Shoreham and District Ornithological Society

Spring Newsletter

2025

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Editorial

Another bumper edition of the Newsletter so thanks to all our contributors with a special mention to John Maskell who tells me that his piece here about local Victorian nature writers is his 40th contribution to a variety of SDOS publications going back to 1983. His 1983 account of a railway trip in India can be found in the relevant Annual Report in the Society's John Newnham archive on the Website. I take this opportunity to remind newer members of this archive which holds most of the Society's publications dating back to 1953.

I was reminded, at a recent talk to the Society, of the tameness of birds in the Gambia. How very approachable they are – particularly a boon for photographers. Goa is much the same in my memory. In contrast we spent Christmas, in France, in a gite in Normandy, and as I emerged from the front door the Wood Pigeons in a tree fully 150m away would head off at high speed for the horizon. Italian birds are wary too. These differences impact on bird watching across the world – the approachability of some birds on islands, for example the Galapagos, has been remarked upon for a long time.

Some of these differences in behaviour are presumably learned and relate to threat levels, but there are other differences less easy to explain. It is well recognized that British resident Robins are quite confiding and will follow one round the garden, whilst in Europe Robins are much more retiring and, indeed, can be elusive. Ten years or so ago I spent four winters trying to watch Water Pipits on Staines Moor, near Heathrow, where they winter. I soon realized that if you could get anywhere near a pipit it wouldn't be of the Water variety.

Why are Meadow Pipits much more approachable than Water Pipits? Why can one walk straight up to a Turnstone whilst other waders are much more skittish? Bird behaviour can be enigmatic I suppose.

Best wishes to you all

Roger

The Stinky Pool 'Grey Ghost'

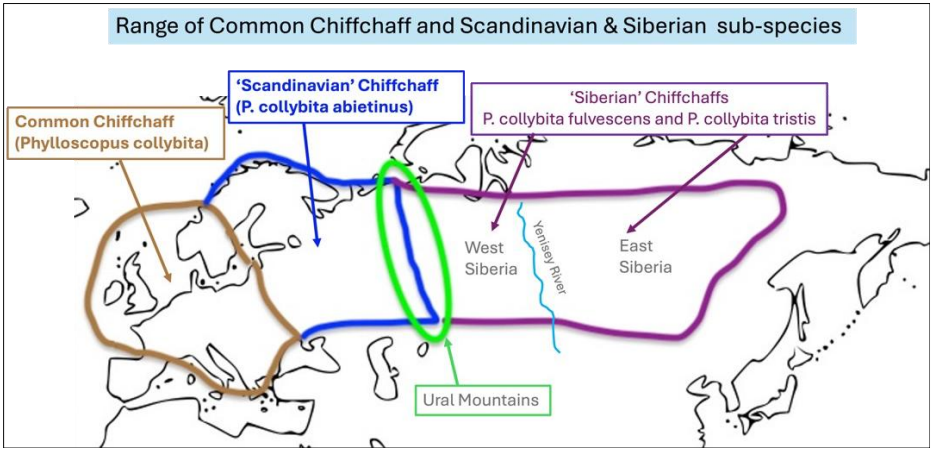
Richard Allan

Chiffchaffs (Phylloscopus collybita) are a common passage migrant and summer breeding warbler in Sussex. There is an increasing trend for some Chiffchaffs to spend winter here too, often around water treatment works or other wet areas where they can find enough insects to see them through our increasingly milder winters.

The excellent Birds of Sussex (2014) estimated the then wintering population to be around 100 birds and suggested "...wintering Chiffchaffs may come from a variety of N and E European locations, with very few being British breeders." Today, I suspect there are now more than 100 Chiffchaffs wintering in Sussex, as it is possible to find 5 to 10 Chiffchaffs in many wet, insect-rich locations.

Chiffchaffs have a vast range, leading to complex taxonomy as birds with distinct plumage and vocal traits become recognised as different subspecies. (see map on Page 5))

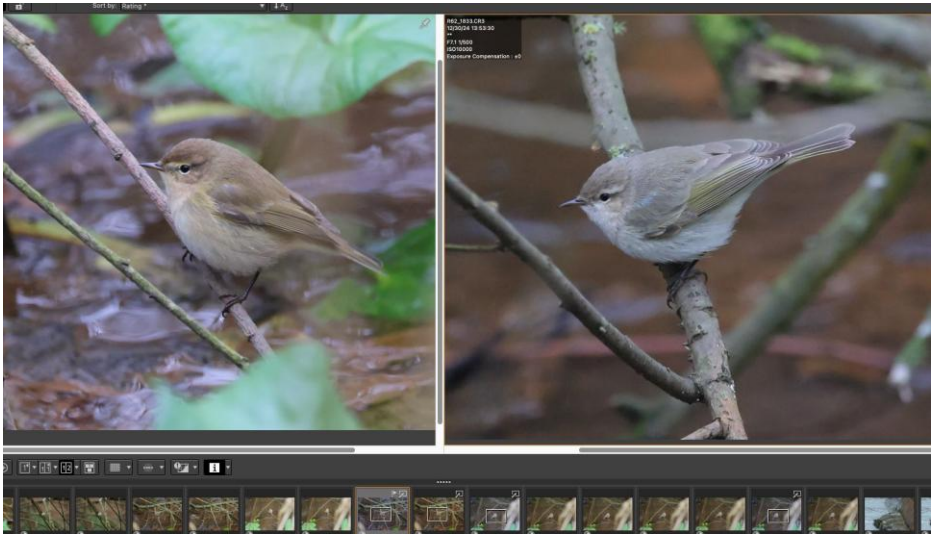
'Siberian' Chiffchaffs are known to be regular but scarce visitors to Britain. Instead of migrating south to the Indian sub-continent like most of their species, these birds choose to fly westward to avoid the harsh Siberian winter. Due to their long journey, they typically arrive in Britain in late autumn. Often these scarce, eastern long-distance migrants stand-out as looking, and even sounding, a bit different from the Common Chiffchaffs they often associate with. Generally, Siberian birds are paler, lacking the olive-brown, yellow and buff tinges of the birds found in Britain and much of Western Europe. However, identifying a particular sub-species in the field is not a straightforward matter, not helped if birds come from areas where ranges overlap leading to intergrades or hybrids between different subspecies.



Around December 20th 2024, Bernie Forbes reported a very pale, 'grey ghost', Siberian-type Chiffchaff from Stinky Pool, Rye Lane, Henfield. It was a bird I wanted to have a good look at but Christmas family visitor commitments meant I could not get there until December 30th. It was a new place for me, and I found a shallow, marshy area with flowing water which looked great for wintering Chiffchaffs. Despite its name, there was no smell.

Standing with another birder, a handful of Common Chiffchaffs were moving around when a much paler, more active bird came into my view. It was just as Bernie had described, a 'grey ghost' amongst half a dozen browner Common Chiffchaffs. It seemed to fly-catch much more than the Common Chiffchaffs which predominantly pecked and probed around the mud for insects. It would have been easy to think I was watching a flycatcher rather than a Phylloscopus warbler.

Over the next hour I made a mental note of some visual features and took hundreds of photos despite the poor light on a grey, dull afternoon and many branches in the way. At home I started working through the photos to see what I could learn and if I could identify the sub-species. Comparing the birds versus the photos of the Common Chiffchaffs proved a big help.



Key features of the 'grey ghost' were:

· Grey-brown mantle

· Pale breast and flanks with just a bit of buff colour around the shoulders

· Very dark, black-looking bill and legs versus dark brown legs of Common Chiffchaffs

· Yellow-edged feathers in the wing and tail were obvious in the field and photos.

· Pale buffy-coloured supercilium, lacking yellow tones and cheeks of a similar colour

Unfortunately, none of the Chiffchaffs were calling as the voice can be a good indicator of sub-species. I posted some pictures on a local WhatsApp group which started a debate about whether this bird was a so-called 'true' Siberian Chiffchaff of the race 'tristis' from the east Siberian Plain beyond the Yenisey river. Other possibilities suggested were a Siberian Chiffchaff of the race 'fulvescens' from the west Siberian Plain, lying between the Ural mountains and

the Yenisey River or a Scandinavian Chiffchaff of the race 'abietinus' from west of the Urals, possibly from the Fenno-scandia region.

I had also started to read many articles about identifying the eastern Chiffchaff sub-species and started to realise how tricky it was. Indeed, there are some authorities who think 'fulvescens' is a hybrid between Scandinavian 'abietinus' and Siberian 'tristis' with another authority adding that 'fulvescens' look and sound predominately as 'tristis' with some subtle olive and yellow plumage traits. Who knew the humble Chiffchaff could be so bewildering!

Locally, we agreed it would really help if the bird called, and even more help if I could record the call on Merlin from where the sonogram could be analysed. Some discussion with very experienced birders agreed that limited playback of the calls of different Chiffchaffs might induce the 'grey ghost' to respond but would be unlikely to distract it unduly from feeding. So, I returned on Jan 2nd with various sound recordings downloaded to my phone. The call of the Siberian races being a distinctive flat 'weep' versus the rising 'hu-weet' of Common Chiffchaff.

As before the 'grey ghost' was very active and present with Common Chiffchaffs. The light was better for photos too. I spent about 1.5hrs with the birds and eventually, as they were not calling, I played calls of Common Chiffchaff (Phylloscopus collybita), Scandinavian Chiffchaff (P.c.abietinus), Western Siberian Chiffchaff (P.c.fulvescens) and Eastern Siberian Chiffchaff (P.c.tristis). None of the Chiffchaffs responded to any of the calls …most unhelpful of the little blighters.

When I played the song (not the call) a few times of Common Chiffchaff, only the pale grey individual responded, briefly doing a circuit of me, including landing in the bushes behind me where I'd never previously seen it go. A little later, a likely Sparrowhawk dashed quickly overhead, and all the Chiffchaffs were momentarily spooked. I was watching the grey bird, saw it flick onto a branch and give 3-4 straight 'weep' calls, more associated with Siberian birds. Unfortunately, Merlin wasn't running at the time. It was the only bird that called. Overall, I wasn't feeling any more optimistic about nailing this bird's

identity to sub-species level, and was perhaps just a tad more confused.

At home, I noticed on the new set of photos how the 'grey ghost' looked browner and less cold grey in the weak sunshine versus previous photos. Despite being the same bird, it now seemed a better fit with the characteristics of 'tristis', having a buff-looking supercilium, face and tinges to the breast, absent in previous photos perhaps due to poor light and limitations of camera sensors etc.

Overall, despite what it might sound like, I did have a few really interesting hours in the field with this bird plus plenty of hours reading identification articles, engaging in WhatsApp discussions and poring through photos.

So, what was the result of all this detective work? Well, my conclusion is that the Sussex Records Committee is going to have to pass judgement on this bird, and even they may just describe it as 'type-tristis', meaning it shows characteristics of birds from east of the Ural Mountains. Does anyone want to stick their neck out and say if it's 'tristis', 'fulvescens', 'abietinus' or even a hybrid or intergrade? Or are you like me; it's just an interesting bird to enjoy that has likely flown a huge distance to spend some time in Henfield.

The bird wasn't reported again after January 2nd, having spent roughly two weeks at Stinky Pool.

Gardening for Wildlife

Sarah Hunt

When I first became the owner of Adrian Thomas's RSPB book *Gardening for Wildlife*, I didn't have a garden, and I didn't live in the UK. I could watch migrating Ospreys, Golden Eagles and vultures from the balcony of my high-rise apartment in the concrete jungle of Gibraltar, but what I craved was a well-attended bird feeder with my 'own' Sparrows.

Fast forward five or so years and I returned to England, to Lancing on the South Coast, less than 100 metres from the sea front. And I finally had my own small patch of garden. It contained a few non-native, scrupulously pruned bushes and a closely cropped lawn: it was on the whole rather bleak. The RSPB garden birdwatch yielded one Wood Pigeon in an hour: I was heartbroken. It was clearly time to set to work and in May 2023 work began in earnest.

However, I quickly learnt why it was such a barren garden. On land which was formerly tidal, the soil was shallow, low in nutrients and was decidedly rocky. To add to my woes everything seemed to be battered by the south westerly salty winds screaming off the seafront to destroy tender new growth. Even plants which were supposed to withstand wind really hated the salt and failed to grow. But I persevered and learnt as I went. I've planted Gorse in shade and Gorse in sun, and in my garden it thrives in the relatively sheltered shade and doesn't much like the sun. I built a compost out of pallets guided by Adrian's book, which is home to all sorts of invertebrates which I could spend a lifetime identifying.

Some creatures are more easy to put a name to, such as the stunning amber eyed Common Toads which not only love the compost heap, but many undisturbed spots all around the garden. I've created sheltered areas and planted alliums, lavender, hawthorn, birch, ivy, honeysuckle, clematis, sedum, pyracantha, verbena, native bluebells and allowed a few Buddleia to stay. It is so satisfying to see the birds hunting around the new plants for seeds and the insects which feed on them. Almost daily I am visited by a Wren which does a circuit of the garden: starting at the compost heap, and then scouring the ivy, and the adjacent honeysuckle, before hopping to the log and stone pile. All these hunting grounds are of my doing and the satisfaction is immense. I put in a tiny pond less than a year ago and have already had a Common Frog visit, much to my daughter's delight. We are hopeful for frogspawn in the spring. To my surprise, astonishingly metallic coloured dragonflies started visiting a matter of months after installation of what is little more than a puddle. On summer evenings the bats circle above it hunting insects - far more interesting to watch

than any TV show. I find it incredible that such a small drop of water can attract so much, and so soon.

Aside from the readily visible bats, and with the help of a remote wildlife camera, I have managed to identify that the main mammalian visitors to my garden are some delightful Wood mice, their big ears and white bellies giving their identity away. Rather surprisingly, considering my garden is walled on three sides and is in a rather urban spot, I have recorded two Hedgehogs on their nightly travels (one large and one smaller). I didn't even dare to dream that this would happen. We are also visited by mischievous Foxes, and occasionally a Brown Rat which helps to clear up around the bird feeder. Neither cause any trouble; they just add to the charm. I make that five mammal species which is not a bad tally for a small urban patch.

The garden birdwatch is now a bonanza of birds, with around 50 Starlings amongst many others. I've been lucky enough to enjoy the company of Goldfinches, Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers, a hunting Sparrowhawk and this week, a Great Spotted Woodpecker. But those visitors I enjoy more than any others are the everyday birds because, to me, they weren't everyday for so many years. 'My' House Sparrows have increased in number since I started feeding them, and they also nest in the eaves of the house. On my rough counts, I think their numbers have just about doubled.

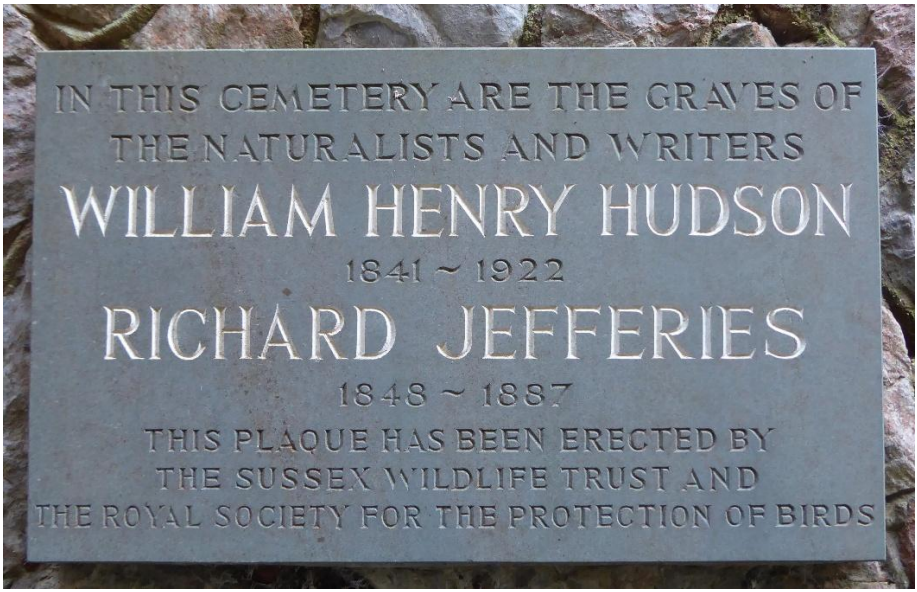
It is still early days with my garden, as many of the trees and bushes have many years until they become established and are able to provide cover for the birds, so I look forward to what the future will bring. In the meantime, I am enjoying having already made improvements for the local wildlife. When you read comments that small patches can make a huge difference, they really can; my garden is, quite literally, living proof.

Local Victorian Nature Writers

John Maskell

One of my favourite birding locations is a short walk from our home and is a place where one can find peace and solitude. The site has extensive footpaths and a variety of habitats where one can encounter many species of birds, a

variety of butterflies in the warmer months and a host of wildflowers including orchids. I have found this to be a reliable local place to see Jays, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers. The area also has a thriving population of Goldcrests but current "star bird" for me was a Mistle Thrush observed in December 2024. I am speaking of the large Broadwater & Worthing Cemetery on South Farm Road which was opened in 1863 and contains some 24,888 burials. It closed to new burials in 2014 unless there is a family grave in an existing plot. Buried in the cemetery are two of the greatest nature writers of the Victorian era. There is a joint memorial to these naturalists on the wall of Broadwater's entrance chapel off South Farm Road.



William Henry Hudson was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, of English parents in 1841. He helped found the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in 1889 and became its chairman. Amongst Hudson's many published books his greatest literary work is generally acknowledged as "Nature in Downland". Hudson died in London in 1922. However, having spent some time staying in Worthing in his later years, he had expressed a wish to be buried near Richard Jefferies. Unfortunately, this was not possible as that part of the cemetery was

full and so his grave is alongside Carnegie Road. It is a joint grave with his wife Emily who had passed away in Worthing the previous year.

Richard Jefferies was a prolific writer and produced essays, books and novels that focused on nature subjects. He was born at Coate, near Swindon, in 1848, later lived in the London area and spent his final years in various parts of Sussex. After being diagnosed with tuberculosis Jefferies moved to Goring-by-Sea to benefit from the coastal fresh air. Sadly, he died there at just 38 years of age in August 1887. The house where he died, called 'Seaview' at that time, is in Jefferies Lane and has a plaque on the façade recording the connection. He was also buried in Broadwater Cemetery where his grave is inscribed, "To the honoured memory of the prose poet of England's fields and woodlands."

Broadwater Cemetery now benefits from the support of the very active Friends of Broadwater & Worthing Cemetery group (FBWC). Whilst the

graveyard receives some maintenance from the local council the FBWC members also operate a maintenance programme that is sympathetic to all

aspects of Nature. SDOS member Paul Robards is the Wildlife & Clearance Co-ordinator and has done much to create and maintain wildlife areas. In addition, FBWC has also produced numerous booklets about various aspects of the cemetery and those interred within. From April to October there are guided walks on the first Saturday of the month. Individual membership is a bargain at just £5 per year. If you are passing I strongly recommend a visit to this interesting location in the middle of the Worthing area. It is open every day with closing times earlier in the winter months.

SDOS Birders on Tour

Dungeness and Rye Harbour January 2025

Jenny Holter

Tuesday 14th January: Pett Level and Dungeness

We departed from Shoreham at 7am with a group of 13 SDOS members for our inaugural overnight minibus trip, meeting three others at our destination, who had made their own way across. Our first stop was at Rock-a-Nore, nestled beneath a cliff at the end of Hastings seafront, where a strategic toilet stop offered the opportunity to get the ball rolling with a Fulmar tick. It didn't take long for us to locate a single bird huddled on the cliff, and before long a few more traversed the rockface, stiff white wings, fringed with grey borders lending an elegant air to their flight.

A smattering of small birds were feeding in the vegetation on the roadside bank, the highlight being a Firecrest found by Tim, although few in the group managed to get onto this. A Buzzard perched on a ledge gave excellent views.

With a full day planned, we didn't linger too long, and continued on to the wonderful open terrain at Pett level, with a glorious mosaic of reed-lined pools and damp grassland stretching out in front of us, and the sea wall rising behind. The sun was shining, bathing the landscape in warm light. In this beautiful setting

the birds came thick and fast, with Curlew and Lapwings spattered across the grass, and a flock of feral Barnacle Geese munching enthusiastically very close to the road. A Kestrel posed on a nearby gate post, whilst a beautifully marked male Marsh Harrier hawked across the reeds. We got the scopes out and were soon able to find small groups of Redshank and Dunlin busily feeding amongst the larger waders. As we surveyed the landscape, more Curlew flew in, their evocative calls filling the skies as they circled round to join their peers, adding to the wonderful atmosphere of this rather special place.

On the pools we found a good variety of wildfowl, with the morning sunlight enhancing their magnificent plumage features - bronze-headed Teal, ghostly grey Pochard with contrasting conker-brown heads, beautifully marked Wigeon blazing bold golden-striped foreheads, and brightly coloured Shoveler sporting chestnut sides, dark green heads and ridiculously oversized bills. A diminutive powder puff Little Grebe bobbed gently in the centre of the water and a good number of Coots rested on the grassy bank.

With the sea and beach bereft of birds, we continued on our way, pausing briefly at Scotney gravel pits, where we added Egyptian Goose and Rook to our increasing tally. From here we drove on to meet Sue Miles at the ARC hide at Dungeness nature reserve. Alongside the regular ducks, we found a couple of elegantly poised Great Egrets, feathers gleaming in the bright sunshine. A pair of up-ending Shelduck were in the middle of the lake and amongst a raft of Tufted Ducks, a drake Goldeneye played hard to get, with frequent dives as we tried to get everyone in the group onto him. Eventually we had success, and a few distant Gadwall added to the mix before we departed. A quick loop around the boardwalk proved birdless save for a single Wren, so we drove across to the main reserve.

A short walk from the track to New Diggings, rewarded us with great views of several Goldeneye, including a group of two males and four females, making a mockery of our hardworking efforts from the last hide! The other highlight here was a female Long-tailed Duck which showed well for everyone, with a Great Crested Grebe and soaring Great Egret powering towards us all adding

to the mix. Some were lucky enough to see an iridescent Kingfisher flash past, sadly too quick for me! Next we headed for Dennis' hide by the car park where we ate our lunch overlooking Burrowes Pit. A Great Northern Diver was the star bird here, and the whole group enjoyed excellent scope views.

Suitably refreshed, we headed for Hookers Pit, a short walk to a mound overlooking a reed bed and watery channels. As we approached, a group of Long-tailed Tits were feeding in the bushes. Here we spent several minutes observing a cluster of nine Bearded Reedlings, acrobatically feeding on a narrow strip of reeds just a short distance from us, giving incredible views of this notoriously tricky bird. This was a definite highlight of the trip, and a lifetime tick for many in the group.

After drinking in this wonderful sight, with time pressing on, we dragged ourselves away to scan the distant flocks of geese near Boulderwall Farm, where we managed to identify a few White-fronted Geese, white-blazed bills

and black banded patches on their bellies just visible though the scopes. Canada Geese and Little Egret added to our growing list.

By now it was mid- afternoon, and with sunset at around 4.30PM we piled back onto the bus and headed out to Walland Marsh, driving through a maze of narrow country lanes till we located a flock of Bewick's Swans, obligingly resting fairly close to the road, and allowing a close inspection of their distinctive yellow and black bills. A bonus here was a small flock of Golden Plover, which entertained us with a brief, yet mesmerising murmuration across the field to settle on a pool of floodwater, their soft golden mantles and bold white bellies sparkling in the evening glow. A fitting finale to a great day's birding in good company, with over seventy species seen.

Wednesday 15th January: Rye Harbour and Pett revisited

After a delicious breakfast at Winchelsea Lodge, we arrived at Rye Harbour nature reserve around 9.30AM. The weather forecast was not promising, with fog or mist predicted for the whole day, but despite wisps of low-lying fog when we arrived, this soon lifted to give clear views of the reserve, despite the grey skies.

Our first birds, lurking in a muddy channel as we approached the visitor centre, were Redshank, Curlew and an elegant Avocet, a new bird for the trip, and a delight to see with its long bluish legs, striking black and white plumage, and distinctive uptilted beak.

Flat Beach was full of birds, and we found a rich variety of waders here. A large battalion of Oystercatchers huddled tight on the shingle bank, whilst the smaller islands overflowed with groups of Golden Power and Dunlin, a sprinkling of Grey Plover and single Black-tailed Godwit intermingled amongst them.

Around the watery edges of the scrape, Turnstones and Ringed Plover were incredibly well camouflaged against the stones, more easily seen when they scuttled across the shingle.

A few stocky Brent Goose posed in the water beside an island, and slim, elegant Pintails, with striking white crescents extending to their napes swam gracefully at the back of the pool. Suddenly a Spoonbill arrived on the scene, soon joined by another, and began 'sweeping' the waters with a sideways motion in a characteristic feeding action. The spatula shaped bills, one pale pink, the other black with custard tip, identified them as a juvenile and an adult. Little Egret and Great Egret on the same pool gave a good opportunity to compare and contrast the features of this trio of white birds, which are all increasing in number across the south of England.

On a couple of occasions, we observed a mass take-off from the area, and the skies were filled with vast swirls of waders; large black and white Oystercatchers with pointed orange bills, tiny, twisting grey and white Dunlin,

the ever-twinkling Golden Plover and Lapwings with softly rounded wings cascading overhead. We searched for a raptor, with Vicci managing to spot a dashing Merlin as the cause of the uproar. A mixed flock of passerines bounced across the sky before dropping to the saltmarsh, where we were able to confirm Clive's identification of Skylarks and Linnets.

We walked to the sea, and located a distant flock of Wigeon, before relocating to Parkes hide, overlooking a freshwater lagoon. Here we found the usual mix of ducks, and a group of nine Snipe huddled against the bank, showing well in the scope. Completing the circuit back to the visitor centre, a Bar-tailed Godwit was rushing around a sloping island in the middle of the pool, tugging aggressively at its prey as it probed the mud. And on the last stretch of the path, we caught up with a flurry of smaller birds, including Chiffchaff, Stonechat and Dunnock.

We enjoyed a rest and some lunch and a hot drink in the cafe, before returning to the bus, where we were surprised by a very tame Collared Dove, giving a "close encounter of the bird kind" when it landed on my head!! It worked its way round the group, landing on arms, phones and backs before we escaped onto the bus.

A short drive to Pett Level to finish the afternoon birding, produced more extended views of Marsh Harrier and a single Ruff foraging on the grass, which was another new trip tick. Climbing the sea wall, we could just make out some straggly lines of ducks on the water. Setting the scopes up these were identified as Great Crested Grebes and Common Scoter respectively, our last bird of the trip.

With a final tally of over eighty species, it had been a very successful couple of days. Thanks to everybody who came along and made it such a friendly and enjoyable trip.

A Barn Owl Box

Tony Benton

I am very pleased to announce that SDOS have funded a Barn Owl Box in memory of Dr Barrie Watson.

Barrie was a member of SDOS since 1967, and passed away peacefully in Devon on the 1st June 2023 at the age of 93. Barrie moved to Shoreham in 1966 to join a Shoreham based general medical practice in partnership with Dr John Stafford, the founder of SDOS. He remained in this position until his retirement in 1993.

Barrie was involved in many ringing projects over the years and this included ringing over 500 Mute Swans! But for many people, Barrie was synonymous with Barn Owls and during his long retirement was busy erecting and checking owl boxes around the county. He was without doubt the county expert on this species, still climbing trees to inspect boxes in his 90th year!

So when the opportunity arose for SDOS to sponsor a box in memory of Barrie, we thought that this was a most fitting use of our funds. The Sussex Barn Owl Study Group provided and installed the box and we will receive periodic reports regarding its occupancy and hopefully success.

'Our' box is on private land that has no public access, but I can assure members that the location is highly appropriate as a memorial to Barrie and that it's in the lower Adur Valley. The Owls will have a most magnificent view of the

South Downs from their box, and will have Tawny and Little Owls as near neighbours.

Barn Owls in Sussex are doing relatively well and experts have told me that 90 % of known successful breeding attempts are in nest boxes. So we have high hopes that our investment of £225 will deliver dividends for nature for years to come.

Thanks are due to our President, John Newnham, for some of the biographical background on Barrie and more can be read in our Autumn 2023 newsletter. We also appreciate the help of the landowner for hosting this box, and the expertise of the Sussex Barn Owl Study Group who made all of this possible. The image is from Tim Holter, with thanks.

Swift News

Jackie Burdon

Surely everybody loves swifts? One of our most fleeting summer visitors, these amazing little birds migrate some of the furthest distances and remarkably barely ever land and never perch – feeding, mating and sleeping on the wing. But you don't even have to know that much about this charismatic species to feel warmly towards it. You just have to be familiar with their excited screams and watch as they criss-cross the skies, high above our towns and cities, to feel they are one of the spirits of our all too brief summers.

Sadly, as we birders are all too aware, these are sights and sounds we witness less often year by year. Like Swallows and martins, this species is in precipitous decline in the UK. The reduction in flying insects and changing weather patters on its long migratory journey from South Africa may both play a part. But a major factor for Swifts is believed to be the loss of nesting sites through modern construction methods, since most houses now have enclosed eaves.

Unlike the problems and perils that face many species, this is something we can influence and improve.

Worthing and Adur Swifts Group has recently been revived, under the aegis of SDOS, to support Swifts in the Worthing area. Around ten of us have been meeting regularly on Zoom to plan for the return of the Swifts this spring. We hope to replicate the journey of other local Swift groups in Lewes, Brighton and Storrington in building local awareness and support for swifts in our town. The focus for the first year will be on establishing a survey of Swift colonies in Worthing and on building the group to advocate for Swifts generally. There are plans for a Swift box programme and to encourage local planners to mandate Swift bricks in Worthing and Adur's many new housing developments.

The Swift Mapper app and the reports of our own enthusiastic members have given us pointers on the first places to look for nesting colonies as we build our survey. Ten nesting sites are identified on the app and we have anecdotal evidence of other places to look. Audrey Wende, whose distinguished ornithological CV has included a spell as Sussex Swift Champion, has been a regular attendee to help us get on the right track for what she warns will be a challenge. Swifts enter and leave their nests rarely and rapidly, so even when concentrating on a known nest area it's a matter of luck to spot. She has urged us to study the Swift's breeding cycle and anticipate likely behaviour at each stage to give us the best chance. She has also cautioned us that Swifts have a strong preference to nest near existing colonies, so new Swift box sites must be selected with care for best investment. It will be just as important, if not more so, to try to protect existing nesting sites from loss, through property renovation, by appealing to householders and landlords.

Come May, we could use many more volunteers to help us with our first regular surveys, and we would also welcome the interest and support of as many SDOS members as wish to help in other ways. Join the working group

by emailing Steve Lawless at one.steve.lawless@pm.me. Or join the Worthing and Adur Swift Group on Facebook, where we will be posting updates.

Birds recorded in the SDOS area between July and December 2024

John Newnham

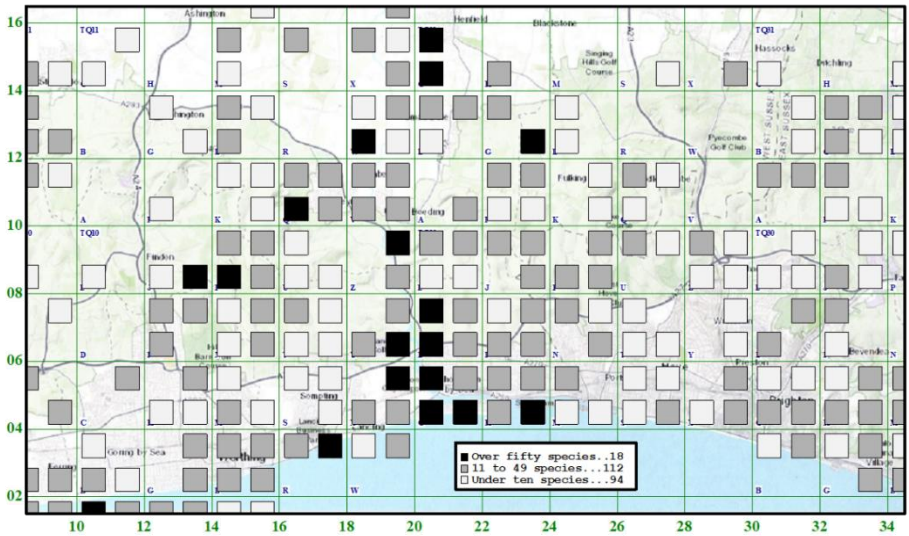
This account of the records from our recording area during the second half of the year has been compiled from observations uploaded into the Sussex Ornithological Society's (SOS) database by early February 2025. Most of the 24,532 records have come from the British Trust for Ornithology's Birdtrack (76%) or from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's eBird (20%) with a small number from iRecord or iNaturalist via the National Biodiversity Network (2%). As yet there are no Wetland Bird Survey or Garden Birdwatch records available for inclusion in this summary.

The large collection of records has been generated by over 300 different observers; one observer providing 2597 local records whilst 58 individuals have furnished a single record. Over 100 records have been submitted by 47 people during this period. The records come from 177 sites; the most popular locations in this period being Cissbury (1516 records), West Tarring (1455), Shoreham (1413) and the River Adur (1086). At three sites, Cissbury, River Adur and the Henfield Levels, more than 90 different species were logged.

Like recent recording reviews there was some recording on each day with a marked range between 475 records on 27th October and just three records on 7th December. The following table shows July and December to be the least popular months in this period.

Month	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number records	2794	4221	4658	4767	4803	3288

As previously mentioned, records with a precise grid reference are of much greater value to those who use the records to support or oppose planning applications. Records with a tetrad (2km x 2km grid square) are fine for county or national level surveys, but greater details are needed for local conservation purposes. Ideally an eight character (100 metre) (AANNNNNN) but for many circumstances a six character (1km) (AANNNN) is adequate. In this dataset over 30% of the records were gathered from areas greater than a tetrad, 14% at tetrad level and 55% at 1km or finer level.



The number of species recorded in each 1km square in the SDOS recording area during the period July to December 2024.

The more detailed records have been plotted in the map above that displays the number of species recorded in each 1km square. The map clearly shows the areas with most recording but also shows areas with few or no detailed observations. The way records are gathered, the defining of sites and the ease of providing pin-point grid references are other contributory factors in determining location accuracy. In this dataset nearly 99% of records submitted via iRecord have grid references meeting these higher standard, whilst the

figures for the other two main recording systems are 62% for Birdtrack and 20% for eBird.

About 205 different species or recognised sub-species were recorded in this period but assessment and verification of these observations is far from complete. Herring Gull was recorded on every day, both Woodpigeon and House Sparrow missed one day, Carrion Crow two days and Magpies four days. Although it is important to record these common and widespread species it is the rare and unusual which are most fascinating; some of the better records in near chronological order include:-

The singing male **Cirl Bunting,** which was first found at Hazelholt Bottom on 3rd June, was recorded until 19th August. A **Long-eared Owl** was reported from a local downland site on 3rd July. On 13th July a splendid **Caspian Tern** was seen on the River Adur; this the 17th county record and third for our recording area. On the 7th and 8th August a **Wood Sandpiper** frequented a small pool at the newly created New Monks Country Park. There were just single records of **Common Nightingale** at Hangleton on 11th August, of **Black Tern** at Brighton Marina on 7th September and a **Nightjar** at Cissbury on 11th September. During this month six **Manx Shearwaters** flew east off Goring on the 16th and a single **Balearic Shearwater** flew west past East Worthing on the 29th. The following table shows high numbers of wildfowl were recorded on Henfield Levels during October and amongst these were a **Red-breasted Goose** on the 5th and 7th, this unlikely to be considered of wild origin, a **Mandarin Duck** on the 7th and 25th and a **Garganey** on the 25th. A **Black Stork** seen over Kithurst Hill on 9th October, if accepted, will be the 21st county record and third for the SDOS recording area. Yet another area third record was a juvenile **Common Rosefinch** which was ringed in Ladywell on 13th October. During November, singles of seven taxa were seen on just one day, a **Goldeneye** at Shoreham on the 14th, a **pale-bellied Brent Goose** at Goring Gap on the 20th, a **Great Skua** off Lancing on the 21st, a **Storm Petrel** flying west at Worthing on the 23rd, a **Sooty Shearwater** flew east past Worthing on the following day, a **Cattle Egret** at Stanmer Park on the 28th and a **Jack Snipe** on the Adur Levels on the 30th. A **Lesser**

Spotted Woodpecker was seen in Steyning on 1st December, a **Black-necked Grebe** on the Henfield Levels on the 2nd and a **Little Auk** flew east just offshore at East Worthing on the 10th.

The other species recorded in the area during this six month period are listed, in taxonomic order, in the following table noting the number of days each has been recorded, the first and last dates of observations and the details of the highest count for each species. Clearly where the peak count is just one only a single record is cited.

Species Name	Dates	First date	Last Date	Maximum date
Brent Goose	35	29-Sep	31-Dec	351 on 03-Nov at Worthing
Canada Goose	29	11-Jul	30-Dec	1200 on 07-Oct at Henfield Levels
Greylag Goose	31	09-Aug	30-Dec	860 on 07-Oct at Henfield Levels
Mute Swan	137	02-Jul	31-Dec	45 on 30-Jul at River Adur
Egyptian Goose	23	17-Sep	26-Dec	36 on 07-Oct at Henfield Levels
Common Shelduck	6	29-Sep	31-Dec	6 on 03-Nov at Worthing
Shoveler	15	14-Jul	28-Dec	42 on 16-Oct at Henfield Levels
Gadwall	10	05-Oct	25-Nov	26 on 25-Oct at Henfield Levels
Eurasian Wigeon	22	18-Sep	28-Dec	200 on 07-Oct at Henfield Levels
Mallard	123	02-Jul	31-Dec	266 on 15-Oct at Henfield Levels
Pintail	14	16-Sep	15-Dec	118 on 25-Oct at Henfield Levels
Eurasian Teal	55	09-Jul	30-Dec	242 on 05-Oct at Henfield Levels
Common Pochard	3	06-Nov	09-Nov	1 on 06-Nov at Brooklands
Tufted Duck	2	06-Nov	12-Dec	3 on 06-Nov at Brooklands
Common Eider	28	08-Jul	31-Dec	5 on 31-Dec at Shoreham Harbour
Velvet Scoter	3	03-Nov	25-Nov	3 on 03-Nov at Worthing
Common Scoter	15	14-Aug	31-Dec	101 on 03-Nov at Worthing
Goosander	11	29-Oct	13-Dec	3 on 14-Nov at Shoreham Beach
Red-breasted Merganser	17	20-Oct	31-Dec	38 on 31-Dec at Worthing
Grey Partridge	18	24-Jul	12-Dec	11 on 11-Oct at Kithurst Hill

Common Pheasant	105	02-Jul	24-Dec	250 on 07-Nov at Storrington
Quail	2	25-Jul	26-Jul	5 on 25-Jul at Mile Oak
Red-legged Partridge	21	08-Jul	20-Dec	43 on 30-Aug at Ditchling Beacon
Common Swift	48	01-Jul	02-Oct	200 on 23-Jul at Steyning
Feral Pigeon	171	02-Jul	31-Dec	110 on 17-Jul at River Adur
Stock Dove	115	02-Jul	30-Dec	30 on 23-Oct at Bramber
Woodpigeon	183	01-Jul	31-Dec	2850 on 27-Oct at Brooklands
Collared Dove	161	02-Jul	30-Dec	40 on 10-Sep at Mile Oak
Water Rail	22	15-Aug	30-Dec	4 on 29-Nov at Bramber Brooks
Moorhen	108	02-Jul	30-Dec	25 on 26-Nov at Brooklands
Coot	68	02-Jul	31-Dec	105 on 09-Sep at Brooklands
Little Grebe	66	11-Jul	31-Dec	13 on 22-Sep at Brooklands
Great Crested Grebe	18	04-Nov	31-Dec	8 on 21-Dec at Worthing
Oystercatcher	106	01-Jul	31-Dec	40 on 06-Dec at Goring Gap
Avocet	2	14-Jul	03-Nov	2 on 14-Jul at River Adur
Lapwing	84	13-Jul	28-Dec	95 on 11-Nov at Henfield Levels
Golden Plover	9	12-Aug	25-Dec	3 on 12-Aug at River Adur
Grey Plover	25	01-Oct	28-Dec	3 on 15-Nov at River Adur
Ringed Plover	64	31-Jul	27-Dec	103 on 27-Aug at River Adur
Little Ringed Plover	3	13-Jul	19-Jul	5 on 14-Jul at River Adur
Eurasian Whimbrel	33	02-Jul	18-Sep	7 on 26-Jul at River Adur
Curlew	42	02-Jul	27-Dec	6 on 30-Nov at Brighton Marina
Bar-tailed Godwit	7	23-Aug	01-Oct	1 on 23-Aug at Worthing
Black-tailed Godwit	6	21-Jul	20-Sep	6 on 21-Jul at River Adur
Turnstone	107	16-Jul	31-Dec	70 on 20-Sep at Brighton Marina
Knot	3	24-Aug	15-Sep	2 on 24-Aug at River Adur
Ruff	5	31-Aug	30-Oct	4 on 31-Aug at River Adur
Sanderling	16	29-Jul	25-Dec	43 on 25-Dec at Goring Gap
Dunlin	65	11-Jul	31-Dec	60 on 31-Dec at Worthing
Purple Sandpiper	13	01-Sep	31-Dec	7 on 17-Nov at Brighton Marina
Little Stint	2	29-Aug	07-Sep	1 on 07-Sep at River Adur

Woodcock	5	27-Oct	20-Nov	1 on 27-Oct at Cissbury
Common Snipe	22	27-Jul	31-Dec	150 on 16-Dec at River Adur
Common Sandpiper	56	10-Jul	30-Dec	15 on 23-Jul at River Adur
Green Sandpiper	4	20-Aug	17-Sep	1 on 20-Aug at Ferring Rife
Common Redshank	112	07-Jul	31-Dec	58 on 16-Nov at River Adur
Greenshank	29	04-Aug	16-Dec	4 on 27-Aug at High Salvington
Kittiwake	9	27-Jul	31-Dec	23 on 24-Nov at Worthing
Black-headed Gull	165	02-Jul	31-Dec	600 on 02-Dec at Henfield Levels
Little Gull	6	11-Aug	24-Dec	2 on 25-Nov at Worthing
Mediterranean Gull	42	02-Jul	31-Dec	54 on 12-Aug at Goring Gap
Common Gull	73	13-Jul	31-Dec	700 on 17-Dec at River Adur
Great Black-backed Gull	144	01-Jul	31-Dec	130 on 23-Nov at River Adur
Herring Gull	184	01-Jul	31-Dec	1350 on 23-Sep at River Adur
Caspian Gull	5	12-Oct	23-Dec	1 on 12-Oct at River Adur
Yellow-legged Gull	12	11-Aug	16-Dec	14 on 11-Aug at Palace Pier
Lesser Black-backed Gull	45	08-Jul	30-Dec	42 on 20-Jul at Palace Pier
Sandwich Tern	26	10-Jul	31-Dec	15 on 14-Aug at Worthing
Common Tern	5	13-Jul	02-Oct	2 on 03-Sep at Goring Gap
Arctic Skua	5	30-Jul	07-Oct	3 on 29-Sep at Goring Gap
Common Guillemot	5	02-Nov	31-Dec	21 on 03-Nov at Worthing
Razorbill	13	05-Oct	31-Dec	41 on 03-Nov at Worthing
Unidentified auk spp	11	05-Oct	31-Dec	259 on 31-Dec at Worthing
Red-throated Diver	13	03-Nov	31-Dec	26 on 09-Dec at Goring Gap
Black-throated Diver	6	17-Nov	31-Dec	2 on 09-Dec at Goring Gap
Great Northern Diver	5	16-Aug	31-Dec	2 on 29-Nov at Worthing
Unidentified diver spp	7	24-Nov	31-Dec	7 on 29-Nov at Worthing
Fulmar	3	29-Nov	31-Dec	1 on 29-Nov at Worthing
White Stork	2	17-Aug	09-Sep	22 on 09-Sep at Cissbury
Gannet	56	09-Jul	31-Dec	591 on 21-Dec at Worthing

Cormorant	138	01-Jul	31-Dec	244 on 03-Oct at West Pier
Shag	5	07-Oct	10-Dec	1 on 07-Oct at Worthing
Spoonbill	2	29-Sep	01-Oct	5 on 01-Oct at Brighton
Grey Heron	121	02-Jul	31-Dec	7 on 20-Nov at Steyning Levels
Great White Egret	6	08-Nov	01-Dec	2 on 01-Dec at Ferring
Little Egret	131	02-Jul	31-Dec	35 on 03-Sep at Goring
Osprey	7	31-Aug	15-Sep	2 on 13-Sep at River Adur
Honey-buzzard	2	16-Aug	28-Aug	1 on 16-Aug at Cissbury
Sparrowhawk	107	08-Jul	25-Dec	2 on 11-Aug at Southwick Hill
Goshawk	2	16-Aug	21-Aug	1 on 16-Aug at Chantry Hill
Marsh Harrier	17	16-Aug	27-Nov	3 on 15-Nov at Chantry Hill
Hen Harrier	11	06-Jul	19-Dec	1 on 06-Jul at Clayton
Red Kite	127	04-Jul	31-Dec	12 on 27-Aug at Michelgrove
White-tailed Eagle	4	31-Aug	15-Oct	1 on 31-Aug at Cissbury
Common Buzzard	152	01-Jul	31-Dec	12 on 27-Aug at Ditchling Beacon
Barn Owl	28	01-Jul	24-Dec	3 on 01-Jul at Steyning Levels
Little Owl	29	30-Jul	20-Dec	2 on 01-Aug at Applesham
Short-eared Owl	2	04-Aug	04-Nov	1 on 04-Aug at Chantry Hill
Tawny Owl	23	21-Jul	03-Dec	5 on 01-Oct at Ladywell
Kingfisher	93	16-Jul	30-Dec	5 on 01-Oct at Ladywell
Wryneck	2	03-Sep	11-Sep	1 on 03-Sep at Sheepcote Valley
Gt Spotted Woodpecker	109	02-Jul	30-Dec	5 on 07-Jul at Oreham Common
Green Woodpecker	130	06-Jul	28-Dec	5 on 10-Nov at Edburton
Kestrel	155	01-Jul	31-Dec	8 on 09-Aug at Beeding Hill
Merlin	3	07-Aug	08-Oct	1 on 15-Sep at South Downs
Hobby	35	01-Jul	09-Oct	2 on 01-Sep at Cissbury
Peregrine	72	03-Jul	30-Dec	3 on 01-Oct at Ladywell
Ring-necked Parakeet	15	11-Sep	15-Dec	2 on 11-Sep at Shoreham-by-Sea
Jay	122	02-Jul	31-Dec	11 on 01-Oct at Storrington
Magpie	180	02-Jul	31-Dec	40 on 07-Nov at Shoreham-by-Sea

Jackdaw	166	02-Jul	31-Dec	307 on 25-Aug at River Adur
Rook	139	01-Jul	31-Dec	300 on 03-Dec at Beeding Hill
Carrion Crow	182	01-Jul	31-Dec	110 on 08-Oct at Goring Gap
Raven	111	02-Jul	31-Dec	12 on 28-Nov at Lower Adur Valley
Coal Tit	40	12-Jul	30-Dec	4 on 23-Dec at Sullington Warren
Marsh Tit	40	24-Jul	04-Dec	6 on 03-Dec at Steyning Round Hill
Blue Tit	170	01-Jul	30-Dec	52 on 13-Oct at Edburton
Great Tit	164	01-Jul	31-Dec	24 on 13-Oct at Edburton
Skylark	113	01-Jul	28-Dec	91 on 01-Dec at Edburton
Sand Martin	24	10-Jul	27-Oct	14 on 10-Jul at Goring Gap
Barn Swallow	105	01-Jul	01-Nov	470 on 06-Oct at West Pier
House Martin	72	01-Jul	27-Oct	600 on 22-Sep at Mill Hill
Cetti's Warbler	67	02-Jul	24-Dec	6 on 27-Oct at Adur Levels
Long-tailed Tit	115	02-Jul	31-Dec	32 on 04-Sep at Hollingbury GC
Yellow-browed Warbler	2	18-Oct	29-Oct	1 on 18-Oct at Sheepcote Valley
Willow Warbler	55	08-Jul	07-Oct	34 on 04-Aug at Cissbury
Common Chiffchaff	140	02-Jul	30-Dec	161 on 04-Oct at Ladywell
Siberian Chiffchaff	3	17-Nov	30-Dec	1 on 17-Nov at Cissbury
Sedge Warbler	12	02-Jul	15-Sep	7 on 11-Aug at Sheepcote Valley
Reed Warbler	33	02-Jul	09-Oct	6 on 28-Jul at Ladywell
Grasshopper Warbler	3	24-Jul	30-Aug	1 on 24-Jul at Cissbury
Blackcap	115	01-Jul	30-Dec	90 on 29-Aug at Cissbury
Garden Warbler	16	02-Jul	15-Sep	3 on 21-Aug at Cissbury
Lesser Whitethroat	27	08-Jul	23-Sep	3 on 15-Aug at Southwick Hill
Common Whitethroat	82	01-Jul	11-Oct	25 on 14-Aug at Sheepcote Valley
Dartford Warbler	3	27-Oct	06-Nov	1 on 27-Oct at Cissbury
Firecrest	46	30-Jul	26-Dec	4 on 27-Oct at Ladywell
Goldcrest	75	02-Jul	31-Dec	11 on 31-Oct at Cissbury
Wren	163	01-Jul	31-Dec	16 on 3-Dec at Steyning Round Hill

Nuthatch	46	02-Jul	30-Dec	5 on 20-Dec at Tottington
Eurasian Treecreeper	27	13-Jul	30-Dec	2 on 17-Aug at Chanctonbury
Common Starling	170	01-Jul	31-Dec	10,000 on 19-Nov at Preston Park
Song Thrush	109	01-Jul	30-Dec	20 on 26-Oct at Sheepcote Valley
Mistle Thrush	62	02-Jul	30-Dec	18 on 23-Jul at Ditchling Beacon
Redwing	44	05-Oct	30-Dec	60 on 02-Nov at Storrington
Blackbird	175	01-Jul	31-Dec	43 on 26-Oct at Sheepcote Valley
Fieldfare	23	17-Oct	30-Dec	70 on 11-Nov at Chantry Hill
Ring Ouzel	14	04-Oct	25-Oct	5 on 17-Oct at Truleigh Hill
Spotted Flycatcher	34	14-Jul	05-Oct	9 on 17-Aug at Cissbury
Robin	171	01-Jul	31-Dec	35 on 26-Oct at Sheepcote Valley
Pied Flycatcher	13	13-Aug	03-Oct	3 on 08-Sep at Brighton
Black Redstart	24	19-Sep	16-Dec	3 on 03-Nov at Hove
Common Redstart	29	26-Jul	09-Oct	6 on 29-Aug at Cissbury
Whinchat	34	09-Aug	23-Oct	17 on 27-Aug at Beeding Hill
Eurasian Stonechat	118	01-Jul	31-Dec	20 on 11-Oct at Devils Dyke
Northern Wheatear	54	26-Jul	27-Oct	17 on 16-Sep at Beeding Hill
House Sparrow	183	01-Jul	31-Dec	100 on 05-Aug at New Salts Farm
Dunnock	164	01-Jul	31-Dec	14 on 15-Sep at Edburton
Yellow Wagtail	25	12-Aug	09-Oct	50 on 02-Sep at Highdown
Grey Wagtail	47	08-Jul	28-Dec	4 on 07-Sep at Goring Gap
Pied Wagtail	127	02-Jul	31-Dec	140 on 24-Oct at Brighton
Meadow Pipit	125	08-Jul	31-Dec	105 on 13-Sep at South Downs
Tree Pipit	19	04-Aug	15-Sep	6 on 25-Aug at Cissbury
Rock Pipit	40	12-Jul	31-Dec	10 on 30-Nov at Brighton Marina
Chaffinch	116	01-Jul	30-Dec	76 on 11-Nov at Henfield Levels
Brambling	9	13-Oct	28-Nov	6 on 10-Nov at Edburton
Hawfinch	5	27-Oct	11-Nov	6 on 31-Oct at Cissbury
Bullfinch	55	07-Jul	04-Dec	5 on 25-Aug at Edburton
Greenfinch	124	02-Jul	31-Dec	11 on 19-Aug at Highdown

Linnet	143	01-Jul	31-Dec	350 on 01-Dec at Edburton Hill
Redpoll	10	24-Oct	17-Nov	18 on 27-Oct at Cissbury
Goldfinch	171	01-Jul	31-Dec	250 on 27-Oct at Brooklands
Siskin	17	28-Sep	09-Dec	20 on 27-Oct at Cissbury
Corn Bunting	93	01-Jul	28-Dec	120 on 20-Aug at Steep Down
Yellowhammer	100	01-Jul	28-Dec	35 on 25-Aug at Edburton
Reed Bunting	60	01-Jul	24-Dec	29 on 13-Oct at Edburton
Black Swan	3	12-Nov	14-Dec	1 on 20-Nov at Steyning Levels
Lord Derby's Parakeet	13	03-Aug	24-Dec	1 on 03-Aug at Shoreham-by-Sea

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.

Ringing in Ladywell 2024

John Newnham

This, the eighteenth year of ringing and study of birds using the Ladywell valley, was the second least active with just 22 mist-netting sessions, three visits merely to monitor the nest boxes and a few sessions to maintain the mist-net rides or repair equipment. The total number of birds ringed was 1372, a little below the average 1523 ringed during the previous 17 years. The ringing totals and number of mist-netting session in each of the recent years are shown in the following table.

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number sessions	38	37	39	40	35	23	35	35	19	22
Total birds ringed	2120	2057	2941	2252	2381	2373	1343	1687	1658	1372

Table 1:- *The numbers of ringing sessions and birds ringed in Ladywell in each year (2015-2024).*

Like recent years the ringing effort was not spread evenly across the year with no sessions during the winter months and early spring. Even the productive autumn season was only covered well during October and over 52% of the birds trapped during the year were caught in six sessions between 15th September and 13th October. These features are clearly shown in Table 2.

Month	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2007-23 sessions	19	12	22	42	44	42	51	80	89	74	45	30
Average catch (2007-23)	50	43	32	35	40	33	46	66	94	77	57	55
2024 sessions	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	4	3	6	3	0
Average catch (2024)	0	0	0	0	42	37	48	55	124	105	60	0

Table 2:- *The number of ringing sessions in each month and the average monthly catch (2007-23 and 2024).*

As last year, the combination of poor weather and team availability were the main constraints in 2024. As mentioned before a few years ago most of the ringers were retired pensioners but now with just one retired member of the team it is difficult to switch ringing plans at short notice; most sessions were planned for weekends. On several occasions when a workable team was available a forecast with a high probability of precipitation meant cancellation and a lost ringing opportunity. Like most recent years, warbler catches in the autumn were increased by the use of 'call-back' lures. Table 3 below lists the 66 different species ringed in Ladywell. Between 27 (in 2007) and 42 (in 2010) different species have been ringed in each year and the 36 species ringed in 2024 is just one below the average for the previous 17 years. Over the 22 ringing sessions in 2024 an average of 13 different species were trapped with a range, similar to previous years, of ten (on 2nd and 30th June and 13th October) to 17 (on 12th August).

The red type shows the species on the red list of high conservation concern (BoCC5) and amount to just nine individuals in 2024.

Species	2007-2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTALS
Sparrowhawk	15			1	2	2	1	2	23
Kestrel	7	1			2				10
Moorhen	0				2				2
Water Rail	1								1
Snipe	0				1				1
Stock Dove	5	1			1		3		10
Woodpigeon	49	5	6	8	12	2	3	3	88
Tawny Owl	2		1						3
Kingfisher	53	11	4	10	3	5	8	5	99
Green Woodpecker	39	1	1	3	2	5	2	5	58
Great Spotted Wdpecker	63	10	6	7	6	1	1	6	100
Swallow	19								19
House Martin	144					5			149
Tree Pipit	2		1				1		4
Meadow Pipit	4								4
Grey Wagtail	4	2	1	3		1	2		13
Wren	444	59	52	45	17	32	28	28	705
Dunnock	392	45	60	57	42	42	29	23	690
Robin	518	52	76	61	56	60	39	47	909
Nightingale	1		1						2
Redstart	7	3			2				12
Stonechat	1								1
Blackbird	594	71	44	29	46	39	28	22	873
Song Thrush	267	58	39	37	38	31	27	24	521
Redwing	55	9	2	1	10	3	1		81
Mistle Thrush	6							1	7
Cetti's Warbler	15	5	10	9	1	4	3	3	50
Grasshopper Warbler	7			1		1	1		10
Sedge Warbler	22	10	6	3	4		2	1	48
Reed Warbler	530	99	115	68	52	78	32	27	1001
Dartford Warbler	0						1		1
Lesser Whitethroat	31	4	3		4	7	4	4	57
Whitethroat	178	25	23	18	28	22	44	6	344
Garden Warbler	46	14	12	11	17	9	16	3	128
Blackcap	2050	567	610	585	297	361	230	155	4855
Yellow-browed Warbler	1			1					2
Wood Warbler	1	1							2
Chiffchaff	3262	513	505	821	254	380	598	723	7056
Willow Warbler	1014	191	334	316	156	173	255	68	2507
Goldcrest	692	71	82	52	10	81	41	30	1059
Firecrest	45	7	13	9	1	6	6	10	97
Spotted Flycatcher	18		1	1	2		2	1	25
Pied Flycatcher	0					1	1		2
Long-tailed Tit	397	26	47	18	19	45	10	20	582
Marsh Tit	0	1							1
Coal Tit	2	2						1	5
Blue Tit	1457	164	184	81	120	121	123	60	2310
Great Tit	744	109	78	59	54	84	43	41	1212
Nuthatch	25							1	26
Treecreeper	72	6	10	6	2	6	3	1	106

Starling	0						2		2
Jay	21	1	2	3					27
Magpie	8	2			1				11
Jackdaw	30	5	6		2	1		2	46
Rook	1								1
Carrion Crow	1								1
House Sparrow	1							1	2
Chaffinch	434	22	15	16	16	11	4	4	522
Greenfinch	159	7	8		9	6	9	6	204
Goldfinch	161	71	21	28	43	56	25	36	441
Siskin	4								4
Lesser Redpoll	32			1		3	30		66
Bullfinch	21		1	1	2				25
Common Rosefinch	0							1	1
Yellowhammer	0					1			1
Reed Bunting	18	1	1	3	7	2		1	33
TOTALS	14192	2252	2381	2373	1343	1687	1657	1372	27257

***Table 3**:- The totals (2007-17) and annual totals 2018-2024 for each species ringed in Ladywell.*

The totals of five widespread and common species were ringed in the lowest numbers since ringing commenced in Ladywell during 2007. Just 22 Blackbirds ringed possibly reflects this species decline which has been noted in other surveys. Both Blue and Great Tits totals were the lowest recorded but this drop is probably due to the absence of winter feeding and ringing. Treecreepers have never been numerous in the valley but just one ringed is the lowest total and the four Chaffinches trapped is the same as 2023 but considerably fewer than past years (see Figure 1).

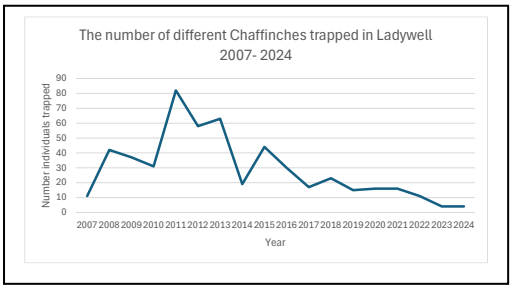


Figure 1: - Chaffinch numbers in Ladywell 2007-2024

On a more positive note a Nuthatch ringed in November was the first since 2017, the same year that the last Coal Tits were ringed in the valley. A House

Sparrow was ringed in the first year in Ladywell but none thereafter until a female was ringed in November. The only new species to be ringed in the valley, and the highlight of the year, was a juvenile Common Rosefinch which was trapped by the Applesham Pond on 13th October.

Table 4 shows the species for which over a thousand captures have been recorded; the list has not altered from previous years, but Wren and Long-tailed Tit have changed ranking position. As noted before Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tit and Dunnock have retraps numbers higher than the ringing figures. Conversely, the figures for Willow Warbler show very few are retrapped with migratory birds moving on very quickly.

Species	New	Retrap	Total
Chiffchaff	7056	318	7405
Blue Tit	2310	2907	5343
Blackcap	4855	414	5288
Great Tit	1212	1701	2954
Willow Warbler	2507	17	2525
Robin	909	852	1764
Dunnock	690	968	1660
Blackbird	873	613	1486
Reed Warbler	1001	460	1468
Wren	705	598	1304
Long-tailed Tit	582	696	1291
Goldcrest	1059	204	1266

Table 4:- *The total number of handlings (new birds and retraps) for species with greater than 1000 handlings in Ladywell (2007-2024).*

One of the exciting aspects of ringing comes from hearing birds ringed in the valley have been found elsewhere (a recovery) or trapping a bird carrying a ring placed elsewhere (a control). During 2024 four birds were trapped which had been ringed elsewhere (control) and four ringed in Ladywell and recovered or controlled later. The details of these few movements are shown in the following two tables.

Species	Date Ladywell	Age	Ring date	Age	Ringing site	Distance
Reed Warbler	28/07/2024	4	05/08/2023	3	Icklesham, East Sussex	68km W
Chiffchaff	29/09/2024	3	27/06/2024	3J	Minsmere ,Suffolk	204km SW
Chiffchaff	04/10/2024	3	23/07/2024	3J	Llangorse Lake, Powis	237km ESE
Chiffchaff	13/10/2024	3	28/09/2024	3	Queen Mary Res. Surrey	66km S

Table 5: *The details of birds caught in Ladywell during 2024 and ringed elsewhere (3= hatched in calendar year; additional J signifies in juvenile plumage; 4=hatched before current calendar year).*

Species	Ring date	Age	Recovery date	Age	Recovery location	Distance
Willow Warbler	16/08/2023	3	12/04/2024	4	Landguard Pnt, Suffolk	165km NE
Chiffchaff	04/10/2024	3	01/11/2024	3	Sainte-Soline, France	514km S
Chiffchaff	22/10/2023	3	09/11/2024	4	Steyning, West Sussex	6km N
Dunnock	22/08/2023	3j	26/11/2024	4	South Milton Ley, Devon	259km WSW

Table 6: *Details of birds ringed in Ladywell and all controlled elsewhere.*

Not surprisingly most of these recorded movements involve Chiffchaffs and these follow the pattern of previous years. Perhaps the most unexpected was a Dunnock, usually a very sedentary species, which was ringed and subsequently retrapped as a juvenile, in the valley in the summer of 2023 and at some point moved west to Devon.

Handling birds and ringing provides considerably more information about population size and structure, species longevity and other aspects of avian biology than just their movements. Retrapping individuals provide some interesting insights into individual's behaviour. During the year 178 different birds of 20 species were retrapped, most, as shown in Table 7 were birds ringed earlier in the year with numbers decreasing rapidly for birds ringed in earlier years.

Years since ringing	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number	125	33	11	5	7	5	2	1	1

Table 7: *The number of individuals from each year re-trapped in 2024.*

Each session report throughout the year included the detailed histories of the more interesting retraps. The most retrapped species was again Blue Tit but, like 2023, with only 32 different individuals involved. Following were Dunnock (23 individuals), Chiffchaff (20), Robin (18), Great Tit (18) and Blackbird (15).

Table 8 gives the details of the Blackbird (LH59671) which not only was the individual with the greatest time between ringing and recapture but also the bird re-trapped in 2024 with the greatest number of previous captures. Additionally, a female Blackbird (LH59726) ringed in October 2016, reappeared in June then approaching eight years after ringing and another male (LC12256) ringed as a juvenile in 2018 was trapped twice in October; over six years old. A Great Spotted Woodpecker (LH59800) ringed in June 2018 was re-trapped on his eleventh occasion in October over six years since being ringed. In the past one Blue Tit has been captured on 37 occasions, a Great Tit on 25 occasions and a Dunnock on 20 occasions so the 19 handlings of LH59671 is still behind these individuals. Reed Warblers regularly return to the valley to breed; in 2024 just 18 adults were trapped of which ten had not

Ring No.	Species	Cap	Date	Age Code	Sex	Subsite	Interval
LH59671	Blackbird	N	01/05/2016	5	M	P3	
		R	20/05/2016	5	M	P1	0y 019d
		R	08/06/2016	5	M	P1	0y 038d
		R	05/07/2016	5	M	P1	0y 065d
		R	13/07/2016	5	M	P1	0y 073d
		R	09/04/2017	6	M	P1	0y 343d
		R	29/04/2017	6	M	P1	0y 363d
		R	18/04/2018	6	M	P2	1y 352d
		R	20/05/2018	6	M	P2	2y 019d
		R	07/07/2018	6	M	P2	2y 067d
		R	12/05/2019	6	M	P2	3y 011d
		R	21/09/2019	4		P2	3y 143d
		R	04/04/2021	6	M	P3	4y 339d
		R	17/07/2021	6	M	P2	5y 078d
		R	10/10/2021	4	M	P2	5y 163d
		R	20/03/2022	6	M	P3	5y 324d
		R	01/05/2022	6	M	P3	6y 001d
		R	04/05/2024	6	M	P2	8y 005d
		R	11/10/2024	6	M	P2	8y 165d

***Table 8**: Details of birds retrapped in 2023 with the greatest intervals between ringing and recapture and the most captures since being ringed.*

Ring No.	Species	Cap	Date	Age Code	Sex	Subsite	Interval
AYE2957	Blue Tit	N	27/05/2019	1		LB08	
		R	03/07/2019	3J		K2	0y 037d
		R	19/08/2019	3J		K	0y 084d
		R	27/08/2019	3J		K	0y 092d
		R	05/01/2020	5		K2	0y 223d
		R	02/09/2020	4		L5	1y 099d
		R	29/05/2021	4	F	LB07	2y 003d
		R	12/12/2021	4		P3	2y 200d
		R	26/03/2022	6	F	K2	2y 304d
		R	10/04/2022	6		K2	2y 319d
		R	15/05/2022	6	F	LB07	2y 354d
		R	27/05/2024	6	F	LB06	5y 002d

***Table 9**: Details of breeding Blue Tit (AYE2957).*

been encountered before, three were ringed in 2023, two in both 2022 and 2020 and one ringed in 2019.

The story of Blue Tit (AYE2957) is shown in Table 9, a female which fledged from a nest-box in the woods on the college side of the valley. She turned up in various places at times but in both 2021 and 2022 she successfully raised young in a nestbox less than 20 metres from where she fledged and in 2024 chose another nearby box. Her five nestlings were ringed on 2nd June but all were dead in the box, having been deserted by 23rd June. AYE2957 has not turned up in a mist net since so presumably was predated whilst tending to her nestlings.

Each of the session reports contained a table of mist-net productivity. As mentioned before this has little scientific value and is mainly of interest to those who know the valley well and to see how much birds move about the valley. On most occasions when at least three experienced ringers were present the full set of nets were erected but on days when fewer ringers were present several mist-nets were left in their bags, most frequently L2, L4 and L5. Table 11 shows most birds were caught in a long run of mist-net by the Applesham

pond but L1, set on the slope of the Ladywell valley, was again the most productive per metre of net set.

	Central			Ladywell valley					Applesham Pond		
Net	**K**	**K2**		**L1**	**L2**	**L4**	**L5**		**P1**	**P2**	**P3**
Number caught	62	264		330	24	29	195		371	419	133
Net length(metres)	24	18		18	18	18	30		54	72	18
Birds/metre	3	15		18	1	2	7		7	6	7

Table 10:- *The various net productivity in 2024.*

The nest boxes in the valley were again visited and the detailed findings logged on the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Nest Record Scheme. A summary and comparison with previous years is shown in Table 11. Despite logging all the boxes on the What3Words app, finding the boxes within the dense early summer vegetation proved difficult.

Just 32% of the available and found boxes were occupied; the lowest percentage uptake since the first two years of the project. Likewise, the 50 eggs laid was, by a large margin, the lowest number since 2009 when there were only 11 boxes in the valley. The total young considered to have fledged was also the lowest number since 2008; perhaps the absence of winter feeding partially accounted for the poor breeding results.

Year	**2008**	**09**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**2024**
Boxes available	11	11	23	23	24	29	32	32	21	37	34	39	41	36	40	34
Blue Tit	3	3	8	13	11	10	9	9	10	12	15	14	15	15	11	7
Great Tit			3	5	2	4	7	6	6	6	6	10	8	8	6	4
Nuthatch					1	1								-		
Occupied boxes	3	3	11	18	14	15	16	15	16	18	21	24	23	23	17	11
Occupancy %	27	27	48	78	58	52	50	47	76	49	62	62	56	64	43	32
Total eggs laid	19	28	89	149	107	103	126	114	95	120	137	139	160	136	116	50
Total pulli	19	25	78	130	83	44	88	69	67	95	86	99	76	90	104	33
Total young fledged	19	23	75	102	56	42	55	25	47	57	79	99	67	76	89	22
% survival egg -> fledging	100	82	84	68	52	41	44	22	49	48	58	71	42	56	77	44

Table 11:- *Summary of Ladywell nest box scheme results 2008-2024. (No data for 2020)*

As previously reported our Health and Safety (H&S) policy requires at least two permit holding ringers to be present at each session; the average number of ringers present for the 22 sessions this year was just under four. Five ringers were present for five sessions and two on just two sessions. During the year the number of outings each team member attended was John Newnham (21), Clare Buckle (15), Louis Fisher (15), Sue Walsh (14) with Becky Parangi and Steve Wilson eight each. We were joined on one occasion by trainee ringers Mya Bambrick, Paul Thrift and Imogen Vowles. Throughout the year Clare continued the supervision of the group's active trainees.

During the year the Health and Safety policy was adhered to including the guidelines set out by the BTO to prevent the further spread of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. The additional measures, including the single use and regular laundering of bird bags continued throughout 2024.

On each visit, including some short visits for stocking feeders or maintenance work, a list of species recorded was logged onto the BTO's Birdtrack recording system. Like 2023 a total of 66 bird species were seen during the year. Common Rosefinch was recorded for the first time bringing the total number of avian species to 121. Jackdaw was recorded on 25 occasions and Pheasant, Rook, Carrion Crow, Chiffchaff and Blackbird were recorded on 24 occasions.

Throughout the year considerable 'gardening' was needed to maintain the net rides in operable conditions; this year the usual tasks of brush-cutting, raking and clearing of fallen branches was undertaken. I would like to extend our continued gratitude and thanks to the college authorities and staff, particularly Jon Hutcheon the farm manager, and to Hugh Passmore of Applesham Farm for their on-going interest, help and support with the ringing in Ladywell. Sometimes the landowners visit us during a ringing session and we are always pleased to see them.

During the year the team continued inputting all the ringing data into the BTO's on-line recording software (DeMon) and I thank the team members who take turns keying the data into DeMon. My thanks also to Sue and Clare who have done much of the organisation of ringing sessions this year. The individual

session reports for 2024 to landowners, interested college staff, local birders and ringers who have followed the work done in Ladywell have been completed by myself but I thank team members for their photographs some which are included in this summary. The session reports, like those from local ringing at Cissbury and Steyning, are copied to the e-users group of the Shoreham District Ornithological Society. Finally, I thank Sue and Clare for correcting this review.

Ringing at Cissbury 2024

Val Bentley

On to the 41st year of ringing at Cissbury! We made the same number of visits as the previous year (34), the first on 3 Feb and the last on 29 Dec. However, despite a similar level of effort, the numbers of total captures and new birds ringed were both lower than in 2023 by a considerable margin, though still better than 2021 and 2022. Gaps in activity from 16 Sep to 4 Oct and again from 10 to 26 Oct, peak Blackcap and Chiffchaff migration times, no doubt contributed to this fall.

Chrissi Twitchen and myself are the two trainers and lead ringers. Brian Clay remains our Group Secretary. Alex Rosenfeld and Toby Stapleton continued their training and did the bulk of the actual ringing, each attending 24 of the 34 sessions, and towards the end of the year Alex was assessed for and gained a C permit. David Campbell had moved to East Sussex and was not able to join us this year. Peter Denyer spent most of the year at Landguard Bird Observatory but it was good to see him on two sessions, in March and December. Peter gained a permit upgrade to A in the autumn. Mya Bambrick is still pursuing her studies at Bournemouth but was able to join us twice when she was back home. Jack Hughes decided to pause ringing, but Kate Woodhouse was taken on as a trainee by Chrissi, and from August Jamie Everitt and partner Meerabai Kings also became part of the team. On the occasions when Alex's girlfriend Angelica came along too, we appreciated her neat handwriting in the log book.

Species	2019 New	2020 New	2021 New	2022 New	2023 New	2024 New (New for Year*)	2024 Total Captures (inc. retraps)
Blackbird	20	19	18	26	16	20 (28)	37
Blackcap	527	741	319	428	608	416 (423)	443
Blue Tit	39	14	35	31	27	32 (36)	49
Bullfinch	14	27	14	23	13	14	20
Chaffinch	4	9	6	9	2	7	7
Chiffchaff	142	244	148	142	363	202 (205)	210
Coal Tit	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dunnock	35	30	26	31	32	23 (37)	61
Firecrest	9	3	5	6	14	10 (13)	15
Garden Warbler	10	10	3	8	16	18	18
Goldcrest	92	24	11	54	101	37 (41)	51
Goldfinch	3	13	8	7	16	32	32
Grasshopper Warbler	1	2	-	1	1	1	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	-	-	-	2	-	1	1
Great Tit	27	9	10	13	22	11 (17)	19
Greenfinch	1	9	4	9	21	9	9
House Martin	-	6	-	-	-	-	-
Jay	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Kestrel	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Lesser Redpoll	-	63	22	19	51	9	9
Lesser Whitethroat	3	5	2	6	4	4	5

Linnet	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
Long-tailed Tit	61	16	18	25	28	19 (27)	30
Magpie	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Marsh Tit	2	4	-	-	2	1	3
Nightingale	-	2	1	-	-	-	-
Nuthatch	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Pied Flycatcher	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Redstart	1	1	-	2	7	-	-
Redwing	19	13	22	8	3	10	10
Reed Bunting	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Reed Warbler	5	5	6	3	4	6	6
Robin	47	62	47	66	60	53 (63)	82
Sedge Warbler	2	-	-	-	2	2	2
Siskin	-	19	-	-	7	-	-
Song Thrush	17	22	22	17	23	33 (36)	42
Sparrowhawk	1	-	2	-	2	1	1
Spotted Flycatcher	2	4	2	5	2	1	1
Swallow	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Tree Pipit	-	3	-	1	-	-	-
Treecreeper	3	-	-	2	2	2	6
Whitethroat	45	53	15	42	55	14	14
Willow Warbler	118	135	46	65	90	113	114
Wood Pigeon	2	1	--	-	-	-	-
Wood Warbler	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Wren	20	23	27	22	34	35 (39)	47
Yellowhammer	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Total	**1275**	**1593**	**841**	**1075**	**1633**	**1138 (1213)**	**1347**

As seen in the table above, the lower numbers of Blackcaps (-31%) and Chiffchaffs (-44%) ringed in 2024 compared with 2023 were the main reason for the overall drop of 30% in the total ringed, but there were also fewer Goldcrests (-63%) and Whitethroats (-75%). Just two fewer species on the list, 32 compared with 34 last year.

Table 1. Captures at Cissbury 2019-2024

The final column shows the total captures (including retraps and controls), the penultimate column shows new birds ringed and *in brackets the number of different individuals of the species i.e. including retraps ringed in previous years and controls.

For comparison, also given are totals for new birds ringed during each of the previous five years. Species whose names are in italics were ringed in at least one of the previous five years, but not in 2024, while the one species in **bold** (Reed Bunting) was ringed in 2024 but not any of the previous five years – in fact not in any of the previous 40 years!

The Ringing Year

February to April (5 sessions, 123 captures, 60 new)

Fortunately the Avian Influenza protocols had been relaxed, though we continued to use a separate bird bag for each individual bird. The first session was on 2 Feb and brought a new species for Cissbury. Although commonly trapped at Phil Clay's Mumbles site, a 2nd year male Reed Bunting was a great surprise, and was the first time Mya had ringed the species. The first Chiffchaffs, seven of them, were caught on 24 Mar, and the first two Bullfinches, both males hatched in 2023. Blackcaps had returned by 15th Apr when we retrapped three ringed in 2023, one as a 2nd year bird and two as juveniles. No spring passage Willow Warblers came through this year while we were there. Two of the National Trust rangers, Kim Greaves and Rebecca Harris, visited on the 30th April and pointed out a small flower called Three-nerved Sandwort, which we'd never noticed before. They also found a Greater Bloody-nosed Beetle and a Fencepost Jumping Spider!

May to July (9 sessions 197 captures, 147 new)

There was very little activity either from ringers or birds in May, with only two visits and 21 birds trapped, of which 14 were retraps. It was a fairly quiet day on the 5th, the highlight being a Green Hairstreak spotted by Toby and, having been alerted to its presence. we discovered lots of Three-nerved Sandwort! On the 19th, despite setting 13 nets, we equalled our worst ever catch of five, though a juvenile Blackbird was the first youngster of the year; followed by speckly juvenile Robins (3) and Dunnock (1) on 2 Jun, then by the first young Chiffchaffs (2), Wren (1) and Song Thrushes (2) on the 13th. A single juvenile Blackcap on the 20th was a precursor for another 40 during the rest of the summer, ending with the final "baby Blaca" on 11 Sep.

Returning migrants started to move through from 21 Jul, when we caught a Reed Warbler and two Willow Warblers, all first year birds, plus one of only two Whitethroats ringed in 2024 which were still in juvenile plumage so "locally" hatched. We also noticed just a few Cinnabar Moth caterpillars, on one of the many Ragwort plants on the site. Normally there is quite a thriving colony. We managed to fit in two more sessions before the end of July. On the 24th we ringed the only Grasshopper Warbler of the year. It was also the earliest we have encountered, with only three previously trapped in July. The first of 18 Garden Warblers was ringed that day too; all were first year birds, and also were moving through earlier than in recent years.

August & September (9 sessions, 614 captures, 585 new)

It was good to have a Marsh Tit and a Lesser Whitethroat on 4 Aug, both still with their juvenile feathers, so presumably hatched nearby; also 31 new Willow Warblers, the species' highest daily total for the year. Invertebrates spotted were a Bloody-nosed Beetle and Cockchafer. The 12th was surprisingly quiet for mid-August, with 39 captures, 10 of which were Willow Warblers and eight Garden Warblers, with one Sedge Warbler by way of variety. The number of Blackcaps caught started to increase from the 21st, and we found the first of only seven young Bullfinches in 2024; evidence of rather a dismal breeding year?

It was "ton up" day on the 29th, though rather predictably 75 of the 104 birds trapped were Blackcaps!

Blackcaps also dominated the three September catches, with only 67 of the 287 new birds being other species, though a respectable number of Chiffchaffs arrived on the 15th, and there was a fluffy juvenile Treecreeper on the 1st. The Blackcaps were stacking up some pre-migration fat, and the heaviest encountered weighed 23.6g.

October to December (11 sessions, 414 captures, 346 new)

The first visit on 5 Oct coincided with a huge passage of Chiffchaffs. One control and 106 new birds exceeded the species' previous day record of 93 on both 26 Sep 2007 and 30 Sep 2023 – and there were no retraps. The 40th week of the year is definitely peak Chiffchaff time. An adult Redwing that day was the earliest autumn capture of this species. There was another hiatus in activity between 10 and 26 Oct but 16 different species were trapped on the 27th, including three Firecrests, six Goldcrests, five Goldfinches, two Greenfinches, another adult Redwing, and an adult Marsh Tit, ringed in July 2023, was retrapped. Happy hour for Redpolls was between 11 am and 12 noon on the 31st, when eight were ringed, only one more turned up during the remainder of the year.

We became a "birthday present" on 2 Nov! The daughter of a Findon couple had contacted the BTO to ask if she could gift a ringing experience for her mum, and in return for a donation to the BTO we were able to show them 11 different species including smart male of both Bullfinch and Chaffinch, plus a Goldcrest. We don't retrap many Firecrests – only 27 individuals have found their way back into the nets, and only two previously known to have survived for more than a year since their first capture. Hence on 10 Nov it was pleasing to recapture a female ringed in November 2023. Chiffchaffs lingered on and were caught in small numbers on six of the seven visits in November and December, probably incoming continental birds. One on 17 Nov had Siberian *tristis* type colouration, but was not quite grey enough to be "accepted" by

SOS! Also during this period we trapped the only Sparrowhawk of the year, a first year male. An adult Jay was the final bird of the year on 29 Dec.

It was a mediocre year for Redwing captures, though better than in 2022 and 2023. Only ten were ringed, of which all but two were adults, indicative of a poor breeding year, compared with 2021 when 12 out of 22 ringed were first years.

Residents

From our small sample of juveniles and first year birds ringed until the end of September, breeding success appears to be average to poor for all species except Song Thrush.

Only two juvenile Bullfinches were ringed before the 30 Sep, though another five first years turned up before the end of December. The species' survival seems poor too, with no birds ringed in 2023 recaptured, and the four males and two females ringed in the breeding season all being 2nd year birds. A few others were trapped, but these were suffering from leg encrustations so were not ringed.

Species	Number of juveniles and first year birds (to 30/9)						
	2018	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Blackbird	6	8	11	8	8	10	8
Blue Tit	8	20	10	19	17	18	11
Dunnock	10	22	20	17	13	21	13
Great Tit	15	15	7	5	6	14	6
Robin	27	27	44	33	49	38	29
Song Thrush	2	6	14	6	1	5	13
Wren	14	12	20	15	9	17	13

Table 2. Productivity of seven resident species

Note: Only juveniles and first year birds trapped until the end of September are included; these are most likely to have been hatched on or near the site.

Comparison of Main Passage Species

Year/s	Blackcap	Chiffchaff	Whitethroat	Willow Warbler
2000-2004	25.5	13.7	6.9	6.8
2005-2009	30.6	15.9	5.0	5.8
2010-2014	30.5	18.4	5.5	6.6
2015-2019	36.0	15.3	4.5	9.1
2020	49.7	15.0	3.3	8.5
2021	37.9	17.6	1.8	5.5
2022	39.8	13.2	3.9	6.0
2023	37.2	22.2	3.4	5.5
2024	36.5	17.8	1.2	9.9

Table 4: Totals of Four Passage Species (as percentages of total number of all birds ringed)

The table above shows the four main passage species ringed as a percentage of the overall yearly totals. It was the worst year ever in terms of actual numbers for Whitethroats, but one of the better ones for Willow Warblers.

Garden Warblers are not included on this table as we do not normally ring very many, but this year we ringed the highest number since 2000 which, as a percentage (1.6) of the overall total, exceeded Whitethroat!

Survivors, Controls & Recoveries

Having a known date of ringing gives an indication of the age of an individual if it is retrapped, e.g. if a bird is a known adult when it is ringed, it is at least into its second calendar year, so if it is recaptured the following year it will be into its third year of life.

Below are examples of older individuals recaptured in 2024, with estimated age.

Species	Ringed	Age/Sex	Retrapped	Notes
Blackbird	30/3/19	Adult female	30/4/24	Also retrapped in '20 & '22, into at least its 8th calendar year
Blackbird	1/10/20	First year male	30/4/24	Also retrapped in '21. '22 & '23, into its 5th calendar year
Blackcap	26/7/20	Juvenile	2/7/24	Now recognisable as female, into its 5th calendar year.
Blackcap	29/9/21	1st year male	4/5/24 & 21/7/24	Also retrapped 7/5/23. Probably not breeding at Cissbury
Dunnock	31/7/21	Juvenile	10/11/24	7th recapture
Long-tailed Tit	14/6/20	Juvenile	24/3/24	Also retrapped in '21, '22 & '23, into 5th calendar year
Long-tailed Tit	22/2/21	Age unknown	3/3/24	Also retrapped in '22 & '23.

5. Selection of Retraps 2024

Three birds were caught at Cissbury which had been ringed elsewhere:

Species	Age/Sex	Date	Ringed at	Date ringed
Chiffchaff	1st year	5/10/24	Queen Mary Reservoir, Surrey	1/10/24 Movement 62km
Blackcap	1st year male	5/10/24	Icklesham (Rye Bay RG)	25/8/24 (juvenile) Movement 74km
Great Tit	Adult male	27/10/24	The Mumbles, Steyning	24/6/23 (juvenile)

Details also arrived of a Chiffchaff controlled at Cissbury in 2023

Species	Age/Sex	Date	Ringed at	Date ringed
Chiffchaff	Juvenile	14/10/23	Newbourne, Suffolk	11/6/23 Movement 174 km

There were two rather nice recoveries of "our" birds by ringers at other sites in 2024:

Species	Age/Sex	Date Ringed	Controlled at	Date
Redpoll	1st year	5/11/23	Hilbre Island, Wirral, Merseyside	16/5/24 Movement 339 km
Blackcap	Juvenile	21/7/24	Orne, France	14/9/24 (1st year male) Movement 286km

The Redpoll is the second Cissbury bird that has been found at Hilbre; a Goldcrest ringed by us on 29 Oct 2016 was controlled there in March 2017.

Farewell IPMR, hello DemOn

For many years now our data has been entered onto a database called Integrated Population Monitoring Reporter (IPMR) on our home computers, and submission files sent to Brian who forwarded them to the BTO for loading onto their system. However, the BTO were keen to move to an online system, Demography Online (DemOn), which was tested from about 2017. While in its infancy we were reluctant to use it, but gradually ringers had been moving over to DemOn as various problems have been ironed out and more functionality included. When the BTO announced that they would cease accepting submissions from IPMR in 2025, we decided now was the time to move on. The advantage is that any ringer with permission can enter the data, so Chrissi, Alex and Toby have all been doing their share, while I am still inputting records on IPMR where extracting specific data seems to be so much quicker and easier. You can only teach an old ringer a certain number of new tricks! The rest of the team are greatly indebted to Brian who spent a very considerable amount of time and effort setting up the online system with all the site information and relevant fields so it was user ready when the time came.

Summary

Once again we are grateful to the Worthing Conservation Volunteers for their sterling clearance effort on the ash and sycamore between rides G and H on 10 Mar, when ten of them wielded their saws to excellent effect. We were able to show them a good selection of species, including a Redwing. Other scrub cutting and ride maintenance was carried out by members of the team, and my husband Roger also helped on several occasions, including clearing trees which had fallen over paths and one of the net rides. We much appreciate the support of the National Trust in our activities here, and permission from the owners of the track for allowing access and parking nearby.

The number of birds ringed at the site at the end of 2024 stood at 48,823. We need to exceed 2024's total of new birds by just 39 to reach 50,000 – can we do it? Watch this space!

Image Gallery

Photograph acknowledgments

The source of images is often clear from the context or other attribution and those are not listed here. Note also that some of the bird photographs are illustrative; they may not be of the actual bird referred to in the account.

Front cover: Eider: Shoreham Harbour: Richard Allan

Page 55: Caspian Gull: Richard Allan

Page 55: Common Kestrel: Richard Allan

Page 56: Rock Pipit: Richard Allan

Page 56: Ruddy Turnstone: Richard Allan

Page 57: Purple Sandpiper: Richard Allan

Page 57: Redshank: Richard Allan

Back cover: Teal: Richard Allan

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If you use an email address but are not a member of the User Group then please consider joining (https://groups.io/g/sdos/join) to make sure you receive up-to-date information about SDOS activities.

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