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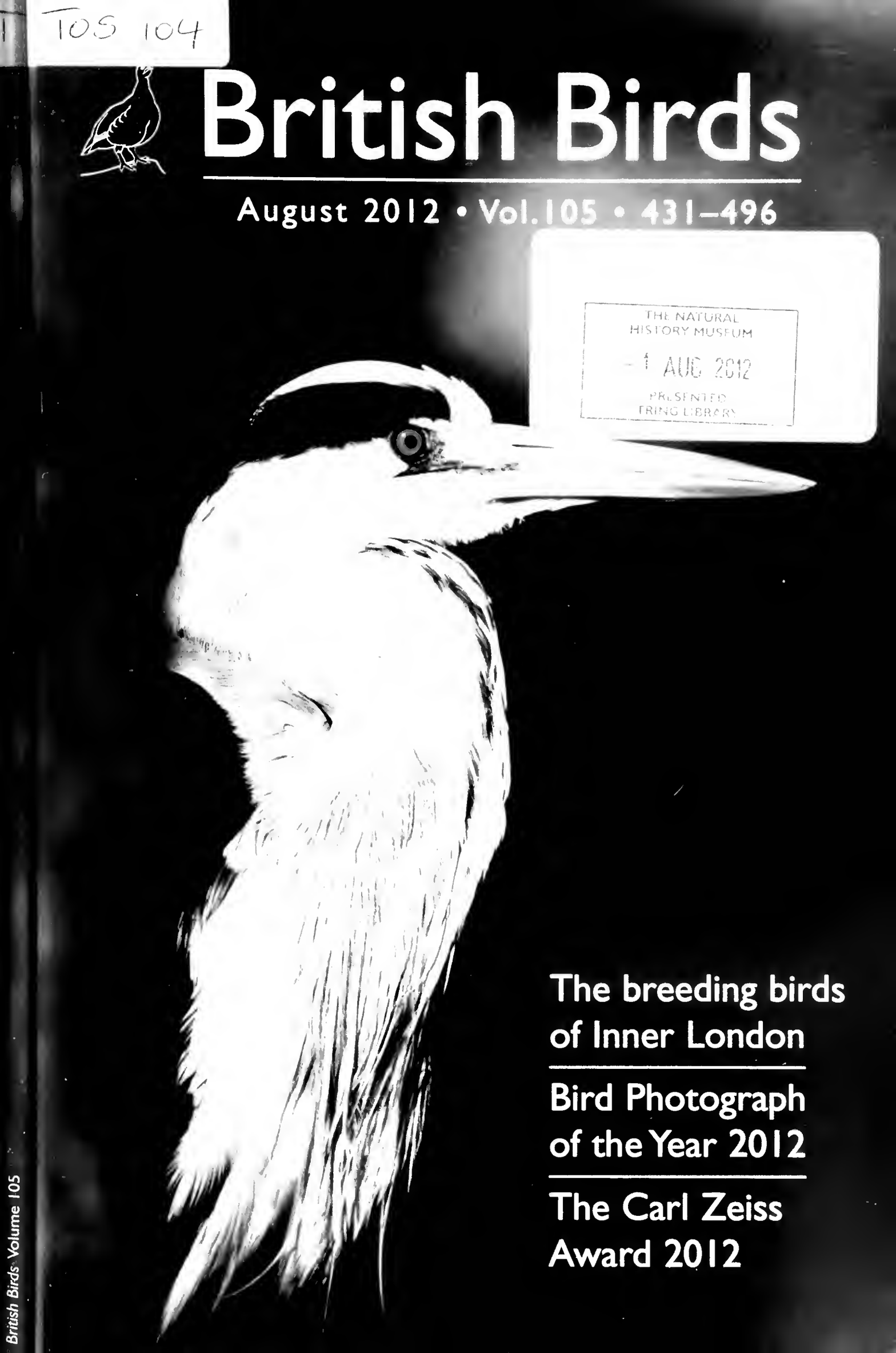

The breeding birds of Inner London

Bird Photograph of the Year 2012

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Front-cover photograph: Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Regent's Park, London, March 2008. *Mike Lane*

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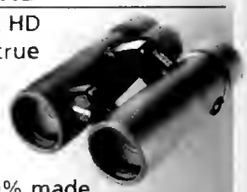

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British Birds

Volume 105 • Number 8 • August 2012

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Editorial

The Stanley Cramp series

Stanley Cramp, who died in 1987 at the age of 73, was unquestionably one of the greats of British and European ornithology in the third quarter of the twentieth century. He was born in 1913 so next year sees the centenary of his birth. Stanley became Senior Editor of this journal in 1963, and retained that title, the equivalent of chairman of the board, until his death. Other ornithological distinctions included a spell as President of the BOU, Chairman of the Scientific Research Committee of the BTO during an important phase of that organisation's expansion, and another spell as Chairman of RSPB Council. But it was as Chief Editor and driving force behind the *BWP* project for which Stanley Cramp will be best remembered.

To read more about his life and his accomplishments, I can do no better than refer you to the various obituaries published after his death, including one by Max Nicholson in *BB* (*Brit. Birds* 81: 10–13) and also a much more detailed appreciation, by fellow *BWP* co-editor Ken Simmons, published in *BB* in 1992 (*Brit. Birds* 85: 387–414). Both of these are freely available online at the *BB* website, www.britishbirds.co.uk

The purpose of this editorial is to introduce a series of papers that have been commissioned to mark Stanley's centenary year and the 25th aniversary of his death. The Editorial Board's aim was to choose three or four of the areas of ornithology that were of particular interest to Stanley and look at changes and developments in each particular field during the past 50 years or so. The first of these appears in this issue and looks at the breeding birds of Inner London. Having moved to London as a young man in the late 1930s, Cramp soon became immersed in various aspects of London's birds. One of those was the roosting behaviour of Common Starlings – check out the photographs of Stanley catching roosting Starlings in London in about 1950, on p. 397 of Simmons's article – health and safety officers take note! In this issue, Ian Woodward and Richard Arnold, two modern stalwarts of the London scene, present a fascinating update of the bird populations in the British capital. As someone who visits London two or three times a year, usually for meetings or to catch a flight to somewhere 'better' for birding, I am dimly aware of London's birds, and have even seen a few decent migrants there, mostly at the London Wetland Centre, since I started working for *BB*. But the diversity of London's avifauna and the population trends revealed in the recent atlas work show that there is a great deal more to London than pigeons, parakeets, and the occasional rarity.

Among Stanley Cramp's other particular interests were the effects of pollution on birds and the wider environment, and seabirds – Stanley was the lead author of *The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland* (Collins, 1974), the book that brought us the results of Operation Seafarer, the first national census of the seabirds of Britain and Ireland. Papers on both of these topics will follow in the next few months.

As this issue drops onto your doormat, staff at *BB* and hundreds of other bird-related organisations will be fine-tuning their preparations for the coming British Birdwatching Fair. In order to attract the crowds, the pre-event advertising usually majors on the wildlife celebrities who will be attending. I certainly enjoy watching out for the big names, either coming over to or passing our stand, although I am more likely to remember someone who I know has made a lasting contribution to ornithology or conservation than someone I might once have seen on the telly. Thirty years ago I'd have been looking out for Stanley Cramp, although, with a smoking ban in the marquees, he might not have been at the stand very long!

Roger Riddington

The changing status of the breeding birds of the Inner London area

Ian Woodward and Richard Arnold

Abstract London's birds have been studied in detail for about 120 years. Stanley Cramp was co-author of two important papers in *British Birds* looking at the birds of Inner London during the first half of the twentieth century, the first of which summarised records from 1900 to 1950, and provided a baseline for future studies. The London Natural History Society has since completed two atlas projects to map breeding bird distribution and is close to completing a third atlas project. This paper looks at the changes that have occurred since the period covered by Cramp's first article (1900–50). An overview of changes in Inner London is followed by more detailed accounts of selected species groups. The number of species nesting annually in Inner London has increased steadily, from around 32 in 1950 to about 60 today. Waterbirds have done particularly well, and the successful return of raptors to the city has also been welcome. The fortunes of passerines have been mixed.

Introduction

The sprawling city of London stretches for approximately 10 miles (16 km) or more north and south of the River Thames, providing homes, workplaces and recreation for the city's inhabitants. Greater London has 7.8 million residents (ONS 2011) and that number is swelled considerably by regular commuters. Most people follow their daily routines without visiting the green spaces that comprise 38% of the city's total area (Greenspace Information for Greater London, www.gigl.org.uk); they see little of London's wildlife and are unaware of how many species survive and prosper in the city. Yet dedicated birdwatchers and naturalists regularly work the many parks and open spaces in London: Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, The Regent's Park, Battersea Park, Wormwood Scrubs, Hampstead Heath and Brent Reservoir (for example) are all well-watched areas where in the region of 100 bird species may be seen during a calendar year. Birdlife is not restricted to the parks, and the Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, perhaps London's most iconic bird, is more likely to be found in office courtyards.

The London Natural History Society (LNHS) dates back to 1858, though the current name was chosen in 1913 (Montier 1977). The ornithological section has recently been rebranded as the London Bird Club, but remains an integral part of the LNHS. The LNHS recording area is defined as a circle with a 20-mile radius centred on St Paul's, and thus includes significant areas of countryside beyond the built-up area of Greater London. Fig. 1 shows the LNHS recording area, together with Inner London, the Watsonian vice-counties (which are still used for biological recording), and modern-day Greater London.

One of the earliest detailed accounts of London's birds dates back to the late nineteenth century (Hudson 1898). Max Nicholson wrote another early report, based on his observations during 1924–26, which remained unpublished until 1995 (Nicholson 1995). In 1929, Holte MacPherson defined 'Inner London' as a rectangular area, eight by

five miles and centred on Charing Cross, and composed a list of the birds found there (MacPherson 1929). Thereafter, an annual update was published in *BB* until 1950. In 1945, Richard Fitter published *London's Natural History*, which describes the development of London and the impact on its flora and fauna, especially birds, covering the Middle Ages up to the time of publication.

Stanley Cramp moved to London in 1938 and a few years later began observing birds in the central London parks, renewing a love of birds that had begun during his childhood (Simmons 1989). From the late 1940s to the mid 1960s, he was a regular contributor to the annual *London Bird Report* (first produced by the LNHS in 1936, and in which MacPherson's Inner London area became one of the recording sectors), and published studies of four of the Royal Parks and of two stretches of the Thames in Inner London. In *BB*, Cramp co-authored a description of the changes to Inner London's birdlife during 1900–50 (Cramp & Teagle 1952), subsequently updated by Cramp & Tomlins (1966).

Stanley Cramp was also one of many contributors to the LNHS summary of London's birdlife in the first half of the twentieth century, originally published as a New Naturalist title (LNHS 1957, 1964). The LNHS has since completed two atlas projects that have

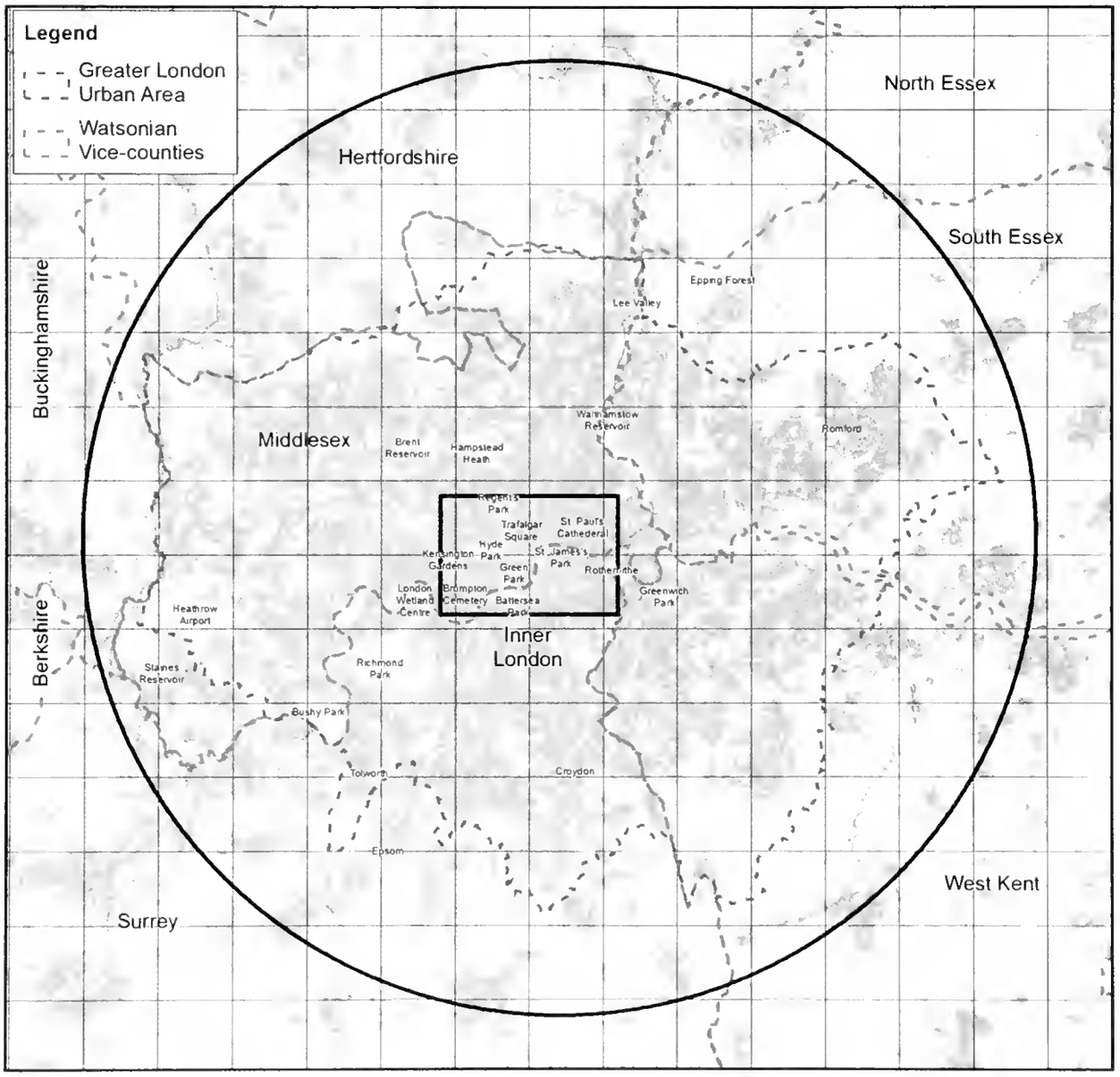


Fig. 1. The London area. The large circle indicates the LNHS recording area, a circle with a 20-mile radius centred on St Paul's, and the rectangle shows the Inner London recording area. Watsonian vice-counties and modern-day Greater London administrative boundaries are also shown. Grid squares are 10 km. The Lee Valley follows most of the western boundary of North and South Essex vice-counties. *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

David Tipling/FLPA

232. A Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* in Trafalgar Square. The Feral Pigeon is perhaps the archetypal 'London bird', but the capital has a great deal more to offer birdwatchers than this and in the past 60 years the species gains have considerably outweighed the losses.

mapped the distribution of London's birds during the breeding season. The first atlas, to which Cramp contributed, covered the period 1968–72 (Montier 1977), and the second covered the period 1988–94 (Hewlett 2002). Oliver (1997) used data from these two projects to provide an update of the changes in Inner London[1] since the account by Cramp & Tomlins (1966). A third atlas project, mapping the distribution of both wintering and breeding birds in London, began in 2008 and is scheduled to finish in 2012.

When comparing Cramp's observations with those of subsequent observers and with what we see today, it is obvious that London's birdlife is far from static, with species gained and lost as well as population fluctuations. Arguably, the story of London's avifauna in the last half century is all the more fascinating because so many different species are living in close proximity to humans. This paper looks mainly at the changes in London's breeding birds since Cramp & Tomlins (1966), with some asides into London's wintering birds, and draws heavily on data from the three atlas projects. In a few cases we have looked back further, to Hudson and/or Nicholson. We have focused predominantly on Inner London, as this was the area studied by Cramp, but we also discuss how some changes relate to the wider LNHS area. For data prior to the current atlas, where no reference is given in the text, the information is taken either from Hewlett (2002) or from *London Bird Reports*.

Overview

In his articles with Teagle and Tomlins, Cramp noted that around 32 species were breeding annually in Inner London in 1950, including seven species that had become

[1] Oliver's Inner London area is based on Atlas tetrads and is around 7% smaller than the actual LNHS Inner London area. Oliver's area excludes strips of c. 0.5-km width to the east and west, and of c. 400 m to the north. However, it includes a 400-m-wide strip to the south which is actually outside Inner London. The same Inner London area (i.e. that based on tetrads) is used in this article when discussing the 2008–11 Atlas data.

Dickie Duckett/FLPA

233. The Common Coot *Fulica atra* first bred in London in 1926; initially found predominantly in St James's Park, it was one of the first London birds that a young Stanley Cramp studied in detail.

regular breeders since 1900 (most since 1925). The additions were Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Common Coot *Fulica atra*, Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*, Black Redstart, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba* and Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*. By 1965, Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, Common Pochard *A. ferina*, Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* and Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* had also been added to the list, the first breeding records for Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* and Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea* had occurred, but Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and Stock Dove *Columba oenas* had been lost from Inner London as breeding species.

The loss of Stock Dove was only brief, and it had returned by the time of the 1968–72 Atlas, which also documented the first Inner London breeding records for Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Magpie *Pica pica*, Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* and Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* in the twentieth century, as well as the return of House Martin *Delichon urbicum* after an absence of 80 years.

Oliver (1997) reported that two species, Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* and Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*, had been lost as breeding birds in Inner London in the 16 years between the first two atlases[1], and that three, Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*, Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* and Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, had shown constant declines. In contrast, 24 species were more common and 20 species were recorded that had been absent in the first survey. These gains are notable, even allowing for the fact that they were exaggerated slightly by the temporary availability of some derelict land and water in the Surrey Docks area.

Oliver's species list is reproduced in appendix 1, with additional columns to show changes between Cramp's time and the current atlas project. Even though the latter is still ongoing, coverage has been extremely good in Inner London, so we can be confident that the data are reliable, although there may be some minor changes in the final publication. During 2008–11, a total of 13 species were recorded in Inner London for the first

[1] In fact, although Tree Sparrows bred in an Inner London Atlas tetrad, the colony was actually outside the true Inner London area (Montier 1977).

time during atlas breeding surveys, six of which bred (Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*, Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Hobby *F. subbuteo*, Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus* and Little Owl *Athene noctua*). This total excludes the non-native Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* and Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*, and also Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, which was not mapped in 1988–94 owing to its uncertain status. A further 22 species were more widespread than in 1988–94, including nine species that bred in Inner London for the first time during atlas survey years (Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*, Little Grebe, Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus*, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*).

In comparison, nine species have been lost as Inner London breeding birds since 1994, three of which were only transient breeders in the Surrey Docks area (Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*), and a fourth that also relies on temporary sites in London (Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*). The other losses were Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Spotted Flycatcher, Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret* and Bullfinch. Collared Doves bred unsuccessfully in St James's Park during the second atlas period, in 1989, but this was unusual so it is perhaps misleading to include the species as a loss. In fact, sightings from six Inner London tetrads and confirmed breeding in five adjacent tetrads suggest that the Collared Dove may be finally about to colonise Inner London. In addition to the losses, a further six species (Kestrel, Tawny Owl, House Martin, Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, Song Thrush and Linnet *C. cannabina*) have suffered range losses within Inner London during the period.

Using Cramp's 1965 list as a baseline rather than 1994 data, the gains are even more striking. The number of species which bred regularly in Inner London in 1965 was 34, but this had increased to 60 by 2011. Just three of the regular breeders from 1965 have been lost (Jackdaw, Spotted Flycatcher and

Erica Olsen/FLPA

234. Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* against a backdrop of Canary Wharf. The Great Cormorant was a rarity in London in the early part of the twentieth century, but is now a common sight in central London and at least eight breeding sites were registered in the LNHS area during the current atlas.

Bullfinch). Although some species are in decline, including the once numerous House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, the variety of birdlife in Inner London is greater than at any time for at least 120 years.

Several of the changes within Inner London and across the LNHS area can be linked to wider UK trends. Willow Warbler, Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll and Bullfinch are all red- or amber-listed following long-term breeding population declines (Eaton *et al.* 2009). Spotted Flycatchers have been recorded breeding in just 4% of tetrads in the LNHS area during the current atlas (having been present in 64% in 1988–94, with breeding evidence recorded in three-quarters of those), while the Lesser Redpoll is also now more or less extinct as a breeding bird in the LNHS area.

Looking beyond Inner London, Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*, Willow Tit *Poecile montana*, Marsh Tit *P. palustris*, Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, Tree Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail, Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* and Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* are other red- or amber-listed species that bred in Greater London in the 1960s but have since suffered severe range declines. Willow Tit and Wood Warbler are now gone from the LNHS recording area, while the others are left just clinging on.

Clearly, some of the changes in London's birdlife are likely to be habitat-related. New habitats were created inadvertently through war-time bombing and when industrial sites, such as the Surrey Docks, became derelict (Grant 1971). These habitats are temporary and soon lost through redevelopment. More recently, sites have been created or managed specifically for wildlife, such as at the London Wetland Centre. Other changes in bird populations are no doubt driven by regional and national trends, in turn linked to factors such as persecution, pesticide use and farming practice. Improvements in air and water quality are also likely to have affected bird populations in London.

The remainder of this paper looks in more detail at some of the species groups breeding in Inner London.

Waterfowl

As well as the Thames, wetland habitat in the form of canals and lakes can be found in central London. Most of the larger parks have one or more lakes, often with islands that

Mike Lane

235. The Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* is now widespread in London and, like several other species of waterfowl, is more numerous than half a century ago.

provide safe nesting sites. In Inner London, Regent's Park, Hyde Park, St James's Park, Battersea Park, Victoria Park and Southwark Park all have lakes with islands, while Kensington Gardens and Burgess Park have lakes without islands. Atlas data show that waterfowl continue to prosper in Inner London and the same is true of Greater London, with its reservoirs, gravel-pits, the Thames marshes and its tributaries. The capital now also boasts two major wetland reserves, Rainham Marshes and the London Wetland Centre, the latter just 1 km west of Inner London.

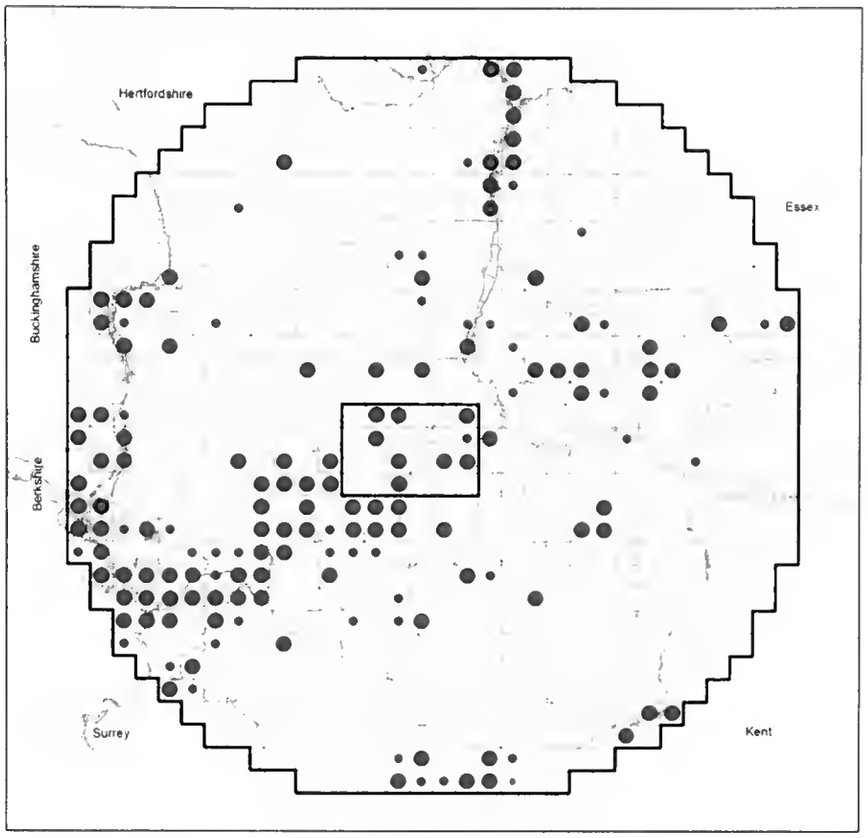


Fig. 2. Breeding distribution of Egyptian Geese *Alopochen aegyptiaca* in the LNHS area in 1988–94 (blue dots: small = present, large = breeding) and 2007–11 (red dots: small = present, large = breeding). The rectangle in the centre of the map represents Inner London. *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

Note: The species maps in this paper are based on provisional data collected for the BTO Atlas 2007–11 and the London Bird Atlas (in prep.) for the same period. The grids shown are tetrads (2 km x 2 km). For all species except Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (fig. 4), 'present' denotes records with no breeding evidence and 'breeding' denotes records with some evidence of breeding (possible, probable or confirmed). The definitions of possible, probable and confirmed breeding are as for the BTO Atlas (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas/taking-part/breeding-evidence).

The populations of all of London's waterfowl have expanded since Stanley Cramp's time. Naturalised species feature prominently, particularly geese. Canada Geese were already breeding in Inner London in the 1960s, after fully-winged birds were released in Hyde Park in 1955 (Cramp & Tomlins 1966), and by the late 1980s they were widespread on rivers and canals as well as in London's parks. Feral Greylag Geese *Anser anser* became established in central London in the 1980s, apparently after young from the St James's Park collection were left unpinioned (Oliver 1997). The Greylag Goose has now spread widely and small numbers can be found among the Canada Goose flocks in many London parks.

Egyptian Geese first bred in 1979, in the northern Lee Valley, where a small population still persists, but it seems likely that a recent expansion into Inner London stems from southwest London. Breeding was reported in Oxted in 1996 and Bushy Park in 1999 (where there were 3–4 pairs in 2002 and 4–6 pairs in 2005), and there have been breeding records from other sites including Hampton Court Park (2000), Kew Gardens and Richmond Park (both 2002). Breeding was finally confirmed in Inner London in 2008, when a pair nested unsuccessfully in Regent's Park. Probable or confirmed breeding has since occurred at six other Inner London sites – St James's Park, Hyde Park/Kensington Gardens, Battersea Park, Victoria Park, Burgess Park and Southwark Park; by 2011, Egyptian Geese occurred in over 18% of tetrads in the LNHS area, with breeding confirmed in 10% of tetrads (fig. 2).

Other non-native wildfowl have become established since Stanley Cramp's time. The Mandarin Duck is still increasing its range

and now nests in the central London parks (since 2001). A breeding population of Red-crested Pochard originated from captive birds in the Royal Parks but this species is now considered self-sustaining and, from 2010, records of free-flying birds will be classified as Category C (*LBR* 2008). Away from Regent's Park and St James's Park, where both free-flying and collection birds are present, it has also bred at Battersea Park, Kensington Gardens and Victoria Park in Inner London, and also at Richmond and Bushy Parks. But for the recent cull, the Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* would probably also have continued its expansion. Several other escaped or naturalised species have bred in London (including the Bar-headed Goose at Regent's Park, where free-flying birds were recorded during the current atlas) and could potentially expand their range further if permitted.

The success of waterfowl is not restricted to naturalised species, however. In the mid 1920s, just Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Tufted Duck and Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* nested in Hyde Park/Kensington Gardens. The Little Grebe was an irregular breeder and the Coot did not breed until 1926 (Cramp & Teagle 1952). The Coot was initially restricted mainly to St James's Park, where it was one of the first London birds that Stanley Cramp studied (Cramp 1947). As the case with other waterbirds, the Coot's colonisation of Inner London may have been aided by humans. Coot eggs were apparently brought from Richmond Park and introduced into Moorhen nests, as the wintering Coots failed to stay for the summer (Cramp & Teagle 1952). The Great Crested and Little Grebe now breed annually in Inner London, as do the Common Pochard and Gadwall, the success of the last two species is also believed to stem from pinioned breeders. The Common Shelduck was restricted to a few localities along the Thames marshes at the time of the first atlas, but was much more common during the second, when breeding was widespread in the Lee Valley and at the southwest London reservoirs. During the current atlas, it has continued to spread and an apparently wild pair has bred in Regent's Park (T. Duckett pers. comm.).

That waterfowl have done well in London is perhaps not surprising. Defra (2011) reported that the UK population of birds of slow-flowing and standing water was 57% higher than in 1975, driven mainly by increases in Mallards, Tufted Ducks and Coots. These data include only native species, and the increase would presumably be even higher if non-natives were included (Holling *et al.* 2011). The London parks generally offer wildfowl a safe haven[1], where they are relatively undisturbed and receive regular supplementary food from visitors.

Cormorants and herons

The Grey Heron was absent from Inner London when Cramp wrote his articles, but became established soon afterwards, at Regent's Park in 1968. At this time, the only other Greater London heronry was at Walthamstow Reservoirs in the Lee Valley (c. 5 km NNE of Inner London), although the species bred at six other locations in the LNHS area during the first atlas. The Walthamstow heronry continues to be the largest in London, but has declined to around 70–80 pairs, having peaked at 138 nests in 1993. Grey Herons have since expanded their breeding range and numbers within Inner London (fig. 3) and across the LNHS area (table 1). As well as established heronries, the totals include isolated breeding attempts, such as the nest in Hyde Park in 2010 (BTO Heronries Census).

The Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* was a rarity in London until the 1930s, though pinioned birds produced free-flying offspring in St James's Park in the 1930s (Sanderson 1995). The first wild breeding

[1] Management of some non-native and feral wildfowl populations takes place within the London parks. This can include egg pricking and use of exclusion fencing. The species targeted are primarily introduced geese, especially Canada and Greylag Geese. The culling of adults has also occurred in the past, for example in the early 1990s (www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/whitehall-wages-war-on-canada-geese-1468476.html), but has proved controversial and we are not aware of any recent culls. The management of these species may be benefiting other species of wildfowl, through improvements in water quality and reduced competition for food and nest-sites.

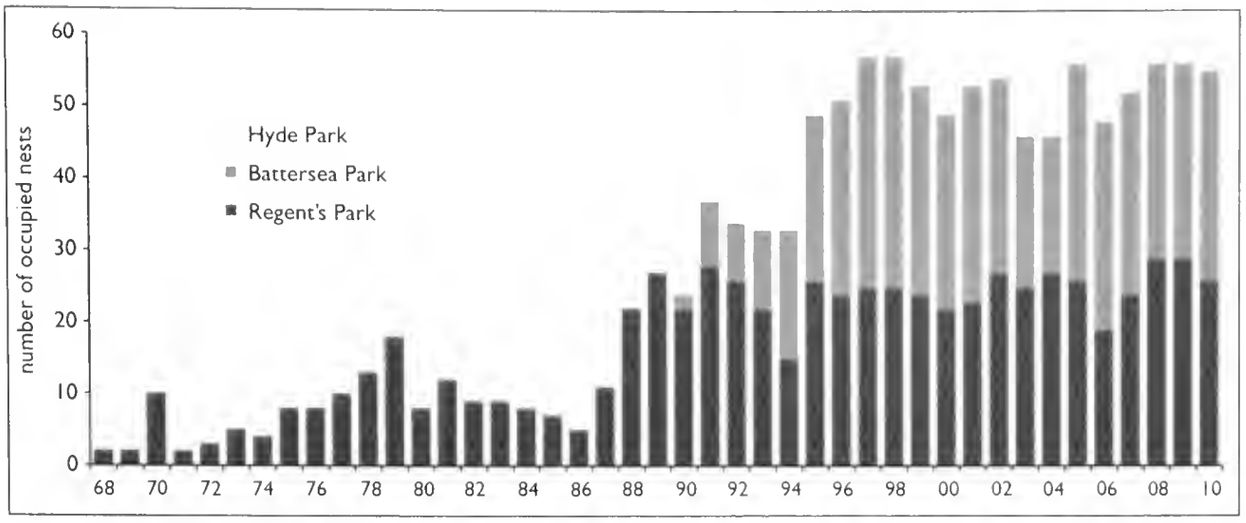


Fig. 3. Numbers of occupied Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* nests in Inner London. Source: BTO Heronries Census. No data were available from Battersea Park for 2006–08 inclusive, so these figures are estimated, based on the 2005 and 2009 counts.

Table 1. Heronries in the London area. The totals show the number of tetrads in which probable or confirmed breeding by Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* occurred.

	1968–72 Atlas	1988–94 Atlas	2008–12 Atlas (provisional)
Inner London	1	2	3
LNHS Area	8	36	43

record was as recently as 1987, at Broadwater Lake in the Colne Valley, while in urban London it first bred in 1991, at Walthamstow Reservoirs. Like the Grey Heron, it has since expanded in both range and numbers; it was recorded nesting in at least eight locations during the current atlas. Although none of these are in Inner London (the closest remains at Walthamstow Reservoirs), Cormorants can be encountered frequently in the central parks and along the Thames and many of the canals.

Mike Lane

236. The Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* first bred in central London in 1968, in Regent's Park (where this photo was taken, in May 2011), and is another waterbird that seems to be thriving in the capital (see table 1).

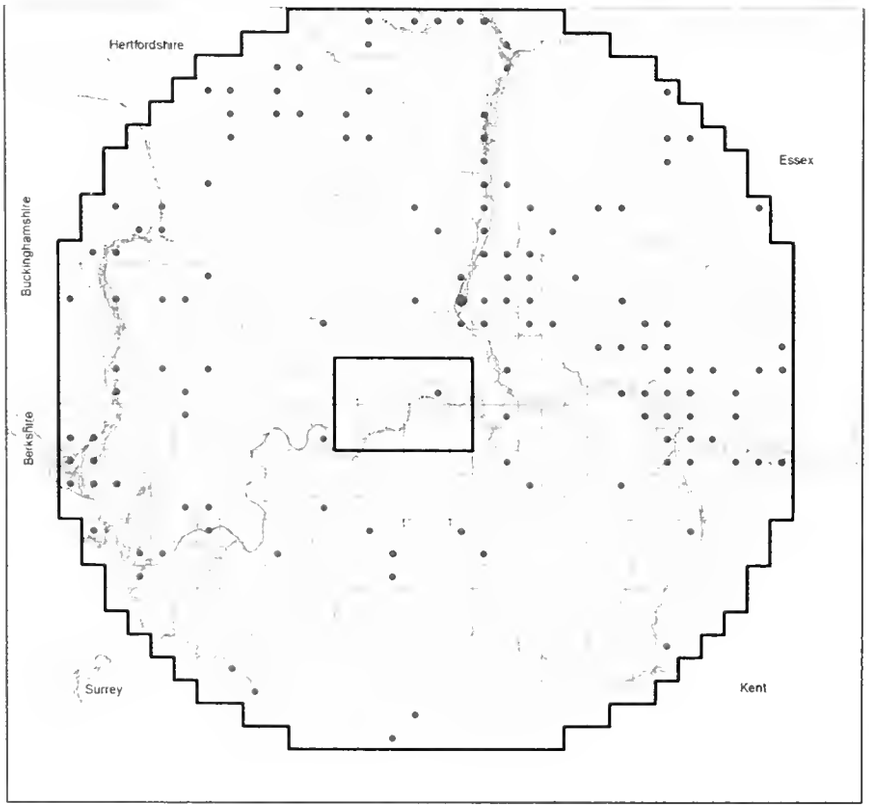


Fig. 4. Distribution of Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* in the LNHS area in the breeding season, 2007–11 (small dots = present, large dot = breeding). Apart from Walthamstow, breeding sites are not shown. *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

The Little Egret merited only a brief mention in the introductory sections of the 1988–94 Atlas, yet it has been recorded in 22% of tetrads in the London area in the current project. Breeding was first confirmed at Walthamstow Reservoirs in 2006, and by 2011 numbers at this site had increased to 10+ pairs raising 15 broods (P. Lambert pers. comm.). Breeding has since been confirmed at four further sites and is suspected elsewhere; the species has not yet colonised Inner London but was recorded along the Thames at Tower Bridge in July 2009 (fig. 4).

Raptors

A hundred years ago, raptors were absent from central London and Hudson famously postulated that 'it is exceedingly improbable that any of the raptorial species which formerly inhabited London – Peregrine Falcon, Kestrel and Kite – will ever return'! He was proved wrong, even before Cramp

Tony Duckett

237. Juvenile Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, London, June 2010. The Peregrine is perhaps the most eye-catching success story of London birding in recent times, and there are now breeding pairs in the heart of the city.

arrived in London in 1938, and Common Kestrels (from the 1930s), Eurasian Sparrowhawks (1990s) and Peregrine Falcons (2000s) all now breed right in the heart of the city. The Hobby also breeds in a few locations within Greater London, where there is sufficient habitat; moreover, the species bred in Inner London in 2002 (unsuccessfully) and 2011 (successfully).

The Peregrine Falcon's success story in London is well publicised, and monitored by London Peregrines and the London Peregrine Partnership, with at least seven pairs present in 2011 in Inner London alone (D. Morrison pers. comm.). A public viewing point is set up annually by the RSPB at the Tate Modern, where the local pair uses a regular perching spot and brings their newly fledged young. Another pair often uses the Houses of Parliament, having taken up residence nearby. As for the urban Peregrines in southwest England (Drewitt & Dixon 2008), the diet of London Peregrines has been analysed and includes night-flying species such as Coot, Moorhen, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* and Redwing *Turdus iliacus* (D. Morrison www.londonperegrines.com).

Common Buzzards made a comeback to the surrounding countryside during the 1990s, with breeding first confirmed in 1998, and the population increasing steadily to over 60 territorial pairs in 2007 (Oliver 2011). A few pairs now nest within the Greater London boundary. It seems likely that the Red Kite will follow suit and become a common resident around the outskirts of London. Although the Red Kite was apparently frequent in medieval London, it remains to be seen whether it and the Common Buzzard will become common in the modern city. Both species are regularly seen flying over the city and sites such as Hampstead Heath (2.5 km north of Inner London) could feasibly support nesting pairs, yet London may now lack sufficient sources of carrion to support them. An ongoing project at the University of Reading is investigating whether increasing numbers of urban Red Kites in Reading is linked to garden feeding. If such a link is established, it may be the key to Red Kites recolonising urban London.

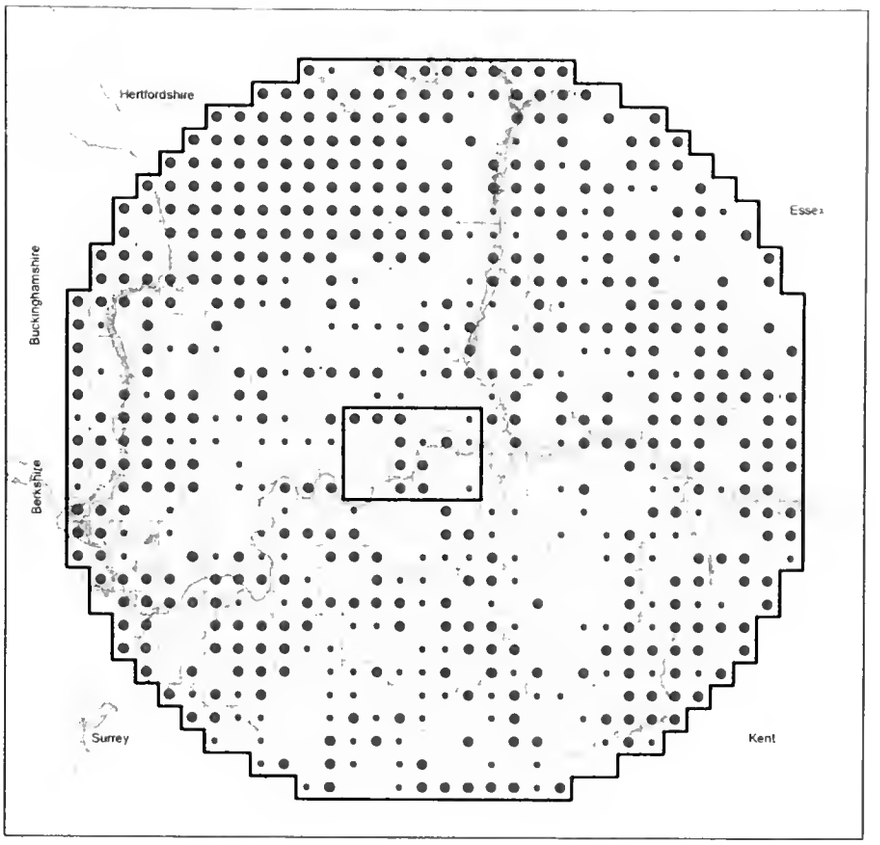


Fig. 5. Breeding distribution of Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* in the LNHS area, 2007–11 (small dots = present, large dots = breeding). *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

The Common Kestrel declined in the UK during 1995–2009 (Risely *et al.* 2011), and provisional atlas data suggests that its status in London mirrors the national trend. Although it is still widespread and continues to be an Inner London resident, gaps in its distribution are beginning to appear, particularly in urban areas (fig. 5).

Gulls and terns

Gulls have long been a feature of London's birdlife during the winter, and Nicholson (1995) noted that five of the six British breeding species were 'in a sense London birds' during the 1920s. Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* was the obvious exception, although Lesser Black-backed Gulls were encountered

mainly as migrants passing overhead. The Kittiwake is still a scarce migrant and the Common Gull *Larus canus* remains just a winter visitor but four species now breed in London, three of them in Inner London.

The Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* was the first, with a colony of up to 300 pairs nesting at Perry Oaks sewage-farm from the 1940s until the early 1960s. The species was then effectively lost as a London breeder until 1998, when young were raised successfully on tern rafts at Staines Reservoir. It now breeds regularly at Staines, and breeding has been recorded (mainly on tern rafts) at several other sites, including Walthamstow Reservoir, Rye Meads and Fishers Green (all in the Lee Valley), but not in Inner London. Herring (London Zoo, 1961) and Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* (Lord's Cricket Ground, 1982) were the next gull species to breed. Both now frequent barges and other structures along the Thames, as well as rooftops across the city, particularly the flat roofs of industrial estates. The two species often nest together, but the Lesser Black-backed (fig. 6) is now the most numerous and slightly more widespread. Hewlett (2002) attributed the initial colonisation in London to the availability of fish at Billingsgate Market and London Zoo, while the subsequent population no doubt reflects the same benefits as noted in other cities, compared with coastal colonies – less disturbance, fewer predators, higher temperatures and greater food availability (owing to the proximity of landfill sites and the option of night-time under artificial lights; Rock 2005).

The Great Black-backed Gull is a more recent colonist of Inner London, with breeding first proved in 2008 on a barge near Wandsworth Park (*LBR* 2008), which was also the first record in the LNHS area. It has since nested at other sites along the Thames in central London and on the Isle of Dogs.

Common Terns took advantage of gravel-pit creation, and the subsequent installation of tern rafts at such sites, across the London area; they first bred successfully in 1963, at Cheshunt Gravel-pits in the Lee Valley. By the time of the second atlas, they were present in as many as 15% of tetrads in the LNHS recording area, with the main breeding populations centred on the Lee Valley and the southwest reservoirs, but sites much closer to Inner London were used at Docklands and Barn Elms (now the London Wetland Centre). London colonies have fluctuated in size, and breeding has since ceased at some, but new sites have been occupied too and the species nested in Inner London during the current atlas period, with a pair at Canada Water in 2010 and two pairs at Surrey Water in 2011 (R. Bonser pers. comm.). Breeding Black-headed Gulls may have an impact on Common Terns, and the increasing gull numbers at Staines Reservoir may be linked to Common Tern declines (*LBR* 2008). Like gulls, Common Terns may forage well away from breeding sites, and fledged youngsters, still being fed by their

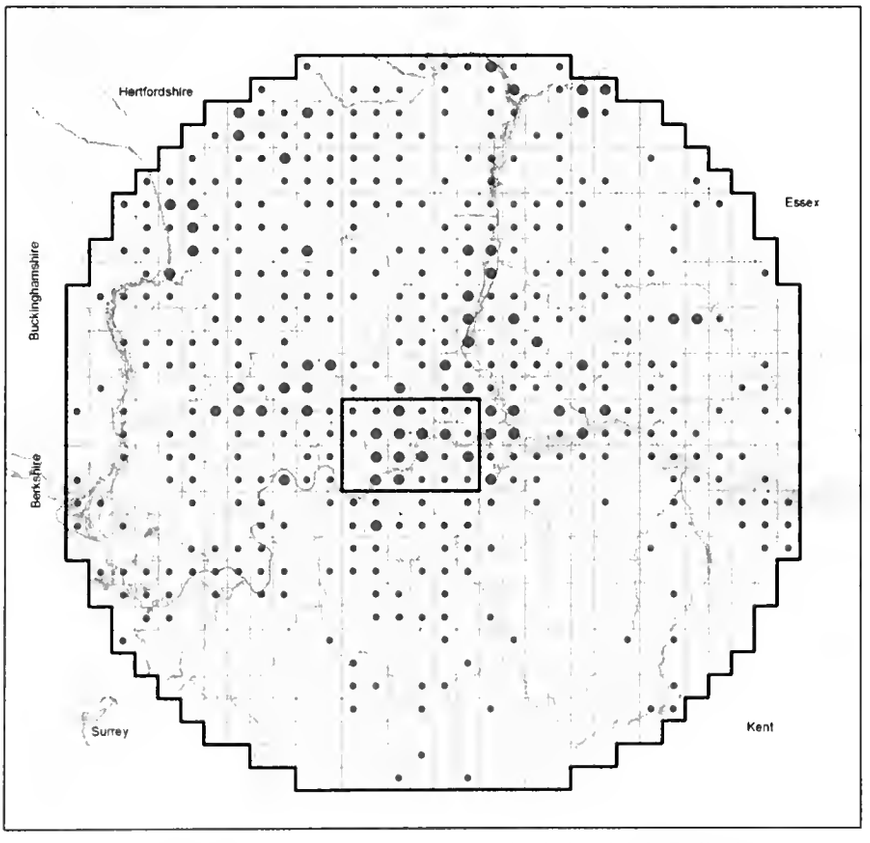


Fig. 6. Breeding distribution of Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* in the LNHS area, 2007–11 (small dots = present, large dots = breeding). *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

Tony Duckett

238. Common Terns *Sterna hirundo*, Regent's Park, June 2011. The Common Tern now nests in Inner London, and is another species that has benefited from the impact of humans on the landscape, through the creation of gravel-pits and the provision of tern rafts in particular.

parents, have been seen at both Hyde Park and Regent's Park; in 2011, a pair was seen courting and passing fish in Regent's Park, but no breeding attempt was made (T. Duckett pers. comm.).

Parakeets

The Rose-ringed Parakeet is arguably one of just two bird species whose population core and history in the UK is centred on London (Black Redstart is the other). It is unclear where the feral population of parakeets came from originally, but it is thought to have become established around 1970. The population in west London began to increase considerably in the early 1990s (Pithon &

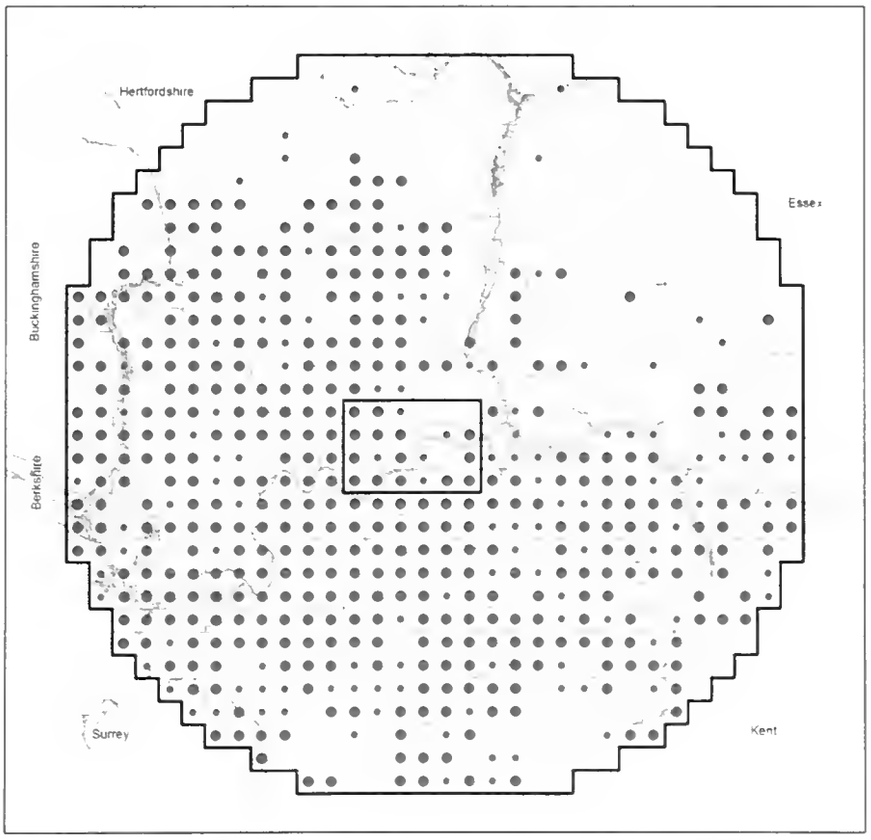


Fig. 7. Breeding distribution of Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* in the LNHS area, 2007–11 (small dots = present, large dots = breeding). *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

Dave Pressland/FLPA

239. The UK distribution of Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri*, shown here in Richmond Park, is centred on London. For anyone who has witnessed the noisy and spectacular roost gatherings which now occur in various parts of London, it may come as a surprise to know that the species became established in the city only in about 1970.

Dytham 2002); this has continued subsequently and parakeets have now spread across much of London and breed in most of the Inner London parks. A few areas of northeast London remain parakeet-free but probably not for much longer (fig. 7). The UK population increased by as much as 842% during 1995–2009 (Risely *et al.* 2011).

The pros and cons of the spread of parakeets will surely continue to divide opinion among birdwatchers and the general public. Studies in Belgium suggest that parakeets could have an effect on Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* numbers in sites where suitable nesting cavities are scarce (Strubbe & Matthysen 2009), but that the impact would be limited, as competition strength was only moderate (Strubbe *et al.* 2010). However, Newson *et al.* (2011) concluded that there was currently no evidence of any significant impact of Rose-ringed Parakeets on Nuthatch populations or those of any other cavity-nesting species in the UK. During the current atlas, Monk Parakeets *Myiopsitta monachus* were nesting in at least two London locations by 2010, one just outside the Inner London recording area.

Owls

All five species of British owls have bred in the London area but both Long-eared *Asio otus* and Short-eared Owl *A. flammeus* are extremely scarce breeders. The Barn Owl *Tyto alba* is slightly more common, though generally restricted to the edge of the built-up area and in the countryside beyond. Cramp reported that the Little Owl was seen frequently in Inner London in the first half of the twentieth century, and that the Barn Owl was an occasional visitor. However, Tawny Owl was the only permanent breeding resident throughout the twentieth century, frequenting many larger parks and cemeteries within Greater London. Perhaps the best known Inner London pair live in Kensington Gardens, and in spring many birders visit the park during their lunch hour to see the young, which can often be found sitting out in full view. The Little Owl has recently returned to Inner London, breeding in Regent's Park each year since 2007, and in Kensington Gardens in 2012 (N. Reeve pers. comm.). This species is mostly restricted to the outskirts of Greater London, although there are 30–40 pairs in Richmond Park (just 5 km southwest of Inner London; N. Reeve pers. comm.).

Swifts and hirundines

Both Common Swifts *Apus apus* and House Martins were widespread in London during the 1960s, though absent from some parts of Inner London, and had increased their range by the late 1980s. Swifts remain widespread in London, although their true status is clouded by the fact that breeding birds can travel long distances in search of food. The loss of nest-site availability in modern buildings is a major concern for Swift populations everywhere, although awareness is growing and nestboxes are now available on a growing range of buildings (Edward Mayer pers. comm.; www.swift-conservation.org.uk).

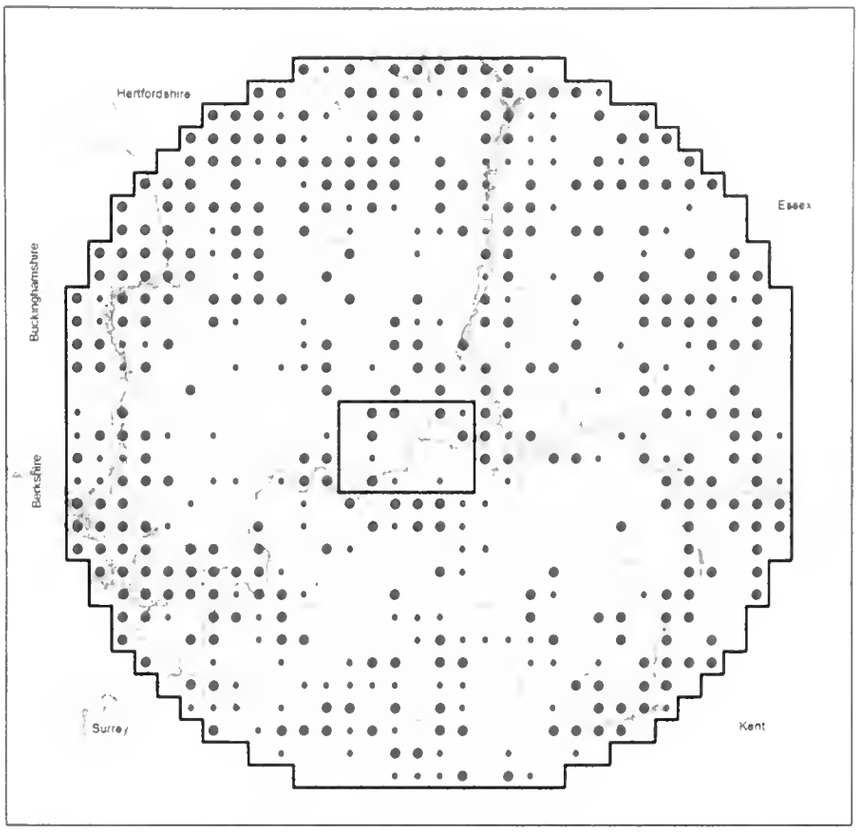


Fig. 8. Breeding distribution of House Martins *Delichon urbicum* in the LNHS area 2007–11 (small dots = present, large dots = breeding). *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

A decline in London's House Martins in the first half of the twentieth century was followed by a recovery from around 1950. Studies in Inner London in 1965, 1966 and 1973, in which Stanley Cramp was involved (Cramp & Gooders 1967; Cramp 1973), and in Outer London in 1974 (Strangeman 1975) compared numbers before and after the 1956

Tony Duckett

240. House Martins *Delichon urbicum*, Regent's Park, May 2011. Stanley Cramp published papers on surveys of House Martins in both Manchester and London. In London, this species' fortunes have fluctuated over the past 100 years, though it is currently declining there.

Clean Air Act. Strangeman suggested that increases could be linked to reduced smoke levels as a result of the Act, leading to greater numbers of insects. The House Martin bred in Inner London in 1966 for the first time since 1889. A more recent decline appears to have started in the 1980s (though the species was still present in 95% of LNHS tetrads in the 1988–94 Atlas) and became more severe during the 1990s. The species still breeds in Inner London, but there are now clear gaps in its London distribution (fig. 8).

In contrast, the Sand Martin appears to be colonising new areas and moving closer to the city centre; the species has bred in Inner London since 2008 at Rotherhithe, with up to three pairs using cavities in the artificial concrete banks of the Thames (R. Bonser pers. comm.). Sand Martins have also taken advantage of purpose-built homes, such as the nest bank constructed at the London Wetland Centre in 2003, used by 40 pairs in 2011 (www.wwt.org.uk).

Crows

The corvids show contrasting fortunes, with the biggest winners being the Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* and the Magpie, both of which occur throughout London, surviving in the smallest of squares or gardens, often where there are just one or two trees suitable for nesting. Carrion Crows were already present in the central London parks at the start of the twentieth century, albeit in small numbers and suffering from persecution, but were widespread by the 1968–72 Atlas. Now, the species is sufficiently numerous (for example, a group of 113 in Kensington Gardens in February 2007; *LBR* 2007) that it is controlled in some parks (Oliver 2006). The Magpie too was persecuted historically and the species was rare in London in 1900, but colonised from the 1930s (LNHS 1964), first nesting in Inner London in 1971 (Oliver 1997). The Eurasian Jay reached Inner London earlier than the Magpie (by the 1950s) but has not yet become quite as ubiquitous as the other two species, with a few gaps in distribution, particularly in the more heavily urbanised areas in the eastern half of Inner London.

In contrast, Rooks *C. frugilegus* have beaten a steady retreat from the city centre since their London heyday, when rookeries existed in Greenwich Park (until c. 1875), Kensington Gardens (1880, further attempts in 1893 and 1900), and Grays Inn Gardens (1915) (MacPherson 1929). Their decline seems to be due to a combination of feeding grounds being farther away and the felling of nesting trees (at least in Greenwich Park and Kensington Gardens). The last Inner London breeding record was from the Temple in 1916 (Cramp & Teagle 1952) and there are no longer any rookeries in Greater London. Jackdaws still bred in Kensington Gardens in 1968–72, but not since, and by the 1988–94 Atlas they had largely withdrawn to the outskirts of Greater London (with some exceptions such as a population in the Richmond Park area). More recently, there are signs that Jackdaws, unlike Rooks, have stopped retreating and are moving back towards the city centre; for example, transect data from the Royal Parks shows a six-fold increase in Richmond Park (1999–2010) and a four-fold increase in Greenwich Park (2003–10), perhaps assisted by the presence of deer in both parks (unpubl. data, the Royal Parks).

In the nineteenth century, Common Ravens *C. corax* were resident within the city, with the last pair breeding in Hyde Park until about 1826 (Hudson 1898). Following the Raven's recent range expansion into south-east England, this species is now being encountered more frequently in the outer LNHS area, and perhaps in time it will become a scarce but regular breeding species around the city outskirts.

Warblers

Most warblers in the London area are restricted to green spaces in the outer suburbs and beyond. The Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* is a key exception. Widespread and fairly common across the LNHS area in the 1950s and 1960s, it has since expanded into more urban areas. An increase of 102% in Greater London during 1995–2009 is in line with the national increase of 73% (Risely *et al.* 2011). The Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* is also widespread, although not as successful as the Blackcap in urban areas, perhaps because of a need for more extensive woodland habitat. Both species bred only irregularly in Inner London in the 1950s, but now do so annually, with Regent's Park alone holding up to seven

Blackcap territories and four pairs of Chiffchaffs in 2010 (Duckett 2011). Common Whitethroat is the third most widespread London warbler, which returned as an Inner London breeder during the current Atlas (at Regent's Park and Rotherhithe), and may well have benefited from wildlife areas in some parks. It replaces the Willow Warbler, which was more widespread than the Chiffchaff in the LNHS area during the first half of the twentieth century (LNHS 1964), and remained so up to the 1988–94 Atlas, when it was still breeding in many Greater London parks. Though still reasonably widespread, the Willow Warbler has now vanished from many sites in London and no longer breeds in Inner London; its future as a London bird looks bleak.

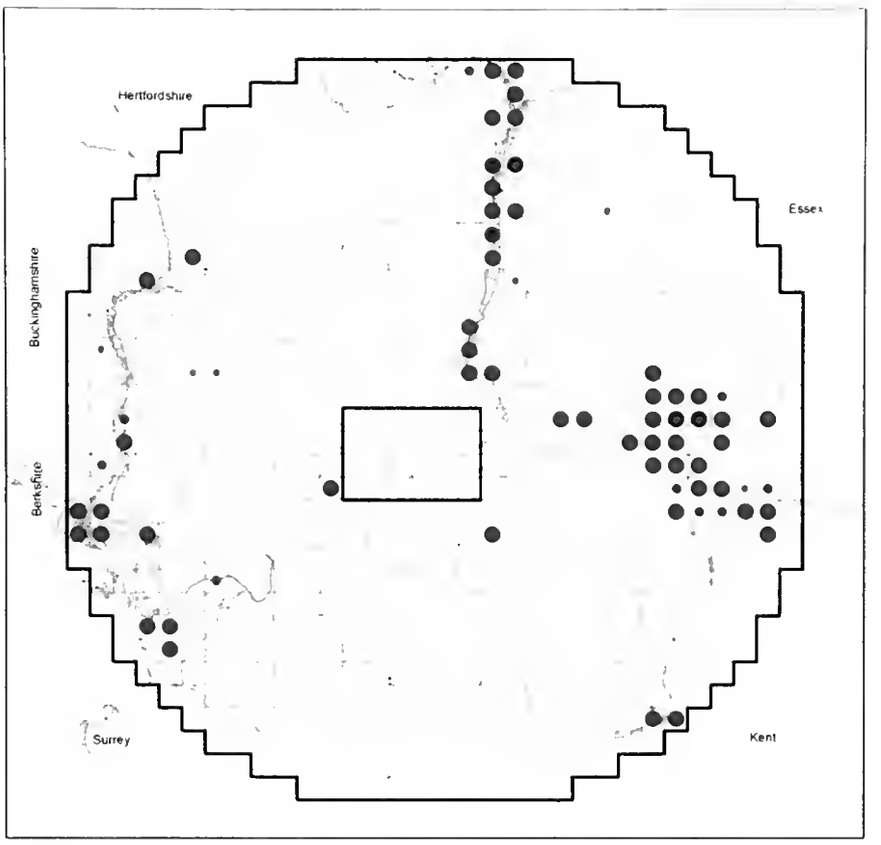


Fig. 9. Breeding distribution of Cetti's Warblers *Cettia cetti* in the LNHS area in 1988–94 (blue dots: small = present, large = breeding) and 2007–11 (red dots: small = present, large = breeding). *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*

In contrast, the Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* appears to be thriving in London. It had not even been recorded in Britain when Cramp and Teagle wrote about London's birds in 1952, and was first recorded in the LNHS area in 1975, at Wraysbury. During the second atlas, breeding evidence was noted in four tetrads (two in the Lee Valley and two on the eastern edge of Greater London in the Ingrebourne Valley). In the current atlas, its range has expanded around these two core areas, with territories recorded at other sites including the London Wetland Centre (fig. 9). Its spread will be limited by available habitat, but it seems likely to continue increasing in the immediate future. Habitat creation programmes have been increasing the amount of reedbed available at several sites, which has also benefited the Reed Warbler (which first bred in Inner London in 1977, at Surrey Docks/Rotherhithe). Reed Warblers now breed annually in Regent's Park (nine singing males in 2010; Duckett 2011) and scrub habitats close to the reedbeds in the park could yet attract Inner London's first Cetti's Warblers.

Thrushes and chats

Several of the thrushes and chats are important garden and parkland birds in London, with Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush and Robin found throughout. All four were regarded by Nicholson as 'survivors from the older [London] fauna' in the 1920s, although he believed that they had all diminished following the spread of houses and was particularly concerned about the Mistle Thrush in central London. All four still breed in Inner London, and Mistle Thrushes can often be found in open parkland across the capital, but both Mistle Thrush and Song Thrush are species of concern in London, declining by 47% and 31% respectively since 1995 (Risely *et al.* 2011). The Inner London range of the Mistle Thrush during the current atlas remains similar to that of 1988–94, but gaps have appeared for Song Thrush with confirmed breeding in just eight Inner London tetrads (17 in 1988–94). Blackbirds are still widespread but have declined by 18% in Greater London since 1995 (Risely *et al.* 2011).

The Common Nightingale is now restricted mainly to London's fringe; it nested in Hyde Park and Regent's Park until the mid

nineteenth century, but had disappeared from Inner London long before Cramp's arrival. Occasionally, birds are heard singing in Inner London but its core areas are now outside the capital, in the upper part of the Lee Valley and Epping Forest.

In contrast, the Black Redstart is an urban and Inner London specialist. The species first bred in London in 1926, and prospered during and after the Second World War at bomb sites. As such sites were redeveloped and became unavailable, it became associated with industrial sites, particularly those along rivers such as the Lee and the Thames. Recent trends are difficult to assess, and marked year-to-year fluctuations may relate more to differences in observer effort and reporting rates than genuine population changes (fig. 10). The peak in 1986 could be linked to the fact that it was removed as a Rare Breeding Bird Panel (RBBP) species between 1977 and 1985, prompting increased recording effort on its return to the list (the mean number of pairs reported between 1973 and 1976 was 17). Other peak counts also seem likely to be connected to attempts to find Black Redstarts. For example, 1994 was the final year of the second atlas, and a special survey in 2000 located 31 pairs, significantly higher than the number reported to the RBBP that year (A. Self pers. comm.). The peaks in 1998 and 2002 are also believed to relate to increased fieldwork, with 23 of the 29 breeding records in 2002 coming from the adjacent London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham. The 2010 peak may also be effort-related but there is also evidence that new breeding sites have been occupied (A. Self pers. comm.)

Since the 1988–94 Atlas, the population seems to have become concentrated in Inner London. Outside Inner London, probable or confirmed breeding has been recorded in just six tetrads during the current atlas (cf. 48 tetrads in 1988–94). There have been no breeding records from the upper Lee Valley for a decade, despite the fact that this former stronghold is adjacent to the well-watched King George V Reservoir.

The increase in reports in 2010 gives renewed cause for optimism, but the current status of the species remains unclear. A thorough survey would help to clarify the true number of pairs in Inner London and confirm whether Black Redstarts have indeed disappeared from formerly occupied sites outside the city centre. Black Redstart remains a priority species on London's Biodiversity Action Plan, and attempts by Dusty Gedge and others to promote green roofs will hopefully provide more sites for the species, and reduce its reliance on temporary sites (Grant 2006).

Wagtails

The Pied Wagtail has long been a London species; Nicholson noted that it bred in Hyde Park/Kensington Gardens in 1925 and it has maintained a presence in Inner London ever since. Large roosts form in winter, with reports of up to 500 in the town centres of outer London boroughs such as Tolworth, Epsom, Croydon and Romford, as well as Heathrow Airport. The Grey Wagtail was scarce in London until the mid nineteenth

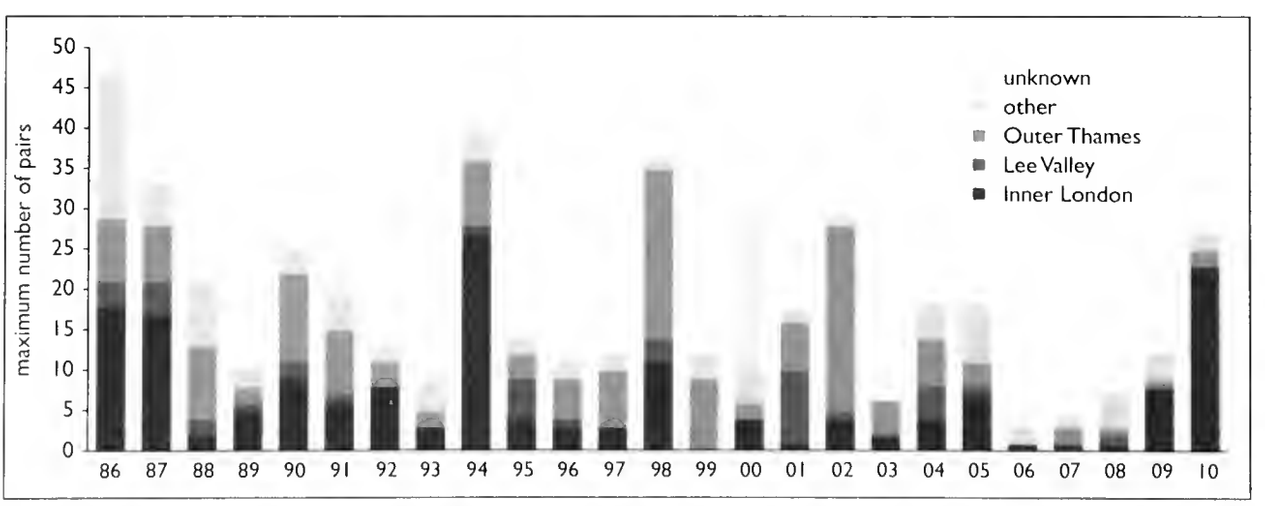


Fig. 10. Maximum number of pairs of Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochruros* recorded in the LNHS area, 1986–2010, including records of singing males on a single date. Data courtesy of the RBBP, with additional records for 2000 from Andrew Self.

David Hosking/FLPA

241. Large roost gatherings of Pied Wagtails *Motacilla alba*, some of several hundred birds, form during the winter months in London; the one shown in this photograph was at Redhill.

century, when a few pairs bred along the main rivers in south London. During the first atlas it was recorded in 13% of tetrads in the LNHS area, mainly to the south and west. By 1988–94, it was widespread (though scattered), found along many of the capital's rivers and canals, even those with little edge habitat other than concrete. It seems to be attracted to weirs, of which there are plenty in London, creating conditions that mimic those of fast-flowing streams. In places, it will now also frequent pools and lakes away from flowing water, even during the breeding season. It first bred in Inner London in 1952 (Cramp & Tomlins 1966), by 1988–94 it was widespread and in the current atlas it has been recorded in almost as many Inner London tetrads as the Pied Wagtail.

Starlings and sparrows

The Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and the House Sparrow are two archetypal urban birds and have long been a familiar sight in London. Hudson saw them in such numbers that he compared the 'everywhere-present multitudinous sparrows' to clouds of butterflies and locusts. He ranked Starling second to House Sparrow in numbers: 'The starlings' thousands are but a small tribe compared to the sparrows' numerous nation.' Both were still present in large numbers in central London in the 1950s (LNHS 1964). Although both are still familiar in most areas, this is not the whole story. The long-term decline of sparrows in central London is demonstrated by the Kensington Gardens bird counts, first carried out by Nicholson and continued by Sanderson and the Royal Parks (fig. 11).

Common Starlings probably began roosting communally during the winter in central London during the 1890s, and numbers peaked sometime in the mid twentieth century. The roosts patronised famous landmarks, such as St Paul's Cathedral and Trafalgar Square, and were formed mainly by resident birds that fed in the London suburbs during the day (Fitter 1943). The roosts remained active into the 1960s (Potts 1967) but sometime around 1980 were abandoned inexplicably (Bolt 2008). Starlings still roost in London, mainly under some of the bridges over the Thames (for example, c. 5,000 at Wandsworth Bridge in 2009) but such numbers pale when compared with the 90,000 roosting in St James's Park in July 1950 (LNHS 1964). Roosting Starlings were

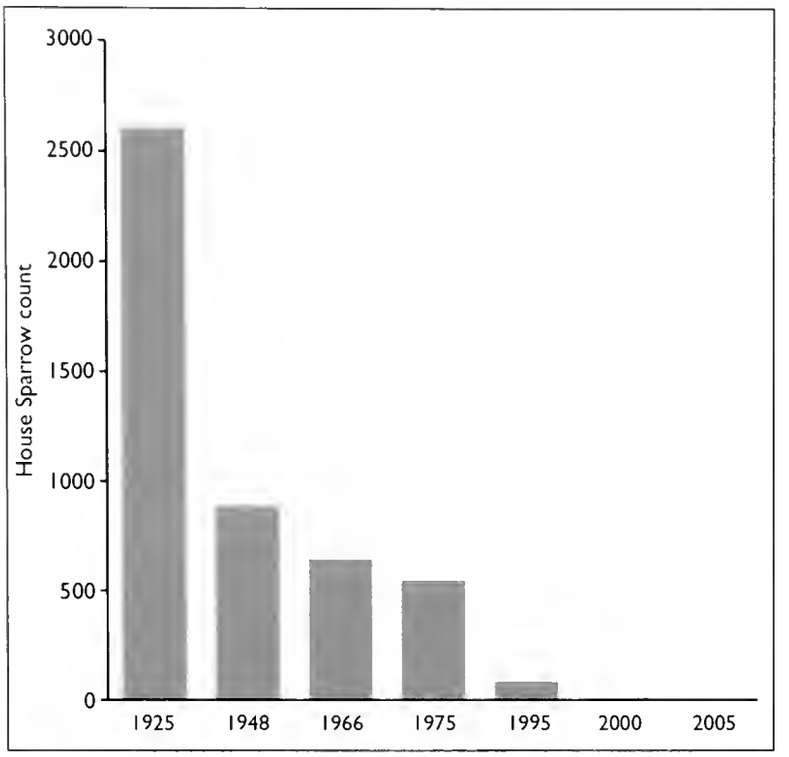


Fig. 11. Counts of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* in Kensington Gardens in autumn (Sanderson 2004, 2008).

of particular interest to Stanley Cramp, who wrote his first paper on this topic at the age of 19, in 1933 (Simmons 1989), and organised surveys of urban Starling roosts in the London and Brighton areas as part of the BTO's 1962–64 national urban Starling roost survey (Potts 1967).

BBS counts show a decline of 69% in House Sparrows and 40% in Starlings in Greater London during 1995–2009 (Risely *et al.* 2011). Both species were present in 100% of tetrads in the LNHS area in 1988–94 but during 2007–11 House Sparrows were recorded in only 91% of tetrads, and were missing from some well-covered tetrads (including Kensington and Chelsea; fig. 12).

Conclusion

Although the plight of both the House Sparrow and the Common Starling gives cause for concern, ongoing research will hopefully highlight the reasons behind their declines and ensure that these common residents do not go the same way as the Spotted Flycatcher. Whatever happens, it seems certain that further gains and losses, as well as range expansions and contractions, will occur in the coming decades, and the last 60 years give hope that there will be more gains than losses. Furthermore, many local authorities and organisations such as the Royal Parks are now undertaking work to promote biodiversity, and protect some of London's more vulnerable species such as the Swift and Black Redstart.

Stanley Cramp would perhaps have been surprised at just how rich and varied Inner London's birdlife is today. It is difficult to predict what new species will be breeding in Inner London in a further 60 years but Little Egret, Collared Dove and Cetti's Warbler are some of the more obvious candidates to colonise Inner London, with other possibilities including Water Rail,

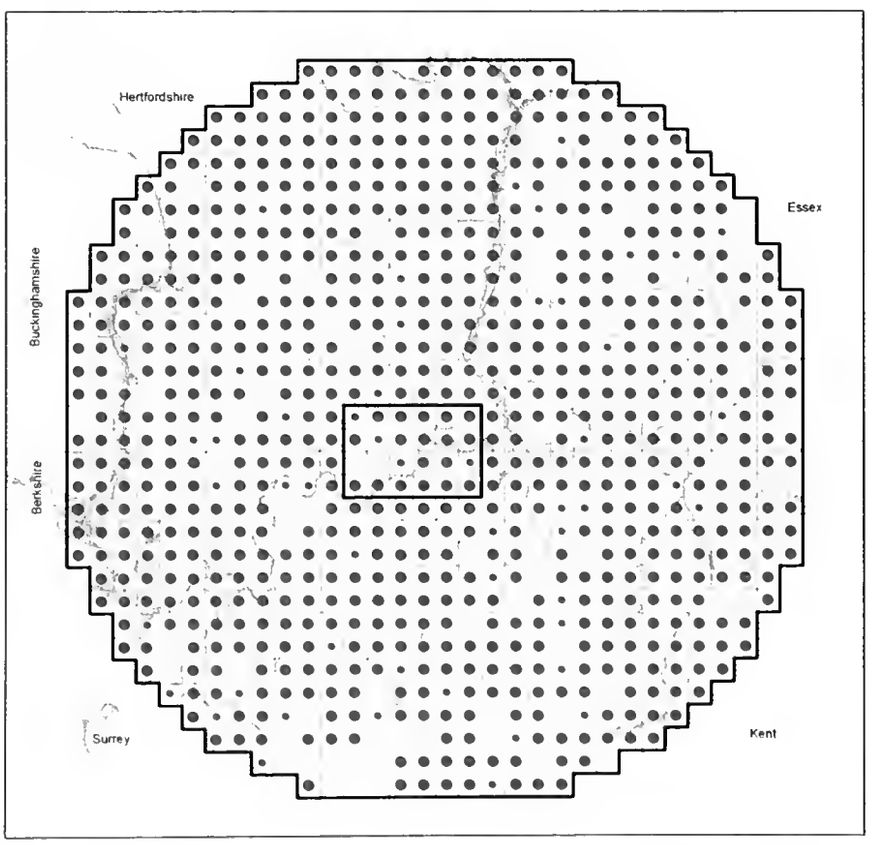
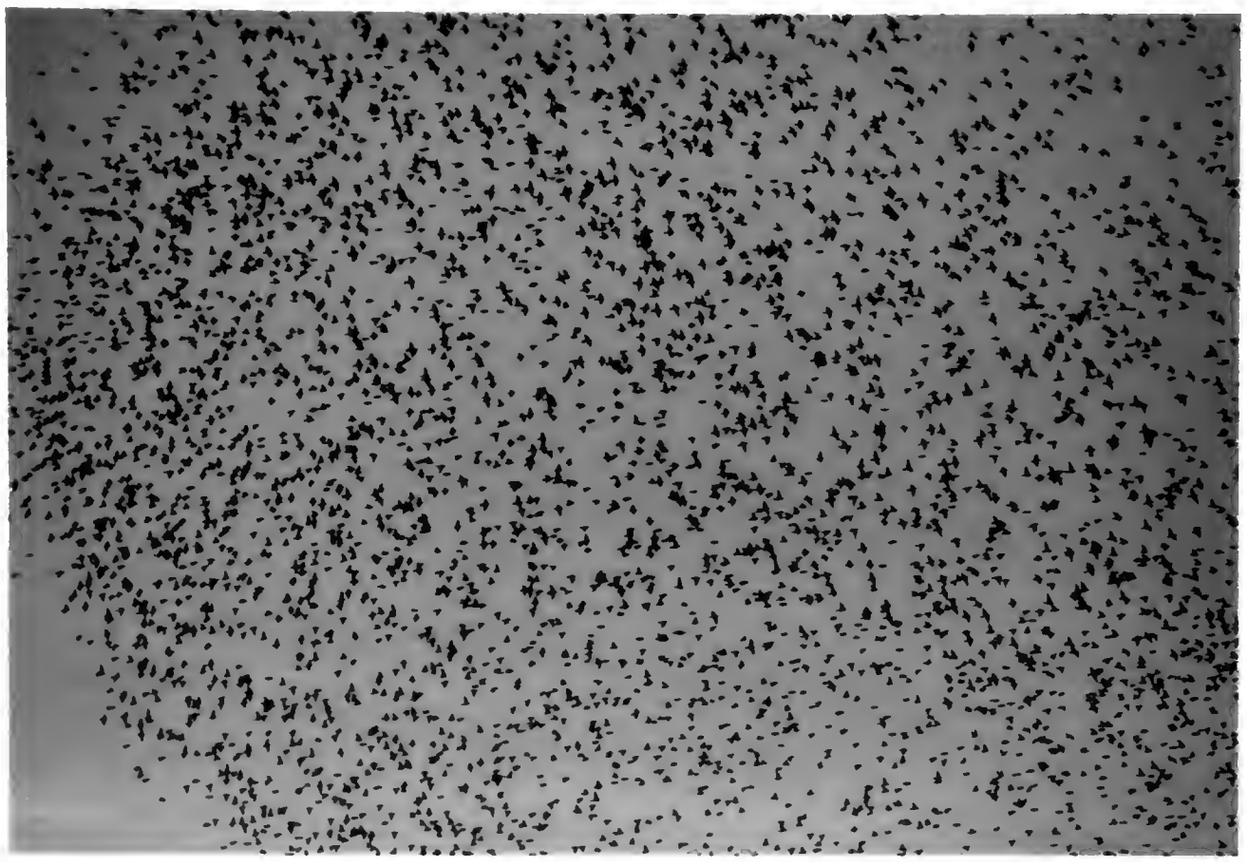


Fig. 12. Breeding distribution of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* in the LNHS area 2007–11 (small dots = present, large dots = breeding). *Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2012.*



Mike Lane

242. Large Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* roosts are one of the great spectacles of winter birding in Britain and Stanley Cramp organised counts of the species in London for the LNHS. Cramp was also involved with the monitoring of Starlings in Brighton, where this photo was taken in November 2006, for the BTO survey in the mid 1960s.

Kingfisher, (feral) Barnacle Goose and Raven. The effects of climate change could also bring more new arrivals from Europe, perhaps including the European Serin *Serinus serinus*. The one certainty is that birding in London will continue to be exciting and unpredictable.

Acknowledgments

We should like to thank Richard Bonser (Inner London recorder) and Andrew Self (LNHS Area recorder) for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article and for providing some additional information. Several other observers have answered queries about specific sites or species, and Neil Smith produced the maps. We would also like to acknowledge the BTO Atlas team and website developers, as well as the many birdwatchers who have either taken part in the atlas projects in London or contributed records via the LNHS recorders – thank you all for your contributions.

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Both **Ian Woodward** and **Richard Arnold** have been watching birds in the London area for 30 years or more. Ian became the BTO Regional Representative for North London in 2006, while Richard is BTO Regional Rep. for the South London region, both of them co-ordinating coverage for BTO local and national surveys, including the Breeding Bird Survey. Bird Atlas 2007–11 provided the ideal opportunity to undertake a new London Atlas alongside the BTO project, for which Ian and Richard have been joint leaders in conjunction with the London Bird Club.

Tony Duckett

243. Adult and juvenile Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, Regent's Park, July 2011. This species now appears to be established in the larger Inner London parks.

Appendix 1. Changes in occurrence of bird species within the Inner London area. Pre-atlas data are based on Cramp & Teagle (1952) and Cramp & Tomlins (1966). The data from the first two atlases are copied from Oliver (1997).

	Occurrence in Inner London prior to 1965		Number of Inner London tetrads occupied (number with probable or confirmed breeding)		
	1900–50	1951–65	1968–72 Atlas	1988–94 Atlas	2008–12 Atlas (provisional)
Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*	Breeding	Breeding	6 (3)	13 (4)	16 (8)
Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*					1 (0)
Greylag Goose *Anser anser*				5 (3)	13 (8)
Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*		Bred from 1950s	5 (5)	11 (6)	19 (10)
Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*					3 (1)
Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*					2 (0)
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*					9 (8)
Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*					5 (1)
Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*				1 (0)	4 (2)
Gadwall *Anas strepera*	Captive breeder				6 (2)
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*	Breeding	Breeding	18 (15)	21 (14)	22 (15)
Garganey *Anas querquedula*				1 (0)	1 (0)
Shoveler *Anas clypeata*					3 (0)
Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*		Captive breeder	?	?	6 (5)
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*	Captive breeder	Breeding	5 (5)	7 (5)	9 (4)
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*	Bred from 1910	Breeding	7 (6)	13 (9)	16 (8)
Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*				3 (1)	4 (1)
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*				4 (0)	19† (0)
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*					1 (0)
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*			* (1)	14 (2)	17 (3)
Little Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*	Regular breeder			1 (0)	6 (4)
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*		Bred 1964	2 (2)	7 (5)	11 (7)
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*		Bred 1953	*	4 (3)	20 (8)
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*	Bred from 1931	Breeding	17 (7)	24 (18)	14 (5)
Hobby *Falco subbuteo*					1 (1)
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*	Occasional			Present	Breeding
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*	Breeding	Breeding	7 (7)	13 (9)	21 (15)
Common Coot *Fulica atra*	Bred from 1926	Breeding	5 (5)	12 (9)	19 (17)
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*					1† (0)
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*				2 (1)	
Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*					2† (0)

	1900–50	1951–65	1968–72 Atlas	1988–94 Atlas	2008–12 Atlas (provisional)
Common Gull *Larus canus*			*	5† (0)	8† (0)
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*		Present 1965	2 (0)	10 (3)	22 (8)
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*		Bred from 1961	4 (3)	12 (3)	22 (8)
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*					7 (1)
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*		*	13† (0)	11† (0)	
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*				1 (0)	9 (2)
Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*	Breeding	Breeding	20 (13)	24 (24)	24 (20)
Stock Dove *Columba oenas*	Breeding	Bred to c. 1960	3 (3)	5 (4)	8 (6)
Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*	Breeding	Breeding	24 (24)	24 (21)	24 (20)
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*				1 (1)	6 (0)
Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*				1 (0)	19 (10)
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	Bred 1905				
Little Owl *Athene noctua*	Present				2 (1)
Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*	Breeding	Breeding	13 (6)	9 (5)	5 (3)
Common Swift *Apus apus*	Breeding	Breeding	9 (3)	23 (4)	20 (4)
Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*	Present	Bred 1952–54		1 (0)	10 (6)
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*	Bred from 1920s	Breeding	2 (1)	6 (3)	23 (9)
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*	Occasional			2 (0)	
Magpie *Pica pica*			3 (1)	22 (19)	24 (19)
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*	Bred from 1932	Breeding	13 (8)	14 (7)	18 (4)
Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*	Breeding	Bred 1950–57, 1963–65	3 (2)		2† (0)
Rook *Corvus frugilegus*	Bred to 1916				
Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*	Breeding	Breeding	21 (15)	24 (22)	24 (22)
Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*			4 (2)	6 (3)	13 (8)
Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*	Breeding	Breeding	20 (18)	24 (21)	24 (20)
Great Tit *Parus major*	Breeding	Breeding	16 (10)	20 (15)	24 (23)
Coal Tit *Periparus ater*	Bred 1947	Irregular breeder	9 (7)	9 (7)	11 (9)
Skylark *Alauda arvensis*				1 (1)	
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*				1 (0)	4 (1)
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	Bred 1907–08, 1941		1 (1)	4† (0)	3† (0)
House Martin *Delichon urbicum*	Bred just outside area		7 (3)	20 (11)	10 (4)
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*			3 (3)	10 (9)	22 (19)
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*	Bred 1937	Possibly bred 1958	3 (1)	7 (2)	17† (3)

	1900–50	1951–65	1968–72 Atlas	1988–94 Atlas	2008–12 Atlas (provisional)
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*	Bred 1920s, 30s	Irregular breeder	3 (2)	10 (2)	6† (0)
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*	Bred 1920s	Irregular breeder	7 (3)	11 (7)	18 (9)
Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*			1 (1)	1 (0)	2† (0)
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*	Bred 1915, 1921			1 (0)	3 (0)
Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*		Bred 1953, 1956, 1960		1 (0)	6† (2)
Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*			1 (0)	3 (0)	7 (4)
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*		Bred 1958–64	1 (1)	5 (2)	4 (2)
Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*	Bred from 1945	Bred to 1954	2 (1)	6 (4)	1 (1)
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*	Breeding	Breeding	17 (12)	23 (20)	24 (19)
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*	Breeding	Breeding	23 (22)	24 (24)	24 (21)
Blackbird *Turdus merula*	Breeding	Breeding	24 (24)	24 (23)	24 (23)
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*	Breeding	Breeding	22 (18)	24 (17)	16 (8)
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*	Breeding	Breeding	21 (16)	20 (17)	22 (14)
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*	Breeding	Breeding	8 (7)	13(9)	2† (0)
Robin *Erithacus rubecula*	Breeding	Breeding	14 (11)	24 (19)	24 (22)
Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*					1 (0)
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*	Bred from 1940	Breeding	7 (1)	12 (11)	11 (6)
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*	Breeding	Breeding	19 (14)	23 (20)	21 (16)
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*	Breeding	Breeding	24 (23)	24 (24)	22 (12)
Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*			1 (1)		
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*	Bred WW2		2 (2)	2 (2)	
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*		Bred 1952, 60–61		10 (6)	18 (7)
Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*	Occasional breeder	Breeding	12 (9)	19 (8)	20 (11)
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*				2 (0)	
Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*	Breeding	Breeding	12 (5)	9 (7)	22 (9)
Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*	Breeding	Breeding	20 (14)	23 (16)	23 (16)
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*	Bred from 1945	Breeding	14 (8)	18 (8)	23 (13)
Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*	Bred 1918		4 (1)	12 (6)	3 (1)
Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret*			1 (0)	6 (4)	
Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*		Bred from 1959	6 (5)	8 (4)	
Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*	Present	Probably bred 1951–52, 54, 56			
Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*			1 (0)	1 (1)	

* not mapped by Montier (1977) † likely to include migrant or flyover birds

Bird Photograph of the Year 2012

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Birds make great subjects for photography. Many of them are active by day, lots are relatively confiding around humans and they are found almost everywhere. But, perhaps ironically, for precisely the same reasons, getting a really *good* photograph of a bird is hugely challenging. Given that access is not always the biggest hurdle, a lot of people, quite reasonably, make birds the subject of their wildlife photography creating a surfeit of pictures that are OK – illustrative, clear, well executed – but just not *great*.

The images in the BPY shortlist this year were all exceptional for one reason or another. In some, it was the moment of extraordinary behaviour that has been captured that sets them apart. In others it was the light or composition. The very best have all the above qualities and possess a further element which is so elusive that, try as one might to develop prescriptive techniques for achieving it, it remains the rarest of assets in wildlife photography. It is a sense of character that transcends the still image and leaps off the page to tell a story. Bird photography, or wildlife photography generally, can and does service an appetite for illustration, but it can also touch the emotions, transport the viewer to a time, a mood, a place that steps beyond the realms of illustration and into art. The best of the images before you now do just that – take you on a journey into the frail and ephemeral world of birds. Enjoy the trip!

Simon King

Simon King was one of the judges for both this year's and last year's Bird Photograph of the Year competition; he will present this year's awards at the British Birdwatching Fair, at Rutland Water on Friday 17th August, at 4.00 pm in the Events Marquee. For more information about Simon King visit www.wildlifewhisperer.tv

1st	Goosander *Mergus merganser*	plate 244	Edmund Fellowes
2nd	Blackbirds *Turdus merula*	plate 245	Ernie Janes
3rd	Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*	plate 246	Jyrki Normaja
4th	Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*	plate 247	Graham Catley
5th	Steller's Eiders *Polysticta stelleri*	plate 248	Harri Taavetti
6th	Puffin *Fratercula arctica*	plate 249	Alex Mustard
7th	Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*	plate 250	Andrew Moon
8th	Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*	plate 251	Kevin Du Rose
9th	Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*	plate 252	Oliver Smart
10th	Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*	plate 253	Dave Mansell
11th=	Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*	plate 254	Harri Taavetti
11th=	Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*	plate 255	Jacqueline Moreton
13th	Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*	plate 256	Kit Day
14th	Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*		Richard Bedford
15th	Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*		Steve Young
16th	Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*		Julian Cox
17th	Little Owl *Athene noctua*		Alfonso Ferrer Yus
18th=	Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*		David Moreton
18th=	Brünnich's Guillemots *Uria lomvia*		Dickie Duckett
20th	Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*		Michele Mendi
Digiscoped entries			
1st	Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*	plate 257	David Tomlinson
2nd	Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	plate 258	David Hatton

Since the first winner of this competition, a photograph of a Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* taken by Mike Wilkes in Worcestershire in May 1976 (*Brit. Birds* 70: 133), bird photography has changed beyond all recognition. The technology available today enables previously undreamt of situations to be captured and documented. Back in the 1970s, black and white was the standard format in *BB*, and Mike Wilkes's winning entry was the only colour photograph to appear in the entire volume. Today, a proliferation of websites and blogs provide an immediate outlet for photographs so that comparatively few images now appear in print.

Composition and image size

In many of the bird photographs found on the internet, the main subject completely dominates the overall image but this competition strives to show the bird *and* its environment. This adds enormously to the interest of the photo and provides essential context, which is particularly important where action is being shown. Of course, image composition is essential, which is why we encourage *limited* cropping to bring out the best of the photograph. Traditionally, the rule of thumb has been that the subject should occupy around one-third of the diagonal length of the image, which leaves ample space to display the surroundings. This year, as in previous years, we received a number of entries in which the size of the main subject significantly exceeded the 'one-third' guideline. One image in particular, which was beautifully composed in the supporting RAW file, was submitted for this award with a much tighter crop; as a result it failed to make the top 20. We feel that the trend towards frame-filling images is strongly influenced by the internet, where space is at a premium, leaving little room for the surroundings, which (should) tell the viewer so much about the main subject. Here, we are not looking for 'field guide' illustrations but rather wildlife images that set the bird in context, in its environment.

244. Bird Photograph of the Year 2012 Goosander *Mergus merganser* with Brook Lamprey *Lampetra planeri*, Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, September 2011. (Canon EOS 1D IV, Canon 500 mm f4, 1/3200, f4, ISO 800.) *Edmund Fellowes*

Ethical photography and unnecessary disturbance

Each year we try to ensure that the winning photographs depict entirely natural behaviour, and that the photographer's presence has not affected the bird(s) unduly. We believe that the winning entries shown here meet the ethical standards to which we aspire. However, as more and more people take up bird photography, there are more and more pictures appearing on the internet of birds returning to the nest with food, or frame-fillers of territorial males. Many of these depict the bird beautifully but there are increasing concerns that some must have involved the photographer affecting the bird's behaviour. We feel that consistently taking photographs under such circumstances is unjustified. We urge photographers to adhere to the *British Birds* Code of Practice for bird photography, which is available on our website at: www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/bird-photography-%E2%80%93-a-new-code-of-practice

Furthermore, in the UK it is an offence to wilfully disturb a breeding bird on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). A list of these species can be found at: www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/wildbirdslaw/birdsandlaw/wca/schedules.aspx

The use of live prey to lure birds closer to photographers was also discussed at this year's judging. Many people regularly feed live invertebrate prey, such as mealworms, to birds in their gardens. This is a widespread practice that seems readily accepted and has few critics, but the use of live mice and voles to lure arctic owls closer to the photographer is a good deal more contentious. It has to be admitted that providing a regular supply of live prey undoubtedly enhances the survival chances and condition of the particular owls involved. Without human intervention, however, most rodent activity takes place below the snow, making their capture challenging for the owls. But releasing a dark-coloured rodent on the surface of the snow affects the way in which the bird behaves, and gives the prey little or no chance of avoiding the predator. In future years, photographs taken using live vertebrate prey, regardless of whether or not the prey is visible in the resulting photograph, will not be permitted in this competition.

Sponsors

We are delighted that Anglian Water has continued as our principal sponsor for a second year, maintaining the relationship between *BB* and Rutland Water, where the winning photographs have been displayed and the awards presented at the British Birdwatching Fair for over a decade. Anglian Water has again provided the £1,000 cash prize for the winner of the competition this year. In addition, our loyal sponsors of many years, Christopher Helm and Collins, have both continued their support by providing books of the winners' choice for the top three places in the main competition. Last, but not least, the Eric Hosking Charitable Trust continues with its aim to encourage digiscoping as a medium for documenting birds and bird behaviour by donating a cash prize. We thank all our sponsors – since without them the competition would not exist – and look forward to working together again in the future.

The entries

After much discussion, the overall winner of the 2012 competition was declared to be Edmund Fellowes, for his quite outstanding image of an immature male Goosander *Mergus merganser* with a Brook Lamprey *Lampetra planeri* on the River Nith in Dumfries & Galloway, in September 2011. This image is a near-perfect composition of bird and background and is full of action: the fast-flowing river, the Goosander tossing the lamprey to reposition it for swallowing, the lamprey twisting and thrashing in a final attempt to escape its fate. Despite all the action, this image is crisp and reveals the row of tiny serrations along the inner edges of the Goosander's mandibles, which enable it to grasp its slippery prey. Edmund described how he obtained this photograph: 'Every year in September, about 15 Goosanders congregate at the weir in the middle of Dumfries. They are here to exploit the run of Lampreys going up the River Nith to spawn, just as the Salmon [*Salmo salar*] do. Only females and juveniles are present at this time of the year as all the male Goosanders are on their moult migration to northern Norway. Over the years they have become accustomed to people and, with care, are readily approached.

245. Second Male Blackbirds *Turdus merula* fighting, Gimingham, Norfolk, May 2011. (Canon EOS 1D IV, Canon 500 mm f4; 1/3200, f9, ISO 640.) *Ernie Janes*

246. Third Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, Jurmo Bird Observatory, Finland, May 2011. (Canon EOS 7D, Canon 400 mm f5.6; 1/4000, f5.6, ISO 800.) *Jyrki Normaja*

247. Fourth Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, Barton Clay-pits, Lincolnshire, April 2011. (Canon EOS 1D IV, Canon 300 mm f2.8 + 1.4x converter; 1/2500, f4, ISO 500.) *Graham Catley*

'The birds don't catch regularly and the action is usually very brief as there is great competition for the fish from all the Goosanders, gulls and Great Cormorants [*Phalacrocorax carbo*]. For photography it is vital that the catch is made in the "right" section of the river and the bird is facing the camera.'

The runner-up is an image of two male Blackbirds *Turdus merula* fighting, taken by Ernie Janes at Gimingham, Norfolk, in May 2011. This behaviour may not be particularly unusual, in fact it probably occurs quite regularly in most British gardens, but it is not easy to freeze the action in a pleasing composition. Ernie has managed to do this and the result is an image which is both aesthetically pleasing and reveals just how these birds interact: the upper bird is on the offensive and the lower has adopted a defensive position ready for the forthcoming attack.

Photographing small passerines in flight is rarely straightforward, so we were pleased to receive several such entries in 2012, of which three feature in the top ten. This behaviour can, to some extent, be predicted, but Jyrki Normaja's image of a Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* flycatching is, by Jyrki's own admission, one of those lucky flukes. Fluke or not, it is a remarkable shot, taken at Jurmo Bird Observatory, Finland, in May 2011. Jyrki explains: 'I had noticed a Spotted Flycatcher [*Muscicapa striata*] catching insects around a 10-m-high birch [*Betula*] tree. I tried to get some shots of the bird flycatching, but with no success. Suddenly, another bird arrived in the top of the same tree, and also started flycatching. To my surprise, it turned out to be a Lesser Whitethroat. In most of the images, there is no bird at all, in a few the bird has been caught in the photo, but only one shot is by any means of acceptable quality.' The posture of the bird, which has already opened its bill to catch the insect, is just right and it is beautifully lit by the early morning light. The photograph also reveals a tick under the bird's eye just behind the gape, something which is quite typical for species that spend time foraging on the ground. *BWP* describes 'occasional attempts to catch insects in flight rarely successful', so this is an unusual piece of behaviour, beautifully documented.

Graham Catley's fourth-placed photo of a Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* singing while descending from the zenith of its display flight illustrates this behaviour beautifully, while the backdrop of the reedbed adds both depth and dimension in

248. Fifth Steller's Eiders *Polysticta stelleri*, Kiberg Harbour, Varanger Fjord, Norway, March 2011. (Canon EOS 7D, Canon 300 mm f/2.8; 1/1600, f5, ISO 500.) *Harri Taavetti*

249. Sixth Puffin *Fratercula arctica*, Farne Islands, Northumberland, July 2011. (Nikon D700, Nikon 60 mm AFS, Inon Z240 underwater flashes, Subal underwater housing; 1/320, f11, ISO 640.)
Alex Mustard

250. Seventh Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* with Mole *Talpa europaea*, King George VI Reservoir, Surrey, May 2011. (Canon EOS 1D IV, Canon 400 mm f4 + 1.4x converter; 1/2000, f5.6, ISO 800.)
Andrew Moon

251. Eighth Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, Horsey, Norfolk, October 2011. (Canon EOS 1D II, Canon 400 mm f5.6; 1/3200, f5.6, ISO 320.) *Kevin Du Rose*

this vertically cropped image. Graham told us: 'Every spring I look forward to the arrival of summer visitors around the clay-pits that form the bulk of my local patch at Barton, in Lincolnshire, and particularly the Sedge Warblers, as their display flights offer an endless challenge. Flight displays are performed regularly in the early part of the breeding season... Individual birds may display on a regular flight line only for the odd day so it is necessary to make quick decisions on which birds offer the best chance of a decent flight shot... I wanted to include the bird's habitat in the shot, which really tests the camera's autofocus system and the operator's reactions; it also puts the bird into its habitat and

252. Ninth Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*, Soltvadkert, Hungary, June 2011. (Canon EOS 1D IV, Canon 70–200 mm + 1.4x converter; 1/800, f6.3, ISO 800.) *Oliver Smart*

demonstrates the beautiful convergence of colour in the bird's plumage and its reedbed habitat. I stood on a small mound by the side of a coastal reedbed and used a 300-mm lens to provide more options for hand-holding the camera gear, my preferred option, providing me with the necessary flexibility for tracking the fast-flying bird.'

Several thousand Steller's Eiders *Polysticta stelleri* spend the winter at Varanger Fjord in northern Norway, which remains ice-free when seas to the east are frozen. By mid March large numbers are still present and there is plenty of daylight. In fact, northern Scandinavia in March is rapidly becoming a photographer's honey pot, providing charismatic and approachable birds, unpredictable but often dramatic lighting, and stunning backdrops. Harri Taavetti's fifth-placed image captures the energy and action of a tight flock of Steller's Eiders surfing the waves at Kiberg Harbour in March 2011. The weather conditions were challenging, with gale-force winds and a heavy sea, but the late-afternoon sun provided marvellous lighting.

In sixth place, Alex Mustard has shown us a Puffin *Fratercula arctica* in a way that very few of us will ever experience first-hand. This is the first underwater entry to make the BPY shortlist, and was taken while Alex was scuba diving off the Farne Islands, in Northumberland. The water was not particularly clear so Alex and his companion Ben Burville had to make a cautious underwater approach to Puffins resting on the water and then wait for them to dive. Mostly the birds just swam away but on a couple of occasions they were curious and rewarded Alex and Ben with a memorable underwater encounter. Puffins move deceptively quickly underwater and swim with jerky wing movements, like a clockwork toy. Puffins are hard enough to photograph while flying; just imagine trying to take those shots underwater! To freeze the movement and illuminate the bird, Alex used two underwater flashes, while the contrast has been increased to help overcome the murky water conditions. This is a novel and innovative photograph that is a worthy contender in the shortlist this year, and we look forward to future competition images employing such enterprising techniques.

Seventh place goes to Andrew Moon's image of a Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* carrying a recently killed Mole *Talpa europaea* at King George VI Reservoir, Surrey, in May 2011. Carrion Crows are opportunistic feeders but they are also wary and wily, and it is difficult to

253. Tenth Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* with Signal Crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus*, Ebro Delta, Spain, August 2011. (Canon EOS 7D, Canon 500 mm f4; 1/2500, f6.3, ISO 400.) *Dave Mansell*

254. Eleventh equal Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*, Lapua, western Finland, March 2011. (Canon EOS 7D, Canon 300 mm f/2.8; 1/1250, f4.5, ISO 640.) *Harri Taavetti*

255. Eleventh equal Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* going to roost, Blackpool Beach, Lancashire, November 2011. (Nikon D300S, Nikon 18–70 mm; 1/250, f4.5, ISO 400.) *Jacqueline Moreton*

get close to a feeding bird. The crow was seen initially at some distance on top of the reservoir bank, where it was clearly dismembering something. As Andrew approached the bird, it flew down the reservoir bank and passed directly below him, and he fired off several shots as it went by. The submitted image is a lovely composition of predator and prey, with the crow's partly closed nictating membrane giving the eye a sly, almost evil, expression.

For photographers as well as birders, one of the highlights of October 2011 in Norfolk was the long-staying Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* at Horsey. Of the many, many images of this photogenic and confiding first-winter, we particularly enjoyed the offering by BPY 2011 winner Kevin Du Rose. His pin-sharp image, in eighth place here, reveals the bird's plumage in immaculate detail: even the wasp can be identified, as a Common Wasp *Vespula vulgaris*. Kevin visited the bird on two occasions and on his second visit he decided to try for some flight shots. The shrike was chasing and catching late-flying wasps, so he avoided the other photographers, positioned himself a little way back from the bird and tried to predict where it might fly once it had caught something. Hand-holding his 400-mm lens, he spent a couple of hours attempting to freeze the bird in flight, without much success. Suddenly the shrike flew straight towards the camera, snatched a wasp and banked, catching the morning sunshine just as the camera's auto focus locked onto the subject.

In ninth place is Oliver Smart's study of a Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* drinking from a pool near Soltvadkert in Hungary. Having prepared a clean drinking pool with an uncluttered background and open foreground, and a subterranean hide that enabled him to get level with the pool, Oliver created an ideal opportunity for that elusive shot of both the bird and its reflection. By taking just a few single shots in order not to disturb the bird, he was able to capture this intimate moment. The dark background was created by woodland foliage, the detail of which has been lost through the use of a wide aperture so keeping the image simple. This photograph also shows the ability that doves and pigeons have to drink by swallowing rather than raising their heads to let the water run down their throats.

Dave Mansell's image of a Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* emerging from its dive

256. Thirteenth Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*, Exmouth, Devon, September 2011. (Canon EOS 1D IV, Canon 400 mm f5.6; 1/2700, f5.6, ISO 800.) *Kit Day*

carrying a Signal Crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus* was placed in tenth position. The grebe is shaking its head and body, while the forelimbs of the crayfish are spinning with equal vigour, the flying water droplets adding to the action. Taken from a hide in the Ebro Delta in northeast Spain, this image shows that this North American alien, which has spread widely throughout European rivers, does have some predators. This crayfish seems on the large size for the grebe to swallow, but perhaps this bird had mastered a technique for dismembering the body before swallowing? *BWP* makes no mention of alien crayfish in the diet of Little Grebes.

Harri Taavetti's image of a female Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* at Lapua in western Finland captures the essence of this spectacular arctic predator from an unusual angle. Harri spent most of a cloudy afternoon in March 2011 photographing this bird; just before sunset, a break in the clouds was a bonus for photography and Harri photographed the owl from below as it returned to its perch on a snow-covered barn roof after an unsuccessful hunting flight. Tied in eleventh place is Jacqueline Moreton's composition of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* heading to roost on a late November afternoon at Blackpool, in Lancashire. The symmetry of the flock somewhat resembles the shape of a normal distribution curve, while the reflections in the pools on the beach convey the drama and action of the wheeling flock.

The final image from the main award shown here is Kit Day's terrific Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* wave-hopping a gentle surf at Exmouth, Devon, in late September 2011 – a relatively serene composition of this species, which is more usually encountered by British birders as a storm-blown accompaniment to late-autumn gales.

Digiscoping

Digiscoping remains a challenge for many but few manage to perfect the art of taking consistently high-quality images that capture an interesting aspect of behaviour. For the 2012 competition we were pleased to receive more entries than usual and it is clear that overall quality is steadily improving and several photographers submitted outstanding images. However, this competition remains committed to promoting and extending the benefits of digiscoping to everyone who carries a telescope. We know that there are many avid digiscopers who produce some outstanding work and we encourage them all to enter this competition next year – there are many technically superb digiscopers who could potentially challenge for the winning slot.

The winner of the Eric Hosking Charitable Trust award for 2012 is a delightful portrait of a Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, perched in an orchard and framed by apple blossom, by David Tomlinson. This image recalls the long-past days when Wrynecks and orchards went hand in hand in the English country-

257. Digiscoping winner Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Poland, May 2011. (Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ7, Swarovski HD80 telescope with 25–50x zoom eyepiece; 1/125, f4, ISO 80.) *David Tomlinson*

side. Such scenes are still commonplace in Poland's Biebrza valley, however, where David took this photograph in early May 2011. It is a pleasing mix of bird and habitat, in which the tree blossom and the neutral green background enhance the aesthetic appeal. Like many digiscopers, David prefers digiscoping to conventional photography, as it allows the photographer to work farther away from his subject and is thus less intrusive.

258. Digiscoping runner-up Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Cley, Norfolk, August 2011. (Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX5, Kowa TSN 823 telescope with 32x wide-angle eyepiece and Kowa DA1 adaptor; 1/60, f3.2, ISO 200.) *David Hatton*

David Hatton's Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, in full breeding regalia, striding across a Norfolk saltmarsh at Cley, is this year's runner-up. The shot is perfectly exposed, revealing the complexity of the bird's plumage, yet still capturing the intensity of the saltmarsh colours, while the slight motion blur of the foot adds dynamism to the image. This bird was some 50 m from the camera when first seen, but stationary. By waiting patiently for the bird to stir, which it did eventually, David was able to fire off four images, of which this was the best.

Prizes

The prizes for the winners will be presented at this year's British Birdwatching Fair on Friday 17th August. We would like to thank our sponsors, Anglian Water, Collins (www.harpercollins.co.uk), Christopher Helm/Bloomsbury Publishing (www.bloomsbury.com) and the Eric Hosking Charitable Trust (www.erichoskingtrust.com), once more for their continued support, without which this competition would not continue. The rules and closing date for next year's competition will be announced in January 2013 on our website (www.britishbirds.co.uk) and in the journal.

Acknowledgments

As in previous years, judging took place at the BTO headquarters in Thetford. Our thanks go to the BTO for their hospitality and the use of their facilities, and particularly to Dawn Balmer for making the arrangements.

Richard Chandler, Tim Appleton, Robin Chittenden, David Hosking, Peter Kennerley, Simon King and David Tipling, c/o 4 Kings Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4AX

The Carl Zeiss Award 2012

The Carl Zeiss Award, which has been running since 1991, is awarded for the photograph or set of photographs judged to have been the most instructive in the BBRC's assessment of rarities during the previous year. Once a final shortlist had been agreed, voting members of BBRC selected this year's winner and runners-up: each member simply ranked all the contenders in the list, and the one with the most points was the winner. A very strong shortlist this year reflects the still-increasing value of photographic documentation to the record-assessment process. As usual, the list included a mixture of images that were instructive in terms of the identification of difficult or poorly known species and subspecies together with those that simply provided categorical proof in support of a record that otherwise might not have been accepted.

Photographs that made it through to the final shortlist but were not in this year's top five included Mike Gould's images of a putative 'Eastern' Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides* in Kent; a ringtail harrier photographed by Martin Goodey on Scilly (submitted as a Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* but the photos provoked a useful discussion of potential hybrid features); Rob Martin's photos of the Norfolk Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans*; Brydon Thomason's shots of a female Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* in Shetland; and Alison Duncan's images of a Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in Orkney.

Martin Goodey's name also appears in our top five this year, with his second shortlisted entry from Scilly being some stunning images of the Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata* at Porth Hellick, on St Mary's, in autumn 2011. Clinching the identification of this species still requires photographic documentation to ensure that the key features have been determined correctly. In cases where we need this level of detail to support the record, the quality of the images available can sometimes lead to subjective judgements (is that outermost tail feather *really* parallel-

Martin Goodey

259. Fifth Juvenile Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*, Porth Hellick, St Mary's, Scilly, autumn 2011.

Steve Arlow

260. Fourth Putative adult Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*, Pitsea landfill, Essex, February 2011.

sided and narrow-looking, with the right pattern of barring?), but the 2011 Porth Hellick bird was extremely well described in a comprehensive written submission that was supported by a wealth of high-quality images from a number of photographers. This enabled a critical analysis of the salient features and made the assessment relatively straightforward. The spread tail in Martin's shot of the bird preening shows the pattern and shape of the outer tail feather perfectly and impressed all the judges.

In fourth place came the Greater London/Essex (putative) Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*. This bird continues several themes that were apparent in last year's competition (*Brit. Birds* 104: 462–465): a record of a difficult gull from southeast England,

Steve Gantlett

261. Third First-winter Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*, Cley, Norfolk, January 2012.

Brian Cox

Brian Cox

262 & 263. Second Putative 'Eastern' Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*, Dungeness, Kent, November 1981.

potentially a first for Britain, which is still in circulation with the Committee. The assessment process this time has been aided significantly by the large number of images and detailed descriptions submitted by a number of observers who encountered the bird during its sporadic appearances in the region. Several judges commented on the quality of the documentation submitted by the original finder, Dominic Mitchell. The value of the photos submitted by Dominic and others enabled us to get to grips properly with the more subtle aspects of the identification, such as the colour tones of the mantle, and this added significantly to the written descriptions. Steve Arlow's spread-wing shot secured fourth place this year, one judge calling this image a 'mastershot' as it shows the 'exact details of the secondary pattern and wing-tip (the gradation of black, the position of white 'pearls', the nature of the mirrors) from both below and above (and on both wings).' In last year's award, Steve took third place, with a different but similarly incisive series of images of a potential Thayer's Gull *L. (glaucoides) thayeri* that was sampling the delights of the landfills along the north shore of the Thames Estuary.

In third place was Steve Gantlett's series of photographs of the Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* at Cley, in Norfolk, from November 2011 to January 2012. Steve's images provided the catalyst for a range of expert opinions from across the Atlantic (and the Irish Sea), which in turn highlighted the importance of individual feather patterns for clinching the identification. Combining these with a critical assessment of structure and moult enabled this difficult identification to be settled with confidence. This shows how really high-quality images can contribute to our collective knowledge and improve understanding of particular identification challenges – one of the key criteria of this award. Sometimes, these challenges are not pursued so assiduously in areas where the species concerned is more abundant (and where the importance of establishing one particular identification is perhaps not so great); in some cases at least, we can potentially learn things about identification from a well-studied individual vagrant in a rarely encountered plumage which have not been apparent in that species' normal range.

Second place this year was awarded for a series of images taken over 30 years ago! Following the debate over the identification of the potential 'Eastern' Black Redstarts in Kent and Northumberland in autumn 2011, Brian Cox dug out his slides of a bird trapped at Dungeness in 1981. That bird had previously been accepted by BBRC as the first record of a Black Redstart showing characters of one of the eastern races and it was recorded as such in the 1982 annual report (*Brit. Birds* 76: 507). However, the record was later removed

from the British List by BOURC when the potential pitfalls of a hybrid Common Redstart *P. phoenicurus* × Black Redstart became apparent (BOU 2002). The original documentation submitted to the two committees was insufficient to rule out that pitfall but Brian had the foresight to realise that his images of the bird in the hand, showing the spread wing and folded wing, allowed a much more detailed assessment of the wing formula and enabled the identification to be revisited. This is another record that is still in circulation at the time of

Ian Fulton

Ian Fulton

264 & 265. Carl Zeiss Award 2012, winner Putative Asian Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica daurica/japonica*, Talisker, Skye, Highland, June 2011.

writing but so far the analysis supports the view that the record should indeed be reconsidered, potentially as a first for Britain. This illustrates once again just how important it is that rarities are properly documented, giving us the opportunity to return to old records as our understanding of identification criteria moves on. This is particularly true of races and 'cryptic' species and this leads nicely on to this year's winning images...

A confiding Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, seen on Orkney (and photographed by Roderick Thorne) and then on Skye, proved to be even more interesting than the observers realised initially. The photographs were sufficient to determine that the same individual was involved and that the record did not appear to be of the familiar European breeding form *C. d. rufula*. We felt that Ian Fulton's images from Skye provided the most informative record of the bird and enabled this individual to be assigned confidently to one of the migratory Asian races *C. d. daurica* or *C. d. japonica*. The vagrancy potential of these forms had already been identified by the Norwegians, but it was not on the radar of many British birders. However, articles in *Birding World* (Thorne 2011, Tveit 2011) were quick to highlight the credentials of this particular claim and, although the record's acceptance to the British List is still pending at the time of writing, there is no doubt that this potential first would have been completely overlooked in the absence of the photographs. Those photographs have alerted us to the suite of characters that separate the eastern forms and both records committees and rarity hunters should now be aware of this likely candidate for full species status. Ian Fulton will be presented with his prize, a pair of 8 × 32 Zeiss FL binoculars, at the British Birdwatching Fair on Friday 17th August 2012, at 4.00 pm in the Events Marquee.

Acknowledgments

BBRC remains grateful to all those observers who submit their photographs for consideration or who post images on websites (especially BirdGuides www.birdguides.com and Rare Bird Alert www.rarebirdalert.co.uk), in so doing helping the Committee to assess records. It is a great pleasure to review the images, both for the assessment process and for this competition, and they continue to improve our collective knowledge of rarity identification. Chris Batty and Nigel Hudson were instrumental in compiling the initial shortlist of images for consideration and Chris Batty, Chris Bradshaw, Paul French, Martin Garner, Nic Hallam, Richard Millington, Mike Pennington, Richard Schofield and Steve Votier cast the votes. We are extremely grateful to Carl Zeiss for their continued support of the Committee and this award.

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Adam Rowlands, BBRC Chairman, East Walks Bungalow, Minsmere RSPB Reserve, Westleton, Suffolk IP17 3BY

Notes

Hatching season for Common Pochards

In the 2009 Rare Breeding Birds Panel report (*Brit. Birds* 104: 490), in the account for the Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, the authors encourage observers 'to check lowland pools and lakes in late summer and report females with broods.' From my own experiences, however, as summer warden at Holkham NNR in north Norfolk, where one of the county's largest breeding populations occurs (the highest totals are 21 broods seen in both 1995 and 1999), I feel that late summer is far from the best time to search for Pochards with ducklings. At Holkham, the first broods generally hatch in mid May with a peak in numbers of newly hatched ducklings coming in the first two weeks of June. As for many species of breeding wildfowl on the site, the mortality of ducklings is high and if searches were not carried out until late summer, most of the broods would actually be missed and the breeding population would be underestimated considerably.

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Red-necked Phalaropes: top spinners or not?

I have observed Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* on a number of occasions in the UK and the Middle East (and twice in the Americas) and have always been surprised at how little spinning they actually do. Although not recorded systematically, I was conscious that a 'spin' was rarely more than a couple of turns, and most of the feeding carried out while swimming comprised rapid, alternate, sideways picks at the water surface for invertebrates. This has been the case both with single birds and with large gatherings on migration when, for example, I have observed over 70,000 together on the saline lakes of northern Iran. Richard Chandler (pers. comm.) has also told me that he has never seen any of the three phalarope species spinning in any serious way and does not believe that it is a particularly common feeding mechanism.

In the early afternoon of 6th October 2010, on a fine day with a light southwesterly wind, Simon Aspinall and I watched a juvenile Red-necked Phalarope on Simmond's Scrape at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's reserve at Cley. In contrast to our previous experience, it was spinning virtually non-stop so we decided to count the number of times it spun without stopping, pausing or even hesitating. The results of 13 consecutive sets of spins were: 81, 88, 65, 206, 90, 30, 38, 11, 19, 16, 118, 85 and 28. We also timed a series of spins and the mean was 54 per minute. Thus although we did not time the continuous 206 spins, this series would have taken nearly four minutes. All the spins observed were in a clockwise direction (*BWP* states that Grey Phalarope *P. fulicarius* 'spins by revolving in either direction (mostly clockwise)', but says nothing about direction in Red-necked).

Hohn (1971) stated that Red-necked Phalaropes undertake an average 46 revolutions per minute when spinning but does not give a range, nor does he comment as to whether spinning is the common or normal form of feeding behaviour. Could it be that 206 continuous spins is a record? Hohn also deduced that phalaropes spin to bring prey into view or within reach. A detailed study of Red-necked Phalaropes spinning in an aquarium (Obst *et al.* 1996) showed that the leg movements involved in spinning produce a vortex in the water below the phalarope, which brings prey items towards the surface and within reach of the bird. Each one-second spin requires 7–8 kicks of the legs and lobed toes, so the Cley phalarope would have kicked its legs over 1,500 times during its session of 206 spins! Obst *et al.* also pointed out that phalaropes do not spin if adequate surface prey is available. Consequently, a spinning phalarope is not only a pleasure to

watch but is a helpful ecological indicator of the state of the waterbody.

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Editorial comment Spinning as a feeding mechanism, though widely mentioned in the literature for all three phalarope species, seems to be relatively rarely reported. We invite readers to submit brief details (date, place, habitat, weather, intensity of spinning, phalarope species involved) of any sightings of spinning behaviour for a possible future review of this behaviour in *BB*. *Eds*

Azure-winged Magpie catching an adult Barn Swallow

On 21st May 2011, by the Rio Gévora (north of Badajoz, Spain), we noticed small parties of adult and fledgling Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* perched in stands of *Arundo donax* growing beside the river. An Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus* approached one group of swallows, flying close to the riverside vegetation so that the swallows did not notice it until it was around 4 m from them. The magpie succeeded in catching an adult Barn Swallow by grabbing the swallow's wing with its feet – like a raptor – rather than its bill. It then landed in the reeds, where it proceeded to eat the swallow. Around 20 minutes later, the same or another Azure-winged Magpie attempted a similar manoeuvre, but this time was detected earlier and all the swallows flew up and avoided capture.

While nestling birds form part of the diet of Azure-winged Magpies (*BWP*), to our knowledge this is the first recorded instance of them taking apparently healthy adult birds. The closest recorded behaviour to our observations that we could find was of a captive Azure-winged Magpie attempting to catch injured small birds (Harrison 1976), although Magpies *Pica pica* have been recorded catching adult birds in flight (*BWP*).

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Western Jackdaw eating snail

While sitting in a parked car in St David's, Pembrokeshire, on 10th October 2011, I noticed five Western Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* which appeared to be rummaging in the roof gutters of a bungalow opposite. I saw one bird collect a quite large snail and carry it to the ridge tiles of the roof. It held the snail in one foot and carefully removed the 'meat' from the shell by pecking and pulling at the contents. A second Jackdaw collected another snail from the gutter, but subsequently dropped it and seemed to lose interest as the snail rolled down the roof back into the gutter. Snails and other molluscs are mentioned in the diet of Jackdaws in *BWP*, but the method of extraction seemed worthy of reporting.

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Letters

Hearing tests for bird survey workers

I have been following the correspondence on the hearing problems experienced by those of advancing years with great interest. My thanks to Dave Smallshire (a mere youngster at 60!) for suggesting the hearing test in the May issue of *BB*. I am still fortunate enough to be able to hear the song and calls of Goldcrests *Regulus regulus* well, so was not surprised to find that I could hear both 8 khz and 10 khz sounds (but no higher). The sonograms in *BWP* show that most Goldcrest vocalisations lie between 6 khz and 8 khz and therefore they are within my hearing capacity. Detecting such high-pitched calls, of course, depends partly on weather conditions and, in breezy weather, foliage noise does tend to mask such sounds – but probably for most birders, not just us older ones.

As a BTO Regional Rep., I am acutely aware of the problems of some survey volunteers. Indeed, a few potential volunteers in my region have declined to participate in the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) due to their diminishing ability to perceive certain bird sounds. Of the 57 BBS squares covered in my region, a quarter have significant suitable Goldcrest habitat. A quick, and very unscientific, exercise to check whether all my volunteers recorded Goldcrests in 2011 in such habitat revealed that most, including several of pensionable age, did so. In answer to Rowena Quantrill, the only female in this category recorded none! Apart from expected annual fluctuations, there seems to have been no apparent decline in the numbers of Goldcrests recorded in the few squares that have been monitored for long periods – some since 1994 – by the same individual observers (including myself). I have not rigorously analysed the regional tetrad data gathered for Bird Atlas 2007–11, but Goldcrests appear to have been recorded widely in all expected localities. This leads me to speculate that missing high-pitched sounds may be only a minor problem in the grand scheme of things, but I may be wrong!

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Richard Porter has a valid point about the effect of declining hearing in bird surveys (*Brit. Birds* 105: 152), but he and subsequent correspondents failed to consider another important variable in observers: eyesight. I can probably still hear as many Goldcrests as most people but since my eyes joined the queue for cataract removal I have increasing difficulty in seeing them, or raptors, or nests, or sorting out congregations of shore- and waterbirds. This consideration must also be important with people doing all sorts of surveys, since while the most important results should come from the same observers doing the same things repeatedly in the same places, they are less useful if they merely record their declining efficiency. While the results might be improved by the use of a telescope, this is not always practical, and anyway the method of observation would not be the same. It is difficult to know how to deal with this, since keen ageing people may either be unaware of their failing powers, or reluctant to admit them (maybe both Richard and I should have ruled ourselves out of TTVs for the Atlas?). Perhaps we should ask surveyors to give their age and state whether they can still separate House *Passer domesticus* and Tree Sparrows *P. montanus* at 50 paces and hear a Goldcrest. This might at least discourage those who can no longer do these things, but they remain only two among many problems with surveys – and the largest problem is often simply to find participants.

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Time out on retrospection?

In their recent dissertation on ornithological fraud, Harrop *et al.* (2012) expressed the hope that more research into and fresh debates on this murky subject would follow. Must they?

In a reappraisal of the 1950–57 rarities, Colin Bradshaw led an ad-hoc subcommittee of BBRC into a rational and quite brisk publication (Wallace *et al.* 2006). A clear target was hit with (to my knowledge) only two later county queries. In sharp contrast, the paper by Harrop *et al.* rakes over much cold ash and yet fails to make clear which species feature in the possibly substantial number of questionable yet still accepted pre-1950 records. So I decided to probe the remaining insecurity in the records of extreme rarities before 1950.

In Naylor (1996), I found 94 species that were true rarities before 1950 and still had some records from that time accepted. Within these I looked closely at the 18 species still on the British List which would have presumably been highly valued in the collector/exhibitor marketplace *and* which remain exceptional finds today. Individually, they had attracted no more than nine reports before 1950 *and* had held onto no more than six acceptances since (Parkin & Knox 2010). In total, the 81 pre-1950 reports of the 18 species had been purified into 18 first records (via BOURC), eight seconds and 14 other sets of thirds or greater numbers (via BBRC, IRBC and county authorities). Nine species had been sanitised up to eight times and none of the rarest (those with only one or two surviving records) lacked the company of near-European acceptances (Mitchell & Young 1999). I detected no nest of vipers. Other similar probes of list risk could have been done by Harrop *et al.*

Later on in the explicit traumas, I found ten accounts of alleged misconduct: one in 1946, one in 1967 and eight from 1977 to 2011. In the last period there was one admitted fraudulent protest and three examples beyond reasonable doubt of strung claims. I do not recall when 'stringing' was fully diagnosed but I suspect that it germinated on a rainy day in Scilly, not later than 1971, when the late Bernard King *et al.* totted up some list lengths. Inadvertently, the well-meant utterance was the touch paper to increasing list comparison and competition and successive outbursts of disbelief and envy.

Meanwhile the reiteration of ancient misbehaviour adds nothing to our understanding of current risks or the correlation of the remarkably overt strictures of the twitching fraternity. The latter has included the general (so inactionable) statement of Lee Evans, broadcast on Radio 4, that '13% of birders are untrustworthy'. Compared with it, the relevance of the misdemeanours of professional scientists quoted by Harrop *et al.* in the overwhelmingly recreational theatre of amateur bird recording is rather distant.

Crucially, all parties to the issues raised by Harrop *et al.* should also remember that the maintenance of the British List and the compilation of the BBRC report requires not only the expert vigilance of the BOURC and BBRC but also the voluntary compliance of hundreds of county recorders and observers. The acceptance by observers of the disciplines exercised by the two authorities stems entirely from consent and respect, and I wonder how those observers will react to the re-expression of multiple allegations of deceitful motives and acts. These seem to distil into five syndromes: prank, financial gain, peer pressure and resultant alterations of repute, and potentially career-advancing fraud. Among the clues for these, the committees clearly pick up most on such perceived aberrations as serial single-observer claims, alterations in strike rate and insufficient other bird finds. Yet no indication whatsoever emerges of the intelligence sources for these measures. At my last ask, the BBRC database still lacked observer names.

Harrop *et al.* have tried to be fair in their review, admitting to some cherry-picked examples, but they have missed from the final edit of their text a clear Freudian slip: 'to extrapolate from... suspected cases of fraud'. Were the whole record review system not vested in consent but bound by law, that kind of injudicious leap and many other inferences from hearsay would be inadmissible in court.

Nobody will write it but a companion text to the recent paper 'Beams in their eyes? The risk to continuing observer consent to rarity recording disciplines from excess zeal' would be welcome. Finally, I suggest that as the conservation value of vagrancy science is minuscule, the BOURC would make better use of its time if it ended its TSC's inaction on the urgent question of which British subspecies are or are not valid taxa and so worthy of conservation concern and effort. For their sake, let us put living birds at risk first.

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What the eye does see: misrepresenting the views of others, and a Freudian slip?

While we agree with Harrop *et al.* (2012) that fraud or deception of one kind or another has occurred (and continues to occur) in ornithology, it seems worth raising the following points.

Harrop *et al.* listed a number of letters published in *British Birds* to, wrongly, imply that we (and others) are 'in denial' that specimen fraud has taken place in the past, despite 'accumulated' and 'substantial' evidence to the contrary. However, the letters with which we were involved discussed specific records that had been rejected by the BOURC, but for which there was a complete lack of either 'accumulated' or 'substantial' evidence of sharp practice (see, in particular, Combridge *et al.* 2010, 2011). In this connection, it is curious that when the BOURC replied to Combridge (2008) they stated that: 'Pete Combridge and others [Chris Smout and Martin Woodcock, *Brit. Birds* 101: 211–213] who have defended the provenance of the 1908 Kermadec Petrel [*Pterodroma neglecta*]... are making good points' (*Brit. Birds* 101: 322). The charge of being 'in denial' is thus not only misleading but also at variance with this statement.

The fact that Harrop *et al.* cited our letter discussing a 1911 record of Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro* in Hampshire (Combridge & Wiseman 2009) as an example of fraud denial is particularly strange, as the BOURC's reply (*BB* 102: 214–215) did not list fraud as one of the reasons for its rejection. Unless Harrop *et al.* are getting themselves into a muddle, this could suggest a Freudian slip and that the date – falling within the time period of the Hastings Rarities (Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees 1962) – did this particular record no favours.

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The status of second-calendar-year Honey-buzzards in Europe

The spring passage of second-calendar-year (2CY) Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* at the Strait of Messina in southern Italy was discussed by Panuccio & Agostini (2006). Of the 487 Honey-buzzards observed there from 27th April to 31st May 2004 for which the age could be determined, they considered 18 (3.7%) to be 2CY birds, and a further 48 birds to be probably of this age class. Panuccio *et al.* (2004) had earlier reported around 55 2CY Honey-buzzards on migration at Ustica Island (Sicily) during the first ten days of May 2002, some 3.6% of a total of 1,530 observed.

Prior to this, 2CY Honey-buzzards were considered exceptionally rare in Europe. For example, Forsman & Shirihai (1997) commented on the difficulties of ageing 2CY Honey-buzzards accurately, discussed the ease with which adult females with juvenile-like plumage can be mistaken for 2CY birds in spring and were unaware of any sightings of this age class in the Western Palearctic documented by photos. Major raptor identification works, including Clark (1999), Forsman (1999) and Gensbol (2008), provided only limited information on the identification of 2CY birds in spring. Panuccio *et al.* (2004) and Panuccio & Agostini (2006) did not specify the characters they used to determine the age of 2CY birds.

Separating juvenile Honey-buzzards in their second calendar-year from some older females (particularly some 3CY birds) can be extremely difficult, particularly in spring, after a winter of plumage abrasion and bleaching in the African tropics. Over the last 25 years, I have observed several million Honey-buzzards throughout the Western Palearctic but seen no more than ten birds that I could age confidently as 2CY; an additional 20 birds or so were probably also of this age class. The birds confidently aged as 2CY included five fully white-headed birds showing the following important characters: remiges and rectrices with juvenile patterning (albeit appearing bleached and abraded), in particular with the outermost (fingered) primaries being almost entirely dark and the secondaries almost solidly dark, with wider dark bars than most adult females; a shorter tail compared with adults in the same flock; a different wing profile, appearing rather more S-shaped; and a contrasting blackish eye-mask. The remaining five were darker but shared the same structure and wing pattern.

Panuccio & Agostini (2006) referred only to the bare-part coloration of the birds they considered to be 2CY. Many adults show variable bare-part and iris colours, and it is extremely difficult to determine the age reliably in the field using these characters alone (Corso in prep.). When discussing the 48 probable 2CY birds, Panuccio & Agostini (2006) stated that: 'the late timing of their passage suggests that these birds were not adults.' In fact, it is not unusual to see adult Honey-buzzards on migration in mid to late June (Shirihai *et al.* 2000; Corso 2005a,b).

Evidence from museum specimens and ringing recoveries

Panuccio & Agostini (2006) noted that six apparent 2CY Honey-buzzards collected in Italy in spring are held in the Arrigoni Degli Oddi Ornithological Collection at the Zoological Museum of Rome. During visits to this collection, I located several adult (or possibly 3CY) Honey-buzzards labelled incorrectly as 2CY. Only one, collected in Sicily and reportedly taken in spring, is aged correctly as a juvenile. However, this bird is in fresh plumage, with no sign of wear, bleaching or moult; it seems likely that it was labelled incorrectly and was actually collected in autumn. In addition, notes by Del Nero, the taxidermist who prepared the above specimens, indicate that some birds, most probably younger adults (3CY+), can show variable bare-part colours, reinforcing the point that it is extremely difficult to use these characters to age Honey-buzzards confidently.

Lars Svensson (*in litt.*) has commented that only three birds with Swedish rings have been found in the spring of their second calendar-year, one each in Sweden, Germany and Italy. Of these, the Italian record concerns a bird ringed in Sweden in summer 1925 and recovered in Italy on 26th April 1926. There is some uncertainty about the ringing and recovery data of the German

record, while the Swedish recovery concerned a ring found with the decomposed remains of the bird, so it is possible that this bird could have died during its first autumn. Svensson also described a record of a Honey-buzzard recovered in April of its second calendar-year in Norway. This is an extremely early date for this species to reach northern Europe and this bird may have spent the winter in Europe. Indeed, there are several documented records of Honey-buzzards wintering in Italy and elsewhere in the Western Palearctic, the majority being juveniles that have interrupted their southbound migration for some reason (e.g. Grussu & Azzolini 1997, Grussu & Corso 1997, Grussu *et al.* 1998, Corso *et al.* 2000, Corso 2005b and Ruggieri & Nicoli 2009).

Discussion

If 2CY Honey-buzzards are reaching Europe regularly in spring, it is likely that they will pass through migration bottlenecks such as Eilat. However, this appears not to be the case. Shirihai *et al.* (2000) noted a late-spring passage of non-adult Honey-buzzards in Israel, some of them considered to be 2CY birds, but those findings have now been reconsidered; Shirihai (*in litt.*) commented that, in the 1980s and 1990s, they considered some spring birds to be 2CY or 2CY/3CY, but subsequent observations have failed to reveal any 2CY birds and as a result he now considers that some of the earlier birds were aged incorrectly.

It is certainly possible that small numbers of 2CY Honey-buzzards reach Europe in spring, but the evidence suggests overwhelmingly that they appear much less frequently than reported by Panuccio *et al.* (2004) and Panuccio & Agostini (2006). The importance of establishing the pattern of the fingered outer primaries, the key character for ageing Honey-buzzards reliably (Forsman & Shirihai 1997; Forsman 1999), cannot be overstressed and any claim of 2CY Honey-buzzards in spring should be documented carefully, incorporating some or all of the characters described in the third paragraph above. Other reported ageing characters, including bare-part and iris colour, remain both highly variable and difficult to determine accurately under field conditions.

Acknowledgments

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The status of second-calendar-year Honey-buzzards in Europe *cont.*

At the time of our observations, the only information on the characters of 2CY Honey-buzzard was given by Forsman (1999). In addition to plumage features, Forsman stated that: 'Captive birds in 2nd cy summer had a yellow cere with darker spots and the eyes were turning yellow, appearing pale from a distance... Iris already dull yellow and cere showing dark spots by 2nd cy Feb'. Accordingly, we considered that only individuals showing a yellow cere, dark iris *and* juvenile plumage characters (in particular, from below, a largely black wing-tip with pale primary bases, contrasting with largely dark secondaries with just the bases paler) were 2CY birds, in order to keep our data as conservative as possible. We chose a watchpoint from which it was possible to observe a good sample of raptors at close range and, since juvenile birds are expected to migrate later than adults, we decided to continue the fieldwork until the end of May, later than other monitoring projects in the central Mediterranean area (Gustin *et al.* 2005). Since we aged birds only when it was possible to observe both cere and iris, only 4.2% of Honey-buzzards counted in spring 2004 were considered in the analysis.

Further data were provided by two birds killed by poachers at the Strait of Messina in spring 2004 and by those held in the Zoological Museum of Rome. As at the Strait of Messina, we considered both the plumage *and* the colour of the cere/iris. Since the iris had been lost and the cere is often damaged in museum specimens, we checked the notes of the taxidermist. In particular, we did not use the taxidermist's determination of age but simply their description of iris and cere colour.

Corso (above) sheds doubts on the number of 2CY Honey-buzzards (18 individuals) that we reported at the Strait of Messina. However, it is not unexpected that limited numbers of 2CY long-distance-migrant raptors reach the Mediterranean and Europe, as in the case of Short-toed Eagles *Circaetus gallicus* (Premuda *et al.* 2010; Mellone *et al.* 2011). Moreover, in the case of the Honey-buzzard, it is well known that a higher proportion of juveniles has been reported along the central Mediterranean flyway than along the eastern and western detour routes during autumn migration (Agostini & Logozzo 1995; Schmid 2000; Hake *et al.* 2003). Unlike Corso, we suggest that a higher proportion of 2CY birds migrate through this Mediterranean area in spring too, retracing the track of their first southbound migration. We hope that, as characters for identifying 2CY Honey-buzzards continue to develop, it will be possible to verify further that up to 3% of the Honey-buzzards migrating through the central Mediterranean in spring are 2CY birds.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Carla Marangoni of the Zoological Museum of Rome for permission to examine and photograph the museum's Honey-buzzard collection.

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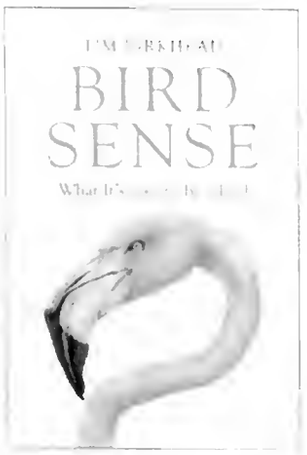
Reviews



Bird Sense: what it's like to be a bird

By Tim Birkhead
Bloomsbury, 2012
Hbk, 266pp including 50pp of notes and references; black-and-white illustrations
ISBN 978-1-4088-2013-1 Subbuteo code M21127
£16.99 *BB* Bookshop price £15.25

Any bird book that opens with the word 'Buggered' deserves more than a cursory glance. And when it's written by Tim Birkhead, you sit up and take note.

Written in Birkhead's deceptively easy style, this delightful little book is a wander through the avian senses, with chapters on seeing, hearing, touch, taste, smell, magnetics and (perhaps a little unexpectedly) emotion. He draws together a mass of information – historical, anecdotal, anatomical, observational and experimental, interwoven with entertaining little personal reminiscences – and uses this to analyse and describe how the avian brain interacts with the outside world. This is effectively a book on avian behavioural physiology – a new branch of science? If that sounds dull, then it is my literary weakness, for this is a fascinating read. There is some stuff that 'everyone' knows, but lots more that is new and beautifully described.

I found the chapter on magnetic sense both illuminating and frustrating. He presents a succinct review of the history of experimental bird migration showing how (at least some) birds must use the earth's magnetic field to orientate and navigate. Yet, a few years ago, hardly anyone believed that birds could sense this at all. Frustratingly, many links in the story remain to be discovered: maybe that's why this chapter is the shortest! How exactly do birds like Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica* find their way non-stop across the Pacific from Alaska to New Zealand, or Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* navigate from Skomer and Skokholm to Argentina? Are they really using magnetism? How important is magnetite in this physiology? How does magnetic sensitivity interact with vision? If this chapter doesn't fire up undergraduate ornithologists to study bird migration, then I despair!

On the subject of emotion, Birkhead spends a good deal of space describing the neurobiology and endocrinology of emotion in mammals generally and humans in particular. Since birds have essentially the same hormones, maybe they can also feel affection, fear, hope, despair? He doesn't climb down off the fence here – we just don't know. That's what makes this book so engaging: there is so much that we don't know and, unlike many authors, he doesn't pretend that it is otherwise.

Oh yes, and 'Buggered' is the word he uses to describe the bird fauna of New Zealand. Not sure it has a lot to do with avian senses, but it's spot on. My own first visit to that country began with a drive north from Auckland Airport: it was two hours before I saw a non-European bird – and that was a myna (Sturnidae). This is an excellent book: how I wish I could write like that!

David Parkin

Finding Birds in The Gambia

By Dave Gosney
Easybirder, 2012
DVD (92 mins) and 40-page booklet
ISBN 978-1-907316-36-4/37-1 Subbuteo code V80095
BB Bookshop price £20.00

This is the eleventh 'Gosney' in the series and explores the tiny Republic of The Gambia – which is less than 50 km across at its widest point going upstream. Starting on the North Coast with its popular tourist hotels, Dave explores the Kotu Creek and sewage ponds, Fajara golf course and Casino cycle track, together with other local sites familiar to many people. He then discovers the west

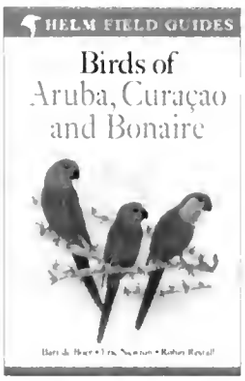
coast with its coastal lagoons and wooded scrub and sites such as the impressive Kartong bird observatory. Moving east, the popular Abuko reserve is dealt with in some detail. Then moving past Pirang the journey takes in Ginack Island, and then upriver on a solar-powered boat to Tendaba, Janjanbureh and MacCarthy Island. In total 30 sites are visited.

The habitat and surroundings are shown for each site, and Dave is often in front of the camera giving his own perspective on the best way to see the most birds. A new development is informal interviews with the guides and owners of the bird lodges. There is plenty of great bird footage and almost 170 species are featured, including targets such as Egyptian Plover *Pluvianus aegyptius*, Black-crowned Crane *Balearica pavonina* and African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*. A gallery of photos by Steve Garvie and Modou Colley is also included on the DVD.

As always the booklet describing the sites is detailed and enormously helpful, with clear maps and precise GPS readings for locations. You could simply buy this on its own, but the DVD brings it all to life.

I made my first trip to The Gambia almost 30 years ago and it is good to see that the birding opportunities are perhaps better now than they were then. Despite the fact that I've made two further trips, I still discovered new locations with this DVD and booklet – which is probably the best test for any such product.

Keith Betton



Birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire

By Bart de Boer, Eric Newton and Robin Restall
Helm, 2012
Pbk, 192pp, 71 colour plates
ISBN 978-1-4081-3727-7 Subbuteo code M21044
£24.99 *BB* Bookshop price £22.49

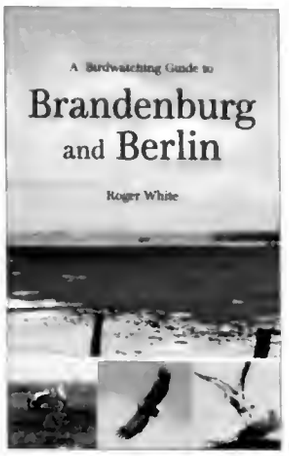
Known until 2010 as the Netherlands Antilles, these islands made up an autonomous Caribbean country which was part of the Netherlands. Often referred to as 'the ABC islands' they are semi-arid, with distinct dry and rainy seasons, and lie off the north coast of Venezuela in the southern part of the Caribbean Sea. The bird fauna of the islands is considered to be South American but there is also a strong West Indian element, most marked in Bonaire.

The islands have around 70 breeding species and do not support any endemics, but at least 16 local subspecies have been described, including four exclusively from Bonaire and two from each of Curaçao and Aruba. Of particular interest are well-differentiated forms of White-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus cayennensis*, Brown-throated Parakeet *Aratinga pertinax* and Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*. The only threatened species on the islands is the Yellow-shouldered Amazon *Amazona barbadensis*, which is restricted to Bonaire.

In 1983, Karel Voous produced an English version of his *Birds of the Netherlands Antilles* but, despite an extensive text, the book was inadequately illustrated. So this is the first comprehensive book on the birds of the region. It is laid out in typical field-guide style with annotated colour plates on the right-hand pages, featuring around five species and text on the opposite page. Among the 71 colour plates there are almost 1,000 images of 285 species. The majority of Robin Restall's illustrations have been taken directly from his *Birds of Northern South America* and the smaller *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, although others have been newly created. The plates are over-colourful in places and the proportions of some of the birds (particularly the waders) feel out of proportion. Some migrants from North America are illustrated only in non-breeding plumage, since these birds will have already moulted by the time they arrive on the islands in the autumn.

The text is concise and covers the main identification topics, including plumage features, voice, habitat and status. An introductory section discusses the history, geography and biodiversity of the islands, including notes on the best spots to go birding. Alternative names are given in Dutch and Papiamento (the local creole language). Given the small size of the islands there are no maps, but a checklist indicates which islands each species has been recorded from. The status texts emphasise how the majority of species in this book are, in fact, rare visitors to these islands, and your likely trip list will comprise a meagre 70–80 species. While these islands are popular with American tourists, and divers in particular, there is relatively little to attract the keen birder. However, if you do decide to visit, this is the guide to take.

Keith Betton



A Birdwatching Guide to Brandenburg and Berlin

By Roger White
Published privately by the author, 2012
Pbk, 230pp, colour photos and maps
ISBN 978-0-9571695-0-0 Subbuteo code M21253
£19.50 *BB* Bookshop price £17.50

Brandenburg is one of the 16 federal states of Germany. Bordering Poland, it surrounds the national capital of Berlin, which is also a federal state in its own right. The combined surface area of over 30,000 km^2 means that it is about 50% larger than Wales but is almost totally flat. It has a rich diversity of birds, some of which are rare in the UK and much of Europe. With over 3,000 lakes, this is a region where large numbers of wintering geese can be found, and in the right months you can connect with thousands of migrating Common Cranes *Grus grus* as well. In all seasons there are plenty of raptors, and this is where you can see the last remaining population of the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* in northern Europe. Other local specialities include Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Little Crake *Porzana parva*, River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*, Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*, Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* and Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*.

With a wealth of cheap flights from the UK to both of Berlin's airports, and a journey time of around two hours, it is surprising that more birders do not visit the area. As Roger White suggests, the reason is probably the dearth of information in English that could direct birders to the best locations. This guide details 110 sites and divides them into eight regions, including 31 in Berlin itself. For each region there are numerous maps, each of which covers several sites. I did find myself getting slightly confused by the use of numbers to indicate options within each site (so sites 1 and 2 appear on map 1, but are numbered 1 to 5, while site 3 appears on map 2 but is numbered 1 and 2). So I do recommend getting to know this book before you arrive in Germany, perhaps using Google Earth to allow you to 'explore' it in some detail. Personally, I like to work out GPS co-ordinates for parking spots and secluded locations, and had these been included in the book I think it would have helped a great deal.

Hints about accommodation and useful websites are given for each region, together with details of access by car or public transport. There are many photographs showing the habitats and main features. A list of about 250 regular species is provided with English, German and scientific names. The main index allows quick reference to find sites for your target species. This is a nicely produced book, which will certainly help anyone who decides to watch birds in this surprisingly rich area of eastern Germany.

Keith Betton

Life on the Wing

By Derwent May
Robson Press, 2012
Hbk, 235pp, black-and-white illustrations
ISBN 978-1-84954-249-4 Subbuteo code M21350
£15.99 *BB* Bookshop price £14.25

Derwent May has been writing his *Feather Reports* in *The Times* for around 30 years, short, chatty and very personal accounts of his wanderings as a birdwatcher. Not surprisingly (for, among other things, he is both a poet and a literary critic), they are carefully crafted and well-written pieces. There is also something delightfully old-fashioned about them – reflecting the author, who, I think, will always be a birdwatcher rather than a birder.

This a collection of these weekly offerings, arranged by the months of the year. Their style will not be to everyone's taste, but there is no mistaking Derwent May's enthusiasm for his subject – nor the depth of his knowledge. His little stories are generally spot on, too: I know from personal experience how thoroughly he does his homework.

It is surely a good thing that collections like this are published. It is a shame, though, that not many copies are likely to be sold.

Mike Everett

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

First ever Spoon-billed Sandpiper chicks hatch in the UK

In mid July, 14 Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* were hatched in captivity at WWT Slimbridge, in Gloucestershire, a first for the UK and only the second flock ever to have been hatched in captivity. These latest chicks are part of the emergency conservation breeding mission to insure the species against imminent extinction in the wild. As we went to press, four further eggs were expected to hatch, which would bring the total flock size at Slimbridge to 30. The size of the flock is critical for triggering breeding behaviour in these extraordinary waders, which reproduce at two years old.

The birds were hatched from eggs taken from the tiny remaining wild population which breeds on the sub-Arctic tundra in the Russian Far East. They were flown by helicopter and plane on a week-long journey via Anadyr, Moscow and Heathrow before arriving at Slimbridge. WWT Head of Conservation Breeding, Nigel Jarrett, travelled with the eggs and is overseeing the care of the tiny chicks, which hatched the size of bumblebees. He said: 'We hatched the first of our conservation breeding flock on the tundra last year and brought them back when full grown. With all we learned then, it made sense to transport them as eggs this year and the huge privilege for the UK is to have these amazing little chicks hatch here for the first time.'

The dramatic decline in Spoon-billed Sandpiper numbers was first observed in 2000. Now fewer than 100 pairs are thought to remain. Christoph Zockler led the expedition this summer to Meinypil'gino, the main breeding site, on behalf of Birds Russia. He said: 'The number of pairs returning to Meinypil'gino dropped again this year, to fewer than ten pairs, [reflecting] the wide-ranging conservation problems along the birds' flyway. We did have some good news, though. With more volunteer fieldworkers this year, we were able to search more remote areas away from the village for the first time and we found five further pairs.'

Tim Stowe, Director of International Operations at the RSPB, said: 'This is a great example of organisations, experts and individuals from around the world working together to save an animal from extinction. All elements of this project – from our work with subsistence hunters in Myanmar and Bangladesh, to efforts in Asia, where the birds' habitat is severely under threat, and the captive breeding programme here in the UK – will make sure future generations won't have to rely on pictures of a quirky little bird that could have been saved if only we hadn't let them down.'

Debbie Pain, Director of Conservation at WWT, said: 'The level of support for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been phenomenal. But it is expensive work and we are still £50,000 short just for this year. I urge anyone who is taken by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper to make a donation, however small.'

Visit www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com or search for the hashtag #sbs2012ex on twitter.

Paul Marshall/WWT

266. A one-day-old Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* chick.

Gamekeeper fined for trapping and starving Buzzard

Defra may have backed away from its controversial trial of Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* 'control' (*Brit. Birds* 105: 424–425), but one gamekeeper has been caught trying to implement his own. RSPB Scotland has welcomed the conviction of a Perthshire gamekeeper who allowed a Buzzard to starve to death in a trap.

The case began when Tayside Police responded to a report from a hillwalker that three crow traps had been found on the Glen Lyon Estate in Perth & Kinross containing a dead Buzzard, a dead Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* and two Common Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs*, respectively. Jonathan Smith Graham, a gamekeeper on the estate, pleaded guilty at Perth Sheriff Court to using a crow trap in which a Buzzard was trapped and starved to death. His 'not guilty' plea was accepted for the two other charges.

Sheriff McCreadie said: 'This case involved a dereliction of duty to wild birds. You did not act as a reasonably competent gamekeeper.' He compared the case to that of a drink-driving offence in which there is a mandatory disqualification, where conviction 'can lead to consequences including loss of employment.' He went on to say: 'I am satisfied that this is a case where a fine is appropriate, not only for you, but to discourage others.' Graham was fined £450 but, perhaps more importantly, he has now been banned from operating a crow cage trap for five years.

Speaking after the court case, Ian Thomson, RSPB Scotland's Head of Investigations, said: 'We welcome the conviction of Mr Graham and the strong comments made by the Sheriff. This latest case illustrates, yet again, the lax approach taken by some gamekeepers to following the licence conditions laid out by the Scottish Government. The use of these licences is a privilege, and with this comes responsibility. Mr Smith clearly did not take his responsibilities seriously and has now lost that right.'

Golden Eagle found poisoned

Police are appealing for information after a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* was found dead near Morar, Lochaber (Highland) in March. A post-mortem showed that the eagle had been poisoned with banned pesticides. This is the third known eagle poisoning incident in the area over the last ten years, with two White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* being the previous victims.

Ian Thomson, RSPB Scotland, said: 'Despite the hard work being done by the police and partner agencies, some individuals continue to disregard the law, and public opinion, by killing protected birds of prey. Sadly, this is just the latest in a long list of Golden Eagles found poisoned over the last few years, and that only represents those actually discovered. Who knows how many of these magnificent birds are killed but never found? We condemn the actions of those who continue to kill Scotland's birds of prey, and hope that anyone with information related to this or other wildlife crimes will step up and pass this to the police or contact Crimestoppers.'

The eagle had been fitted with a satellite transmitter in 2010 prior to fledging from a nest in a habitat management area created by Scottish Power Renewables beside Beinn an Tuirc windfarm on the Kintyre peninsula.

Golden Jubilee of nesting survey

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in the UK, one year after it was first published in the USA. What is perhaps less well known is that it also marks the 50th anniversary of an unusual bird survey carried out by then *BB* Editor James Ferguson-Lees, in company with fellow naturalists Dennis Elliott and Bruce Campbell. Their aim? To see how many nesting species they could find at the Southill Park Estate in Bedfordshire.

This 1963 endeavour was itself undertaken to mark the 60th anniversary of a similar outing in 1903 involving Jannion Steele-Elliott (uncle of Dennis) and Ronald Bruce Campbell (father of Bruce). On that turn-of-century occasion the pair found nests with eggs of 27 different species. This was thought to be 'a feat which can have few parallels in British field ornithology'. As it turned out, the sixties group nearly emulated them – but not quite.

Having discovered the story of this repeated survey in an old copy of *The Bedfordshire Naturalist* (the tale was also republished as a chapter in the book *Best Days with British Birds*, in 1989), Conor Jameson thought that it would be remiss not to attempt to repeat the project, 50 years on. Barry Nightingale – who carries out

WeBS surveys at the park's extensive lake – sought permission (duly and kindly granted) from the Southill Estate to carry out a recce in June 2012. Barry and Richard Bashford will again join Conor for the full survey in early June next year, the results of which will be written up for *BB*.

'It will provide a unique opportunity to gain a snapshot of how things have changed across the last century or so, and since *Silent Spring*, and the Edwardian era, on one carefully managed and very scenically appealing lowland English estate, with a range of interesting habitats,' said Conor. 'There will be a bit less emphasis on finding the actual nests,' added Richard Bashford. 'It's not just that we may have lost some of those old nest-finding skills of our forebears, but times of course have changed. We'll settle for 'strong evidence of breeding' – and see how we go. We found quite a few in five hours this time, and will have longer to look on the big day, next year.'

Black-winged Stilts attempt to breed in Somerset

Yet another long-legged bird has found Somerset to its liking, following recent breeding success in the county for Great White Egret *Egretta alba*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (see *Brit. Birds* 105: 423–424).

This spring saw a noticeable influx of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* into Britain. Although they turned up in most of the surrounding counties, they seemed to be actively avoiding Somerset, where the last twitchable bird was in May 1980, at Steart. Then, on 2nd June, local birder Roger Musgrove hit the jackpot on Curry Moor, which (unusually for the time of year) was flooded after prolonged heavy rain. As other local birders gathered on site, one Black-winged Stilt quickly became three, and it also became apparent that something even more remarkable was happening – two of the birds were a pair, and they were nesting!

The RSPB was informed and arrangements put in place for 24-hour monitoring of the site. Alas, in worsening weather, the birds stopped sitting – less than a week after the nest was discovered, it had been deserted. In fact, the attempt may have been doomed anyway, since the remaining floodwater was low in oxygen and it is doubtful that there would have been enough food available on site to support the chicks.

Brian Hill, President of Somerset Ornithological Society, said: 'In a year when the UK's first pair of Great White Egrets has fledged three young in Somerset, it would have been another great coup if the stilts had also been successful, but it was not to be. Many thanks, though, to the farmers and landowners of Curry Moor who reacted so positively and sympathetically to the news of the attempt despite the difficult circumstances.'

(*Contributed by Julian Thomas*)

Green shoots of recovery for House Sparrows?

The House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* has been in long-term decline in the UK and BTO surveys show that the number of House Sparrows using garden feeders in winter has fallen by two-thirds since the early 1970s. The middle of the last decade saw a particularly sudden decrease, which coincided with a large outbreak of the disease trichomonosis in Greenfinches *Chloris chloris* and Chaffinches. It is possible that trichomonosis might also have had an impact on House Sparrows, although further analysis is required to establish a link.

Since the lows of 2006 and 2007, however, the numbers of House Sparrows in gardens have rallied and are now approaching a six-year high. This recovery is fragile, however, and English House Sparrows in particular are in need of some TLC. Since 1995, when the year-round BTO Garden BirdWatch survey started, declines of House Sparrows in English gardens have been much steeper than those in Scottish or Welsh gardens. On average, almost one in four English gardens has lost its House Sparrows since 1995, compared with fewer than one in ten in both Scotland and Wales. Early indications suggest that Irish House Sparrows are also faring better than those in England. A new House Sparrow factsheet is available free from the BTO (just e-mail gbw@bto.org).

Cuckoo update

Since last month's issue, there has been plenty to report on the Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* sponsored by *British Birds*, part of the BTO Cuckoo project. BB was the first of the Scottish Cuckoos to leave the UK, on 18th June, arriving in the Netherlands after an unusually long sea crossing. From the Netherlands, he passed through Germany and the Czech Republic and, as we went to press, he had arrived in northern Italy. Follow his progress, and that of the other satellite-tagged Cuckoos, at www.bto.org

Cornish Choughs are Irish

The Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* stands proud on the Cornish coat of arms but the species became extinct in the Duchy in 1947, denuding Cornwall of one of its most charismatic birds and cultural symbols. That was until three Choughs of unknown origin appeared in Cornwall in 2001 and founded a new breeding population, restoring the 'Cornish Chough' to its historical home and causing great excitement among birdwatchers and conservationists alike. (See the paper by Ian Johnstone *et al.* in the August 2011 issue of *BB* for a fuller account of the Chough's return to Cornwall; *Brit. Birds* 104: 416–431.)

Terry Whittaker/FLPA

267. Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*, Saltee, Co. Wexford; it now appears that Choughs from Ireland may be the source of the re-establishing population in Cornwall.

But where did the three pioneer Choughs come from? Until now, it had been assumed that they had come from Chough populations in Wales or Brittany. But now, genetic analysis suggests that they came from even farther afield – from Ireland, in fact.

Scientists from the University of Aberdeen collected moulted feathers from the Cornish Choughs, and from Choughs in other populations across Europe. They extracted DNA from the feathers, and compared the DNA sequences of the new Cornish Choughs with those of Choughs living elsewhere. By far the best match to the Cornish Choughs came from birds in Ireland, suggesting an unexpected Celtic origin for the new Cornish birds.

Dr Jane Reid, Royal Society University Research Fellow at the University, said: 'We would never have known the origin of the new Cornish Choughs without the DNA analysis – we didn't guess that they had come from Ireland.'

The RSPB's Claire Mucklow, one of the co-authors of the *BB* paper referred to above, added: 'We assumed that those intrepid colonists would have come from closer populations; how wonderful that they have turned out to be Irish! The return of Choughs to Cornwall has been very significant, not just in terms of conservation but in terms of Cornwall's cultural heritage.'

The new Cornish Chough population is now going from strength to strength and five pairs bred successfully in 2012. The future success of the population is being ensured by conservation organisations and farmers, who are working to provide suitable habitat, and by volunteers, who provide round-the-clock surveillance of nests.

With recent sightings of colour-ringed Welsh Choughs in north Devon, there is potential for a merging of Celtic Chough diversity in southwest England, which researchers say can only be positive for the future prospects of this terrific species.

BB at the Birdfair

Forget the Jubilee, forget the Olympics. THE event of the summer will be the 2012 British Birdwatching Fair, according to the Birdfair organisers. The 24th annual Birdfair takes place over the weekend of 17th–19th August and *British Birds* will be there. You can find our stand, as ever, in Marquee 3. Do come along and say hello.

We'll be exhibiting the winners of the Bird Photograph of the Year competition and this year *you* can be a judge too! For fun, we're conducting a 'people's vote' to see if the birding public agrees with the judges' choice.

This year's Birdfair is again raising funds for BirdLife's Flyways campaign with the East Asian–Australasian Flyway used by so many threatened shorebirds featured. www.birdfair.org.uk

For extended versions of many of the stories featured here, and much more, visit our website www.britishbirds.co.uk

Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers early June to early July 2012.

Headlines In the midsummer period it is often quality rather than quantity that stands out and 2012 was no exception. Crowd-pleasers included a lingering Little Swift in Cheshire & Wirral, a Little Bittern in Hertfordshire and a Pacific Golden Plover in Norfolk, while Black-eared Wheatear in Lincolnshire and Trumpeter Finch on St Kilda were less easy to connect with. Rare warblers in Shetland included Arctic, River, Paddyfield and Great Reed, while at the 'scoter hotspot' of Blackdog, in North-east Scotland, a Black Scoter and up to six Surf Scoters were on view, along with a King Eider. A widespread influx of Rose-coloured Starlings reached most regions, and there was a typically good selection of waders and terns reported.

Mark Rayment

268. First-summer female Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Stocker's Lake, Hertfordshire, June 2012.

American Wigeon *Anas americana* Loch of Strathbeg (North-east Scotland), 17th–26th June; Graemeshall Loch (Orkney), 7th July. Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), 30th June to 8th July. Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* North American race *dresseri*, Malin Head (Co. Donegal), long-stayer to at least 16th June. King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* Blackdog (North-east Scotland), long-stayer to 1st July; Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire), 1st July. Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* Long-stayers at Blackdog to 8th July, with up to six in this period, and Burray (Orkney), to 19th June; Monifieth (Angus & Dundee), 1st–6th July. Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* Blackdog, 14th June to 6th July. White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* Fetlar (Shetland), 10th–11th June. Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* Off Scilly, one 13th June, two 2nd July.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Stocker's Lake (Hertfordshire), 10th–17th June. Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Pennington (Hampshire), long-stayer to 21st June; Holy Island (Northumberland), 25th June; Sand Voe (Shetland), remains found, 28th June; Hampton (Greater London), 1st July. Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* Seaford (Sussex), 21st June; Welney (Norfolk), 30th June to 1st July. Great White Egret *Ardea alba* Records from Cheshire & Wirral, Cornwall, Isle of Wight, Somerset and Sussex. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Dungeness (Kent), long-stayer to 14th June; Grove Ferry (Kent), 29th June to 1st July. Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* Loch Fleet (Highland), 6th July. White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* Long-staying, wandering group of four Somerset, 13th–18th June, then in Caernarfonshire on 19th June and Derbyshire on 28th June; also three in Sussex, 20th–30th June. Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Long-stayers in Hampshire, Pembrokeshire (with presumably another on Skokholm,

Adrian Kettle

Adrian Kettle

269. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Cley, Norfolk, June 2012.

8th July), Suffolk and Sussex; two at Combwich (Somerset), 11th June; Upper Lough Erne (Co. Fermanagh), 13th–19th June; Cahore (Co. Wexford), 24th June; Tacumshin, 25th–30th June, then two to 8th July; Clogheen Marsh (Co. Cork), 1st July.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Lincoln (Lincolnshire), 17th June; Shetland (various localities), 18th–27th June; St John's Loch (Highland), 19th June; Stonehenge (Wiltshire), 23rd June; Buckden (Cambridgeshire), 23rd June. Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* Tealham Moor (Somerset), long-stayer to 11th June; Kinpurney Hill (Angus & Dundee), 11th June; Tophill Low (Yorkshire), 13th–15th June; Slemish Mountain, 14th–18th June, then Montiagh's Moss (both Co. Antrim), 26th–27th June; Crimdon Dene (Co. Durham), 16th June.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Welney, 13th–18th June. American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* Landguard (Suffolk), 11th June. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* Cley (Norfolk), 22nd–27th June. White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* Frampton Marsh (Lincolnshire), 7th July; Rosslare (Co. Wexford), 7th July. Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* North Somercotes (Lincolnshire), 11th June; Nosterfield (Yorkshire), 15th–16th June; Inishkeas (Co. Mayo), 2nd July. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Greenabella Marsh (Cleveland), 13th–17th June; Ouse Fen (Cambridgeshire), 8th July. Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* Scaling Dam Resr (Cleveland), 18th June; Hilfield Park Resr (Hertfordshire), 24th June. Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* Tavy Estuary (Devon), 5th July; Virkie, then Loch of Hillwell (both Shetland), 7th July.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* Coombe Hill Meadows (Gloucestershire), long-stayer to 5th July; Hornsea Mere (Yorkshire), 11th June; Benbecula (Outer Hebrides), two, 14th June; Backworth Ponds (Northumberland), 1st July; Minsmere (Suffolk), 2nd July.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Loughor (Gower), 24th–27th June; Lodmoor (Dorset), 29th June; Dungarvan (Co. Waterford), 29th June. Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Minsmere, 6th July; Brownsea Island (Dorset), 6th July; Wissington beet factory (Norfolk), 7th July. White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* Ranworth Broad (Norfolk), 14th June; Swillington Ings, 18th June, then Fairburn Ings (both Yorkshire), 19th–20th June; Leighton Moss (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 23rd June; Staines Resr (Surrey), 25th June; Grove Ferry, 25th June; Cotswold Water Park (Wiltshire), 27th June; Shapwick Heath (Somerset), 28th June; Lodmoor, 8th July. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* long-stayer, Tacumshin, to at least 1st July.

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* North Uist, long-stayer to 11th June, same St Kilda (both Outer Hebrides), 13th June. Alpine Swift *Apus melba* Bempton (Yorkshire), 29th June to 2nd July; Blakeney Point, then Walsey Hills (both Norfolk), 30th June; Spurn (Yorkshire), 1st July. Little Swift *Apus affinis* New Brighton (Cheshire & Wirral), 22nd–29th June. European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* Climping Beach, four, 14th June, Hastings, five, 17th June, then Blackham (all Sussex), 18th June; also singles in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Norfolk, Pembrokeshire and Suffolk. European Roller *Coracias garrulus* Aldbrough (Yorkshire), long-stayer to 14th June.

Steve Young/Birdwatch

270. Juvenile Little Swift *Apus affinis*, New Brighton, Cheshire & Wirral, June 2012.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* Long-stayers at Winterton (Norfolk) and Great Orme (Caernarfonshire), both to 14th June; John O'Groats (Highland), 13th June; Gunton (Suffolk), 19th–20th June; Sneatonthorpe (Yorkshire), 26th June. Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* Lundy (Devon), two long-stayers to 14th June; the Cull (Co. Wexford), 23rd–24th June; Blakeney Point, 8th July.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* Bardsey (Caernarfonshire), 30th June. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* Whalsay (Shetland), 27th June. Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 1st July. Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* Long-stayers at Kenidjack (Cornwall) to 21st June and Porlock (Somerset) to 8th July. River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis* Fair Isle, 11th–13th June, again 24th June to 8th July. Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* Blacktoft Sands (Yorkshire), 14th June to 5th July; Topsham (Devon), 21st–23rd June; Tacumshin, 25th–30th June. Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* Fair Isle, 30th June to 8th July. Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Boddam (Shetland), 28th June.

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus* Stockton-on-Tees (Cleveland), 10th June; Severn Beach (Gloucestershire), 10th–11th June; Saltholme (Cleveland), 11th June; Spanish Point (Co. Clare), 13th June; Skelligs (Co. Kerry), 15th June; Whitley Bay (Northumberland), 16th June; Rhos-on-Sea (Caernarfonshire), 16th–24th June; Minions (Cornwall), 17th June; Valley (Anglesey), 18th–24th June; near Wicklow Head (Co. Wicklow) 18th June to 4th July; Frampton Marsh, 20th–25th June; Scratby (Norfolk), 21st June; Mizen Head (Co. Cork), 24th–28th June; Llangefni (Anglesey), 25th June; St Martin's (Scilly), 3rd July; Ynyslas (Ceredigion), 5th July; Newbiggin-by-the-Sea (Northumberland), 5th July; Malin Beg (Co. Donegal), 6th July. Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* Frampton Marsh, 12th June.

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* St Kilda, 10th June. Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* Ystalyfera, 17th June, then Porthyrhyd (both Carmarthenshire), 18th–24th June; North Uist, 19th June.

Gary Thoburn

271. Male Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*, Porlock, Somerset, June 2012.

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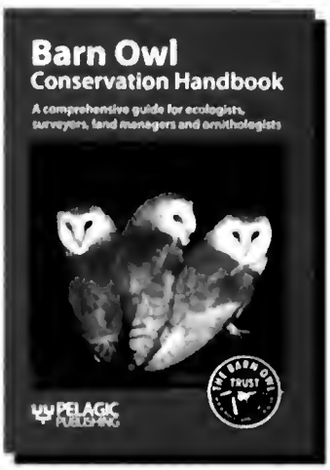

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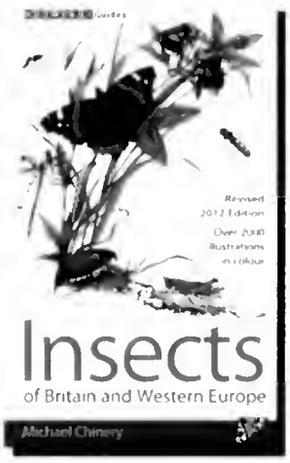

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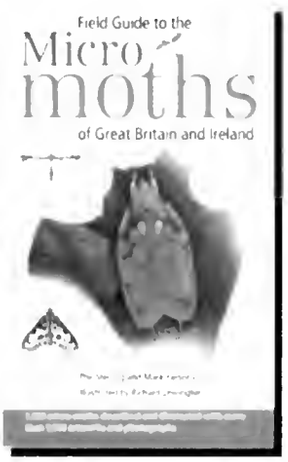

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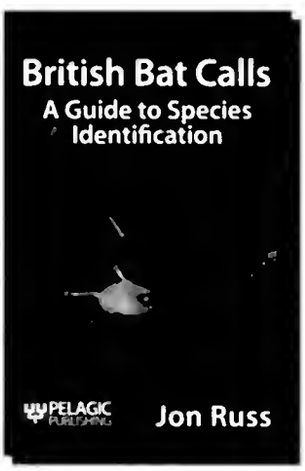

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