Shoreham and District Ornithological Society

Spring Newsletter

2026

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Front Cover: Little Gull: Adur saltmarsh: Richard Allan

Editorial

As I write it is the last days of February and I see that Birdguides are reporting that three Zitting Cisticolas remain just north of Minsmere in Suffolk, at the site at Walberswick where the species bred last summer. This was a first for the United Kingdom. Like Serin, Zitting Cisticola has been on lists of potential UK breeding arrivals for decades, but has never quite made it up till now. It is quite widespread in Europe, extending into Scandinavia and Western Russia, so has probably been put off by the English Channel.

In southern Europe they are quite common in coastal areas and the places they live have a particular feel – you get out of the car and just think Zitting Cisticola. Then you hear the steady Zit Zit Zit as it passes by overhead, often unseen. Their specific name is *Cisticola juncidis* and therein lies the clue: Juncus is the genus of spiky reed clumps that inhabit lowland and coastal marshes, and a typical place to find the bird would be in a slightly saline, reedy area at the top of a saltmarsh or coastal flat. If they stick as a British breeder there would be places for them to breed along the south coast of England too.

The genus is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa where one can find Rattling, Croaking, Chirping, Tinkling and Wailing along with the Zitting version. There are others too. Overall you will get the general idea – they aren't songsters.

I have spent many frustrating hours trying to identify African Cisticolas. Based on this experience I can share some advice with you: if the range map doesn't sort it out immediately then give up and go look for Lions. The Genus encapsulates the notion of the little brown job!

Best wishes to you all

Roger

A good period for Little Gulls

Richard Allan

Little Gull, as its name implies, is the smallest of the world's gull species. This delightful, dainty gull, with its tern-like buoyant flight, is regularly seen in Sussex passing offshore most numerously in Spring. However, birds passing along the coast often give little opportunity for prolonged observation. In Winter, Little Gull is considered scarce in Sussex but any birds encountered can give observers better opportunities to enjoy this lovely gull.

When you look at records from our immediate area, rather than Sussex, then Little Gull is far less regularly encountered. However, sightings locally, and in Sussex generally, may be increasing, probably because the Baltic breeding population is doing well. It is likely these birds pass our coast on passage. Locally, Little Gull is still rarely encountered away from the immediate coast. Indeed, in his excellent talk on local gulls at the December 2025 Indoor Meeting, Richard Fairbank stated in all his years of local birdwatching he had never yet seen Little Gull any further up the Adur Estuary than the Harbour. mouth. The scarcity of Little Gulls in the Estuary is confirmed by John Newnham with his table (below) confirming only 14 non-coast records with none in mid-winter.

his winter, howver, has provided good opportunities to see both adult and immature Little Gulls at places on the coast like Southwick Beach and Widewater and, more impressively, in the Adur Estuary.

A local birder reported the first local winter sighting of Little Gull on December 17th with a 1st-winter off Southwick Beach. 1st-winter birds are very distinctive. As well as being small, they have a distinctive black 'W' marking across their open wings, easily visible as they fly. This 1st-winter bird was reported again on December 19th. On the 20th I was able to make the short-trip over to the long and somewhat stark expanse of Southwick Beach. I chose a spot to park and expected a lot of walking, waiting, and searching. To my surprise, within a minute or so, I had the 1st-winter Little Gull feeding just

offshore. It was reasonably close and bobbing down like a Tern to feed on tiny morsels picked from amongst the breaking waves. At one point the Little Gull, the smallest gull species, passed close to the largest, a Great Black-backed Gull. The size contrast was eye-opening.

Site Name	***Species***	***Arrive***	***Depart***	***Number***
Shoreham Airport	*Little Gull*	*05/11/1960*		*1*
Toll Bridge to A259	*Little Gull*	*17/09/1961*	*18/09/1961*	*1*
Toll Bridge	*Little Gull*	*25/09/1974*	*29/09/1974*	*1 imm*
Toll Bridge to A259	*Little Gull*	*13/03/1976*		*1*
Shoreham River Adur	*Little Gull*	*30/09/1982*		*3*
Shoreham River Adur	*Little Gull*	*17/07/1984*	*22/07/1984*	*1*
Shoreham River Adur	*Little Gull*	*04/09/1986*		*1*
Shoreham River Adur	*Little Gull*	*20/11/1987*		*1*
Shoreham River Adur	*Little Gull*	*18/03/1995*		*1 1st Win*
Shoreham Airport	*Little Gull*	*27/08/1997*		*1*
Cuckoo Corner	*Little Gull*	*07/03/1999*	*09/03/1999*	*1*
Railway - Toll Bridges	*Little Gull*	*10/08/2023*		*1 (Pumping Station)*
Railway - Toll Bridges	*Little Gull*	*02/11/2023*		*1 (from old picnic site)*
Adur Saltings (RSPB Reserve)	*Little Gull*	*11/08/2024*		*1 for four minutes*

I walked further along the beach towards the harbour looking for other gulls and waders. Some distance beyond my original sighting, again I saw a 1st-winter Little Gull feeding amongst the surf. I looked back some distance to where I'd seen the original bird and could see it was still there, its black 'W' marking clearly visible even from afar. So now there were definitely two 1st-winter birds.

By Dec 22nd, these two birds became three 1st-winters and a reliable feeding area was noted around some red posts in the sea. They stayed around for some days and, hopefully, many SDOS members got to see them.

Sadly, these young birds departed, presumably heading further south, and were not seen after Dec 24th. However, as we started 2026, more Little Gull sightings were to be had, this time of an adult further up the Estuary. On January 20th Richard Fairbank reported an adult passing east off Widewater.

Most of us presumed it would be a passing bird, with little chance of being encountered again. However, the next day, January 21st, around 2:30pm I got a nice surprise. I was casually scanning the west side of the Adur Estuary north of the Railway Bridge looking for waders when an adult Little Gull flew through my view. Its characteristic dark underwings grabbed my attention along with its plain silvery-grey upper wings, but there were a few Black-headed Gulls around, and I wondered if it was just a trick of the light. I scanned a little more carefully and picked up on the gull again confirming it was an adult Little Gull.

As Richard Fairbank said in his talk, and supported by John Newnham's table of records, Little Gull is a decidedly scarce sighting within the Estuary, so this felt a noteworthy local sighting. I thought it likely this would be the same adult bird seen off Widewater by Richard the day before.

I grabbed a few photos from the east side to confirm the sighting, before dashing across to the west side from where the views were much closer. I had put a message out on a WhatsApp group and soon saw that a trio of SDOS birders had quickly arrived on the east side to enjoy this scarce estuary sighting. A little later I too relocated back to the east side where Jerry Campbell plus Tim and Jenny Holter were standing. Whilst there, Jerry brought to our attention two adult Yellow-legged gulls, which are scarce, but regularly encountered each winter in the Adur Estuary SSSI.

Since Jan 20th, presumably the same adult bird has been lingering and has been seen again as follows, allowing more SDOS members to enjoy it:

January 22nd - seen around the Ferry Bridge / RSPB Reserve, roosting on the airfield and later along the Amsterdam Pub section.

January 27th - Adur Estuary between Railway and Toll Bridges.

January 28th - Adur Estuary between Railway and Toll Bridges.

February 15th - South of Toll Bridge resting amongst a great many Black-headed Gulls.

I wonder if we will have any more sightings of this adult, especially as it should soon start acquiring its jet-black hood and rosy-pink tinged underparts?

The Shoreham Airfield "Green Space" and the development of the next Adur Local Plan

Tony Benton assisted by Tim Holter

In November 2025 some Members of SDOS Council received a local authority planning newsletter. This included an extensive document outlining various matters that Adur District Council need to consider as a preliminary to preparing a draft of the next Local Plan. When completed, the Draft Local Plan will be made available for public consultation, the official time for representation or objections.

Once adopted, the new plan will replace the existing Adur Local Plan which was adopted in 2017. It is anticipated that the new Adur Local Plan will be adopted by the successor authority after the forthcoming local government reorganisation in Sussex.

The development of the Adur Local Plan is a complex exercise and is significant in that the plan provides a framework for deciding planning applications. The recently constructed Panattoni warehouses (images below) are built on an airfield area formally allocated for commercial development several years ago in the present Local Plan. This development has happened despite objections at the consultation stage of the present plan. Hence our concern and our desire to make an early representation in relation to the new plan.

The initial documents received were not the consultation as such, and did not invite comments. We, however, together with Sussex Wildlife Trust, and possibly others, are concerned about nature related aspects of these documents, and we thought that an early response was important.

The preliminary documents included a Biological Technical report that contained surveys of many local green spaces. Shoreham Airfield was not

included in this green space survey and this omission was the focus of our response.

The Society (SDOS) has, therefore, formally written to the Head of Planning at Adur District Council with copies to several Councillors. We have expressed particular concerns about the potential for yet more damaging development on Shoreham Airfield.

Our letter to Adur District Council

To: Head of Planning Adur District Council

Subject: Biodiversity Technical Report and the Local Plan

I am writing on behalf of Shoreham District Ornithological Society (SDOS - www.sdos.org) with regards to the Biodiversity Technical Report. Although we understand that the technical report is not, at this stage, subject to any public consultation process, we ask you to consider and respond to a few observations. Our focus is Shoreham Airfield, the adjacent SSSI, Lapwings as a proxy for ecosystem health, and the need to protect ecosystem functions and connectedness across Adur. We also comment on Biodiversity Net Gain targets.

Shoreham Airfield

Shoreham Airfield is an important site for birds, notably wintering Lapwing, and roosting gulls, and Skylarks and Meadow Pipits held breeding territories. In 2025, Barn Owls have been regularly observed on the western edge of the airfield and the adjacent New Monks Park Country Park. We believe that the airfield should be considered as Natural Capital and an ecological asset, given its importance to birds and the role it plays as part of the 'green gap 'and nature connectivity corridor.

We further argue that you should work with trusted organisations, such as Sussex Wildlife Trust, with a view to agreeing safeguards - for example, designation as a Local Wildlife Site, or similar. The Technical Report does not appear to recognise the value of the airfield from an ecological perspective and this needs to be addressed.

The basis of our challenge is that the airfield is supporting habitat for the adjacent Adur Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and that by further degrading the airfield, the features of the SSSI are damaged. The most salient example of this can be seen in terms of Lapwings, for which the SSSI is an important wintering area. In January 2000, 1840 Lapwings were present on the SSSI, but in recent years the number of birds has plummeted to a peak of around 100 - 120. (Source: British Trust for Ornithology Wetland Birds Survey).

If these birds do not have safe and food rich wintering areas like the airfield and SSSI then their chance of breeding success diminishes, contributing to their population decline.

Why this matters?

Lapwings are an emblematic species of the SSSI and require safe roosting sites when the tide is high and they are pushed off the saltmarsh and intertidal mud flats. For decades, Lapwings roosted in the North East corner of the airfield, but that safe roosting and supplemental feeding area has been lost, due to the construction of the large (and empty) warehouse facility. As a consequence, the small residual population of Lapwings now have to find roost sites that are 'second best', such as closer to the runway, roads and footpaths. This means being exposed to more disturbance, including from cars, people and aircraft movements during daylight hours.

Lapwings (a Red Listed UK bird of conservation concern) must have safe roosting and supplemental feeding areas adjacent to the SSSI during the winter

months, so it is imperative that no further damage is done to what remains of their roosting site on the airfield. Quite simply, any more buildings, commercial or otherwise, would be a disaster for these iconic birds which are suffering a catastrophic population decline locally and nationally.

Protecting ecosystem functions across Adur

As a Supporting Authority, Adur District Council have been involved in the creation of the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, due for adoption in 2026. You will be aware of the need to fully consider the function of your ecological assets, and how they interact, as a whole, to ensure the delivery of a sustainable and resilient vision for nature.

For this reason, we urge the Council to recognise the value of the airfield in terms of its connectedness to the SSSI and wider ecosystems. It provides a stepping stone between landscape scale projects such as Sussex Bay, Weald to Waves, and the Adur Recovery Project, and is adjacent to land owned by the Council for the purposes of nature conservation (New Salts Farm and Pad Farm). It follows, therefore, that any further degradation of the airfield would undermine the ecological integrity of the SSSI, all of the projects referred to above, and your policy ambitions for New Salts Farm and Pad Farm.

Biodiversity Net Gain targets

The recommendation in the Technical Report for a target of 20% (not 10%) Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is one that we approve of. This approach goes beyond the statutory measure of 10% in the Environment Act and complements the approach that was adopted early on in 2021 by the Worthing Local Plan. We believe that Adur should align with Worthing and adopt the 20% target, given the scale of habitat loss, and especially the damage to riverine habitat caused by urban squeeze in recent years. (please note, for example, that the SSSI is assessed as unfavourable and declining by Natural England.)

In conclusion

We believe that the previous Local Plan was flawed when it allocated part of Shoreham Airfield for development and urge the Council, consistent with its vision for a 'Greener Adur', to ensure that no such allocation is made when the next plan is developed. It is imperative that the airfield is protected from any further development in order to safeguard the features of the SSSI, and to provide the required connectivity with other nature recovery projects and your own nature focused land holdings. The airport buildings might well be defined as 'brown field' but it is disingenuous to regard a vast grassland area with its peripheral scrub as anything other than 'green field 'and Natural Capital.

We also strongly urge you to adopt a target of 20% for BNG.

Next steps

Please respond to this submission and confirm that it will feed into the Local Plan process. We are happy to answer any questions that you might have.

Who we are?

With over 400 members, SDOS is the oldest ornithological society in Sussex and is well placed to provide data on bird trends (abundance and distribution) within the ADC study area. We have particular expertise around the Adur Estuary SSSI and connected habitats and would welcome the opportunity to be formally consulted as the Local Plan develops.
With best regards.

Tony Benton

View from the river bank looking north towards Lancing College

View from the western river bank looking south towards Shoreham

Food for thought

Roger Smith

In January I was birding on La Gomera, a small island near Tenerife in the Canaries. Birding was very slow on the dry, steep, rocky slopes of the volcano but then, in scrubby countryside near an isolated house, I found a large and vociferous flock of Atlantic Canaries. The house had a bird feeder in the garden and the Canaries had found it. This reminded me of an article by the late Ian Wallace in Birdwatching Magazine about 30 years ago, in which he advocated that one approach to finding birds was to look for their food – to develop an appreciation of the landscape as a source of bird food rather than being just a mosaic of fields, hedges and woods.

Vultures and Marabou Storks surround an overnight kill in the Serengeti.

Amongst animals, birds, because they can fly rapidly from place to place, have a singular ability to exploit irregular food supplies. A host of gulls will assemble

behind a ploughing tractor, seemingly within a few minutes. Out at sea, off Shoreham, a flock of Gannets will assemble to exploit a shoal of fish, whilst In the savannas of Africa rollers and kites head towards bush fires to enjoy a roast dinner. Again in Africa, the vultures take off with the first thermals of the day in a co-operative patrol of thousands of hectares of savanna. They watch the ground from a great height and they also watch one another – soaring and gliding saves energy and eventually produces the reward, a carcass will be gone within hours.

Thus far our examples have focused upon ephemeral food supplies, but birds are also well able to exploit regular seasonal flushes of ecosystem productivity. As a result of the tilt of the earth's axis the earth has seasons. The annual march of the sun is from tropic to tropic, overhead at 23"26' North about June 21st and at the same latitude South around 21st December. A belt of convective rainfall associated with thunderstorms (called the Intertropical Convergence Zone) trails the overhead sun by about 6 weeks, and the result is that seasonality in the tropics is basically a wet and a dry season with relatively little temperature change. This tropical seasonality is least near to the Equator where benign temperatures and plentiful rainfall sustain the most productive and biodiverse ecosystem on the earth, the Tropical Rainforest. Here Net Primary Production (NPP), essentially the amount of carbon locked up by photosynthesis, is about 2200g/m^2/year. Coral reefs, wetlands and some estuaries can achieve similar levels of productivity.

In contrast to the humid tropics some other global ecosystems have very low productivity: open tropical oceans have a productivity around 150g/m^2/yr and often seem bird free as a result. Open ocean productivity tends to be limited by nutrient shortages.

Primary production in the northern Arctic tundra is limited by low temperatures and a short growing season. Low annualized rates of primary production may, however, conceal short-lived bursts of productivity that birds are well suited to exploit. We tend to think of some of our waders and geese

Egrets congregate and breed to exploit the prodigious food supplies available on the falling flood in the Pantanal of Brazil – an example of high tropical wetland productivity following the passage of the rains.

as Arctic breeders, but equally one could make the claim that they are Arctic feeders – the feeding drives the breeding. Waders rush north to exploit a surge of insect and other invertebrate productivity in June, and tundra breeding geese are able to exploit a burst of vegetation productivity that comes a few weeks later. Smaller birds tend to go further north where the season is shorter as they have a shorter breeding cycle. Greylag Geese and Whooper Swans breed in Iceland but smaller geese, like Pink-footed and Barnacle, and Bewick's Swans will also breed farther north.

So Arctic breeders, our summer visitors, our winter visitors and our passage migrants are all exploiting seasonal food supplies. To some extent this is rather obvious but the linkage of migration to ecosystem productivity changes is often implicit rather than explicit in accounts of the movements of birds. We can appreciate that Swallows and Martins arrive in April for the insects whilst

Swifts, which feed on aerial 'plankton', delay their arrival until May, but why do they go back when they do? When Willow Warblers leave in August have they run out of food or is there a better opportunity in the African Sahel with the arrival of the summer rains? Chiffchaffs hang on later into the autumn – perhaps they are waiting for the summer drought to break around the Mediterranean where they will spend the winter?

A pair of Barnacle geese shepherd four goslings on Spitsbergen in early July. These goslings need to be ready to fly out in early September. Twenty four hour days drive plant productivity and feeding round the clock and they grow rapidly.

Ross's Goose on migration in Nunavut, northern Canada in early September. The growing season is already over and the cotton grass has turned brown.

To summarise, areas of the world that experience strong seasonality are likely to have surplus food resources in the most productive seasons. Resident birds, whose populations are limited by winter or dry season food availability, are unable to fully exploit this resource. Other species, therefore, have developed a strategy of migration to exploit this surplus food. The ability of warm-blooded birds to fly fast and far, and adapt quickly to new surroundings, opens to them an opportunity not available to other forms of life that must plod or crawl across the surface of the earth. Evolution would surely invent birds if they did not already exist.

Worthing and Adur Swifts Group

Steve Lawless

When April comes around we all look forward to Swifts, harbingers of summer, turning up in our skies. At least we hope that they will! This now red-listed bird brings seasonal joy to those who behold its antics. It is a marvel of nature to see an animal that lives almost exclusively in the sky, and only touches down when it needs to breed. It is so aerial that youngsters that fledged last summer may not land for another three years.

Our Swifts group, as many of you will know, started last year with a view to surveying the Worthing and Adur conurbation, and establishing a baseline of how many nests we have and where they are located.

The initial activity was focused around recruiting volunteers to the group and running regular online planning meetings. We used Facebook and contacted the SDOS membership, and we also set up a WhatsApp group. About ten people were regularly active.

We used the RSPB citizen science app, SwiftMapper, to log our results. SwiftMapper already recorded a number of local entries spread over several years. These entries were, very probably, made by individuals focusing on where they lived. In our survey work we focused on places where nests had previously been identified, and we tried to cover as much of the area as we could to see which nests were still active. We were able to record 21 nests in total, 18 of which were in Worthing. This was the highest number of nests that had been recorded, using SwiftMapper, in our area in one year.

Although this gave us a better picture of how many Swift nests there are, and where they are located, it is still probably only indicative of a larger population. To survey the whole of Worthing would require significantly more people than we have available.

Another issue is that identifying a nest is very much like all birding; it is about being in the right place at the right time. An observer needs to witness the brief moment when a Swift enters a roof space. If you are facing the wrong way, or having a concentration break, then you will miss it! I was fortunate enough to identify two previously unrecorded nest sites in Broadwater. Standing in the street staring up at these fast and elegant birds circling and joyously calling to each other, is pleasurable in itself, but it also paid off in terms of nest site identification.

The Group's first season activities delivered several outcomes. We became more cohesive as the season progressed, spurred on by the excitement of identifying nest sites. Several members decided to organise a Swift walk, during Swift week. This attracted about eleven members of the public and was very well received. People became more confident about their surveying and, probably most importantly, we identified the main Swift colonies. In addition one of our members, who lives in in Littlehampton decided to start her own Littlehampton group. Permission was also granted by the Anglican diocese to put boxes in the church tower of St Mary's in Broadwater. These should be installed in time for the new season.

At the end of the summer, we were able to collate our results, slap ourselves on the back, and have a drink together in a Worthing hostelry. Although the birds had left our skies for Africa, we still had some work to do. With the support of Vicki Wells, lead Councilor for the Environment in Worthing, we identified and contacted a number of building developers. This work continues, but, so far, both Worthing Homes and Southern Housing, have agreed to include Swift bricks in all future developments. A meeting is also being arranged with Roffey Homes.

Andy Jinman has been vigilant in spotting scaffolding on buildings where boxes could be useful. This has resulted in boxes being installed on Greystoke Manor, a retirement home in Ferring. The owners paid for this work. Paul Stevens, the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) Hirundine Champion, put the boxes up

for us. Paul has also been doing some site surveys with a view to installing more nest boxes in central Worthing, Tarring, East Worthing and Durrington.

We have identified those areas with the largest colonies. These are West Worthing, Broadwater, and Goring. There is a small colony that we also want to support in East Worthing. We are now targeting these locations for the installation of Swift boxes. Swifts prefer to nest near an existing colony.

Last year the BBC broadcast a nature series, presented by Hamza Yassin, called Hamza's Hidden Wild Isles. In the summer episode, he visited Park Avenue in Leeds, a suburban street where over forty pairs of Swifts return annually to nest. This colony is supported by a tight-knit group of local residents who are all passionate about Swift conservation. We therefore decided we would adopt this model of promoting, and supporting, co-operating residents' groups in our target areas. We plan to run a Swift Walk in each of these neighbourhoods this coming summer. The central Worthing group has already recruited neighbours who are having boxes installed. Goring Way also has a couple of residents who are building boxes for neighbouring houses. So excellent progress is being made.

SOS have given us a grant to support the erection of boxes. To date property owners have paid for their own boxes and installation, and we do hope for a financial contribution from a property owner. Also "Callers" are an essential element of encouraging Swifts to find and occupy a box. Callers are small speakers that broadcast a Swift call. These have to be located in, or very near to, the new box. We anticipate funding some of these as they attract Swifts to new boxes.

Swifts which are nearing maturity will seek to identify potential future nesting sites. These Swifts are called bangers as they will fly past a potential nest site knocking it to find out if it is unoccupied. For this reason bangers arrive in the UK slightly later than the already nesting adults. If a nest site is occupied the resident Swifts will call out a warning to the bangers.

There are various ways that you can support the project too, and thereby contribute to Swift conservation. If you live in any of the target areas then you can have a box installed. You can also participate in the surveying which takes place over four months of the summer. An hour a fortnight is sufficient. We particularly need people in the Broadwater area where there is a large colony, but not enough feet on the ground in terms of survey work. If you know of any resident's associations or conservation groups in those areas then do get in touch to tell us about them. Email: one5swift@proton.me .We will also be surveying parts of Shoreham, Shoreham Beach, and mid-Lancing this coming summer.

I will finish by thanking Audrey Wende, Paul Stevens and Dave Boddington for the enthusiastic support they have given us so far.

Birds recorded in the SDOS area between July and December 2025

John Newnham

At the time of drafting this brief summary of the records from our Recording Area in early February (2026) there are 29,135 SDOS area bird sightings for the last six months of 2025 logged in the database of the Sussex Ornithological Society. In keeping with recent years, most observations have come via the two main on-line recording systems; namely the British Trust for Ornithology's Birdtrack (65.0%) and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's eBird (31.6%); the remaining 3.3% from various other sources. Members are again reminded that postings on the society's user-group, local Whatsapp and Facebook pages do **not** regularly get into the county database; sightings should be recorded through one the channels mentioned above.

This large collection of records has been generated by nearly 400 different observers. As usual the range of recording activity is massive with six individuals logging over 1000 sightings, a further 48 birders contributing more than 100 sightings, whilst 108 people have only created one or two records.

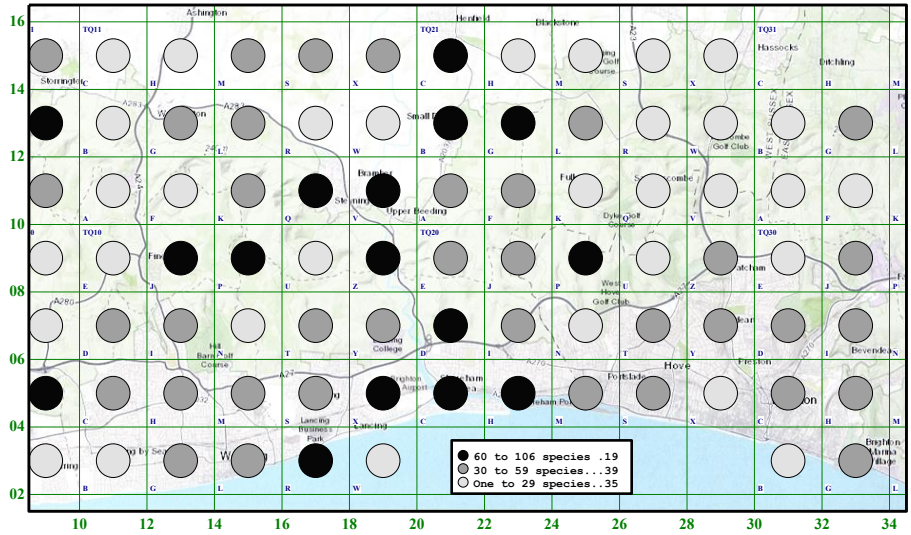
All are valuable. Like the first half of the year the records came from about 200 sites; the most popular locations in this period in descending order of record numbers were the River Adur (1527 records), West Tarring (1448), Cissbury (1386), Shoreham-by-Sea (1375), Brooklands (1171) and Widewater (1046). In keeping with recent times there was some recording on each day during this period with 8th November (356 records) being the most actively recorded day and 18th December (18 records) the least. The following table shows July to be the month with fewest records whilst the following month was the peak.

Month	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number records	3725	5658	4913	5387	5076	4375

As before, it is encouraging to see that most of the recording area had received some coverage in the first half of the year. A high portion (87%) of the records carried a grid reference enabling mapping at a tetrad (2km x 2km grid square) level. The following figure shows just four tetrads where there was no recording and plots the number of species recorded in each tetrad. Like the first six months the squares in the lower Adur Valley have the highest recorded species diversity. TQ20C (106 species) and TQ20D (105 species) were the only two squares where more than 100 species were recorded.

In keeping with most half year periods just about 200 different species or recognised sub-species were recorded but assessment and verification of these observations is still far from complete.

Thirty-one species were encountered on only one or two occasions; the details of these sightings follow in chronological order. Typically, July was fairly quiet with the highlights occurring on the 14th when a **Manx Shearwater** flew west offshore at Widewater early in the morning and a **Spoonbill** was seen there during the afternoon. The scarce species occurring in August included a **Wood Warbler** ringed at The Mumbles, Steyning on the 8th, a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecke**r seen in Hove Park on the 14th and an **Ortolan Bunting** photographed at Steyning Round Hill on the 15th. Strong onshore



The number of species recorded in each tetrad in the SDOS recording area July to December 2025.

winds on 3rd September produced a 'sketchy' sighting of a petrel, thought to be a **Storm Petrel**, flying west off East Worthing and a first calendar year **Sabine's Gull** at Brighton marina; the latter remained until the 5th. During the same period the area's only autumn **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Little Ringed Plover** were seen on the river on the 3rd and 5th respectively. Later in the month two **Nightjars** were recorded at Woods Mill on the 15th, five **Spoonbills** on the river on the 17th and a **White Stork** over Kithurst Hill on the 23rd. On 18th October a **Sooty Shearwater** was tracked moving east along the Sussex coast and was seen passing both Goring Gap and Hove. On the following day the area's only **Jack Snipe** was found at Bramber Brooks nature reserve. The rarest bird for the year was a first year **Daurian or Turkestan Shrike** which arrived near Woods Mill on 26th October and remained until 2nd November, allowing good views and photographic opportunities for many birders. Separating the young of these two shrike species is very difficult, and many experts consider it impossible without DNA

analysis. One lucky observer also logged the area's only **Goshawk** on 30th October whilst looking for the shrike.

Early November produced a small flurry of eastern leaf warblers with **Pallas's Leaf Warblers** seen at Brooklands on the 5th and 8th and at Ferring Rife also on the 8th whilst **Yellow-browed Warblers** were at East Brighton Park on the 8th, Brooklands on the 10th and again at East Brighton Park on the 20th. A **Great Grey Shrike** remained at Beeding Brooks between the 13th and 18th and a **Slavonian Grebe** joined the Little Grebes at Widewater between the 23rd and 30th allowing many birders to get excellent views of this species. All the other November cited records were of species just recorded on one day in the period and include a **Short-eared Owl** at Ditchling Beacon on the 13th, a **Great Skua** offshore at Widewater on the 14th, a **Hawfinch** at Henfield Levels on the 14th and an **Avocet** on the river on the 25th. A **Red-necked Grebe** remained in Southwick Canal between 8th and 11th December but the Common Pochard on Brooklands in the 19th did not stay more than a day. On Boxing Day some interesting wildfowl were reported from the Henfield Levels including a **Bewick's Swan**, four **Barnacle Geese**, 15 **White-fronted Geese** and seven **Tundra Bean Geese**; the grey geese also seen on the 27th.

The following large table lists 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. The order follows the current British List posted by the British Ornithologists' Union in December 2025. 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
Mute Swan	158	01-Jul	31-Dec	39 on 25-Nov at Widewater
Brent Goose	39	29-Sep	31-Dec	139 on 23-Dec at Widewater
Canada Goose	31	21-Jul	28-Dec	900 on 27-Oct at Henfield Levels
Greylag Goose	28	04-Jul	28-Dec	700 on 27-Oct at Henfield Levels
Egyptian Goose	24	23-Jul	29-Dec	39 on 27-Oct at Henfield Levels
Common Shelduck	8	11-Jul	17-Nov	11 on 11-Jul at Goring Gap
Common Eider	15	14-Jul	25-Nov	1 on 14-Jul at Shoreham Harbour
Common Scoter	16	20-Jul	30-Dec	19 on 17-Sep at East Worthing

Red-breasted Merganser	6	07-Nov	30-Dec	18 on 30-Dec at East Worthing
Goosander	37	28-Oct	31-Dec	3 on 06-Dec at Widewater
Shoveler	13	08-Aug	29-Dec	91 on 26-Dec at Henfield Levels
Gadwall	10	11-Jul	29-Dec	7 on 01-Nov at Henfield Levels
Eurasian Wigeon	23	25-Sep	29-Dec	500 on 27-Dec at Henfield Levels
Mallard	134	01-Jul	31-Dec	100 on 26-Dec at Henfield Levels
Pintail	10	05-Nov	29-Dec	69 on 26-Dec at Henfield Levels
Eurasian Teal	53	05-Jul	31-Dec	400 on 29-Dec at Henfield Levels
Grey Partridge	20	01-Jul	29-Dec	40 on 23-Nov at Chantry Hill
Common Pheasant	113	02-Jul	30-Dec	245 on 24-Sep at Highdown
Quail	7	04-Jul	08-Aug	1 on 04-Jul at Truleigh Hill
Red-legged Partridge	28	17-Jul	30-Dec	55 on 28-Aug at Ditchling Beacon
Little Grebe	89	14-Jul	31-Dec	19 on 25-Nov at Widewater
Great Crested Grebe	20	01-Oct	30-Dec	8 on 30-Dec at East Worthing
Common Cuckoo	3	26-Jul	29-Aug	1 on 26-Jul at South Downs
Turtle Dove	3	01-Jul	23-Sep	2 on 23-Sep at Lower Adur Valley
Collared Dove	166	01-Jul	31-Dec	50 on 23-Sep at Mile Oak
Woodpigeon	184	01-Jul	31-Dec	4100 on 08-Nov at Highdown
Feral Pigeon	177	01-Jul	31-Dec	250 on 13-Dec at Southwick Canal
Stock Dove	125	01-Jul	31-Dec	130 on 19-Dec at South Downs
Water Rail	20	10-Aug	27-Dec	2 on 10-Aug at Poynings
Moorhen	116	01-Jul	31-Dec	28 on 18-Sep at Brooklands
Coot	87	04-Jul	31-Dec	130 on 20-Oct at Brooklands
Oystercatcher	129	01-Jul	31-Dec	64 on 21-Nov at Goring Gap
Grey Plover	44	12-Aug	30-Dec	15 on 08-Dec at Brooklands
Golden Plover	3	09-Sep	07-Oct	5 on 05-Oct at Fulking
Ringed Plover	99	11-Jul	31-Dec	85 on 01-Oct at R. Adur
Lapwing	114	01-Jul	30-Dec	500 on 27-Dec at Henfield Levels
Eurasian Whimbrel	36	05-Jul	10-Oct	6 on 18-Jul at Lower Adur Valley
Curlew	44	01-Jul	30-Dec	4 on 14-Jul at Goring Gap
Bar-tailed Godwit	4	22-Aug	07-Nov	1 on 22-Aug at Goring Gap
Black-tailed Godwit	10	02-Jul	28-Dec	3 on 02-Jul at R. Adur
Woodcock	4	22-Nov	20-Dec	1 on 22-Nov at Beeding Brooks
Common Snipe	27	15-Aug	31-Dec	100 on 22-Dec at Adur Saltings
Common Sandpiper	67	08-Jul	30-Dec	9 on 13-Aug at Lower Adur Valley
Green Sandpiper	9	30-Jul	27-Dec	1 on 30-Jul at Lower Adur Valley
Common Redshank	137	05-Jul	31-Dec	55 on 06-Nov at Adur Saltings
Greenshank	40	15-Jul	22-Dec	3 on 25-Jul at Adur Saltings
Turnstone	136	01-Jul	31-Dec	77 on 05-Sep at Goring Gap
Knot	4	03-Sep	10-Sep	10 on 06-Sep at Adur Saltings
Sanderling	24	23-Jul	14-Dec	98 on 12-Dec at Goring Beach

Dunlin	83	17-Jul	30-Dec	112 on 23-Dec at Widewater
Purple Sandpiper	22	25-Oct	29-Dec	12 on 29-Dec at Brighton Marina
Little Stint	3	09-Sep	11-Sep	1 on 09-Sep at Botolphs
Arctic Skua	3	03-Sep	31-Oct	2 on 15-Sep at Goring Beach
Razorbill	10	10-Oct	30-Dec	26 on 30-Dec at East Worthing
Common Guillemot	3	03-Oct	25-Dec	2 on 03-Oct at Widewater
Unidentified auk spp	11	03-Oct	30-Dec	1100 on 30-Dec at East Worthing
Sandwich Tern	32	05-Jul	25-Nov	25 on 20-Jul at Widewater
Arctic Tern	7	25-Sep	02-Oct	1 on 25-Sep at R. Adur
Common Tern	6	13-Aug	03-Oct	2 on 13-Aug at Hove Lagoon
Commic Tern	1	03-Sep	03-Sep	2 on 03-Sep at West Worthing
Little Gull	8	23-Aug	23-Dec	3 on 22-Dec at Southwick Beach
Kittiwake	12	20-Jul	30-Dec	4 on 14-Nov at Widewater
Black-headed Gull	178	01-Jul	31-Dec	1200 on 21-Oct at Adur Valley
Mediterranean Gull	56	01-Jul	25-Dec	51 on 01-Jul at Lower Adur Valley
Common Gull	86	02-Jul	31-Dec	1800 on 12-Dec at Adur Valley
Caspian Gull	7	17-Oct	14-Nov	2 on 18-Oct at Lower Adur Valley
Herring Gull	184	01-Jul	31-Dec	950 on 15-Oct at Lower Adur Valley
Yellow-legged Gull	50	11-Jul	30-Dec	5 on 14-Aug at Withdean
Great Black-backed Gull	157	01-Jul	31-Dec	188 on 18-Oct at Lower Adur Valley
Lesser Black-backed Gull	82	01-Jul	28-Dec	15 on 01-Aug at Worthing Beach
Red-throated Diver	12	19-Oct	30-Dec	26 on 30-Dec at East Worthing
Great Northern Diver	12	19-Oct	30-Dec	1 on 19-Oct at East Worthing
Fulmar	8	15-Jul	17-Dec	2 on 03-Sep at East Worthing
Gannet	44	05-Jul	30-Dec	184 on 03-Oct at East Worthing
Shag	19	23-Aug	28-Dec	2 on 10-Dec at Southwick Canal
Cormorant	148	01-Jul	31-Dec	104 on 05-Sep at Palace Pier
Little Egret	150	01-Jul	30-Dec	36 on 15-Aug at Goring Gap
Great White Egret	15	07-Sep	07-Nov	6 on 24-Sep at Highdown
Cattle Egret	6	21-Jul	29-Dec	9 on 06-Sep at Upper Adur Levels
Grey Heron	135	01-Jul	31-Dec	9 on 07-Oct at Lower Adur Valley
Common Swift	53	01-Jul	10-Sep	300 on 23-Jul at Shoreham-by-Sea
Barn Owl	16	03-Jul	20-Dec	3 on 05-Jul at Small Dole
Little Owl	42	03-Jul	29-Dec	3 on 23-Jul at Truleigh Hill
Tawny Owl	24	05-Jul	30-Dec	3 on 05-Jul at Sompting
Osprey	3	26-Aug	23-Sep	1 on 26-Aug at Wild Park
Honey-buzzard	3	14-Aug	13-Sep	1 on 14-Aug at Chantry Hill
Sparrowhawk	108	01-Jul	30-Dec	3 on 31-Aug at Cissbury
Hen Harrier	8	18-Aug	24-Dec	1 on 18-Aug at Cissbury
Marsh Harrier	12	03-Aug	16-Nov	2 on 15-Oct at Canada Bottom
Red Kite	122	03-Jul	30-Dec	13 on 30-Sep at Chantry Hill

White-tailed Eagle	5	03-Jul	24-Dec	2 on 23-Sep at Kithurst Hill
Common Buzzard	148	01-Jul	31-Dec	12 on 19-Aug at Chanctonbury
Kingfisher	110	18-Jul	31-Dec	3 on 09-Sep at Lower Adur Valley
Wryneck	4	17-Aug	05-Sep	1 on 17-Aug at No-Mans Land
Green Woodpecker	135	01-Jul	30-Dec	5 on 26-Jul at South Downs
Great Spotted Woodpecker	116	01-Jul	29-Dec	6 on 02-Oct at Highdown
Kestrel	147	01-Jul	31-Dec	8 on 05-Sep at Beeding Hill
Merlin	6	13-Oct	29-Dec	1 on 13-Oct at Steyning Round Hill
Hobby	30	15-Jul	16-Oct	3 on 23-Jul at Shoreham-by-Sea
Peregrine	75	10-Jul	31-Dec	3 on 05-Nov at Cockroost Hill
Ring-necked Parakeet	21	28-Jul	31-Dec	3 on 19-Oct at Shoreham-by-Sea
Jay	132	02-Jul	31-Dec	10 on 21-Sep at Highdown
Magpie	182	01-Jul	31-Dec	41 on 22-Dec at Shoreham-by-Sea
Jackdaw	175	01-Jul	31-Dec	450 on 25-Jul at South Downs
Rook	137	01-Jul	31-Dec	600 on 14-Aug at Mill Hill
Raven	114	01-Jul	31-Dec	12 on 15-Aug at South Downs
Carrion Crow	183	01-Jul	31-Dec	121 on 30-Jul at Goring Gap
Blue Tit	177	01-Jul	31-Dec	50 on 02-Oct at Highdown
Great Tit	170	01-Jul	31-Dec	14 on 30-Jul at Withdean
Coal Tit	68	06-Jul	30-Dec	4 on 08-Nov at Offington
Marsh Tit	28	13-Jul	14-Dec	8 on 05-Dec at Steyning Round Hill
Skylark	118	01-Jul	31-Dec	120 on 06-Nov at Steyning
Sedge Warbler	18	03-Jul	06-Sep	5 on 22-Jul at Old Erringham Fm
Reed Warbler	37	01-Jul	22-Sep	17 on 06-Jul at Sompting Brooks
Grasshopper Warbler	4	29-Jul	19-Sep	1 on 29-Jul at Cissbury
Sand Martin	33	03-Jul	07-Oct	30 on 06-Sep at Highdown
Barn Swallow	107	01-Jul	07-Nov	1800 on 25-Sep at Ferring
House Martin	62	01-Jul	21-Oct	700 on 09-Sep at Cissbury
Long-tailed Tit	127	01-Jul	31-Dec	40 on 10-Oct at Highdown
Cetti's Warbler	66	03-Jul	20-Dec	4 on 06-Sep at Upper Adur Levels
Willow Warbler	58	06-Jul	02-Oct	64 on 09-Aug at Cissbury
Common Chiffchaff	139	01-Jul	29-Dec	100 on 22-Sep at Cissbury
Garden Warbler	17	14-Jul	30-Aug	2 on 06-Aug at Cissbury
Blackcap	125	01-Jul	31-Dec	90 on 06-Sep at Mumbles Steyning
Lesser Whitethroat	34	01-Jul	13-Oct	5 on 28-Aug at Cissbury
Common Whitethroat	81	01-Jul	02-Oct	50 on 06-Aug at Sheepcote Valley
Dartford Warbler	11	11-Aug	31-Dec	2 on 31-Dec at Tenant Hill
Firecrest	48	11-Aug	31-Dec	7 on 02-Dec at Cissbury Fiekds
Goldcrest	119	01-Jul	30-Dec	25 on 15-Nov at Ferring Rife
Nuthatch	44	02-Jul	29-Dec	3 on 19-Aug at Chanctonbury
Eurasian Treecreeper	40	01-Jul	29-Dec	4 on 03-Aug at Poynings

Wren	164	01-Jul	31-Dec	16 on 05-Dec at Steyning Round Hill
Common Starling	180	01-Jul	31-Dec	3000 on 06-Dec at Palace Pier
Mistle Thrush	40	06-Jul	19-Dec	14 on 24-Jul at Wiston Estate
Song Thrush	123	01-Jul	30-Dec	45 on 14-Nov at Sheepcote Valley
Redwing	51	01-Oct	31-Dec	50 on 27-Dec at Henfield Levels
Blackbird	177	01-Jul	31-Dec	75 on 14-Nov at Sheepcote Valley
Fieldfare	30	13-Oct	29-Dec	70 on 22-Nov at Beeding Brooks
Ring Ouzel	2	01-Oct	17-Oct	2 on 01-Oct at Cissbury
Spotted Flycatcher	47	02-Jul	02-Oct	25 on 12-Sep at Cissbury
Robin	179	01-Jul	31-Dec	33 on 08-Nov at Sheepcote Valley
Common Nightingale	7	02-Aug	14-Sep	1 on 02-Aug at Cissbury
Pied Flycatcher	6	10-Aug	22-Sep	1 on 10-Aug at Steyning
Black Redstart	20	01-Aug	24-Dec	3 on 17-Oct at Beeding Hill
Common Redstart	44	18-Jul	26-Sep	10 on 11-Sep at Cissbury
Whinchat	38	27-Jul	09-Oct	21 on 25-Aug at Edburton Hill
Eurasian Stonechat	132	04-Jul	31-Dec	30 on 25-Sep at Cockroost Hill
Northern Wheatear	65	23-Jul	27-Oct	33 on 05-Sep at Beeding Hill
Dunnock	164	01-Jul	31-Dec	15 on 29-Sep at Edburton
House Sparrow	180	01-Jul	31-Dec	60 on 18-Aug at Stretham Manor
Grey Wagtail	59	16-Jul	30-Dec	23 on 05-Sep at Goring Gap
Yellow Wagtail	35	26-Jul	01-Nov	150 on 31-Aug at Cissbury
Pied Wagtail	141	01-Jul	31-Dec	100 on 13-Nov at Small Dole
White Wagtail	3	11-Jul	16-Oct	3 on 16-Oct at Hove
Tree Pipit	19	16-Aug	29-Sep	6 on 05-Sep at Highdown
Meadow Pipit	131	01-Jul	31-Dec	500 on 22-Sep at Steyning Round Hill
Rock Pipit	36	02-Jul	28-Dec	5 on 25-Oct at Shoreham Harbour
Brambling	2	11-Oct	06-Nov	1 on 11-Oct at Sheepcote Valley
Chaffinch	121	01-Jul	31-Dec	35 on 08-Oct at Cissbury
Bullfinch	54	06-Jul	29-Dec	7 on 17-Nov at Edburton
Greenfinch	124	01-Jul	30-Dec	50 on 14-Oct at Sheepcote Valley
Linnet	137	01-Jul	31-Dec	500 on 21-Oct at Mile Oak
Redpoll	18	19-Aug	08-Nov	20 on 25-Oct at Cissbury
Common Crossbill	25	08-Jul	29-Dec	43 on 25-Jul at Patching Hill
Goldfinch	164	01-Jul	31-Dec	1420 on 17-Oct at Goring Gap
Siskin	36	12-Sep	16-Dec	149 on 13-Oct at Goring Gap
Reed Bunting	48	01-Jul	22-Dec	8 on 26-Nov at Ferring Rife
Corn Bunting	98	01-Jul	31-Dec	150 on 02-Oct at Cissbury
Cirl Bunting	14	01-Jul	29-Jul	1 on 01-Jul at Hazelholt Bottom
Yellowhammer	100	01-Jul	31-Dec	30 on 16-Aug at Cissbury
Black Swan	68	08-Jul	28-Dec	1 on 08-Jul at Lower Adur Valley
Lord Derby's Parakeet	9	27-Aug	31-Dec	1 on 27-Aug at Shoreham-by-Sea

Woodpigeon and Herring Gull were recorded on each day during this six months, Carrion Crow was missed just one day, Magpie missed two, and both Common Starling and House Sparrow were not recorded on four days. As previously stated 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 2025.

This, the nineteenth year of ringing and study of birds using the Ladywell valley, was the least active with just six mist-netting sessions. The three principal ringing permit holders were either out of the country for extended periods, very busy with work commitments or with reduced mobility due to ill health. The total number of birds ringed was just 172 with 67 handlings of birds already ringed. The totals for each of the six sessions were:-

Date	27/04/2025	03/05/2025	31/05/2025	22/06/2025	27/07/2025	17/08/2025
New Birds	16	1	23	41	52	39
Retraps	17	19	22	4	4	2
Total	33	20	45	45	56	41

Table 1:- *The totals for each of the 2025 ringing sessions in Ladywell.*

Out of the nineteen different species ringed Blackcap, Willow Warblers and Blue Tit, each with 26 ringed, were the top species. A Treecreeper, ringed in October 2022, was retrapped during the first two outings and brings the total number of species handled during 2025 to twenty. Clearly, with so few ringing outings and low numbers of birds any comparisons with previous years are meaningless.

Despite the paucity of ringing some interesting movements were reported. During 2025 a very dark coloured Reed Warbler was trapped which had been ringed in France (control) and four birds ringed in Ladywell were

controlled by other ringers 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	31/05/2025	4	27/08/2024	3	Creuse, France	554km SW

Table 2: *The details of birds caught in Ladywell during 2025 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
Chiffchaff	16/11/2024	3	18/01/2025	5	Eastleigh WTW, Hants	47 WNW
Chiffchaff	15/09/2024	3	28/03/2025	4	Cottenham, Cambridgeshire	164 N
Chiffchaff	11/10/2024	3	18/05/2025	4	Wilstone Res Tring, Herts	109 NNW
Blackbird	31/05/2025	3J	16/07/2025	3J	The Mumbles Steyning	6 N

Table 3: *Details of birds ringed in Ladywell and controlled elsewhere.*

Last year I reported the most unexpected movement of a Dunnock (PY15502) ringed as a juvenile in August 2023, retrapped in Ladywell on 17th September and 15th October before being controlled in Devon during November 2024. Early in 2025 I received a second notification of a Dunnock ringed in Ladywell (PY15520) which had been controlled at the same Devon site in December 2024. I clearly had not read the notification thoroughly and assumed it was the same Dunnock (PY15502), a very sedentary species, being retrapped at South Milton Ley. It was not until Val Bentley noted in the BTO annual ringing report that two Dunnocks (both in Ladywell in the same October week) were reported as having moved to Devon. This, a highly unlikely scenario and most likely one of the rings PY15502 or PY15520 have been misread. Presumably one of these had flown to Devon but which one!.

The ringing in Ladywell has provided some interesting life histories of birds in the valley and this year two Blackbirds were retrapped more than six years after ringing; neither of these males, both ringed as adults, have spent much time in the valley. A Dunnock was retrapped a day short of a six-year interval and a Reed Warbler, Robin and Wren exceeded four years since being ringed.

Sadly, the nest boxes in the valley were not monitored during 2025

Ring No.	Species	Cap	Date	Age Code	Sex	Subsite	Interval
LC12277	Blackbird	N	17/10/2018	4	M	L2	
		R	10/10/2021	4	M	L2	2y 359d
		R	03/05/2025	6	M	L1	6y 200d
LH59750	Blackbird	N	09/04/2017	6	M	L4	
		R	10/06/2017	6	M	K2	0y 062d
		R	23/09/2023	4	M	L1	6y 168d
		R	27/04/2025	6	M	L2	8y 020d

***Table 4**: Details of birds retrapped in 2025 with the greatest intervals between ringing and recapture.*

As previously reported our Health and Safety (H&S) policy requires at least two permit holding ringers to be present at each ringing session. During the year the number of outings each team member attended was John Newnham (4), Clare Buckle (4), Sue Walsh (4), Paul Thrift (3) and Becky Parangi (2). We were assisted on one occasion by Alex Rosenfeld from the Cissbury team and were joined one morning by Ashley who was interested in observing the process of ringing. Throughout the year Clare continued as lead supervisor 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 2025.

On each visit, including visits undertaking maintenance work, a list of species recorded was logged onto the BTO's Birdtrack recording system. No new species were added to the list of 121 species recorded in the valley.

Between the few ringing sessions, 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 were 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.

In keeping with recent years all the ringing data was entered into the BTO's on-line recording software (DeMon) and I thank the team members who take turns keying the data into DeMon. The individual session reports for 2025 to landowners, interested college staff, local birders and ringers, who have followed the work done in Ladywell have been completed by Sue, Clare or me, but I also thank team members for their photographs, some which were included in these summaries. 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 2025

Val Bentley

The 42nd year of ringing at Cissbury, and on the 12th October a Goldcrest became the 50,000th bird to be ringed here. We carried out 31 sessions, three fewer than in 2024, the first on the 2nd February and the last on the 20th December. The number of new birds ringed was an increase of 299 (26%) over the previous year, but just under 200 lower than in 2023. Once again there were some gaps in activity during prime Blackcap and Chiffchaff migration, from 7th-20th September, and 28th September – 11th October, so numbers of these two species were not much greater than in 2024. However, nine visits between 26th July and the end of August produced the highest number of passage Willow Warblers since 1997.

Chrissi Twitchen and myself are the lead ringers/trainers. Brian Clay remained our Group Secretary. Peter Denyer (A permit) and holder Alex Rosenfeld (C permit) were both around for most of the year, whilst trainee Toby Stapleton was working at Spurn Bird Observatory from May to November so only visited

three times. Mya Bambrick is now employed in Dorset, so has transferred to a trainer there, and two other trainees discontinued. Kate Woodhouse took some time out due to work commitments, but hopes to return, and we were able to welcome Vera Vinken, already a trainee, who had moved into the area, and Ben Ayling who is new to ringing.

As seen in the table below, Blackcap and Chiffchaff numbers increased slightly, but those for Goldcrest, Lesser Whitethroat, Long-tailed Tit. Redpoll, Reed Warbler, Whitethroat and Willow Warbler were considerably higher than in 2024.

Species	2020 New	2021 New	2022 New	2023 New	2024 New	2025 New (New for Year*)	2025 Total Captures (inc. retraps)
Blackbird	19	18	26	16	20	15 (22)	26
Blackcap	741	319	428	608	416	438 (441)	464
Blue Tit	14	35	31	27	32	38 (39)	44
Bullfinch	27	14	23	13	14	12 (13)	14
Chaffinch	9	6	9	2	7	3	3
Chiffchaff	244	148	142	363	202	289 (294)	307
Dunnock	30	26	31	32	23	31 (40)	59
Firecrest	3	5	6	14	10	7	10
Garden Warbler	10	3	8	16	18	9	9
Goldcrest	24	11	54	101	37	65 (66)	72
Goldfinch	13	8	7	16	32	4 (5)	
Grasshopper Warbler	2	-	1	1	1	1	5

Great Spotted Woodpecker	-	-	2	-	1	-	-
Great Tit	9	10	13	22	11	20	27
Greenfinch	9	4	9	21	9	16	15
House Martin	6	-	-	-	-	--	-
Jay	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
Kestrel	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lesser Whitethroat	5	2	6	4	4	12	13
Linnet	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Long-tailed Tit	16	18	25	28	19	38 (40)	52
Magpie	1	-	-	-	-		-
Marsh Tit	4	-	-	2	1	2 (3)	3
Nightingale	2	1	-	-	-	2	2
Nuthatch	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Pied Flycatcher	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Redpoll	63	22	19	51	9	40 (41)	41
Redstart	1	-	2	7	-	2	2
Redwing	13	22	8	3	10	2	2
Reed Bunting	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Reed Warbler	5	6	3	4	6	27	27
Robin	62	47	66	60	53	68 (73)	97
Sedge Warbler	-	-	-	2	2	2	2
Siskin	19	-	-	7	-	-	-
Song Thrush	22	22	17	23	33	9 (13)	
Sparrowhawk	-	2	-	2	1	1	1
Spotted Flycatcher	4	2	5	2	1	-	-

Swallow	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Tree Pipit	3	-	1	-	-	-	-
Treecreeper	-	-	2	2	2	2	2
Whitethroat	53	15	42	55	14	52	60
Willow Warbler	135	46	65	90	113	199	202
Wood Pigeon	1	--	-	-	-	1	1
Wood Warbler	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Wren	23	27	22	34	35	30(33)	39
Yellowhammer	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Total	**1593**	**841**	**1075**	**1633**	**1138**	**1437 (1482)**	**1617**

Table 1. Captures at Cissbury 2020-2025

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 of birds 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 2025. There were no species ringed this year that had not appeared in any of the previous five years.

The Ringing Year

February to April (4 sessions, 54 captures, 34 new)

The four visits were during February and March, with no activity from 10th March to 17th May, despite the weather being generally dry. This was due to holidays, persistent northerly winds, and various ringing jaunts abroad by almost all the group.

Four of the group met on a chilly 2nd February, delighted to have the services of the Worthing Conservation Group. They were rewarded with close up views of a Treecreeper, admiring its cryptic plumage, long curved claws and beak, so beautifully designed to cling to the bark of trees and extract goodies from within. The next session, with just Alex and Toby, was pretty unproductive, as were the remaining two in this period, though some energetic cutting vastly improved the appearance of net ride F1. The only birds of note were a retrapped Marsh Tit on 3rd March, ringed as a juvenile in August 2024, and the first two Chiffchaffs of the year on the 9th.

May to July (10 sessions 322 captures, 273 new)

By the 18th May other migrants had returned. Seven Blackcaps were caught, one ringed as a 1st year bird in September 2021, together with three Lesser Whitethroats, one a retrap male ringed in its second year in May 2022. The first juveniles were four speckly Robins trapped on 8th June. On the 22nd we arrived to find the table knocked off its blocks, a bench turned over and abundant cowpats – the plus side was that the grass in the net rides was well cropped. We didn't see the bovine trespasser, so hopefully he/she had found a way out. That day saw the arrival of the first juveniles of migrant species, three Blackcaps and five Chiffchaffs. On a solo session on the 30th June Alex ringed 34 juveniles, including seven Blackcaps, 16 Chiffchaffs and two Greenfinches. Lesser Whitethroat and Whitethroat juveniles were ringed on the next session on 6th July.

The first passage birds arrived in the nets on 26th July, 17 Willow Warblers, three Reed Warblers and a single Sedge Warbler; all were birds hatched during the year. We were also delighted that four SDOS visitors, Tony Benton, Sue Miles and Tim & Jenny Holter, were able to come along to see ringing in action.

August & September (10 sessions, 910 captures, 846 new)

A very busy couple of months. Though only one more session than in the same period in 2024, there were almost 300 more captures, the bulk of these being young Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers. The first of two Nightingales turned up on the 2nd August, there was also an adult Sedge Warbler and the only Bullfinch in the entire year still in juvenile plumage, though a first year bird was ringed at the end of November.

We had the first 100+ catch of the year on the 9th August, with only the eight eastern nets set. The 64 Willow Warblers included just one we could positively say was an adult bird. Seven Reed Warblers was a good total for a downland scrub site. The 30th brought another "ton" with 128 captures, only

seven of which were retraps, but this time the 81 Blackcaps easily outnumbered the 15 Willow Warblers. Chrissi carried out a solo session on 27th September with just four nets but had 123 birds, including 64 Chiffchaffs, a control Blackcap and a young male Sparrowhawk.

October to December (7 sessions, 331 captures, 284 new)

There were four fewer visits in this period than in 2024, and correspondingly fewer captures. There was a two week gap between the final September visit and the first in October, on the 12th. We wondered if we had possibly missed a rush of Chiffchaffs, as only 28 were trapped that day, but another 50 were ringed on the 18th. That day also saw 21 Redpolls ringed, followed by another 19 before the end of the year, plus one ringed elsewhere. We used to assign most of these as Lesser Redpolls but Redpolls are now decreed to be all the same species with different subspecies. One bird trapped on 25th October was

definitely much whiter than the rest, and was possibly what we would have previously called a "Common" Redpoll, subspecies *flammea* rather than *cabaret*. There were only two visits in both November and December with a yield of 87 new birds, of which 20 were Goldcrests and 21 Long-tailed Tits. Redwings seemed to arrive in southern England quite late, and only two were ringed this year.

Residents

Continuing the comparison of juvenile birds ringed until the end of September for eight of our resident species, this small sample suggests productivity was good for most, except Blackbird which was rather lower than usual, and both Bullfinch and Song Thrush for which the 2025 breeding season appears to have been pretty disastrous here.

Species	Number of juveniles and first year birds (to 30/9)						
	2019	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
Blackbird	8	11	8	8	10	8	5
Bullfinch	3	12	6	12	4	2	1
Blue Tit	20	10	19	17	18	11	23
Dunnock	22	20	17	13	21	13	19
Great Tit	15	7	5	6	14	6	14
Robin	27	44	33	49	38	29	48
Song Thrush	6	14	6	1	5	13	0
Wren	12	20	15	9	17	13	18

Table 2. Productivity of eight 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.

BTO data gathered from Constant Effort Site (CES) ringing nationally indicates that overwinter survival for Blue and Great Tits, Dunnocks, Robins and Wrens was lower than normal, but they had a productive breeding season, as did our

birds. However, for Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, there were different fortunes elsewhere with both species experiencing near normal winter survival and average productivity overall. 2025 was the first year in which no juvenile Song Thrushes were trapped, possibly suitable food for "thrush" nestlings was lacking in the hot and incredibly dry summer on our downland scrub site.

It was also the worst year on record for young Bullfinches with only one juvenile found in this period despite six adult males and five females being encountered during the year; a first year bird was also ringed on 30th November, presumably from a local nest. The BTO CES data also showed a drop in overwinter survival and productivity for Bullfinches, but nowhere as dramatic as we have seen at Cissbury.

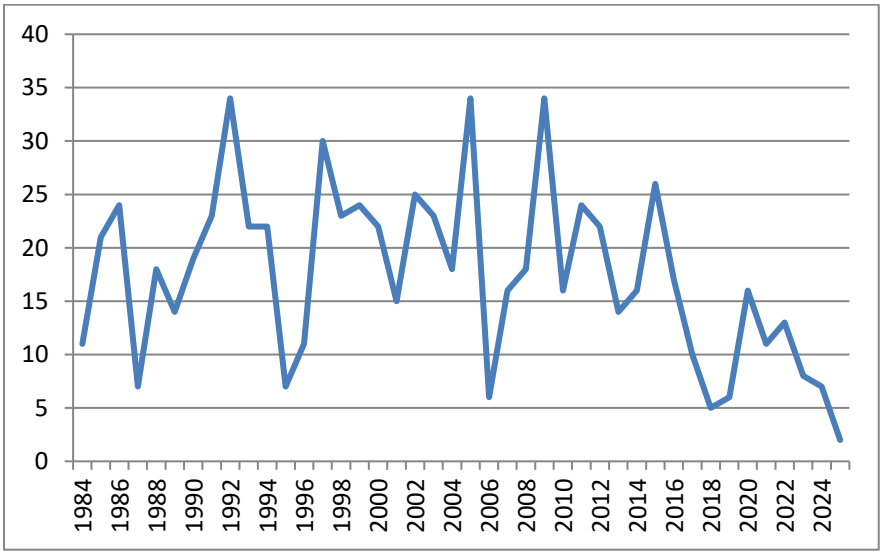


Figure 1. Number of Juvenile and First calendar year Bullfinches ringed 1984-2005

Comparison of Main Passage Species

The table below shows the four main passage species ringed as a percentage of the overall yearly totals. As stated earlier, the number of sessions carried out during the species' peak migration periods will have an effect on the overall comparisons.

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
2025	30.5	20	3.6	13.8

Table 3: Totals of Four Passage Species (as percentages of total number of all birds ringed)

There were only eight Garden Warblers ringed, half the 2024 figure. However, the total of 12 Lesser Whitethroats was three more than in 2024 and the highest since 2010.

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.

Longer-lived individuals recaptured in 2025 were:

Species	Ringed	Age/Sex	Retrapped	Notes
Blackbird	18/9/21	Juvenile male	9/3/25	4th recapture, into its 5th calendar year
Blackcap	29/9/21	First year male	18/5/25	4th recapture, into its 5th calendar year
Dunnock	21/7/21	Juvenile	31/5/25	9th recapture, into 5th calendar year
Long-tailed Tit	22/10/21	Unaged	2/3/25	7th recapture, into at least its 5th calendar year.
Lesser Whitethroat	29/5/22	2nd year male	18/5/25	1st recapture, into its 4th calendar year

Four birds trapped at Cissbury had been ringed elsewhere:

Species	Age/Sex	Date ringed	Ringed at	Date recaptured
Blackcap	1st year female	9/8/25	Queen Mary Reservoir, Surrey	27/9/25 Movement 62 km, 49 days
Chiffchaff	1st year	8/10/25	Clopton Mediaeval Village, Cambs	12/10/25 Movement 74 km, 6 days
Redpoll	1st year	19/9/25	Skipworth Common NR, N Yorks	25/10/25 Movement 331 km, 36 days
Goldfinch	Adult male	22/10/25	Sparsholt, Hants	20/12/25 Movement 76 km, 59 days

There were three recoveries of "our" birds by ringers at other sites in 2025, and one bird found dead elsewhere:

Species	Age/Sex	Date Ringed	Controlled at	Date
Blackcap	1st year male	17/8/25	Gorjoes, Faro, Algarve, Portugal	2/10/25 Movement 1640 km 46 days
Chiffchaff	1st year	23/9/23	Allestree Park, Derby	20/5/25 (Adult female) Movement 246 km, 1 yr 239 days
Goldfinch	Adult male	17/11/23	Hardham, Pulborough	24/11/25 Movement 14km, 2 yrs 7 days
Willow Warbler	Adult	13/8/24	Dumfries & Galloway (taken by predatory bird)	1/8/25 Movement 480km, 351 days

Of course, the Willow Warbler will have travelled much further than 480 km, because it would have undertaken autumn and spring migration before its demise.

Summary

The Worthing Conservation Volunteers visited on 2nd Feb and carried out some amazing vegetation clearance at the lower end of net ride H. Members of the team also lowered the scrub at both sides of F1, which led to subsequent improved catching performance. My husband, Roger, and I continued our clearance efforts at D.

Data entry into the BTO Online system (DemOn) was carried out by several team members, while I also continued inputting records into the old IPMR database, enabling me to extract data in a familiar way, and with more speed

and finesse than DemOn allows at present. Brian has now retired as Group Secretary from 2026 – he has done a brilliant job with all the data over the past four decades, and more recently with setting up the sites and details on the online BTO system. So huge thanks to Brian; I am sure we will be firing questions at him for some time to come!

We very much appreciate the support of the National Trust for our activities here, and also thank the owners of the track for allowing access and parking nearby.

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: Little Gull: Adur estuary: Richard Allan

Page 46: Shrike sp. :Richard Allan

Back cover: Slavonian Grebe: Widewater: Richard Allan

Daurian or Turkestan Shrike which arrived near Woods Mill on 26th October

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17/3/2026