



# **SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

## **2010 BIRD REPORT**

**Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes**



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## Editorial

Welcome to the SECOS Annual Bird Report for 2010. It follows the usual format of two pages of the birding sites in the area, followed by the systematic list, followed by special articles and reports. This year an impressive 166 species have been recorded, an improvement on last year's 162.

After reading through the report to note the highlights I had quite a few – it has been a good year. The highlights – in Systematic List order – include three Scaup at EHF; a juv/1<sup>st</sup> winter Great Northern Diver at Astbury Mere; Great White Egret at Holmes Chapel; an unusual two White Storks in Leighton Hospital!; five Common Cranes over Alsager; two Turtle Doves over Wistaston; four cuckooing Cuckoos; a Short-eared Owl in Weston; a Hoopoe in the Queens Park, Crewe; two Wood Larks at Brereton Heath; many Waxwings scattered around; Black Redstart at Arclid; a well watched Ring Ousel at Elworth and one at Mow Cop; probably two pairs of Grasshopper Warbler breeding; two Pied Flycatchers; a Marsh Tit still on the feeders at Rode Pool hide; many Tree Sparrows with over 100 pairs in nest boxes; and finally a single appearance of a singing Corn Bunting – how I wish they would return.

There are also some additional articles this year as well as the usual ones on rare bird first or second records. Mick Ball has recorded his valiant efforts in recording 112 species within 3 kms of his house. It just shows what can be achieved if you put the effort in! The usual report from Trevor Clowes on the Society's excellent Winter Garden Bird Survey – a worthy survey to support if you do no other. We have special reports on Barn Owls by Dave Bromont and Mute Swans by David Cookson. There is also an in depth report and analysis of nest box usage at Quakers Coppice by John Thompson and Bill Fox. Finally the usual early and late dates for summer visitors; dates to look forward to or targets to beat.

This will be the last Annual Bird Report produced by me. The scope of reporting for the Systematic List is now reduced to detailed records from Sandbach Flashes, Doddington and Rode Pool with occasional records from elsewhere. As such it does not give a true record of all birds in the SECOS area, which is its objective.

I am still the SECOS Recorder and will be happy to accept records of interest to pass on to CAWOS for consideration for inclusion in the county bird report. Any articles worthy of publication in the future can be published separately or included in the annual newsletter. This will be produced in August as usual.

Finally thanks to everyone who has helped in the submission of records and the publication of the bird reports for the past 25 years.

As usual Andy Firth has compiled the records for the flashes and produced the front and back cover. I was particularly pleased with his choice for the inside back cover and two of the best sunset shots I have seen – they seem very appropriate!

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 and to the individuals who have submitted paper records personally. Those records have been used to produce this report.

## 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.

## 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		

## BIRDING SITES

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

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

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

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

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings.

**Astbury Mere SJ849624** <sup>4</sup>

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

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

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

**Bent Farm Sand Quarry SJ830621** <sup>3</sup>

A large working sand quarry owned by WBB Minerals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A very extensive area of mixed woodland and farmland.

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

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

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

Large area of mixed woodland including a lake.

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

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **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 SJ745530<sup>3</sup>**

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

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

Farmland and mixed woodland by the River Dane.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SYSTEMATIC LIST 2010

### Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	33	24	4	10	32	56	62	57	18	10	11	30

Two pairs bred at Doddington; one failed on eggs and one hatched three young but none fledged. A pair at Rode Pool had six young on 18<sup>th</sup> May but all had disappeared by the 25<sup>th</sup>. One pair also at Stowford. Up to 30 at Astbury in January. Regular at Sandbach Flashes.

### Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes three flew into EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> Apr and stayed for several hours, one was on EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> Nov and an impressive 18 flew over EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> Nov.

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

*Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.*

Skins of 185, 220, 130, 240, 200, 150 and 200 in Jan and up to 13<sup>th</sup> Feb flying over heading north west. At Sandbach Flashes 15 on PHF on the 15<sup>th</sup> Jan; on 27<sup>th</sup> Sep 72 were over EHF with 30 also over EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> October and seven at PHF 26<sup>th</sup> Dec. The usual south east movement to Norfolk in Nov and Dec saw skeins of 80, 180, 300 and 80 over.

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

*Very rare winter visitor*

Six were seen at Sandbach Flashes first over RF and then over EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> Feb.

### Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

*Rare winter visitor or uncommon feral.*

Up to six were present in the early winter period and then infrequently recorded throughout the year at Sandbach Flashes with 14 at EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> Oct being by far the largest count. Numbers continue to increase at Doddington where the now regular autumn flock arrived at the end of July and the total of 81 included many juvs. Possibly helped by increased breeding success at Rode Pool where 13 adults fledged 12 juvs in three broods.

### Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

*Common resident.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	150	206	104	85	119	113	112	4	327	174	280	250

68 adults with 51 juvs at Doddington but reduced breeding success at Rode Pool where only 10 juvs seen. Still very common at Sandbach Flashes with a gathering of 1,000 birds around the area in Nov.

### Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

*Rare visitor or feral.*

At Sandbach Flashes up to six with the Canada Goose flock throughout the year.

### Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

*Uncommon resident and winter visitor.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	50	50	28	34	22	33	31	29	11	9	21	18

The first brood at Sandbach Flashes was at EHF on 16<sup>th</sup> May, three further broods produced a total of 22 juveniles. Two at Arclid on 21<sup>st</sup> Mar.

### Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

*Rare visitor or feral*

Sandbach Flashes hosted one at EHF and PHF between 20<sup>th</sup> Nov and early Dec. A female at Newsbank, Congleton on 8<sup>th</sup> Feb.

### Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*)

*Rare visitor or feral*

One over University Way, Crewe on 10<sup>th</sup> Apr and one dropped into PHF, Sandbach on 14<sup>th</sup> Apr.

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

At Sandbach Flashes recorded regularly throughout around MGT, RF area but no evidence of breeding, four on RF 15<sup>th</sup> Aug being the largest count. Pairs seen in Apr at Rode Pool, Stowford and University Way, Crewe and also on the canal at Rode Heath in Oct and Nov.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	400	420	520	141	2	4	3	4	60	286	550	800
Doddington	21	152	101	0	0	0	0	4	0	6	32	129

The summering birds at Sandbach Flashes could well have been individuals in poor condition. A max of 10 at Rode Pool in Oct.

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

A much better year at Sandbach Flashes with birds present throughout the early winter period, on one occasion in double figures. Three at Doddington in Apr and one in Sept.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	250	225	114	141	57	12	23	185	284	319	355	312
Doddington	62	34	0	0	0	0	0	18	6	4	35	90
Rode Pool	16	28	14	6	0	4	6	28	40	25	34	34

Slightly lower numbers than usual at all sites.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	220	235	112	54	170	224	227	567	432	221	98	105
Doddington	577	355	210	182	119	153	276	206	685	690	640	990
Rode Pool	57	45	21	20	21	50	51	82	96	66	92	260

At Doddington a big increase in numbers in Sep when 500 birds were released by the shoot and also at the year end when smaller waters froze over and birds moved here.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	7	10	10	8	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	4

A poor number of birds were present at Sandbach Flashes in both winter periods. A scarce species elsewhere with just four at Doddington on 24<sup>th</sup> Sep.

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

The first record at Sandbach Flashes was a drake on EHF throughout the day on 5<sup>th</sup> Apr; another was on EHF from 27<sup>th</sup> July until 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	11	21	21	10	1	1	2	12	35	24	28	9
Doddington	11	2	2	2	0	0	2	5	13	37	15	10
Rode Pool	19	11	7	3	2	0	0	0	7	25	24	10

At all sites numbers were slightly down on those expected.

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

No recovery from recent decreases with a max at Doddington of only 22 in Feb and 19 in Oct. and five at Rode Pool. Once again at Sandbach Flashes recorded infrequently and in small numbers.



**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	79	120	129	80	42	27	40	50	59	142	56	42
Rode Pool	11	23	26	21	10	11	4	4	4	9	18	2

Up to 35 present at Sandbach Flashes on CF in Nov. Breeding from RF with two broods on 17<sup>th</sup> July. A good breeding season everywhere with broods of 10, 5, 4 and 4 at Doddington plus 6, 4 and 2 at Rode Pool. A high count of 96 at Astbury in Jan.

**Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*)***Rare winter visitor*

For many Sandbach Flashes lists the highlight of the year was three individuals (1<sup>st</sup>W drake, two females) first seen on EHF briefly on 14<sup>th</sup> Oct, returning to EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> Nov much to the relief of the individuals who missed the birds first visit. Good records also from Doddington with a male present from 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar to at least 2<sup>nd</sup> Apr. Then two females on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct with one staying until at least 8<sup>th</sup> Dec.

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

Doddington continues to be the main site for this winter visitor with a max count of 24 in Feb. At Sandbach Flashes two females were present briefly on EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> Nov. Still a difficult bird to see at this site.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	28	18	19	3	1	0	0	0	1	4	10	9

Regular at Rode Pool with max of 10 in Feb and 18 in Nov. Also recorded in winter at Arclid (12), Swettenham (7) and Winterley Pool (10).

**Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)***Rare visitor.*

Two at Doddington in March had managed to avoid the shooter's bullets!

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

At Sandbach Flashes freshly released birds for shooting present at CF in Nov increased the diminishing numbers present throughout the year. Regular at Doddington where a local shoot releases 500 each year.

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

A few wild birds seen occasionally at Oak Farm, Alsager. Up to 40 at Doddington after they wander across the road from the adjacent large shoot where many are released.

**Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*)***Rare summer visitor.*

Just one record of one bird, heard calling in the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> May at Stowford.

**Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)***Scarce resident except where locally released.*

Regular throughout the Sandbach Flashes area once again. Common in shooting areas.

**Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*)***Very rare visitor*

A juv/1<sup>st</sup> winter was first seen on Astbury Mere in the afternoon of 12<sup>th</sup> Nov. It stayed there until at least 29<sup>th</sup> Nov, giving good close views. See article on page 23 for details.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	3	3	6	2	4	3	5	4	9	11	5	1

At Sandbach Flashes regularly seen at GF and CF with juveniles at both sites. Numbers have plummeted at Doddington and only one pair bred with one juv seen. Six at Rode Pool in Oct and Nov,

a high count for here. The lake in the Queens Park, Crewe has been drained for three years but was partly re-filled in 2010 and a pair bred here and fledged one juv. Also two pairs on Lawton Mere.

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

*Common resident.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	1	5	17	25	19	22	46	90	92	59	17	1

An exceptional year at Doddington where eight broods were noted with at least 19 young during the summer. Then the usual autumn post-breeding influx resulted in a grand total of 92 birds, the highest total ever here. Average numbers at Rode Pool, where seven adults with two broods of at least three young. However, another disappointing year at WLF and WF with numbers rarely into double figures.

**Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)**

*Fairly common winter visitor. Rare in summer.*

At Sandbach Flashes little change with double figure counts throughout the winter months, commonly seen on RF and particularly CF. Numbers peaked in autumn as usual at Doddington with high counts of 52 in Sep and 55 in Oct.

**Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)**

*Scarce visitor.*

After last year's poor show at Sandbach Flashes a much better year with seven records of nine birds, one on 19<sup>th</sup> Apr, one on 13<sup>th</sup> July, one on 14<sup>th</sup> July, three on 18<sup>th</sup> Aug, two on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug and one on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec. All records from EHF although the Dec bird was also seen at WLF. Two records from Doddington with one from 4<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Jan and then a long stayer from 11<sup>th</sup> Sep to 8<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Great White Egret (*Ardea alba*)**

*Vagrant*

An adult first seen on 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan by the River Croco at Holmes Chapel was seen again in the same area on 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. Only the second record for SECOS. See article on page 23 for details.

**Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)**

*Common resident.*

The heronry at Rode Pool held 47 nests this year (47 in 2009; 53 in 2008; 42 in 2007). A group of 26 at Doddington in Oct were all huddled together sheltering from a gale. At Sandbach Flashes regular especially throughout the winter period.

**White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)**

*Very rare visitor*

An incredible record, but supported by a photograph, of two perched on the roof of a building at Leighton Hospital, Crewe on 16<sup>th</sup> Apr. Two were seen at Wylfa, Anglesey on the 10<sup>th</sup> Apr and then on the 11<sup>th</sup> they moved east to Tregle, Anglesey.

**Honey-buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)**

*Rare summer visitor*

A single was noted flying south over a hill near Alsager on 7<sup>th</sup> Sept.

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

*Scarce visitor*

At Sandbach Flashes three records with one over FF in early Mar, one on 26<sup>th</sup> Mar over EHF, another was over PHF on 26<sup>th</sup> May. Only two other records this year with one over Somerford, Congleton on 28<sup>th</sup> June and one over Crewe Road, Sandbach on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)**

*Common resident.*

A possible increase in numbers in gardens since recorded in 39 out of 49 gardens this year and 34 out of 52 in 2009. No change in status at Sandbach Flashes.

**Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)**

*Common resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes extremely common with 16 over EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> May. Now so common it is rarely recorded!

**Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)**

*Scarce migrant.*

Just two on spring migration at Sandbach Flashes with one over EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> Apr and one also over EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> May. None on return passage. Or anywhere else – a poor year.

**Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)**

*Common resident.*

Common throughout the area. Adult with juvs seen in a bunker on Queens Park, Crewe golf course! No change in status at Sandbach Flashes with recently fledged juveniles again on MGT.

**Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)**

*Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor*

At Sandbach Flashes one, a male at EHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar with other unsexed birds on 14<sup>th</sup> Nov and 16<sup>th</sup> Nov and 11<sup>th</sup> Dec also at EHF. Also a male near Alsager on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb and 1<sup>st</sup> Dec, one over Sandbach on 25<sup>th</sup> Mar and a female at Oakhanger on 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov.

**Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)**

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

The first for 2010 at Sandbach Flashes was over EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> May, then infrequently throughout the summer months. Fewer records than usual. Are numbers now decreasing or are we just getting used to seeing them? A colour ringed bird seen at Doddington on 16<sup>th</sup> July was proved to have been ringed as one of a brood of two near Beaminster, Dorset in July 2008.

**Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)**

*Scarce resident and winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes regular at EHF and RF. Wandering birds seen at Alsager, Arclid, Doddington and Oakhanger. This year a pair seen circling over Rail House, Crewe on 21<sup>st</sup> March, a favourite site!

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

*Scarce winter visitor.*

Recorded infrequently in the Sandbach Flashes area but presumably no change in status. Other records from near Quakers Coppice and Alsager.

**Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)**

*Common resident.*

Breeds on most large and small waters throughout the area. Counts of around 40 regularly at EHF, typical of Sandbach Flashes numbers.

**Coot (*Fulica atra*)**

*Common resident and variable winter visitor.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	395	377	205	162	151	391	669	513	290	322	189	151

Breeds on many larger waters with numbers building up at Doddington in autumn. A count of 303 around EHF and PHF on 15<sup>th</sup> Jan was outstanding by Sandbach Flashes standards.

**Crane (*Grus grus*)**

*Very rare visitor*

Five were seen flying north west near Alsager on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. The third record for the SECOS area.

**Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)**

*Scarce winter visitor and uncommon summer visitor.*

Birds returned from the coast in mid Feb as always. Two pairs bred at Doddington with broods of three and two seen. Also bred at Stowford and a site near Alsager. Once again at Sandbach Flashes recorded regularly after the first on the typical date of 17<sup>th</sup> Feb.

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

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

No breeding again at Sandbach Flashes but passage juveniles started to return on 1<sup>st</sup> July at EHF, and 25<sup>th</sup> June at Doddington. Several records of one or two birds on spring passage also at Doddington and Arclid.

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

*Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes again recorded infrequently throughout with seven on 22<sup>nd</sup> May the largest count at EHF.

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

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes in the early winter period recorded in very small numbers, from Oct again infrequently recorded through to the year end. Also 36 at Stowford on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, nine over Sandbach on 25<sup>th</sup> Mar and four over Alsager on 10<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)**

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	800	1100	33	28	42	224	368	550	594	677	775	754

At Sandbach Flashes just one brood recorded with three on EHF on 26<sup>th</sup> June. Low winter numbers elsewhere with a max of just 160 at Doddington.

**Knot (*Calidris canutus*)**

*Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor*

Two adults were at Sandbach Flashes, on EHF on 26<sup>th</sup> Jul.

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

*Scarce passage migrant*

A juvenile was on EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug with another from 28<sup>th</sup> Sep to 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct also on EHF, these were the only records for 2010 at Sandbach Flashes.

**Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	0	0	1	46	2	1	1	3	3	4	2	0

Sandbach Flashes hosted an impressive (unprecedented?) 46 at EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> Apr following heavy rain by far the highlight of another poor year.

**Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	7	9	8	7	1	0	11	12	4	6	4	5

At Sandbach Flashes once again a typical spread of records with an impressive 10 juveniles on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug at EHF the highlight.

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

*Scarce winter visitor*

Sandbach Flashes recorded just one at RF on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. Also one at Stowford on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan and one at Arclid on 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan.

**Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	10	24	35	5	0	0	1	20	21	18	17	9

Typical numbers of this difficult to record species reported from Sandbach Flashes although approximately 80 were recorded from the RF area on 19<sup>th</sup> Nov. A low max of only three at Doddington where good boggy areas have been drained.

**Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes very rarely seen unless flushed, however two were seen on MGT on 13<sup>th</sup> Feb just prior to dusk. Three other records with one feeding in an Alsager garden in Jan, one near Elworth in Feb and one near Alsager on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)***Common non breeding resident*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	4	3	17	41	10	320	254	30	4	0	0	0

Scarce away from the flashes, a single was at Doddington on 20<sup>th</sup> April.

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

A flock of six over EHF on 6<sup>th</sup> Apr, with a single there on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, another was over EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> July, these were the only records of this difficult to see species at Sandbach Flashes.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	34	41	1	1	1	3	34	56	51	41	33	49

**Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)***Scarce passage migrant*

At Sandbach Flashes a very good year with juveniles on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug, 31<sup>st</sup> Aug and one from 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Sep, all records from EHF.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	5	6	6	2	1	1	2	6	1	2	5	5

In terms of numbers a typical year at Sandbach Flashes.

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

The first for Sandbach Flashes was over EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> May, up to four were present on and off throughout Aug commuting between EHF, PHF and RF.

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

At Sandbach Flashes a wintering bird was on EHF on 18<sup>th</sup> Jan, singles in spring and the first returning birds at EHF on 18<sup>th</sup> June, up to ten throughout late summer. Away from the flashes, singles on passage were noted at Doddington in Aug and Sep and wintering birds were seen at Alsager, University Way, Crewe and Stowford.

**Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)***Scarce passage migrant.*

At Sandbach Flashes on the evening of 9<sup>th</sup> May an amazing four were together on EHF, two more were also present at this site from 11<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> May, another also on EHF on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

**Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)***Fairly common passage migrant.*

First recorded at Sandbach Flashes with one on EHF on 10<sup>th</sup> Apr, four days later than last year and then regularly seen. Two at a site near Alsager on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Several records from Doddington with up to three on spring passage and singles from 17<sup>th</sup> Aug to 17<sup>th</sup> Sep.

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

A minimum of 12 recorded at Sandbach Flashes with the first on 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb, five days earlier than last year; the first returning juvenile was on EHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jul. An adult in near full breeding plumage was at Arclid on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb.

**Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)***Rare visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes a 1<sup>st</sup> W at EHF on 31<sup>st</sup> Mar was the only record.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	750	600	320	155	nc	nc	675	nc	nc	nc	nc	1300

The first returning juveniles at Sandbach Flashes were on EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> Jun. The only count of the gull roost at Doddington was on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov when there was a low total of 8,000. One pair at Stowford in spring was thought to be possibly nest building on an island in the fishing pools.

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

Scarcer than recent years at Sandbach Flashes with the largest count being just 45. Also a low count of just 30 in the evening gull roost at Doddington 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	nc	nc	nc	516	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	376	nc	300

At Sandbach Flashes the first returning juvenile was on EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> Jul. At Doddington the evening gull roost in Nov held a very high 2,200 with the usual numbers augmented by passage birds.

**Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*)***Regular passage migrant.*

Numbers recorded at Sandbach Flashes continue to increase particularly regular in late summer.

**Caspian Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)***Scarce visitor*

At Sandbach Flashes records listed below, all from EHF, PHF:-

3w, 18<sup>th</sup> Jan to 26<sup>th</sup> Jan. Ad, 20<sup>th</sup> Jan to 27<sup>th</sup> Jan. Ad, 14<sup>th</sup> Mar. 1s, 11<sup>th</sup> May. Ad, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. Ad 15<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)***Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes regular with larger Argentatus birds seen throughout winter.

**Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*)***Scarce winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes at least four in the first winter period, with two in Dec at EHF.

**Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)***Scarce winter visitor*

At Sandbach Flashes three in the first winter period.

**Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)***Uncommon winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes 130 were counted on EHF/PHF on 16<sup>th</sup> Jan with 75 on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov.

**Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)***Scarce passage migrant.*

Just one record from Sandbach Flashes with one briefly over EHF on 10<sup>th</sup> Sep. Five seen at Doddington, all juvs on autumn passage, with one on 10<sup>th</sup> Aug, one on 6<sup>th</sup> Sep, one on 15<sup>th</sup> Sep and two on 17<sup>th</sup> Sep.

**Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)***Uncommon passage migrant.*

At Sandbach Flashes the first was over EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> Jun, a further two on 26<sup>th</sup> Jun, further sightings on 10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Jul again over EHF. At Doddington just one record on spring passage with a single on 23<sup>rd</sup> Apr. More numerous in autumn as usual, with five records of seven birds at Doddington and another one at Rode Pool, all in Aug.

**Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)***Scarce passage migrant*

The first at Sandbach Flashes was one over EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> May; another was at EHF on 5<sup>th</sup> May

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

*Common resident*

Regularly seen in the Sandbach Flashes area all year. The usual flocks are in most town centres.

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

*Uncommon resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes 103 were adjacent to EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb with 183 present on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov. In Quakers Coppice at least nine pairs used nest boxes, laid 19 eggs and fledged seven young. Up to 40 regular at Doddington.

**Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)**

*Common resident.*

Still abundant at Sandbach Flashes throughout the year. A flock of at least 2,000 feeding on just cut maize stubble at Doddington in Nov was impressive. Its transition into a garden bird seems to be complete since it was recorded in all 49 gardens in the SECOS winter garden survey.

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

*Common resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes counts of 50 plus not uncommon in the winter period. Recorded in 47 of the 49 gardens in the SECOS winter garden survey

**Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)**

*Rare summer visitor*

Two were seen as they flew over Wistaston on 7<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)**

*Scarce summer visitor*

Four records in May with one over Hardings Wood, Alsager, one near King George's playing field, Crewe, one at Back Lane, Smallwood and finally one at Wybunbury Moss.

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

*Scarce resident.*

Only four records this year at Sandbach Flashes although this could be due to the lack of observer coverage and recording rather than a true decrease in numbers. Not surprisingly only a few random records received but see the article on the South Cheshire Barn Owl Group for an accurate account.

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

*Common resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes as last year only three individuals recorded so presumably the decline continues. A few records from several other sites and one pair used a nest box at Stowford.

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

*Common resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes under recorded once again but presumably no change in status. In Quakers Coppice a nest box with four eggs was found in February. Presumably infertile since they failed to hatch, despite being incubated for several weeks.

**Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)**

*Rare visitor.*

One was seen flying across Snape Lane, Weston on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan.

**Swift (*Apus apus*)**

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

No obvious change at Sandbach Flashes. 150 over Doddington on 12<sup>th</sup> April. The Haslington colony was down to just 12 birds this year. The last bird was over Sandbach on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes a definite decrease in sightings this year, possibly due to the severe winter of 2009/10. Records from several sites but no breeding proved.

**Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)**

*Rare visitor*

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June one was heard calling by the Queens Park, Crewe.

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

*Uncommon resident.*

Several records but most regular at a Haslington farm where a pair fed on apples in the orchard for a few months in the autumn. At Sandbach Flashes one on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar by CF.

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

*Common resident.*

Recorded in 23 out of 49 gardens in the Winter Garden Bird Survey, the same as in 2010. At Sandbach Flashes regular around all the area. By far the commonest woodpecker.

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

*Uncommon resident*

After last year's blank at Sandbach Flashes just one this year briefly by PHF on 28<sup>th</sup> June. Just four other records with singles at Lawton Woods, Alsager South, Astbury Mere and Rode Pool.

**Wood Lark (*Lullula arborea*)**

*Vagrant*

On 7<sup>th</sup> Nov two birds were found feeding in a stubble field at Brereton Heath. Fortunately they stayed until 20<sup>th</sup> Nov, giving many observers chance to see them – although this proved to be very difficult at times! See article on page 22 for details.

**Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)**

*Fairly common.*

Regular winter flocks of 35+ at Stowford and Bridgehouse Farm, Oakhanger. At Sandbach Flashes 16 were feeding in fields by CF on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan.

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

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

A small breeding colony within the Sandbach Flashes area was not used this year and no other breeding colonies were noted. 300 over Doddington on 20<sup>th</sup> April in bad weather.

**Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)**

*Common summer visitor.*

First record was on 23<sup>rd</sup> Mar, an average date and then seen commonly after. 20 pairs bred in buildings at Meremoor Farm, Stowford. No large flocks in autumn but a late bird over Sandbach on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct. Commonly seen at Sandbach Flashes.

**House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)**

*Common summer visitor.*

No big numbers or breeding colonies reported. Regular at Sandbach Flashes.

**Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)**

*Rare passage migrant*

Three records on spring passage between 22<sup>nd</sup> Apr and 9<sup>th</sup> May on rough ground off University Way, Crewe may have been the same bird. In autumn one at Stowford on 8<sup>th</sup> Aug and one over Shavington on 16<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

A poor year at Sandbach Flashes, with numbers on MGT well down on passage, and also at other sites. Max count of 30 at Doddington and 10 at Oakhanger in autumn.

**Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)**

*Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes becoming a difficult bird to see with only approximately fifteen records throughout. Pairs bred at Stowford, five juvs seen, and Basford, with juvs seen, and possibly at Doddington, pair but no juvs seen. Up to three on passage at Doddington from 20<sup>th</sup> Apr to 28<sup>th</sup> May.

**Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)**

*Fairly common resident and winter visitor.*

Winter records from Alsager sewage farm, Doddington, Rode Pool and Wheelock sewage farm as well as 13 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. At Sandbach Flashes seen and heard at EHF.



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

*Fairly common resident.*

An impressive 135 on the filter beds at Wheelock sewage farm in Feb. 40 on passage at Doddington in Oct. At Sandbach Flashes common throughout.

*M.a. alba* A White Wagtail on Alsager sewage farm on 7<sup>th</sup> April.

**Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)**

*Very rare winter visitor*

A large influx into the country in late Oct and Nov saw many birds arriving in our area by late Nov. Some sites such as Elworth primary school (up to 39) and Gresty Road, Crewe (up to 30) held birds regularly whereas many sites only had low numbers and briefly as the birds moved about. Sandbach Flashes hosted a very brief 30 by EHF on 10<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)**

*Abundant resident.*

Recorded in 47 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)**

*Common resident.*

Recorded in 49 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)**

*Abundant resident*

Recorded in 49 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochrorus*)**

*Rare visitor*

A female was seen briefly at Arclid on 21<sup>st</sup> March.

**Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)**

*Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes one was in a hedge by Green Lane on 1<sup>st</sup> Aug and two were in the hedge bordering PHF on 20<sup>th</sup> Sep, with one remaining a further two days. One near Alsager on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)**

*Scarce migrant.*

Sandbach Flashes hosted three together on MGT on 9<sup>th</sup> May, a single on 28<sup>th</sup> Aug MGT, single 7<sup>th</sup> Sep EHF and one 16<sup>th</sup> Oct MGT. Good records also from Stowford with singles on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> May. Then in Sept, one at Doddington on 3<sup>rd</sup>. two at Stowford on 4<sup>th</sup> and two at Chorlton on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

A very poor year at Sandbach Flashes with just a juvenile at MGT on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug and another, also at MGT, on 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct. Three overwintered at Stowford in the early part of the year and one at Alsager and one at Basford, Crewe at the other end of the year.

**Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)**

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

An early bird at Arclid with one here on 7<sup>th</sup> Mar. Main passage in late Apr with five at Stowford and five at Doddington the highest counts. At Sandbach Flashes the first was by EHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> Mar, a modest spring passage followed. Ten on MGT on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug was the largest return passage count.

**Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)**

*Rare visitor*

A male was seen on 19<sup>th</sup> Apr in a field and hedgerows in Elworth. Present all day, it was seen by many observers. Another one was seen at Mow Cop on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)**

*Abundant resident and winter visitor.*

The commonest bird in the area, being recorded in 1179 bird/weeks out of a possible 1216 in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)**

*Common winter visitor.*

Common in both winter periods at Sandbach Flashes but no large counts noted. The only large flock noted was 300 near Crewe on 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. Some moved into gardens during the freezing weather.

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

*Fairly common resident.*

Seen and heard regularly at Sandbach Flashes. Recorded in 45 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)**

*Common winter visitor.*

As with Fieldfare regular in winter at Sandbach Flashes. Some moved into gardens during the freezing weather.

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

*Fairly common resident.*

Breeding proven at WLF, the most regular site at Sandbach Flashes. No large numbers recorded.

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

*Rare summer visitor*

At Sandbach Flashes on 27<sup>th</sup> Apr a male was reeling in hedgerows bordering MGT; possibly the same bird had stayed to breed as a bird was seen and heard on and off throughout May and into June. A single was seen in the same area on 25<sup>th</sup> Sep this being the latest ever SECOS record. Possible breeding also at Chorlton where a male was reeling from mid May to end of June. Passage birds in Apr at Crewe, Haslington and Stowford.

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

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes GF was the most productive site after the first on 17<sup>th</sup> Apr. Nine singing males at Stowford on 19<sup>th</sup> May. One pair bred at Rode Pool and at Doddington.

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

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes still regular at WLF but increasingly seen and heard by Fowle Brook where the first was seen on 17<sup>th</sup> Apr. Four pairs bred at Doddington, three at Rode Pool and possibly one at Crewe Business Park.

**Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)**

*Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.*

Singing birds regular throughout May at Sandbach Flashes particularly around the Red Lane Tip area. Wintering birds recorded in 16 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

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

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes another poor year with once again only three singing birds. The first record was on 16<sup>th</sup> Apr but not recorded in autumn so no late record this year.

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

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

A typical run of records at Sandbach Flashes after the first on 21<sup>st</sup> Apr. Few other records.

**Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)**

*Common summer visitor.*

The first at Sandbach Flashes was seen on 17<sup>th</sup> Apr earlier than usual at this site. 11 singing males at Stowford on 19<sup>th</sup> May.

**Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)**

*Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.*

A bird seen in early Nov was the only over wintering bird reported at Sandbach Flashes. 12 singing males along the River Dane at Swettenham on 28<sup>th</sup> March.

**Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)***Common summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes never common but singing males regular after the first on 7<sup>th</sup> Apr. On 8<sup>th</sup> Apr two at Stowford and one near Crewe.

**Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)***Fairly common resident and winter visitor.*

Fewer records in 2010 at Sandbach Flashes. Recorded in 23 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. A pair with four juvs seen at Rode Pool.

**Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)***Uncommon summer visitor.*

At Doddington a pair bred under the eaves of an estate cottage as usual and fledged two broods with five in Jun and two in Aug. Pairs also bred at Alsager, Bradwall, Crewe Green, Lawton and Weston. At Sandbach Flashes a better year than 2009 with one at EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> May, two were in the hedgerow around WF on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug, one by PHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug, another also by PHF on 26<sup>th</sup> Aug.

**Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)***Rare visitor*

A male was seen briefly by the Bentley Factory, Crewe on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. Another male was singing by a nest box in the woods at Rode Pool on 18<sup>th</sup> May but was not present the next day.

**Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)***Common resident.*

Post breeding flocks of up to 30 seen at FF and EHF and at Doddington.

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

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged	Productivity (juvs per pair)
Quakers Coppice	15	149	135	83	5.5
Rode Pool	4	33	30	20	5.0

Second commonest winter bird after Blackbird and recorded in 49 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

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

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged	Productivity (juvs per pair)
Quakers Coppice	4	27	25	14	3.5
Rode Pool	5	28	24	16	3.2

Recorded in 48 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

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

At Sandbach Flashes recorded regularly and now frequently at the EHF feeders. Recorded in 44 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*)***Scarce resident.*

Only recorded along the Salt Line and one other site near Alsager.

**Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*)***Scarce resident*

One regular on the feeders at Rode Pool. Could this possibly be the same bird that was first recorded here on 17<sup>th</sup> Sep 2002 and has been seen in most weeks since? Birds also recorded from near Alsager, Quakers Coppice and at Wybunbury Moss where a nest was seen last year.

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

Another very good year for sightings of this species at Sandbach Flashes with records particularly from the FF area, this species is undoubtedly extending its range in the recording area. Recorded in only 24 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey (36 of 51 last year).

**Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)**

*Common resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes regularly seen in FF and also increasingly by the EHF feeding station. Recorded in 15 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey as last year.

**Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes regular around FF again.

**Magpie (*Pica pica*)**

*Common resident.*

Around 35 in a regular winter roost in an old hedge at Crewe Business Park. At Sandbach Flashes 30 plus were by EHF in Nov, these larger gatherings becoming a regular event.

**Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)**

*Common resident and winter visitor.*

The corvid roost at FF still contains many hundreds of this species but no specific counts were made at Sandbach Flashes. A winter flock of 200 at Doddington.

**Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)**

*Common resident.*

The total nests at regularly counted rookeries were: -

Site	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Crewe/Alsager (8 sites)	402	423	462	487	472
Foden's Flash	103	127	147	138	136

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

*Common resident.*

Once again very common throughout the recording area but the most under recorded species there is!

**Raven (*Corvus corax*)**

*Scarce visitor and resident.*

A pair bred as usual in Georges Wood, Doddington and fledged two young. Records from several other sites. At Sandbach Flashes still regularly recorded with birds now often feeding around EHF. The increase in sightings shows no sign of slowing.

**Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)**

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes the feeding flock around MGT again numbered one thousand plus on several dates. No winter roosts reported.

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

*Common resident.*

Increasingly seen around the EHF feeding station but still not common at Sandbach Flashes. Only ranks sixth in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey, being seen in 46 of 49 gardens.

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

*Fairly common resident.*

The incredible colony at Meremoor Farm, Stowford continues to grow, supported by the feeding and breeding scheme. This year 77 pairs – yes 77 pairs – used nest boxes, many of them were triple brooded leading to uncounted hundreds of juvs. 18 pairs used nest boxes at Bridgehouse Farm, Oakhanger. Still regular at Sandbach Flashes but probably in slightly smaller numbers around EHF.

**Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)**

*Common resident and winter visitor.*

The largest recorded flocks were from Doddington with 250 in Jan and 150 in Dec. The commonest finch at Sandbach Flashes. Seen in 45 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

CF hosted the first of the year at Sandbach Flashes on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan; another was also at CF on 14<sup>th</sup> Nov and a party of five over WLF in early Oct. Two at Doddington in Jan and Dec, singles at Alsager, Haslington and Sandbach. Seen in 8 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Greenfinch** (*Carduelis chloris*)

*Common resident.*

Recorded in 37 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. No obvious change in status at Sandbach Flashes. Highest count was 60 at Doddington in July.

**Goldfinch** (*Carduelis carduelis*)

*Fairly common resident.*

A huge flock of 500 at Stowford on 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug. A flock of well over 100 on MGT on 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep was the largest count at Sandbach Flashes. Recorded in 46 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey with a highest garden count of 36.

**Siskin** (*Carduelis spinus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.*

The only 10+ flocks were 60 on University Way, Crewe and 25 at Crewe golf course. Recorded in just 3 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey (21 in 2009). At Sandbach Flashes recorded in small numbers particularly around FF.

**Linnet** (*Carduelis cannabina*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Winter flocks of 80 at Oakhanger, 50 at Alsager and 45 at Doddington. At Sandbach Flashes 45 were in fields bordering EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> Apr.

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

*Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.*

The largest winter flocks were 40 at Doddington and 30 on Crewe Business Park. Present in small numbers in both winter periods at Sandbach Flashes again particularly around FF. Recorded in 12 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Common Crossbill** (*Loxia curvirostra*)

*Very rare visitor*

At Sandbach Flashes single flyovers on 25<sup>th</sup> Aug and 1<sup>st</sup> Sep, with two plus over WLF in early Oct. A male flew low over University Way, Crewe on 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan.

**Bullfinch** (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

*Uncommon resident.*

At Sandbach Flashes regularly recorded and possibly increasing. Recorded in 15 out of 49 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Yellowhammer** (*Emberiza citrinella*)

*Uncommon resident.*

A field near Alsager held a creditable 70 in Jan. However, in Dec with complete snow cover everywhere the field still had a cereal crop poking above the snow giving a feeding opportunity and it held around 200 Yellowhammers and 100 Reed Buntings plus smaller numbers of other birds, and a Merlin. A better year at Sandbach Flashes with at least five singing birds noted throughout spring and early summer. Hopefully the decline has ended.

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

*Uncommon resident.*

100 near Alsager, see Yellowhammer for details. Up to 20 regularly on and around MGT making this the best site at Sandbach Flashes.

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

*Rare visitor*

On 15<sup>th</sup> April one was heard singing at Oak Farm, Alsager, a former stronghold of this species.

## Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes

### **Cape Shelduck** (*Todoma cana*)

One at Doddington on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Jan. One at EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug was present for several days at Sandbach Flashes

### **Wood Duck** (*Aix sponsa*)

At Sandbach Flashes a male was regular in the MGT/RF area.

### **Ringed Teal** (*Callonetta leucophrys*)

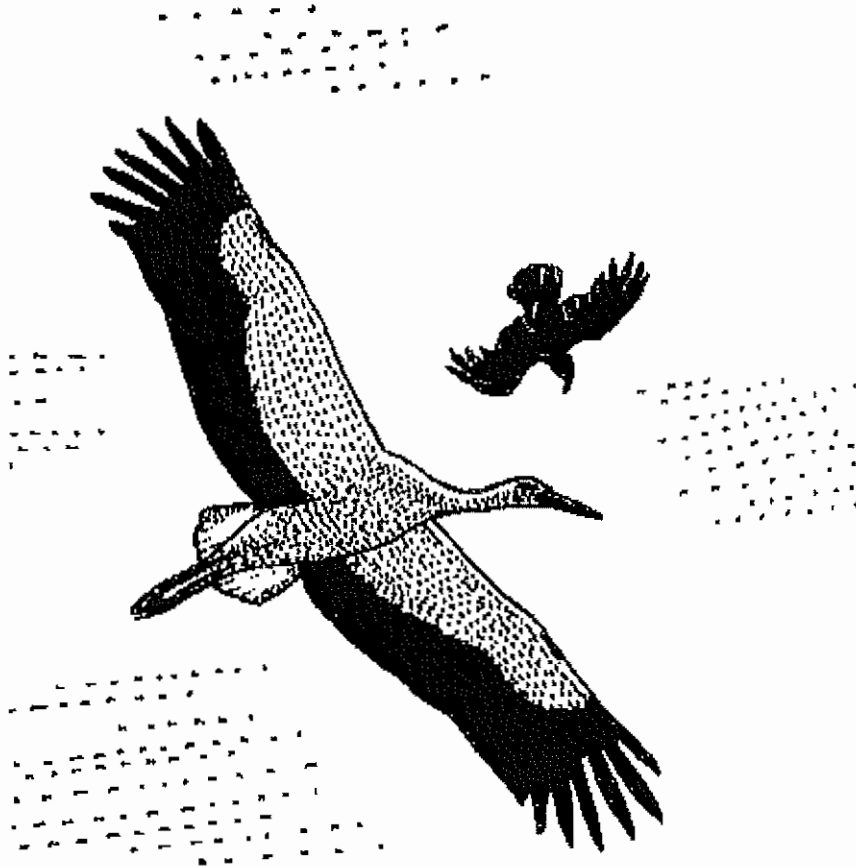
One was regularly seen at Sandbach Flashes throughout Sep on EHF.

### **Red-crested Pochard** (*Netta rufina*)

A female was seen at Doddington on 10<sup>th</sup> May and 18<sup>th</sup> Jun.

### **White Stork** (*Ciconia ciconia*)

At Sandbach Flashes one on the rather unexpected date of 25<sup>th</sup> Oct was found to be an escape from a local collection; all future sightings will therefore have to pass the escape test as three others are also kept at this site. This individual was found dead at Weaverham in the freezing conditions of early Dec.



## TWO WOODLARKS AT BRERETON HEATH, NOVEMBER 2010

On 7th November I was on one of my regular walks from Holmes Chapel, through the Dane Valley and back over fields via Brereton Heath. At a stubble field at Bagmere Bank Farm at 11.35 a lark walked past the Meadow Pipit I was watching. It struck me as different and I was pretty sure it was a Woodlark. I hadn't seen this species at close range for over 25 years so phoned my brother Andy to check the features. I was soon certain and put the news out.

Steve and Gill Barber and Janet Jones were amongst the first four on the scene and amazingly Gill noticed there was a second Woodlark. By 12.50 we'd lost them and they weren't seen again until Andy Goodwin relocated them on the 8th. Fortunately they remained until the 16<sup>th</sup>, with one still present until the 20<sup>th</sup>, although they took much perseverance to see at times. Great photos were taken by Dave Kelsall, John Rayner, Paul Hill and Mike Atkinson.

Description: bold white supercilia meeting in a V on the nape. Very short tail and short, rounded wings. Plain chestnut-brown ear coverts with black then white surrounds. Narrow pale eye ring. Clear pectoral breast band of bold black streaks. White spot below each eye. No white tail sides. "Noodle-oo!" call heard once in flight. Pied panel at bend of wing. Generally better marked than Skylark.

A pleasing footnote is that the farmer apparently delayed ploughing his field while visitors were watching the birds - a very clear benefit of the twitch for the birds themselves and they seemed to be finding plenty of food.

John M Spottiswood

*This is the first record for the SECOS area and the 16<sup>th</sup> for Cheshire and Wirral. Most of the past records are of single birds recorded as flyovers on passage at an estuarine location. The only two exceptions are of a male in song at Lindow Moss from 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> June 2006 and three in a mixed lark flock at Appleton Thorn on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> December 2008.*

Colin Lythgoe

## **GREAT WHITE EGRET, CROCO PARK, HOLMES CHAPEL, 2<sup>nd</sup> JANUARY 2010**

My first birding walk of the year was one of my three regular routes near Holmes Chapel, over fields to the south. At 09.15 from the secondary school field I saw a large heron fly up from the River Croco below. Through binoculars I knew immediately it was a Great White Egret. It landed in the field but flew off before I could get my telescope up. I put the news out and continued my walk hoping to relocate it.

Back at Croco Park at 12.25 I re-found it flying quite low downriver. I walked back to near the school and it flew into the field and I finally got 20 minutes of great views during a snow storm as it slowly walked back to the river. I decided to leave it for others to twitch. It was only my 28th bird of the year and just quarter of a mile from my house!

I later learned some of the Sandbach Flashes regulars successfully twitched it in the afternoon. On the 15th it was reported to Birdguides by the A50 at 09.00. Later that day presumably the same bird was seen in Poynton.

Description: large, rangy Grey Heron-sized all-white egret with long, snake-like neck and long black stilt-like legs, dirty yellow near the top. Orangey-yellow, dagger-like bill. Yellow irides. Greenish-yellow between bill and eye.

John M Spottiswood

*This is the 10<sup>th</sup> record for Cheshire and Wirral and the second in the SECOS area. The previous Cheshire record was in 2008 when one was at Rostherne Mere on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February and at nearby Marbury on the 16<sup>th</sup>. The first SECOS record was in 2002 when one was at Sandbach Flashes on 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> January and again for a few minutes on 13<sup>th</sup> February.*

Colin Lythgoe

## **GREAT NORTHERN DIVER AT ASTBURY MERE, 12<sup>TH</sup> TO 29<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2010**

A juv/1<sup>st</sup> winter bird was first seen here in the afternoon of 12<sup>th</sup> November. The bird seemed very settled and it stayed here until at least the 29<sup>th</sup> November and was seen by many observers.

Although Great Northern Divers are recorded annually on the coast they are rare inland and this is only the third record in the SECOS area. The first was an immature at Watch Lane Flash, Sandbach from 5<sup>th</sup> March until 10<sup>th</sup> March 1995 when it was chased off the water by a fisherman in a boat! The second was a winter plumage adult, also at Astbury Mere, on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2006. First seen at 11-30 it flew off at 12-00.



## ALSAGER 100 IN 2010

I'm someone who doesn't like DIY, doesn't like gardening and doesn't watch much TV. I do like birdwatching, I do like the countryside and I do like a challenge. So I decided that for 2010 I would combine these three and attempt to see 100 bird species within 3 kms (<2 miles) of my house in Alsager. Three kms was chosen mainly because Rode Pool was just within that distance.

Looking at the British List I reckoned 70 species were 'certainties'. From my knowledge of birds around Alsager I thought another 24 species were possible with luck and effort. Seeing all those 94 plus another 6 surprise species was my target.

2010 started like 2009 finished, bitterly cold! I only went out six times in January but saw 54 species, which included Pink-footed Goose when I saw a flock of 200+ flying over.

February remained cold but I still went out 15 times. I only saw ten new species but these included a bonus Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Lawton Woods.

I didn't see a new bird until March 18th when a Great Crested Grebe returned to the Mere from its enforced visit to the sea. The last ten days in March saw a much welcome rise in temperature and with southerly winds I welcomed summer visitors with a Wheatear (22nd), Chiffchaff (26th) and Swallow (31st). A Merlin (24th) helped me end March on 73 species.

April was good weatherwise and common migrants were early arrivals with singing Blackcap (2nd) and Willow Warbler (7th). Listening to these two warblers on a mild April day made me feel like this is what life is about. A singing Corn Bunting on the 15th in an area where it used to be plentiful gave me hope of its return as a breeding bird. Alas it was my only sighting. On the 24th I was angry when I found a setaside field being ploughed. I had been watching six pairs of Skylark here and from their actions I knew eggs were being incubated. A slight consolation to me was when two Herring Gulls dropped out of the sky for a meal. I have not seen Herring Gulls in Alsager since the tip was closed. April closed with me on 89 species.

I went to Doxey Marshes, Stafford on April 24th and saw four Grasshopper Warblers. I actually heard two of them which surprised me as I thought that I no longer could. I discovered that if I was within 20 yards I could still hear them. So on May 3rd I went to what I thought was good Gropper habitat on my patch. No Gropper I'm afraid but I did have a Sedge Warbler singing, only my second ever in Alsager. The next day I saw a pair of Marsh Tits, my first ever around here. Good birds continued to be seen but my biggest thrill was on the 11th. A Cuckoo was 'cuckooing'. Weird really but initially it didn't register with me, I just thought it was my sub conscious doing some wishful thinking. It continued singing until reality kicked in and it flew past me still 'cuckooing'. That made not just my day but my year. I can't remember how long since I saw a local Cuckoo. Then a massive piece of luck on the 22nd when I went round a private site. Here I found three bonus waders in Oystercatcher, Little Ringed Plover and Common Sandpiper.

A good start to June with a Hobby on the 1st but I had to wait until the 30th when I at last saw a Barn Owl, having previously dipped five times. I went out several times after this to watch it and track it back to its nest site. I say 'it' but surely there were two birds as prey was taken to the nest three times in 14 minutes. I was now on 99 species with half the year left to see just one more species.

Despite plenty of effort I had to wait three weeks for species 100 when I had a Raven fly over. Just the one addition to my list in July but it was a good month for seeing

fledged young. I was helping with the BTO Atlas and these sightings gave definite breeding success.

August 1st was a dull windy day. Although this type of day isn't the sort to make you want to go out I have learned that with return migration ongoing you are more likely to see the unexpected than on a warm summers day. I was rewarded with a Common Tern at Rode Pool. On the 25th I saw a Willow Tit in the White Moss Birch wood. The 26th was another wet and windy day so out I went. I peered over the stile of a small cow field and disturbed a bird low down by a hedge. It moved further along the hedge but I had seen its red tail. Following it slowly as it kept flipping a further 20yards away from me, and noting its orangey front, it was a young Redstart. I continued looking and saw an orange fronted bird sitting on top of a thistle. Thought to myself 'how did the Redstart get there'. It flew to catch an insect, 'didn't notice the red tail' I thought. I had a closer look to confirm it didn't have a red tail, also it's back was a streaky black/brown. It was a young Stonechat. Both birds in the same small field. A returning Wigeon on the 30th brought my total to 105.

September 7th was a fine summer's day with a light southerly wind. I was looking across the Cheshire plain from a hill just to the south of Alsager. I picked out a raptor a couple of miles away. It kept flying south, mainly gliding, straight for me and eventually passed me just 50 yards away and about the same altitude so I had no problem picking out the features for Honey Buzzard. Later in the month I tried this site for a kind of birdwatching gaining popularity. It is known as vizmig - visible migration. Coastlines are good for it but in Alsager I had to make do with a hill. We are fortunate in that this hill is the first of any height southbound birds meet after crossing the Cheshire plain and is more than 200 feet higher than the plain, hence the birds are flying lower here. On September 22nd I did the first of eight vizmigs. I found it difficult in that my hearing is not good in hearing flight contact calls of small birds; also underside views of a lot of them are not easy to identify. The 11th October was the best for quantity with 946 birds heading S/SW in 1.5 hours. Vizmig added two new species to my year list in October with Siskin (4th) and Golden Plover (10th) my 108<sup>th</sup> species.

In November I found a Stonechat (14th) which stayed until the bitterly cold weather became set. At the same site - an uncut barley field with wild flowers - I found a flock of about 500 buntings, finches, skylarks and mipits. Most of these also gradually disappeared about this time. Rode Pool was frozen on the 25th and remained frozen to the year's end.

After seven weeks without a tick I then had four in a week. I found a Green Sandpiper (28th) in a stream. I flushed a Woodcock (30th) feeding daytime in the snow and saw another a few days later in a garden. Then in December five Lesser Redpolls (2nd) were seen in a birch tree on the golf course and I saw up to 16 Waxwings (4th) from my house, feeding in a rowan tree. These brought my **final total to 112 species**.

Of my 70 'certainties' I didn't see Yellow Wagtail and of my 24 'possibles' I missed Green Woodpecker. Chris Parry had one sighting of Green Woodpecker and he also saw a Water Rail and Pied Flycatcher that I didn't.

If anyone is interested in seeing my full list of species giving date, where seen and comments I can send a Microsoft Excel file.

My email address is [mick.ball@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mick.ball@hotmail.co.uk).

Mick Ball

## SECOS WINTER GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2009/10

This survey was supported by records from forty-nine gardens. Five recorders from the previous survey dropped out and two new recruits started. An impressive one thousand, two hundred and sixteen garden/week records were produced by the recording team during the twenty-six week period from October to the end of March. One hundred and six members have taken part at various times in the twenty-five surveys carried out since 1985. Five members who took part in the very first survey still contribute. Seventy-six different species of birds have been recorded in gardens for the duration to date. No new species was added to this list during the latest survey.

The ten most common garden birds remain exactly the same as in the previous survey. There were the usual minor changes to the relative positions as shown below, while the number in square brackets following the name shows the corresponding position last year.

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

Blackbird, Blue Tit and Robin were recorded in every garden as usual and were joined this year by Dunnock and Woodpigeon, confirming the Woodpigeon change of status from a purely country bird 30 years ago to now being an urban bird as well.

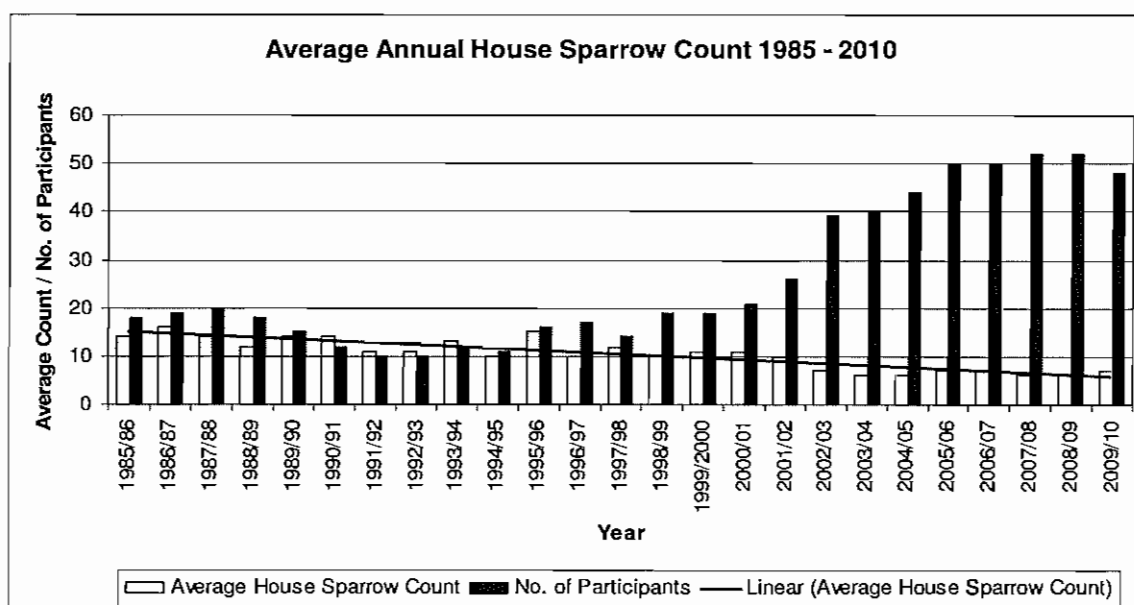
Fieldfares and Redwings are not regular garden visitors but the harsh weather of weeks 11 to 14 brought them in to 13 gardens, many for the first time. Also unusual was a Woodcock, taking food droppings from under a bird feeder.

Sparrowhawks continue to flourish and were recorded in 39 of the 49 gardens and seen to take several different prey species.

Chaffinches were once more reported to have the fungal infection known as "scaly leg". Although it can look serious it is not usually fatal, unlike the Greenfinch parasitic disease of Trichomonosis.

Siskin records suffered one of the largest crashes so far recorded. The last survey included a hundred and twenty records from twenty-one gardens, but this survey contains only eight records from three gardens, a ninety-three percent reduction.

The average House Sparrow count has increased from six to seven in this survey. However the twenty-five year trend line on the chart shows that the House Sparrow population continues to decline.



Trevor Clowes. Further details are available if anybody would like them.

## **SOUTH CHESHIRE BARN OWL GROUP**

The group began in 2000 when a notice in the local free paper invited people interested in helping wild Barn Owls to meet in Wybunbury Village Hall. The meeting was chaired by Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT) and about 60 people attended the meeting where the South Cheshire group and a committee were formed. The area covered by the group is from Faddiley to Mow Cop (east to west) and Warmingham to the Shropshire border (north to south) but not the area around Congleton. We have a few boxes just over the border in Staffordshire at Betley.

At that time it was thought that there were only 14 breeding pairs of Barn Owls in the whole of Cheshire. This was partly because there were few people reporting sightings or breeding in many parts of the county. In 2010 there were 130 confirmed breeding pairs in Cheshire but there will be more since we get sightings around areas where we have no breeding records. These could be non-breeding birds or birds breeding in natural holes in trees or buildings. When we started we didn't know how we could help but with input from CWT we soon began to get sightings from farmers and locals in South Cheshire. It was decided to make and erect owl boxes in areas where the sightings were coming from. Designs of the boxes were taken from the Hawk and Owl Trust and CWT at Reaseheath since they had made and erected some boxes around the College. We soon started making the boxes ourselves; by the end of 2010 we have made and erected 127, with several more orders on the way. There are three designs we use, Tree, Pole, and Barn boxes. Mostly Tree boxes are used as these are easier to make and erect.

Funding in the beginning was a problem but in 2003 we managed to obtain a Lottery Fund grant of £3000. This enabled us to buy tools and equipment for the group, including ladders, ropes and safety equipment as well as wood for the boxes.

When in 2002 we found three pairs nesting in the boxes we had erected it was very rewarding. Up to 2009 we had 13 known pairs nesting in our area but in 2010 we have had 20 pairs, with only one failing to rear young. Two of the pairs have nested in holes in Ash trees, five in pole boxes and 13 in tree boxes. We have also had two Little Owls (with seven chicks) nest in our boxes this year. Other birds nesting in the boxes are 48 Stock Doves, 12 Jackdaws and one box inside a barn had a Blackbird nesting on the outer ledge.

The best thing about being part of our group is checking boxes for breeding pairs and ringing the chicks when you find them. This year we ringed 30 Barn Owl chicks and two adult birds as well as seven Little Owl chicks. Not all the young reared this year were rung as two pairs nested in tree holes which were inaccessible and some had flown between finding the young and the ringer being available. Alastair our ringer comes from Chester to ring the chicks. When ringing we weigh, sex and age the chicks. The ageing is done by measuring the length of the 7<sup>th</sup> primary feather and looking it up according to a table in a book by Colin Shawyer.

We always need new members and help when making and erecting boxes. If anyone is interested in joining or helping please contact me on phone 01270 878147 or e-mail [bromont@btinternet.com](mailto:bromont@btinternet.com)  
Our Chairman is Tony Dickinson and his e-mail address is: [tony\\_d1@talktalk.net](mailto:tony_d1@talktalk.net)

David Bromont

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

The group was started in August 1988 by Dennis Elphick as a result of finding less than twenty breeding pairs in the whole of Cheshire. As time progressed the general population gradually increased as shown in the figures below, probably due to the banning of lead weight used by fishermen. In the 1990s Winterley Pool, near Sandbach proved to be an important site for Mute Swans but since then, numbers there have fallen dramatically following the cessation of the heavy feeding that had been provided, and are now at a more natural level.

### Comparative Breeding Results for Cheshire 1988 to 1999.

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Total pairs	21	29	43	38	52	70
Total pairs with eggs	16	22	29	25	32	49
Total cygnets hatched	83	114	134	79	n/r	238
Total cygnets fledged	76	67	98	n/r	148	179

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total pairs	92	98	107	111	140	144
Total pairs with eggs	69	69	57	84	90	104
Total cygnets hatched	339	348	264	433	412	402
Total cygnets fledged	255	290	190	323	282	294

After 1999 I decided to concentrate on the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total pairs	26	32	36	35	27	29
Total pairs with eggs	19	21	16	17	15	13
Total cygnets hatched	57	69	60	82	48	54
Total cygnets fledged	40	40	34	45	33	33

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total pairs	24	23	15	43	25
Total pairs with eggs	19	22	15	30	16
Total cygnets hatched	74	24	16	56	33
Total cygnets fledged	38	26	15	41	25

### Selected Movements from the SECOS Area.

**Green Darvic C879**, ringed as a male cygnet on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2000 at the Canal, Rode Heath near Sandbach, was sighted on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2001 at the Four Mile Bridge, Valley, Anglesey, a movement of 156 Kms.

**Green Darvic C973**, ringed as a second year male on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2002 at Winterley Pool near Sandbach, was sighted at Kensington Gardens, London on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2007, a movement of 232 Kms.

**Green Darvic CA14**, ringed as a third year male on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2001 at Winterley Pool near Sandbach, was sighted at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2003, a movement of 151 Kms.

**Green Darvic CJ09**, ringed as a female cygnet on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2004 at Doddington Pool near Nantwich, sighted at Cavendish Dock, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2004, a movement of 131 Kms.

David Cookson

## QUAKERS COPPICE NEST BOX REPORT - 2010

2010 is the 26th year that Quakers Coppice has been monitored for tit and Stock Dove nesting success. This year has thrown up a couple of surprises for Bill and me: -

- While doing our early season 'spring clean' of the boxes, we discovered a Tawny Owl sitting on four eggs in one of the Stock Dove boxes – the last reported Tawny Owl nest was in 2003.
- One of the small hole boxes had mud around the hole and bark flakes ( not grass / moss ) in it - typical signs that we had a Nuthatch pair occupying it.

Our bird books suggest that Tawny Owls usually lay eggs in March to April. So this owl started rather early. We first found the adult sitting on four eggs on 2nd February. The adult was still sitting on 20th March, but by 17th April had abandoned the nest. Witherby says "the interval between eggs may be from 48 hours to a week", so the first egg may have been laid about mid January. With the particularly cold winter, it must have been pretty cold to be brooding eggs from January to March!

As the breeding season progressed, the Tawny Owl eggs failed to hatch, but the Nuthatch chicks fledged. This is the second record for Nuthatches using nest boxes on the reserve - in 2005 four eggs were laid in a tit box, but none fledged. Nuthatches usually modify old woodpecker cavities or natural holes by plastering mud around the entrance hole to reduce its size.

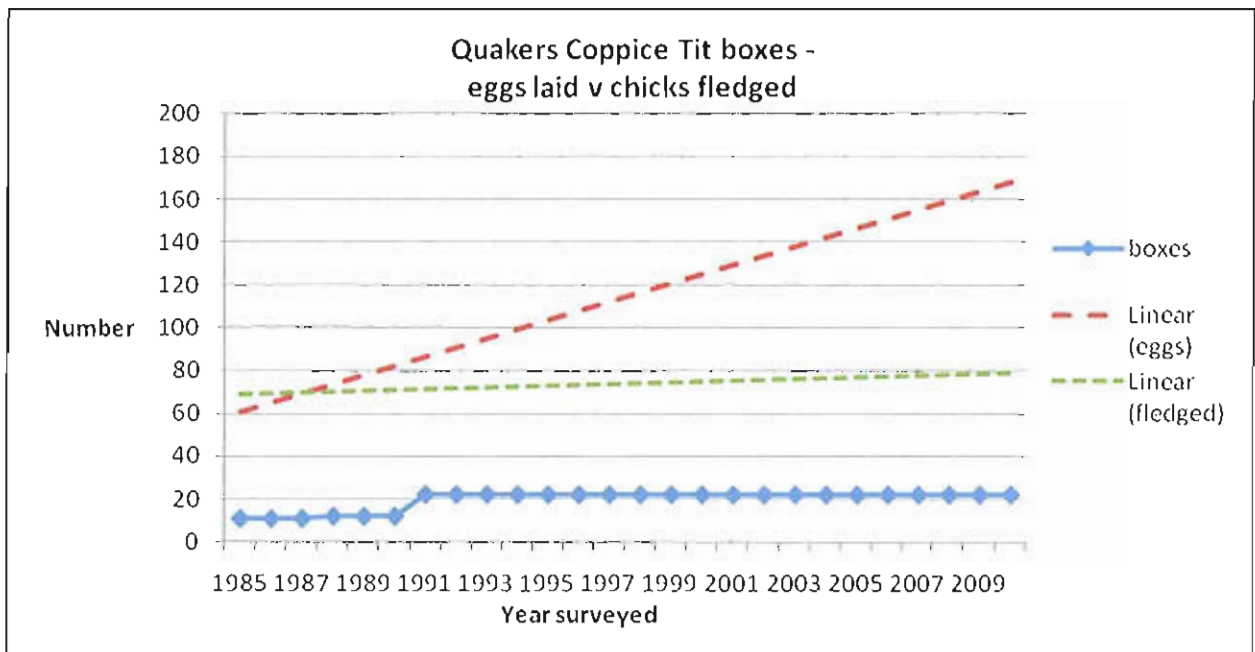
The Stock Dove breeding season extends well beyond our reporting period, so although we have data for this species, it is not for the complete season.

This year's results: -

Species	Total Nests	Total Eggs	Total Hatched	Total Fledged	*Productivity	1st egg date
Blue Tit	15	149	135	83	5.5	19th Apr
Great Tit	4	27	25	14	3.5	17th Apr
Stock Dove	9	19	10	7	0.8	28th Mar
Nuthatch	1	8	8	4	4	19th Apr
Tawny Owl	1	4	0	0	0	approx. mid Jan

\* - Productivity = Total Fledged divided by Total Nests - i.e. the average number fledges per nest

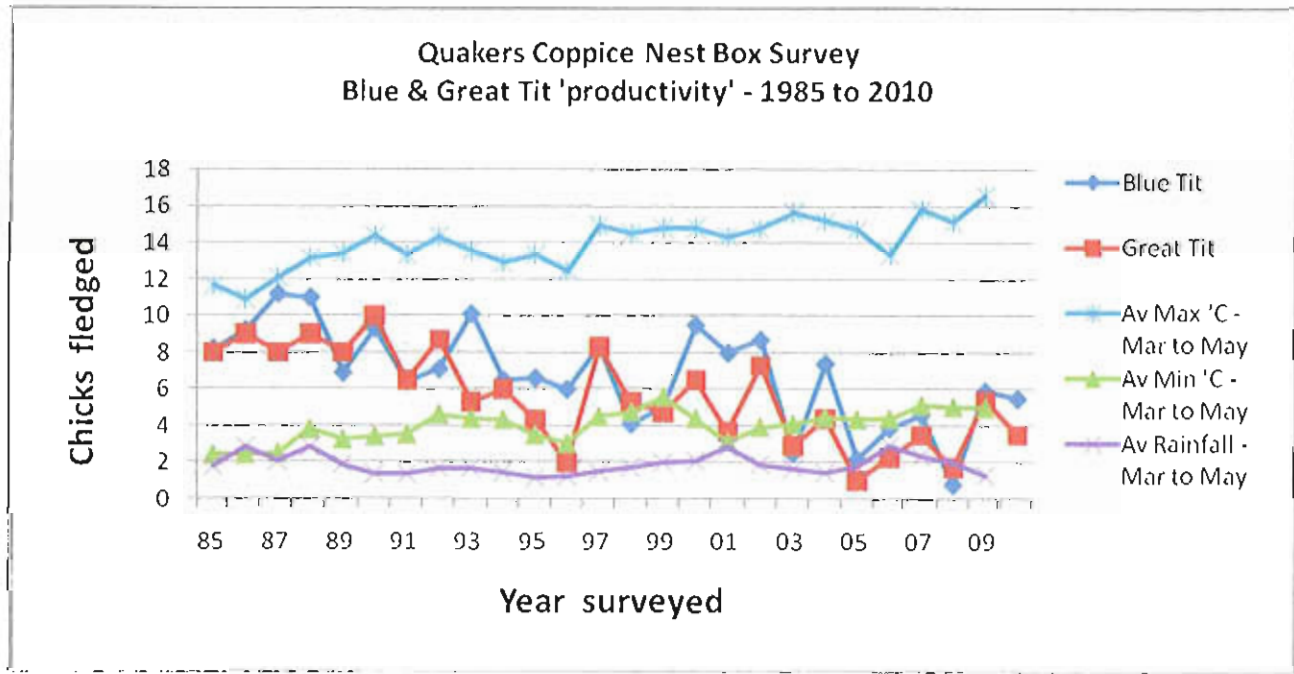
Bill and I have done some 'number-crunching' from the data we have added to that previously collected by Colin and Bryan. Firstly, following a comment from Colin to me last summer about the biomass possibly having reached capacity, the first graph appears to support that theory.



As more tit boxes were erected, pairs occupied them and the results recorded. It would be expected that as the number of pairs increased then the number of eggs laid would rise. The graph confirms that. However, unexpectedly, the number of chicks fledged appears to be only marginally higher - interesting?

As last year was the 25th anniversary, we also thought it would be interesting to consider if we could get weather related data covering the same period. I am extremely grateful to David Cookson of the Cheshire Swan Study Group<sup>1</sup> for supplying me with the information.

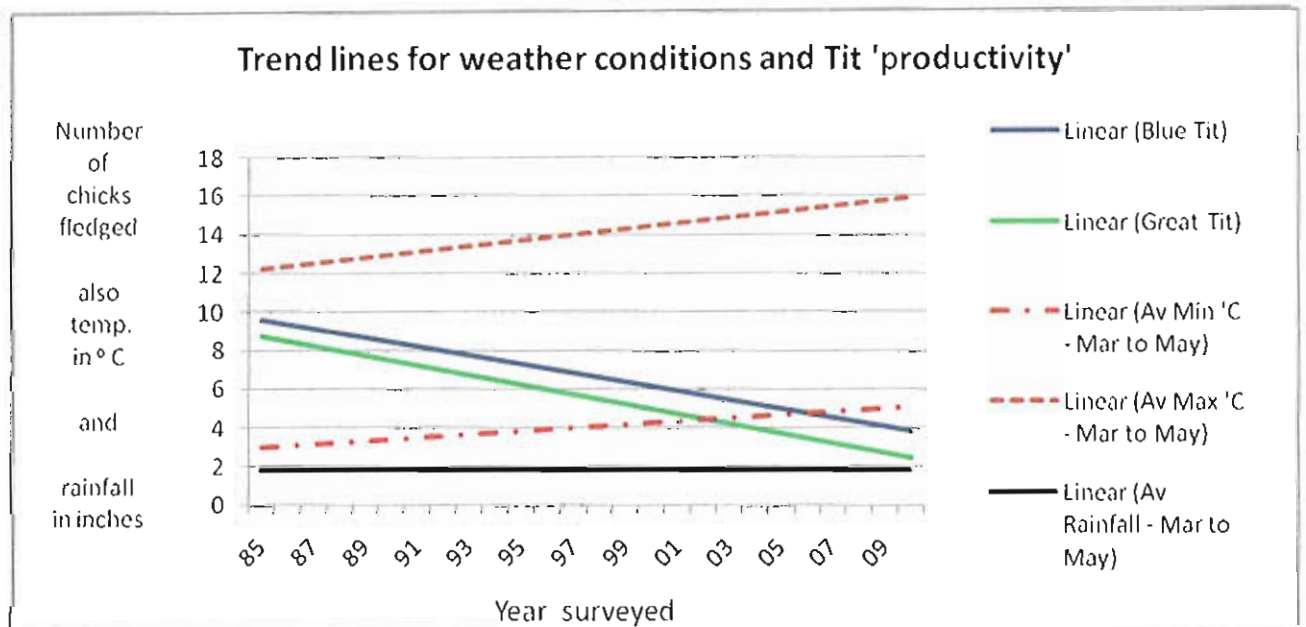
The rather 'busy' graph below shows the productivity of the Blue and Great Tits using the nest boxes over the 26 years and we have overlaid the max. and min. temperatures, plus average rainfall for the months of March to May.





The graph below shows the same data, but uses trend lines<sup>2</sup> (designated as Linear) to represent the information and it reveals some 'disturbing' results: -

- that even though more boxes have been made available and more pairs are using them, productivity has dropped at a similar rate for both Blue and Great Tits over the period
- average temperature and rainfall for the breeding season has remained constant or risen slightly over the 26 years - suggesting 'climate change' may not be a factor or if the slight rise in the average min. and max. temperature is having an effect, it is having a detrimental one!



What conclusions can we draw from this information?

Before doing so, consider some extracts from last year's item on the subject: -

- The following extract from a leaflet produced by Cheshire Wildlife Trust in 1985 is interesting:  
*"The reserve is closed during the main nesting season March to June inclusive. Damage and disturbance to birds and other wildlife is minimised at other times of the year if visitors would please keep to the paths. Please note that dogs are not allowed on the reserve."*
- When Colin first visited the area in the early 1980s there were no paths, ground vegetation was mainly dense brambles and it was difficult to walk in the wood!

Not all of the boxes erected are used each year. So it is also likely that the species we have been monitoring over the years have also been nesting in natural nest sites on the reserve. We have not been able to identify any recently to record their successes. We have no way of checking how they are faring.



While on our weekly Spring visits to the reserve we often hear and see the migrants - Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, etc. They, too, will want to feed themselves and their brood.

Other nesting records:

During the visits over the years there have been evidence of other species nesting at Quakers Coppice. These include Great Spotted Woodpeckers in holes in the trees - we have heard young calling; a Goldcrest's nest in a yew tree; a Wren nesting on the ground, young Moorhen on the pond at the south end of the reserve.

What is contributing to the decline in productivity?

Could it be: -

- the weather conditions ( although relatively constant ) were unfavourable
- the biomass can only support a certain number of fledged chicks
- human disturbance -
  - encroachment of industrial units / business park
  - dog walkers and others visiting the wood
- man-made nests distort the productivity of the total population
- has the feeding station been regularly 'topped up'? Have some birds been depending on it?
- decline in recent years of the biomass surrounding the reserve due to change of land use from farmland to industrial and commercial premises

Bill Fox and John Thompson

**References: -**

1 Cheshire Swan Study Group Website -

<http://www.record-lrc.co.uk/Group.aspx?Mod=Article&ArticleID=G0012001> and the Forum site is <http://www.record-lrc.co.uk/forum/viewforum.php?f=30>. On behalf Cheshire Swan Study Group (including North Wales Swan Study Group) British Swan Study Group, Cheshire and Wirral Ornithology Society and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

2 a trend line is ( usually a straight line ) used to depict trends in your existing data or forecasts of future data

## EARLY AND LATE DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS

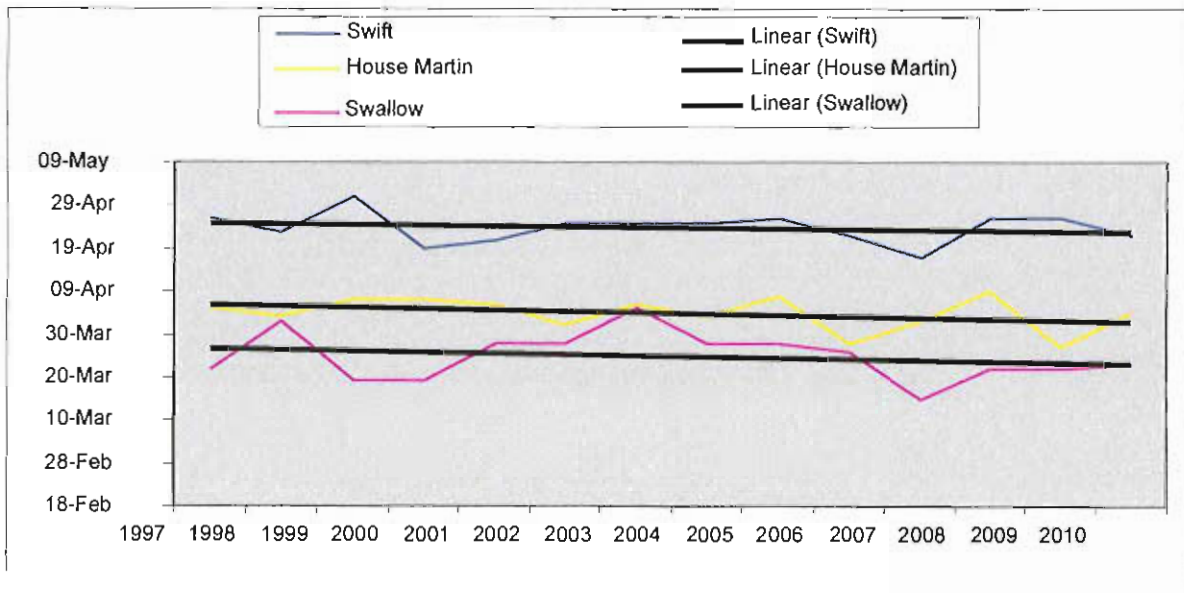
The table has been arranged in date order for the '10 year average' arrival dates so that you know what order to expect the visitors in.

Species	ARRIVALS			DEPARTURES		
	Date in 2010	10 Year average	Earliest ever	Date in 2010	10 Year average	Latest ever
Little Ringed Plover	17-Mar	16-Mar	05-Mar-00	08-Sep	31-Aug	16-Oct-85
Sand Martin	18-Mar	17-Mar	11-Mar-08	01-Oct	18-Sep	24-Nov-72
Swallow	23-Mar	25-Mar	10-Feb-07	17-Oct	20-Oct	30-Nov-74
Willow Warbler	07-Apr	01-Apr	21-Mar-09	15-Sep	05-Sep	27-Sep-08
House Martin	04-Apr	03-Apr	25-Mar-95	12-Oct	13-Oct	05-Nov-77
Yellow Wagtail	02-Apr	14-Apr	29-Mar-81	17-Sep	19-Sep	27-Oct-06
Lesser Whitethroat	21-Apr	14-Apr	21-Mar-00	15-Sep	12-Sep	01-Oct-98
Reed Warbler	17-Apr	19-Apr	16-Apr-80	04-Sep	16-Sep	04-Oct-98
Whitethroat	16-Apr	20-Apr	11-Apr-09	02-Sep	07-Sep	21-Sep-93
Sedge Warbler	17-Apr	22-Apr	15-Apr-93	01-Sep	04-Sep	01-Oct-78
Swift	20-Apr	23-Apr	05-Apr-82	08-Sep	06-Aug	03-Nov-78
Cuckoo	06-May	24-Apr	16-Apr-96	nr	15-Aug	01-Oct-86
Garden Warbler	16-Apr	24-Apr	16-Apr-09	nr	28-Aug	09-Sep-83
Hobby	30-Apr	28-Apr	27-Mar-94	21-Sep	26-Sep	08-Oct-00
Grasshopper Warbler	18-Apr	29-Apr	15-Apr-09	25-Sep	nr	25-Sep-10

nr signifies no record in the current year.

Only one significant change this year with a very late Grasshopper Warbler.

Since this is the last chart that I will produce I have taken the opportunity to use the available data since 1997 to check for trends in the arrival date of these summer visitors. Although the data is not sufficient for a detailed analysis the charts do show a trend and I have included the one for Swift, Swallow and House Martin as an example. Arrival dates in 2010 are around two days earlier than in 1997.





Winter scenes from 2010, the sun sets looking west over Pump House Flash.  
Bob Brown.