



## Winter Bird Count 2017-2018

### Report from the Records Sub-committee

by Martin Chaffé and Thelma Caine

#### Introduction

Thirty members participated in the 2017-18 Winter Bird Count, recording 78 species from 36 stations. The previous winter, 31 members covered 34 stations, with 71 species recorded. Weatherwise, significant events were Storm Caroline which brought strong winds on December 7<sup>th</sup>, followed by a cold spell with frosts. Storm Eleanor arrived in early January bringing more strong winds. Early February was cold with frosts, turning milder mid-month before the arrival of the 'Beast from the East' which brought bitterly cold conditions and heavy snow from Feb 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>.

Among the highlights were reports in November of a **Stonechat** in Bushy Park, a **Peregrine** over Hinchley Wood on Nov 21<sup>st</sup> and a **Tawny Owl** in Esher. Remarkably a **Marsh Tit** visited a garden in Manor Road South, Hinchley Wood almost daily throughout the winter period with a **Hawfinch** also here on four dates in December, corresponding with an influx into the UK during that period. Other notable December records were **Common Buzzards** reported from Littleworth Common and Hinchley Wood, **Tawny Owls** heard at two sites in Esher with further reports from these sites in January, and a **Reed Bunting** which visited a garden in West Molesey on several dates from December to mid-February. The Molesey area produced a **Little Egret** on Cow Common on Jan 10<sup>th</sup> and **Water Rail** on the R. Mole on Jan 25<sup>th</sup>. February was notable for several records of **Red Kite** with singles reported over Hinchley Wood on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> and over New Malden on Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>. Cold weather at the end of this month brought numerous reports of **Redwings** and **Fieldfares**. Highlights in March included **Skylarks** and a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** in Bushy Park, a **Chiffchaff** in a West Molesey garden on 4<sup>th</sup>, a **Firecrest** at Littleworth Common on 6<sup>th</sup>, three **Common Buzzards** circling over More Lane, Esher on 9<sup>th</sup> and a **Cetti's Warbler** heard along the R. Mole, West Molesey on 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### Top ten species

Of the ten most common species, **Woodpigeon**, **Robin** and **Magpie** shared top spot, reported from 94% sites. These were followed by **Blackbird** and **Carrion Crow** both seen at 92% of sites. **Redwing** made it into the top ten for the first time since the Winter Bird Count began, seen at 89% of stations, a result of the severe weather in late February which brought cold weather movements of this species. **Blue Tit** and **Great Tit** were both seen at 86% of stations. The top ten was completed by **Black-headed Gull**, **Ring-necked Parakeet** and **Dunnock** which were each seen at 83% of sites. **Starling** dropped out of the top ten, seen at only 81% of stations compared with 94% in 2016-17 and **Goldfinch** showed a dramatic drop, also falling out of the top ten, reported at only 44% of sites compared with 85% in 2016-17.

#### Gains and Losses

**Redwings** (+42) and **Fieldfares** (+19) showed the largest increase in percentage presence from the previous winter, the severe weather at the end of February bringing numerous sightings. **Siskins** and **Redpolls** were also up (both +14). Several species increased for the third consecutive winter. These included **Pied Wagtails** (+12), seen at 50% of sites

compared with 38% the previous year and **Song Thrushes** (+11) reported from 64% of sites compared with 53% in 2016-17. It was also a good winter for **Sparrowhawks** and **Kestrels** (both +7) seen at 33% and 25% of sites respectively.

The large drop in **Goldfinch** records was very surprising (-41) seen at only 44% of sites compared with 85% the previous winter. This does not reflect national records as the RSPB Garden Birdwatch reported this species as up by 11%. **Greenfinch** declined for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive winter (-12) seen at only 17% of sites compared with 29% in 2016-17. This species continues to be affected by Trichomonosis, as does **Chaffinch** (-17) seen at only 39% sites compared with 56% the previous winter. After consecutive increases in our area in the last four winters **Starling** reports were down (-17) seen at 81% of stations, compared with 94% in 2016-17. Whereas other thrushes did well, the same was not true for **Mistle Thrush** (-7) which was reported from 22% of sites compared with 29% in 2016-17. Reports were less widespread than normal for several of our common garden species e.g. **Blue Tit** (-8), **Nuthatch** (-7), **Blackbird** (-5), **Wren** (-4) and **Robin** (-3), possibly reflecting a poor breeding season for these species in 2017.

#### Changes since the Winter Bird Count began

The chart overleaf shows the percentage presence of species in the winter of 2017-18 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 last winter compared with 1980-81 are **Ring-necked Parakeet** (+83), **Redwing** (+74), **Jackdaw** (+54), **Long-tailed Tit** (+53), **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (+48), **Sparrowhawk** (+33), **Goldcrest** and **Herring Gull** (both +31), **Fieldfare** (+28), **Green Woodpecker** (+27), **Collared Dove** (+25), **Grey Heron** (+24), **Blackcap** (+23), **Canada Goose** (+17), **Cormorant** and **Woodpigeon** (both +14). Species recorded in 2017-18 which were not present at all in 1980-81 include **Egyptian Goose**, **Little Egret**, **Red Kite**, **Buzzard**, **Peregrine**, **Water Rail**, **Stock Dove**, **Ring-necked Parakeet**, **Stonechat**, **Cetti's Warbler**, **Firecrest**, **Marsh Tit** and **Hawfinch**.

Species showing the most notable decrease between 1980-81 and 2017-18 include **Greenfinch** (-52), **House Sparrow** (-39), **Bullfinch** and **Chaffinch** (both -34), **Mistle Thrush** (-25), **Starling** (-14), **Great Black-backed Gull** and **Kestrel** (both -9).

Species present in 1980-81 but not recorded at all in 2017-18 include **Grey Partridge**, **Pheasant**, **Snipe**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Barn Owl**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Rook**, and **Tree Sparrow**.

#### Contributors

D Abrahams, M Boulby, G & T Caine, M Chaffe, A Coom, R Davies, R Evans, A Fure, E & G Gill, J Hannam, J Harlow, C Harris, R Ingold, H Jones, M Marriott, E Moore, G & S Peggs, D Raymond, S Read, R Riggs, C Sherlock, I Simonsson, E Stannard, A Stiegler, P & V Tregenza, D Wooldridge.

### Winter Bird Count 2017-18 and 1980-81 Comparison

