



Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter May 2014

2013 Annual Bird Report

Hi All,

This month's biodiversity newsletter is devoted to the Stratford Park annual bird report for 2013. 2013 marks the 5th year of annual bird reports for Stratford Park. During this time we have introduced many new conservation initiatives to encourage and enhance the wild bird population. Even during this short space of time many species of birds that were disappearing from the park are once again thriving, thanks in part, to a continuing nest box scheme. 2013 has been yet another successful year for birds, and as these are the most prominent and evident animals within the park, its no wonder that they receive much more attention and interest from the public and also dominate the monthly newsletters. Everyone loves birds whether in the garden, in woodlands, commons or parks; they are enduring creatures that captivate with their colour and song. This year's annual report sees another upward trend in wild bird distribution and status in Stratford Park, despite an increasing squirrel problem which has impacted on several open nesting species. This is encouraging to its future biodiversity, as birds are an important ecological barometer. As we continue through another year, what we are doing here to monitor and help wild birds is providing a stable and sustainable environment for their future in this important green space.

Mike

A REVIEW OF THE YEAR

2013 was a year of contrasts. Snowfall in January and February was not as heavy as previous years, but biting cold winds and snow prevailed during February. This cold snap continued to bring Redwings and Fieldfares into the park from Northern Europe. The last two weeks of February in particular, were very cold with north-easterly winds. In complete contrast from March 2012 when record temperatures reached 23C, March 2013 was the coldest on record bringing snow, gales and flooding. This had an adverse effect on spring nesting birds, as the emergence of insects was delayed resulting in a shortage of invertebrate food. Many species such as Blackbird and Song thrush simply delayed breeding until later in the spring. The cold weather in March also impacted on the park's wildfowl, with Mallards showing a considerable reduction in breeding. In contrast to this, March 2012 produced 12 broods of Mallard ducklings. April continued unsettled and experienced lower than average temperatures, but by the middle of the month temperatures started to rise and nesting birds were more in evidence. May also proved disappointing with wind and rain prevailing during most of the month. Despite this, temperatures rose on sunny days and the first summer warblers arrived in the park –Chiffchaff and Blackcap.

With temperatures rising during June, most of the resident bird species were now nesting. The contrasts of the first six months of weather was an unprecedented prelude to the following month as July was dominated by a large area of high pressure that extended eastwards from the mid Atlantic during the first few days and then sat over the area for more than two weeks. Temperatures reached the high 20s most days. The last week of July was particularly humid and the park experienced some heavy downpours of rain and thunder. The hot weather curtailed much bird activity but the resident little owls had produced a brood of 3 young owls and these were showing very well most days. 2013 proved to be a successful year for little owls in the park and images of the owls in the nest box sitting on eggs was included in the May biodiversity newsletter. August turned out to be a warm and dry month compared to recent years, in fact the warmest since 2004, although the past 6 or 7 Augusts have not been particularly warm or dry! September continued very humid but experienced less rainfall than in the previous year. During this month Mallards were producing second broods of ducklings and even Moorhens raised one late brood on the lake. Despite the hot summer, few summer migrants reached the park, although a surge in numbers of blackbirds indicated a migration from Europe. By July many birds were sitting on eggs but squirrel predation continued to be a major problem, and many squirrels were seen preying on active nests throughout the park and woodland. October and November were relatively normal months, although there were days when the park experienced some torrential downpours. The first redwing was seen in the park on October 8th. With November continuing mild, redwings and fieldfares were arriving in smaller numbers. December started dry and experienced less rainfall than previous years. Only 2 frosts were recorded in the park during the first week. As we approached the end of the year, fieldfares and redwings were starting to arrive in larger numbers. As a footnote to the above, it is sad to report that the severe storms in February 2014 caused the loss of our family of Little owls. Although only one dead bird was found, it is feared that the rest of the family was trapped

in the walnut tree that fell on the main field. Since then, the owls have been absent from the park. Hopefully, birds from the surrounding valley will visit and re-establish here in the future.

Mike



THE NESTBOX SCHEME

Now in its 5th year, the park's bird box scheme has been a continuing success and restored the breeding status of several important species. Starting in 2009 with 12 boxes, we now have 54 purpose made boxes to target species such as Nuthatch, Little owl, Tawny owl, Coal tit and Great tit. During 2013 almost every box was occupied. The only downward trend was once again, a reduction in the numbers of breeding Nuthatch. Only 2 active nests were located, one of these in a box in the woodland. This appears to be a complete contrast to the previous 3 years where we have seen the number of breeding nuthatches increase considerably. I can only conjecture that the cold spring has been a factor in this decline. The dominant species using the boxes are Blue and Great tit. The less common Coal tit uses the boxes less frequently and these are always occupied in those erected in coniferous trees, especially in the woodland. One species that has eluded the scheme is Marsh tit, although its status as a resident bird is questionable since the 1980s.

2013 has seen the introduction of a number of new boxes specifically to target birds frequenting water habitats. In February we built and installed 6 new duck boxes along the woodland stream. In October 2 boxes have been provided for Grey wagtails which have nested in the park pre 1990s. A Kingfisher nesting chamber was also installed into an elevated section of bank in the woodland. These two species are among the target birds for 2014.

We have had great success with birds of prey in particular Little owl which is now a breeding resident in the park. The species was previously a spring and summer visitor to Stratford Park, but now that the green corridors have been extended and there is 2 purpose made nest boxes for them to nest, they are now established all year round. For the first time this year (and the first time in over 40 years), Tawny owls have successfully bred in our box in the beech woodland. Reliable sources reported 3 young owls during the summer in the box and adjacent woodland. This is a particularly great result and could be indicative of the woodland management work currently being carried out by the Landscape Group. The other target bird of prey species is Kestrel, which although present in the park, has failed to use the specially made boxes installed in the park's large oaks. This may be due to the volume of visitors to that part of the park. One encouraging sign is that we have a pair of kestrels that are frequenting the park more often, especially the walled garden where the overgrown vegetation and walled privacy provides them with good hunting ground for rodents. Their hunting is not confined to this site so any future development of the walled garden should not impact too much on their present occurrence.



Sam Morgan (volunteer) with wagtail boxes



Great tit eggs in one of the park's boxes

We have sadly had to remove all of our open type nest boxes due to squirrel predation. This has naturally had a continuing negative impact on the open nesting bird populations. However, thrushes, blackbirds and particularly Robins are using other natural sites. In conclusion, the nest box scheme is continuing to have a positive influence on the numbers of resident nesting birds in Stratford Park and also provide an educational focal point for those visiting the park and with a particular interest in birds. There are no plans to erect more hole nesting boxes during 2014 as we feel that the balance is right at this present time, although some of the existing boxes may be re-located and a second Tawny owl box will be erected in the beech woodland following a second successful year of breeding in spring 2014.

It should be mentioned that much of the conservation and biodiversity work that we are doing in Stratford Park would not be possible without the continued support of Stroud District Council who have shown continued commitment to the park, the Landscape Group and its ongoing biodiversity work.

Mike McCrea (Contract Supervisor the Landscape Group) May 2014

Systematic List



Stratford Park Little Owl Photo courtesy of Ian Peters

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (resident)

The park's resident pair this year produced a brood of 4 cygnets. Of these, 2 have survived and reached maturity. Park staff continues to place annual nesting material on the island for the swans to use. The first 2 weeks are crucial to the survival of new born cygnets and gulls continue to be the main predators often plucking cygnets from the lake whilst separated from their parents. Yearly offspring from the resident pair are removed from the lake and re-located to other suitable sites during February and March as the adult swans become territorial before every new breeding season and will often attack their own young.

Mandarin duck *Aix galericulata* (occasional visitor)

During 2013 only 1 female bird has been recorded in July and September.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (Common resident)

Mallards are common ducks and as a resourceful species, are well adapted to surviving on various waterways. In Stratford Park there is no doubt that the population is sustained in great part by the general public who continue to feed bread to the birds. With this inexhaustible supply of free food, Mallards will proliferate. Despite this, their natural food supply is limited in the park, and also their natural nesting sites. Success and annual breeding therefore, is generally influenced by the weather. 2012 was a bumper year with over 12 successful broods raised. 2013 was a complete contrast as the wet spring delayed normal nesting. Only a few broods were raised and these were all very late in the season – July. New nest boxes have been placed along the stream and it is hoped that these will be used during 2014. In the meantime it remains very common.

Tufted Duck *Athya fuligula* (occasional resident)

Occasionally seen on the lake usually in pairs. 23rd August 2 males and 1 female. 3rd September 1 male.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* (occasional resident)

Seen most months, usually in the beech woodland and in adjacent Callowell fields.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (Resident)

The park supports 1 resident pair, although these do not nest here. Most days one or two of the herons can be seen fishing from the angler's concrete causeway. Sometimes birds will be seen perched high in the adjacent cedar trees.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* (Occasional resident)

No evidence of nesting in 2013 despite extensive searches, although young birds were heard calling in the woodland at Salmon springs on 3rd September, so nests could have been overlooked. Sparrowhawks can be seen over the park most months and kills are frequently found throughout the woodland and arboretum, chiefly pigeons.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (Resident)

Another raptor which did not nest in the park during 2013 despite its regular occurrence. Frequent over the woodland and fields throughout the year.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (Occasional resident)

One of the target species for 2014, Kestrels are seen in the park most months but have yet to become established. Despite an extended green corridor along the northern elevation of the park, the continued management of the rough grass areas and a purpose made nest box erected in one of the large oaks, this species has still yet to breed in Stratford Park. The only possible reason for this is the close proximity to the children's play area which in summer is packed with people. During summer the main fields are heavily used by the public so there is every possibility that this is the reason why kestrels are not becoming established. We know that a resident pair has been using the park since August, and these have been observed hunting in the walled garden which in its present overgrown state is a refuge and haven for mice and voles.

In 2014 we intend moving the existing nest box to a more private part of the main fields in the hope that this species will add to our other successes with birds of prey.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* (Rare visitor)

No records for 2013

Red kite *Milvus milvus* (Rare passage migrant)

One seen over the park September 14th 2013.

Moorhen *Gallinule chlorops* (Resident)

Although nationally a common water bird, it has been a poor season for Moorhens on the lake. The lake only supports a few pairs but the wet spring had an impact on nesting with only 3 young birds seen. Lack of suitable and safe nesting sites is another influencing factor for the small number of Moorhens in the park.

Coot *Fulica atra* (Resident)

Usually one pair on the lake but these have only been seen occasionally. For the first time in 5 years the resident pair did not nest, no doubt again due to the cold wet spring.

Black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus* (Common resident and immigrant)

The commonest gull in the park. Resident on the lake throughout the summer. Large flocks possibly supplemented by immigrant birds feed on the main fields throughout autumn and winter. Occasional prey of Sparrowhawk.

Lesser-black backed gull *Larus fuscus*

(Frequent visitor) Large gulls often arriving during the wildfowl nesting season and responsible for predated many young ducks and moorhens.

Herring gull *Larus argentatus* (Occasional visitor)

Another large gull occurring less commonly than the Lesser-black backed gull but equally responsible for taking young ducks and moorhens. These are usually plucked from the water during the first few days and taken to nearby buildings before being devoured.



Feral Pigeon
(Common)

Columba livia
resident)

A flock of around 40 birds present by the lake throughout the year. These birds possibly nest within Stroud town. Many are taken by sparrowhawks.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* (Common to abundant resident)

Common throughout the park. Nests in most months.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocta* (Resident)

Despite occurring within 200 yards of the park this common species is never recorded. A few birds are sometimes seen on Stratford Court but despite the park providing perfect habitat it is still absent from the arboretum and woodland.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas* (Resident in small numbers)

Stock doves have undoubtedly been overlooked in the park, often confused with wood pigeons and feral pigeons. During 2013 we were able to distinguish this species and confirm it as a breeding bird in the park. During May a small group of stock doves were located in the woodland where they attempted to use old woodpecker nest holes. Unfortunately they were thwarted by Jackdaws. Birds were also observed in the large oak trees and the walnut tree on the main field, but were once again deterred by jackdaws that are colonizing all of the remaining tree holes and cavities. Several large nest boxes have been placed in the woodland which we hope will be used by stock doves in 2014.

Cuckoo *Calculus canorus* (Occasional summer visitor)

No records for 2013

Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (Rare occasional visitor)

No further records since 2009.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* (Local resident)

A very successful year for Little owls in Stratford Park. Owls are now using the purpose made nest boxes and during 2013 raised 3 young. Thanks to enhanced habitat management and continuing conservation work the species is now established throughout the year using the nest boxes to over-winter. (May 2014 – This species status is now uncertain following recent storm damage to habitat),

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* (Scarce resident)

2013 has seen a breakthrough in breeding status for Tawny owls in the park. I have documented the reason for its decline in recent decades in previous reports and newsletters, but despite the presence of suitable habitat this owl is still hanging on tenuously in the beech woodland. Being nocturnal it is never seen but more often heard, usually in autumn. For the first time in over 40 years Tawny owls have bred in Stratford Park during 2013. 3 young owls were observed at the purpose made nest box erected in 2009. Tawny owls have bred again in spring 2014. As a result of this, a second nest box will be erected in the woodland.

Swift *Apus apus* (Common migrant)

A good year for swifts due to the hot summer. Seen most days hunting over the main fields.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (Local resident)

Single birds are seen most days flying along the river and hunting by the lake. This is a target species for 2014 and a purpose made nesting chamber was placed in an elevated section of bank along the woodland stream. It is hoped that kingfishers will use this as a nesting site in future.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* (Resident)

It has been a successful year in general for our two resident woodpecker species. Despite being active and conspicuous birds, green woodpecker nests are notoriously hard to locate, especially when trees are in full canopy. They are quiet and stealthy when moving near to a nest and it is usually the flash of crimson on the head that gives the bird away. This year the greens did not use the annual nest site in the far oak tree but used one of the large black poplars in the woodland. What made this nest unique was that a Great-spotted woodpecker was using a nest hole in the same branch and just a metre from the green woodpecker nest hole. This afforded views of both species at the nest hole together – a rare sight. On fledging one young green woodpecker was found in the river and fortunately rescued. The bird was taken to a local vet to be treated and then released back into the park on recovery. The rest of the brood are seen feeding on the anthills on the wildflower bank during summer months before dispersing to other areas.



Juvenile Green woodpecker from Stratford Park (Photo: Sharon Tucker)



Young Green woodpecker rescued from the stream

Great-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus major* (Resident)

Another good year for Great-spotted woodpecker with 3 active nests located. Remains our commonest woodpecker.

Lesser-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor* (Rare visitor)

No further records since 2009.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (Scarce occasional resident)

Only recorded very infrequently in adjacent callowell field. Is declining throughout the Stroud district.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (Common summer visitor)

Seen over the main fields between May – September. Birds attempted to nest in the service compound this year.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum* (Common summer visitor)

Common over the main fields between May – September.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* (Occasional resident)

Not present in the park but birds are seen in summer in adjacent callowell fields.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (Local resident)

Another target species for 2014. 2 purpose made nesting boxes have been placed on the bridge at salmon springs to encourage this species to breed. Grey wagtail is another declining species. A few birds are seen most days by the lake and along the stream.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* (Resident and immigrant)

Relatively common found in the park most months. Is supplemented by European birds in Autumn and Winter. Small flocks can be seen in winter feeding on the main fields. No record of nesting in the park. Large roosts occur around Stroud.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* (Local breeding resident)

See occasionally near the Salmon Springs section of the stream, rarely by the lake. No evidence of breeding in the park, but the species nests further along the Painswick valley.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (Common resident)

Very common and breeds regularly in the woodland and arboretum in a wide range of sites including the bandstand roof apex (2012). Most natural nest sites are in ivy on trees around the woodland.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (Common resident)

A common species in the park but found mainly around the bowling green and putting green where dense hedges provide it with nesting sites. Nests are difficult to locate, but observations indicate that most of our birds nest in the main conifer hedge at the end of the bowling green.

Blackbird *Turdus merulus* (Common resident and immigrant)

Remains a common species in the park despite continued nest predation from squirrels. Numbers are often supplemented by birds from Europe during late summer.

Song thrush *Turdus philomelos* (Breeding resident)

A severely declining species in the park due primarily to squirrel predation. Probably only 2 pairs remain. Has declined rapidly in recent decades. Up to 30 pairs occurred pre-1980s.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* (Winter visitor)

2013 saw fewer numbers reach the park unlike the two preceding winters when the UK experienced colder temperatures. Despite this, reasonable numbers were seen feeding on the main field between October – March.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus* (Winter visitor)

This species usually arrives in the park from Scandinavia during early October. Good numbers recorded during winter 2013, but unlike previous colder years, the birds did not come into the arboretum areas to feed on holly and yew berries.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula* (Common resident)

A common species chiefly throughout the arboretum and adjacent shrub beds. Many nests were located during 2013.

Mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus* (Local breeding resident)

Another species declining due to squirrel predation. The park supports 2 pairs. During the 1970s and 1980s Mistle thrushes nested along the Stratford Road corridor in yew and holly trees. One nest was found during the year in the cedar of Lebanon below the museum.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapella* (Summer visitor)

One pair occurred in the woodland during 2013, and has remained in the park throughout the winter of 2013 – 14. Although rather secretive, the bird is often located by its song. The pair is undoubtedly breeding in the woodland, but to date we have not located a nest.

Chiffchaff *Phyloscopus collybita* (Common summer visitor and breeding migrant)

Usually arrives in late March and inhabits the woodland. Song is unmistakable.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (Rather local breeding resident and immigrant)

There has been an increase in the number of Goldcrest nests located in the park this year, but sadly all were predated by squirrels. Despite this, birds are seen in most months of the year, chiefly among the large cedars and other conifers throughout the woodland.

Long-tailed tit *Aegitholas hypoleuca* (Common resident)

Appears to be increasing in numbers and found throughout the year. During 2013 several nests were located in the woodland, including one in the service compound. Large parties can be seen feeding with other birds during the winter months. Remains common.

Blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* (Very common breeding resident)

Remains common to abundant throughout the park.

Great tit *Parus major* (Common breeding resident)

A common species, regularly using nest boxes.

Coal tit *Periparus ater* (Local breeding resident)

Not as common as in previous years although birds are regularly seen in conifers in the woodland, particularly Atlas Cedars. Uses the bird boxes and other natural nest sites including holes in walls – (model railway May 2013).

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* (Local breeding resident)

During the first 2 years of the nest box scheme, Nuthatches increased considerably. The last 2 years has seen numbers remain steady in the park, but birds only used 2 boxes in 2013 in

comparison to 8 boxes in 2012. Metal protective plates fitted to their boxes to deter squirrels only deterred birds further from using the boxes, no doubt due to the fact that they 'mud up' the entrance holes to customize the box. Metal plates have not deterred other species such as Great tits and Blue tits. Despite this, Nuthatches occur in small numbers throughout the arboretum and woodland.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* (Local breeding resident)

A secretive species occurring throughout the arboretum and woodland especially in alders along the banks of the stream. Has nested in the Wellingtonia trees by the orangery.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius* (Breeding resident)

Despite being a common woodland bird nationally, probably only one pair occur in the park. Rather secretive and more often heard than seen, Jays can be seen in the woodland most months.

Magpie *Pica pica* (Common breeding resident)

Remains very common.

Carrion crow *Corvus corone* (Common breeding resident)

Most pairs nest in the large oaks on the main field. A common species.

Raven *Corvus corax* (Occasional visitor)

Birds occur in the park between August and November, probably juvenile birds where they roost in the wellingtonias. Between 6 and 8 birds were recorded during September.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* (Common breeding resident)

The park supports one small rookery adjacent to the outdoor pool entrance. Another rookery previously occurred on the Stratford road boundary among Scots pines, but in recent years, this has been abandoned. Most birds feed in adjacent Callowell fields.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* (Common breeding resident)

Found mainly in the woodland where it uses old woodpeckers' nest holes in the black poplar. Huge flocks occur at dusk, roosting in the arboretum. These flocks contain hundreds, sometimes 'thousands' of birds.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (Common resident and winter visitor)

Despite being an abundant bird nationally, still only found in adjacent Callowell fields, where modest sized flocks can be seen in Autumn and Winter. Previously nested in Elms which grew around the main fields and rarely occurs in the park.

House sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Common breeding resident)

Still absent from the park but occurs commonly in adjacent housing developments.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* (Common breeding resident)

Common throughout the park.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (Common breeding resident)

Found only around the bowling green where it uses dense conifer hedges to nest. Remains quite common.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (Local breeding resident)

Found throughout the year, but more abundant during winter where large flocks roost among the hawthorn hedges around the top perimeter of the park. Can also be seen in autumn, feeding on teasels by the outdoor sports pitch.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus* (Fairly common winter visitor)

Small numbers are seen most years, mainly among alders along the stream and top fields.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (Local breeding resident)

One pair seen occasionally, mainly around the walled garden and orangery. Possibly breeding by the woodland in conifers, but to date, no nests have been located.

