



Report from the Records Sub-committee

by Martin Chaffé and Thelma Caine

Introduction

Thirty members participated in the 2015-16 Winter Bird Count, recording 65 species from 36 stations. The previous winter, 37 stations were covered, with 63 species recorded. November was generally mild but unsettled and windy with a brief cold snap from the 21st to 23rd. December was the warmest on record, 4°C above average, with a moist tropical airflow for most of the month, which brought very wet and windy conditions and flooding in some parts of the country. Conditions remained mild and unsettled at the start of January, but it turned colder around mid-month, with widespread frosts, warmer, wet conditions returning towards the end of the month. After a windy start to February, it turned colder mid-month with some sharp frosts. The start of March was dominated by low pressure, bringing wet, cold weather followed by a settled spell with sunny conditions mid-month.

Highlights of the 2015-16 winter, were sightings of **Firecrest** at Homestead Gardens, Claygate on December 9th and another at Littleworth Common on December 24th. A **Stonechat** was reported from Pen Ponds on December 15th and a **Barnacle Goose** of unknown origin was seen feeding with Canada Geese on Sandown Park Golf Course on New Year's Day. **Stock Doves** were also reported from Sandown Park in January and February and from a garden in More Lane, Esher in January and March. **Tawny Owls** were heard in all months from November to February at More Lane, Esher. One lucky member had a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in her garden in Thistledeane, Thames Ditton on February 4th and a **Little Owl** was observed in Bushy Park on March 12th.

Top ten species

The ten most common species were the same as last year, but changed positions slightly with **Maggpie** and **Carriion Crow** in joint first place with 100% presence, seen at 36 stations. **Woodpigeon** and **Blackbird** shared second place, each seen at 97% stations. These were followed by **Robin** reported from 92% of stations. **Black-headed Gull** and **Blue Tit** were widely reported from 89% of stations and the top ten was completed by **Starling**, **Great Tit** and **Ring-necked Parakeet** which were observed at 86% stations, the latter surprisingly showing a decrease from the previous winter when it was seen at 95% of stations.

Gains and Losses

It was a good winter for **Redwings**, seen at 44% of stations compared with 22% the previous winter. **Chaffinches** showed a welcome increase (+12) seen at 61% of stations. Four stations (11%) reported **Siskins**, which surprisingly were not reported at all in the 2014-15 Winter Bird Count. **Green Woodpeckers** were up on the previous year, reported from 42% of stations (+10) and **Coal Tits** continued to do well, benefitting from garden feeders, seen at 47% stations (+9). Species recorded in the winter of 2015-16 which were absent the previous year also included **Mandarin**, **Teal**, **Shoveler**, **Little Owl** and **Kingfisher**.

Compared with the previous winter, the largest decrease was recorded for **Song Thrush**, seen at only 36% of stations compared with 51% in the winter of 2014-15 (-15). **Collared Dove** was less widely recorded than the previous winter, down from 68% of stations to 58%. **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**, rather surprisingly also showed a decrease, present at only 47% stations compared with 57% the previous year. There were very few reports of **Stock Doves**, seen at only 6% stations, compared with 14% in the previous winter and observations of **Grey Wagtails** fell from 11% of sites in 2014-15 to only 6% in 2015-16. Species not recorded at all in the Winter Bird Count for 2015-16 included **Chiffchaff** and **Redpoll**, the latter particularly surprising since it has previously been recorded as a visitor to niger seed feeders and has been on the increase in recent winters.

Changes since the Winter Bird Count began

The chart overleaf shows the percentage presence of species in the winter of 2015-16 and a comparison with results from 1980-81, our baseline year (this being the first WBC for which we have comparable results). From this, species showing the most notable increase in figures during the period are **Ring-necked Parakeet** (+86), **Long-tailed Tit** (+48), **Jackdaw** (+45), **Herring Gull** (+34) **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (+31), **Redwing** (+29), **Green Woodpecker** (+27), **Goldfinch** and **Canada Goose** (both +20), **Sparrowhawk** (+19), **Egyptian Goose**, **Mute Swan**, **Blackcap** and **Woodpigeon** (all +17) and **Collared Dove** (+16). Species recorded in 2015-16 which were not present at all in 1980-81 also include **Stock Dove**, **Little Owl**, **Stonechat** and **Firecrest**.

Species showing the most notable decrease in figures between 1980-81 and 2015-16 include **House Sparrow** and **Song Thrush** (both -48), **Kestrel** (-26), **Greenfinch** and **Mistle Thrush** (both -25) **Chaffinch** and **Great Black-backed Gull** (both -12), and **Tawny Owl** (-10).

Species present in 1980-81 but not recorded at all in 2015-16 include **Grey Partridge**, **Pheasant**, **Lapwing**, **Snipe**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Barn Owl**, **Skylark**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Rook**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Redpoll**, **Bullfinch** and **Reed Bunting**.

Contributors

D Abrahams, G Avison, M Boulby, G & T Caine, M Chaffe, A Coom, R Davies, J Fleck, G & E Gill, J Hannam, J Harlow, R Ingold, H Jones, D Lewis, M Lunn, M Marriott, P & A Mayes, J Meier, E Moore, M Parilla, D Pharaoh, D Raymond, S Read, C Sherlock, E Stannard, V & P Tregenza.

