

Shoreham and District  
Ornithological Society:

Autumn Newsletter 2015



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# EDITORIAL

Roger Smith

It is Autumn again and you are reading another bumper edition of the newsletter brought to you by our band of faithful correspondents and photographers. We seem, over the four editions I have edited thus far, to have settled down to a mix of regular local items combined with pieces taking a broader perspective and bringing us news of birds farther afield.

Wendy Ball's article about White-tailed Eagles in Scotland relates good news about the return of the species to Scotland. This bird is also increasing in Europe with a population expanding from 2000 pairs in the early 1970's to about 10000 today. This statistic comes from an interesting publication 'Wildlife Comeback in Europe' (linked at [static.zsl.org](http://static.zsl.org)). This is quite a cheering read and documents population increases across a range of the larger European mammals and birds. In addition in this newsletter Brianne Reeve has written about her Barn Swallows and Sue Miles has a short piece on Sussex Nightingales. Tim Holter, Val Bentley, Clive Hope and Stephen Simpson have made their regular contributions and as ever Dorian Mason's splendid photographs brighten up the Newsletter.

Your contributions are welcomed so keep them coming. The deadline for the next Newsletter is 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

# White-tailed Eagles

## Wendy Ball

Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the White-tailed Eagle was a more common sight than the Golden Eagle in parts of northern and western Scotland. After a prolonged period of persecution during Victorian times, when large numbers of Scotland's birds of prey were shot, poisoned or had their eggs stolen, the White-tailed Eagle was finally exterminated as a British breeding species in 1916.



As a result of a successful re-introduction programme that took place on the Inner Hebridean Island of Rum between 1975 and 1985, the nearby Isle of Mull has become a stronghold for White-tailed Eagles as the population of these impressive birds matures and expands.

Two abortive attempts were made to introduce Norwegian birds to Scotland prior to the successful Nature Conservancy Council project that released 82 Norwegian birds on Rum from 1975–1985. A further 59 birds

were released in Wester Ross from 1993–1998 to bolster numbers. White-tailed Eagles often hatch two young allowing one to be available for relocation projects. A third release programme beginning in 2007 around the Firths of Tay and Forth sought to expand the gene pool and the species range in Scotland. The final batch of birds was released in 2012 making a total of 86 birds overall for the east coast programme.

In 2012 13 pairs of White-tailed Eagles successfully nested on Mull raising a record 18 chicks and providing a welcome boost to the ecotourism industry. There has been some local opposition, particularly from sheep farmers, but the eagles are well protected during the breeding season by a range of organisations including the Mull Eagle Watch Team. The Mull eagles have featured on flagship national television programmes such as ‘Springwatch’ and ‘Autumnwatch’.



During the last 5 years we have visited Mull 8 times and observed the eagles first hand. On an earlier trip to Scotland we were lucky enough to witness two White-tailed Eagles being harried by a Golden Eagle in the

Findhorn valley. This was an unforgettable experience. On a trip to the Varanger Fjord in northern Norway we also had several excellent views of these amazing birds.

We have observed the White-tailed Eagles in many places on Mull, Skye and South Uist in the Hebrides. In particular a boat trip to watch the eagles being fed has provided excellent photo-opportunities. In spring 2015 on a boat trip we had 6 eagle encounters with birds from different territories. We will return to this wonderful island this autumn to see the eagles accompanied by other wildlife treats such as Otters, Hen Harriers, Golden Eagles and Short-eared Owls.

## A very personal relationship

### Brianne Reeve

Migration has always fascinated me. As Michael McCarthy has observed 'If we could see it as a whole, if they all arrived in a single flock, say, and they came in the day instead of at night, we would be truly amazed: 16 million swallows, martins, swifts, warblers, wagtails, wheatears, cuckoos, chats, nightingales, nightjars, thrushes, pipits and flycatchers pouring into Britain from sub-Saharan Africa. They would cover the sky from horizon to horizon: it would be the greatest of all natural spectacles' ('Say Goodbye to the Cuckoo': Michael McCarthy).

I found the house we now live in when bird-watching in April 1976: it was not visible from the road as Elm trees encircled the property (all of which had to be felled within the year due to Dutch Elm disease). By the end of May we had moved in, not realising at the time how important the well, our only water supply, was going to be in that very hot summer and in the future.

We learned very quickly that we were not the only ones to find this house immensely attractive but some of the visitors were more welcome

than others. A very large oval Wasp nest was discovered in one of the loft spaces, there was an active, friendly, colony of Bees over the front door and Pipistrelle Bats were occupying an area in the hanging tiles at one end of the house.

There were also some old outbuildings: a stable with a very tall eight foot door and another entrance with an ordinary door. In the tall door there was a hinged flap about four inches square and because it was the end of May I was able to see this entrance being used by adult Swallows and to find at least two nests within the stable. Every year, bar one, since 1976, we have had Swallows nesting in the stable and using that tiny Swallow door when the main door is closed. It really is astonishing to see their confidence to dive through those four square inches from bright sunshine into the darkness of the stable.

Last year the male Swallow arrived on April 10<sup>th</sup> at 5.30 pm loudly announcing his arrival perched outside our bedroom window. His mate was here two days later. Their delight at having made a safe return journey was patently obvious. (Of course I am making my own judgement about this but unless you have witnessed their behaviour I can see you might not believe me!). All seemed to be going well for nesting in the stable but about three weeks later the female was missing.

Then to my astonishment two more Swallows appeared on May 10<sup>th</sup> and were welcomed by the adult male. Their streamers were difficult to assess so sexing them was not easy. However these two birds were not prepared to set up home in the lowly stable and decided our house was a much better option. I found them indoors on numerous occasions, quite unperturbed by people. They perched on the top of the grandfather clock looking like two finials, on the curtain rails, in the bathroom, on the beams in the upstairs landing and their favourite place, our bedroom. One morning they spent 45 minutes chasing each other in and out of the beam supports, it was enchanting for me but sadly I had to draw the line when I discovered they were bringing in nesting material! I had to put up netting

at the windows and try to remember to keep the doors closed. It worked and they returned to inspect the stable.

By May 24<sup>th</sup> an old nest was being repaired with fresh mud, which I think is collected from the River Adur about a quarter of a mile away. This was also when I decided the original male had moved on. How I wish it had been possible to ring these birds for further identification. Before the end of the month two Swallows were roosting comfortably on the refurbished nest at night and by mid-June five young Swallows were lined up peering over its edge and the adults were in and out feeding them continuously, the youngsters responding with much loud twittering. Within two days they had exercised enough inside the stable to take a first cautious flight out on to the roof of the nearest green-house where they were even more vociferous in demanding food. Every night at about 9 pm I checked they were all back inside the stable before closing the doors, the young on the nest and the adults roosting on nearby beams. The doors were opened as early as possible in the morning though I knew they could get out between the roof and the rafters but I did not want to have any accidents if they misjudged that little door. Each time I went in to the stable I talked to them gently only to get them used to my voice and recognise me as a friend. I am sure they understood.

I was away for less than a week at the end of June but came back to find the female sitting on a second brood in a different nest. The first brood returned to their nest at night, the adult female on the second nest and the male perched above overseeing his family.

This year the male was here on April 6<sup>th</sup> with the female arriving four days later. By the 25<sup>th</sup> this pair was using the first nest from last year. Once again on May 5<sup>th</sup> two more Swallows appeared, as last year, and were welcomed with much twittering by the resident pair. It seemed they were prepared to use another nest in the stable but were also prospecting inside our house once again. However by the first week in June the second pair seemed to be visiting only occasionally. The young Swallows

from the first nest fledged at the end of June. By July 11<sup>th</sup> the female back here was sitting tightly on a different nest well-hidden behind a diagonal beam which had not been used for three years. Her first brood were seen regularly flying with the adult male and roosted in the stable at night squashed together in and on their old nest.

On July 25<sup>th</sup> I found a present from my Swallows, the tiniest empty egg-shell, two pieces held together with a fine membrane, just to show there had been a hatching. The female was immensely patient, brooding her young and being fed by the male, but she rarely left the nest. Then five days after I found the egg-shell, in exactly the same place, was a perfectly formed, well-fed, dead baby Swallow. Very sad and I do not know why, but by the second week in August there were four little heads peering over the side of the nest and very quickly all four were out on the diagonal beam beside the nest with both adults busily feeding them.



The weather has not been helpful to birds which have to catch their food on the wing, but as soon as there is any break in the rain-showers all the Swallows are out hunting. Even as I sit and write this I can see them

twisting and turning around the house and stable. So, in 2014 ten young Swallows survived the first stage of their lives and left here to fly on that amazing journey south without the guidance of their parents. In 2015, nine young have safely fledged. The adults are still here making sure the second brood is building up the necessary fuel for that marathon journey. It is hard to understand how the bird which emerges from that tiny egg, can develop so quickly, the skills that will enable it to undertake a journey it has never done before. Migration is miraculous.



The photograph above compares the egg size of a Swallow with that of a Wood Pigeon.

Final update: the adult male and two juveniles left on Sept. 6<sup>th</sup> followed by the adult female the next day. Two young were together for three days but one left on Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>. The last youngster returned for six nights on its own. I let it out on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> and have not seen it again. The Swallow family had been here for 23 weeks and four days!

# Widewater Saline Lagoon LNR Spring & Summer 2015 and a little wider!

Tim Holter

Interesting ornithological activity is always at a low ebb in this Local Nature Reserve between April and August, the period covered by this report. Wintering birds such as Teal depart for more northerly nest sites and Little Grebes depart for sheltered nesting sites elsewhere as the reserve is too open and exposed to predators and public disturbance. Even the usually numerous Black Headed Gulls leave for safely remote ground nesting sites, but non-breeders are quick to return. An occasional lingering Redshank is seen and together with Ringed Plover. The latter are more regularly seen along the beach. Apart from the gulls, the first returning wintering birds have started to appear by the end of August and their numbers will gradually build up through the autumn.

For me the season's highlights at Widewater have been:

A newly arrived male Redstart in pristine condition which Brianne Reeve and I were fortunate to encounter on the 13<sup>th</sup> April. Gordon, the Lancing Parish Council groundsman, had erected a number of perching posts around the grass area near the car park and the Redstart used most of them as, in typical Redstart fashion, it searched for prey on the ground.

This was a big migration day. At the same time the Tamarisk bushes were full of Willow Warblers and earlier that day I had walked home to Shoreham from East Worthing through a large fall of Wheatears spread along the beach from Brooklands to Widewater.

Late in the afternoon of 3<sup>rd</sup> June Bernie Forbes alerted members to a Red Necked Phalarope in the lagoon which Jenny and I found later in the evening as the light faded. It appeared to be settling down to roost on a large expanse of algae. The next morning left a number of photographers and SDOS members disappointed as it had gone. This demonstrates the

value of Widewater for occasional rarities; this bird would have been off track on its migration to Arctic breeding areas with only eight spring sightings reported in Sussex since 1962. (*The Birds of Sussex*).

The one ever present interest is the fate of the pair of Mute Swans that breed every year. Six cygnets were raised in 2013 but only one survived from the nest in 2014 due to a change of nest site following house building works. Prior to 2015 breeding the new nest site was protected from foxes and dogs by netting and, so far, seven cygnets have survived.

Outgoing Wheatears are now passing through, both in the reserve but usually on the beach and a Greenshank has been seen during late August. This maybe the same bird seen from her houseboat by Jess Aidley in the RSPB Adur Nature Reserve and viewed from Coronation Green at low tide on the shell fish covered mudbank in the river. A Common Sandpiper has also been seen.

In the Spring 2016 Newsletter I hope to report on imminent improvements to the bird island (*to be called Allen Island as approved by the parish council*). I await with interest the next LNR management committee meeting to hear progress by WOW, the friends' groups, on plans for a visitor centre, an idea which has made limited progress since first aired a year ago. The intention is to construct a new visitor/education centre which will replace the existing octagonal booth, ice cream kiosk and toilets and provide much more space for LNR education and exhibition purposes. In August a constituency report from Tim Loughton, our local MP, advised that E-on may wish to site an information centre in respect of their off-shore windfarm at Widewater. This is potentially a golden opportunity for WOW to 'piggy-back' which will overcome planning approval, design and fundraising concerns. I believe WOW are following this up and I hope to report some positive progress. Watch this space!

## Selected records from 2014

### Clive Hope

The following list includes brief notes on some of the species recorded in the SDOS area in 2014. A list of the remaining species is added at the end. Thanks to John Newnham for providing the information from the SOS Database. Full details on all the birds on 'our patch' will be found in the SOS report when it becomes available.

#### **Bewick's Swan**

Five were on Beeding Brooks on Feb 9<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Tundra Bean Goose**

One was present in the Cuckoo Corner area of the River Adur from Dec 6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Whitefronted Goose**

Two on Beeding Brooks on Feb 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> then seven past Worthing beach on 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Barnacle Goose**

One at Goring Gap then Widewater on Mar 29<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Brent Goose**

Totals past Worthing beach were 1366 in Mar, 238 in Apr, 31 in May then 1153 in Oct, 175 in Nov and 51 in Dec.

#### **Pale-bellied Brent Goose**

One with Dark-bellied Brents past Worthing on Nov 7<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Egyptian Goose**

Up to three were present on Henfield Levels in Feb, Oct and Dec. Five near Shoreham Airport on Nov 29<sup>th</sup>.

## **Mandarin**

One record from Sandgate Park on Mar 19<sup>th</sup>.

## **Pintail**

A high count of c.400 on Beeding Brooks on Feb 17<sup>th</sup>.

## **Garganey**

Six reported. First was on Mar 30<sup>th</sup> when one past Worthing beach, then a pair on Steyning Levels on Apr 13<sup>th</sup>, a drake W along the beach at Ferring on May 4<sup>th</sup> and finally two W at Worthing on Jul 27<sup>th</sup>.

## **Long-tailed Duck**

Three seen from Worthing/Ferring beaches – one on Nov 9<sup>th</sup> and two on Dec 28<sup>th</sup>.

## **Common Scoter**

Seawatch totals from Worthing beach were 1172 in Mar, 351 in Apr, 2038 in May and 483 in June.

## **Velvet Scoter**

A total of 18 recorded during the year from the sea at Worthing and off Widewater.

## **Goosander**

At Widewater up to six noted in Feb.

## **Grey Partridge**

Maximum counts were ten at Chantry Hill and 12 at Lychpole Hill. Five in fields near Kingston Gorse on Oct 28<sup>th</sup> were the first in the area for many years.

## **Quail**

Between Jun 24<sup>th</sup> and Aug 2<sup>nd</sup>, one or two at Ditchling Beacon, Edburton, Steep Down and Cissbury.

## **Great Northern Diver**

One was reported from Worthing on Jan 30<sup>th</sup>.

## **Sooty Shearwater**

Two flew past Worthing beach on Oct 6<sup>th</sup>.

## **Manx Shearwater**

An early record on Mar 2<sup>nd</sup> from Worthing beach then one on Apr 27<sup>th</sup>, three on Jul 7<sup>th</sup> and three in Aug.

## **Balearic Shearwater**

Four flew past Worthing beach on Aug 25<sup>th</sup>.

## **Shag**

A maximum of seven in Brighton Marina on Dec 4<sup>th</sup>.

## **Little Egret**

The colony in the Adur Valley near Coombes continued to flourish. Sixteen birds resulted in six nests being used that produced seventeen young.

## **Spoonbill**

One off Goring Gap on Oct 5<sup>th</sup>.

## **Black-necked Grebe**

Two were on the sea off Worthing on Mar 31<sup>st</sup>.

## **Marsh Harrier**

Single birds were seen at four sites with two near Chantry Hill on Aug 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **Hen Harrier**

About eight birds noted during the year on the Downs or at Beeding Brooks, three in the first winter period and five in the second.

### **Osprey**

Six records received, two in Spring from Apr 14<sup>th</sup> and four in Autumn, last on Oct 14<sup>th</sup>. None of the birds lingered.

### **Merlin**

Six widely spread sightings. Early year records were between Jan 15<sup>th</sup> and Mar 15<sup>th</sup> and late year from Sept 26<sup>th</sup> and Dec 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **Oystercatcher**

A pair bred at Shoreham raising two young.

### **Avocet**

Eight were noted on spring seawatches. One was on the Adur at Shoreham on Nov 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Ringed Plover**

Four pairs attempted to breed in the area. Two fledged young were seen.

### **Grey Plover**

A maximum count of 120 on Goring Gap fields on Feb 12<sup>th</sup>.

### **Sanderling**

An outstanding count of 430 on the Goring Gap fields on Feb 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Little Stint**

One at Widewater on Sept 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> and on the Adur on Oct 7<sup>th</sup>.

### **Curlew Sandpiper**

An unusually early bird on the Adur on Mar 28<sup>th</sup> then one there between Aug 28<sup>th</sup> and Sept 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **Purple Sandpiper**

A maximum of ten at Shoreham Harbour on Feb 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Dunlin**

The Goring Gap roost held a huge 446 on Jan 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Ruff**

There were up to seven at Beeding Brooks between Jan 19<sup>th</sup> and Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **Jack Snipe**

Three at as many sites in the first winter period and two at Ferring Rife in the second.

### **Woodcock**

Singles on Feb 17<sup>th</sup> at Edburton and on Mar 16<sup>th</sup> in Brighton were the only records.

### **Black-tailed Godwit**

Fifty reported off Brighton Feb 16<sup>th</sup> (!).

### **Common Sandpiper**

Maximum count for the year was 20 on the Adur between Shoreham and Beeding on Jul 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Greenshank**

Up to four (15<sup>th</sup>) on the Adur Saltings in Aug.

### **Turnstone**

The Goring Gap roost held 270 on Feb 12<sup>th</sup>.

### **Grey Phalarope**

The popular bird at Hove Lagoon was present from Jan 5<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> and another appeared on Henfield Levels from Nov 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Pomarine Skua**

One E at Brighton Marina on Apr 23<sup>rd</sup>. Fifty-one passed E in May with 43 of them logged between Ferring and Lancing on 5<sup>th</sup> when there was a good passage along the south coast. In the autumn four flew W there on Nov 8<sup>th</sup>.

### **Arctic Skua**

Worthing seawatch totals were Apr ten, May 36, Jun one, Jul two, Aug two, Sep three, Oct seven and Nov one.

### **Great Skua**

In Apr 22 passed Worthing beach, 15 in May, three in Jun and five in Oct.

### **Little Gull**

A total of 37 passed Worthing beach in Apr but none in May.

### **Caspian Gull**

One was found on the Adur at Shoreham on Oct 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **Iceland Gull**

One was on Goring Gap on Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, one at Brooklands on 27<sup>th</sup> and one at Goring on Mar 27<sup>th</sup> and May 7<sup>th</sup>.

### **Glaucous Gull**

One was present in the Widewater, Shoreham, Southwick and Hove areas from Jan 7<sup>th</sup> to Mar 27<sup>th</sup>. One at Brighton Marina on Jan 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **Little Tern**

Recorded from Apr 8<sup>th</sup> but most in May with 119 E and 14W max. 71 on 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Tern**

Just four logged at Worthing beach (three on May 1<sup>st</sup>) and one at the Marina.

**Puffin**

One in Shoreham Harbour on Feb 9<sup>th</sup>. Four washed-up dead birds found.

**Turtle Dove**

Noted at three sites with two birds at Streatham Manor and Woods Mill.

**Rose-ringed Parakeet**

Three records from the Brooklands area of Worthing.

**Cuckoo**

First was one at Hollingbury on Apr 15<sup>th</sup> then noted from 18 sites.

**Barn Owl**

Thirty-one young reared at nine sites.

**Little Owl**

Seen at eleven sites but no proven breeding.

**Long-eared Owl**

Eight young fledged from three downland nests.

**Short-eared Owl**

There were up to eight at Upper Beeding in Feb and one or two at four sites in the latter part of the year.

**Swift**

First was on Apr 27<sup>th</sup> and last on Aug 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Hoopoe**

One in a Storrington garden on May 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> and one in Hove on Aug 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **Wryneck**

Four reported in Sep.

### **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**

One at Steyning King's Barn, Sewage Works on Nov 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Great Grey Shrike**

One near Ladywell, Lancing from Dec 11<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **Raven**

A maximum count of 14 at Chantry Hill on Aug 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Marsh Tit**

Just three sites reported holding one, two and three birds respectively. A worrying decline.

### **Sand Martin**

Not noted until May 1<sup>st</sup> and only five seen in Spring. Last was on Sep 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Swallow**

First was on Apr 3<sup>rd</sup> at Worthing beach. Peak movement in autumn there was 3450 on Sep 15<sup>th</sup>. Last was one at Sheepcote Valley on Nov 7<sup>th</sup>.

### **Red-rumped Swallow**

One on Apr 27<sup>th</sup> in the Kings Barn, Steyning SF area.

### **Yellow-browed Warbler**

One was trapped at The Mumbles, Steyning on Oct 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wood Warbler**

Three records in Jul and Aug.

### **Siberian Chiffchaff**

One or two at King's Barn / Steyning SF Jan 31<sup>st</sup> to Mar 23<sup>rd</sup> and from Dec 13<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Ring Ouzel**

Records from 11 sites between Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> and Nov 16<sup>th</sup>. Maximum was 15 at Truleigh Hill on Oct 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wheatear**

First was one on Ferring beach on Mar 13<sup>th</sup> and last one at Widewater on Nov 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### **Pied Flycatcher**

One on Apr 14<sup>th</sup> at Lancing Clump. Six in the Autumn at as many sites.

### **Brambling**

Two at High Salvington on Oct 16<sup>th</sup>, one at Sheepcote Valley on 22<sup>nd</sup> and one at Sweet Hill, Patcham on 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Siskin**

Very poor year with just three sites totalling 12 birds.

### **Lesser Redpoll**

Rather scarce with four sites recording just singles. Nine were trapped at The Mumbles, Steyning.



Other species recorded in the SDOS area in 2014:

Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Red-breasted Goose (presumed escape), Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Red-crested Pochard (presumed escape), Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Fulmar, Gannet, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Slavonian Grebe, Red Kite, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Hobby, Peregrine, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Knot, Snipe, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Curlew, Redshank, Green Sandpiper, Kittiwake, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, Guillemot, Razorbill, Feral Pigeon, Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Tawny Owl, Swift, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Magpie, Jay, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Goldcrest, Firecrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Skylark, House Martin, Cetti's Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Whitethroat, Sedge

Warbler, Reed Warbler, Nuthatch, Tree Creeper, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Robin, Nightingale, Black Redstart, Redstart, Whinchat, Stonechat, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Tree pipit, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Corn Bunting.

## February to July 2015 Highlights

### Stephen Simpson

These records were sourced mostly from the postings on the SDOS User Group and the Recent Sightings pages of the Sussex Ornithological Society web site and therefore are not confirmed.

#### **February 2015**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> at Shoreham Airport there were two Curlew and 230 Lapwing. Also on the 1<sup>st</sup>, at Widewater, there were 29 Little Grebes, two Red-breasted Mergansers, 11 Teal and on the beach, 32 Ringed Plover. On the sea there, on the 10<sup>th</sup>, were eight Great Crested Grebes and two Red-breasted Mergansers. Later in the month on 12<sup>th</sup> Widewater held 24 Teal.

Blackcaps were recorded in the SDOS area on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and a male was singing on the 18<sup>th</sup>. A pair of Long-tailed Tits was seen with nesting material at the NW corner of Goring Gap on 4<sup>th</sup> and a Firecrest was at High Salvington on 5<sup>th</sup>.

A Chiffchaff was at Goring on 1<sup>st</sup>, seven Snipe were at Beeding Brooks on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 100+ Dunlin were on the beach at East Worthing on 6<sup>th</sup>. On the sea at West Worthing on the 4<sup>th</sup> there were 85 Great Crested Grebes, around 20 Red-breasted Mergansers, two Red-throated Divers and a Shelduck.

Around Steyning Sewage Works two Siberian Chiffchaffs were seen on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> with 15 to 20 Chiffchaffs.

At Henfield Levels on 17<sup>th</sup> at least 800 Lapwing and about 50 Snipe were recorded. Four Purple Sandpipers were at Shoreham Harbour on 16<sup>th</sup> and two on 19<sup>th</sup>. A Chiffchaff was singing at Brighton Marina on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **March 2015**

Blackcaps were recorded at Lancing on 2<sup>nd</sup>, Steyning on 4<sup>th</sup>, Ferring on 18<sup>th</sup>, a pair in Worthing daily including 20<sup>th</sup> and Goring on 30<sup>th</sup>.

A Chiffchaff was singing near Lancing on 1<sup>st</sup> and Chiffchaffs were further recorded elsewhere on 13<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

At Widewater there were 14 Little Grebes on 1<sup>st</sup>, six Ruff and a Dunlin were at Henfield Levels on 9<sup>th</sup>. A Firecrest was at Lancing on 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. Near Ferring Rife on 16<sup>th</sup> a Reed Bunting and a Water Rail were recorded. At Steyning Sewage works two Siberian Chiffchaffs were recorded on 13<sup>th</sup> and one on 20<sup>th</sup>.

A female Eider E and two Fulmars were off Shoreham Harbour on 11<sup>th</sup>. Also at Shoreham Harbour on 17<sup>th</sup> there were two Rock Pipits and on 18<sup>th</sup> three Purple Sandpipers. A Black-tailed Godwit was on the Adur at Shoreham on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>.

Two pairs of Red-breasted Mergansers were on Widewater on 15<sup>th</sup>. Red-breasted Mergansers were also on the sea at Goring Gap, 10 on 14<sup>th</sup> and 16 on 21<sup>st</sup>.

Two Sandwich Terns were resting on the shoreline at Ferring on 12<sup>th</sup>. A Black Redstart was at Goring Gap beach on 12<sup>th</sup> and one was at Brighton Marina on 18<sup>th</sup>. A male Wheatear was recorded at Widewater on 17<sup>th</sup>, two males were at Brooklands on 18<sup>th</sup> and there was a further record from Widewater on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Brent Geese were on the move. From Ferring there were 120 E on 12<sup>th</sup>. From Goring Gap there were 50 E in one flock on 14<sup>th</sup>, 48 W and 241 E (including one flock of 111) on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 39 E on 24<sup>th</sup>.

Also from Goring Gap, one Fulmar E on 15<sup>th</sup>, two Red-throated Divers on 15<sup>th</sup>, one Curlew E on 21<sup>st</sup>, two Egyptian Geese over the beach on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25 Common Scoter E on 24<sup>th</sup>.

A Fieldfare, Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings (including a flock of 25) were in the area of Steyning Round Hill on 19<sup>th</sup>. Yellowhammer was also recorded at Cissbury on 18<sup>th</sup>.

Two Slavonian Grebes were on the sea at Ferring on 19<sup>th</sup> and two Ravens flew over Durrington on 20<sup>th</sup>. Two Short-eared Owls flew in off the sea at Shoreham Harbour on 25<sup>th</sup>.

## **April 2015**

Wheatears were at Ferring on 2<sup>nd</sup> (one), Hove beach on 3<sup>rd</sup> (two), Widewater on 4<sup>th</sup> (two) and 13<sup>th</sup> (five), Goring Gap on 4<sup>th</sup> (14) and 20+ between Brooklands and Shoreham on 13<sup>th</sup>.

At Worthing beach on the 3<sup>rd</sup> a Black-necked Grebe was offshore and two Common Terns and four Sandwich Terns flew E. Ten Sandwich Terns and one Common Tern flew E at Worthing beach on 4<sup>th</sup> and there were four Sandwich Terns E at Goring Gap on 5<sup>th</sup>.

A Swallow flew in from the sea at Widewater on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, one was at Bramber on the same day, two flew E at Worthing beach on the 4<sup>th</sup> and five were at Brooklands on the same day. Willow Warblers were at Worthing on 6<sup>th</sup>, The Mumbles on 9<sup>th</sup>, near Ferring on 9<sup>th</sup> (four), St Ann's Well Gardens on 12<sup>th</sup>, New Salts Farm bridge on 13<sup>th</sup>, Portslade on 13<sup>th</sup> (four) and Worthing on 13<sup>th</sup> (at least eight).

On the 8<sup>th</sup> at Ferring beach: Red-throated Divers two E, Brent Geese 95 E, Sandwich Tern 38 E, Common Scoter 15 E, Red-breasted Merganser 15 on the sea.

A Cuckoo was at Mill Hill on 7<sup>th</sup>, two Ravens were near Cissbury on 8<sup>th</sup>, a Common Redstart was at Goring Gap on 8<sup>th</sup>, a Black Redstart was near Steyning Round Hill on 9<sup>th</sup>, a Nightingale was at Woods Mill on 13<sup>th</sup>, a Reed Warbler was at New Salts Farm bridge on 13<sup>th</sup>, a Whinchat was at Widewater on 13<sup>th</sup>, two Yellow Wagtails were at Widewater on 13<sup>th</sup>, six Blackcaps were in Lancing on 13<sup>th</sup>, a Pied Flycatcher was at Lancing Ring on 13<sup>th</sup> and Whitethroats were at Wild Park on 13<sup>th</sup> and at Lancing Ring on 14<sup>th</sup>. House Martins were at Upper Beeding on 15<sup>th</sup> and a Sedge Warbler was near Cuckoo Corner on 19<sup>th</sup>.

A Black Guillemot flew E at Goring Gap on 16<sup>th</sup> and on 25<sup>th</sup> probably the same bird was seen offshore from Goring. A Hoopoe was at Goring on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. An Arctic Skua flew past Ferring beach on 19<sup>th</sup>, a Wryneck was heard at Woods Mill on 23<sup>rd</sup> and a Black-throated Diver flew E at Goring on 25<sup>th</sup>.

From Goring Gap: Brent Geese 55 E on 8<sup>th</sup>, 106 E on 9<sup>th</sup>, 71 E on 10<sup>th</sup>; Sandwich Terns 17 E on 9<sup>th</sup>, 21 E on 10<sup>th</sup>, 34 E on 16<sup>th</sup>; Red-breasted Mergansers 11 on the sea on 10<sup>th</sup>; Whimbrel 7 E on 15<sup>th</sup>, 11 E on 16<sup>th</sup>, 20 E on 22<sup>nd</sup>, 30 E on 23<sup>rd</sup>; Oystercatchers 14 on the beach on 22<sup>nd</sup>; Dunlin 12 on the beach on 26<sup>th</sup>; Common Scoter 10 E on 26<sup>th</sup>.

## **May 2015**

A pair of Gadwall was on the sea at Goring Gap on 1<sup>st</sup> and single Arctic Skuas flew E there on 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. Around 300 House Martins and Swallows were at Steyning Sewage Works on 3<sup>rd</sup> where there was also a Cuckoo on 7<sup>th</sup>. Also on the 7<sup>th</sup>, Nightingale and Reed Warbler were recorded at Woods Mill and again on 11<sup>th</sup>. A Cuckoo was calling outside Woods Mill on 13<sup>th</sup>. Four Sanderling were on the beach at Widewater on

9<sup>th</sup>, a female Siskin was at Worthing on 10<sup>th</sup>, a Spotted Flycatcher was just west of Ferring Rife on 12<sup>th</sup> and there was a male Common Redstart at Shoreham on 15<sup>th</sup>. A Spotted Flycatcher was at Shoreham on 20<sup>th</sup>.

On 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> a Nightingale was singing at Mill Hill and on 17<sup>th</sup> a Cuckoo was calling from the field below towards the Adur. On the same day on the Adur north of the A27 there was a pair of Oystercatchers and two Whimbrel, and one was in the area on 19<sup>th</sup>. Turtle Dove was recorded at Woods Mill from 8<sup>th</sup> and Cetti's Warbler from 13<sup>th</sup>. Cetti's Warbler was also heard from Mill Hill towards the river on 10<sup>th</sup>. A Black-tailed Godwit was on the Adur at Shoreham on 29<sup>th</sup>.

Species with young included Mute Swan at Widewater and Woods Mill, Coot and Reed Warbler at Woods Mill and elsewhere in the SDOS area: Robin, Blackbird, Mallard, Great Tit, Blue Tit, House Sparrow and Starling.

## **June 2015**

A Red-necked Phalarope was at Widewater on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. A Redstart was at Goring on 4<sup>th</sup>. A Bee-eater flew over Southwick on 7<sup>th</sup> and one was reported from the Brighton area on 26<sup>th</sup>. Two Hobbies were at Steep Down on 7<sup>th</sup>.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> throughout the month Water Rail with chicks were seen at Woods Mill. Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler and Turtle Dove were recorded there on several days. A Kingfisher was seen briefly on 13<sup>th</sup>.

Three Sandwich Terns flew W at Ferring on 7<sup>th</sup> and a seawatch there on the 12<sup>th</sup> produced 60 Common Scoter, 26 Common Terns, 28 Sandwich Terns, 23 Gannets and a Fulmar all heading E. Four Great Crested Grebes were on the sea.

From Mill Hill a pair of Cuckoos was seen and the male heard on 8<sup>th</sup>. One was heard from there again on 14<sup>th</sup> and a pair of Bullfinches was there on

16<sup>th</sup>. Five or six Swifts were over Hove on 14<sup>th</sup> and five were seen over Steep Down on the same day.

Additional species in the area with young included Stonechat at Steep Down on 7<sup>th</sup> and Song Thrush, Crow, Swallow and Herring Gull.

## **July 2015**

Oystercatchers were recorded as breeding in the SDOS area. A Common Sandpiper was at the Adur near the Cement Works on the 1<sup>st</sup> and a Green Sandpiper was at Bramber on the 9<sup>th</sup>. A Hobby flew over Cissbury on the same day.

A seawatch from Ferring on 11<sup>th</sup> produced two Common Terns W, as well as four Whimbrel, a Curlew and about 15 to 20 Sandwich Terns. A Common Gull was on the beach at Goring on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

On 25<sup>th</sup> a Marsh Harrier flew over the Adur and 11 Common Sandpipers were downstream from the Cement Works.

A pair of Stonechats was seen at Steep Down carrying food for young on 25<sup>th</sup> and a pair was recorded again on 29<sup>th</sup>. A Quail was heard there on the same day and Corn Buntings and Linnets were recorded on both occasions. Around 15 Grey Partridges were there on 31<sup>st</sup>.

A Redstart was at Henfield on 26<sup>th</sup> and a pair of Bullfinches was in High Salvington on 28<sup>th</sup>. Eight Willow Warblers were at the NW corner of Goring Gap on 30<sup>th</sup> and a Wood Warbler was recorded north of Cissbury on 31<sup>st</sup>. At least five Common Sandpipers were seen flying down the Adur also on 31<sup>st</sup>.

# Garden Bird Survey 2014

## Val Bentley

Members participating during 2014 were: Noranne Biddulph, Reg Bradbury, Jean Carder, Brian Clay, Jay Cooper, John Cooper, Shirley Downs, John Ford, Martin Ford, Clive Hope, Laurie Keen, Cyril & Maureen Leeves, Sheila Marshall, John & Shena Maskell, Janet & (the late) Gordon Paterson, David Potter, Antony Robinson, John & Jeannette Simpson, Stephen Simpson, Jim & Judith Steedman, Marion Taylor, Gordon & Vera Tickler, Rae Titcomb, David Tomalin, Peter Whitcomb, Martin Wilson and Audrey Wisdom. There were 27 forms returned for the first quarter and 25 for the remaining three.

After a great deal of time spent punching in the data from the forms returned, I can reveal that the fifteen most frequent garden visitors during the year were:

	Species	Average % of gardens used each quarter	2013 overall Position	2012 overall Position	Maximum number seen in one week	Average number seen per garden per week
1	Blackbird	100	1	1	9	1.60
2	Blue Tit	99	3	2	12	2.29
3	Dunnock	97	5	5=	7	0.86
4=	Robin	96	2	3	4	0.96
4=	Woodpigeon	96	4	4	c70	1.84
6	Great Tit	95	6	5=	6	1.14
7	Magpie	87	7	7	14	0.88
8	Collared Dove	79	8	8	16	0.84
9	Goldfinch	78	9	9=	23	1.16
10	Greenfinch	74	11	11	12+	0.75
11	Crow	73.5	12=	12	5	0.51
12	House Sparrow	73	14	13	c40	3.59
13	Starling	68.5	15	14	c60	2.67
14	Wren	68	12=	15	3	0.26
15	Chaffinch	64	10	9=	8	0.68

## First Quarter

The number of different species recorded was 38, considerably lower than the 49 seen in the same, much colder, period in 2013, and counts were down too. No Fieldfares or Siskins were seen, and only David P and John & Shena recorded Redwing. Reg and Sheila had Reed Buntings, with a pair on a feeder at Reg's on 11<sup>th</sup> March and two regularly visiting Sheila from the middle of February through to mid-March. There was a noticeable three year fluctuation in the number of gardens recording Song Thrush this quarter, 58% in 2012, 83% in 2013 and just 44% in 2014, and Long-tailed Tits showed a similar, but less pronounced, variation with 52%, 62% and 48% respectively.

Chiffchaffs were not recorded in any of our observers' gardens until March, but wintering Blackcaps were noted by Brian, John C, Shirley, Martin F, Clive, Laurie, Sheila, David P, Stephen, Marion, Vera & Gordon, Rae and Martin W. Nuthatches only visited those living at High Salvington, namely Brian and Janet & Gordon.

Greenfinches were seen in a slightly higher percentage of gardens in this quarter than in the previous two years, but fewer were seen, with a weekly average of only 1.17 turning up in the gardens which reported them, compared with 2.9 and 2.19 in the previous two years. However, while Goldfinch and Chaffinch numbers were both lower than those in the same period of 2013, they were similar to those of 2012.

Noranne noticed four Jays together on her patio on 2<sup>nd</sup> March and more than 30 Starlings turned up at Jean's in early March. John C was entertained on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February by two male Moorhens fighting in his flower beds – they retreated to the adjacent mill pond and were lying on their backs supporting themselves with outstretched wings and kicking and pecking at each other's undersides. Laurie commented that for the first spring ever, no Blue or Great Tits nested in his garden, but Martin F

noticed that Blue Tits occupying a nestcam box had driven off House Sparrows.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March Martin W was having breakfast when he spotted a pair of Long-tailed Tits very close to his back door, both of which collected a small white feather, so must have been nesting nearby. A Peregrine caused a great commotion under feeders in Audrey's communal garden in Shoreham on 15<sup>th</sup> January; it was on the ground, partly hidden by undergrowth, and she suspected it had dived onto Collared Doves on a flat roof but missed and was recovering its composure.

## **Second Quarter**

Thirty-seven different species recorded this quarter, with summer migrants passing through. Willow Warblers were seen by five recorders, and Whitethroats by both Noranne and Martin Ford in the week of 20<sup>th</sup> April. Swifts were first reported by Noranne on 14<sup>th</sup> May in Hove, and on 22<sup>nd</sup> May in Steyning by John C. Blackcaps were seen in seven of the gardens, but only Laurie recorded visits each week of the quarter.

Brian reported about 70 Wood Pigeons in a beech tree at the back of his house demolishing the new shoots – totally ignoring a tree preservation order! He also noted the only garden Bullfinch of the year in mid-June. Peter recorded his first ever Jay, which alighted briefly in a silver birch on 17<sup>th</sup> May, and the next day his first Greenfinch for about five years taking seed from borage plants. On 7<sup>th</sup> June John C noticed an adult Great Spotted Woodpecker feeding peanuts to a juvenile and Marion also recorded similar activity that month.

Rae followed the progress of a rather late Great Tit brood in a nestcam box. Commenting that a nest in another box had probably failed, she watched a female sitting on 9 eggs on 8<sup>th</sup> June, returned from a week away to find seven or eight hatchlings being fed by the 16<sup>th</sup> and they fledged on the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>. In another part of Shoreham, the numbers of

House Sparrows and Starlings at Audrey's rocketed from 15 to 30 and 12 to 40 respectively as young emerged from their nests in mid-May.

### **Third Quarter**

As in the first quarter there were 38 different species seen. Reg recorded Wheatear on two occasions, mid- August and the end of September, and on 9<sup>th</sup> September found an exhausted Sedge Warbler in his garden. He popped it into the shade to recover and eventually it flew off. His first Reed Bunting since the end of April turned up, with a companion, in the week of 21<sup>st</sup> September, a sign of winter on its way. Whitethroats were seen by David P for four consecutive weeks from mid-August to early September, and by Martin F who had a single bird early August and two in the week of the 10<sup>th</sup>. Willow Warblers passed through five gardens.

As in 2013 a female Mallard walked her ducklings into John C's conservatory in May. A Green Woodpecker in the last week of the quarter was a new garden bird for Clive at Ferring, while for Laurie one seen on 16<sup>th</sup> September was only his 3<sup>rd</sup> record in over 30 years. He had previously had a similar small number of visits from Great Spots in the same three decades, but from 25<sup>th</sup> August noted 14 daily visits from both a male and a female coming to take water, fat and nuts.

Slight changes to habitat can make all the difference. John & Shena had enjoyed regular visits from Goldcrest and Coal Tit until the neighbours' mature "pine" tree was severely pruned a couple of years previously, reducing the amount of cover – however things were improving and both species began to make regular appearances this quarter.

### **Fourth Quarter**

An increase to 41 species recorded. Pied Wagtails had hitherto been completely absent from all the gardens, until one was spotted by John C at the end of October, then individuals were noted by Vera & Gordon (3 weeks), David T (3 weeks) and Marion, right at the end of December. Grey Wagtails were seen this quarter by Noranne, Martin F, John & Shena

and Audrey, all single visits apart from three at Audrey's in late November. John & Shena were particularly pleased as one visited their newly renovated garden pond. Martin W will not forget the 27<sup>th</sup> of November - he was able to enjoy watching a Black Redstart, probably a young one, on his neighbour's roof for periods of up to 20 minutes catching insects during a stay of three hours or so. He very honestly added this as a footnote rather than claiming it as a garden bird!

As in the first quarter, only one Redwing was seen, at the end of December and again by John & Shena. No Chiffchaffs were reported after the week of 19<sup>th</sup> October, and late or wintering Blackcaps were seen by Martin F and John & Shena.

Laurie recorded his 49<sup>th</sup> garden bird (or 51<sup>st</sup> if he counts the Swallows and Swifts that used to feed nearby), when a Red-legged Partridge arrived at dusk on 3<sup>rd</sup> December and fed voraciously for a while. It returned again on the 6<sup>th</sup> and stayed for quite a while before flying off to the south.

### The “Also Rans”

Regular visitors, but outside the top 15 were:

Species	Average % of gardens used		
	2014	2013	2012
Herring Gull	47%	50%	47%
Jackdaw	43%	33%	31%
Feral Pigeon	38%	23%	29%
Long-tailed Tit	37%	47%	47%
Song Thrush	36%	46%	41%
Great Spotted Woodpecker	28%	33%	32%
Coal Tit	21%	26%	22%
Goldcrest	14%	22%	24%

Of these species Jackdaw and Feral Pigeon both seemed to be increasing their visits, and indeed are often found in the same gardens, while Song Thrushes were more frequent in 2013, but dropped back again in 2014 and Goldcrest appearances were considerably fewer in 2014.

## **In Summary**

The number of different species seen during the year was 48, comparing unfavourably with 63 in 2013 and 54 in 2012, and could be described in the same words as the BTO's Garden Bird Survey. Their GBW website page for 2014 says "2014 was a better year for birds than for Garden BirdWatchers. Due to a mild start to the year, a mostly dry summer and another warm autumn, most species started the year off in low numbers, but increased to average numbers during the summer and autumn, thanks to a productive breeding season. This saw Great and Blue Tit families arriving in gardens two-to-three weeks earlier than in recent years, as well as higher post-breeding numbers of House Sparrow and Wren. Towards the end of the year, a combination of mild weather and plenty of food available in the wider countryside meant that many species did not start to increase in gardens again until November."

Slight differences when comparing the SDOS and BTO top 15s were a lower ranking for Chaffinch and higher position for Magpie and Wren in the Shoreham recording area. All others were broadly similar, except for Coal Tit which made it into the top 15 BTO Garden birds for three of the four quarters in 2014, but was well off the leader board for us and, as only to be expected from a coastal area, a far greater frequency of Herring Gulls locally, which were 16<sup>th</sup> for SDOS and didn't figure in the top 43 shown by the BTO for any of the quarters of 2014!

I am always astonished at how many of you are faithfully carrying out weekly recording of the birds in your garden – I have just registered to do the BTO Garden BirdWatch, and hope I can be just as diligent!

# Ringling at Cissbury 2014

## Val Bentley

The first three months of the year are devoted to site management work in an attempt to keep the rampant ash and sycamore trees under some sort of control. On four of these occasions a single net was set and just two new birds were ringed and seven retrapped, one of these being a Firecrest ringed on 10<sup>th</sup> November the previous year. In 2014 29 ringing sessions were carried out, one more than in each of the previous two years but the total of birds trapped was considerably higher at 1577, compared with 1180 in 2013 and 937 in 2012. Of these 1308 were new birds, 266 retraps, and three controls, i.e. a capture of a bird ringed elsewhere.



**Table 1: Captures at Cissbury 2014**

Species	New	Retrap	Control	Total
Blackbird	40	25		65
Blackcap	462	56	1	519
Blue Tit	25	9		34
Bullfinch	34	13		47
Chaffinch	2			2
Chiffchaff	274	14	1	289
Dunnock	42	37		79
Firecrest	8	1		9
Garden Warbler	9			9
Goldcrest	65	16		81
Goldfinch	19	1		20
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1			1
Great Tit	19	10		29
Green Woodpecker	1			1
Greenfinch	15	1		16
Lesser Whitethroat	4	2		6
Linnet	1			1
Long-tailed Tit	24	29		53
Redstart	1			1
Redwing	8			8
Reed Warbler	10			10
Robin	65	22		87
Song Thrush	29	1	1	31
Spotted Flycatcher	1			1
Treecreeper	2			2
Whitethroat	61	10		71
Willow Warbler	53			53
Woodpigeon	1			1
Wren	30	19		49
Yellowhammer	2			2
	<b>1308</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1577</b>

Although rain curtailed one effort after just two captures, numbers during the five visits in May and June (109 new and 45 retraps) were higher than during the same period in 2013 (88 new and 46 retraps in six visits). Phil Clay and Tom Flower carried out the first session on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, finding 42 birds of 13 different species, with returning migrant Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and a Whitethroat. It was the only time that year that we encountered V945551, a male Blackcap ringed as a juvenile on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2009, but he did

return again in 2015. On the second visit, on 17<sup>th</sup> May, the first juveniles were found, four Blackbirds and one Robin. In 2013 we had waited until 15<sup>th</sup> June for the appearance of juveniles of these species and 17<sup>th</sup> May was the earliest date for a juvenile Robin in the 26 years during which we have been ringing here in the spring. We also discovered that for the second year running Great Tits were using a hole in one of our railway sleeper seats to raise a family, and hastily moved the ringing operation away from the table! The first juvenile Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were trapped on the 8<sup>th</sup> June, three weeks earlier than in 2013 and by the end of July juveniles of these species ringed had reached 34 and 24 respectively.

As well as the new young birds arriving in the nets, June also saw the installation by the National Trust of a fence around the ringing site, a precursor to the future introduction of cattle into the area.

We had only trapped a single adult Bullfinch in 2013, despite there being 15 new juveniles ringed. However in 2014 we caught four adult males and three adult females, including one ringed in 2011 which had not been retrapped since its initial capture. Thirty young birds ringed indicated a much better breeding season for the species. The bulk of young Bullfinches arrive in August (219 out of a grand total of 347 still in complete juvenile plumage), but this year the first was ringed on 14<sup>th</sup> June, the earliest date by three weeks, though there was then a month's gap until another two on 14<sup>th</sup> July.

Other species of finch ringed during the breeding season were Goldfinch with an adult female on 4<sup>th</sup> May and four juveniles between June and early August and Greenfinch with four males and two females trapped in May and three juveniles later. However apart from hearing a male in song on three visits in May and June, Chaffinches were absent from the nets until two were caught on 12<sup>th</sup> October, an adult male and a first year female. Two female Yellowhammers were ringed on 17<sup>th</sup> May, and though neither had a brood patch we heard a male singing on that visit and on others until the end of July, so breeding was suspected.

Our six most recorded resident breeding species mainly had a productive year. The table below shows totals for the past five years of the numbers of juveniles plus first year birds ringed until the end of September; other first year birds captured thereafter could well be incoming individuals, particularly in the case of Robins and Blackbirds.

**Table 2: Productivity of six resident species**

Species	Number of juveniles and first year birds (to 30/9)				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Blackbird	3	17	17	8	22
Blue Tit	41	32	10	19	14
<u>Dunnock</u>	13	30	18	24	29
Great Tit	43	28	4	10	16
Robin	22	40	35	24	43
Wren	13	24	12	13	22

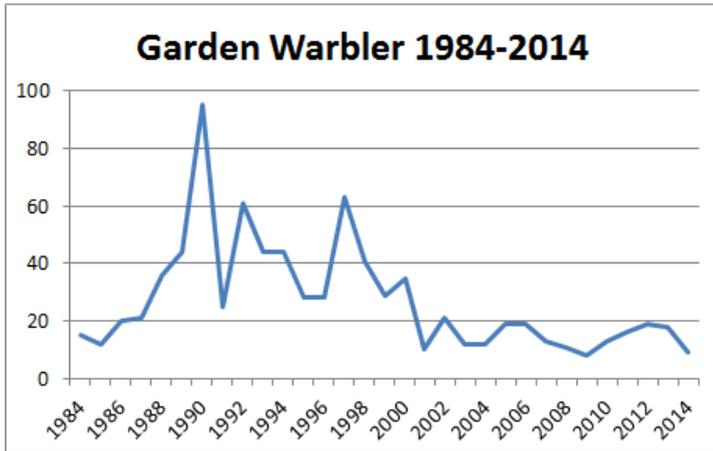
Both tit species have become less common over this five year period, but Blackbirds, Dunnocks, Robins and Wrens have maintained or increased their production.

Some of our migrant breeding species did well in 2014, others less so. We only trapped one adult Garden Warbler, a male on 14<sup>th</sup> June, then no more until three first year birds on 3<sup>rd</sup> August and only a total of nine in the year. Two Lesser Whitethroats, a male and female, were ringed on 17<sup>th</sup> May, but no juveniles appeared, just two probable passage birds in late August. There were 12 adult female Blackcaps trapped in May and June, two female Chiffchaffs i.e. with brood patches, and four adult female Whitethroats.

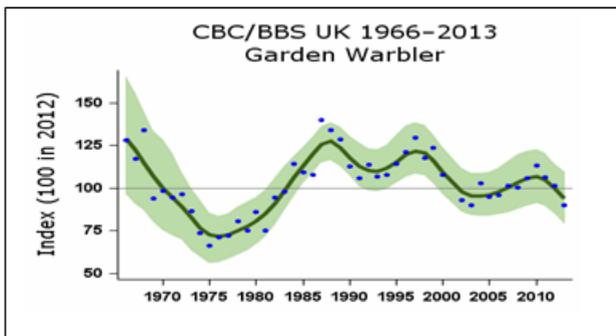
Many species, such as Garden Warbler, that winter south of the Sahara are showing long-term population declines, particularly notable among these being Cuckoos and Turtle Doves. Our own small-scale trend is broadly similar to that shown from the BTO Common Birds Census and Breeding Bird Survey results. This is reproduced below, though the

CBC/BBS data collection obviously starts much earlier than our Cissbury records.

**Numbers of Garden Warblers ringed at Cissbury 1984-2014**



**Population Trend for Garden Warbler 1966-2013 (BTO)**



“Autumn” arrived on 27<sup>th</sup> July with the first obvious passage birds, namely one each of Willow and Reed Warbler. More Willow Warblers followed before the last of 53 new birds for the year was ringed on 5<sup>th</sup> September, the maximum daily tally was 22 on 15<sup>th</sup> August. Ten Reed Warblers passed through the site before the final one on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, but there

were no Sedge Warblers. Other scarcer passage migrants for us were a Spotted Flycatcher on 2<sup>nd</sup> September and a Redstart on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

There are always new occurrences, and apart from the first June Bullfinch juvenile, we also had the only August Firecrest at either Cissbury or The Mumbles, when a female of undetermined age was ringed on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.



Towards the end of August and into September, the majority of the birds ringed are Blackcaps, with a mixture of locally bred birds and others passing through, taking advantage of various types of berries to gain weight before migration. On 30<sup>th</sup> August one very light bird only weighed 13g, while another was 25.3g. A very busy morning on 2<sup>nd</sup> September saw 75 new Blackcaps ringed out of a total of 102 birds in the morning. The final Willow Warbler of the year was ringed on 5<sup>th</sup> September, but the numbers of Chiffchaffs built up to 47 on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, though they were just outnumbered that day by Blackcaps at 51. Two weeks later the tally was 56 Chiffchaffs to 41 Blackcaps. Both species lingered into

November. One Blackcap was caught on 18<sup>th</sup> November and two Chiffchaffs on our final session on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

As seen from the table below both Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs exceeded their average percentage of birds ringed while Whitethroats and Willow Warblers were at their lowest. Again the last two are longer distance migrants, like the Garden Warbler.

**Table 3: Totals of Four Passage Species (as percentages of total number of birds ringed)**

Years	Blackcap	Chiffchaff	Whitethroat	Willow Warbler
2000-2004	25.5	13.7	6.9	6.8
2005-2009	30.6	15.9	5.0	5.8
2010	25.7	11.8	8.3	11.5
2011	34.9	20.9	5.4	5.7
2012	24.1	15.3	4.5	7.0
2013	32.3	23.0	5.0	4.8
2014	35.3	20.9	4.3	4.0

Apart from the August bird, the first autumn ‘crests were two Firecrests and six Goldcrests on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, with nine different Firecrests and 66 Goldcrests seen during the year. The first Redwing arrived on 4<sup>th</sup> November and seven more were ringed between then and our final session at the end of November. Song Thrushes came too, with just eleven until the end of September but a further 19 captured thereafter, including one on 29<sup>th</sup> November that had been ringed over the channel in the Dunes de la Slack, just south of Calais, exactly two months earlier.

Two other controlled birds were ringed in the UK, a first year Blackcap ringed near Southampton two weeks before we found it at Cissbury on 30<sup>th</sup> September, and a Chiffchaff trapped on 12<sup>th</sup> October which had been ringed near Aldermaston eight days earlier. The only known movement of a bird away from the site was a recapture of a Long-tailed Tit, ringed at Cissbury on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011 but which has preferred the Ladywell Valley since 2013 and was once more trapped by the team there on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

It is always pleasing to retrap birds from previous years, and those of more venerable age found in 2014 were:

**Table 4: Selection of Retraps 2014**

Ring No.	Species	Ringed	Recaptured	Minimum Age
X960977	Robin	27.08.11	29.11.14	3 yr 94 d
CF17961	Blackbird	04.06.11	03.05.14	2 yr 333 d
CF17974	Blackbird	27.08.11	03.08.14	2 yr 341 d (Also retrapped 2015)
CF17983	Blackbird	05.11.11	15.11.14	3 yr 10 d (First recapture)
CF17986	Blackbird	12.11.11	18.11.14	3 yr 6 d (First recapture)
V945508	Blackcap	16.05.09	03.08.14	5 yr 79 d (First year of recapture)
V945551	Blackcap	20.06.09	03.05.14	5 yr 325 d (Also retrapped 2015)
V945985	Blackcap	29.04.10	03.05.14	4 yr 4 d
X960171	Blackcap	24.07.10	09.08.14	4 yr 16 d
X960092	Blue Tit	03.07.10	17.05.14	3 yr 318 d
X960087	Great Tit	03.07.10	22.08.14	4 yr 50 d
X960911	Bullfinch	20.08.11	17.05.14	2 yr 270 d

Ringers at Cissbury during the year were Val Bentley, Brian Clay, Phil Clay, Tom Flower, and Sue Walsh, with one visit from Chrissi White. We remain grateful to the National Trust for their permission to ring at the site, to Vic Oliver the NT Warden with whom we liaise with regard to site management, and to the owners of the track for allowing vehicular access.

## The Nightingale sings in Spring

### Sue Miles

It is Mid-April and time to visit Pulborough Brooks for an annual treat. A walk from the visitor centre to the first corner where the path turns downhill and there it is that rich, fluid, varied song of the nightingale. Stops at the courtyard, picnic area and the top of adder alley provide further renditions. Sightings can be difficult but each year I find at least one bird I can photograph and then just watch in amazement how this tiny bird can produce such a volume of sound. With all its body quivering it delivers the familiar notes. Singing continues until early June with unpaired males singing at night and territorial ones during the day.

In the latest statistics there are 6700 breeding males in England. Sussex is a stronghold for the species in the United Kingdom and the latest BTO survey suggests upwards of 800 territories with a strong representation in the wet clay lowlands to the north of the Downs. Birds can be heard singing from wet, scrub habitat along minor roads in the favoured area and a little patience, particularly in the morning, and early in the season may provide a welcome view.



Nightingale in full voice at Pulborough Brooks RSPB.

## Images of local birds



Wheatears at Goring Gap in late August 2015 (Clive Hope)



Firecrest in West Sussex in early March



Coal Tit at Burton Mill Pond in early April



Stonechat at Ambersham Common in late May



Spotted Flycatcher at Blackdown in early June



Black-winged Stilt at Sidlesham Ferry in April

## Society officers

(Officers in post following the A.G.M. of 10th February 2015)

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Front Cover: Turtle Dove by Dorian Mason

Rear Cover: Peregrine Falcon by Dorian Mason

