



SECOS GARDEN BIRD SURVEY FOR OCTOBER 2011 TO MARCH 2012

The Survey Recorders

In this survey the number of registered participants was fifty-three. Records were received from fifty survey members in both sessions. The number of contributors remained substantially the same as in the last survey, with one new recorder joining and four previous contributors not continuing. Fourteen survey members are not members of SECOS. Again the level of support is most encouraging and the usual thank-you is extended to all contributors new and old.

Table 1 below lists the people who recorded for this survey together with their registration number. Please note your number for the next survey.

Table 1

<u>Reg. No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Reg. No.</u>	<u>Name</u>
8501	Hilary Clowes	1029	Peter & Marilyn Norbury
8502	Bryan Perkins	0430	John Goulding
9703	John & Wendy Smith	8731	John P. Barker
1104	Ken & Beverley Jones	0432	Avril Watkins
8505	David & Elaine Meakin	0333	Alan Robson
0107	Christine Howarth	0334	Bill Bellamy
0208	Stan Wildig	9635	Doreen Jones
0409	Marie Turner	9636	Geoff Yarwood
0610	John Nixon	1037	Roslyn Walmsley
8511	Alan & Joan Soper	0838	Richard Howells
0612	Alan Straw	0639	Chris Parry
9813	John Thompson	0240	Ron & Cynthia Cadman
9814	Colin Lythgoe	0341	Howard Nixon
0316	Paul & Margaret Harvey	0342	Brian Sankey
1017	Mick Ball	0343	John & Wendy Fuller
8518	Ann Pym	0844	Dave O'Hara
0119	George & Barbara Fisher	0946	Jack Bower
9921	Barbara Hubbard	0347	Sylvia Jarvis
1022	Mike & Christine Brooks	0849	Howard & Phyllis Yates
9923	Janet & Peter Roberts	0853	David Bromont
0024	Derek Owen	0754	Brian Burke
1025	John Varty	0556	Bill & Jan Fox
0026	Charles Hull	0757	Gordon & Valerie Squire
0227	Andrew Bailey	0758	Brian & Susan Plowright
0128	Gordon Fleet & Kath Conroy	0759	Rachel Minshull

The Cumulative (All Time) Bird Species List

Since the beginning of SECOS Garden Bird Surveys in 1985, seventy-eight different species of birds have now been recorded as listed in *Table 2* below in alphabetical order. No new species have been added during this survey.

Table 2

No.	Bird Species	No.	Bird Species
1	Black-headed Gull	40	Magpie
2	Blackbird	41	Mallard
3	Blackcap	42	Marsh/ Willow Tit
4	Blue Tit	43	Meadow Pipit
5	Brambling	44	Merlin
6	Bullfinch	45	Mistle Thrush
7	Buzzard	46	Moorhen
8	Chaffinch	47	Mute Swan
9	Chiffchaff	48	Nuthatch
10	Coal Tit	49	Pheasant
11	Collared Dove	50	Pied Wagtail
12	Common Gull	51	Raven
13	Corn Bunting	52	Red-headed Bunting
14	Crow	53	Red-legged Partridge
15	Duncock	54	Redpoll (Lesser)
16	Feral Pigeon	55	Redwing
17	Fieldfare	56	Reed Bunting
18	Garden Warbler	57	Ring-necked Parakeet
19	Goldcrest	58	Robin
20	Goldfinch	59	Rook
21	Great Spotted Woodpecker	60	Siskin
22	Great Tit	61	Skylark
23	Green Woodpecker	62	Snipe
24	Greenfinch	63	Song Thrush
25	Grey Heron	64	Sparrowhawk
26	Grey Wagtail	65	Starling
27	Herring Gull	66	Stock Dove
28	House Martin	67	Swallow
29	House Sparrow	68	Tawny Owl
30	Jackdaw	69	Tree Sparrow
31	Jay	70	Treecreeper
32	Kestrel	71	Water Rail
33	Kingfisher	72	Waxwing
34	Lapwing	73	White Wagtail
35	Lesser Black-backed Gull	74	Willow Warbler
36	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	75	Woodcock
37	Linnet	76	Wood Pigeon
38	Little Owl	77	Wren
39	Long-tailed Tit	78	Yellowhammer

The Current Survey

Fifty participants producing bird records over a period of twenty-six weeks could produce a maximum of 1300 bird/week records (55 x 26 =1300). People are not available to record at various times, for reasons like joining the survey after it has commenced, holidays and sickness, consequentially the actual number of bird/week records produced was reduced by 89. This exceptionally high level of commitment achieved 1221 bird/weeks of records.

The “Listed Species”

In *Table 3* below the species entered on the “listed species” section of the input forms “A1” & “A2” are listed in descending order of number of bird/week record occurrences, as a measure of their commonality within this survey.

Also shown in the table is the number of gardens visited, the highest single count recorded for each species and the registration number of the member(s) who recorded the highest count.

Table 3 – ‘Ranking of Listed Species’

<u>Rank No.</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Number of Bird/Week Records Out of 1221[1295]</u>	<u>Number of Gardens Visited (Out of 50 [53])</u>	<u>Highest Single Count</u>	
				<u>Count</u>	<u>Reg. No.</u>
1 [1]	Blackbird	1121 [1243]	50 [53]	20	1104
2 [2]	Blue Tit	1055 [1203]	50 [53]	12	0612 & 0838
3 [3]	Robin	1045 [1176]	50 [53]	10	1104
4 [4]	Wood Pigeon	1017 [1175]	49 [53]	35	9703
5 [6]	Dunnock	1005 [1028]	49 [53]	11	1104
6 [5]	House Sparrow	978 [1060]	48 [51]	70	0759
7 [7]	Collared Dove	836 [1004]	48 [51]	11	0844
8 [8]	Great Tit	779 [989]	48 [53]	15	0612
9 [9]	Chaffinch	723 [913]	48 [53]	23	8518
10 [12]	Goldfinch	719 [771]	35 [47]	31	8518
11 [13]	Magpie	696 [580]	47 [48]	12	0754
12 [10]	Starling	637 [822]	44 [52]	80	0759
13 [14]	Greenfinch	570 [570]	42 [44]	30	9921
14 [11]	Coal Tit	553 [812]	42 [51]	7	1104
15 [16]	Wren	446 [452]	47 [48]	3	1104 & 9636
16 [19]	Jackdaw	341 [300]	30 [29]	40	0026
17 [15]	Long-tailed Tit	327 [465]	45 [50]	17	1104
18 [17]	Crow	291 [318]	35 [37]	4	#1
19 [18]	Nuthatch	231 [305]	20 [31]	2	#2
20 [20]	Song Thrush	168 [259]	30 [45]	3	1104 & 0347
21 [22]	Sparrowhawk	124 [164]	34 [38]	2	0838 & 0757
21 [21]	Pied Wagtail	103 [203]	20 [39]	3	0208 & 0838

#1 Members No. 0612, 0026, 0333, 0639 & 0556.

#2 Members No. 0107, 0612, 9923, 9636, 0838, 0639, 0347, 0754 & 0757

[] Denotes the corresponding ranking or count in the previous survey for comparison.

(See *Table 1* for correlation of registration no. to members’ names.)

A comparison with the previous survey shows that the rankings within the table show remarkably little change from the previous survey. Last year seven species had a presence in every garden in the survey, this year there were only three, blackbird, blue tit and robin. Wood pigeon and dunnock were each missing from one garden, house sparrow, collared dove, great tit and chaffinch

from two. The top ten list of birds saw the starling relegated with the goldfinch taking its place, other than that the order was little changed.

Greenfinch records showed no sign of a recovery following the decline in the 2009/10 survey with an identical count as last year from two fewer gardens.

Coal tit, song thrush and nuthatch records were much reduced with a presence in far fewer gardens.

Pied wagtail records crashed to a half, only being recorded in half as many gardens.

Nineteen contributors from the total of fifty recorded the highest or joint highest count for at least one bird species. One member recorded the highest or joint highest count for seven species, one member for three species, two members for three species and five members for two species.

The “Other Species”

In *Table 4* below the species entered on the “Other Species” section of the input forms “A1” & “A2” are listed in descending order of number of bird/week record occurrences, as a measure of their commonality within this survey. A further thirty-one species were recorded, giving a total number of fifty-three species recorded in this year’s survey {last survey fifty-nine} from the seventy-seven in the “all-time” list (*Table 2*). Any species recorded in the last survey, but not recorded in this survey, are included for reference.

Table 4 – ‘Ranking of Other Species’

<u>Rank No.</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Number of Bird/Week Records (Out of 521 [651])</u>	<u>Number of Gardens Visited (Out of 50 [53])</u>	<u>Highest Single Count</u>	
				<u>Count</u>	<u>Reg. No.</u>
1 [1]	Bullfinch	152 [212]	20 [24]	6	0556
2 [2]	G S Woodpecker	139 [204]	20 [26]	2	#1
3 [6]	Pheasant	92 [74]	7 [7]	4	0612 & 0026
4 [19]	Redwing	81 [32]	24 [14]	60	9923
5 [4]	Jay	70 [86]	6 [15]	3	0639
6 [16]	Mistle Thrush	59 [39]	10 [12]	3	1017
7 [11]	Tree Sparrow	53 [50]	6 [7]	10	0026
8 [5]	Black Headed Gull	52 [77]	11 [15]	20	9921
9 [17]	Fieldfare	48 [38]	16 [11]	50	0026
10 [8]	Reed Bunting	45 [54]	6 [11]	7	1022
11 [10]	Blackcap	41 [51]	11 [15]	4	9704
11 [20]	Tawny Owl	41 [30]	5 [2]	2	0639 & 0556
13 [3]	Goldcrest	39 [87]	11 [17]	3	0758
14 [9]	Lesser Redpoll	34 [52]	8 [12]	7	8518
15 [6]	Siskin	33 [74]	11 [18]	4	8518
16 [14]	Treecreeper	29 [40]	9 [14]	1	-
16 [11]	Rook	29 [50]	4 [7]	40	0026
17 [25]	Feral Pigeon	29 [8]	3 [1]	30	9813
19 [14]	Stock Dove	26 [40]	4 [5]	4	0026
20 [17]	Grey Wagtail	13 [38]	2 [8]	1	-
20 [28]	Buzzard	13 [4]	5 [3]	1	-
20 [28]	Raven	13 [4]	2 [2]	2	0026
23 [21]	Mallard	12 [18]	3 [3]	3	0026
24 [13]	Brambling	11 [46]	2 [14]	5	8518

#1 Members No. 8511, 9923, 0026, 0639 & 0342

[] Denotes corresponding figures to the previous [2010/11] survey for comparison.

Table 4 – ‘Ranking of Other Species’ (continued).

<u>Rank No.</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Number of Bird/Week Records (Out of 521 [651])</u>	<u>Number of Gardens Visited (Out of 50 [53])</u>	<u>Highest Single Count</u>	
				<u>Count</u>	<u>Reg. No.</u>
25 [26]	Chiffchaff	8 [6]	5 [3]	2	0026
26 [24]	Kestrel	7 [10]	4 [5]	1	-
27 [23]	Grey Heron	6 [14]	6 [6]	1	-
28 [22]	Moorhen	3 [17]	1 [4]	3	0758
29 [31]	Green Woodpecker	2 [2]	1 [2]	1	-
29 [32]	Snipe	2 [1]	1 [1]	2	0556
31 [28]	Herring Gull	1 [4]	1 [2]	1	-
[27]	Waxwing	0 [5]	0 [4]	-	-
[32]	Yellow Hammer	0 [1]	0 [1]	-	-
[32]	Swallow	0 [1]	0 [1]	-	-
[32]	Woodcock	0 [1]	0 [1]	-	-
[32]	Common Gull	0 [1]	0 [1]	-	-
[32]	Willow Warbler	0 [1]	0 [1]	-	-
[32]	House Martin	0 [1]	0 [1]	-	-
[32]	Water Rail	0 [1]	0 [1]	-	-

[] Denotes corresponding figures to the previous [2010/11] survey for comparison

The number of records in the “Other Species” table were greatly reduced in comparison to the previous survey, accepting that three fewer gardens took part. In addition only thirty-one species were recorded compared to thirty-nine previously. The net result is that generally records for many species are greatly reduced. Even considering this, sightings of siskin, goldcrest, moorhen and grey wagtail were reduced to a far greater extent than the general trend, in fact goldcrest stood at third in the table previously and now stands at thirteenth.

There were no species recorded in this survey which did not appear in the previous survey and waxwing, yellow hammer, swallow, woodcock, common gull, willow warbler, house martin and water rail, present previously were not recorded this time.

Happily a few species managed to reverse the downward trend by increasing their presence. These include pheasant, redwing, mistle thrush, fieldfare, tawny owl, feral pigeon, buzzard and raven.

Bullfinch counts repeated the last survey’s feat of relegating the great spotted woodpecker to second place.

The garden reporting the highest number of species in this “Other Species” part of the survey was that of member No. 0026 with seventeen, closely followed by the gardens of members No. 0612 and 0639 with thirteen each. Member 0026 also had the highest count for nine species.

Having found a new trick in Access, I have now found it easy to include for the first time the highest count of each species and attribute it to the survey member.

News from the Comments Column (Section “B1” &”B2” of the input forms)

Much information related to avian feeding habits was recorded, for which a summary is included.

Magpies figured prominently, one seen dunking peanuts in a birdbath prior to eating, another lucky individual was particularly partial to dried fruit. Elsewhere another was seen to be consuming another bird’s eggs, whilst eight more devoured rowan berries in the same garden.

Jackdaws demolished fat balls and six were recorded on one bird table at the same time. Nuthatch and bullfinch fed from peanut and seed feeders.

Given a choice this year goldfinches totally ignored nyjer seed when sunflower hearts were available. Previously they would fight and squabble in great numbers for nyjer. Sunflower hearts are currently irresistible to great tits, blue tits, blackcap, bullfinch. Redwing feeding on holly berries were chased off by an aggressive blackbird. Redwing, fieldfare and mistle thrush stripped berries from cotoneaster shrubs in the harshness of January, whereas at the same location blackbirds preferred pyracantha berries.

Wood pigeon and blackbird took berries from grape ivy.

Redwing, together with the more common birds appreciated garden bird baths, for fresh water intake especially during freezing conditions.

Clearly, gardening for wildlife, by including berry bearing shrubs and providing a water supply, benefits bird recording and more importantly the birds.

Weather conditions, highlighted below, also influenced garden attendance. One member had ten blackbirds seeking food in cold conditions and another cold February day resulted in twenty-one different species visiting one garden on a single day, the 4th February.

Sparrowhawk attacks as usual generated a lot of reports. Not all were successful and greenfinch, goldfinch and sparrow were noted to evade capture. On other occasions though collared dove, blackbird, goldfinch and sparrow were recorded as prey.

One low flying individual, clutching prey, was seen to be mobbed by crows.

In one garden on one single day a female sparrowhawk plucked a sparrow on the fence, a male flew through a little later and an immature made an appearance.

Other raptors included a kestrel sharing a garden fence with a squirrel. A pair of tawny owls which regularly used a chimney roost were mobbed at dusk by a goldcrest, which was joined in the action by a blackbird, finches and tits.

Elsewhere after eleven consecutive weeks of tawny owl calling, it was finally seen in the garden on the very last day of the survey.

A buzzard was recorded in a garden oak tree and another perched on a fence above a garden pond which contained newly hatched tadpoles.

Numerous records of unusual behaviour included a blue tit storing sunflower seeds in its nest box. A coal tit was seen making regular visits to a sunflower heart feeder in order to stock secret buried stores.

Hérons provided more comment than normal. One landed in a garden with prey in its beak, probably a mouse, hung around for a while and then departed still with a tight hold on the mouse. Herons were recorded perched on hedges always above garden ponds and another stayed in a garden pond for an hour!

In Holmes Chapel a flock of about three thousand starlings circled overhead from 17.00 hours throughout the month of February.

Unusually only one member complained of cats stalking birds in this survey.

There were several reports of garden bird deaths, presumed to be due to the trichomonosis parasite, which causes those affected to be unable to swallow food resulting in death through starvation. Collared dove, woodpigeon and greenfinch were recorded as victims.

Finches, particularly chaffinches, were also recorded as afflicted with the fungal leg parasite known as bumble foot or fur foot. This is generally not fatal and sometimes clears naturally. Surprisingly birds seem to cope with this condition.

Gardens witnessing these problems are advised to stop feeding for a period to limit the possibility of the infection being spread by visiting feeding posts. Before resuming feeding please ensure that all feeders are sterilised. More detailed information is available on the RSPB and BTO web sites.

Weather Conditions

Table 5 provides a brief overview of weather conditions for the twenty-six week survey period, which, as usual, is provided courtesy of John Barker's detailed records.

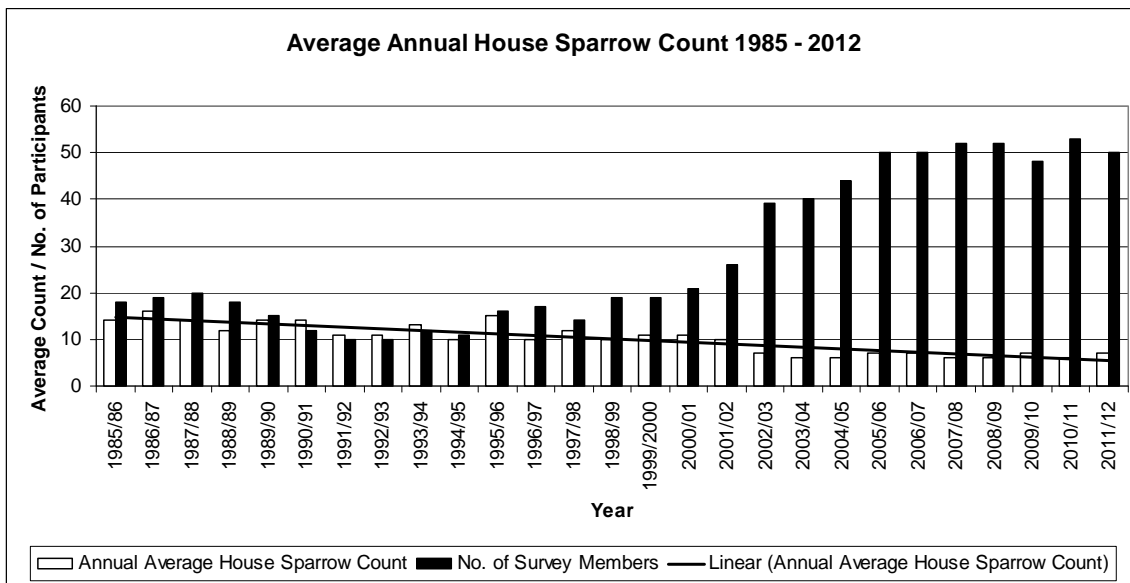
Table 5 – Weather Summary

<u>Week No.</u>	<u>Number of Days</u>			<u>Inches of Rain</u>	<u>Temp. °F</u>		<u>Wind</u>		<u>One Word Notes</u>
	<u>Sunny Periods</u>	<u>Frost Snow Sleet</u>	<u>Wet cloudy</u>		<u>Max</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Direction</u>	<u>Strength</u>	
1	3	0	4	0.72	75	40	SW-N/W	Strong	Mixed
2	3	0	4	0.31	63	36	W/NW	Light	Mixed
3	3	0	4	0.75	61	33	S/W	Light	Mixed
4	1	0	6	0.34	60	35	S-SW	Strong	Cloudy
5	0	0	7	0.79	60	31	S-SW	Moderate.	Wet
6	0	1F	6	0.48	53	26	S-SE	Light	Cloudy
7	7	0	0	0.00	54	36	SE	Light	Sunny
8	0	1F	3	0.45	52	32	S-NW-SW	Fresh	Cloudy
9	0	0	5	0.27	53	29	NW-NE	Strong	Cloudy
10	0	6F	7	0.50	58	27	NW	Light	Mixed
11	0	7F	7	1.02	44	23	SW	Light	Cloudy
12	0	2F	6	1.28	50	26	NW & SW	Light	Cloudy
13	0	0	3	0.37	53	35	SE	Variable	Cloudy
14	1	3F	6	0.93	48	29	SW	Strong	Mixed
15	2	3F	4	0.18	52	24	NW	Light	Mixed
16	2	3F	4	0.72	49	24	SE-NW	Fresh	Mixed
17	0	5F	6	0.67	48	25	NW-SE	Fresh	Mixed
18	3	7F	2	0.21	38	16	SW-E	Light	Mixed
19	0	7F	4	0.31	39	16	SE	Light	Cloudy
20	0	3F	5	0.32	49	27	NW	Fresh	Cloudy
21	1	1S2F	4	0.22	61	30	NW & SW	Light	Mixed
22	0	0	3	0.07	59	33	SW	Light	Cloudy
23	0	2F	4	0.44	59	29	NW	Light	Mixed
24	0	1F	1	0.14	54	30	SE	Light	Cloudy
25	6	1F	1	0.17	64	27	NW	Light	Sunny
26	5	1F	0	0.00	69	28	SE	Light-Mod	Sunny

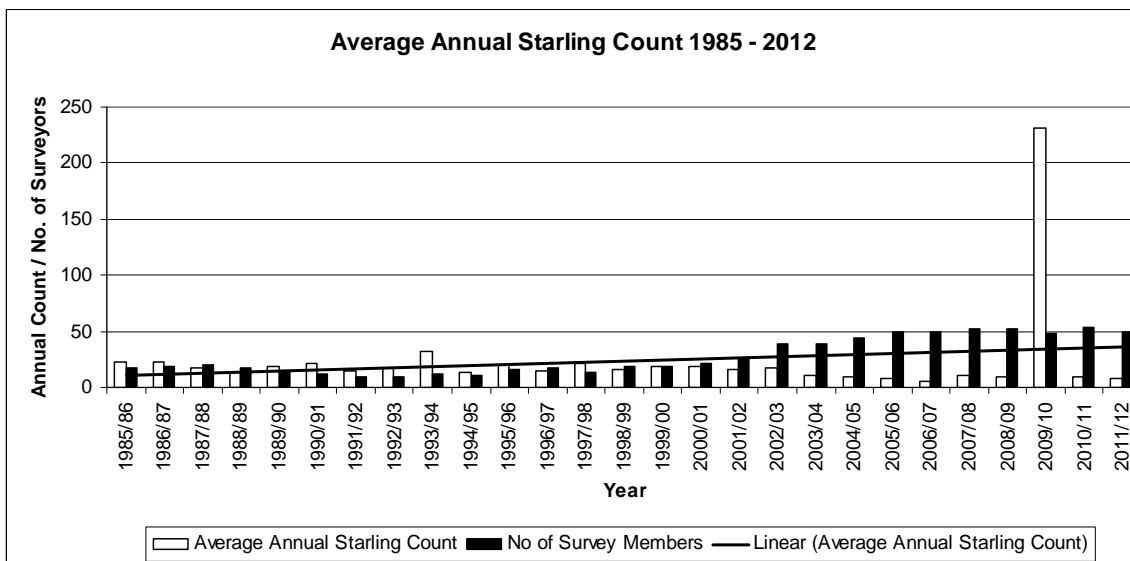
House Sparrow and Starling Research from the Garden Bird Survey Archives 1985 to 2012

The two bar charts used in previous reports have once more been updated to include the latest data from this survey and are presented below.

The average garden house sparrow count has stabilised at six or seven since the year 2002 and stands at seven in this survey. The twenty-seven year trend line on the chart shows that the house sparrow population has declined from an average of around fifteen suggesting that the population has been reduced by sixty per cent over that period. From personal experience, since our neighbour has found it difficult to maintain his garden, it has reverted to the wild and we now normally have a house sparrow colony in double figures. This tends to support the theory that habitat loss is a big factor.



The average starling count for this survey dropped from ten to eight birds in this survey. The trend line is still distorted by the large one-off roost of 2009-10. The reality is that numbers are still in decline.



This survey continues to support the general concerns that a decline in both populations is under way. The data is contained in two Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, with pages for each year of the survey so far, and can be made available to anyone who would like to perform more analysis.

The Next Survey

In anticipation and hope of your continued support, forms for the 2012/13 Winter Garden Bird Survey will be provided to all present members of the survey team. Those who take email distribution will be in receipt by that medium and the remainder will receive forms with the pre-season newsletter.

I include my usual plea to be informed of anyone who wishes to discontinue supporting the survey, so that I know when I am in receipt of the full complement of completed forms and able to commence analysing the data and preparing the report. As usual forms for any new recruits to the next survey will be available at the first club meeting in September or by email. Please encourage others to join up and emphasise the process is simple and undemanding. Though SECOS always welcomes the support of new members, it is emphasised that it is not necessary to be a member of SECOS to take part in this survey.

There are many benefits from using email communications for this survey, including saving paper, printing costs, legibility of inputs and easier record storage. If any further members are willing to receive the forms, guidelines and reports as e-mail attachments rather than paper copies, please let me have your e-mail address. Where I have e-mail addresses I assume willingness for this form of transaction unless told to the contrary. My e-mail address is
for contact and returning your completed forms.

Finally I include the usual offer to anyone who wishes to perform a more detailed analysis of the 2011/12 survey data than is contained in this report (or previous reports). I can make all of the data available to them as a copy of the databases in Microsoft Access 2003 format, either as an e-mail attachment, on a 3.5" floppy disk (if anyone other than me still uses them) or CD-ROM.

Again, many thanks to all contributors.

Trevor Clowes.

24th May 2012