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# SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## 2004 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes



Male Lesser Scaup  
with female Tufted Duck  
at Railway Flash  
Paul Hill

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 2004 report for the SECOS area. The main body of the report is the **Systematic List**, which gives details of all birds seen and recorded in the SECOS area during 2004. Records have been received from more observers than ever so the list is even more comprehensive. If you can contribute similar records for 2005 then please send them to me. Even records of common birds help to make the summaries for those species.

The usual articles include the SECOS **area map** and **gazetteer**, which I hope is of value to those new to the area or who are not familiar with the birding hot spots. The other regular article is the list of **Early and Late Dates** for migrants. One early arrival date and one late departure date were equalled as well as three late date records that were extended – are they staying later because it is staying warmer? I have also included a summary of the **Coordinated Count of all Flashes** in January to illustrate the distribution of the different species around the 14 flashes in the area.

It has been quite a good year at the flashes with some of the species missed last year being seen this year, as well as two new species for the site. There have also been some good single observer sightings making it overall a very good year for sightings with a grand total of 161 species recorded, including 23 wader species.

The two new species were the Franklin's Gull at Elton Hall Flash briefly in September and the Lesser Scaup at Railway Flash and Elton Hall Flash for five days in October and then two days in November. Other noteworthy records included a Black-necked Grebe at Doddington, only the second for the SECOS area and a White Stork flyover at Checkley, the fourth record following the second and third last year. After a blank year for Marsh Harrier and Osprey at the flashes last year there were four records of each there this year. Another cracking bird was the adult summer plumaged Spotted Sandpiper that brought the twitchers to Elton Hall Flash in mid-June. An amazing sight was the non-breeding flock of first summer Black-tailed Godwits at Elton Hall Flash that grew to a peak count of 660 in mid-May. This easily smashed the previous highest count for the species, as did the count of 42 Black Terns that passed through the flashes on 10<sup>th</sup> August. As records were submitted at the end of the year the coincidence of Wrynecks appearing in two separate gardens on the same date in September became known. Finally the Waxwing invasion hit the area with 33 at Congleton and 22 at Crewe by the end of the year. Good numbers but only a foretaste of things to come in 2005!

Other articles include a summary of the annual **Common Bird Census** in Crewe Business Park, notes on the **Hobby** and a more detailed analysis on the **Decline of the House Sparrow**, using data from the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

Fieldwork for the **CAWOS Atlas** has been completed for the first breeding season and almost so for the winter birds. Coverage has been good and thanks are due to everybody who has been involved. However, don't forget that it is a three year survey so keep up the effort! There are still tetrads waiting to be allocated.

The **SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey** goes from strength to strength with 46 members contributing data. It provides an interesting and useful activity for the members as well as an invaluable source of records for this bird report. Thanks to all members who are involved and particularly to Trevor Clowes for organising the survey so ably.

Thanks to those local birders who provide food at the various feeding stations and particularly to H J Lea Oakes at Wheelock Mill for helping with free food. Many thanks to all contributors, without whose records there would not be a report. Special thanks to Joan and Keith Tilbrook for their help in typing, collating and checking this report.

Colin Lythgoe; SECOS Recorder

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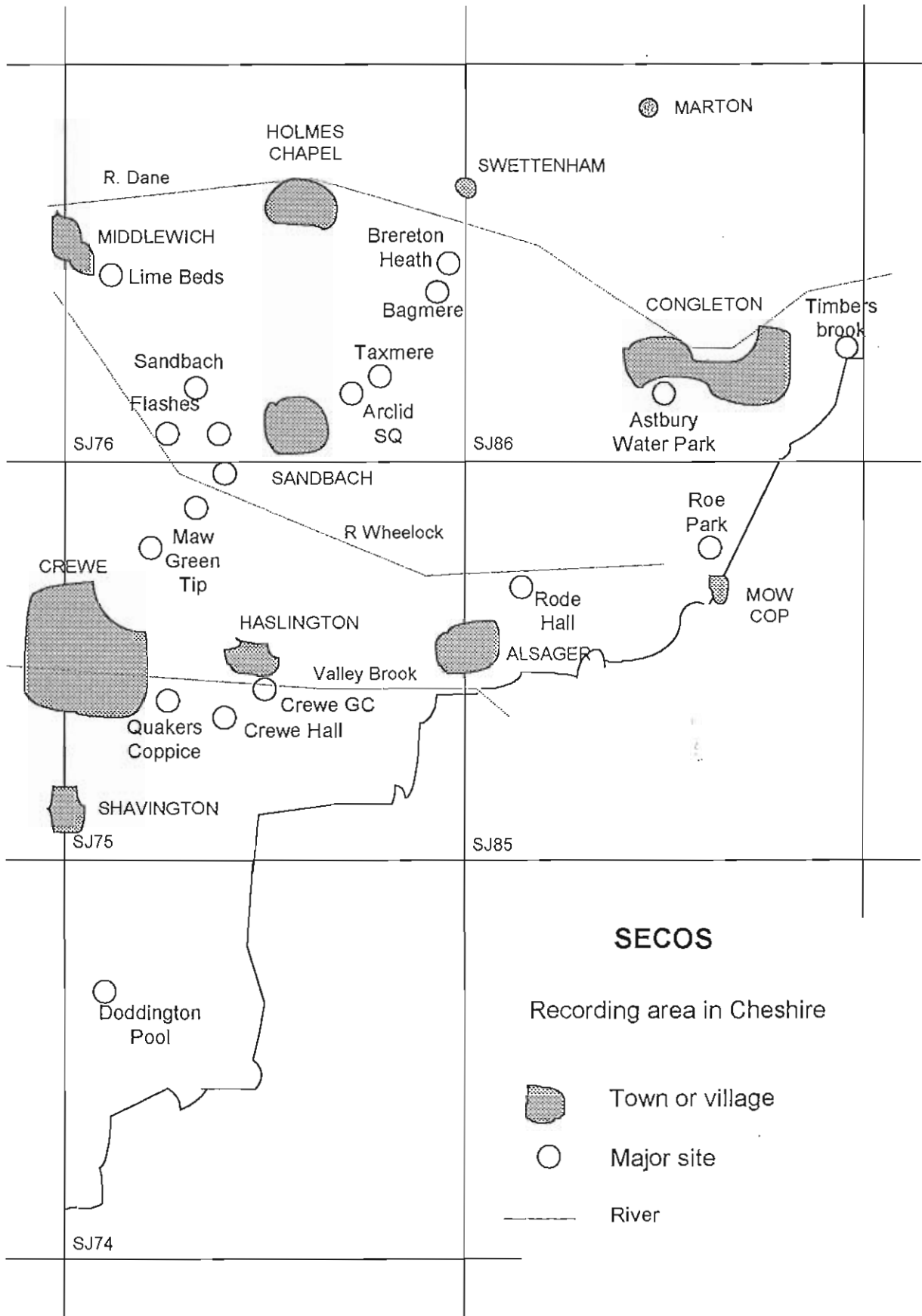
## Abbreviations Used

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

## Status Definitions

The status of species within the area is given in a one-line entry after the species heading. These have been defined as follows:-

Abundant	Occurs in large numbers in suitable habitats and seasons.
Common	Occurs regularly or widely distributed in suitable habitats.
Fairly common	Occurs in moderate numbers in suitable habitats.
Uncommon	Occurs in small numbers.
Scarce	One or two records in each year, or restricted to specific habitats.
Rare	Occurs less than annually.
Very rare	Less than 10 records in the last 20 years.
Vagrant	Less than 2 records in the last 20 years.



## BIRDING SITES

I have listed below some of the more major sites for birding in the SECOS area, including a brief summary of the site and a grid reference of its approximate centre. The level of access is denoted by the figure shown, in accordance with the following definitions:-

- <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.

**Cheshire's Close SJ868588 <sup>4</sup>**

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

**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.

**Eaton Hall SQ SJ864654 <sup>3</sup>**

A working sand quarry.

**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 2004

### **Little Grebe** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Records from six sites in the first winter period. All singles except for a max of 11 at Doddington in March.

Pairs bred at Doddington where 4 pairs with 5 juvs on the main pool and 3 pairs with 1 juv on the Lemon Pool, an improvement on 2003 when 23 adults but only 4 juvs. Also 1 juv seen at EHF in July where probably bred at GF, the usual site.

The usual post-breeding flock at Doddington peaked with 31 in Sept (21 in 2003).

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

*Common resident.*

Flocks in the first winter period were at WLF (26), Doddington Pool (22), Rode Pool (11) and Arclid SQ (11).

A real shortage of breeding records from the flashes where the only proved breeding was 6 juvs seen at WF during fieldwork for the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas. No more juvs or no records?

Other sites with proved breeding were Astbury Mere (a pair fledged 2 juvs from a nest on a concrete slab in the water), Brereton Heath CP (pair + 2 juvs), Doddington Pool (20 birds present, few bred and only 4 juvs seen), Lawton Hall (pair + 1 juv), Rode Pool (4 pairs with broods of 4; 2; 2; 2), Weston Wychwood Park (pair but failed), Winterley Pool (pair + 3 juvs and pair + 4 juvs), Wybunbury (where several pairs) and Arclid SQ (5 pairs nested but four were abandoned and 1 pair fledged 3 juvs – the first successful breeding since 2001).

The usual post-breeding flock numbers were well down at Doddington Pool with only 19 in Oct (65 in 2003) 21 at WLF (18 in 2003) and 22 at Arclid SQ.

### **Black-necked Grebe** (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

*Very rare visitor.*

A juv was at Doddington Pool on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> July. Probably the same juv re-appeared on 25<sup>th</sup> Aug and stayed through to 16<sup>th</sup> Sept. Presumably this was a bird from one of the breeding sites in the north of the county.

Only the second record for the SECOS area, with the first being one at WLF on 15/10/72.

### **Comorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

*Fairly common winter visitor. Rare in summer.*

PHF used to be the top site but numbers seem to be reducing here with first winter period max of only 12 at PHF (and four months with no records) but 16 at Doddington. In the second winter period Doddington peaked at 51 in Nov with only 20 at PHF.

22 were seen flying over Crewe town centre on 19<sup>th</sup> Sept. Six on the R. Dane at Swettenham in Sept and one or two at six other sites.

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

*Rare visitor.*

On 5<sup>th</sup> Aug one was flushed by a tractor out of the river at PHF and it flew towards RF.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug a bird was seen at RF and then later seen flying over EHF at 09.30.

Finally on 28<sup>th</sup> Dec one was flushed from the Fowle Brook between MGT and the railway line in the afternoon.

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

*Common resident.*

Recorded from 18 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas, and many other waters, showing its widespread distribution when feeding.

At the Rode Pool heronry there were 39 nests in total, spaced around the pool. 40 here in 2003.

Winter records from many sites in the area.

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

*Very rare visitor.*

On 20<sup>th</sup> April one was seen flying slowly west over Checkley Hall Farm.

The fourth record for the area with the second and third being two over EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2003.

### Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

*Fairly common resident.*

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

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Winterley Pool	35	37	43	41	33	29	26	27	30	23	39	40
Doddington	32	7	9	7	29	37	35	32	13	24	31	29

Breeding pairs were noted at Astbury Mere, where the resident pair bred on the path again, laid six eggs but failed after attacks by dogs; Bent Farm (pair but no juvs); Congleton (pair with 6 juvs on the canal in Canal St.); Crewe (pair with 2 juvs in the Queens Park); Doddington (pair had 7 juvs, soon down to 5); Marton CP (pair with 1 juv); Rode Pool (pair but no juvs); Stowford (pair with 3 juvs); Weston Wychwood Park (pair but no juvs); Wheelock (pair with 6 juvs on the canal); Winterley Pool (pair but no juvs) and CF (pair with 5 juvs).

### Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

One bird that had been present at Doddington Pool from 5/12/03 stayed there with the Mute Swans until 6<sup>th</sup> Feb.

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

*Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.*

Much movement of skeins flying over during Jan to mid-Feb with 120, 24, 200, 35 over the flashes, 80 and 300 over Crewe, 150 over Sandbach, 230 over Gawsorth CP, and 200 and 76 over Arclid SQ. Usually heading north towards the Lancashire Mosses.

A very early second winter period movement of 119 over EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> Sept. Also 50 and 60 over in Nov and a very high count of 540 over Marton on 31<sup>st</sup> Oct.

As usual there were low numbers with the Canada Geese, including five regular at the flashes during March.

### Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

*Rare winter visitor or feral.*

18 were at Doddington Pool for two weeks in mid-Aug and six were at Rode Pool from March to May. Apart from those there were up to three with Canada Geese at several sites through the year.

### Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

*Common resident.*

Max numbers in the first winter period were all flashes (323), Doddington Pool (245), Bent Farm SQ (200), Arclid SQ (154), Winterley Pool (68).

Bred at many sites, those with multiple broods being Doddington (110 adults and a crèche of 59 juvs on 4<sup>th</sup> June), Rode Pool (62 adults and 20 juvs in Aug), CF (7 adults with 12 juvs), Winterley Pool (5 adults and 10 juvs).

The main site for post-breeding flocks is at Arclid SQ where numbers built up from 235 on 31<sup>st</sup> July to a max of 505 on 19<sup>th</sup> Sept.

There were some large flocks in the second winter period, particularly an impressive record count of 829 at Doddington Pool on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov. Also at Rode Pool (350), Arclid SQ (205), EHF (138) and Winterley Pool (110).

### Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

*Rare visitor or feral.*

Several records from different sites of a single bird with Canada Geese in the first winter period. 12<sup>th</sup> Feb at Bent Farm SQ, 17<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> Feb at Arclid SQ, 1<sup>st</sup> March at CF, 8<sup>th</sup> March at Winterley Pool and 23<sup>rd</sup> March at EHF. If it is the same bird then it is very mobile and gives an indication of the mobility of the Canada Geese.

### Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

*Very rare visitor, usually presumed escapes.*

One was at Bent Farm SQ from 14<sup>th</sup> March through into April.

At EHF two flew in on 17<sup>th</sup> April for 15 minutes and probably the same two were also at EHF on 20<sup>th</sup> April.

**Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)**

*Uncommon resident and winter visitor.*

High numbers in the first winter period at EHF when a monthly max of 26 in Jan built up to 52 by the end of Feb.

At least four pairs bred at EHF where 22 adults and four broods of 29 juvs were there on 11<sup>th</sup> June. Successful breeding also at Eaton Hall SQ where a pair with 8 juvs were seen on 27<sup>th</sup> June. Pairs in the breeding season also at Stowford, Doddington and CF but no juvs seen.

As usual birds disappeared to moult in autumn but by Dec had built up to 27 at EHF.

**Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*)**

*Scarce visitor.*

As last year a pair were resident in Queens Park Crewe in the early part of the year but a male only from April to the year end.

Few other records with just a pair at Doddington on 17<sup>th</sup> March and 12<sup>th</sup> Aug, and one near Swettenham during the breeding bird atlas fieldwork.

**Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Typical numbers from the flashes with a max of 605 in the first winter period (Jan) and 564 in the second winter period (Nov). Recorded in every month with one in May and July, and four appeared for three days at the end of June.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	605	573	578	146	1	4	1	2	89	201	564	360

Also recorded in winter from Doddington Pool, where usually around 10 but 145 flew in at dusk on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec (from Sandbach Flashes?), Bent Farm SQ (4), Rode Pool (9), Gawsworth CP (2) and Arclid SQ (10).

**Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

After an exceptionally poor year in 2003, when only recorded on five days, there were many records from EHF this year. Recorded in eight months of the year (not March, June, Sept and Dec) with generally a random spread of records of one, two or three birds.

Also five at Doddington Pool in Feb and one in April.

**Teal (*Anas crecca*)**

*Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.*

The main site is EHF/PHF and monthly max for this site are given in the table. Also regular at RF (max 53), TLF (28), CF (25).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	242	250	138	140	3	14	20	203	314	410	362	300

Generally lower numbers than in 2003.

Counts of 10+ in winter from other sites were Gawsworth CP (106) Arclid SQ (an exceptional 62), Doddington Pool (42), Rode Pool (28) and Bent Farm SQ (11).

**Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)**

*Common resident. Abundant in winter.*

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

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	323	55	26	nc	50	155	230	512	325	95	nc	160
Arclid SQ	325	163	96	36	106	144	199	212	200	263	250	374
Astbury Mere	93	nc	nc	62	20	nc	nc	nc	nc	80	nc	nc
Doddington	235	74	82	136	162	110	230	267	148	314	260	476

Breeds commonly on most waters in the area, as shown by the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas when recorded in 36 out of 39 tetrads. They also breed late, as shown by the female that appeared at Crewe Business Park, with 16 two-day-old ducklings on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Pintail (*Anas acuta*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Regular in both winter periods at EHF with a max of 18 in March and the last on 3<sup>rd</sup> April.

The first bird in the autumn was on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. A max of eight up to the end of Nov and then increasing to 19 in Dec.

Also seen at Doddington Pool with 15 on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov and a single bird that flew in with 145 Wigeon on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec (from Sandbach Flashes?).

**Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)**

*Scarce summer visitor.*

No records in spring but one was seen regularly at EHF from 8<sup>th</sup> Aug and one at RF from 18<sup>th</sup> Sept. Finally proved to be two different birds when they were seen together at EHF on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept. Last recorded on 7<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor, scarce in summer.*

As in 2003 there were records in all months at EHF. Birds in the first winter period left by mid-May and returned for the second winter period in mid-July with a single in June.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	16	15	9	8	5	1	5	11	22	25	12	20

Also recorded in winter from Doddington Pool (max 37), Rode Pool (21) and Arclid SQ (8). An increase in numbers at all sites.

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

*Rare visitor.*

Three records this year, all of females, with one at Doddington Pool on 30<sup>th</sup> April and 4<sup>th</sup> June, and one at EHF briefly in the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)**

*Fairly common winter visitor.*

A slight increase in numbers of this winter visitor that moves away by the end of March and is rarely seen again until the end of Sept. Numbers similar in both winter periods and max counts were Doddington Pool (53), Astbury Mere (50), Winterley Pool (26), Rode Pool (22), EHF (21), Arclid SQ (6) and WF (5)

**Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)**

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.*

As usual at the flashes it is commonest on the deeper waters with a winter max of 32 at WLF and 29 at CF. Monthly max at other main sites were:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Astbury Mere	58	7	nc	17	nc	2	nc	nc	7	18	nc	nc
Doddington	49	77	105	60	37	41	48	44	43	114	71	53
Winterley Pool	16	33	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11	19

The most widespread duck after Mallard with records in the breeding season from Astbury Mere (pair + 2 juvs), Bent Farm SQ (pair + 8 juvs), Hough (female + 7 juvs), Marton (female + 5 juvs), Stowford (2 pairs), Weston Wychwood Park (pair + 3 juvs) and Wybunbury (7 pairs).

*Doddington - at least three broods including one huge brood of 18 on the Lemon Pool.*

**Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*)**

*Vagrant.*

On 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct whilst checking Railway Flash an adult male was found amongst the other ducks. Well watched that day it stayed at RF until 6<sup>th</sup> Oct when it moved over to EHF and was last seen here on 7<sup>th</sup> Oct.

Presumably the same bird re-appeared on the back pool at EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov and stayed there until 12<sup>th</sup> Nov, when it was last seen at 16.20.

This is the first record for the SECOS area and only the third for Cheshire. Previous records were a male at Redesmere from 13<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2001 and one at Frodsham from 19<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> Sept 1996.

**Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

In the first winter period ever-present at Doddington Pool with a high max of 21 in Feb and the last being a female on 16<sup>th</sup> Apr. Also three at Astbury Mere in Jan.

In the second winter period a max of 10 at Doddington Pool, 2 at WLF, 1 at RF, 1 at EHF, 1 at Rode Pool and 1 at Arclid SQ.

**Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

A big increase in records and numbers this year. In the first winter period regular at Lawton Hall (with a max of 28 in Jan) and Rode Pool (with a max of 15).

More widespread in the second winter period. At Sandbach Flashes a female was seen on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug and then birds were recorded on 30% of the days up to five on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. Also recorded from Bent Farm SQ (6), Congleton River Dane (1), Doddington (2), Middlewich River Dane (6), Rode Pool (17), Timbersbrook (2), Swettenham River Dane (1) and Arclid SQ (1).

**Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

Records from six sites with breeding attempts at at least two, one successful when four juvs were seen.

**Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)**

*Rare passage migrant.*

A good series of records of passage birds in autumn with four records of female/imms.

27<sup>th</sup> July one at EHF was seen over the chemical factory and flew off northwest.

24<sup>th</sup> Aug one at EHF early in the morning.

7<sup>th</sup> Sept one over EHF at 13.05 was mobbed by two kestrels and three buzzards as it went over the railway.

8<sup>th</sup> Sept one at RF at 09.05 flew low across the maize field, then soared over and drifted south of RF being mobbed by corvids.

**Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)**

*Common resident.*

Common throughout the area and recorded from 29 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas. Proved breeding from three sites with a pair + 2 juvs in the observer's garden in Sandbach, a pair + at least 2 juvs near King George's playing fields Crewe and a pair + 2 juvs at Arclid SQ. Probable breeding from several other sites where adults seen carrying food into woods.

In winter recorded in 17 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey.

**Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

There are now too many records to try to estimate the number of breeding pairs. It was the commonest raptor recorded on the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas, being seen in 33 out of 39 tetrads. Breeding was confirmed at Arclid Hollow, Doddington Park, Haslington, Bostock Green Middlewich, Oakhanger, Rode Heath, Marton CP (2 pairs), Taxmere, Swettenham and Tidnock.

The high numbers that congregated in a field at Stowford in 2003 (max 22 in Dec) continued into Jan 2004 (max 17) but dispersed during Feb.

**Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)**

*Rare migrant.*

A good year, particularly on spring passage when there were four records at Sandbach Flashes.

On 9<sup>th</sup> April one flew over WLF at 09.30 and one flew over CF at 10.00 (slow flier, stopped on the way, watches wrong – or different birds?).

29<sup>th</sup> April one over EHF and another over EHF on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

On return passage one flew over EHF/PHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug.

**Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)**

*Common resident.*

Common throughout the area and recorded in 30 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas. It always seems more difficult to prove breeding for this species compared to Sparrowhawks, and only one proved breeding was noted this year with a pair fledging 3 juvs from the steelworks in Weston Road, Crewe.

Not recorded from gardens in the SECOS area in winter compared with 17 out of 39 for Sparrowhawk, reflecting the different hunting techniques of the two species.

#### **Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)**

*Rare winter visitor.*

A male at WLF on 17<sup>th</sup> Jan and one at EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> March. Also a female seen along Old Park Road, Crewe Hall on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb.

Then in the second winter period, a male was in the area of EHF and WLF from 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug to 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. No records then until 4<sup>th</sup> Nov when another male stayed in the area with several sightings up to 26<sup>th</sup> Nov.

#### **Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)**

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

A late arrival this year when the breeding pair at Doddington arrived together on 6<sup>th</sup> May (27<sup>th</sup> April in 2003) and spent several days feeding over the water before moving to the nesting area. One at EHF on 12<sup>th</sup> May then the first bird arrived back at Hassall on 18<sup>th</sup> May.

After many hours searching breeding was again proved at Doddington Park and Hassall with both pairs fledging a creditable three juvs.

Clusters of records or breeding behaviour also noted at Brereton Heath CP and Shavington.

Records from a total of 17 sites during the summer.

The last record was of one over EHF and possibly the same bird over WLF on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct.

#### **Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)**

*Scarce resident and winter visitor.*

As usual two birds were resident in the RF area through the year but no positive breeding attempt was noted. There was an interesting cluster of records in May and June from the Nantwich Road area of Crewe.

Occasional records of wandering birds from eight sites, mainly in autumn or winter.

#### **Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)**

*Rare except where locally released.*

The CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas has thrown up more records than usual, being recorded in seven tetrads. Also recorded from five other sites. Probably all relate to birds released by shooting syndicates, although one pair bred near Doddington.

#### **Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)**

*Scarce resident.*

More records than usual but it is not clear yet whether this is due to more birds or increased observer effort. Records from 10 sites and a covey of 10 birds were seen in a field at Weston.

#### **Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)**

*Scarce resident except where locally released.*

Usually concentrations of thousands where released for shooting on the big estates, e.g. Crewe Hall, Doddington Park and Rode Estate.

However, they are more widespread than previously thought, with records in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas from 18 tetrads + seven other sites.

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

*Scarce winter visitor.*

Again a good series of records at both ends of the year. Singles seen or heard up to 3<sup>rd</sup> April at EHF, FF, MGT and WF.

In the second winter period from 11<sup>th</sup> Sept a single at EHF was very obliging, giving good views in front of the watch point and along the river. Also singles at WLF and MGT and two at RF and PHF.

#### **Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)**

*Common resident.*

The co-ordinated count of all flashes on 25<sup>th</sup> Jan gave a total of 53 spread over 10 of the flashes, with only nine at EHF and five at PHF. There were 64 at eight flashes in 2003 and 83 at 11 flashes in 2002. A decline here but still very widespread with small numbers on most waters, large and small. On the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas records from 36 out of 39 tetrads.

The only other sites with a max of 10+ were Winterley Pool (29), Alsager South (14) and Rode Pool (10).

### Coot (*Fulica atra*)

*Common resident and variable winter visitor.*

The co-ordinated count of all flashes on 25<sup>th</sup> Jan gave a total of 191 spread over 12 flashes with WLF (52) and CF (38) holding the highest numbers as usual. There were 305 over five flashes in 2003 and 234 over 10 flashes in 2002. Monthly max for other sites excluding Sandbach Flashes, where only EHF and PHF are counted monthly, were:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Astbury Mere	91	nc	nc	20	10	nc	nc	nc	nc	122	nc	nc
Doddington	324	142	76	87	75	278	643	439	455	779	884	250
Winterley Pool	22	28	24	16	11	24	nc	9	nc	36	36	33

Not as widespread as Moorhen, with records from 24 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

### Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

*Scarce winter visitor and uncommon summer visitor.*

Arrivals seem to be getting a few days earlier each year, this year being on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb with one at WLF. Other Feb arrivals were at Bent Farm SQ. Birds were then present at the flashes on most days although no breeding attempt was noted this year.

A pair did breed successfully this year at Doddington Pool, where co-operation from fishermen in keeping off the island gave them chance to raise one young. Another pair bred successfully at Arclid New SQ and fledged two young.

Records of wandering birds from 11 sites and the last record being four at RF on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug.

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

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

The first bird was one at EHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and present there on most days thereafter with a max on spring passage of only a very low eight (19 in 2003).

Breeding records from EHF (2 pairs and 2 juvs), Eaton Hall SQ (2 pairs and 1 juv), Arclid New SQ (pair bred but nest predated again) and Bent Farm SQ (pair bred but no juvs seen).

On return passage there was a max count of 24 on 3<sup>rd</sup> July and the last record was one at EHF on 4<sup>th</sup> Aug.

### Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

*Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.*

First of the year was one at EHF on 6<sup>th</sup> March. Then recorded on seven days in March (max 3), nine days in April (max 3) and most days in May (max 10).

Return passage started on 29<sup>th</sup> June but recorded on only eight days (max 3) up to the last on 13<sup>th</sup> Sept. Also recorded at Doddington Pool with a juv on 12<sup>th</sup> June and Marton CP with a juv on 25<sup>th</sup> Aug.

### Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Recorded fairly regularly at the flashes in both winter periods, although there was no resident flock. In the first winter period max counts from Jan to March were Arclid SQ (90), EHF (65) and a flock of 190 briefly over Doddington Pool on 16<sup>th</sup> Jan. One at PHF on 9<sup>th</sup> April was in summer plumage.

The first bird in the second winter period was on 12<sup>th</sup> Sept at MGT and then recorded occasionally with a max of 60 at EHF in Nov and 27 at Arclid SQ in Nov.

### Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

Monthly max at EHF were:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	526	830	47	17	26	206	450	nc	400	470	nc	1400

Other large flocks recorded in the first winter period were:- Arclid (230), Stowford (600), Marton (120), Tidnock (100) and an exceptional count of 1250 to 1500 at Arclid SQ on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb.

Breeding was noted at Arclid SQ (2 pairs), EHF (several pairs + 9 juvs), CF (pair + juvs), Bent Farm SQ (pair + juvs), Doddington (pair + 1 juv), Shavington (1 pair) and Stowford (2 pairs).

In the second winter period Arclid SQ continued its impressive numbers with up to 1225 on 4<sup>th</sup> Dec but few other large flocks except for 250 at Doddington.

**Knot (*Calidris canutus*)**

*Rare visitor.*

Three singles this year put in brief appearances as usual. One at EHF on 16<sup>th</sup> March; one at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> Sept and one at EHF/PHF on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Nov.

**Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)**

*Scarce passage migrant.*

A few records from EHF in mid-May. One on 11<sup>th</sup> May in winter plumage followed by one the next day (12<sup>th</sup>) in summer plumage. Another or the same in summer plumage on 15<sup>th</sup> May and a different bird on 24<sup>th</sup> May.

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

*Scarce passage migrant.*

Three small waders believed to be of this species were at Arclid SQ on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept. One was at EHF from 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Oct, the first record here since 4<sup>th</sup> Dec 2002.

**Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)**

*Scarce passage migrant.*

Another poor year for records with just three juvs at EHF from 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Sept and five there on 21<sup>st</sup> Sept.

**Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

Low numbers at EHF in the first half of the year, as in 2003, but much better in the second half. In the first winter period from Jan to March a max of only 3, as in 2003.

Spring passage from April to early June generally had a low max of five, except for 22 briefly on 3<sup>rd</sup> May passing through. (10 in 2003 and 20 in 2002). Only one single in June, then daily in July, again with a max of 22, on 26<sup>th</sup> July, then down to one single in Aug.

Probably a second passage in Sept and Oct with a max of 15 on 12<sup>th</sup> Oct. Then settling down to the winter residents, with a max of seven in Nov.

Good numbers also this year at Arclid SQ where recorded on 13 dates, with a max count of four, the last being on 30<sup>th</sup> Oct. Also one at Marton CP on 30<sup>th</sup> Oct.

**Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

The resident wintering flock at EHF was present from the start of the year to 13<sup>th</sup> March, max 19.

There were spring records of passage singles on 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April and 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> May with a summer plumage male on 16<sup>th</sup>.

One on return passage on 19<sup>th</sup> July, then the first bird back in the second winter period was back on 4<sup>th</sup> Aug. Numbers built up slowly to a max of 16 in Dec.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	19	6	5	1	2	0	1	1	6	14	13	16

Just one record from Arclid SQ of four birds on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov.

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

*Scarce winter visitor.*

Few records this year, with one at MGT in Jan, one at RF in March. Then up to three at MGT in Oct, Nov and Dec and one at RF in Nov.

**Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.*

Most common at Sandbach Flashes with max counts in the first winter period of EHF (27), PHF (18), GF (7), RF (7) and WF (4).

Much more common – or visible! – in the second winter period, particularly Sept with max counts of EHF (137), RF (40) and WLF (15).

Recorded from several sites in the area and those with 10+ counts were Arclid SQ (24), Weston Wychwood Park (15), Alsager South (12) and Stowford (11).

*passage birds?*



**Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

More records than usual of this under-recorded crepuscular species.

Singles in winter at FF, WLF, Bath Vale Congleton, Crewe – flying over houses in Sydney Road, and Taxmere. Also three on railway land off Weston Road Crewe and at Little Taxmere.

Up to seven flushed during shoots in the woods at Rode Pool. Lower than usual with 10 to 15 in the last few years.

**Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)**

*Scarce migrant and rare winter visitor.*

The large flock of non-breeding 1<sup>st</sup> summer birds was present again at EHF. The record-breaking max count of 365 in 2002 was smashed this year with a staggering 660 on 16<sup>th</sup> May.

Although recorded daily, numbers fluctuated widely as birds moved away – where to? – and returned during the day, e.g. 21<sup>st</sup> June 7 birds at 10.00 up to 185 at 14.00.

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of days recorded	1	5	28	26	31	20	16	17	3	4
Max. daily count	2	26	660	236	62	14	6	32	9	5

**Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)**

*Scarce passage migrant.*

A very poor year with just two records on spring passage and two on autumn passage. 25<sup>th</sup> April RF (7), 8<sup>th</sup> May EHF (2), 26<sup>th</sup> July EHF (1) and 4<sup>th</sup> Aug EHF (1).

**Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)**

*Scarce resident and fairly common winter visitor.*

A max of up to 65 in the usual evening roost at EHF in the first winter period. Numbers reduced rapidly from mid-March as birds returned to their breeding sites and only up to three were present during April, May and up to mid-June.

From the end of March through April and May there were many sightings of a pair singing and in display flight in fields east of Haslington. On 18<sup>th</sup> June a pair with two young were seen flying up from these fields.

Numbers at EHF built up from mid-June as finished breeders returned and numbers built up rapidly to the usual 60.

Flocks flying over in early April were noted at Marton (54), Wybunbury (40) and Brereton Heath CP (19).

**Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)**

*Uncommon visitor and migrant.*

In the first winter period the resident winter flock at EHF had a max count of 10.

Spring passage was virtually non-existent with singles on only five days in April, May and June.

A few more on return passage with up to four in July and nine on 28<sup>th</sup> Aug.

None in Sept, then the winter flock built up again and numbers peaked at 20 in Dec.

Also one at Arclid SQ on 7<sup>th</sup> July.

**Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)**

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

The only spring passage record was of one flying over Chorlton on 24<sup>th</sup> April.

On return passage scattered records on 11 days from 3<sup>rd</sup> July to 7<sup>th</sup> Sept at EHF. Also one over Arclid SQ on 6<sup>th</sup> Aug, one over Gawsworth CP on 13<sup>th</sup> Aug, and one at Marton CP from 11<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug.

**Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)**

*Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.*

Wintering records in the first winter period from the usual site of Stowford (max 2).

Spring passage is always very light but this year was non-existent with no records.

However autumn passage is always good and at EHF extended from 19<sup>th</sup> June to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept, where recorded on most days with a max of four.

On return passage also recorded at Bent Farm SQ (2), Doddington (2), Gawsworth CP (1), Marton CP (1) and Stowford (2).

Usually up to three at Stowford in the second winter period but five there on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept. Also one at Marton CP.

### **Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)**

*Scarce passage migrant.*

A concentrated movement in mid-Aug with birds recorded on 8<sup>th</sup> EHF (1), 11<sup>th</sup> Marton CP (2), 13<sup>th</sup> Gawsorth CP (1), 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> EHF (1) and Marton CP (1).

### **Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)**

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Spring passage started with three at WLF and one at Arclid SQ on 15<sup>th</sup> April. Peak counts at both sites were also on the same day with 9 at Arclid, 5 at WLF and 4 at EHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> April. The last spring record was on 31<sup>st</sup> May.

Return passage started on 2<sup>nd</sup> July with one at EHF but seven at Doddington Pool. Then recorded daily at EHF until 30<sup>th</sup> Aug, max 9.

Autumn records also from Astbury Mere, Bent Farm SQ, Crewe Business Park and Winterley Pool, with the last being at Arclid SQ on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept.

### **Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*)**

*Vagrant.*

On 12<sup>th</sup> June an adult was seen at 06.55 at EHF. It was present all day and watched by a few hundred observers but could not be re-located the next day. Full details in the separate article.

This was only the second record for Cheshire and the second for the flashes. The first was an imm at RF from 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Sept 1980.

### **Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)**

*Scarce visitor.*

Yet another increase in records this year with a total of 15 singles at EHF (10 in 2003 and 8 in 2002). Three in Jan on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, on Feb 19<sup>th</sup>, Mar 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, May 20<sup>th</sup> a 1st summer bird, July 6<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, Aug 28<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> and finally Sep 1<sup>st</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*)**

*Vagrant.*

An adult was found in the gull roost at EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. Seen at 18.45 it was present until dark at 20.15 and seen by around 50 observers. It was still in the gull roost at dawn on 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept but moved off at 06.30 and was not seen again. Full details in the separate article.

This is the first record for Sandbach Flashes.

### **Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)**

*Rare visitor and passage migrant.*

A 1st winter bird was at Astbury Mere from 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept to 1<sup>st</sup> Oct.

Also an adult winter bird was at EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct.

### **Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)**

*Abundant autumn and winter visitor.*

In the first winter period the evening roost at EHF saltpan peaked with 3342 on 17<sup>th</sup> Jan. There were few actual counts at MGT/RF during the year. Numbers of all gull species were generally reduced due to the regular shooting of gulls on the tip by Waste Recycling Group.

Less than 20 at EHF during the summer, with the first juv noted on 26<sup>th</sup> June, the same date as 2003.

At least 1000 during the autumn and then up to 3000 again in the evening roost on the saltpan.

In the winter gull roost at Doddington there was a max of 8,000 in Jan and 11,000 in Nov.

No records from Astbury Mere or Eaton Hall SQ this year.

### **Common Gull (*Larus canus*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

The usual pattern of records from the flashes with few in winter (max 5), then a noticeable passage in March (max 180), none in summer, very light passage in autumn (max 4) and low numbers in the second winter period (max 20).

The Doddington Pool roost had max of 180 in Jan and 50 in Nov.

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)**

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

Fairly consistent numbers this year from EHF saltpan but few counts from MGT due to shooting there. A max of 67 in Jan, then 250 to 350 during March to May. Numbers built up from mid-July (max 600 on 31<sup>st</sup> July) and around 500 in all months to the year-end.

Max numbers in the main gull roost, at Doddington Pool, were only 10 in Jan but 300 in Nov. Other flocks were noted in autumn at Gawsworth CP (280) and Marton CP (250).

### Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

Max count in the first winter period was 90 at EHF. No noticeable passage movement and less than four at EHF in summer. In the second winter period a max of 180 at EHF but 450 at MGT. This illustrates the difficulty of recording the large gull species since there are few actual counts from the tip and also the large gull species move directly in the late afternoon from the tip away to the north to roost.

Very scarce in the gull roost at Doddington Pool where a max of only four was noted.

Birds showing characteristics of the Scandinavian race *L.a. argentatus* were noted on many more occasions with five on 31<sup>st</sup> Jan and nine on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. Then in the second winter period singles on 29<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> Nov and 13<sup>th</sup> Dec.

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

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of days recorded	1	1	1	1	0	3	7	4	10	6	4	0
Max day Count	1	1	1	1	0	1	5	2	6	7	3	0

### Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

The only record was of an adult on MGT on 4<sup>th</sup> Jan.

### Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

On 29<sup>th</sup> Dec a 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird was seen on the bank at PHF. At 11.10 it was seen to fly over to MGT, where it was recorded independently. At 15.30 it returned to the bank at PHF where it roosted. At this time it looked lethargic and rather sickly. Still there the next morning it died around 11.00 (on the 30<sup>th</sup>).

On 31<sup>st</sup> another 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird was seen at EHF.

### Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Recorded in every month at EHF, with usually up to three sub-adults. Highest numbers as usual in Jan and Nov/Dec when a max of 20 at EHF but 73 on MGT.

### Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

*Rare spring passage migrant.*

Two records during the year. One on 13<sup>th</sup> March was in the usual window of Feb/March/April for spring passage but one on 12<sup>th</sup> May was the first record for May.

### Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Spring passage records on 18<sup>th</sup> April WLF (1), 4<sup>th</sup> May EHF (1), 9<sup>th</sup> May WLF (4), 10<sup>th</sup> May Doddington Pool (2), 14<sup>th</sup> May WLF (2).

As usual more records on return passage with the first being at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> June. Then recorded on 11 dates at Sandbach Flashes from 17<sup>th</sup> July to 16<sup>th</sup> Aug with two juvs still food begging from their parent on 20<sup>th</sup> July.

The last record was of two at Astbury Mere on 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug.

### Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

Five flew over EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> April.

On 10<sup>th</sup> Aug 17 were over EHF when the 42 Black Terns moved through.

### Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

One passed over EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> April.

Only the 12<sup>th</sup> record for the flashes, the previous last being at WLF on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2002, Nine of the 12 records have occurred between mid-April and mid-May.

### **Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)**

*Rare passage migrant.*

The first bird was a juv at Astbury Mere on 8<sup>th</sup> Aug. On 9<sup>th</sup> Aug two birds were at EHF, PHF and RF. Then on 10<sup>th</sup> Aug an unprecedented movement of birds through the flashes. 11 passed over WLF in the morning, then 18 through EHF in the early afternoon, followed by a further group of 13 at EHF, who then moved over to RF – a total of 42.

The previous highest day count was 33 in May but the highest autumn max was only 16.

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

*Common resident.*

Common in most town centres with, for example, in Dec in Crewe 122 on Asda roof, 54 on Market Square, 15 on Nantwich Road and 20 on Fourth Avenue.

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

*Uncommon resident.*

At least six pairs used the nest boxes in Quakers Coppice. Breeding also proved at Doddington Park where a pair fledged 2 juvs in a Barn Owl box.

Recorded from at least 29 sites around the area. Only two flocks of 10+ with 50 at Tidnock on 9<sup>th</sup> Sept and 19 at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)**

*Common resident.*

Very widespread with records from 38 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas. Large flocks in winter from Sandbach (1200), Taxmere (1000), Doddington (700), Rode Estate (500), Marton CP (250) and Alsager South (210).

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

*Common resident.*

Common and widespread, being recorded in 35 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas and all of the 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. A max of 20 in gardens here with other recorded large flocks at Marton CP (31) and Stowford (32).

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

*Rare summer visitor.*

On 15<sup>th</sup> June one was reported on the pager network as being present at a farm near Lawton Heath End, Alsager, for the past two weeks. It was subsequently seen by many observers over the next two weeks and stayed there for several weeks, last date not known.

This is the first record since one with Collared Doves at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2000.

### **Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)**

*Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.*

More records than last year but probably due to increased coverage. Records from the end of April with two on 25<sup>th</sup>, at Blakenhall and Swettenham, 27<sup>th</sup> at Hassall Green and 28<sup>th</sup> at Smallwood. Records in total from 17 sites but no record from Arclid SQ, for the first time since recording began in 1981.

The last bird of the year on 25<sup>th</sup> Aug was also the only juv recorded. It was watched for 10 minutes feeding on a Wistaston allotment and struggling with a large wriggly worm!

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

*Scarce resident.*

Again an increase in records this year, probably reflecting a genuine increase in the population, with records from 22 sites compared with 18 in 2003. Successful breeding with juvs seen at five sites, with one brood of two juvs, three of three juvs and one exceptional six at Coppenhall.

From 5<sup>th</sup> Dec to the year end one bird appeared from the chemical works near EHF most evenings between 16.15 and 16.30, and hunted the railway embankment. Possibly one of the Coppenhall birds.

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

*Common resident.*

The commonest owl, with its favoured habitat of open farmland, and the most often recorded with records from a total of 37 sites.

No actual nests found but adults seen carrying food at two sites.

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

*Common resident.*

Common in wooded areas and recorded in 25 areas (only 12 in 2003 but 24 in 2002).

Breeding records from Alsager where two pairs, one with two juvs and the other with four, also Swettenham and Crewe Green where a pair bred in a barn owl box in an open barn and fledged at least one juv.

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

*Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.*

On 14<sup>th</sup> May one was watched from 20.15 to 21.00 hunting over a marshy field by the railway line at Stowford.

A series of records on Oct from the MGT area of possibly the same bird.. One was seen on MGT on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct, then one flushed from a rough grass field in nearby Coppenhall on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct and one seen twice at MGT on 31<sup>st</sup> Oct.

Also one at Arclid SQ in the evening of 31<sup>st</sup> Oct – the first there since 1985.

### **Swift (*Apus apus*)**

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

As usual a mass arrival in the last week of April with the first being two over Crewe on 25<sup>th</sup> – the same date for the last three years. Then on 26<sup>th</sup> at Astbury Mere, Arclid SQ and EHF, 27<sup>th</sup> at Blakenhall, 28<sup>th</sup> at Alsager South and 29<sup>th</sup> at Stowford.

Few counts at breeding colonies but still at least eight in a screaming party over St. Peter's Church Hall Elworth, venue for our monthly meetings.

Most birds departed in the latter half of Aug, with three late birds over EHF on 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. Last date in 2003 was 5<sup>th</sup> Sept – a very reliable migrant for timing!

### **Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

Recorded from 23 sites this year (14 in 2003 and 2002) but no indication of proved breeding this year and as usual many more winter records than breeding season records.

### **Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*)**

*Very rare passage migrant.*

An amazing coincidence this year with two records of birds in gardens and on the same day. The first was in Lawton Heath End, Alsager, where a bird was first seen around mid-day on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept in the observer's garden, feeding on ants on a rockery. Watched for around 30 minutes it disappeared but put in a similar appearance for the next three days, being last seen around 10.30 on 11<sup>th</sup> Sept.

The second was in Weston also on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept in the observer's garden feeding on ants but only seen briefly in the evening and not seen again.

There was apparently a big (relatively) passage of Wrynecks through the country at that time. The last local record was on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1997 at EHF.

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

*Uncommon resident.*

More records due, I think, to increased coverage with records from 20 sites this year (9 in 2003 and 7 in 2002). Most of the records are of birds 'yaffling' in Feb, March and April.

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

*Common resident.*

By far the commonest woodpecker with records from many sites across the area. Breeding was proved from eight sites.

In the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey recorded in 12 out of 39 gardens.

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

*Uncommon resident.*

Another good year for this elusive species with records from 13 sites (11 in 2003 and 2002). Probably most refer to breeding pairs but the only proved breeding was at Rode Estate where a pair and a juv were seen in Aug.

One lucky observer at Swettenham had a pair present daily from mid-June to early July feeding on a cherry tree in the garden.

### **Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)**

*Fairly common.*

Two very large flocks (or possibly the same) reported from the Weston area in Jan with records of up to 75 and at least 110.

Records in the breeding season from 38 sites.

Some evidence of passage over several sites from 24<sup>th</sup> Sept to end of Oct.

The only flocks in the second winter period were 60 at Weston, 11 at MGT and 12 at Doddington.

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

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

First birds of the year were seven at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> March, then on 21<sup>st</sup> March one at RF and 25 at Doddington Pool.

Breeding colonies at Bent Farm SQ (three separate colonies, at least 200 holes), Eaton Hall SQ (large colony but not able to count there), Wybunbury (where the colony has virtually disappeared, only five birds seen) and Arclid New SQ where about 65 holes on 27<sup>th</sup> May were down to 50 by 9<sup>th</sup> June and were apparently deserted by early July, the second year that this has happened.

The last record was two at EHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept.

### **Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)**

*Common summer visitor.*

The first bird was one at EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> March then on 30<sup>th</sup> March one at PHF and one at Astbury Mere.

Seven of the eight reported nest sites were in farm buildings, showing its reliance on such sites, and its threatened status as farms are converted to dwellings or subject to stricter hygiene requirements when milking. The eighth site was in a still unfinished house extension in Sandbath Heath for the second year.

Last records in Oct from Alsager South, Arclid SQ, Sandbach, EHF, Marton, Marton CP, Arclid where one was seen resting on wires on 17<sup>th</sup> Oct and the last were three at Weston on 19<sup>th</sup> Oct.

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

*Common summer visitor.*

The first record was of two at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, followed by two at Arclid Hollow on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

Breeds commonly throughout the area with large colonies at Brookside Hall Arclid Hollow (29 nests, three more than last year) and Leighton Hospital Crewe (at least 30 nests). Also many records of low numbers on houses.

Late birds were two at Arclid SQ and two over Sandbach on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct with the latest being two over Marton on 7<sup>th</sup> Oct.

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

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant. Scarce resident.*

Winter flocks in the first winter period included 60-75 at Arclid SQ, 45 at Stowford, 30 at Weston, 25 at Haslington and 22 at Doddington.

Five singing males at Cheshire's Close at the end of March and two at Mow Cop, both regular breeding sites.

Extended southerly passage noted on most days from beginning of Sept through to mid-Oct at several sites.

Becoming more common and widespread in winter with records from 26 sites and flocks of 100 near Haslington Hall, 60 on MGT, 34 at Stowford and 28 at Arclid SQ.

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

*Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.*

Early records this year with the first at Arclid Hollow on 5<sup>th</sup> April, followed by one at RF on 7<sup>th</sup> April and one at Weston on 10<sup>th</sup> April.

Breeding season records from 19 sites with proved breeding at six of those.

All birds seemed to have gone by 9<sup>th</sup> Sept but then a very late bird over WLF on 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct equalled the previous latest ever record of 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1987.

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

*Uncommon resident and winter visitor.*

Becoming more common and widespread. Overall recorded from 36 sites throughout the year, plus five gardens in the SECOS winter garden bird survey. Records from 16 in the breeding season, and proved near Haslington where a pair seen with a juv.

The regular autumn roost at Arclid SQ was much reduced in 2003 and did not form at all this year.

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

*Fairly common resident.*

The only large flock recorded in the first winter period was 100 going in to roost by the Crewe Arms Hotel.

Breeding pairs were noted at Arclid Hollow, Arclid SQ, Crewe (2), Hassall, EHF and WF.

Many more birds recorded in the second winter period. These were headed by the long standing Crewe Arms Hotel/Post Office/Railway Station roost that peaked at 300 in Dec and a roost of 90 at Marton CP in maize.

Other feeding flocks were Asda car park (50), Wheelock Sewage Farm (40) and Haslington (32).

Birds of the Continental race *M.a. alba* were recorded on passage from Stowford on 24<sup>th</sup> March, PHF with six on 18<sup>th</sup> April and EHF with one on 11<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*)**

*Rare winter visitor.*

There was a large influx of Waxwings into the country from Northern Europe in Oct and by the end of Nov some of these were being reported from our area.

The first records were from WLF with two there on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov and one on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. Then mainly from the Crewe town area with the first being two on 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec in Jubilee Gardens. Then on the 9<sup>th</sup> three in Ludford Street, then a single round Crewe Station on 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Dec. By the 28<sup>th</sup> the small groups had started to form a larger flock based on berry trees in Asda Car Park, with a max of 22 by the end of the year. Observers who had been searching all Dec for the mobile small groups could finally catch up with them as this party stayed faithful to Asda! To be continued in 2005!

Another regular site was the Clayton Bypass in Congleton where birds were present from 20<sup>th</sup> Dec to the year-end with a max of 33.

**Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)**

*Scarce resident.*

Recorded at the regular site on the R. Dane at Havannah, Congleton in the breeding season but no further details.

Also at least one bird was regular during the summer on the R. Wheelock near Hassall Green but breeding was not proved.

**Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)**

*Abundant resident.*

21 territories were recorded in a Common Bird Census in Crewe Business Park (18 in 2003 and 16 in 2002).

Recorded in 33 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey with a max of 3, and 38 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

**Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)**

*Common resident.*

15 territories were recorded in a Common Bird Census in Crewe Business Park (11 in 2003 and 13 in 2002).

Recorded in 35 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey with a max of 5, and 38 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

**Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)**

*Abundant resident.*

Consistent in numbers with 23 territories recorded in a Common Bird Census at Crewe BP (21 in 2003 and 21 in 2002), 26 recorded in a BTO Breeding Bird Survey in Congleton SJ8664 (28 in 2003 and 28 in 2002).

Also recorded in all 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey, with a max of 5 (all 39 and max 6 in 2003).

**Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)**

*Very rare visitor.*

On 13<sup>th</sup> Nov a male was seen in a tree on Newcastle Road Congleton, near Astbury Mere. It was watched for 20 minutes but not seen again.

**Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)**

*Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.*

Four birds recorded on passage in mid April, all males. One at Crewe Business Park on 11<sup>th</sup>, Crewe Green 12<sup>th</sup> and MGT on 18<sup>th</sup>, with another seen in the Engelsea Brook area.

Then one seen at PHF on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> July moved to RF on 20<sup>th</sup> July but was not seen again.

**Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)**

*Scarce migrant.*

On spring passage a male was seen in the Wheelock area on 25<sup>th</sup> April. Then on 3<sup>rd</sup> May a male and three females were on MGT with one also at EHF on 6<sup>th</sup> May.

On return passage one at Somerford on 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug and then all other records came from MGT with a single on 8<sup>th</sup> Aug, three from 11<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Sept and finally one on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct.

**Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

Just two records in March, with one at Doddington on 15<sup>th</sup> March and a female near EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> March. Both well watched sites and not previously recorded, so probably passage migrants.

In July a pair were seen a few times in suitable breeding habitat along Betley Drain near Chorlton but no breeding was confirmed.

Many records in the second winter period with a juv at Congleton on 10<sup>th</sup> Oct and three regular at the Chorlton site but most records from MGT.

A male seen from 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug to 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept, also 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Sept. Then two in mid Oct and on 31<sup>st</sup> six, with three males and three females – a record count for the area. One on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov and finally two on 4<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)**

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

First record was a single at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> March, the same number, site and date as in 2003.

Then several more records, particularly in mid April when there was a very heavy passage with a total of 55 birds in the flashes area, including 42 on MGT on 18<sup>th</sup> April.

Also recorded at 11 other sites on spring passage.

Autumn was nothing like as exciting with just two singles at EHF, 15<sup>th</sup> Aug and 9<sup>th</sup> Sept and one at Marton on 15<sup>th</sup> Sept!

Also an unusual record of a summering bird. It lived at Spark Lane Nurseries Arclid in the large poly tunnels from spring passage time through to Nov. It was a very brightly coloured bird, probably of the Greenland race, and could fly, although drooping its right wing.

**Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)**

*Abundant resident and winter visitor.*

32 territories were recorded in a Common Bird Census at Crewe Business Park (29 in 2003 and 27 in 2002) and 48 birds seen in a BTO Breeding Bird Survey in SJ8664 at Congleton (47 in 2003).

Recorded in all 39 of the gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey with a max of 15.

**Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)**

*Common winter visitor.*

In the first winter period flocks of 100+ were noted at Doddington (200), Mow Cop (120), Stowford (150) and Marton (110).

The first returning birds in the second winter period were noted on 9<sup>th</sup> Oct, with 19 over Stowford, two at EHF and one at FF. Then flocks of 100+ at EHF (130), Marton (150), Arclid SQ (200), Sandbach (150) and Wheelock (170).

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

*Fairly common resident.*

Two territories were recorded in the Common Bird Census at Crewe Business Park (two in 2003 and three in 2002) and ten birds seen in the BTO Breeding Bird Survey in SJ8664 Congleton (seven in 2003 and 14 in 2002).

Recorded in 32 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey with a max of three.



**Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)**

*Common winter visitor.*

Much smaller than usual flocks in the first winter period with most around 50 max.

The first birds back in the second winter period were eight at WLF on 29<sup>th</sup> Sept. Then flocks of 100+ at Marton (340), MGT (400), WLF (300), Congleton (200) and near Bradwall Green (200).

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

*Fairly common resident.*

Breeds throughout the area but usually under-recorded as shown by the records from 34 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

Post-breeding flocks of 21 on the cricket field at Rode Estate and 18 at Alsager South.

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

*Rare summer visitor.*

Two records this year of 'reeling' birds with one at Stowford on 6<sup>th</sup> May and one at Lower Withington on 16<sup>th</sup> May. Neither was heard again and so were presumably birds passing through.

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

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

First record was one at RL on 20<sup>th</sup> April (the same first site as in 2003) and at several other sites before the end of April, including seven at RF on 25<sup>th</sup> April. On 10<sup>th</sup> May a warbler survey at Sandbach Flashes gave a total of 25 singing males within the flashes boundary, including 16 in the RF/MGT area.

Also many more records away from the flashes this year with singing males in May from a further 12 sites.

The last record was of two at RF on 8<sup>th</sup> Sept.

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

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

First record was one at WLF on 18<sup>th</sup> April (the same place and date as in 2003), then two at WLF from 25<sup>th</sup> April. The warbler survey on 10<sup>th</sup> May gave a total of 12 singing males within the flashes boundary.

Few records away from the flashes, reflecting its more specific habitat requirements, with three singing males at Rode Pool and one on a reed-fringed pond near Bradwall Green.

The last record was on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept with two at WLF and one at RL.

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

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

First record from CF on 18<sup>th</sup> April, then at MGT on 19<sup>th</sup> April, Smallwood on 20<sup>th</sup> April and five other sites by 30<sup>th</sup> April. The 10<sup>th</sup> May warbler survey at the flashes gave a total of eight singing males within the flashes boundary.

Again more records than usual, with singing males recorded from 14 other sites. The last record was of one at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> Sept.

**Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)**

*Common summer visitor.*

First record from CF on 20<sup>th</sup> April, then becoming widespread from 23<sup>rd</sup> April with one at Alsager South, three at FFF, one at PHF and five at RF.

A very common breeding species again, with 26 singing males within the flashes area in the 10<sup>th</sup> May warbler survey, and recorded in 30 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas. The last record was one at EHF on 13<sup>th</sup> Sept.

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

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

First record was from CF on 20<sup>th</sup> April with the only other April record coming from Brereton Heath CP on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

A scarce bird at the flashes with only one singing male recorded, from the PF/FF area.

More numerous but not particularly common elsewhere, being recorded in 18 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

The last record was of one at EHF on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept.

### **Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)**

*Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.*

More records than ever in the first winter period when a total of 13 birds were recorded from ten members' gardens in Jan to March, plus three other records.

Difficult to separate winter from spring records but the first summer visitor was considered to be the one at Arclid SQ on 29<sup>th</sup> March, followed by one at WLF on 5<sup>th</sup> April.

A widespread breeder with, for example, records from 31 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas, 10 to 12 territories at Arclid SQ and seven territories at Crewe Business Park. The last summer visitor was at EHF on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept.

Far fewer records in the second winter period with records from just two sites, one at Crewe and one at Hough.

### **Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)**

*Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.*

Usually the commonest warbler and definitely so this year. First records on 17<sup>th</sup> March with two at Astbury Mere, one at Arclid SQ, two at Weston and four at FF, and then birds flooded in with, for example, 13 singing males at Arclid SQ by 31<sup>st</sup> March.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May a warbler count gave a total of 20 singing males within the flashes area, and birds were recorded in 38 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

Four winter records this year with one at Weston on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan, one at Alsager South on 16<sup>th</sup> Feb, one at EHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov and one at Middlewich in late Dec.

### **Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)**

*Common summer visitor.*

The first bird was seen and heard singing at Astbury Mere on 1<sup>st</sup> April, then three at WLF on 5<sup>th</sup> and one at CF on 6<sup>th</sup>.

Low numbers of breeding birds continue with a total count of only six singing males in the flashes warbler survey on 10<sup>th</sup> May. Also only six territories at Arclid SQ where usually around 15 prior to 2000. Recorded in 26 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

Three Sept records with one at Rode Pool on 7<sup>th</sup> being the only record of the year there, one at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> Sept and finally one at Weston on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, but the last bird was seen at Marton on 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, the latest date ever for the SECOS area.

### **Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Winter records from 11 sites plus nine out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey (18 + 5 in 2003) with a max of 11 at Alsager South.

However, a big increase in breeding season records with singing males recorded from 13 sites (6 in 2003) and a very surprising count of records from 26 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas! There will be some duplication here with the 13, and how many relate to April departing winter visitors is not known, but 26 are still more than expected.

### **Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)**

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

Last year's improvements continued with records from 15 sites with juvs seen and breeding proved at five of them, Arclid Hollow, St. Mathew's Churchyard Crewe, Doddington Park, St. Mary's Churchyard Sandbach and Walnut Tree Nurseries.

### **Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)**

*Common resident.*

High numbers continue with many flocks of around ten birds seen throughout the area in winter, with flocks of 10+ at FF (30), MGT (24), EHF (20), Arclid SQ (19), Crewe GC (15), Haslington (14) and Alsager South (11). Recorded in 28 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey, with a max count of 14 in a Timbersbrook garden.

Obviously breeds successfully but few records.

### **Marsh Tit (*Parus palustris*)**

*Rare visitor.*

Once again the only record was of the long-staying bird at Rode Pool. First seen on the feeders by the bird hide on 17<sup>th</sup> Sept 2002, it has never been missing for more than two weeks and only one has ever been seen so presumably it has never bred and is still looking for a mate! Never heard singing, it is presumably a female.

**Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*)**

*Scarce resident.*

Recorded during the breeding season at Taxmere (where proved with juvs fledged from a nest in a rotten elder stump), Biddulph Valley Way Congleton and Doddington Park.

Winter records from a further eight sites.

**Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)**

*Fairly common resident.*

Recorded from 29 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey and 21 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas, with breeding proved at Arclid SQ, Crewe (three sites), Doddington Park and near FF.

**Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*)**

*Common resident.*

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	15	?	112
Quakers Coppice	11	107	81
Rode Pool	3	?	18

An average year for breeding success after the disaster of 2003. At Quakers Coppice a productivity rate of 7.4 young per pair compared to only 2.5 young per pair in 2003.

One of the three clutches at Rode Pool contained a record 17 eggs, although only six fledged! As usual this is the most common bird recorded in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Great Tit (*Parus major*)**

*Common resident.*

Nest boxes were used at the following sites:-

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs fledged
Crewe BP	4	28	20
Quakers Coppice	8	65	35
Rode Pool	5	?	32

Again a recovery from 2003 although the productivity rate of 5.1 young per pair was still well short of the average of around 7 young per pair.

Recorded in 38 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey, with a max of 22.

**Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)**

*Common resident.*

Quite widespread with records from 22 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

Breeding proved at Sandbach old Waterworks (pair + 3 juvs), near Haslington (2 pairs raised 5 juvs) and Crewe Cemetery where a pair bred in a cherry tree for the fifth successive year.

Recorded in 10 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey, as in 2003.

**Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)**

*Common resident.*

Usually under-recorded but the increased observer effort due to the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas resulted in it being recorded in 27 out of 39 tetrads during the breeding season.

At Doddington Pool a pair nested inside the bird hide for the third successive year. Six eggs laid and hatched but sadly the nest fell down and was lost.

Not common in gardens and so only recorded in five in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

Nice to get confirmation that this conspicuous but under-recorded bird really is widespread during the breeding season, with records from 29 out of 39 tetrads.

Breeding proved with juvs seen at FF, Doddington Park and Haslington.

### Magpie (*Pica pica*)

*Common resident.*

Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, 11 territories recorded in a Common Bird Census at Crewe Business Park (10 in 2003 and 9 in 2002).

In winter recorded in 32 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. Winter roosts recorded in Feb with at least 25 at FF and around 50 at Crewe Business Park. Then in Nov 38 going in to roost in Crewe Business Park.

### Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

*Common resident and winter visitor.*

A common breeder particularly around old buildings with, for example, 25 pairs in Doddington Hall and a further 20 pairs in the old tower there. No counts of large feeding flocks.

The big winter corvid roost at Crewe Hall woods continues with a minimum count of 1300 going in on 11<sup>th</sup> Dec. A winter roost also at FF with at least 220 there on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb.

### Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

*Common resident.*

The totals at regularly counted rookeries were:-

Site	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
Crewe/Alsager	511	537	528	566	539
Foden's Flash	121	126	117	nc	116
Arclid	77	81	93	82	69

The large winter corvid roost at Crewe Hall continues but a count of only 1000 going in on 11<sup>th</sup> Dec was on the low side.

### Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

*Common resident.*

Probably the most ignored species in the area! Recorded from 38 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas. The highest counts in winter were 28 along the Salt Line, 15 at Alsager South and 15 at Arclid Hollow.

### Raven (*Corvus corax*)

*Scarce visitor and resident.*

More records than ever this year. The breeding pair at Timbersbrook/Rainow Hill was successful again, fledging four young. Pair present again but breeding not proved at Doddington Park.

Flyovers on 16 days at the flashes, including a party of six together over CP on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov, and flyover records from 13 other sites.

### Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

Few records received but recorded in 38 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas.

The largest recorded flocks were Stowford (400), Arclid SQ (375), Crewe (200) and Alsager South (150).

### House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

*Common resident.*

Recorded in 34 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. Data for House Sparrows from 18 years of this survey has been analysed and forms a separate article. The results show a decline over that period of 25% to 30%.

Large regular counts from gardens were Congleton (50), Blakelow (38) and Haslington (40).

### Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Numbers maintained or possibly slightly improved after the decline of recent years. Recorded from 17 sites (15 in 2003, 19 in 2002, 21 in 2001).

Max number counted at the flashes colony was around 30 but probably more since they are difficult to count there. Max counts at other sites were Haslington (32), Marton CP (22) and Stowford (15).

Recorded in three gardens with one at Swettenham recording a regular 15 to 16.

Six pairs used nest boxes at the flashes and of these four were double brooded but not checked for third clutches.

**Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)**

*Common resident and winter visitor.*

Common throughout the area with flocks in the first winter period at Arclid Hollow (150) and Marton CP (100).

Widespread breeder with records from 38 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas, although only six territories in a common bird census at Crewe Business Park (7 in 2003 and 9 in 2002).

Recorded in all gardens in winter in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)**

*Scarce winter visitor.*

Seven records in the first winter period with one at Arclid Hollow, two at Rode Pool and two at Gawsorth CP, and the others in gardens at Haslington (two sites), Middlewich (3 birds) and Weston (two males).

In the second winter period just a single at Crewe Business Park in Nov and one over WLF also in Nov.

**Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)**

*Common resident.*

A very common finch, recorded in 37 out of 39 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey, with a max of 50 in a Crewe garden and 40 in a Haslington garden. Also a flock of 60 at Marton in Jan.

A flock of 100 seen in June near Haslington contained many juvs.

The winter roost in laurel bushes in Crewe Business Park formed again with at least 120 in Dec.

**Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)**

*Fairly common resident.*

Holding its own or slightly increasing, with flocks of 10 to 20 quite common in winter. The only large flocks recorded were WLF (70), Alsager South (65), RF/MGT (50), Haslington (40) and Rode Pool (35).

Recorded in 25 gardens out of 39 in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)**

*Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.*

After a good year in 2003 there were far fewer records this year. The only flocks of 30+ were from Rode Pool (70), the Salt Line Day Green (40) and Weston Lane Crewe (30).

Only recorded in 19 gardens (25 in 2003) in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

**Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)**

*Fairly common resident.*

Much reduced in numbers from 2003. The only large flocks were 120 at Doddington Park in Sept, 75 at Arclid SQ, 70 resident in winter on MGT and 30 at Haslington in Jan. Records from 20 sites compared to 24 in 2003.

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

*Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.*

Records from 12 sites in the first winter period including 15 at Swettenham, seven at Doddington Estate and seven in two separate Haslington gardens.

Far fewer records in the second winter period with four at FF, three at MGT, one in Crewe Valley Park, one at Rode Pool and one at WLF.

**Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)**

*Very rare visitor.*

Just one record of a pair heading west over Bradwall Road, Sandbach on 21<sup>st</sup> June.

**Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

A wide spread of records and recorded from 24 out of 39 tetrads in the CAWOS Breeding Bird Atlas. Generally four or less but seven at WLF in Feb. Breeding proved with juvs seen at Arclid SQ (two pairs), Crewe (two sites), Doddington Estate and Wistaston.

**Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)**

*Uncommon resident.*

Again a welcome increase in records for this species that seems to be making a comeback locally. Winter flocks of 34 at Haslington and 31 at Oakhanger, but the biggest increase again was in the number of sites with singing males in the breeding season, 23 this year compared with 18 in 2003.

Usually less than ten in the second winter period but a post-breeding flock of 15 in Basford railway yard Crewe in July contained several juvs.

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

*Uncommon resident.*

Maintaining its recent steady increase with winter counts of 20 at MGT/RF and 17 at Stowford.

The warbler count at the flashes on 10<sup>th</sup> May gave a total of 18 singing males within the flashes area, including 11 at MGT/RF. Also 8 or 9 breeding pairs at Arclid SQ and records of one or two from around 15 other sites.

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

*Scarce resident.*

A welcome return of sightings for this species that was not recorded at all in 2003.

All singing males with two from April to July at Chapel Brook Fields Marton. One at Tidnock during July. Two at Cobbs Lane Hough during June. One at Pinfold Farm Swettenham Heath on 27<sup>th</sup> June.

## Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes

**Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*)**

One was in the Queens Park Crewe on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

**Cape Shelduck (*Tadorna cana*)**

A female was at Doddington Pool on 26<sup>th</sup> March and on 9<sup>th</sup> July.

**Chiloe Wigeon (*Anas sibilatrix*)**

A dark phase female was on Winterley Pool on 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

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

Two birds at EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov were probably an adult moulting into male plumage and a female.

**White-cheeked Pintail (*Anas bahamensis*)**

One seen at Doddington Pool several times during Feb, on 17<sup>th</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> Dec was probably a female.

**Golden Pheasant (*Chrysolophus pictus*)**

A beautiful male was seen occasionally in gardens in Crewe Road Winterley throughout the year.

**Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)**

One was seen at Bath Vale Congleton on 26<sup>th</sup> July, flying around and calling.

**Red-rumped Parakeet (*Psephotus haematorotus*)**

One bird answering to the description of the yellow mutant form of this cage bird was seen at Alsager South on 16<sup>th</sup> Feb.

**COORDINATED COUNT AT ALL FLASHES ON 25<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2004**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Flashes	15	16	Total
Little Grebe															0(1)			0
G't Crested Grebe	1				1		13						6		21(1)	3	2	26
Cormorant			1		7	2									10(12)		2	12
Grey Heron			1		1								2		4(10)		5	9
Mute Swan		2			2							14	3		21(7)	34		55
Canada Goose		111				43	36					74	59		323(367)	39	3	42
Shelduck			2			14									16(20)			16
Wigeon			52		178	223									453(772)			453
Mallard	3	8	5		37	286	8		5	9	28	11	15	15	415(329)	96	183	694
Teal	5	15			36	206					3			27	292(265)			292
Pintail						4									4(15)			4
Shoveler						4									4(7)			4
Pochard						1	1								2(1)	26	3	31
Tufted Duck	2										20				22(0)	33		55
Ruddy Duck															0(0)			0
Moorhen	3	11	5		5	9	6	1		3	2	8			53(64)	15	3	71
Coot	5	19	23		15	10	52	2	2	1	1	38	23		191(305)	28	10	229
Lapwing					12	514									526(295)		700	1226
Snipe	7		5			2									14(5)		4	18
Curlew						3	48				1				52(6)			52
Ruff						11									11(0)			11
Redshank						5									5(3)			5
Black-headed Gull			591		2	221	35				5	3			857(695)	300	100	1257
Common Gull			4												4(27)			4
Lesser B'back Gull			58			9									67(15)			67
Herring Gull			83												83(1691)			83
Great B'back Gull															0(68)			0

Flashes numbers in brackets are from Jan 2003 following a week of freezing conditions.

**SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

Total of all birds excluding gulls: sites 1-14 = 2440 (2485 in 2003) & sites 1-16 = 3629 (3516)  
On the count date, although cold, none of the flashes were frozen over.

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

## LESSER SCAUP AT SANDBACH FLASHES ON 3<sup>RD</sup> TO 7<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2004

On Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October Andrew Goodwin and myself had arranged to meet at Maw Green Landfill Site. After some time around the tip area we decided to check Railway Flash. Scanning the water with binoculars I picked up a variety of wildfowl including Teal, Wigeon, Ruddy Duck and Tufted Duck and then what I thought at first was another Tufted Duck but then realised it had a scaup-like back. I told Andy and he scoped the bird and confirmed that it was a Scaup species. Being only a hundred feet or so from the bird we decided to retreat so as not to flush it. We set up our telescopes and starting taking notes to determine whether it was a Greater or Lesser or possibly an Aythya hybrid. Andy also alerted the local birders.

Checking details of the bird it was around the same size as the nearby Tufted Duck. The head appeared peaked at the crown, not smooth and rounded. The upperparts were grey and very vermiculated and the stern of the bird showed a large amount of black. The bill was uniform blue-grey with a tiny black nail and a little black nostril stripe. The white flanks contrasted well with the grey upperparts and dark tail.

Reinforcements arrived with a good selection of bird books. These helped to eliminate hybrids of the Aythya ducks and so we could concentrate on Greater or Lesser identification features, particularly the primary and secondary wing bar colour. Difficult to see when on the water, after a while the Scaup was spooked into flight when it flew round the flash three times then landed. In flight it was hard to establish whether in fact the wing bar was all white or white and grey due to the rapid wing beats, so I was still not a hundred percent convinced. Paul Hill and Bob Brown had arrived with their cameras and were positioned at the edge of the flash to one side. The bird was still spending its time moving around, swimming and diving. Finally it stood up in the water and flapped its wings several times giving an excellent view of the wing bar. You could clearly see that the secondaries showed a white wing bar, whilst there was a pale grey bar on the inner primaries. So after three hours and twenty minutes we were all now convinced one hundred percent that we were looking at a drake Lesser Scaup. Both photographers had also managed to get good pictures showing these features.

The bird remained on Railway Flash until 6<sup>th</sup> October and then moved to Elton Hall Flash for the 7<sup>th</sup> October when it was last seen.

Mark Stubbs

*This was the first record for the SECOS area and only the third for Cheshire. The previous records were of a male at Redesmere from 13<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2001 and one at Frodsham from 19<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> September 1996.*

*Presumably what was the same bird reappeared on the back pool at Elton Hall Flash on 11<sup>th</sup> November and stayed until 12<sup>th</sup> November when it was last seen at 16-20. Where had it been in the meantime, since it had not been reported from elsewhere in Cheshire?*



## FRANKLIN'S GULL AT ELTON HALL FLASH ON 2<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 2004

I arrived at Elton Hall Flash after work on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September to continue the rather thorough coverage the site had been given lately by the regulars, and to hopefully add to an already impressive personal Flashes 2004 year list (130 at that point).

After an hour of scanning the flash the best bird to be found was a juvenile Goosander (a site scarcity). I duly telephoned Dennis Swaby as I knew he needed Goosander for his year list.

Robert Jones, another regular, arrived and walked up the road to view the salt pan from a different angle to myself. I started scanning through the burgeoning gull flock and after a minute or so came to a small obviously dark mantled gull. Realising this was something different I shouted to Rob, his reply being 'are you looking at that gull?' We joined forces and discussed the bird in detail with me resorting to my field guide (I'm not proud). We were convinced it was a Franklin's but making that first call to the locals and pager services was delayed until we had looked through the recently arrived Dennis Swaby's zoom lens. Small size, dark mantle, hooded appearance, white eye crescent – what else could it be?

The telephone calls commenced and within an hour about 25 birders were enjoying a flashes first. By dark approximately 50 had connected. The bird roosted and was seen early the following morning.

It seems sad (though not to local patch workers) but I didn't sleep well that night, the excitement of jointly finding a flashes first and Cheshire rarity running through my mind. The next morning on relating my euphoria to my wife she replied 'it's only a bird'. Is she beyond conversion!

The Franklin's Gull was a surprise but not a totally unexpected find. Local birder Dave Norbury had selected this species in the "Next New Species for the Flashes" sweep. The flashes list now stands at 233 of which I have seen 164 since my first visit in May 1998.

Andy Firth

*The last record in Cheshire was of an adult summer bird at Witton Flash from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> May 1987 then Rostherne from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> May 1987.*

## SPOTTED SANDPIPER AT ELTON HALL FLASH ON 12<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2004

Having spent the last two days watching some fantastic birds in North Norfolk and Suffolk, on the morning of 12<sup>th</sup> June I decided to visit my local patch at Sandbach Flashes.

Arriving at 6-20 am I first checked out Pump House Flash where the only bird of note was a single Little Ringed Plover. I then moved up the road to the main watch point overlooking Elton Hall Flash and the salt pan, noting that there were not as many Black-tailed Godwits as there had been earlier in the week, the best count being 660 a couple of weeks earlier. I decided to have a look down Brook Lane to check out the back pool and flushed two small waders from the mud under the willows close to the road. After a quick fly round they appeared to land on a muddy spit towards the back right hand corner. I located them with my binoculars, noting that they were two sandpipers. Getting them in the telescope the first one was obviously a Common Sandpiper; the second bird had clearly got a spotted breast and a yellow bill. At this point something disturbed the birds causing them to fly round the pool again and I followed them with the binoculars noting the spotted bird had a shorter wing bar. They flew round and landed in the original spot I had flushed them from where they were only about 15 metres away, allowing a very close examination and comparison. The spotted bird was noticeably smaller than the Common Sandpiper the spots went underneath and around towards the tail, the tail seemed shorter and the bill was yellow, as were the legs.

At this point I realised that I was looking at a possible Spotted Sandpiper. With this in mind I rang Andy Firth, getting him out of bed. After describing the bird to him he said he would be down as quick as he could. Ten minutes went by before he arrived, allowing me wonderful close-up views of a truly gorgeous bird. Just as he arrived the birds flew back to the muddy spit and as soon as he scoped the bird he agreed it was a Spotted Sandpiper. Just to be sure we called Dave Norbury, Mark Stubbs and Andy Goodwin. Andy Goodwin had been watching Spotted Sandpipers two weeks earlier in Alaska. They all arrived within 15 minutes and all agreed it was a Spotted Sandpiper. The five of us then set about contacting all the local birders and pager services and it was not long before the first birders began to arrive. The bird stayed all day, in company with the Common Sandpiper, through to dusk, but was not present next morning and was not seen again.

Somewhere in the region of 500 people had seen it by the end of the day and it had also been well photographed.

Ian Barber

*This was the second record for the flashes, with the first being an immature at Railway Flash from 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> September 1980. These two records also constitute the first and second records for Cheshire.*

## SECOS WINTER GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

The 2003/04 survey was supported by forty recorders. Three new members joined and two dropped out. Nine hundred and thirty-three bird/week records were produced by the recording team during the twenty-six week period of the survey from October to the end of March 2004.

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

Thanks are extended to the following recorders who provided all of the data for the survey (in survey membership number order across). Names in *italics* provide records but are not SECOS members.

Hilary Clowes	Bryan Perkins	John and Wendy Smith
Janet Grice	David and Elaine Meakin	Christine Howarth
Stan Wildig	Anne Davies	Christopher Price
Alan and Joan Soper	Joan Tilbrook	John Thompson
Colin Lythgoe	Megan McKelvey	Paul and Margaret Harvey
Ann Pym	George & Barbara Fisher	Lorna Pickstock
Barbara Hubbard	Bill Bellamy	Bill and Betty Brookes
Derek Owen	Alan and Linda Battersby	Janet and Peter Roberts
Charles Hull	Andrew & Doreen Bailey	Gordon Fleet
Paddy Bennion	John P. Barker	Alan Robson
Ron and Doreen Jones	Geof Yarwood	<i>Derek Leigh</i>
<i>Tony Coomer</i>	Paula Birchall	Cynthia Cadman
<i>Howard Nixon</i>	<i>Brian Sankey</i>	<i>John &amp; Wendy Fuller</i>
Sylvia Jarvis		

The ten most common garden birds remain substantially the same as in the last survey. The wood pigeon replaced the greenfinch in position ten. The remaining nine positions were occupied by the same species, albeit with the usual minor changes to the relative positions as shown below. The number in square brackets following the name shows the corresponding position last year.

Our current most common ten bird species are :-

1) [2] Blackbird; 2) [1] Blue Tit; 3) [3] Robin; 4) [5] Collared Dove; 5) [6] Great Tit; 6) [4] House Sparrow; 7) [8] Dunnock; 8) [7] Starling; 9) [9] Chaffinch; 10) [11] Wood Pigeon.

Long-tailed tits were not so common in this survey as in the last and the number of redwing and fieldfare records were only about twenty-five per cent of the last survey. Sparrowhawks and great spotted woodpeckers continued to be frequent garden visitors.

The garden rarities recorded in this latest survey include little owl, buzzard, yellowhammer, lesser redpoll and marsh/willow tits.

The level of support is at an all time high but new recruits are more than welcome and new entrant packs are available

The Garden Bird Survey provides the opportunity to do some bird watching in comfort at home, over a cup of coffee, so why not give it a try?

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

Trevor Clowes

## CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL BIRD ATLAS

This exciting Bird Atlas project is being coordinated by the county bird club, the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society. There are a few hundred volunteers involved in surveying all areas of Cheshire and Wirral during 2004 to 2007. The aim is to find all of the species of bird that are breeding or spending the winter in each tetrad (2x2 km square). This will allow a fascinating comparison of the changes in our birdlife since the first breeding bird atlas of Cheshire and Wirral, based on fieldwork undertaken in 1978-84. It will also enable the first atlas of winter birds in Cheshire and Wirral to be published. The data will also be used by conservation bodies, in reporting on the progress of Biodiversity Action Plans, and so on.

Fieldwork for the first year of the Breeding Atlas was carried out during April, May and June in 2004. This involved as many visits as the observer felt necessary to achieve good coverage of all habitats within the allocated tetrad, recording all species and behaviour noted, as well as the habitat type. Fieldwork for the Winter Atlas started in mid-November 2004 and involves recording species and counts, as well as habitat again.

So far as SECOS is concerned most of the society's area is being coordinated by Colin Lythgoe. This involves the 10km squares SJ74 Wybunbury (8 tetrads), SJ75 Crewe (23 tetrads), SJ76 Sandbach/Middlewich/Holmes Chapel (25 tetrads) and SJ85 Alsager (9 tetrads) giving a total of 63 tetrads to be surveyed. During 2004 a very creditable 51 tetrads were covered by a fairly even split of SECOS members and non-members. Many thanks to everybody who has carried out fieldwork during this successful year. If anybody is not yet involved, but feels that they would like to be, can give a few hours in the next one or two summers and winters and can recognise most common birds then please contact me – I still have 12 tetrads to be covered plus a few in adjacent areas!

The quality of the records received is generally good to excellent although a few observers are possibly pacing themselves over the three years to get a complete coverage! Most observers have indicated that they would like to have a second year on their tetrad, particularly to improve on the status of those species recorded i.e. improving to a 2 letter code and so proving breeding. If anybody feels that they have completed coverage on their tetrad, or now has the opportunity to take on an additional one, please let me know, as I said earlier I still have a few left to cover.

The results have all been fed in to the CAWOS database for future analysis but I have not seen those that were submitted directly by the observers. It is not possible, or even desirable at this intermediate stage, to do a full analysis of records received, but some interesting facts are emerging from the increased coverage. It is pleasing to see that some species are more common than was previously thought, including Tree Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail and particularly Yellowhammer. Those species that are difficult to see such as Lesser Spotted Woodpecker have stayed elusive, with only two recorded, but it was heartening to get Grey Partridge from three tetrads. Finally the most unexpected record was probably the Dipper seen several times on the upper reaches of the River Wheelock near Day Green.

Colin Lythgoe; SECOS Recorder

## CREWE BUSINESS PARK, COMMON BIRD CENSUS 2004

A census of breeding birds was carried out during 2004. A total of eight visits were made, all birds recorded and results analysed in accordance with the rules for the Common Bird Census of the British Trust for Ornithology.

The results are listed below: -

SPECIES	No.	2003	2002
Heron	✓	✓	✓
Canada goose	0	0	✓
Mallard	5	3	5
Mandarin	0	0	✓
Sparrowhawk	0	✓	✓
Kestrel	✓	✓	✓
Pheasant	0	✓	0
Moorhen	5	6	7
Coot	✓	0	0
Stock dove	2	1	2
Woodpigeon	22	20	24
Collared dove	2	1	1
Feral pigeon	✓	✓	1
Tawny Owl	0	0	✓
Swift	✓	0	✓
Kingfisher	0	✓	✓
Green woodpecker	0	✓	1
Great spotted 'pecker	1	1	1
Swallow	✓	✓	✓
Pied wagtail	✓	✓	1
Wren	21	18	16
Dunnock	15	11	13
Robin	23	21	21
Redstart	✓	0	0
Blackbird	32	29	27
Song thrush	2	2	3
Mistle thrush	✓	1	✓
Sedge warbler	2	0	✓
Lesser whitethroat	✓	0	0
Whitethroat	✓	✓	✓
Garden Warbler	1	3	2
Blackcap	7	5	7
Chiffchaff	4	3	2
Willow warbler	✓	✓	✓
Goldcrest	0	0	✓
Spotted flycatcher	0	✓	✓
Long-tailed tit	5	4	3
Coal tit	✓	✓	0
Blue tit	25	23	18
Great tit	9	9	9
Treecreeper	✓	1	1
Magpie	11	10	9
Jackdaw	0	✓	✓
Crow	1	2	2
Starling	✓	0	0
House sparrow	1	✓	✓
Chaffinch	6	7	9
Greenfinch	3	3	5
Goldfinch	3	3	2
Linnet	0	✓	0
Bullfinch	3	4	3
Reed bunting	1	0	0

### Notes:

1. No. is the number of occupied territories in 2004.
2. 2003 is the number of occupied territories in 2003.
3. 2002 is the number of occupied territories in 2002.
4. ✓ signifies recorded but not enough to give a territory.
5. Most territories along the brook include habitat on both sides.

### Comments

- New species were: - Coot, Swift, Redstart, Sedge Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Starling, Reed Bunting.
- Species lost were: - Sparrowhawk, Pheasant, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Spotted Flycatcher, Jackdaw, Linnet.
- Moorhen numbers were down since three usual sites were too dry to use.
- Wren numbers increased, particularly along the brook, so they were not adversely affected by the building works.
- Dunnock numbers increased by colonising the shrubbery around the car parks, particularly around the Focus, Genus, Barclays buildings. Wren and Robin did so last year.
- Good numbers of Sedge Warblers and two pairs probably bred.
- Blue Tits responded to the provision of more nest boxes with more pairs breeding.
- Reed Bunting was a welcome addition to the list of breeding birds, the first at this site.

Note As we approached nest box 30 on 26 May an adult came out of the nest hole. It did not fly away but hovered around the hole and then went back in. This unusual behaviour was repeated several times.

When the lid was removed and the contents carefully examined it was found that the adult had a strong but very thin thread around its body, around one claw, through a fairly large bundle of moss from the nest and around one leg of a juvenile!

As it was flying out of the nest it had been trying to drag the large bundle of moss and the juvenile with it through the nest hole but could not, so it went back into the box!

The thread was broken with some difficulty and unravelled from the adult and the juvenile, the adult released and flew away strongly and the juvenile returned to the nest. It fledged successfully several days later.

Colin Lythgoe

## THE HOBBY

This beautiful raptor, once confined to the heathlands of Southern England, has now become a regular sight over the open farmland and flashes of Cheshire. This is probably a natural expansion of its range and it has adapted well, although global warming may have played a part.

The Hobby arrives in Britain from mid April and departs in late September to spend the winter in Africa, in the savannah country south of the Sahara. It is roughly the same size as a Kestrel, but has blue-grey underparts, bright rufous trousers and prominent black moustachial stripe. In flight it appears short-tailed, has scythe like wings and is a sleeker bird. In fact when seen it can give the impression of a large Swift

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a rare summer visitor to Cheshire. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was not until the mid 1970s that it was recorded annually. Records increased in the 1990s with the first confirmed modern breeding record in the county in 1998. Today there could be up to 20 pairs breeding in the county, with 9 definite and 11 probable, including at least four pairs in the SECOS area, two definite and two probable, but because of its secretive behaviour this species is difficult to survey.

The usually preferred nest site is in an old Crow's nest in an oak tree. They lay two to four eggs and on average fledge two juveniles, usually around mid August. Insects form a large part of their diet and birds can be seen hawking dragonflies and flying beetles in spring and late summer. When feeding young in the nest the main prey items are small birds, including Swallow, House Martin, Sand Martin, Swift, finches and sparrows. Bats are occasionally taken as they will hunt well into dusk.

Sightings of the Hobby have literally come from all over the county but your best chance is from mid August onwards when young fledge and birds move away from their breeding areas. Equally if you see a flock of hirundines rising and giving urgent alarm calls there is a good chance of a Hobby being present. As for the future the status of the Hobby in Cheshire looks good and the population will continue to increase.

Mark Stubbs

## THE DECLINE OF THE HOUSE SPARROW IN CHESHIRE GARDENS

The national decline in Britain's House Sparrows has been well documented. During the last 25 years, data from the BTO Common Bird Census (CBC) and Garden Bird Feeding Survey (GBFS) has shown that this species has declined rapidly (Baillie *et al.* 2000). The latest Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) figures for House Sparrows (1994-2002) suggest that in the north-west the current rate of decline during that period was about 12%, very close to the national average for England, where the population has fallen from about 12 million pairs in the early 1970s to six or seven million pairs now (BTO News 242). According to data from the BTO Garden BirdWatch the number of House Sparrows visiting rural, urban and suburban gardens has also fallen (by about 40%) since 1995, (BTO News 244) and House Sparrows are now Red listed. Although the possible reasons for the decline in House Sparrows are many, reductions in over-winter survival, as a result, in part, of changes in rural and urban habitats is likely to be a contributing factor (Siriwardena *et al.* 1999). Since 1985 the South East Cheshire Ornithological Society (SECOS) has been monitoring the numbers of House Sparrows visiting gardens in and around Crewe, Alsager, Congleton, Sandbach and Middlewich from October to March. In light of the national concern regarding House Sparrows, the opportunity was taken to examine data collected at a local level to see if changes in numbers here mirrored the general decline seen over the country as a whole.

Since the start of the SECOS survey members have been invited to record the maximum numbers of House Sparrows visiting their gardens every week between October 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>. As members' participation varies between years, the number of gardens surveyed each year also varies, but typically ranges between 10-20, although during the last two years numbers have increased to 39. For each garden the weekly counts were used to calculate the typical group size for that garden and the mean number of birds per garden calculated each year from these data (Fig. 1). The number of House Sparrows visiting individual gardens varied considerably (range 1 to 60) depending on, among other things, the size of the garden, however, the annual mean ranged between 7-16 birds and has declined by about 29% since the survey began (Spearman Rank Correlation:  $r = -0.579$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ) (Fig. 1).

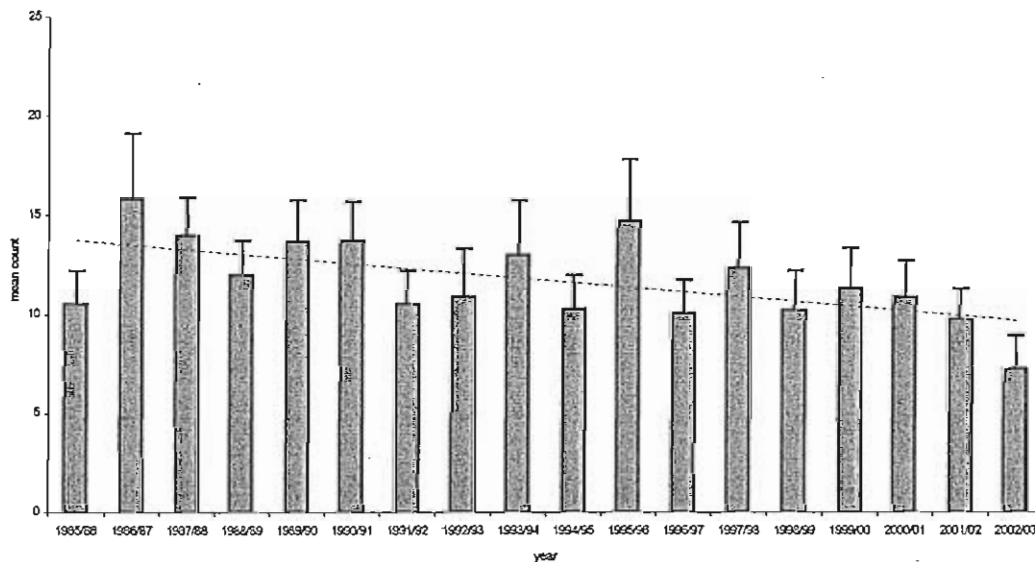


Figure 1 Mean ( $\pm$  se) winter counts of House Sparrows in Cheshire gardens 1985-2003.

Although these data show a clear and statistically significant decline in the average number of House Sparrows visiting Cheshire gardens, no data were available on either (i) the size of the gardens surveyed or (ii) whether these gardens were urban, suburban or rural. As both are very likely to affect the number of birds present, the extent to which these factors contributed to the decline shown above remains, at present, unquantified. There is evidence, however, to suggest that the trend is indeed a real one and of some cause for concern. Data were available from a sub-set of 'SECOS' gardens ( $n=6$ ) in which weekly counts had been carried out in almost all years since the survey began. Both size of garden and location were, therefore, constant between years and so the opportunity was taken to examine these data separately. The results were interesting.

**Table 1: Changes (%) in the numbers of House Sparrows visiting six Cheshire gardens between 1985-2003.**

Garden	Trend	Change (%)	Spearman Rank Correlation	
			r	p
#1	decrease	27.8%;	-0.398	ns
#2	decrease	45.2%	-0.532	0.023
#3	decrease	80.5%;	-0.803	0.0001
#4	decrease	87.5%;	-0.887	0.0001
#5	Increase	25.5%	+0.136	ns
#6	increase	245.4%	+0.611	0.009
1-6 combined	decrease	27.0%	-0.498	0.035
1-6 excluded	decrease	38.3%	-0.521	0.027

In the six gardens examined, House Sparrows had significantly decreased in three (by between 45.2% and 87.5%), significantly increased in one (by almost 2.5 times) and showed non-significant changes in the remaining two (Table 1). Overall, across these six gardens House Sparrows had declined by 27%, very close to the overall decline of 29% shown above (Fig. 1). To remove the effect of these six gardens on the latter, the data were removed and the changes in numbers recalculated across years. The picture was again the same, one of gradual decline (Table 1). Whilst the exact magnitude of this decline is difficult to quantify precisely from the above, an overall decline during the last 18 years in excess of 25% appears quite likely. Unfortunately, House Sparrows in the south-east of Cheshire seem, therefore, to be faring just as poorly as their cousins elsewhere in England.

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It is a good example of the benefits of bird recording, when something as simple as recording House Sparrows in your garden on a regular basis can provide data suitable for an important article.

Colin Lythgoe.



## EARLY AND LATE DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS

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

	ARRIVALS			DEPARTURES		
	Date in	10 Year	Earliest	Date in	10 Year	Latest
Species	2004	average	ever	2004	average	ever
Chiffchaff	17-Mar	13-Mar	8-Mar-89	28-Oct	10-Oct	28-Oct-04
Little Ringed Plover	23-Mar	17-Mar	5-Mar-00	04-Aug	5-Sep	16-Oct-85
Sand Martin	17-Mar	21-Mar	12-Mar-89	23-Sep	21-Sep	24-Nov-72
Swallow	28-Mar	27-Mar	19-Mar-00	19-Oct	23-Oct	30-Nov-74
Willow Warbler	01-Apr	2-Apr	28-Mar-03	1-Oct	7-Sep	1-Oct-04
Blackcap	29-Mar	2-Apr	18-Mar-97	20-Sep	16-Sep	30-Sep-00
House Martin	03-Apr	4-Apr	25-Mar-95	01-Nov	14-Oct	5-Nov-77
Yellow Wagtail	05-Apr	14-Apr	29-Mar-81	02-Oct	15-Sep	2-Oct-87&04
Lesser Whitethroat	18-Apr	19-Apr	21-Mar-00	17-Sep	12-Sep	1-Oct-98
Reed Warbler	18-Apr	19-Apr	12-Apr-97	26-Sep	17-Sep	4-Oct-98
Whitethroat	20-Apr	21-Apr	15-Apr-93	13-Sep	6-Sep	21-Sep-93
Cuckoo	25-Apr	21-Apr	5-Apr-82	26-Aug	18-Aug	1-Oct-86
Sedge Warbler	20-Apr	21-Apr	16-Apr-80	08-Sep	31-Aug	1-Oct-78
Swift	25-Apr	24-Apr	16-Apr-96	04-Sep	9-Sep	3-Nov-78
Garden Warbler	20-Apr	27-Apr	20-Apr-96&04	20-Sep	11-Aug	20-Sep-04
Hobby	06-May	1-May	27-Mar-94	06-Oct	21-Sep	8-Oct-00
Grasshopper Warbler	06-May	12-May	25-Apr-93	nr	none	30/8/??

I have selected 17 species in total, these being summer visitors that usually nest in the SECOS area. I have deliberately not chosen the spring and autumn passage migrants, since these times quite often overlap, and it is not possible to separate the end of spring passage from the start of autumn passage. Also some passage migrants are only seen on one passage but not both.

It should be noted that there is usually some uncertainty over the dates for Blackcap and Chiffchaff. Both of these species over-winter regularly and have been recorded in every month of the year. It is currently accepted that the wintering population is made up of birds who move here from the continent, whilst our summering birds migrate south. Therefore these two species do fit my criteria for inclusion.

Straightforward for Chiffchaff since there was a record on 16<sup>th</sup> February but this was considered to be a winter visitor since the next was not until three on 17<sup>th</sup> March, followed by several in the next few days. However, the records for Blackcap exemplify the problem. Records on 4<sup>th</sup> March and 14<sup>th</sup> March were almost certainly winter visitors but the record on 28<sup>th</sup> March could easily have been a summer visitor except that it had been in the same garden since 17<sup>th</sup> December 2003! So the earliest summer visitor was the one on 29<sup>th</sup> March.

One early arrival record was equalled with a Garden Warbler on 20<sup>th</sup> April equalling the date in 1996. However, three late records were extended and one equalled – are they staying later because it's warmer?

The records involve Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Yellow Wagtail and Garden Warbler (again) and are highlighted in the table.