

Rode Pool

Bird Report 2024



A Pair of Mandarin Ducks
A watercolour painting
by Chris Parry



2024 was the 26th year that SECOS members have recorded the birds at Rode Pool, its shoreline and the woodland that encircles it.

I would like to remind readers of this report that access to: -

- the wooded area - where the hide was located is restricted to SECOS members
- Poolside is restricted to Stoke-on-Trent Angling Society (SoTAS) permit holders

I would like to express my gratitude to: -

- the Wilbraham family, the estate owners, for continuing to allow SECOS members access to the grounds
- the local fishing community, (SoTAS), who manage the shoreline at Poolside who occasionally supply us with bird sightings
- Colin and Chris for proofreading the report
- Chris for the image on the front cover

A few dedicated SECOS members visit the site almost every week, and monthly there is a WeBS Count – see Note 1. Also, there is the annual Heronry Survey – see Note 2, a nest box survey monitoring Mandarin Ducks and tits – see Note 3. These records are added to the various British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) databases. Their records are used by Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society (CAWOS) to produce their annual Bird Report. There are also a few records that appear to have come from the Estate staff of birds seen elsewhere in the grounds.

The raw data is a combination of all the above.

This year's report is in a different format – a consequence of: -

- a reduced number visits to the west end of the pool where the hide, was located – see Note 4. The hide was destroyed by fire and since then most of the visits to that area were to monitor the various nestboxes
- I have offered to take on the task of preparing the report as Colin is struggling with his health

Section 1: lists species recorded in 2024

Section 2: list species recorded pre-2024

I thought it might be timely to use this opportunity to look back over the past 26 years of records to see if things have changed. I've split the species into two groups: water birds and others – in alphabetical order for the benefit of those readers who are not familiar with the Systematic Order for listing species.

This section lists over 130 species, an impressive total – only a handful were reported as flyovers.

Some of the SECOS members also record the birds at another country estate which has a large body of water, Doddington Hall, south of Wybunbury. It would be unfair to compare the species reported at both locations as Rode Pool has very little, if any, sloping bank with sand or mud which is an attractive feeding ground for many waders.

The Rode Pool Regulars: -

- Chris Parry, Colin Lythgoe, Dave Winnington and John Thompson (report compiler)
- Mick Ball is less able to join us now but has contributed greatly in the past

We are grateful to our sponsor HJ Lea Oakes Ltd, who provides feed for some of the local feeding stations

Section 3: The history of The Rode Estate

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Section 1: records for 2024

Waterbirds: -

Black-headed Gull	Greylag Goose	Oystercatcher
Canada Goose	Herring Gull	Pink-footed Goose
Coot	Kingfisher	Reed Bunting
Cormorant	Lapwing (200)	Reed Warbler
<u>Domesticated Duck*</u>	Lesser Black-backed	Shoveler (40)
Egyptian Goose (4)	Gull	Snipe
Goosander	Little Egret (21): 08/12	Teal
Great Black-backed Gull	Little Grebe	Tufted Duck
Great Crested Grebe	Mallard	Water Rail
Great White Egret (2)	Mandarin Duck	Wigeon
Grey Heron (116)	Moorhen	33 species
Grey Wagtail	Mute Swan	

Figures in brackets indicate where the count improves on previous years

NB: the Grey Heron count is based on the number of the survey of apparent occupied nests (AON) this year

this list doesn't include any cross-bred or leucistic individuals seen

Other species: -

Blackbird	Great Tit	Redwing
Blackcap	Green Woodpecker	Robin
Blue Tit	Greenfinch	Rook
Bullfinch	Hobby	Sand Martin
Buzzard	House Martin	Siskin
Carrion Crow	House Sparrow	Song Thrush
Chaffinch	Jackdaw	Sparrowhawk
Chiffchaff	Jay	Starling
Coal Tit	Kestrel	Stock Dove
** Collared Dove	Long-tailed Tit	Swallow
Dunnock	Magpie	Swift
Feral Pigeon	Mistle Thrush	Tawny Owl
Fieldfare	Nuthatch	Treecreeper
Goldcrest	Pheasant	Willow Warbler
Goldfinch	Pied Wagtail	Woodpigeon
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Raven	Wren

48 species

**** 'new' species for the site**

81 species reported in 2024

Section 2: records pre-2024

Key: -

*	resident or seen all-year round
\$	migrant
##	using the feeding station by the hide
recent max	2000 onwards

Water birds: - *some counts may include juveniles hatched & reared on the estate*

Baikal Teal – a record of one bird from Jun 2019 (Rarity Form accepted)

Barnacle Goose – a record of one bird from Sep 2015

Bittern – records from Jan. & Nov/Dec 2013, Mar `14 and 1 record from Feb `15

Black Swan – a record of one bird from Feb & Apr 2017

Black-headed Gull *
max: 560 – 2011

Black-tailed Godwit 1 – 2004 (recorded within the Rode Heath tetrad)

Cackling Goose – a single was with the Canada Geese flock in 2008 & `09
also 1 seen in `07 – listed as “Unidentified Goose”

Canada Goose *
breeds; max: 350 - 2004

Common Gull – records from 2001 & `03, `15 - `16 & `18
max: 2 - 2001

Common Sandpiper – records from 2001, `05, `09 - `23
max: 3 – 2001, `11, `21 - `23

Common Tern \$ – records of one bird from 2021 - `22

Coot *
breeds; max: c100 - 1977, recent max: 23 - 2014

Cormorant *
max: 32 - 2018

Curlew – 7 feeding in the bay by a fisherman in 2009 and 1 bird flying over in 2016

Egyptian Goose – first recorded in 2020
max: 4 - 2021, `23 & `24

Gadwall – records from 2000 - `02, `07 - `08, `11, `14 & `19
max: 3 - 2019

Garganey – “a cracking good male” from Apr 2005

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Goldeneye – records of one bird from 1937, '39, 2002 - '05

Goosander

max: 25 - 2011

Great Black-backed Gull – a record from 2023

Great Crested Grebe *

breeds; max: 19 -1986, recent max: 12 - 2003

Great (White) Egret – records from 2013 & '14, '18 - '19 & '21 onwards

max: 2 - 2018, '19 & '22

Green Sandpiper – records of 1 bird from 1999, 2001, '06, '11 - '12, '14 - '16 & '20

max: 2 - 2022

Grey Heron * – see Note 2

breeds; max: 112 – 2018 & '20

Grey Wagtail – singles; records from 2010 & '20 - '22

Greylag Goose

breeds; max: 140 - 2023

Herring Gull

max: 8 - 2011

Kingfisher * - bred in 1998, '99, 2007 & '15 (possibly bred in '14)

has bred; max: 4 - 2009 & '22

Lapwing

max: 100 - 2019

Lesser Black-backed Gull

max: 20 - 2017

Little Egret – records from 2008 - '09 & '11 onwards

max: 17 - 2023

Little Grebe

max: 10 - 1997, recent max: 6 - 2010

Mallard *

breeds: on one occasion “nested 8 metres in an oak tree”

max: 260 - 2010

Mandarin Duck * – see Note 3. Historic records from 1988 - '89.

A male & female were first noted here 10th Nov 1999

breeds: first duckling seen Jun 2011. They started using nestboxes in 2012

max: 51 - 2017

Moorhen *

breeds; max: 15 - 2005

Mute Swan

has bred; max: 20 "an exceptional number" - 2002

Osprey \$ – records from 1997, 2012, '14, '15 & '21

Oystercatcher – records from 2005 - '06, '08, '12, '14, '16 - '18, '21 & '23
max: 5 - 2014

Pink-footed Goose – records from 2005, '08, '15, '17, '19
max: 190 - 2005

Pintail – a record from Sep 2020 of 2 birds

Pochard – records from 1988, '99, 2001 - '03, '11 - '16, '18 – '20 & '22
has bred; max: 23 – 1938; recent max: 22 - 2004

Red-breasted Merganser – a record of 5 from Dec 1991

Red-necked Grebe – a record of one bird from Jan/Feb 1937

Reed Bunting *

Reed Warbler

max: 2

Ring-necked Duck – a record from May 1978

"A bird reported as a Ring-necked Duck at Rode Pool in May was considered to be a hybrid
Pochard x Tufted Duck"

Ruddy Duck – records from 1978, '86 - '88, '93 - '95, '99, 2001 - '02, '04 - '05 & '08
has bred; max: 21 - 1988, recent max: 5 - 2001

Ruddy Shelduck – records of one bird from 2004 & '15

Sedge Warbler \$

breeds

Shelduck – records from 1995 (1), 2021 - '22 (2s)

Shoveler

max: 35 – 2015, '17 & '19

Smew \$ – records from 1939, 2017 - '19 & '21

all singles except '18 & '19 when 2 were recorded

Snipe \$

max: c50 - 2018

Teal

max: 72 - 2016

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Tufted Duck

has bred; max: 43 - 2012

Unidentified Goose – 2007 – '09, see Cackling Goose above

Water Rail – records from 1998, 2005 - '09, '13, '17 - '22
max: 3 – 2021

Wigeon

max: 62 - 2008

Yellow-legged Gull – records of one bird from Aug/Sept 2018

59 species

Other birds: -

Barn Owl – records from 1999 & 2019
has bred

Blackbird *

Blackcap \$

Blue Tit ##

Brambling – ##: records from 1999, 2002, '04

Bullfinch *

Buzzard *

Carrion Crow *

Chaffinch *

Chiffchaff \$

Coal Tit ##

Common Crane – an unconfirmed report of one flying over in Apr 2014, also a BirdGuides report of 1 in 2016

Cuckoo \$ – records from 1997 & 2017

Dunnock ##

Feral Pigeon

Fieldfare \$

Garden Warbler \$ – records from 1988, 2002, '15 & '21

Goldcrest *

Goldfinch *

Goshawk – unconfirmed reports of one in 1997

Great Spotted Woodpecker ##

Great Tit ##

Green Woodpecker *
breeds

Greenfinch *

Hobby \$ – unconfirmed reports of a pair in the grounds of the Hall in 1999

House Martin \$

House Sparrow *

Indian Peafowl / Peacock – records from 2004

Jackdaw *

Jay *

Kestrel *
breeds

Lesser Redpoll

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker –
records from 1988, '94, '96, '98, 2004 - '11, '13 - '16, '18 & '21
has bred

Long-tailed Tit ##

Magpie *

Marsh Tit ## – records from 2002 - '12

Meadow Pipit \$

Merlin – records from 1998

Mistle Thrush *
post breeding flocks seen near the cricket pitch

Nuthatch ##

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Osprey \$ – one recorded here for 9 days in 1997

Peregrine – records from 2006 - '07, '09 & '22

Pheasant ##

Pied Flycatcher \$ – records from 2010, '16 & '21

Pied Wagtail *
post breeding flocks seen near the cricket pitch

Raven * – first recorded in Oct '99
breeds: from 2005

Red Kite – a record from 2018

Redpoll
Redstart – a record from 2015

Redwing \$

Reed Warbler \$
breeds

Ring-necked Parakeet – one flew over in Apr and Oct 2001

Robin ##

Rook *

Sand Martin \$

Siskin

Sparrowhawk *

Spotted Flycatcher \$ – records from 2001, '04 - '06, '11, '12, '14 - '17 & '19 - '21

Song Thrush *

Starling *

Stock Dove *

Stonechat – a record of a male in Nov 2023

Swallow \$
on Autumn migration, they have been recorded in 'several hundreds' over the pool

Swift \$

Tawny Owl
has bred

Treecreeper *

Tree Sparrow – records from 1987 & '89
has bred

Waxwing – a record from 2008 (in the trees by the Hall)

Wheatear \$ – records from 2015

Whitethroat \$ – a record from 2014

Willow Tit – records from 1988, '92 & 2002

Willow Warbler \$ – records from 2013 - '15, '18 - '20, '22 & '23

Wood Pigeon *

Woodcock \$
has bred

Wren ##

Wryneck – a record from 2016 (Rarity Form accepted)

Yellow Wagtail \$ – records from 2003 & '14
probably bred

77 species

136 species reported up until end of 2023

Notes: -

1. WeBS - the BTO's **W**etland **B**ird **S**urvey –



The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) monitors non-breeding waterbirds in the UK.

WeBS surveyors monitor the UK's internationally important non-breeding waterbirds. Following a tradition begun in 1947, wetland sites are counted once per month, providing data for population and trends in abundance and distribution. The network of sites legally protected for their importance to wintering waterbirds depends fundamentally on the WeBS counts. "Waterbirds" includes wildfowl (ducks, geese and swans), waders, rails, divers, grebes, cormorants and herons. Gulls and terns are optionally included. In a typical year over 220 waterbird species, races or populations are counted in WeBS, including non-native, feral and vagrant species. National trends are produced for the most numerous 110 of these.

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2. Grey Heron

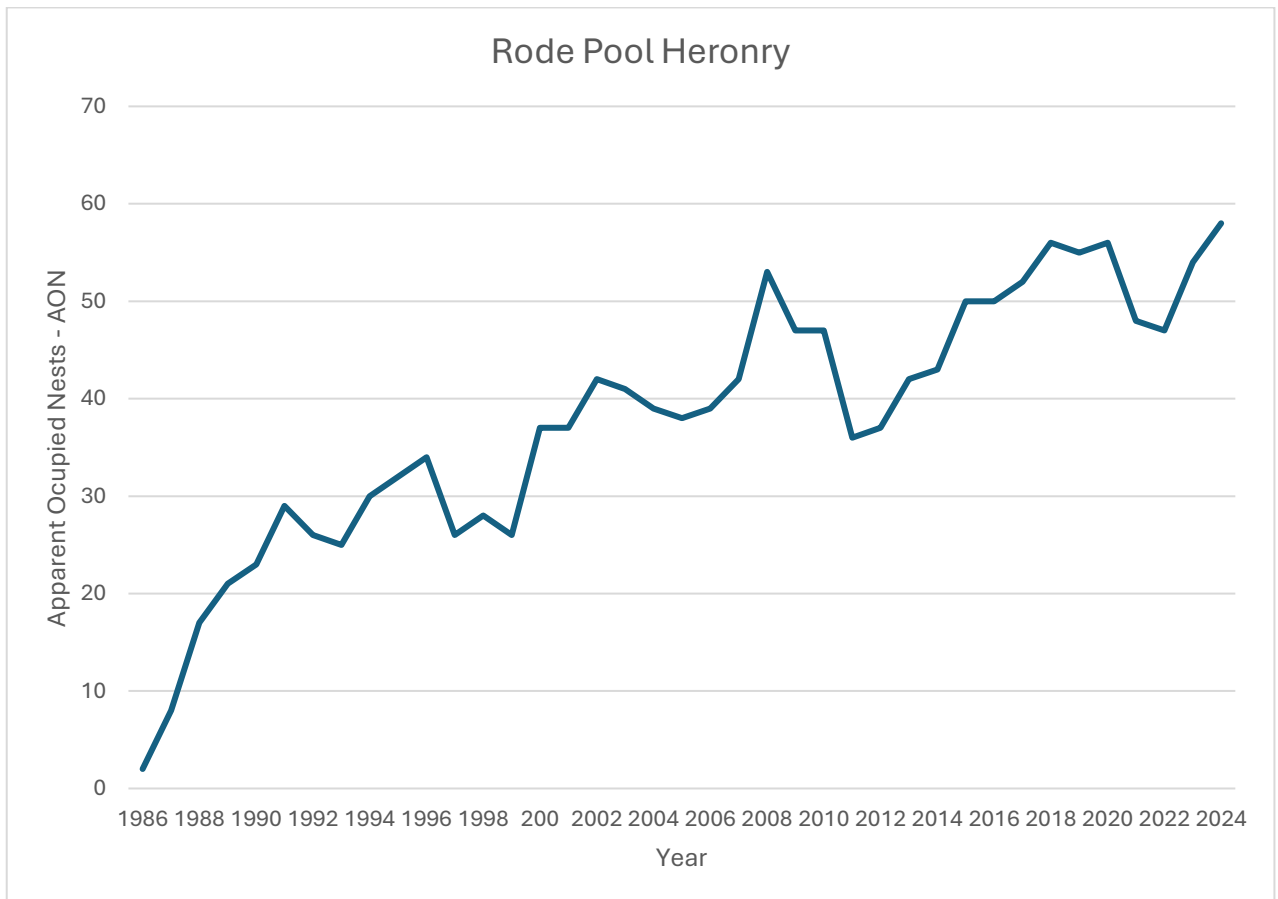
Heronries Census nest counts are made by BTO volunteers, including birdwatchers, reserve wardens, landowners and foresters. Help from people with special access to private or remote heronries is especially welcome.



Making a count of 'apparently occupied nests' (AON) at a heronry is often very straightforward but is tricky when the nests are obscured by foliage. No specialised ornithological knowledge or experience is required. Clues such as droppings or hatched eggshells under nests can help observers decide whether a nest is in use.

Changes in the numbers of nests over time are a clear measure of population trends. The more heronries that can be counted each year, the more certain we can be of population trends at national, regional and local scales.

When working through the various resources to extract AONs, occasionally the count is of pairs of birds. I have assumed that each pair occupies an active nest. JT



3. Mandarin Duck

The BTO's Nest Record Scheme (NRS) participants gather vital information on the breeding success of Britain's birds by following the progress of individual nests.



Every year almost 750 NRS participants monitor over 35,000 nests of different bird species in a variety of habitats. Thanks to the dedication of these volunteers, the BTO and other scientists can use the Nest Record Scheme's unparalleled long-term dataset to assess the impacts that changes in the environment, such as habitat loss and global warming, have on the productivity of wild birds.

You can participate whether it's by following the progress of a few nests in your local area, erecting and monitoring boxes or becoming a highly skilled nest finder. As with all BTO surveys, the welfare of birds comes first and we expect all participants to follow the Code of Conduct, a set of precautions designed to ensure that monitoring a nest does not harm or put it at risk.

An extract from Colin's 2013 Rode Pool Bird Report: -

Mandarin Ducks were first seen here occasionally during 2009 and 2010, so in 2010/11 we provided a nest box fastened to a tree over the water. Mandarins are one of the few hole nesting species of ducks and need a suitable sized hole in a tree, preferably in woodland near to water.

In 2011 birds were present for seven of the 12 months with two males and a female present during the breeding season, but no breeding attempt noted.

In 2012 birds were present for nine of the 12 months with a peak count of six males and two females. During the summer they showed an interest in the only nest box but it was not possible to check the contents. Frustratingly in June, from the hide, we had quite literally a one second view of a fluffy duckling as it emerged and immediately disappeared into the poolside reeds, with a female Mandarin nearby. Identification by association was probable but not conclusive. Encouraged by this we provided two more nest boxes in the winter of 2012/13.

In 2013 birds were again present regularly. On 21st May whilst doing checks of all the nest boxes one of the Mandarin boxes was opened to reveal a female Mandarin sitting on a clutch of nine eggs. Euphoria!!

Summary for the SECOS Annual Newsletter of this year's nesting season

Mandarin Duck Nesting on Rode Estate in 2024

2023 was a very poor year for nesting Mandarin Ducks since five nesting attempts produced 97 eggs laid but all failed and no young were hatched. 2024 was just the opposite when six nesting attempts produced 147 eggs and of these 59 hatched. Multiple females tend to lay in most boxes and eggs appear and sometimes disappear at random making accurate counting occasionally difficult. However, we are confident that our numbers are pretty accurate.

Mandarin Ducks were first recorded at Rode Pool as occasional visitors from 2009 and when we put suitable nest boxes up in 2013 they were still scarce. Although chick survival rates are very low, numbers have steadily increased since then and we now get records from several other sites in the SECOS area.

Rode Pool Regulars

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4. An extract from the 1999 SECOS Bird Report

RODE POOL BIRD HIDE

During the 98/99 winter a new bird hide was erected for the use of SECOS members at Rode Pool, with the permission of the Rode Estate. Together with a raised boardwalk which gives dry access through the often very wet marsh, the hide was completed in February 1999 and has been in regular use since then.

It was known from previous observations and records that Rode Pool does not host a large number of waterbirds. However, together with the surrounding woods and parkland, and the large heronry, it was anticipated that there should be enough of interest to justify the expenditure. This has well and truly proved to be the case, with a total of 71 species being recorded, 25 of them associated with water, and 46 other species. At least 23 members have visited the hide and entered records in the log book.

The area seems to have a charm and attraction all of its own, even on a winter's day with the frosted trees and reeds surrounding the lake reflecting well in the Pool. Often the easiest way to identify the whereabouts of the resident Kingfisher is to look for an electric blue or rust-red reflection in the Pool. Even the commonest records can lead to pleasant memories, such as watching the flocks of small birds on the feeders just a few feet from the hide. Here the Coal Tits quickly learned to slip inside the peanut feeders instead of pecking through the mesh; surprisingly the Nuthatches copied and also squeezed through the narrow opening. Also remembered was the amusement caused when a party of Long-tailed Tits clambered over the fat balls, tails sticking out at all angles. On the water it was gratifying to see a pair of Little Grebes diving in a shallow bay created in the reeds in front of the hide, and the surprise appearance of a pair of Mandarin Ducks. The hide also overlooks several nests in the heronry and gives an opportunity to watch these long-legged birds where they look totally out of place in the tops of trees. No doubt with more observations in the future the species list - and the pleasant memories - will increase. It must be noted that access to the estate and to the bird hide is padlocked and is only available to SECOS members.

COLIN LYTHGOE.

I'm an advocate of the therapy Shinrin-yoku or Forest Bathing and my trips to the very tranquil surroundings of the Rode Estate, particularly when I visited the hide, were ideal. JT

Section 3: The history of the Rode Estate

Most of the information in the section below was extracted from various sources on the internet. Some of it may not be correct!

- Rode Estate has been in the ownership of the Wilbraham family since 1669. It was originally bought from Randle Rode by his cousin Roger Wilbraham. The Wilbrahams were prominent landowners in Cheshire at that time and Rode was purchased for Randle, the younger son of Roger Wilbraham of Townsend, now part of Nantwich, for £2,400.
- Rode's Grade II listed park and gardens are amongst the finest in Cheshire. A seventeenth-century survey described "orchards, gardens and courts within the Greene before ye hall" but there are no further records of the grounds until 1790 when Richard Wilbraham Bootle commissioned a 'Red Book' from the landscape gardener Humphry Repton (1752 – 1818)
- It was Randle Wilbraham III, Richard's son, who implemented some of Repton's proposals, employing in 1803 John Webb (1754 1828), a partner of William Eames. Webb constructed a new entrance driveway, laid out the five-acre Wild Garden in the dell to the west of the house, and created two artificial lakes: the 'less water' or 'Stew Pond' **and the one-mile long 'large water' known as 'Rode Pool'**. There is a tradition that when the family were at home a canvas of a waterfall was placed to create the illusion from the house that there was a cascade between the two lakes
- Redecoration commenced in a piecemeal fashion **following the First World War, when the house had been used as a hospital**
- The current custodians of the family home are Randle and Amanda Baker Wilbraham.