



SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

2007 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes



**Yellow-browed Warbler
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Editorial

Welcome to the SECOS annual bird report for 2007. For this and hopefully future years I will be working with Colin Lythgoe on the collation of data and the production of the report.

As almost all of my bird watching is done at Sandbach Flashes I have agreed to record and collate the sightings from the flashes and Colin will manage the Doddington, Rode Pool and other SECOS area records. Any non flashes records can still be entered in the log book located at EHF and Colin and I will gladly accept other records of interest from the recording area.

Having been heavily involved in the production of this report I now appreciate the effort and work that goes into the finished article and as it is Colin's 22nd I can only admire his stamina and enthusiasm over the years.

This years report will follow the same format as usual with the systematic list (the order of species has changed slightly to follow the recommendation of the BOURC) forming the majority of the text and finishing with first hand accounts from local bird watchers of their finds and observations.

The year 2007 saw a "first" for the county (see later article) with a Desert Wheatear in the heart of industrial Crewe for three days in December. This bird was the ultimate in the one that got away for several local bird watchers who have spent the last few years recording around this area for the forthcoming bird atlas (there's no justice in birding). Not quite as rare but still an outstanding find was a wintering Yellow Browed Warbler, again found in the heart of industrial Crewe (see later article).

At Sandbach Flashes the first Caspian Gull was found and identified and a remarkable early winter series of Iceland Gull sightings kept the regulars busy. Avocets made a brief but welcome return and an amazing run of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker records ensured anyone with time and patience could be guaranteed at least one sighting. A lingering Osprey at Doddington and a "twitchable" Red Kite in Crewe were reward for keen patch watchers at those sites. (A report on the Caspian Gull and an overview of Red Kite records can be found in the report)

The SECOS winter garden bird survey continues and produces welcome records of normally under recorded species.

Thanks go to all the bird watchers who record their sightings and with whom the report would not be possible and to the regulars at the sites with feeding stations whom maintain and stock the feeders which have allowed species like Tree Sparrow and Willow Tit to stabilize and then increase their numbers. Thanks also go to HJ Lea Oakes of Wheelock for the supply of free bird food.

Andy Firth

Contributors

Many thanks to those people who have recorded sightings in the log books at Sandbach Flashes, Doddington Pool and Rode Pool and to the individuals who have submitted paper records personally. Those records have been used to produce this 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	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
RLT	Red Lane Tip	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 ten records in the last 20 years.
Vagrant	Less than two 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 2007

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Fairly common resident.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	6	3	2	4	38	49	49	34	14	13	9	4
Winterley	27	22	17	24	17	19	17	16	12	11	14	11

Numbers are now much reduced at Winterley. Successful breeding from several sites. A coordinated count of all the Sandbach Flashes totalled 25 on 28th Jan. Max of 39 at Astbury Mere in Jan.

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

Rare winter visitor.

Three low over Swettenham on 6th Jan. Three over Stowford on 18th Oct. At Sandbach Flashes 12 on 25th March landed on EHF before flying north in the early evening. On 24th Sept three flew north over EHF. In late Oct/early Nov one roamed the Flashes.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.

At Sandbach Flashes skeins of 300 and 80 over EHF in late Jan otherwise very few in the early winter period with three records in March. In the late winter period several skeins over with no exceptional counts. 500 over Stowford on 8th Oct, 250 over Hassall Green on 31st Dec and 200 over Crewe on 17th Dec heading south west. .

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Rare winter visitor or feral.

At Sandbach Flashes odd birds regular at EHF with ten on 26th May and six over on 24th June noteworthy. A pair bred at Rode Pool, with seven juvs seen in May. In June the pair were down to five juvs but another 12 adults were present.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Common resident.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	130	247	162	133	249	164	124	250	188	1215	384	140

The exceptional count of 1215 at Doddington in Oct probably occurred when several of the usual wandering flocks visited at the same time. 75 adults with 12 juvs at Rode Pool in June. Common at Sandbach Flashes with a maximum count of 457 in Aug.

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.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	66	57	44	47	36	36	4	5	0	2	19	34

Up to five pairs bred at Sandbach Flashes with at least 36 juvs recorded. At Doddington seven in Feb and three in Dec.

Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*)

Scarce visitor.

A good series of records from Rode Pool where up to six were regular from Jan to June. Odd ones or twos recorded occasionally at various sites, particularly Queens Park Crewe.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

Common winter visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	270	333	227	146	1	0	1	3	83	231	600	820
Doddington	105	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	4	86
Rode Pool	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	21	15

The main site at Sandbach Flashes is EHF/PHF but big numbers are also regular at CF. Early winter maximum counts of 333 in Feb were well down on the previous years. Numbers also well down at other sites except for Doddington in Jan and Dec.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)*Uncommon winter visitor.*

The usual scattering of records from Sandbach Flashes with one or two most months but no pattern to the records. Two at Doddington in Feb and March and two at Rode Pool in Dec.

Teal (*Anas crecca*)*Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	336	488	308	120	7	20	30	177	453	363	212	340
Doddington	4	57	4	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	6	94
Rode Pool	29	32	4	8	1	0	1	6	21	68	27	32

The main site at Sandbach Flashes is EHF/PHF and well over 450 were present at times in early Feb. Numbers increasing and more regular at Rode Pool. Two exceptional counts at Doddington with 57 in Feb and 94 in Dec.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)*Common resident. Abundant in winter.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	275	180	177	121	177	68	295	750	720	334	76	170
Doddington	257	245	188	199	136	156	144	204	126	480	339	334
Rode Pool	102	67	40	20	40	48	90	94	114	82	75	109

Breeds commonly on most waters in the area. At Sandbach Flashes post breeding numbers reaching 700 plus on dates in Aug and Sept on EHF. At Rode Pool a pair nested 8 metres high in an oak tree.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	34	23	13	9	2	1	1	9	7	7	5	7

Maximum count of 34 and present in all months at Sandbach Flashes with EHF being the most productive site. At Doddington four in Feb and one in Oct.

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

At Sandbach Flashes a drake at EHF on 6th May and single drake or drakes also at EHF on 23rd and 24th May.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	4	12	8	15	4	3	2	8	15	26	5	30
Doddington	53	17	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	9	20	7
Rode Pool	19	21	8	3	0	2	1	1	0	13	12	16

Smaller numbers at Sandbach Flashes than last year, but slight increases elsewhere.

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

Once again Astbury Mere is the top site for this species with 52 in Jan and 39 in Dec. Up to 12 at Doddington and ten at Rode Pool. Uncommon at Sandbach Flashes with five in early June on EHF notable.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	69	55	67	54	14	28	0	34	9	2	72	45
Rode Pool	15	35	15	8	9	7	5	3	5	2	8	8
Astbury	93	30	52	28	nc	nc	nc	32	82	90	66	90

A coordinated count of Sandbach Flashes on 28th Jan produced 31 individuals. Several pairs bred at Doddington and two pairs bred at Astbury Mere.

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

Doddington is still the top site for this species although numbers are much reduced this year with a max of only 12 in Feb (17 in 2006) and 11 in Nov. Six at Astbury Mere in Jan. One at Sandbach Flashes commuting between EHF and PHF in Jan was welcome.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)*Rare winter visitor*

A male seen at Astbury Mere on 27th Nov was found dead on the bank there on 4th Dec.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)*Winter visitor.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	12	8	17	3	1	0	0	3	3	3	4	6

Becoming regular at Sandbach Flashes with numbers seemingly dependant on water levels at the main flashes. FFF is becoming a regular site for this species. In the second winter period up to 16 were at Lawton Pool and up to 24 at Rode Pool, presumed to be the same birds moving between the two sites.

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

Regular in small numbers on some of the Sandbach Flashes and at Doddington.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)*Rare except where locally released.*

Records from several sites probably all relate to birds released for shooting. Max counts were 38 at Bridgemere and 18 at Doddington. At Sandbach Flashes two at CF on 7th May were the only records.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)*Scarce resident*

A large flock of 24 seen near Holmes Chapel on 22nd Jan. In late July coveys of three birds and two birds were seen at Alsager South.

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. At Sandbach Flashes common at the feeding station in FF.

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)*Fairly common resident.*

Slightly lower numbers than usual and few juvs seen but Doddington continues to be the stronghold with probably two pairs and two juvs on the main pool and five pairs and three juvs on the Lemon Pool. Recorded regularly at Sandbach Flashes with juvs noted at GF and EHF.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	5	4	4	6	11	6	6	5	12	5	5	6

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)*Common resident.*

Although numbers were high in the early year at Doddington breeding success was poor with few juvs seen. The post-breeding flock was only 24 (52 in 2006). A better year at Rode Pool where probably five pairs bred with four broods noted and eight juvs seen. Regular at Sandbach Flashes with WLF having birds present every month and up to 20 regular in winter. Three pairs at Astbury Mere fledged four young.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	28	27	21	27	27	22	13	24	19	12	16	18

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)*Fairly common winter visitor. Rare in summer.*

Numbers usually peak in Oct and Nov at Doddington and did so this year with 37 in Nov (41 in 2006). Recorded every month at Sandbach Flashes with a peak count of 22 in Nov.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Rare visitor.

Just two records at Sandbach Flashes with singles at EHF on 20th April and 12th Aug. Also one at Doddington on 21st Sept.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Common resident.

At the Rode Pool heronry there was a slight increase in nesting pairs with 42 nests in use this year (39 in 2006) with many juvs seen. Regular at Sandbach Flashes with a maximum of 12 at EHF in Nov.

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

Very rare visitor

An exceptional year with one over Barthomley on 23rd Feb; one at Cheshire's Close for four days in early Aug and a leucistic individual near Oakhanger for seven days in late Aug. See the later article for more details.

Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

Rare visitor

At Sandbach Flashes an adult male flew over EHF on 6th Aug. One was watched for five minutes soaring over The Cloud on 26th April.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area with many records. Recorded in 32 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. Proven breeding from Crewe Cemetery where at least two juvs were seen. There were three successful nests within Crewe Town.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Common resident.

Now the commonest raptor and can expect to be seen during a few hours birdwatching anywhere. The highest counts were of 12 together in Aug over Oakhanger and also at Sandbach Flashes.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Rare migrant.

At Sandbach Flashes one flew north over EHF on the evening of 18th April. A super autumn at Doddington with one bird on 25th Aug then two together on 5th Sept. One of these stayed until 12th Sept giving brilliant views as it was fishing.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area but not so many records as for Sparrowhawk. The only proven breeding at Sandbach Flashes was from RF.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Rare winter visitor.

Records from Sandbach Flashes with singles in Jan, Feb and Sept totalling six sightings. Where specifically sexed all were females. Also a female over the River Dane, Swettenham on 1st April and one near Congleton on 15th Jan.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Proved breeding again from Oakhanger with two juvs fledged. Probably also bred at Stowford, Hough and Congleton. The first arrival at Sandbach Flashes was one over EHF on 22nd April. Recorded regularly then with the last being over EHF on the 14th Sept. Later records from Stowford with the last on 23rd Sept. Noteworthy reports were one mobbing a Peregrine in April and one seen to take a House Martin in mid Aug, both at the flashes.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Scarce resident and winter visitor.

As usual at Sandbach Flashes birds were resident in the RF area through the year but no breeding attempt noted. One was seen to catch and eat a Eurasian Teal at EHF in late March. Records of wandering birds from seven sites and interestingly more records of birds on the tower at Leighton Hospital, a regular site – are they nesting nearby?

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

In the first winter period singles recorded Sandbach Flashes at FF, GF, WLF and MGT. One heard calling at FF in late June was particularly noteworthy. Recorded at EHF in Dec. Away from the flashes Nov was a good month with four at Doddington and one at Rode Pool.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common resident.

The co-ordinated count of all Sandbach Flashes on 28th Jan gave a total of 44 spread over eleven 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 28th Jan gave a total of 252 spread over nine flashes.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	133	218	113	77	158	269	292	152	144	163	139	140

At Doddington in Aug on the main pool the numbers dropped from 300 to 26 after the sailing club controlled (i.e. treated with chemicals) the water vegetation. Most moved to the Lemon Pool. 90+ regular all year at Astbury Mere.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Scarce winter visitor and uncommon summer visitor.

The first of the year was at Doddington on 9th Feb. Two pairs here all summer but no breeding attempt noted. Two pairs did breed on fishing pools at Stowford, with three juvs seen. Pairs also at Wychwood Park Weston and Bent Farm Quarry. Up to five were present regularly at Sandbach Flashes until early Sept after the first on the typical date of 17th Feb.

Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

Very rare visitor

At Sandbach Flashes a party of six (2 adults and 4 juvs) on 24th June at EHF was a highlight for many locals.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/autumn migrant.

At Sandbach Flashes the first bird was one at EHF on 15th March. Then present intermittently until the last bird on 1st Sept. Vastly reduced numbers at EHF from previous years with five being the maximum count and no evidence of breeding. A pair at Bent Farm Quarry fledged at least two juvs. A pair also at White Moss Quarry Alsager and one at Stowford on spring passage.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes the first record was three at EHF on 19th April. Recorded infrequently with six at EHF on 22nd May the maximum spring count. Very scarce on return passage with a flyover ten at EHF on Aug 14th being the only count of note.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Not regular in either winter period at Sandbach Flashes, nine on 24th Feb being the largest early winter count with ten on Dec 26th the largest late year count. Singles at Byley in Nov.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	1200	1350	311	40	21	148	350	357	444	679	1170	2000

Most birds moved away from Sandbach Flashes in spring to breed but a few stayed and probably three broods fledged at EHF. Largest winter flocks away from Sandbach Flashes were 500 near Astbury in Jan, 460 at Byley in Nov and 350 at Stowford in Feb. Two pairs bred at Stowford.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

Rare visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes singles at EHF on 15th, 16th and 22nd Aug.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)*Scarce passage migrant.*Just one record at Sandbach Flashes of a juv on 29th Sept at EHF.**Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)***Very rare migrant.*Sandbach Flashes hosted two juvs on EHF on the evening of 19th Sept however there was no sign of either bird the following day despite both individuals being present at nightfall.**Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)***Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	1	0	0	4	14	1	1	3	6	3	3	0

A particularly poor year at Sandbach Flashes considering favourable water levels at migration times.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	17	18	14	1	0	0	4	9	13	14	9	9

At Sandbach Flashes a typical spread of records from EHF.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)*Scarce winter visitor.*At Sandbach Flashes two seen at MGT in Jan, with an excellent record of one on 13th Aug flushed from the footpath by GF. One at RF in Nov. Also two at Stowford in Jan and one in late Sept.**Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)***Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	28	12	5	1	0	0	3	37	10	10	17	38

A very difficult species to count accurately so probably under recorded at Sandbach Flashes. Up to ten regular in the marsh at Stowford in the winter and seven at Rode Pool in Jan.

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)*Scarce winter visitor.*At Sandbach Flashes three were flushed on 1st Jan and also on 25th Dec from FF. Singles also flushed in winter at Crewe Business Park, Haslington, Stowford, Weston and Doddington.**Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)***Common non breeding resident*

Now present all year at Sandbach Flashes and especially numerous at EHF but numbers can vary wildly from day to day. All birds are assumed to be of the Icelandic race and many birds present in summer are most likely immature birds. An individual seen in display flight in late Apr was unusual.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	10	14	105	170	2	55	70	58	55	43	10	9

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)*Rare passage migrant.*Two records from Sandbach Flashes was an excellent return. A summer plumage bird on 30th April and another individual on 8th Aug both on EHF.**Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)***Scarce passage migrant.*At Sandbach Flashes 16 briefly at EHF on the morning of 27th April was an excellent record. After that singles and a party of four also at EHF in May followed by a single in the Curlew flock recorded in June and July at PHF.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	70	59	13	4	1	2	45	58	63	66	54	57

Quite a predictable series of records from Sandbach Flashes with birds seen intermittently displaying between PHF and RF in spring but no evidence of breeding. Pairs displaying at Stowford and Haslington in spring but no breeding attempt noted.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	6	5	4	4	0	1	0	2	3	4	6	3

Still regular at Sandbach Flashes (EHF) but never common with numbers lower than in previous years. Also two at Doddington on 6th April.

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

A particularly good spring passage at Sandbach Flashes with birds recorded on 14 days throughout April and May on EHF. Also on EHF four together in early June. Scarcer on return passage but one over Haslington on 21st Aug.

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

The drainage ditches at Stowford are a regular wintering site, with up to three present in the early winter period and two in late winter. One bird was present on floodwater on Clay Lane in Feb. Spring passage at Sandbach Flashes totalled just three records; however the predictable return passage produced a maximum of 12 at EHF in Aug. Also three at Bent Farm Quarry in July.

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

Spring passage at Sandbach Flashes extended from 10th April to 8th June at EHF, with a maximum count of four. Regular on return passage. Two at Doddington on 25th May.

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)*Rare visitor*

One record at Sandbach Flashes of an individual on 28th Aug on EHF.

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

Scarce at Sandbach Flashes in the early part of the year with EHF hosting two in March and one in April and May. In mid July four different individuals (two Ads and two 2nd Sum) were recorded followed by several records of juvs in Aug, two in Dec completed the year

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	4100	2200	1070	350	157	42	236	370	1950	2100	1750	1900

Usual numbers of up to 11, 000 in the evening gull roost at Doddington.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)*Very rare visitor*

An adult in winter plumage graced Sandbach Flashes in Oct, being seen for two consecutive days on the 24th and 25th. The same or another adult was on PHF on the 19th and 20th Dec.

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

The usual pattern of records from Sandbach Flashes with few in winter (max nine), strong passage through March (max 87), rare in summer, very low numbers on autumn passage and low numbers in the second winter period (max 15).

Numbers in the Doddington Pool roost followed a similar pattern but no actual numbers recorded, except for around 50 in Nov.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	30	160	700	600	150	12	27	70	145	157	950	350

The Doddington Pool gull roost held 400 in Nov.

Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*)

Scarce visitor.

This species is being recorded with more frequency at Sandbach Flashes almost exclusively at EHF with records in most months but particularly in July and Aug with up to four individuals present.

Caspian Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)

Very rare visitor

The first for Sandbach Flashes was found by DN at EHF on 17th April, a 1st summer bird it stayed until at least 3rd May and was seen well by all the locals (description submitted to the relevant recorder). Another bird, this time an adult, was seen on several dates at EHF from 15th Nov along with a probable 3rd winter. It may be this species will become regularly recorded at the Flashes as it spreads north and the locals gain experience of the ID features.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Rarer than Lesser Black-backed Gull at Sandbach Flashes but with impressive counts at MGT/RF of 420 in early Feb.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*)

Scarce winter visitor.

An amazing early winter period for this species at Sandbach Flashes with birds seen on 51 days between Jan 1st and April 19th. It is possible up to eight individuals or even more made up these records with all age groups noted. A first winter was seen at PHF on 24th Nov and presumably the same bird stayed into Dec.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Scarce winter visitor

A welcome return at Sandbach Flashes after a blank 2006 with a 1st W on April 7th at EHF/PHF.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Never common although regular at Sandbach Flashes with an impressive 60 at MGT/RF on 17th Jan the biggest early winter count and also 60 at EHF on 5th Dec.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Rare visitor.

Just one record at Sandbach Flashes of this scarce visitor an individual on 28th March at EHF

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

Very scarce in spring at Sandbach Flashes with one passing through EHF on 29th April the only record. In mid summer several more were seen but never in any numbers or for very long.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Scarce passage migrant.

EHF provided both Sandbach Flashes records of this less than annual species with an adult on 21st July and another briefly on the 10th Aug.

Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common resident

Common in built up areas especially in Crewe town centre.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

Uncommon resident.

Up to 25 at Doddington in winter and 17 at Alsager. Around eight pairs used nest boxes in Quakers Coppice. Regular at Sandbach Flashes with very little apparent change in numbers.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Common resident.

Up to 250 at Doddington and 150 at Rode Pool. A common resident at Sandbach Flashes with numbers augmented by migrants in the winter period with visible migration evident on some days.

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common resident.

The largest flocks noted were 53 at Hulme Walfield and 36 at Monneley Farm Barthomley. Recorded in 46 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. A common resident at Sandbach Flashes with 28 noted around EHF in early Jan.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.

The first record was one at Crewe Golf Course Haslington on 23rd April, followed by one at Doddington on 24th April. Records from Arclid and Cheshire's Close in May and one in Crewe on 11th June. Another disastrous year at Sandbach Flashes with just one record of a bird on 5th July around FF.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Scarce resident.

Numbers continue to increase, with pairs at Coppenhall Crewe and Stowford showing very well. 51 juvs were ringed in the nest by South Cheshire Barn Owl group. No longer a particularly difficult species to see at Sandbach Flashes with three separate individuals seen at various locations on the morning of 3rd June particularly noteworthy.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Common resident.

Still the commonest owl in its preferred habitat of open farmland but possibly a declining species at Sandbach Flashes with fewer recorded than in previous years and a couple of reliable sites no longer holding birds. A regular bird by CF was the most predictable individual.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

Common resident.

Most definitely an under recorded species at Sandbach Flashes but breeding was proven around EHF with juvs being seen on several occasions. A pair bred successfully in a Barn Owl style nest box at Crewe Golf Course.

Short Eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)

Rare visitor

Just one record of this less than annual visitor to Sandbach Flashes of one over EHF on the afternoon of 20th Nov.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First of the year was one at EHF on 17th April, with 24 at Doddington on 23rd April. Recorded then intermittently until the last on 27th Aug. Numbers seem to have reduced even further.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

Uncommon resident.

Not uncommon at Sandbach Flashes with a particularly confiding male being seen well throughout Aug at EHF, most recorded however from FF. Records from several sites but breeding only proved at Rode Pool where one adult and three juvs were seen perched together on a branch.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

Uncommon resident.

Records from several sites but no proved breeding. Only one of this hard to see species recorded at Sandbach Flashes with one calling by the viewpoint at EHF on 10th July.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Common resident.

By far the commonest woodpecker in the area. Recorded in 17 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. A common and possibly increasing species at Sandbach Flashes with records from all areas and proven breeding at EHF and FF.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)

Uncommon resident.

A female on the track at WLF on 24th Feb was the only record in the early part of the year at Sandbach Flashes. From July 25th a remarkable run of sightings around EHF with probably two males and one female resulting in sightings on more than 20 days often at very close range. Even more surprising as this woodpecker is barely annual at the flashes. Also recorded at Valley Park Crewe and Rode Pool.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Fairly common.

Quite widespread through the year, usually in low numbers but a winter flock of 92 at Basford, then 18 at Stowford, 14 at Haslington and 11 at Alsager. Never common at Sandbach Flashes with MGT being the most reliable site, six there on Jan 21st and Feb 11th being the biggest count.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First records of the year were on 15th March with one at Sandbach Flashes and six at Astbury Mere. Recorded regularly particularly at EHF until the last on Sept 19th. The old breeding site at Wybunbury Sand Quarry was reused this year after an old sand cliff collapsed exposing a new face and at least 25 pairs bred.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Common summer visitor.

An exceptionally early bird was seen flying low over Alsager on 10th Feb. The next record was one over Astbury Mere on 15th March. At Stowford 20+ pairs nested in buildings at Meremoor Farm fledging 200+ juvs. First recorded at Sandbach Flashes on 29th March and regular until the last on 4th Oct.

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Common summer visitor.

The first local record was one over Haslington on 2nd April. Sandbach Flashes first and last dates were 9th April and 27th Sept, common in between these dates with counts of 300+ at EHF in late Aug.

Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

Rare passage migrant

Instead of the usual flyovers a bird was present at the Oakhanger Red Kite watch point from 26th Aug to 1st Sept, typical dates for this species.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

At Sandbach Flashes most regular at MGT but recorded regularly from all flashes on passage especially in autumn. Max winter flocks were 40 at MGT, 35 at Stowford and 27 at Pyms Lane Crewe.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

A good year at Stowford with the first passage bird 14th April, nine on passage on 22nd April and one pair bred with three juvs seen. First record of the year at Sandbach Flashes on the late date of 7th May, then recorded in ones and twos with juvs in early July until the last on 29th Sept.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Fairly common resident and winter visitor.

A continued increase and now common in many areas throughout the year. Recorded in all months at Sandbach Flashes but commoner in winter.

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Fairly common resident.

The winter roost at Crewe Arms/railway station numbered at least 100 in Nov. Winter flocks of 50 at Haslington and 32 at Wychwood Park Weston.

At Sandbach Flashes singles of the continental race *M.a. alba* at EHF on 2nd and 4th April.

Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Scarce resident.

A pair in spring at Bathvale, Congleton, a regular breeding site, but may not have bred this year due to heavy disturbance.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Abundant resident.

Recorded in 42 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

Dunnoek (*Prunella modularis*)

Common resident.

Recorded in 48 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Abundant resident.

Recorded in 50 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.

Two records from Sandbach Flashes this year with a female in the hedgerow bordering PHF on April 25th and on return passage a female type in bushes adjacent to MGT on 12th Aug. Also one at Stowford from 25th Aug to 2nd Sept.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Scarce migrant.

The only records from Sandbach Flashes were two birds at MGT on 11th Aug with one remaining the following day. At Stowford singles in spring on 22nd April and 6th May and in autumn on 1st Sept and 2nd Oct.

Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)

Scarce winter visitor.

A disappointing year for this species at Sandbach Flashes with just two birds recorded in Jan and Feb at MGT and two also at MGT throughout Dec. At Stowford two regular in the early winter period and up to three in the second winter period. Also one near Quakers Coppice in Dec.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

First recorded at Sandbach Flashes on 14th April with three more April records, four in May and one in Aug until the last of the year on Sept 13th. Spring records only from other sites with up to 12 at Stowford from 11th March to 20th May, two at Doddington and one at Swettenham.

Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*)

Vagrant

An incredible record of one at a private site in Crewe from 12th to 14th Dec was a first for Cheshire. See the separate article for more details.

Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)

Rare passage migrant

Singles on passage at Stowford on 10th April and 21st/22nd April.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

This is the commonest bird in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Common winter visitor.

The biggest count at Sandbach Flashes was c500 over EHF on 22nd March in the early winter period with 2000 around the flashes on 18th Nov the largest late period count. Also 500 at Stowford.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Fairly common resident.

Numbers seem to be decreasing again after recent increases.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

Common winter visitor.

500 at Doddington in Dec. The biggest count at Sandbach Flashes in the early winter period was c100 over EHF on 15th March with 200 around the flashes on 18th Nov the largest late period count.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Fairly common resident.

Breeds commonly throughout the area but generally under-recorded. 30 at Stowford in Sept.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

Rare summer visitor

One was singing in the small marsh by the boardwalk at Stowford on 22nd April only.

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The earliest recorded at Sandbach Flashes were two at GF on April 27th. Never common after with five at RF on May 16th the largest count. Singing males in the breeding season at Doddington and Stowford.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First recorded at Sandbach Flashes on the same date as the previous year (April 22nd) at WLF and then undoubtedly commoner than Sedge Warbler with up to four regular at both RF and WLF until the last at EHF on Sept 19th. A good year elsewhere also with successful breeding pairs at Doddington, Rode Pool, Stowford and even in a tiny reed bed in Crewe Business Park.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.

Recorded at Sandbach Flashes in the winter period with birds in Jan and early March. Other winter records include 11 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. Singing males at Congleton on 8th and 11th March and at Astbury Mere on 25th March.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First record for Sandbach Flashes was on April 29th at Red Lane tip then fewer than ten logged sightings throughout the rest of the summer. A good count from Brereton CP with 11 singing males on 29th April. First records on 26th April from Crewe and Congleton.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first record from Sandbach Flashes was one behind the railway line on April 14th then recorded regularly including recently fledged juveniles until the last at EHF on Sept 3rd. Records from several other sites.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

Common summer visitor.

The first from Sandbach Flashes was one by FFF on April 15th with the largest single count being seven on May 3rd. The last recorded was on Sept 8th at EHF. Good counts from Stowford with 15 on 7th May, mainly singing males.

Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*)

Vagrant

At the Council works depot in Crewe a bird was first heard on 3rd Feb and then seen to be present there until 11th April. See the separate article for more details.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.

First record for Sandbach Flashes was on 12th March with seven noted on March 17th. Recorded regularly afterwards until the last on Oct 9th. First records for the area were singles on 11th March at Stowford, Day Green Alsager and Congleton. One in Crewe Business Park on 13th Nov.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Common summer visitor.

April 7th saw the first record for Sandbach Flashes then relatively scarce throughout with no more than a count of three logged. The last record was on Aug 30th.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

Fairly common resident and winter visitor.

Not uncommon in the area in winter with birds recorded regularly from FF. Recorded in 12 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. Also increasingly common as a breeding bird.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Another increase in numbers with for example five pairs breeding at Doddington and one pair nesting in the porch of Crewe Green Church. However, just three records from Sandbach Flashes with two at Tetton Lane on June 3rd and one at EHF in the autumn.

Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

Rare summer visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes one showed well but briefly on Aug 17th in hedgerows bordering EHF.

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Common resident.

Very common at Sandbach Flashes with flocks of 30 plus seen at EHF and FF which could be a result of this species being an early breeder and an exceptionally settled early spring period of weather conditions. Flocks of 20+ also at Brereton CP, Doddington and Middlewich.

Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

Common resident.

Common at Sandbach Flashes with breeding reported from EHF and FF.

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged	Productivity (juvs per pair)
Quakers Coppice	12	108	86	55	4.6
Rode Pool	2	17	15	4	2.0

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

Common resident.

Common at Sandbach Flashes with breeding reported from EHF and FF

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged	Productivity (juvs per pair)
Quakers Coppice	6	36	33	21	3.5
Rode Pool	5	33	31	20	4.0

Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*)

Fairly common resident.

Reported infrequently at Sandbach Flashes with juvs seen in FF in June being of note.

Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*)

Scarce resident.

The success story of the year was the re-emergence of this bird as a breeding species at Sandbach Flashes, also regular at the feeders in FF. Records in winter from Astbury Mere, Bathvale Congleton, Crewe, Wybunbury Moss and Stowford.

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. Also one at Wybunbury Moss on 31st Jan.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)

Common resident.

A species seemingly on the increase at Sandbach Flashes with regular sightings in FF and a juv recorded on June 2nd confirming breeding locally. Quite widespread and common in large trees.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

Common resident.

Common at Sandbach Flashes with nests in use noted at EHF and FF. One pair at Rode Pool used a specially designed nest box, laid four eggs but finally deserted.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

Uncommon resident.

Regular at Sandbach Flashes particularly in autumn, recently fledged juvs at FF in June confirming breeding locally.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)

Common resident.

Common all year at Sandbach Flashes though under recorded. A winter roost of 25+ at Crewe Business Park.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

A common bird in and around the Sandbach Flashes area with groups of 50 plus recorded especially in winter. The corvid roost in Crewe Hall woods holds 2000+ Jackdaws during the winter.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Common resident.

The total nests at regularly counted rookeries were:-

Site	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
Crewe/Alsager (8 sites)	487	472	460	476	502
Foden's Flash	138	136	131	121	126

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Common resident.

Common all year at Sandbach Flashes and mobbing birds are often the first sign of the presence of a raptor.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Scarce visitor and resident.

Still increasing in numbers with winter records from 15 sites and proved breeding at Doddington where two juvs were seen. Recorded sightings at Sandbach Flashes numbered 19 but all were flyovers.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

The long established but small roost in Leylandii trees by Crewe Station car park has become very large this year with 20,000 to 25,000 birds by 31st Dec. Giving spectacular displays whilst covering cars in guano! Particularly common still in winter at Sandbach Flashes though in smaller numbers with c900 being the largest count at EHF.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Common resident.

Largest recorded flocks were 120 in a hedge in Shavington in July and 50 plus in farm buildings at Meremoor Farm Stowford. Not many records from Sandbach Flashes but still regular around buildings in the area.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Fairly common resident.

Numbers steadily increasing, helped by several nesting and feeding schemes. At Meremoor Farm Stowford 12 pairs used nest boxes, most had three broods giving 100+ juvs. At Sandbach Flashes six pairs used the nest boxes around EHF/FF and flocks of 60 in March around Green Lane and 44 around EHF/FF were the largest counts.

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

By far the largest winter total was 550 in several flocks around the Doddington Estate on 19th Dec. Commonly resident all over the Sandbach Flashes recording area.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Exceptional numbers at Doddington in Nov and Dec where the huge finch flock held at least 30 Brambling. At Sandbach Flashes one or possibly two seen (and heard) on several occasions between 15th and 17th Nov.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common resident.

Recorded in 42 out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey with a max count of 25, but no large flocks reported. Common at Sandbach Flashes.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Fairly common resident.

The largest recorded flocks in late winter were 200 at Stowford and 150 at Doddington. Commonly recorded from Sandbach Flashes with 55 at MGT in Aug being the highest count.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.

A poor year generally with the largest recorded flocks being only 27 at Crewe Business Park and Haslington followed by ten at Rode Pool and Astbury Mere and recorded in only four out of 50 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. At Sandbach Flashes less than 30 records and most of these birds flying over calling.

Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Fairly common resident.

Winter flocks of 100 at Stowford in Jan, 70 at Alsager in Nov and 250 at Doddington and 120 at Congleton in Dec. The largest count from Sandbach Flashes was of 120 on Jan 3rd.

Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis cabaret*)

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

The largest winter flock was 20 at Stowford in Feb. As with Siskin a poor year at Sandbach Flashes with only 12 records of which seven were in Jan.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Uncommon resident.

Regular at Sandbach Flashes and breeding proven at FF.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Uncommon resident.

Lower numbers this year with max winter counts being 32 at Basford, 17 near Winterley Pool, 12 in a Crewe railway yard and ten at Holmes Chapel. At Sandbach Flashes still very rare with just two being the largest single count

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Uncommon resident.

Not recorded in large numbers anywhere this year. Max of six singing males on the marsh at Stowford. At Sandbach Flashes MGT is the most reliable site.

Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

Scarce resident

Only one singing male this year, from the regular site of Cobbs Lane, Hough.

Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes

Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)

One on 9th March at Sandbach Flashes on PHF.

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

At Sandbach Flashes sightings from MGT on the pool bordering the landfill and from PHF.

Lesser Canada Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*)

One bird which was a perfect fit for B.h. minima was with a large Canada Goose flock at Doddington in June and Rode Pool in July.

Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*)

A pair were present in the Oakhanger area throughout July and Aug and seen at several locations.

Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)

Two flew over Haslington on 2nd May, calling loudly.

DESERT WHEATEAR AT CREWE: FIRST RECORD FOR CHESHIRE & WIRRAL.

One perk or perhaps otherwise of being County Recorder, is that I receive regular phone calls, or e-mails from members of the public commenting on some "unusual" bird they have seen in their gardens or work places. These fall into the categories of either being something mis-identified, like the 300 Long-tailed Tits photographed in some trees in Macclesfield that were roosting Pied Wagtails, or exotic cage escapes like the Masked Weaver in Winsford which was reported as a Black-headed Bunting. Real rarities are exactly that, very rare, and having already had one this year, a Rose-coloured Starling photographed in a garden near Chester, I had no expectations as I clicked on the e-mail entitled "FOA County Recorder" that popped into my in box around mid-day on Friday 14th December. The note was from a worker at the Unipart Rail Distribution centre at Crewe about a strange bird had been present, on the fringe of a car park near this site, frequenting a small stony area with sparse weeds since Wed 12th December. Several workers had seen the bird and thought it unusual, and one had brought his camera in and taken a few pictures. He had contacted garden-birds.co.uk and they suggested alerting me as County Recorder. It took me seconds from the brief description to realise that it was either a Black-eared or Desert Wheatear.

I phoned him immediately and although he said he had not looked for the bird this morning, he thought the bird was still there but the site was completely private with no public access, and he would not even be allowed to escort me round it, given the nature of lorries and wagons loading and unloading, as it was a high security area with patrolling guards and CCTV cameras. He was also adamant that it was not possible to view the bird from any public area. Undeterred, I quickly left work, and headed for Crewe.

His description of the area was right, the yards and warehouse area were surrounded by 8 feet high steel fencing, with CCTV cameras and locked gates everywhere. Having scoured the area from outside, including viewing the back of the various depots from across the other side of the railway sidings area, I could see nothing. I then gained access through a works entrance adjacent to the distribution yard, and on making my way round to the back of this area I immediately noticed a wheatear perched on the edge of a stack of pallets. The yellowish sandy plumage with black facemask, black remiges with white edges, buffy coloured rump and an all black tail confirmed the identification as a Desert Wheatear. The bird then flew down to a weedy stony edge of a tarmac area, and foraged around for some 10 minutes. Viewing through a steel fence, I managed a few notes and a picture using my mobile phone before I was interrupted by a Security Guard and made to leave the area.

I tried to negotiate general access over the upcoming weekend with the Security personnel at the reception, noting that with extensive parking nearby, and with safe access and a bit of marshalling across the yard beside the distribution area, that visiting birders would be able to come and go with minimal disturbance. I also commented that most would be willing to donate to a charity of the staff's choice for the chance to see this bird. However my pleas were to no avail, the Security team was adamant that there could be no access to this area and that news of the bird's presence must not be broadcast. In the event, my contact phoned on both Saturday and the following Monday to say that he had not been able to relocate the bird.

A brief description précised from the detailed notes submitted to BBRC, was as follows:

A small plump chat, reminiscent in silhouette of a large round-headed robin. Basic plumage was sandy coloured on back and upper breast, paler below on belly and flanks. The crown was sandy brown, with slight greyish tinge with a narrow white/buff supercilium running above and behind eye, and round above upper base of bill. Area of black feathering running from below base of lower mandible, chin and upper throat back to and around lores almost to back side of neck, giving a "masked" appearance. Strongest black around dark eye forwards, but much of the mask had a scaly appearance with greyish / whitish tips to the feathers.

The nape, mantle and back uniform pale sandy brown, with greyish tinge, contrasting to warmer almost peach coloured scapulars. Visible coverts and primaries blackish brown with whitish edges, particularly median coverts, which were black centred but edged white. Alula appeared black. Overall effect was of narrow areas of black lines on white on closed wing. The rump was a lighter buffish than upper back, extending to upper tail coverts. Tail looked completely black. The upper breast was the same, warm peach sandy brown as scapulars, with the lower breast and flanks, pale buff right down to undertail coverts. Bill, legs and feet black.

The bird showed a typical upright wheatear stance, but often with head tucked into breast, appeared short necked when still. When feeding, foraged in a horizontal way, upending tail and tipping forward to pick up invertebrates from the vegetation on the stony area. Ran short distances sometimes then turning. Appeared active and unconcerned of presence of large trucks unloading some 30 yards away

I considered the bird was a Desert Wheatear by the all black tail, the buffy coloured rump, and the extensive white edges to the remiges, which would rule out both Black-eared Wheatear and Isabelline Wheatear.

A Hugh Pulsford; County Recorder, Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society.

WINTERING YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER IN CHESHIRE

I work for Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council and on Saturday 3rd February 2007, whilst finishing my work duties for the day, I heard a bird call from the hedgerow bordering the work's depot. My first impression was Yellow-browed Warbler but after a brief search I dismissed it out of hand and being tired and hungry (it was overtime!) I left it at that.

On 27th February I heard the bird call again in the same hedge and this time I was convinced it was a Yellow-browed Warbler and after a short while located it with a small tit flock. Luckily my brother Noel, who also works for the council and is a birdwatcher, and another work colleague were on hand to see it. But then came the problem. The hedge the bird was in was not only bordering our depot but on the opposite side was a car park belonging to Bentley Motors and the whole area is private with no public access. I approached the Council's Head of Works Services and also the Transport Manager who runs the depot and, although both men were interested in the sighting and the bird's origin, access unfortunately could not be granted due to security, insurance and safety issues. Not only is the depot used as a work site but there is a large recycling centre where the household rubbish from the borough is stored, with large articulated lorries entering the depot daily to take the recyclable items away to be processed.

I also telephoned a couple of local birders who work for Bentley Motors who could get access to their car park and they did manage to see the bird, but then I decided to suppress the sighting as I didn't know what else I could do. I did not like this situation at all. I have in the past found county rarities such as Lesser Scaup, Wryneck, Black Redstart and Firecrest and have always released the news as soon as I possibly could, but I had to respect my working environment and my employer's decision.

A week or so later with the bird still being present I mentioned it to a few local birders who I knew and trusted and they understood the situation. One of them approached Bentley Motors Security Office independently and explained about the Yellow-browed Warbler and access was granted to their car park on the understanding that only local people could visit with no more than a couple of people present at any one time. It was also stated by Bentley Motors Head of Security that at no point could news be released on a wider scale as this was a car park used by their staff. Security and safety issues were again raised and these instructions were obeyed with birdwatchers reporting to the security office before entering the car park.

Generally word spread through the Cheshire grapevine and eventually more people managed to see the bird. During its stay not only did it call regularly but it was heard singing occasionally and it was last seen on Wednesday 11th April 2007.

For anyone wishing to see Yellow-browed Warbler, a visit to the east coast or South West England in October should produce one with known sites regularly turning them up, but I do genuinely feel for North West and particularly Cheshire birders as this was a long staying bird and showed extremely well but unfortunately could not have shown up at a more private site locally, but it just goes to show what can turn up in the most surprising places.

If I had not been a birdwatcher this record would certainly have gone unnoticed and it just makes you think what could be lurking in your working or urban environment. Not only that but at least six Yellow-browed Warblers have over-wintered in England this winter, how many more have been overlooked?

Mark Stubbs. Reproduced from Birding North West Vol. 4 No. 4 May 2007.

Caspian Gull. A first for Sandbach Flashes

On the 17th April while routinely scanning through the Gulls Dave Norbury found and identified a 1st summer (2nd calendar year) Caspian Gull. This was not a totally unexpected first as several possible and even probable Caspian Gulls had been reported in the last few years at the flashes. This individual stayed until at least the 3rd May and was seen by most of the locals and quite a few birdwatchers from further away. I first saw the bird on 20th April and several further times until my last sighting on 28th April. In this time I managed to take a description which was forwarded to the relevant county recorder. In the period of the birds stay all the features of this species could be noted with time and patience. I have not reproduced my description of the bird but below are a few observations noted by observers of the bird.

Size: - Larger than all Graellsii to which it could be compared and larger than all but the biggest Argenteus.

Bill: - Long and slim black with a faint paler area towards the base

Head: - Strikingly pale (the one overriding feature by which the bird could be located amongst the flock). The classic pear shaped head could be sometimes obvious when the bird was alert but was certainly not so obvious when the bird was relaxed. The small dark eye stood out in good light against the white head.

Underparts: - The bulging rear underbelly was quite pronounced when the bird was clear of the water.

Legs: Flesh coloured and compared to the accompanying Graellsii very long, flesh pink.

Mantle: - Feathering predominantly pale grey with irregular brown markings particularly on the scapulars.

Coverts: - Feathering predominantly brown with paler edges and tips. Contrast between coverts and mantle noticeable.

Tertials: - Darker brown with white edging and tips.

Primaries: The visible feathers were black and unmarked.

Even though Caspian Gull at this age is supposedly the easiest age group to identify, good and prolonged views are required to note all the features to be confident of a positive identification and the finder of this bird spends many hours in the field looking through the hundreds and sometimes thousands of Gulls present at the flashes. Photographs were taken of this bird and any internet search should reveal an image.

Andy Firth

WILLOW TITS AT FODENS FLASH

After being seen intermittently in and around Foden's Flash for several years the Willow Tit appears to have made a welcome and dramatic return as a resident and breeding bird.

Up to three adult birds started regularly visiting the feeding station in Foden's small wood throughout the winter of 2006/2007. These birds were still present in April 2007 and it was hoped they would stay to breed which would be the first occurrence in the area for many years. Three birch logs and three nestboxes were suitably positioned with the help of Bryan Perkins and Colin Lythgoe in the hope the birds would take up residence, the boxes however were occupied by Blue and Great Tits (which subsequently fledged young).

Two adult Willow Tits were still using the feeding station and on the 9th June I saw the two adults feeding two juveniles. Over the next few days most of the regulars saw the birds with only one being present from the 14th July. Both adults were still present well into the winter period.

In keeping the feeding station going throughout the year over thirty-five species have visited the area including five Nuthatches, Great Spotted Woodpeckers with two juveniles, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff. Nearby it was a good year for Bullfinches with two pairs seen with young. In the last twelve months over sixty species have been recorded in or around Foden's small wood. Thanks to Dave Robinson for helping to keep the feeders topped up and to Ian Mumford for supplying some of the food.

Janet Jones

Status information from the British Trust for Ornithology.

Willow Tits have been in decline since the mid 1970s, and have become extinct in an ever-growing number of former haunts. Following a brief period of stability during the 1980s, the Common Bird Census/Breeding Bird Survey index continued to decline through the 1990s, with the population falling by 69% between 1994 and 2006. Consequently the UK conservation listing has recently been upgraded from amber to red. Numbers have changed least in the wet woodlands that the species prefers. Farmland is now only rarely occupied. The most likely causes of decline are competition with other tit species, increasing nest predation by Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and deterioration in the quality of woodland as feeding habitat for Willow Tits through canopy closure and increased browsing by deer. Numbers have fallen widely in Europe since 1980.

RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*)

Few birds have teetered on the brink of extinction and then come back with such success. These birds were once (up to the 18th century) widespread but the population was persecuted and languished to the point where a single breeding female was successfully breeding in the 1930s in Central Wales. There followed a gradual increase and expansion on to better ground, probably helped by the arrival of new genes and increased site protection. Breeding success has improved so that they are increasing faster.

In 1989, a decision was taken by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to reintroduce kites to various parts of the UK. Between 1989 and 2004 the RSPB, English Nature and a variety of other partners have been working on a programme to re-introduce Red Kites to a number of sites across Britain with introductions of Spanish birds to England and Swedish birds to Scotland from 1989.

Birds have been released at seven sites in the country: - Chiltern Hills; Northamptonshire (Rockingham Forest); Yorkshire (Harewood Estate); Northeast England (Northern Kites); Southwest Scotland (Dumfries & Galloway); Central Scotland and North Scotland (Black Isle). A new project, beginning in summer 2008, is planned for an eighth site, Northern Ireland, and will involve the release of up to 70 kites over three years in the South Down area.

This has proved to be an outstanding success for the RSPB, EN and SNH. The Red Kite UK population is now growing by up to 30% a year and in 2006 was approximately 2,000 birds.

This increase has been reflected in the number of sightings in our area this year.

23/02	Near Barthomley and the M6 junction 16 – a flyover.
05/06	Over the A54 between Holmes Chapel and Congleton – a flyover.
06/08 to 09/08	Along Congleton Edge – a bird present continuously at a private site.
22/8 to 27/08	Oakhanger – a leucistic individual present in the same area for six days.
08/09 to 10/09	Stapeley/Hatherton – a bird seen occasionally in this general area may have been present for some time.

None of the birds recorded have been wing-tagged so are presumably wandering youngsters from any of the release areas, looking for a mate and a suitable breeding area. Will Red Kite be the next new species to breed in the SECOS area?

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
	2007	average	ever	2007	average	ever
Chiffchaff	11-Mar	14-Mar	8-Mar-89	09-Oct	11-Oct	28-Oct-04
Little Ringed Plover	15-Mar	17-Mar	5-Mar-00	01-Sep	1-Sep	16-Oct-85
Sand Martin	15-Mar	20-Mar	12-Mar-89	19-Sep	22-Sep	24-Nov-72
Swallow	10-Feb	26-Mar	10-Feb-07	08-Oct	22-Oct	30-Nov-74
Blackcap	08-Mar	30-Mar	08-Mar-07	23-Sep	18-Sep	2-Oct-05
Willow Warbler	07-Apr	31-Mar	28-Mar-03&05	30-Aug	8-Sep	26-Sep-98
House Martin	02-Apr	5-Apr	25-Mar-95	27-Sep	17-Oct	5-Nov-77
Yellow Wagtail	14-Apr	13-Apr	29-Mar-81	29-Sep	15-Sep	27-Oct-06
Lesser Whitethroat	14-Apr	18-Apr	21-Mar-00	03-Sep	14-Sep	1-Oct-98
Sedge Warbler	27-Apr	19-Apr	16-Apr-80	nr	1-Sep	1-Oct-78
Reed Warbler	22-Apr	20-Apr	12-Apr-97	19-Sep	18-Sep	4-Oct-98
Whitethroat	15-Apr	20-Apr	15-Apr-93	08-Sep	5-Sep	21-Sep-93
Cuckoo	23-Apr	22-Apr	5-Apr-82	05-Jul	17-Aug	1-Oct-86
Swift	17-Apr	23-Apr	16-Apr-96	27-Aug	11-Sep	3-Nov-78
Garden Warbler	26-Apr	26-Apr	20-Apr-96	nr	19-Aug	9-Sep-83
Hobby	22-Apr	2-May	27-Mar-94	23-Sep	26-Sep	8-Oct-00
Grasshopper Warbler	22-Apr	8-May	22-Apr-07	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.

Three earliest ever dates have been beaten this year with the best being the exceptionally early Swallow seen flying low over Alsager on 10th February. There was only one record for Grasshopper Warbler this year but that was on 22nd April, beating the previous earliest date of 25th April. The most difficult bird was as usual Blackcap with a singing male at Astbury on 8th and 11th March. An early summer visitor or a joyful winter visitor about to depart?

It is always more difficult to get records of the latest date for species since most people do not realise that the birds have gone until they have not been seen for several days – or weeks! That might explain the rather early “late date” for House Martin of 27th September, the first time for 10+ years with no October record. There were also no acceptable “late dates” for Sedge Warbler and Garden Warbler.

COORDINATED COUNT AT ALL FLASHES ON 28th JANUARY 2007

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Flashes	15	16	Total
Little Grebe			1			1									2(0)			2
G't Crested Grebe							2					4	9		15(19)	5	5	25
Cormorant			1			1	1								3(4)		1	4
Grey Heron			1	2		1					1	1	2		7(9)		2	9
Mute Swan			13				5						5	2	25(20)	23		48
Barnacle Goose							1								1(2)			1
Canada Goose				34			232						1		267(405)	37	119	419
Shelduck						36									36(35)			36
Wigeon				5		240						23	2		270(474)			270
Mallard	13			8		180		2	4	27		14	20	7	275(218)	53	254	582
Teal	5					270	3			4		38		21	336(411)		15	351
Pintail						9									9(23)			9
Shoveler						4									4(16)		1	5
Pochard															0(0)	6		6
Tufted Duck												31			31(18)	12	13	56
Goosander				2		3									5(0)			5
Ruddy Duck			1												1(0)			1
Water Rail															1(0)			1
Moorhen	7	4	5			11	1			4			10	3	44(63)	18	4	66
Coot	6	27	6	4		47	44					34	81	3	252(184)	14	22	288
Lapwing						1000									1000(1900)			1000
Snipe	5					5									10(9)		5	15
Curlew							46								46(56)			46
Ruff						15									15(14)			15
Redshank						4									4(12)			4
Black-tailed Godwit						7	1								8(3)			8
Black-headed Gull						107	25					15	4		151(930)	45	180	376
Common Gull						3									3(5)			3
Lesser B'backed Gull						26									26(24)			26
Herring Gull						37									37(68)			37
Great B'backed Gull						12									12(5)			12

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

Flashes numbers in brackets are from Jan 2006

SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Total of all birds excluding gulls: sites 1-14 = 2711 (3892 in 2006) & sites 1-16 = 3272 (4466)
 On the count date the weather was.

- note: 1) much shooting disturbance at Railway Flash
- 2) the count from PHF and EHF is combined under EHF.

SUMMARY OF THE TOTAL COUNTS FROM 2001 TO 2007

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

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Average
Little Grebe	2	4	1	0	1	0	2	1
G't Crested Grebe	2	13	1	21	24	19	15	14
Cormorant	8	14	12	10	23	4	3	11
Grey Heron	6	7	10	4	10	9	7	8
Mute Swan	11	12	7	21	7	20	25	15
Canada Goose	509	419	367	323	490	405	267	397
Shelduck	42	12	20	16	30	35	36	27
Wigeon	431	211	772	453	751	474	270	480
Mallard	2	151	329	415	206	218	275	228
Teal	357	441	265	292	613	411	336	388
Pintail	10	8	15	4	25	23	9	13
Shoveler	8	3	7	4	22	16	4	9
Pochard	1	0	1	2	7	0	0	2
Tufted Duck	0	11	0	22	19	18	31	14
Goosander	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1
Ruddy Duck	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	1
Moorhen	62	83	64	53	66	63	44	62
Coot	306	234	305	191	220	184	252	242
Lapwing	782	1170	295	526	648	1900	1000	903
Snipe	19	64	5	14	116	9	10	34
Curlew	49	48	6	52	64	56	46	46
Ruff	6	16	0	11	13	14	15	11
Redshank	2	7	3	5	9	12	4	6
Black-tailed Godwit	0	0	0	0	0	3	8	2
Black-headed Gull	464	754	695	857	841	930	151	670
Common Gull	3	3	27	4	2	5	3	7
Lesser B'backed Gull	8	14	15	67	48	24	26	29
Herring Gull	201	22	1691	83	150	68	37	322
Great B'backed Gull	2	10	68	0	18	5	12	16