



SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1964

2003 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes



Red-backed Shrike female



Richard's Pipit

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

CONTENTS

Page	Title
3	Editorial
4	Contributors/Abbreviations/Status Definitions
5	Map of SECOS Recording Area
6	Birding Sites
8	Systematic List
29	Red-backed Shrike at Maw Green Tip Richard's Pipit at Maw Green Tip
30	Ring-billed Gull at Elton Hall Flash
31	White Stork at Elton Hall Flash Hoopoe at Haslington and Smallwood
32	Is this the Earliest Ever Early Bird?
33	SECOS House Sparrow Survey
36	Notes on a Colony of Tree Sparrows at Elworth
38	Birding Maw Green Tip and Railway Flash
40	SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey
41	Crewe Business Park Common Bird Census 2003
42	Cheshire & Wirral Bird Atlas
43	Where Am I?
44	Early and Late Dates for Summer Visitors

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 2003 bird report for the SECOS area, written in this the 40th anniversary year of the foundation of SECOS. The society is flourishing, active and continuing to grow, as is this bird report with 44 pages this year compared to 36 in 2002.

The main body of the report is the Systematic List, which gives details of all birds seen and recorded in the SECOS area during 2003. If you can contribute similar records for 2004 then please send them to me. Even records of common birds help to make the summaries for those species.

The usual articles include the SECOS area map and gazetteer, which you may need to refer to for the new sites included this year. We now have two recorders in the previously remote and uncharted area north of the River Dane! The other regular article is the list of Early and Late Dates for migrants, and in 2003 two records have been extended. Details are given as usual for birds recorded for the first or second time in the area and also of a Christmas 2002 egg-laying pair of Tawny Owls in Quakers Coppice.

The SECOS survey for this year was only a questionnaire on House Sparrows but yielded some interesting facts. There is also an article on the Tree Sparrow colony at Elworth. This is an important site for this threatened species. The colony is thriving, no doubt due to the provision of all year round food and a number of nest boxes. Thanks to those local birders who provide food and also to HJ Lea Oakes at Wheelock Mills for helping with free food. Some interesting facts on the breeding biology of Tree Sparrows were discovered whilst checking the nest boxes. The site guide covers Maw Green Tip and the Railway Flash complex; an area heard of by many but visited by few. Thanks once again to Andrew and Angela Goodwin for this, the latest in the series of site guides.

This year sees the start of fieldwork for the Cheshire & Wirral Bird Atlas. Three years of fieldwork will be followed by the publication of the atlas of breeding and wintering birds in Cheshire and Wirral. Suitably competent volunteers are needed for the fieldwork, which will not be too difficult. Please read the article on page 42 and consider whether you could help with this project.

The best birds of the year were the Red-backed Shrike seen by one lucky but sharp-eyed observer on Maw Green Tip, and the Richard's Pipit seen by just three observers, also on Maw Green Tip. Two other good records were the Ring-billed Gull, seen by many observers, and two White Storks, seen by two observers, both at Elton Hall Flash. The four top birds were all seen in the area of the flashes, but the regulars there feel that they have had a fairly poor year! Although 163 species were recorded in the area in 2003, the same as in 2002, some were not seen at the flashes, such as Marsh Harrier at Marton, Hen Harrier at Arclid and Osprey at Westlow Mere. Passage migrants were down, with 23 wader species seen in the SECOS area and 21 at the flashes, compared to 25 in 2002. However, don't get too despondent, you need the occasional bad year to make you appreciate the good years even more!

Finally a mention of the SECOS winter garden bird survey, which now has 39 members. It provides an interesting and useful activity for the members as well as an invaluable source of records for this bird report. Thanks to all members who are involved and particularly 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

List of Contributors

A. Arrowsmith	R. Crawford	C. Hull	M. Powell
A. Bailey	T. Davies	C. Jones	A. Pym
M. Bailey	T. Dickinson	J. Jones	J. Roberts
M. Ball	P. Dobson	R. Jones	J. Smith
G. Barber	N. Edwards	T. Jones	A. Soper
I. Barber	A. Firth	P. Lunt	R. Stonier
S. Barber	A. Ford	C. Lythgoe	M. Stubbs
A. Battersby	A. Goodwin	F. Malbon	N. Stubbs
M. Billington	A. Goodwin	I. Marshall	D. Swaby
R. Black	L. Greenough	D. Meakin	J. Thompson
A. Booth	T. Halliday	J. Molyneux	J. Tilbrook
D. Bromont	D. Hands	L. Nixon	J. Wakefield
R. Brown	W. Hamilton	D. Norbury	J. Wallace
J. Clowes	A. Hearn	A. Perkins	G. Yarwood
D. Cookson	P. Hill	B. Perkins	

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

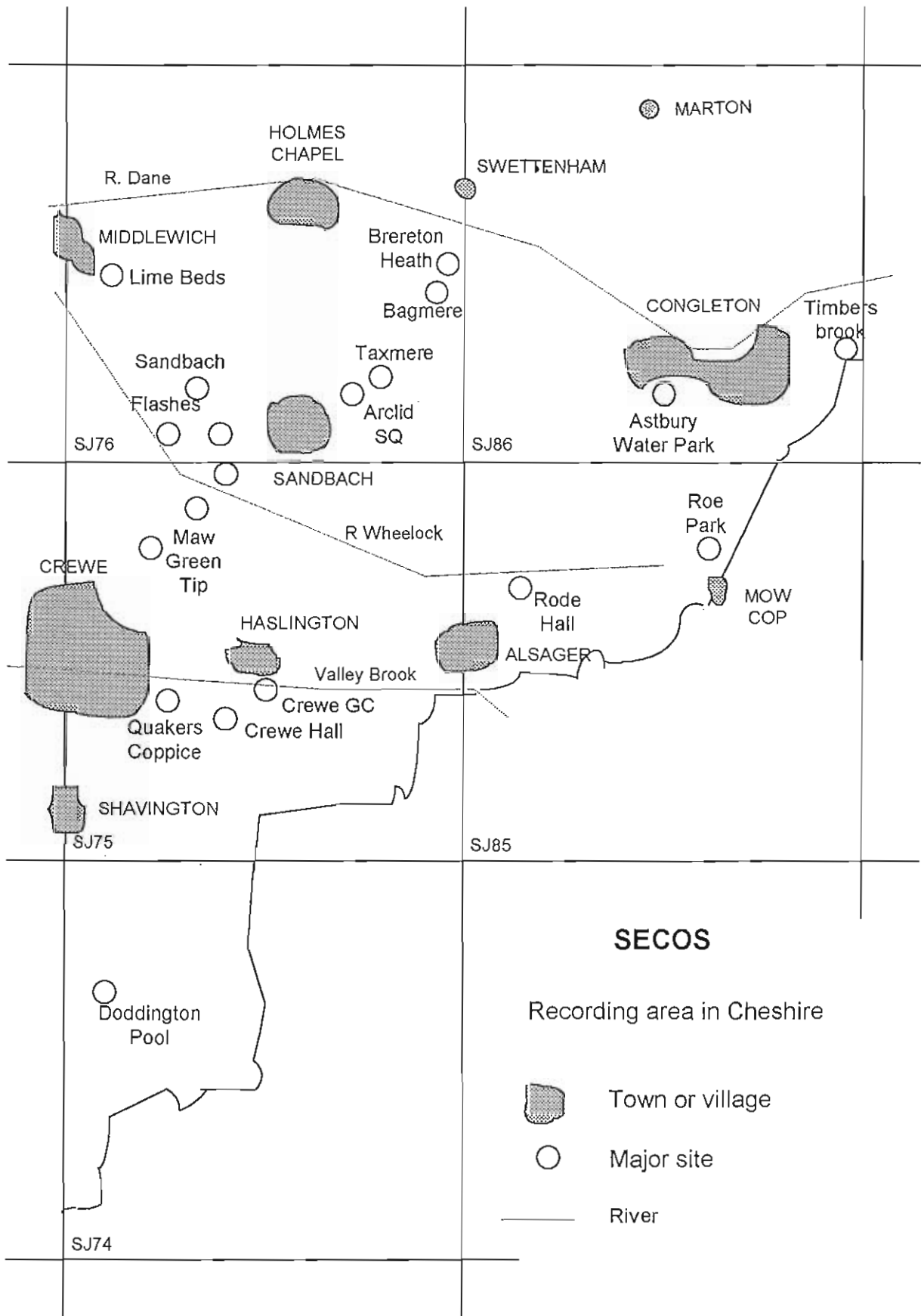
Abbreviations Used

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	Groby 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.



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.

Cheshire's Close SJ868588 ⁴

The old stone quarry 2 kms. north of Mow Cop.

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.

Eaton Hall SQ SJ864654 ³

A working sand quarry.

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 2003

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Fairly common resident.

Records from 6 sites in the first winter period. All singles except for a max of 8 at Doddington.

Pairs bred at Doddington where 13 ads but only 4 juvs on 26th Aug; Westlow Mere where 2 pairs had 4 juvs but all were taken by mink, Blakenhall where 2 pairs on 20th June, and GF where a pair with 2 juvs in June.

As well as the usual post-breeding flock at Doddington, max of 21 in Sept, there were 14 at Westlow Mere in Oct.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Common resident.

Flocks in the first winter period were at WLF (11), CF (6), Arclid SQ (10), Doddington Pool (13) and Rode Pool (12), with smaller numbers at 10 other sites.

Overall the breeding success was about average although for the second successive year pairs at Arclid SQ failed to produce any young.

At the flashes pairs with juvs were noted at GF and WLF. Other sites with proved success were Brereton Heath (1 pair + 3 juvs), Doddington Pool (4 pairs + 5 juvs), Rode Pool (4 pairs + 4 juvs), Westlow Mere (1 pair + 1 juv), Winterley Pool (2 pairs + 4 juvs) and Wybunbury (1 pair + 2 juvs). Sites with pairs but no juvs seen were Astbury Mere, Bent Farm SQ and Weston New Golf Course.

The usual post-breeding flock at Doddington peaked at 66 on 5th Sept. This flock included many juvs of various ages and one only a few days old riding on its mother's back.

These had dwindled down to 27 by Dec with the next largest flock being 13 at WLF.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Common winter visitor. Rare in summer.

As usual PHF was the top site with birds recorded in every month except Aug and with a max of 28 in Feb, but only 14 in Dec.

10+ counts also from Astbury Mere with 14 in Dec, a very high number for this site, and Doddington with 18 in Oct. Also recorded from five other sites.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Rare visitor.

On 17th Apr two were seen at Doddington perched in trees by the pool. They were being harassed by two Grey Herons, flying at the egrets and forcing them off their perch. After the fourth time the egrets gave up and flew off south.

On 26th Aug one was at EHF from 09.30 to 10.10. Presumably the same bird also made brief visits there on 29th Aug and 30th Aug.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Common resident.

Recorded from 10 of the 14 flashes at Sandbach and regular at many other waters, showing its widespread distribution when feeding.

At the Rode Pool heronry there were 40 nests in total, the same as in 2002, and a late nest in mid-June.

White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)

Vagrant.

Two were seen at EHF on 7th May soaring beyond the saltpan. They were watched for five minutes circling and gaining height, then they drifted off east.

This is the second record for the flashes and only the 11th for Cheshire.

The first record was of a bird seen at PHF on 17/5/98 and again at EHF on 24/5/98.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Fairly common resident.

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

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Winterley Pool	107	95	73	76	74	62	52	48	47	33	32	36
Doddington	5	2	2	4	33	35	21	24	19	10	11	26

Two records of ringed birds were of interest: one ringed on 11/2/03 at Winterley Pool was seen at Bewdley, Worcestershire, on 5/10/03, another ringed on 16/2/03 at Hack Green, Nantwich, was subsequently seen on 9/4/03 at Winterley Pool; 4/6/03 on River Clwyd, Rhuddlan; 20/7/03 at Bangor Harbour and finally 19/10/03 at Aber Ogwen, Bangor.

Breeding pairs with juvs were noted at RF, CP, Trent & Mersey Canal Thurlwood, Astbury Mere (where the pair bred on a grass bank within one metre of the footpath walked by dozens of dog walkers every day), Doddington, Trent & Mersey Canal Rode Heath, Westlow Mere, Trent & Mersey Canal Wheelock, Winterley Pool and Wybunbury.

Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

Five at Doddington Pool on 7th Nov were looking very wary and keeping separate from the other swans.

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

Rare winter visitor.

One at Doddington Pool, first seen on 5th Dec, stayed until the end of the year, mixed in with the Mute Swans. 5 were at EHF on 27th Dec.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.

Lots of geese flying over EHF in the first week of Jan with 26 on 2nd Jan, 45 on 3rd Jan, 280 on 4th Jan and 300 on 5th Jan.

Also similar movements at the end of the year with 110 over on 3rd Dec, 120 on 7th Dec, 90 on 28th Dec and finally 150 on 31st Dec. Also 23 south over Marton on 24th Dec.

As usual there were a few singles with Canada Geese, including one seen with a very distinctive limp on 15th Feb at OF and one seen the next day at Queen's Park, Crewe, with a similar limp and associated with a similar size Canada Goose flock.

White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

Very rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

On 3rd Jan two skeins, totalling 37 birds, flew low over Haslington heading west.

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Rare winter visitor or feral.

15 flew east over Marton on 31st May. 12 were on the saltpan at EHF on 4th Aug. Also one or two with Canada Geese from six other sites through the year.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Common resident.

Max numbers in the first winter period were SF (367), Doddington Pool (170), Arclid SQ (228) and Winterley Pool (210).

Bred at many sites with, for example, a high count of 96 adults and 54 juvs on 30th May at Doddington Pool, RF (17 juvs), Arclid SQ (8 juvs), Rode Pool (16 juvs), Winterley Pool (11 juvs) and Wybunbury (15 juvs).

The main site for post-breeding flocks is Arclid SQ where numbers built up to a max of 510 on 20th Aug. Numbers then reduced rapidly to around 50 in early Sept.

The largest flocks recorded in the second winter period were CF 310 and Arclid SQ 236 but the total population is not known due to the mobility of most flocks around all suitable waters and feeding sites.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

Rare visitor or feral.

One with Canada Geese at Arclid SQ from 18th Jan to 31st Jan.

One at Bent Farm SQ on 6th April and one at EHF on 27th April.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

Very rare visitor, usually presumed escapes.

On 5th Apr a group of four flew in to EHF from the south and then flew off southeast. Also at EHF a female first seen on 1st July stayed until 20th July.

Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

Max count in the first winter period was 34 at EHF and 12 at Doddington Pool.

Probably three pairs bred at the flashes with broods of 9, 9 and 8 recorded. A pair present at Arclid SQ in early May did not breed.

Most birds disappeared in autumn as usual. The second winter period max was very low with the highest count being only 11 at EHF in Nov. (24 in 2002 and 32 in 2001).

Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*)

Scarce visitor.

A pair was seen regularly at Queen's Park, Crewe, for most of the year but no successful breeding this year. Also scattered records of one or two from Crewe BP, Crewe GC, Winterley Pool and Wistaston during the year.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

At SF there was a very high count of 772 from a co-ordinated count of all flashes on 12th Jan (RF 57, PHF 518, EHF 3, CF 194). No birds summered here this year and the last bird was seen on 25th Apr.

The first returning birds appeared on 26th Aug with two at EHF. Numbers then continued to increase gradually up to the year end with a max of 570 in Dec.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	521	661	221	8	0	0	0	2	55	290	340	570

Also recorded in winter from Arclid SQ (max 19), Astbury Mere (max 2), Doddington (max 12), Eaton Hall SQ (max 18) and Rode Pool (max 10).

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

A very poor year for this species, with all records given. 13th Jan 1 at PHF, 16th May 4 at EHF, 6th Sept 1 at EHF, 1st Oct 1 at EHF and 5th Nov 3 at EHF.

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.

Most records are from EHF and PHF and these counts are given in the table. However, birds are also regular in winter at RF, with a max of 51, and CF, with a max of 85.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	528	569	233	220	15	19	21	137	297	432	365	814

High numbers in Dec at EHF/PHF with more than 600 all month and a very high count of 814 on 18th Dec.

Max counts of 10+ from other sites were Arclid SQ (13), Doddington (15), Eaton Hall SQ (53) and Rode Pool (19).

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Common resident. Abundant in winter.

Max counts at the main sites in the area throughout the year were:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	239	nc	53	14	77	164	400	317	219	435	171	200
Arclid SQ	404	257	59	48	54	158	155	280	286	238	238	286
Astbury Mere	98	103	28	nc	nc	55	129	nc	nc	134	143	99
Doddington	311	45	34	69	62	31	118	107	6	149	220	286
Winterley Pool	151	nc	55	35	32	85	138	90	95	116	86	90

Breeds commonly on most waters in the area and with an extended breeding season this year with a female + 10 juvs at Oakhanger on 28th Mar and a female with 3 just hatched juvs on 17th Oct at Winterley Pool.

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

A male at Arclid SQ on 26th Jan and a male at the unusual site of Winterley Pool on 8th Apr. All other records were from EHF.

A max of 23 in the first winter period with the last on 31st Mar. One lone male on 3rd June.

The first returning bird in the second winter period was one on 24th Sept. Then generally present to the year end with a max of 8 on 31st Dec.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)

Scarce summer visitor.

Another good year for this sometimes elusive species.

A pair was on RF for a day on 9th May. Then a female/imm was at EHF from 14th July through to 25th July. Another female/imm, or possibly the same bird, was at EHF from 20th Aug through to 21st Sept.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

Uncommon winter visitor, scarce in summer.

Recorded in all months from EHF. The latest date for first winter period records was 10th May. As last year, two put in a brief appearance in mid-June and the first returning bird was seen on 31st July.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	14	21	19	20	2	2	1	11	22	15	19	7

Also recorded in winter from Doddington Pool (max 16), Eaton Hall SQ (max 2) and Rode Pool (max 10).

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

Fairly common winter visitor.

Numbers of this diving duck continue to go down at the flashes, where they are usually recorded at CF and WLF, since PHF and EHF are not deep enough for them to dive in! Max counts in winter were CF (11), WLF (5), Astbury Mere (29), Doddington (30), Rode Pool (11), Winterley Pool (40) and Arclid SQ (8).

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.

Although more common than Pochard at the flashes this diving duck is only regularly found in 10+ flocks at CF where a max of 23 was recorded in Mar.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Astbury Mere	20	51	27	33	nc	2	4	1	0	1	36	45
Doddington	48	161	74	82	44	26	29	12	29	43	29	30
Winterley Pool	38	31	5	6	2	nc	1	0	0	1	4	25

After Mallard this is easily the most widespread duck with records from most flashes at SF, Arclid SQ, Bent Farm SQ, Rode Pool, Stowford, Weston and Wybunbury.

Pairs bred at RF (6 juvs), Doddington (broods of 11, 4, 3 and 1) and Wybunbury SQ (1 juv).

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

Very rare visitor and passage migrant.

At Astbury Mere a male arrived at 16.20 on 5th July, stayed until dark but was not present next day.

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

In the first winter period ever-present at Doddington where a max of 14 (1 male + 13 females/imms) in Feb and the last being a single on 17th Apr. 3 at Arclid SQ on 25th Jan.

In the second winter period a max of 4 at Doddington in Dec, 2 at Arclid SQ on 30th Dec, 1 at Astbury Mere on 31st Dec and 1 at Rode Pool in Oct and Nov.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

The top site continues to be Rode Pool where a max of 12 through Jan and 3 in Feb. Also a pair at Arclid SQ on 19th Jan.

In the second winter period records in Nov from Lawton Hall (9), Rode Pool (5), Doddington (1), Arclid SQ (2), and EHF where a female briefly on the saltpan on 23rd Nov. In Dec records from Astbury Mere (1) and Arclid SQ (1).

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Uncommon resident.

Present in the area but no details given so as not to help the impending Ruddy Duck cull imposed by the Government.

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

Very rare visitor.

On 1st Feb two were seen at Wheelock Heath. Initially noted as they were sitting in a tree, they were watched for a few minutes and then as they flew away.

On 28th Feb there was an unconfirmed report on the pager network of a bird seen flying on the Cheshire side of the M6 near Junction 16.

On 1st April at Arclid SQ a bird was seen briefly in the late afternoon during a wintry shower. It flew east of the quarry and headed off south. This is the first record for this site.

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

Rare passage migrant.

On 3rd Aug a female/imm flew south over the observers near Lower Withington.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

Very rare autumn and winter visitor.

At Arclid SQ a male was seen in the company of 3 Buzzards just before mid-day on 11th Oct. It was circling and gaining height to the east of the quarry. After reaching a considerable height just below the cloud base it drifted south in the company of at least one of the Buzzards. This is the first record for this site.

Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

Vagrant.

On 6th July there was a report of an escaped bird with jesses in the Eaton Hall SQ area.

On 28th Nov a female was seen from WLF looking towards FF.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded from 28 sites plus most of the flashes at SF. Only three proved breeding sites with a pair + 3 juvs in Crewe Cemetery, adults with juvs in Dunwoody Way Crewe, and young calling at Gleadsmoss.

Recorded in 10 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Uncommon resident.

A bewildering abundance of records, which would indicate at least 39 breeding pairs with proved breeding at Hulme Walfield, Eaton, Oakhanger, Swettenham, Gleadsmoss, Marton and Tidnock Wood.

On 16th Oct a group of 12 Buzzards were noted in a field by the railway line at Stowford. Thought at first to be a one-off gathering it subsequently proved to be a daily congregation, with 15 to 18 birds present daily to the end of the year and a max count of 22 on 5th Dec.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Rare migrant.

The only record is of one at Westlow Mere on 28th Aug.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded from 25 sites plus most of the flashes at SF.

Juvs were noted at Arclid SQ, and Crewe where a pair fledged 3 juvs from a nest in a railway workshop at Basford Hall.

Not recorded from any gardens compared with 10 out of 39 for Sparrowhawk, reflecting the different hunting techniques of the two species.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first of the year was on 27th Apr with records from EHF and RF of probably the same bird, followed by one at Doddington on 1st May.

During the summer there were records from 11 sites in the south of our area. Breeding was proved once again in the Oakhanger area where a pair had two juvs. Breeding was also proved on

the Doddington estate where a pair had two or three juvs and all gave brilliant views as the young birds fledged at the end of Aug. Other areas with a cluster of records through the summer were around Shavington, and Arclid SQ where an adult and an imm gave good views in mid-Sept.

The last record of the year was of one over Shavington on 25th Sept.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Scarce resident and winter visitor.

A pair is still resident in RF area, using the electricity pylon as a base and hunting there and also over PHF, EHF and MGT. Hopes of them using an old crow's nest on the pylon as a nest base were dashed as the old nest blew off in the winter. Prey items taken included Coot and Lapwing. In Nov one bird was noted as having a damaged leg and this bird was also noted over Haslington in Dec.

Occasional records of another pair in the Leighton area of Crewe. Singles also seen at Arclid SQ, Alsager South, Doddington, Haslington and Shavington.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

Rare except where locally released.

Less sightings this year and only recorded from Arclid Hollow, Doddington, Smallwood and Wybunbury, with a max of 13 at Doddington in Nov.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

Scarce resident.

1 at Alsager South on 11th Apr and 2 at Basford on 15th Apr. However, there were reports of two pairs, each with coveys of 8 to 10 young, in the Alsager South area later in the year.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Scarce resident except where locally released.

Very common where released for shooting and usually 1s and 2s elsewhere. The only known numbers were at Crewe Hall where 1,500 were released.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

More records than usual with singles at MGT, EHF, GF, WLF, FF, RL, Bradwall and Taxmere in the first winter period up to 23rd March.

Singles in the second winter period from 20th Sept at RF, GF, EHF, WLF and FF.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common resident.

The co-ordinated count of all flashes on 12th Jan gave a total of 64 spread over eight of the flashes (83 at 11 flashes in 2002). Very widespread with small numbers on most waters, both large and small. The only other sites with 10+ counts were Rode Pool with 14 in Sept and Winterley Pool with 19 in Aug.

Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Common resident and variable winter visitor.

The co-ordinated count of all flashes on 12th Jan gave a total of 305 spread over 5 of the flashes (234 over 10 flashes in 2002 but very icy then). Other monthly counts for the flashes only cover EHF and PHF whereas WLF and CF usually have the highest counts.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	204	129	102	83	91	244	634	60	41	30	83	130
Winterley Pool	42	33	17	10	7	18	25	32	30	31	35	38
Astbury Mere	81	60	27	nc	nc	14	22	34	nc	105	119	130

A bad year at Doddington where the post-breeding numbers were building up normally in June and July but crashed in Aug with only 60 compared to 817 in 2002 and 1100 in 2001. Possibly due to a lack of plant food in the water.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Scarce winter visitor and scarce summer visitor.

February first arrivals as usual with 2 at EHF on 9th Feb followed by 1 at Arclid SQ on 12th Feb and 1 at WLF on 24th Feb. The first proved breeding at SF with an adult with 3 juvs at CF on 23rd July where breeding behaviour had been noted in June.

Also bred on the island at Doddington but failed due to disturbance by fishermen. A pair present all summer from 6th Apr at Bent Farm SQ possibly bred. Pairs bred at Arclid SQ and Arclid New SQ but both failed.

The last summer record was of 1 at Arclid SQ on 19th Aug. A single appeared at RF on 19th Dec and stayed there and EHF until 28th Dec.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/autumn migrant.

The first bird was 1 at EHF on 18th Mar and present daily thereafter with a max on spring passage of 19 on 21st Apr. Also on spring passage at Bent Farm SQ on 24th Apr, Oakhanger on 26th Apr and Crewe town on 6th May.

Up to 5 present at EHF during the summer but no juvs seen. A pair at Arclid SQ nested but was predated and a pair at Arclid New SQ probably bred but no juvs seen. Also a pair at Eaton Hall SQ on 6th July. On return passage at EHF there were peaks of 16 on 30th June and 12 on 11th July.

The last record was from EHF with a single on 26th Aug.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

Only recorded from EHF with the first bird there on 7th Mar and then 2 on 26th Mar. A good series of records then with birds present on around half the days in each month to Aug and a max on spring passage of 7 on 14th May.

No records from 4th June to 17th June, which probably marks the start of the return passage, which had a max of 3 in June and Aug. 2 at EHF on 30th Aug then a gap to the last bird on 16th Sept.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Rather scarce in the first winter period with only 3 records in Jan and a max of 18 on 14th Jan. Also 80 flew over PHF on 2nd Mar.

Better in the second winter period with singles on the 1st and 5 other dates in Aug. Then more regular from Oct with max of 20 in Oct, 63 in Nov and 148 in Dec; although generally less than 15.

The best year ever at Arclid SQ where up to 32 present with Lapwings from 13th Oct to the year end. Also 17 with Lapwings at Tidnock on 24th Oct.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	1071	527	53	38	12	238	300	207	410	600	1200	1300

Other large flocks recorded in the first winter period were 540 at Doddington and 317 at Arclid SQ in Jan.

Breeding was noted at EHF where probably 4 pairs bred with 13 juvs seen, Crewe Hall where 4 pairs with at least 5 juvs, Doddington 4 pairs, Haslington Hall 3 pairs, Oakhanger 1 pair, Stowford 6 pairs and Arclid SQ where 5 pairs had 19 juvs.

Large flocks in the second winter period were noted at Alsager South (122), Arclid Hollow (200) and Eaton Hall SQ where 986 on 11th Nov. At Arclid SQ numbers built up rapidly from 650 on 12th Nov to 1500 on 11th Dec.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

Rare visitor.

The only record was of a single at Arclid SQ on 7th Aug. The first record for this site.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Two singles at EHF on spring passage, one on 28th Apr and one on 25th May.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)

Very rare autumn visitor.

1 was at EHF on 24th Sept, first seen at 10.45. The 11th record for the flashes.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

Scarce passage migrant.

A poor year with only two records. 2 at EHF on 24th July and 1 at EHF on 3rd Oct.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

All records from EHF and recorded in all months, but in much reduced numbers.

In the first winter period from Jan to Mar a max of 3 (9 in 2002).

Spring passage from Apr to early June with a max of 10 (20 in 2002).

Autumn passage from July to late Oct with a max of 9 (9 in 2002).

In the second winter period the usual resident flock did not appear and there were only three records, 8 on 12th Nov, 2 on 25th Nov and 1 on 11th Dec.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Higher numbers this year in the resident winter flock at EHF. Present from the start of the year to 6th Mar with a max of 27 (20 in 2002).

Returning birds were slightly earlier this year with 1 on 7th July (14th July in 2002 and 15th July in 2001). Present daily then to the end of the year with increased numbers in Sept indicating some passage birds and then settling to the resident winter flock.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	26	27	16	0	0	0	4	15	20	16	12	17

A good year at Arclid SQ where up to 10 birds were with the Lapwing flock from 23rd Oct to 10th Dec, coinciding with a drop in numbers at EHF at that time.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

In the first winter period singles at MGT, EHF, PHF and 2 at RF in Mar. Also 1 at Lea Forge, Wybunbury, on 23rd Jan.

Only one record in the second winter period with a single at MGT on 7th Nov.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.

Max counts from sites in the first winter period were EHF (28), RF (28), TLF (2) and CF (2), with the last record on 25th Apr.

The first record in the autumn was 2 at EHF on 17th July. Present continuously then to the end of the year with max counts from sites being EHF (37), RF (24), MGT (5), and CF (2).

Occasional winter records from Alsager South (1), Doddington (3), Eaton Hall SQ (4), Stowford (13), Wistaston (1) and Arclid SQ (18).

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Crewe Hall woods were surveyed during the BTO Breeding Woodcock Survey but none were found. The last known breeding record here was in 1995. However, up to 20 are regularly shot here in winter, and up to 10 at Rode Estate, showing its status as a continental winter visitor.

Other winter records of singles near King George's Playing Fields Crewe, in the Wistaston area and Taxmere.

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

Scarce migrant and rare winter visitor.

No repeat of last year's record-breaking numbers (max of 365) at EHF but still a good year.

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
No. of days recorded	11	6	7	2	10	16	1
Max daily count	5	11	47	6	15	3	1

On 11th May one of the birds was seen to be colour-ringed. It was ringed on 12/7/02 in North Iceland as a chick. It was also subsequently seen on the Dee estuary in June. Numbers in May and June fluctuated widely from day-to-day and are probably due to a highly mobile flock of non-breeding 1st summer birds.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Spring passage at EHF with singles on 27th Apr and 29th Apr and then on 7 dates in May with 3 on 7th May.

On return passage 2 on 19th July, 1 on 25th and 27th July and 14 high over WLF on 16th 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 up to mid-June.

As in 2002 there were no breeding records this year.

Numbers at EHF built up rapidly from late June as finished breeders returned and once again settled at around 60 in the evening roost.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)

Rare passage migrant.

1 at EHF on 22nd Aug and 2 at EHF on 2nd Sept.

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

Uncommon visitor and migrant.

In the first winter period the resident flock at EHF had a max of 8.

Steady spring passage from late Mar to mid-May with a max of 4.

Records on return passage were very sparse with 1 or 2 on only 15 dates in June, July, Aug and Sept.

However, recorded on most days at EHF in the second winter period with a max of 6 in Dec.

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

On spring passage a single was at EHF from 14th Apr to 20th Apr and then 3 there on 21st Apr.

Scattered records on return passage with 2 on 22nd June and singles on 6 days in Aug, 4 days in Sept and finally 1 on 11th Oct.

Also 2 over Arclid SQ on 7th Aug and 1 over Doddington on 26th Aug.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.

Wintering records in the first winter period of singles at EHF and Stowford.

A light spring passage as usual with 1 or 2 from 5th Apr to 22nd Apr but 5 on 20th Apr and 4 on 21st Apr.

A long extended return passage as usual with 1 on 27th June and then daily through to 17th Oct, with monthly max of June (3), July (6), Aug (4), Sept (3) and Oct (2).

At Doddington up to 4 were present from 22nd July through to 28th Nov but not thereafter.

Other records in the second winter period from Stowford in Oct, Eaton Hall SQ in Nov and EHF and CF in Dec.

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)

Scarce passage migrant.

1 at EHF on 1st July.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

The first records were of 2 at WLF and 2 at Arclid SQ on 13th Apr. Spring passage continued through to 19th May with a max of 3, but not present continuously. Also on spring passage 1 at Doddington on 25th Apr.

Return passage started with 1 at EHF on 6th July, then present continuously from 14th July with a max of 5 and the last at EHF on 20th Sept. At Arclid SQ present on 9 dates with 3 on 27th July and the last on the very late date of 18th Oct. Also 1 at Doddington on 8th Sept.

Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)

Scarce visitor.

Another good year with 10 records spread throughout the year (8 in 2002). Single adults at PHF on 12th Jan, EHF 8th Feb and 27th Feb. Then an adult summer plumaged bird at Arclid SQ on 11th Mar. 2 adults at EHF on 16th Mar, 1 on 26th Mar and a 2nd summer bird here on 22nd Apr.

Then a gap until mid-July when a 2nd summer bird at EHF on 11th July moved to MGT on 12th July and was joined by an adult for the day. Finally a 2nd winter bird was at EHF on 16th Nov.

Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)

Rare visitor and passage migrant.

Only one record this year, with an adult seen at EHF at 20.50 on 6th May.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

Abundant autumn and winter visitor.

High numbers in the evening roost at EHF saltpan in late winter 2002 continued into 2003 with at least 5,000 present on 1st Jan. Few actual counts at MGT/RF this year but birds still present there in good numbers during the first winter period.

Less than 40 at EHF during the summer and the first juvs arrived here from breeding sites on 26th June. Numbers on the saltpan built up during the autumn and a max of 2,000 was noted in Nov.

In the Doddington winter gull roost, numbers in the first winter period were lower than previously with a max of 6,000 but more normal in the second winter period with a max of 8,500 in Dec.

Numbers in the Astbury Mere gull roost peaked at 2,000 in Dec but birds now use the alternative Eaton Hall SQ more frequently and around 4,000 were noted here in Dec.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)

Very rare visitor.

On 23rd Mar at EHF an adult was found on the saltpan at 15.40. It stayed until 16.05, then moved off with Common Gulls. On 24th Mar presumably the same bird re-appeared here at 16.20 with 160 Common Gulls but moved off at 17.20 and was not seen again. There was a heavy passage of Common Gulls through the area at this time.

The 2nd record for the flashes. The 1st record was a 2nd winter bird near RF on 5/2/95 that only stayed for a few minutes.

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Lower numbers in the first winter period with a max of 25 at MGT/EHF in Jan and only 15 in the roost at Doddington in Feb.

Heavy passage noted at EHF during the second half of Mar, starting with 41 on 14th Mar and up to at least 280 on 23rd Mar, the day of the Ring-billed Gull.

In the second winter period less than 10 noted at the flashes but around 300 in the roost at Doddington in Dec.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

The main site continues to be MGT/RF/QF area although EHF saltpan is being used more. Low numbers at the beginning of the year as usual with a max of 63 noted. Numbers build up on spring passage during Mar and Apr with up to 650 noted daily.

Lower numbers in summer, then building up again from late July when 520 on MGT through to Oct when 1,100 on MGT, and falling down to around 200 at the end of the year.

At the other winter gull roost sites a max of 150 at Doddington and 156 at Eaton Hall SQ were noted in Nov.

An adult showing characteristics of the Baltic race *L.f. fuscus* was noted at EHF on 19th Apr.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Although few actual counts were received from MGT/RF, numbers in the first winter period showed some recovery from last year's low with a count of 1,600 on MGT on 12th Jan.

However, numbers were much lower in the second winter period as heavy shooting of gulls on MGT had an effect and a max of only 70 was recorded. As usual less than 10 were present through the summer from Apr to Oct.

Birds showing characteristics of the Scandinavian race *L.a. argentatus* were recorded with 1 on the early date of 27th Aug and then from the more usual times of Nov and Dec as follows: 12th Nov (2), 29th Nov (2), 2nd Dec (4), 3rd Dec (2) and 31st Dec (4).

Birds of the race *L.a. michahellis* (Yellow-legged Gull) continue to be recorded in ever increasing numbers.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of days recorded	0	2	0	1	2	2	16	22	6	9	6	3
Max day Count	0	1	0	1	2	2	8	9	4	2	1	1

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

An adult was at EHF on 7th and 8th Jan and probably the same bird at MGT, also on 8th Jan. The only other record was of a 1st winter bird at EHF on 10th Mar.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

As usual max numbers were recorded in Jan and Nov/Dec. Counts of up to 70 at MGT in Jan were normal but in Nov/Dec no more than 7 were recorded, presumably again as a result of the heavy shooting pressure.

Recorded in every other month at EHF but usually less than 5 sub-adults.

Up to 6 regular in the winter gull roost at Eaton Hall SQ in the second winter period.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Rare spring passage migrant.

1 seen on the salt pan at EHF on 2nd Apr was following the usual pattern of birds seen on spring migration during Feb, Mar and Apr.

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*)

Very rare passage migrant.

An excellent year with three records. 6 at EHF on 25th May, 1 over EHF on 14th Aug and 3 on the saltpan on 9th Sept.

Surprisingly there have only been five previous records of this species at the flashes. The last was of 3 on 21/4/00 and then back to 1980 for the next.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

Two records on spring passage with 1 at EHF on 19th May and 2 at EHF on 3rd June.

More records on return passage with 1 at EHF on 27th June and then several during July, being seen on 7 days during July at EHF. Also 1 at Alsager South on 10th July and 1 at Doddington on 22nd July, the last record of the year.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

Rare passage migrant.

Again only one record this year with 1 over the back pool at EHF on 13th Sept.

Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common resident.

No records received, but there are flocks of around 100 in most town centres in the area.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

Uncommon resident.

The nest boxes at Quakers Coppice were not checked this year but were still in regular use, with usually around 8 pairs in previous years. Recorded from 14 sites this year and flocks of 10+ were at EHF with 18 on 14th Mar, Doddington with 13 on 18th July, Arclid SQ with 13 on 18th Aug and 11 at Marton on 7th Dec.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Common resident.

Large flocks in winter recorded from Arclid SQ (750), Crewe Hall (600), High Wood (300), Wheelock Heath (300) and Arclid South (278).

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common resident.

Common and widespread but grossly under-recorded. Counts of 10+ from EHF with 61 on 1st Jan, Marton 47 on 13th Nov, Oakhanger 23 on 28th Sept and 15 in a Smallwood garden was the max count in the SECOS winter garden bird survey. Also recorded in every garden in the survey.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.

The first bird this year was seen and heard at Chorlton on 20th April, the same date as last year, closely followed by 1 at Crewe GC on 21st April. Other records of singles from nine other sites, giving a total of 11 sites, one more than last year. No proved breeding and the only juvenile seen was at Arclid SQ on 3rd July, the only record for that site. The last was 1 at EHF on 15th Aug.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Scarce resident.

Some evidence of an increase in numbers for this elusive species. Various records received that probably cover 18 sites in total, many of which will be breeding sites, although only confirmed at Maw Green (2 pairs) and Crewe (1).

Typical is the comment from the farmer at Fields Farm, Moston, who said the two sightings this year were the first there for 20 years.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Common resident.

By far the commonest owl, with its favoured habitat of open farmland. Recorded from 17 sites but no proved breeding this year.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

Common resident.

Common in wooded areas although a big reduction in numbers this year with records from only 12 sites (24 in 2002 and 14 in 2001).

At Quakers Coppice a juv was found whilst cleaning the nest boxes in Feb! It was subsequently proved that a pair bred, laid 5 eggs between Christmas 2002 and the end of the year, and fledged 3 juvs from these! Full details in the separate article.

Also bred at Taxmere with a juv seen on 13th May.

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

Two records of singles this year with 1 over EHF on 29th Mar at 09.15 for two minutes, then it drifted off north, and another 1 at EHF on 22nd Apr.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

A general arrival on 25th Apr, the same date as last year, with 6 at EHF, 2 at WLF and 6 at Doddington Pool in a mixed flock of 600 hirundines. Widespread by the first week of May, including 400 at Doddington on 1st May.

Numbers continue to fall at a dramatic rate with only 80 birds seen in the Crewe west end colony where around 500 a few years ago, and only 6 birds in the Haslington colony where around 50 a few years ago.

Most birds departed in the second half of Aug with one late bird seen over the observer's house in Sandbach on 5th Sept.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 14 sites this year (same as last year) but no indication of proved breeding anywhere and as usual a scarcity of records in Apr and May.

Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)

Very rare visitor.

A fascinating series of records of one bird as it moved through our area on 17th and 18th April. First heard in Haslington it was then seen at two sites in the Smallwood area. Full details in the separate article.

This is the third record for the area and the first away from the flashes.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

Uncommon resident.

Another disappointing year for this species with records from only 9 sites (7 in 2002 and 13 in 2001) and no proved breeding. One regular in Crewe BP in May and June gave excellent views as it fished ants out from cracks in the kerbstones of a car park.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Common resident.

By far the commonest woodpecker with records from many sites across the area. Breeding was proved from five sites usually with adults feeding juvs at a nest hole but a pair with 2 juvs visited a garden feeder at Bostock Green.

In the SECOS winter garden bird survey records of 3 from Swettenham and Timbersbrook and recorded in 9 out of 39 gardens.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)

Uncommon resident.

Another good year for this elusive species with records from 11 sites, the same as 2002 and 2001. Although males were heard drumming and pairs seen, breeding was not proved anywhere.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Fairly common.

The largest flocks in the first winter period were 31 at Basford in Feb and 30 at Chorlton in Jan.

Breeding records of at least 28 singing males widespread at 16 sites (59 at 24 sites in 2002).

Some evidence of passage from mid-Sept to mid-Oct, with 14 over Smallwood on 24th Sept, 8 over EHF on 28th Sept, 9 over MGT on 11th Oct and light passage noted over Marton also on 11th Oct.

Flocks in the second winter period included a very impressive flock of around 60 at Weston that flew over the observer's house and landed in a stubble field and started feeding. Other flocks noted were 14 at Haslington, 12 at Bridgemere and 10 at Tidnock.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First bird of the year was 1 at Astbury Mere on 20th Mar, followed by another 1 there and 1 at PHF on 22nd Mar. 45 at EHF on 5th Apr and 100 at Doddington in a mixed hirundine flock on 25th Apr brought down by bad weather.

Breeding colonies at Eaton Hall SQ where 80-100 pairs, Bent Farm SQ where 30 pairs, and Arclid where birds had a difficult time at the new quarry. There were 38 nest holes by 8th May but these were destroyed by earth-moving operations. The birds then moved to the opposite end of the quarry and there were 55 active nests by the end of June. However, many of these were predated, probably by foxes

Still a few pairs hanging on at Wybunbury SQ (around 6 pairs this year where 150 last year) which is now disused and becoming unsuitable. Some of the few nests were dug out apparently by a fox.

The last record was 1 at EHF on 28th Sept.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Common summer visitor.

The first record was of 1 at Astbury Mere on the rather late date of 5th Apr (the 10-year average arrival date is 26th Mar). Then another at Astbury on 7th Apr, birds at Haslington and Crewe on 8th Apr, and Barthomley and WLF on 9th Apr.

Still breeds fairly commonly throughout the area but pressure is building up as farms and farm buildings are sanitised. This is probably the reason why a pair at Sandbach Heath fledged 6 juvs from a nest in an unfinished house extension.

In autumn 200 were at Arclid SQ in Sept, 100 were feeding over the cricket field at Rode Pool and a very large flock of 1,500 roosted in a maize field at Marton.

The last record was of 1 at PHF on 17th Oct.

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Common summer visitor.

The first record was a single at Astbury Mere on 10th Apr followed by 2 at EHF on 13th Apr.

250 in a mixed hirundine flock over Doddington Pool on 1st May.

Breeds commonly throughout the area with 24 pairs nesting at Brookside Hall, Arclid Hollow.

Many pairs nest at Leighton Hospital Crewe where 80 to 100 flying around the buildings on 16th Sept.

Several records in Oct with the last being on the 11th at three sites, EHF, Sandbach and Cheshire's Close.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant. Scarce resident.

Winter flocks in the first winter period included 47 at MGT, 45 at Haslington Hall, 35 at Stowford, 18 at Doddington and 21 at Arclid SQ.

Around 6 singing males at Cheshire's Close on 25th Mar, a regular breeding site.

Southerly passage noted from early Sept to late Oct from EHF, Marton and Cheshire's Close, where around 35 an hour passing over during the morning of 11th Oct. Also at Arclid SQ where small numbers noted passing on most days but an exceptional movement on the night of 17th/18th Sept left at least 200 birds there on the 18th.

In the second winter period flocks of 45 at MGT, 32 at Arclid SQ, 70 near Brereton Heath CP, 20 at Doddington and 20 at Wheelock.

Richard's Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)

Very rare visitor.

An adult was found amongst Meadow Pipits on MGT on 10th Oct at 13.15. Seen by two other observers it moved away at 15.00 and could not be re-found. Full details in the separate article.

Although the first for the flashes, there has been one previous record of a bird at Cheshire's Close from 14th March to 3rd April 1993.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

First record was 2 at EHF on 16th Apr followed by 2 at Smallwood on the 18th, found whilst searching for the Hoopoe!

Breeding season records from 13 sites and juvs seen at Arclid SQ, Brereton, Doddington and EHF, an improvement on last year.

The last record was 1 at EHF on 25th Sept.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

Recorded from 26 widespread sites during the year with records in the breeding season from 4 of these but no proved breeding. (25 sites and 10 in the breeding season in 2002).

The regular autumn roost at Arclid SQ was much smaller and fragmented this year with a max of 9 birds present in Sept.

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Fairly common resident.

Flocks in the first winter period at Congleton Barn Road filter beds (100), Wheelock Sewage Farm filter beds (30) and MGT (63). Very few confirmed breeding records with juvs noted only at Arclid SQ, EHF, Oakhanger Hall and Rode Pool.

At Arclid SQ at least 75 birds were present on the morning of 18th Sept with 200 Meadow Pipits, brought down from overnight passage.

Flocks in the second winter period included MGT (50), Doddington (60), Wheelock filter beds (40) and Arclid SQ (20).

Birds of the continental race *M.a. alba* were recorded on passage at EHF with 1 on 18th Apr, 1 on 26th Apr and 2 on 27th Apr, and at Arclid SQ on 19th Apr and 2nd June.

Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Scarce resident.

At Bath Vale a pair was present all year and watched nest building in May but no juvs seen. Another pair present on the River Dane near Havannah, Congleton, with a juv seen on 24 June. These are the two regular sites for this species in the SECOS area.

At Arclid SQ on 12th Jan 1 was seen briefly by the feeder stream, the first record for this site.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Abundant resident.

18 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (16 in 2002 and 15 in 2001) and 34 in the BTO breeding bird survey at Congleton in SJ8664.

Recorded in 37 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)

Common resident.

11 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (13 in 2002 and 15 in 2001).

Recorded in 36 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Abundant resident.

Not much change with 21 territories recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (same as 2002 and 2001) and 28 in a BTO breeding bird survey at Congleton in SJ8664 (same as 2002).

Recorded in all 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey, with a max of 6 in a Timbersbrook garden.

Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)

Very rare visitor.

A male found at 09.15 on 4th Jan along Weston Road Crewe stayed there all day. Still present next morning, it was last seen around mid-day and never relocated.

The third record for the area.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.

Three records in Aug with a male on 2nd Aug near Haslington, 1 at Oakhanger on 8th Aug and a male at PHF on 29th and 30th Aug.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Scarce migrant.

Presumably the same male recorded on several days from 20th April to 9th May at MGT.

Then in autumn a female at MGT on 12th and 14th Aug followed by 4 there on 29th Aug dwindling to 1 on 6th Sept. Also 1 at Rookery Bridge on 7th Sept.

Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)

Scarce winter visitor.

In the first winter period a male + female at Weston New Golf Course and a female on Weston Road, Crewe.

More records as usual in the second winter period but all in Oct with a male at MGT on the 7th, a male at Middlewich Lime Beds on the 12th, a male at Blakelow on the 19th and a female at Haslington on the same day.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

First record on 17th Mar with a single at EHF. Then recorded on 16 more dates in spring up to 15th May with records from EHF, PHF, TLF and MGT where the spring max of 6 on 26th April. Also on spring passage at Cheshire's Close (1) Crewe BP (1) Oakhanger (2) and Arclid SQ (1).

Fewer records on return passage with 1 at MGT between 24th Aug and 6th Sept, 3 there on 29th Aug. Also 1 in Dunwoody Way Crewe and 2 at Oakhanger. The last of the year was 1 at EHF on 10th Sept.

Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)

Vagrant.

The only record of the year was a male feeding in the field below the old quarry at Cheshire's Close on 26th Mar.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

29 territories were recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP (27 in 2002 and 31 in 2001) and 47 birds seen in a BTO breeding bird survey at Congleton in SJ8664 (31 in 2002 and 32 in 2001).

Recorded in all 39 of the gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey with a max of 12 in an Alsager garden.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Common winter visitor.

In the first winter period flocks of 100+ were noted at Chorlton (600), Haslington (130) and Weston (100). The first record in the autumn was on 13th Oct with a total of 100 at Arclid SQ, 80 at WLF and 2 at CF. In the second winter period flocks of 50+ were noted at Stowford (150), EHF (100), Tidnock (80) and Haslington (70).

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Fairly common resident.

Conflicting reports this year with only 7 birds seen in the BTO breeding bird survey in Congleton SJ8664 where 14 in 2002. Numbers also down in the common bird census at Crewe BP with 2 pairs this year where 3 in 2002 and 2001, but 8 pairs at Arclid SQ, the same as 2002.

However, in the SECOS winter garden bird survey birds were recorded in 33 out of 39 gardens, an improvement on previous winters.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

Common winter visitor.

Flocks noted in the first winter period included Chorlton (130), Wheelock Heath (90) and Haslington (50).

Autumn arrival in the first week of Oct as usual with the first being birds flying over Smallwood on 2nd Oct. Although fairly widespread in the second winter period numbers seemed much lower than expected with 85 at Marton and 37 at Alsager South being the only flocks of 20+ recorded.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Fairly common resident.

Breeds throughout the area but not often recorded. Post-breeding flocks of 35 at Tidnock Wood, the largest seen there for several years, 21 on the cricket field at Rode Pool and 11 at Alsager South.

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First record was of 1 at RL on 15th Apr and then at several sites from 19th Apr. Records of singing males were mainly from the flashes with 15 heard at 7 of the flashes (similar to last year). Also from Arclid SQ (2) Rode Pool (2) where they bred, but 2 at Crewe BP on 3rd May moved on. The last was at WLF on 19th Sept.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first record was 1 at WLF on 18th Apr, then a gap until the next on 30th Apr. Not as widespread as Sedge Warbler due to its more specific habitat requirements of reed beds, the main site as always is at the flashes. Probable numbers of pairs were WLF (7 and adults seen feeding juvs here), OF (1), GF (1), MGT (1) and EHF (1). Also at Rode Pool (3). A first breeding record for Taxmere where a pair were seen feeding young in a nest in the reed bed on 7th July.

A sad record from Crewe BP where one was found fresh dead under a window on 29th June – what was it doing there?

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First record from FF on 20th Apr. Then records from several sites with at least one singing male at seven of the flashes. Singing males also at Taxmere, Bent Farm SQ, Shavington, Crewe Green, Chorlton, Buglawton and Haslington where two adults were seen carrying food to a nest. Last record was from EHF on 20th Sept.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

Common summer visitor.

Mass arrivals as usual for this species with 7 at FF/CP and 1 at Alsager South on 16th Apr and at three more sites on 18th Apr.

A common breeding species with, for example, 18 pairs recorded at the flashes, including 5 pairs along the railway embankment at FFF, and 6 pairs at Taxmere. However, records were only received from 7 other sites (14 in 2002) and none on BTO breeding bird surveys.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First record from Crewe GC on 26th Apr followed by 1 on Foden's Test Track on 28th Apr, and several in the first week of May.

Not particularly common at the flashes with only a few occasional records but more records of singing males from elsewhere with Alsager South (3) Swettenham (4) and Wheelock Rail Trail (4).

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.

More records than usual of wintering birds in the first winter period with records from near FF (1), Crewe (3 separate singles and 1 two), Middlewich (1), Sandbach (1 single and 1 two), Hough (1), Alsager (1) and Scholar Green (1), a total of 13 birds from 11 sites.

The first summer visitor was at Astbury Mere on 28th Mar followed by singles on 4th Apr at Rode Pool and WLF. Recorded from several widespread sites but only 5 territories in the common bird census at Crewe BP where 7 in 2002 and 9 in 2001. The last departing summer visitors were seen at Crewe BP with 3 here on 26th Sept.

Winter visitors in the second winter period were at Sandbach where 3 males and a female were seen together on 23rd Nov and Astbury Mere with a male on 31st Dec.

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

Scarce summer visitor and passage migrant.

On 14th May a male was heard singing and then watched for some time in the woods going up The Cloud.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.

Always the first warbler to arrive and no exception this year with 2 at WLF on 10th Mar followed by 1 at Brereton Heath CP on 14th Mar, 1 at Doddington on 15th Mar and several more in the following week. Their abundance was shown by the record of 16 singing males from 15 sites around Crewe town centre on 27th Mar.

Many records in late Sept and early Oct as passage birds sing on migration as they move south. The last record was a late one at Arclid SQ on 23rd Oct, the latest ever date in the SECOS area.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Common summer visitor.

Three early arrivals this year on 28th Mar with 2 at Weston Road Crewe and 1 at WLF, which was the earliest ever date for the flashes.

A definite reduction in breeding records this year with the max count for a site being 8 pairs at Arclid/Taxmere, and then 3 singing males at Astbury Mere.

A walk along the Wheelock Rail Trail on 5th June only gave one Willow Warbler but several each of Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Garden Warbler.

Two Sept records with 1 at EHF on 2nd and the last of the year at Sandbach on 4th.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Winter records from 18 sites (13 in 2002, 20 in 2001) with generally 1, 2 or 3 except for 6 at Lawton Hall and 5 at Crewe GC. Also 1 or 2 recorded in 5 gardens out of 39 in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Breeding season records from 6 sites: Buglawton, Queen's Park Crewe, Doddington, Haslington, Sandbach Heath and The Cloud.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

A good number of pairs, with records from 13 sites, continuing the improvement shown in recent years. However, of the three nest outcomes reported two were failures, Arclid Hollow and Basford, but a pair with juvs were seen at Taxmere.

Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

Rare passage migrant and summer visitor.

On 13th Apr 1 was seen in the observer's garden at Middlewich.

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 were seen but these seemed slightly smaller than usual being 10 to 15 instead of the more normal 15 to 20.

The largest counts were 20 in a Timbersbrook garden and 19 at Arclid Hollow. Recorded in 30 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Marsh Tit (*Parus palustris*)

Rare visitor.

The only record was of the long staying bird at Rode Pool. First seen on 17th Sept. 2002, it was present on the feeders on most days throughout the year. With only one bird ever seen it must be getting lonely – and desperate!

Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*)

Scarce resident.

7 records of this species throughout the year with singles at Weston Road Crewe on 19th Mar, 2 separate birds at Crewe Hall on 31st Dec, Doddington 1st Jan, Stowford 12th Mar, Wybunbury 29th Jan, and Taxmere where 1 or 2 were seen most of the year except for May and June.

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)*Fairly common resident.*

Recorded from 12 sites in winter and also recorded in 33 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey with a max of 7 in an Audlem garden.

Breeding season records from 8 sites including 5 pairs at The Cloud.

Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*)*Common resident.*

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	15	?	?
Quakers Coppice	8	74	20
Rode Pool	4	?	27

An exceptionally bad year for breeding success at Quakers Coppice reflected the national position.

In 2003 8 pairs fledged 20 young, a productivity rate of only 2.5 juvs/pair compared with 2002 when 9 pairs fledged 78 young, a productivity rate of 8.7 juvs/pair, around the usual figure. Also the average first egg date in 2003 was 22nd Apr, a week later than 2002, again a result of the very poor weather in April.

However, big numbers were still recorded at some sites in winter with 40 in a Middlewich garden and 35 feeding on house roofs in Marton during bad weather.

Great Tit (*Parus major*)*Common resident.*

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	5	?	?
Quakers Coppice	9	53	26
Rode Pool	2	?	14

Although not affected by the bad weather quite as much as the Blue Tits, the Great Tit pairs also had a very poor year. Egg laying was later, clutch sizes were smaller and most clutches lost some young, usually due to starvation as the adults were unable to find enough food for the young.

The productivity this year was 2.9 juvs/pair compared to 7.3 in 2002.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)*Common resident.*

Recorded from 19 sites but quite common with, for example, 3 pairs along the brook at Crewe GC. Seen at 7 sites in the breeding season but no breeding proved. Recorded in 10 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)*Common resident.*

Not surprisingly this inconspicuous little bird is under-recorded. Only noted from 14 sites with proved breeding only at Arclid SQ. Not a regular garden visitor due to its feeding requirements and only recorded in 4 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*)*Vagrant.*

On 31st May a female was seen on Maw Green Tip. Seen perched on top of one of the new hedges it was watched for several minutes diving down for food and then moving along the hedge but was then lost from view and unfortunately could not be relocated. Full details in the separate article.

This is the first record for the area.

Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)*Very rare visitor.*

One was present in the area of the junction of the Macclesfield Canal and River Dane near Bosley at least through most of November. Although just outside the SECOS boundary it was seen inside our area on at least two or three occasions during its stay.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

Uncommon resident.

The usual numbers with records from 21 sites of 1, 2 or 3 birds. Adults with juvs seen near Walgherton and near Winterley Pool.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)

Common resident.

Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, 10 territories recorded in a common bird census at Crewe BP.

No large flock sizes noted but recorded in 35 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

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 pairs in the old tower.

The only large count was 700 feeding in a maize stubble field at CF on 23rd Nov. Unable to count the large roost at Crewe Hall again but from flight line counts was around 1500.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Common resident.

The totals at regularly counted rookeries were:-

Site	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999
Crewe/Alsager (9 sites)	537	528	566	539	524
Foden's Flash	126	117	nc	116	119
Arclid	81	93	82	69	52

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Common resident.

Probably the most ignored species in the area 5 pairs with nests were found during a four-mile walk round Hassall Green on 8th Apr. An adult with 4 juvs was seen on the lawn at Brookside Hall Arclid Hollow on 2nd June.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Scarce visitor and resident.

Not quite as many fly over records as last year but we now have two proved breeding pairs. At Doddington Park a pair was seen with 5 juvs in late April, finally proving what had been suspected for the past two years. The resident pair at Timbersbrook also bred and fledged 3 juvs.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

The largest flock in the first winter period was around 5000 seen along Clay Lane Haslington on 23rd Jan.

Few records in summer but one pair with a nest in a hole in an oak tree along Poolside at Rode Pool.

In the second winter period the regular flock at MGT numbered around 2000. The next largest was 200 roosting in a Wistaston garden.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Common resident.

A survey was carried out amongst SECOS members this year and the details are given in a separate article in this report.

Overall the figures showed a fairly steady decline of around 34% over the past 18 years.

Several flocks of around 30 were reported from observers' gardens.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Fairly common resident.

Again a reduction in the number of records. Only recorded at 15 sites (19 in 2002, 21 in 2001) and excluding the flashes colony the max numbers recorded were only 10 in a Swettenham garden and 10 at Marton.

A special study was made of the colony at EHF this summer and produced some surprising results, particularly on the number of clutches per pair and on productivity. Details in the separate article in this report.

Flocks of 46 in Feb and 60 in Sept at MGT/RF.

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

Common throughout the area with flocks in the first winter period of 100 at Doddington and 30 at Wheelock Heath.

In breeding bird surveys at least 12 birds seen in SJ8664 Congleton and 7 territories in the common bird census at Crewe BP.

An impressive flock of at least 340 in the Gawsworth area on 28th Nov.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Fewer records in gardens than last year with singles in gardens at Hough (15th to 22nd Mar) and Timbersbrook (mid-Jan to mid-Mar).

More records at the other end of the year with 1 over MGT on 11th Oct and 1 at Marton on the same date, 2 over Tidnock Wood on 2nd Nov, 1 with Chaffinches at Gawsworth on 28th Nov and 1 at Joey-the-Swan Wistaston on 30th Nov.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common resident.

A very common finch, recorded in 37 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey with counts of 50 in a Crewe garden and 40 in Haslington and Middlewich gardens.

A reduced count of 3 territories in a common bird census at Crewe BP (5 in 2002 and 10 in 2001).

The winter roost at Crewe BP formed again with at least 70 in laurel bushes in Oct.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Fairly common resident.

Smaller flocks than last year with those of 20+ recorded at Crewe Cemetery (70), FFF (55), Arclid SQ (50), Bath Vale (40), Alsager South (24) and WLF (30) plus 25 in gardens in Coppenhall, Crewe and Alsager.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.

Fewer records of most finch species this year except for Siskin, a species that most observers like to record.

Usually seen in Jan to Mar and then not much before Nov with flock sizes of FF (43), Arclid (100-150), Basford Hall Crewe (33), Crewe (35), Rode Pool (40), Haslington (53), Tidnock (50), Wynbunbury (60) and Winterley (35).

Recorded in 25 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey from Jan to Mar.

Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Fairly common resident.

Seemingly on the increase with flocks of 200 at Doddington in Sept, 180 at Alsager South in Aug, 80 at Haslington in Dec, 45 at Marton in Dec, 40 at MGT in Sept and 40 at Taxmere in Dec. Records from 24 widely scattered sites with breeding behaviour noted at many of them.

Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis cabaret*)

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Records of 1, 2 or 3 birds at 11 sites from Jan to Mar. At the other end of the year, records in Dec with 11 in a Sandbach garden and 9 in a Holmes Chapel garden and up to 4 from 4 other sites.

Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)

Very rare visitor.

On 7th Aug 2 were seen as they flew over Brereton calling. (Also recorded here in Aug in 2002).

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Uncommon resident.

A wide spread of records from 19 sites, all of which are probably breeding sites for this sedentary species. Generally less than 4 birds except for Astbury Mere where up to 8 regular on the feeders there.

4 territories were recorded in the common bird census at Crewe BP and birds were recorded in 8 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Uncommon resident.

Another welcome increase in records for the second consecutive year. Winter flocks of 28 at Marton and 22 at Chorlton but the biggest increase was for singing males in the breeding season with records from Blakenhall/Basford/Weston area (10), Basford Hall Crewe (7), Haslington Hall (6), Sandbach Heath (4), Smallwood (3 – found whilst searching for the Hoopoe) plus 1 or 2 from at least 13 other sites.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Uncommon resident.

Again a species showing an increase for the second consecutive year. Good numbers in winter at MGT/RF with a max count of 32 in Nov. Also recorded in 3 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey with a max of 6 in a Crewe garden.

Breeding season records of 8 pairs at Arclid SQ plus 3 pairs at Taxmere, at least 6 pairs from 5 sites at the flashes, and 1 or 2 from 13 other sites.

Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

Scarce resident.

Sadly the question I posed last year 'Is this the last year that we will record Corn Bunting in our area?' may have come true, with no records at all this year.

Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes

Cape Shelduck (*Tadorna cana*)

A female spent some time wandering around with a group of Shelduck. First seen at EHF on 1st Mar, it was at Doddington on 27th Mar. Then seen again at Doddington on 1st May, it was at EHF on 24th May and 28th May.

White-cheeked Pintail (*Anas bahamensis*)

One was present at Doddington on 5th Dec. A probable female due to smaller size and duller colouration of cheeks and bill patch.

Green Parrot sp

One flew over PHF at 06.20 on 26th April.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE AT MAW GREEN TIP ON 3RD MAY 2003

Whilst walking across the fields on top of the tip at 10-00 on Saturday morning a bird caught my eye perched on top of a hedge. Tipping finished in this area around four years ago and it was grassed over and hedges planted for future field boundaries. Focussing my binoculars on the bird I recognised it as a female Red-backed Shrike. It stayed perched on top of the hedge for several minutes in an upright posture before swooping down behind the hedge. It then reappeared about 25 metres further along on top of the hedge, again in an upright posture. On this occasion it reappeared with an insect and started eating it. I witnessed this behaviour of swooping and reappearing on top of the hedge four times, over a distance of 120 metres, before finally dropping down and not reappearing. Several other birders and myself then spent hours trying to relocate the bird but with no success.

David Meakin

This is the first record for the SECOS area.

RICHARD'S PIPIT AT MAW GREEN TIP ON 10TH OCTOBER 2003

I was walking over the tip when I flushed a small group of Meadow Pipits. Amongst them I noticed a much larger bird with an unfamiliar call. It landed on top of a wire fence but sadly the sun was facing me so I couldn't get much detail on the bird. I could tell by the shape of the bird that it was a large pipit with a long tail and long legs. It then dropped on to the grass below the fence with the Meadow Pipits. They were covered by the long grass but I could still see the head and upper breast of the large pipit. I noticed it had an upright alert stance and a large stout bill. This led me to the conclusion that it was a Richard's Pipit. The bird then went out of sight when it flew to the top of the hill.

I then walked to Elton Hall Flash where I told Andrew Goodwin and Ian Barber what I had seen and we decided to go and look for the bird. After a lot of searching we flushed the bird by the tip perimeter fence. Again I noticed its long tail and the call, which was a harsh "shreep". Its flight was bounding, a lot like a wagtail. It then landed on bare ground where we obtained good views with our binoculars. I again noticed its upright stance and a band of short streaks on the upper breast. Sadly before we could set up our telescopes the bird flew away, again calling. It appeared to land on the other side of the tip but after extensive searching the bird was not seen again. As soon as Andrew Goodwin heard it call he confirmed that the bird was a Richard's Pipit as he has had some experience with them in the past.

Ian Marshall

This is the first record for the Sandbach Flashes area but the second for the SECOS area. The first was a single at Cheshire's Close (the old quarry north of Mow Cop), which was present from 14th March to the 3rd April 1993.

RING-BILLED GULL AT ELTON HALL FLASH ON 23RD & 24TH MARCH 2003

Sunday 23rd March had been notable for a heavy passage of Common Gulls. After covering all the flashes my wife and I decided to give the salt pan at Elton Hall Flash one last try before going home. We noticed a large number of Common Gulls on the salt pan. This is unusual for us so we decided to count them in the hope of beating the flashes record count. I started counting them using my 'scope with x20 lens and had reached a dense group of Common Gulls when a bird in the middle of the group stopped preening and showed me a long yellow bill with a black sub-terminal band. The bird was facing us at a great distance and had started preening deep inside its breast feathers again. After about 30 seconds it stopped and again showed me its banded bill. I could see part of its mantle and wings and they appeared the same colour as the Common Gulls alongside and partly obscuring the bird. Its legs were yellow but it was standing in water so I couldn't see their length. Its size was the same as the Common Gulls and nowhere near the size of the Lesser Black-backed Gulls nearby. Its head, neck and underparts were pure white. I showed the bird to my wife who confirmed the banded bill.

John Wakefield, a local birder, was nearby with another visiting birder. I asked John if he had a zoom lens on his Nikon 'scope. He could tell from my excitement I was on to something good and ran to his car for his x50 lens. With the good light this gave us very good views and I and my wife took the following notes.

Size similar to Common but a trifle bulkier and longer bodied, thicker necked and larger headed. Forehead more sloping than Common's rounded head. Bill slightly longer than Common and a touch thicker. Noticeable black sub-terminal band down across both mandibles. Lower mandible showing a very slight gonyd bump. It showed a red gape when it yawned, with the red gape line going back to just before the eye. Slitty, scowling eye, yellowish white with narrow red eye ring. Head, neck and underparts pure white. Mantle, back and wings grey, slightly paler than accompanying Commons. Narrow white tertial fringe much narrower than on Commons alongside. Black wing tips showing three small white spots. Tail and uppertail coverts white. Legs yellow.

At 16-05 the bird flew south with adult Commons allowing superb comparisons of wing tip pattern, revealing the tiny white mirror compared to Common's large white patch. In flight little size difference could be discerned although perhaps a touch longer and broader winged.

D Norbury and I located the same bird at 16-20 on the 24th. This time it stayed at least an hour, allowing many of the locals to see it. All of the above features were double checked and photographs taken by P Hill. Despite extensive searching it was not seen subsequently.

Andrew & Angela Goodwin

This is the second record for the flashes. The first was a 2nd winter bird present for 20 minutes between Maw Green Tip and Railway Flash on 5th February 1995.

WHITE STORK AT ELTON HALL FLASH ON 7TH MAY 2003

From the viewpoint at Elton Hall Flash and looking east I saw two large birds beyond the railway line, soaring and circling within a regular small area and gradually rising. They continued in this manner, slowly gaining height, moving gradually eastward, until they were lost from sight. There was no discernible wing movement. Their wings were long with black flight feathers, the rest of their wing plumage being white. Their wing tips, with separate fingers, were black. Their bodies were white and their long white necks were stretched out in front. Their bills were long, pointed and red. Their legs also were red and stretched out beyond their bodies.

John Wakefield

There are two previous records of presumably the same bird. One seen over Pump House Flash on 17th May 1998 and again over Elton Hall Flash on 24th May 1998.

HOOPOE AT HASLINGTON AND SMALLWOOD ON 17TH & 18TH APRIL 2003

Although I usually only give details of records of species seen for the first or second time I have also included this extraordinary one. It is written by Colin Lythgoe using details extracted from the observers' rarity forms.

It was first recorded at 08-00 on 17th April from Haslington when Reg Crawford's wife, who was inside the house, heard a strange bird call from outside. She alerted her husband who identified it as a Hoopoe, calling from nearby gardens, although it was never seen.

Later that same day Andrew Goodwin's brother was driving along Back Lane, Smallwood at 20-00 when he saw an exotic looking bird standing in the middle of the lane. He stopped the car and the bird slowly walked to the side of the road into an open gateway where it remained. He later rang Andrew Goodwin, who identified it from the description.

Andrew Goodwin was on site before 06-00 next morning. He parked 200 metres away so as not to disturb the bird and walked back to the gateway where the bird was last seen, but there was no sign of it. He climbed up on to the gate to give a better view and the Hoopoe rose up from the ground just 2 metres away! It flew over the road and into a nearby dead tree. After leaving the area to telephone other birders, he returned at 06-20 in time to see the bird fly out of its tree and round the back of a neighbouring cottage. Despite extensive searching it was not seen again.

Subsequently I was given another record when a resident of Smallwood saw a Hoopoe in an apple tree in his garden at 11-30 on 17th April.

This seemed to be a classic example of the uncertainties of birdwatching! The initial contact with the bird on each occasion was made by a non-birder, who fortunately knew a birder who could confirm the identification. It makes one wonder how many similar instances there are of less exotic looking/sounding rare birds that pass through unrecorded.

This was incidentally the third record for the SECOS area but the first away from the flashes. The first was of one at Elton Hall Flash on 30th and 31st May 1971. The second was of one at Elton Hall Flash on 15th and 16th October 1985.

IS THIS THE EARLIEST EVER EARLY BIRD?

When the nest boxes at Quakers Coppice, Crewe are cleaned out we have found a variety of things in them over the years. However, whilst doing them this year, on 27th February, Bryan had a real shock when checking a large hole box with no lid on to find himself staring eyeball to eyeball with a fledgling Tawny Owl !

After double checking to make sure that it was not a 'feathery' squirrel (the usual occupants) we moved on quickly since Tawny Owl adults can be very aggressive when defending their young. Returning two days later on 1st March to replace the lid, the box was found to be empty. But after a thorough search of the wood the young bird was finally found sitting high up on a branch of a tree 70 yards from the nest box, with an adult perched nearby watching it!

A search of the nest uncovered the part eaten remains, mainly just legs, of two more young Tawny Owls, one less than a week old and the other between one and two weeks old.

Reading through the Birds of the Western Palearctic later confirmed the following:-

- The usual clutch size is 2-5 eggs, with a mean of 2.7

- The incubation period is 28-30 days

- Young emerge from the nest at 25-30 days and climb up the tree using claws, bill and flapping wings

- The young begin to fly at 32-37 days i.e. around 7 days after leaving the nest

- The young are dependent on the adults for 2 to 3 months after fledging

- Fratricide sometimes occurs when food is in short supply.

If we assume that the owlet had just left the nest on 28th February, and using the above data, then the egg was laid between 1st and 6th January! But since the owlet could probably fly, since it was found 70 yards from the nest box, it could even have been up to a week earlier and become a late December egg!!

And we thought that was the end of a remarkable breeding record until 3rd March. A further search then found two more fledged young, obviously larger and so older than the first one, which was also re-found on this day, together with an adult.

So in summary it is probable that five eggs were laid between Christmas 2002 and the end of the year; all five hatched and three young survived to at least leave the nest box.

On 11th March the three young were still roosting in the open in the wood with an adult roosting in a nearby holly tree.

This information was included in David Glue's usual article on early nesting birds in BTO News 246, when he commented that this was the earliest known Tawny Owl nest in Britain this year and offered the additional information that in autumn 2002, a huge crop of beech mast and other woodland fruits fuelled locally high populations of rodent prey, enabling Tawny Owls to take advantage via early egg-laying.

Bryan Perkins and Colin Lythgoe.

SECOS HOUSE SPARROW SURVEY

The National Picture

Introduction

As most people will be aware from articles in birding magazines and the national press, there is widespread concern over the current status of the House Sparrow. A wide variety of facts, guesses, myths and local experiences have been put forward as reasons. As a result, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has commissioned the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to lead a major project to investigate the change in numbers, breeding success and survival rates of the House Sparrow in Britain. Much work has been done and an interim report published.

Facts and Figures

- In the 1970s there were 12 million pairs of House Sparrow in Britain.
- Now there are between six and seven million pairs.
- Just over half of Britain's House Sparrows occur in southern and central-eastern England.
- There is much regional variation in House Sparrow population changes.
- House Sparrow populations have declined most in eastern England (90%) and south-east England (65%).
- Numbers are currently thought to be increasing in Scotland and Wales.
- As with several other declining species, it is the inability of young House Sparrows to survive to breeding age that has driven population declines.
- Breeding performance in suburban and urban habitats appears to be poorer than in farmland.
- House Sparrows suffer greatest mortality during the breeding season, when adult birds appear to incur greater risks as they try to find food for the youngsters.
- Predation by cats and Sparrowhawks could be a factor affecting populations in suburban and urban situations, as cat ownership has risen and Sparrowhawks have colonised urban areas.
- Food supplies in our towns and cities have been reduced with the development of new buildings on previously derelict land.
- House Sparrows need aphids, weevils, grasshoppers and caterpillars to feed their young and these may now be harder to find in our towns and cities.

Possible Causes of the Decline

- Recent work has proved that the fledging success rate of second and third broods has declined, possibly due to insect food, on which young are fed, being less plentiful later in the season.
- Lack of nest sites as modern houses are not suitable and older houses are modernised.
- Increased predation by domestic cats and Sparrowhawks.
- Loss of sources of weed seeds due to changes in farm practices, increasingly tidy gardens and building on previously unused or derelict sites.
- Disease transmission, particularly of salmonella at bird feeders.
- Air quality in towns and cities.

Research is ongoing into the national decline, which varies over the country and is probably due to several causes.

The Local Survey

Introduction

The survey was a very simple one with recorders merely being asked to fill in a questionnaire. This asked for details of nest site availability, breeding pairs and feeding routines for their own and neighbouring properties. Only 18 survey forms were returned.

All gave full details of the recorder's own house but some were not sure about details of neighbouring properties. So I have done a full analysis of the own house details and used the other available information in the summaries.

Nest Site Availability

Of the 18 properties, ten had sites suitable for House Sparrows to nest in. However, of these ten, six had provided nest boxes of various types. Out of the overall total of 18 only eight had nest sites available due to the construction and condition of the building. Most of the ten where "natural" sites did not exist were due to previous modernisation of barge boards and gutters etc.

Nest Sites Used.

Seven sites had House Sparrows nesting, involving around 15 pairs. Sites used included under eaves (1); behind barge boards (1); in roof gaps (2); House Sparrow nest boxes (6); House Martin nest box (1); House Martin nests (3); hedge (1).

Of the three House Martin nests, two pairs used the previous year's old nests but one nest involved the eviction of a pair of House Martins after they had refurbished an old nest ready to use. This behaviour was also noted at two neighbouring properties where House Sparrows evicted House Martins after they had built a nest ready to use. I was not previously aware of this behaviour but on checking my books found the following under House Sparrow in "Birds of Cheshire" published by Coward and Oldham in 1900. "Not only does the Sparrow rear its young in the nests of House Martins, but it frequently uses these sites as roosting-places in the winter."

It can be seen that only five pairs used "natural" sites whereas ten pairs used "provided" sites.

Feeding Routines

As you would expect from a group of bird-lovers, all 18 recorders provided food in winter and 15 provided food in summer as well. It is probably significant that all sites with breeding House Sparrows provided food all the year.

Comments

All recorders were asked to comment on the status of their House Sparrows and any changes noted. Of the 18, two thought that numbers had gone up, four had gone down, eight had not changed and four did not comment.

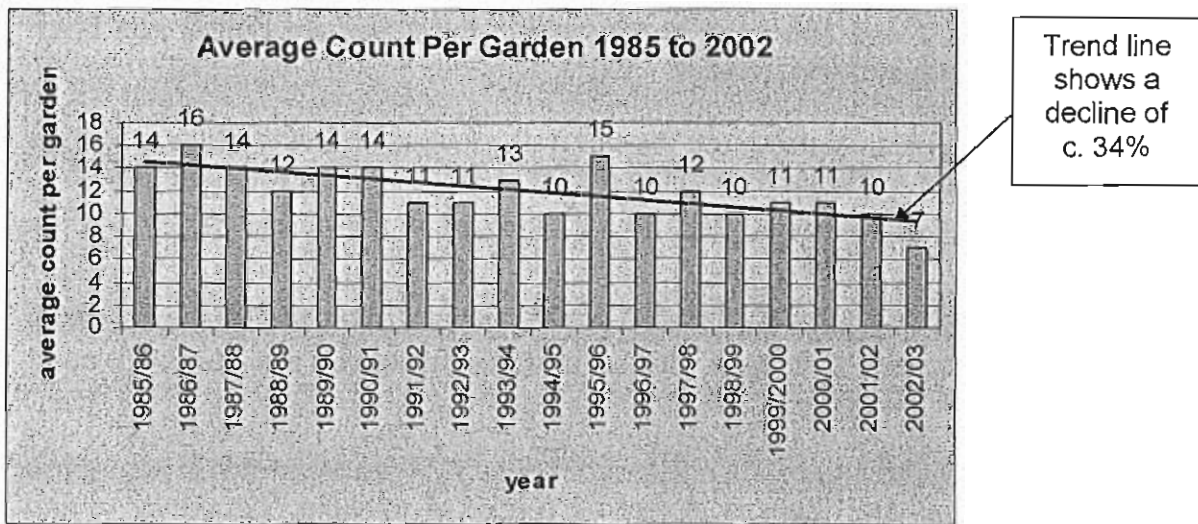
Winter Garden Bird Survey

SECOS members have contributed data to a Winter Garden Bird Survey (WGBS) continuously since the winter of 1985/6, a period of 18 years. Trevor Clowes, the WGBS organiser, has kindly collated all House Sparrow records for that period and analysed them. To even out the variations and to make the results more readable, the figures have been grouped into six sets of three year periods and data for "average count per garden" and "group average maximum count" are given.

	1985/88	1988/91	1991/94	1994/97	1997/00	2000/03
Average count per garden	14.7	13.3	11.7	11.7	11.0	9.3
Group average max count	43.0	30.7	27.0	37.0	33.3	36.0

Overall the "average count per garden" shows a steady decline over the whole period, with a total reduction of 34%. However, the "group average maximum count" shows much more variation and overall there is no significant trend. This would indicate that House Sparrows are now found in fewer gardens but where they do occur the numbers are fairly constant.

Three members have contributed to the scheme since it started in 1985 and their results are probably representative of the overall position with one having no significant change, one with a significant decrease and one with a significant increase.



Summary

From the SECOS House Sparrow Survey results it is apparent that there are wide variations even within our small area. Comments ranged from "numbers dropped in the last two years by at least 30%" and "numbers fallen dramatically" to "none up to a few years ago but now drawn in by food". However, the overall impact of the results is that numbers have decreased but only slightly.

Considering the more factual data of the WGBS, numbers have decreased by 34%, a significant reduction but still much less than the national average.

So what can we do? I would suggest three items for action.

- ✓ Provide nest boxes, with an entrance hole of at least 32 mms diameter.
- ✓ Feed throughout the year, sterilising feeders when necessary, and provide clean water.
- ✓ Leave wild, weedy and shrubby areas in the garden.

Many thanks to everybody who contributed and particularly to Trevor and Hilary Clowes for the laborious job of collating and analysing the WGBS data, John Smith for reading and correcting drafts of this report and finally to the BTO for access to their data.

Colin Lythgoe

NOTES ON A COLONY OF TREE SPARROWS (PASSER MONTANUS) AT ELWORTH

Introduction

A small colony of Tree Sparrows has been slowly building up in recent years around Elton Hall Flash and Pump House Flash at Elworth. This increase was helped initially by the provision of food in winter and then helped even more by the provision of food all year round and the provision of nest boxes.

Up to 2002 there were 21 nest boxes in the area. Early in 2003 another 7 boxes were provided and the opportunity was taken to monitor the progress of the nesting attempts during the summer.

Tree Sparrows take very readily to nest boxes, although they will also build nests in hedges. In fact there was one such hedge nest in the study area but it has been excluded from the data in these notes.

When nest building, Tree Sparrows fill the box with grass stems and straw and then have a tunnel from the entrance hole to the nest cup which is lined with feathers.

Colony Nesting

In total 28 boxes are available for nesting. Of these, there are two clusters of five, two clusters of three and 12 singles. In the clusters the boxes are spaced around 20 to 30 cms apart.

There was no multiple occupancy in clusters of boxes by Tree Sparrows in any of the four clusters this year and there is in fact no record of multiple occupancy in any previous year.

Although Tree Sparrows are social and colonial in their nesting habits, perhaps loosely colonial would be a better description. They seem to have a very small territory around the nest and in this colony the closest nests are 10 metres apart.

Nest Desertion

Tree Sparrows are usually thought to be prone to desert the nest if disturbed. To test for this nests were grouped and visited a different number of times.

In total three nests failed. Two were found to be empty. However, one of these may be due to predation since it was in a quite exposed location and had suffered previous damage with the hole being enlarged to around 50 mms. This nest had been visited four times before failure. The other had been visited twice. The third nest contained dead juveniles but they were found on the first nest visit for that clutch.

The successful nests had been visited from one to six times each for an individual clutch and up to eight times in total during the summer.

Therefore it would seem that the monitoring of nests in this colony did not lead to significant desertion by the adults.

Timetable

- Nest building commenced in early April.
- Egg laying was mainly during the third week in April, and all pairs were quite synchronous.
- Most first clutch juveniles fledged during the fourth week in May.
- Five of the nine breeding pairs laid second clutches and these were laid within a week of the first clutch fledging, (i.e. the first week in June.)
- Second clutches were laid in the same nest used for the first brood, without any apparent renovation, and so it became quite trampled.
- Second clutches fledged around the fourth week in June, taking a few days less than the first clutches.
- Then three pairs went on to lay third clutches during early July.
- These fledged during mid August

Summary

In total nine pairs used the boxes available.

Of the first clutches seven were successful.

Five of the pairs laid second clutches, all of which were successful.

Then three went on to lay third clutches of which two were successful.

Due to the type of nest construction it is very difficult to accurately count the nest contents, particularly at the egg stage. However, of those that could be counted : -

Clutch size varied from 4 to 5, average 4.75, n=4.

Brood size varied from 2 to 5, with an average of 3.5, n=13.

Overall, from 17 clutches, 14 were successful. Using the average brood size of 3.5 gives a productivity of 49 young fledged during the summer.

Considering that only one box in any cluster will apparently be used in any year then all available suitable boxes were used. (Some boxes were used by Blue Tit and Great Tit pairs). It is proposed to split clusters and re-site boxes by varying distances to check their take-up next year.

Colin Lythgoe

BIRDING MAW GREEN TIP AND THE RAILWAY FLASH COMPLEX

The marvellous Sandbach Flashes do it again! I of course refer to the two new species recorded in 2003, a spring Red-backed Shrike and an autumn Richard's Pipit. Personally it came as no surprise to me that both of last year's top birds came from the raised banks of Maw Green Tip. We therefore felt obliged to drop other plans in order to do an in-depth site guide to this area as part of our on-going annual site guide series.

Visits can be made at any time of the year but wellington boots, warm clothing and a flask are requisites, except in mid-summer. This site has everything from wintering gulls and ducks, through passage waders and passerines to summer breeding warblers. As usual dawn visits are recommended, recent annoying disturbance from gull scarers and shooters has made this even more essential. Sunday is the best day, except in spring and summer, when very early starts on any day of the week should be good.

From Maw Green in Crewe go along Groby Road and park your car opposite the stile and public footpath leading to the tip at SJ713574. There is room to pull off here on to the grass verge. Climb the stile, cross the grass field and go over the second stile. Cell C in front of you should be good for gulls for the next five years. Follow the footpath to the left and go over a third stile. Cell A is now thick grass and not very good although Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and Reed Buntings can be flushed into the "shrike" hedge in winter. Stop at viewpoint 1 and check Groby Flash below you. Little Grebes, ducks and Sedge Warblers breed here. Between here and viewpoint 2 look to flush pipits and buntings out of rough grass. They like the newly planted hedges, as do Whinchats in spring and autumn.

Viewpoint 2 gives great views over Railway Flash B. Wigeon, Teal and Pintail occur in the winter months and Garganey are nearly annual, including resplendent males on occasions in spring. Common Snipe, Common and Green Sandpipers turn up on occasions and if the water level is low other species of waders are possible. Jack Snipe can sometimes be flushed from the Newt Pools but are more regular from Railway Flash B marsh. In winter any concentrations of gulls on the tip or in fields or on the flash should be carefully checked for Glaucous or Iceland Gulls, especially between Christmas and Easter. Also possible are Little, Mediterranean, Yellow-legged and on one occasion Ring-billed Gulls.

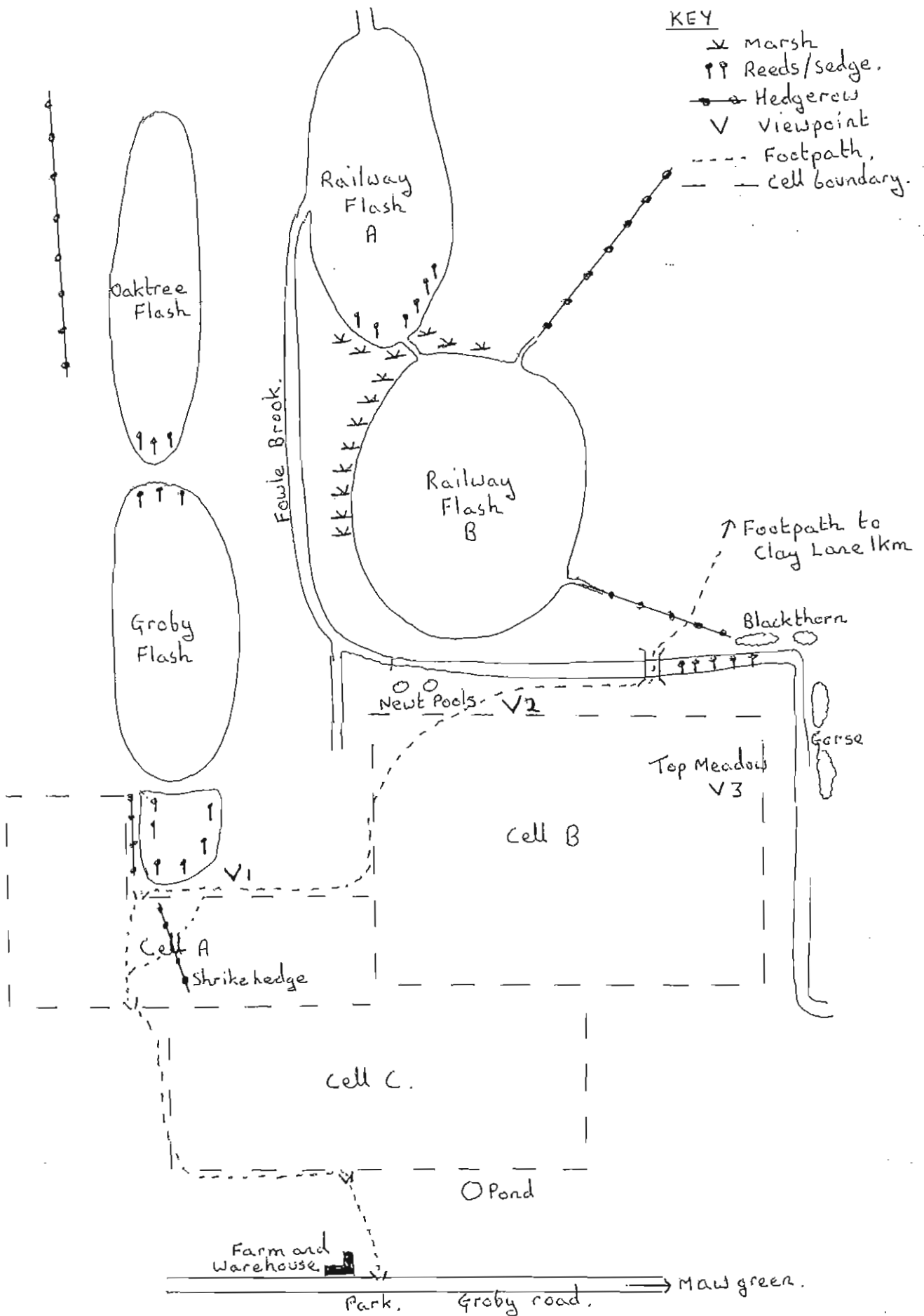
Cross the bridge over Fowle Brook. We then often walk east along the bank of the brook to the blackthorn and gorse bushes, seeing Tree Sparrows regularly. The phragmites reeds growing in the brook are good in summer for Sedge and Reed Warblers. Back at the bridge you can continue north along the footpath for 1 km to Clay Lane and on to the other flashes. We prefer to climb the banks of the tip on to the top meadow and viewpoint 3. Some recent tree planting here should be great in a couple of years time, forming some nice scrubby patches. Look east and south over the railway line with your 'scope where rough grazing around Horton's Flash looks promising. Cell B which is now full should be brilliant this spring and autumn. This is the highest point and when top-soiled should pull in Wheatears, pipits and buntings.

Retrace your steps to viewpoint 2 and if the weather is nice find somewhere to sit with your telescope. With its elevated position this is a great place to stay a while. Four species of raptor are more or less guaranteed. Peregrines perch on the top arms of the electricity pylons. In summer Hobbies are seen frequently but Marsh Harriers and Ospreys are still rare. Unfortunately Railway Flash A is mostly hidden from the tip and is best worked from the footpath starting at Pump House Flash.

I won't bore you with a list of rarities recorded here other than to say it's a long one! Although an excellent site this area is best worked in combination with the other flashes to give a great days birding.

Andrew & Angela Goodwin, with thanks to Mark Stubbs for a current update.

MAW GREEN TIP AND RAILWAY FLASH COMPLEX



KEY

- x Marsh
- ↑↑ Reeds/sedge.
- x— Hedgerow
- V Viewpoint
- - - Footpath,
- - - cell boundary.

SECOS WINTER GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

Our latest survey enjoyed an unsurpassed level of support with fourteen new members joining and one dropping out, bringing the total to thirty-nine contributors. Over the twenty-six weeks from October 2002 to March 2003, eight hundred and fifty-two bird/week records were produced. Thanks are due to everyone who participated.

Since the survey started in 1985 seventy-five members have taken part at various times. Seventy-four different species of birds have been recorded in gardens over that period.

This survey reversed the previous one's one change in the constituent species of the ten most common garden birds. The greenfinch re-established itself in the top ten, at the expense of last time's usurper, the coal tit. Except for that one change the other species remained the same. There were the usual minor changes to the relative positions of some species. Our current most common ten bird species are:-

1) Blue Tit, 2) Blackbird, 3) Robin, 4) House Sparrow, 5) Collared Dove, 6) Great Tit, 7) Starling, 8) Dunnock, 9) Chaffinch, 10) Greenfinch.

Once more long-tailed tits, sparrowhawks and great spotted woodpeckers continued to be frequent garden visitors. Siskins made a good showing. The rarities recorded in this latest survey include, kingfisher, lesser spotted woodpecker, woodcock and water rail.

The following members and non-members provided all of the data for the survey.

Hilary Clowes	Bryan Perkins	John and Wendy Smith
Janet Grice	David and Elaine Meakin	Christine Howarth
Stan Wildig	Ann Davies	Christopher Price
Alan and Joan Soper	Joan Tilbrook	John Thompson
Colin Lythgoe	Megan McKelvey	Lorna Pickstock
Ann Pym	George & Barbara Fisher	Bill and Betty Brookes
Barbara Hubbard	Arthur Fisher	Janet and Peter Roberts
Derek Owen	Alan and Linda Battersby	Charles Hull
Andrew & Doreen Bailey	Gordon Fleet	Paddy Bennion
Jan Fox	John P. Barker	Hilda Johnson
Ron and Doreen Jones	Geoff Yarwood	Derek Leigh
A.R.Coomer	Paula Birchall	Cynthia Cadman
Howard Nixon	Brian Sankey	John & Wendy Fuller

The Garden Bird Survey provides a relaxed opportunity to raise one's awareness of, and to interact with, the local bird population from the comfort of one's own home. You may be surprised by what is out there, so why not give it a try?

If anyone would like a copy of the more detailed survey report please contact me.

Trevor Clowes

CREWE BUSINESS PARK, COMMON BIRD CENSUS 2003

A census of breeding birds was carried out during 2003. 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	2002	2001
Heron	✓	✓	0
Canada goose	0	✓	1
Mallard	3	5	3
Mandarin	0	✓	0
Sparrowhawk	✓	✓	✓
Kestrel	✓	✓	✓
Pheasant	✓	0	0
Moorhen	6	7	7
Stock dove	1	2	2
Woodpigeon	20	24	17
Collared dove	1	1	✓
Feral pigeon	✓	1	1
Tawny Owl	0	✓	0
Swift	0	✓	✓
Kingfisher	✓	✓	✓
Green woodpecker	✓	1	1
Great spotted 'pecker	1	1	1
Swallow	✓	✓	✓
Pied wagtail	✓	1	✓
Wren	18	16	15
Dunnock	11	13	13
Robin	21	21	21
Blackbird	29	27	31
Song thrush	2	3	3

Mistle thrush	1	✓	1
Sedge warbler	0	✓	✓
Whitethroat	✓	✓	2
Garden Warbler	3	2	✓
Blackcap	5	7	9
Chiffchaff	3	2	2
Willow warbler	✓	✓	2
Goldcrest	0	✓	0
Spotted flycatcher	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed tit	4	3	3
Coal tit	✓	0	✓
Blue tit	23	18	21
Great tit	9	9	9
Treecreeper	1	1	1
Jay	0	0	✓
Magpie	10	9	9
Jackdaw	✓	✓	✓
Crow	2	2	1
Starling	0	0	1
House sparrow	✓	✓	✓
Chaffinch	7	9	6
Greenfinch	3	5	10
Goldfinch	3	2	1
Linnet	✓	0	0
Bullfinch	4	3	3

Notes:

1. No. is the number of occupied territories in 2003.
2. 2002 is the number of occupied territories in 2002.
3. 2001 is the number of occupied territories in 2001.
4. ✓ signifies recorded but not enough to give a territory.
5. Most territories along the brook include habitat on both sides.

Comments:

- New species this year were Pheasant, Coal Tit and Linnet.
- Species lost were Canada Goose, Mandarin, Tawny Owl, Swift, Sedge Warbler and Goldcrest.
- Greenfinch numbers continued to decline, down to 3 from the exceptional high of 10 in 2001.
- However, Goldfinch and Bullfinch numbers showed a slight increase.
- In the warblers, Blackcap numbers declined again, down to 5 from 9 in 2001; Garden Warbler has shown a definite increase, up to 3 from 0 in 2001, and Long-tailed Tit and Chiffchaff have shown a slight increase.
- There was some evidence of colonisation of the car park borders in the older areas around Barclays/Focus/Genus with additional records, particularly of Wren and Robin.

Colin Lythgoe

CHESHIRE & WIRRAL BIRD ATLAS

Aims. The aim of this Atlas is to determine the distribution and abundance of all birds in Cheshire and Wirral. Fieldwork will cover the next three years and be followed by the publication of the Atlas, covering both breeding and wintering birds.

Methods. Fieldwork will be based on an area known as a tetrad. This is a square with sides 2kms in length. Each 10 km square is divided into 25 tetrads and identified with a letter as shown here. A detailed explanation of the Ordnance Survey National Grid system is given later.

E	J	P	U	Z
D	I	N	T	Y
C	H	M	S	X
B	G	L	R	W
A	F	K	Q	V

Tetrads will be surveyed for breeding birds during April to June and wintering birds from November to February. Two breeding season and two winter visits must be made. Extra visits can be made if required to ensure that all habitat types within the tetrad are visited at least once and to record early/late breeders and nocturnal species.

There is no need to count birds, merely to record whether a species is present in the tetrad, and for the breeding survey some indication of the breeding status.

One tetrad can be covered with one year's fieldwork so different tetrads may be covered in each of the three years.

Full instructions and recording forms will be provided to all surveyors.

Coverage. There are 670 tetrads to be surveyed in the whole of Cheshire & Wirral. Of these 70 are in the SECOS area and I have taken on the role of co-ordinator for those tetrads. So it is my job to find volunteers to carry out surveys in all of those tetrads!

What Do I Need? If you are interested in bird-watching; are enthusiastic about ensuring that birds in the SECOS area are fully represented in the Atlas; can identify most common birds; are willing to get up early occasionally; are willing to give up a few mornings during the year – then I need YOU!

What Do YOU Need To Do?

- Think about the above requirements.
- Decide to volunteer.
- Look at the map and consider where you would like to survey.
- Contact me to clarify the details. Otherwise I may be contacting you!

Casual Records. It will be possible to also use records of birds not specifically collected during a survey PROVIDED that I know which tetrad they were seen in. So if you see an uncommon bird please let me have the record **BUT IT IS ESSENTIAL** that I know where the bird was. Use either a precise description, or give a grid reference or best of all give me the correct tetrad designation.

I hope to get bombarded with records over the next three years!

You can contact me as follows: -

telephone 01270 582642; post 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF, or e-mail at colinlythgoe@haslington9.freeserve.co.uk, or use the Flashes Log Book. All records will of course also be used for the SECOS Annual Report.

WHERE AM I?

(A Detailed Explanation of the Ordnance Survey National Grid.)

For this survey locations will use the Ordnance Survey National Grid system with place names being used only as an additional guide.

The OS National Grid system divides the country into imaginary squares with sides of 100kms in length. These are identified by two uppercase letters and fortunately for us, all of the SECOS area is in the square designated SJ, so no problem so far!

Each 100 km square is then further divided into squares with sides of 10kms in length. These are known as "10km squares" and are designated by the two letters of the 100km square and then two numbers, the first number of the easting reference and the first number of the northing reference i.e. the bottom left hand corner of the square. For example the 10km square containing Holmes Chapel is designated SJ76.

Precise locations are given using a six figure grid reference, which should be prefixed by SJ. The first three figures are the easting reference and the last three figures the northing reference. Using Sandbach railway station as an example go east and note the number of the blue line before the location (73) and then estimate how many tenths across that square the location is (8), so the easting reference is 738. Do the same for the northing reference to give 616. So the full reference for Sandbach railway station is SJ738616. Other examples are Holmes Chapel railway station at SJ767670 and Doddington Pool at SJ714464.

What is a Tetrad?

A tetrad is a square with sides of 2 kms and is the recording unit used for this survey.

A 10 km square is divided into 25 tetrads and they are identified using all the letters of the alphabet except for O. See the layout on the right.

So Sandbach Railway station is in tetrad 76F,
Holmes Chapel railway station is in 76T and
Doddington Pool is in 74D.

E	J	P	U	Z
D	I	N	T	Y
C	H	M	S	X
B	G	L	R	W
A	F	K	Q	V

Colin Lythgoe; Co-ordinator for SJ74; SJ75; SJ76 and SJ85.

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 2003	10 Year average	Earliest ever	Date in 2003	10 Year average	Latest ever
Chiffchaff	10-Mar	13-Mar	8-Mar-89	23-Oct	8-Oct	23-Oct-03
Little Ringed Plover	18-Mar	16-Mar	5-Mar-00	26-Aug	6-Sep	16-Oct-85
Sand Martin	20-Mar	21-Mar	12-Mar-89	28-Sep	21-Sep	24-Nov-72
Swallow	05-Apr	26-Mar	19-Mar-00	17-Oct	23-Oct	30-Nov-74
Willow Warbler	28-Mar	2-Apr	28-Mar-03	04-Sep	8-Sep	26-Sep-98
Blackcap	28-Mar	4-Apr	18-Mar-97	26-Sep	15-Sep	30-Sep-00
House Martin	10-Apr	5-Apr	25-Mar-95	11-Oct	15-Oct	5-Nov-77
Yellow Wagtail	16-Apr	13-Apr	29-Mar-81	25-Sep	14-Sep	2-Oct-87
Reed Warbler	18-Apr	19-Apr	12-Apr-97	25-Sep	15-Sep	4-Oct-98
Lesser Whitethroat	20-Apr	20-Apr	21-Mar-00	20-Sep	11-Sep	1-Oct-98
Whitethroat	16-Apr	20-Apr	15-Apr-93	09-Sep	6-Sep	21-Sep-93
Cuckoo	20-Apr	21-Apr	5-Apr-82	15-Aug	22-Aug	1-Oct-86
Sedge Warbler	15-Apr	23-Apr	4-Apr-99	19-Sep	27-Aug	1-Oct-78
Swift	25-Apr	23-Apr	16-Apr-96	05-Sep	9-Sep	3-Nov-78
Garden Warbler	26-Apr	27-Apr	20-Apr-96	07-Aug	13-Aug	9-Sep-83
Hobby	27-Apr	3-May	27-Mar-94	25-Sep	21-Sep	8-Oct-00
Grasshopper Warbler	nr	9-May	25-Apr-93	nr	none	30/8/??

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 there were two records in January and four in February. Then there was a record of a male singing in a Sandbach garden on 11th March, but it had been present for most of the winter. So the first spring migrant was the one at Astbury Mere on 28th March.

For Chiffchaff there were no records in the first winter period. The first were two seen on 10th March and there was a mass arrival during the following week. In October there were records on 1st, 16th, 22nd and 23rd and none after that.

Two records were extended this year, one early and one late, both for warblers. The first Willow Warbler was seen on 28th March, extending the previous early date of 29th March 1981 by a day. The last Chiffchaff was seen on 23rd October and is considered to be a departing summer visitor, not a winter arrival, since there were no records after that. This extends the previous latest ever of 15th October 1987.