



*Stratford Park Biodiversity Newsletter
December 2011*

Hi All,

This, the last biodiversity newsletter of 2011, is devoted to a review of the park's birds. Since my Stratford Park Bird report 2 years ago, there has been much new information on the distribution of wild birds in the park, and new species have been recorded for the first time. Nesting successes particularly with birds of prey have been largely due to the erection of nest boxes and changes to the maintenance regimes throughout the park, which has improved habitats for hunting prey. During the past 2 years, many other species have benefitted from the nest box scheme, and of the 6 target species highlighted in 2009, 4 of these have been successful in breeding. Sadly, some birds have declined rapidly, particularly Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush. Both of these species are prone to squirrel predation during the breeding season. With a 10 year biodiversity action plan now in place, Stratford Park is finally being recognized as an important place for wildlife within the Stroud district and beyond. During these difficult financial times, it is gratifying to see Stroud District Council investing in the park's biodiversity development, and warm thanks must be extended to Carlos Novoth and Rozelle Jachowicz of public spaces, for assisting with this. I would like to convey my best wishes this Christmas to all

those associated with the park, and who have a vested interest in its development. Thanks also to Colin Lennox (The Landscape Group), who has given me great flexibility within my job remit to work on the park's biodiversity alongside SDC. Finally, I would like to thank Ann Taylor and the Museum in the Park staff for all their assistance this year in organizing the public events, bird walks and moth evenings. To everyone else, happy Christmas and a healthy new year.

Mike



STRATFORD PARK BIRD REPORT (AN UPDATE)

Since the compilation of the Stratford Park bird report in 2009, there has been a significant increase in the species of birds breeding in the park. As previously mentioned prior to the report, very little if anything had been done on the distribution and status of the avian fauna. I was able to base my report on my own records and observations gleaned from over a 30 year period, but even during this time, many records and much information would have been overlooked. Only through daily observation through working in the park, has a more thorough assessment been achieved on the status of birds in Stratford Park. 3 new species have been recorded for the first time in 2011, Hobby, Willow Warbler and Wryneck. All 3 are summer visitors. Little Owl has bred for the first time in 5 years, and Sparrowhawk has bred for the first time since 1985. The erection of nest boxes throughout the park has played an important role in the increase of hole nesting birds. Nuthatch, a species which was disappearing prior to 2009 has increased in numbers by 40% through using these boxes. Coal tit, another local bird, has also increased in numbers. Of the 38 boxes placed around the park and throughout the woodland, 36 have been used by the park's birds.

Despite 2 severe winters, numbers of small birds has remained stable. It is assumed that these nest boxes may be used as roosts during winter months. The cold winters of 2009 / 10 brought large numbers of Redwing, Fieldfare and Siskin to the park. The park's waterfowl has also benefited from new nesting boxes placed on the island in the lake, with clutches of 18 eggs common this spring. The addition of a new pond and subtle adjustments to the lake's perimeters will improve the nesting requirements of water birds. Despite what appears to be an upward trend, some species are declining. Open nesting birds such as Song Thrush and Mistle thrush have declined due to squirrel predation. During the past 30 years this decline has been compounded by an ever increasing squirrel population. Some of our more scarce birds such as Spotted Flycatcher have disappeared completely. Bullfinch is another species on the danger list. Robins, Dunnocks, Blackbirds and other finches are all open nesting birds whose eggs fall prey to marauding squirrels. The issue of squirrel culling is both an emotive and controversial subject, but there is no doubting that they are primarily responsible for the decline of many of the park's wild birds. Conserving, improving and creating habitats is the key to promoting the bird population. The 10 year management plan will no doubt highlight areas for development and improvement, especially in the woodland. In 2011 the general state of the park's wild birds is healthy and stable. Except for those species under threat from squirrels, the rest of the population is showing positive signs of increasing. 2012 will see another Little Owl box erected, and the target species for next year is Kestrel.

STRATFORD PARK BIRDS RECORDED 2010-11

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

1 pair still present on the lake. 3 young successfully reached maturity during 2010. In 2011 another 3 cygnets have reached the juvenile stage. Clutches of eggs for both years has been 6. Mortality rate is 50%, mainly during the early cygnet stage, through natural causes and predation by gulls.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*

One pair occasionally on the lake during summer.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Status: Common

Has increased in numbers since 2009 mainly through using nest boxes. Late broods were recorded in September 2011 due to the warm summer.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Occasional visitor. Recorded in June 2011-12-05

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Mainly seen in Callowell fields, though birds do visit the woodland in autumn. Remains an occasional visitor to the park.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Status: Occasional visitor

First recorded on the lake in July 2010. These birds were juveniles, probably passing through to feed. Another bird was seen on the lake in September 2011.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

1 bird frequent at the lake most months of the year. No evidence of nesting (nests in colonies).

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Status: Local

Breeding recorded for the first time since 1985. The nest was located high up in a larch tree in the woodland. 3 young were successfully raised. This species continues to occur in the woodland and on the fields where evidence of kills are often found. The chief prey appears to be Wood pigeons and Blackbirds along with other small birds. The pair breeding in the park are often seen taking birds from a bird feeder in a garden adjacent to the Stratford Park.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Status: Increasing

Bred in the woodland 2010. 3 young successfully raised. The nest was located in a tall scots pine at the far end of the woodland by S.Roberts. No breeding recorded in 2011, but the species is frequent over the park most months.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Status: Declining

Kestrels have been seen hovering over the rough grass areas around the park perimeters, and are no doubt benefitting from the cessation of mowing in these areas. Despite this, and the erection of 2 nest boxes, Kestrels have not bred in the park. This is a mystery, as the habitat including Callowell field is perfect. The species is declining nationally. However, it is seen in the park most months. A dead bird (female) was found in the park in October 2011. Remains scarce.

Peregrine *Falco peregrines*

Rare visitor. One seen flying over the park August 2010. No sightings in 2011.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Status: Rare summer visitor

Recorded for the first time on August 14th 2011. Seen flying rapidly over field at dusk. (MM)

Moorhen *Gallinule chlorops*

Status: Common

Only a few pairs on the lake and river. Heavily predated by gulls during the nesting season. Numbers low probably due to a lack of suitable nesting sites.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Status: Nationally common. 1 pair breeding in park.

Only 1 pair is found on the lake. The same nest site is used each year on a peninsula of vegetation on the island. 2 broods were raised in 2011. This species is another one heavily predated by gulls who take the chicks.

Black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus*

Status: Remains a common species especially in winter.

Lesser black-backed gull *Larus fiscus*

Status: Occasional visitor

The main predator of Mallard, Coot and Moorhen chicks. 2 pairs visit the lake each spring, and are responsible for predated waterfowl chicks.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Status: Occasional visitor mainly in early summer.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Status: Common

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Status: Remains very common

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decoata*

Status: Not frequent in the park. Occasional visitor.

Cuckoo *Calculus canorus*

Very secretive and more often heard from late April to August. Recorded in 2010 / 11.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Status: Scarce

One bird was seen flying over Callowell fields in December 2010. No further records.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Status: Local summer visitor

During January 2011, the owl box constructed specifically for this bird was re-located to one of the large oak trees on the main field. The previous location above the play area was being predated by squirrels and proved unsuccessful as a nesting site.

This year (2011) a pair bred in the re-located box producing 4 owlets. The birds could be seen each evening at dusk, hunting over the fields and again early in the morning.

A second owl box will be sited in 2012.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

Status: Local resident

The park has 1 pair of Tawny Owls frequenting the woodland. Evidence of activity in the nest box sited in the woodland indicates that this is probably being used as a roost site. No evidence of breeding has been observed to date, but the box will be monitored closely in the future.

Swift *Apus apus*

Status: Common summer visitor

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Status: Local resident

Kingfisher's are seen in the park throughout the year and may be seen fishing in the lake. Despite creating a natural bank along the stream to encourage the birds to nest, to date no breeding has been recorded.

Wryneck *Jynx torquata*

Status: Rare summer visitor.

One unconfirmed sighting in June 2011. Although the bird was spotted by an experienced birder, further investigation proved inconclusive.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Status: Increasing

Since 2009 this species has increased in numbers. During 2010 the large oak on the main field was again used as a nesting site, but this became covered in fungi in 2011, and no nesting occurred. Despite this, young woodpeckers were seen during summer 2011. The nest sites have been hard to locate, but we believe them to be high up in poplars in the woodland.

Great-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

Status: Increasing

Another woodpecker that has increased since 2009. Several nests were located in 2010 / 11 throughout the woodland. Remains our commonest woodpecker.

Lesser-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor*

Status: Rare

Remains very local and secretive. Only 1 sighting on August 12th 2011



Lesser-spotted woodpecker

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Status: Local

Not recorded on Callowell fields during 2010 / 11

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Status: Common summer visitor. Evidence of previous nesting in the park works compound circa 1990s. No further evidence of breeding.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Status: Remains a common summer visitor

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Status: Rather local resident

Only recorded in Callowell fields, mainly in autumn.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Status: Resident

Another species previously recorded as breeding in the park. Recorded in every month of the year but never in large numbers.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Status: Common resident

Recorded in the park mainly in autumn and winter. Remains common.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

Status: Local resident

No evidence of nesting in the past 2 years despite suitable nest sites at salmon springs. Seen occasionally flying along the Painswick stream.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Status: Remains a common resident. Nests located during 2010/ 1.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Status: Declining.

Has declined rapidly in recent years due to squirrel predation. The park supports a few pairs mainly around the shrub beds by the bowling green, where conifers are the favoured nest sites.

Blackbird *Turdus merulus*

Status: Declining.

Another species declining through squirrel predation. Despite this, large numbers of birds arrived in the park from Scandinavia during December 2010. Remains a declining species.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Status: Common winter visitor.

Huge numbers arrived during the cold winter of 2010 / 11. Remains a common winter visitor.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Status: Declining.

Once the commonest thrush in Stratford Park, this species has declined dramatically during the last 3 years. Squirrel predation of eggs is the main reason for its decline. Several nests were located in 2011, but all of these were predated.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Status: Common winter visitor.

Numbers were huge in the park during the cold winter of 2010 / 11. Remains a common winter visitor.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Status: Declining

Another once common thrush in the park, and sadly declining again through squirrel predation. 1 nest located in June 2010 by the bandstand. No records of breeding in 2011.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Status: Occasional summer visitor and resident.

Not recorded in 2010. One pair in the woodland during April – June 2011. This pair probably bred, but no nest was located.

Chiffchaff *Phyloscopus collybita*

Status: Common summer visitor and breeding migrant.

Remains common throughout the woodland between March – July.

Willow Warbler *Phyloscopus trochilus*

Status: New species for Stratford Park.

May 2011, identified first by song (MM) and spotted flying to nest. The nest was located low down in a bramble hedge in the woodland adjacent to the model railway. Not previously recorded in the park, but possibly overlooked.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Status: Increasing

Despite 2 severe winters, Goldcrests have remained stable. Their numbers are supplemented in winter by immigrant birds. Both 2010 and 2011 have been good years for this species. Though numbers have been strong, locating the nests has been difficult.

Long-tailed tit *Aegitholas hypoleuca*

Status: Regular breeding resident.

Mainly seen in winter when they join other small birds forming feeding parties in the woodland. Remains quite common.

Blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Status: Very Common.

Has benefitted from the introduction of bird boxes in the park, and is the chief occupant of nest boxes in spring.

Great tit *Parus major*

Status: Very Common.

Another species which has increased in numbers through the use of nest boxes. Is the second most common occupant of nest boxes throughout the park.

Coal tit *Periparus ater*

Status: Local resident.

Prior to 2009 this species had declined dramatically. Coal tits have been using the nest boxes, particularly at the woodland edge. In 2010 a pair nested in one of the masques on the museum railings. One pair was predated by Great-spotted woodpeckers, who took the chicks from one box. Despite this, the Coal tit has increased its numbers in the park.

Marsh tit *Poecili palustris*

Status: Rare

Only one possible sighting in the woodland March 2010 (MM). No further records.



Marsh tit

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Status: Increasing

Nuthatches have greatly increased in numbers through the introduction of nest boxes. 2009 and 2010 were exceptional years, with most of the 32mm nest boxes being used.

2011 has seen a different picture. Nuthatch numbers dropped, and the bird boxes were not used (only by Great tits). We think that the reason for this is the fixing of steel squirrel protection plates over the entrance holes. As the bird prefers to 'mud up' the entrance hole to suit its own profile, it is possible that they have been deterred by the metal plates. As an experiment, it is intended to remove some of the metal plates before the 2012 nesting season, and to see if the birds return to the boxes. The bird is found throughout the year, mainly through the arboretum and in mature trees by the orangery.

Treecreeper *Cynthia familiaris*

Status: Increasing.

Another species which is increasing in the park, despite 2 severe winters. In 2011 the birds did not use the nest boxes provided for them, but nested behind bark in the large black poplars in the woodland. Mainly found along the river side. It is particularly fond of the Dawn Redwoods in searching for food.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Status: Common breeding resident.

Remains common throughout the woodland, and seen taking acorns in autumn.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Status: Common breeding resident.

Remains very common.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Status: Common breeding resident.

The colony in the walnut tree on the main field continues to grow, with around 6 pairs nesting each year in the cavities. Elsewhere, the species is found in the woodland, and has started using some of the large bird boxes placed there.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Status: Common breeding resident.

An active rookery by the outdoor pool entrance. The second rookery on Stratford road has been deserted in 2011, possibly due to vehicular disturbance. Remains a common species.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Status: Common breeding resident.

Most of the park's large oaks provide nesting sites for this bird. Remains common.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Status: Common breeding resident and migrant.

Rarely seen in the park, but flocks occur in Callowell fields in autumn. Starlings used to nest in the elms which were once growing along the top perimeters circa 1970s. (MM)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Status: Declining.

Once a common sight in Stratford Park in and around the outdoor pool, House Sparrows are seldom seen in the park these days. They are seen in neighbouring residential developments and Callowell fields.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Status: Moderately Common breeding resident.

Remains the park's commonest finch, but numbers have fallen in recent years. In 2011 a nest was found in the wisteria on the mansion house and in a conifer by the bowling green.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Status: Declining.

The national decline of the Greenfinch is well documented due to a parasitic infection which affects the bird's ability to feed correctly. In 2011 only 4 birds have been seen, mainly around the bowling green. No evidence of breeding.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Status: Declining.

The Bullfinch has become a very scarce bird in the park and elsewhere. 1 pair was seen flying into the walled garden in June, but a search for any nests proved unsuccessful. The reasons for its decline are unknown, but once again, squirrel predation may be contributory.



Bullfinch

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Status: Rare breeding resident.

One unconfirmed sighting by a member of the public in August 2010. No further records.

Goldfinch *Cardeulis cardeulis*

Status: Common breeding resident and immigrant.

Flocks present along the top perimeter of the park during winter. Remains a relatively common species.

Wildlife to see now at Stratford Park

BIRDS: Many of the winter visitors can be found in the park this month. Fieldfare, Redwing and Siskin (all above the main field). Siskin can also be seen along the stream feeding in alders. Buzzard (over the woodland most days). Nuthatch, Coal tit, Goldcrest, Treecreeper (all in the woodland in good numbers) Long-tailed tit (feeding amongst other flocks of birds throughout the woodland). Kingfisher (regular at the lake most mornings). Great-spotted and Green woodpeckers are both showing well in the woodland now that the leaves have fallen.

MAMMALS: Roe Deer (occasionally in the far woodland by salmon springs).

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