



SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

2009 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes



**Ring-necked Duck
Phil Woollen**

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Editorial

Welcome to the SECOS annual bird report for 2009. As in previous years the report follows the standard format with the systematic list forming the bulk of the text and articles written by local birdwatchers completing the report. Once again the area produced an impressive list of species for 2009 with 162 recorded and the front cover this year is graced by the Ring-necked Duck which was only the second record for the SECOS area. This year we have managed to add another colour page with images of two of the Caspian Gulls seen at Sandbach Flashes, this site is proving to be one of the top locations in Cheshire for this species.

Food for thought in 2009 from my own observations is the continued decline of Little Owl certainly on my local patch and also surprisingly the reduction in Great Crested Grebe numbers throughout the area. Visitors to Sandbach Flashes will see that the days of risking life and limb to the road traffic at Elton Hall Flash are hopefully over with the creation of a viewing area away from the main road, this combined with the well stocked bird feeders should ensure any visit is worthwhile.

For this years report we have had the luxury of too many articles to include and thanks to everybody who took the time to put finger to keyboard or pen to paper for making the effort. Thanks once again to all the local birdwatchers who stock the various feeding stations which from the bird's point of view could have made all the difference in the prolonged cold spells in early and late 2009. Thanks also go to HJ Lea Oakes of Wheelock for the continuing supply of free bird food.

This year we looked into the possibility of including more photographs into the report but the production costs and so cover price would have increased considerably and with the report only of local interest just the Caspian Gull images are included. Finally many thanks to the birders who continue to report all local sightings.

Andy Firth

Contributors

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

Abbreviations Used

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

Status Definitions

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

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

BIRDING SITES

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

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

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

Arclid Sand Quarry SJ778623 ³

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings.

Astbury Mere SJ849624 ⁴

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

Bagmere SJ796643 ³

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

Bent Farm Sand Quarry SJ830621 ³

A large working sand quarry owned by WBB Minerals.

Brereton Heath CP SJ798651 ⁴

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

Crewe Business Park SJ720550 ⁴

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

Crewe Golf Course SJ744546 ³

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

Crewe Hall SJ735544 ¹

A very extensive area of mixed woodland and farmland.

Doddington Pool SJ714464 ²

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

Lawton Woods SJ825559 ³

Large area of mixed woodland including a lake.

Middlewich Lime Beds SJ711653 ¹

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

Mow Cop from SJ856573 to SJ873593 ³

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

Quakers Coppice SJ724546 ⁴

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

Rode Pool SJ815575 ²

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

Roe Park SJ858583 ³

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

Sandbach Flashes³

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

Elton Hall Flash SJ727596

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

Maw Green Tip SJ717577

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

Pump House Flash SJ723595

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

Railway Flash SJ718585

Currently two separate flashes with a marshy area between.

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

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

Warmingham Flash SJ719619

Heavily disturbed by fishermen.

Watch Lane Flash SJ727606

Heavily disturbed by fishermen but with two small reed beds.

Stowford SJ745530³

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

Swettenham SJ801675³

Farmland and mixed woodland by the River Dane.

Taxmere SJ780625¹

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

Timbersbrook/The Cloud SJ896627 to SJ900635³

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

Westlow Mere, Congleton SJ855644³

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

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

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

SYSTEMATIC LIST 2009

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Fairly common resident.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	6	4	5	8	40	60	64	54	22	18	20	31

Successful breeding from several sites with two pairs at Doddington, each with four juvs. One juvenile was seen at Rode Pool but it disappeared after two weeks. Regular at Sandbach Flashes with ten on EHF on 17th Jan. Numbers at Winterley Pool now always less than ten and one pair bred here.

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

Rare winter visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes in the early winter period two flew over RF on 11th Jan. Two flew over EHF on 26th Oct with one on PHF that same afternoon. Two more were over EHF on 4th Nov. Also two landed briefly on the ice at Brereton Heath C.P. on 23rd Dec.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.

Sandbach Flashes hosted a single with the Canada Goose flock throughout Feb and in Dec. 300 flew over EHF on 13th Feb. 60 were over PHF on 1st Oct, 150 over Crewe on 30th Nov and a minimum of 300 over EHF on 29th Dec in the usual winter movements.

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Rare winter visitor or uncommon feral.

Up to four were present in the early winter period and then infrequently recorded throughout the year at Sandbach Flashes. Now present in every month at Doddington with 25 in Jan, down to five in the spring but a flock of up to 42 present from Aug onwards. Successful breeding again at Rode Pool where a pair with two juveniles in Jun.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Common resident.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	210	80	190	85	101	101	97	223	54	221	200	220

83 adults with 27 juvs at Doddington and 85 adults with 24 juvs at Rode Pool. Still very common in the Sandbach Flashes area and a count of well over 800 in Nov was most unwelcome.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

Rare visitor or feral.

At Sandbach Flashes two were with the Canada Goose flock in Jan/Feb with one throughout the year. On 16th May five dropped on to PHF one of which was ringed. The ring was read and the details submitted, unfortunately the birds originated from a feral flock in Bedfordshire and the ringed bird was an adult female processed in 2005. One at Stowford in Apr.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

Rare visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes one was present on EHF from 11th to 21st Jul; two were present on 8th Aug with another single on 21st Aug. One, possibly the same, was seen flying over Crewe Green on 22nd Aug.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	37	55	56	42	30	24	24	1	0	3	12	45

On 25th May EHF held 25 juveniles from at least three broods. Winter numbers at Sandbach Flashes were slightly down on 2008. Singles at Doddington and two at Stowford in winter.

Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*)

Scarce visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes five were present (two drakes, three females) on RF in the early winter period with breeding once again proven with a female and eight juveniles present on the MGT pool on 13th May, these were down to two juveniles on 24th Jul. One at Rode Pool in Apr and three there in Nov. One at Doddington in May and a pair here in Oct and Dec.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	657	780	390	117	1	0	1	1	37	166	325	400
Doddington	31	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	18	6	94
Rode Pool	28	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	14

Another increase in numbers at Sandbach Flashes in Feb and a high count for Doddington in Dec.

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

Never common at Sandbach Flashes with seven on 26th Dec on PHF unusual. Exceptionally a count of eight at Doddington on 3rd Jun.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	360	510	174	109	4	22	6	150	246	293	160	270
Doddington	162	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	3	108
Rode Pool	20	9	13	8	0	1	0	2	42	66	35	40

At Sandbach Flashes the 510 present in Feb was the largest monthly count for some time and at Doddington the 162 in Jan was the highest count ever. Also high numbers at Rode Pool in the second winter period.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	117	125	75	52	212	120	200	1050	211	275	130	281
Doddington	529	213	171	95	70	176	280	330	228	410	335	600
Rode Pool	215	40	22	18	18	57	71	73	133	136	71	81

The post breeding flock at Sandbach Flashes in Aug for once became countable when all the birds flushed on to open water and this figure (1050) probably represents a more accurate reflection of numbers than some of the WEBS counts as many hundreds of birds hide in the willow scrub. Many birds were released on to small ponds on the estate by the shoot at Doddington.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	9	22	17	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	3	2

At Sandbach Flashes numbers slightly down on previous years but still regular in the winter months. A single at Doddington in Jan, Mar and Oct.

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

The first record of a wintering bird from Sandbach Flashes came when a keen eyed observer picked one out on 7th Feb. This bird was seen intermittently until 25th Feb. A female seen initially on RF between 9th and 15th Apr could well have been the same bird. A drake was then present on EHF on 14th May. Once again there were no late summer/autumn records.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	16	14	8	7	1	1	0	12	30	12	7	8
Doddington	9	0	2	0	0	0	0	4	27	36	46	12
Rode Pool	21	23	29	1	2	0	0	3	9	10	26	23

A very typical series of records from all sites.

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

Numbers continue to fall with a max of only 20 at Doddington in Feb and 24 in Dec whereas there were 36 in 2008. At Sandbach Flashes recorded infrequently and in small numbers.

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)

Vagrant

A probable 1st winter male put in a brief one day appearance on 1st Nov at Astbury Mere. Photographic evidence showed the same plumage details as the long-staying bird at Westport Lake and this was almost certainly the same bird having an away day from Westport since it was back there the next day!

This was only the second record for the SECOS area with the first being a drake at Rode Pool on 1st to 7th May 1978. The 1978 record incidentally was also the first record for Cheshire and the current record in 2009 is the 14th for Cheshire.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	84	138	114	87	63	49	109	48	151	177	140	131
Rode Pool	16	30	17	11	4	4	11	3	9	14	16	16

A significant increase in numbers at Doddington and at least five pairs bred successfully. Also bred at Rode Pool with one brood of four seen. Sandbach Flashes saw a definite reduction in numbers on CF. The only confirmed breeding was from here with four small juveniles on 4th Jul, a typical date for this late breeder.

Scaup (*Aythya marila*)

Rare winter visitor

A 1st winter male was first recorded at Doddington on 23rd Jan. Looking very tatty on this date, it stayed until 17th Apr when it looked super in breeding plumage.

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

Rare visitor

As in 2008 the only site to record this species was Astbury Mere with one there on 8th Mar.

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Doddington continues to be the main site for Goldeneye with 20 in Jan, 21 in Feb and 23 in Mar. Also 14 in Dec. One or two females were present in the Sandbach Flashes area on and off in Jan and Feb.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

Winter visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF/PHF	28	19	15	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	10	22

Numbers appear to have stabilised after a dramatic increase in recent years at Sandbach Flashes. Also regular in winter at Rode Pool with a max of nine in Jan and eight in Dec.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Uncommon resident.

Present in very small numbers at Sandbach Flashes and one pair bred raising three young. Up to six at Doddington intermittently through the year but no breeding noted.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

Rare except where locally released.

Regular at Doddington where released by the shoot. Sandbach Flashes held five in the set-aside (now removed) by CF in early Jan.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

Scarce resident.

41 seen at Doddington in Nov, where up to 60 have wandered across the road from the adjacent large shoot where many are released. A good record of at least four seen twice near Alsager, where none have been released recently.

Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*)

Rare summer visitor.

Only two records with one near Marton in Apr and one near Bridgemere in Jun.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Scarce resident except where locally released.

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

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Fairly common resident.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	8	5	9	3	6	9	13	19	15	10	12	10

Another year at Doddington with low numbers for that site; around four pairs and three broods noted. Two pairs bred successfully on pools near Weston. A count of five on CF in Sep and Nov was impressive in a Sandbach Flashes context and a pair bred once again by GF. Five at Rode Pool in Nov.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Common resident.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	1	3	14	14	19	20	23	21	31	30	14	8

Numbers are down at Doddington although breeding success was slightly better with two broods seen where only one in 2008. Last year's post breeding flock peaked at 70 in Aug but only 31 this year. Only six adults at Rode Pool but two broods seen here as well. Based on the last two years seemingly a declining species at Sandbach Flashes with much smaller numbers on the strongholds of WLF and WF and once again only two breeding pairs.

Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

Rare visitor

A single bird in breeding plumage was at Doddington on 9th and 10th Apr and also on 1st May.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Rare in summer.

At Sandbach Flashes little change with double figure counts throughout the winter months. Numbers peaked in autumn as usual at Doddington with 38 in Sep and 29 in Oct.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Scarce visitor.

After last years eight individuals at Sandbach Flashes a very poor two records this year with one over EHF on 23rd Jul and one feeding on EHF on 12th Aug. Not the increase in records expected for a rapidly expanding species in coastal areas. One was at Rode Pool on 25th Feb.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Common resident.

The heronry at Rode Pool held 47 nests this year (53 in 2008; 42 in 2007 and 39 in 2006). An increase in late autumn numbers of up to 19 at Doddington has raised hopes that the old heronry may be re-established soon. Ever present once again at Sandbach Flashes but little change in status.

Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)

Rare visitor

One was seen over Stowford on 1st Aug.

2008 correction:

One was seen over Elworth on 28th Sep

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

Scarce visitor

Five records from the Crewe/Stowford/Sandbach area in late May. One at Doddington on 1st Sep. Three records this year at Sandbach Flashes with one over PHF on 30th May, one over EHF on 2nd Jun and one behind EHF on 2nd Jul.

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

Very rare visitor

After last years blank at Sandbach Flashes a juvenile flew over PHF on 7th Aug.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

Very rare visitor

A female/immature was seen for a few minutes as it flew low over fields across the estate at Doddington on 31st July.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area with many records including the regular pair in Crewe Cemetery. Recorded in 34 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey.

Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

Very rare visitor

At Sandbach Flashes a male flew over PHF on 13th Sep.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Common resident.

Now by far the commonest raptor and seen on almost every birding trip.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Scarce migrant.

An excellent year for sightings. One at Doddington stayed for at least two days on 31st Jul and 1st Aug. Then three together here on 13th Aug with at least one still present the next day. At Sandbach Flashes one in spring and two in autumn. One perched in the locally iconic dead tree on EHF for fifteen minutes on 27th Apr with two fly overs, on 11th Aug from Red Lane Tip and 25th Sep from EHF.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area. At Sandbach Flashes bred in the MGT area with 2 juvs on 6th Aug.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Rare winter visitor

One was seen over the marsh at Stowford on 1st March.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Records from several sites, with juvs seen at Oakhanger, Stowford and west of Crewe. Regularly but never commonly seen at Sandbach Flashes with the first on 2nd May and the last here seen from MGT on 22nd Sep. A late adult was seen chasing House Martins at Alsager on 18th, 20th and 24th Sep.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Scarce resident and winter visitor.

Seen quite frequently in the Sandbach Flashes area once again but still with no evidence of breeding. Regular records from three near-adjacent industrial sites in south west Crewe over the past three years but again no evidence of breeding. Wandering birds from Stowford and Doddington. In Dec a bird was perched on the roof of Rail House Crewe, a site used occasionally over several years.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

In winter in the Sandbach Flashes area recorded from all areas with suitable habitat. Also several records from Stowford and Rode Pool.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common resident.

Breeds on most large and small waters throughout the area. Seen regularly throughout the Sandbach Flashes area with between 25 and 30 a typical WEBS count from EHF.

Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Common resident and variable winter visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Doddington	284	297	161	110	163	283	699	616	638	766	686	570

Breeds on many larger waters with big numbers building up at Doddington in autumn. At Sandbach Flashes 119 from PHF on 8th Jan was noteworthy.

Crane (*Grus grus*)*Vagrant*

One was seen flying over Stowford on 31st May whilst the lucky observers were looking for a Red Kite that had been seen there that morning! This was the second record for the area with the first being one that was seen feeding at the back of PHF on 3rd, 8th and 9th Nov 1997.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)*Scarce winter visitor and uncommon summer visitor.*

Once again arguably the most easy species to predict at Sandbach Flashes with the first on 18th Feb rising to a maximum of seven on 30th Jun. Two pairs at Doddington as last year but both failed this year with no juvs seen. Also at Stowford in Mar and Apr.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)*Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/ autumn migrant.*

A disappointing return this year at Sandbach Flashes with once again no breeding and the largest count being of 15 on 3rd Jul which included five juveniles. One at Arclid on 15th Mar.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)*Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.*

Another poor year with one's and two's only at Sandbach Flashes and few birds staying for any length of time.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)*Uncommon winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes in the early winter period one was on EHF on 27th Jan with 20 on 13th Feb and six 13th Mar. Small numbers also recorded in Nov and Dec with 25 on 1st Dec. A large flock of around 280, associating with up to 400 Lapwing, were regular at Doddington in Nov and Dec.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)*Rare passage migrant*

A welcome return of this species for the Sandbach Flashes area with a single in partial summer plumage on EHF on 16th Apr.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	1021	970	126	44	10	277	530	683	677	900	1500	750

Several pairs raised young at Sandbach Flashes but none were seen to reach adulthood. Wintering numbers were fairly typical. Up to 800 were regular on the Doddington estate in Jan and Feb. Two pairs bred successfully on a farm at Oakhanger where the RSPB have created special wader scrapes.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)*Rare passage migrant*

Two records from Sandbach Flashes after several blank years, an adult was on EHF on 13th and 14th May and a superb juvenile was present on EHF/PHF on 14th and 15th Sep.

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

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

Another desperately poor year at Sandbach Flashes with double figure count numbers being non-existent. One at Doddington on 17th Apr.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	7	8	7	2	0	1	5	8	7	8	6	8

At Sandbach Flashes once again a typical spread of records.

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

At Sandbach Flashes five were recorded in the first winter period. Singles were recorded at Stowford in Jan and Oct.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	6	47	22	4	0	0	3	18	17	15	10	40

Typical numbers reported from Sandbach Flashes. Up to 15 at Doddington and six at Stowford in winter.

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

At Sandbach Flashes very rarely seen unless flushed, three on 1st Jan from FF were typical. Singles were seen at Stowford and Doddington in Jan, where up to ten are regularly flushed by the shoot.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	2	11	29	70	1	40	53	8	1	1	1	2

As with last year 2009 saw a reduction in the enormous numbers of previous years at Sandbach Flashes but still fairly regularly seen in most months.

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

A poor return but typical range of records at Sandbach Flashes with singles on 12th, 26th, 29th Apr and one on 20th May. None stayed for long and none were recorded on return passage so a year in which this species was easily missed.

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

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	55	57	25	3	0	2	54	55	47	41	58	44

As with Oystercatcher a species with which one could set a calendar at Sandbach Flashes. Counts from all months typical. Also seven at Rode Pool in Mar.

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

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

In terms of numbers a typical year at Sandbach Flashes although none were present for lengthy periods.

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

In comparison with most passage waders quite a good year at Sandbach Flashes with the first on 11th May and then a minimum of twelve records before the last on 1st Sep. One at Doddington on 14th Aug.

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

Unusually a productive spring passage with ten records to early Jun at Sandbach Flashes. Common once again on return passage and ever present throughout July, Aug and Sep. At Doddington one in Aug and one on floodwater in Dec. At least two over-wintered in the ditches at Stowford as usual and the one over University Way Crewe in late Dec was probably from here, moved by the icy conditions.

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

Two records in 2009 at Sandbach Flashes with juveniles on 25th Aug and 8th Sep both on EHF. **2008 records missed in last years report.** At Sandbach Flashes two records with one at EHF on 9th and 10th May and another also on EHF on 29th Jul.

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

First recorded at Sandbach Flashes with one on EHF on 6th Apr and then regular but never common throughout. A fairly common passage migrant with several singles recorded at Doddington, Stowford and Rode Pool on passage.

Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)

Scarce visitor.

A minimum of 16 recorded at Sandbach Flashes with the first on 8th Feb and three juveniles passing through in Jul and Aug.

Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)

Rare visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes two flew over EHF on 17th Apr.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

Abundant autumn and winter visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	1500	1900	50	47	50	nc	nc	nc	1300	1750	1200	2300

At Sandbach Flashes the first returning juvenile was on 13th Jun. Around 9,000 in the evening gull roost at Doddington in Nov.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)

Rare visitor

Hopefully this species could be becoming annual with records from Sandbach Flashes once again. An adult was on EHF on 7th Feb and another on PHF on 21st/22nd Feb.

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Scarcer than in previous years at Sandbach Flashes with no counts of over 50 received. A very low count of only 50 in the evening gull roost at Doddington in Nov.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Maximum	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
EHF	200	180	400	234	380	800	nc	nc	338	472	130	350

Very common all year round at Sandbach Flashes with many sub adults seemingly staying year round, presumably attracted by the offerings from MGT. Up to 900 in the evening gull roost at Doddington in Nov.

Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*)

Scarce visitor.

Numbers recorded at Sandbach Flashes continue to increase with eight at PHF on 9th Oct especially noteworthy.

Caspian Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)

Scarce visitor

All Sandbach Flashes records (12) listed below:-

Adult 29th Jan to 6th Feb. 1w 10th to 14th Feb. 1w 12th to 28th Feb, 1w 12th Feb. 1w 6th Apr. 3w 15th Apr. 1s 1st to 9th May. 1s 17th Jun. 1s 30th Jun. **Juvenile** 19th Aug. **Juvenile** 25th Aug. **Adult** 31st Oct. All records came from EHF and PHF.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

In January of the 1000 plus birds present at Sandbach Flashes many were very dark mantled large birds with very heavily streaked heads and are presumably of the Baltic race *L.a. argentatus* instead of our resident *L.a. argenteus* race. Examples of this type were seen in both winter periods. A leucistic Herring Gull caused some confusion in late May and early June.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Another excellent return from Sandbach Flashes with five recorded in the first winter period. All were aged as 1st winters. The first was on EHF on 5th Jan with one still present on 26th May. In the second winter period a 2nd winter on 29th Dec.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Scarce winter visitor

As with Iceland Gull an excellent year at Sandbach Flashes with five in the first winter period. Two aged as 2w in Jan, two 1w in Mar and a long staying 1w from 26th Mar to 30th Apr.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes an excellent count of 245 were on EHF on 2nd Jan

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

Scarce passage migrant.

An adult in summer plumage on the evening of 13th May at EHF was the sole record from Sandbach Flashes. On return passage two juveniles were at Doddington on 31st Aug with one still present on 1st Sep.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

At Sandbach Flashes the first was over EHF on 6th May, 34 over EHF on 26th Aug was most noteworthy. Otherwise only infrequent singles were noted. Two were over Doddington on 1st Aug.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Scarce passage migrant

After no records from Sandbach Flashes the previous year an adult and juvenile together for an hour or so at EHF on 12th Aug was most welcome.

Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common resident

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

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

Uncommon resident.

Several pairs used nest boxes at Quakers Coppice. Up to 40 resident at Doddington. Few records of this species at Sandbach Flashes but double figure counts were noted with reports from EHF and CF.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Common resident.

Common to abundant throughout the area once again with large concentrations moving through in early winter. 3,000 at Doddington in Dec were impressive.

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common resident.

A common resident, being recorded in 49 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey with a max count of 11. At Sandbach Flashes a count of 66 on 11th Nov from EHF.

Rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)

Vagrant

On 20th Oct one was calling raucously whilst perched on a tree near the maintenance depot at Crewe Golf Course.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Scarce summer visitor

The decline of the Cuckoo continues with just two records this year, with one heard at Doddington on 2nd May and a juvenile from Alsager on 21st Sep.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Scarce resident.

Seemingly much scarcer this year at Sandbach Flashes with only eight or nine recorded sightings. Did however breed once again at a regular site here and at several other known sites in the area.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Common resident.

At Sandbach Flashes the dramatic decline in sightings continues with only three records from the whole year. One was by MGT on 1st Jan, one from the WLF bridle path on 10th Oct and one intermittently seen from MGT in Dec. Few other pairs noted and sadly one of a brood of three at Stowford drowned in a water trough. Data from the BTO indicate a 50% reduction in numbers in the past 25 years but it seems more severe locally.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

Common resident.

At Sandbach Flashes not commonly recorded again this year but that is probably due to the strictly nocturnal habits of this species rather than an actual decline in numbers. One hunting over MGT on 26th Aug was unusual. A pair still resident around the nest box on Crewe Golf Course.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

No particularly impressive counts from Sandbach Flashes and quite possibly a declining species rather than under recorded. See table for first and last dates. 35 birds counted at the breeding colony in Haslington in late Jun. This species needs a survey in 2010 to determine its current status.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

Uncommon resident.

Records from several sites and breeding proved at Rode Pool where an adult was seen with three juveniles perched on a branch. Also seen at RF, EHF, WLF, PHF and FF within the Sandbach Flashes area.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

Uncommon resident.

A good year with records from several sites and young noted at Wybunbury and near Crewe Business Park. By Sandbach Flashes standards an excellent year for this barely annual visitor, starting with a juvenile on 25th Jul in trees by Oakwood Lane, this bird was seen at various sites through to 31st Aug. It was joined briefly by an adult during this stay.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Common resident.

Recorded in 23 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey. Seemingly expanding at Sandbach Flashes with birds seen throughout the year from all areas.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus minor*)

Uncommon resident

Records from two sites in Crewe and also Rode Pool, all in early spring. Further records in Dec with one at Wistaston and one at Rode Pool.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Fairly common.

At Sandbach Flashes records received mainly from MGT with several breeding pairs. In Sep and Oct noted regularly from EHF with two's and three's flying overhead. Small flocks of less than ten from several other sites.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

A small breeding colony within the Sandbach Flashes area was found this year in a riverbank adjacent to CF, at least seven active nests were noted. No other breeding colonies were noted. The first record was on the early date of 14th Mar. 100 were at Doddington on 10th Apr in bad weather.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Common summer visitor.

First record was on 22nd Mar and then commonly recorded throughout with probably no change in status, although no large flocks were reported. 20 pairs bred in farm buildings at Meremoor Farm, Stowford.

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Common summer visitor.

An early first record with one on 27th Mar (earliest ever on 25th Mar 1995) but no big numbers during the summer except for 250 plus at Sandbach Flashes over the willows bordering EHF on 7th Jul.

Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

Rare passage migrant

Three records on return passage this year with one over Bradwall near Sandbach on 13th Aug; one over University Way, Crewe on 15th Aug and one over Stowford on 22nd Aug.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Nearly all Sandbach Flashes records from the RF, MGT area. Largest counts being 30 plus on several occasions in spring and autumn passage. Large numbers also at Stowford with 50 in Mar and 30 in Sep on passage.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

The first record was one at Stowford on 5th Apr and one pair bred here with adults seen feeding juveniles on 21st Jun. Six here on 5th Jul. Two at EHF on 4th May were the first of the year at Sandbach Flashes with three on 29th Aug being the largest count. One on 3rd Sep was the last record. A male of the Continental race Blue-headed Wagtail *M.f. flava* was seen and photographed at Stowford on 11th May.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Fairly common resident and winter visitor.

Numbers continue to increase slowly and recorded in 13 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey where seven gardens in 2008. A pair with two young near Alsager at a long-established site. At Sandbach Flashes recorded regularly in small numbers outside of the breeding season.

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Fairly common resident.

A field adjacent to PHF held an impressive 73 on 27th Feb. "White Wagtails" of the race *M.a. alba* were noted on 27th Mar (two individuals) and 7th May (a single). Typical returns for Sandbach Flashes. A big increase in winter garden records with records from 31 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey with only 19 in 2008.

Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulous*)

Rare winter visitor

Just two records, both from mid Feb, with 21 at Sandbach on the 9th and 25 at Crewe on the 13th.

Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Scarce resident

On the River Dane at Congleton in Apr.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Abundant resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded in 47 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey. Under recorded at Sandbach Flashes but no change in status.

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded in 49 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey. Under recorded at Sandbach Flashes but no change in status.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Abundant resident

Common throughout the area and recorded in 52 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey. Under recorded at Sandbach Flashes but no change in status.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Scarce migrant and rare summer visitor.

Just one recorded from Sandbach Flashes with a male (probably a 1st summer) on 11th Apr in a hedgerow adjacent to RF. One juvenile was seen in an Alsager garden on 26th Aug.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Scarce migrant.

The best year in recent memory at Sandbach Flashes mainly due to the coverage of the RF/MGT area by one or two observers. All records listed:- one 15th Apr (MGT), one 26th Apr (MGT), one 9th May (PHF), one 13th May (MGT), one 27th Aug (MGT), two 20th Sep (MGT), one 4th Oct (MGT). Also one at Stowford, with a female there on 12th May.

Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Recorded solely from the MGT area at Sandbach Flashes with one or two intermittently throughout the non-breeding season. Regular winter records from Stowford where two wintered in the early part of the year and up to three in the latter part. Also a singing male on 17th Apr here. Four on rough land along University Way Crewe in Mar and one at Arclid in Oct. Near Alsager a f. on 13th Nov was joined by a m. on 2nd Dec.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

A disappointing return from Sandbach Flashes with only approximately 15 on spring passage, even smaller numbers on return passage with the last from MGT on 30th Oct. Relatively good numbers at Stowford through Apr to mid May with a max count of 12 on 27th Apr. A good record near Alsager on 10th May with 3 m. and 6 f. of the Greenland race *O. o. leucorhoa*.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

The commonest bird in the area, being recorded in 1230 bird/weeks out of a possible 1272 in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Common winter visitor.

From Sandbach Flashes the 71 from CF on 30th Mar was the largest count in the early winter period. 200 at Stowford in Nov.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Fairly common resident.

At Sandbach Flashes recorded regularly but in small numbers throughout. Recorded in 40 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey (in 43 gardens in 2008).

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

Common winter visitor.

No large counts from Sandbach Flashes but much commoner than Fieldfare in the late winter period. 150 at Rode Pool in Jan and 120 at Stowford in Oct.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Fairly common resident.

Breeding confirmed at Sandbach Flashes from WLF. The only post breeding flock was 40 at Stowford in Sep.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

Rare summer visitor

Bird of the year for some at Sandbach Flashes was the reeling bird in a hedgerow bordering MGT between 22nd and 30th Apr. This was part of a large influx in the latter half of Apr. Singing males were recorded on several dates from Weston (1), Wistaston (2), Stowford (1) and Hough (1).

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes infrequently recorded after the first at TLF on 7th May. Three breeding pairs at Stowford and one at Rode Pool.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

Once again much more commonly recorded than Sedge Warbler at Sandbach Flashes with birds singing in all suitable habitats. Of particular note is the increasing presence of birds by Fowle Brook. Good records of singing males from elsewhere with three at Doddington, two at Rode Pool and two at Stowford.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.

Fewer singing birds this year at Sandbach Flashes but still recorded frequently, particularly from the FF and WLF areas. Wintering birds were recorded in 16 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey (in 10 gardens in 2008).

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)*Fairly common summer visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes only three territorial birds noted with one in a hedgerow bordering MGT and two by the canal towpath behind FF. The first was on 13th May with the last on 8th Sep.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)*Uncommon summer visitor.*

A good year at Sandbach Flashes with birds recorded regularly after the first on 16th Apr.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)*Common summer visitor.*

The first at Sandbach Flashes came on the 17th Apr and then singing birds noted throughout with the last on 9th Sep. A creditable 11 singing males at Stowford in late Apr.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)*Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes no wintering birds were seen so the first on 14th Mar could have been a true migrant. Widespread records from late Mar. Recorded in 2 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey. Winter records also from Crewe on 17th Dec and Wistaston on 19th Dec.

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

A slightly better year than 2008 with more singing birds reported from Sandbach Flashes after the first on 10th Apr. A very early bird at Stowford on 21st Mar.

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

No apparent change in status at Sandbach Flashes. Recorded in 23 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey (19 in 2008). Breeding records from several sites.

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

At Doddington a pair nested under the eaves of one of the estate cottages and fledged two broods, with five juveniles in Jun and two in Aug. Pairs with juveniles also at Warmingham, Crewe Green and Crewe Business Park. Just one recorded at Sandbach Flashes with an individual from 27th to 31st Aug around the viewpoint at EHF.

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

Common throughout the recording area although few large flocks recorded in winter.

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

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged	Productivity (juvs per pair)
Quakers Coppice	10	111	94	59	5.9
Rode Pool	4	--	--	--	--

A big improvement in productivity after last year's disastrous weather. See the later article for details. Sandbach Flashes had a bird with a deformed mandible seen regularly around the feeders at EHF in the early winter period.

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

Site	Pairs	Eggs laid	Juvs hatched	Juvs fledged	Productivity (juvs per pair)
Quakers Coppice	7	50	45	38	5.4
Rode Pool	4	--	--	--	--

Again an improvement in productivity. At Stowford 11 pairs used the nest boxes provided for Tree Sparrows.

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

At Sandbach Flashes recorded regularly and now frequently at the EHF feeders. Recent increases maintained and now recorded in 51 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey.

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

At Sandbach Flashes in the early winter period seen in FF. Two at Bridgemere in Jun.

Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*)*Rare visitor.*

The highlight was a pair seen feeding young in a nest behind the bark of a tree at Wybunbury Moss. The long staying bird around the feeders at Rode Pool was not seen after mid-Nov, but one was seen at Poolside on 15th Dec. Also one in Sandbach during Jan. Sandbach Flashes first record since 1998 was one in the Red Lane Tip area on 14th Aug, it was not seen subsequently.

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

Another very good year for sightings of this species in the Sandbach Flashes recording area with records particularly from the FF area. Recorded in 36 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey (29 in 2008).

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

At Sandbach Flashes regularly seen in FF. Generally under recorded, except in SECOS members' gardens! Recorded in 15 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey compared with only 6 in 2008.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)*Uncommon resident.*

Commonly recorded throughout the area, with FF being the most productive site at Sandbach Flashes.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)*Common resident.*

Around 35 in the regular winter roost in an old hedge at Crewe Business Park. At Sandbach Flashes 20 plus were by EHF in Nov.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)*Common resident and winter visitor.*

At Sandbach Flashes the large winter corvid roost in FF once again held impressive numbers of this species. Around 2000 in the corvid roost in Crewe Hall woods.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)*Common resident.*

The total nests at regularly counted rookeries were: -

Site	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Crewe/Alsager (8 sites)	423	462	487	472	460
Foden's Flash	127	147	138	136	131

The county society CAWOS carried out a county wide survey in 2009 with several members assisting with fieldwork. The results will be published after analysis by CAWOS.

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)*Common resident.*

Once again very common throughout the area.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)*Scarce visitor and resident.*

What a difference a decade makes! Up to and including 1999 there had been just 11 records of 17 birds at Sandbach Flashes, 2009 saw 49 records throughout the year. A similar increase in the rest of the area with many records of wandering birds throughout the year. The Doddington resident pair fledged at least two young and again there was probably a pair in the Crewe Hall/Stowford area.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

At Sandbach Flashes the feeding flock around MGT numbered one thousand plus on several dates. Few large roosts reported at either end of the year, except for 2000 at Stowford in Jan.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Common resident.

Increasing in some areas but see the article on the SECOS Winter Garden Bird Survey. Now regularly seen at the EHF feeders and possibly increasing in the Sandbach Flashes area.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Fairly common resident.

The incredible colony at Meremoor Farm, Stowford continues to grow, supported by the feeding and breeding scheme. Around 80 nest boxes have been provided and of these 57 were used successfully, many multi-brooded. The max count was of around 400 birds feeding in a nearby field! At Sandbach Flashes 52 around EHF was the largest count recorded.

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

The largest winter flocks were from Doddington with 200 in Jan and 300 in Nov. Also 200 near Alsager in Dec. The commonest finch at Sandbach Flashes though rarely counted. Recorded in 48 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Up to six in the Chaffinch flock at Doddington and five at Weston in the first winter period. A male found by CF on 1st Jan was most welcome. Very scarce in the second winter period, two were in the field behind the log book on 6th Nov.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common resident.

No significant records received but recorded in 42 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey. No obvious change in status at Sandbach Flashes.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Fairly common resident.

Two huge post breeding flocks this year with 300 at Stowford in Aug and an impressive 230 in a field adjacent to RF on 30th Aug, this was by far the biggest count of the year at Sandbach Flashes. Recorded in 48 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and scarce resident.

Widespread in winter but in low numbers with no flock of more than 10 recorded. Recorded in 21 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey. At Sandbach Flashes seen regularly in the early winter period especially around FF.

Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Fairly common resident.

The largest winter flock was near Alsager with 200 in mid-Nov down to 50 by mid-Dec. Other winter flocks of 70 in Weston Road, Crewe, 20 in Crewe Business Park and 20 at Stowford. Sandbach Flashes hosted flocks of 20 plus at EHF and 30 plus on MGT in the early winter period.

Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis cabaret*)

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Present in small numbers in the early winter period at Sandbach Flashes particularly around FF. A good flock of 23 at Crewe Business Park on 20th Dec. Recorded in 12 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey.

Mealy Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)

Rare winter visitor

At Sandbach Flashes one was identified with Lesser Redpoll in FF on 16th Jan and 17th Feb and one was reported from a Crewe garden with five Lesser Redpoll on 29th Jan.

Common Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)

Very rare visitor

MGT had two birds flying over calling on 19th Oct; one was seen briefly at FF on 30th Dec. Excellent Sandbach Flashes records.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Uncommon resident.

At Sandbach Flashes regularly recorded especially around FF, but also regularly from EHF. Recorded in 15 out of 52 gardens in the SECOS Winter Garden Bird survey, with one lucky contributor having up to five present all year.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Uncommon resident.

A slightly better year at Sandbach Flashes with five singing birds noted throughout spring and early summer. However, generally the decline continues with few records received.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Uncommon resident.

At Sandbach Flashes regular double figure counts from MGT with sixteen in early Feb. Breeds at several regular sites in the area.

Category E Species – Introductions or Escapes

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)

One at Doddington on 5th June.

Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*)

A single was with the Canada Goose flock at Rode Pool in Jun and Jul, the same place and time as last year.

Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*)

Two were on the fishing pools near Stowford on 8th Feb.

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

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

Ringed Teal (*Callonetta leucophrys*)

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

Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)

An eclipse male at Doddington on 2nd Jan.

RING-NECKED DUCK AT ASTBURY MERE ON 1ST NOVEMBER 2009

We like to include a report of rarity sightings in the area so that the circumstances are recorded permanently. Usually submitted by the finder this brief report has been prepared by me since nobody has contact details for John from Holmes Chapel who found the bird! Details have been extracted from the Rarity Form submitted by Janet Jones and the website of Phil Woollen, who has given permission to reproduce one of his images on the front cover.

The bird was found on Astbury Mere in the morning of 1st November and details put on the pager network. Several local birders managed to see the bird during the day. The following particulars were extracted from the description submitted.

"A well marked pale blue bill with a wide white sub-terminal band and a black tip. White thin line around the top of the bill. Grey wing bars showed well in flight"
The bird was not present the following day.

This was the second record for the SECOS area and the 14th for Cheshire. The first record was of a male at Rode Pool from 1st to 7th May 1978, which was also the first for Cheshire.

Comparing the images taken of this bird at Astbury with the 1st winter male present at Westport Lake for most of the winter it was the same bird.

Colin Lythgoe

COMMON CRANE AT STOWFORD ON 31ST MAY 2009

On the morning of 31st May I had found a Red Kite around Meremoor Farm. The bird spent most of the morning around the farm, over the adjacent fields. In the afternoon a small group of birders assembled hoping to see the kite. At around 15-30 myself and five others decided to walk back down the track.

As I walked down the track I looked up and saw a Common Crane approaching from south of the A500. It circled above the farm for around ten minutes before heading back south over the A500.

The crane was about 500 yards above us and the red on its head was visible as it circled. It was unmistakable being very large with trailing legs and a long narrow neck. The wings were large with dark black primaries, deeply fingered on a flat wing. The rest of the body was grey and the neck was black and white.

Antony Brydges

This was the second record for the area with the first being one that was seen feeding at the back of Pump House Flash on 3rd, 8th and 9th November 1997.

Colin Lythgoe

SECOS WINTER GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2008/09

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

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

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

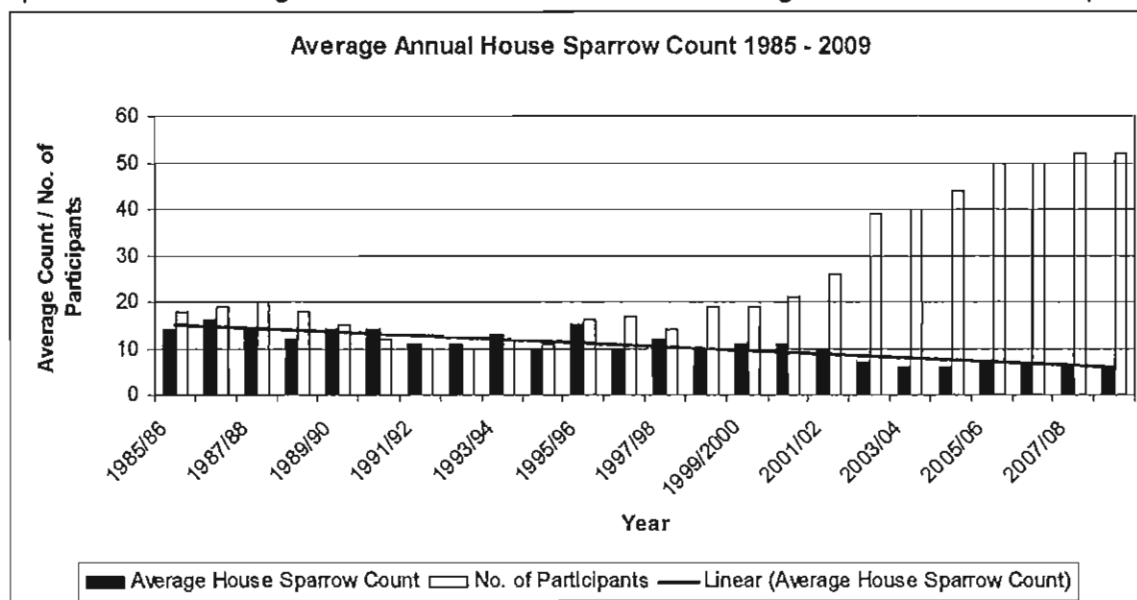
Again, Blackbird, Blue Tit and Robin were recorded in every garden surveyed. Wood Pigeon were only absent from one garden.

Dunnock records were up by roughly twenty-five per cent compared to the previous survey. Siskins continued to have an extensive garden presence over lengthy periods, often accompanied so far as this survey is concerned by the less common Lesser Redpolls. Treecreeper records increased by a factor of three gained from three times more gardens than previously. Brambling records were also far more numerous in this survey.

Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Marsh/Willow Tit were all recorded, having been absent last time.

Fieldfares were more common garden visitors than Redwings in this survey, turning up in twice as many gardens as in the last survey and similarly doubling their count. Redwing numbers on the other hand remained at their previous level. Great Spotted Woodpeckers continued to be frequent garden visitors. Blackcap numbers made a substantial recovery.

The statistics extracted from the twenty-four years of garden bird surveys for House Sparrows and Starlings continue to show a trend of declining headcounts over that period.



The Next Survey

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

Trevor Clowes

URBAN BIRDING - CONTINUED

Following on from my article in last year's SECOS bird report regarding birding in urban Crewe, I decided this year to watch an area of wasteland off University Way as my urban local patch.

As it was a relatively small area I could easily cover it in a short period of time, so I decided to do early morning visits at weekends. The area consisted of a small wood which backed onto open fields leading to Crewe Hall Estate and a large scrub area with small trees scattered in amongst it, a tree-lined stream, a warehouse factory unit and the road itself. There's also a fair amount of bare ground, rubble and a disused tarmacked road waiting for development to continue in the area.

Apart from the commoner birds you'd expect to encounter, several highlights included Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (heard calling only), Stonechat, Spotted Flycatcher, Green Woodpecker, Reed Bunting, Garden, Sedge and Reed Warbler. However the best sighting must go to a flyover Tree Pipit, first heard calling and then seen well. Kingfisher, Wheatear, Whinchat, Little Owl, Yellowhammer and Hobby were also seen.

Pre-dawn and dusk visits produced sightings of Tawny Owl, but no sign of any Barn Owls, although they may use the area for hunting as they are found nearby.

Birds seen on most visits were Great Spotted Woodpecker, Bullfinch, Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Coal Tit, Jay, Stock Dove, and Linnet. Summer migrants noted were Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat, with Swift, Swallow and House Martin seen hunting overhead.

In both winter periods, Siskin and Lesser Redpoll were seen. Also a charm of Goldfinches often feeding on thistle heads. Along the avenue of trees riverside a Long-tailed Tit flock were often obvious and the trees also held other tit species and the occasional Goldcrest. Late summer, autumn fly overs included Meadow Pipits and even the odd Skylark, also a skein of seventy Pink-footed Geese were seen heading north in November.

Grey Wagtails appeared along with the more numerous Pied Wagtails, often perching on the factory roof (maximum of three).

It's also worth mentioning that Crewe Hall Estate woods hold a large Corvid and Wood Pigeon roost and it's an impressive sight when these birds gather and disperse at dawn and dusk. One evening this even attracted a Peregrine.

Other Raptors such as Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel hunt regularly over the waste ground as all of these species breed on the nearby estate along with Pheasants which are released for shooting purposes and escapees are seen here but are more often heard. Mallard and Moorhen breed on the nearby business park but can be seen on the river along with Grey Heron.

In all a varied selection of birds were seen throughout the year but unfortunately it's only a matter of time before this area is developed as the land is up for sale and I'm in no doubt it will end up with factory units on it, which are in evidence nearby but I will continue to watch here for as long as possible.

It's worth mentioning that away from this area I have had a couple of exceptional sightings of birds in urban Crewe this year.

First there was a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on Macon Meadows, and I was also fortunate enough to see a flyover Ruddy Shelduck. The status of this bird is questionable but it coincided with several birds seen in Cheshire and one the previous day at Sandbach Flashes was probably the same individual.

Incidentally local birder Bob Brown not only had a Willow Tit in his garden in Birch Avenue but also a Mealy Redpoll using his feeding station. My brother Noel Stubbs saw a Red Kite being mobbed by a Crow from his bedroom window in Westminster Street in the middle of Crewe town and it was seen a short while later at Sandbach Flashes. These sightings just demonstrate what can be found and flies over urban locations.

Finally it's not just about the birds, I was lucky enough to see a badger early one morning in November, whilst I was locking my bike up at the gateway from Crewe Business Park to University Way.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN ON UNIVERSITY WAY WASTEGROUND

Mute Swan*	Skylark*	Long-tailed Tit
Canada Goose*	Swallow	Blue Tit
Pink footed Goose*	House Martin	Great Tit
Mallard	Tree Pipit*	Coal Tit
Pheasant	Meadow Pipit	Nuthatch
Grey Heron	Grey Wagtail	Treecreeper
Sparrowhawk	Pied Wagtail	Jay
Buzzard	Cormorant*	Magpie
Kestrel	Wren	Jackdaw
Peregrine	Dunnock	Rook
Moorhen	Robin	Crow
Lapwing*	Stonechat	Raven*
Snipe*	Blackbird	Starling
Green Sandpiper*	Fieldfare	House Sparrow
Black-headed Gull*	Song Thrush	Chaffinch
Common Gull*	Redwing	Greenfinch
Lesser Black-backed Gull*	Mistle Thrush	Goldfinch
Herring Gull*	Sedge Warbler	Siskin
Feral Pigeon	Reed Warbler	Linnet
Stock Dove	Blackcap	Lesser Redpoll
Woodpigeon	Garden Warbler	Bullfinch
Collared Dove	Lesser Whitethroat	Reed Bunting
Swift	Whitethroat	
Tawny Owl	Chiffchaff	
Kingfisher	Willow Warbler	Total 77 species
Green Woodpecker	Goldcrest	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Spotted Flycatcher	
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**		

* Birds seen flying over but not using the area. Swifts, hirundines and raptors did use the area for hunting purposes.

** Species heard only.

QUAKERS COPPICE – NEST BOX REPORT 2009

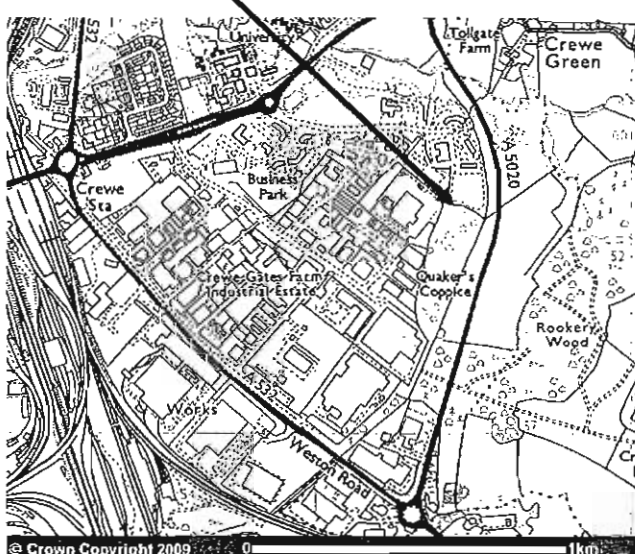
For those of you new to the Society and / or reading our Annual Report for the first time, here's some background about the Nature Reserve we have been able to track down.

It is described as: -

" 5.4 hectares of deciduous woodland with ponds".

" .. owned by the local authority & managed by Cheshire Wildlife Trust since May 1986. The woodland extends to approximately 12 acres and stands on heavy clay. The signs are that the wood consists of secondary woodland on an ancient woodland site."

p.s. – site appears on the Tithe Maps of 1836–51 (Crewe Library) in the same 'shape' as today. The woods are best accessed from the path leading from Mallard Close, off Electra Way.



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Ordnance Survey Map of 1882

The following is a section of a report written by Colin Lythgoe in December 2008 to staff managing the reserve ...

"Nest boxes were first provided at Quakers Coppice in 1985 by Cheshire Wildlife Trust, who managed the area for the owners, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council. They were numbered 1 to 16. Additional small hole boxes were provided by Colin Lythgoe in 1988 and 1991.

Several large hole boxes specifically for Stock Doves were provided in 1991. These were monitored in detail from April to September each year from 1991 to 2001. Juveniles were ringed in the nest each year but there were no recoveries. Nest box use has been monitored since 1985 by Colin Lythgoe and Bryan Perkins. When one considers the heavy usage of Quakers Coppice by dog walkers and the subsequent limited ground vegetation, the following extract from a leaflet produced by Cheshire Wildlife Trust in 1985 is interesting. *"The reserve is closed during the main nesting season March to June inclusive. Damage and disturbance to birds and other wildlife is minimised at other times of the year if visitors would please keep to the paths. Please note that dogs are not allowed on the reserve."*

There are a number of obvious changes that have occurred for reasons not known:

- Since 2004 the number of pairs of Blue Tits increased significantly.
- Since 2001 the number of pairs of Great Tits increased very significantly.
- Since 2003 the productivity of both species has decreased. The changing weather patterns affecting the availability of food for young will have definitely had some effect. Also the final outcome of fledged young was not monitored quite so closely before that year.

When Colin first visited the area in the early 1980s there were no paths, ground vegetation was mainly dense brambles and it was difficult to walk in the wood!

Those of you who have visited the reserve in 2009 will have seen the creation of a grit path, numerous footbridges and a pond-dipping platform. Much of the new path is on a different route to that already trodden. Also visible is the route taken by equipment used by the workmen. The consequence of this was there was little or no ground vegetation to be seen during the breeding season. Sufficient live food for the chicks must have been extremely difficult to come across for the adults. The site is used heavily by dog walkers, and also by pedestrians and cyclists, so the vegetation and wildlife suffers much disturbance. If the wildlife, particularly ground nesting birds and small mammals, are to be encouraged to use the reserve I feel there needs to be additional 'protection'. Perhaps the middle could be fenced off to allow the ground vegetation to regenerate – similar to that in operation on Wigg Island.

The last page of this section shows in table form the nest box breeding productivity. Not shown in the table is the box number used by a species, its height above the ground, its orientation or the species of tree it's on. For those considering erecting a small hole nest box in their garden, below are some observations we have drawn from the data - *bearing in mind it is not a 'controlled' study.*

- All are between 4 & 6 metres off the ground
- 60% are on Oak, 20% on Hornbeam, the rest either on Alder, Horse or Sweet Chestnut
- orientation is evenly spread from East through North to West
- of the 5 boxes used by the same species **each year** since 2003,
 - Great Tit prefer Oak or Alder (exclusively)
 - while Blue Tit only used Oak

Our other observations:-

2008 was a particularly bad year for Tit breeding success, but 2009 was about average. 2009 saw the highest productivity in 5 years for Blue Tits and in 7 years for Great Tits. Stock Dove data is incomplete due to the length of the breeding season, but records (& our observations when cleaning the boxes before the start of the breeding season) suggest that all young successfully fledged. The larger boxes they use are generally higher off the ground and their food different, suggesting that the Stock Doves are less susceptible to human / dog disturbance and less dependant on weather conditions for raising young. Typically they raise 2 chicks and commonly the boxes are used throughout their breeding season, but not necessarily by the same pair to raise other broods.

Bill Fox and John Thompson

Quakers Coppice Small Nest Box Breeding Productivity

Year	Blue Tit				Productivity (i.e. fledges ÷ nests)	1 st egg date
	No. of nests	Eggs	Hatched	Fledges		
1985	6	53		50	8.2	
1986	6	66		55	9.2	
1987	5	57		56	11.2	
1988	9	94		88	11	
1989	9	76		62	6.9	
1990	6	58		56	9.3	
1991	9	65		58	6.4	
1992	8	83		57	7.1	
1993	8	89		81	10.1	
1994	8	72		52	6.5	
1995	10	96		66	6.6	
1996	8	79		54	6	
1997	8	73		67	8.4	
1998	7	65		29	4.1	
1999	8	77		40	5	
2000	11	134	124	104	9.5	
2001	8	93		64	8	28-Apr
2002	9	100		78	8.7	14-Apr
2003	8	74		20	2.5	22-Apr
2004	11	107		81	7.4	23-Apr
2005	12	103	84	26	2.2	24-Apr
2006	14	133	99	54	3.9	26-Apr
2007	12	108	86	55	4.6	18-Apr
2008	10	90	76	8	0.8	28-Apr
2009	10	111	94	59	5.9	05-Apr
Average	8.8	86.2	93.8	56.8	6.8	20-Apr

Year	Great Tit				Productivity (i.e. fledges ÷ nests)	1 st egg date
	No. of nests	Eggs	Hatched	Fledges		
1985						
1986	1	10		9	9	
1987	1	8		8	8	
1988						
1989						
1990	1	10		10	10	
1991	2	16		13	6.5	
1992	3	27		26	8.7	
1993	3	26		16	5.3	
1994	1	8		6	6	
1995	3	19		13	4.3	
1996	2	12		4	2	
1997	3	27		25	8.3	
1998	3	21		16	5.3	
1999	3	19		14	4.7	
2000	2	13	13	13	6.5	
2001	6	40		22	3.7	03-May
2002	7	56		51	7.3	22-Apr
2003	9	53		26	2.9	27-Apr
2004	8	65		35	4.4	23-Apr
2005	5	32	23	5	1	25-Apr
2006	7	50	20	16	2.3	29-Apr
2007	6	36	33	21	3.5	23-Apr
2008	7	45	32	12	1.7	03-May
2009	7	50	45	38	5.4	16-Apr
Average	4.1	29.2	27.7	18.1	5.3	25-Apr

EARLY AND LATE DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS

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

Species	ARRIVALS			DEPARTURES		
	Date in	10 Year	Earliest	Date in	10 Year	Latest
	2009	average	ever	2009	average	ever
Little Ringed Plover	13-Mar	17-Mar	05-Mar-00	01-Sep	01-Sep	16-Oct-85
Sand Martin	14-Mar	18-Mar	11-Mar-08	03-Sep	20-Sep	24-Nov-72
Swallow	22-Mar	24-Mar	10-Feb-07	14-Oct	21-Oct	30-Nov-74
Willow Warbler	21-Mar	01-Apr	21-Mar-09	12-Sep	04-Sep	27-Sep-08
House Martin	27-Mar	04-Apr	25-Mar-95	11-Oct	13-Oct	05-Nov-77
Yellow Wagtail	05-Apr	13-Apr	29-Mar-81	06-Sep	20-Sep	27-Oct-06
Lesser Whitethroat	16-Apr	15-Apr	21-Mar-00	07-Sep	13-Sep	01-Oct-98
Sedge Warbler	19-Apr	20-Apr	16-Apr-80	30-Aug	05-Sep	01-Oct-78
Reed Warbler	11-Apr	21-Apr	11-Apr-09	20-Sep	15-Sep	04-Oct-98
Whitethroat	17-Apr	21-Apr	15-Apr-93	09-Sep	07-Sep	21-Sep-93
Cuckoo	02-May	23-Apr	05-Apr-82	nr	17-Aug	01-Oct-86
Swift	26-Apr	23-Apr	16-Apr-96	06-Sep	07-Sep	03-Nov-78
Garden Warbler	16-Apr	26-Apr	16-Apr-09	08-Sep	26-Aug	09-Sep-83
Hobby	30-Apr	30-Apr	27-Mar-94	24-Sep	26-Sep	08-Oct-00
Grasshopper Warbler	15-Apr	01-May	15-Apr-09	nr	nr	30/8/??

nr signifies no record in the current year.

We have selected 15 species in total, these being summer visitors that usually nest in the SECOS area. We have deliberately not chosen the spring and autumn passage migrants, since these times quite often overlap, and it is not always possible to separate the end of spring passage from the start of autumn passage. Also some passage migrants are only seen on one passage and not both.

From this year we have removed Blackcap and Chiffchaff from the table as we are receiving more reports from the winter period and it is not safe to assume birds singing, for example in early March are true trans continental migrants and not just birds wintering further south in the UK. Equally reports of Chiffchaff in November and December are not unknown and Blackcap is now a regular wintering species.

A good year for record breaking with dates improved for four species, all early arrivals. The biggest increase was for Willow Warbler with a very early one at Stowford on 21st March, beating the previous record by seven days. Also noteworthy is Grasshopper Warbler where the earliest ever date was beaten for the second consecutive year and by a good six days. The other two species are Reed Warbler, one day earlier, and Garden warbler, four days earlier.

Garden Warbler also came closest to beating a late departure date with the last record being on 8th September and the latest ever being 9th September in 1983.

Caspian Gulls Sandbach Flashes 2009



The above two images taken by Bob Brown depict two of the Caspian Gulls recorded at Sandbach Flashes in 2009. The top image is an adult on 31st Jan; this bird was present from 29th Jan to 6th Feb. The bottom image is a 1st winter taken on 24th Feb; this bird was present from 12th to 28th Feb.