

Stratford Park Biodiversity newsletter

January 2017

Mike McCrea (Contract Supervisor)



ANNUAL BIRD REPORT 2016



Hi All,

This month's Biodiversity Newsletter, the first one of 2017, comprises the bird report for Stratford Park (2016), a year which has seen the park add another 4 new species to its list.

Despite this, it has been a year of mixed fortunes for our resident birds many of which continue to decline primarily due to continuing squirrel predation and unusual weather patterns. On the plus side, it has proved another successful year for owls in the park with the return of nesting little owls and also tawny owls in the woodland. We hope to continue this success in 2017 with the introduction of more owl boxes on the main fields and in the woodland. As someone who has followed the movements and fluctuations of wild birds in Stratford Park for over 35 years, and who is now placed at the park 24/7, I am perhaps, more qualified than many to assess the ornithological barometer of the park. However, this does not mean that I am definitely capturing a complete and accurate record of the bird populations, and there is much information that has no doubt slipped under my radar. Despite this, I am fortunate enough to be able to monitor and record most of the resident birds in the park on a monthly basis whether captured in the monthly newsletters, my own notes and records or sightings from others visiting the park. Having said this, I feel that the following report provides a good overview of the wild birds in



Stratford Park and should allow anyone reading this to visit the park and identify where birds are to be found. Since first introducing guided bird walks through the Museum in the Park in 2009 the interest from the public has increased considerably, and during the year when these walks are held, I am seeing more and more people both young and old, who are keen to explore and discover new birds here. If we have achieved something from this in the past 8 years it is not just a better understanding of the rich wildlife diversity in Stratford Park but more importantly, the fact that we are bringing the public into a green space and leaving them enriched with a better knowledge of its biodiversity. I am pleased to say that all of the habitat enhancements and development work we have done to date in the park through our collaboration with Stroud District Council is benefitting not only birds, but other wildlife. However, this does not completely mitigate the worrying level of squirrels in the park and the negative and debilitating impact they have on its nesting birds and other wildlife. The responsibility and future action to address this problem lies with others and does not fall within my remit. Furthermore, it does not also assign responsibility by the writer to any organisation, third party or individual. It is however, my opinion that a well balanced report needs to include both negative and positive inputs to establish the reasons why birds are increasing or declining. It is on this context that the following report is based.

Mike McCrea (Contract Supervisor) January 2017



A REVIEW OF THE YEAR

2016 was another year of contrasts regarding the weather. January started very mild with early blossom appearing on many trees throughout the park. The first severe frosts arrived between 17th and 20th January and during this time, redwings and fieldfares were moving into the arboretum in search of food. The remainder of the month continued cold and strong winds caused damage to trees, including important woodpecker nesting sites. It was during February that during routine nest box cleaning we discovered a roosting little owl in one of the owl boxes on the main field. This had followed an absence of two years, and confirmed that the owls were over wintering in the park. February continued very wet and windy, but mild. On 9th March the

park was battered by heavy winds and rain causing water levels to rise in the stream and localised flooding. The rest of the month was very wet and mild. The first chiffchaff was heard on 16th March. April was a mixed month with periods of fine, clear weather interspersed by frequent showers. As temperatures started to rise, birds became more active throughout the park and during a scheduled bird walk on the 17th the park's first pied flycatcher was recorded. By the start of May the weather had settled down nicely with warm temperatures, although rainfall was higher than average. Most of the park's birds were well into the nesting season including nuthatch, which had a very good season utilizing both natural nest holes and the bird boxes. June was predominantly a dry month with occasional heavy downpours. Blue and great tits were well down on previous years and activity at the nest boxes was also very low. The weather in July was relatively dry with average temperatures and it was during this month that we added another new bird to the park's list – linnet. A pair was present amongst bramble scrub in the green corridors for several weeks, indicating that nesting may have occurred. Due to the impenetrable growth of the bramble, I was unable to find a nest, but the birds remained throughout July and well into August. The first hot weather arrived on 18th July and temperatures soared into the 80s with high humidity, but this was short lived, with rain returning during the latter part of the month. Ravens returned to the park during July and could be heard in the arboretum. With summer well established August was mainly warm and dry with very high temperatures returning during the last two weeks. This hot weather extended into September with the warmest September night ever recorded in the UK on the 12th. Most of September remained warm with very high humidity. Surprisingly this month, some early redwings appeared in the park, which is a very early date for this winter visitor. A flock was seen by the orangery on 13th. The mild weather continued into October which was the driest and warmest on record. On the night of 31st the temperature hit 22c at 20.00hrs. November was very mild and by this time, redwings and fieldfares had arrived in numbers. Large numbers of pied wagtails were in the park on 12th and a peregrine was over the park on the 19th. A large influx of blackbirds and song thrushes was evident during the month, peaking during December. The rest of December was milder than usual with higher than average rainfall. The last week of December saw Waxwings feeding on mistletoe berries adjacent to Stratford Court which caused a big stir amongst local birdwatchers.

THE NEST BOX SCHEME

The next box scheme, initiated in 2009, has proved to be a continuing success. During 2016 a further 8 boxes were erected throughout the park bringing the total to around 86. It is planned during early 2017 to provide a second Tawny owl box in the far woodland and a third Little owl box on the main field. In any year, most of the park's nest boxes are all occupied with the main hole nesting species being blue tit, great tit, Nuthatch and to a lesser extent, Coal tit. During

2016 we placed out four open type nest boxes, two in the arboretum and two in the woodland, but these have remained unoccupied other than one box by the Museum which was used by robins. Squirrel predation remains a problem for all nest box breeding birds, and some boxes have had their lids chewed through. Placing metal plates over the entrance holes affords better protection from predators, but as mentioned in previous bird reports, this seems to distract Nuthatches from using these boxes. I have witnessed some predation by Great-spotted woodpeckers, and the damage and subsequent loss of a brood of Coal tits by the orangery during 2009 has been previously documented. Although we have had some success with Little owls nesting in the park during 2017, the fact still remains that very often the purpose made boxes placed to attract these birds are frequently taken over and occupied by squirrels.

As well as this, squirrels are also responsible for the severe decline in many open nesting bird species, especially Song thrush, Blackbird, Chaffinch and Goldcrest. Mistle thrush, although susceptible to the same level of predation, is very tenacious in defending its nests, so to some extent, has not suffered the same losses as the birds mentioned. 2016 has seen the loss of several important trees in the park which have provided nesting sites for birds including treecreeper. The loss of a giant sequoia in October robbed the park of its main treecreeper roosting and nest site. Storm damage has also impacted on natural nest sites for birds, with further loss of black poplar along the lower woodland areas. Although the park still provides many suitable nesting sites for birds, a sustainable nest box scheme is vital to the success of many species. It should be fitting then, that we are placing out more boxes this year, and to coincide also with National Nest box Week on 14th February 2017. During 2016 I have had an opportunity to visit other parks and Green Spaces, and I have been pleased to see that many of these have introduced bird boxes, so this is a good indicator that the conservation of birds is being considered on a national level. The nest box scheme here, underpins a small element of the Biodiversity Management Plan, but a very important one which continues to benefit wild birds in Stratford Park.



(An owl box on the main field)



(Great tit eggs)

SYSTEMATIC LIST 2016

Mute swan *Cygnus olor* (resident)

Our resident pair of swans on the lake has had a very successful breeding season producing a clutch of 6 eggs in April. All of the eggs hatched successfully but two of the cygnets were lost during the first two weeks. The remaining four cygnets have survived to adulthood and are currently present on the lake. During February, the parent birds will again become territorial and distance themselves from their offspring. At this time, cygnets can start to wander once ejected from the lake, and it is then that park staff will remove these from the park and re-locate them to another water course or lake. Pairing of the adults will then take place in late February and nesting commences in March. As in previous years, due to the lack of natural vegetation around the lake, park staff will provide new nesting material for the swans. The main problem for newly emerged cygnets in the spring is gulls, and, despite our best efforts to provide barriers on the stream, some small cygnets are frequently washed over the weir.

Mandarin duck *Aix galericulata* (occasional visitor)

Not recorded in 2017 but an occasional visitor to the lake during 2013 and 2015, usually a pair, and on the stream.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (resident)

Despite being our only common duck on the lake, 2017 was the worst breeding season in seven years. We only recorded three broods of ducklings, way down on previous years. The ducks did however use the boxes on the island. The resident population is no doubt sustained by members of the public feeding them on bread which is an annual problem but one which is difficult to stop. Many eggs were found abandoned along the stream and in the woodland during April and May, and I can only conjecture that the poor success of breeding was due to the wet spring causing eggs to chill during incubation and perhaps predation by foxes.

Tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* (occasional visitor)

A pair was on the lake on 23rd April, 11th May and 18th July. The ducks do not stay long on the lake as there is not sufficient natural food to sustain them.

Shelduck *Tadoma tadoma* (scarce visitor)

No further records since 2012.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* (occasional resident)

A frequent visitor to the beech woodland, pheasants are quite common in the adjacent fields and throughout the Painswick valley.

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

Seen in small numbers during the summer, usually in groups of two or three and mainly in arable fields adjacent to the park. Sometimes occurs on the main field and along the green corridors on the northern side of the park.

Grey heron *Ardea cinerea* (regular visitor)

The park's lake supports one regular grey heron which is present throughout the year. At times, other herons visit the lake and in 2014 a record 9 birds were on the lake during July and August. These birds will visit the lake during periods of hot weather when oxygen levels are low. Fish will more frequently come to the surface for air, and this provides easy prey for the herons.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* (Occasional resident)

A regular visitor to the park but has not bred since 2013. Birds are seen during every month of the year, often flying over at high altitude. The main prey is pigeons and evidence of sparrowhawk kills are found regularly, especially in winter. Nesting sites are known within 1 mile of Stratford Park, and they will often take small birds from local bird tables.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (resident)

No evidence of nesting since 2010 but is seen most days soaring over the park on thermals. The species has increased in recent years and is known to breed within 1 mile of the park in well wooded areas.

Red kite *Milvus milvus* One over the park 23rd August. A second bird on 3rd October.

Kestrel *falco tinnunculus* (uncommon visitor)

Kestrels are rarely seen in the park despite nest boxes being placed for them. They are sometimes seen hunting over the green corridors and a pair was in the park on 23rd May 2016. Single birds are sometimes seen flying over the park, but not as regularly as they used to.

Peregrine *falco peregrinus* (rare visitor)

Only 3 sightings during 2017, 22nd April, 2nd September and 15th November (all single birds flying over the park).

Moorhen *Gallinule chlorops* (resident)

Only 2 pairs present on the lake. Nests every year on the small island and has used the duck boxes (2015 / 2016). Nests are also found along the stream. Remains a common water bird throughout the Stroud District.

Coot *Fulica atra* (resident)

Although very common on other water courses throughout the Stroud District, only 1 pair occurs on the lake, and, as with the paucity of other water birds, it is due to the poor quality of the lake, absence of marginal vegetation and natural prey.

Black headed gull *Larus ridibundus* (common resident)

A common visitor to the park especially during winter when large flocks converge on the main fields and lake. Does not predate ducklings and cygnets. Remains very common.

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

Occurs mainly in spring and predate ducklings, coot and moorhen chicks and cygnets. The birds arrive during March and are responsible for the high mortality rate of young water birds.

Herring gull *Larus argentatus* (occasional visitor)

A few birds seen on the lake each year, mainly in spring. Another gull which predate young water birds.

Feral pigeon *Columba livia* (resident)

There is a flock of pigeons present by the lake throughout the year, around 60 birds. Along with wood pigeons they represent the main prey for sparrowhawk and are taken frequently.

Wood pigeon *Columba palumbus* (common resident)

Very common throughout the park and woodland.

Stock dove *Columba oenas* (local visitor)

Several pairs in the woodland during May 2015 and 1 pair on the main field June 2015. A few seen during 2016, again, on the main fields.

Collared dove *Sretopelia decaocta* (resident)

Despite being a very common garden visitor to gardens next to the park, collared dove is seldom seen in Stratford Park. Single birds are seen by the bowling green most months.

Cuckoo *Calculus canorus* (summer visitor)

Heard most days throughout the summer but seldom seen.

Little owl *Athena noctua* (local resident)

The history of breeding little owls in Stratford Park has been a tale of mixed fortunes. Since the introduction of nest boxes in 2009 owls have bred successfully most years. The owls were absent from the park during 2014 following the loss of a walnut tree on the main field which was being used for roosting. We believe that the family of 2 adults and 3 young were all killed when the tree fell, although only 1 corpse was found. It was therefore very pleasing to see another pair arrive in the park during April 2015, most probably from adjacent fields. The owls nested successfully in one of the boxes in the oak tree on the main field. A routine inspection of the box during May 2015 revealed the female sitting on eggs (below). Further inspections later in the year revealed that the owls were also using the boxes as winter roosts, and fresh prey was noted in these boxes. It is undoubtable that the owls have returned to the park to hunt in the green corridors, and they have been seen by the writer at dusk, hunting over these areas. Sadly, it is a continuing problem with squirrels using the boxes and this is partially responsible for this species' tenuous presence in the park.



(Little owl sitting on eggs May 2014 Photo: Mike McCrea)

Tawny owl *Strix aluco* (local resident)

The park supports 1 pair of tawny owls which is surprising as the main woodland areas provide perfect habitat for this owl. The absence of suitable nesting cavities is largely to blame for the absence of more birds. This problem was addressed in 2009 when a purpose made box was erected in the far woodland. This proved successful during 2012, and every year to 2016 with the owls producing an average brood of 3 young per year. The part of the woodland where the owls occur has seen significant management over recent years in accordance with the Biodiversity Management Plan (2011) with scheduled tree thinning and the partial restoration of the woodland pond. This has been beneficial to the owls as analysis of pellets found, contained remains of amphibians (frogs) which is an unusual prey source for tawny owls but a good indicator of the improved ecosystem in which it lives. A second tawny owl box is being erected during February 2017.

Swift *Apus apus* (regular summer visitor)

Arrives in good numbers most years. Swifts are seen flying and feeding over the main fields throughout the summer.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (local resident)

Not yet recorded as a nesting species, but seen regularly during every month of the year. Kingfishers are often seen fishing from the alders around the lake. Breeds along tributaries of the river Frome throughout the Stroud District.

Green woodpecker *Picus viridis* (resident)

The park supports probably 2 pairs of green woodpeckers. These continue to nest in the oak on the main field and in black poplars along the lower woodland areas. Juvenile birds are seen during the summer and autumn feeding on ant hills on the wildflower bank and throughout the green corridors.

Great-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopus major* (resident)

This species has increased since 2012 and this is evident by the large number of new nest holes. Since 2014 one pair has been nesting in a large cedar tree by the ornamental bridge. Another pair nests in decayed black poplars in the lower woodland and a third pair has nested in a birch tree within the main woodland. The park's great-spotted woodpeckers are frequently seen flying to and from the park and using local bird tables, especially during the breeding season. The image (below) is of one of the park's birds feeding at a bird table within 300m of Stratford Park. Despite being a beautiful bird, great-spotted woodpeckers are responsible for predated the eggs and nestlings of other species that use the park's bird boxes and an annual inspection of these during January 2017 has shown substantial damage to 12 nest boxes.



(Great-spotted woodpecker at bird feeder Photo: Sharon Tucker)

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

One male bird seen in alders by the Model Railway Bridge 20-05.2015, this is the first record since 2009. This woodpecker remains a very rare visitor to the park. It is known by the writer to have bred in oaks along the Painswick Valley. No further records for 2016.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (local resident)

Found in reasonable numbers on most of the limestone commons around Stroud. Occasionally birds are seen over adjacent Callowell fields during summer.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (Common summer visitor)

Swallows are not as common as they once used to be. Seen in small numbers most years hunting over the main fields. Nesting attempted in the works yard during 2013.

House martin *Delichon urbicum* (summer visitor)

Common over the park between May and September.

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

Although this species is absent from the park, it is often seen perched in hedgerows along the green corridors and in Callowell fields.

Grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (resident)

Present along the stream and on the lake throughout the year. Nests within 100 metres of the park where more suitable nest sites are available. A nest box was erected on the stone bridge at Salmon Springs during 2014 but has not yet been used.

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

This species is generally an autumn and winter visitor seen mostly on grass areas around the play area and car park. Numbers peak in November and December. 100 birds recorded on the main field 18.12.2016.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* (local resident)

Seen on the stream most months, mainly at the Salmon springs section, nests further upstream along the Painswick Valley.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (common resident)

Remains a common species. Most nests are found in ivy on trees.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis* (fairly common resident)

Found mainly in shrubs around the Bowling Green and rarely in the arboretum. Nests in the leylandii hedge at the far end of the bowling green, unassuming and often overlooked.

Robin *Erithacus rebecca* (common resident)

Robins have continued to increase in the park. In 2016 the park probably supports around 20 pairs, many of these within the arboretum and shrub beds around the Bowling Green. Has used the open type nest boxes.

Blackbird *Turdus merulus* (Common resident and immigrant)

Although a common bird in the park, blackbird numbers were well down during 2016 and very few nests were located. There was an unusual absence of birds throughout the summer and early autumn, but a very large influx occurred during December 2016 and January 2017. These birds no doubt arrived with redwings from Scandinavia.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* (winter visitor)

Generally common winter visitor, birds arrived early in September but the main immigration occurred in December with birds moving through the park and in large numbers on the main field.

Song thrush *Turdus philomelos* (declining breeding resident)

This species continues to decline due to squirrel predation. The song thrushes' eggs are amongst the most beautiful of British birds, but their bright blue colour is easily located by squirrels. Song thrushes are very prone to deserting their nests at the slightest disturbance, so the increase in park visitors may also be partly to blame for its decline. Previously abundant in the park pre 1980s.



(Song thrush by the orangery December 2016 and Song thrush nest with eggs in the woodland April 2015)
Photos: Mike McCrea

Mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus* (local breeding resident)

Remains a declining species in the park but has nested successfully each year. In recent years birds are using very high branches amongst the cedar trees as nesting sites. These birds fiercely defend their nests from predators and are frequently seen dive bombing squirrels. Two active nests were recorded during 2016, both within the arboretum.

Pied flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* (rare summer visitor)

This species was added to the park's list on 17th May 2016. A single bird was seen by the bandstand during a bird walk. The bird was probably on passage to the Forest of Dean where it is an annual summer visitor. This is the first time pied flycatcher has been recorded in Stratford Park.

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

One or two pairs are usually seen each year amongst vegetation by the model railway. These birds are no doubt, nesting in the woodland, but the nests are very difficult to locate. One pair over-wintered during 2014 / 15.

Garden warbler *Sylvia borin* (scarce summer visitor)

One bird seen in the woodland June 3rd 2014. A good ID of this bird was had from the new bridge over the stream and represents a new species for the park. No further records.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* (summer visitor)

This warbler usually arrives in the woodland around the middle of March, is very visible feeding amongst trees along the lower woodland areas by the stream throughout the summer.

Willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* (scarce summer visitor)

Has occurred in the woodland during May 2013. Very secretive and rarely seen, but birds have been heard singing during May and June 2016. The call distinguishes it from the previous species.

Long-tailed tit *Aegitholas hypoleuca* (resident)

Well represented in Stratford Park with good numbers recorded throughout the year, nests chiefly in the woodland usually amongst conifers and brambles. Nested in the works compound during 2014.

Blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* (common resident)

2016 was noted for the conspicuously low numbers of blue and great tits in the park, the lowest numbers for many years. Blue tits remain the commonest users of bird boxes, but in 2016 numbers were down. It is a common fact that blue tits and other small birds synchronize their egg-laying to coincide with the annual emergence of Lepidoptera caterpillars. In damp, wet springs, the mortality rate of these caterpillars is very high, and this has a big impact on the availability of food for blue tit chicks. The springs of 2015 / 2016 have been wet and cold and perhaps for this reason, blue tit numbers in 2016 have plummeted. Also, the mortality rate for blue tit chicks was high in 2016, with many boxes containing dead birds, another indication of the lack of natural food sources.

Great tit *Parus major* (common resident)

This species has shown the same trend during 2016 as the blue tit, and for the same reasons.

Nesting numbers were well down on 2015 but great tits still accounted for 50% of nest boxes used during 2016.

Coal tit *Periparus ater* (resident)

A rather secretive little bird and found mainly in conifers throughout the woodland. Coal tits have used the nest boxes, but not during 2016. Distinguished by its small size and white stripe on the back of the head, the coal tit is not as common as the previous two species.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (resident)

Goldcrest numbers have remained stable in the park most probably due to recent mild winters. The mortality rate can be high during severe winters, but goldcrests have been showing in good numbers during 2016. Most nesting sites are in conifers along the lower woodland areas.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* (local breeding resident)

Nuthatches have regained numbers in Stratford Park as a direct result of nest boxes. 2016 was a bumper year for nuthatches with active nests observed in natural sites and in nest boxes.

The lime tree by the Bandstand produced 2 active nests during May and June. Numbers in general have increased significantly, with birds being present throughout the year in good numbers.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* (resident)

A year of mixed fortunes for treecreepers, the park supports a stable number of treecreepers, but these depend on suitable nesting and roosting sites. Many of our treecreepers roost and nest in the large Giant Redwood trees in the arboretum. These trees have soft, loose bark which provides good insulation. Sadly, one of these trees was felled during 2016 which was the 'main' tree in the park for treecreepers. These birds are unobtrusive and often overlooked, but the best place to see them is in the Dawn Redwood trees next to the ornamental bridge where they can be seen most days spiralling up the trunks.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius* (resident)

Single birds usually seen in every month. Has previously nested in the woodland and no doubt still nests there. Nests are difficult to find in full canopy, and the adult's call is sometimes the only way of locating a nest.

Magpie *Pica pica* (common resident)

A common species which nests amongst hawthorns in the green corridors and sometimes in oaks on the main field.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* (common resident)

Stratford Park has the largest roost of jackdaws in the Stroud District with thousands of birds converging in conifers by the museum every evening. These birds comprise individual flocks from around the district. At dawn the birds become active again, leaving the park for their daily feeding grounds. Our resident jackdaws have formed a small colony in the black poplars in the woodland. Here, they are using old green woodpecker nest holes. Jackdaws have also nested in the oaks on the main field, and previously in 2013, the walnut tree.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus* (common resident)

There are no rookeries in the park since 2013 but local birds are frequent in adjacent Callowell fields where they gather to feed on leatherjackets in spring.

Carrion crow *Corvus corone* (common resident)

Unlike jackdaws and rooks, carrion crows are solitary birds. They nest mainly in oaks on the main fields, but more recently, have nested in Atlas Cedars in the arboretum. Young birds that have fallen from the nest are often found by park staff.

Raven *Corvus corax* (summer visitor)

Ravens have become established as regular summer visitors to the park. This is unusual, as this is a bird of more open and rugged habitat. However, small numbers arrive in the park during summer and stay until October. The birds are more often heard than seen, but in flight, are unmistakable over the park. Their main roosting site appears to be in tall conifers within the arboretum.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (common resident)

Although an abundant bird elsewhere in the district, starlings are still curiously absent from the park. Small flocks still converge in the adjacent Callowell fields, especially in autumn and winter, but very few birds are seen in the park. This was once a very common nesting bird in Stratford Park, and birds even nested in trees by the stream. Starlings also nested in the large elms pre-1973.

House sparrow *Passer domesticus* (resident)

Another species once abundant in the park, but now absent and only found in neighbouring housing developments.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* (common resident)

Remains a common species in the park, with large flocks gathering during winter.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* (resident)

A declining species found mainly around the Bowling Green where it nests in the conifer hedges. It is rarely found elsewhere in the park, but some birds do join chaffinches and goldfinches in winter flocks.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* (resident)

A relatively common finch especially during autumn and winter where it can be seen feeding on teasel heads on the wildflower bank. Joins other finches and small birds during winter to form large flocks.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* (occasional winter visitor)

No further sightings since 2012.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus* (winter visitor)

Numbers fluctuate every winter, with most birds seen in alders on the main field and throughout the green corridors. In December 2015 large numbers were seen feeding in alders by the lake. 2016 – only a few seen on the main field in December.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (rare occasional resident)

Sightings of bullfinches are rare in the park. This stunning bird was once a common sight throughout the park and woodland. Absent from the Walled Garden since recent development but occasionally seen in small conifers by the Model Railway. The species may be overlooked, but its plumage makes it one of our most conspicuous birds.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina* (scarce occasional visitor)

11.07.2016 one pair in the green corridors. This pair remained for several weeks, and possibly bred. Previously recorded for Stratford park 1972, 1973 and 1974 (Mike McCrea) but not recorded until 2016. This represents a new species for the park's list.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* (scarce winter visitor)

Waxwings remain an enigma in Stratford Park because it contains more berry laded trees and shrubs than anywhere else in the Stroud District, yet, waxwings have been absent from the park. There has occurred a 'waxwing invasion' throughout the UK this winter, and finally, on 29th December 11 birds were sighted by Stratford Court feeding on mistletoe berries. Further searches on other mistletoe bearing trees in the park proved unsuccessful. This is a bird which is easily overlooked, but finally, we can add it to the park's list.



(Moorhen with young Photo: Mike McCrea)

Monitoring wild birds in Stratford Park remains an 'ongoing project'. I am always pleased to receive sightings from anyone visiting the park, and especially, photos of birds. As we progress through the Biodiversity Landscape and Action Plan (2011) we can be assured that birds are benefitting, whether through habitat enhancement, woodland management or by putting out nest boxes. In submitting this report, I must acknowledge Stroud District Council for their proactive help with assisting and encouraging biodiversity in Stratford Park. We are also very fortunate that we are employed by a company (*idverde*) that is totally committed to the environment and actively supports the work we are doing here in the park.

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