

# BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY



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## PREFACE

Observant readers will have noted that although this issue of *Bristol Ornithology* is numbered 19, it is dated 1987, two years after the previous issue. In the intervening year, the Club published a supplement which replaced the regular issue for that year. However, in order to maintain continuity as far as Club activities are concerned, two reports from the Secretary appear in this issue, covering the years 1985 and 1986. The supplement took the form of a book entitled *The Sunning Behaviour of Birds*, written by Dr K. E. L. Simmons, a long-standing Club member and a regular contributor to the journal. The book has received good reviews in several scientific and more popular journals, and continues to sell well. There is no reason why this should not be the first of other supplementary publications, and other ideas would be welcome.

Conversely, one does not have to be very observant to notice that what has been a regular feature of the journal to date – the annual review of birds in the Club's recording area – is missing this time. Considering the amount of work involved we have been fortunate over many years to find members willing and able to take on the arduous task of compiling this report, but reluctantly have not been able to do so this time. Many thanks are due to all those who have written this report in the past but perhaps the time had come for a change. In this issue there appear reports based on surveys of two species groups – waders and woodland birds – with records drawn from a 50km radius of Bristol over a recent five-year period. There is plenty of scope for similar articles covering other species in order to ascertain trends in local populations, and again suggestions would be welcome. The main paper this time is a summary by John Aldridge of records from the Keynsham area over many years, and continues the series of papers on 'local patches'.

Finally, an era in the Club's history drew to a close in 1987 with the death in March of Bernard King, our first, and for a long time, only Honorary Life Member. Bernard took every opportunity to publicise the Club, and this journal in particular, and in this issue we publish the last of a series of his notes which have appeared in every issue since 1970. His many achievements have been detailed in obituaries elsewhere; we can only add that birdwatching, particularly in the south-west, will not be quite the same without him.

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# BIRDS OF THE KEYNSHAM AREA

by John Aldridge

The town of Keynsham is situated to the south of the confluence of the Rivers Chew and Avon. In this study the area is defined as extending from Hicks Gate in the north-west, eastwards along the River Avon from Hanham to the viaduct south of Bitton. The village of Queen Charlton has been taken as the western point, whilst Wooscombe Bottom and Chewton Keynsham have been set as the southern edge. No attempt has been made to include Saltford which deserves recognition in its own right, although there are great similarities in the species present and their habits, particularly along the course of the River Avon. (See Fig. 1 for boundaries).

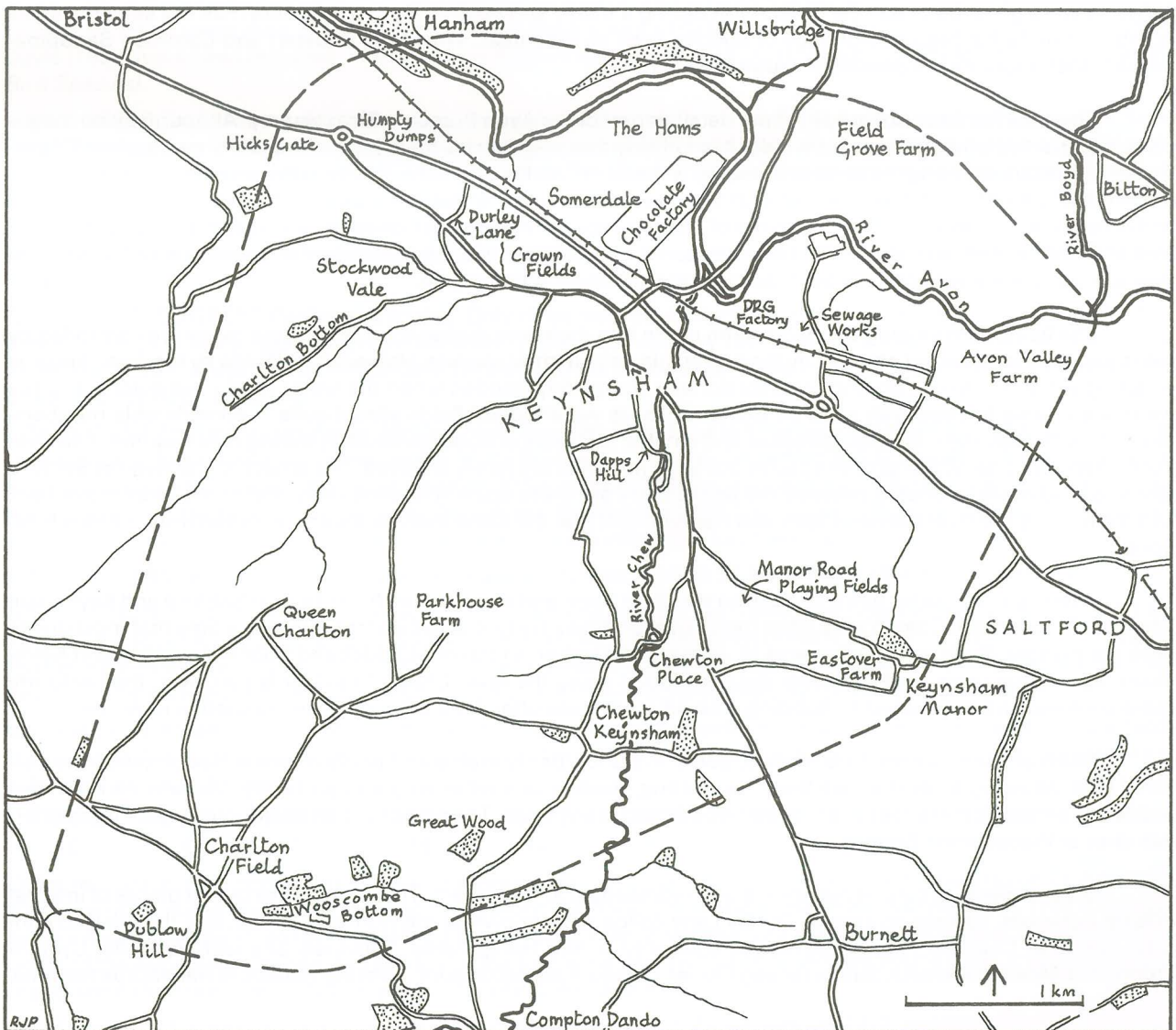


Fig. 1. Map of study area at Keynsham.



A. H. Davis, in his paper in *Bristol Ornithology* 15 recognised the presence of a migration route over the town and attempted to link it to Chew Valley Lake. This prompted more detailed observations and the highest point in the area (118 metres) to the south of Queen Charlton, named Charlton Field, proved to be an excellent observation point. The link with Chew Valley Lake is still a little tenuous, however. Much of the movement is to the south and south-east as well as south-west. A flock of 350 Mallard that flew south along the line of the River Chew on 20 September 1985 then turned south-west and looked destined for the lake, but two weeks later, when over 3000 birds flew south (generally) on the morning of 5 October 1985, little movement was noted there. Most movement has been noted during the autumn, particularly in October, when counts have been done in conjunction with the annual BOC watch, but significant movement has also been apparent in winter, coinciding with the onset of particularly cold weather.

Much of the autumnal movement at Charlton Field is of passerines with Meadow Pipits\* featuring prominently, and with regular occurrences of thrushes, finches and three species of wagtail. Numbers peak in early October with particularly high counts on 2 October 1983 and 5 October 1985. Winter movement was particularly noticeable from 7 to 9 January 1982 when flocks of Lapwing, Golden Plover, Skylark, Fieldfare and Redwing, exceeding 4000 in total, passed south-west over the town during adverse weather, and on 9 February 1985 when over 4000 Lapwing were grounded near the River Avon during a heavy snowstorm. Spring migration has not seen the same number of birds but regular sightings of species such as Wheatear, Whinchat, Redstart and Common Sandpiper indicate that migrants are passing through the area.

The area has been covered in some detail as part of the Avon Breeding Birds Survey. Although by no means complete, particularly on the eastern side, it is unlikely that any species have been completely overlooked. Of particular significance among the species breeding is the Sand Martin where the colony at Somerdale is one of only two left in the county of Avon, the other being at Batheaston. Lapwings breed in the Queen Charlton/Charlton Field area and occasionally elsewhere. Breeding birds of prey are represented by Sparrowhawk and Kestrel and, possibly, Buzzard and Hobby. Both species of partridge are seen throughout the year and are known to breed locally, but whether they are completely wild or have been deliberately put down is not known.

The fields surrounding the River Avon come into their own during the winter. Both rivers are controlled by weirs and are therefore not affected by the tide at this point in their courses. However, the fields by the Avon become waterlogged after heavy rain and are occasionally completely flooded when the water level rises quickly and the weirs are unable to cope with such an extreme. These waterlogged fields attract gulls in considerable numbers, together with Lapwings, corvids, thrushes and smaller numbers of duck, particularly during cold weather. The river itself often sees a selection of duck species but large numbers are rarely involved. The stretch of the Avon at Saltford tends to hold more, probably because the banks there are more open. It is most likely that some birds move back and forth along the river between Bath and Hanham and that the same individuals are recorded from various locations.

There is a noticeable influx of duck on the River Avon and surrounding fields both at Saltford and Keynsham when the Blagdon and Chew Valley lakes freeze over and they are forced to disperse. It is at this time that most diving duck are present. Such an occasion was 15 January 1982 when a total of 143 duck and Coot were counted at Keynsham. Apart from tame Mallard, fewer duck are found along the River Chew. This river is narrower, the banks are more confined and not subject to flooding. The adjacent trees often hold a good Siskin population in winter.

Much of the countryside is farmed, partly livestock, partly arable and partly orchard. Hedgerows have survived well, allowing birds that use them for nesting, feeding or shelter ample opportunity. There is no extensive woodland although there are several small woods and many trees. The woods are all deciduous except for coniferous ones at Wooscombe Bottom.

Other aspects of natural history are well represented at Keynsham. There are two excellent places of interest to local botanists, namely an area by Durley Lane colloquially known as the Humpty Dumps, and the disused concrete works at Charlton Field. A particular speciality is Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia* whilst Upright Chickweed *Moenchia erecta*, Subterranean Clover *Trifolium subterraneum*, Stinking Hellebore *Helleborus foetidus*,

\*Scientific names are given in the systematic list.



Bath Asparagus *Ornithogalum pyrenacium* and Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* are included in the list of rarer flowers. Charlton Field holds a varied butterfly population with 23 species recorded. There is also a good Badger *Meles meles* population with Fox *Vulpes vulpes*, Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*, Weasel *Mustela nivalis*, Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*, Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* and Hare *Lepus capensis* representing the better known mammals. Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* dominate certain places and have a significant effect on the environment, allowing the more interesting plants to flourish and thereby increasing the variety of insect life. Less welcome is the Mink *Mustela lutreola* which seems to have increased its numbers recently and its effect on the rest of the wildlife needs to be monitored carefully. There are several species of bats, dragonflies and three species of newts which, when considered alongside the plant and animal life mentioned, the fish in the rivers and the insects not considered here, all add up to a fairly rich variety of natural history in the area.

### Systematic list

The list contains accounts of most species recorded in and around Keynsham. There are far more details in respect of recent years than in former years due to the amount of data available. Very few records documented by Davis (1982) have been included. The sequence follows that of Professor K. H. Voous (1977, *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species*).

**LITTLE GREBE** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. Overwinters in small numbers on the River Avon and sometimes on the River Chew. First appears in September (earliest date 11 September 1977) and normally moves away by the end of March. The maximum number present on the Avon was 12 on 24 January 1987, although a more normal number is two or three. Easily overlooked as they have a habit of hiding in the vegetation by the river banks. A record of a pair with two young from Bitton on 27 July 1976 may well have been on the Avon, but could conceivably have been elsewhere. There were breeding season records in 1978 (May to August) from Chewton Keynsham but breeding was not proved.

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE** *Podiceps cristatus*. Only three records, all in February during cold spells of weather, probably as a result of birds dispersing from the lakes. Those of 8 February 1976 and 16 February 1986 were on the River Avon near Bitton, whilst that of 18 February 1979 was by the Lock-keeper restaurant (formerly Isle d'Avon) where the Chew and the Avon combine.

**CORMORANT** *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Moving birds are seen from time to time over the town and Charlton Field and they have also been noted, but infrequently, on the River Avon. No regular pattern has emerged. One flew south over Charlton Field on 8 October 1983, three north on 30 September 1985 and two west on 25 September 1987. Up to three were present on the River Avon between August and September 1979. Up to seven have sometimes taken up residence on the roof of Cadbury's boiler house when Chew Valley Lake has been frozen over in winter.

**LITTLE BITTERN** *Ixobrychus minutus*. An immature bird was seen on 28 September 1958 by the River Avon.

**NIGHT HERON** *Nycticorax nycticorax*. A sub-adult (second or third year) was observed by several people on 5 May 1986 by the River Avon at the end of Durley Lane, and had probably been present since 2nd. It perched in a Willow (*Salix*) most of the day, flying off at dusk. Another was seen briefly at Saltford sewage works on 3 September 1987 and flew along the Avon towards Keynsham. This record awaits ratification by the Rarities Committee.

**GREY HERON** *Ardea cinerea*. Present throughout the year though mostly in the winter months, usually on the fields by the River Avon. A winter flock builds up by Field Grove Farm near Bitton. Maximum numbers in recent years at this location are as follows:

1977/8	1978/9	1979/80	1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
10	4	21	19	14	9	18	4	9	6

Older records include eight that flew over the bypass on 11 August 1970 and 18 near the rubbish tip on 11 July 1971. Birds are often noted during the evening flying along the River Chew and sometimes over the town. This is thought to be a local movement, possibly involving Chew Valley Lake. Breeding took place in a single nest in a wood to the north of the Avon near Hanham in 1986 and in the following year two pairs raised two young each. It will be interesting to see if this continues in future years. The site looks ideal for a heronry.

**WHITE STORK** *Ciconia ciconia*. One was seen over Keynsham on 24 September 1972, circling with Herring Gulls. This was doubtless the individual that had been released from Rode Bird Gardens after a year in captivity following



a fall down a chimney at Downside School, Stratton-on-Fosse on 6 September 1971. It was almost the end of a fascinating episode involving Denmark, Penzance, Madeira and the first traffic jam on the Isles of Scilly. More details can be found in *British Birds* 65:4–5 and 66:336, and *Confessions of a Scilly Birdman* by David Hunt (1985).

**MUTE SWAN** *Cygnus olor*. Usually seen in small numbers on the River Avon. Nested at Bath Hill in the late 1940s. Breeding not known again until 1983 when a pair nested at the Keynsham marina and four eggs were laid, but were deserted due to disturbance before hatching occurred. Successfully reared six young in 1985 although this later reduced to five. The nests were built beneath a boat that had been taken out of the water. There being little natural nesting material available, general boat debris was used including an oar and a brush handle. Eight birds fed in a flooded field on 20 March 1982 but this was exceptional. Moving birds include three flying west over the town on 1 March 1982 and one to the north over the highest point of Charlton Field on 12 October 1985.

**BEWICK'S SWAN** *Cygnus columbianus*. Six adults and three juveniles flew east along the Avon together with a Mute Swan on 19 December 1981 whilst 10 were noted in the area nine days later. Three adults and one juvenile flew from the north-west towards the same river on 1 February 1986, then turned back once Saltford sewage works came into view.

**WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** *Anser albifrons*. Only three records over 42 years have been found but there is a great similarity between the dates. 20 south-west over Chewton Keynsham on 15 January 1945, 21 over Keynsham on 17 January 1963 and 35 south-east over the Avon on 17 January 1987.

**CANADA GOOSE** *Branta canadensis*. Surprisingly few records considering the increase that has taken place in Avon and other adjacent counties. Apart from those noted by Davis, three to the south-east over the town on 15 May 1985. The most likely locality, the fields by the River Avon, have produced only two records — singles on 17 April 1983 and 22 September 1985 although there were two at the nearby marina on 16 April 1982. A flock of 50 geese flying north over Charlton Field on 5 January 1986 were probably this species.

**WIGEON** *Anas penelope*. All observations have been by the River Avon or the adjacent fields, coinciding with cold weather, which suggests dispersal from the lakes. 60 on 1 January 1982 with five remaining on 15th. Up to six between 6 January and 10 February 1985, maximums of 17 between 11 January and 27 February 1986, and 19 between 24 January and 8 February 1987.

**GADWALL** *Anas strepera*. Four by the River Avon on 27 January 1985, one on 15 January 1987 and two on 31 January 1987.

**TEAL** *Anas crecca*. Again, all records are from the River Avon mostly during winter, but not exclusively coinciding with the freezing of the reservoirs. There were 30 on 1 January 1982 and on 17th 48 out of a total of 129 in the Saltford area flew downstream towards Keynsham. Only three or four in the winters of 1982/3 and 1983/4 but there were maximums of 10, 20 and 14 respectively in 1984/5, 1985/6 and 1986/7. In spring three on 14 April 1982 and one on 16 April 1986.

**MALLARD** *Anas platyrhynchos*. Present throughout the year. A flock of up to 70 tame birds is often present on the River Chew at the bottom of Dapps Hill. Breeding takes place regularly along both rivers with up to ten pairs involved. Winter numbers do not usually rise substantially although 30–40 birds are often seen on the Avon at Somerdale. During freezing conditions on 15 January 1982, 74 were present along the Avon towards Saltford. A few moving birds are often seen over the town or Charlton Field. On 20 September 1985 a large flock of 350 flew south along the line of the River Chew, then turned south-west towards Chew Valley Lake.

**PINTAIL** *Anas acuta*. Single males were present on the River Avon on 27 January and 9 February 1985, from 16 February to early March 1986 and on 18 January 1987.

**SHOVELER** *Anas clypeata*. A male spent the week from 18 to 24 January 1987 on the River Avon.

**POCHARD** *Aythya ferina*. Ten on 20 January 1979, nine on 15 January 1982, four on 20 January 1985, six on 10 February 1986, and 13 on 1 February 1987, all on the River Avon. Single birds on other occasions.

**TUFTED DUCK** *Aythya fuligula*. Seen more frequently than Pochard. All records have been in winter except April 1979 at Chewton Keynsham and April 1980 on the Avon. Maximum winter numbers in recent years are as follows:

1978/9	1979/80	1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
7	1	3	18	20	1	25	3	18

Much higher numbers of this species occur at Saltford when the lakes freeze over.



**GOLDENEYE** *Bucephala clangula*. An irregular visitor to the River Avon during very cold weather. Singles in February 1976, 20 February 1983, 19/20 January 1985 and 16 February 1986. Four were present on 22 February 1986 with two remaining on 27th. Seven were noted on 17 January 1987 with four still present on 4 February.

**SMEW** *Mergus albellus*. A flock of 14, including 10 males, rose from the River Avon at Somerdale on 20 January 1985, flew east, then settled on the water briefly before flying off again. This surprising flock was the second highest count in the county of Avon and the highest number since 1963. It was part of a national influx that occurred at the time.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** *Mergus serrator*. A female/immature that flew downstream along the River Avon on 11 January 1985 was almost certainly one of the two overwintering birds displaced from Chew Valley Lake due to lack of open water. Another, possibly the same bird, was seen on 31 January 1987. Again, it had probably been forced from the lake and was later seen at Hunstrete on 12 February.

**GOOSANDER** *Mergus merganser*. A regular visitor to the River Avon since 1978 but not seen every year. The lack of records before then is probably fairly realistic (although there was one at Bitton in January 1891) and those in recent years reflect the increase in numbers present on the reservoirs. There have been April records in several years but there is no real hope of them breeding unless they substantially extend their range much further to the south. Maximum winter counts in recent years are as follows:

1978/9	1979/80	1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
4	0	5	18	0	2	10	14	37

The higher counts in 1986/7 are partly due to early morning visits as flocks break up once they are disturbed. Birds have been seen flying south along the Chew valley on several occasions, almost certainly heading for Chew Valley Lake.

**RUDDY DUCK** *Oxyura jamaicensis*. Keynsham's first record was a female on the River Avon on 22 February 1986, and is a small example of this species ability to cope with the worst of Britain's weather and bodes well for its continuing expansion on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

**RED KITE** *Milvus milvus*. An old record of one trapped at Chewton Keynsham in August 1890.

**SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*. Frequently seen throughout the year in all parts of the area. Reports of probable breeding go back at least to 1966. There may well be four sites — near Chewton Keynsham, Charlton Field, Hanham and Somerdale. They have bred at the latter site since 1979 and have withstood tremendous intrusion in the form of scramble bikes, etc., but have not deserted the site. The highest autumn number noted at one place was three at Charlton Field on 20 September 1985, one of which was chasing a Green Woodpecker.

**BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*. Irregular sightings mostly between the months of March and October. The maximum was four at Chewton Keynsham in September 1985. Nest building took place at the same locality in April 1986 but whether or not this was successful is unknown. Most other records have been from the area of Charlton Field, the most likely source of these birds being Compton Dando.

**OSPREY** *Pandion haliaetus*. One on 25 August 1982 (Davis, 1982).

**KESTREL** *Falco tinnunculus*. Frequently seen throughout the year in all parts of the area. Has bred on the rock face by the railway cutting to the north-west. Evidence of breeding around Queen Charlton since at least 1970 and a pair present at Chewton Keynsham in 1985. Attempts to breed at Somerdale in a nest box have so far been unsuccessful mainly due to predation by Carrion Crows, but may well succeed in future as they gain experience.

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*. Singles on 17 February 1976, 10 November 1980 and 25 October 1986 at Somerdale, and a female further east along the River Avon during cold weather on 22 February 1986.

**HOBBY** *Falco subbuteo*. Seen most summers since 1971 and bred in a disused Carrion Crows' nest at Clack Mill Farm in 1977. This is the only occasion that breeding has been proved but it does seem possible that it still occurs not too far away. Seen moving north in spring on 4 May 1984 and 6 May 1987 and in autumn on 16 October 1971, 23 September 1979 and 9 September 1987.

**PEREGRINE** *Falco peregrinus*. Singles to the south-east over the town on 11 August 1984 and to the west over Charlton Field on 6 August 1985. One was shot at Keynsham in 1927.

**RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE** *Alectoris rufa*. The area is a relative stronghold in Avon for this species with breeding at Queen Charlton reported since the 1940s. They are still seen in the breeding season near the village and an adult with



eight small young was seen at nearby Charlton Field on 25 July 1986. Also noted at Chewton Keynsham and Keynsham Manor. Autumn and winter coveys include 16 at Charlton Field on 6 October 1984 and the same number at Keynsham Manor on 26 December 1978.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix*. As with the Red-legged Partridge, this species is well represented in the area. Although recorded since the 1960s, proof of breeding has been difficult to establish. Pairs have been seen from May to July at Chewton Keynsham, by the River Avon, Charlton Field, Queen Charlton and Stockwood Vale, and coveys of ten on 30 October 1971, 14 in January 1981, 12 on 2 October 1983, 15 on 15 January 1984 and 15 on 27 August 1984 indicate success for the species.

QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*. One heard and seen at Queen Charlton on 30 June 1971, a year which was not a good Quail one.

PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*. Present in most parts of the countryside, breeding proved in several years. An albino male was seen paired with a normal female on 25 April 1971.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*. Two found dead on the Willsbridge road opposite Cadbury's factory on 10 February 1956. Two by the River Avon near the cycle track on 9 January 1986 and one at the same site on 15 January 1987. Has also been seen a little further east near Swineford.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*. Breeds along both rivers and other suitable wet places, particularly in the vicinity of Somerdale where 30 nests were found in 1978, 19 of which were successful. There is some concern for this species due to the substantial increase in the number of Mink along the rivers. There was an unusual nest six metres above the ground in a Willow tree by the River Chew where a pair raised two broods in 1984. Another built a nest on a discarded tyre in the mill grounds in 1987 where eight eggs were laid. Maximum winter numbers by the River Avon east of the Lock-keeper in recent years are as follows, but the figures should be treated with some caution due to the species' natural shyness:

1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
23	17	15	35	16	15	17

An almost complete albino was present on 29 September 1977.

CORNCRAKE *Crex crex*. Was heard in the late 1930s or 1940s in the area that is now the playing fields along the Bristol road.

COOT *Fulica atra*. Present on or by the River Avon during most winters in small numbers. Eight in January and February 1979, 19 (an exceptionally high number) on 15 January 1982, five in February 1986 and eight on 15 January 1987. Singles on the River Chew on 5 March 1985 and 23/24 February 1986, and a summer record of one on the Avon on 27 June 1981.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. One heard over the town at 11.30 p.m. on 6 May 1987.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*. An irregular visitor to the area, most often seen during the winter. Flocks of 300 on 1 January 1982, 30 on 28 November 1982, 13 on 9 February 1985 and 29 on 2 February 1986 constitute the highest numbers on the fields beside the River Avon. Has also been noted at Queen Charlton and Charlton Field for many years, sometimes in flight and at other times resting: 300 on 31 December 1955, 66 on 6 November 1958, 20 on 6 November 1965, 110 on 1 December 1973, 15 on 18 November 1983, 40 on 19 February 1984, 50 on 5 January 1985, 80 on 10 November 1985, 29 on 5 January 1986 and 16 on 22 December 1986 with smaller numbers on other dates. Seen less often in spring but ten were noted at Queen Charlton on 4 April 1945 and five on 24 April 1982 and 30 were seen over the mill grounds on 18 March 1987.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. Present in significant numbers on the fields by the Avon in winter. Maximum counts in recent years are as follows:

1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
250	80	372	400	300	1000	183

An almost completely albino bird was present on 5 December 1982. Heavy bad weather movement was noted by Davis (1982) and has been observed since: 365 on 28 December 1984, 460 on 5 January 1985, 170 on 10 February 1985 all to the south-west, with smaller numbers on other dates. Flocks totalling 4340 were grounded near the Avon during heavy snow on 9 February 1985. Only 250, representing the overwintering population, were left the following day. Regularly breeds around Queen Charlton and Charlton Field with three or four pairs involved. Has also probably



bred near Field Grove Farm, Chewton Keynsham and the sewage works in the last ten years. Small midsummer movements occasionally occur, presumably involving post-breeding continental adults e.g. 20 on 26 July 1983, 25 on 3 June 1984, 15 on 26 June 1985 all to the south-west, 10 to the south on 10 June 1986 and three south-west on 6 July 1987. Autumnal movement of up to 130 birds has been seen at Charlton Field.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*. Four by the River Avon on 1 January 1982, one feeding by a large puddle near the same river on 10 February 1985 and one on the settling pool at the DRG factory on 24 July 1985. 15 flew down the Avon at Somerdale on 22 July 1987.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*. One on the fields by the River Avon during freezing conditions on 10 February 1985.

SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*. Often seen by the River Avon during winter, usually on the fields, but moving to the small muddy patches by the river when the ground is too frozen for them to feed. Maximum winter numbers in recent years are as follows:

1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
37	9	48	39	27	8

Present less often by the River Chew: one on 19 February 1977, three on 20 November 1982 and one on 15 January 1986, all by the mill. Six at Parkhouse Farm on 9 February 1984. One or two autumn migrants are occasionally seen at Charlton Field, the earliest being two on 1 August 1985. Singles appeared at the rubbish tip on 18 August 1971 and the River Avon on 6 August 1987.

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*. Nested in Hornsby wood to the east of the area in the late 1940s. Four were present at the Hams near Somerdale from January to March 1986.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. Two over Somerdale on 5 May 1980, 11 north-east on 15 April 1981, three to the north on 3 May 1983 and heard on 15 May 1986 at 10.15 p.m. Four appeared over the mill grounds on 27 July 1987.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*. Single birds seen by the River Avon on 6 January 1985 and 10 February 1985, and one flying high to the south-west at Charlton Field on 1 July 1985. Heard calling over the town at 11.30 p.m. on 12 April 1986.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*. One to the south-west at Charlton Field on 11 October 1984. Another fed on the bank of the Avon during cold weather on 15 January 1987.

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*. One flew down the River Avon on 23 August 1981. One to the south-west on 20 August 1983 and one feeding by an overgrown puddle at Charlton Field exactly two years later. Another heard calling at the same locality on 18 September 1986.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*. Singles between Keynsham and Saltford in August 1981 and heard calling over the town on 31 August 1987.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*. Regularly seen in spring by the rivers, and less often in autumn. One to four birds usually involved but eight on 28 April 1980. One was seen feeding by a pool at Charlton Field on 7 August 1985.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*. Feeds and rests on the fields by the River Avon, large numbers appearing when the ground is waterlogged during cold weather. Maximum counts in recent winters are as follows:

1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
447	1062	917	550	805	280

A flock of 250 appeared over the town as flying ants took to the wing on 9 August 1986. Smaller numbers have been seen in other years in the same circumstances. Early post-breeding adults were noted flying over the town on 4 July 1982, 6 July 1984 and 6 July 1987.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*. Normally seen only in small numbers (less than 50), but 335 were present by the River Avon on 7 January 1984, 77 on 9 February 1985 and 100 on 1 January 1987. A female found dead by the River Chew on 3 January 1982 had been ringed as a three year old at Matsalu Reserve, Estonia, USSR on 4 May 1973. The earliest post-breeding adult noted was one flying south-west over the town on 4 July 1982.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*. Less than 20 normally present by the River Avon in winter but there were 42 on 2 February 1986, mostly of the form *intermedius*. A Bristol ringed adult was present in February 1986 and it, or another, returned the following winter. Larger numbers, maximum 170 on 9 October 1985, gather around



Queen Charlton. A pair of adults has spent the summers of 1985/6/7 by the rivers but positive signs of breeding have not been seen.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*. Very small numbers noted in winter, but more often seen with the previous species at Queen Charlton, maximum 35 on 13 June 1982.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*. Single adults by the River Avon on 28 September 1983 and 11 January 1986.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*. One in flight in early March 1957. This may be as a result of a wreck from 25 January to early February after which birds were unexpectedly found in several places for some weeks (Chadwick and Wright 1958).

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*. One on 23 April 1987 flew along the River Avon and settled in a field near the River Boyd during an early afternoon rainstorm on a day of south-easterly winds.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*. Two from 1 to 15 October 1982 along the River Avon at Somerdale.

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia*. Largest flocks were 228 on 2 December 1983 and 100 on 22 February 1986, both by the River Avon, and 250 on 13 November 1985 at Charlton Field. Breeds locally.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*. Often seen in small numbers by the River Avon in winter and Charlton Field throughout the year. Breeding is possible at the latter site in recent years and was proved on 25 April 1954 at Chewton Keynsham when a nest with four eggs was found. Exceptional numbers were 38 at Queen Charlton on 10 February 1979 and a flock of 25 on 1 January 1986 building up to 80 on 8 February and 200 on 22 February, by the River Avon.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*. Sizeable flocks are sometimes seen in cold weather by the River Avon but do not remain long. 272 on 21 February 1982, 590 on 16 February 1986 and 260 on 11 January 1987 constitute the largest numbers. Autumn movement was noticeable in 1983 with 176 to the south on 21 October, 450 to the south-east on 22 October and 120 to the east on 5 November.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*. Ever present in the town. Large flocks have been noted for several years. 121 on 21 February 1973, 97 by the River Avon on 30 September 1984 and 60 at Wooscombe Bottom on 6 July 1985 are the largest counts, whilst 20 to 30 are often seen in various localities.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*. Nested at Chewton Place in the late 1940s. One or two noted in spring or summer in recent years at Charlton Field, but occasional 'purring' has been the only sign of possible breeding. One near the cycle track to the east of the area on 5 May 1980. In autumn one at Queen Charlton on 17 September 1987.

CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*. Seen most years, singly or in pairs, in most parts of the countryside, and occasionally flying over the town. Only recorded in April, May and June and there has been no proof of breeding.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*. Has diminished in recent years in line with other parts of Avon and adjacent counties. Reported from Chewton Keynsham, Queen Charlton and Keynsham regularly up to 1979 but only a single sighting on 12 June 1985 near Somerdale since then. A recent re-introduction programme to the west of the area has not yet brought an increase in observations.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*. Well represented in the area, particularly along the Chew valley, and often seen elsewhere. Regular confirmation of breeding with sightings of young from various localities. At Somerdale two young were raised in 1976-8 with three in 1980 and 1982-6.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*. Not seen regularly but doubtless under-recorded. Breeding was proved at Queen Charlton in 1976 and probably occurred at Chewton Keynsham. Bred successfully at Somerdale in 1984 when two young were raised in a nest box. An adult subsequently became trapped inside a building in winter and died. A nest with two young and an adult in attendance was found at Wooscombe Bottom in 1986.

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*. One flew south over the mill grounds on 7 November 1982. Another flew north along the line of the River Chew on 3 April 1984. It was almost certainly the same individual seen over high ground at Fishponds 30 minutes later and gives a further clue to the flight line of which Keynsham is a part. Another spent the period from 31 December 1985 to 4 January 1986 by the River Avon whilst a fourth flew south-south-east over the town on 13 October 1986.

NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus europaeus*. One found exhausted on the river bank on 15 May 1979 revived and flew south when released. A male flew east along Wooscombe Bottom on the evening of 30 May 1986. There were no other Avon records in the intervening years.



SWIFT *Apus apus*. Breeding occurs under the eaves of the older houses in the centre of the town and the population is probably in the region of 30 to 40 pairs. First arrivals are often in April, the earliest recorded being 22 April 1984. There is a constant movement south-west/north-east from May to August, particularly noticeable over Charlton Field, which probably consists of breeding birds taking advantage of the abundant food available at Chew Valley Lake. This theory is substantiated by a record of an adult which was ringed at the lake on 19 July 1966 and caught again on its nest site at Hanham the following day. This movement masks autumn migration but 112 over Charlton Field on the evening of 19 August 1985 was almost certainly this. Latest date 19 September 1982.

KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*. Reported regularly for at least the last 20 years along the rivers. Breeding took place at Somerdale or the immediate vicinity in 1970–1, 1974, 1978–9, 1981–3 and 1986–7. Failed in other years for a variety of reasons, mainly flooding or disturbance from fishermen or boats.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops*. An old record from 1862 and, more recently, on 27 June 1977 when one was found in a Keynsham garden and photographed with an Instamatic camera.

WRYNECK *Jynx torquilla*. The only reference found concerned nesting around Keynsham about 1895.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*. Found in most parts of the area outside the town centre with five or six pairs breeding.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos major*. Probably three or four pairs in the area. This species enters the built-up parts more often than the previous species and is sometimes seen near the town centre.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos minor*. This elusive species has not fared well in recent years unless it has been overlooked. Breeding took place between 1950 and 1968 according to Palmer and Ballance (1968) and this continued up to 1974, and again in 1976 (the mill grounds) and 1979. Since then there have only been a handful of sightings from Keynsham and Chewton Keynsham.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*. Breeds regularly in suitable areas of grassland in the outlying countryside. Southerly autumnal movement is noticeable in late September and October at Charlton Field: 40 on 9 October 1982, 75 on 22 October 1983, 58 on 29 September 1984, 85 on 12 October 1985 and 24 on 4 October 1986. Winter flocks are present by the River Avon in varying numbers, usually between 10 and 60, but exceptionally 200 on 8 February 1986. Hard weather movement was described by Davis (1982). An albino bird was seen in October 1980.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*. Has bred in drainage holes at Somerdale for many years with varying fortunes. The earliest available figure is 30–50 pairs in 1958 although they could not all have been accommodated at the present site. A colony existed somewhere in Keynsham before 1948 and may have been here. Up to eight pairs bred at the log mills by the River Chew from 1975 to 1983. In 1980 six pairs prospected drainage holes at the police station but did not remain to breed. The number of nesting pairs at Somerdale since 1974 are detailed below. These have been supplied by M. J. Willmott and are believed to be accurate, based on birds sitting on nests with feathers. They should therefore be read in preference to previously published accounts.

1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
9	10	12	22	12	9	7	4	4	3	2	3	3	6

They are not always successful as nesting birds are occasionally washed out during very heavy rain. Re-nesting and second broods help to compensate for this. The first returning spring birds sometimes quickly disappear, probably for the same reason as House Martins. There were exceptionally late records of single birds on 16 and 18 November 1976.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*. Breeds in the surrounding farmland. Sometimes feeds over the sewage works in April and May where 50 were present on 8 May 1983 and 30 on 21 April 1985. Autumn migration usually involves only small numbers but in 1984 there were 80 on 15 September, 132 on 28 September and 72 on 29 September, all flying south or south-east over Charlton Field.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*. Keynsham breeding numbers have diminished recently. This is impossible to quantify without definitive counts but there are several sites where nesting took place a few years ago but did not in 1985/6/7. A total of 28 nests were found in 1986 but only 15 in 1987. Also breeds at Queen Charlton. The sewage works in a good gathering point for this species with 100 on 8 May 1983 and 2 June 1984 and 40 to 50 on 20 June 1985. Birds have been noted at their nest sites in April and have then disappeared until May. They are thought to be relocating their nests from previous years before moving to better feeding areas to get into prime breeding condition. The highest autumn count was 75 moving south-west on 5 September 1987.



TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*. One or two migrants on 18 April 1984, 20 August 1985, 12 September 1985, and on 9, 18 and 20 September 1987 at Charlton Field and five at this location on 15 September 1987. Successfully bred at this site in 1981. Singles over Keynsham on 10 and 25 April 1982 and 7 September 1985 and three on 15 April 1983.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*. Conspicuous autumn passage starts about 7 September and peaks in the first week in October. Charlton Field is the centre of the movement where the birds fly over the high ground on a fairly broad front. Over 100 birds are often counted flying south, south-east or south-west. Higher numbers occurred on 2 October 1983 with over 2000, 8 October 1983 (689), 16 September 1984 (224), 29 September 1984 (290), 5 October 1985 (2778) and 4 October 1986 with 192. A few winter by the River Avon, increasing in number as the weather gets colder. The winter maximum was 141 on 9 February 1985 when some entered the town and fed in the Memorial Park. Only small numbers in spring and none after the end of April.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*. Regularly seen by the River Avon and flying over Charlton Field in late August and September: nine on 23 August 1981, five on 12 September 1982, nine on 8 September 1985 and eight on 25 September 1985 are the largest numbers. Occasionally seen over the town at this time. Noted less often in spring with a maximum of six by the River Avon on 29 April 1983 and a late one on 22 June in the same year.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*. Often present in ones or twos by the rivers. Breeds in the Memorial Park, at Chewton Keynsham and, in 1986, by a small stream under the bypass at Durley Lane. Southerly autumn passage occurs at Charlton Field with a maximum of ten on 7 October 1984.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba*. A few are present during the summer and bred in the Memorial Park in 1987. A southerly autumn movement occurs over Charlton Field: annual maxima are 57 on 9 October 1982, 33 on 19 October 1983, 40 on 29 September 1984, 80 on 5 October 1985, 50 on 4 October 1986 and 22 on 3 October 1987. On winter evenings birds are often seen flying to roost in the direction of Somerdale. A roost of over 300 was noted in 1980 but has decreased in successive winters since then.

WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulus*. Three in Keynsham on 28 and 29 November 1981.

DIPPER *Cinclus cinclus*. Singles on the River Avon in the Memorial Park on 18 January 1981 and two on 7 March 1981. One on the River Chew on 18 February 1984, 26 December 1986 and February 1987. Has also been seen flying along the River Avon at Somerdale on a few occasions in December and January. The most likely source of these birds is Willsbridge where breeding has occurred.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*. Regular breeder and present throughout the year.

DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis*. Regular breeder and present throughout the year.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*. Regular breeder and present throughout the year. 17 on 19 September 1985 at Charlton Field may represent a small autumn influx.

NIGHTINGALE *Luscinia megarhynchos*. According to Palmer and Ballance (1986), bred fairly regularly along the River Avon from Claverton to Keynsham. They certainly occurred in the Durley Lane area between 1937 and 1947 and to the south of Park Road in the late 1940s. Bred at Somerdale in 1968 and possibly the following year. There have been no recent sightings despite its breeding within three kilometres of the town.

BLACK REDSTART *Phoenicurus ochruros*. Singles on 11 November 1953 (female), 21 October 1968, autumn 1980, 12 November 1984 (immature) and 28 December 1986 to 13 January 1987 (female). The latter two were at Somerdale.

REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Bred in St. Clements Road in the late 1940s. Two on 27 April 1952 and at least one or two in every year since 1983, during spring and autumn chiefly in the south and south-west of the area. Garden records on 1 October 1983 and 25 September 1985. Latest date 7 October 1986.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*. According to Palmer and Ballance (1968) bred in Keynsham between 1880 and 1930. More recently in spring there was one at Parkhouse Farm on 9 April 1981, five near Eastover Farm on 3 May 1983, three at Charlton Field on 3 May 1985, three by the River Avon on 6 May 1985 and two at Charlton Field on 26 April 1987. In September 1984 at Charlton Field there were four on 2nd, three on 14th and two on 16th, and in September 1987 there was an excellent passage with three on 4th, four on 6th, 9th and 13th, five on 15th, four on 16th, two on 17th, nine on 18th, two on 20th and one on 25th. These are mostly thought to be different individuals as visits on other dates in between produced no sightings.



STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*. One or two at Queen Charlton in January 1974, two on 15 December 1974 and one on 23 January 1983. At nearby Charlton Field singles on 18 August 1984, 4 October 1984 and 19 September 1985 with two on 14 September 1984. One at the Hams on 30 January 1978.

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Frequently seen in spring and autumn at Queen Charlton and Charlton Field, highest numbers being on 5 May 1980 (12), 9 May 1981 (6), 16 April 1986 (7) and 2 April 1987 (8). A pair at Chewton Keynsham from 8 April to 15 May 1983 looked set to breed with the male in song, but moved on soon after this date.

RING OUSEL *Turdus torquatus*. A male was present at Chewton Keynsham on 2 April 1987.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*. Regular breeder and present throughout the year.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*. Winter flocks feeding by the River Avon vary considerably during the season, larger numbers being present during cold spells. Maximum numbers in recent years are as follows:

1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
200	80	110	400	151	2000	350

Hard weather movement to the south-west occasionally occurs, the highest number being 600 on 9 February 1985. A few birds move into gardens in the coldest conditions. The latest spring record is 31 at Parkhouse Farm on 27 April 1979 and the earliest autumn birds were seen on 27 October 1980.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*. Resident breeding bird. Flocks of 12 on 30 October 1983 and 14 on 17 December 1983 at Charlton Field were flying south.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*. Heard flying over the town at night from early October. Early morning moving flocks appear over Charlton Field in October. The direction these flocks take varies considerably and this has been put down to them searching for suitable feeding and resting places following a night's flight. Maximum numbers at this site are 182 on 9 October 1982, 609 on 30 October 1983, 400 on 7 October 1984 and 265 on 23 October 1985.

Feeding flocks are present throughout the winter by the River Avon. They vary considerably during the season with large flocks sometimes appearing and disappearing within a few days. Maximum winter counts in recent years are:

1980/1	1981/2	1982/3	1983/4	1984/5	1985/6	1986/7
200	391	110	150	338	1357	53

Up to 300 (on 25 January 1981) have appeared on Crown Fields and a few are often present within the town in cold weather.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*. Present throughout the area and probably breeds in all tetrads that the area covers. Particularly conspicuous by the cemetery. Up to five birds seen moving over Charlton Field in autumn. Flocks of between 15 and 25 have been seen at Chewton Place in September of 1976/7/9/80. Only one large flock — 60 on 9 December 1984.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*. In 1965 or 1966 several singing birds were present at Chewton Keynsham throughout the breeding season. Since then the only records available are singles at Chewton Keynsham on 17 April 1981 and Parkhouse Farm on 17 May 1981.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Single birds between April and June in 1976, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1984, 1985 and 1986, usually by the River Avon and three singing males near the sewage works in June 1987. Probably breeds some years. In autumn singles on 26 and 28 September 1983 and 9 September 1985 by the viaduct over the River Avon and one was flushed by the bypass in September 1985.

MARSH WARBLER *Acrocephalus palustris*. According to Palmer and Ballance, bred near Saltford and Keynsham between 1894 and 1919. Nested at Charlton Bottom in the late 1940s.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. One seen at Keynsham on 26 July 1926 and one by the viaduct in late July 1980 and on 3 August 1983. At this latter site five, including a pair feeding two juveniles, were seen on 2 August 1982. One singing by the sewage works on 16 June 1985.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*. Regularly noted around the area since at least 1956 when a nest was found at Chewton Keynsham. Charlton Field/Wooscombe Bottom is a recent stronghold with five singing males in July 1985. Late birds (latest 3 October 1987) at this site are probably migrants passing through.



WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*. One or two pairs breed at Charlton Field, the sewage works, Charlton Bottom and, possibly, near the River Avon and Chewton Keynsham. As with the previous species September birds at Charlton Field are probably migrants.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*. Not seen or heard very often although probably bred at Charlton Field in 1985. Other April and May records from the two rivers, Manor Road playing fields, Chewton Keynsham and a Keynsham garden. Possibly underrecorded.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*. Breeding pairs present every year in suitable habitat. Some birds overwinter and are usually seen in gardens, but occasionally by the River Avon. There were many sightings in early 1986 with at least six individuals involved. As these records were from only three observers it is most likely that considerably more are present during winter. October and November records from Charlton Field could be late British breeding birds or early continental arrivals.

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*. Single birds on 23 April 1983 at Dapps Hill and 26 April 1983 at Chewton Place.

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*. Breeds in the area in suitable habitat. Arrives during March in some years, earliest dates being 29th in 1980, 22nd in 1981, 20th in 1982, 31st in 1985 and 16th in 1986. There have been winter records of single birds on 27 December 1983, 17 and 18 January 1987 (different individuals) all in gardens, and 24 November 1985 by the River Avon. Up to 11 present at Charlton Field well into September with some remaining in mid October are probably migrants.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Found across the area in suitable localities, densest around Charlton Field where seven to nine singing males are often present in spring. Arrives in March some years, being seen on 29th in 1980 and 1981 by the River Avon. 20 on 24 April 1987 probably included migrants moving through the area.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*. Present during the breeding season in several parts of the area and has been known to breed near the DRG factory. Small numbers by the River Avon in winter when they also enter gardens. Maximum count was 15 at Charlton Field on 18 October 1987.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*. One seen briefly on 9 January 1982 during Winter Atlas work in the bushes near the point where the River Chew joins the Avon. Another seen much better on 13 April 1982 by the viaduct over the River Avon later moved up the River Boyd. These sightings are consistent with the statement in the Winter Atlas that inland records of this species tend to be found along river valleys (Lack 1986).

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*. A regular breeding bird along the River Chew, Durley Lane and probably by the River Avon. In 1985 there were four pairs known to have raised young plus another two pairs that probably did. In 1987 at least three pairs were successful. Two autumn migrants at Charlton Field on 15 September 1987.

PIED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hypoleuca*. A female in some trees by the cycle track on 17 April 1983 and a male in the mill grounds on 2 May 1985.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*. Has bred or attempted to breed in most parts of the area. Feeding parties are often present in autumn and winter, with small numbers visiting gardens in the middle of the town when the weather gets very cold.

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris*. Bred in Great Wood in 1984 and possibly in 1986. Up to four present at nearby Charlton Field in the autumn of several years. Singles noted at Chewton Keynsham on several occasions since 1979.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*. Probably breeds in the conifer woods at Wooscombe Bottom. One or two are seen from time to time in the autumn and winter in trees by the rivers and in gardens feeding on peanuts.

BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*. Breeds throughout the area. In winter flocks are often found feeding in the Alders *Alnus glutinosa* by the rivers, with 28 on 25 January 1981 and 44 on 2 December 1983 by the Avon. 100 moved south at Charlton Field on 8 October 1983 and smaller flocks moving south and south-west have been seen since at this site.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*. Breeds throughout the area. Up to nine in the Alders by the rivers in winter. Six flew south over Charlton Field on 19 October 1983 and 20 were in the bushes at this site on 30 October 1983.

NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*. Just a single record of one at Chewton Keynsham on 27 August 1983.

TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*. Possibly breeds at Queen Charlton, Durley Lane, in the Willow trees by the River Chew and near the River Avon.



GOLDEN ORIOLE *Oriolus oriolus*. Two quite independent but unsubstantiated reports of a male in the Dapps Hill/Bath Road area in the summer of 1983.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE *Lanius collurio*. One or two pairs bred up to about 1947 in the area of Durley Lane. One Club member recalls taking an egg from a nest at Dapps Hill in the late 1940s during less enlightened times.

JAY *Garrulus glandarius*. Normally present at Wooscombe Bottom and by the cycle track near Bitton. Successfully bred in the Durley Lane area in 1987. During the large nationwide influx in the autumn of 1983 approximately 40 passed over Charlton Field, chiefly to the south and south-west.

MAGPIE *Pica pica*. Breeds throughout the area. In winter up to 37 have been noted by the River Avon.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*. Possibly breeds in several localities. Flocks build up by the River Avon in winter with 262 on 19 December 1981, 99 on 26 December 1982 and 160 on 15 January 1984. During extremely cold weather on 11 January 1982 a constant stream moved south-west at Hicks Gate. Between 400 and 500 were counted in a 15 minute period. Early on 24 January 1987 670 Corvidae, mostly Jackdaws, left a roost somewhere by the Avon to the south-east.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*. There were rookeries by the Bristol Road and near Keynsham Manor in 1933 but these have since disappeared. There are still two rookeries but in different localities. One at Publow Hill contained 113 nests in 1980 and 110 in 1985. That at Chewton Place is split into two with 15 nests in the higher site and 26 in the lower in 1986. The lower site has been about this size for a number of years. The higher one has been established recently and has replaced a rookery of about the same size that previously existed about half a kilometre to the south-west. It held 51 nests in 1973, 24 in 1975 and 25 in 1980. Up to 111 (on 13 November 1983) by the River Avon in winter.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*. Breeds throughout the area, including parts of the town. In winter large flocks sometimes occur by the River Avon: 250 on 27 December 1974, 100 on 5 March 1978 and 138 on 3 November 1985. 200 left a roost by the River Chew on 14 January 1982 after a very cold night. Has a great fondness for the sewage works with 55 on 29 June 1986.

STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*. Nests in the roofs of many houses. First broods leave the nest about 11 May but up to two weeks later in poor springs. Between 200 and 400 are regularly present by the River Avon in winter. Up to 75 seen moving south-east over Charlton Field in October.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*. Regular breeder and present throughout the year.

TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*. 25 at Parkhouse Farm on 19 February 1976, approximately 30 on 19 February 1977 and four on 22 April 1978 at unspecified localities. 14 on 19 November 1981, 25 on 29 November 1982 and 45 on 3 December 1983 are the highest numbers encountered in the hedge that forms the boundary between Avon and Stidham Farms. 11 flew over the viaduct over the River Avon on 4 January 1985. Singles on other dates.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*. Probably breeds throughout the area. Up to 100 seen moving, mostly south-west, at Charlton Field in October and up to 35 by the River Avon in winter. Flocks of 200 on 30 October 1971 and 300 on 28 February 1971 have been recorded in the area.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*. One at Chewton Keynsham on 19/20 February 1978, ten on 17 March 1979 at Parkhouse Farm and two near Field Grove Farm on 22 February 1986. Singles over Charlton Field on 13 and 23 October 1985 and 15 January 1987, and by the Avon on 18 January 1987.

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*. Breeds throughout the area. Outside this season maximum flocks were 25 at Charlton Field on 30 October 1983 and 80 at Field Grove Farm on 6 November 1983.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*. Breeds throughout the area often in Laburnham trees *Laburnham anagyroides* in the town. Small flocks move south or south-east over Charlton Field in autumn, maximum 52 on 12 October 1985. A feeding flock of up to 100 birds was here from 20 September to early October 1987. Up to 80 have been present in September 1984/5 at Manor Road playing fields. In winter flocks totalling up to 100 feed in the Alder trees by the rivers.

SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*. Winters regularly in Alders by the two rivers. In a typical winter between 25 and 70 birds are involved. Flocks are very mobile as they search for the best trees for feeding. In February 1981 exceptional flocks built up by the River Avon, peaking at approximately 150 on 14th. In 1985/6 even larger numbers arrived as in other parts of southern Britain. The first local indication of anything unusual were 16 moving south at Charlton Field on 20 September, followed by 68 to the south-east on 5 October and 85 on 12th. By the River Avon 40 were present on



24 November, rising to 118 on 15 December and 227 on 4 January 1986, some of which appeared to be moving south-east. The largest single count was a minimum of 530 by both rivers on 1 January, many moving south in large flocks (maximum 160). Between 240 and 290 were seen along the Saltford stretch on this date, making a minimum total of 800 along the rivers. Despite the fact that many of these seemed to be moving through, 414 were present by the Avon on 18 January and 426 on 1 February. Numbers declined after this date although there were still 140 on 22 February, further reducing to 35 by 16 March. Food supplies obviously became short and by 16 February many were feeding on the ground, on broken Alder branches and beneath the trees, some becoming very tame. Birds came into gardens to feed on peanuts by 20 February, returning daily for seven weeks (to 11 April). In the following winter numbers were back to normal (maximum 28 on 4 February 1987).

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*. Probably breeds throughout the area, particularly around Charlton Field. Autumn flocks build up at this site, a few of which have been seen moving south, south-east and south-west. Such flocks totalled 83 on 21 October 1983 and 16 September 1984, 90 on 7 September 1985 and 250 on 27 September 1986. Very small flocks spend most winters by the River Avon but in 1985/6 60 were present from early November rising to 450 on 22 February near Field Grove Farm. This latter flock fed on a single field of rough vegetation that had been allowed to go to seed.

REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*. Noted infrequently by the River Avon and in the Memorial Park in winter: five at Somerdale in February 1969 but otherwise rarely more than two. A few (maximum 4) have passed over Charlton Field in September and October, heading generally south. One flying north here on 24 April 1984 and two nearby 11 days earlier are the only spring records. An exceptional flock of 25 birds flew south over the town on 4 October 1987.

TWO-BARRED CROSSBILL *Loxia leucoptera*. A male was shot from a small flock near Keynsham in the last week of February 1895.

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. Resident breeding bird. Up to 14 at Charlton Field in autumn. Garden visitor most often in winter.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*. Resident breeding bird with about 15 pairs, mainly to the south of the area. In winter up to 30 at Queen Charlton in November 1974, about 70 on 28 January 1979 and 25 on 8 March 1987. A flock at Field Grove Farm reached 23 in the winter of 1982/3 and there were 28 in the same area on 12 November 1983.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*. A singing male is often present between the sewage works and the River Avon in spring, suggesting probable breeding. Probably also bred by the viaduct over the River Avon in 1979 and Charlton Bottom in 1987. Single birds in autumn at Charlton Field on several dates represent post breeding dispersal. One or two by the rivers in winter and has been known to enter gardens at this time of year. There were four near Queen Charlton on 8 March 1987 with the Yellowhammer flock.

CORN BUNTING *Miliaria calandra*. Single birds at Queen Charlton on 9 June 1970 and sometime in 1976, and at an unspecified Keynsham locality on 5 April 1972. These records are consistent with the poor status of this species in South Avon.

#### Probable escapes

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*. Two by the River Avon on 11 March 1981.

SNOW GOOSE sp. *Anser caerulescens*. Three partial hybrids were seen at Somerdale on 8 April 1987. One was later seen flying south-east and all three appeared at Chew Valley Lake by 11th.

MUSCOVY DUCK *Cairina moschata*. Two by the River Chew from 12 July 1987 until at least October.

RED-CRESTED POCHARD *Netta rufina*. Female on the River Avon on 26 December 1975.

LAUGHING DOVE *Streptopelia senegalensis*. One at Chewton Place on 25 June 1984.

COCKATIEL *Leptolophus hollandicus*. One at Queen Charlton on 1 April 1983 and one at Keynsham in August 1987.

BUDGERIGAR *Melopsittacus undulatus*. Singles in Keynsham on 11 May 1979 and 2 March 1981.

#### The future

There is constant pressure to extend the limits of the built-up area for housing and light industrial development. The latest plans do not extend into the more important sites for wildlife although they do encroach into the

breeding territory of the Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler. The Avon ring road is scheduled to enter Keynsham near the 'Humpty Dumps' which are of County significance botanically and where Great Spotted Woodpecker and several species of warbler probably breed. The disused concrete works at Charlton Field are an enigma. The crumbling buildings and large piles of reinforced concrete are an eyesore and this impression is exaggerated by graffiti and the dumping of household rubbish, large and small. However, the original removal of the surface vegetation and soil which was not replaced on the closure of the works, has allowed a small but fascinating calcareous ecological system to emerge. Events in 1986 brought up the question of the site being 'tidied up' again and this possibility must be monitored carefully if the wildlife is to survive.

Much of the southern bank of the River Avon is part of Avon Valley Farm (formerly Stidham's) which is largely pick-your-own. The owners are currently enhancing the area by digging pools which will probably benefit water birds, particularly in winter. Suggestions were put forward recently that gravel might be extracted near the River Avon. If this proceeds and is done under strict environmental controls, it could benefit the birds substantially in the long term.

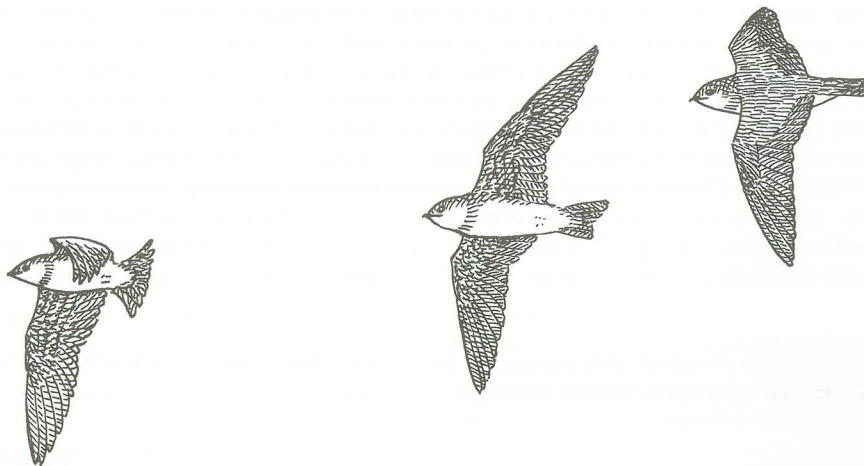
As with any expanding urban area, continued recording and monitoring is necessary to enable the environment to be taken fully into account when decisions are made on the future of the area. I therefore urge local birdwatchers to continue to submit their records in future as they have in the past and which have been an invaluable source of information in the preparation of this paper. Particular thanks are due to A. E. Bone, D. J. Bowley, Miss S. E. Caola, A. H. Davis, W. Duckworth, Dr T. Garrett, the late B. King, R. Palmer, T. H. Smith, M. J. Willmott and R. Webber for providing extra information.

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## WADERS IN AVON AND NORTH SOMERSET, 1981–85

by H. E. Rose

Waders are one of the main bird families occurring in the Avon area; large numbers can be seen on the coast for most of the year and a good selection of 'fresh water' species can be seen at the reservoirs during autumn migration. Twenty-seven wader species are recorded every year ranging from Dunlin† with counts often exceeding 20,000, to Wood Sandpiper with normally fewer than ten birds seen in a year. Also at least twenty-seven further species have occurred irregularly or as vagrants. Oystercatcher, Little Ringed Plover, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank breed in small numbers, but neither Avon nor North Somerset are major breeding areas for waders.

One of the main ways of monitoring wader populations is the Birds of Estuaries Enquiries (BOEE) organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. It started in 1971 and Avon and Somerset have been involved from the beginning. Standardised counting procedures are used and these provide a quantitative basis which enables trends to be monitored across the country. Apart from providing valuable scientific data, the BOEE can have a powerful influence on planning applications for 'critical sites' and so is important in the fight to save these sites. The following account uses counts made during the years 1981 and 1985 inclusive (Rose 1981–85) as a starting point to assess the recent status of waders in the county of Avon and that adjacent part of Somerset which includes the Mendips, Cheddar, and the Parrett Estuary from Brean Down to Steart and inland to Durleigh Reservoir. This corresponds roughly to what used to be called 'the Bristol district' except that a small, but important, western extension has been added. Although it does not follow a county boundary, it is a natural ornithological unit, and is well covered by observations from members of the Bristol Ornithological Club.

The summaries below give, for the main species, the average BOEE count for each month over the period July 1981 to June 1986, the averages being 'rounded' slightly. If a species was recorded at least once in the five-year period this is denoted by a +. The nine sites in Avon and Somerset involved in BOEE are Oldbury Power Station silt lagoons, Severnside (Chittening to Aust), the River Avon at Sea Mills, Royal Portbury Dock, the seawall area between Clevedon and the Yeo Estuary, Sand Bay, the Axe Estuary including the south-western end of Weston Bay, Berrow Sands, and Steart and the mouth of the River Parrett. Note that as these counts are taken on a fixed day each month they are often much lower than the maximum count for that month. The Severn Estuary is of major international importance for Dunlin, Ringed Plover (on passage) and Whimbrel (on spring passage). Curlew and Redshank also occur in the Estuary in numbers (at times) above the one per cent of the world population level which classifies them as of international importance.

Of course, coastal counts give only a partial picture of wader numbers, as several species occur mainly at freshwater sites, and even 'coastal' waders can be seen inland in significant numbers at certain times of the year, particularly on passage. At the present time Chew Valley Lake is quite definitely the best watched site in our area, and the extensive records produced provide an accurate picture of the bird population of the lake. As a basis for comments on waders occurring inland, the table in Appendix 1 shows the average monthly counts for July to October in the years 1981 to 1985 (see Rose 1982, 1985). These averages are of the highest single count made in each month over the years in question. The number of waders present depends critically on the water level; if it is low, as it often is in late summer and autumn, many waders are seen feeding on the exposed mud, but this number drops dramatically if the water level remains high. The water level was low in 1982 and 1984 and high for at least a good part of the autumn in the remaining years, but even so the table provides a picture of autumn migration at a non-coastal site.

The other records on which this account is based are taken from the relevant county reports for the period (McGeoch 1982–85, Rabbitts 1986, Taylor 1982–86).

†Scientific names are given in the systematic list.

In 1936, H. H. Davis published an account of the waders in the Bristol district, one of the first major papers on a bird family in our area. The coverage of sites now is clearly far greater than it was half a century ago, but even so Davis's account was comprehensive, although he did admit that certain sites and species were under-recorded. Severnside was well-watched, but the coverage was less good in the western part of the region with virtually no observations from the Parrett Estuary. It should be noted that Oldbury Power Station, with its silt lagoons, Avonmouth Sewage Works, and Chew Valley Lake did not exist in 1936. In the summaries below a comparison (marked by a (D)) is made between the situation reported by Davis in 1936 and the records for the five years under consideration here. Only a general indication is possible as no actual counts were given by Davis, but a tentative list of gains and losses can be drawn up. Excluding vagrants, species now seen more regularly than in 1936 are:

Avocet	Black-tailed Godwit
Little Ringed Plover	Spotted Redshank
Knot	Greenshank
Little Stint	Wood Sandpiper
Ruff	Green Sandpiper

Species now less common than in 1936 are:

Ringed Plover	Snipe
Lapwing	

Clearly the construction of more reservoirs has made observations of many of these species easier and so the increases noted may be more apparent than real in global terms. On the other hand the drainage of many 'wet' moors must have had a major influence on species such as Snipe and Lapwing.

One other notable change since 1936 is the vastly increased number of reports of North American vagrants; Davis noted only one sighting of one bird from this group. The main causes for this are first, the greatly increased coverage at all sites, and second, the construction of Chew Valley Lake. Even so, very few of these vagrants are seen on the coast. It is much easier to verify the identification of a 'difficult species' from a reservoir hide than it is from a seawall with no boulder, tree or screen of any kind in sight. It is possible that a genuine increase has occurred in the numbers of North American waders crossing the Atlantic, but an analysis carried out by Sharrock and Sharrock (1976) attempting to correct for the increase in 'observer-activity' indicated that, nationally, there was little evidence for any significant real increase, despite the rise in the number of sightings.

Much remains to be understood about the wader populations and their biology in our area. Waders are an important and fascinating family of birds and we are privileged to have such a large and varied range visiting both Avon and Somerset. Long may it remain so!

### Systematic list

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. Occurs mainly on the coast in the western part of the region, Weston Bay and the Parrett Estuary, with smaller numbers in Sand Bay and at Clevedon. Also noted at the reservoirs. Breeds in very small numbers at several coastal sites with usually only one or two nests, breeding success being very low. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
180	170	130	125	120	60	120	290	400	335	180	250

showing a fairly stable population apart from an increase during autumn passage.

(D) Apparently no change since 1936, Davis noted highest numbers in winter and breeding at Woodspring.

AVOCET *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Occasionally recorded on the coast mainly in winter in the Parrett Estuary area — largest count 9 at the Brue Estuary in December 1982 — but there are some mid summer records also.

(D) Prior to 1952 this species was a rare vagrant.



STONE CURLEW *Burhinus oedicanus*. One record from Steart in July 1981.

(D) The 1936 report also contained one record, two at the Yeo Estuary in 1925.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*. A scarce migrant more often recorded at the reservoirs than on the coast. Spring passage usually less than six birds whilst an average of ten birds, mostly juveniles, are recorded in the autumn. Has bred at a few coastal sites in Avon (regular at one locality) with normally one or two successful broods each year. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
0	0	0	2	3	3	7	4	1	0	0	0

(D) Not recorded in the 1936 report. The first two records were in 1952 at Durleigh and 1954 at Chew Valley Lake following a similar pattern in many other English counties.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*. A commonly occurring wader with highest numbers during autumn passage when flocks of 500+ have been seen. Mainly coastal but regularly noted at the reservoirs in autumn. Large numbers (up to 200) are also seen in late May and early June, mostly passage birds heading for the breeding grounds in Iceland and North-east Greenland. As with the previous species a small number of pairs breed using similar sites. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
76	59	53	44	83	20	34	740	330	105	77	97

(D) Compared with 1936 there may have been a drop in the wintering population as Davis noted that it was 'common on the coast particularly in autumn and winter'.

KENTISH PLOVER *Charadrius alexandrinus*. Four records (5 birds) reported in the period, all coastal and all except one in spring.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

DOTTEREL *Charadrius morinellus*. Two records, one at the Kenn Estuary in August 1981 and one inland, at Pucklechurch in May 1982.

(D) Described as 'very occasional' in 1936.

AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis dominica*. One record, a bird with Golden Plovers in the Cheddar area in October 1984.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*. Occurs in good numbers at regularly favoured sites mainly on high ground and the moors, September to April, flocks of several hundred being not uncommon. Also occurs at Chew Valley Lake, Clevedon and the Axe Estuary area in late autumn, and large concentrations (300+) can occur on the coast in very cold weather. This species does not breed in our area. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
6	150	+	+	+	+	3	5	18	18	9	18

(D) A similar situation was noted in 1936.

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*. Recorded mostly on the coast at Steart and, to a lesser extent at the Yeo Estuary, with much lower numbers in the summer. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
61	94	125	18	10	4	1	51	64	51	75	69

(D) A similar situation was reported in 1936 with Yeo Estuary singled out, although Morley (1986) records a distinct increase in numbers at Steart since the mid 1950s.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. This species is widely distributed throughout the region with a wintering population often in excess of 10,000. It is also the commonest breeding wader with numbers of pairs in the 100-400 region. It has suffered badly from the recent severe winters with both breeding and wintering numbers well down in 1985. As an illustration of this decline flocks over 2500 were quite often seen at Chew Valley Lake in the mid 1970s but the largest flock at Chew in 1985 was 300. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2450	2200	230	80	90	300	890	1050	800	1350	1550	1850

showing the partial summer migration affecting western Britain (Prater 1981) as well as the winter build-up.

(D) It is likely that breeding numbers have dropped considerably since 1936 when it was said to breed freely in suitable places. The area of wetland has decreased markedly but no quantitative data is available.

KNOT *Calidris canutus*. Except at Steart where it occurs regularly, this species is seen haphazardly along the coast in quite small numbers. The two main Severn Estuary sites are Undy and Steart and so many of the records are probably of birds moving between these sites. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
40	3	14	25	2	0	10	24	160	180	160	130

(D) Only noted at Severnside in the 1936 report but thought to be under-recorded. During the '60s and early '70s large numbers (5000+ at times) were recorded in the Weston area, the reason for this remarkable rise and following fall in numbers being unknown.

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*. Berrow is the only site where this species occurs in reasonable numbers, with up to 80 on spring passage and 130 on autumn passage in the past five years. As most other sites have little or no sand, numbers elsewhere are much lower. The largest counts are often in spring. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
+	0	0	4	11	1	13	20	21	5	0	0

(D) In 1936 only noted at Severnside but Davis felt that it was underrecorded.

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*. Recorded in small numbers on the coast and at the reservoirs mainly on autumn passage; one or two are seen on the coast in spring and there are a few winter records from Chew Valley Lake. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
0	+	0	0	0	+	+	1	5	2	0	0

(D) There were only three records up to 1936 but Davis commented that it is easy to overlook this small wader.

TEMMINCK'S STINT *Calidris temminckii*. Two birds were seen in 1984, at Oldbury Power Station in April, and at Chew Valley Lake in October, the 13th and 14th records, respectively, for Avon.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER *Calidris fuscicollis*. Three coastal sightings (at West Huntspill in July/August 1984 and at Severn Beach in September and November 1985) have been reported, but the last one was not accepted by the 'British Birds' Rarities Committee.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER *Calidris melanotos*. This is the commonest North American wader in Britain, although it is possible that some birds come from eastern Siberia as they also breed there. The maximum counts in each year were 1981, zero; 1982, four; 1983, four; 1984, ten; 1985, one but almost certainly some duplication occurred with these counts. The majority were seen at inland reservoir sites.

(D) This was the only non-European wader recorded in the 1936 report (one at Barrow Gurney in September/October 1935).

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*. Mostly seen on autumn passage both inland and on the coast when quite large flocks have been noted, the largest being 55 at Severnside in 1983. Only one or two were recorded in spring and there was one winter record. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
+	0	0	0	+	0	0	1	13	5	0	0

(D) In 1936 only an autumn visitor but more common than Little Stint.

PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima*. Over ninety per cent of all records come from Severn Beach in winter where up to nine occur regularly. There are also a few records from Sand Point and Brean Down. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1	+	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

(D) An exactly similar situation was noted in 1936.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*. This is by far the commonest wader in our area, with counts of over 30,000 having been made for the whole coast. The Severn Estuary is a site of international importance for this species. In western Europe there is evidence of a worrying decline over many years in the winter counts, but this has not been noted in Avon or Somerset. There are three main peaks in the yearly counts: spring (mid April to mid May) and autumn (late July to late August) passage involves mainly birds of the race *schinzii* with a few of the race *arctica*, whilst the wintering birds (late October to mid March) belong almost entirely to the race *alpina*. These breed further north and east than the *schinzii* birds. The BOEE data is:



J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
16800	17600	4660	760	600	45	1020	1550	980	2600	13900	17600

(D) Davis described this species as abundant from late summer to spring with a spring passage of birds in breeding plumage.

**BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER** *Limicola falcinellus*. There was a single record at Oldbury Power Station in August 1983.

(D) Not recorded in 1936, the above record being the first for Avon.

**BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER** *Tryngites subruficollis*. Although there have been a number of records of this species over the past twenty years, none were seen in the period under consideration. It occurred in 1980 at Chew Valley Lake and 1986 at Blagdon Lake.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

**RUFF** *Philomachus pugnax*. This species ranges widely, being regularly seen on the coast, at the reservoirs and on the moors, also sometimes on farmland and on river banks. It occurs on passage sometimes with flocks of 30 birds and is also occasionally seen in winter with up to ten birds on the moors. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1	0	+	+	0	0	+	7	1	+	+	0

(D) There appears to have been an increase in this species since 1936; Davis reported up to three fairly frequently at Barrow Gurney and Blagdon Lake and one coastal record. Nationally, there has been an increase in the wintering population over the past twenty years.

**JACK SNIPE** *Limnocryptes minimus*. Due to its secretive habits this is the species for which we have the least information. It is only a winter visitor and is usually seen singly on the coast although it does occur in most of the habitats of the following species. It is worth noting that the national records from the shooting fraternity indicate that one in eight of all snipe shot are Jack Snipe. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
4	7	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	4

(D) There is no evidence of any change since 1936.

**SNIPE** *Gallinago gallinago*. This is a widely distributed species occurring on the coast, on the moors and on wet farmland. There is some autumn passage and a build-up of numbers to a mid-winter peak when flocks over 100 are not uncommon. A few pairs breed on the moors. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
100	70	80	5	2	1	3	10	7	17	60	105

(D) As with the previous species there is no evidence of any change since 1936, but drainage of many wetlands must have affected the breeding population over the last half century.

**WOODCOCK** *Scolopax rusticola*. Mainly a winter visitor with usually not more than six birds recorded at any one time and unfortunately most reports come from shooting parties in late autumn. It is fairly certain that it does not breed although it has occasionally in the past. In general the south-west is not a stronghold of this species, summer or winter.

(D) There is no evidence of any change since 1936.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa limosa*. This species has declined markedly in the past five years. At its main site, the Parrett Estuary area, counts over 150 were regular in the early '80s but 44 was the largest count in 1985. Elsewhere it is regular on passage in small numbers both on the coast and at the reservoirs. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2	7	2	5	2	2	62	25	35	5	8	13

(D) Notwithstanding the recent decline, numbers are well up on the early '30s when Davis described this species as a scarce autumn visitor and noted only one North Avon record.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** *Limosa lapponica*. This species occurs most often on spring passage when flocks of 50+ are regular on the coast. A few are seen in autumn and winter at the reservoirs and on the coast. Unprecedented numbers (5000+) were seen moving up the Severn Estuary in late April and early May 1984, with most birds in breeding plumage. This was caused by unusual easterly wind conditions as these birds normally migrate along the European North Sea coast from their wintering areas on the West African shore to their breeding grounds in northern Russia.

The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
10	6	3	430	410	3	2	5	21	15	8	9

(D) Davis does not mention a spring passage, so this may be a new phenomenon but he also noted that the species was under-recorded.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. Large numbers are seen on spring passage in the fields and on the coast between Clevedon and Bridgwater. Flocks over 1000 were regularly recorded in the Parrett Estuary area five years ago, but by 1985 the size of these flocks had dropped considerably. It is possible that the birds are now using a wider area as larger counts have been made at other sites recently. The autumn passage numbers are much lower. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
0	0	0	73	44	1	14	13	14	+	0	0

(D) Davis did not mention the Parrett Estuary roost, and it was not apparently recorded until the mid '70s, although possibly overlooked earlier.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*. A common species occurring mainly on or near the coast, flocks over 500 being counted regularly. Most birds arrive in July and leave in March or April and no strong migration count peaks are recorded. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
650	860	680	380	90	180	1030	890	1100	1020	620	610

(D) The species used to breed on the Mendips but it has not done so for many years now.

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*. This species is seen mainly on autumn passage at the reservoirs when flocks of up to ten birds are not uncommon. There is a small spring passage and one or two birds winter in the Parrett Estuary area. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
0	0	+	1	0	+	4	1	8	1	2	3

(D) Davis reported only four sightings of one or two birds so it is clear that there has been a considerable increase in the past half century.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*. This is the fourth commonest wader in our area after Dunlin, Lapwing and Curlew with 500 to 1000 regularly recorded on the coast from July to March. It breeds on the moors and near the coast with usually about 50 pairs. In some parts of the country this species can suffer greatly in the cold weather, but does not appear to be so badly affected in the south-west. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
530	700	560	135	45	80	540	660	930	830	850	830

(D) In our area this species first bred in 1902 and there has been a slow increase since that time. There is no evidence of any change in wintering numbers.

MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*. Recorded at Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes in October 1982 and August 1984, the latter bird also being seen briefly at Cheddar Reservoir.

(D) Not recorded in 1936, and the above two individuals were the first for Avon and Somerset respectively.

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*. There are a few winter and spring passage records but the main numbers occur on autumn passage when flocks of 20+ are not uncommon both at the reservoirs and on the coast. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
+	1	0	1	1	1	6	13	9	2	0	0

(D) A similar pattern of occurrence was noted in the 1936 report but average flock sizes seemed to be larger now. Also there were no records for Severnside.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS *Tringa flavipes*. One bird was seen at Avonmouth Sewage Works in September and October 1984, only the second Avon record.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*. This species is seen mainly at the sewage farms and reservoirs on autumn passage, with a few wintering and seen in spring. Over the period there has been an eighty per cent drop in records



from Chew Valley Lake. The reason for this is unclear particularly as no corresponding drop has been reported from other sites. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1	+	1	1	+	+	5	8	4	1	+	1

(D) As Avonmouth Sewage Works and Chew Valley Lake were built after 1936 it is likely that more birds occur in our area now.

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*. This is an uncommon passage wader occurring in very small numbers (3 to 20) every autumn, and there have also been two spring records from the Brue Estuary.

(D) Not recorded in 1936 — first reported in our area at Cheddar in 1939.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*. This is a familiar species on the reservoirs, rivers and coast with regularly up to twenty birds at some sites. Main numbers occur on passage but two or three normally winter on quiet river banks, particularly by the River Avon below Bristol. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
4	3	2	4	3	2	26	32	11	3	2	2

(D) There is probably no change since 1936 but Davis did not record any wintering birds.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER *Actitis macularia*. Recorded at Chew Valley Lake in October 1982, the first Avon record.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*. The main site for this wintering and passage species is Severnside where flocks of over 400 have been reported. Oldbury Power Station, Clevedon and the Parrett Estuary are the only other sites where it is regularly seen with usually less than 60 birds. The BOEE data is:

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
140	120	145	110	22	8	18	145	175	150	160	155

(D) A similar situation was reported by Davis in 1936.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE *Phalaropus tricolor*. Recorded at Steart in October 1984 and Chew Valley Lake in October 1985.

(D) Not recorded in 1936.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE *Phalaropus lobatus*. There have been two records, from Steart in August 1982 and Cheddar Reservoir in September 1983, during the period. Usually about one bird is reported every five years.

(D) Records for 1921 and 1933 were given by Davis.

GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Storm-driven birds were recorded in each autumn, and in 1983 up to 14 individuals were seen. Most reports came from the reservoirs in September and October.

(D) A similar situation was noted in 1936.

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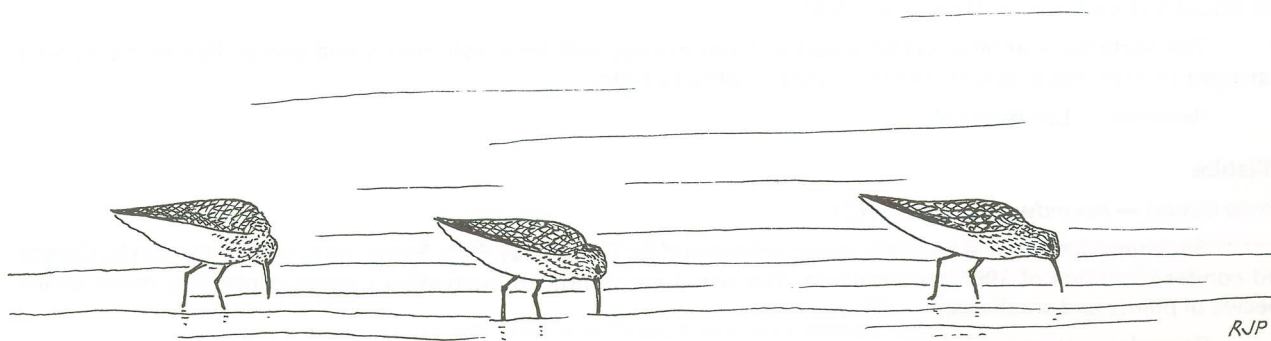
**Appendix 1. Autumn wader counts at Chew Valley Lake**

This table gives the average for the years 1981 to 1985 of the maximum monthly (30 day) counts of waders at Chew Valley Lake. As counts are made almost daily, a fairly accurate picture is given by this table.

	Jul 1-30	Jul 31-Aug 29	Aug 30-Sep 28	Sep 29-Oct 28
Oystercatcher	3	7	2	+
Little Ringed Plover	3	3	2	1
Ringed Plover	2	36	28	10
Golden Plover	0	0	10	72
Grey Plover	0	1	2	3
Lapwing	390	385	675	410
Knot	0	1	4	4
Sanderling	1	+	+	0
Little Stint	+	1	6	10
Curlew Sandpiper	0	4	11	2
Dunlin	10	26	20	21
Ruff	1	7	10	5
Jack Snipe	0	0	1	+
Snipe	3	29	31	23
Black-tailed Godwit	3	4	2	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	0	1	2	+
Whimbrel	1	2	2	+
Curlew	1	2	4	+
Spotted Redshank	+	3	5	4
Redshank	2	4	2	2
Greenshank	3	11	9	4
Green Sandpiper	5	10	6	2
Wood Sandpiper	+	2	1	+
Common Sandpiper	21	21	8	2
Turnstone	+	2	2	+

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RJP



# TRENDS IN BREEDING WOODLAND BIRD POPULATIONS FOR AVON AND SURROUNDING COUNTIES, 1981–86

by John Tully

## Introduction

Avon Bird Reports, like many others, rarely give much useful information on common woodland species. This can only be provided by regular fieldwork on one species or on specific areas. I have chosen to do the latter by using figures provided by five local woodland plots participating in the Common Bird Census (CBC) over the six years 1981–86 together with two further plots used for supplementary information.

It might be argued that the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) already produces national trends (Marchant 1981–86) for its woodland plots (approx. 90) and that this article is redundant. However, my article collects the local CBC results and compares them to the national figures and points out differences and similarities.

## Description of the woodland sample

Every woodland is variable in terms of tree species, density, altitude, etc. and in order to gain a feel for the plots, I have visited all the woods except Pinkflower Gorse which is scrub habitat. All the plots are within 51km of Blaise Woods (see Fig. 1). Details of the plots are as follows.

### Avon

#### *Blaise Woods, Bristol (BW)*

Eight hectares of high canopy woodland mainly oak, but with beech, ash and some conifers with a good shrub layer of hazel and rhododendron — altitude 70m. The woodland was described in detail in *Bristol Ornithology* 17: 77–83 (Tully, 1984).

Recorder — John Tully.

### Gloucestershire

#### *Five Acre Grove, Leonard Stanley (FAG)*

Five hectares — a Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation (GTNC) woodland in three distinct areas. It is high canopy oak woodland with ash and beech with a good shrub layer of many species. It also has a good deal of woodland edge which enhances the number and variety of bird species — altitude 30m. This woodland has a real gem of a booklet describing all aspects of its natural history.

Recorder — Geoffrey Fisher.

#### *Silk Wood Nature Reserve, Westonbirt (SW)*

Ten hectares — another GTNC wood with oak canopy with lime, ash, cherry and poplar. Part of the wood is managed as hazel coppice with oak standards — altitude 140m.

Recorder — Len Bricknell.

### Wiltshire

#### *Home Covert — Roundway, Devizes (HC)*

Seventeen hectares — formally an amenity wood for Roundway Park. Some mature trees remain but beech and conifer plantings of 1961 predominate. The wood surrounds an interesting garden containing many exotic species of plants and small trees — altitude 110m.

Recorder — Beatrice Gillam.

*Pinkflower Gorse, Kingston Deverill (PG)*

Six and a half hectares — chalk downland scrub mainly hawthorn and gorse with a small hazel copse — no mature trees — altitude 180m.

Recorder — John Pollard.

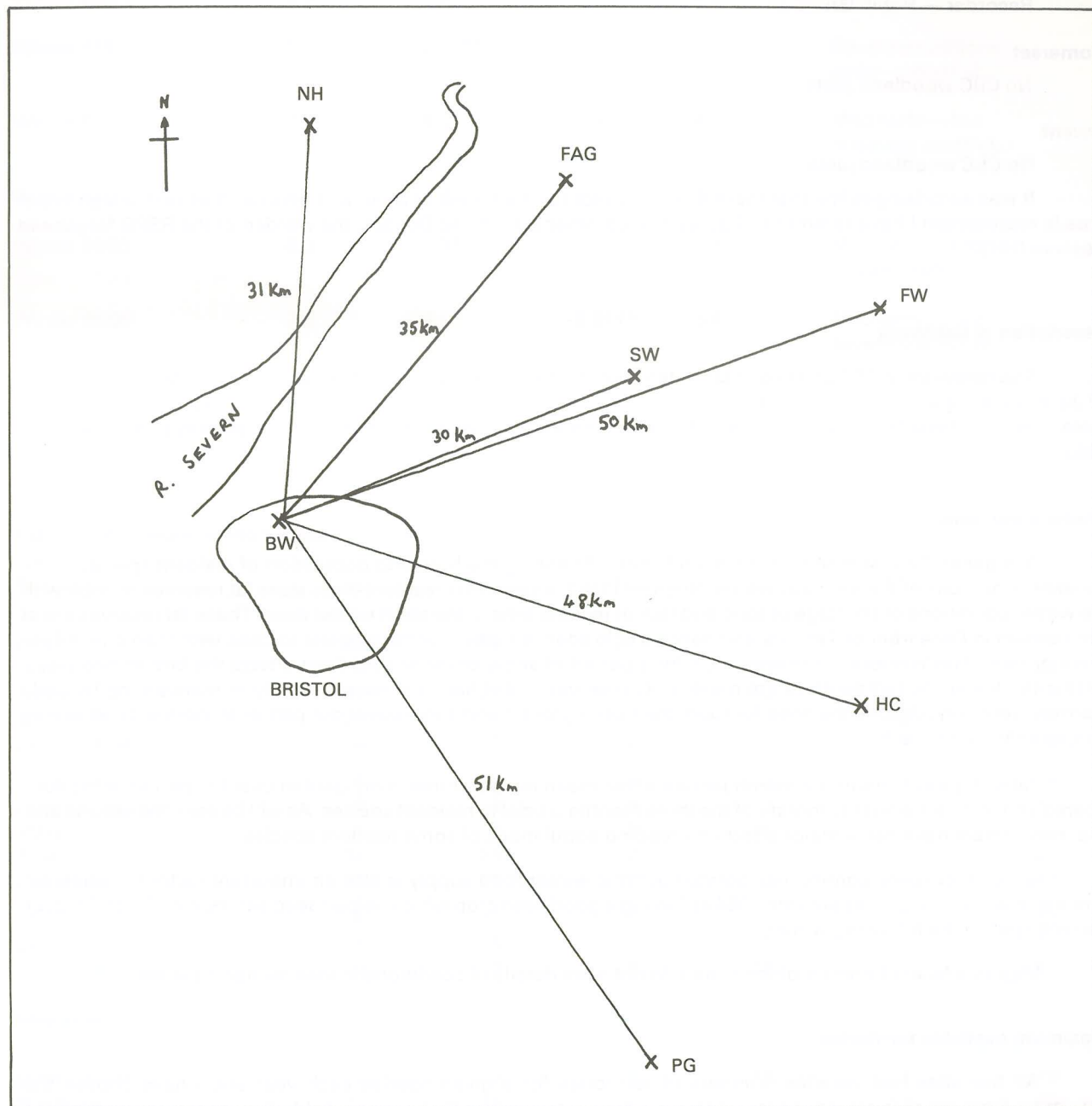


Fig. 1. Study woodlands in relation to Blaise Woods, Bristol.



Also referred to in the text is:

*Freeths Wood and Eight Acre Copse, Ashton Keynes (FW)*

Ten hectares — these woods are surrounded by gravel pits. The dominant canopy is sycamore with ash, beech and poplar and there is a good shrub layer with a variety of species — altitude 80m. This wood is not included in the main figures due to CBC work being available for 1983–86 only.

Recorder — Robin Griffiths.

**Somerset**

No CBC woodland plots.

**Gwent**

No CBC woodland plots.

It was surprising to me that there is no CBC plot for the Forest of Dean and in order that such a significant area is represented I have referred to figures and comments from Ian Bullock, the warden of the RSPB Nagshead Reserve (NH).

**Description of fieldwork**

The fieldwork in CBC plots consists of ten visits to the plot evenly spread in the period mid-March to the end of June. All song and sightings are recorded on each visit. At the end of the season the BTO apply their standard rules, based on their fieldwork experience, to determine the number of territories held by each species (Marchant 1983).

**Winter conditions**

It is generally assumed that the main factor influencing the breeding population of resident species is the weather conditions of the previous winter. Spencer (1982) argues that resident birds store fat reserves to cope with the winter conditions of shortage of food and lack of feeding time in the short winter days. These fat reserves are at a maximum in December or January and hence a cold spell in these months is easier to cope with than one in February or later. Furthermore, he maintains, a long period of snow cover or hard frost affects the bird in two ways. Firstly, the lower the temperature the more of its reserves a bird has to consume simply in maintaining its body warmth. Secondly, despite the need for food, the frozen ground and snow cover put part or all normal food supply temporarily out of reach.

Table 1 gives a month by month picture of the mean temperatures in my garden over the period being considered and includes a brief summary of the three months crucial to resident species. As will be seen the second and final two winters have had a major effect on breeding populations of some resident species.

Ian Bullock (pers. comm.) has pointed out that winter food supply is also an important factor to residents' survival in winter. He quotes autumn 1984 as having a good seed crop which helped seed eaters, e.g. Great Tit, over the cold spell in the following winter.

Migrants face different problems but I do not have details of conditions in their wintering areas.

**Maximum available territories**

All five sites had variable numbers of territories for a given species each year and I have chosen the maximum from the six years to represent the woodland capacity for that species. Table 2 gives maximum territory figures for each species in each wood and the totals of these figures. Any species with ten or more is included in the table and I have used this figure to define a 'common' species for the purpose of this article. Table 3 shows maximum territory capacity for each wood, on the same basis but including all species.

**Table 1.** Mean monthly temperatures in my garden (Celcius)

	Dec	Jan	Feb	3-month mean	Comments
Winter 80/81	5.3	4.9	3.5	4.6	Mild.
Winter 81/82	1.2†*	2.7†**	5.4	3.1	Severe conditions early— mild Feb.
Winter 82/83	3.8	6.4	2.4†	4.2	Mild early— but relatively cold Feb.
Winter 83/84	5.7	4.3	4.2	4.7	Mild.
Winter 84/85	6.0	0.9†	2.7†	3.2	Mild Dec— cold Jan and Feb
Winter 85/86	7.3	4.4	-0.9††*	3.4	Mild early— but severely cold Feb.

†Prolonged cold weather

††Very prolonged cold weather

\*Snow

\*\*Heavy snow

**Table 2.** Maximum territory capacity of each wood for common species

Residents	BW	FAG	HC	PG	SW	Total
Wren	23	33	25	14	22	117
Dunnock	6	10	5	10	3	34
Robin	20	23	16	3	16	78
Blackbird	24	12	13	10	6	65
Song Thrush	4	7	2	2	3	18
Goldcrest	6	6	10	3	3	28
Long-tailed Tit	2	3	2	2	2	11
Marsh Tit	1	3	2	0	6	12
Blue Tit	34	25	7	2	13	81
Great Tit	16	9	9	2	8	44
Chaffinch	6	18	8	21	11	64
Bullfinch	1	6	1	0	2	10
Yellowhammer	0	0	0	16	1	17
<b>Migrants</b>						
Whitethroat	0	2	0	16	1	19
Blackcap	11	15	5	7	11	49
Chiffchaff	7	15	8	0	8	38
Willow Warbler	0	9	2	27	10	48



**Table 3.** Available territories for each wood

	Area (hect.)	Max. Terr. Cap.	Terr./Hect.
Blaise Woods (BW)	8	241	30.1
Five Acre Grove (FAG)	5	278	55.6
Home Covert (HC)	17	155	9.1
Pinkflower Gorse (PG)	6.5	170	26.2
Silk Wood (SW)	10	156	15.6
TOTALS	46.5	1000	21.5

If I total all five sites they had a potential of 1000 territories in an area of 46.5 hectares (116 acres) or 21.5 territories per hectare. This theoretical figure would only be achieved by a wood if ideal conditions for all species coincided in the same year. In fact, yearly territory totals for each wood ranged from 75% (PG) to 86% (FAG) of the maximum theoretical figures.

## Species trends

### 1. Resident species

Table 4 gives the year by year totals of each of the common resident species. The figures in brackets give the number of territories expected if the five woodlands followed the national trend, assuming 1981 as a base.

**Table 4.** Total territories for the five woods (national figures)

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Wren	111 (111)	38 (74)	71 (97)	89 (105)	77 (92)	58 (67)
Dunnock	29 (29)	16 (24)	25 (24)	22 (22)	23 (20)	20 (21)
Robin	65 (65)	51 (49)	62 (55)	66 (55)	47 (47)	60 (44)
Blackbird	57 (57)	45 (50)	55 (52)	59 (51)	51 (50)	46 (47)
Song Thrush	14 (14)	10 (12)	8 (13)	8 (12)	7 (9)	6 (10)
Goldcrest	16 (16)	13 (16)	24 (20)	19 (19)	18 (17)	7 (7)
Long-tailed Tit	4 (4)	2 (4)	6 (5)	7 (4)	7 (4)	7 (3)
Marsh Tit	11 (11)	8 (9)	7 (10)	7 (10)	5 (9)	8 (8)
Blue Tit	70 (70)	68 (63)	72 (71)	72 (69)	75 (72)	61 (66)
Great Tit	37 (37)	33 (34)	34 (37)	38 (36)	33 (38)	29 (32)
Chaffinch	47 (47)	40 (45)	52 (47)	49 (47)	53 (46)	45 (44)
Bullfinch	8 (8)	3 (6)	7 (7)	6 (7)	6 (7)	4 (6)
Yellowhammer	11 (11)	15 (10)	16 (10)	13 (10)	16 (10)	11 (9)

The winter of 1981/82 in our area had a more severe effect than nationally on a number of species, in particular Wren, Dunnock and Bullfinch and to some extent Blackbird, Song Thrush, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit and Chaffinch. Only Yellowhammer improved significantly against the national trend. Many of the declines were reversed in the following season, bouncing back to the national figures, e.g. Dunnock and Bullfinch. Wren numbers have not yet (1986) recovered to the levels expected from the 1981 figures.

More worrying is the steady decline of Song Thrush against the national trend. In fact the Song Thrush to Blackbird ratio in our local woods has declined from 1 to 4 in 1981 to almost 1 to 8 in 1986. It is difficult to find reasons for this being peculiar to our area. Any ideas? On the credit side both Long-tailed Tit and Yellowhammer have increased against the expected national figures.

A number of residents decreased more moderately in response to hard winter conditions e.g. Blue Tit, Great Tit and Chaffinch. These species are able to make more use of alternative food sources like bird table food and peanuts, whereas insect eaters like Wrens, Dunnocks and Goldcrests do not adapt.

In Fig. 2, Wren and Blue Tit numbers are used to illustrate the differences between insect eaters and mixed diet birds.

These last two species give credence to Spencer's argument that the decrease between 1985 and 1986 is more exaggerated due to the fact that the very cold spell was in February in 1986, rather than in January as in 1985. Also some of the decrease would be due to its being a second consecutive poor winter. The large decrease in the 1986 Goldcrest territories particularly supports the cold February theory. The Goldcrest numbers in Freeths Wood declined from a mean of six territories in 1983/85 to none at all in 1986. Such wide fluctuations are mentioned in the Winter Atlas (Lack 1986).

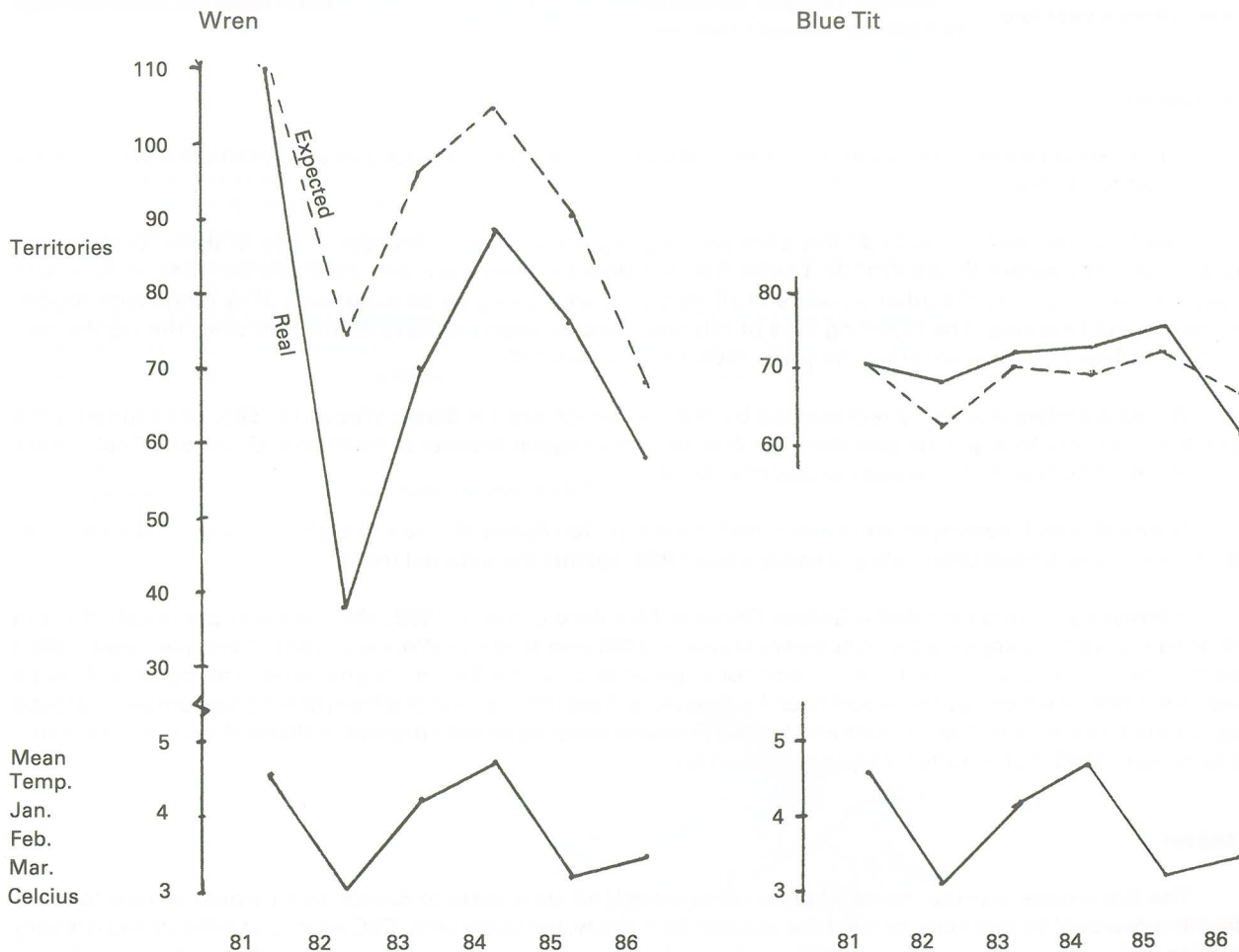


Fig. 2. Comparison of population fluctuations of Wren (insect-eater) and Blue Tit (mixed diet), using combined totals for the five woods.



## 2. Migrant species

**Table 5.** Total territories for the five woods (national figures)

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Whitethroat	13 (13)	13 (16)	16 (12)	15 (9)	15 (9)	16 (11)
Blackcap	32 (32)	27 (34)	29 (31)	38 (36)	37 (35)	28 (30)
Chiffchaff	32 (32)	28 (30)	20 (25)	29 (23)	34 (29)	28 (25)
Willow Warbler	40 (40)	42 (41)	41 (40)	36 (39)	36 (27)	25 (25)

After a set back in 1982 Whitethroat numbers are improving against the national trend but it is a small sample mainly based on Pinkflower Gorse which is desirable Whitethroat habitat.

Blackcap had a dip in 1982 and to some extent in 1983 although it is now fully recovered; perhaps our springs in 1982 and 1983 were colder than in the rest of the country. A similar pattern exists for the Chiffchaff. The poor numbers in 1986 for these two species might be the result of the appalling spring weather.

Willow Warbler numbers have been fairly steady until the dip of 1986 which is consistent with the national figures, albeit a year late.

### Rarer species

A number of rarer species occur in all the woods, and although they do not give any reliable feature of trends, they are worthy of note.

The Sparrowhawk hunts in all five sites and is a regular successful breeder in two of them. Cuckoos are regular in all sites except Blaise Woods. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers have only held one territory, in Five Acre Grove, but it is a visitor to the other woods and all recorders are hoping for an expansion of its range with regular hammering and breeding. The breeding area of this woodpecker seems to have contracted since the results contained in the Breeding Atlas covering the years 1968/72 (Sharrock 1976).

Wood Warblers were only represented by one pair which bred in Blaise Woods in 1985; unfortunately the eggs were destroyed by a ground predator. The Willow Tit is a regular breeder at Pinkflower Gorse and Coal Tits are present in small numbers at all woods except the above.

Nuthatch and Treecreeper are present, with maximum territories of nine and eight respectively but the numbers of Treecreepers have been falling steadily since 1983, against the national trend.

Interesting visitors included a Golden Oriole at Five Acre Grove in 1982, after one was previously there in 1979. Pied Flycatchers appeared at Pinkflower Gorse in 1985 and at Blaise Woods in 1983, 1984 (pair) and 1986. I hope that they will stop and breed in Avon and not all go on to cross the Severn! Nightingales are regular in Freeths Wood as are Hobby which use this wood near the Cotswold Water Park gravel pits from May to September in groups of up to nine birds. Finally, both a male and female Firecrest were separately present in Blaise Woods in late March and early April 1985, but unfortunately they moved on.

### An appeal

The five woods provide nearly 50 hectares of woodland fairly close to Bristol, but it would be nice to feel a wider sample would be available for a similar assessment in, say, ten years time. CBC work isn't difficult and it is very enjoyable in the woods on a spring morning so how about a ten hectare plot in Leigh Woods, the Frome Valley, a Mendip wood or part of the Forest of Dean?

## Acknowledgements

This article could only have been written with the effort and help of all the CBC recorders and Philip Whittington at the BTO. I am most grateful for their assistance. Thanks also to Ken Hall who read a draft of this article and made many helpful suggestions.

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## Appendix 1. Scientific names of birds mentioned in the text

Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>
Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>
Cuckoo <i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Marsh Tit <i>Parus palustris</i>
Dunnock <i>Prunella modularis</i>	Willow Tit <i>Parus montanus</i>
Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Blue Tit <i>Parus caeruleus</i>
Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>
Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>
Whitethroat <i>Sylvia communis</i>	Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
Wood Warbler <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>

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## NOTES

### Feeding behaviour of a vagrant Spotted Sandpiper

A Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* was present on the Porthellick Pool, St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly, from 8 to 30 September 1978 (*Brit. Birds* 72(1979):524) during which period I saw it many times. It spent much of its time on the mud on the outer edge of or just within the reeds surrounding parts of the pool. It actively walked among the reed stalks, with a forward-stooping stance and with 'knees' (tibiotarsal joint) slightly bent, searching for food items. Sometimes the wader pursued its prey well within the reeds and so was 'lost' for periods of up to fifteen minutes, only to reappear on the edge of the reeds in a different place from where it had disappeared. By using my telescope I noticed that it took insects from the reed stems with quick bill movements, also obtaining small earthworms (Lumbricidae) plus other unidentifiable material from the ground. Sometimes the sandpiper left the reed shelter for firmer areas of mud bank but still away from the water's edge where more earthworms were found and quickly swallowed.

Nearby, two Common Sandpipers *A. hypoleucos* were feeding in typical fashion by the water's edge on the open mud, making an interesting contrast in behaviour. I cannot recall having seen this species feeding within reed cover in the same way as did its American relative.

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### Jackdaws and Herring Gulls breeding in close proximity on a roof-top

Since retiring to Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall in 1971 I have observed many pairs of Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* breeding in roof-top sites in the vicinity. They remain paired and use their roof-top territories throughout the year and do not consort with the flocks of Jackdaws that roam the area in winter.

Sometimes their breeding is interrupted by Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* and, in recent years, by increasing numbers of pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus* which also use buildings on which to breed (King, 1979). This activity is especially noticeable where I live and gave me an opportunity to observe interactions between Jackdaws and Herring Gulls. In the spring of 1985 a pair of roof-top breeding Jackdaws on the house opposite was rudely alarmed by a pair of Herring Gulls which decided to nest where the base of a chimney stack converged to meet the sloping roof. The Jackdaws had bred in the chimney for many years. In consequence, there occurred constant noisy bickering between the two species for a week or so, with the corvids swooping onto the gulls. Nevertheless, on two alarming occasions I watched a Jackdaw being pulled across the roof by its wing by one of the gulls, with accompanying alarm cries from the former. Although the Jackdaws almost certainly had eggs or young the nest was deserted, thus leaving the gulls to their own devices.

However, in the following year, 1986, the Jackdaws (presumably the same birds) were present in the chimney area and the Herring Gulls were also seen occasionally, slouching around their previous nesting site. Later, and to my surprise, both pairs settled down to nesting and there was no aggression. The gulls brought in quantities of nest material, and during their absences, beakfulls of it were stolen by the Jackdaws to replenish their own nest. Both species ultimately bred successfully.

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King, B. 1979. Roof-nesting by Great Black-backed Gulls. *Brit. Birds* 72:340–343, plates 186–188.

Bernard King

## Collared Dove nesting on house

On 6 June 1984 William and Patricia Tonkin informed me that a pair of Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* were nesting on their house at Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall. The nest seemed precariously supported on a horizontal loop of electric cable leading into the side of the house, a metre below the eaves, and about 7.5 metres from the ground. It was made of twigs, bents, small pieces of paper and other artefacts, and contained two eggs. It was, however, fully exposed at times to strong south-easterly winds coming across Mounts Bay. Furthermore, it was there for all passers-by to see. Nevertheless, the doves seemed quite unconcerned and successfully reared two young.

Collared Doves again attempted to use the same electric cable for nesting in the spring of 1985 but heavy rain storms and gales dispersed their nest material.

Bernard King

[BWP mentions that Collared Doves occasionally nest on pylons or on ledges of buildings, as well as, more usually, in trees or bushes. Eds.]

## Bathing behaviour of wintering Redshanks in Cornwall

At Newlyn Harbour, Cornwall, on 21 October 1978 I was watching several Redshanks *Tringa totanus* feeding on the mud at low tide. The sea gradually encroached to cover their feeding ground but, instead of flying to another uncovered area, they all swam out into deep water to start a vigorous bathing and preening session. Their bills and the whole of their heads were rapidly thrust into the water and then, with jerking sideways head movements, they caused much spray to fall on their upper parts. Bathing was assisted by movements of their wings which were dipped into the sea and used to flick water over themselves. Some individuals preened sporadically, moving their bills along their primaries or pressing the backs of their heads against their oil glands before rubbing their heads over much of their plumage. Eventually, after nearly ten minutes had elapsed, the Redshanks departed elsewhere and were not seen to repeat the behaviour.

Bernard King

## Escape behaviour of a Dipper

During the spring of 1986 I spent some three months living next to the River Tavy, Devon, and spent many afternoons walking along its banks. In the stretch that I walked four pairs of Dippers *Cinclus cinclus* held territories. On one occasion, accompanied by a colleague, Clare Stone, the walk took us downstream into the territory of a pair which had fledged young. One adult bird that was moving down the river just in front of us had a particularly effective way of preventing detection. As it flew from one mid-stream boulder perch to another it would drop into the water just in front of a boulder, seemingly disappearing and then re-emerging out onto the boulder a split second after. It totally confused us as to its location even though we knew logically where it should be. The bird was never seen to do this while going upstream; possibly the force of the running water around the boulder might have swept the bird away. This would seem to be a very useful survival technique against attack by a Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* as well as being an effective cryptic behaviour pattern.

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## CLUB ACTIVITIES, 1985 & 1986

Compared with recent years, **1985** was comparatively uneventful, even though the most energetic of members could have still found 50 days-worth of activity with the Club. Perhaps there was too much on the agenda, for two coach outings had to be cancelled because of lack of support. One of these was a joint meeting on Exmoor with Bristol Naturalists, too. Few members could find the time to go on the Club holiday to Northumbria, either, though the handful who did had a splendid time. On the other hand, a weekend in Norfolk attracted a minibus load and there were full houses for talks by Chris Mead and Peter Harrison. Membership remained steady at around the 430 mark, with one in four attending most indoor meetings. The year marked the first occasion when a migration watch week was held, rather than on two separate days, and members were asked to go to various migration points whenever they could during the period. On the conservation front, money was spent on providing nest boxes, made by members, for Leigh Woods, and a donation was made to the Crook Peak appeal following the acquisition by the National Trust of this Mendip landmark. One sad note: Ray Thomas died suddenly during the summer.

**1986** was a significant year for the Club, with the 20th anniversary being celebrated in December and a special supplement to *Bristol Ornithology* being published in book form in the same month. This new venture, *The Sunning Behaviour of Birds*, was written by Club member Ken Simmons and illustrated by founder member and former chairman Robin Prytherch. A holiday in Austria was the highlight of the Club's more usual 'business', while some members also took part in weekend visits to Central Wales and Cornwall. Once again, indoor meetings were generally well supported, but there was less support for field meetings and, for the first time, there was an overall loss on coach outings. Club representatives had taken part in talks on conservation measures at Chew Valley Lake, and BOC was also represented at meetings of the Severn Estuary Conservation Group, set up to keep a close watch on moves to build a barrage across the Severn from Brean Down to Landguard Point in South Wales. The only fieldwork actually organised by the Club during the year was a survey of breeding birds in Leigh Woods. Numbers remained constant around the 434 mark — keeping in touch with most of them was made easier with the computerisation of membership lists — but an otherwise good year for the Club was marred by the death of Laurel Tucker.

### Indoor meetings

17.1.85	Snipe — Rhys Green	16.1.86	Birds of Southern Europe — Terry Bond
14.2.85	Members' evening	13.2.86	Members' evening
14.3.85	Migration — Chris Mead	13.3.86	Birds in camera — Mike Wilkes
19.9.85	North Atlantic seabirds — Peter Harrison	18.9.86	The Kingfisher — David Boag
17.10.85	Audio visual presentation — Edgar Deadman	16.10.86	The making of the Winter Atlas — Peter Lack
14.11.85	'British' geese — Myrfyn Owen	13.11.86	West Wales bird islands — David Saunders
19.12.85	Annual General Meeting	18.12.86	Annual General Meeting

### Publications

*Bird News* continued to be published monthly, and *Bristol Ornithology* 18 appeared in May 1986, with *The Sunning Behaviour of Birds* supplement in December 1986.

John Barber *Honorary Secretary*.

