



Winter Bird Count 2018-2019

Report from the Records Sub-committee

by Martin Chaffé and Thelma Caine

Introduction

Twenty-three members participated in the 2018-19 Winter Bird Count, recording 72 species from 29 stations. The previous winter, 30 members covered 36 stations, with 78 species recorded. There were no unusual weather events, with average temperatures in November and a mild December. January was drier than normal with a cold spell at the end of the month and February was exceptionally mild and sunny.

Among the highlights were reports of **Tawny Owl** in Esher (Nov) and in Surbiton (Nov-Dec), **Siskin** at Great Bookham (Nov-Feb), and **Redpoll** at the same location (Jan-Mar). **Little Egrets** were noted in December at Mill Road, Leatherhead and along the R. Hogsmill in Kingston. A **Peregrine** was seen over Portsmouth Road, Kingston in early January. **Red Kites** were recorded at Great Bookham (Dec and Mar) and at both Esher and Worcester Park (late Jan). A **Firecrest** was an exciting find at Littleworth Common on Jan 30th, so too was a **Goshawk** seen at Great Bookham on Feb 27th. A **Barn Owl** was reported from Bushy Park in February. The only overwintering **Chiffchaffs** reported were in early February in Grove Way, Esher and at Littleworth Common, in early March. A **Kingfisher** was also observed at Grove Way, Esher in late February.

Top ten species

Of the ten most common species, **Woodpigeon** and **Carrion Crow** shared top spot, reported from 100% of sites. These were followed by **Magpie** seen at 97% of sites. **Ring-necked Parakeet** was in fourth place at 93% of sites compared with 83% the previous year. **Blackbird** and **Great Tit** were both reported at 90% of sites. These were followed by **Blue Tit** and **Starling**, seen at 83% of sites. It was a good winter for **Jay** which shared the final place with **Jackdaw** and **Goldfinch**, all of which were reported at 79% of sites. Those edged out of the top ten compared to the previous year were **Redwing** seen at only 41% sites compared with 89% the previous winter and both **Black-headed Gull** and **Dunnock** which were reported from only 73% sites compared with 83% in the winter of 2017-18.

Gains and Losses

Jays increased for the fifth consecutive winter (+15) seen at 79% of stations compared to 64% the previous winter. **Nuthatches** also did well (+13), seen at 38% stations compared with 25% in 2017-18. **Ring-necked Parakeet**, recorded at 93% stations (+10) compared with last winter, were almost back to the peak figure reached in 2014-15 when they were seen at 95% stations. It was a good winter for **Coal Tit** (+8), which increased for the fifth consecutive winter, seen at 66% stations compared with 58% the previous winter. Sightings of **Red Kite** outnumbered those for **Buzzard** with **Red Kites** seen at 10% sites (+7) and **Buzzard** at only 3% sites. Overwintering **Chiffchaffs** showed a slight increase, reported at 7% sites compared with 3% in 2017-18. **Little Egrets** were also up (+4) compared to last winter seen at 7% sites. **Barn Owl** was recorded for the first time since the first year of the Winter Bird Count (1980-81), **Pheasant** was recorded for the first time since the winter of 2013-14 and the

Goshawk at Great Bookham in February was the first sighting ever since the WBC began.

Winter thrush flocks were down compared to the previous winter with **Redwings** (-48) and **Fieldfare** (-28) both showing losses. The drop in **Grey Heron** sightings was surprising (-27), seen at only 34% of sites compared with 61% the previous winter. Following increases in five consecutive winters, **Goldcrest** sightings dropped (-22) seen at 31% sites compared with 53% the previous winter. After a good winter in 2017-18, **Pied Wagtail** reports were also down, seen at 31% stations compared to 50% the previous winter (-19). It was the worst ever winter for **Robins** since the Winter Bird Count began, seen at only 76% stations (-18) compared to 94% in 2017-18. The same was true of **House Sparrow** and **Mistle Thrush** which both hit a new low, with **House Sparrow** seen at only 38% stations (-15) compared with 53% in 2017-18 and **Mistle Thrush** reported from 10% stations compared to 22% the previous winter (-12). **Song Thrushes** also had a poor winter, reported from only 48% sites compared with 64% the previous winter (16). **Goldfinch** reports also fell markedly, seen at 79% stations compared to 94% stations the previous winter (-15). There was a slight increase for **Chaffinch** however seen at 41% stations compared to 39% the previous winter, while **Greenfinches** remained at 17%, no change on the figure for 2017-18.

Changes since the Winter Bird Count began

The chart overleaf shows the percentage presence of species in the winter of 2018-19 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 presence last winter compared with 1980-81 are **Ring-necked Parakeet** (+93), **Jackdaw** (+52), **Goldfinch** (+46), **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (+46), **Long-tailed Tit** (+43), **Herring Gull** (+32), **Sparrowhawk** (+28), **Green Woodpecker** and **Redwing** (both +26), **Blackcap** (+23), **Coal Tit** (+18), **Canada Goose** and **Great Tit** (both +17) and **Nuthatch** (+15). Species recorded in 2018-19 which were not present at all in 1980-81 include **Greylag Goose**, **Egyptian Goose**, **Little Egret**, **Red Kite**, **Buzzard**, **Peregrine**, **Goshawk**, **Stock Dove**, **Ring-necked Parakeet**, **Stonechat**, and **Firecrest**.

Species showing the most notable decrease between 1980-81 and 2018-19 include **House Sparrow** (-54), **Greenfinch** (-52), **Mistle Thrush** (-37), **Song Thrush** (-36), **Bullfinch** (-34), **Chaffinch** (-32), **Pied Wagtail** (-18), **Great Black-backed Gull** (-15), **Starling** (-12), and **Kestrel** (-10).

Species present in 1980-81 but not recorded at all in 2018-19 include **Grey Partridge**, **Lapwing**, **Snipe**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Skylark**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Rook**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Bullfinch** and **Reed Bunting**.

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Winter Bird Count 2018-19 and 1980-81 Comparison

