on 19<sup>th</sup> was the first seen in the SECOS area this year. I had my one and only Hobby sighting on 27<sup>th</sup>, with an amazing seven Buzzards up in the air together.

**September** and a Chiffchaff was still present mid-month. Six Snipe flew over on 22<sup>nd</sup>, which coincided with an influx of this species at Sandbach Flashes. A brief view of a Willow Tit on 30<sup>th</sup> was a surprise and a welcome addition to the year list.

**October** saw the Willow Tit re-identified as a Marsh Tit! This was even better as this species is extremely scarce in the SECOS area and has not been recorded for several years. It was the call that finally nailed it, as this bird seemed to show characteristics of both species, which can overlap.

**November** birdwatching visits unfortunately limited to weekend visits due to dark nights. The Marsh Tit was still present on 10<sup>th</sup>. Mute Swan and Heron were back on the pond, a Bullfinch pair was noted and a Little Owl was seen at dusk. Black-headed Gulls started to build up again on the pond with 87 on 15<sup>th</sup>, also six Moorhen regular here. A Tawny Owl (male) calling in the hedgerow just after dusk on 17<sup>th</sup> was only the second record of the year. They probably breed nearby in Quakers Coppice or Crewe Hall. Five Bullfinch together on 18<sup>th</sup> were similar to the early year records.

**December** The Marsh Tit was present to the year end, usually around the willow screen feeding station. Two Common Gulls were regular at the main pond with the Black-headed Gulls (96 max on 26<sup>th</sup>). Also several Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were joining them on the office roofs again. Goldcrests were often seen and the Long-tailed Tit flock containing over 20 birds was very mobile, with the odd Treecreeper and other tit species amongst them. Redpoll (4), Siskin (10) and another flyover Peregrine (the second record of the year) were sighted. Highlights of the month were 9 Golden Plover which flew over on the 29<sup>th</sup>, with Green Woodpecker seen extremely well on the same day and a flyover Raven on the 30<sup>th</sup> which headed towards Crewe Town Centre – my only record of this species all year!

#### Species Recorded Using Crewe Business Park

Grey Heron	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Goldcrest
Mute Swan	Skylark	Long-tailed Tit
Canada Goose	Sand Martin	Marsh Tit
Mallard	Swallow	Coal Tit
Buzzard	House Martin	Blue Tit
Sparrowhawk	Meadow Pipit	Great Tit
Kestrel	Pied Wagtail	Nuthatch
Pheasant	White Wagtail	Treecreeper
Moorhen	Grey Wagtail	Jay
Coot	Wren	Magpie
Black-headed Gull	Dunnock	Jackdaw
Common Gull	Robin	Rook
Herring Gull	Redstart	Carrion Crow
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Whinchat	Starling
Great Black-backed Gull	Blackbird	House Sparrow
Stock Dove	Fieldfare	Chaffinch
Woodpigeon	Song Thrush	Greenfinch
Collared Dove	Redwing	Goldfinch
Cuckoo	Mistle Thrush	Siskin
Tawny Owl	Sedge Warbler	Linnets
Little Owl	Whitethroat	Redpoll
Swift	Garden Warbler	Bullfinch
Kingfisher	Blackcap	<b>Total 71</b>
Green Woodpecker	Chiffchaff	
	Willow Warbler	

#### Other Species Seen Flying Over

Cormorant	Black-tailed Godwit	Golden Plover
Hobby	Snipe	Raven
Peregrine		

#### Species Seen By Other Observers

Red Kite (over)	Waxwing
Goshawk	Spotted Flycatcher

#### Highlights of the year

No doubt the bird of the year for me at this site was the Marsh Tit, followed by the spring male Redstart and the Whinchat.

Here's hoping for something special in the next twelve months!

Noel Stubbs

## CREWE BUSINESS PARK, COMMON BIRD CENSUS 2001

Crewe Business Park is an area of business developments that is sympathetically managed to maximise the landscape and wildlife potential of the area.

A census of breeding birds was carried out during 2001. A total of six visits were made, all birds recorded and results analysed in accordance with the rules for the Common Bird Census of the British Trust for Ornithology.

The results are listed below: -

SPECIES	No.
Canada Goose	1
Mallard	3
Sparrowhawk	#
Kestrel	#
Moorhen	7
Stock Dove	2
Woodpigeon	17
Collared Dove	#
Feral Pigeon	1
Swift	#
Kingfisher	#
Green Woodpecker	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1
Swallow	#
Pied Wagtail	#
Wren	15
Duncock	13
Robin	21
Blackbird	31
Song Thrush	3
Mistle Thrush	1

Sedge Warbler	#
Whitethroat	2
Garden Warbler	#
Blackcap	9
Chiffchaff	2
Willow Warbler	2
Spotted Flycatcher	#
Long-tailed Tit	3
Coal Tit	#
Blue Tit	21
Great Tit	9
Treecreeper	1
Jay	#
Magpie	9
Jackdaw	#
Crow	1
Starling	1
House Sparrow	#
Chaffinch	6
Greenfinch	10
Goldfinch	1
Bullfinch	3

### Notes:

1. No. is the number of occupied territories.
2. # signifies recorded but not enough records to give a territory.
3. Most territories along the brook include habitat on both sides.

### Comments:

- > A pair of Stock Doves used a nest box for the first time (from the Quakers Coppice colony?).
- > There were many sightings of Green Woodpecker and a pair must have bred nearby.
- > Blackbird territories were up from 21 in 2000 to 31 in 2001 but I am not sure why.
- > Warblers generally did better with increases in territory numbers for Whitethroat from # to 2; Blackcap from 5 to 9 and Chiffchaff from 1 to 2.
- > Blue Tit pairs up from 15 to 21 and Great Tit pairs up from 6 to 9 were responding to the provision of additional nest boxes. Incidentally the pressure on hole nesters to find a suitable site was shown by the pair of Great Tits that used a bat box! They squeezed through a 12mm slot many hundreds of times whilst raising 7 young.
- > Chaffinch numbers were up from 2 to 6.
- > Greenfinch numbers were up from 7 to 10, mainly clustered around the main pond, which holds a winter roost of over a hundred Greenfinches.

Colin Lythgoe

## EARLY AND LATE DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS

*The table has been arranged in date order for the '10 year average' arrival dates so that you know what order to expect the visitors in.*

Species	ARRIVALS			DEPARTURES		
	Date in 2001	10 year average	Earliest Ever	Date in 2001	10 year average	Latest ever
Chiffchaff	14-Mar	13-Mar	8-Mar 89	11-Oct	9-Oct	15-Oct 87
Little Ringed Plover	13-Mar	18-Mar	5-Mar 00	30-Sep	4-Sep	16-Oct 85
Sand Martin	17-Mar	21-Mar	12-Mar 89	6-Oct	18-Sep	24-Nov 72
Swallow	28-Mar	26-Mar	19-Mar 00	25-Nov	19-Oct	30-Nov 74
Willow Warbler	1-Apr	3-Apr	29-Mar 81	1-Sep	12-Sep	26-Sep 98
Blackcap	3-Apr	5-Apr	18-Mar 97	8-Sep	12-Sep	30-Sep 00
House Martin	6-Apr	7-Apr	25-Mar 95	12-Oct	13-Oct	5-Nov 77
Yellow Wagtail	14-Apr	12-Apr	29-Mar 81	3-Sep	15-Sep	2-Oct 87
Reed Warbler	25-Apr	17-Apr	12-Apr 97	8-Sep	18-Sep	4-Oct 98
Whitethroat	28-Apr	19-Apr	15-Apr 93	22-Aug	11-Sep	21-Sep 93
Cuckoo	1-May	20-Apr	5-Apr 82	nr	22-Aug	1-Oct 86
Sedge Warbler	25-Apr	23-Apr	16-Apr 80	20-Aug	29-Aug	1-Oct 78
Swift	21-Apr	24-Apr	16-Apr 96	2-Sep	7-Sep	3-Nov 78
Lesser Whitethroat	19-Apr	27-Apr	21-Apr 88	1-Sep	9-Sep	1-Oct 98
Garden Warbler	28-Apr	28-Apr	20-Apr 96	nr	3-Aug	9-Sep 83
Hobby	15-May	1-May	27-Mar 94	27-Sep	20-Sep	8-Oct 00
Grasshopper Warbler	17-May	7-May	25-Apr 93	nr	nr	30-Aug ??

I have selected 17 species in total, these being summer visitors that usually nest in the SECOS area. I have deliberately not chosen the spring and autumn passage migrants, since these times quite often overlap, and it is not possible to separate the end of spring passage from the start of autumn passage. Also some passage migrants are only seen on one passage but not both.

It should be noted that there is some uncertainty over the dates for Blackcap and Chiffchaff. Both of these species over-winter regularly and have been recorded in every month of the year. It is currently accepted that the wintering population is made up of birds who move here from the continent, whilst our summering birds migrate south. Therefore these two species do fit my criteria for inclusion.

However, the problems of assessing records are well illustrated by the following:-

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March a singing male Blackcap appeared for the first time at King George's playing field Crewe, and stayed for several days – summer visitor?

On 28<sup>th</sup> March a record of two males and one female Blackcap, but they had been feeding in the observer's garden since mid-February – winter visitor?

The first record that I have accepted is a singing male on 3<sup>rd</sup> April in Crewe Business Park since there were several more records immediately after.

For Chiffchaff the first record was on 14<sup>th</sup> March and then also at four other sites in the next five days and so presumably all summer visitors.

No dates were extended this year, but a near miss was the very late Swallow on 24<sup>th</sup> November, which just failed to beat the even later bird on the 30<sup>th</sup> November in 1974.