



Report from the Records Sub-committee

by Martin Chaffé and Thelma Caine

Introduction

Thirty-one members participated in the 2016-17 Winter Bird Count, recording 71 species from 34 stations. The previous winter, 36 stations were covered, with 65 species recorded.

November was generally bright and cool with temperatures slightly below average, Storm Angus bringing rain and strong winds on 20th-21st. December began cold and dry, followed by mild conditions which remained until 20th. After a wet, windy spell from 21st-26th, cold, dry conditions returned in the final week with frosts and some fog. January was fairly cold, with higher than average sunshine but a wintry spell arrived from 12th-14th bringing scattered snow showers. February was unsettled with frequent showers but was exceptionally mild on several days, temperatures reaching 18°C on the 20th. The mild conditions continued into March, the first two weeks being changeable with winds from the south-west.

Highlights of the 2016-17 winter were sightings of **Redpoll** at Kingston Cemetery in late November and again in February. This site which adjoins the Hogsmill Sewage Works also produced sightings of **Lapwing** on several dates between December and March. A **Greenshank** was reported on the R Ember, Esher on 20th December. **Bullfinch** was seen along the R Mole, Molesey on the 24th December and again on 14th January. Bushy Park produced sightings of **Skylarks** in December and March. **Tawny Owls** were heard from late December to early March in Esher and Hinchley Wood. **Stock Doves** were reported from Sandown Park, Fishponds and Hinchley Wood on several dates during the winter. Among the highlights in January were sightings of a **Water Rail** on the R. Mole, Molesey on the 5th and 14th. **Kingfisher** was reported from R Ember, Esher on January 24th with further sightings here in February. **Little Egret** was also seen on R Ember on 27th January and at Fishponds on the 28th. A **Buzzard** was reported over Claygate in late January, again in early March and possibly the same bird over Hinchley Wood. An overwintering **Chiffchaff** was reported from Fishponds on 26th February. This month also produced a sighting of 8 **Waxwings** at Manor Road South, Hinchley Wood on Feb 27th and an early **Willow Warbler** was reported from Fishponds on 15th March.

Top ten species

The ten most common species were the much same as in recent years, with **Woodpigeon** in top spot, seen at 100% of sites. This was followed by **Robin**, **Blackbird**, **Maggie** and **Carriion Crow**, all seen at 97% of sites. **Blue Tit** and **Starling** were almost as widespread, reported from 94% of locations. **Ring-necked Parakeet** was once again one of our most common species. Both these and **Great Tit** were observed at 88% of sites. **Goldfinch** made it into the top ten this year, sharing tenth spot with **Black-headed Gull**, both seen at 85% of stations.

Gains and Losses

Goldfinch showed the largest increase from the previous winter (+32) benefitting from plentiful garden food supplies,

combined with mild winter temperatures. The same was true of **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (+21) seen at 47% of stations. Perhaps most surprising was a substantial increase for **Song Thrush** (+17) seen at 53% of stations compared with 36% the previous winter. The lack of severe weather led to higher numbers of **Goldcrests** (+14) and **Wren** (+12) which were more widely reported than the previous year. It was a better winter for **House Sparrows** (+12) seen at 56% of stations compared with 44% in the previous winter. Two other garden species which did well were **Collared Dove** (+13) and **Nuthatch** (+10). There was a welcome increase also for **Kestrel**, (+10) seen at 18% of stations compared with just 8% in the winter of 2015-16.

Very few species showed declines compared to the previous winter, however the largest decrease was recorded for **Greenfinch** (-15) seen at only 29% of stations compared with 44% the previous year. This was the lowest ever figure since the WBC began. These losses can be mainly attributed to the fatal disease Trichomonosis which is affecting this species particularly badly. **Chaffinch** numbers also fell (-5), seen at only 56% of stations compared with 61% the previous winter. Surprisingly no **Siskins** were reported at all from any of the stations covered. Other species which were absent having been recorded the previous winter included **Little Owl**, **Stonechat**, **Mandarin** and **Shoveler**.

Changes since the Winter Bird Count began

The chart overleaf shows the percentage presence of species in the winter of 2016-17 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 during the period are **Ring-necked Parakeet** (+88), **Long-tailed Tit** (+55), **Jackdaw**, **Goldfinch** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (all +52), **Herring Gull** (+34), **Green Woodpecker** (+32), **Canada Goose** (+30), **Collared Dove** (+29), **Sparrowhawk** (+26), **Goldcrest** (+25), **Blackcap** (+24), **Woodpigeon** (+20) and **Grey Heron** (+19). Species recorded in 2016-17 which were not present at all in 1980-81 include **Greylag Goose**, **Egyptian Goose**, **Little Egret**, **Buzzard**, **Water Rail**, **Greenshank**, **Stock Dove** and **Waxwing**.

Species showing the most notable decrease between 1980-81 and 2016-17 include **Greenfinch** (-40), **House Sparrow** (-36), **Bullfinch** and **Song Thrush** (both -31), **Mistle Thrush** (-18), **Kestrel** (-16), **Chaffinch** and **Great Black-backed Gull** (both -15), **Pied Wagtail** (-11), and **Tawny Owl** (-7).

Species present in 1980-81 but not recorded at all in 2016-17 include **Grey Partridge**, **Pheasant**, **Snipe**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Barn Owl**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Rook**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Siskin** and **Reed Bunting**.

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Winter Bird Count 2016-17 and 1980-81 Comparison

