



Stratford Park Bird Report

2019

Mike McCrea (Contract Supervisor)



(Common Buzzard in Stratford Park Photo: Mike McCrea)

Hi All,

This month's Biodiversity Newsletter features a Stratford Park Bird Report for 2019.

Mike



INTRODUCTION



Birds globally are facing increasing challenges; the main drivers being Climate change, agricultural management, hydrological change, urbanisation and invasive non-native species. These factors in the last thirty years have caused the world's bird populations to decline by 40%. Birds are an indicator species – their presence (or lack thereof) is a sign of the good health (or otherwise) of an ecosystem. The recently published *Wild Bird Populations in the UK 1970 – 2018* report shows that many of our familiar birds are still declining, with several doing so at a worrying rate. This downward trend is happening globally in a wide range of habitats.

Within the context of global bird distribution, Stratford Park is but a microcosm within the whole picture but as important as any other habitat for wild birds, for it is this park, like many others throughout the UK, which provides important habitats for our birds. Within a snapshot of 30 years the park has lost at least six species of birds, several of which were previously common – bullfinch and spotted flycatcher being the most notable. Others such as Mistle thrush and song thrush have declined at an alarming rate.

During the last 10 years we have helped the recovery of many of the park's bird species through the introduction of nest boxes and creating new habitats. The Stratford Park Biodiversity & Landscape Action Plan (2011) has been the catalyst for biodiversity development and a working tool which we have used to identify key areas throughout the park that require conservation measures for the benefit of birds and other animals. In 2020 therefore, birds in Stratford Park are in a better place than they were in 2008. Sadly, squirrel predation is still the primary reason for the decline in many open nesting birds in Stratford Park, but this is also compounded by the huge weather fluctuations we are now experiencing, the latter accounting, for a massive decline in blue tit and great tit numbers during the last 5 years.

Annual nest box inspections in February 2019 showed a marked increase in mortality of nestlings and un-hatched eggs. Habitat change and loss remains a secondary factor and where areas have been lost to horticultural or amenity development, new habitats have been created in other parts of the park to mitigate this.

During the past 8 years almost 2000 trees have been planted on the far fields creating more nesting habitat for birds. Tawny owls now breed annually in our purpose made owl boxes in the far beech wood. Sadly, our little owls have not bred in the park's owl boxes for 3 years, again down to squirrels using the boxes. The park is home to the largest jackdaw roost in the district with thousands of birds converging every evening at dusk, and ravens have now become established in the park. The presence of water birds on the lake remains stagnant with no new species recorded. The lake is going through a very long transition which hopefully, over time, will encourage other ducks and water birds to visit. Tufted duck and Mandarin ducks occur infrequently.

As we enter 2020 it will be a pivotal year for biodiversity development and monitoring in Stratford Park as our present contract comes to an end in December, and ongoing monitoring is, at present, uncertain.

Since 2008 we have collated a huge repository of information about the park's birds and other wildlife, much of which is captured in the monthly newsletters. During this time I have generally seen an upward trend in bird populations. Nuthatches in particular have benefited from the nest box scheme, and we have been able to show this to the public during our guided bird walks. Also through these guided walks many more children are being

introduced to the wonderful world of birds and nature. Our remit to date has been to discover, record and educate; this needs to continue if birds are to thrive in Stratford Park. The woodland must continue to be managed and green corridors extended. When I took on this role in 2009 the woodland had become overgrown, the paths inaccessible and the deciduous woodland was too overcrowded. Birds had lost natural nest sites due to the removal of dead trees, and a lack of natural nesting cavities caused hole-nesting birds to plummet in numbers. In 10 years, thanks to sympathetic management and a proactive client in SDC, we have reversed these declines. Stratford Park has now become an important green space within the district to see birds. The Stratford Park Management Group has also been instrumental in promoting biodiversity development and helping to implement change in Stratford Park, whether through providing new interpretation or overseeing projects such as the lake restoration and new planting.

If idverde continues to manage the park in 2021 and thereafter, or indeed a new contractor, there is still much to do. I would like to see a small bird guide produced in similar format to the recently produced tree guide, and camera boxes that can transmit images of nesting birds. There is also lots more habitat management to be done, especially in the beech woodland, if we are to bring more wildfowl to the lake, reed beds need to be planted and more aquatic plants introduced. All of these can be achieved under the right park management. We need to continue to bring the park's birdlife to the public through continued guided bird walks and other events.

Whatever the future holds for birds in Stratford Park, I can feel satisfied that both myself, the staff and the company have made a significant contribution to the conservation and promotion of wild birds in Stratford Park during the last 10 years.

Mike McCrea (Contract Supervisor December 2019)

2019 A year in review

2019 was a year of extremes: record-breaking heat and rain, along with notable spells of cold and windy weather have all been prominent. January got off to a cold start with the coldest January night for seven years recorded on 31st January. During this month there was a large influx of redwings and fieldfares to the park, especially around the play areas and oaks.



(Redwing on the main field Photo; Mike McCrea)

There also occurred this month an influx of pied wagtails which remained on the main fields throughout January.

February will be remembered for record breaking temperatures despite starting with snow and freezing temperatures. On 26th February temperatures exceeded 19 degrees in Stratford Park and in London temperatures reached a balmy 20 degrees, making this the warmest February on record. February also produced large numbers of blackbirds in the park, possibly driven down from Northern European countries. February also saw an increase in robins, again, probably immigrant birds.

March was a mild month which produced a surge in bird activity in the park along with early emergence of flora. The park experienced particularly low levels of rainfall in April with mild temperatures. Despite this, nesting activity by hole-nesting birds such as blue and great tits was unusually low.

Nuthatches showed a marked increase in April, with birds calling from many trees in the arboretum throughout the month. Several new nesting sites were also discovered including a third in the large lime tree by the bandstand. No chiffchaffs were heard calling in the woodland during April (in previous years, they have arrived mid-April). The first singing bird was heard and seen by the orangery on 2nd May.

During May, bird activity increased substantially with continuing warm weather. Great-spotted woodpecker once again used one of the cedar of Lebanon by the ornamental bridge



as a nesting site. Mistle thrush young were present in the arboretum, eight birds from two pairs, but song thrush was absent.

By June, bird activity had reduced but some species such as robin and blackbird were producing second broods of young. Surprisingly this month and the preceding two months, saw very few mallard ducklings on the lake. Only one brood of eight ducklings was recorded for the spring and early summer compared with record breaking broods the previous year. In one box during April a mammoth 18 mallard eggs was recorded, but only a few of these hatched. Green woodpeckers also bred in June at two locations. In June treecreepers nested in the giant sequoia next to the orangery.

July will be remembered for the hottest day on record ever recorded in the UK with a maximum temperature of 38.7 degrees at Cambridge on 26th July. The temperature in the park that day was 32 degrees. With such hot temperatures bird activity was very low during July. The exceptionally high temperatures gripped large parts of central and Western Europe, with Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands breaking national temperature records. These European temperatures were influential to the arrival of summer migrant birds to the UK and this was reflected in the park by the lack of warblers in the woodland including blackcap and willow warbler, both previously recorded in 2018.

The weather remained hot throughout August with intermittent thunder storms. Bird activity was again, very quiet. Autumn was predominantly wet, but ravens arrived in September and took up residency in the arboretum throughout the winter.

During September and October large flocks of black-backed gulls converged on the main fields and lake. No significant movement of birds was seen in the park during autumn and with mild and wet weather prevailing throughout October and November, few redwings or fieldfares were arriving. In contrast to the previous three years, these did not start arriving until early December and in very small numbers. With the first 'cold' temperatures in December bird activity was high, with foraging flocks of long-tailed tits and nuthatches seen throughout the woodland.

Despite a mixed year for birds in Stratford Park, there was some highs; tawny owls once again nested in the woodland in one of the owl boxes and sparrowhawk nested again after an absence of six years. Linnet was again recorded in the green corridors although no active nests were found. Kingfisher and dipper can still be seen on the stream running through the woodland.

There is still more scope to introduce more nest boxes, especially for birds of prey and this is something we will revisit during 2020. The woodland in spring and summer remains relatively under-recorded due to increasing scrub, vegetation and a thick canopy and closer observation here will, I am sure, reveal more birds. In the meantime, birds are capitalizing on the number of nest boxes in the park and the increase in new habitat. The species recorded in this report do not represent a complete record of the bird fauna of Stratford Park due to time constraints in collating the data, but does represent a good snapshot of what we have here and where it can be seen.

SYSTEMATIC LIST 2019

Mute swan *Cygnus olor* (resident)

Since the last bird report in 2016 the park's resident swans have been subjected to a great deal of public attention due to continued egg theft and possibly, natural predation. During 2018 – 2019 the nest of our pair of swans has been repeatedly attacked by, we think, egg thieves, targeting the eggs to hatch themselves. Clutches of six eggs in both 2018 and 2019 were taken precisely one to two weeks prior to hatching which indicates planned and controlled egg theft. The 2018 brood was particularly upsetting as the female swan had laid early that year and was hit by severe snow during the 'Beast from the East' which saw her trying to incubate her eggs in freezing conditions (below).



(Swan incubating eggs during the 'Beast from the East' Photo: Shaun Burnham)

Remarkably, five of the six eggs eventually hatched but three of the cygnets were lost through natural predation and in one case, drowning over the weir. The remaining cygnet reached the juvenile stage but sadly, in August that year, was killed by a dog.

In 2019 nesting material was once again placed on the island by staff and the swans produced another six eggs. These were monitored closely but were again, stolen about a week prior to hatching. This caused much anger with the general public, so much so that SDC engaged its Biodiversity Officer and local police to assess the nesting site. Despite the loss of eggs the female produced a second single cygnet in early June. By then, CCTV cameras had been installed on the island (the regular nesting site) but no intervention or disturbance was recorded. The single cygnet has, at the time of writing, reached maturity

and will be re-located in February or March. Some protection has been planted on the island and SDC will again be monitoring the nest this spring.

Mandarin duck *Aix galericulata* (occasional visitor)

One, sometimes two pairs, visit the lake throughout the year, mainly in late summer and autumn.



(Mandarin Duck Photo: Shaun Burnham)

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (resident)

The most common species of wildfowl on the lake, 2019 was a poor year for breeding with only two broods of ducklings recorded. Duckling predation is high in spring, usually by gulls. Duck boxes placed on the island and along the stream have proved popular with this species.

Tufted duck *Athya fuligula* (occasional visitor)

A pair can be seen on the lake most months.

Shelduck *Tadoma tadoma* (scarce visitor)

No further records since 2013.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* (occasional resident)

Frequently seen in the adjacent fields and in the woodland. The species has benefitted from the increase and improvements to the park's green corridors which now, in places, provide dense cover.

Red-legged partridge *Alectoris rufa* (local resident)

Birds are often seen in adjacent Callowell fields but rarely venture into the park. Single birds are occasionally seen on the main field along the northern perimeter.

Grey heron *Ardea cinerea* (Regular visitor)

One bird is on the lake most days, occasionally other birds will be present, often perching high up in the adjacent cedar trees.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* (local resident)

Frequent in the woodland throughout the year. Has previously bred (2013). Bred in 2019 (first since 2013), young sighted August 2019 in woodland. The species will often take feral pigeons in the park that gather by the stream. Often seen in flight at high altitude over the park. Female seen more frequently than male, juvenile bird sighted by woodland January 2019 (below)



(Juvenile Sparrowhawk January 2019 Photo: Mike McCrea)

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (frequent resident)

No evidence of nesting since 2010 but is seen most days soaring over the park on thermals, particularly in summer. During 2018 birds started moving into the arboretum to capitalize on discarded food from the public. Birds became quite bold and afforded good opportunities for photos. Nesting sites are known within a two-mile radius of Stratford Park. Within Stratford Park, birds are often seen perched on the perimeter fencing of the outdoor sports pitch.



(Common buzzard in Stratford Park March 2018 Photo: Mike McCrea)

Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (scarce visitor)

Although this species has continued to extend its range in the UK, only occasional birds are seen passing over the park. Last sighting 21st June 2019 flying in North- Easterly direction.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (scarce visitor)

This species has experienced a significant decline throughout the UK in recent years. Only one male was seen 6th April 2019 hovering over the main field. Pre-1990 the park supported one resident pair which nested in the far oak. Boxes have been placed to attract kestrels but to date, have not been used.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* (rare visitor)

No further sightings since 2017.

Moorhen *Gallinule chlorops* (resident)

The lake only supports two pairs of moorhens, yet another indicator of its poor condition. The birds nest each year on the island and along the fishermen's causeway where some reeds grow adjacent to the stream. Pre-1980 around twenty pairs frequented the lake.

Coot *Fulica atra* (resident)

Only one pair present on the lake and these nest on the island, usually on small peninsula of vegetation.

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

The commonest of our resident gulls occurring in large flocks on the main field during autumn and winter and possibly supplemented by immigrant birds from Europe. They converge on the lake during early spring before moving to coastal areas to breed.

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

Occurs in the spring, usually in April to coincide with the hatching of mallard ducklings which it predated, often plucking these from the water.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* (occasional visitor)

Another gull which predated mallard ducklings. A few can be seen in spring perched on the angler's causeway.

Feral pigeon *Columba livia* (common resident)

There is a resident flock found in trees adjacent to the stream and lake numbering 60 – 80 birds. Occasionally taken by sparrowhawks.

Wood pigeon *Columba palumbus* (common resident)

Remains very common throughout the park and nests mainly in the arboretum.

Stock dove *Columba oenas* (local visitor)

Only a few pairs seen during summer 2019, with one pair nesting in the oak adjacent to the bore hole. This site was previously used by jackdaws. Often seen in alders by the woodland stream.



Collared dove *Streopelia decaocta* (resident)

Although a common species throughout the district, collared doves are absent from the park.

Cuckoo *Calculus canorus* (summer visitor)

May be heard from May but seldom seen.

Little owl *Athene noctua* (local resident)

This beautiful little bird has sadly disappeared from the park following an absence of four years. We know that the main cause is occupancy of squirrels in their purpose-made nest boxes. During every nest box inspection during the winter, squirrels have built nests in the boxes and we have physically removed them. We plan to erect two more little owl boxes this spring in the hope that they will return again. Between 2009 and 2016 the owls bred regularly in the boxes. They are found throughout the Painswick Valley.



(A little owl using one of the purpose-made nest boxes in 2016 Photo: Mike McCrea)

Tawny owl *Strix aluco* (local resident)

Our single pair of tawny owls have continued using the nest box placed in a large conifer in the far beech wood. Young owls can often be seen hopping from branch to branch near the nest box during the spring and early summer. Some pellets found near the base of the tree in 2019 revealed that the main prey is wood mouse and beetles, but the remains of frogs has also been found in pellets.

Swift *Apus apus* (regular summer visitor)

Although previously present in good numbers over the main field only a few birds were seen over the park during 2019. There has been a national decline in both swift and swallow numbers in recent years.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (local summer visitor)

Not recorded in the park during 2019. Has previously nested in the stable building in the service yard prior to the construction of the Museum in the Park in 2000.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (local resident)

Found along most of the tributaries which feed into the river Frome and can be seen on the stream running through the park. Usually only seen singly feeding on the lake. Often uses the alders along the stream to dive for fish.

Green woodpecker *Picus viridis* (resident)

The park still supports two pairs of birds which still use the same nest sites each year, the oak on the far field and the black poplar by the stream. Young birds are a familiar sight in summer on the main field and the birch bank opposite the play area. The main diet is ants which they take from ant hills on the wildflower bank adjacent to the outdoor sports pitch.

Great-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus major* (resident)

This woodpecker has increased in numbers since 2016 and has moved into the arboretum to nest. Formerly, the main nest sites were in black poplars along the Painswick stream and in various decayed trees within the woodland. In recent years it has bred in the cedars. Active nest holes can be seen in the large Atlas cedar adjacent to the ornamental bridge. This nest site has produced several broods between 2016 and 2019.

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

No further records since 20th May 2015.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (local resident)

No further records.

Meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis* (passage migrant and partial resident)

Two birds seen along the green corridors 25.05.2019. Occurs on local Edge Common.

Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (resident)

Seen regularly on the lake and along the Painswick stream. Nests over the other side of the A46 road at Salmon Springs. No evidence of nesting in the park post 1976. During the 70s the birds nested in ivy covered wall cavities in the Salmon Springs Bridge until renovations in the 1980s.

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

This species has increased during recent years possibly due to climate change. The park has seen large fluctuations throughout the autumn and winter with large flocks seen feeding on the main field and grass areas around the play area. In winter the plumage is variable and two geographical sub-species exist. Autumn 2019 saw many birds in the park.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* (resident)

Dippers are found on most of the tributaries throughout the district and along the River Frome. Single birds are sometimes seen flying over the stream flowing through the park, but they are more frequent upstream towards Painswick where water is shallower and flows much faster. Here, they nest regularly in old walls and weirs. Dippers have nested in the park during the 1970s at Salmon Springs, but as with the grey wagtail, nest sites were lost when the bridge was reinforced in the 1980s.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (common resident)

Remains a common species nesting throughout the park, but particularly in ivy covered trees in the woodland. Birds nest in the service yard compost bays each year.

Robin *Erithacus rebecula* (common resident)

One of the most abundant birds in the park nesting in a wide variety of situations. Robins in the park have become very tame, often taking worms and grubs from the ground when staff are weeding. Quite often birds will take food from the hand. They are most common around the bowling green, Sensory Garden and Leisure Centre where horticultural activity is more frequent. Conifers by the bowling green are a common nesting site.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (common resident)

A common species found mainly around the Bowling Green where it nests in the dense conifer hedges. Unassuming and often overlooked.

Blackbird *Turdus merulus* (reasonably common resident and passage migrant)

It is easy to feel complacent about the presence of the familiar blackbird, however, numbers have dropped significantly in the past decade and Stratford Park is no exception. During the 1970s I could locate at least 50 nests on any April day, nowadays I am lucky to find 5. Squirrel predation is the primary reason for its decline in the park, and many nests are

predated each year. In winter our population is supplemented by birds arriving from Northern Europe, and in some years 'notably the Beast from the East 2018' large influxes were recorded.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* (common winter visitor)

Usually arrives in good numbers from October but this is determined by continental weather. In harsh Scandinavian winters, Fieldfares will arrive in huge numbers. The best places to see them are feeding on mistletoe berries in the huge poplar trees by the Model Railway and also throughout the green corridors where they will eat hawthorn berries.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus* (Common winter visitor)

During 2018 and the 'Beast from the East' Redwings arrived in huge numbers and could be seen close-up feeding around the play area and car parks. They are often seen in the arboretum feeding on winter berries and especially holly berries.

Song thrush *Turdus philomelos* (scarce resident)

Song thrushes continue to decline dramatically not only in Stratford Park but elsewhere throughout the UK. This is another species where, in the 1970s, on any April day, I could locate 20 nests. In 2019 only 1 active nest was found in the woodland. Another species being impacted by squirrel predation, it remains very scarce in the park.



(Song thrush nest with eggs in the woodland Photo: Mike McCrea)

Mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus* (local breeding resident)

Mistle thrushes are holding their ground in the park and I am finding more and more nests each year. Although not a common bird here, up to four pairs are present. They can be seen

in the summer on the main fields when the turf is short. Here they are seen taking worms. Elsewhere in the park, the arboretum is their main nesting habitat, often building their nests high in the cedars. These nests are often given away by pieces of plastic and paper used to build the nest.

Pied flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Only one record since 17.05.2016, a female spotted by the orangery on 23.05.2019. No further records.



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

Only one pair seen in the woodland in May and June 2019.

Garden warbler *Sylvia borin* (rare summer visitor)

No further records since 03.06.2014.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (summer visitor)

Absent or possibly overlooked during 2019. Chiffchaffs are seen and heard in the woodland most years.

Willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* (scarce summer visitor)

No further records since June 2016.

Long-tailed tit *Aegitholas hypoleuca* (fairly common resident)

Remains a common species especially in winter when it forms large flocks and can be seen flying from tree to tree, often along with other birds such as chaffinches.

Blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* (resident)

Blue tit numbers plunged dramatically during 2018 and 2019 due to fluctuating extremes of weather and cold wet springs. Nest box inspections revealed high mortality rates for chicks and many boxes contained un-hatched eggs. The adult birds have also been scarce. This is a national decline reflected heavily in the park. It is hoped that normal spring weather will prevail in 2020 allowing blue tits to re-establish healthy numbers.

Great tit *Parus major* (resident)

Great tits have experienced the same decline as the blue tit with equally high mortality rates for chicks. These birds, like their relatives rely on the emergence of certain Lepidoptera

caterpillars in spring, mainly winter moths the emergence of which can be affected by cold springs. As with the blue tit, adult birds have been low in numbers.

Coal tit *Periparus ater* (local resident)

Has declined but is seen regularly in the coniferous parts of the woodland especially the fringe adjacent to the arboretum. Only one nest box used in 2019 by the Model Railway.

Declining as per the two previous species.



Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (fairly common resident)

Occurs throughout the year almost exclusively in conifers. The Cedar of Lebanon trees are the best place to see the birds, especially the tree next to the lake where it is often seen feeding on the lower branches. No nests found in 2019 but probably overlooked.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* (common resident)

No other bird has benefited more from nest boxes than the nuthatch. Nuthatches continue to use the nest boxes and have thrived as a result. Numbers are now strong in the park. They also use natural nest holes like this one shown below, in the lime tree by the bandstand.



(Nuthatch nest hole in lime tree showing 'mudded' entrance hole Photo: Mike McCrea)

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* (resident)

Seen throughout the year throughout the arboretum. Nests and roosts behind bark on Giant Sequoias. One active nest located on a sequoia by the orangery June 2019. The birds can often be seen in the swamp cypress tree next to the ornamental bridge.



Jay *Garrulus glandarius* (resident)

A few birds are found in the park and can often be seen caching acorns in autumn from beneath the oaks on the main field. A vocal species in the woodland and rather secretive nester with nests hard to locate in the full woodland canopy.

Magpie *pica pica* (common resident)

A common species, nests in tall hawthorn trees throughout the green corridors and in the oaks on the main field. Not often found in the woodland or arboretum preferring the main fields and green corridors.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* (Common resident)

Social species occurring in small groups. Main nesting sites are in decayed poplars along the Painswick stream and a few alders also along the stream. Has nested in the oak adjacent to the bore hole, but has not used any of the large nest boxes in these trees.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* (common resident)

The two rookeries, one adjacent to Stratford road and next to the outdoor pool entrance have disappeared since 2015. Rooks are no longer seen in the park but still feed in adjacent Callowell Fields.

Carrion crow *Corvus corone* (common resident)

A common bird nesting solitary in oaks on the main field and high up in atlas cedars in the arboretum. Can be a pest in the park, tearing open refuse bags and raiding litter bins where it causes much mess. Intelligent opportunist bird recently taking to pecking at car windscreens and damaging car window seals.

Raven *Corvus corax* (occasional resident)

During the last two years ravens have become established in the park. Their distinctive calls can be heard in the arboretum during most months. No evidence of nesting has been found but closer observation is planned for 2020 to see if the birds are breeding in the park.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (absent from the park but common elsewhere)

Starlings are common birds and once nested in large numbers in Stratford Park. The main nest sites were in decayed alders along the Painswick stream and pre 1972 in the cavities of the large elm trees that once lined the northern perimeter of the park. Between 1972 and 1974 two major developments affected the park, the felling of all the elms due to Dutch elm disease and the construction of the new leisure centre. This, together with increased health and safety resulted in the removal of many dead trees along the Painswick stream. Effectively, all existing nest sites were lost and starlings slowly retreated to nearby housing developments and began nesting under the eaves of roofs and behind open soffits. Later in the early 80s, local authorities replaced traditional wooden eaves and soffits with new PVC systems so further starling nest sites were lost, which also affected house sparrows. Starlings are often augmented by immigrant birds from Europe during winter and these birds together with resident starlings, form huge flocks known as murmurations. During winter

months, medium sized flocks of starlings converge on adjacent Callowell fields but rarely, if ever, move over onto the park's main fields. This seems unusual behaviour from what is, a gregarious bird. Starlings are common throughout the Stroud District, even within 100 yards of the park, but never occur here. I can only put this down to the increased human presence and large number of motor vehicles, but then again, this occurs in cities where starlings commonly flock in winter.



(Common starling Photo: Mike McCrea)



(A flock of starlings in Callowell fields with the park behind Photo: Sharon Tucker)

House sparrow *Passer domesticus* (common resident locally but absent from the park)

A once common bird in the park, but disappeared during the 1980s. Although never abundant, it is found in nearby housing developments.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* (Common resident)

One of the commonest birds found in the park, nests in shrubs and trees and by the bowling green. Forms medium sized flocks in winter and is especially seen in the birch and alders by the top car park

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (reasonably common resident)

Although greenfinches are not as common as they once were in the park, a few pairs nest around the bowling green most years, mainly in the dense conifer hedges. During winter they join chaffinches, forming large flocks throughout the green corridors.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus* (winter visitor)

Numbers fluctuate each year, but siskins rarely arrive in large numbers. The main place to see them is around the main field where mature alders grow. They can also be seen in alders next to the lake.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (scarce resident)

A BAP species, bullfinches have now disappeared from the park, but previously, pre-1976, nested in young beech trees in the far woodland and also in blackthorn in the Walled Garden (circa 2011) M.McCrea. A single female was seen by the outdoor sports pitch 21.04.2019, other than this there are no further records for this species.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina* (scarce visitor)

First recorded as a nesting bird in Stratford Park in May 2017, one nest located in bramble in the green corridors. One pair present, seen in summer but not regularly. It appears that these birds are also using hedges in Callowell fields as they have been seen flying to and from the park from there.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (resident)

Seen throughout the year especially in autumn feeding on teasel heads on the wildflower bank. Pre 1980 frequently nested in box hedges at Stratford Court and box hedges in the park opposite the Museum. Forms small flocks 'charms' in autumn and winter and is then seen throughout the green corridors with other finches.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* (occasional winter visitor)

Only one possible sighting (unconfirmed) MM 05.12.2019. No further records.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulous* (winter visitor)

A small flock of birds was reported from trees adjacent to Tesco filling station Stratford road December 2018, but not by the writer. No records for 2019 although birds were seen in other parts of the county that year.

Common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (occasional visitor)

Following restoration work to the lake during August 2018, individual birds were observed feeding on the newly exposed banks. Since then single birds are seen most months.

Little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (occasional visitor)

Once a breeding species on the lake, little grebes are now only occasional visitors to the lake. One bird was seen on a bird walk on 23.05.2017 which stayed for several days. No further records.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (vagrant)

A single bird was seen on the main field on 20.10.2017. No further records.

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(Common buzzard in Stratford Park Photo: Shaun Burnham)