SDBWS Red Data Species Survey 2015-16

Report from the Records Sub-committee

by Martin Chaffé and Thelma Caine

Introduction

The aim of this survey is to assess the population levels of three Red Data Species in our area during the winter months and to monitor change during each winter and between successive winters. The three species selected for study were House Sparrow, Song Thrush and Starling. 2015-16 was the fifth winter of this survey.

The SDBWS previously conducted a survey of wintering House Sparrows in members' gardens over five successive winters from 1995-96 until 1999-2000, results of which were published in the Society's 1999 Annual Bird Report. For the Red Data Species survey, it was decided to follow the same guidelines as were used for the original House Sparrow Survey, by gathering data during the annual Winter Bird Count survey.

Although most of the records for the Red Data Species Survey come from within the Society's recording area, the survey is not confined to this area. To enable members who live outside the recording area to participate in the survey, a small number of sites beyond the boundaries of the recording area are included.

Thirty members took part in the Red Data Species Survey in 2015-16.

Method

For each of the selected species, members were asked to count the maximum number observed on any one day, in each of the eight half-monthly periods from 16th November 2015 to 15th March 2016 and to record the highest figure on the Winter Bird Count Form. At the end of the winter survey, the data was analysed.

As the previous five winter study of House Sparrows had been confined to data from members' gardens and the aim is to compare the results of the new survey with those of the previous survey, only garden sites have been used in the House Sparrow analysis.

For Song Thrush and Starling, no previous study was carried out and for these species, the analysis is not confined to gardens but includes all sites covered by members.

Results

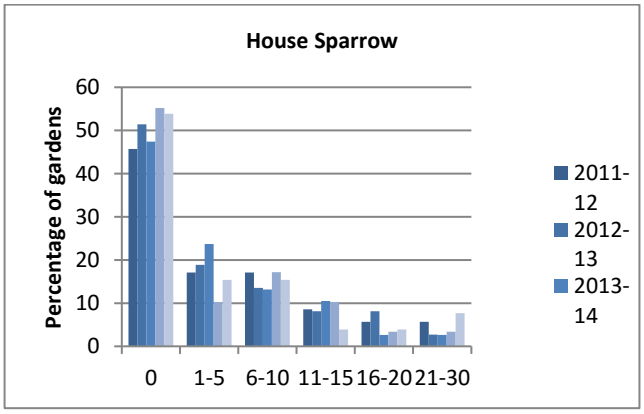
House Sparrow

Records were received from only 26 gardens for the House Sparrow survey in the winter of 2015-16 compared with 29 in 2014-15, 38 in 2013-14, 37 in 2012-13 and 35 in 2011-12. The results are summarised below:

Table 1

Maximum Count	Percentage gardens				
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
0	53.9	55.2	47.4	51.4	45.7
1-5	15.4	10.3	23.7	18.9	17.1
6-10	15.4	17.2	13.2	13.5	17.1
11-15	3.9	10.3	10.5	8.1	8.6
16-20	3.9	3.4	2.6	8.1	5.7
21-30	7.7	3.4	2.6	2.7	5.7

Fig 1



The largest number of House Sparrows seen at one site in 2015-16 was 25 in a garden in Norton Avenue, Tolworth, during the period 16-29th February. Only three other gardens recorded double figures for House Sparrows during the winter with numbers ranging from 14-22, and 14 of the 26 gardens (53.9%) recorded none at all.

A comparison of the distribution of maximum flock sizes for House Sparrow each winter from 2011-12 to 2015-16 covering all garden sites is shown in Fig 1.

The number of House Sparrows seen in all gardens in each of the eight half-monthly periods was totalled based on maximum counts recorded for each garden. The results are as follows:

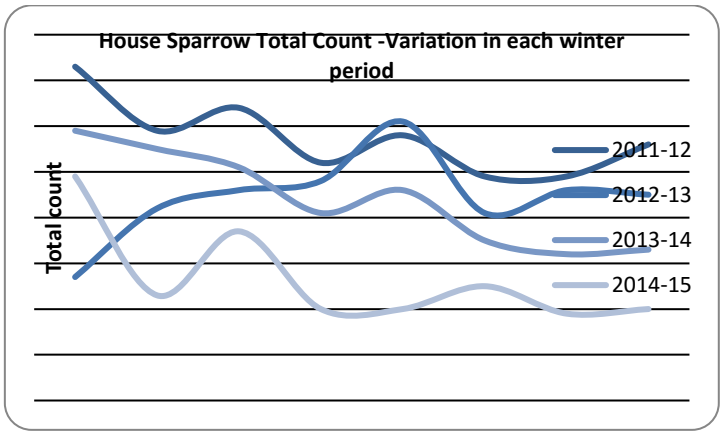
Table 2

Period	Total House Sparrows				
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
Nov 16-30	66	109	119	87	133
Dec 1-15	71	83	115	102	119
Dec 16-31	84	97	111	106	124
Jan 1-15	89	80	101	108	122
Jan 16-31	65	80	106	121	118
Feb 1-15	65	85	95	101	109
Feb 16-28	77	79	92	106	112
Mar 1-15	54	80	93	105	119

From these results it can be seen that in the winter of 2015-16 the minimum total count for House Sparrows was 54 in the period 1-15th March. Previous minima were 79 in the second period of February in 2014-15, 92 in the same period in 2013-14, 87 during the period 16-30th November in 2012-13 and 109 in the period 1-15th February in 2011-12. The highest total count in 2015-16 was 89 in the period 1-15th January. This compares with peak counts of was 109 in the period 16-30th November in 2014-15, 119 in the same period in 2013-14, 121 in the period 16-31st January in 2012-13 and 133 during 16-30th November in 2011-12. As with all winters except 2012-13, there were fewer House Sparrows recorded by the end of the winter compared to the first count in November.

A graph showing the variation in total numbers of House Sparrows each winter from 2011-12 to 2015-16 is shown in Fig 2.

Fig 2



Of the 26 garden sites, 20 have been covered in all five winters. The following are totals for each winter based on maxima for each of the 20 gardens:

Total House Sparrows Based on 20 gardens covered in all winters				
2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
103	79	85	100	91

From this it can be seen that numbers of House Sparrows declined in these 20 gardens from the winter of 2012-13 to 2014-15, decreasing from 100 to 79 but staged a recovery in 2015-16 which produced the highest count of the five winters.

Song Thrush

Thirty-six sites were covered for the Song Thrush survey in the winter of 2015-16 compared with 37 in 2014-15, 47 sites in 2013-14, 50 sites in 2012-13 and 44 sites in 2011-12. The results are summarised below:

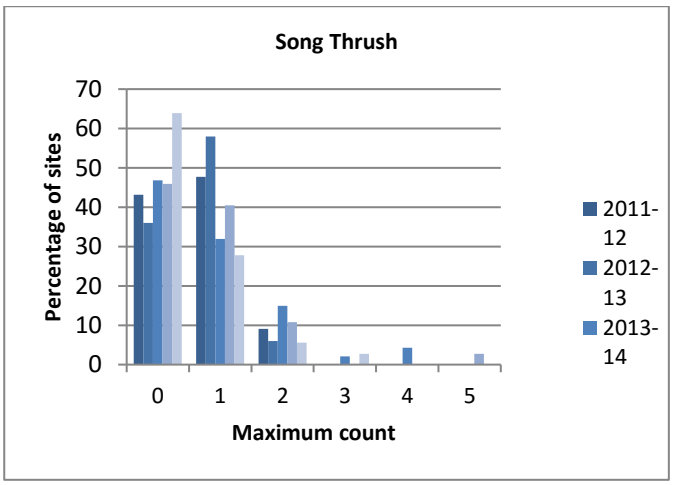
Table 3

Maximum Count	Percentage sites				
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
0	63.9	45.9	46.8	36	43.2
1	27.8	40.5	31.9	58	47.7
2	5.6	10.8	14.9	6	9.1
3	2.8	0	2.1	0	0
4	0	0	4.3	0	0
5	0	2.7	0	0	0

36.1% of sites recorded at least one Song Thrush in 2015-16 compared with 54.1% of sites in 2014-15, 53.2% in 2013-14, 64% in 2012-13 and 56.8% in 2011-12. Two Song Thrushes were recorded at two sites in 2015-16, with three seen in a garden at Southfields, East Molesey in the period 1-15th December. 63.9% of sites had no Song Thrushes at all in 2015-16. This is the highest number recording an absence of this species across the five winters.

A graph showing the distribution of maximum counts for Song Thrush covering all sites is shown in Fig 3.

Fig. 3



The number of Song Thrushes seen at all sites in each of the eight half-monthly periods was totalled based on maximum counts recorded for each site. The results are as follows:

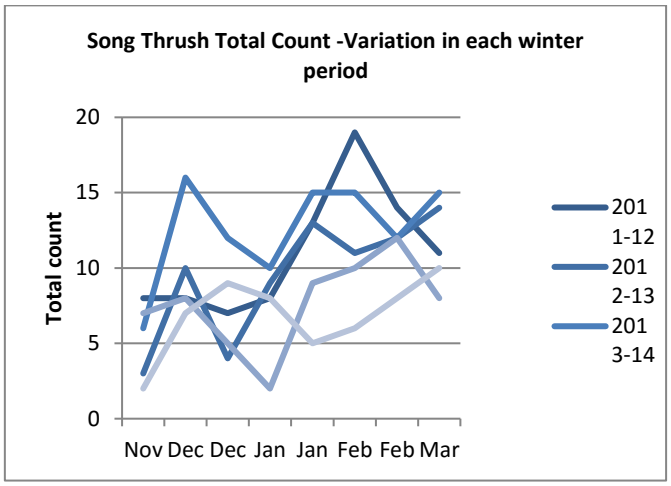
Table 4

Period	Total Song Thrushes				
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
Nov 16-30	2	7	6	3	8
Dec 1-15	7	8	16	10	8
Dec 16-31	9	5	12	4	7
Jan 1-15	8	2	10	9	8
Jan 16-31	5	9	15	13	13
Feb 1-15	6	10	15	11	19
Feb 16-28	8	12	12	12	14
Mar 1-15	10	8	15	14	11

From these results it can be seen that the minimum number of Song Thrushes recorded in 2015-16 was 2 in the period 16-30th November. Previous minima were 2 in the period 1-15th January 2014-15, 6 in the period 16-30th November 2013-14, 3 during the same period in 2012-13 and 7 in the period 16-31st December 2011-12. The maximum number of Song Thrushes recorded in the winter of 2015-26 was only 10 in the period 1-15th March. Previous maxima were 12 in the period 16-28th February 2014-15, 16 in the period 1-15th December 2013-14, 14 during the period 1-15th March 2012-13 and 19 in the period 1-15th February 2011-12.

A graph showing the variation in total numbers of Song Thrushes each winter from 2011-12 to 2015-16 is shown in Fig 4.

Fig 4.



Of the 36 sites, 24 have been covered in all five winters. The following are totals for each winter based on maxima for each of the 24 gardens:

Total Song Thrushes Based on 24 gardens covered in all winters				
2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
9	15	20	14	17

Among these gardens, the Song Thrush population fluctuated during the first four winters, peaking at 20 in 2013-14, but showed a marked fall in the winter of 2015-16.

Starling

Thirty-six sites were covered for the Starling survey in the winter of 2015-16 compared with 37 in 2014-15, 47 sites in 2013-14, 50 sites in 2012-13 and 44 sites in 2011-12. The results are summarised below:

Table 5

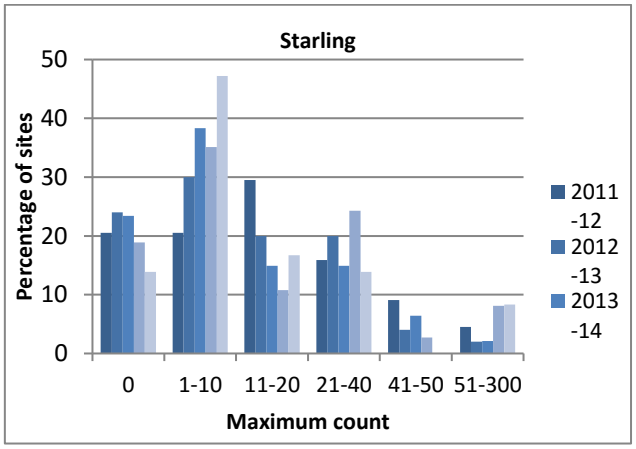
Maximum Count	Percentage sites				
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
0	13.9	18.9	23.4	24	20.5*
1-10	47.2	35.1	38.3	30	20.5*
11-20	16.6	10.8	14.9	20	29.5
21-40	13.9	24.3	14.9	20	15.9
41-50	0	2.7	6.4	4	9.1
51-300	8.3	8.1	2.1	2	4.5

[*= data corrected from previous reports]

The largest number of Starlings seen from one site in the winter of 2015-16 was 200 over a garden in Southfields, East Molesey in the period 1-15th December. In the same period, a flock of 55 was reported from Sandown Park and 100 were reported over a garden in Norton Avenue Tolworth during 16-31st December. Five sites (13.9%) recorded no Starlings at all in 2015-16, compared with 18.9% of sites in 2014-15, 23.4% in 2013-14, 24% in 2012-13 and 20.5% in 2011-12.

The distribution of maximum flock sizes for Starling covering all sites is shown in Fig 5.

Fig 5.



The number of Starlings seen at all sites in each of the eight half-monthly periods was totalled based on maximum counts recorded for each site. The results are as follows:

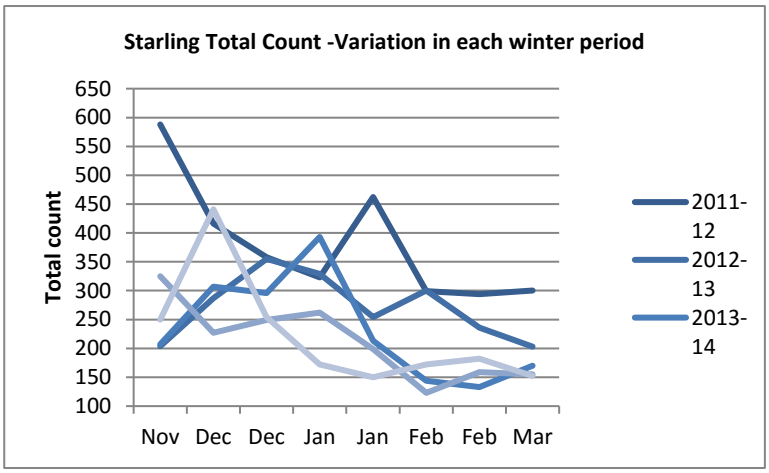
Table 6

Period	Total Starlings				
	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
Nov 16-30	250	325	207	204	588
Dec 1-15	441	227	307	287	416
Dec 16-31	254	249	296	355	358
Jan 1-15	172	262	393	329	323
Jan 16-31	150	199	213	254	462
Feb 1-15	172	123	144	300	299
Feb 16-28	182	159	133	236	294
Mar 1-15	152	155	170	203	300

In 2015-16, the peak count for Starling was 441 during the period 1-15th December. This compares with 325 during the period 15-30th November 2014-15, 393 during the period 1-15th January 2013-14, 355 in the period 16-31st December in 2012-13 and 588 in the period 16-30th November in 2011-12. The minimum count in 2015-16 was 150 in the period Jan 16-31st. This compares with 123 in the period 1-15th February in 2014-15, 133 during 16-28th February 2013-14, 203 during 1-15th March 2012-13 and 294 during 16-29th February in 2011-12.

A graph showing the variation in total numbers of Starlings each winter from 2011-12 to 2015-16 is shown in Fig 6.

Fig 6.



Of the 36 sites, 24 have been covered in all four winters. The following are totals for each winter based on maxima for each of the 24 gardens:

Total Starlings				
Based on 24 gardens covered in all winters				
2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13	2011-12
372	386	430	231	694

From this it can be seen that the peak count was 694 in the first winter, numbers dropping the following year to 231 but climbing again to 430 in 2013-14. Since then, numbers have fallen in successive winters.

We wish to thank all those who took part in the 2015-16 survey.

Contributors:

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