

BISHOP'S STORTFORD AND DISTRICT NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
HATFIELD FOREST BIRD WATCH
Sunday 23rd May 2021

Introduction

The society's long involvement with Hatfield Forest has resulted in the production of many reports, particularly on the birds of the forest. This report, the thirteenth in the series, continues on the theme of a "Big Forest Bird Watch", in which members of the Society spent a morning recording as many as possible of the birds present in the area being surveyed. The number of areas surveyed depends on the number of people present; this year seven members attended on the day and this enabled surveys to be made in four of the five areas into which the forest has previously been divided for this purpose. The weather was initially bright and sunny, clouding over later as the morning progressed. The forest looked magnificent in the early morning sunlight, with vast numbers of buttercups in flower on the forest plains and plentiful new foliage as a result of the recent wet weather. This survey is the first since 2019 because no survey was undertaken in 2020 due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. As a result, the attached species count spreadsheet compares this year's results with those for the three years 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Acknowledgements

The Society is indebted to The National Trust for their interest in such surveys and for their encouragement and the positive attitude always shown to the Society's members. Grateful thanks are due to the participants for their time and interest in undertaking such survey work.

Participants

Claire Bertschinger, Robert Phillips, Bob Reed, Marion Swan, Chris Swan, Dave Webber, Carol Wylde.

Methodology

Traditionally the Forest has been divided into five areas, described as northwest, northeast, southwest, southeast and lake. These are shown on a map which is appended as a pdf document and this is the map that has been used in previous surveys. This year the surveyors sampled four of the five areas; the northwest area was not surveyed. The surveyors covered as much of their areas as was practicable and recorded both the total numbers seen for each species and also noted whether birds were breeding using the usual commonsense indicators, such as birds observed holding territory, sitting on nests, carrying food or nesting material, or the presence of young birds. Where young birds were counted, numbers are shown; otherwise "Y" is entered to indicate that breeding is considered likely to have occurred using the other criteria.

Survey teams were arranged as follows:

Northeast: Robert Phillips, Carol Wylde.
Southwest: Dave Webber.
Southeast: Claire Bertschinger, Bob Reed.
Lake: Marion Swan, Chris Swan.

As mentioned above, no survey was undertaken in the northwest section.

Results

The results are presented in a spreadsheet that is appended as an Excel document. For purposes of comparison and interest, the total numbers of birds recorded in the 2017, 2018 and 2019 surveys are shown in addition to this year's results, there being no results for 2020 for the reason stated above.

Discussion

As with the surveys of previous years, it must be remembered that a survey such as this is not claimed to be comprehensive; it is simply a "snapshot" of those species seen on a particular occasion. As a result, a repeat survey a few days or even a few hours later may give different numbers of species, and indeed even additional or fewer species compared with this exercise. The morning provided an excellent example of this; on arrival the skies above the lake were filled with Swifts, together with Swallows, House Martins and Sand Martins but by the time of our departure these had almost all disappeared. Nevertheless, since the methodology is essentially unchanged, the results of this survey may be compared with earlier years and valuable information may be gleaned on the status of the various species observed. Some duplication may occur; for example, the corvids are very mobile and it can be difficult to obtain accurate counts as the birds constantly come and go. It is also difficult to be certain that the same group of birds is not counted twice as a result of moving from one survey area to another during the morning.

There are several encouraging aspects of this year's survey. Two pairs of Shelduck were observed and this species is known to have bred in previous years near the Stansted Airport lagoons. Two male Reed Warblers were holding territory in the reed bed and two male Reed Bunting were exhibiting territorial behaviour in the marsh area. Two Great Crested Grebe were observed, one carrying nesting material towards the northern banks of the lake and judging by the numbers seen, Jackdaws have had another successful year. On the other hand, no Common Terns were observed this year and it seems that their traditional nesting place on the tern rafts in previous years has been taken over by Black-headed Gulls, with three nests seen on the new raft and one on the old raft, together with a Canada Goose that also appeared to be sitting on a nest. A Little Grebe was observed for the first time in many years, another species frequently recorded in the past on the airport lagoons.

A Nuthatch was observed, confirming the view that in some previous surveys although apparently missing, they were almost certainly around and may simply have been in another area of the forest. The limited evidence of breeding for some species should again not be viewed with too much gloom. Many species breed very early in the year and it is therefore not surprising that young are quite well developed by late May and become more adept at hiding from view. This is particularly true for the Dunnock, where relatively low numbers on this survey should not be seen as a cause for alarm.

A single Cuckoo was heard in the south eastern corner of the lake area and another, probably the same bird further north but it is not certain that these calls were actually coming from within the forest since the sound carries well. The total of 56 species observed this year is the highest for several years and the total number of adult birds seen was a satisfying 629. In addition to the birds seen, many Rabbits were present including some very young ones and on the forest plains in addition to the buttercup display we enjoyed the pleasant picture of a contented herd of Red Poll cattle with many calves.

Chris Swan
24th May 2021

BSNHS Hatfield Forest Bird Survey, Sunday 23rd May 2021

17ad	17y	18ad	18y	19ad	19y	21ad	21y	Species Seen 2017 - 2021	NE ad	juv	NW ad	juv	SE ad	juv	SW ad	juv	Lake ad	juv	Comments
2	0	2	2	1	0	2	0	Great Crested Grebe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	Y	Adult with nesting material
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Little Grebe	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Cormorant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Grey Heron	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
1	0	2	0	4	4	1	0	Mute Swan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
1	0	2	0	0	0	5	1	Greylag Goose	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	
18	0	42	0	23	0	24	0	Canada Goose	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	Y	Bird on nest on Tern raft
0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	Shelduck	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	
1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	Gadwall	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	
23	0	24	2	39	0	26	0	Mallard	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	18	0	
3	0	4	0	7	0	5	0	Tufted Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Sparrowhawk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	Red Kite	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
5	0	1	0	1	0	4	0	Buzzard	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	
1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	Kestrel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Red-legged Partridge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
5	0	4	0	6	0	5	0	Pheasant	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	
3	0	4	0	1	0	3	0	Moorhen	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	
1	0	5	1	8	1	5	0	Coot	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	Black-headed Gull	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	Y	4 nests on Tern rafts
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Lesser Black-backed Gull	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
2	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	Common Tern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4	0	5	0	4	0	6	0	Stock Dove	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	0	
43	0	59	0	108	0	48	0	Woodpigeon	17	0	0	0	7	0	18	0	6	0	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Collared Dove	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Cuckoo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Barn Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Little Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Tawny Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
7	0	3	0	0	0	21	0	Swift	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	
9	0	6	1	4	0	6	0	Green Woodpecker	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	
5	0	6	0	9	0	5	0	Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	Y	Bird on tree with many holes
0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Skylark	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
10	0	4	0	2	0	7	0	Swallow	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	
4	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	House Martin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	
0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	Sand Martin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Pied Wagtail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
30	0	22	0	51	0	42	0	Wren	13	0	0	0	9	0	19	0	1	0	

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5	2	12	0	3	0	5	0	Dunnock	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
27	0	24	0	21	1	25	0	Robin	6	0	0	0	6	0	10	0	3	0
32	0	39	0	44	0	33	0	Blackbird	11	0	0	0	4	0	11	0	7	0
6	0	12	0	9	0	12	0	Song Thrush	6	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	1	0
0	0	1	0	6	0	3	0	Mistle Thrush	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
3	0	3	0	3	0	2	0	Reed Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	Y
0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Sedge Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	Lesser Whitethroat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
8	0	13	0	25	0	20	0	Whitethroat	9	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	6	0
1	0	2	0	4	0	2	0	Garden Warbler	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20	0	22	0	39	0	30	0	Blackcap	15	0	0	0	5	0	9	0	1	0
23	0	20	1	27	0	28	0	Chiffchaff	13	0	0	0	3	0	9	0	3	0
1	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	Willow Warbler	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Goldcrest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	0	0	0	13	4	4	0	Long-tailed Tit	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
1	0	5	1	0	0	1	0	Marsh Tit	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Coal Tit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
40	0	44	0	52	0	30	0	Blue Tit	8	0	0	0	6	0	7	0	9	0
26	0	12	0	10	0	26	0	Great Tit	7	0	0	0	5	0	12	0	2	0
6	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	Nuthatch	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	4	0	2	0	1	0	Treecreeper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
11	0	8	0	8	0	6	0	Jay	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
15	0	7	0	7	0	12	1	Magpie	8	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	1
16	0	3	0	1	0	6	0	Rook	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
10	2	10	0	11	0	12	0	Carrion Crow	6	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	1	0
66	0	82	0	152	0	96	1	Jackdaw	30	0	0	0	11	0	20	0	35	1
0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	Starling	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	House Sparrow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	0	24	0	27	0	17	0	Chaffinch	10	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	1	0
0	0	2	0	0	0	5	0	Greenfinch	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Linnet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	0	5	0	1	0	0	0	Goldfinch	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	Bullfinch	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	Yellowhammer	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2	0	3	0	1	0	3	0	Reed Bunting	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	Y
550	4	563	8	747	10	629	3	sub totals	204	0	0	0	84	0	148	0	193	3

