



Report from the Records Sub-committee

by Martin Chaffé and Thelma Caine

Introduction

Thirty-two members participated in the 2014-15 Winter Bird Count, recording 63 species from 37 stations. The previous winter, 47 stations were covered, with 62 species recorded. November was mild and wet with rainfall well above average. December remained unsettled and was generally mild with cold spells at the start and end of the month. Mild conditions returned in the first half of January with westerly winds bringing a series of Atlantic lows, but the second half of the month was colder with some sharp frosts. February was relatively dry but chilly up to 12th with northerlies dominating, but the second half of the month was milder and wetter with some strong winds.

Two first-ever records for the Winter Bird Count were **Cetti's Warbler** reported from several sites along the R. Mole, Molesey from December to February and a **Pintail** seen on the roadside pond at Littleworth Common in early March. Other sightings of note included **Stock Doves** reported from gardens in More Lane, Esher and Nelson Road, New Malden, with further reports from Littleworth Common, Molesey Heath, and Canon Hill Common. A **Barnacle Goose** of uncertain origin was seen feeding with Canada Geese in Grove Way, Esher on December 9th. Also in Grove Way, a **Tawny Owl** was heard in early December and 1-2 birds were heard regularly throughout the winter from Sandown Park, Esher. Birds of prey included a **Red Kite** over Homestead Gardens, Claygate in January. A pair of **Stonechats** were seen in Bushy Park in early February and the only **Chiffchaff** record came from the Sir Joseph Hood Sports Ground, Motspur Park, in early March.

Top ten species

The ten most common species were almost the same as last year, **Ring-necked Parakeet** sharing top spot with **Carriion Crow**, both seen at 95% of stations, with **Woodpigeon**, **Magpie** and **Robin** all in joint second place, seen at 92% of stations. These were followed by **Blackbird** which showed a decrease in records from 94% stations in 2013-14 to 89% stations in 2014-15. **Blue Tit** showed a similar drop, down from 94% stations in 2013-14 to 86% of stations in 2014-15. However both of these apparent declines may simply be due to the loss of some regular garden observers. Next came **Black-headed Gull** seen at 84% of stations with **Great Tit** and **Starling** completing the top ten list, both recorded at 78% of stations. **Dunnock** dropped out of the list to 12th place, seen at 73% of stations compared to 79% the previous winter.

Gains and Losses

Of the species showing gains from the previous winter, **Wren** showed the largest increase (+12) seen at 65% stations compared to 53% the previous winter. **Grey Wagtails** also did well (+7) seen at 11% stations compared to 4% in 2013-14. Of the thrushes, only **Mistle Thrush** showed an increase (+5), recorded at 24% stations compared to 19% in 2013-14. Other gains were mainly in waterbirds with **Moorhen** (+6) recorded at 19% stations, and **Cormorant** and **Egyptian Goose** both (+5), seen at 24% and 14% stations respectively. As well as **Cetti's Warbler** and **Pintail**, species gained which were not recorded the previous winter were **Wigeon** seen at two sites

bordering the R. Mole in Esher, **Greylag Goose**, **Gadwall**, **Stonechat** and the **Barnacle Goose** of dubious origin, all seen at a single site each.

Both species of wintering thrushes showed marked decreases compared with the winter of 2013-14 with **Redwing** (-38) recorded at 22% sites compared with 60% sites the previous winter and **Fieldfare** (-14), reported from only 3% sites compared with 17% in 2013-14. This may reflect the relatively mild winter weather with fewer thrushes reaching southern UK. Overwintering **Blackcap** were well down too (-17), seen at only 19% of stations compared to 36% the previous winter. This was their lowest level since the winter of 2000-01. All the finches showed decreases compared with the previous winter with **Goldfinch** (-16), **Chaffinch** (-11), **Greenfinch** and **Lesser Redpoll** (-10), **Linnet** (-1) and no **Siskins** reported at all. Tits were less widespread too with **Coal Tit** (-15) reported from only 38% stations compared to 53% in 2013-14 and **Great Tit** (-11), **Blue Tit** (-8) and **Long-tailed Tit** (-7), the latter reported from 59% stations compared to 66% in 2013-14. Loss of some garden observers however may well account for some of these changes.

Changes since the Winter Bird Count began

The chart overleaf shows the percentage presence of species in the winter of 2014-15 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** (+95), **Jackdaw** (+49), **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (+41), **Long-tailed Tit** (+40), **Collared Dove** (+26), **Herring Gull** (+25) **Sparrowhawk** (+19), **Green Woodpecker** (+17), **Canada Goose** (+16). **Blackcap**, **Egyptian Goose** and **Stock Dove** (all +14). and **Goldfinch** (+13). Species recorded in 2014-15 which were not present at all in 1980-81 also include **Pintail**, **Red Kite**, **Stonechat** and **Cetti's Warbler**.

Species showing the most notable decrease in figures between 1980-81 and 2014-15 include **House Sparrow** (-51), **Bullfinch** (-34), **Song Thrush** (-33), **Kestrel** and **Greenfinch** (both -26) **Chaffinch** (-24), **Mistle Thrush** (-23), **Pied Wagtail** (-19), and **Starling** (-17).

Species present in 1980-81 but not recorded at all in 2014-15 include **Grey Partridge**, **Pheasant**, **Lapwing**, **Snipe**, **Barn Owl**, **Kingfisher**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Skylark**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Rook**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Bullfinch** and **Reed Bunting**.

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