



SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1964

2006 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes



American Wigeon
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EDITORIAL

This is the 21st Annual Bird Report that I have produced for SECOS and it will most probably be the last. 2006 has been a difficult year for me personally and this, coupled with the death of my dear friend Joan Tilbrook, has left me with no will to continue. For several years Joan has typed the report and helped me to produce it to the high standard that I think we achieved in the last few years and I have missed her support.

The proposed Atlas of the Birds of Cheshire is an excellent project which has been well managed and our local birders have supported it enthusiastically. This has resulted in many hours of fieldwork and many thousands of records being generated. These have all been checked by me and then passed to CAWOS for inclusion in their database. However, the very success of that project has created another major problem for me – how to manage several thousand additional records. Finally I decided that it was not possible and so this is a reduced report. Instead of covering all birds reported in the SECOS area as usual it concentrates on those sites that are watched regularly and birds logged at least weekly. So it covers in detail the birds of Sandbach Flashes, Doddington and Rode Pool, together with noteworthy records from other sites where known.

The main body of the report is the **Systematic List**, covering all known species. The regular articles include the SECOS gazetteer, which I hope is of value to those new to the area or who are not familiar with the birding hot spots. Also the list of **Early and Late Dates** for migrants and a summary of the **Coordinated Count of all Flashes** in January to illustrate the distribution of the different species around the 14 flashes in the area, together with a summary of these counts since 2001.

Noteworthy records include the Hawfinch which was present in Wistaston for a week at the end of March and the Red-necked Phalarope at Elton Hall Flash on 14th and 15th August. An interesting record was the probable nesting attempt by a pair of Ringed Plover at Elton Hall Flash in the last two weeks of June. Also a good year at Astbury Mere with a Great Northern Diver in November and Black-necked Grebe in August. The grand total of species recorded in the area was 156 including 24 wader species, compared with 163 and 26 in 2005. Finally worth a mention is the Marsh Tit that was first seen on the feeders at Rode Pool on 17th September 2002 and has been recorded on most weeks since.

Fieldwork for the **CAWOS Atlas** is finally drawing to a close as I write this with just three weeks left of the final winter recording season. Coverage has been good and thanks are due to everybody who has been involved. Intensive efforts are already underway to write the Bird Atlas and publication is planned for late 2008. Be prepared to buy a copy and see the results of your efforts in print!

The **SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey** goes from strength to strength with 49 members contributing data. It provides an interesting and useful activity for the members. Thanks to all members who are involved and particularly to Trevor Clowes for organising the survey so ably.

Thanks to **H J Lea Oakes** at Wheelock Mill for helping with free food.
Many thanks to all contributors, without whose records there would not be a report.

Colin Lythgoe; SECOS Recorder

Contributors

Many thanks to those people who have recorded sightings in the log books at Sandbach Flashes, Doddington Pool and Rode Pool. Those records have been used to produce this abbreviated report.

Thanks are also due to those volunteers who have spent many hours of fieldwork whilst recording for the CAWOS Atlas Project. Your records have all been passed to CAWOS. They will be used to produce the County Bird Atlas and are held on their records database, to be used when compiling the annual bird report.

Abbreviations Used

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

Crewe Business Park SJ720550 ⁴

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

Crewe Golf Course SJ744546 ³

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

Crewe Hall SJ735544 ¹

A very extensive area of mixed woodland and farmland.

Doddington Pool SJ714464 ²

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

Lawton Woods SJ825559 ³

Large area of mixed woodland including a lake.

Middlewich Lime Beds SJ711653 ¹

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

Mow Cop from SJ856573 to SJ873593 ³

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

Quakers Coppice SJ724546 ⁴

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

Rode Pool SJ815575 ²

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

Roe Park SJ858583³

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

Sandbach Flashes³

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

Elton Hall Flash SJ727596

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

Maw Green Tip SJ717577

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

Pump House Flash SJ723595

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

Railway Flash SJ718585

Currently two separate flashes with a marshy area between.

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

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

Warmingham Flash SJ719619

Heavily disturbed by fishermen.

Watch Lane Flash SJ727606

Heavily disturbed by fishermen but with two small reed beds.

Stowford SJ745530³

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

Swettenham SJ801675³

Farmland and mixed woodland by the River Dane.

Taxmere SJ780625¹

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

Timbersbrook/The Cloud SJ896627 to SJ900635³

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

Westlow Mere, Congleton SJ855644³

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

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

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

SYSTEMATIC LIST 2006

Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*)

Very rare visitor

A winter plumage adult was at Astbury Mere on 18th Nov. First seen at 11-30 it flew off at 12-00.

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Fairly common resident.

Doddington continues to be the stronghold with at least four pairs and nine juvs on the main pool and three pairs and one juv on the Lemon Pool.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	15	12	12	11	6	11	21	11	6	7	6	9

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Common resident.

Again Doddington Pool continues to be the stronghold with at least five pairs and six juvs on the main pool and two pairs and three juvs on the Lemon Pool. A post-breeding flock of 52 in Aug.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	5	4	16	21	27	18	27	52	33	31	23	19

Up to 20 regular at WLF in winter.

Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

Very rare visitor.

At Astbury Mere one was seen at 20-55 on 6th Aug and was still present through 7th Aug.

The last two SECOS area records were also in Aug.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Rare in summer.

Peak counts in winter of 41 at Doddington and ten at SF.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Rare visitor.

Seven records in the year, one from Leighton, Crewe and six from the flashes from March to Sept.

Singles except for two at PHF on 6th Aug.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Common resident.

At the Rode Pool heronry there were 39 nests in use with many juvs seen, a consistent number over the past few years.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Fairly common resident.

Monthly max at the two main sites were:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	28	18	2	8	56	68	76	75	12	1	1	9
Winterley	38	30	29	21	20	21	20	20	17	13	16	22

Numbers are now much reduced at Winterley. Successful breeding from several sites.

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

Rare winter visitor.

All records from SF with two on 31st Oct, one on 6th Nov and 14 over on 12th Nov.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.

Much reduced mid-winter movements after last year's record numbers. Skeins of 300, 130 and 150 over SF on 3rd, 4th and 5th Jan, heading north west as usual. 53 over heading south east on 29th Oct.

A flock of 73 took up residence at MGT/PHF from 31st March to 1st May.

White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

Rare winter visitor

Three adults and four 1st winter birds were at RF/MGT from 25th to 27th Feb.

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)*Rare winter visitor or feral.*

A few recorded with Canada Geese from several sites.

Greater Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)*Common resident.*

Doddington	72	266	142	92	155	198	202	135	0	350	578	64
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At Doddington a crèche of 74 juvs in July.

Bred at many sites and with several large wandering flocks in winter. The largest recorded was 578 at Doddington in Nov.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)*Rare visitor or feral.*

As usual many records of singles with the Canada Goose flocks at various sites.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)*Uncommon resident and winter visitor.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	31	28	41	44	16	24	0	0	1	5	18	32

Probably three pairs bred at SF with 20 juvs seen. Also at Oakhanger, a pair with six juvs.

Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*)*Scarce visitor.*

Odd ones or twos recorded occasionally at various sites.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)*Uncommon winter visitor.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	920	620	680	50	3	1	1	11	121	330	495	nc
Doddington	87	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	81	59
Rode Pool	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	17

The main site is EHF/PHF but big numbers are also regular at CF. The count of 920 on 25th Jan is the highest ever recorded in the area. Now becoming regular in winter at Doddington and Rode Pool.**American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)***Very rare winter visitor*A bird was with the Wigeon flock at the flashes from 14th to 29th Oct.**Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)***Uncommon winter visitor.*The usual scattering of records from SF with one or two in seven of the months in the year (but no real pattern) and five on 2nd June.**Teal (*Anas crecca*)***Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	310	289	200	126	10	18	26	86	278	289	575	nc
Doddington	23	21	0	12	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Rode Pool	12	11	5	0	0	0	7	5	8	31	21	14

The main site is EHF/PHF but also at other flashes and a co-ordinated count on 22nd Jan gave a grand total of 411 (613 in 2005).**Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)***Common resident. Abundant in winter.*

Max monthly counts at the main sites in the area were:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	150	161	80	21	86	168	nc	611	302	211	315	nc
Doddington	187	73	53	60	65	106	114	105	237	260	402	394
Rode Pool	34	19	10	20	16	65	94	95	125	135	105	100

Breeds commonly on most waters in the area.

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)*Uncommon winter visitor.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	26	24	31	7	1	0	1	1	7	3	15	19

More common this year with a max. count of 31 and present in all months except June. Also three at Doddington in Dec.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)*Scarce summer visitor.*

A male at EHF from 2nd to 6th June and also for one day on 28th June.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)*Uncommon winter visitor, scarce in summer.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	28	18	8	6	2	0	0	18	51	59	25	8
Doddington	5	10	4	5	0	2	0	0	2	12	22	52
Rode Pool	32	16	16	6	0	0	2	0	5	11	10	14

A similar pattern of records at EHF as in 2005, with a big increase in numbers in Sept and Oct. Maybe they moved to Doddington where there was an exceptional 52 in Dec.

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)*Fairly common winter visitor.*

Numbers continue to plummet at all regular sites except for Astbury Mere. This is now clearly the top local site for this species with a winter max of 60 in Dec and the only counts of more than 20.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	84	117	89	95	34	19	44	15	52	57	59	29
Rode Pool	12	16	4	7	2	6	2	0	6	24	9	11
Astbury	84	80	34	47	10	26	6	18	83	84	66	82

A slight increase in numbers at most regular sites, including a max of 22 at CF. Also a good breeding success with seven broods seen at Doddington (12,9,8,8,6,3,3) and two at RF (8,5).

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)*Rare visitor.*

A female was present at Astbury Mere from 29th April to 4th May.

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Doddington is the top site for this species and typical numbers in the first winter period were 17 in Feb but a low five in Dec. Also one at the flashes in Dec.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)*Uncommon winter visitor.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	10	10	5	6	2	0	0	0	0	1	21	28

Numbers continue to increase in winter to a level that justifies a table! The count of 28 (7 males and 21 females/imms) at EHF in Dec is easily a record for this site. Also up to eight at Rode Pool.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)*Uncommon resident.*

Records from four sites during the year and two broods noted.

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)*Rare passage migrant.*

On 20th Aug one flew over EHF towards WLF.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)*Common resident.*

Common throughout the area with many records. The only proved breeding was from Crewe Cemetery where at least two juvs seen.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Common resident.

Now the commonest raptor and can expect to be seen during a few hours birdwatching anywhere. Up to 11 together over EHF in Sept.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Rare migrant.

A poor year with no records from the flashes and only one from Doddington where a single was present on 10th May.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area but not so many records as for Sparrowhawk. The only proved breeding was from RF where a male was seen and juvs heard at a nest hole.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Rare winter visitor.

All records were from the flashes with singles, all sexed as females, on 26th and 27th Feb, 22nd April, then 3rd Sept, 30th Oct and 22nd Nov.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first arrival was an early bird over EHF on 18th April. Records received would indicate seven pairs in the SECOS area. However, intensive field work by an observer in just one 10km square found six nests, all of which fledged young!

At Doddington a pair with at least two juvs and at Oakhanger a pair with two juvs were watched closely – see the article by Richard Fox.

The last record was of one over Sandbach on 3rd Oct.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Scarce resident and winter visitor.

As usual birds were resident in the RF area through the year but no breeding attempt noted. A bird roosted regularly on large pylons in the Basford Hall railway yard, Crewe in early winter. Also a few records from Doddington through the year.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

Rare except where locally released.

Records from several sites probably all relate to birds released by shooting syndicates.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

Scarce resident

One at Brereton in June and two at Blakenhall in Nov.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Scarce resident except where locally released.

Usually concentrations of thousands where released for shooting e.g. Crewe Hall and Doddington.

Quite widespread in low numbers outside these concentrations.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

In the first winter period singles at FF, WLF and MGT. Away from the flashes, also at Rode Pool in Jan and Winterley Pool in Feb.

In the second winter period two at FF, one at RL and one at GF.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common resident.

The co-ordinated count of all flashes on 22nd Jan gave a total of 63 spread over 11 of the flashes. This shows its widespread distribution with small numbers on most waters, large and small.

Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Common resident and variable winter visitor.

The co-ordinated count of all flashes on 22nd Jan gave a total of 184 spread over 12 flashes.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	194	213	169	73	109	309	624	543	61	47	108	192

At Doddington in July on the main pool the numbers dropped from 603 to 14 after the sailing club controlled (ie sprayed with chemicals) the water vegetation. Most moved to the Lemon Pool.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Scarce winter visitor and uncommon summer visitor.

Arrivals in mid-Feb as usual with one at Doddington on 9th Feb, a different bird nearby on 10th and one at RL on 14th Feb. Up to six were then present regularly at the flashes until the last on 5th Aug.

Breeding pairs at Doddington, where a pair had three juvs on the island, and near Stowford where a pair had at least one young.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/ autumn migrant.

The first bird was one at EHF on 21st March. then present virtually daily until the last bird on 18th Aug. In June up to three juvs were noted and the peak passage number in Aug was eight.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

The first record was two at EHF on 7th April, then one at EHF on 29th April. Generally up to six on passage except for an exceptional 35 in a mixed wader flock briefly on 13th May.

From 18th June a pair almost certainly attempted to nest at the back of the saltpan but abandoned on 2nd July.

One or two on return passage, last on 14th Sept.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Not regular in either winter period. Usually one or two but 35 on 10th Feb and 44 on 28th Nov.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

Rare visitor and passage migrant.

A typical record of this less than annual visitor with one present at EHF for part of one day on 7th May.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	1900	1110	391	29	15	150	249	800	560	650	670	1300

Most birds moved away from the flashes in spring to breed but a few stayed and probably three broods seen at EHF.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

Rare visitor.

Singles at EHF on 13th March, 16th and 17th April and 2nd Aug. Usually more common on return passage.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Three records, all from EHF, with one on 7th May, three on 13th May and one on 5th Aug.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Usually recorded on return passage, this year was different. One at EHF on 27th Feb was probably a wandering winter bird. The only other record was of two at EHF on 18th May. None on return passage.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	3	2	3	4	40	1	2	4	3	0	2	1

Low numbers but showing a slight increase on spring and autumn passage. Up to ten on passage in May except for the brief visit by the mixed wader flock on 13th May that included 40 Dunlin.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	14	14	10	2	0	0	3	4	16	16	13	12

A typical spread of records from EHF.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)*Scarce winter visitor.*

One seen regularly at MGT in Jan and Feb, through to 12th March. Also one at Winterley Pool on 12th Feb. Only one record in late winter with one at GF on 26th Nov.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)*Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	6	5	15	8	0	2	8	30	77	11	20	22

Monthly max in the table show evidence of strong passage in Sept.

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)*Scarce winter visitor.*

A few records of this under-recorded crepuscular species. Up to four in the usual winter site of FF in the first winter period. On 19th Nov one was flushed from the roadside near WLF. Other winter records from Alsager, Rode Pool and Wistaston.

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)*Scarce migrant and rare winter visitor.*

Now present all year at EHF but numbers increased rapidly from late March, through April and May to a peak in mid-June as the flock of non-breeding 1st summer birds built up. Rapidly decreasing from early Aug to residual numbers of less than ten.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	4	19	52	188	120	271	200	200	1	6	4	6

Two colour ringed birds were noted at EHF, see the article for more details.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)*Scarce passage migrant.*

A sprinkling of records on spring passage with six records in April and May of up to four birds. Poor return passage with just one record of one over WLF on 20th July.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)*Scarce resident and fairly common winter visitor.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	56	60	9	1	1	13	34	64	65	59	51	64

Figures show that numbers are fairly constant in the evening roost at EHF with around 60, except for the breeding season when birds move away to breeding sites.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)*Rare passage migrant.*

Just one record with a single at EHF on 1st July.

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)*Uncommon visitor and migrant.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	12	12	7	4	0	3	1	4	2	1	4	5

Numbers significantly reduced from 2006 with a max of 12 (19 in 2006) in the first winter period and a max of five (ten in 2006) in the second winter period.

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)*Uncommon passage migrant.*

All records from EHF with a single on four days in early May, one for six days in early June and four singles through July.

Then on return passage one or two birds on ten days in Aug and Sept and nine together on 18th Aug.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)*Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.*

One bird was present on floodwater on Clay Lane from Jan to late March.

No spring passage but prolonged autumn passage as usual. Recorded at EHF on most days from 17th June to 21st Oct with a max of six in Aug.

Two records from EHF in Nov and present all winter at Stowford, a regular site.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Spring passage extended from 7th April to 17th May at EHF, max seven. Also at Astbury Mere and Doddington.

Autumn passage from 24th June to 29th Aug at EHF, max four. Also at Arclid SQ and Eaton Hall SQ.

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)*Rare passage migrant.*

Four were seen to fly over EHF on 5th Aug.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)*Very rare migrant.*

Around 18-00 on 14th Aug a bird of this species was spotted on EHF and identified as a juv/1st winter. It stayed overnight and was last seen at 13-00 on 15th Aug.

This is the fourth record for the flashes, the last one being an adult female at WLF on 28th May 1984.

Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)*Scarce visitor.*

Another increase in records at EHF with singles seen in Jan -four days; Feb -four days; March -one day; June -only one day but a record of two adults and two juvs over, Aug -two days; Dec -two days.

Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)*Rare visitor and passage migrant.*

After last year's summer resident a poor year with just one on 7th Jan and one on 30th Oct.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)*Abundant autumn and winter visitor.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	930	5000	nc	200	nc	48	206	540	1800	611	1570	2000

The table gives counts for the evening roost at EHF except for the Feb count which is for a big count at MGT/RF/PHF.

Usual numbers of c11,000 in the evening gull roost at Doddington.

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

The usual pattern of records from the flashes with few in winter (max seven), strong passage through March (max 70), none in summer, very low numbers on autumn passage (max five) and low numbers in the second winter period (max 20).

Numbers in the Doddington Pool roost followed a similar pattern but no actual numbers recorded, except for around 200 in March.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	24	nc	nc	388	20	260	nc	260	440	530	670	nc

The Doddington Pool gull roost held 700 in Dec.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Few records and usually of less than ten. Some passage in April when 55 recorded.

Birds showing characteristics of the nominate Scandinavian race *L.a. argentatus* were noted on 11th Aug; 18th Oct and three on 29th Oct.

Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*)

Scarce visitor.

As usual most records are in July to Oct, with a few in winter but not Jan.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of days recorded	0	2	1	2	1	4	7	7	6	9	5	1
Max day count	0	3	1	1	1	2	2	4	5	7	2	1

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*)

Scarce winter visitor.

After the blank year in 2006 there were three records this year, all in the evening gull roost at EHF.

An adult seen from 25th to 28th Feb was thought by some to possibly show characteristics of Kumlien's Gull. A worn 1st winter bird from 14th to 17th April. Finally a juv/1st winter bird on 20th Dec.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Recorded in every month at EHF but never more than six.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

On spring passage two singles over EHF in April.

More on return passage with one or two on five days in June, four days in July and finally two over WLF on 3rd Aug.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Just one record of three birds at WLF on 2nd Aug.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

Rare passage migrant.

In May one at WLF on 7th and one at Astbury Mere on 9th.

On 14th Sept one passed through EHF in the morning followed by 18 in the afternoon.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

Uncommon resident.

Up to 30 at EHF in Sept.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Common resident.

Around 1000 roosting in FF wood.

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common resident.

22 at EHF in Jan.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.

The first bird was heard near WLF on 29th April. Then in May one on 8th at Smallwood, one at PHF on 17th and one at Alsager South on 30th.

Finally one for two days on MGT, on 2nd and 3rd July.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Scarce resident.

A continuing general increase in numbers. At the flashes records in winter and spring from EHF and MGT.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Common resident.

Remains the commonest owl, with its favoured habitat of open farmland, but no proved breeding.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

Common resident.

Regular in FF wood. At Rode Pool a pair used a nest box but sadly one nearly fledged juv was found dead outside the box with its leg trapped in branches.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First of the year on 22nd April at PHF, three days earlier than the recent usual date of 25th April. No counts but a feeling that numbers are still declining. Last of the year at EHF on 3rd Sept.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

Uncommon resident.

Again the only proved breeding was from Rode Pool where an adult with a juv was seen in early July.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

Uncommon resident.

Records from several sites but only one from the flashes when a bird flew past the EHF watch point on 13th May.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Common resident.

By far the commonest woodpecker.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)

Uncommon resident.

Records from several sites including EHF on 15th Oct and from Rode Pool in Dec.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Fairly common.

Quite widespread through the year, usually in low numbers but a flock of 100 at Blakenhall in Nov and 40 at Weston in Dec.

Some passage over EHF during mid-Sept to mid-Oct.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First birds of the year were two at Doddington Pool on 26th March, closely followed by four at EHF on 27th and 30 at Astbury Mere on 30th.

No breeding records and the last bird was seen over EHF on 11th Sept.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Common summer visitor.

As with Sand Martin the first bird of the year was at Doddington with one on 26th March, followed by singles on 28th March at CF, EHF and Astbury Mere.

No big numbers recorded and the last birds were three over Sandbach on 14th Oct.

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Common summer visitor.

A lot of species arrived in late March, with this one being first recorded on 28th March at CF.

Breeds commonly throughout the area. Last record was of a single at EHF on 17th Oct.

Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

Rare passage migrant

More regularly recorded as an autumn passage migrant, one was heard and seen over EHF on 30th Aug, a typical date.

A less than annual visitor, the last record for the SECOS area was one at Arclid SQ on 19th April 2002 and the last record for the flashes was one over EHF on 23rd Aug 2001.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant. Scarce resident.

A regular winter flock of up to 60 at MGT, Jan to March.

Many passing over on autumn passage from Sept to mid-Oct with the highest numbers being 140 at Oakhanger, 100 over EHF and 70 over Mow Cop.

Only 30 recorded on MGT in late winter.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

First bird of the year was one at Doddington on 13th April followed by one at EHF on 16th April.

Up to eight at SF on autumn passage. One bird was recorded at Sandbach on 23rd Sept, normally a very late date but beaten this year by two exceptionally late birds at EHF on 27th Oct, equalling the latest ever Cheshire date.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Fairly common resident and winter visitor.

A continued increase and now common in many areas throughout the year.

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Fairly common resident.

The winter roost at Crewe Arms/railway station numbered at least 100 in Jan and in the late winter period up to 70 at WLF in Nov.

Birds of the Continental race *M.a. alba* were recorded on spring passage with two at Doddington on 14th April and singles at EHF on 17th April, 1st, 4th and 14th May.

Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Scarce resident.

One at Bathvale, Congleton, a regular breeding site and one in Jan at Day Green, Alsager where a pair bred successfully in 2005.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Abundant resident.

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)

Common resident.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Abundant resident.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.

Two spring records this year with a male at PHF on 23rd April and one at RL on 13th May.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Scarce migrant.

Three in spring with one at MGT on 30th April, one at PHF on 5th May and one at EHF on 13th May.

Two autumn records with one at PHF on 11th Sept and one at MGT on 1st Oct.

Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Up to six regular on MGT and two at Stowford in the first winter period. Then just one male seen at MGT/RF in Oct.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

First record was one at WLF on 28th March. Then usually up to eight through April, except for 15 on 30th April.

Just three records in autumn with one each in Aug, Sept and Oct at the flashes. Also at Doddington and Mow Cop.

Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)

Rare passage migrant

A probable family group of four were on The Cloud on 14th Oct.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Common winter visitor.

Biggest counts were around 300 at EHF, Doddington and Stowford.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Fairly common resident.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

Common winter visitor.

Biggest counts were around 200 at EHF, Doddington and Sandbach.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Fairly common resident.

Breeds commonly throughout the area but generally under-recorded.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

Rare summer visitor.

One was heard reeling from private land off Weston Road Crewe on 27th and 28th April.

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First record was one at WLF on 22nd April. Pairs with juvs seen at RF and EHF.

The last record was one at EHF on 15th Sept.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First record was one at WLF on 22nd April. No counts of breeding pairs from the flashes but three pairs bred at Rode Pool and one pair fledged two juvs in the new reedbed at Doddington Lemon Pool. Singing males also in the small reedbed at Astbury in June.

Last record was one at EHF on 19th Sept.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First record was one at Astbury on 23rd April, closely followed by one at CF on the 24th. Uncounted pairs bred at the flashes and the last record was one at EHF on 15th Sept.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

Common summer visitor.

First record from FFF on 20th April but a mass arrival since there were ten along the railway embankment plus three at CP by the 22nd. Breeds commonly and the last record was one at EHF on 19th Sept.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First record on 29th April from EHF but a scarce bird at the flashes. The last record was one at EHF on 5th Sept.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.

A male and female at the Wistaston Hawfinch site in late March were possibly the first summer visitors – but may have over-wintered since there were no further records until the 4th and 5th April when there were records from many sites – who knows?! Known winter visitors were still in gardens on 9th April! The last record was on 23rd Sept at EHF but many birds over-wintered.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.

Mass arrival as usual at the end of March with records from several sites on 28th to 31st March and still the commonest warbler. Last summer record was one at EHF on 18th Oct.

Winter records from WLF, EHF and Astbury.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Common summer visitor.

First bird was one at EHF on 30th March. The highest count was five singing males along the railway embankment at FFF in late April. Last record was two at EHF on 29th Aug.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

Fairly common resident and winter visitor.

Records from many sites in winter with 5+ regular at FF. Increasingly common as a breeding bird.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Once again an increase in numbers for this recently scarce species.

Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

Rare summer visitor.

A male singing and seen on a telegraph pole at Nick o' th' Hil, Congleton Edge on 11th May.

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Common resident.

High numbers continue with many flocks of around ten birds seen regularly.

Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*)

Rare visitor.

Amazingly the bird first recorded on the feeders at Rode Pool on 17th Sept 2002 has been present there ever since. Recorded in most weeks, summer and winter, it has never been seen with another Marsh Tit and so presumably has never bred.

Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*)

Scarce resident.

Two regular, and occasionally three, at FF. Singles also at Doddington, Lawton Hall and Swettenham.

Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

Common resident.

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged
Quakers Coppice	14	133	99	54
Rode Pool	2	?	?	15

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

Common resident.

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged
Quakers Coppice	7	50	20	16
Rode Pool	4	?	?	22

Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*)

Fairly common resident.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)

Common resident.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

Common resident.

Quite common and widespread but this inconspicuous little brown job is always under-recorded.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

Uncommon resident.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)

Common resident.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Common resident.

The total nests at regularly counted rookeries were:-

Site	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
Crewe/Alsager (9 sites)	519	500	511	537	528
Foden's Flash	136	131	121	126	117

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Common resident.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Scarce visitor and resident.

Another increase in records with many flyovers, particularly in the autumn and late winter period.

No proved breeding but pairs present at the regular sites of Timbersbrook and Doddington. Five together near Holmes Chapel in July may have been a family group.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

The largest winter roost was at Wheelock Heath where up to 2000 were regular in a *Leylandii* hedge.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Common resident.

Largest count was from a Haslington garden where eight pairs bred in eight nest boxes and up to 50 present in winter.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Fairly common resident.

The recent increase in numbers was maintained with at least 100 near CF in Jan (attracted by a food supply of an adjacent game cover crop of quinoa plus extra food put down by the shooting syndicate) and up to 60 regular in the feeders at EHF where several pairs used the nestboxes for breeding. A large flock of 160 was noted on a stubble field near Holmes Chapel in Aug..

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

By far the commonest finch. The largest flock was at Doddington in Dec when a huge flock of at least 500 flew up out of a quinoa game cover crop where they were feeding.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Another good sprinkling of records mainly in the first winter period with max of ten at Brereton in Jan and eight at Doddington in Feb.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common resident.

The largest recorded flocks were 100 at EHF in Aug and 80 at Eaton in Jan.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Fairly common resident.

Many records, the largest flock being 50 at Alsager South in Aug.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.

Most records during Jan to March as usual with the largest flocks recorded being 100 at Wistaston, 70 at Congleton and 40 at Stowford.

Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Fairly common resident.

Fewer records than Greenfinch and Goldfinch since it does not come to feed in gardens. Largest winter flocks were 250 at Eaton, 120 at Doddington, 100 at EHF and 70 at MGT.

Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis cabaret*)

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Winter records of usually less than ten birds but 25+ at FF in Feb and 20 at Astbury on 13th April.

Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)

Very rare visitor.

On 5th March at Doddington six were seen in the conifer plantation at the rear of a cottage on the estate and watched for several minutes during which the crossed mandibles were clearly seen.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Uncommon resident.

A wide spread of records throughout the year from many sites. Juvs were recorded at EHF, FF and Rodø Pool.

Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)

Very rare visitor

An adult female in summer plumage was present in Wistaston from 23rd to 31st March. See the separate article for more details.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Uncommon resident.

Recent increases maintained and flocks of 30 recorded from Alsager South and Day Green in Jan.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Uncommon resident.

No count of singing males from the flashes this year but several pairs bred. Also at least ten singing males in the marshy area at Stowford. The largest winter count was 15 at Doddington in Dec.

Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

Scarce resident

Records of singing males from the two regular sites of Cobbs Lane, Hough and Casey Lane, Weston.

Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)

One at Astbury Mere from 20th to 23rd Sept.

Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptica*)

Three at PHF and WLF on 16th Aug.

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

Two at MGT on 26th Feb, one at PHF on 30th Aug and one at WF on 3rd Dec.

White-cheeked Pintail (*Anas bahamensis*)

One was seen regularly at Doddington Pool from Feb through to July.

COORDINATED COUNT AT ALL FLASHES ON 22nd JANUARY 2006

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Flashes	15	16	Total
G't Crested Grebe			1				11				1	1	5		19 (24)	4	4	27
Cormorant					1							3			4 (23)		4	8
Grey Heron			3	1		2	2					1			9 (10)		3	12
Mute Swan			5		2				1			5	6	1	20 (7)	34		54
Barnacle Goose	1											1			2 (0)			2
Canada Goose	37	37	22	18	57		1					224	46		405 (490)	30	23	458
Shelduck			4		4	27									35 (30)		2	37
Wigeon			61		92	135	23					163			474 (751)		2	476
Mallard	15		4	2		95	26		2	13		35	14	12	218 (206)	62	204	484
Teal	5		26		17	250					2	80		31	411 (613)		3	414
Pintail					4	16						3			23 (25)			23
Shoveler						12						4			16 (22)			16
Pochard															0 (7)	25	1	26
Tufted Duck												17	1		18 (19)	16	2	36
Water Rail															0 (1)		1	2
Moorhen	11	2	4	3	6	17	6	1		3	4		6		63 (66)	30	8	101
Coot	6	12	9	6	25	21	33	2		2	2	19	47		184 (220)	27	6	217
Lapwing						1900									1900 (648)		47	1947
Snipe														9	9 (116)		29	38
Golden Plover												1			1 (0)			1
Curlew							56								56 (64)			56
Ruff						14									14 (13)			14
Redshank						12									12 (9)			12
Black-tailed Godwit							3								3 (0)			3
Kingfisher	1						1								2 (0)			2
Black-headed Gull			242			650	6					32			930 (841)	40	1600	2570
Common Gull			2		2							1			5 (2)			5
Lesser B'backed Gull			17		7										24 (48)		1	25
Herring Gull			62		6										68 (150)			68
Great B'backed Gull			4		1										5 (18)			5

Flashes numbers in brackets are from Jan 2005

SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Total of all birds excluding gulls: sites 1-14 = 3892 (3369 in 2005) & sites 1-16 = 4466 (3906)
On the count date the weather was average for January, cold but not freezing.

On Wednesday 25th January there was a record count for Wigeon of 900 at EHF and PHF

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Groby Flash | 9 Canal Pool |
| 2 Oaktree Flash | 10 Fodens Flash |
| 3 Railway Flash | 11 Plex Flash |
| 4 Fields Farm Flash | 12 Crabmill Flash |
| 5 Pump House Flash | 13 Warmingham Flash |
| 6 Elton Hall Flash | 14 Tetton Lane Flash |
| 7 Watch Lane Flash | 15 Winterley Pool |
| 8 Red Lane Pool | 16 Arclid Sand Quarry |

SUMMARY OF THE TOTAL COUNTS FROM 2001 TO 2006

This is the total for sites 1 to 14 which is all of the flashes comprising Sandbach Flashes

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Little Grebe	2	4	1	0	1	0
G't Crested Grebe	2	13	1	21	24	19
Cormorant	8	14	12	10	23	4
Grey Heron	6	7	10	4	10	9
Mute Swan	11	12	7	21	7	20
Canada Goose	509	419	367	323	490	405
Shelduck	42	12	20	16	30	35
Wigeon	431	211	772	453	751	474
Mallard	2	151	329	415	206	218
Teal	357	441	265	292	613	411
Pintail	10	8	15	4	25	23
Shoveler	8	3	7	4	22	16
Pochard	1	0	1	2	7	0
Tufted Duck	0	11	0	22	19	18
Goosander	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ruddy Duck	0	2	0	0	1	0
Moorhen	62	83	64	53	66	63
Coot	306	234	305	191	220	184
Lapwing	782	1170	295	526	648	1900
Snipe	19	64	5	14	116	9
Curlew	49	48	6	52	64	56
Ruff	6	16	0	11	13	14
Redshank	2	7	3	5	9	12
Black-tailed Godwit	0	0	0	0	0	3
Black-headed Gull	464	754	695	857	841	930
Common Gull	3	3	27	4	2	5
Lesser B'backed Gull	8	14	15	67	48	24
Herring Gull	201	22	1691	83	150	68
Great B'backed Gull	2	10	68	0	18	5

CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (CAWOS) ATLAS,
TETRAD SJ 75T, 2006 BREEDING SEASON.
FIELD NOTES OF HOBBY (*FALCO SUBBUTEO*) SIGHTINGS AND BREEDING.

Introduction and habitat

Tetrad SJ 75T is situated in Hassall between Sandbach and Alsager in south Cheshire and straddles the M6 motorway. Hobbies have bred in this area since 2001 and in 2006, as part of the CAWOS atlas recording work, my objective was to determine proof of breeding again.

Within this rural area the habitat is lowland farmland, mainly mixed grass / tilled land. This is interspersed with broad-leaved woodland, small coppices and a few patches of scrubland. Some hedges are overgrown and >2 metres in height and others < 2 metres, often containing mature broad-leaved trees. There is one small lake, several field ponds and small streams and ditches with flowing water.

Breeding colonies of Swallow and House Martin were again active in this tetrad in 2006. Damselflies and Dragonflies were also seen on the tetrad.

Observations 2006

Summary of events, all within 300 metres of nest tree

Date	Notes
3 May	First sighting. Single adult Hobby hunting.
10 May	Single adult hunting.
19 May	Single adult hunting.
29 May	Pair of adults flying together and displaying.
25 June	Single adult flew into an ash tree, the site of an old crow's nest. Calls heard.
7 July	Single adult, hunting and perched near ash tree. Calls heard.
27 July	Single adult in air. Second bird came out of ash tree and chased crows. Scolding calls.
30 July	Adult with a kill on dead branch of oak near the ash tree. Calls heard.
31 July	Adult flew out of ash tree; took House Martin and with kill, flew back into the ash tree. Two birds left ash together and chased off crows. One bird returned to ash tree immediately. First sighting since 29 May of both birds in air together.
4 August	Calls heard from ash tree but only a single bird seen in flight.
6 August	Single bird in air at first. Calls heard then two birds chased crows from ash tree and flew off together, leaving nest unattended for c.45 minutes. Then three Hobbies came out of ash tree and flew away fast in tight group, calling. First sighting of a third bird in company with two others. Later the adult pair drove off a Buzzard and then hunted insects around nest site. A kill was brought to the nearby oak followed by the pair soaring together in a fine display.
7 August	Calls from nest tree. First sighting of one fledgling on nest (and possibly a second). Adult nearby.
10 August	Two adults soaring and hunting. Calls from nest tree. Photograph of fledgling in oak 60 metres from nest tree.
17 August	Four Hobbies in tree 250 metres from nest. Confirmed two of these to be juveniles.
24 August	Two birds in flight, calling. Unable to confirm age.
30 August	Two birds in flight, calling, before one of these perched and was confirmed as a juvenile.

A typical detailed observation record is: -

6 August

- 06.45hrs. Single adult Hobby on dead branches of oak near the ash tree. After ten minutes, moved off, hunting. "Kew-kew-kew" calls from ash tree heard sporadically but no bird movement around nest. Single bird seen at hourly intervals, hunting and soaring and perching in top of ash. No sign of any kill.

- 11.15hrs. Adult Hobby perched in top of ash tree and then flew at a pair of crows and was quickly joined by a second Hobby. The crows dispersed and then the pair of Hobbies soared up, circled nearby and flew off, out of sight to the east. This is the first time that the pair has been seen soaring and flying off together, leaving the nest noticeably unattended.

- 12.00hrs. Single Hobby returns to usual perch at top of the ash tree.

- 12.15hrs. Commotion, calls and movement in ash tree and then three Hobbies flew out in tight group, keeping low and calling, "kew-kew-kew". Passed within 50 metres of my hide and disappeared heading east. This is first sighting of a third bird in company with two others.

- 14.00 hrs. Pair of Hobbies in air around the nest site, calling and then, working together with talons showing, driving off a Buzzard.

- 14.30hrs. Pair acrobatically hunting insects around the nest site.

- 14.40 – 16.00hrs. Adult Hobby with kill on top of oak tree adjacent to nest site. Some calling and then this bird flew to join second bird in air. Several more sightings of the pair at close range before they soared together in a fine display of several minutes, gaining height until one bird stooped fast towards the coppice east of the nest tree.

(This was a most rewarding day with clear changes in behaviour. **1.** The pair flying together and leaving the nest unattended. **2.** First sighting of a third Hobby. **3.** The pair driving off a Buzzard and then hunting and soaring together. A reasonable conclusion is that this marks the end of the fledging period and at least one youngster is flying.)

Conclusion

Following the arrival of at least one adult Hobby in early May 2006, a pair nested near last year's site. Incubation probably started in early June with the clutch hatching in about the first week of July. Two young were fledged and flew in about the first week of August, remaining near the nest site until at least the end of August.

Richard Fox

Comment

Intensive field work in another part of the SECOS area resulted in six Hobby nests, all of which fledged young, being found in one 10km square! When plotted on a map the nests were found to be equally spaced by a distance of three kms.

Richard also had two further sightings of a single Hobby hunting House Martins in early August just south of Radway Green. These were found to be exactly three kms away from the Oakhanger site and so indicate another possible breeding pair in that area.

Colin Lythgoe

BACK INTO THE WILD

On the morning of August 23rd I was looking out of my window when I saw a Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) on the ground in my garden. Nothing unusual there as I frequently get Sparrowhawks visiting the garden and I assumed that this bird had prey. However the bird remained where it was for a few minutes doing nothing apart from preening. It then loped across the lawn towards my birdbath and tried to fly up to it but couldn't, which made me realize the bird had a problem. Going out to check on the bird it ran under the hedge where it remained. I got a cardboard box from the shed and putting on my gardening gloves (the bird having sharp talons) I managed to catch the bird and put it in the box. I rang the local wildlife hospital at Stapeley who were happy to accept the bird for treatment.

Over the next three weeks I rang for updates and was told that the bird was doing well and would hopefully be released back into the wild. I was further informed that they planned to radio tag the bird to assess its ability to survive once back into the wild. On September 14th I was invited to Stapeley to see the bird fitted with its radio tag.

The man in charge, Dr Andrew Kelly, informed me that the bird, aged as a second year male, had had a broken scapula, probably caused by a collision whilst hunting. The cure for this is cage rest and the bird was now fully recovered. Stapeley have started a scheme of radio tagging released Sparrowhawks to assess their ability to survive once back in the wild and it also gives information as to the Sparrowhawk's territorial range. My bird was to be the third one they had done. Of the previous two, one had survived over 80 days till the transmitter battery had run out whilst the other was found drowned in a river after a fortnight, possibly the victim of a road accident .

I was ushered into the operating theatre where I was shown the radio tag which costs £85 and weighs only 2.5 grams, minimal compared to the bird's weight of 295 grams, and has a battery life of 60-90 days. The operation took about 25 minutes and involved the bird first being anaesthetized by the vet using gas with the vet continually monitoring the bird's welfare. The tag was attached to the top of a central tail feather using superglue and very lightweight silk ties to ensure that it did not fall off. This causes no harm to the bird and the tag would eventually fall off when the bird moults. At the same time the bird was fitted with a BTO metal ring. After being brought round the bird was put back in the aviary for a few days to recover.

On the morning of September 20th Dr. Kelly called me and arranged to come round to my house where I could release the bird back into my garden. On opening the carrying box the bird flew rapidly up into a tree before settling to get used to its new freedom. Dr Kelly showed me the tracking antenna, which has a range of approx. 1 km, that he would use to follow the bird's progress and was currently showing a clear and strong signal. He said he would supply regular updates as to how the bird was doing.

I have subsequently received the following details of the bird's whereabouts, with each tracking session being conducted between 10am and 1pm or 2pm and 4pm. The bird stayed mainly in the Queens Park area of Crewe close to the release site. The park is ideal Sparrowhawk territory with lots of small birds and plenty of mature trees. The bird was actually seen twice in the park, on one occasion in the same tree as a female Sparrowhawk. Being quite mobile the bird covered an area of about four square kilometres in a mainly linear pattern. Examination of a map shows that the bird seemed to use the Valley Brook in Crewe as a flyway, there being plenty of mature trees along parts of the brook. On two occasions the bird was reported in the vicinity of Crewe railway station but again this can be explained by the bird flying along the brook but exploring a bit further afield.

The final contact with the bird was on November 23rd in Queens Park and it is assumed that the battery subsequently expired (after 71 days) as the bird itself seems to be fit, mobile and surviving. However on Dec 14th a Sparrowhawk looking very like this bird was briefly perched back in my garden, one of three different birds that I have seen in the garden over the year; the injured one, a regular "old" male and large female possibly the one reported in Queens Park above.

In conclusion this has been a fascinating and worthwhile exercise and proves that injured birds of prey can be successfully rehabilitated into the wild and also gives an insight into the territorial range of the bird. Assuming the bird survives, the antenna will be lost on its next moult but the bird should be able to be identified by the BTO metal ring on its leg....so keep a look out.

Tim Halliday

HAWFINCH IN WISTASTON, 23RD TO 31ST MARCH 2006

This bird was first found by Ian Marshall on 23rd March whilst looking for Brambling, where up to six had been seen regularly in the area.

The site that the bird favoured was a public footpath with an adjacent brook, in a small valley running between two sets of houses in a suburban area, between Broughton Lane and Woodside Lane. Many of the gardens have feeding stations in them and one in particular was favoured by the bird. There are a lot of mature trees and large gardens running along this rather quiet valley.

I saw the bird several times on four days during its stay and the following description taken. First seen in flight, the large head and neck, short tail and white wingbars were obvious. With binoculars I could see it was pinkish brown in colour, although the head colour did not seem to very bright, and the bill was blue/grey in colour. Later views with a telescope gave more detail. The wing panel formed by the secondaries was ash grey (blue in males) and the head was not brightly coloured (a more golden colour in males) so the bird was sexed as a female. The bill colour was blue/grey making it an adult in summer plumage since winter plumage birds have a yellow bill. So the bird was identified as an adult female Hawfinch in summer plumage. In flight the bird looked very similar to a small Jay.

The bird remained in the area until at least 31st March.

The value of this quiet little haven was shown by the other birds recorded here whilst waiting for the Hawfinch to show. Including the Hawfinch a total of 40 species were seen over the nine days and included such scarce species as: Brambling, Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Woodcock.

Mark Stubbs

~~3rd~~ 1st for the SEROS wheat?
18 Nov 1985 Batt Vale, Congleton
15 Nov 2001 Sandbach

CORN BUNTING

Corn Buntings were once found all over arable farmland but have now seriously declined in numbers. National studies have shown that this decline is due to agricultural intensification including the sowing of winter wheat and harvesting it early in spring before the young Corn Buntings have fledged.

Also with farming methods changing there is not enough set-aside left in winter to provide food for buntings and other granivorous species of birds such as sparrows, finches and larks. However, in the areas where I have been I can see no evidence of this, so the problem instead may be down to the level of insecticide used on cereal crops and field margins.

To look at the Corn Bunting, it is plain – not unlike an overgrown female House Sparrow – and it can be lark-like in appearance. But it is very charismatic both in its behaviour and song. It is our largest resident bunting with dark streaked grey brown upperparts, white underparts and dark streaking on the throat. It has no striking head pattern, unlike the Reed Bunting, but has a stout bill, which along with its legs are pinkish straw in colour.

Another feature that separates it from other resident buntings is that it has no white in the outer tail feathers. Also, Yellowhammers in all plumages show a reddish brown rump, again a feature not shared with Corn Buntings. In flight the Corn Bunting can resemble a Skylark; however when flying short distances it drops its legs which can look unusual. Fortunately territorial males like to sit in the open on telegraph wires, fence posts and treetops so can easily be seen.

If you are still not sure whether you have spotted a Corn Bunting the call is unmistakable, just like somebody rattling a bunch of keys together. These birds seem to sing later than other buntings (from April/May onwards), as they tend to time their breeding season with the crops in which they forage. Its complex breeding habits make it very interesting, along with Bittern and Marsh Harrier it is polygamous. A male can have more than one female to provide for, in fact some males can have up to three nests to look after.

Sadly however they are in decline and in the last ten years I have seen colonies disappear from Alsager, Basford, Brereton, Congleton (Wall Hill), Doddington, Walgherton and Winterley. In fact there were no records at all in 2003 from south east Cheshire. Relief came in 2004 when two males were located at Hough and another male was found between Swettenham and Marton. These were also present during the 2005 and 2006 breeding season.

Nationally they seem to be holding their own in areas such as North Yorkshire, East Anglia and Scotland and have started to use rape seed fields as well as traditional sites. But they have also disappeared from Wales and this picture seems to mirror a huge decline across north west Europe since the 1960s. Again this could all be down to changes in traditional farming methods.

All is not lost though; in 2005 the Government launched the Environmental Stewardship scheme. This rewards farmers for the environmental management of their land. This should not only benefit Corn Buntings but also other birds such as Skylark, Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting and Grey Partridge.

Talking of Grey Partridge, the Game Conservancy Trust, in accordance with the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), aims to halt this species' decline and with the help of land managers hopes to create habitat suitable for Grey Partridges, which will in turn benefit other farmland birds including the Corn Bunting. Both birds rely on insects taken from grasslands, crops and weeds around field edges to feed their young.

So maybe we can be optimistic about the Corn Bunting's future in Cheshire and hopefully they will return to areas they once occupied and that jangly call will be heard by generations of Cheshire birdwatchers to come.

Mark Stubbs

BLACK-TAILED GODWITS AT SANDBACH FLASHES

The presence of two colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwits at Elton Hall Flash this spring has prompted me to record a few facts.

At Sandbach Flashes we get the Icelandic race *Limosa limosa islandica*.

Up to 2001 birds were only recorded on passage but from 2002 a summering flock of 1st year non-breeding sub-adults has been present here.

Year	Maximum count	Status
1997	33	On passage
1998	26	On passage
1999	22	On passage
2000	87	On passage
2001	57	On passage
2002	365	Summer resident
2003	47	Summer resident
2004	660	Summer resident
2005	500	Summer resident
2006	271	Summer resident

Black-tailed Godwits are being individually colour ringed in Iceland as part of a long term study. The population is currently around 47,000 individuals and is increasing. About 1%-2% have been individually colour ringed.

The aims of the project include estimating the population size; determining the wintering areas; to check the arrival synchrony on the breeding grounds of pairs who winter in different areas; the timing of migration; habitat selection of individuals.

The two colour-ringed birds have been reported to the ringing group in Iceland who have supplied a history.

1. OW-RX [Orange over White on left leg and Red over WhiteX on right leg]

27-04-03 ringed as an adult in Iceland
winter 03/04 in Wexford, Ireland
winter 05/06 in The Wash, Lincolnshire
spring 06 Sandbach Flashes on return passage

2. WY-WR [White over Yellow on left leg and White over Red on right leg]

13-07-05 ringed as a chick in North Iceland
April 06 Newton Marsh, Preston on passage
May 06 Sandbach Flashes as a summering non-breeder.

So it shows how valuable reports of colour-ringed birds are. If you see one please let me have the details.

Colin Lythgoe

EARLY AND LATE DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS

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

Species	ARRIVALS			DEPARTURES		
	Date in	10 Year	Earliest	Date in	10 Year	Latest
	2006	average	ever	2006	average	ever
Chiffchaff	28-Mar	13-Mar	8-Mar-89	18-Oct	11-Oct	28-Oct-04
Little Ringed Plover	21-Mar	17-Mar	5-Mar-00	18-Aug	1-Sep	16-Oct-85
Sand Martin	26-Mar	19-Mar	12-Mar-89	11-Sep	22-Sep	24-Nov-72
Swallow	26-Mar	26-Mar	19-Mar-00	14-Oct	22-Oct	30-Nov-74
Blackcap	24-Mar	31-Mar	18-Mar-97	23-Sep	18-Sep	2-Oct-05
Willow Warbler	30-Mar	1-Apr	28-Mar-03&05	29-Aug	8-Sep	26-Sep-98
House Martin	28-Mar	6-Apr	25-Mar-95	17-Oct	17-Oct	5-Nov-77
Yellow Wagtail	13-Apr	13-Apr	29-Mar-81	27-Oct	15-Sep	27-Oct-06
Lesser Whitethroat	23-Apr	18-Apr	21-Mar-00	15-Sep	14-Sep	1-Oct-98
Reed Warbler	22-Apr	19-Apr	12-Apr-97	19-Sep	18-Sep	4-Oct-98
Sedge Warbler	22-Apr	19-Apr	16-Apr-80	15-Sep	1-Sep	1-Oct-78
Whitethroat	20-Apr	20-Apr	15-Apr-93	19-Sep	5-Sep	21-Sep-93
Cuckoo	29-Apr	21-Apr	5-Apr-82	nr	17-Aug	1-Oct-86
Swift	22-Apr	23-Apr	16-Apr-96	03-Sep	11-Sep	3-Nov-78
Garden Warbler	29-Apr	26-Apr	20-Apr-96	05-Sep	19-Aug	9-Sep-83
Hobby	18-Apr	3-May	27-Mar-94	03-Oct	26-Sep	8-Oct-00
Grasshopper Warbler	27-Apr	8-May	25-Apr-93	nr	nr	30/8/??

nr signifies no record in the current year.

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 that move here from the continent, whilst our summering birds migrate south. Therefore these two species do fit my criteria for inclusion.

The most significant record this year was Yellow Wagtail with two very late birds seen at Elton Hall Flash on 27th Oct. This date equals the county latest date set in 2004.

There have been some minor changes in the "10 year average" dates but no changes in the species order.