



Hi All,

This month's newsletter is devoted to the Stratford Park bird report for 2012. The last biodiversity newsletter of 2012 is a fitting time to review and evaluate the park's wild birds, especially as it has been a season of contrasts, successes and failures both in terms of breeding and numbers. This annual review indicates a slightly downward trend for many of our common resident birds, which is a stark contrast from the two previous years. However, not all is bad in the park, as we have recorded some new species for the first time. As a green space and an area that encompasses many different habitats, it is surprising that the number of resident birds breeding in the park is not higher, and there are several common species locally that do not occur in Stratford Park, namely Starling and House Sparrow, two species which are adaptable and should be breeding here. The reasons for such a small number of wildfowl on the lake, has been well documented in the past, but even here common species like Tufted duck are absent.

Other birds such as Little owl are hanging on in the face of competition from other birds and of course, squirrel predation. Even in an area comprising 56 acres, monitoring the birds is a challenge, especially when this has to somehow be accommodated around ones' main work duties. It would therefore be an acknowledgement for me to state that this report is by no means complete, but in view of the observations and records accumulated by myself and Adrian Watts (Landscape Group Employee), it represents a good overview of the park's birds. In fact I would like to take this opportunity to thank Adrian for his assistance during the year, for his keen eyes have located nests that would otherwise be completely overlooked. As the public is becoming more and more aware of the biodiversity on its doorstep here in the park, the bird walks held through the Museum in the Park have become very popular and well attended. These events allow people to explore the wilder parts of the park and observe birds that are not generally seen closer to human proximity. A continuing nest box scheme is also helping the park's birds. Stroud District Council's policy of promoting the biodiversity of Stratford Park and supporting conservation work is pivotal to its continued success as an important green space for wildlife. Finally, I would like to thank Stroud District Council's public spaces department for continued support and of course the Landscape Group for their support and contributions during the year. It just remains once again, for me to wish everyone who works with me and who are associated with the park, a very happy Christmas and New Year.

Mike



A REVIEW OF THE YEAR

In stark comparison to the three previous years, 2012 has seen some downward trends in the movements and breeding status of the Park's resident birds. The year started mild compared to the extremely cold winters of the previous three years, and this was indicative of the smaller number of wintering Redwing and Fieldfare visiting the Park. Numbers were well down during January and February, with the last birds leaving in late February. Those that returned during the autumn did so in even smaller numbers. A very wet spring resulted in poor pollination of many trees and this in turn produced few berries. The cold northerly weather stream from Scandinavia did not reach the UK in November, bringing fewer birds to our shores. The Holly and Yew berry crop this winter is almost non-existent, and would therefore not support a wave of these Thrushes from their Scandinavian breeding grounds. The result is a 75% drop in numbers in the Park during December 2012. Other winter visiting species such as Siskin has

also not been recorded in the Park this year. The nesting season started late in the Park due to the very wet weather. Many of the smaller birds like Blue, Coal and Great tit which rely on the emergence of Lepidoptera larvae, particularly winter moth *Operopherta brumata*, suffered badly, as the wet and cold weather killed many caterpillars. As a result of this, many of our hole - nesting species, and those using nest boxes nested a month later than normal. Unfortunately, this then coincided with a brief hot spell in June which led to high nestling mortalities. Many young chicks died of dehydration in south facing boxes. In normal circumstances these chicks would have been almost fully fledged and able to withstand increases in temperature. This is just another example of how adverse and extreme weather patterns can have a detrimental effect on the food chain. Nuthatch also had a poor nesting season with only two recorded nest boxes being used. As mentioned last year, the addition of squirrel plates to the entrance holes of the bird boxes is not encouraging Nuthatches to use them. These protection plates appear to have no affect on other species.

With such a wet spring, other birds also suffered especially Blackbird and Song Thrush, both of which were heavily predated by squirrels. Nests of both these species were down on previous years. One Goldcrest nest was located in the woodland, but this in turn was predated by squirrels. Treecreeper enjoyed a good year, and several nests were located in the Park.

The wet weather continued into the summer with higher than average rainfall extending through June and July. Many species failed to produce second broods, and even Mallards failed to produce strong clutches of eggs. In May and June the number of summer visiting warblers was small, with only a few Chiffchaffs singing in the woodland. No Blackcap was recorded this summer. Other normally common summer visitors like Swallow, House Martin and Swift were all scarce. Breeding successes were few, but Green Woodpecker once again nested in the far oak tree on the main field producing a brood of 4 young birds. This year, Great-spotted woodpecker nests were difficult to locate, but nesting was observed in two trees by the stream.

It was a mixed year for birds of prey in the Park. Our Little owls arriving again in March, attempted to use the purpose made owl box on the main field, but that box was taken over by squirrels.

Another attempt to nest in the adjacent Walnut tree was thwarted by Jackdaws. However, the owls remained throughout the summer and autumn, and for the first year have extended their stay into December. Sparrowhawk has been present in the park throughout the year. We know that one pair is using the park within their hunting range, and although the birds nested successfully in 2011 no nest was located this year. Both Adrian Watts and my self scoured the woodland and the arboretum for signs of nesting, but were unable to locate any nests. There is every possibility that these may have been overlooked as the canopy in the coniferous part of the woodland is very dense in summer. Common Buzzard has been recorded in every month, but again did not nest in the park for the second year running. Tawny owl remains a mystery. We know that Tawny Owls are present in the woodland as their calls can be heard in the autumn, yet despite placing a special nest box for them, they remain absent as a breeding species. Occasionally pellets are found beneath roosting trees, especially in the winter. Another bird of prey which is rare in the park is Kestrel. A species which has declined nationally, a few birds are seen hunting over the fields in summer, but this is another species which has excellent habitat and a supply of nesting boxes placed in key locations that is not breeding in the park.



The Stratford Park Sparrowhawk (male) with kill (Photo by Sharon Tucker)

The paucity of Stratford Park wildfowl species has been documented in the past and is the subject of ongoing debate to restore biodiversity to the lake. In the absence of this, only adaptable species such as Mallard, Moorhen and Coot will continue to thrive there. These species rely heavily on the public feeding them. A freshwater space such as this should be supporting many more species of wildfowl, and as mentioned in previous biodiversity newsletters, the lake pre-1980 supported Tufted duck, Pochard, Teal, Wigeon (in winter), Little Grebe and occasionally Great-crested Grebe. The resident pair of Mute Swans produced 4 cygnets this year of which one was found dead in the lake about 1 week after hatching. The remaining 3 juvenile birds are still on the lake in December, but will be driven away by the adult birds in due course. Since my Stratford Park bird report 2009, a further 8 species have been added to the list, most notably Firecrest on 28th December 2011. We are doing everything we can to help the park's birds flourish, from making positive changes to habitats, to creating new ones. We are increasing the number of bird boxes in the park, providing nesting material for wildfowl and helping birds of prey, but inevitably continuing extremes of weather will be the biggest influence to the status of wild birds in Stratford Park and beyond. Add to this the continuing threat from an increasing squirrel population, and it is easy to see that birds have an uphill struggle. It is clear to see from the ongoing monitoring of the bird population that Stratford Park is a valuable and important enclave for wild birds within the Stroud district, accommodating within its diversity of habitats, a strong number of woodland and parkland species. With continued development of the woodland, and subtle changes to other habitats within the park, all looks promising for our birds, though a succession of normal and balanced weather over the coming years would greatly accelerate any upward trends.

Mike McCrea (Contract Supervisor the Landscape Group Stratford Park) December 2012

SYSTEMATIC LIST 2012



Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* (resident)

1 pair resident on the lake. 4 cygnets were produced in April. 1 cygnet died about one week after hatching. 3 juvenile birds remain on the lake. Nesting is always on the island where nesting material is provided by Landscape Group staff in March.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* (occasional resident)

One pair was recorded on the lake in April. No further records for 2012.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (common breeding resident)

Present throughout the year and remains a common species on the lake. Breeding was down in 2012 with birds producing smaller broods than in previous years. A brood of 8 ducklings hatched on August 8th (a late date). Continues to be the most abundant species of wildfowl on the lake.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* (Occasional resident)

A species which was previously common on the lake pre-1980. A few pairs most years. 1 pair on the lake during August.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (scarce resident)

Recorded in 2011. No records for 2012.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* (occasional resident)

Recorded in adjacent Callowell fields in 2012. Occasionally in the Beech woodland. Common throughout the Stroud district and only occasionally recorded in Stratford Park.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* (scarce resident)

1 bird sighted in Callowell fields on 22nd May 2012. A new species for the park.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (resident)

1 bird is regularly sighted on the lake especially during the summer.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* (local resident)

The park supports one regular pair of Sparrowhawks. The pair bred successfully in 2011, and although no nest was located in 2012, one young bird was heard calling in the woodland during August indicating that the birds nested somewhere in the park. Kills are found regularly, especially in the woodland and by the lake. The chief prey is wood pigeon and feral pigeon, the latter taken from a small flock which feeds by the lake. Songbirds such as Blackbird and Song thrush are also taken in the park, and 2 Black-headed gull have also been noted as a prey species. The birds are seen most days throughout the year, and are known to take small birds from a garden bird feeder within 300 yards of the park. (see photo above).

Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (resident)

Seen throughout the year over the woodland. Bred in the park 2010. No records of breeding in 2012.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (local resident)

A species which should be breeding in the park, as the surrounding green corridors provide suitable hunting ground, and the oak trees on the main field have been supplied with nest boxes. However, Kestrel remains a scarce visitor to the park. Solitary birds are normally seen hunting in the park on the top fields during the summer months.

Pergegrine *Falco peregrinus* (rare visitor)

1 bird seen flying high over the park on June 20th 2012. No further records.

Moorhen *Gallinule chlorops* (resident)

Although relatively common on the rivers and lakes throughout the Stroud district, a lack of suitable vegetation and nesting cover around the lake has reduced the birds to 1 to 3 pairs. Most that nest are heavily predated by gulls and squirrels. No breeding was recorded in 2012.

Coot *Fulica atra* (resident)

The lake supports one pair of birds throughout the year, though these leave the lake during the winter for other feeding grounds. Nesting is always on a small peninsula of vegetation on the island. In 2012 Landscape Group staff built a floating nest raft which was placed by the island and used successfully in May.

Black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus* (common resident)

The commonest gull present in the park. Numbers reduce during the breeding season, but large flocks converge on the lake and top field during autumn and winter.

Lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus* (frequent visitor)

Present most months, especially in April and May where it frequently takes Moorhen and Coot chicks. In winter, joins other flocks of gulls on the main fields.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* (occasional visitor)

A few birds recorded on the lake each year. Another gull which predares young Moorhen and Coot chicks.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* (common resident)

A small flock are present throughout the year by the lake. These birds are often taken by sparrowhawk.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* (Common resident)

Remains very common in the park. Nests observed by the bowling green and along the top perimeter. Wood pigeon is the main prey of sparrowhawk in the park.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas* (rare visitor)

Recorded in 2012. No further records for 2012.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocta* (resident)

Surprisingly absent from the park, though recorded in gardens adjacent to Stratford Park.

Cuckoo *Calculus canorus* (summer visitor)

Heard most days during May and June, though not often seen.

Little Owl *Athene noctua* (local resident)

This mercurial little bird is the jewel of the park in ornithological terms. Its movements are sporadic and unpredictable as is its breeding pattern. The park supports one resident pair which arrives during March. Nest boxes placed on the top field have been partly successful and in 2011, the owls raised 4 young birds. With a sparsity of natural nesting sites, Little owls are competing with Jackdaws and squirrels for suitable nesting holes, and unfortunately the birds did not produce young in 2012. At the time of writing (December), it appears that the owls are over-wintering in the park, which is unusual. The owls normally leave the park in the autumn, returning each spring. It is pleasing to see that these resilient little owls are holding out in the park. Park staff is constructing 2 more owl boxes which will be placed in February 2013. This should increase the number of nesting sites for this species.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* (local resident)

The Tawny owl has a long history as a resident bird in Stratford Park, and pre-1980s nested regularly. As the habitat is ideal for Tawny Owls in the park, it is another mystery why this species is not breeding here. I feel that this is attributed to the lack of mature hollow trees. Possible disturbance from the car park and outdoor sports pitch may also be a factor. Tawny owls are sometimes heard calling from the woodland in the autumn, but never sighted. The purpose made nest box placed in the beech woodland is still un-occupied, but pellets are occasionally found at the base of the tree indicating that the owls may be roosting in the box.

Swift *Apus apus* (regular summer visitor)

Swift numbers were well down in 2012. This was no doubt due to the very wet spring. Movements into the park and district were sporadic in May and June.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (resident)

Recorded in every month. Birds are often seen fishing from the anglers' platforms. No evidence of breeding.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* (resident)

The park supports one regular pair. The birds once again used the far oak tree on the main field to produce a brood of 3 young birds. Green woodpeckers are often seen feeding around the play area and on the wildflower bank. The birds are also visiting a garden adjacent to the park.

Great-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus major* (resident)

A regular species in the park, but not as abundant as previous years. Nesting was recorded in 2 locations, both in the woodland. Remains the commonest woodpecker in the park.

Lesser-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor* (rare resident)

Not recorded since 2009. Remains a rare visitor to the park.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (local resident)

No records for 2012.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (summer visitor)

Numbers were down on previous years, but seen regularly between May and September.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum* (summer visitor)

As with the previous species, numbers were down on previous years.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* (passage migrant and summer breeder)

Seen briefly in flight in Callowell fields 23rd June 2012. No other records.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (resident)

Present along the stream and on the lake most months. No evidence of breeding.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* (common resident and passage migrant)

Has increased in numbers. Birds are augmented by immigrants from the continent in winter. In the park, pied wagtails frequent the areas of grass by the play area where natural springs provide areas for foraging. Remains the commonest wagtail in the park, recorded in every month, but commonest in winter.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* (local resident)

Although previously regular on the Painswick stream, there have been no sightings of Dipper in the park during 2012. This is probably due to increased rain and higher water levels along the stream where Dippers previously used for feeding. Is present on most of the Frome and its tributaries, especially between Stroud and Cainscross.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (common resident)

Despite 2 severe winters, wren populations in the park have remained stable. Many nests were located in 2012, the most interesting being in the apex of the bandstand during May. Remains a common species.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (common breeding resident)

Although a relatively common species, Dunnocks are restricted in the park, to the shrub areas around the Bowling Green, where the conifer hedges provide good roosting and nesting sites. The species is seldom seen elsewhere in the park.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula* (Common breeding resident and passage migrant)

Robins have increased in the park numbering around 6 – 8 pairs. They are found throughout the park but mainly around the composting area where regular supply of worms can be found, and along the hedges adjacent to the putting green. No nests were located in 2012, but young birds were seen around the museum in June.

Blackbird *Turdus meruus* (Common breeding resident)

Remains common in the park, but nests are heavily predated by squirrels during the nesting season.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* (winter visitor)

The first birds arrived late in 2012 (mid November). Numbers from the continent are lower this year, but Fieldfares are outnumbering Redwing this year in the park. Birds are mainly found on the top fields and adjacent Callowell fields.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* (breeding resident)

A declining species in the park primarily due to squirrel predation. Squirrels were observed taking eggs from several nests in April and May. Previously abundant in the park pre-1980s, where nests could be found in almost every shrub in the park.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* (local breeding resident)

Another species which is declining in the park due to squirrel predation. No records of breeding in 2012 and absent for most of the year. 2 pairs observed during November and December.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (summer visitor and occasional winter resident)

Previously recorded in 2011. No records for 2012.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (Common summer visitor)

Normally a common summer visitor, but 2012 saw very few in the woodland.

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

This species appears to be increasing in the park. Nests were located this summer, and during November and December, large feeding flocks have been seen mixing with other birds in the trees by the staff office block and along the top perimeters of the park.

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* (Common breeding resident)

Despite being rated as a common species 2012 proved a disastrous season for breeding due to the wet and cold spring. Although many of the park's nest boxes were used by Blue tits, many broods failed to survive. Numbers of adult birds have been unusually low during the autumn and winter.

Great Tit *Parus major* (common breeding resident)

Another species which has had a poor breeding season due to the wet and cold spring. As with the Blue tit, numbers have been unusually low in the park throughout the year, and birds normally common in autumn, have been very scarce.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater* (local breeding resident)

Remains the scarcest of the 3 4 tits found in the park. Nesting was observed in the woodland and in one nest box. Remains a local species.

Marsh Tit *Poecili palustris* (rare resident)

No further records for 2012.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* (local breeding resident)

After 3 previous successful years, nuthatch numbers have tumbled again. Since installing metal squirrel protection plates to the nest boxes, Nuthatches have stopped using those boxes. As the species likes to 'mud up' the entrance of the nest hole, it would appear that the metal plates are not suitable in providing suitable adhesion for the mud used. Nuthatches have used boxes in the woodland this year, which do not have the plates installed, so it is intended to remove plates from all of the 32mm boxes before nest spring. These plates do not appear to make any difference to other hole nesting species.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* *Certhia familiaris* (breeding resident)

Treecreepers have had a good year in the park, being recorded in every month. Evidence of nesting has been found in the arboretum (*cupressidae*) and in the woodland. Numbers peaked during May and June indicating a good breeding season.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius* (Fairly common resident)

Seen in most months, and is observed frequently taking acorns from the top fields. No evidence of breeding this year, but remains a frequent species.

Magpie *Pica pica* (common breeding resident)

Remains common.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* (Common breeding resident)

An adaptable species, the park supports a strong colony of Jackdaws which nest mainly in the walnut tree on the main fields. They are also nesting in old woodpecker holes in the woodland. Their presence in the walnut tree, although welcome, is reducing the amount of nesting sites for Little owl which previously nested in the walnut tree.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* (Common breeding resident)

The main rookery in the park is still in trees by the outdoor pool entrance. Remains very common.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* (Common breeding resident)



Treecreeper by Steve Roberts

Remains a common species nesting in the oaks on the main fields.

Raven *Corvus corax* (occasional visitor)

The surprise of the year in the bird calendar has been the arrival of Ravens in the park. Around 8 birds arrived in early September, and have remained in the park mainly in the tall wellingtonias in the arboretum. This is a bird of more open and rugged habitat therefore it is a surprise to see it taking residence in a sub-urban park. The birds can be seen most days flying and calling over the park where they are frequently mobbed by other crows and Jackdaws.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (common resident)

Forms flocks on Callowell fields, but is absent from the park. Pre-1980s was a breeding species, nesting in the elm trees along the top perimeter of the park.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (resident)

Another species which was once common in the park. Frequent in outlying areas but not recorded in the park for many years.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* (Common breeding resident)

Remains a common species in the park.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (resident breeding resident)

A relatively common finch, but still restricted to shrub areas around the bowling green where thick conifers provide nesting sites.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (fairly common breeding resident)

Seen in most months, especially on the wildflower bank where teasels grow. Forms medium sized flocks in winter, and feeds amongst hawthorns on the top fields.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* (winter visitor)

Callowell fields 5th January 2012. 4 birds feeding amongst Chaffinches.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus* (winter visitor)

No records for 2012. The cold winters of 2009 / 10 saw large numbers converge on the park. The park has plenty of alder trees, the species' main food source, and in good years, the birds are frequent along the top perimeter of the park.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (scarce breeding resident)

Sightings of Bullfinch are scarce in the park. Once a common breeding species, only one pair remains in the park. The pair is frequently sighted in the walled garden, where it is assumed they are nesting.



Bullfinches at a bird feeder (photo: Doreen Frusher)

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (scarce resident)

3 birds observed by the lake on 5th May. An unusual record given the habitat, but represents a new species for the park.

EVENTS: Bird walk Sunday 6th January 2013 2.00pm (Meet at the Museum in the Park)

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LINKS:

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www.bto.org www.theaes.org

