

Shoreham and District
Ornithological Society
Autumn Newsletter
2021



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Editorial

Roger Smith

It is early September here in Pulborough and summer has finally arrived although the forecast suggests not for long. It hasn't been the Mediterranean summer that the climate change forecasts of 15 years ago promised us but a benefit has been that, unlike last year, my Fuchsia bushes have thrived in the prevailing cool conditions. Fuchsias are plants of the mountain rainforests of South America and this is why they do well in places like western Ireland and the West Country, whilst being a little more problematic in the south east of England. Indeed it has been so cool that my white-flowered *Fuchsia magellanica alba* has few flowers at all. This bush needs some warmth to flower freely.

Our Newsletter again is a bumper production in terms of length but in this edition there is an emphasis on bird recording and its value in our local region with articles by Jenny Holter, John Newnham and John Maskell. The SDOS recording area extends well to the east of Shoreham, as far as Ditchling Beacon and Brighton Marina, and Peter Whitcomb's article on the Hollingbury area of Brighton and Moulsecoomb Wild Park serves to remind us of a good birding area within the Brighton City limits. Clive Hope's article on birds recorded locally, again refers to the Recording Area and if you are a bit uncertain where this is there is a map on the website.

Yet again a big thanks from me to all our contributors who maintain a seemingly constant flow of articles and it is good to see new writers and photographers appearing on the scene.

Best wishes to you all

Roger

Presentations to Long Serving Officers



As a result of Covid necessity, the presentation, held earlier in the year, to the long serving officers and members of SDOS Council Bernie Forbes, Audrey Wende and Dorian Mason was a quiet celebration of their many years of combined service to the Society.

Bernie joined the Society as a teenager in 1962 and became the field outings organiser in the early 1970's. Following service as the Society's Recorder and Chairman he became President of the Society, retiring in 2021 after nearly twenty years in the role. Bernie will continue to lead some of our Field Outings and we all look forward to experiencing many further years of his inspiring bird-finding ability.

Following many years of service to the Sussex Ornithological Society, Audrey joined SDOS Council in January 2011 and replaced Brianne Reeve as our Chairman in 2017. During her period on Council she also took on the role of

organising the refreshment team and served for a time as Minutes Secretary. She brought a wealth of experience of Sussex ornithology to the deliberations of Council and we are sure she will continue to provide us with sound advice into the future.

Dorian joined the Council as Field Officer in 2006 and organised the Society's Outings Programme for nearly ten years until 2015. He continued to serve on Council until Spring 2021. Dorian has particular skills as a bird photographer and his inspiring images have enlivened this and many other editions of our Newsletter. We can look forward to enjoying many more of his ornithological portraits in the Newsletter and our other publications.

Patch birding at New Salts Farm

Jenny Holter

I have never considered myself a 'patch birder', someone who regularly covers the same patch of land, observing bird behaviour and seasonal changes in populations. I have always enjoyed walking and my birding preference has been exploring a rich variety of places, both around Sussex and across the UK, appreciating scenic views and the variation of habitat and birdlife this offers. In recent years I have also been enthralled by the stunning abundance of fascinating birds and diverse scenery to be found abroad.

However, with the news of Adur and Worthing Councils planning to create a new nature reserve at New Salts Farm, we were given permission to undertake an informal 'baseline survey'. This loosely followed the format of the common bird census, with a commitment to 10 visits, recording all birds seen or heard, with the exception of common corvids and Woodpigeons. So, I was curious to discover whether I could come to enjoy this type of birding, or whether my expectation that I would find covering the same area every week 'boring' would prove to be correct.

Tony Benton and Tim Holter had already completed an initial visit in November 2020, when the usual generalist subjects were seen – corvids, gulls and 41 red-listed Starlings. Birds of note were a single Meadow Pipit on the fence-line and a Cetti's warbler singing from scrub adjacent to a ditch. However, it was not possible to access the whole site.

A further pre-survey visit in January 2021, yielded a total of 28 species, with Starling again topping the bill (70 birds, conveniently perching on telephone wires at regular intervals), followed by Jackdaws feeding on the sheep-bitten grass fields (30 birds). Good numbers of Blue Tit and Great Tit were present, mainly around the site margins, perhaps easily seen at this time of year with limited leaf cover on the trees and bushes. House Sparrows were abundant, particularly where homes and gardens abutted the site boundary. There was evidence of birds being fed in these gardens, but also plenty of bushes for roosting and feeding, and the use of old sheds and garages for potential nesting sites.

Key features of the site included reed-lined ditches, where a pair of Mute Swan was found, and a Cetti's Warbler gave a metallic call from the exact same spot as heard in November, indicating a permanent territory at this location. At the boundary, a small copse with a number of Black Poplars, probably non-native, alongside some willow, hawthorn and bramble scrub was also fruitful. This copse included some fallen trees and dead wood, and here we found both Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker, plus four calling Stock Dove. On the other side of a ditch, a large wasteland area offered three Stonechat, a Dunnock and Goldfinches, all making use of plentiful seed-heads and a few isolated scrubby bushes. A kestrel was observed hovering overhead. Thus, our first visit gave a positive impression of a diverse range of habitats with the potential to offer an interesting selection of birds as the weeks progressed.

We began our weekly monitoring on 18th March 2021. A pair of Mute Swans was now nesting on a raised bank within a small reed bed. The Cetti's Warbler was again heard from its regular location, now dubbed 'Cetti's Corner' and the Stock Doves were also favouring the same area within the copse. As we had

hoped at this time of year, a number of Chiffchaffs were foraging in the bushes and treetops. Overhead a Kestrel was quartering the area and we were also pleased to get a super view of a Sparrowhawk.



Over the course of the next few weeks, we were pleased to observe some further indications of potential early breeding activity with singing Chiffchaff, a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming repeatedly in the copse and no less than 5 Cetti's Warblers calling from varied locations around the site on our second visit. Two Skylarks were also displaying, soaring skywards with their joyous song before cascading down and disappearing into the grassy field. These were observed over several weeks, and one was seen resting on a small

mud patch, but we were never able to confirm breeding, and the numbers of Jackdaws active on the fields, together with at least two families of foxes, would suggest any attempted nesting was unlikely to bring success. As Spring progressed, we began to identify more suspected breeding territories with Reed Buntings and Cetti's warblers consistently observed singing from favoured locations and at least four Wren territories identified.



Migrant passage birds also provided additional interest. On an early visit in March, just beyond the site boundary I was very pleased to see a migrant Black Redstart flick its scarlet tail at us before flying off. In late April, accompanied by Bernie Forbes, we flushed a few Snipe from the ditch, presumably passing through en-route to their breeding grounds. As the weeks went by, we were thrilled to also find a Garden Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher, and a number of Willow Warblers, but best of all was a fabulous Hobby, which stayed

perched in a tree in the copse for our entire visit, presumably newly arrived and exhausted after a long migration.

Late April brought the first summer migrants that would stay to nest. Reed Warblers were abundant, together with good numbers of Sedge Warbler making use of the reed lined ditches, whilst Whitethroat frequented the scrubby landscape and bramble thickets, and Blackcaps burred their distinctive song from the hedgerows and copse. The Swans had now hatched seven cygnets, although the family disappeared by the following week. During May Swallows and Swifts began to appear regularly over the fields in small numbers, and Grey Heron, a pair of Mallard, and a Moorhen with four chicks, were all seen in the ditches, before the reeds gradually closed in, making viewing impossible.

By the time we reached our final survey date in early June, bird observation had become more challenging, with tall vegetation providing cover for ground birds and considerably less bird song together with full leaf cover hiding any passerines. However, there was now clear evidence of breeding success, with fledgelings active and we noted young Reed Buntings, Sedge Warblers, Great Tits, Carrion Crow and Reed Warblers. Whitethroats were seen carrying caterpillars. Amusingly, we also heard a Song Thrush mimicking the bird scaring sound regularly heard from the airport.

One of the recommendations of the Common Bird Census is to include an evening or night-time visit. Due to various commitments we did not manage to achieve this, but both felt it would have been interesting and worthwhile to have included this. Barn Owls and Short-eared Owls have both been reported from the farmland areas in past winters, so this would certainly be worth following up on later in the year. Additional visits during the autumn migration period would probably also be fruitful, as the hedgerows and bramble patches should provide plentiful food for birds wanting a last feast before heading south. The habitat also looks good for migrating Whinchat.

Overall, the site has tremendous potential to attract some interesting birds. We managed to log around 55 species on Birdtrack from our own limited

observations, so with others visiting and recording their sightings across the seasons and over a number of years I am sure many more species would be found. These are exciting times for Shoreham birdwatching!

So, am I a convert to patch birding? Well, partially. In just a few months we managed a good variety of birds, so there is great potential to achieve a good bird list from this site going forward. It is also satisfying to be able to walk to a local site, especially in these times where we are increasingly aware of our environmental footprint. Perhaps too I learnt to focus a little more closely on some bird behaviours and seasonal patterns, which would probably make me a much better birdwatcher. But I shall always love to spread my wings further afield too ...Scotland, here I come!

Bird Recording in the Society's Area

John Newnham

One of the main objectives of the budding society in the early 1950s was to promote the study and protection of birds and their environment; these aims remain high in the Society's recent review of policies and rules which were approved at the 2021 annual general meeting. Central to any study, and the preservation of wildlife habitats, are the records held by, or available, to the society. With increasing pressure from central government to provide more housing the developers are not only exploring potential brownfield sites in our built-up area but are making assaults on green spaces. Being armed with information is vital. In many ways Planning Committees are not unlike a court of law; the better the evidence presented the more likely the right outcome is secured. In this article the history of the Society's recording is explored, how this has evolved and consideration given to ways current recording practices can be utilised to provide information to aid planning decisions.

For the first sixty years the Society had an Honorary Recorder who not only sat on the Society's Council but was responsible for collating and storing observations from which an annual review was created to feed back to the

membership in the Annual Report. This task was undertaken by nine members, listed in the following table, during these six decades.

JM Twort	1953-64		BF Forbes	1981-86		PJ Whitcomb	1997-2003
T Palmer	1965-74		DI Smith	1987-92		CE Hope	2004-11
JA Newnham	1975-80		RM Shaw	1993-96		SP Simpson	2012

During the early years member's observations were posted to the Recorder on sheets of paper. These were usually from a fairly small number of regularly watched local sites most of which had well known abbreviations in the annual report, WW-Widewater, CC-Cuckoo's Corner, TB-Toll Bridge, FA-Flood Arch some examples. The hand-written notes were transcribed into a note book, or on to loose A5 sheets during my tenure in the post, to facilitate drafting species accounts for the report. Do any of these original sheets still exist I wonder. At this time only observations which were deemed more interesting were recorded so the Annual Reports included mainly the 'notable' records and for many years not all species occurring in the area were reported.

During the late 1970s the Society's membership was expanding with members living and recording at sites further away from Shoreham so in 1981 the society changed its name from the Shoreham Ornithological Society to the Shoreham District Ornithological Society (SDOS). At this time it was felt that some clear definition was needed for the boundaries for observations to be included in the annual report and the first map defining the area was produced in the 1985 Annual Report. During this period there were active members living in Goring and Ferring, the Ferring Rife being an area the society was working in, and several Brighton members watched places like Coney Hill, Wild Park,

Sheepcote Valley and the Brighton Marina so the western and eastern limits were pragmatically set. There was a suggestion to use one of the northings (TQ15) to complete the boundary. This seemed a reasonable proposal for the local society to take an interest and record locally leaving the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) to deal with the rest of the county. Furthermore most natural history societies have clearly defined recording limits whether it be county administrative borders, Watsonian Vice Counties or grid squares. This then gave the SDOS a focus and members surveyed and recorded, in detail, at several local patches, to build up an archive of records.

The number of contributors to the list of records up to 1981 remained fairly constant with an annual average of 21 observers. Thereafter there was a rise in the number of observers acknowledged in the annual report as shown in Figure 1.

During the late 1980s the SOS explored the possibilities of computing bird records and by 1989 CoBRA (County Bird Recording Application) had been set up to capture the county's bird records (arrow in Fig 1).

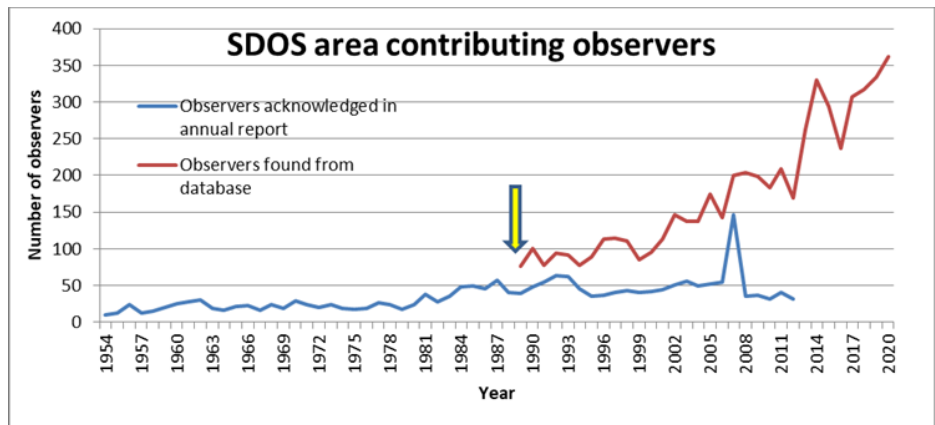


Figure 1:- The number of observers who contributed records in the SDOS area 1954-2020.

Computing revolutionised recording by directing observers to gather information in a uniform fashion and, most importantly, allowed the dataset to be interrogated not only by species but by location. This system was designed to enable smaller recording groups in the County to easily tap into this facility so it became possible to collect information from the SDOS recording area. Thereafter the SDOS reports were generated from a mix of paper-based records with an increasing reliance on the output from CoBRA. Further marked changes occurred in 2002 when the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) set up Migration Watch, an on-line recording system for logging sightings. This was initially designed to investigate the departure of wintering and arrival of summer migrants but it rapidly evolved into Birdtrack which has developed into the recording system many members use today. In recent years eBird, administered by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology (Ithaca, New York), has become another popular recording medium and iRecord, operated by the Biological Records Centre as part of the work of the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, is often used by the more general naturalist. Thus over 90% of the records logged into CoBRA now derive from a variety of on-line recording systems with the remainder coming from other databases. Long gone are the days of transcribing or keying records from paper forms. Figure 1 also shows the rapid increase in the number of observers recording in the SDOS area culminating in over 350 in 2020. However, many are visitors to the area providing a few casual observations.

With the development of Birdtrack observers were encouraged not only to note outstanding or unusual observations but to record full lists of species seen or heard during a visit to a site. This provides useful information about species presence and plots migration in detail. Furthermore it fundamentally altered the way birds were being recorded with common and widespread species also being logged. This brought bird recording in line with the methods many groups recording other taxa were already using and was particularly valuable during the last county tetrad atlas survey (2007-11). This practice, coupled with the increased number of observers, has resulted in the number of records to rise dramatically as shown in Figure 2. Although there are over 30,000 historical

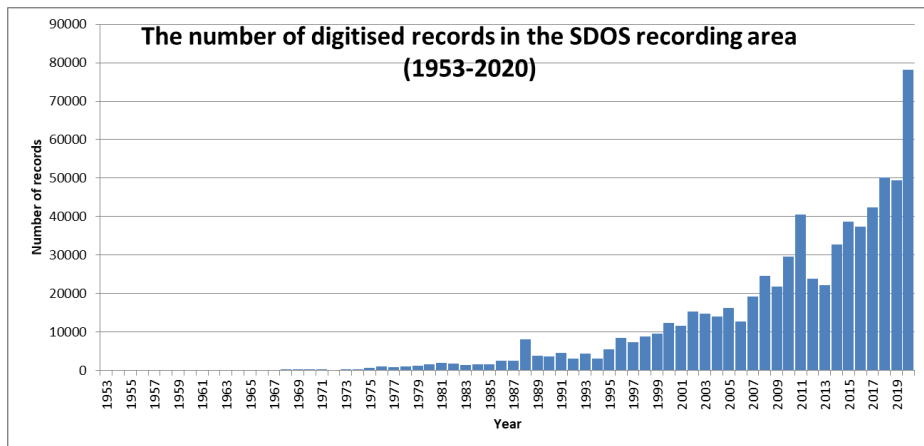


Figure 2:- The number of records held in COBRA for the SDOS area 1953-2020.

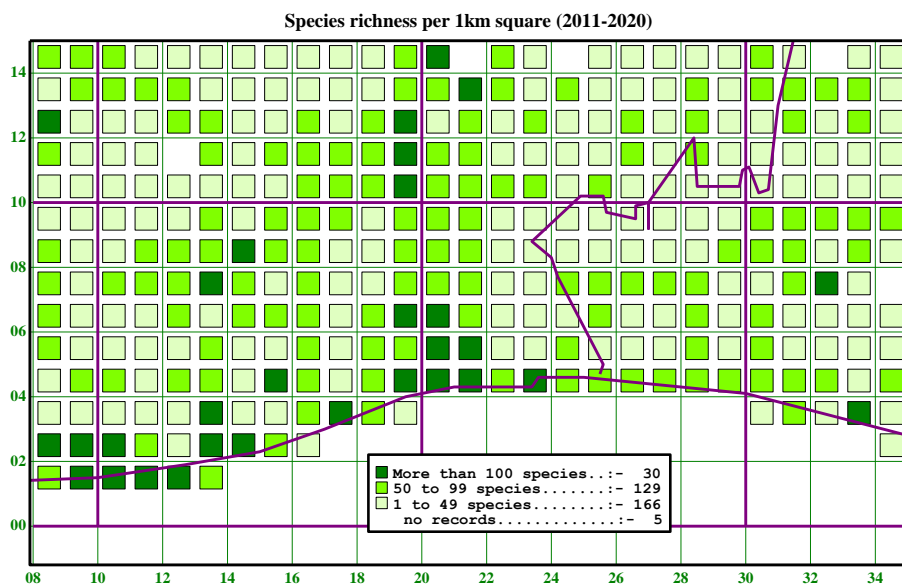


Figure 3:- The number of species recorded in each 1km grid square in the SDOS area 2011-2020.

records digitised for our recording area for the years 1953-1988 these are insignificant in comparison with recent years.

Completing full species list also improves the ability to provide evidence about species diversity at various sites. This feature is one which ecologists and planners find of value and the presence of 100 or more species using a place is one of the county features to make a site a candidate to become a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). Figure 3 shows the recorded species richness in each of the 1km grid squares in our recording area; the figure also includes species flying through the square and shows, not surprisingly, areas on the coast and in the Adur Valley to support the most varied range of species.

Figure 3 only plots records for the most recent ten year period; although long term trends are important the current presence of large numbers of species provides a stronger argument to offer protection to an area. The other aspect of recording which is of great value when preparing reports to support or challenge planning applications is the presence during the breeding season (April to July) of species of Conservation Concern (Red and Amber) or other designations such as Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) or Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). The species involved can be found in the Sussex List at <https://www.sos.org.uk/the-sussex-list-v2>. However, detail needs to be correctly recorded and from the conservation view point the 'Gold Standard' would be for all records of these species to have a pin-point 100 m grid reference and a breeding status code; both features which are very easy to record within Birdtrack. Figure 4 shows how disappointing this aspect of local recording has been over the past decade.

So how can YOU help? Despite the large number of local contributors there are many members who do not record their interesting observations for potential future analysis or to aid conservation actions. Unfortunately postings on blogs, social media such as Facebook, websites or e-user groups do not regularly get converted into records in the database but all entries into the

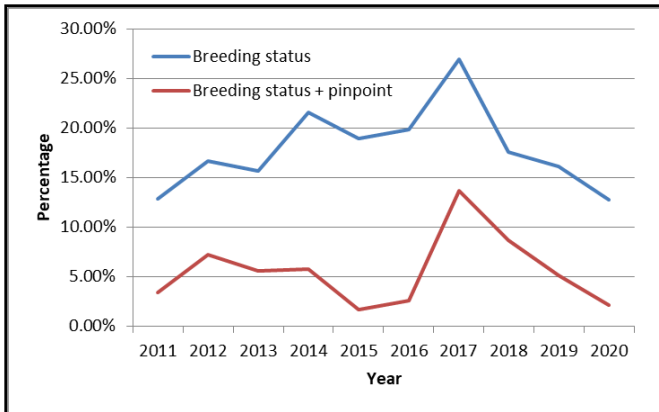


Figure 4:- The percentage of records received between April and July (2011-2020) with a breeding status (blue) and additional eight character grid references (red) for designated species on the Red and Amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern, Schedule I (1981) and Section 41 (2006)

main on-line recording systems previously mentioned are harvested. Why not consider taking part in one or more of the many national or county surveys, usually organised by the BTO or SOS but occasionally by other bodies. Not all surveys require a high level of expertise or a massive time commitment; details can regularly be found on the BTO or SOS websites. Some merely involve recording in your garden.

Watching a regular ‘patch’ can be very instructive and most rewarding. One of the first actions of our society was to lease the ‘Sanctuary’ – a patch which was very regularly visited between 1953 and 2007 with, during several years, in excess of 200 days of recording. Take a look at Figure 3 and with the aid of an Ordnance Survey map pick an area with a pale shade of green or with no recent records and go and explore.

There are several points which enhance the value of records entered into Birdtrack or other systems. Clearly the species seen, where and when are key aspects but the more precise the location the greater the value of the record. As previously mentioned Birdtrack has an excellent facility for ‘pin-pointing’,

with an eight-character grid reference, the precise place a species was seen. Most recording systems allow the recording of a species presence but an estimated number or precise count is much more valuable, although not always possible. When recording movements, in particular a seawatch, the duration including start and finish times and a flight direction are vital details; a feature prompted by several recording systems. Almost all recording systems have space to add interesting notes. Such points are often used in reports and can draw future users of the records to significant facts. As previously stated the value of a breeding status cannot be overstated. Thankfully most recording systems, although not all, have easy ways to record this feature and guidance how to record what has been observed.

As previously mentioned many members are already turning their observations into records providing important ammunition for the conservations teams of this and other organisations to use. Furthermore the more members who contribute the fuller and more accurate are future analyses and reports on our local avifauna. Initially recording systems, like Birdtrack, appear overwhelming but a little perseverance will reap rewards. There are also several members in the society who will willingly share their expertise with these systems, so please do ask, perhaps via the user group, if you would like some help getting started.

My thanks go to Shena Maskell, Jenny Holter and Clive Hope for reviewing this article and for their helpful and constructive comments.

Making Tracks for the Garden

John Maskell

As regular readers of these Newsletters and the Society's User Group messages will know I am passionate about what I see in our garden. Hand-in-hand with this obsession goes my enthusiasm for recording what I see and members cannot fail to have noticed that I never miss an opportunity to "plug" the value of the British Trust for Ornithology's free on-line BirdTrack recording scheme.

The BirdTrack project is essentially a partnership between the BTO, RSPB, Birdwatch Ireland, the Scottish Ornithologists Club and the Welsh Ornithological Society that seeks to record bird distribution and migration throughout Britain and Ireland. BirdTrack started in the autumn of 2007 having evolved from the BTO's Migration Watch that commenced in 2002 to record Spring migrants. At the personal level, BirdTrack enables individuals to store and manage their own bird records in the knowledge that their recorded observations will contribute to local, regional, national and international surveys and ultimately conservation. The system allows one to opt for records to be automatically forwarded to County Recorders so that at the Sussex level you know that the Society's Recorder will receive your records without you having to send in a separate list. The great thing is that you can log records for wherever you go so long as you're prepared to register a site. Indeed, I know that over the years when travelling around my records will have filtered through to county recorders in other parts of the UK.

It is also possible to input one's records from earlier years. During last year's first "Lockdown" I dug out my old notebooks and inputted data from the past 40-or-so years so that I can now interrogate more than 128,000 of my own UK records!

To take part in BirdTrack you need internet access and then register as a recorder. Data can also be entered using a mobile phone "app" but I prefer just to use my laptop. You then need to set up sites that you visit regularly and where you record bird sightings. I've gradually added to mine and now have several hundred sites around the UK! My advice would always be to start with your garden.

Sites are usually based on the OS grid and for accuracy I try to stick to 1km squares. However, it is also possible to create specific sites using a polygon drawing tool. The BirdTrack statisticians prefer complete bird lists but you can just add "casual sightings" if that's all you've time for. If you choose to, the system has the facility for you to add your own "General" comments and "Weather" to each BirdTrack list. Recent improvements to the BirdTrack

system mean that in addition to birds, Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) and mammals, you can now also record other taxa: amphibians, butterflies, reptiles... and orchids.

It is perhaps pertinent to point out that a BirdTrack “record” is a species logged not the number of birds. Thus, one record could be a single Robin or a flock of 300 geese. When entering the numerical data for each list you have the option of giving exact numbers of birds, approximate numbers (e.g., 30+) or just “seen”. There is also the facility to add further details including valuable breeding evidence.

Using Birdtrack has become part of my daily routine so that whatever happens I will always endeavour to add a garden list to my records. Shena and I have lived in our current house in the West Tarring area of Worthing for 33 years and recently Billy Whizz, our regular male Blackbird, became our 50,000th garden bird record contributed to Birdtrack. My own interpretation of a “garden list” is any bird seen in the garden. Any species seen or heard flying over I annotate within the BirdTrack system as “flying overhead”; but that’s my personal choice. What matters is that all these records enable me to look back at highlights and trends.

Back in 1988 Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Tawny Owl and Song Thrush were garden regulars with the latter nesting on several occasions. All of these species are now garden rarities for us. On migration Pied and Spotted Flycatchers would sometimes be recorded (5 and 7 times respectively) but for the Pied we have had no records from 2002 until a sighting this year. Conversely, on the positive side, wintering Blackcaps can be daily in the early part of the year. Overhead we have recorded Common Buzzards on 52 occasions in the present century with all bar 3 of those records since 2011. I recall Shena and I visiting West Wales in April 1990 to see our first Red Kite whereas in the past 6 years we’ve logged them over the garden on 17 dates with a quartet circling above on 24th March 2017. Always remembering to look up, especially when the Herring Gulls are “shouting”, we’ve recorded singles of Marsh Harrier and Short-eared Owl in the past decade. Meanwhile prolonged watching can be rewarded with

occasional passerine rarities, such as a Lesser Whitethroat that spent a winter (20th December 2017 – 9th March 2018) with us enjoying suet pellets. This was probably an Eastern race bird pictured below feeding on suet pellets on the 4th January, 2018.



Nevertheless, the more exotic species are all very well but no day is complete without seeing and recording a Blackbird, a House Sparrow and a Woodpigeon on my patch. And all this information I can retrieve within a few seconds thanks to the free storage provided by Birdtrack. I am certainly not a computer expert and my skills are pretty limited. Yet I have found BirdTrack to be straightforward to use and, if you're prepared to give it a go, you will find a system that is very user-friendly.

In summary, beware... recording, in general, and BirdTrack, in particular, can become addictive. At whatever level you undertake your birding, BirdTrack is the only list you will need to keep. If you haven't yet dabbled, try it and see! The great thing is that you know that your records will be safe and are always available for immediate reference.

Birds recorded in the SDOS area between January and June 2021

Clive Hope

Around 250 observers submitted 31,636 records of 189 species and two sub-species (plus three escapes) in the first half-year. Ten of these have yet to be approved by the SOS records committee. Data from which the following list has been compiled, has been provided (courtesy of John Newnham) from Birdtrack, e-Bird and iRecord. No breeding data has been included. This is a list of all recorded species with brief notes against most of them. Due to the volume of records involved that is all that this article is able to cover. Those in **BOLD** are scarce either in the area or at this time of year.

Red-legged Partridge	Fourteen at Lower Standean Chattri memorial on Feb 18 th was largest congregation out of 36 downland sites with records for this species.
Grey Partridge	Seven at Harrow Hill, Patching on May 7 th .
Quail	Three at Steep Down from Jun 29 th onwards.
Common Pheasant	Michelgrove, Patching held 81 birds on Apr 21 st .
Brent Goose	Passage to May 11 th . 44 on Goring Gap Feb 15 th . Peak day was Mar 9 th with 290 E.
Canada Goose	Reported from thirty sites with 317 counted at Henfield Levels on Jan 9 th .
Barnacle Goose	One at Ferring on May 2 nd (presumably feral)
Greylag Goose	Three hundred and fifty on Steyning Levels Feb 15 th .
White-fronted Goose	Seven past Shoreham Beach on Jan 7 th .

Mute Swan	Thirty-six on Steyning Levels on Jan 18 th was the largest flock.
Egyptian Goose	Maximum number was 23 on Steyning Levels Jan 1 st .
Common Shelduck	Noted from 16 sites with 28 passing Widewater on Feb 9 th .
Mandarin Duck	Two in Sandgate Park Storrington on Jan 15 th .
Garganey	Recorded in Apr on 2 nd , when four on Henfield Levels, and 22 nd .



Shoveler	Peak of 157 on Henfield Levels on Feb 21 st .
Gadwall	Max was 18 on Feb 21 st on Henfield Levels.
Eurasian Wigeon	Peak of 338 on Henfield Levels on Feb 21 st .
Mallard	Forty-three at Henfield Levels on Feb 14 th was the largest count.
Pintail	Eighty-four flew E off Worthing on Feb 23 rd .
Eurasian Teal	Peak of 506 at Henfield Levels on Feb 21 st .
Common Pochard	One at Brooklands from Jan 1 st to Feb 16 th .

Tufted Duck	Four E at Goring Gap on Feb 27 th and two at Patching Pond.
Common Eider	One or two between Feb 12 th and Apr 26 th off Lancing/Goring.
Velvet Scoter	One E at Ferring on Feb 27 th .
Common Scoter	Recorded from Jan 1 st through to May 21 st with maximum numbers in Apr, peak of 820 passing Widewater on 24 th .
Goldeneye	One past Goring beach on Feb 25 th .
Goosander	Records in Jan, Feb and April mostly of single birds but three off Goring on Jan 10 th .
Red-breasted Merganser	Seventy-nine on sea off West Worthing on Mar 22 nd . Last in spring was on Apr 18 th .
Nightjar	One on May 7 th resting on lower roof of house in Lancing and one in centre of Brighton on 24 th .
Common Swift	First reported on Apr 25 th but not widespread until late May. 100 at Sompting Abbots on June 20 th .
Common Cuckoo	First record was Apr 9 th . Noted from about a dozen sites.
Feral Pigeon	On Jan 17 th , 270 reported from Brighton Borough.
Stock Dove	Forty at Steyning Round Hill on Jan 23 rd .
Woodpigeon	The second most recorded bird with 1230 records.
Turtle Dove	First was on May 7 th at Woods Mill then records from a further five nearby sites.
Collared Dove	Twenty-five at Sompting Downs and Abbots Jan 9 th .
Water Rail	Three Cokeham Brooks, Sompting on Jan 2 nd and the last there on Mar 28 th . Noted from six other sites.
Moorhen	Widespread with max of 52 on Henfield Levels on Feb 17 th .
Coot	Eighteen sites held Coots with 82 on Henfield Levels on Feb 17 th the max.
Little Grebe	Nine at Widewater on Feb 10 th was the maximum recorded.

Great Crested Grebe	Reports from 17 sites. Most were off West Worthing with 58 on Jan 26 th .
Slavonian Grebe	On the sea at five sites between Widewater and Goring Gap from Jan 5 th , when two off Goring, and Mar 8 th .
Oystercatcher	Present throughout with 30 on Goring Gap on Jan 2 nd as the maximum number recorded.
Avocet	One on the Adur at Shoreham Feb 28 th to Mar 4 th and again on 16 th . Two flew E off Widewater on 22 nd followed by seven on Apr 20 th with one W on 25 th .
Lapwing	1250 on Henfield Levels on Feb 17 th was the largest count. Bred at two sites where three and four young were seen.
Golden Plover	Singles at Steyning Round Hill on Jan 8 th , Henfield Levels on Feb 15 th and Goring Gap on 23 rd . Two flocks totalling 45 flew in off the sea at Lancing beach on Mar 28 th .
Grey Plover	Records from eleven sites with 43 at Goring Gap on Jan 4 th the most. Single spring migrants at Shoreham on the Adur on May 22 nd and June 2 nd and 3 rd .
Ringed Plover	There were 80 on the beach at Widewater on Feb 1 st . No records for Apr was surprising but eight on Lower Adur on May 8 th and one or two at Shoreham and Brighton Marina in Jun.
Little Ringed Plover	One on Henfield Levels on Mar 27 th .
Eurasian Whimbrel	First was on Mar 13 th and last on June 6 th at Shoreham. 558 flew E in Apr and 16 in May.
Curlew	One or two on the Adur at Shoreham from Jan 1 st to Apr 13 th . Returning birds were seen at or passing the coast from Jun 5 th .
Bar-tailed Godwit	Passage between Apr 7 th and May 29 th . 369 flew E in April.



Black-tailed Godwit	Two at both Henfield Levels and Goring Gap on Mar 17 th . One heard calling over Hove late on 21 st and one at Goring Gap on 24 th .
Turnstone	Present throughout the max. of 167 on Worthing Pier on Feb 18 th .
Knot	Two Adur at Shoreham Feb 8 th and Mar 7 th . Two E Ferring May 31 st .
Ruff	Single birds in the Lower Adur on Feb 8 th and 9 th , at Steyning WTW on 11 th , Streatham Manor and Botolphs on 12 th .
Sanderling	Recorded from Jan 1 st to May 13 th . Max. count of 230 at Goring Gap on Mar 15 th .
Dunlin	Recorded from Jan 1 st to May 16 th . Max. count of 287 at Goring Gap on Mar 15 th
Purple Sandpiper	Six at Brighton Marina on Jan 15 th was most noted. Two at Shoreham Harbour mouth until Apr 8 th .
Woodcock	Single birds at five sites between Jan 7 th and Mar 2 nd .

Common Snipe	Present until Apr 22 nd in the Lower Adur/Lancing area with a max count of 53 on Jan 1 st on the Adur saltings at Shoreham..
Common Sandpiper	Although present in the Lower Adur Valley from Jan 3 rd the spring max. was just three birds on May 8 th , the last date. Singles also reported from Steyning WTW in Feb and Beeding Brooks on May 9 th .
Green Sandpiper	Most records were of single birds from Henfield (Wood's Mill or Levels) from Jan 3 rd to Apr 17 th .
Common Redshank	As usual, majority of records were from Adur Saltings at Shoreham where 48 on Mar 2 nd was the peak count. Elsewhere two each at Widewater and Goring Gap on various dates.
Spotted Redshank	One at Goring Gap on Jan 2 nd . A scarce bird in our area.
Greenshank	One was present on the Adur at Shoreham from Jan 1 st to Apr 24 th then two or three till 29 th there. One on Worthing beach on 26 th was the only other record.
Kittiwake	Recorded on sea-watches between Jan 1 st and May 15 th . Most occurred in Jan (352W, 63E) and Feb (251W,435E) with 142 on Jan 28 th as the peak day.
Black-headed Gull	Present throughout with over 500 records. Largest gathering was of 1000 at Goring Gap on Mar 2 nd .
Little Gull	Seen off Widewater or Worthing on six days between Mar 10 th and Apr 24 th with eight W at the latter on Apr 16 th .
Mediterranean Gull	Records from Jan 3 rd to June 12 th . Goring Gap held 122 on Feb 24 th . 131 passed Widewater on Apr 18 th and 63 at Worthing on 27 th .
Common Gull	Present till May 15 th with 1000 on beach at Goring Gap on Mar 2 nd .

Great Black-backed Gull	Present throughout with 41 at Goring Gap on Jan 20 th and 40 on the Adur between the rail and toll-bridge on Feb 9 th the largest counts.
Glaucous Gull	One at Widewater on Apr 3 rd .
Iceland Gull	One in Shoreham on Jan 18 th .
Herring Gull	The most recorded species in the area with 1269 records. 1400 were counted in the Lower Adur Valley on Jan 26 th .
Argentatus Herring Gull	One of this race was reported from Goring Gap on Feb 14 th .
Caspian Gull	Two or three reports. One Lower Adur/Shoreham Jan 4 th /5 th . One Goring Gap on 16 th .
Yellow-legged Gull	Seven records between Jan 5 th and Apr 10 th across the area.
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Most numerous in Feb and Mar with 26 on Mar 10 th in the Lower Adur.
Sandwich Tern	Records from Feb 8 th (single bird). Poor spring passage with just 303E in Apr, max. of 88 on 24 th past Widewater.
Little Tern	One E at Worthing on Apr 23 rd , a flock of ten E on 24 th and one on 28 th was the total spring passage.
Common Tern	A truly dreadful spring passage. After an early one on Mar 26 th , no more than four together between Apr 22 nd and May 13 th .
Arctic Tern	A flock of 24 flew E on Apr 24 th .
Commic Tern	Between Apr 21 st and May 2 nd , the paltry total was 115 passing E.
Black Tern	Four passed E on Apr 24 th off Widewater and a single noted on 28 th .
Great Skua	Noted from Apr 10 th to May 8 th , mostly single birds seen from Goring, Worthing and Lancing. Five on Apr 23 rd was the maximum.

Pomarine Skua	Three passed Goring and Worthing on Apr 24 th and one on May 10 th .
Arctic Skua	Between Apr 24 th to May 13 th , 21 moved E along the coast with five on May 9 th as the most.
Common Guillemot	Identified at the coast from Goring to Lancing between Jan 2 nd and May 8 th , the majority in the first two months with 90 on Feb 8 th the maximum.
Razorbill	With twice the number of reports than the previous species, this auk was seen in far greater numbers over an identical time period. 369 off Widewater on Feb 4 th was the peak count.
Auk species	Large coastal movements in the first two months with 3785 W and 8865 E in Jan and 12579 W and 3479 E in Feb. The big day was Feb 8 th when an estimated 9740 flew W..
Red-throated Diver	Recorded along the coast between Jan 1 st and May 8 th , with westerly movement of 233 in Jan and 337 in Feb, then easterly passage of 740 in Feb, 30 in Mar and 22 in Apr. The peak day was Feb 10 th with 93 off Worthing. Up to 15 were noted on the sea off Goring in the early months.
Black-throated Diver	Reported on 12 days between Jan 2 nd and Apr 29 th , single birds except for two on the last date off Goring Gap.
Great Northern Diver	A better than average showing with four off East Worthing and two off Goring on Jan 2 nd . Singles at about ten other sites up to the end of Feb then one in Apr off Worthing Pier and one on May 4 th off West Worthing.
Diver sp	Over one hundred were unassigned. Fulmar Small numbers noted offshore, most in Apr and May, one Jun 15 th .



Manx Shearwater	Two off Widewater on Apr 24 th and four (one E, three W) off Worthing on May 4 th .
Gannet	Seen daily offshore in varying numbers. In Jan, 350 off Widewater on 2 nd was the largest congregation. Easterly movements noted off Worthing end of Jan and early Feb. 115 off Widewater on May 11 th .
Cormorant	Present all year. On Feb 7 th , 90 counted off Widewater.
Shag	Singles from Jan 6 th to Mar 27 th (both Southwick) and four other sites in that period.
Cattle Egret	One flew over Shoreham on Apr 2 nd and appeared at Lancing from 21 st to 22 nd . One flew E over Tarring on Jun 1 st .
Grey Heron	Present all year in constant numbers with nine at Henfield Levels on Mar 14 th the max. A number of pairs present at Coombes heronry.

Great White Egret	One Henfield Levels /Beeding Brooks from Mar 18 th to Apr 3 rd .
Little Egret	Eleven in the Lower Adur Valley on Jun 25 th was indicative of breeding. Nine pairs present at Coombes heronry. Elsewhere from one to four at many sites across the area.
Osprey	One over Brighton on Feb 26 th represents the earliest record for our area. More typical were singles at Kithurst Hill on Mar 22 nd , Shoreham on 30 th , West Worthing on Apr 4 th and Woods Mill on 7 th .
Sparrowhawk	Well reported from 68 sites throughout the period, Three at Adur Saltings on Feb 2 nd .
Goshawk	One at Steyning WTW on Apr 1 st .
Marsh Harrier	One at Kithurst Hill, Storrington on Mar 27 th and one Beeding Hill Apr 2 nd .
Hen Harrier	Probably eight different birds between Jan 1 st and Apr 24 th all on downland other than one on Steyning Levels on Jan 3 rd . Males seen on Jan 3 rd at Southwick Hill and Chantry Hill on Mar 19 th .
Red Kite	The 122 records from 53 sites gives testimony to the species increase in our area. Five together at Steyning Round Hill on Jan 25 th . No marked spring passage this year.
White-tailed Eagle	Five sightings of immature birds, most from the introduction programme. These were two at Kithurst Hill and one at Hollingbury, on Mar 14 th which may have been a 'visitor', one over Findon Valley on 18 th and one over Worthing on Apr 1 st .
Common Buzzard	Ninety-six sites made this the most widely reported raptor. Nine at Beeding Hill on Feb 27 th was largest gathering.

Kestrel

Eighty sites held Kestrels during the period with five at Lychpole Hill on Jan 17th the maximum count.

Merlin

Six records between Jan 17th at Steyning Round Hill and Apr 29th over Steyning Levels.

Hobby

First was one at Wood's Mill on Apr 24th then eight in May and four in Jun across the area.



Peregrine

With 149 records from 41 sites, this falcon is doing well. Four on Steyning Levels on Jan 10th.

Barn Owl

Most were seen in Jan when two at Beeding Brooks on 25th. After Mar 24th at Steep Down, the only record was one at Tegdown Hill nr Brighton on May 13th.

Tawny Owl

Surprisingly, only 25 reports from 14 sites.

Little Owl	Only recorded from three sites – downland near Sompting, Wick Farm, Westmeston and Devil's Dyke between Jan 15 th and Mar 25 th .
Long-eared Owl	Just four downland sites held this elusive Owl.
Short-eared Owl	No records have yet been submitted but believed to have been seen.
Kingfisher	Records till the end of May from 18 sites.
Wryneck	One at Sheepcote Valley, Brighton from Apr 22 nd to 26 th .
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Widespread and common across the area. Six at Rye Farm, Henfield on Feb 13 th .
Green Woodpecker	As with the previous species well recorded. Five at Oreham Common on Feb 27 th .
Ring-necked Parakeet	One at Brooklands was later seen over Shoreham on Feb 22 nd . On Mar 16 th , one was seen at both West Worthing and Steyning and another at the former site on Apr 12 th .
Jay	Common and widespread. Seven at Rye Farm, Henfield on May 7 th .
Magpie	Forty-five at East Kingston nr Ferring on Mar 22 nd .
Jackdaw	Thirteen hundred Upper Beeding Jan 2 nd .
Rook	Four hundred Beeding Hill on Feb 12 th .
Carrion Crow	Eighty at Goring Gap on Feb 1 st .
Raven	Records from 49 sites with 22 Kithurst Hill Apr 1 st
Coal Tit	With records from just thirty sites and seldom more than two birds noted, distribution is patchy.
Marsh Tit	Records from just eight sites mostly of singles but three at Steyning Round Hill on Feb 22 nd and two at Kithurst Hill on Apr 1 st .
Blue Tit	Very common and widespread with a max of 43 at Steyning Round Hill on Jan 8 th .
Great Tit	Similar numbers to Blue Tit. Max of 19 at Edburton on Feb 1 st .

Bearded Tit	One reported from Sompting on May 20 th , a remarkable record.
Skylark	Present all year with 120 at Steep Down on Jan 22 nd .
Sand Martin	First was one at Patching on Mar 9 th . Twenty at the Sandgate Park breeding site on Apr 16 th .
Barn Swallow	First at Sompting and Steep Down on Mar 26 th , then 100 at Steyning WTW on Apr 8 th . A slow arrival with generally low numbers.
House Martin	First at Steyning WTW on Apr 11 th then 50 there on May 18 th .
Cetti's Warbler	This species continues to spread with 164 records from 25 sites. Max. were eight at Beeding Brooks on May 16 th and nine at Sompting Brooks on 19 th . Ferring Rife was a new site.
Long-tailed Tit	Widespread and common throughout the area.
Yellow-browed Warbler	One at Patching WTW on Mar 8 th remained until Apr 19 th .
Willow Warbler	First were singles at Patching and Southwick Hill on Mar 30 th . Eight at Highdown on Apr 19 th . Just three records for May and two for Jun.
Chiffchaff	Widespread and common. Fifteen at Steyning WTW on Jan 9 th . Twenty at Patching on Mar 9 th and 12 Southwick Hill Apr 3 rd .
Sedge Warbler	First was one at Beeding Brooks on Apr 4 th and the max. 13 there on May 16 th .
Reed Warbler	First was at Sompting Brooks on Apr 14 th . Nine trapped out of 14 present at Lady well on May 1 st . Thirty-nine counted at Beeding Brooks on 16 th and 25 at Ladywell on Jun 16 th .
Blackcap	Present in about 20 locations in the first two months, mostly one or two birds but four in Steyning on Feb 21 st . In Mar, five in West Tarring on 23 rd and in Apr,

	eight at Northbrook Farm, Worthing on 20 th . Thereafter, common and widespread.
Garden Warbler	First was one at New Salts Farm on May 1 st remaining till 14 th then singles at Patching Hill, Sompting and the Lower Adur Valley.
Lesser Whitethroat	First was one each at Wood's Mill, Cissbury and Sheepcote Valley on Apr 23 rd . Noted at 26 sites up to the end of Jun.
Common Whitethroat	First record was on Apr 9 th at Wood's Mill. This site, Steep Down, Sompting and Beeding Hill all held at least 15 birds in May/Jun.
Dartford Warbler	One was wintering at Shoreham Beach from Jan 2 nd to 12 th . Singles at Widewater, Cissbury and Steyning Round Hill in Feb.
Firecrest	Records from 29 sites across the area in all months.
Goldcrest	Records from 59 sites with six at Wood's Mill on Feb 7 th and Washington Common on May 1 st .
Wren	Very common and widespread.
Nuthatch	Well distributed north of the Downs but only reports elsewhere were in Brighton Parks, Hove, High Salvington and Highdown Hill.
Eurasian Treecreeper	Records from 27 sites with just Preston Park and High Salvington south of the Downs.
Common Starling	Abundant and widespread. 7500 on Palace Pier on Jan 6 th . Two leucistic birds seen in the Ferring and Goring areas late Jun.
Ring Ouzel	Two on downland between Steyning Bostal and Monarch's Way on Apr 21 st , two at Cissbury on 22 nd and one at Chantry Hill on 24 th .
Blackbird	1100 records with 31 at Washington Common on May 1 st and five counts elsewhere of over 20.

Fieldfare	On Jan 7 th , 200 at No-Man's Land but less than 50 at most other sites and the last in the Lower Adur Valley on Mar 25 th .
Redwing	Biggest numbers in each month were: in Jan, 180 at Ashurst on 15 th , in Feb 200 Botolphs on 12 th and in Mar 77 at Steyning WTW on 8 th . Last was one at Ladywell on 29 th .
Song Thrush	452 records from 102 sites. Nineteen counted at Upper Beeding on Feb 9 th .
Mistle Thrush	From one to three birds at 58 sites.
Spotted Flycatcher	First was at Ferring Country Centre on May 6 th . Just six further records, five in May and one in Jun at Sullington Warren.
Robin	With over a thousand records from 137 sites, predictably common and widespread. Noticeably more numerous in the first three months.
Common Nightingale	First were one at Small Dole and three at Wood's Mill on Apr 9 th . Nine sites produced records. Max were six at Wood's Mill on May 27 th and five at West Mill Farm on the Adur Levels on Jun 16 th .
Black Redstart	Records from fifteen sites with a long-stayer at Shoreham Harbour Jan to Mar. Four reported in Apr and one at Shoreham Harbour on May 6 th .
Common Redstart	First was at Mill Hill on Apr 9 th , then Steyning Bostal/Monarch's Way and Cissbury on 13 th . Unusual dates and sites were reports from Varncombe Hill, Brighton on Jun 23 rd and in Worthing on 30 th .
Whinchat	First was one at Chantry Hill on May 1 st , followed by singles at Beeding Hill on 5 th , Goring Gap and Ferring Country Centre on 6 th , then two on the Steyning Downland scheme on 9 th and one at Sompting on 26 th .

Eurasian Stonechat	Twelve at Mile Oak, Portslade on Jan 22 nd was largest count from 49 sites in the area.
Northern Wheatear	First was on the late date of Mar 25 th when ten at Goring Gap, one at Widewater and six on Shoreham Beach. There were 19 on Beeding Hill on 29 th . The last for spring was on May 9 th by the Adur at Shoreham.
House Sparrow	Remains abundant and widespread. 150 counted at New Salt's Farm, in Mar, Apr and May.
Dunnock	Records from 119 sites. Surely every garden has one?
Yellow Wagtail	First was one over West Worthing on Apr 18 th . Four more from there, one each at Cissbury, Henfield Levels and Harrow Hill, and several arriving overhead at Goring Gap were the only others in the period.
Grey Wagtail	Records from 32 sites mostly of single birds but four at Patching on Mar 8 th and three at Steyning WTW on Apr 11 th .
Pied Wagtail	Sixty at Steyning WTW on Jan 1 st and 170 in Sandgate Park on 11 th . Numbers returned to normal after with up to 25 at several sites.
White Wagtail	One at Steyning WTW on Mar 24 th and Apr 3 rd .
Meadow Pipit	Wintering birds mainly confined to the levels and the Cissbury Lychpole area where 40 on Jan 17 th . Twenty-four counted Upper Beeding on Feb 21 st . Coastal migrants appeared in Mar with 65 W at Worthing on 16 th . Beeding Hill held 100 on 29 th .
Water Pipit	One on Henfield Levels Jan 25 th to 29 th .
Rock Pipit	Confined to Brighton Marina where five on Mar 20 th , Southwick Canal and Shoreham Harbour with one or two birds. Just four records after the end of Mar.
Chaffinch	With 410 records from 100 sites, still generally a common bird but has become scarce at some coastal locations.

Brambling

Bullfinch

One at a garden feeder in High Salvington Mar 20th.
Records from 32 sites with few south of the Downs, the exception being the six at Highdown on Jun 16th which included juveniles. Four at Wood's Mill on May 15th.

Greenfinch

With reports from 88 sites, some recovery may be evident. Seventeen by Southwick Canal on Feb 8th and Steyning Levels on 21st were the largest counts.

Linnet

Two hundred at Steyning Round Hill on Jan 25th and 44 on Steep Down on Jun 29th with flocks of c.40 at several other downland sites in the early months.

Lesser Redpoll

One at Henfield Levels Feb 19th, two Sheepcote Valley Mar 13th and one Wood's Mill on Apr 29th.

Goldfinch

With 839 records from 115 sites, the most abundant finch.

Siskin

Seen on nine dates between Feb 27th and May 2nd at five sites.

Corn Bunting

Almost completely restricted to the Downs where quite widespread. Largest count was of 300 at Beeding Hill on Mar 12th.

Yellowhammer

Between one and 25 at majority of the 55 sites. Exceptions were 40 at Perching Sands Farm, Edburton on Feb 6th and 35 at Beeding Hill on 12th.

Reed Bunting

Most of the 176 records were from the Levels but 33 on Steep Down on Feb 19th. Later, 18 at Beeding Brooks on May 16th.

Escapes

Bar-headed Goose

One on Steyning and Henfield Levels from Jan 1st to Mar 12th.

Black Swan

One on Henfield Levels on Mar 11th.

Violet Turaco

One at East Worthing on Mar 16th.

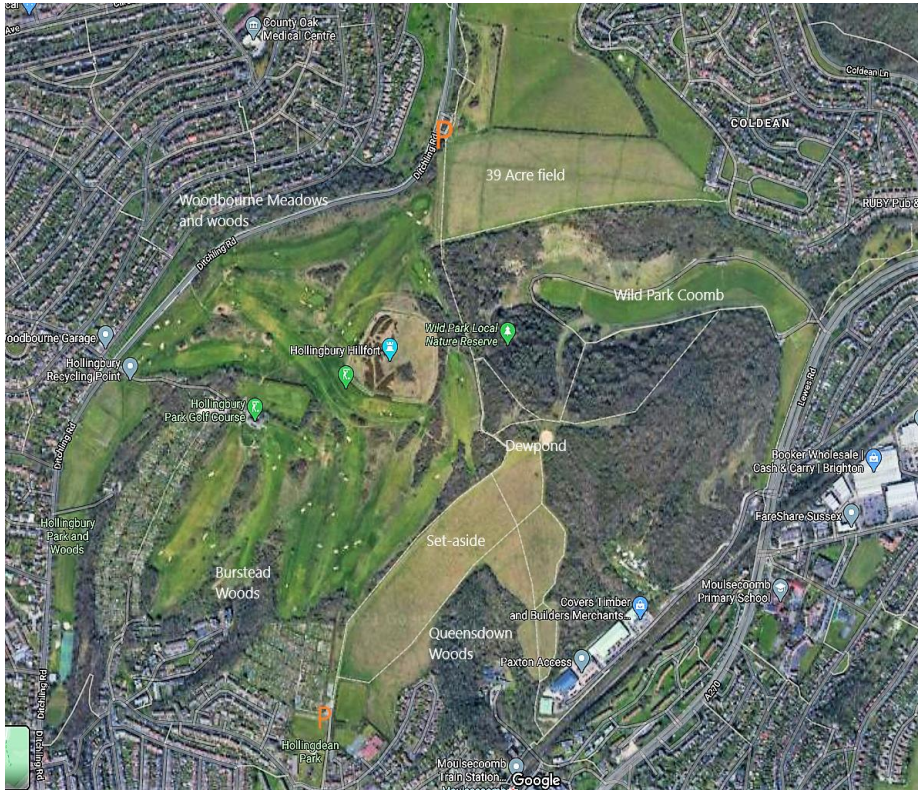


The Birds of Brighton's Hollingbury Hillfort and the Wild Park LNR

Peter Whitcomb

Thirty-five years ago the area was truly a wild park, with scrub getting rather dense and the stretches of woodland and allotments were ideal for the more common resident breeding birds. Species such as Nightingale, Grasshopper Warbler, Cirl Bunting and Stonechat all probably bred at the time. Cirl Bunting is now extinct in Sussex but the other three are still seen occasionally as migrants. During the last few years, with careful management, foot-paths have been maintained and some areas of scrub and woodland cleared.

Hollingbury Woods suffered terribly in the Great Storm of October 1987 and nest sites for Stock Dove, Ring-necked Parakeet and Starlings were lost overnight. The parakeets disappeared from the area in 1998. Patches of



The LNR is Brighton's largest nature reserve.

undergrowth, now developing after the gale, are attractive to Whitethroats and Blackcaps - new additions as breeding birds in this specific area in recent years.

The Golf Course contains some excellent habitat as none of the thickets or bushes are very dense, making the birds visible. The commonest nesting birds of this area are Blackbird, Dunnock, Whitethroat, Greenfinch and Wren. Whimbrels have been recorded as feeding on the short grass, whilst Wheatears, Whinchats and even the odd Hoopoe enjoy this habitat.

The Hillfort itself contains a perimeter path with an adjoining dry moat. Other paths cross between the gorse clumps. This is a particularly good spot for migrants like Wheatear and Whinchat, whilst Linnet and Yellowhammer both breed, though the latter is unfortunately in decline locally. Stonechats, and a Dartford Warbler, have put in an appearance. There are times when the wind blows across the hilltop and the birds are driven off to more sheltered parts, but when they are moving through on passage, this area can turn up high counts and some interesting birds. Pipits, hirundines and finches all pass overhead, some stopping for a while to rest or feed. Early mornings are best.

The area just east from the Camp, including the woodland at the topmost part of the Wildpark coomb, is perhaps the best area for finding migrants. In Spring it is always the place to listen for Nightingale and Wood Warbler, and both flycatchers and Redstart seem to prefer this area. In the Autumn the tit flocks can be worth a look as Goldcrest, Firecrest and assorted warblers often join them. The Wild Park itself is a haven for breeding warblers. The bushes along the edge of the arable field next to the eastern boundary of the golf course can also hold migrants, who feed up on the hawthorn and elder berries in the Autumn, before moving off across the Channel.

Spring migration

The weather often plays a part in just what may turn up. Clear nights are often a sign that birds will fly over the coast, but a dull or misty morning will more than likely bring in a few species such as Yellow Wagtail, Tree Pipit or Hobby. Swallows and Martins are noted each year but in nothing like the numbers which appear in the Autumn. Few years pass without a Ring Ouzel or two stopping off on the Hillfort or nearby. Other species noted are Redstart, Whinchat, Grasshopper Warbler, Wood Warbler, Firecrest, Spotted and Pied Flycatcher and, of course, the common warblers. Cuckoo and Turtle Dove, once regular, are now very infrequent.

Breeding birds of the area

A full list of recent breeding birds (up to 2020) is shown in the table below:

Sparrowhawk	Great-spotted Woodpecker	Lesser Whitethroat	Magpie	Yellowhammer
Common Buzzard	Skylark	Whitethroat	Carrion Crow	
Kestrel	Wren	Blackcap	Starling	
Common Pheasant	Dunnock	Chiffchaff	House Sparrow	
Stock Dove	Robin	Long-tailed Tit	Chaffinch	
Wood Pigeon	Blackbird	Blue Tit	Greenfinch	
Collared Dove	Song Thrush	Great Tit	Linnet	
Green Woodpecker	Mistle Thrush	Jay	Bullfinch	

Other species which have nested in the recent past include Willow Warbler, Garden Warbler, Grey Partridge and probably Goldcrest and Tree Creeper. The decline of Stock Dove after the storms of 1987 could have been expected, with many of the older trees disappearing, but in reverse two species of woodpecker now nest regularly in the area and Buzzards too have nested recently. Unfortunately a number of species are in decline, including Mistle Thrush, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer.

Autumn migration

At the Wild Park the period from mid-August to mid-October can bring in significant numbers of passage migrants. Numbers of Whitethroats may increase with the arrival of migrants adding to the local breeding population. Willow Warblers pass through in large numbers, and by the end of August most Swifts have departed, and the odd Wheatear or two may turn up on the Camp or golf course.

By mid-September a fall or two of really high numbers can take place. It is always nice to see double figures of Whinchat, Yellow Wagtail or Redstart, or the bushes full of warblers dodging through feeding-up before their lengthy

travels. Hirundine passage can occasionally be significant with thousands of Swallows or House Martins flying through.

October sees the arrival or passage of some of the finches and the recognising the calls as birds fly through can give good numbers of Siskin, Linnet, Meadow Pipit and Skylark. Smaller numbers of Brambling, Redpoll and even Woodlark, together with the passage of Ring Ouzel, Fieldfare and Redwing, makes the area an interesting place to be. Birds such as Snipe and Woodcock can be flushed from the arable fields or long grassy areas.

Skulking species such as Reed, Sedge and Grasshopper Warbler, and other birds which are silent on return passage, like Nightingale and Wood Warbler, will probably pass through in small numbers. It is not in doubt that these are under-recorded, and only a ringing operation would indicate the true number.

Scarce or unusual sightings

The area is two miles from the sea and whilst not rare in themselves, some birds are nevertheless regarded as significant if more normally seen in different habitats. Herons, Cormorants and Lapwings, for instance, are quite commonly seen as over-flyers, perhaps commuting from the Adur valley to Lewes Brooks. Even more unusual have been other wildfowl flying over the area, including Canada Goose, Brent Goose, Bewick's Swan, Shoveler, Goosander and Curlew. Even Fulmar and Moorhen have been recorded.

Some of the scarcer birds seen with some regularity are Firecrest, Hobby, Raven, Red Kite, Black Redstart and Crossbill. Scarcer species seen usually as a single sighting have included Marsh Harrier, Little Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Nightjar, Jack Snipe, and Hawfinch. Regarded as scarce for the area, birds like Nuthatch, Hawfinch, Corn Bunting and Lesser spotted Woodpecker have all been recorded.

Rarities include Honey Buzzard, Wryneck, Tawny Pipit, Barred Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Ortolan Bunting. The total number of species recorded here in the LNR is 164.

SDOS Garden Birds 2020

Val Bentley

Though Covid-19 rules kept us confined to our homes for some of 2020, surprisingly there were fewer participants this year than in previous years. Happily, many stalwarts continued to send in their records – in fact all but one of the 16 who I noted were taking part when I started collating the forms back in 2009. As well as myself, the other garden bird surveyors during the year were Tony Benton, Reg Bradbury, Brian Clay, Jay Cooper, John Cooper, John Feest, Clive Hope, Laurie Keen, Cyril & Maureen Leeves, Sheila Marshall, John & Shena Maskell, Anthony Robinson, John & Jeanette Simpson, Marion Taylor, David Tomalin, Gordon & Vera Tickler, Rae Titcomb & Peter Whitcomb. There were no new joiners during the year, a few who have dropped out since 2019 and, sadly, David Tomalin passed away towards the end of 2020. There were 19 forms returned for the first two quarters and 17 for the second two.

Putting the weekly figures onto an Excel spreadsheet is the only way I have found to put the information into a format which enables a “Top 15 Species” list to be extracted. By way of explanation, one individual of a species only has to be seen once to count for that particular garden in a quarter, but the abundance of a species can be calculated by averaging out the number seen per week in all the gardens. For example, at least one Blue Tit was seen in 100% of the gardens each quarter, with an average of 1.67 birds per garden per week. Starlings were seen in 78.9% of gardens, but with an average of 3.43 birds per garden. If, though, you take out those who never see a single Starling, the average is 4.34. All very amateur, but it does seem to make a bit of sense!

Top 15 Species

Species	Average % of gardens used each quarter	Overall position				Maximum number seen at one time (Observer & week)	Average number seen per week all gardens
		2020	2019	2018	2017		
Blue Tit	100	1	1	1=	2=	10 (Brian, several weeks)	1.67
Magpie	98.7	2	4	6	7	13 (John & Shena, 18 Oct)	1.19
Blackbird	98.5	3	2=	4	4	8 (John & Shena, 15 Nov)	1.47
Robin	95.9	4	5	3	2=	4 (Marion, Jun/Jul)	0.91
Woodpigeon	93.1	5	2=	1=	1	12 (Marion, several weeks)	2.12
Dunnoek	91.3	6	7	7	6	4 (John & Shena, 28 Jun, & 9 Aug)	0.87

Great Tit	83.3	7	6	5	5	7 (Marion & Laurie, several weeks)	1.13
House Sparrow	82	8	9	12	9	36 (John & Shena, 2 Feb & 15 Mar)	4.88
Goldfinch	79.2	9	8	8	8	50 (John C, 15 Jan)	2.20
Starling	78.9	10	10	10	13	73 (John F, 12 Jan)	3.44
Wren	75.9	11	12	13	11	3 (John & Shena, 9 Aug)	0.41
Carrion Crow	70.4	12	11	9	10	4 (David, 12 Jan)	0.38
Collared Dove	65.1	13	13	11	12	5 (John & Jeanette, 29 Nov)	0.49
Herring Gull	65.1	14	15	15	14	17 (John F, 5 Jul)	1.30
Long-tailed Tit	53.9	15	16	14	15	25 (Laurie, 22 Nov)	0.91

Blue Tit has maintained the top spot for the past three years, though abundance was lower in 2020 at 1.67 birds per garden per week, compared with 2.21 in 2019. Perhaps an unwelcome climber again, up to 2nd place, was Magpie, with 13 at John & Shena's being the maximum this year. Woodpigeon slipped down to 5th, having been top in 2017 and joint 2nd last year. The only species to creep back into the top 15 was Long-tailed Tit, edging Greenfinch out again.

The “Also Rans”

Regularly recorded, but not in the top 15, were:

	Average % of gardens used each quarter			
Species	2020	2019	2018	2017
Greenfinch	50%	61%	51%	58%
Chaffinch	42%	47%	49%	53%
Blackcap	41%	33%	38%	32%
Chiffchaff	31%	35%	24%	36%
Feral Pigeon	30%	24%	27%	21%
Great Spotted Woodpecker	29%	36%	41%	48%
Sparrowhawk	28%	28%	28%	22%
Coal Tit	26%	33%	35%	28%
Jay	25%	32%	34%	31%
Song Thrush	23%	34%	42%	39%
Goldcrest	22%	33%	36%	35%
Jackdaw	22%	30%	28%	31%

With fewer participants this year, I suspect that the reduction for finches and Coal Tit is mainly down to no survey forms being received from a garden which regularly recorded these! *Trichomoniasis* disease is still hitting Greenfinches, and

both Laurie and myself have noticed Chaffinches with “crusty legs” which, when really severe, makes it difficult for them to walk. However, the increase in gardens recording Blackcaps is real, and during the first quarter nearly 70% of surveyors reported seeing at least one. Brian and John & Shena saw them regularly, with a maximum of 7 at John & Shena’s on 1st March, comprising 4 males and 3 females. As in previous years, only Laurie saw them almost weekly during the summer months, from mid-May to early August. Song Thrush continued its decline, though my experience of hearing them singing lustily around Henfield in spring seems to belie this.

The Highlights

First Quarter

There were 35 different species noted. Tony reported the only visits by a Pied Wagtail in the year, when he saw a single bird each of five weeks from late January to early March. Brian and John & Shena saw Redwings in January. Blackcaps were availing themselves of abundant food, including using a buggy nibble feeder, as supplied by their generous hosts John & Shena, who also noticed Starlings checking out Swift and House Sparrow boxes, while Blue Tits were inspecting sparrow boxes! John C noted a Barn Owl in an adjacent field in March, struggling in a high wind and a Red Kite over his front garden in February, though neither could count as “in the garden”! Laurie saw Goldcrests several times, and a single Firecrest in both January and March. Seven gardens recorded Chiffchaffs, all in March. John F recorded the maximum number of Starlings this year, a rather astonishing total of 73 at the start of January.

A non-bird sighting from Laurie was of a fox diving into a bonfire pile to catch a rat, which it proceeded to swallow!

Second Quarter

Thirty-nine species seen this quarter, including Willow Warblers and a single Whitethroat in April. The only Reed Bunting noted this year was also in April, in Reg’s garden in Lancing, and a pair of Mallard arrived there briefly in early

June. The year's single Treecreeper was in my garden, though was a bit of a "cheat bird", as I was doing some home ringing and it flew into a net! The Blackcaps in Laurie's garden were sometimes noted using the bird bath. John & Shena saw Sparrowhawks most weeks with two seen independently plucking prey in a silver birch tree on the 24th June. Two Lesser Black-backed Gulls seen by Anthony in mid-May were the only record for the species in 2020. And there was one rather large bird I couldn't put on my own list. One of the "celebrity" Henfield Peacocks turned up on my roof in May!



Third Quarter

The total was down to 36 different species from July to September. There were still good numbers of Starlings in John F's garden, up to 50 in mid-July. A Cormorant and Kingfisher on a mill pond were unfortunately just outside John C's garden so didn't count! Willow Warblers were seen by Brian, John F, Laurie and John & Shena, while other migrants on the move were Redstarts

which graced Laurie's garden on the 10th August and Tony's on the 26th. The 2020 star migrant was a Pied Flycatcher at John & Shena's on the 31st, their 5th garden record and first for 13 years. Brian saw two Bullfinches at the end of July, the only ones noticed in the survey in 2020.

Fourth Quarter

There were 34 different species between October and December. A Grey Heron briefly popped into my garden in December, but soon thought better of it. As in the first quarter, it was Brian and John & Shena who noticed Redwings, but just single birds. Marion said that a Tawny Owl was in the trees in her piece of woodland in Old Shoreham Road, and flew through the garden twice on two different days; also a Buzzard sat in one of the trees for quite a while. December Blackcaps were in shorter supply this year, seen in only three gardens.

In Summary

Locations of the gardens were Brighton (1), Ferring (1), Findon (1), Goring (1), Henfield (1), High Salvington (1), Hove (1), Lancing (3), Rustington (1), Shoreham (6), Steyning (1) and Worthing (1). There was an overall total of 50 different species reported, one fewer than in 2018. Twelve of these only made one appearance during the year: Bullfinch, Buzzard, Grey Heron, Kestrel, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Pied Flycatcher, Pied Wagtail, Reed Bunting, Reed Warbler, Tawny Owl, Treecreeper and Whitethroat.

Though collection of information was hampered by Covid restrictions, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Preliminary Results from Constant Effort Sites ringing during 2020 may go some way to explaining the drop in the abundances of our Blue and Great Tits which were 1.67 and 1.13 respectively in 2020 compared with 2.21 and 1.39 in 2019. While CES results showed that all our resident species showed a decline in breeding success, Blue and Great Tits were particularly hardest hit, with declines of 55% and 39% respectively, though winter survival rates had been good. BTO commented on its Garden Birdwatch page that in 2020, nationally, "*Blue Tits have been seen in fewer gardens*

and in smaller numbers since May 2020. It is thought that this year's spring, with the fifth warmest April in over 100 years, meant that invertebrates, including butterflies and moths, got off to an early start. Caterpillars are an important food for Blue Tit nestlings but in warm springs caterpillars develop early, and there are fewer available during the main Blue Tit nesting season, often leading to reduced survival of nestlings and smaller populations overall".

In the national Garden Bird Survey run by the BTO six of the seven "top" species are the same as ours, with the difference being that Magpie is 9th nationally but has risen to 2nd here – however the BTO have a more sophisticated way of calculating the totals than I do! Rather obviously, Herring Gull features in our top 15, but is a far less frequent garden visitor in other parts of the country, so is way down on the national list.

Thank you to all those taking part in the SDOS Garden Birdwatch for their observations and comments.

The River Adur: a year's birding

Jerry Campbell

Most days I walk from Shoreham up along the banks of the Adur to beyond the cement works. This account details some of the more unusual birds I've seen on the River Adur over the last year (August 2020 to August 2021) and aims to provide readers with an idea of what they might expect to see along the river. My records go back to 2016 and I'll refer to these where relevant. The birds are listed in order of first sighting during the most recent year.

A **Green Sandpiper** was seen on 12 August 2020 north of Cuckoo Corner flying from one bank to the other. This bird is a rare sighting. Only seen twice before, both times in 2016. A **Corn Bunting** was seen on 26 August 2020, 1 June and 21 July 2021, each time in bushes on west bank south of the cement works. Seen twice before in 2019. A **Whinchat** was seen on 26 August 2020 perched on a pile of hay in a field north of A27. Seen twice before in 2018.

Lesser Whitethroat is a summer visitor which is difficult to see and I usually detect it by its rattling song. It is generally confined to the bushes on the east bank especially those a little distance north of the A27. Seen or heard on 21 September 2020, 11 May and 1 June 2021. The May sighting was a particularly good one with the bird perching in a bush for a considerable period of time. Previously seen or heard on just a handful of occasions in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

A **Greenshank** was seen on 13 October 2020 near the Toll Bridge. This bird is rarely seen this far up the river. Only previously seen in 2019. **Goosander** is a sawbill that turns up regularly, if infrequently, on the Adur, usually a single bird though occasionally a pair, and I've seen it every year since 2016 during the winter. The latest winter period was an atypically good one with nine sightings between 13 October 2020 and 15 February 2021. I saw a **Water Rail** diving for cover on 26 October 2020 as I flushed it from the path leading into the Cuckoo Corner car park. My only other sighting was a brief glimpse, also near Cuckoo Corner, in 2017.

White-Fronted Goose is a rarity with just a single sighting of four on 30 November 2020. They were feeding in a field on the west bank north of Cuckoo Corner. They were gone by the next day. **Grey Plover** is an uncommon sighting. Seen on 9 December 2020 and 8 January and 3 June 2021. Only seen twice before, in 2018 and 2019. A **Brent Goose** was seen on 6 January 2021 opposite the airport. An uncommon sighting, only seen twice before, in 2017 and 2019. A **Snipe** was seen on 12 February 2021 south of the cement works. My only ever sighting.

A **Treecreeper** was seen on 23 February 2021 at Cuckoo Corner. Only seen twice before, both times in 2019, also at Cuckoo Corner. An **Avocet** was seen on 28 February 2021 opposite the airport. My only ever sighting. A **Yellowhammer** was seen on 6 and 20 April 2021 near a bird feeder in the paddock north of the cement works. Only other sighting was in 2018. A **Wheatear** was seen on 9 April and 19 August 2021. Only seen before in 2017 and 2019 (both in September) and always on the ground in fields.

A pair of **Shelduck** was seen on 14 April 2021 opposite the airport. I've seen this species a few times in most years since 2016 (all in spring/summer). A **Bar-Tailed Godwit** was seen on 29 May 2021 opposite the airport. I've seen this species only three times before, in 2017, 2019 and 2020 (all in spring).

Other birds seen in the last year which are more common but worth a mention are as follows.

Raptors: **Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk, Red Kite.**

Waders: **Lapwing, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Whimbrel.**

Warblers: **Blackcap, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Garden Warbler.**

Others: **Linnet, Skylark, Reed Bunting, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Kingfisher, Raven.**

Local Conservation News

As regular readers of the SDOS User Group will know there are proposals for three local sites, New Salts Farm and Pad Farm at Shoreham, and Shepherds Mead near Cissbury Ring in the Findon valley, to change their use in ways that are likely to benefit nature and enhance their interest. Here Adrian Thomas and Tim Holter provide us with updates on the progress so far. Adrian works as a Project Manager with the RSPB but is providing advice in a personal capacity as a long-standing SDOS member and local resident. Tim is representing SDOS in many of the ongoing local discussions as these projects go forward.

New Salts Farm, Shoreham, Update – Adrian Thomas

Many of you will know that Adur and Worthing Councils announced that they are seeking to purchase New Salts Farm, a 28-hectare (70 acre) area of fields west of the Dogs Trust in between Shoreham and Lancing, north of the A259.

This is in addition to two other purchases for nature conservation recently: a proposed ‘managed realignment’ scheme at Pad Farm on the banks of the Adur just north of the A27, and Shepherd’s Mead on the west flank of Cissbury Ring. Such moves by the Council are very welcome indeed.



Their stated aim for New Salts Farm is “for the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural environment; enhancing biodiversity; and contributing to the Council’s ambition of being Carbon Neutral by 2030” (Joint Strategic Committee Report, 8 Sep 2020).

The SDOS has been very proactive in signaling to the Council our interest in what they might plan for the site and our aspiration that everything is done to make the site as good as possible for birdlife. We are in close contact with their Project Manager, Chloe Clarke.

Although there are no public rights of way across the site, SDOS sought permission to carry out a survey of the birdlife on the site, and Tim and Jenny Holter, with assistance from a number of SDOS members, put in a huge effort to survey it on a weekly basis during spring/summer 2021. The survey

demonstrated the presence of Corvids, Woodpigeons, House Sparrows and five Cetti's Warbler territories together with evidence of summer migrants using a reed filled stream and an area of scrub. Summer residents included Reed and Sedge Warblers, Reed Buntings and Whitethroat. A Garden Warbler was seen and Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps have probably nested. Moorhens and Mute Swans produced young and a pair of Skylarks displayed nesting behavior. Willow Warblers and a Hobby passed through.

The current habitats are largely sheep-grazed dry pasture, with a few reed-lined ditches, one field that is ungrazed and is reverting to scrub, and a small patch of mature trees including several Black Poplar trees (or hybrids).

At the time of writing (end Aug 2021), the Council still hasn't concluded the purchase of the site, although we understand that it could happen soon. Nevertheless, we have taken the initiative to put forward some initial ideas for the site on behalf of SDOS.

It is important at this stage to realise that there more information is needed from the Council to inform our aspirations. For example, we are advocating some wetland creation, but soil surveys and hydrological studies will be required to see whether that is indeed possible. Nor do we know key facts such as what budget the Council have to create and manage the habitat or what non-avian aspirations they may have for the site. There are many other pieces of evidence that the Council will need to gather before they can pull together a plan and before we can ascertain what is truly possible there.

However, we feel we have put birds firmly on their radar already at this very early stage, and we will keep you informed as our discussions with them progress.

Pad Farm, Shoreham, Update – Tim Holter

This 18-hectare (45 acre) site is an area of the river valley floor immediately to north of the A27 Shoreham flyover, It is on the west side of the Adur to

the south of Cuckoo Corner. At the present time it is protected from flooding by the river embankments.

This site has been acquired for the managed re-alignment of the river and conservation of green space. In November 2020 AWDC said that 'It wants to return the land to salt marsh, to encourage biodiversity and to enhance the site's role in flood defence plans.' Both the SDNP and the Environment Agency are engaged with this project and the Surrey Wildlife trust conducting a survey.

We are awaiting details of the definitive project, which we anticipate may be a significant habitat change. SDOA have not yet put in place a baseline survey, if that is required, but we have access to historic data on bird distributions for the wider area.

Shepherds Mead, Findon valley, Update – Tim Holter

AWDC are now in control of this 40-hectare (100 acre) site in the Findon Valley on the cessation of a farm tenancy. The site is also known as Cissbury Fields. It lies below the National Trust's Cissbury Ring estate. The site is within the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and the National Park have been involved with tree felling and planting in the Sheepcombe Hanger area.

SDNP have advised an alteration to the grass cutting regime previously adopted by the farmer. Recently cut grass has been left in-situ to break down into nutrients but this practice benefits the more vigorous grasses. Cut grass will now be removed in future with the objective of restoring downland habitat and flora assisted by livestock grazing rotated around the site. Uncut borders will be left to allow expansion of hedgerows and boundary vegetation.

Such proposals are subject to AWDC creating a management plan. Surrey Wildlife Trust have been commissioned to conduct an ecological survey. Brian Clay and Richard Nowak are conducting regular bird surveys on behalf of SDOS.

Swallows and Swifts 2021

Brianne Reeve: Swallows

There is no doubt that 2021 will be remembered as one of the strangest years for all of us, for many different reasons but mainly for the effect of the corona virus and how it limited what we were able to do.

The arrival of the first Swallows at Coombes came on April 12th, a male and a female together perched on our telephone wire, chattering to each other with delight at having made a safe return journey. No other Swallows ever perch on this wire unless they are 'mine'. Every year I am relieved and delighted to record their arrival since we came here in 1976. It is still a mystery that these migrants can navigate their way from somewhere in South Africa to a stable in a hamlet of only eight houses at Coombes, year after year. They were obviously coming here prior to 1976 as our stable door has a four-inch flap cut in the top to enable Swallows to fly in and out when the doors are closed. They swoop in from bright sun into the darkness of the stable through this small hole apparently without touching the sides, proving their amazing agility.

The arrival of a pair of Swallows is very unusual. In the past the male has always been first, often by several days. Almost at once these were flying in and out of the stable and I began to think we were going to have another good year. (2020 had produced 19 young from two broods from two pairs). There was very little activity to record all through April 2021 possibly due to the very dry weather, but the pair was present around and over the garden and always roosting in the stable at night. It was not until May 22nd that I found an empty egg shell below the nest and on the 28th there were five young Swallows peering over the edge waiting for each of the parents to bring in their vital insect supply. Six days later they had all fledged safely and could be seen hunting for themselves and occasionally being fed in mid-air by an adult. Then, disaster, only two days after the young had fledged, the female disappeared and the male was doing all the feeding late into the evening. (I am sure he looked exhausted but he did not give up)! By mid-June all the young had disappeared, one or two

at a time (I think on early migration because they looked perfectly healthy) and the male was alone roosting at night.

But 17 days later on July 1st, having stayed faithful to the stable, the male introduced a new female and she adopted a nest which I have never seen used before. After 13 days of watching, waiting and hoping, five young were seen in this rather small nest. As they grew some were in the nest, some on the diagonal beam with the male, and others with the female on the nest. All the young fledged safely and the last two Swallows left us on August 20th having been here for only 130 days, the shortest period of time I have recorded by at least 12 days. The weather, cold, too dry, very wet and strong winds and the loss of the first female all played their part in a disappointing year. Even so ten young Swallows had survived their time at Coombes. Perhaps, some of those from the 2020 broods might return when they are old enough to breed in 2022. I think records will show that far fewer Swallows were seen in 2021 so I am very grateful for those that found us for the 45th year.

Sallie Bedford: Swifts

We put up our first box shortly after we moved to Henfield in about 1994 and the subsequent four during the following years when we realised the birds were using them. Their position, high on the north-facing wall of the house, with a clear space north towards Henfield cemetery, seems ideal for their approach flight though they seem to prefer to leave by flying west towards the King's Field.

The cry "They're back" heralds the first sighting of the birds and usually comes during the first week of May. Two were spotted on 5th May 2021 over Saelig Cottage and on the 10th there were four flying low, close to the house and from then on numbers built up to a maximum of a dozen or so.

Each evening at about 9-9.30 pm birds arrive from all directions to join the screaming and the fly-past during which they swoop round the house in ever-larger numbers. One year we found a dead bird in the yard and another year

a perfect egg on the ground but normally the only way we can tell there are young being fed is the quantity of droppings that accumulate on the log box below the nests. This year, however, my son Chris managed to film two nestlings reacting with each other at the entrance to a box, a small sign of family recognition!

Swifts are active in good weather flying up to the boxes, two or three touching the same box. This year all five boxes have been entered. Young birds call from their nests and we see their white throat patches as they look out.

There is nothing one can do to assist Swifts like hanging up food or filling a bird bath. One can only put up a box, and be pleased when they use it. I lift the lid of our five water butts occasionally to release a cloud of midges and hope that that helps! We marvel at how they swoop round the yard missing each other, and us, as they go. They seem to be particularly active at 9.30 pm or later each evening when parties of up to ten will scream and fly in close formation, gathering from all around as though summoned by bells. A wonderful sight outlined against a darkening sky with a new moon showing.

A Sojourn in Suffolk in June

Peter and Mags Whitcomb

It can be quite difficult to find places to stay around Minsmere especially with so many people having UK holidays, so we thought it rather lucky that we were able to book a cottage at Middleton, not far from Minsmere RSPB.

The small Suffolk Wildlife Trust nature reserve at Darsham Marshes was even closer and here we had great views of Barn Owls on each visit. Garden Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and Whitethroat were all seen and heard. Nearby was a site for Turtle Doves but we were unlucky not to see any. The reserve had wonderful meadows with Ragged Robin, Yellow Flag and hundreds of

Southern Marsh Orchids. Grasshopper Warblers were absent this year, but were mentioned on the noticeboard, together with various dragonflies.

The area is spoilt for choice for visiting nature reserves but of course Minsmere is the main port of call and we had four visits at different times of the day during the week in early June. The car park always looks full, but visitors are spread out and there were no worries on social distancing as the RSPB required masks to be worn in hides and social distancing measures were observed.



A Barnacle Goose family at Minsmere

At Minsmere Marsh Harriers are guaranteed but for Bitterns you have to be lucky. We saw Bitterns in flight on each visit. The scrapes had plenty of interest with broods of young of many species including Avocet, Redshank, Lapwing, various wildfowl, noisy Black headed Gulls and terns. We also noted Mediterranean Gulls, Little Gulls and some Kittiwakes that had come in off the sea. Hobby and Little Egret were seen in decent numbers, and of course Sedge and Reed Warblers. A few warblers were still in song in the woodland areas and Cuckoo was heard a couple of times.

We had some pleasant walks around Westleton and Dunwich Heaths. Dartford Warblers are present but not always seen well as the heaths are popular. Tree Pipit and Woodlark avoided us, but maybe they had stopped singing or we weren't in the right area – these heaths are extensive. We did get a brief song of Nightingale and Garden Warblers were in full throttle. It was interesting to get site instructions for seeing Stone Curlews in the area. Once upon a time the nesting sites were a big secret but they are doing well with over a dozen pairs scattered on suitable habitat. Unfortunately the area set aside for them at Minsmere held just one male that had failed to attract a mate and it remained hidden from view.

Slightly further away was Carlton Marshes, towards Lowestoft. This is a new reserve which borders Oulton Broad and the river Waveney. A brand-new visitor centre has many events and an afternoon cup of tea and cake was enjoyed whilst watching the Water Voles from the verandah! Avocets are doing very well here and other birds noted were Great White Egret, Little Egret, Dabchick, Marsh Harrier, and a few waders. Cuckoo and Grasshopper Warbler were heard. Spoonbills had been resident there during the week but had moved elsewhere on our visit. Chinese Water Deer are another speciality here. Other nature reserves were visited including Hen Reedbed and Dingle Marshes where the species noted included Bittern, Marsh Harrier, and Avocet, but it is also worth pointing out there is botanical and dragonfly interest at these places too. We found a patch of the scarce Sea Pea on Dingle Marshes shingle. As this was a holiday rather than a birdwatching tour, we did the tourist

bit and visited Thorpeness and Southwold, but found more enjoyment and less crowds on our visits to Suffolk's nature reserves.



Sea Pea on the shingle at Dingle Marshes

Paired for Life?

John Maskell

As regular readers of the SDOS User Group email correspondence will know, I am an enthusiastic recorder of our garden wildlife. Indeed, I endeavour to submit a daily list to the BTO's BirdTrack recording scheme. In our daily recording it has become a household joke that midway through the day when we check on species numbers it is invariably 13. Now I'd like to think that we're not superstitious but that 13 always encourages us to try and log a further species or two, and in this regard, we do include "fly-overs". Shena and I also contribute garden records to the BTO's Garden Birdwatch Scheme and many of these notes also find their way into this Society's Garden Birdwatch recording scheme that Val Bentley co-ordinates. All these commitments to recording ensure that we never miss an opportunity to gaze and observe.

Perhaps not surprisingly on my study wall hangs a copy of W.H.Davies' poem entitled 'Leisure' that begins,

"What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare"

We are often told that you can only reliably identify individual birds if they are sporting a ring. But if you study a confined area such as your garden it is possible to get to know individuals if they have plumage or physical variations or regular behaviour traits. Into both these categories fall our very own Billy Whizz and Mrs Stumpy! These are a pair of loyal Blackbirds who have been with us for several years and whom we regard as friends. No day is complete without seeing them!

I'm sure that many members will know that Billy Whizz is a speedy human character that graces the pages of 'The Beano' comic. I got to know him in my junior school days when he first appeared on 16th May 1964. Now our male Blackbird is a fast policer of our patch, so his nickname seemed quite appropriate. Behaviour-wise he always follows the same routes across the garden and doesn't tolerate intruders of his own species. Billy is also a top-flight vocalist and he employs a number of distinctive variations in his repertoire. We taught him to wolf whistle a few years ago and when commencing this year's Spring song he demonstrated that he hadn't forgotten this characteristic phrase over the Winter.

As a regular moth-trapper I have often been aware of being watched when unloading the trap soon after dawn. Invariably I will turn around and there will be Billy casually watching. With lightning speed he will pounce on any poor moth that evades the potting-for-identification process. Now when I see Billy I always greet him with, "Oh hello Billy!" Just a short greeting. I'm convinced that he is attuned to my voice for whenever I see him in the garden, mothing or not, I use the same salutation and I'm sure that this familiarity has made him comfortable and familiar with my presence since he never flies off when our paths cross. Amusingly after a fox bit through the mains cable my moth trap



was out-of-action for 3 months earlier this year awaiting a spare part, yet on the first day it was reactivated there was Billy just casually passing by but with an eye for the main chance for one of those juicy noctuids!

Perhaps we've adopted a tad un-political nomenclature for Mrs.Stumpy. She is a shy female Blackbird who has a deformed left claw that is just an extended stump. She seems to have had this "problem" since birth and has adapted amazingly well such that to a casual observer you might not notice anything untoward. We are always amazed at how well she balances and runs across the lawn. She has proved to be an excellent nest builder.

These two characters are clearly a pair and have successfully bred in our garden for at least 5 years; sometimes producing several broods in a season.

Unfortunately, on more than one occasion their nestlings have been predated by thieving Magpies. Whilst they are intolerant of other Blackbirds they will often feed alongside each other with no cross words.

In penning these notes I am aware that although I'd like to think that I keep careful garden notes I don't seem to have an exact date as to when we first noticed Mrs Stumpy, when she first bred or when we taught Billy Whizz to wolf-whistle. There's always room for improvement in our recording. Finally, a recent update: a late brood resulted in the successful fledging of 3 birds that were still being fed by Billy in early August 2021. Sadly, his partner may well have been the victim of a Sparrowhawk's visit to the nest site a couple of weeks earlier as we haven't seen her since.

Barbara Dobbs June 11th 1930 – May 19th 2021

Brianne Reeve

Barbara came into this world as quite a surprise to her mother who was unaware she was expecting twins and only learned of her impending arrival shortly after delivering her sister June!

Barbara was sporty and competitive as a child, always captain of the netball team and later, as a passionate golfer, she became Ladies captain of the Worthing Golf Club where she won an impressive array of trophies. She loved horse riding and riding her Lambretta! She was fearless with a strong sense of adventure, in her teens she became an Air Ranger girl guide and when she was 19 years old took up the offer of a flight piloted by her section leader. On SDOS outings she always had her eyes to the skies to identify any passing plane, though she loved bird watching too.

Whatever Barbara did, she threw herself into it and did well. Turning her hand to music she learned to play the accordion, becoming extremely competent. She joined a band and enjoyed entertaining at fetes and in nursing homes. She travelled extensively: Canada, New Zealand and

Australia and much of Europe, making friends because she was happy to talk to everyone.



She worked at Lloyds Bank all her life, applying her precision and perfectionism wholeheartedly to her work just as she did in other aspects of her life. Her enthusiasm extended to friendships and she chose well. Though a careful and competent driver she became nervous about night driving and Dorian, very kindly went out of his way to pick her up, and bring her to the SDOS meetings. She valued his friendship which continued to the end of her life whilst he kept in regular contact with her. She did not want to give up her bungalow but was persuaded to try Highgrove House Nursing Home where she enjoyed a happy relationship with the staff and settled in before the pandemic would have made it impossible for her to cope alone.

At her funeral, entirely planned by Barbara, the priest was slightly behind with the Committal and found he was reading it to the recessional music of 'The Dambusters March' played by the Band of the RAF. Barbara definitely was in control to the end!

Photograph acknowledgments

The source of photographs is often clear from the context or other attribution and those are not listed here. Note also that some of the bird photographs are illustrative; they may not be of the actual bird referred to in the account.

Front cover: Honey Buzzard - Dorian Mason

Page 22: Garganey – Richard Allen

Page 25: Whimbrel – Richard Allen

Page 29: Cattle Egret – Bernie Forbes

Page 31: Peregrine – Dorian Mason

Page 38: Siskin – Dorian Mason

Back cover: White-tailed Eagle – Bernie Forbes

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If you use an email address but are not a member of the User Group then please consider joining (<https://groups.io/g/sdos/join>) to make sure you receive up-to-date information about SDOS activities.

