



SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1964

2002 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes



Great White Egret

Paul Hill

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 2002 bird report for the SECOS area. Once again there have been a few improvements including the most obvious one of a colour image on the front cover. Many thanks to Paul Hill for allowing the use of his image of the Great White Egret at the flashes in January.

The main body of the report is the Systematic List which again is slightly more detailed than last year. There are the usual articles including the SECOS area map and gazetteer, in which some sites have been updated and new ones added, and the list of Early and Late Dates for migrants in 2002.

This year's site guide covers both Astbury Mere and Bent Farm Sand Quarry and includes details of an interesting circular walk between the two sites. Thanks once again to Andrew and Angela Goodwin for the latest in this series of site guides. There is a report on ten years of ringing of Mute Swans at Winterley Pool by David Cookson and a short note on the second proved breeding of Hobbys in the area by Mark Stubbs. At Crewe Business Park a common bird census was carried out for the third year and I have included the results of this.

Quite a few members were involved in the two main surveys carried out in 2002. One was a SECOS organised local survey for Song Thrush and Blackbird and the other a national survey of Mute Swans. Results of both of these surveys are included.

The best bird of the year was the Great White Egret that graced the flashes from 4th to 6th January, the first record for the SECOS area. Other birds seen in the area in the first week of January included Little Egret, Whooper Swan, Smew, Mediterranean Gull, Iceland Gull and Glaucous Gull, giving a good start to the new year's list for the lucky observers. The other new species for the flashes was Bearded Tit, a heard only record on 19th October, two days after only the second ever Lesser Yellowlegs. Other good species included a very impressive build up of Black-tailed Godwits in the summer with an incredible maximum of 365 in May; Spoonbills in May; Hobbys bred successfully and Peregrines undoubtedly would if they could find a suitable nest site. In total 163 species were recorded in the area including 25 wader species, a very creditable total for an inland site.

The Tree Sparrow colony at Elton Hall Flash is increasing with five pairs using nest boxes, flocks of up to 70 in the area and up to 25 regular on the feeders. Thanks to John Wakefield and Dave Bromont for providing food. Thanks also to H J Lea Oakes at Wheelock Mills for providing free food and to Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society for financial support. Finally a mention of the SECOS garden bird survey which now has over 30 members. It provides a useful and interesting activity for the members as well as an invaluable source of records for the bird report. Thanks to all members who are involved and to Trevor Clowes for organising the survey.

Many thanks to all contributors, without whose records there would not be a report. Special thanks to Joan and Keith Tilbrook for their help in typing, collating and checking this report.

Colin Lythgoe
SECOS Recorder

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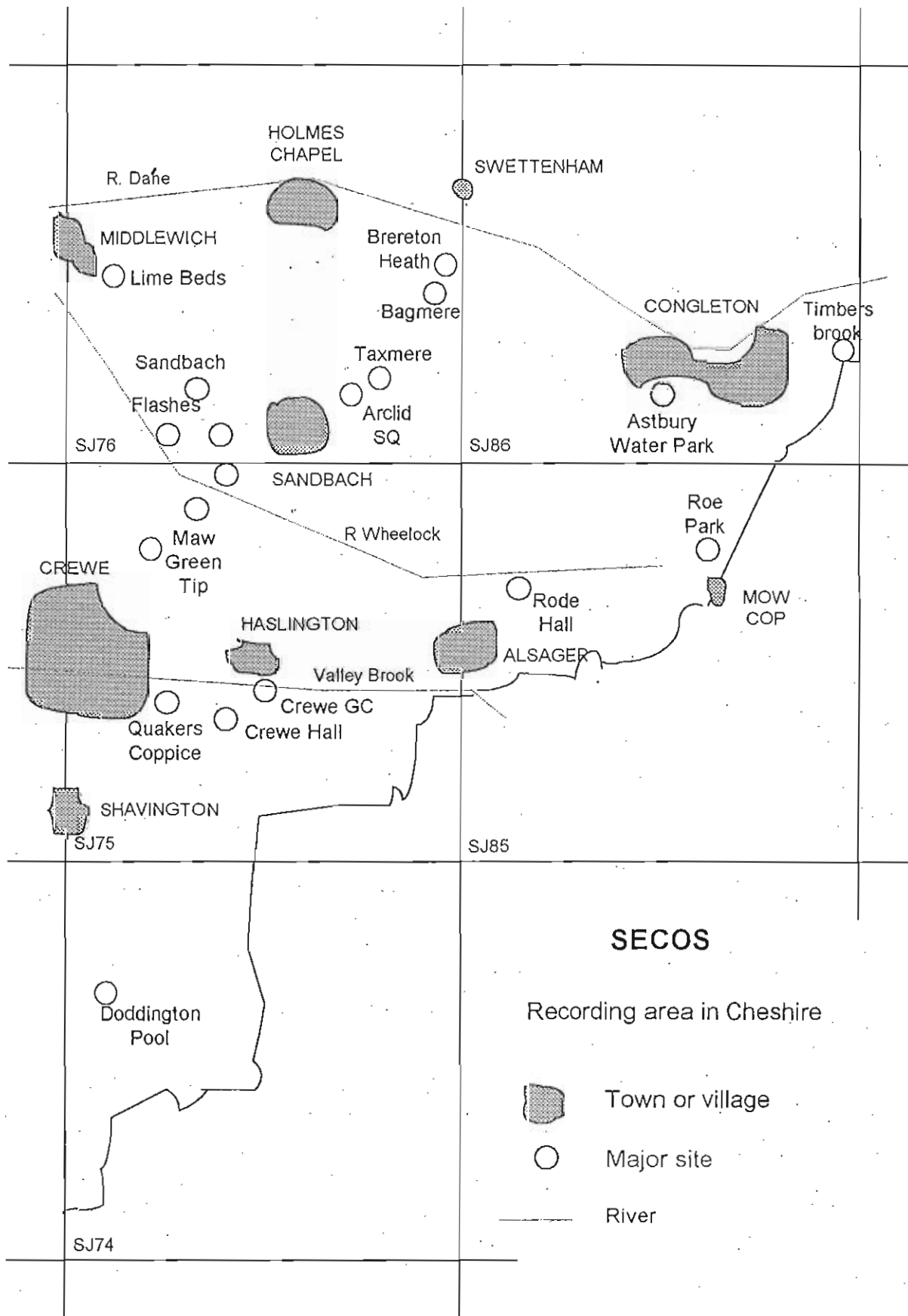
Abbreviations Used

CF	Crabmill Flash	ad	adult
CP	Canal Pools	m	male
EHF	Elton Hall Flash	f	female
FF	Foden's Flash	imm	immature
FFF	Fields Farm Flash	juv	juvenile
GF	Grobby Flash	c	approximately
OF	Oak Tree Flash	max	maximum
PF	Plex Flash	BBRC	British Birds Rarities Committee
PHF	Pump House Flash	BP	Business Park
RF	Railway Flash	CP	Country Park
SF	Sandbach Flashes	SQ	Sand Quarry
TLF	Tetton Lane Flash		
WF	Warmingham Flash		
WLF	Watch Lane Flash		

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.



SECOS

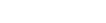
Recording area in Cheshire



Town or village



Major site



River

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:-

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

Arclid Sand Quarry SJ778623 ³

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings.

Astbury Mere SJ849624 ⁴

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

Bagmere SJ796643 ³

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

Bent Farm Sand Quarry SJ830621 ³

A large working sand quarry owned by WBB Minerals.

Brereton Heath CP SJ798651 ⁴

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

Crewe Business Park SJ720550 ⁴

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

Crewe Golf Course SJ744546 ³

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

Crewe Hall SJ735544 ¹

A very extensive area of mixed woodland and farmland.

Doddington Pool SJ714464 ²

Includes two large lakes, woodland, the Hall and grounds.

Lawton Woods SJ825559 ³

Large area of mixed woodland including a lake.

Middlewich Lime Beds SJ711653 ¹

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

Mow Cop from SJ856573 to SJ873593 ³

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

Quakers Coppice SJ724546 ⁴

A wood of six hectares on the south side of Crewe owned by Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council.

Rode Pool SJ815575 ²

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

Roe Park SJ858583³

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

Sandbach Flashes³

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.

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.

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.

The Moat SJ730613 (previously known as Foden's Flash)

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

Warmingham Flash SJ719619

Heavily disturbed by fishermen.

Watch Lane Flash SJ727606

Heavily disturbed by fishermen but with two small reed beds.

Stowford SJ745530³

An area of wet meadows between the A500 and the railway line.

Swettenham SJ801675³

Farmland and mixed woodland by the River Dane.

Taxmere SJ780625¹

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

Timbersbrook/The Cloud SJ896627 to SJ900635³

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

Westlow Mere, Congleton SJ855644³

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 2002

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Fairly common resident.

Records from 5 sites in the first winter period. Generally only 1s or 2s but 7 at Doddington in Feb.

Breeding success was average with 3 pairs and 5 juvs seen at Doddington, a pair with 2 juvs at Westlow Mere and at the flashes juvs were seen on GF, RF and PHF.

Doddington held a post-breeding total of 23 in Sept and 20 in Oct but down to 2 in Nov.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Common resident.

Flocks in the first winter period were at WLF (21), WF (11), Arclid SQ (12), Doddington (20) plus small numbers (from 1 to 8) at 7 other sites.

Overall the breeding success was about average, although 4 pairs at Arclid SQ failed to produce any juvs. At the flashes pairs with juvs were seen at GF and WF (3 pairs). Other sites with proved success were Astbury (3 pairs + 1 juv), Brereton Heath CP (1 pair + 1 juv), Doddington (3 pairs + 1 juv + 4 juvs), Rode Pool (3 pairs + 1 juv), Winterley Pool (2 pairs + 1 juv + 2 juvs) and Wybunbury (1 pair + 1 juv). Sites with pairs but no juvs seen included CF, FF, OF, Lawton Hall and Westlow Mere.

The usual post-breeding flock at Doddington peaked at a high count of 51 in Sept with 23 at Arclid SQ in Aug. The over-wintering flock at WLF had a max of 17 in Nov.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Common winter visitor. Rare in summer.

PHF has always been the best site in the area for this species, and this year birds were recorded in every month except for Jun, with a max of 32 in Feb and 22 in Oct. However, this is now being eclipsed by Doddington where last year there were 48 in Nov, and this year again there was a surge in numbers in Oct and Nov with 57 in late Oct and 64 in early Nov, but down to a regular 15 to 20 by late Nov. Also in single figure numbers from 9 other sites.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Rare visitor.

There were 5 records this year of an increasingly common species, although all 6 birds only made brief appearances!

5 th Jan	Arclid SQ	1 seen at dusk
6 th May	Elton Hall Flash	2 over at 18.35 then flew off south-west
9 th July	" " "	1 briefly on the saltpan in the evening
2 nd Aug	" " "	1 present from 12.30 to 12.35
16 th Sept	" " "	1 present for 10 minutes in the afternoon

Great White Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Vagrant.

An adult was first located around 10.00 on 4th Jan at EHF. It stayed in the area until 6th Jan and although always very flighty it was seen by many birders. The bird made a brief return visit on 13th Feb when it flew over from MGT, over PHF and landed on EHF for 5 minutes.

This record has been accepted by the BBRC, and is the first for the SECOS area and only the second for Cheshire (first in Aug 1995 at Inner Marsh Farm). See separate article for details.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Common resident.

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

At the Rode Pool heronry there were 40 nests this year in Apr plus 2 very late nests in Jul (not counted in 2001 due to foot and mouth restrictions, and 36 in 2000).

Records were received from a heronry at Engine Wood, Swettenham, with 6 nests reported this year and 15 in 2001. The existence of this heronry was not known previously.

Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)

Very rare visitor.

2 were seen under the railway embankment at 15.00 on 17th May. They fed well, slept for 10 minutes and then were flushed off by a passing train at 16.30. The 6th record for the flashes with the 5th being 2 at EHF on 29/4/00.

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	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Winterley Pl	137	113	99	91	70	65	66	62	70	82	99	120
Doddington	15	25	12	21	54	56	67	64	21	7	4	8

During the summer of 2002 a national survey of Mute Swans in Great Britain was carried out. Several SECOS members took part and in total we found 9 breeding sites with 46 young and 6 sites with non-breeding or failed pairs.

BREEDING PAIRS		NON-BREEDING OR FAILED PAIRS
LOCATION	JUVENILES	
Queen's Park, Crewe	8	Wybunbury Sand Quarry
Doddington Pool	2	Alsager Mere
Railway Flash, Elworth	4	Sandbach Lake
Big Pool, Stowford	6	Brereton Heath CP
Winterley Pool	6	Lawton Hall
Trent & Mersey Canal, Wheelock	5	Astbury Mere
Trent & Mersey Canal, Hassall Green	6	
Trent & Mersey Canal, Thurlwood	4	
Westlow Mere, Congleton	5	

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

Rare winter visitor.

An even worse year than 2001 for yellow-billed swans with only 1 record of a single seen flying low northwards over MGT, then RF, then PHF on 6th Jan.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.

Plenty of over-flying winter skeins this year with 31 over EHF on 1st Jan, 60 over Arclid SQ on 21st Jan, 80 over EHF on 13th Feb.

Even more records in the second winter period with 71 over EHF on 6th Oct, 120 over EHF on 30th Oct, 90 over EHF on 31st Oct, 100 over Arclid SQ on 22nd Nov, 80 over EHF on 24th Nov and 100 over Weston on 17th Dec. Also 40 at RF on 17th Nov and 45 at MGT on 22nd Dec.

Several feral birds with Canada Goose flocks.

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Rare winter visitor or feral.

11 over Sandbach on 27th Mar and 20 over EHF on 7th Dec were possibly wild birds. Several feral birds with Canada Goose flocks.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Common resident.

Max numbers in the first winter period were SF (419), Arclid SQ (202), Winterley Pool (120), Doddington (100).

Bred at many sites with, for example, 19 juvs at Rode Pool, 19 juvs at Doddington, 19 juvs at SF and 14 at Arclid SQ.

The main site for post-breeding flocks is Arclid SQ where numbers built up in Aug to a max of 601. Numbers reduced to the usual 50 to 100 before Oct.

Big flocks in the second winter period were recorded at Doddington (574) and EHF (412) but the total population is not known due to the mobility of most of the flocks around all suitable waters and feeding sites.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

Rare visitor or feral.

11 records of 1 or 2 from SF, 1 at Arclid SQ and 1 at Doddington throughout the year are all feral birds/escapes.

Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

Slightly lower numbers than in recent years at SF with a max of 26 in Mar (43 in 2001) and 24 in Dec (32 in 2001). This was the only proved breeding site with broods of 9 and 8 at EHF and 7 at RF. Pairs also at Doddington and Bent Farm SQ in spring but no juvs seen.

Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*)

Scarce visitor.

In the Queen's Park, Crewe, a male was noted for most of the year and in Jun a fully-fledged juv appeared, whether bred there or flown in was not clear. Also noted at several other sites with a male at WLF in Apr, a male at Crewe BP in Jun, possibly the same bird at Crewe GC in Jun, a female at RF in Jul, a male at EHF in Aug and a male + female at EHF/PHF in Dec. During Apr a male roosted regularly in a tree in Quakers Coppice.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Peak numbers at SF in the first winter period were 431 in Feb. Generally less than 10 at the other sites, i.e. Arclid SQ, Astbury Mere and Doddington. However, at Doddington there were 205 birds in late Jan, which is very similar to 2001 when less than 10 except for 208 in early Feb!

Once again around 4 birds summered at EHF/PHF but no breeding activity was noted.

Numbers started to build up from 24th Aug when 16 birds flew over EHF, and the peak count in the second winter period was 552 in Dec.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	365	431	377	17	3	4	3	18	127	228	497	552

Also 27 at Rode Pool in Oct but not regular here.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Wintering birds at SF with 1 or 2 in Jan and Feb. Then some evidence of passage in Apr with a pair at EHF, 2 at Doddington and 2 at Rode Pool.

Recorded for a few days in all months from 27th Jul to the year end but not present continuously. Usually 1 or 2 but there were 10 at EHF on 19th Nov, a record count for the flashes.

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.

At EHF/PHF a max of 329 in Jan but on 27th Jan a count of all flashes gave a total of 441.

A few birds summered at EHF but there was no evidence of breeding activity. In the second winter period numbers peaked at 509 at EHF/PHF and birds were also regular at Doddington (25) and Rode Pool (18).

EHF/PHF	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Teal	329	422	288	101	4	21	33	356	382	376	509	300
Mallard	236	60	14	30	207	185	134	380	812	615	245	135

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Common resident. Abundant in winter.

Max counts in the first winter period were EHF/PHF (236), Arclid SQ (420), Queen's Park, Crewe (160).

Breeds commonly on most waters throughout the area and post-breeding flocks in late summer were at Arclid SQ (214), Doddington (175) and at EHF where around 800 arrived at the end of Aug.

Max counts in the second winter period of EHF/PHF (245), Arclid SQ (310), Rode Pool (117), Winterley Pool (98).

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Only recorded at SF in the first winter period where present from the start of the year through to 25th Mar with a max of 15.

The first bird in autumn was a female at RF on 28th Aug, then 3 singles in Sept. Some evidence of passage with singles also at Arclid SQ in Sept and Doddington in Oct. Present at EHF/PHF from 12th Nov to the year end with a max of 24.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)

Scarce summer visitor.

A much better year than 2001 for this elusive duck with a pair at EHF on 19th Jun, a female at EHF in Jul, 2 different females at RF and EHF in Aug and 2 females at EHF in Sept, with the last date for the year being 14th Sept.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

Uncommon winter visitor, scarce in summer.

Recorded in all months except for May at SF, the latest first winter period record being 6 at EHF on 14th Apr. 2 appeared briefly in mid-Jun and the first returning bird was 1 at EHF on 21 Jul.

Occasional winter records from Doddington (24), Arclid SQ (6) and Rode Pool (4).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	10	10	12	8	0	2	1	16	38	30	31	27

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

Fairly common winter visitor.

Numbers continue to decrease generally with only 3 records of 1 or 2 at SF in mid-Jan, although 18 were at CF on 8th Feb. Then 1, 2 or 3 at EHF in Nov and Dec and 7 at WLF in Nov.

Numbers also down at other sites with Winterley Pool 32 (54 in 2001), Astbury Mere 17 (21 in 2001) and Doddington 34 (31 in 2001 but 73 in 2000).

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Astbury Mere	24	11	32	0	2	0	1	5	14	18	28	58
Doddington	37	84	89	114	49	34	35	31	78	53	63	46
Winterley P.	42	31	11	4	5	0	1	2	6	nc	14	17

After Mallard this is easily the most widely spread duck. As well as those tabled above, also recorded at all of the flashes at SF, Astbury Mere (58), Rode Pool (20), Bent Farm SQ (23), Westlow Mere (5) and Arclid SQ (7).

Pairs bred at GF (7 juvs), RF (6 juvs and 4 juvs) and Doddington but only one brood of 8 where there were four broods last year.

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

Very rare visitor and passage migrant.

A female at Arclid SQ on 1st Nov was the first record there since 1988.

The opportunity has been taken to correct an error in 'The Birds of Sandbach Flashes 1935 to 1999' (Andrew Goodwin & Colin Lythgoe):

The entry on page 42 under this species that reads "14 records of 28 birds" should actually be "14 records of 38 birds".

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Present continuously throughout the winter months at Doddington with 10 in Jan, 17 in Feb, 6 in Mar then 1 in Oct, 7 in Nov and 7 in Dec.

Also at Astbury Mere with 1 in Jan and 1 in Oct, Rode Pool 1 in Nov, Arclid SQ 2 in Feb and at WLF with 3 on 20th Oct and 1 on 21st Oct being the only records.

Smew (*Mergellus albellus*)

Very rare winter visitor.

A pair were at Arclid SQ in the early morning of 6th Jan after a foggy night at the end of a week of freezing weather. They flew out westward at 09.45 and were not seen again. Only the second record here since recording began in 1980.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

Very rare visitor.

An unusual record of a female at Astbury Mere on 31st May.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

An intriguing series of records from the River Dane in Congleton Park where a pair were seen on most days in Feb and an adult was recorded in May. Then on 8th July a juv was seen on the river. Had it bred there or floated downriver?

First winter period records from Rode Pool where 11 in Jan, and SF with 1 in Jan. In the second winter period records from EHF with a juv from 3rd to 11th Aug, 2 female/juv over EHF on 3rd Sept, a female at Doddington in Nov, a male at PHF on 30th Nov, and finally 10 at Lawton Hall pool during Dec.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Uncommon resident.

The only proved breeding was at GF where 4 male and 3 female were present in Apr and 3 juvs were seen in Jun. Doddington Pool also held 4 male and 2 female in May but no juvs were seen. 11 were here in Nov.

Recorded in numbers of up to 5 from PHF, EHF, RF and WLF throughout the year and Astbury Mere, Rode Pool, Winterley Pool and Wybunbury in winter.

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

Very rare visitor.

Recorded for the third consecutive year, although only one record this year with one seen over the observer's house in Weston on 2nd June.

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

Rare passage migrant.

Four records in Aug but probably all refer to the same bird, a female/juv seen at EHF on the 6th, 12th, 17th and 19th Aug.

The 10th record for the flashes.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded from 24 sites, plus most of the flashes at SF, although no juvs were seen anywhere. Also recorded from 13 out of 29 gardens in the SECOS garden bird survey.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Uncommon resident.

A bewildering abundance of records which can probably be summarised into around 34 breeding pairs with breeding proved at Arclid Hollow, Doddington, Swettenham and Taxmere.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Rare migrant.

Three records on spring passage and one on autumn passage. The first was 1 that flew through EHF on 26th Mar. Then two records from Doddington where 1 was seen briefly on 1st Apr and another 1 on 10th Apr was watched for an hour. It caught a fish at the fourth attempt and flew off with it towards Wrinehill.

On return passage 1 flew through EHF on 5th Aug.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common resident.

Not as common as Sparrowhawk but still recorded from 20 sites plus most of the flashes at SF in all months of the year.

Juvs were seen at Arclid SQ and MGT.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Scarce migrant and winter visitor.

A female was present in the flashes area from 18th Oct to 15th Nov being seen at MGT/EHF and WLF.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first records of the spring were 1 at Oakhanger on 2nd May followed by 2 more over EHF, seen hawking insects on 3rd May. During the summer there were records from 16 widespread sites indicating how common this lovely raptor is becoming. Once again following much hard work a nest

site was discovered in the Hassall area. When found there was a pair with 3 juvs that had just fledged but were still using the nest. Considering the records received there is a strong possibility of another pair in the Bent Farm SQ area, and the possibility of yet another pair in the Checkley area.

The last birds were 2 juvs that arrived at Arclid SQ on 28th Sept and then gave the observer magnificent close-up displays whilst catching insects (craneflies, butterflies and dragonflies) until 1st Oct when they moved off south.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Scarce resident and winter visitor.

A pair is still resident in the RF area, using the electricity pylon as a base and hunting there and also over PHF, EHF and MGT. A juv was seen here in late Aug, but was considered to be a dispersing bird from another site since locally bred juvs would usually be seen from late Jun.

Another pair took up residence on the boiler chimney at Leighton Hospital in May. Although prey items were taken up there and food passes between the pair were noted, it was not considered to be a serious nesting attempt.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

Rare except where locally released.

Scattered records from 12 sites, five of which are known release sites for shooting syndicates.

A breeding pair was noted at Middlewich where a pair with 3 juvs were seen in May. Also recorded at EHF feeding under the feeders.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

Scarce resident.

The only probably wild pair recorded was at Bradwall in Jun when a pair was seen with juvs. Also seen at Bridgemere, where released for shooting.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Scarce resident except where locally released.

Very common where released for shooting e.g. Rode Pool (2000 birds), Doddington (2000 birds), Bridgemere (1000 birds) with 1s and 2s seen elsewhere.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

In the first winter period there were records from FF and Taxmere (2). In the second winter period from EHF (1), WLF (4), FF (1) and Taxmere (2+) with the first bird being heard on 21st Sept.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common resident.

The co-ordinated count of all flashes at SF on 27th Jan gave a total of 83 spread over 11 flashes (62 at 8 flashes in 2001). Very widespread with small numbers on most waters, both large and small.

Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Common resident and variable winter visitor.

The co-ordinated count of all flashes at SF on 27th Jan gave a total of 234 spread over 10 flashes (306 over 7 in 2001).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	600	262	89	93	120	246	772	817	650	440	121	158
Winterley P	56	n.c.	15	12	11	23	27	31	37	36	36	37

Other high counts were at Astbury (82), Rode Pool (22) and Westlow Mere (20).

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Scarce winter visitor and scarce summer visitor.

Arrivals as usual in mid-Feb with 1 at Arclid SQ on 5th, 1 at WLF on 10th and 1 at Doddington on 15th. Up to 7 seen regularly on spring passage at various flashes at SF.

Breeding records from Arclid SQ where one pair bred but failed, and another pair probably bred, and Doddington where a pair bred with a nest on the island of the main pool, but this also failed. A pair was seen displaying at EHF in late Apr but no breeding attempt noted, and a pair were present at Bent Farm SQ.

The last birds were at Arclid SQ on 5th Aug and EHF on 7th Aug.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/autumn migrant.

The first bird was 1 at EHF on 17th Mar. Then present virtually daily at EHF on spring passage with a max of 10 in Apr. Up to 5 present here in the breeding season but no juvs seen. On return passage the peak period was mid-Jul when up to 18 were present daily.

At other sites a pair bred but failed at Arclid SQ but another pair bred successfully at Arclid New Quarry. At Doddington a pair was present on the small island in the new pool in May and Jun with 4 juvs seen in Jul. A pair was present at Bent Farm SQ but no breeding noted.

The last bird was 1 at EHF on 16th Sept.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

Only recorded from EHF with the first bird there on 20th Mar and then three other days in Mar. Three records in Apr with 5 on 21st. Then the major passage period from mid-May to mid-Jun with a max count of 13.

Much lighter return passage as usual with only 7 records in Aug, (max 4) and the last bird being seen at EHF on 9th Sept.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Records in the first winter period up to 24th Feb at EHF with usually less than 10, but 104 on 22nd Jan and 39 on 29th Jan.

A similar pattern in the second winter period at EHF with generally less than 5 birds seen on around ten days each month from 20th Aug to the year end, but with occasional high numbers, e.g. 18 on 2nd Oct and 60 on 25th Nov.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	1150	197	27	17	6	110	300	322	622	650	1517	1250

Other max flock sizes in Feb were Arclid SQ (350), Doddington (350) and Stowford (150).

Breeding was noted at EHF (probably 3 pairs), Oakhanger (1 pair: 5 last year but the wet meadow has been ploughed), Stowford (2 pairs?), Weston (8 pairs) and Wheelock (7 pairs on a BTO breeding survey).

Apart from the flock on the saltpan in autumn there were no other large flocks, the largest being 105 at Doddington in Jul.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

Rare visitor.

Again only one record this year, a single seen briefly at EHF on 14th Sept.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

Scarce passage migrant.

One bird on spring passage at EHF present from 16th to 18th May.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Only two birds this year but both relatively long-stayers. One from 25th to 31st Aug on return passage, and the other from 22nd Nov to 4th Dec either a very late migrant or a winter visitor.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Quite rare on spring passage and one at EHF on 27th Apr was unusual. A good series of records on autumn passage with 4 at EHF on 22nd Aug, reduced to 1 on 30th Aug that stayed through to 7th Sept. Then 2 from 12th Sept through to 25th Sept and finally 1 at EHF on 12th and 13th Oct.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

All records from EHF and PHF and seen in every month except Jun. The different activities could be more clearly seen this year.

Winter resident flock in Jan to early Mar with a max of 9.

Spring passage from mid-Mar to 23rd May with a max of 20.
Autumn passage from 3rd Jul to early Oct with a max of 9.
Winter resident flock from late Oct to the year end with a max of 8.
Also noted at Arclid SQ with 1 on 25th Apr.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

The resident winter flock at EHF was present from the beginning of the year through to mid-Mar with a max of 20. One bird at EHF on 7th Apr was probably a passage migrant.

As usual the first birds return in mid-Jul (14th this year and 15th last year) and slowly build up to the year end with monthly max of Jul (5), Aug (6), Sept (13), Oct (14), Nov (20) and Dec (28).

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyrtus minimus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

The temporary marsh at MGT continued to be the best site early in the year with up to 3 regular in Jan. Also 1 at Middlewich Lime Beds in Feb. By the second winter period the MGT marsh had gone to make a new tipping site and single birds were then seen at RF in Sept, RF in Oct and EHF + MGT in Nov.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.

In Jan there were 27 on MGT and a co-ordinated count of all flashes on the 27th Jan gave a total of 64 at 5 of the flashes. None in May and Jun, then recorded from 13th Jul to the year end at SF. Usually recorded from 25 to 55 in Aug and Sept but the problems of counting this species are highlighted with normal counts of 10 to 15 in Nov and Dec, but 70+ when flushed up.

Occasional winter records from Arclid SQ (9), Alsager South (1), Coppenhall Moss (1), Crewe Cemetery office (1), Doddington (11), Middlewich Lime Beds (8) and Stowford (18).

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

Scarce winter visitor.

In the first winter period a count of 6 at FF on 6th Jan is a record count for SF.

The more usual singles were also seen at MGT, WLF, Taxmere, Bath Vale, Haslington and Rode Pool.

Fewer records in the second winter period with 1 at Taxmere, and then during a pheasant drive in Dec at Rode Pool 8 were flushed from the woods within 200 m. of the bird hide!

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

Scarce migrant and rare winter visitor.

An extraordinary year for this species for both the number of days they were present and the max numbers seen, all at EHF.

A solitary record in Mar of 3 on the 25th. Then on 6th May 55 flew in but only stayed for 3 hours. On 9th May 53 appeared and dwindled down to 1 by the 12th May. Then on 23rd May a flock of 214 were seen to arrive, and these numbers increased on 24th and 25th until on the 26th May there were 365 birds present. Down to 2 on the 27th and gone by the 28th!

Next on 1st Jun 220 were seen at EHF, up to 263 on the 2nd and down to 1 on the 3rd. Then a number of birds varying from 1 to 64 were seen every day through to 4th Jul. Singles were then seen on 6 days in Aug, 14 in Sept and 7 in Oct. Finally a winter record of 2 on the saltpan on 6th Dec.

Whilst the birds present during May and 1st-2nd Jun would be passage migrants why did a large number of birds, most in breeding plumage, stay here through the breeding season?

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

In contrast only 1 record of 1 bird at EHF on 11th Jun.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Spring passage at EHF with 2 on 29th Apr, then up to 4 on 7 days in May and 1 on 7th Jun.

Less on return passage as usual with 1 at EHF on 30th Jul and 1 over Bradwall on 18th Aug.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Scarce 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-Mar as birds returned to their breeding sites, and less than 5 were present during Apr, May and Jun.

Sadly no birds were present during the summer from the usual breeding site at Stowford.
By early Jul numbers at EHF had built up to around 60 again and were present to the year end.

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

Uncommon visitor and migrant.

Recorded in every month but with a different status. Resident in the first winter period up to mid-Mar with a max of 10. Spring passage in Apr and early May but only 1 or 2 on any day.

A protracted return passage from mid-Jun to Sept with a max of 3.

Finally becoming a winter resident again from Oct with numbers building up to 9 by the year end.

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

No records in spring this year. The first bird on return passage was a single at EHF on 17th Jul. Then on 2 other days in Jul, 11 days in Aug (max 3) and 2 days in Sept (max 3). The last bird was 1 at Astbury Mere on 26th Sept.

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*)

Vagrant.

On 17th Oct a juv was at EHF. First seen at 13.30 hours it stayed until dusk but was not seen again.

This is only the 2nd record for the flashes, the first being a long-staying bird from 27th Aug to 18th Sept 1974. (See separate article for details).

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.

As usual very scarce on spring passage with only a single at EHF on 1st and 9th Apr.

Return passage started on 19th Jun and then present daily through to mid-Sept with a max of 8. Then singles at EHF on 9th and 12th Oct.

At Doddington 3 birds on 9th Aug increased to 6 by late Sept, and stayed through to 5th Nov, but departed when the water levels were raised.

Winter records in Jan from Haslington (1) and Stowford (2 through to Apr), in Oct from Stowford (1) and on 29th Nov from EHF (1).

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)

Scarce passage migrant.

One record in spring with a single at EHF from 6th to 9th May and one in autumn when a single was at EHF for one day on 26th Aug.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

The first record was 1 at EHF on 2nd Apr and spring passage continued through to 19th May with birds seen regularly, but not continuously, at SF (max 3) and Arclid SQ (max 6 on 22nd Apr).

Return passage started with a single at EHF on 23rd to 27th Jun. Then a gap until 5th Jul when birds were then present continuously at EHF until 31st Aug with a max of 5. Also regular at Arclid SQ with a max of 4 and the last birds of the year were here on 8th Sept.

This species is usually seen in low numbers, rarely more than 5 together. So two records from Doddington were exceptional with a flock of 13 seen on 12th Jul and another – or the same? – flock of 13 seen on 2nd Aug.

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

Rare passage migrant.

Only one record of 1 bird, seen at EHF on 7th Jun.

Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)

Scarce visitor.

Only one record in the first winter period with an adult at PHF on 3rd Jan.

More birds in autumn with an adult summer plumage bird at RF/PHF/EHF on 10th and 15th Jul and a 2nd summer plumage bird at EHF on 18th Jul. Then an adult at EHF on 14th Aug and presumably the same adult with a juv there on 15th Aug. Also at this time a winter plumage adult with the Black-headed Gulls at Winterley Pool on 23rd and 24th Aug.

Finally in the second winter period there was an adult in the gull roost (somewhere amongst 8,000 other gulls!) at Doddington on 22nd Nov and 3rd Dec.

Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)

Rare visitor and passage migrant.

A good year for this rare gull with four records during the year. On 19th Jan an adult was on the saltpan at EHF from 16.00 to 16.40. This is the first record in Jan for this species.

Then a 1st summer bird at EHF on 3rd Jul, a juv at EHF on 18th Aug and finally a 1st winter bird at WLF on 27th Oct.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

Abundant autumn and winter visitor.

Still present in winter around MGT and RF but few actual counts this year, although it was felt that numbers were lower. The roost on the saltpan held around 1,500 birds in Jan. Present in summer but less than 10 birds. Numbers in the post-breeding flock peaked at around 2,200 birds in Aug. Then from mid-Nov numbers in the roost on the saltpan built up gradually to a record max of around 5,000 by the end of Dec.

Possibly linked to this is the fact that numbers in the Doddington roost were well down from the usual 10,000, with only only 6,000 present in Dec.

Also present at Arclid SQ in winter with max of 700 in Jan and 525 in Oct although birds do not roost here, flying west at dusk.

No count at the Astbury Mere winter roost.

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

In the first winter period up to 30 regular at SF and 200 in the gull roost at Doddington. Then in autumn the first birds were 1 on 17th Jul at Arclid SQ and a juv at EHF on 19th Jul. Then usually present to the year end with a max of 11 at SF.

Up to 250 in the roost at Doddington supporting the fact that most gull flocks are likely to have one or two Common Gulls in them.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

The main site for this species continues to be MGT/RF/OF area although EHF saltpan is being used more. Few counts from MGT this year with only 100 at RF in Mar and 120 at EHF in Jan.

In Jul there were around 500 at MGT/RF and on 23rd Sept 532 were counted on the saltpan.

A low max of only 120 was recorded in the winter gull roost at Doddington.

An adult showing characteristics of the race L.f. intermedius was noted at EHF on 25th Jul and 8th Dec.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Although few actual counts were received numbers appear to have reduced dramatically at SF. The max count in Jan was 228 (750 in 2001 and 2500 in 2000) and the max count at the end of the year was 800 in Nov (1,200 in 2001 and 4,000 in 2000). Less than 10 from mid-Mar to mid-Nov as usual.

Birds showing characteristics of the Scandinavian race L.a. argentatus were recorded on 22nd Nov (1 bird), 28th Nov (3 birds), 8th Dec (2), 9th Dec (7), 13th Dec (4) and 21st Dec (3).

Birds of the race L.a. michahellis (Yellow-legged Gull) were recorded more frequently than ever at EHF.

Table shows the number of days seen during the month with, in brackets, the max count on any day in the month:

Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
8(3)	13(8)	16(7)	11(4)	3(1)

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Three separate birds were seen in the last week of 2001, and two of these were also seen in the first week of 2002 with an adult at PHF on 1st and 5th and a 1st winter at MGT on 6th and 8th Jan.

A further bird at EHF on 17th Feb was a probable 3rd winter.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Three records of probably the same bird, all aged as a 1st winter, from MGT on 8th Jan, EHF on 20th Jan and GF on 3rd Feb.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Although the usual pattern was followed with peaks in Jan and Nov/Dec, the numbers were much reduced with 23 at EHF in Jan (102 in 2001 and 62 in 2000) and 15 at MGT in Nov (102 in 2001 and 200 in 2000).

The only record away from SF was a 1st winter bird at Crewe BP on 16th Feb.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Rare spring passage migrant.

Following the pattern of previous occurrences an adult was at EHF on 3rd Feb. Seen over the saltpan from 16.30 to 16.45 when it flew off north.

This species is becoming more common (or more commonly identified?). There were 8 records of 10 individuals in all years up to 1995, and in the seven years since then 9 records of 9 individuals, mainly on spring passage from Feb to Apr.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

Spring passage records from 18th May to 2nd Jun, all from EHF or WLF, with 18th May (1), 23rd (1), 25th (4), 26th (1), 29th (7) and 2nd Jun (2).

On return passage records from 6th Jul to 15th Aug with 6th Jul (1), 11th (1), 21st (1), 30th (2) and 15th Aug (1).

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Rare passage migrant.

One at WLF on 25th May on spring passage. In autumn a juv was seen at RF on 28th Sept.

Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*)

Rare passage migrant.

One was present at WLF on 21st Apr from 09.15 to 09.25 only.

The 11th record for the flashes.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

Rare passage migrant.

The only record of the year was one at Doddington Pool on 15th May.

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 a max of 69 at Arclid SQ.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

Uncommon resident.

The nest boxes in Quakers Coppice were not monitored this year but were thought to be used as last year – around 8 pairs. Also bred at Crewe BP (2 pairs in boxes) and Bath Vale (1 pair in a tree hole). Recorded from a further 12 sites in 1s and 2s except for a flock of 50 at Arclid SQ in Oct, 28 over Sandbach in Dec and 21 at EHF in Feb.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Common resident.

Average numbers with winter flocks of over 100 recorded at Crewe Hall (800), WLF (500), Haslington (400) and Arclid SQ (150).

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common resident.

Common and widespread but grossly under-recorded. The only double figure flocks were 27 and 22 in different areas of Haslington. Recorded in every garden in the SECOS garden bird survey.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.

A concentrated arrival this year with 1 at Arclid Wood on 20th Apr, 1 at Stowford on 21st Apr and singles on 22nd Apr at Crewe GC, Sandbach and Winterley Pool. Other records of singles from seven other sites, giving a total of 10 sites, one more than last year. The last record was only on 14th Jun and no juvs were seen.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Scarce resident.

Breeding was confirmed at six sites – Barthomley, Bridgemere, Maw Green (2), Stowford and Wybunbury, and probable, but not confirmed, at Blakenhall. Other records were concentrated in the Weston/A500 area. Similar figures to last year.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Common resident.

Common in open farmland and recorded from 12 sites as well as three of the flashes and MGT. This year breeding was proved at Haslington (2 sites) and in Clay Lane, near Haslington.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

Common resident.

Common in wooded areas. Recorded from 24 sites (14 in 2001) and probably bred at most of these since this is a sedentary species. Only proved breeding at three sites, Swettenham where an adult and a juv seen, Smallwood where unfortunately a juv was found dead, and Taxmere where a downy fledgling was seen on 20th Jun.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

The first birds were 4 over Crewe on 25th Apr and 2 over EHF on 26th Apr. Then a gap followed by a general arrival from 1st May. Following last year's full survey there were no counts at colonies this year, but the indications are that numbers have reduced further.

Most birds departed in mid to late Aug as usual but late birds were 1 over Haslington on 10th Sept and 2 over Sandbach on 13th Sept.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 14 sites this year (15 in 2001) although as usual (but still for reasons unknown) most were outside the breeding season. Birds were seen flying and carrying fish at EHF (River Wheelock), Crewe BP (Valley Brook) and Doddington.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

Uncommon resident.

Only recorded from seven sites this year (13 in 2001; 16 in 2000) and the only proved breeding was at Crewe GC where a pair with 2 juvs were seen in Jun.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Common resident.

By far the commonest woodpecker, with records from many sites across the area. Breeding was proved from seven sites, usually with adults seen feeding juvs. At Arclid Hollow a juv was watched being fed from a fat block at the feeding station. Juvs were also seen at EHF feeding station.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)

Uncommon resident.

Another good year for sightings of this elusive species with records from 11 sites, the same as 2001. A good run of sightings in Mar from the flashes with males and females seen at RLF, WLF, EHF and FF, where a male was seen excavating a nest hole by the feeders. In winter seen on garden feeders in Alsager, Middlewich and Wybunbury, and the feeders in Quakers Coppice.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Fairly common.

A much better year following last year's low counts due to foot and mouth access restrictions. A winter flock of up to 18 at MGT in Jan. Some evidence of light passage over EHF from mid-Feb to mid-Mar.

Breeding records of 59 singing males from 24 widespread sites (17 from 9 in 2001).

Winter flocks of 14 at Doddington and then in Dec an incredible 41 together on a manure covered, weedy stubble field near Haslington.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First birds of the spring were 4 at EHF on 24th Mar, daily thereafter and around 200 feeding over the water at Astbury Mere on 31st Mar were the first away from the flashes.

Breeding colonies at Wybunbury SQ (106 holes); River Wheelock near CF (46). Also still at Bent Farm SQ but not counted this year.

At Arclid New Quarry there were 110 holes in the colony. Some indication of the pressures these colony nesters are under is given by the fact that 15 holes were dug out by foxes, and on one day quarry staff reported 4 Kestrels (possibly Hobbies), 6 Buzzards, 16 Magpies and various crows all attempting to catch Sand Martins at the entrance to the holes.

The last record was of 1 over EHF on 22nd Sept.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Common summer visitor.

The first record was of 1 at WLF on 28th Mar, then 3 at EHF on 30th and daily thereafter.

Still breeds fairly commonly throughout the area but pressure is building up on breeding sites as farms and farm buildings are 'sanitised'. Few large post-breeding flocks except for a mixed flock of 2500 to 3000 hirundines, mainly Swallow and House Martin over Day Green, Alsager, on 24th Aug. 300+ over EHF on 19th Sept. The last record for the flashes was 2 over WLF on 18th Oct and the last for the area was 2 over Sandbach on 21st Oct.

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Common summer visitor.

The first record was a single at EHF on 7th Apr, then a gap until 17th when there was a widespread arrival in the next few days. Breeds commonly throughout the area although the only breeding record was of 10 nests on Brookside Hall at Arclid Hollow. Autumn flocks of 50 at Westlow Mere but see under Swallow for a huge flock on 24th Aug.

The last record was of 1 over Alsager on 18th Oct.

Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

Scarce passage migrant.

1 was in the trees and scrub on the slopes of the old spoil mound at Arclid SQ on 19th Apr.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant. Scarce resident.

As usual MGT is the main wintering site at the moment with a max of 44 there in Jan and Feb.

There were records of singing males in the breeding season at Cheshire's Close and Mow Cop, both suitable for breeding. Some evidence of passage over Arclid SQ, MGT and EHF during Sept and early Oct.

Records in the second winter period from 11 sites with 85 at Doddington, 25 at MGT, 20 at Haslington, 18 at Arclid SQ and 16 at Stowford.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

First recorded on the early date of 1st Apr at EHF with the next record being on the 15th, then regular from 19th but a max of only 3. This species continues to decline with breeding season records from only 4 sites – EHF, Smallwood, Stowford and Wybunbury. No records from Arclid SQ for the first time since 1980.

The last record was of 1 at EHF on 13th Sept.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

Recorded from 25 widespread sites around the area (23 in 2001) with records in the breeding season from 10 of those. At Arclid SQ the usual autumn roost was re-established in Sept, peaking at 13 birds by mid-Nov but down to 4 birds by mid-Dec.

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Fairly common resident.

Roosting flocks in the first winter period were at Wheelock sewage works (70), Leighton Hospital Crewe (60) and MGT (42). Breeding pairs were noted at EHF, Alsager, Arclid SQ, Arclid Hollow, Crewe BP, Doddington and Rode Pool. There were no flocks recorded in the second winter period except for 25 at Arclid SQ.

Birds of the continental race *M.a.alba* were recorded on passage at EHF from 17th Apr to 1st May with a max of 4. Also at Arclid SQ on 16th March (1), 19th Apr (1) and 20th Apr (2).

Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Scarce resident.

1 or 2 seen throughout the year at Bath Vale and in summer on the River Dane near Havannah Weir Congleton. These are the two regular sites for this species in the SECOS area.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Abundant resident.

16 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (15 in 2001), and 31 in a BTO breeding bird survey at Congleton SJ8664.

Recorded in 22 out of 25 gardens in Jan to Mar in the SECOS garden bird survey.

Dunnoek (*Prunella modularis*)

Common resident.

13 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (same as 2001). As for the Wren, recorded in 22 out of 25 gardens in Jan to Mar in the SECOS garden bird survey.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Abundant resident.

21 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (same as 2001) and 28 in a BTO breeding bird survey at Congleton SJ8664 (25 in 2001).

Recorded in 24 out of 25 gardens in Jan to Mar in the SECOS garden bird survey.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.

A female was at EHF on 3rd Jun. Then a good series of records in autumn with 1 at PHF on 7th Jul, a juv there on 13th Jul and a male on 14th. These 2 birds were present through to 29th Jul, being very faithful to the hedge and fence alongside the footpath to RF (usually with a Little Owl nearby!), and the juv present until 7th Aug. Finally a male at PHF on 21st Aug.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Scarce migrant.

Only two records, with a pair together at TLF on 28th Apr and 1 at PHF on 1st Sept.

Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)

Scarce winter visitor.

A pair were on MGT during Jan. Then 2 at EHF on 16th Mar on spring passage and a juv at MGT on 27th Jul was presumably on autumn passage.

As usual more records in the second winter period with 1 at MGT in Nov, 1 at Weston Road Crewe in Nov and at Stowford – which is now becoming a regular site – 1 male + 1 female in Oct and 1 male + 2 female in Nov.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

First record was of 1 at EHF on 18th Mar, then on 20 more dates up to 17th May with a max of 5. Also on spring passage at Chorlton where 7 on 21st Apr, Crewe BP, 1 on 30th Mar, Stowford, 4 on 21st Apr and 2 on 8th May, and Arclid SQ 1 on 24th Apr.

Fewer records on return passage with 1 at EHF on 11th Aug, then 2 on 4 dates in Sept, the last being 2 at MGT on 19th. Also 1 at Bradwall on 6th Sept.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

27 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (31 in 2001). 31 territories in a breeding bird survey at Congleton SJ8664 (32 in 2001). SECOS members contributed to a Song Thrush and Blackbird Survey in the summer. Please read the separate article for details.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Common winter visitor.

In the first winter period flocks of 100+ were noted at Haslington (680), PHF (800) and Clay Lane Haslington (250). The first autumn bird was seen at EHF on 13th Oct and flocks of 100+ were noted at Crewe BP (110) and Haslington (120).

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Fairly common resident.

Only 14 territories were recorded in a BTO survey at Congleton SJ8664 where 31 in 2001 but numbers maintained at Crewe BP where 3 territories in 2002 and 2001. 6 singing males along the canal to FF, and at least 6 singing males at Arclid SQ.

SECOS members contributed to a Song Thrush and Blackbird Survey in the summer. Please read the separate article for details.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

Common winter visitor.

The usual size of winter flocks with WLF (100) and Haslington (200) in the first winter period.

The first bird in autumn was seen at EHF on 7th Oct followed by others at Sandbach 8th and Crewe BP 9th, and widespread thereafter.

Flocks in the second winter period at EHF (100), Bath Vale (100) and Arclid SQ (100).

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Fairly common resident.

Breeds throughout the area but not often recorded. Post breeding flocks of 23 at Rode Pool, where regular on the cricket field at this time, and 16 at Doddington.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

Scarce summer visitor.

Possibly lost this year as a breeding species with no records from the usual site at Bagmere.

A 'reeling' male was heard at dusk on 4th May at TLF and again the next evening but not after that. A returning autumn migrant was seen at Arclid SQ on 19th Aug.

↳ record suppressed. Actually present through June & possibly later. !

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Early records were 1 at Crewe BP on 23rd Apr and 1 at RF on 24th, but the main arrival was the first week of May. Records of singing males in May were 13 males at 7 of the flashes at SF, 6 at Rode Pool, 2 at Bagmere, 3 at Doddington and 1 at Arclid SQ.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first record was 1 at WLF on 24th Apr. Not as widespread as Sedge Warbler due to its more specific habitat requirements, the main site as always is the flashes. Probable numbers of pairs were GF (1), RF (2), WLF (2), RL (1) and CP/FF (6).

Also 1 pair bred at Westlow Mere and singing males were seen on one day at Astbury Mere and Crewe BP.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first record was 1 at WLF on 25th Apr. A good number of records of singing males at the flashes in early May with GF (1), EHF (1), MGT (1), FF/CP (7), CF (1), WLF (3), TLF (1). Also at Haslington (1), Hassall (1), Hassall Green (3), Hough (1) and Arclid SQ (1).

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

Common summer visitor.

Mass arrivals as usual for this species with 3 at SF and 3 at Bagmere on 22nd Apr, and 7 at CP and 1 at Alsager South on 24th Apr.

A common breeding species with, for example, 15 singing males along the canal and railway embankment at FF/CP/FFF, and 6 at Taxmere/Arclid SQ. Also records from 14 other sites.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

The first bird was 1 at Arclid SQ on 23rd Apr, with 2 at Arclid SQ on 25th and then 1 at FF on 29th Apr. Not particularly common with, for example, only 3 singing males along the canal at FF/CP and records from 8 other sites.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.

Two records in Mar with 1 at WLF on 30th and 1 at Astbury Mere on 31st. Then spread throughout the area quickly in early Apr and recorded from many sites. Typical breeding numbers were Arclid SQ (10), FF/CP/FFF (7), Crewe BP (7), Brereton Heath (5).

Fewer wintering records than last year with 1 or 2 in gardens at Crewe, Sandbach, Elworth and Wistaston in Jan to Mar. In Nov or Dec there were records from 6 different gardens in Sandbach (1), Crewe (3) and Scholar Green (2).

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

Scarce summer visitor and passage migrant.

On 9th Jun 2 singing males were in suitable habitat off Gosberryhole Lane, Timbersbrook. This is the same site where a pair bred in 1997 and 1998. 1 also recorded here on 11th Jun.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.

Our earliest, and easiest to hear and identify, summer visitor, resulting in a mass of records for one of our commonest warblers. Arrivals in mid-Mar as usual with 1 at Haslington on 12th and 1 at FF on 13th. Recorded at 15 other sites before the end of Mar, and bred throughout the area. Many records in late Sept and early Oct as passage birds sing on migration as they move south. Last record was of a singing male at Crewe BP on 9th Oct.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Common summer visitor.

First of the year was 1 at FF on 31st Mar. Then on 3rd Apr 1 at EHF and 1 at Astbury Mere.

Although probably still our commonest warbler, numbers have possibly declined. Concentrations of breeding pairs at Bagmere (11), FF/CP/FFF (5) and Arclid SQ (6) where numbers have definitely declined.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Winter records from only 13 sites (20 in 2001) with generally 1, 2 or 3 except for 6 at Doddington. Breeding season records from 5 sites, Arclid Hollow, Queen's Park Crewe, Lawton Hall, Oakhanger Moss (where juvs seen) and at PF where a juv seen in the conifer wood by the canal is probably the first proved breeding in the flashes area.

Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*)

Very rare winter visitor.

1 very tame individual was seen in the morning of 7th Jan at Arclid SQ where it spent most of its time feeding in dense clumps of wild roses. It could not be relocated in the afternoon.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Another good number of records with pairs breeding at Arclid Hollow, St. Michael's Churchyard Crewe, Crewe Cemetery (juvs seen), Haslington Hall (juvs seen), Hough and Smallwood. Also seen and possibly bred at EHF, Bradwall, Congleton Park, Haslington, Malkins Bank, Sandbach, The Cloud and Winterley Pool.

Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

Rare passage migrant and summer visitor.

1 was seen near Bradwall, Sandbach on 15th Jun.

Bearded Tit (*Panurus biarmicus*)

Vagrant.

A frustrating day on 19th Oct at WLF when a bird of this species was heard calling at 09.40 from a reed bed by the main car park. Despite being under constant observation from then until the end of the day the bird was never seen, although it was heard calling several more times.

Although it was only heard and not seen its identification was not in doubt and it has been accepted. It is a first for the flashes but not for the SECOS area.

This seems an opportune time to record the details of the first known Bearded Tit in the area.

On 7th October 1981 Harold Dean, who at the time was serving on the SECOS committee, returned to his home in Haslington in the late afternoon and found a male Bearded Tit dead on the ground below the kitchen window! Other than being dead it was in good condition, and probably died after flying into the window. It was presumed to have been dispersing from a breeding colony, possibly at Leighton Moss.

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Common resident.

Continues to be common and widespread, no doubt helped by the run of mild winters. Many wintering flocks recorded and those of 15 or more were at Alsager South (17), Crewe BP (30), Crewe GC (24), EHF (44), Lawton Hall (25), Rode Pool (15) and Arclid SQ (21).

Also recorded in 16 out of 25 gardens from Jan to Mar in the SECOS garden bird survey.

Marsh Tit (*Parus palustris*)

Rare visitor.

Although not recorded annually there were 4 birds seen this year. At Crewe BP the one present from 2001 stayed here until 13th Mar; 1 was seen at Crewe GC on 2nd Mar; 1 was in the tit flock on Hough Common on 9th Oct; and finally 1 appeared on the feeders at Rode Pool on 17th Sept. Fortunately this bird stayed to the year end, giving the small band of Rode Pool hidiers time to decide between Marsh Tit and Willow Tit!

Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*)

Scarce resident.

5 records of this species although no long stayers. At Taxmere birds were seen throughout the year and probably bred. Also seen at Smallwood (1) on 1st Jun; Arclid Hollow (2) on 12th Jun; Dingle Valley Sandbach (1) on 21st Aug; and Wheelock Rail Trail (1) on 30th Oct.

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)

Fairly common resident.

Recorded in winter from 16 sites with breeding season records from 7 sites. Proved breeding with juvs seen at Queen's Park Crewe, Crewe BP and Crewe Cemetery.

Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*)

Common resident.

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	18	?	?
Quakers Coppice	9	100	78
Rode Pool	4	34	26

At Quaker's Coppice the average 1st egg laying date was 14th Apr, around the normal date. Recorded in every garden in the SECOS garden bird survey.

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

Common resident.

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	9	?	?
Quakers Coppice	7	56	51
Rode Pool	3	23	22

At Quaker's Coppice the average 1st egg laying date was 22nd Apr. Pressure to find suitable holes to nest in is shown by the pair at Crewe BP who again used a bat box, squeezing through a 12mm slot hundreds of times whilst successfully raising their brood, and also at Rode Pool where two active nests were found only 60cms. apart in the trunk of an alder tree. Both pairs were feeding young so there was much activity by four birds.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)

Common resident.

Recorded from 18 sites, but quite common with, for example, 3 pairs along the brook at Crewe GC. Proved breeding at Crewe Cemetery, Crewe GC, Quaker's Coppice (in a nest box), Smallwood and Swettenham. Seen in 6 out of 25 gardens in the SECOS garden bird survey Jan to Mar.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

Common resident.

Not surprisingly this inconspicuous little bird is under-recorded. Only noted from 12 sites although breeding was proved at Arclid Hollow, Crewe BP, Crewe Cemetery, The Cloud, Arclid SQ and Taxmere.

Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)

Vagrant.

The opportunity has been taken to correct an error in 'The Birds of Sandbach Flashes 1935 to 1999' (Andrew Goodwin & Colin Lythgoe). The entry on page 105 under this species that reads "Two males at EHF on 17th May 1967" should actually be "One male at EHF on 17th May 1967".

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

Uncommon resident.

Similar to last year with records from 17 sites. Usually 1 or 2 but 6 at EHF in Apr, 6 at Alsager South in Apr and 5 at Lawton Hall in Oct. Breeding proved at Arclid Hollow and Taxmere.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)

Common resident.

Breeds commonly throughout the area and flocks of 25 at Crewe BP in Feb and 8 at Stowford in Mar.

At Crewe BP 9 territories were recorded in a common bird census. From the watch point at EHF in May a Magpie was seen taking eggs from a Blackbird's nest and then later in the month chasing and catching recently fledged Blue Tits.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

A common breeder, particularly around old buildings, with, for example, around 25 pairs in Doddington Hall and a further 20 in the old tower. A temporary roost of around 1200 in fields near Haslington Hall in Dec. The long-established roost at Crewe Hall was not counted this year (no access) but from flight lines was around 1500.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Common resident.

The total of nests at regularly counted sites was:-

Site	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
Crewe/Alsager (9 sites)	528	566	539	524	469
Foden's Flash	117	n.c.	116	119	93
Arclid	93	82	69	52	57

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Common resident.

An almost totally ignored species with records from only 4 sites.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Scarce visitor and resident.

Yet another surge this year with records from 16 sites (12 in 2001 and 7 in 2000). All were of 1 or 2 birds, usually flying over in autumn/winter although spring records from Doddington, and at Weston a bird was perched in a tree on 17th Dec.

The breeding pair near Timbersbrook are now well established (since 2000) and fledged 3 juvs this year.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

The roost in a leylandii hedge in Haslington that started in Dec 2001 peaked in mid-Jan with around 8,000 birds in it.

Few records in summer.

In the second winter period there were at least 1000 regular at MGT, a roost of 700 in Dec in the same Haslington leylandii hedge, 500 at Pym's Lane Old Tip Crewe in Nov and 300 in a Wistaston garden.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Common resident.

Regular autumn/winter flocks were recorded at Bath Vale (50), Crewe (70), Haslington (50) and Middlewich (30), but numbers have reduced dramatically in recent years. 15 years ago it was ever-present in my garden but this year I only had 3 records from Oct to Dec.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Fairly common resident.

Recorded from less sites than last year (19 against 21 in 2001) but still some encouraging flock sizes with MGT (70), EHF/PHF (30), Bag Mere (20), Haslington (45) and Wheelock Heath (25).

Breeding proved at Bostock Green and Swettenham and also at EHF where 5 pairs bred in nest boxes with broods of 5, 4, 5, 6, 4. The population here is no doubt supported by the provision of food with up to 25 birds regular on the feeders.

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, winter flocks of PHF (30), Doddington (30), Haslington (25), Lawton Hall (40) and Winterley Pool (30).

In breeding bird surveys at least 11 pairs at Congleton and 9 at Crewe BP where 6 in 2001.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Records in the first winter period from 5 sites, all at garden feeders, as follows: Crewe (Jan), another Crewe site (Feb), Sandbach 2 (Jan), Lawton Heath (all of Feb), Rode Pool (Apr).

In the second winter period only one record of a single flying over the observer's house in Sandbach.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common resident.

A very common finch with, in the first winter period, flocks of at least 100 in laurel bushes at Crewe BP, and 36 at Alsager South.

Recorded in 21 out of 25 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey Jan to Mar.

5 territories in a common bird census at Crewe BP, but 10 pairs in 2001.

In the second winter period flocks of 120 again roosting at Crewe BP and 70 on feeders in a Crewe garden.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Fairly common resident.

A welcome increase in the number of winter flocks of this delightful finch. Flocks recorded in either winter period were RF (100), MGT (30), CF (40), Alsager South (45), Crewe Cemetery (100), Haslington (47), Stowford (50).

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.

A species that observers like to record!

Usually seen in Jan to Mar and then not much before late Nov with flock sizes of Arclid SQ (55), Alsager South (41), Basford Hall Crewe (115), Crewe town centre car park (60) and Rode Pool (110). Also regular in gardens from Jan to Mar, being recorded in 14 out of 25 gardens in the SECOS garden bird survey.

On 18th Jun there was an intriguing record of a juvenile watched for a few hours feeding on sunflower seeds in a Crewe garden: no adult was present. This was within a mile of the Queen's Park where there were several records in April.

Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Fairly common resident.

Autumn/winter flocks of PHF (125), MGT (40), Pym's Lane Crewe (40), Doddington (60), Haslington (30) and Winterley Pool (70). Few breeding records but 3 pairs nesting on the gorse bank at Astbury Mere.

Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis cabaret*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

Records of 1, 2 or 3 birds with flocks of Siskin in winter from 9 sites but as separate flocks at Crewe (16) and Arclid SQ (12).

Also up to 10 regular in a Crewe garden on the feeders from Jan to Mar.

No records from Apr to Sept.

Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)

Very rare visitor.

Three records this year with approx. 25 going south-west over Winterley Pool on 13th Aug.
4 flying around Brereton Heath Park on 26th Aug and 20 over a house at Sandbach on 2nd Sept.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Uncommon resident.

A wide spread of records from 29 sites across the area (25 in 2001 and 20 in 2000) all of which are probably breeding sites for this sedentary species. Generally less than 4 birds except for Astbury Mere where 8 have been seen together on the feeders there, a regular site for this species.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Uncommon resident.

An increase in records this year from the very poor year of 2001 with flocks of 10+ at Basford (12), Haslington by-pass (12) and Haslington Hall (14).

Records from 24 sites including both summer and winter records.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Uncommon resident.

The one bunting species that now seems to be holding its own following its previous serious decline in numbers, with a winter flock of MGT (17) and records from 7 other sites. Breeding season records of 9 pairs at Arclid SQ, 7 pairs at MGT/GF/RF and records from 5 other sites.

Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

Scarce resident.

Disastrously the only record is of a singing male at Basford, Crewe, on 17th Mar and 17th Apr. Is this the last year that we will record Corn Bunting in our area?

Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes

Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*)

On 17th March a bird with jesses was seen near the Haslington by-pass.

Harris Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

A falconer was regularly flying 2 birds at MGT in the early part of the year to scare the gulls off from there.

GREAT WHITE EGRET AT SANDBACH FLASHES ON 4TH TO 6TH JANUARY 2002

I was at Elton Hall Flash with Tony Dickinson erecting nest boxes for Tree Sparrows and tits. Two unknown non-local birdwatchers were looking over Pump House Flash and I asked if there was anything different than usual. One of them said there was a Little Egret on Elton Hall. I asked him where and he said that he would show us. We walked up to the bridge over the river and the egret was in the river. As soon as I saw it I said that it was too big for a Little Egret and after a look through his telescope I said that it was a Great White Egret. Unfortunately the bird flew upstream (showing its all-black feet) but soon landed. It then flew again over the railway. After several phone calls to local birders we went to see if we could find the bird again. Meeting Andy Goodwin and Colin Lythgoe, the bird was relocated further upstream along the River Wheelock.

It was seen that afternoon by many local birders and during the next day by many other birders. It stayed until mid-morning on Sunday 6th January when it moved to Marbury Mere, Northwich. During its stay it was very flighty, moving regularly along the river and between Elton Hall Flash, Pump House Flash and Railway Flash.

Seen well in flight and standing, occasionally next to Grey Heron, the following description was taken: -

A large all white bird with a large yellow bill. When flying and standing the all-black legs and feet could be seen. Approximately the same size as Grey Heron.

Dave Bromont

This is the first record of this species in the SECOS area and only the second for Cheshire. On 13th February the bird paid a brief return visit when it was seen flying from the direction of Maw Green Tip, over Pump House Flash and then to Elton Hall Flash where it landed on the far side at 10-10. By 10-15 it had gone.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS AT ELTON HALL FLASH, 17TH OCTOBER 2002

On the afternoon of 17th October, Dennis Bowyer and myself were birdwatching at Elton Hall Flash. Ironically, as it turned out, I was musing at the lack of any significant wader passage. We decided to walk down the lane to the south of the flash to scan the exposed mud. My attention was immediately drawn to an elegant looking wader which I initially called as a probable Wood Sandpiper. Dennis stated immediately and correctly that the bird was too big for that species. This was confirmed when a redshank alighted and chased the bird off. After the usual panic when realisation of a possible rarity strikes, we gained excellent views and the deep yellow legs could clearly be seen. The bird was a Lesser Yellowlegs (Greater discounted on size alone).

Phone calls to the regulars were immediately initiated and within an hour the locals were enjoying Sandbach Flashes second Lesser Yellowlegs.

The bird was superficially similar to a Wood Sandpiper in shape and structure but was bigger and had longer deep yellow legs, a longer neck and more attenuated rear end.

The bird was aged as a juvenile on account of the white spots on the upper parts.

Some excellent digital images were taken by Paul Hill.

There was no sign of the bird the following day but probably the same bird spent some weeks at a site in the Midlands thereafter. A first winter Lesser Yellowlegs was then seen in Norfolk in November and could well be the same bird.

Andy Firth

This is the second record for the flashes, the first being an adult present from 27th August through to 18th September in 1974.

BEARDED TIT AT WATCH LANE FLASH ON 19TH OCTOBER 2002

I arrived on foot at Watch lane Flash at 09-40 and stopped to scan the water from the gate on the causeway. I heard a quiet 'ping' call from the reed bed in front of the gate but hearing nothing further after five minutes listening I moved up the causeway and then heard a loud twanging 'ping'. Running back to the gate I phoned Mark Stubbs and as I did the bird called 'ping' again.

Looking down the fisherman's path that skirts the phragmites reed bed I was excited that any minute I would see a Bearded Tit. But it did not show, although it did call again and was heard by Dave Norbury. Several local birders arrived soon after but despite many pairs of eyes staring at the reed bed the bird was not seen. Most birders moved off in early afternoon, convinced that the bird had departed since it had not been heard for a few hours. Mark Stubbs and Dave Norbury stayed and persistence paid off as the three of us heard the bird as it called again a few times around 14-30.

I left the site at 16-00 as the weather deteriorated but the bird was heard later by Andy Firth, Paul Hill and Bob Brown. I returned pre-dawn on the 20th but there was no sight or sound of the bird.

We all pondered long and hard as to what to do with this record. After much deliberation it was decided to report the record even though the bird was only heard. The reasons for this being that the calls are distinctive and the record is important locally.

Of interest, but frustrating at the time, one of those amazing coincidences occurred at mid-morning when the pager network reported a Bearded Tit at Blithfield Reservoir in Staffordshire. More sightings were made in the country during the next week, so our bird was part of an irruption or autumn dispersal.

Andrew Goodwin

This is the first record for Sandbach Flashes and the second record for the SECOS area. The first bird was killed in unusual circumstances, please see the species account.

BREEDING OF HOBBYS IN THE SECOS AREA IN 2002

As in 2001, a pair of Hobbys bred successfully in the SECOS area in 2002, fledging three young compared to two last year. Presumed to be the same breeding pair, the nest site was in the Hassall area, a mile or so north of last year's site at Oakhanger. Predictably though, the nest site was an old crow's nest in an oak tree.

Looking for the nest was deliberately left until late July/early August so as not to cause any disturbance and to minimise the possibility of nest desertion by the adults. The area around Oakhanger was thoroughly searched but to no avail. However, regular sightings were coming from Winterley and Hassall so the search was switched to that area. The nest site was finally located in the second week of August and it was found that three juveniles had very recently fledged, but were still at the nest. The site was then watched until late August when activity decreased as the birds moved further away from the nest site.

No doubt the adults and young were visiting Sandbach Flashes as juvenile Hobbys were seen there on several occasions from mid-August. A highlight for me was seeing one of the adults and the three juveniles flying around the nest site successfully catching insects and then one of the juveniles having a go at a Kestrel which was seen off. The nest site this year seems to be in a better location than last year with at least two farms nearby with breeding Swallows. The adults were also seen to fly off in different directions, one to Oakhanger and the other to Haslington, probably to take advantage of the large House Martin colonies there. Hopefully in 2003 they will return to breed in the area again maybe this time fledging four young, which really would be an amazing sight!

Mark Stubbs

BIRDING ASTBURY MERE AND BENT FARM SAND QUARRY

This pleasant four mile walk should provide interesting bird watching at any time of the year. We start at Astbury Mere, follow footpaths to Bent Farm Quarry, circle round the quarry, follow footpaths to Astbury village and then back to Astbury Mere. An early start is advisable due to possible disturbance from water sports at Astbury Mere. Parts of the walk can be muddy so we recommend that you wear walking boots, but all paths are easily walkable and well marked.

Leave Congleton on the A34 road to Newcastle-under-Lyme. Half a mile from the town centre pass the Wagon and Horses public house on the right. Go a further 400 yards and turn left signposted 'Astbury Mere Country Park'. After 300 yards enter the car park with ranger station and public toilets. During mid-winter we usually arrive at 08-30 and the gates are always open. During the summer if you arrive earlier than this you may find the gates locked. If so park on the left before the gates and walk in.

Walk down to the mere and carefully check over the water with your telescope. Tufted Duck and Pochard should be present in winter with hopefully an occasional Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck or even Goosander. In spring and summer Great Crested Grebes should be present along with feeding Sand Martins and Swallows. Walk left along a path close to the shore. Alders well to the left near to the houses are often the haunt of Redpolls and Siskins in winter and further on the wooded slopes are good for warblers in spring. The mere itself can be quiet if disturbance has been heavy in previous days. But it can be very good during frosty spells when South East Cheshire rarities recorded have included Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes, Long-tailed Duck and Smew. Even in spring and summer Common Scoter has been seen so anything is possible. The mere looks very good for terns but there are few records, probably due to lack of coverage in spring and summer.

After half a mile you will pass the water sports building on the far side, go straight ahead on a tarmac road up a slight bank with a speed hump. After 300 yards cross over the main road in to Padgbury Lane. Take the second left, also called Padgbury Lane and after 70 yards take the footpath on the right. Keep right after 20 yards and after another 30 yards cross a brook, then turn sharp left following the bank of the brook. When you meet the tarmac lane turn right and follow this lane for ½ mile up to Bent Farm.

Just before entering the farmyard take the footpath on the right. This skirts the farm buildings before emerging on to a wide bridleway. After 100 yards set up your telescope and view the pools, quarry workings and sloping pasture field on your left. Lapwings display here in spring and Skylarks should be singing. Tufted Ducks probably breed on the pools and Shelduck seem to be regular in summer. Oystercatchers are also regular in spring and summer. After another 100 yards further good views of the workings are had, the shallow sandy lagoon closest to you sometimes has Little Ringed Plovers although they prefer other areas of the workings with no access. Carry on along the path which narrows, but ignore the footpath off to the right.

After ¼ mile you will reach a road, turn left here and pass the quarry entrance. Soon after you will pass a bungalow on the left and from here count 300 yards when you will find a wooden gate on the left. Unfortunately the land beyond the gate is private; this is a shame because by opening this unlocked gate and walking 10 yards on to the top of the bank you will have great views of another good pool and to your right in the distance the sand cliffs containing a large colony of Sand Martins. Hobbies predate this colony from mid-May to July. Carry on down the lane for another ½ mile. Where the road narrows and opposite Lesser Reeves Farm take a narrow footpath on the left. Follow this path up the field edge to the top. Unfortunately the quarry workings are screened by a bank. At the top scan for raptors; Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk should be easy if the weather is good and Hobby is always possible at the right time of year.

Follow the footpath signs past a small pond on your left and past farm buildings. At a junction of footpaths turn left. After 200 yards ignore the footpath off to your right and carry straight on along a beautiful path with hedges on both sides and good fields. Astbury Church should be visible and also The Cloud and Mow Cop. I have only just discovered this path; I saw Yellowhammers and Reed Buntings in February and I hope for some surprises in spring and summer. After ¼ mile you will emerge back on to the tarmac lane leading to Bent Farm; turn right. Carry on straight down to the A34, ignoring the path to the left that we came on. Cross over the A34 and go straight up to the Egerton Arms in Astbury village. The food and ales of this traditional Cheshire ale house are recommended. The village has Nuthatches present. The church is imposing and the village green has a tremendous display of daffodils in March. Walk back down to the noisy A34 and walk right back towards Congleton. Opposite Padgbury Lane turn right through the green gates and back down to Astbury Mere. Walk left along the mere and back to the car park, ranger station and toilets.

The gull roost on Astbury Mere is worth checking in December and January. We usually arrive at 14-45 and scan the gulls with telescopes. Amongst the hordes of Black-headed Gulls we have also found Mediterranean and Iceland Gulls over the years.

Andrew & Angela Goodwin.

MUTE SWAN SURVEY 2002

- During the summer of 2002 a national survey of Mute Swans in Great Britain was carried out.
- Several SECOS members took part and checked out probable sites in our area.
- In total we found 9 breeding pairs with 46 young; plus six sites with non-breeding or failed pairs; plus non-breeding flocks at two sites.

Details are: -

BREEDING PAIRS		NON-BREEDING OR FAILED PAIRS	NON- BREEDING FLOCKS
LOCATION	JUVENILES		
Queen's Park, Crewe	8	Wybunbury Sand Quarry	Doddington Pool
Doddington Pool	2	Alsager Mere	Winterley Pool
Railway Flash, Elworth	4	Sandbach Lake	
Big Pool, Stowford	6	Brereton Heath C.P.	
Winterley Pool	6	Lawton Hall	
Trent & Mersey Canal, Wheelock	5	Astbury Water Park	
Trent & Mersey Canal, Hassall Green	6		
Trent & Mersey Canal, Thuriwood	4		
Westlow Mere, Congleton	5		

Many thanks to all members who gave up their time to help in this survey.

Colin Lythgoe

WINTERLEY POOL REPORT

Ringling and recording has been ongoing at Winterley Pool now for ten years. This report is the analysis of these past ten years. For those of you who do not know the pool, I will endeavour to tell you a little about it. The pool is a man-made water of some 9.78 acres with islands and promontories making up a further 0.96 acres. Its western end adjoins the former A534 Haslington to Sandbach road. The footpath here is separated from the pool by a steel fence with two small gates near each end. This prevents waterfowl straying onto the road. The pool is coarse fished throughout the year.

I think you will find from reading the following report (and those of you who have read our previous reports on Winterley Pool will agree with me) that Winterley Pool is one of the most important sites for Mute Swans in the north-west of England. The population rises to about 120 birds during the months of January and February and drops to about half during June and July, proving that it is an important wintering ground, while the rest of the year some of the swans disperse to their breeding sites.

Number of swans identified at Winterley that were ringed within the county, with the site of ringing given.

Black Lake, Wilmslow	11
Bottom Flash, Winsford	61
Doddington, Nantwich	5
Nantwich Boating Lake	58
Redesmere, Macclesfield	11
River Dee, Chester	50
Tatton Park, Knutsford	13
Warrington	31

Number of swans identified at Winterley that were ringed outside the county, with the county of ringing given.

Anglesey	1
Clwyd	22
Cumbria	1
Derbyshire	2
Greater Manchester	10
Gwynedd	11
Lancashire	16
Powys	4
Staffordshire	28
Shropshire	34
Warwickshire	1
West Midlands	9
Westport Lake	182

Number of individual swans identified during each year.

1993 - 1994 - 1995 - 1996 - 1997 - 1998 - 1999 - 2000 - 2001 - 2002
105 181 336 325 337 391 257 254 148 221

Number of individual swans identified since 1989 = 1345

Number of swans ringed 1988 to 2002 = 394

David Cookson

SONG THRUSH AND BLACKBIRD SURVEY 2002

Introduction

There has been much discussion in recent years as to the current status of the Song Thrush and so we decided to organise a breeding survey of Song Thrushes to try to determine their status in our local area. It was decided to also include the Blackbird since it would involve very little extra effort but would give valuable data for comparison purposes.

The survey was designed to cover the whole of the breeding season, from 1st April through to 18th August, a period of 20 weeks. Observers were asked to record the maximum number of Song Thrushes and Blackbirds seen in the garden in each of the 20 weeks and also to provide a range of additional information, particularly if any nests were found.

Results for Blackbird

Abundance

They were recorded in most weeks in all gardens. An index of abundance was calculated as follows. The total number of birds recorded week by week in each garden was divided by the total number of weeks when sightings were recorded (sometimes less than 20 due to holidays etc.) to give an average number of birds per week. This was recorded for each garden giving a high figure of 3.56 and a low figure of 1.94 and then each garden index was averaged to give an overall average of 2.6 Blackbirds per week per garden.

Breeding

21 pairs were noted as actually nesting in gardens, of which six nests were noted as having failed, but this could have been more since only 12 nests were noted as having juveniles. Nest sites chosen generally reflected the usual garden shrubs with leylandii, pyracantha, virginia creeper and beech hedge being used, although one pair nested in a shed, one pair nested in a hedge on top of a nest box and one pair built a nest on top of pipes.

Fatalities

One juvenile was killed by a Sparrowhawk and two juveniles were found dead on the lawn in the same garden.

Results for Song Thrush

Abundance

Of the 16 gardens, Song Thrushes were not seen at all in three of them and only recorded once in two other gardens. The index of abundance (see Blackbird for details) gave a high figure of 1.4 and a low figure of 0.05 and an overall average of 0.8 Song Thrushes per week per garden.

There was no common view amongst those observers who commented on any perceived change in Song Thrush abundance since four thought that numbers had increased, three considered them to have decreased and one gave no change.

Breeding

Surprisingly only one pair actually nested in an observer's garden, although juveniles were seen visiting other gardens.

Fatalities

Two were killed in the same garden, although on different days, by flying into a window and one was killed by a cat.

Discussion

On a national scale Song Thrushes were more abundant than Blackbirds in the early 1900s. During that time Blackbird numbers increased and they became the commoner species from the 1940s. Song Thrushes are particularly vulnerable to cold winters (much more so than Blackbirds) and there were several short term decreases after severe winters but overall the population was stable up to the early 1970s. From then until the early 1990s the population showed a steady decline and over the 20 year period suffered a decrease of 56%. The causes of this are not known. During the same period the Blackbird population declined by only 20%, a significant difference. In 1990 there were an estimated 990,000 breeding pairs of Song Thrushes and 4,400,000 breeding pairs of Blackbirds in Britain. Since 1990 the Song Thrush population initially stabilised and then began to increase and has now shown a 14% increase from 1994 to 2001.

So in summary the Song Thrush population nationally was stable in the mid 1900s, declined drastically from 1970 to 1990 and has increased slightly from 1990 to 2001. The Blackbird population showed a modest decrease from 1970 to 1990 and has also increased slightly from 1990 to 2001.

On a local level it is not possible to say factually from our survey whether our Song Thrush population has followed the national trends since we have no baseline data to compare with. (This survey will provide that baseline data for a repeat survey in a few years time). However, the very general perception of Song Thrushes locally is that they have increased slightly in recent years, although this view was not held by all observers.

One source of local data that we do have is from John Smith, who has surveyed the same area of south Alsager for several years and kept records of all birds seen. His data for Song Thrush records from 1997 to 2002 are shown in table 1. This gives the monthly figure for each of the six years, a graph of those same figures and then finally a comparison of each year for April, which has been chosen as a representative month. Although 2002 did fall from 2001, the graph shows a generally rising trend, indicating that Song Thrushes are now more common in that area.

One surprising fact that did emerge was that Blackbirds were three times more common when feeding in gardens but 20 times more common when nesting. This does assume that Song Thrush pairs with nests were as easy to find as those of Blackbirds. It could be that Blackbird density was such that breeding pairs had a small territory and were more likely to breed in the observer's garden and Song Thrush density was such that breeding pairs have a larger territory, are less likely to actually nest in an observer's garden but are more likely to visit occasionally to feed.

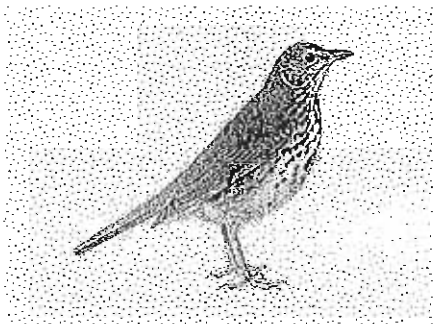


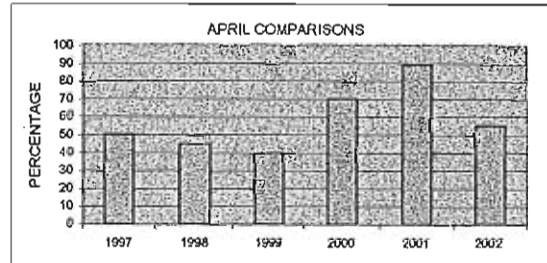
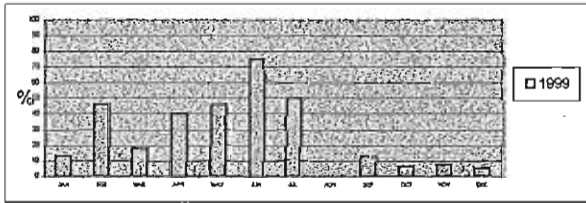
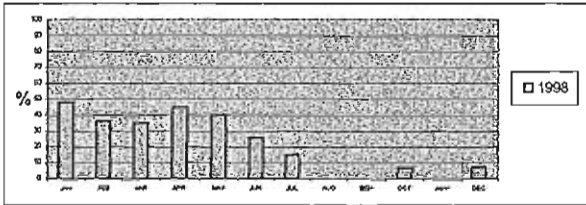
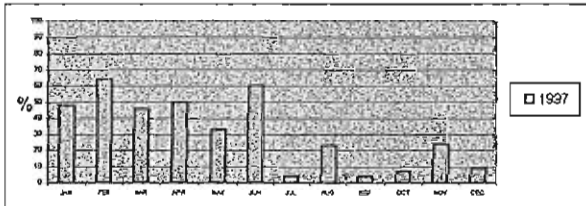
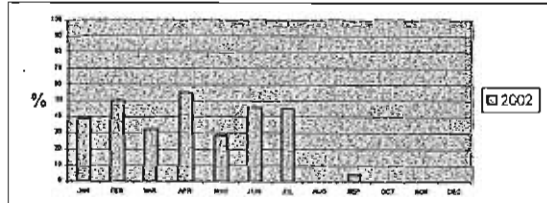
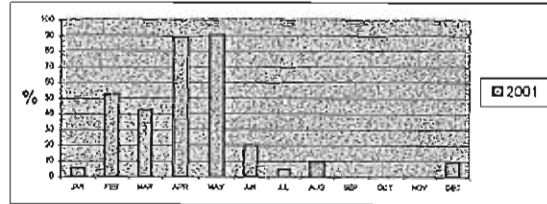
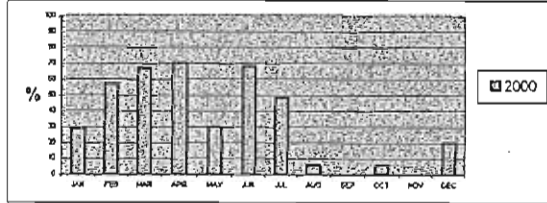
TABLE 1

SONG THRUSH SIGHTINGS

(ALSAGER SOUTH)

The percentage shown in the graphs is a comparative observation record produced by comparing the number of days in a month on which the species was sighted, with the total number of observation days in that month. (e.g. If observations were made on 20 days in a month, and a species sighted on 4 of them, a result of 20% would be recorded.)

MONTHLY SIGHTINGS 1997 - 2002												
YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1997	48	64	46	50	33	60	4	23	4	7	24	9
1998	48	36	35	45	40	26	15	0	0	7	0	7
1999	13	46	18	40	46	75	50	0	13	6	7	5
2000	29	57	67	70	30	68	48	6	0	6	0	20
2001	6	53	43	89	90	20	5	10	0	0	0	10
2002	39	50	32	55	29	46	45	0	4	0		
AVGE	30	51	40	58	45	49	28	6	4	4	6	10



Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to the 16 members who participated in this survey and submitted their records.

Thanks also to the British Trust for Ornithology for providing factual data from their ongoing bird monitoring surveys.

References

- The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland 1988 -1991.
- The State of the UK's Birds 2001.
- The BTO Breeding Bird Survey 2001.

Colin Lythgoe and John Smith

CREWE BUSINESS PARK, COMMON BIRD CENSUS 2002

A census of breeding birds was carried out during 2002. A total of eight 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	2001
Heron	✓	0
Canada goose	✓	1
Mallard	5	3
Mandarin	✓	0
Sparrowhawk	✓	✓
Kestrel	✓	✓
Moorhen	7	7
Stock dove	2	2
Woodpigeon	24	17
Collared dove	1	✓
Feral pigeon	1	1
Tawny Owl	✓	0
Swift	✓	✓
Kingfisher	✓	✓
Green woodpecker	1	1
Great spotted woodpecker	1	1
Swallow	✓	✓
Pied wagtail	1	✓
Wren	16	15
Dunnock	13	13
Robin	21	21
Blackbird	27	31
Song thrush	3	3

Mistle thrush	✓	1
Sedge warbler	✓	✓
Whitethroat	✓	2
Garden Warbler	2	✓
Blackcap	7	9
Chiffchaff	2	2
Willow warbler	✓	2
Goldcrest	✓	0
Spotted flycatcher	✓	✓
Long-tailed tit	3	3
Coal tit	0	✓
Blue tit	18	21
Great tit	9	9
Treecreeper	1	1
Jay	0	✓
Magpie	9	9
Jackdaw	✓	✓
Crow	2	1
Starling	0	1
House sparrow	✓	✓
Chaffinch	9	6
Greenfinch	5	10
Goldfinch	2	1
Bullfinch	3	3

Notes:

1. No. is the number of occupied territories in 2002.
2. 2001 is the number of occupied territories in 2001.
3. ✓ signifies recorded but not enough to give a territory.
4. Most territories along the brook include habitat on both sides.

Comments:

- New species this year were Heron, Mandarin, Tawny Owl and Goldcrest
- Species lost were Coal Tit, Jay and Starling.
- Chaffinch numbers were up from 6 to 9 (following a rise from 2 to 6 in 2001).
- Greenfinch numbers were down from 10 to 5, although the winter roost in the laurel bushes around the main pond still held over 100 birds.
- Work on the Fujitsu site seems to have had little effect on the breeding birds of the adjacent hedge.
- A pair of Great Tits again used a bat box to nest in, squeezing through a 12 mm slot many hundreds of times whilst rearing their young.
- Green Woodpeckers probably did not actually nest on the business park but it formed a large part of their territory, with juveniles seen regularly.

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 2002	10 year average	Earliest Ever	Date in 2002	10 year average	Latest ever
Chiffchaff	12-Mar	13-Mar	8-Mar-89	09-Oct	8-Oct	15-Oct-87
Little Ringed Plover	17-Mar	17-Mar	5-Mar-00	16-Sep	5-Sep	16-Oct-85
Sand Martin	24-Mar	20-Mar	12-Mar-89	22-Sep	20-Sep	24-Nov-72
Swallow	28-Mar	27-Mar	19-Mar-00	21-Oct	22-Oct	30-Nov-74
Willow Warbler	31-Mar	02-Apr	29-Mar-81	18-Sep	5-Sep	26-Sep-98
Blackcap	30-Mar	04-Apr	18-Mar-97	17-Sep	14-Sep	30-Sep-00
House Martin	07-Apr	07-Apr	25-Mar-95	18-Oct	14-Oct	5-Nov-77
Yellow Wagtail	01-Apr	16-Apr	29-Mar-81	13-Sep	14-Sep	2-Oct-87
Reed Warbler	24-Apr	18-Apr	12-Apr-97	22-Sep	14-Sep	4-Oct-98
Whitethroat	22-Apr	20-Apr	15-Apr-93	10-Sep	6-Sep	21-Sep-93
Cuckoo	20-Apr	21-Apr	5-Apr-82	nr	22-Aug	1-Oct-86
Lesser Whitethroat	25-Apr	22-Apr	21-Mar-00	19-Sep	10-Sep	1-Oct-98
Sedge Warbler <i>4 April 99</i>	23-Apr	23-Apr	16-Apr-80	nr	27-Aug	1-Oct-78
Swift	25-Apr	24-Apr	16-Apr-96	13-Sep	9-Sep	3-Nov-78
Garden Warbler	23-Apr	28-Apr	20-Apr-96	20-Aug	10-Aug	9-Sep-83
Hobby	02-May	03-May	27-Mar-94	01-Oct	22-Sep	8-Oct-00
Grasshopper Warbler	04-May	09-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 usually 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 this year there is no confusion. For Blackcap the latest winter record was from a Wistaston garden on 10th March then a gap before a mass arrival from 30th March. The first record was on the 30th from Watch Lane Flash followed by one at Astbury Mere on 31st and then several in the first few days of April from various sites. For Chiffchaff there were two early singles with one at Haslington on 12th March and one at Fodens Flash on 13th. Then a mass arrival at various sites from 19th. Chiffchaffs were particularly prominent on autumn passage with many birds singing as they moved south. There were several records in early October with the last being on the 9th with one at Crewe Business Park.

No records were broken this year and 16 of the 17 species considered arrived within 6 days of the 10 year average date. The exception was Yellow Wagtail with the 1st April arrival being 15 days earlier than the average.