

Shoreham District
Ornithological Society
Autumn Newsletter
2024



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Editorial

We moved recently from Pulborough to Storrington. The main drivers were to seek less vertiginous accommodation than our previous town house and to be nearer village shops. I had high hopes, in moving to Storrington, of actually living for the first time ever in the SDOS Recording Area. Despite trying very hard we have still missed out by about 50m, though I haven't measured it!

The garden and its birds here in Storrington are distinctly suburban compared to our former view of the Arun and its floodplain. Probably the best garden birds in our 10 years in Pulborough were a couple of Short-eared Owls but it was a biodiverse place and anything could turn up.

Last year in spring my wife bought me a giant bee house. It is seriously large offering accommodation to maybe more than a hundred solitary bees (assuming they don't mind communal living). It was in the garden at Pulborough for the summer of 2023 and attracted much buzzing back and forth. When we moved here I cleaned out the mud and sand from its many orifices and put it in a nice sunny place. The outcome has proved to be zilch. Perhaps it is the nature of the rainy summer but more probably it is the place.

Still we now have a very biodiverse lawn which I have decided to manage as a meadow. It seems to be a very nutrient poor acidic grassland overlying the Lower Greensand and when I get a bit more time I will puzzle out its floral composition.

Best wishes to you all

Roger Smith

Table Manners

John Maskell

One of the wedding presents that Shena and I received in 1979 was a set of RSPB bird feeders from Shena's parents. My father-in-law was a keen birder and a great influence on our birding interest.

Our nuptial gift consisted of a hanging roofed bird table and two feeders; each had a distinctive RSPB metal plate attached. The steel and white coated basket was designed to hold suet blocks or peanuts whilst the other comprised a wooden box with a removable mesh on the underside and designed as a tit feeder. So this was our garden starter kit.

It wasn't long before the local Blue and Great Tits discovered our new feeding station and we took great delight in watching "our" birds. We noticed that Blackbirds, House Sparrows and Robins were happy to use the bird table and enjoyed pecking up the morsels that had been dislodged by the tits. Woodpigeons proved to be most efficient gleaners! Occasionally a House Sparrow or Robin would attempt to land on the basket feeder but they never had any success.

Meanwhile we found that the bird table's provisions were regularly decimated by Woodpigeons so, following my father-in-law's patent, I installed a network of wooden dowling rods to create a restricted aperture that still gave easy access for the smaller passerines whilst discouraging the larger birds.

Since those early days we have continued to provide a series of hanging feeders in the garden but it is many years since we have provided a bird table. Later, newly-designed feeders encouraged Greenfinches whilst Chaffinches still preferred to pick up what had been knocked to the ground.

During more than four-and-a-half decades of feeding the birds in our Worthing garden we have observed some significant "evolutionary" changes. From those

early days, when only the tits seemed able to cope with the hanging feeders, we now have more than a dozen species that readily find sustenance. Although initially a little clumsy and hesitant, we have seen a high degree of confidence and dexterity develop. For several years House Sparrows have mastered the technique of hanging on whilst lately Dunnocks have joined the acrobats. Our most recent addition to the “hangers on” has been our resident pair of Blackbirds. They now happily land and feed on the wire meshed feeders that host suet pellets and we have noticed that the female has her own routine. She will land on the top of the feeder, pass through the hanging loop from right to left and then drop onto the feeder, grip the mesh and comfortably feed (see attached photograph). She never passes through the loop in the opposite direction. Is this a ritual we wonder?



Over the years we have recorded species changes. We no longer have regular Greenfinches visiting our feeders but occasionally Chaffinches have learnt to feed by hovering at the feeder portals. Families of Long-tailed Tits arrive *en masse* and tuck in with confidence. This year Magpies have learnt the technique.

Nationally one of the great successes of recent years has been the increase in the number of Goldfinches visiting garden feeders. We were told that niger seed was their favourite and, initially, I attempted to encourage them into the garden by “spiking” dried teasels. No success I’m afraid but the use of a purpose-built niger feeder did eventually have the desired effect. However, Goldfinch tastes seem to have undergone a change in these parts and after regularly finding the niger seed feeder untouched and the seed going mouldy we abandoned the specialist feeder. These days Goldfinches are very happy to devour sunflower hearts.

Studying our Birdtrack records for Goldfinch I notice that at our previous Broadwater house (1979 – 1988) we recorded Goldfinch on just 4 dates. Our move to West Tarring produced just 11 records in the period 1988 – 2006. Then came the Goldfinch “explosion” and since then they have been noted on more than 2,300 days!

Nowadays wintering Blackcaps regularly visit garden feeders: a recent and spectacular change of behaviour. Indeed, I have related our own garden experiences in a previous article. After two Blackcaps were seen on our feeder on 8th January 1981 we only recorded wintering Blackcaps on 12 days until we moved in the Spring of 1988. For our first two decades in West Tarring wintering Blackcaps only steadily increased. However, there has been a marked rise since 2010 and in recent winters Blackcaps have been observed using our sunflower hearts and suet pellet feeders on most days between January and March. These have often been multiple birds with our current record being 8 Blackcaps on 3rd March 2018.

Probably the most notable visitor to our suet pellet feeder was a wintering Lesser Whitethroat that we watched on various dates between 20th December

2017 and 9th March 2018. When first seen, we thought we must be hallucinating so it was a reminder to always keep a pair of binoculars and a camera to hand... just in case.



In summary Shena and I have seen some dramatic changes in our garden bird habits since we first hung up a feeder in May 1979. Feeding our garden birds has given us endless pleasure and we'd like to think that Shena's father continues to smile down approvingly.

An interview with our President: John Newnham

Tony Benton

1) How did you first get into birding and who encouraged you in your early days?

I had an interest in the natural world whilst at primary school, Downsbrook in Broadwater, and recall regularly exploring the nearby downland during school holidays. My secondary education was as a boarder at Steyning Grammar School and here I was encouraged to conduct bird surveys around the Steyning Mill Pond by the biology master, Mr 'Jo' Luker, who was then a member of the Shoreham Ornithological Society. In my class was Michael Goddard who lived on Mill Hill opposite Dr John Stafford who was training Michael to ring at the society's 'Sanctuary'. We became good friends and spent many hours together ringing at the Sanctuary and various other locations, seawatching from the beach at Widewater and visiting local birding sites.

2) At what point did ringing become a passion and why?

This has already been alluded to and, as a teenager, I spent much of my spare moments ringing. As a result of help from Dr Barrie Watson and many early mornings ringing in a reed bed at Ivy Lake, Chichester, I was able to gain my A permit before I went north to Edinburgh University Medical School which enabled me to continue ringing in the Lothians. My early ringing at Chichester Gravel Pits was collecting data for the BTO's Sand Martin and Acrocephalus Enquiries and seeing the results of these studies unfold convinced me of the value of ringing. Despite the development of modern methods of following individual bird movements ringing still provides vital information about migration, population structures, breeding success and longevity.

3) How has modern technology changed the world of ornithology and is there a downside to its use? Here I'm wondering about data analysis, GPS trackers, Merlin and similar technologies.

There have been immense changes in the decades I have been birdwatching. Developments in optics and digital cameras have made a massive difference to our enjoyment of birding and we are now able to share this joy with others via the internet. We must all marvel at the knowledge gained by GPS tracking of individual birds and perhaps the BTO's Cuckoo study is the best known. This technology is also teaching us about foraging ranges of seabirds; something which hitherto had been impossible to study and this knowledge will help construct plans to help protect declining species. The move from paper records to digital systems is now virtually complete and undoubtedly computers facilitate more observations to be stored, enable quick retrieval, analysis and sharing information. In 1988 Sussex was amongst the early counties to move to computerizing records. I was tasked to set this up and still remain closely involved with the maintenance of the county database. Over these years there have been massive advancements in both computer hardware and the systems to store and manipulate data. From the birding perspective, the evolution of on-line recording systems for the annual national surveys such as the Wetland Bird Survey, Breeding Bird Survey, and Garden Birdwatch or more general birding using Birdtrack, eBird and iRecord has massively increased the number of records and people prepared to report their observations. From discussion on the SDOS users group I think the jury is still out with regards to Merlin although I have no doubt it will improve and become more reliable and a valuable tool for birdwatchers.

4) I know you spend a couple of months each year in Western Australia and I'm wondering if there is the equivalent of the RSPB, SDOS and the like on the other side of the world? In short, what's the birding scene like?

Denise and I have visited Alice, our daughter, in Perth on seventeen occasions so far – mostly in the northern winter. For much of this time I have been a member of BirdLife Australia and used their recording system, Birddata for many years. Although the WA BirdLife branch offices are in Perth I have not been to any meetings. From time to time I meet other birders in the field but they are spread fairly thinly in the vast countryside that is Australia. At one time there was a website which posted unusual sightings from around the Perth metropolis and beyond but sadly this seems to have ceased and I have yet to find a social media or website to learn what is about.



John and family at The Pinnacles, a National reserve in Nambung, Western Australia, April 2023

5) We know that there have been huge declines in a wide range of birds across Sussex. How can SDOS members contribute to conservation and nature restoration?

Although many species are less numerous and some have been lost from the county, there are others which are doing well. It was not many years ago when egrets were on the rarity list and many birds of prey, such as Common Buzzard, Peregrine and Sparrowhawk, were rarely seen locally. SDOS, as a society, has taken an interest and lead at preserving the best birding sites in our area. There is no doubt that knowledge and records are a powerful tool in the conservation armoury; a tool that SDOS members can augment by participating in national and county surveys and recording their observation somewhere available to all. In this respect the BTO's Birdtrack is ideal.

6) If you could wave a magic 'conservation wand', what would you do to tackle the ecological crisis?

This would need to be a very powerful magic wand. I see the largest threat, not only to our wildlife, but also to ourselves as the relentless warming of the planet. A wand to capture the atmospheric greenhouse gases and slow or reverse the heating process would be useful. I believe there are already devices which may do this on a small scale so this wand has a little hope.

7) Finally, what was the best birding day you've ever had and why?

With more than six decades of birding this is a tough question to answer. I spent all of September 1969 on Fair Isle, when Roy Dennis was warden, and there were days when scarce migrants seemed to be everywhere and rarities were almost a daily occurrence. I saw species on this trip such as River and Arctic Warbler, Yellow-breasted Bunting and Great Snipe which have eluded me since. Perhaps more mundane but equally satisfying have been busy ringing days. I have always enjoyed the spectacle of mass migration and to this end a good seawatch, especially in the company of friends, can be exhilarating. Some

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of the most memorable include 7th May 1981 and 14th May 1984, details can be read in past SDOS reports, and a coffee mug crafted by Mike Hall to celebrate the latter date is still in my study. Then, of course, there are days on foreign holidays when new species abound. Particularly memorable was a boat trip from Kaikōura, New Zealand when several species of albatross, petrels and shearwaters were so close they could be photographed with a standard lens.

Widewater Wildfowl Update

Jo Proctor

It has been a very interesting season for the swans and ducks on Widewater.

The resident cob and pen swans now dominate the lagoon having chased the older pair, known to the locals as Stanley and Hilda, out of the lagoon and into an adjoining garden! They were then relocated to a private lake. Sadly Stanley passed away there but he had lived a long, life and was in his twenties. Hilda returned to Widewater and lived in my garden for three months, but finally left to return to the lagoon and hopefully she will find another mate. The Adur flock of about 25 Swans moved in to Widewater for a while but they have been gradually dispersed by the dominant cob.

The breeding season this year has been fascinating! Swans are renowned for their life long pairings and monogamy but the cob has been something of a “Casanova” and mated with both his long-standing mate and another pen! Both pens built nests, the resident on an island and the new mate, on the bank. The new pen hatched five cygnets but sadly they were all predated. The cob was busy protecting his regular partner and her nest and so the newcomer was vulnerable. This underlines the importance of pair bonding in Swans to maximise the survival of the cygnets which is their natural behaviour. Why the cob mated with two Swans is a mystery.

The resident pen had hatched seven cygnets and six have survived. This is a very good statistic, the average survival for swans in the wild is only 50%.

The juveniles are still on the lagoon and are flying. They will be chased off by the parents in the autumn and they will fly off to the river Adur to join the local flock to mature. The other pen remains on the lagoon too. The cob does not chase her but his mate does! In the end, she will probably leave to find a partner as she is of breeding age.

The duck life has been interesting too. Several Runner ducks and two Appleyard ducks were “dumped” on the lagoon one night. The Runner ducks were relocated to a private home by Wadars Animal Rescue but the Appleyards seemed to be surviving well here so they stayed. Recently one passed away but the other remains and has befriended a female Mallard. They swim around together! It is always interesting to observe the wildfowl at Widewater including the shenanigans! I wonder what will happen next?!



Update on RSPB Adur Estuary Reserve Signage Project and the Friends of Adur SSSI group

Sarah Hunt

As an RSPB volunteer based in their Brighton office, I have been working closely with the area manager on the challenging process of improving signage and managing recreational disturbance at the Adur Estuary reserve. Here is where we stand:

Background and Challenges:

Our research has been extensive. Many years ago (before my time on the project), Natural England indicated that marker buoys were not a preferred option for the site due to the possibility of scouring around the anchor points. We were encouraged instead to utilise existing structures. We explored this but all the contractors approached indicated this was not an option due to the foundations required for signs to remain upright in tidal mud. Additionally, we did not consider that existing posts and poles were necessarily in the optimum position to deter paddlers. Signage was further ruled out due to high costs (running into six figures), potential wind damage, and installation difficulties due to the depth and consistency of the mud, and the environmental implications of piling and concrete bases.

We looked at how other reserves, like the Exe Estuary, manage recreational disturbance, and gathered valuable insights from those on the ground, including the outcome of their application to Natural England. After careful consideration, we revisited the buoy idea. Buoys have been designed to suit the unique needs of the Adur Estuary with input from knowledgeable contractors in the area. Quotations for supply and installation were obtained, and we have now developed a robust project plan.

Tony Benton, Richard Allan and I met with Natural England with our SDOS hats on, and I didn't miss the opportunity to speak with them about the proposed marker buoys. I had to challenge some preconceptions and took on board their valuable feedback.

Current Situation

A full and detailed application has now been submitted to Natural England to obtain their consent to any works which are undertaken within the SSSI (a much larger area than the RSPB reserve). They have up to four months to review the application, and we hope to receive feedback by November 2024. The Harbour Master has already consented to the works and is supportive.



A bad day at the RSPB Reserve (Jess Aidley)

Friends of Adur SSSI Group Initiative

Separate from my RSPB work, I am also working on establishing a “Friends of Adur SSSI” group. This group aims to support Natural England’s efforts in maintaining the site’s condition, and hopefully improve it. We plan to inform and engage with the local community to ensure everyone is aware of the gem of a reserve that they have in the heart of an urban area. I am of course part of SDOS, but I am also a dog owner and close with the watersports enthusiasts, being one myself. Progress is already being made in helping everyone to enjoy the river responsibly.

For those interested in following this project or getting involved, please sign up for updates and future volunteering opportunities at:

www.friendsofadursssi.org.uk

We appreciate your continued support and interest and look forward to sharing more progress soon.

Sarah Hunt is an RSPB volunteer and SDOS Council member.

Swifts in the SDOS Recording Area

Jenny Holter and Peter Chase

A few years ago we had an inspiring talk from David Campbell, who was Swift Champion for the Sussex Ornithological Society at the time, on how to support and encourage these iconic birds, now a red-listed species. Steve Lawless created a Facebook group, Worthing and Adur Swifts Group to encourage the sharing of sightings, but unfortunately this hasn’t really taken off so far, and with many other conservation priorities locally, we have no formal monitoring group in place.

In Shoreham the Swift population appears to be in decline, with many previous nest sites no longer used, and just a scattering of reports received. We have informally been made aware of a few nest sites in East Shoreham, but there are no details of breeding success. I am aware of only four nest sites in Worthing this year, although many records will not yet be available, so I am sure there will be others. However, elsewhere in the SDOS recording area, things are more positive.

Brighton and Hove has a good population of Swifts, and some of our members are involved in monitoring nest sites in this area. In 2020, the local authority implemented planning regulations to ensure new developments over 5m high make provision for Swifts to nest. Sadly, no such policy currently exists in Worthing and Adur.

In Steyning a small group of enthusiasts is also monitoring and encouraging a small population of Swifts, and I have been given permission by Peter Chase, the writer, to share the following report from last year. The report arrived just too late for inclusion in our Spring newsletter.

Steyning Church Swifts 2023 – Peter Chase

The summer of 2023 was another relatively encouraging year for the Steyning Church Swifts, although numbers were slightly down in terms of confirmed breeding pairs from previous years.

Thanks to a group of watchers comprising Andrew Armitage, John Woodward, Colin Holter, John Wakefield, Alan Swetman and myself we managed to establish with reasonable certainty that five pairs of Swifts nested at the Church. It is possible that a couple of pairs evaded our watchful eyes. They probably produced between eight and twelve fledged chicks. This success of this colony made a major contribution to the thirteen pairs that we confirmed as breeding around the town.

The largest number of Swifts seen in the air at any one time was twenty on the twentieth of July. This was five more than the previous years. Swifts feed on insects that are sucked up by air currents to several thousand feet and they travel large distances of ten miles or more when searching for them. It is therefore quite difficult to determine the exact numbers at any site.

Eight known Swift nest boxes were also monitored and three of these were used last year. They seem to prefer nesting in soffits or holes in walls or roofs, so the Church is an important site for them and many thanks to the Church Committee for supporting Swifts.



Swift chick ready to fledge

First indications for 2024

Although there is no full report as yet, Peter noted a slow start to the season. He did record breeding success in his own nest box, with a pair observed feeding a single chick, despite a first egg being destroyed by House Sparrows.

This disturbance interrupted the laying cycle and a third egg did not hatch. The surviving chick fledged on 19th July, just a few days later than last year.

It will be interesting to see how the Steyning population overall fares this summer. There are at least nine known boxes in the town, with occupancy rates below 30%. An increase in activity around nest sites in July may indicate more returning birds next year. Cold and wet weather leading to reduced insect populations is likely to have impacted breeding efforts in the 2024 season.

Nearby, Henfield, which just touches the SDOS recording area, has a very active Swift Project. The project has promoted the installation and use of Swift boxes and has had lots of success in monitoring and recording an increasing population whilst also raising awareness of the bird across the town. They had fifteen successful nest sites in 2023, fledging at least 20 chicks.

We need to be doing all we can to encourage these wonderfully charismatic birds, so please report and record any sightings of screaming parties and 'banging' birds in late summer, when young birds investigate potential nest sites. Particularly we need to know about nest sites with confirmed or suspected breeding. You can use Birdtrack, eBird, or the RSPB Swiftmapper site to record and report any sightings.

Additionally, you may wish to share any sightings on the Worthing and Adur Swifts Group or Shoreham Birding Facebook groups to help raise awareness in the wider community. However, it is important to be aware that this does not provide an official record for monitoring processes.

Swifts are dependent on insect populations for food, so planting and creating habitats in your garden or on balconies to encourage insects is one way we can support this species.

Finally, if you have a suitable property, and especially if you are lucky enough to have swifts nesting nearby, you may wish to consider putting up a swift nest

box. Please see www.swift-conservation.org for further information and advice.

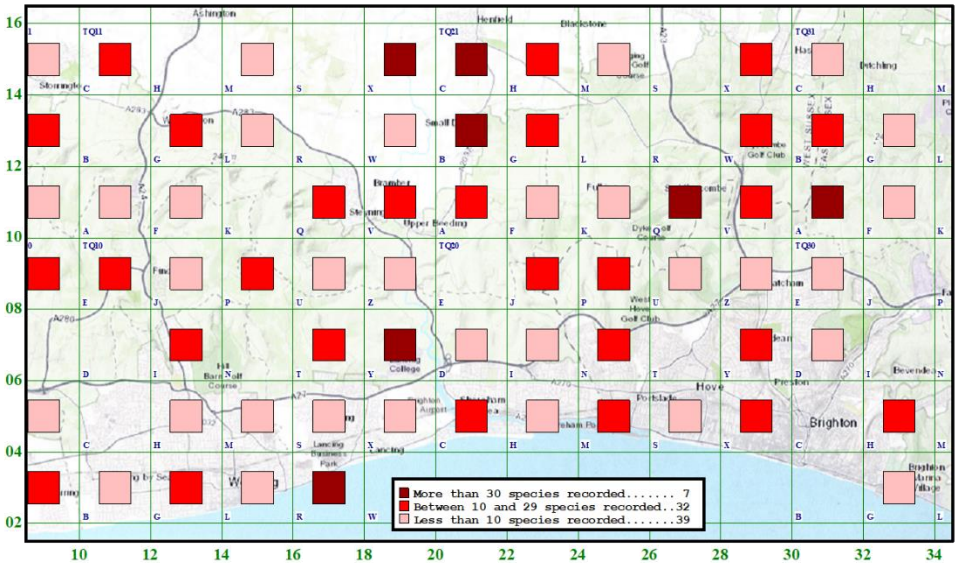
Birds recorded in the SDOS area between January and June 2024

John Newnham and Clive Hope

This summary of the records from our recording area during the first half of the year has been compiled from observations uploaded into the Sussex Ornithological Society's (SOS) database by early July 2024. Most have come from the British Trust for Ornithology's Birdtrack or the National Biodiversity Network's iRecord with no records yet from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's eBird or national surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, Wetland Bird Survey or Garden Birdwatch. Despite this large number of sources some records have not yet been harvested but over 25,350 SDOS area records have been received from over 240 observers. The range of recording activity is massive with 45 birders logging over 100 sightings whilst 56 people have created just one record. The records come from 185 sites; the most popular locations in this period being the Henfield Levels (2286 records), Shoreham-by-Sea (1690), West Tarring (1441), Brooklands (1258), Woods Mill (1242) and the River Adur (Tollbridge to Cement Works section) (1000). In keeping with the last half year review there was some recording on each day with a marked range between 471 records on 12th February and just seven records on both 28th May and 26th June. The following table shows April to be the most popular month.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Number records	4254	3304	4676	5666	4400	3051

A large portion of the breeding season occurs in this period and records with a breeding status noted carry much more value and are further enhanced if accompanied by a precise grid reference. The following figure suggest there is room for improvement in this aspect of recording with just seven tetrads in our area with a breeding status recorded for 30 or more species.



The number of species with a recorded breeding status in each tetrad in the SDOS recording area during the spring 2024.

Just about 200 different species or recognised sub-species were recorded in this period but assessment and verification of these observation is far from complete. The highlights and species with only one record, listed in taxonomic order, included a **Goldeneye** which remained faithful to Brooklands between 9th January and 29th April and the areas only **Goosander** at Widewater on 7th May. Scarce grebes can occasionally be found offshore; a **Red-necked Grebe** was off Goring on 28th February, a **Slavonian Grebe** there on 5th February and two **Black-necked Grebes** were off Hove on 7th April. More unusual were two **Black-necked Grebes** on Henfield Levels between 10th and 12th

April. Two **Stone-curlews** were noted at a downland site on 4th May and one seen at the same location on 22nd June. Single **Wood Sandpipers** were found on the Henfield Levels on 17th April and again between the 9th and 11th May. A **Gull-billed Tern** was seen off Goring on 24th June and a **Storm Petrel** off Worthing on 3rd May. The Henfield Levels hosted a **Glossy Ibis** on 8th and 9th May and earlier a **Spoonbill** on 21st March. Unusual raptors included an **Osprey** at Hove on 18th May, single **Goshawks** at Storrington and Steyning in April, a **Marsh Harrier** at Horton Hall on 24th January, a **Black Kite** over Wild Park on 19th March and single **White-tailed Eagles** over Brooklands on 26th January, the Henfield Levels on 18th April and Kithurst Hill on 20th May. The only **Hoopoe** of the spring was in Wild Park on 7th April and the only **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** at Storrington on 29th May. Likewise, there were just single records for a **Hooded Crow** in Hove on 20th April, three **Waxwings** in Brighton on 5th February and a **Ring Ouzel** at Hollingbury on 13th April. The splendid male **Citrine Wagtail** which was photographed at Widewater on 15th May was only the second to be recorded in the county and the first seen locally. A **Serin** was reported from Small Dole on 18th May but the undoubted star of this period was a singing male **Cirl Bunting** which was first found at Hazelholt Bottom on 3rd June. This, the first county record since March 1996 and the first SDOS record since October 1981, stayed faithful to the area and was seen and heard by many admirers on most days into early July.

The following large table lists, in taxonomic order, the other species recorded in this period showing the number of days each species has been recorded, the first and last date and the maximum count for each. Where there are several days with the same maximum count, mostly one or two birds, then just the first record is shown.

Species Name	Dates	First date	Last date	Maximum count
Brent Goose	48	01-Jan	14-May	1429 on 13-Mar at Worthing
Canada Goose	61	01-Jan	10-Jun	700 on 16-Jan at Henfield Levels
Greylag Goose	56	01-Jan	23-Jun	100 on 01-Feb at Henfield Levels
White-fronted Goose	33	14-Jan	17-Apr	13 on 14-Jan at Adur Levels
Mute Swan	126	01-Jan	25-Jun	32 on 12-Feb at Widewater
Bewick's Swan	6	05-Jan	01-Feb	8 on 01-Feb at Henfield Levels
Egyptian Goose	31	01-Jan	18-May	12 on 14-Mar at Henfield Levels
Common Shelduck	47	02-Jan	17-May	17 on 12-May at Worthing
Mandarin Duck	4	08-May	11-May	1 on 08-May at Henfield Levels
Garganey	5	13-Apr	18-Apr	1 on 13-Apr at Henfield Levels
Shoveler	40	01-Jan	19-Jun	112 on 20-Mar at Henfield Levels
Gadwall	23	01-Jan	09-May	18 on 16-Mar at Henfield Levels
Eurasian Wigeon	35	01-Jan	20-Apr	350 on 14-Mar at Henfield Levels
Mallard	140	01-Jan	30-Jun	100 on 16-Jan at Henfield Levels
Pintail	26	01-Jan	12-Apr	148 on 16-Mar at Henfield Levels
Eurasian Teal	74	01-Jan	20-Apr	400 on 15-Jan at Adur Levels
Tufted Duck	22	01-Jan	10-May	14 on 14-Mar at Henfield Levels
Common Eider	33	04-Jan	26-May	1 on 04-Jan at Hove
Velvet Scoter	4	03-Mar	27-Apr	7 on 25-Apr at Widewater
Common Scoter	54	07-Jan	17-May	502 on 31-Mar at Worthing
Red-breasted Merganser	34	01-Jan	07-May	35 on 12-Jan at Worthing
Grey Partridge	14	26-Jan	12-Jun	8 on 09-Feb at Newtimber Hill
Common Pheasant	98	01-Jan	30-Jun	64 on 05-May at Michelgrove
Quail	5	25-May	24-Jun	1 on 25-May at Steyning Bowl
Red-legged Partridge	25	11-Jan	25-Jun	38 on 01-May at Myrtle Grove Fm
Common Swift	56	21-Apr	30-Jun	70 on 10-Jun at Mile Oak
Common Cuckoo	39	07-Apr	17-Jun	2 on 30-Apr at Henfield Levels
Feral Pigeon	159	01-Jan	30-Jun	185 on 13-Jan at Whitehawk
Stock Dove	123	01-Jan	30-Jun	50 on 22-Apr at Botolphs
Woodpigeon	179	01-Jan	30-Jun	500 on 11-Mar at Henfield Levels
Turtle Dove	10	29-Apr	25-Jun	3 on 24-May at Adur Levels
Collared Dove	167	01-Jan	30-Jun	20 on 11-Jan at Ditchling Beacon
Water Rail	18	03-Jan	14-Apr	3 on 14-Jan at Adur Levels
Moorhen	118	01-Jan	30-Jun	28 on 27-Jan at Beeding Brooks
Coot	93	01-Jan	30-Jun	60 on 25-Jan at Brooklands
Little Grebe	75	01-Jan	19-Jun	9 on 09-Jan at Widewater
Great Crested Grebe	72	04-Jan	19-May	57 on 02-Feb at Worthing
Oystercatcher	111	01-Jan	28-Jun	59 on 15-Jan at Goring Gap
Avocet	4	11-Mar	27-May	4 on 11-May at Widewater

Lapwing	74	01-Jan	17-Jun	200 on 14-Jan at Adur Levels
Golden Plover	2	14-Jan	02-May	50 on 14-Jan at Adur Levels
Grey Plover	40	02-Jan	12-May	16 on 11-May at Worthing
Ringed Plover	32	07-Jan	23-May	45 on 16-Jan at R Adur
Little Ringed Plover	2	10-Apr	18-Apr	1 on 10-Apr at Goring Gap
Eurasian Whimbrel	37	05-Apr	19-May	120 on 27-Apr at Worthing
Curlew	54	02-Jan	16-Jun	4 on 07-Mar at Widewater
Bar-tailed Godwit	22	05-Jan	15-May	103 on 27-Apr at Worthing
Black-tailed Godwit	8	07-Mar	11-May	15 on 14-Mar at Henfield Levels
Turnstone	88	01-Jan	22-Jun	72 on 18-Mar at Goring Gap
Knot	5	06-May	12-May	6 on 11-May at Worthing
Sanderling	26	05-Jan	17-May	70 on 19-Feb at Ferring
Dunlin	55	03-Jan	19-May	132 on 14-Jan at Brooklands
Purple Sandpiper	23	09-Jan	27-Apr	3 on 21-Jan at Brighton
Woodcock	5	09-Jan	23-Feb	1 on 09-Jan at Woods Mill
Common Snipe	32	04-Jan	14-Apr	120 on 14-Jan at R Adur
Common Sandpiper	28	16-Jan	15-May	10 on 27-Apr at Brighton Marina
Green Sandpiper	6	09-Jan	21-Apr	2 on 12-Feb at Henfield Levels
Common Redshank	68	01-Jan	27-May	50 on 15-Feb at R Adur
Wood Sandpiper	4	17-Apr	11-May	1 on 17-Apr at Henfield Levels
Greenshank	30	01-Jan	11-May	3 on 30-Apr at Henfield Levels
Kittiwake	21	12-Jan	15-May	12 on 04-May at Worthing
Black-headed Gull	130	01-Jan	27-Jun	700 on 19-Feb at R Adur
Little Gull	5	21-Jan	12-May	1 on 24-Jan at Southwick
Mediterranean Gull	61	01-Jan	12-May	179 on 06-Apr at Worthing
Common Gull	79	01-Jan	29-May	1000 on 19-Feb at R Adur
Great Black-backed Gull	130	01-Jan	29-Jun	73 on 02-Jan at R Adur
Herring Gull	174	01-Jan	30-Jun	750 on 02-Jan at R Adur
Caspian Gull	3	21-Jan	21-Feb	1 on 21-Feb at R Adur
Yellow-legged Gull	7	02-Jan	25-Jun	3 on 13-Mar at Brighton
Lesser Black-backed Gull	77	04-Jan	28-Jun	26 on 28-Mar at Henfield Levels
Sandwich Tern	48	06-Mar	17-May	131 on 27-Apr at Worthing
Little Tern	10	25-Apr	12-May	16 on 06-May at Worthing
Common Tern	17	31-Mar	14-May	96 on 06-May at Worthing
Arctic Tern	6	26-Apr	12-May	30 on 26-Apr at Worthing
Common Tern	14	08-Apr	13-May	30 on 26-Apr at Goring Gap
Great Skua	13	25-Mar	04-May	5 on 30-Apr at Worthing
Pomarine Skua	4	29-Apr	14-May	2 on 14-May at Worthing
Arctic Skua	14	27-Mar	15-May	5 on 14-May at Worthing
Common Guillemot	13	12-Jan	21-Apr	2 on 30-Jan at Worthing

Razorbill	12	12-Jan	29-Apr	330 on 12-Jan at Widewater
Unidentified auk spp	14	04-Jan	15-May	1800 on 12-Jan at Worthing
Red-throated Diver	57	04-Jan	16-May	246 on 12-Jan at Worthing
Black-throated Diver	12	26-Mar	17-May	3 on 08-Apr at Worthing
Great Northern Diver	23	01-Jan	09-May	4 on 12-Jan at Worthing
Unidentified diver spp	21	12-Jan	14-May	30 on 12-Jan at Widewater
Fulmar	29	08-Mar	26-May	6 on 15-Apr at Worthing
Manx Shearwater	4	14-Apr	06-May	5 on 29-Apr at Widewater
White Stork	8	02-Apr	20-May	4 on 03-May at Henfield Levels
Gannet	61	04-Jan	17-May	110 on 12-Jan at Widewater
Cormorant	126	01-Jan	30-Jun	31 on 05-May at Worthing
Shag	11	01-Jan	14-May	2 on 22-Apr at Worthing
Cattle Egret	16	19-Feb	09-May	2 on 23-Mar at Henfield Levels
Grey Heron	88	01-Jan	30-Jun	14 on 18-May at Adur Levels
Great White Egret	23	17-Jan	22-Apr	2 on 20-Mar at Henfield Levels
Little Egret	102	01-Jan	30-Jun	26 on 18-Apr at Woods Mill
Sparrowhawk	63	01-Jan	30-Jun	2 on 22-Jan at Mile Oak
Hen Harrier	12	04-Jan	22-Apr	1 on 04-Jan at Fulking
Red Kite	83	01-Jan	30-Jun	20 on 04-Feb at Kithurst Hill
Common Buzzard	131	01-Jan	30-Jun	8 on 12-Feb at Mile Oak
Barn Owl	6	08-Mar	24-Jun	1 on 08-Mar at Small Dole
Little Owl	4	19-Jun	27-Jun	3 on 23-Jun at Edburton
Long-eared Owl	2	07-Jan	23-Jun	2 on 07-Jan on local downland
Short-eared Owl	8	02-Mar	04-May	2 on 04-May at Ditchling Beacon
Tawny Owl	25	01-Jan	23-Jun	2 on 24-Jan at High Salvington
Kingfisher	25	04-Jan	24-Jun	2 on 14-Jan at R Adur
Great Spotted Woodpecker	110	01-Jan	30-Jun	5 on 11-Feb at Henfield Levels
Green Woodpecker	105	01-Jan	30-Jun	4 on 11-Feb at Henfield Levels
Kestrel	118	01-Jan	30-Jun	5 on 14-Jan at Adur Levels
Merlin	2	26-Jan	04-Feb	1 on 26-Jan at No-Mans Land
Hobby	23	15-Apr	20-Jun	3 on 11-May at Adur Levels
Peregrine	58	01-Jan	30-Jun	2 on 16-Jan at Southwick Canal
Ring-necked Parakeet	28	01-Jan	25-May	2 on 10-Feb at Brooklands
Jay	85	01-Jan	27-Jun	5 on 11-Feb at Henfield Levels
Magpie	176	01-Jan	30-Jun	26 on 16-Jan at Shoreham-by-Sea
Jackdaw	172	01-Jan	30-Jun	750 on 08-Mar at Small Dole
Rook	112	01-Jan	30-Jun	200 on 23-Feb at Steep Down
Carrion Crow	173	01-Jan	30-Jun	100 on 04-Mar at Wiston Estate
Raven	72	06-Jan	27-Jun	6 on 18-Mar at Kithurst Hill
Coal Tit	35	01-Jan	10-Jun	2 on 27-Jan at Findon Valley

Marsh Tit	16	01-Jan	15-Apr	5 on 14-Apr at Steyning
Blue Tit	168	01-Jan	30-Jun	31 on 11-Feb at Henfield Levels
Great Tit	165	01-Jan	30-Jun	19 on 26-Jan at Cissbury Fields
Skylark	138	03-Jan	30-Jun	40 on 30-Apr at Mile Oak
Sand Martin	16	20-Mar	06-Jun	20 on 24-Apr at Rock Common
Barn Swallow	80	20-Mar	30-Jun	27 on 27-Apr at Worthing
House Martin	40	28-Mar	30-Jun	25 on 27-Jun at Bramber
Cetti's Warbler	104	01-Jan	30-Jun	9 on 21-Apr at Adur Levels
Long-tailed Tit	99	01-Jan	24-Jun	15 on 16-Jan at Devils Dyke
Willow Warbler	16	30-Mar	04-May	8 on 19-Apr at Brooklands
Chiffchaff	134	01-Jan	30-Jun	12 on 14-Jan at Adur Levels
Sedge Warbler	24	08-Apr	25-Jun	8 on 11-May at Adur Levels
Reed Warbler	57	07-Apr	30-Jun	15 on 11-May at Adur Levels
Blackcap	146	01-Jan	30-Jun	10 on 30-Jun at Ladywell
Garden Warbler	10	12-Apr	10-Jun	2 on 11-May at Devils Dyke
Lesser Whitethroat	42	12-Apr	25-Jun	9 on 22-Apr at Henfield Levels
Common Whitethroat	72	08-Apr	30-Jun	30 on 25-Jun at Sheepcote Valley
Firecrest	27	04-Jan	25-May	3 on 10-Mar at Patcham
Goldcrest	76	01-Jan	30-Jun	6 on 03-Mar at Cissbury
Wren	165	01-Jan	30-Jun	21 on 25-Jun at Sheepcote Valley
Nuthatch	54	02-Jan	23-Jun	4 on 03-Mar at Woods Mill
Eurasian Treecreeper	16	01-Jan	23-Jun	5 on 26-Apr at Warren Hill NT
Common Starling	169	01-Jan	30-Jun	20000 on 16-Feb at Palace Pier
Song Thrush	145	01-Jan	30-Jun	20 on 01-May at Steyning
Mistle Thrush	51	05-Jan	30-Jun	12 on 25-Jun at Ditchling Beacon
Redwing	56	01-Jan	26-Apr	1500 on 12-Mar at Widewater
Blackbird	175	01-Jan	30-Jun	33 on 18-May at Sheepcote Valley
Fieldfare	47	01-Jan	26-Mar	250 on 11-Jan at Devils Dyke
Spotted Flycatcher	5	11-May	07-Jun	3 on 23-May at Patcham
Robin	177	01-Jan	30-Jun	24 on 26-Jan at Cissbury Fields
Common Nightingale	42	05-Apr	02-Jun	5 on 01-May at Woods Mill
Black Redstart	10	08-Jan	22-Mar	1 on 08-Jan at Shoreham Airport
Common Redstart	6	07-Mar	23-May	2 on 23-May at Patcham
Whinchat	2	12-Apr	08-May	1 on 12-Apr at Hollingbury
Eurasian Stonechat	86	01-Jan	28-Jun	15 on 19-Jan at Mile Oak
Northern Wheatear	38	14-Mar	08-May	33 on 19-Apr at No-Mans Land
House Sparrow	180	01-Jan	30-Jun	94 on 20-Feb at Portslade-by-Sea
Duncock	165	01-Jan	30-Jun	14 on 09-Feb at Sheepcote Valley
Yellow Wagtail	6	22-Apr	20-May	2 on 15-May at Goring Gap
Grey Wagtail	28	01-Jan	11-Jun	2 on 03-Jan at Shoreham-by-Sea

Pied Wagtail	116	01-Jan	28-Jun	228 on 01-Jan at Brighton
White Wagtail	2	12-Apr	13-Apr	1 on 12-Apr at Henfield Levels
Meadow Pipit	89	06-Jan	30-Jun	24 on 11-Mar at Goring Gap
Water Pipit	3	12-Mar	26-Mar	1 on 12-Mar at Henfield Levels
Rock Pipit	20	01-Jan	09-Jun	5 on 01-Jan at Southwick Canal
Scandinavian Rock Pipit	3	02-Mar	11-Mar	2 on 10-Mar at R Adur
Chaffinch	132	01-Jan	28-Jun	58 on 27-Jan at Edburton
Brambling	2	19-Feb	10-Mar	2 on 19-Feb at Devils Dyke
Bullfinch	35	06-Jan	21-Jun	3 on 14-Apr at Cissbury
Greenfinch	135	04-Jan	30-Jun	20 on 17-Feb at Sheepcote Valley
Linnet	114	04-Jan	30-Jun	90 on 14-Jan at Adur Levels
Lesser Redpoll	2	10-Mar	14-Apr	2 on 14-Apr at Cissbury
Goldfinch	163	01-Jan	30-Jun	65 on 27-Feb at Henfield Levels
Siskin	10	15-Jan	14-Apr	15 on 10-Mar at Steyning
Corn Bunting	85	04-Jan	30-Jun	100 on 23-Feb at Lancing Clump
Yellowhammer	104	03-Jan	30-Jun	40 on 27-Jan at Edburton
Reed Bunting	83	04-Jan	28-Jun	99 on 27-Jan at Edburton
Lord Derby's Parakeet	23	01-Jan	29-Jun	1 on 01-Jan at Shoreham-by-Sea

House Sparrows were recorded on all bar two days with Woodpigeon and Robin missing only three and five days respectively. As noted before this summary provides little detail and analysis of the plethora of observations from our recording area but it hopefully provides an insight into the range of species, their abundance and occurrence locally.

Thanks to all the observers, far too numerous to name, who have contributed records in our recording area during this period.

Notes from the front line of conservation

Tony Benton and others

There is a huge amount happening on the local conservation front at the moment. Here is a summary of some of the work that SDOS is involved in.

Starting with Shoreham, the **Adur estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** is officially judged as ‘unfavourable and declining’, and that is not good news for birds. Accordingly, SDOS has been involved in numerous conversations with Natural England, RSPB, and others, campaigning for action to safeguard and improve the SSSI.

The good news is that at long last Natural England have commissioned consultants to carry out an ecological assessment of the SSSI and SDOS are seen as a key ‘ecological stakeholder’. What this means in practice is that we have submitted a very detailed report charting the drastic decline in some waders using the estuary, and we have shared our insights in relation to recreational disturbance. The outcome that we would like to see is a habitat restoration plan that landowners sign up to - that would be a game changer.



The **RSPB Adur Reserve** is within the Adur SSSI and is subject to considerable disturbance from recreational paddlers (canoeists and stand-up paddle boarders). The image on the previous page shows damage to the saltmarsh vegetation. Elsewhere in this Newsletter Sarah Hunt records the work behind the scenes to try and better safeguard this precious reserve.

New Salts Farm (NSF) was purchased in September 2020 by Adur District Councils (ADC) and represents 70 acres of green space between Lancing and Shoreham. In December of the same year, ADC purchased **Pad Farm** (PF). Pad Farm comprises 45 acres of arable farmland to the north of the A27, on the western bank of the Adur, between the river and Coombes Road, and was once a bird rich habitat.

Both NSF and PF were purchased “for the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural environment; enhancing biodiversity; and contributing to the Council’s ambition of being carbon neutral by 2030”. And there is no doubt that both sites could make an important contribution to nature restoration and recovery in the Lower Adur Vally. However, the trick will be to turn these aspirations into reality and after nearly 4 years ADC are still searching for ways to unlock this potential.

As I write this, SDOS continues to carry out ad-hoc surveys of NSF and PF and have offered to support the development of a nature recovery plan for both sites. The recent results of the local and general elections have opened up the possibility of new and innovative mechanisms for enhancing biodiversity, and we really hope that there will be some good news soon about a way forward on our local Shoreham patch.

Looking out to the western half of the SDOS recording area, a part of **Goring Gap** has been under threat from a developer. SDOS opposed the proposal on ornithological grounds and many local residents lodged objections too. The proposal for a bar, sandpit, and other concessions was refused, but it now

seems likely that this will be reconsidered under appeal. We will be keeping a very close eye on what happens next.

The **Cissbury Fields Project**, also over in the west, is where Richard Nowak and Brian Clay are actively representing SDOS. Here Richard explains the current state of play.

“Cissbury Fields is located to the east of Findon Valley on the outskirts of Worthing, and below Cissbury Ring. The 100-acre site was brought back into Worthing Borough Council’s ownership in 2021 with the intention of “re-naturing” the site, whilst maintaining its amenity value to local residents. A Management Plan was devised by the Council in partnership with the South Downs National Park Authority, Findon Valley Residents Association, and nature interest groups including SDOS. If you would like a copy of the management plan please contact me (richardenowak@gmail.com).”

SDOS colleague Brian Clay and I have been carrying out a monthly survey along a prescribed route since 2021, with the intention of tracking any improvements in ornithological diversity. The statistics we have gathered suggest that so far there has been, at best, only a very modest improvement.

The management plan envisages the introduction of a community orchard at the southern end of the site and for rotational conservation cattle grazing to commence in the autumn of 2024. Whilst the orchard has indeed been planted, the cattle grazing will be delayed due to the state of the Council’s finances.

The Council has submitted an application to the South Downs National Park Community Infrastructure Levy fund and in parallel an application into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which would potentially provide revenue support for the project and allow it to progress further.

The Council has also established a partnership with South Downs National Park to build on knowledge and capacity in the new world of nature financing. This would, for example, see developers who are unable to demonstrate

adequate plans to increase biodiversity buy “credits” which can be used by the Council to deliver nature recover projects.

Meanwhile Brian and I hope to continue our surveys for the foreseeable future and any members who would like to tag along on one of our visits would be more than welcome!

Towards the north of our recording area **Bramber Brooks** nature reserve has now passed from private to public ownership, with Horsham District Council acquiring the site. At the time of writing there is talk of the long-promised scrape being created and Phil Clay will be keeping an eye on this and the birdlife in general. This is a small but perfectly formed reserve, and the SDOS nest box has been used successfully by Barn Owl in the past.

Finally we should note some of grand plans covering the larger landscape. At the county level (East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove) a new **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** is being developed (this is a new statutory duty). This is very much a top-down planning exercise, but Adur and Worthing District Councils (AWDC) will also contribute from the bottom up. As I write, AWDC are agreeing how they will develop a detailed Adur and Worthing Nature Plan and SDOS will undoubtedly contribute to this.

As if all of this was not enough for us to be getting on with , we are also involved in the **Adur River Recovery Project**, a ‘Landscape Recovery’ project that aims to revitalise and restore the River Adur to improve water quality, biodiversity and resilience to drought and flooding. The project is led by the Knepp Wildland Foundation.

We all know that the U.K. is one of the most nature depleted countries in Europe and that urgent action is required to reverse this ecological crisis, so SDOS looks forward to playing its part. Future generations will thank our generation if we can reverse the recent trends of nature degradation.

Two very special birds visit the Recording Area

Roger Smith (Editor)

Summer 2024 saw the arrival in the Recording Area of a Cirl Bunting in June and a Caspian Tern in July. The Cirl Bunting sang and held a territory until August at Mile Oak but the Caspian Tern was a fleeting afternoon and evening visitor to the lower Adur.

Cirl Buntings used to breed in our area but southern England is on the northern edge of the bird's distribution in Europe, where it extends from southern Spain and North Africa through much of France to the Balkans and western Turkey. In Europe it is not a common bird and is most often found in hilly, warm terrain incorporating a range of habitats: trees, hedges, scrub and weedy fields. It is a bird of warm continental climates rather than the dry Mediterranean coast.



Cirl Bunting on the Downs: a drawing by the late John Reaney

Alan Duffy takes up the story of our Cirl Bunting in an account written for Inside Shoreham and Southwick: –

“this summer’s star visitor has been a rather more diminutive yet equally gorgeous bird, in the perfectly pint-sized form of a male Cirl Bunting (pronounced ‘Sirl’). These extremely rare little finches were last seen in the area almost 43 years ago, while they last bred in Sussex 40 years ago.”

Yet another vulnerable species on the ever-growing red-list in the UK (birds under threat of extinction in the country), this stunning yellow, black and chestnut bird is now limited to a small population in Devon and Cornwall. A concerted effort by environmental groups, via habitat improvement, work with local farmers and a re-introduction programme, has led to a most welcome increase in Cirl Bunting numbers in the south-west, with over 800 breeding pairs now estimated to be in situ.

Our own special visitor has been hanging out in the scrub just north of Mile Oak farm above Portslade since the beginning of June, and as of writing this, is still present. So just what is this cute little chap doing around these parts? Well, there are two likelihoods, the first being that it is a bird who has ventured across the channel from the continent, where they are more widespread. The second explanation is that a particularly adventurous member of the Cornwall and Devon population decided to take a trip up the coast, a very unexpected decision by these most sedentary of birds.

Of course, there is the tantalising possibility that this sighting will pave the way for a return of these birds on a permanent basis to the area. However, just as one Swallow doesn’t make a summer, one Cirl Bunting doesn’t make a breeding population (it needs a mate for starters!). Still, its presence is a positive sign for the future while it has certainly been keeping local ornithologists busy, with a constant stream of binocular-wielding birders making their way to see the rare visitor, no doubt popping into Mile Oak farm for coffee and cake on the way.”

Shoreham Sanctuary	Cirl Bunting	27/04/1978	1	
Lancing Clump	Cirl Bunting	13/05/1978	1	Singing Male
Lancing	Cirl Bunting	13/05/1978	1	
Lancing	Cirl Bunting	16/04/1980	1	
Cissbury	Cirl Bunting	26/10/1981	1	Male

The last five sightings of Cirl Bunting in the Recording Area (data from John Newnham).



The Mile Oak Cirl Bunting

The Birds of Sussex (2014) lists a few records after those shown above and states:-

“since 1984, there have been just three records: in 1987, a male was at Church Norton (Pagham Harbour) on 11 October; the following year a male was at Selsey Bill on 8 May; and the last record in the county was a male at Sidlesham on 20 & 21 Mar 1996. It is noteworthy that the three most recent records in Sussex were all from the extreme west of the county, possibly involving wandering birds from Devon although continental birds cannot be ruled out. There is one interesting ringing recovery of this species involving Sussex, which confirms its ability to wander occasionally: a bird ringed at Hodcombe (Beachy Head) in July 1975 was controlled the following June, 625 km away on the Isle of May off the coast of Eastern Scotland! Targeted conservation work has allowed the Devon population to thrive, with up to 862 breeding pairs in 2009 including a reintroduction scheme in Cornwall. However, these populations are incredibly sedentary, so the prospect of Cirl Buntings naturally recolonising Sussex remains a long way off.”

Caspian Terns, the world’s largest tern, are, on the other hand, anything but sedentary. These birds get around. The species is found on six continents and breeds on five. Emphasising this point the image below shows two birds on the shore of the Southern Ocean in South Australia. Beyond that ocean is Antarctica, the only continent where they do not occur.

Until July 13th this year our three most recent local sightings were of birds off or along the coast as shown in the table below.

Shoreham-by-Sea	28/07/1981
Brighton Palace Pier	20/05/1996
Worthing Beach	12/05/2001



Caspian Terns, Kangaroo Island, Southern Australia

In the late afternoon of that day, however, a bird was located in the RSPB Adur Reserve. Richard Allan has provided an account of his experiences of the tern:

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“On Saturday July 13, my son and his partner were visiting and I was all set for a family weekend. We had a restaurant in Shoreham booked for 6:45pm, a short walk from home. My plans then got a little mixed up when a message arrived at 4:55pm from fellow SDOS member Dave Park saying he could see a Caspian Tern resting on the ground in the RSPB Adur reserve.

I replied this was a mega bird for the Adur and that I was on my way. I grabbed binoculars and camera and was on the Norfolk bridge about five minutes later having promised the family I'd be back in time to go to the restaurant.

I scanned quickly from the Norfolk Bridge and could immediately see the bird. I sent a WhatsApp to the Sussex Bird Alert group and immediately got messages about 'where exactly is that' and 'where do we park'.

I moved along the bridge to get a better and slightly closer view. Next to arrive were Tim and Jen Holter, and then local birder Matthew P. Soon other birders started to arrive. Bizarrely, one Sussex birder was having a pint purely by chance in The Bridge pub and once alerted could see the bird.

The bird was moving a little and disappeared into a channel. I left the main group on the bridge and walked further along, about half way towards the top of the Houseboat Channel. From there, through a gap in the trees, I could see the Caspian Tern quite well, with Black-headed Gulls and some Redshanks. I called Jen who was on the bridge to tell everyone to come to me to get decent views. I was then treated to the sight of some ardent twitchers, who had yet to see the tern, eagerly sprinting along the path by the A259. One well-known Sussex twitcher exclaimed his relief with a few choice words when I pointed where it was. He said it was a bird he had never connected with in Sussex and his few UK views had been of birds flying past.

About 5:45pm I left to walk home, mindful of our family dinner at a local restaurant. However, a message soon arrived that the Caspian Tern had flown up river and I quickly searched from the balcony in case I could see it between the Rail and Toll bridges. No luck and a little later we headed out for dinner.

Around 8:30pm, as we were leaving the restaurant I saw some messages saying the Caspian Tern had been relocated earlier....and it was on the east side south of the Toll Bridge. I would have been able to see it from our balcony which would have been a great 'balcony tick'. However, the honour of seeing it from their property goes to the original finder Dave Park who everyone was very grateful to for getting a message out very promptly, including by email to SDOS User Group."

Caspian Terns, which breed around the coast of the Baltic Sea, migrate north-eastwards and south-westwards across the European continent, some probably following the large rivers. They winter in southern Iberia, and much of Africa. Birds have been tracked migrating through northern France but historically the bird has been rarely seen in the UK. However, Josh Jones, in an article in Birdwatch, July 2024, explains that they are occurring more often in recent years. He attributes this to intense conservation efforts in Sweden that have led to an increase in breeding success and to a steadily growing population in Finland. The Swedish effort has focused on reducing nest predation by White-tailed Eagles!

So two very special birds for Shoreham this summer with both, perhaps, reflecting the outcomes of successful conservation efforts elsewhere.



Caspian Tern, Houseboat Channel, Shoreham

SDOS Garden Bird Survey 2023

Sim Eliott

Thank you to all those members who returned data on your garden bird sightings. Seventeen people participated in 2023 (20 people participated in 2022). In 2023 I received data from 14 people in Quarter 1; 14 in Quarter 2; 17 in Quarter 3 & 14 in Quarter 4. (Total quarterly returns: 59; 2022 total: 64).

Whilst we do not have many people participating, the quality of anecdotal information, in addition to the number of birds, remains fascinating, and I have tried to capture some of the richness of this information in the highlights section.

I have calculated the ranking of garden birds seen for 2023 and the change from 2022, using just the total numbers of sightings this year. Obviously, the total sighting is not the total number of individual real birds seen but the total of the maximum number of birds seen at one time, in each week. Across the year, if you saw 2 Wood Pigeons every week, it is likely that that was the same two Wood Pigeons, not 104 Wood Pigeons, but the figure of 104 is used for statistical purposes as a proxy of abundance.

We should not draw too much significance from increases or decreases in numbers of birds in our area year-on-year, as our dataset (number of participants) is too small for increases or decreases in abundance to be statistically valid and significant. We need to look at the much bigger data sets of the RSPB and BTO garden bird watches to know what is going on with garden birds in the UK.

However, there are important trends to notice in the SDOS area: worryingly all but 11 of the 43 species seen seemingly showed declines in abundance.

Because there were 64 returns in 2022 and 59 in 2023 (a reduction of 8%), I adjusted last year's proxy total number of birds by reducing the totals for 2022 by 8% to make a fairer comparison between the two years. This, however, is a very inexact method, so caution should be applied to the validity of any year's increases and declines in abundance. Of the many decreases in abundance in the SDOS area in 2023 some of these are seemingly particularly striking: for example Starlings (-44%); Blackbirds (-60%); Carrion Crows (-51%), Blackcaps (-75%), Chaffinches (-83%) and Sparrowhawks (-72%). Year-to-year change may not be part of a general trend, although looking at national data from the BTO and the RSPB, the trajectory of abundance of Starlings, Blackbirds and Chaffinches is downward everywhere. The general decline in abundance in the SDOS area is congruent with the RSPB's State of Nature Report 2023 which suggests nearly one in six species in the UK are threatened with extinction.

You are now only slightly more likely to see a Song Thrush in your garden than a Sparrowhawk, which shows the alarming decline in Song Thrush numbers. The apparent downward trends in Blackbirds, Chaffinches and Starling numbers is in line with the national trends reported by the British Trust for Ornithology. It is not yet known why Chaffinch numbers are declining. The recent decline in Blackbirds is of particular concern and is in line with other southern counties.

The BTO states that since 2020, birdwatchers have reported fewer Blackbirds in their gardens, especially in London. This recent decline has been linked to the appearance of Usutu virus, a new mosquito-borne virus in the UK which is often fatal to Blackbirds. It was first detected in the UK in London in the summer of 2020, and appears to have since started to spread further in southern Britain. It is prevalent on the near-continent and its spread has been linked to climate change, which has benefited the mosquitoes which spread the virus.

In 2023 the RSPB reported that there has been a serious decline in the numbers of many birds, including the Song Thrush, Skylark, Lapwing and House Sparrow

and that most of the declining species are farmland birds. They proceed to observe that the latest research suggests that intensive farming practices, particularly an increase in pesticides and fertiliser use, is the main driver of most bird population decline. Changes in farming practices have had a devastating effect on farmland birds. It can seem hard to believe that farming could impact birds in suburban and urban areas. However, as around 70% of the UK is farmland, what happens there will affect birds in all habitats. Especially as, in many cases, urban and suburban bird populations are continuous with the countryside.

What can we do about this? In addition to lobbying about protection of habitats, and climate change, something that we can all do is count “ordinary” birds in our gardens and report that data to a national recording scheme. This reporting helps the BTO and RSPB to understand the changes in abundance that are occurring and they can use this data, in combination with other research, to see why populations are declining and to judge the efficacy of interventions to improve abundance.

As our garden bird watchers already know, 2024 is the last year of the SDOS birdwatch and we are stopping the scheme at the end of December, although I will write, next year, a report on the data you have sent in for 2024. I have been amazed by the dedication of a regular group of members who have diligently sent in data and extremely interesting anecdotal information. I would urge you, if you are not already doing so, to contribute your data to the BTO Garden Bird Watch <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw>. I would urge everyone to join the BTO Garden Bird Watch – it is free, and you can send in paper submissions once you have joined if you do not want to send in your data on line.

On a more positive note, House Sparrow numbers seemingly increased a little in the SDOS area from last year, despite doing badly nationally. That may be a surprise to you, as some of you never see a House Sparrow in your garden, or only see a few; but some garden bird watchers see a lot (e.g. Peter, Anthony,

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Jay, Clive, John & Shena and Reg). It is fascinating looking at the quarterly returns as certain patterns are very clear. If Robins are seen, it is mostly only one, but the probably the same one week after week in the winter. This is in line with their highly territorial behaviour. If you see Wood Pigeons, you probably see a pair, although in some gardens there are many more than two. Woodpigeons are monogamous birds that mate for life and a resident pair is normal. Starlings, House Sparrows and Herring Gulls are flocking birds, and when they are in your gardens there are often lots of them, if you see them at all. If you see Long-Tailed Tits you tend to see them in a small group and just occasionally, in line with their behaviour of moving around frequently in extended family groups

As well as abundance decline, we also saw a decline in diversity: 42 different species of bird were seen in 2023; 54 different species were seen in 2022. In 2023 participating members did not see the Black Headed Gulls; House Martins; Great Black-Backed Gulls; Garden Warblers, Mallards, Linnets, Marsh Tits, Wood Warblers, Black Red Starts, Fieldfare, Herons, Kestrel, Pied Flycatchers or Reed Buntings that were seen in 2023.

The following table shows ranking (by total of weekly sightings of maximum number of birds seen at one time, and the total of weekly sightings of maximum number birds at one time per week (this is not the actual numbers of individual birds who visit gardens as week on week you will often have been counting the same individual birds). The weekly average of birds per garden and the percentage change are rounded to the nearest whole number)

Species	Rankings		Birds			Change
	2023	2022	2023 total	2023 Weekly average (*)	2022 Adjusted (**)	
House Sparrow	1 ↔	1	4240 ↑	6	4052	5%
Feral Pigeon	2 ↑	4	1676 ↓	2	1680	0%
Starling	3 ↓	2	1656 ↓	2	2982	-44%
Wood Pigeon	4 ↓	3	1647 ↓	2	1820	-9%
Goldfinch	5 ↔	5	946 ↓	1	1396	-32%
Blue Tit	6 ↑	7	940 ↓	1	994	-5%
Great Tit	7 ↑	9	807 ↓	1	898	-10%
Herring Gull	8 ↑	10	745 ↓	1	854	-13%
Magpie	9 ↓	8	675 ↓	1	898	-25%

Robin	10 ↑	11	647 ↓		744	-13%
Dunnock	11 ↑	12	547 ↓		657	-17%
Blackbird	12 ↓	6	433 ↓		1079	-60%
Collared Dove	13 ↑	14	372 ↑	>	358	4%
Green-finch	14 ↑	15	339 ↑	>	313	8%
Long-Tailed Tit	15 ↑	17	205 ↓	>	224	-9%
Carrion Crow	16 ↓	13	190 ↓	>	389	-51%
Wren	17 ↑	18	178 ↓	>	221	-19%
Jackdaw	18 ↑	20	135 ↓	>	182	-26%
Blackcap	19 ↔	19	52 ↓	>	209	-75%
Chaffinch	= 20 ↓	16	42 ↓	>	248	-83%
Coal Tit	= 20 ↑	23	42 ↓	>	76	-45%
Chiff-Chaff	22 ↑	24	38 ↓	>	56	-32%

Great Spotted Woodpecker	23 ↓	21	35 ↓	>	87	-60%
Goldcrest	= 24 ↑	27	30 ↓	>	44	-32%
Song Thrush	= 24 ↑	28	30 ↓	>	43	-31%
Jay	26 ↔	26	24 ↓	>	45	-47%
Sparrowhawk	27 ↓	22	23 ↓	>	82	-72%
Swift	28 ↑	30	19 ↓	>	25	-24%
Stock Dove	29 ↓	25	13 ↓	>	50	-74%
Willow Warbler	30 ↓	29	7 ↓	>	30	-77%
Green Woodpecker	31 ↑	34	5 ↔	>	5	0%
Redwing	32 ↑	39	3 ↓	>	2	63%
Nut-Hatch	= 33 ↔	33	2 ↓	>	6	-64%

White-throat	= 33 ↑	= 43	2 ↑	>	0	
Firecrest	= 33		2 ↑	>	0	
Buzzard	= 36 ↑	= 43	1 ↔	>	1	0%
Lesser Black Backed Gull	= 36 ↑	= 43	1 ↔	>	1	0%
Pheasant	= 36 ↑		1 ↑	>	0	
Pied Wagtail	= 36 ↑	= 43	1 ↔	>	1	0%
Rook	= 36 ↑	= 43	1 ↔	>	1	0%
Siskin	= 36 ↑	= 43	1 ↔	>	1	0%
Wheatear	= 36 ↑	= 43	1 ↑	>	0	

(*) total number of birds divided by (52 [weeks] X 14.75 [average number of returns for a quarter])

(**) 2022 totals reduced by 8%

The Highlights

First Quarter

Val had the pleasures of seeing a Firecrest, Goldcrest and a Tawny owl and Marion saw two (a pair) Firecrests. Six people saw Sparrowhawks. John and Shena saw Sparrowhawk four times (once as a pair); they also had a very high number of Sparrows! Rae had weekly sightings of a Wren, which is very unusual in our area; but Wrens are notoriously secretive. Marion had a male Great Spotted Woodpecker 10 weeks in a row, twice with a female. David had a markedly high number of Woodpigeons and Peter had a high number of Feral Pigeons.

Second Quarter

Mark saw a Rook; the only Rook seen in a garden in 2023, and Rae continued seeing her daily Wren. Maureen had many fussy-eater Starlings. Marion, Rae, David, Clive and Jay were lucky and saw daily Blackbirds, but mostly only singletons. Sheila, Marrion and Laurie saw Jays; garden counts include overspills from woodlands, which emphasises the importance of garden bird counting

Third Quarter

Val saw one of only two Nuthatches seen this year. Peter saw a Goldcrest in September. Mark saw Long-Tailed Tits for five weeks (one of my favourite birds!) John and Shena saw 178 swallows flying overhead; perhaps on their way back to their winter home in Africa. Noelle and Tony saw above average numbers of House Sparrows. Tony Z saw the only Whitethroats of the year. Reg continued seeing large numbers of House Sparrows and the only Pheasant of the year.

Fourth Quarter

Rae was pleased to see Goldfinches returning in good numbers in her garden and she was one of the few people who saw a Chaffinch regularly. Laurie saw

a Goldcrest. Tony B. and Peter were two of the few people who had regular Herring Gulls in their garden. Whilst Herring Gulls were the 8th most abundant bird in SDOS gardens, most of them were in a few gardens. There are many Herring Gulls where I live, near the sea front in Brighton, but they are never in my garden because my garden is too small for a landing. Abundance in gardens is not always a proxy of general abundance in an area. Sadly, Jay saw three cats in his garden every week, which significantly impacted on his bird count. Peter and Anthony saw really encouraging numbers of House Sparrows every week and Reg saw a huge number of House Sparrows every week (30+ in most weeks).

Thank you to all those taking part in the SDOS Garden Birdwatch for your observations and comments. I will miss reading the very interesting reports you send in, but unfortunately, I have had to take on more caring responsibilities for my mum, so have had to reduce the number of voluntary activities I undertake. I really hope any regular SDOD garden bird watchers who are not currently members of BTO Garden birdwatch scheme join the BTO scheme, as your data is really valuable and their statistical expertise will result in your data being much more usefully used than I have been able to!



Photograph Acknowledgements

The source of images is often clear from the context or other attribution and those are not listed here.

Front cover: Little Grebe – Richard Allan

Page 34: Cirl Bunting – Richard Allan

Page 36 Caspian Terns – Roger Smith

Page 38: Caspian Tern – Richard Allan

Page 49: Dunlin – Richard Allan

Page 49: Wood Sandpiper – Richard Allan

Back Cover: Cirl Bunting – Ron Bewley

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