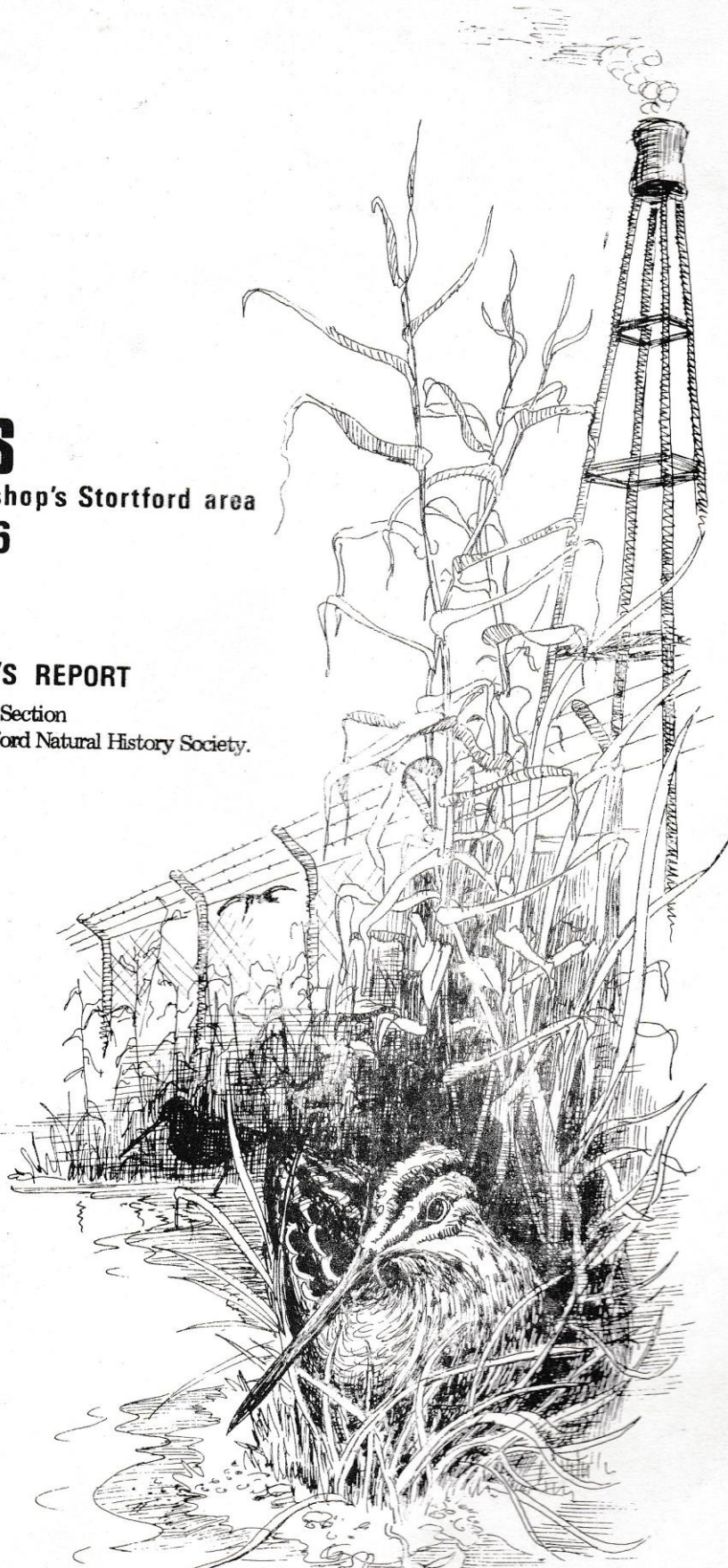


BIRDS

of the Bishop's Stortford area
1974-76

RECORDER'S REPORT

Ornithological Section
Bishop's Stortford Natural History Society.



BIRDS OF THE BISHOP'S STORTFORD AREA, 1974-6

by

The Bishops Stortford Natural History Society - Ornithological Section

The last survey of the birds of this area was made by S E Linsell in 1953 (Trans Herts Nat Hist Soc XXIV, 23-30). A few further records are included in "A History of the Birds of Hertfordshire", B L Sage, 1959, and in "A Guide to the Birds of Essex", R Hudson and G A Pyman, 1968. An article on the bird life of Hatfield Forest by S E Linsell appeared in the Essex Bird Report, 1968. With the shining exception of the records of the ringing station which has operated at Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm for many years, few details are available for the intervening years. The reason for this is not difficult to see. One cannot call this area one of exceptional interest to the average bird-watcher. It has no large expanse of water, which so often attracts the rarity, particularly on migration. And in these days of easy mobility, the temptation is always to go to Abberton Reservoir, the Essex Coast, or beyond.

The Ornithological Section was formed by Michael Hurford in 1974 as an off-shoot of the Bishops Stortford Natural History Society. The purpose was to survey the birds of the area, and to take part in any national or local schemes which might seem appropriate. The 1975 rookery census and the 1976 Nightingale census, both organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, have been examples of the former, and the 1976 breeding bird survey of Hatfield Forest an example of the latter.

The present report is a summary of observation made over the past three years. A few earlier records are included when they give a better picture of the status of a particular bird. 121 species are listed, not a great number by most standards, but giving a very fair picture of what might be seen in the area. It would have been possible to swell the list slightly by turning to earlier records, but it was felt that this did not add to the value of the survey. All birds which might be expected have been recorded; any other species would be a rarity for the area. Perhaps mention should be made only of the Wood Sandpiper and the Bearded Tit, both of which have been recorded at the Sewage Farm on a number of occasions between 1961 and 1973. Our area is that covered by the Grid Squares TL 41, 42, 51 and 52, but has been extended slightly to include a few records from the Meesden area.

About 20 members have contributed records or taken part in the Sections activities. We are particularly indebted to Jack Dowsett for the many records from the ringing station at Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm, to Don Smith for his two surveys of the River Stort (Twyford to Harlow Mill) in 1974 and 1975, carried out for the British Trust for Ornithology, and to Hugh Coe, Mike Cowan, Jack Dowsett, Jim Fish, Tom Lewis and Arthur Nickels for their work on the Hatfield Forest Survey.

We would be very pleased to hear from anyone with comments or additions to the list, or who would like to be associated with the work of the Section.

T J Lewis (Recorder to the Section)
13 Oaklands Park
Bishops Stortford

Great Crested Grebe

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant. One was present from April 12-19, 1974, on the Bishop's Stortford Fishing Lake (Barker's Pit), and birds are occasionally seen in winter on Hatfield Forest Lake, although we have no records for the past 3 years.

Little Grebe

Common resident species along the R Stort below Bishop's Stortford. 22 breeding pairs were counted between Twyford Lock and Harlow Mill in 1974 and 15 pairs in 1975. Undoubtedly more pairs will be found down-river of Harlow Mill but this area has not been covered systematically. The total number of pairs recorded for the whole of Essex for these two years were 70 and 61 respectively, so that the Stort birds were a significant proportion of these totals.

Grey Heron

Seen frequently along the R Stort at all times of the year, but more frequently in winter. The old heronry at Hallingbury has been empty since 1955, but the possibility exists of the odd nest being overlooked. The heron population throughout the country is abnormally high, and over the past year or two there has been a tendency for pairs to break away from the traditional colonies and nest in isolation.

Mullard

Common resident species. 24 pairs were estimated during the 1974 breeding season between Twyford Lock and Harlow Mill, and 61-63 pairs in 1975. It must not be assumed that all these bred successfully, or even attempted to. Three pairs were present on Hatfield Forest Marsh during the 1976 breeding season. At other times during the year quite large flocks may be seen. 50-100 birds have been reported from Hatfield Forest Lake, Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm, Tednambury Marsh, etc.

Teal

Fairly common along R Stort outside the breeding season. The only indication of possible nesting was of a pair present on Tednambury Marsh on June 29 and 30, 1975. This was, however, rather late in the season, and dispersion from the breeding grounds may have already occurred. The largest recorded flocks were of 40 during Jan 1975 at Bishops Stortford SF, and 36 at Pishiobury on March 29, 1975. However, Tednambury Marsh remains its most regular haunt.

Garganey

Rare passage migrant. A pair were seen on Tednambury Marsh on April 24, 1975.

Wigeon

Rare passage migrant. One record only, of a drake on Tednambury Marsh during April 1974.

Shoveler

Unusual passage migrant. A pair was seen at Tednambury Marsh in March 1974, and a single drake on March 16, 1975. 2 drakes were at Harlow Mill on May 1, 1975,

and a single drake in the same place on 18 May 1975. Although these last observations could count as breeding season records, no ducks were seen, and there can be little doubt that they were non-breeding birds on passage.

Tufted Duck

Resident breeding species along R Stort and on Hatfield Forest Lake. More common at other times of year. 4-5 pairs were recorded between Twyford Lock and Harlow Mill in 1974, and 12 pairs in 1975, but in neither case were broods seen. The only records of ducklings being seen are at Hatfield Forest Lake in 1974, Gaston Green Gravel Pit (5 young seen on Aug 24, 1975) and at Tednambury (1 young, on 31 July, 1976). Outside the breeding season, the largest flock noted was of 30 birds in the Tednambury Marsh - Gaston Green GP area on April 11, 1976.

Pochard

An irregular winter visitor. 2 were present on Hatfield Forest Lake on Oct 16, 1975, and a small flock was present on Gaston Green GP from January to March 1976 (11 including 7 drakes on Jan 1, 1976; 10 on March 6).

Shelduck

Rare winter visitor. One was present at Bishops Stortford SF on Feb 21, 1976.

Canada Goose

Individuals occasionally wander through the area, but there is no breeding, wild colony. During 1975 one was seen on Hatfield Forest Lake on Oct 16, and up to 3 were seen on a number of occasions along the R Stort.

Mute Swan

Familiar resident species. During 1974 four pairs between Twyford Lock and Harlow Mill had broods of 4, 4, 5 and 6 cygnets respectively. Five pairs bred along this same stretch of river in 1975.

Buzzard

Rare winter visitor. One seen at Wareside on Oct 17, 1976, could not be specifically identified, but was probably a Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). The other possibility, the Rough-legged Buzzard (*Buteo lagopus*), is less likely. Birds of this species arriving in this country in autumn normally remain near the coast. Also the date is rather early and no major eruption was reported elsewhere.

Sparrowhawk

A single bird was seen at Meesden Green in early November 1975. This species had been seen several times during 1973 (from June onwards) in the same area. The Sparrowhawk is, of course, a very rare bird in SE England, but a pair bred in Central Essex in 1974, the first record since 1969. Linsell in 1953 described the species as "well distributed, but by no means uncommon", but again writing in 1968 of Hatfield Forest he describes it as "resident until 1940, but only 3 subsequent sightings". The impression gained is that the Sparrowhawk was in serious decline before the great collapse of the early '60s.

Hobby

Apparently a regular summer visitor, individuals having been seen in each of the years 1974-6. One was seen hawking amongst Swifts at Stocking Pelham during the summer of 1974, one was seen in Hatfield Forest on May 10, 1975, and one was seen during May 1976, again amongst Swifts, at Manuden. There is considerable reason for optimism that a breeding pair may be present in the area.

Kestrel

A common resident, numbers probably increased by immigration during winter. This is the type of species where reports tend to reflect the occurrence of observers rather than birds. For instance, 1975 breeding season reports came from 11 areas sufficiently dispersed to be regarded as separate territories, viz Stansted, Bishops Stortford, Spellbrook, Pishiobury, High Wych, Stansted Airport, Hatfield Forest, Standon, Little Hadham, Much Hadham, and Stocking Pelham. There is thus a tendency for territories to be along the river valleys, where rough ground and meadowland make suitable hunting areas. However, many suitable areas went unobserved, and there can be little doubt that the recovery of this species from its low point of the early '60s is complete.

Red-legged Partridge

A common resident. A brief survey carried out in the Farnham area showed this species to outnumber the Common Partridge by about 10 to 1.

Common Partridge

A fairly common resident. Although outnumbered by the preceding species in most areas, odd pairs can be found in most open regions. Undoubtedly becomes more common in the NW of the area, and around Stocking Pelham may equal or even exceed the Red-legged Partridge in numbers.

Pheasant

A common resident, particularly where small woods and copses border farmland. We do not know how much artificial rearing is carried out in the district, and information from the sporting fraternity would be much appreciated.

Water Rail

A resident species, present in suitable habitat. Before reconstruction, 3-4 pairs bred at Bishops Stortford SF. It was then thought to be lost, but at least one bird was present during the 1976 breeding season. It is also present throughout the year in Tednambury, Sawbridgeworth and Hatfield Forest Marshes, and it may be safely assumed that each contains at least one territory, though positive proof of breeding of this secretive species is rarely obtained.

Moorhen

Very common resident on all suitable rivers and ponds. 55 pairs were counted on the R Stort between Twyford Lock and Harlow Mill in 1974, and 53-58 pairs in 1975. The Hatfield Forest Survey of 1976 revealed 6 pairs.

Coot

Resident on the larger waters. 7 pairs were present between Twyford Lock and Harlow Mill in both 1974 and 1975, mostly in the Tednambury area. 3 pairs were present on Hatfield Forest Lake during the 1976 breeding season.

Lapwing

An uncommon breeding species and common winter visitor. One pair was believed to have nested in the Tednambury-Gaston Green area in both 1975 and 1976. In each case the birds showed great agitation on approach, but no eggs or young were found. 3 pairs were present in the area of Elsenham Sand Pit in early April 1975, and this, no doubt, is another breeding area. The situation does not seem to have changed since 1953, when Linsell records "odd pairs only" as nesting. Winter flocks may number several hundred, and are well dispersed throughout the area. There may well have been some increase since 1953, when Linsell described the species as "by no means abundant in winter".

Ringed Plover

Rare passage migrant. A pair were present at Bishops Stortford SF on May 5, 1974. Birds seen on this date may reasonably be assumed to be of the Arctic race, tundrae.

Little Ringed Plover

Uncommon passage migrant. May possibly have attempted breeding on one occasion. A pair were seen at Gaston Green GP on June 29 and 30, 1975. The pit is very suitable breeding habitat, but no juveniles were seen, and the birds were not present one week later. It is a matter of speculation whether the birds were present throughout the season. Other records during the period under review is one from Bishops Stortford SF on April 16 and 17, 1976, and 4 during July 1976, and 4 at Stansted Sewage Farm, also in July 1976.

Golden Plover

Sporadic winter visitor, sometimes in large numbers. We know of no traditional area where birds are seen every winter, and coming across a Golden Plover flock seems to be a matter of chance. By far the largest gathering was of 500-600 birds, associated with Lapwings, at Allens Green on Feb 22, 1975. A flock of about 100 was at Whitehall Farm, Bishops Stortford in Jan 1974. Two flocks, totalling about 100 birds, flew across Hatfield Forest at dusk on Dec 26, 1975, and a flock of about 40 were present just outside the Bush End entrance to the Forest on Feb 14, 1976.

Common Snipe

Resident breeding species and winter visitor. Snipe nest regularly in at least three locations - Tednambury, Sawbridgeworth and Hatfield Forest Marshes. The '74 and '75 river surveys showed a total of 3-4 pairs, and the '76 Hatfield Forest Survey gave two territories. Occasional nesting may also occur at Bishops Stortford SF. This is not a common breeding bird in SE England, and our birds represent more than half of Essex County records. During winter large numbers are found at many places along the R Stort, Hatfield Forest Marsh, etc. Over 100 were reported from Bishops Stortford SF in December 1975, 77 were counted at

Harlow Mill on March 29, 1975, and over 50 were at Tednambury on Dec 28, 1976. Birds were present not only in the Marsh but in all surrounding meadows.

Jack Snipe

Winter visitor in small numbers only. A few are generally present at Bishops Stortford SF. The following are maximum numbers: 3 in Nov 1975, 3 in Jan 1976, 6 in Feb 1976 and 4 in March 1976. The birds returned in late Sept 1976, when 2 were present. The only other records are one at Tednambury Marsh on Oct 5, 1975, and several undated reports from Sawbridgeworth Marsh.

Woodcock

The status of this species in the area is uncertain. Only one record has been received, of a bird at Meesden Green in early November 1975. Linsell in 1953 said that roding Woodcock had not been seen in Hatfield Forest since 1941, but in 1968 he states that roding birds had been seen in 4 areas that year. No woodcock were seen during the 1976 census, and it is highly doubtful as a breeding species.

Curlew

Rare winter visitor. One was seen at Tednambury Marsh on March 6, 1976, and one (possibly the same bird) flew over Bishops Stortford SF on March 16, 1976.

Green Sandpiper

Winter visitor, occasionally non-breeding birds present in summer. The largest numbers are always at Bishops Stortford SF with maximum of 5 during November 1974, 6 from October 1975, and 6 from July 1976. At least one bird was present throughout the summer of each year. Away from the Sewage Farm, the only records are of 1 at Twyford on Dec 1, 1974 and 2 at Gaston Green GP on June 30, 1975 and again on July 7, 1975.

Common Sandpiper

Regular spring and autumn passage migrant. All reports come from the R Stort or from Bishops Stortford SF. In 1974 one was seen on spring passage at the Town Meads, Bishops Stortford, and a maximum of 4 individuals passed through the Sewage Farm during August. In 1975 single individuals were seen at Twyford on April 19, at Tednambury on April 19, and at Stansted on May 9 and 14. At the Sewage Farm 1 was seen in July, 1 in August and 2 in September. In 1976 reports have come only from the Sewage Farm - 1 on June 8, 4 on Aug 7, 1 on Aug 13, and 1 on Sept 4.

Redshank

Rare winter visitor. One at Tednambury on March 22, 1976, and one at Bishops Stortford SF on Jan 31, 1976. We can find no justification from past records for the statement by Bryan Sage in "A History of the Birds of Hertfordshire", 1959, that "there is little reason to doubt that a pair or two breed in the Stort Valley below Bishops Stortford", though it must be admitted that the habitat appears suitable, and the rarity of this common wader in this area is rather surprising.

Greenshank

Rare passage migrant. One was seen at Bishops Stortford SF on Aug 28, 1974, and one at Tednambury Marsh on May 10, 1975.

Dunlin

Rare winter visitor. Two were present at Bishops Stortford SF on Nov 2, 1974, and one on Feb 3, 1976.

Ruff

Winter visitor and passage migrant. 1976 has been a remarkable year at Bishops Stortford SF for this species. A single female was first seen on Jan 31. Numbers built up to a maximum of 6 on Feb 3, and birds were present until March 19. Further single individuals were seen on April 17 and on Sept 20. County records show that there has been a considerable increase in the number of wintering birds during the last few years.

Great Black-backed Gull

Occasional passage migrant. The three larger gulls are seldom seen in the area, and only one record exists of the Great Black-backed, of a bird flying down-river at Sawbridgeworth on Sept 19, 1976. It is probable that a number pass through on passage, and occasionally parties may visit the area in winter.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

Passage migrant and winter visitor. The commonest of the 3 larger gulls. It is particularly noticeable on autumn passage. For instance, 15 were present around Gaston Green GP during the latter part of August 1975. However, increasing numbers of this once-migrating species are wintering in the Lea Valley reservoirs, and these will sometimes wander into the area. 24 were at Much Hadham Rubbish Tip on Dec 15, 1975, and 4 at Gaston Green on Feb 15, 1976. These figures probably give no fair picture of the status of this species in the area.

Herring Gull

Occasional winter visitor. Again, there are few firm records. One was at Elsenham Sand Pit on Nov 27, 1975, and 20 at Much Hadham Tip on Dec 15, 1975. 3 were present at Gaston Green GP on Feb 15, 1976.

Common Gull

Very common winter visitor, particularly to the NW of Bishops Stortford, where it is frequently more common than the following species. Birds presumably roost in the Lea Valley reservoirs.

Black-headed Gull

Very common winter visitor. By far the commonest of the gulls of the Lea Valley Roosts. May be seen almost anywhere in the area.

Black Tern

Rare passage migrant. Only one record, of a rather late bird on Hatfield Forest Lake on Oct 5, 1975.

Stock Dove

Fairly common resident. Generally, but thinly distributed. 4 pairs were recorded during the Hatfield Forest Survey in 1976, but only 1 pair was located along the

Stort in 1974 and none in 1975. Outside the breeding season it is occasionally noticed, but no large flocks, such as are frequently seen on the chalk to the north of our area, have ever been recorded.

Wood pigeon

Very common resident.

Turtle Dove

Fairly common summer visitor. Generally distributed. With such species it is very difficult to get accurate pictures of breeding density unless a thorough census is made. The 1976 Hatfield Forest census recorded 7 territories, but the R Stort surveys of 1974 and 1975 showed only one pair present on each occasion.

Collared Dove

Very common resident. Now nesting very generally throughout the area around gardens, parks and farms. The winter flocks in the commercial centres of Bishops Stortford and Sawbridgeworth have been prominent now for at least a decade.

Cuckoo

Common summer visitor, present in all types of habitat. The R Stort surveys of 1974 and 1975 and the Hatfield Forest Survey of 1976 recorded 3 pairs in each case.

Barn Owl

Resident breeding species. 4 territories were reported in 1974, at Margaret Roding, Albury, Stocking Pelham and to the immediate west of Bishops Stortford. Outside these areas there have been further reports from Birchanger on Feb 21, 1976 and from Ugley. It is very probable that a number of other territories exist within our area but which have never been visited at night.

Little Owl

Fairly common resident. The little owl appears to be quite generally distributed. Two pairs were present during the breeding season in 1976 in Hatfield Forest, and other breeding season reports have come from Bishops Stortford (West side), Albany Stocking Pelham, Gt Hornead, Little Hadham, Standon and Elsenham. Many other territories have obviously been unrecorded.

Tawny Owl

Common resident. Only two territories were recorded in Hatfield Forest in 1976, which seems a surprisingly low number. Numerous reports have been received from gardens and other wooded areas.

Long-eared Owl

Uncommon resident. A Long-eared Owl was first seen at Stocking Pelham on Nov 22, 1974, and was seen on a number of occasions during 1975. A pair were present at Bury Green from January to March 1976, but it is not known whether nesting occurred.

Swift

Common summer visitor.

Kingfisher

Resident breeding species. There were three pairs along the R Stort between Bishops Stortford and Harlow Mill, in all the years 1974-6, and one on the Ash at Widford. Pairs nest in the Twyford, Spellbrook and Sawbridgeworth reaches of the river. Juveniles were seen from the Twyford pair in 1974, and three juveniles were trapped and ringed at the Sewage Farm in 1976. These had probably come from birds nesting at Twyford. Sage (1959) states that 8 pairs nested on a 4 mile stretch of the R Stort near Bishops Stortford in 1955. There appears to have been a reduction since then. Kingfishers are seen more frequently outside the breeding season. They may be seen anywhere on the R Stort and not infrequently on Hatfield Forest Lake.

Green Woodpecker

Generally distributed resident. Probably the most common woodpecker in the area. Five pairs were present in Hatfield Forest in 1976, and along the R Stort 3 pairs were present in 1974 (at Tednambury, Sawbridgeworth and Pishiobury) and 4 pairs in 1975 (the above 3 territories plus one at Wallbury). Other breeding season reports have come from Bishops Stortford (west side), Patmore Heath, Stansted, Widford, and Much Hadham. It is clear that this species is generally distributed over the area, and has made a good recovery from the mid '60s when it became decidedly uncommon.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Generally distributed resident. Numbers reported have been decidedly fewer than the above species. 3 territories in Hatfield Forest in 1976, but only one recorded along the R Stort in both 1974 and 5 (at Spellbrook). Other breeding season reports have come from Birchanger Wood and Much Hadham. There is a belief that this species is less common now than 10 years ago.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Generally distributed resident. 2 territories in Hatfield Forest in 1974, and 2 territories along the R Stort in 1974/5 (at Twyford and Sawbridgeworth, and possibly a 3rd in '74 at Wallbrook). Other breeding season reports have come from Bishops Stortford (west side), Little Hadham, Birchanger Wood, Takely and Albury. (Successful breeding was known to occur from the Takely pair in both 1975 and 1976.) As with the other woodpeckers, there is little doubt that this species nests in many suitably wooded areas, and may be found in an even wider range of habitat outside the breeding season.

Wryneck

Rare passage migrant. One was seen in a garden on the west side of Bishops Stortford in early September 1974. Curiously, one had been seen close-by on a similar date 5 years earlier.

Skylark

Very common resident in all open country. Hudson and Pyman, in "A Guide to the Birds of Essex", 1968, say that numbers have decreased since 1960 due to toxic

chemicals. Without quantitative surveys we cannot comment on this observation. It is still a very common bird throughout our area. Winter flocks of 20 or so are common. The largest flock reported was of 60 at Gt Hornead on Jan 1, 1976.

Swallow

Common summer visitor. Large pre-migration flocks gather at a number of places along the R Stort.

House Martin

Common summer visitor. Flocks of several hundred may gather around Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm during early September.

Sand Martin

Fairly common summer visitor. Three breeding colonies are known:- at Much Hadham Tip, Elsenham Sand Pit, and Gaston Green Gravel Pit. At the last site 20 burrows in 1974 had increased to 50 in 1976. The nesting period was particularly extended in 1976. Birds were seen leaving burrows carrying faecal sacs as late as Aug 25. Normally most birds would have left the district by this date.

Carrion Crow

Common resident.

Rook

Common resident. A rookery census was carried out in 1975 as part of the national scheme organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. A similar count had been made in 1971, and a comparison of the number of nests found in the two counts is made in the following Table. The full count was made for Hertfordshire only, but included the area covered by the Ordnance Survey Grid Square TL 43 (Meesden, Brent Pelham, etc).

	<u>1971</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>% Change</u>
<u>Total Nests</u>	1659	1253	-24.5
<u>The Ash Valley (+ Hunsdon)</u>			
Upwick - Little Hadham	301	289	-3.9
Much Hadham - Widford	363	376	+3.6
Hunsdon - Stanstead Abbots	<u>144</u>	<u>145</u>	<u>+0.7</u>
Total	808	810	+0.2
<u>Area outside Ash Valley</u>	851	443	-47.9
Bishops Stortford - Thorly	140	89	-36.4
Meesden - Brent Pelham	144	78	-45.8
Sawbridgeworth - High Wych	263	97	-63.0
Standon	80	21	-73.6

It can be seen that there was an overall reduction in numbers between 1971 and 1975, but numbers in the most popular area - the Ash Valley - remained constant. Two thirds of the birds are now concentrated in the line from Upwick to Stanstead Abbots. Particularly disastrous was the crash in the Sawbridgeworth area, where the position of the rookeries was much changed.

Jackdaw

Common resident. Hatfield Forest contains many breeding birds. 23 pairs were estimated in 1976, but we feel that this may be rather on the low side.

Magpie

Common resident. No detailed information is available. This is another species where a thorough census would be useful.

Jay

Common resident. Approx 13 pairs were present in Hatfield Forest in 1976, and 7 along the Stort between Twyford and Harlow Mill in 1975. Probably all small woods in the area contain a pair or two.

Great Tit

Very common resident.

Blue Tit

Very common resident.

Coal Tit

Fairly common resident. With its preference for conifers, the coal tit is by no means abundant in the area as a breeding species. However, in 1974 11 out of 15 members reported having seen coal tits in their gardens between March and September. The majority of these reports came from large gardens on the west side of Bishops Stortford, and many probably referred to winter or post-breeding wanderers. Six breeding pairs were recorded in Hatfield Forest in 1976, which was less than for both the Marsh and Willow Tit. Quite large numbers are sometimes seen in winter.

Marsh Tit

Fairly common resident. This species is, of course, virtually indistinguishable in the field from the Willow Tit except by call and song. Throughout much of the area, but particularly along the valley of the R Stort, the Marsh Tit is rather less common than the Willow Tit. In 1975 between Twyford and Harlow Mill there were 3 pairs of Willow Tit and none of Marsh, although neither species was detected in 1974. Both species nest in Birchanger Woods. In 1976 there were 3 pairs of Marsh and 1 of Willow Tit - the only area in which the Marsh Tit appears to be in greater numbers. The ringing returns from Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm indicate that up to the end of 1975 54 Willow Tits had been trapped and ringed, but only one Marsh Tit. There was in the past a small Willow Tit colony at the farm, which has necessarily biased the results very much in favour of this species. In the 1976 Hatfield Forest census 7 Marsh Tit and 10 Willow Tit territories were recorded.

Willow Tit

Fairly common resident. For distribution relative to the Marsh Tit, see under that species.

Long-tailed Tit

Fairly common resident. 6 pairs recorded in the 1976 Hatfield Forest Census. Generally distributed in all well-wooded areas.

Nuthatch

Rare resident species. Nuthatches have bred for many years in Hatfield Forest, but the 1976 census revealed one pair only. Linsell (1968) estimates 2-3 pairs for the Forest, and says that it was "once quite common". We are inclined to doubt this last remark, since with the maturing of the coppices the Forest should be more suitable now for Nuthatches than ever before, and it is a bird which has tended to increase nationally. It is frequently seen in winter, and we suspect that many past observations may not have referred to breeding pairs. Outside the Forest the only record is of a pair at Much Hadham on April 10, 1975. It seems probable that the nuthatch breeds in this area.

Tree Creeper

Fairly common resident. Seen in most wooded areas, but only 4 definite territories recorded in Hatfield Forest in 1976.

Wren

Abundant resident.

Mistle Thrush

Common resident species. Well distributed throughout the area, though territories are large and population density never high. 7 territories recorded in Hatfield Forest in 1976.

Fieldfare

Common winter visitor. Flocks rarely reach 3 figures, and are generally much less, though 350 were counted between Spellbrook and Twyford on Jan 1, 1975. First birds generally seen in mid-October.

Song Thrush

Very common resident. Never as numerous as the Blackbird.

Redwing

Common winter visitor. Perhaps commoner than the Fieldfare, and more inclined to come to gardens during hard weather. 200-300 were estimated in one flock at Hatfield Forest during February 1975, 80 were on the Town Meads, Bishops Stortford on Jan 4, 1975, and 100 were in a field at Spellbrook on Oct 26, 1975.

Blackbird

Abundant resident.

Wheatear

Regular double passage migrant in small numbers. About 20 birds have been

recorded during the past 3 years. These include:

1975	April 19	3 at Bishops Stortford SF
	May 2	1 at Stocking Pelham
	May 11	2 at Widford
1976	May 7	1 at Allens Green
	May 22	1 at Bishops Stortford SF
	July 24-Sept 4	3-4 Bishops Stortford SF
	Aug 29	2 at Long Meadow, Hadham Rd, BS
	Sept 19	3 at Gaston Green GP

Stonechat

Winter visitor in very small numbers. Records refer probably to 15 birds over the 3 year period.

1974 Maximum of 4 at Bishops Stortford SF during November.
1975 2 birds, first seen at Bishops Stortford SF on Oct 11, were present for the rest of the winter.
1976 First seen at Bishops Stortford SF on Oct 2, built up to 4 by late October. Pair at Tednambury on Oct 31, one on Dec 28, 3 at Much Hadham on Oct 17.

Whinchat

Double passage migrant in very small numbers. A maximum of 14 birds have been recorded, the majority in one remarkable period at Bishops Stortford SF. The full records are:

1975	April 24 & 29	One on each date at Tednambury
	May 11	One at Widford
	Oct 18	One at Tednambury
1976	July 27-Sept 29	Max of 8 at Bishops Stortford SF
	Aug 29	2 at Long Meadow, Hadham Rd, BS

Redstart

Rare double passage migrant. 4 records only.

1974	1 at Manuden in early May
1975	1 at Tednambury on April 25
1976	1 at Hatfield Forest on May 10
	1 at Bishops Stortford SF on Sept 20

Nightingale

Uncommon summer visitor. Much reduced nationally as a breeding species, the Nightingale in our area is now decidedly uncommon. Linsell (1968) states that it was once common in Hatfield Forest, and as late as 1968 7 singing males were present. Known territories have been as follows:

1975	One each at Hatfield Forest, Little Hadham, Patmore Heath.
1976	Hatfield Forest (4 territories), Little Hadham (2 territories), Patmore Heath, Matching Wood.

Whitethroat

Common summer visitor. Once the most common by far of the scrub warblers, the whitethroat suffered a population crash in 1969 from which it only partially recovered. A total of 16 pairs were found in Hatfield Forest in 1976. In optimum habitat - shrub areas and the oak/larch plantation - the bird is still quite plentiful. 7-8 pairs were along the R Stort (Twyford-Harlow Mill) in 1974 and 9-14 pairs in 1975. It has been in hedgerows that the reduction has been most marked. They still exist in this habitat, but two brief surveys in 1975, one in the Farnham area and one in the Brent Pelham area, showed only one pair to 2 or 3 miles of hedgerow. The most remarkable of all our records for this 3 year period was of a male Whitethroat which remained at Bishops Stortford SF from Jan 21 until the end of February 1975. It was trapped and ringed during this time. This is the first wintering record for Essex.

Lesser Whitethroat

Fairly common summer visitor. Since the great reduction in Whitethroats mentioned above, it has been claimed that the Lesser Whitethroat is the more numerous of the two species. However, in our area all quantitative surveys have shown the Lesser Whitethroat to be in a minority. 11 pairs were present in Hatfield Forest in 1976, 6 pairs were along the R Stort (Twyford-Harlow Mill) in 1974 and 3-4 pairs in 1975. However, records from Bishops Stortford SF during 1976 migration passage showed a large excess of this species over the Common Whitethroat.

Willow Warbler

Very common summer visitor. Present in all wooded and bushy areas. Quantitative surveys have shown:

1974	24 pairs along R Stort (Twyford-Harlow Mill)
1975	21-22 " " " " " "
	7 pairs in Birchanger Woods
1976	5 " " " "
	80 " in Hatfield Forest

Chiffchaff

Common summer visitor. Present in most wooded areas, but rather less common than the Willow Warbler. Survey figures have been:

1974	4 pairs in Birchanger Woods
	6 pairs along R Stort (Twyford-Harlow Mill)
1975	5 pairs " " " "
	5 pairs in Birchanger Woods
1976	3 pairs in " "
	24 pairs in Hatfield Forest

Goldcrest

Fairly common resident. Widespread in winter. This species has greatly increased in numbers over the past few years, but positive proof of breeding is rarely obtained, and the majority of birds seen at other times of the year are presumably immigrants to the area. One pair was present in the oak/larch plantation of Hatfield Forest during the 1976 breeding season, and 1 sighting in 1974 and 3 in 1975 were made in the R Stort surveys. A nest was found in a garden adjacent to Birchanger Woods in 1976.

Spotted Flycatcher

Common summer visitor. Particularly common around large gardens and parks. In the 1974 Garden Bird Scheme, the first project of our Group, no fewer than 9 out of the 15 contributors recorded this species either in their garden or in the immediate vicinity, and several mentioned successful breeding. However, only 2 territories were recorded in the 1976 Hatfield Forest Census. Admittedly, the close nature of the Forest would not be attractive to Flycatchers, but nevertheless this number is surprisingly low. More surprising still were the low numbers recorded in the R Stort surveys (Twyford-Harlow Mill) - 4 in 1974 and 2 in 1975.

Duncock

Very common resident species. In optimum habitat - gardens adjacent to Birchanger wood - a breeding density of about 5 pairs per acre has been recorded.

Meadow Pipit

Common winter visitor and passage migrant. All records have come from the River Stort (Stansted-Harlow Mill) and refer to the period mid-September to mid-April. Large numbers (up to 100) spend the winter at Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm, where it is perhaps the commonest bird during the mid-winter period. Sizable flocks (about 25) remain also in the Tednambury area, but elsewhere parties seldom exceed 4 or 5 birds.

Tree Pipit

Rare summer visitor. One pair was present in Hatfield Forest in 1975 and 2 pairs in 1976. A single bird was seen in a third area of the Forest in 1976. This species, once quite common in Hatfield Forest, had not been recorded since 1955. However, with the clearing of certain areas, and the oak/larch plantation now being of suitable maturity, a welcome return has been made.

Water Pipit

Rare winter visitor. One stayed at Bishop Stortford Sewage Farm from late 1975 until late March 1976. During this time it was trapped and ringed. A total of 6 birds of this species have been ringed at the Sewage Farm over the years.

Pied Wagtail

Common resident. 6 pairs only were recorded along the R Stort from Twyford to Harlow Mill in 1974, but 14-15 pairs in 1975. There is a communal roost in a reed-bed at Sawbridgeworth. 30-40 birds were estimated on July 7, 1975.

Grey Wagtail

Uncommon resident. More widespread in winter. Perhaps 3 or 4 pairs nest near the R Stort between Stansted and Harlow Mill, and 2 pairs on the R Ash between Widford and Wareside. Breeding season records have come most regularly from Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm, where birds have been present in all years 1974-6. Juveniles have been trapped and ringed. In 1974 a male was seen at Harlow Mill on June 21, in 1975 birds were seen at Stansted Sewage Farm on May 10 and at Sawbridgeworth on May 26, and in 1976 a pair at Tednambury on April 11 were seen by a local farmer on many later occasions and probably nested. Also in 1976 a pair was seen at

Wareside on April 10 and a single bird at Widford on the same date. Further sightings at Widford were made on May 1, 12 and 16. A glance at County records shows the Grey Wagtail to be a rare nesting species in this part of the country. Rarely are more than 2 or 3 pairs recorded as breeding in Essex, and the Stort is regarded as its stronghold. It becomes a little more frequent as one travels westwards through Hertfordshire.

Yellow Wagtail

Uncommon summer visitor. There appears to be only 2 areas on the R Stort where breeding occurs - near Harlow Mill, where 2-3 pairs were present in 1974 and 1 pair in 1975 (not observed in 1976), and at Tednambury, where one pair was present in each of the years 1974-6.* One seen at Widford on April 1, 1976 was not seen subsequently, and was probably on passage.

*A family party of 6 remained on Tednambury Marsh during the summer of 1976, being last seen on Aug 28.

Great Grey Shrike

Rare winter visitor. One flew across Twyford Marsh and perched on a bush near the railway line on Feb 2, 1975, and one was present at Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm on Jan 24, 1976.

Starling

Very common resident. Numbers greatly increased in winter.

Hawfinch

Probably a rare resident, but status uncertain. Only 1 record of this elusive species has been obtained during the 3-year period - of a female feeding on hornbeam seeds in a garden backing on to Birchanger Woods on Feb 7, 1976. Up to 7 birds (including 4 males) were present in this same garden during the 3rd and 4th weeks of April 1973. No birds were reported in the 1976 Hatfield Forest Census, although Linsell estimated 4 breeding pairs in 1968.

Greenfinch

Common resident. Reports have been too fragmentary for any comment to be made on distribution. 14 pairs were recorded in the 1976 Hatfield Forest census, and 25-30 pairs along the R Stort, 1974/5. Much larger numbers present in winter.

Goldfinch

Common resident. Well distributed as a breeding bird. 13 pairs recorded in the 1974 Hatfield Forest census. Flocks of 50 or more birds often seen on waste ground at other times of the year.

Siskin

Rather uncommon winter visitor. Siskins are particularly attracted to the seeds of the alder, and are most likely to be seen in those areas along the R Stort where this tree is common. One was seen at Twyford in early autumn, 1974, and a party of 12 at Twyford on Jan 1, 1975. 4 were seen between Bishops Stortford and Stansted on Jan 11, 1976, and one was present amongst a flock of 100 Redpolls in Birchanger Woods from Jan-March 1976.

Linnet

Common resident. This is a very common hedgerow bird in open country. Large flocks are sometimes seen on migration. For instance, a flock of 80 was present at Gaston Green Gravel Pit on April 11, 1976.

Redpoll

Not uncommon resident, and common winter visitor. This species has greatly increased in numbers during recent years. As a breeding bird 3 pairs were present in the oak/larch area of Hatfield Forest in 1976, and a report of an adult feeding young was received from the Dane Park area of Bishops Stortford. It has also been reported for the nearby Cricket-field Lane area. In the winter the Redpoll is quite widespread. The largest flocks have been reported from Birchanger woods (110 counted in late Dec 1975, were still present in March 1976), and Hatfield Forest, where flocks of 20 or so could be seen in any area with an appreciable number of birches, these flocks persisting in the oak/larch area until well into May. A number of reports of smaller flocks in alders along the R Stort have been received.

Bullfinch

Common resident. Well distributed. 10 pairs in Hatfield Forest in 1976, 11 along the Stort (Twyford-Harlow Mill) in 1974 and 6-7 in 1975. Although less prone to flocking than many finches, groups of 20 or more birds have been seen in Hatfield Forest well into April.

Chaffinch

Very common resident, but by no means as abundant as might be expected for one of Britain's commonest birds. 57 pairs were counted in Hatfield Forest in 1976. This made it the second commonest of the birds considered, but it must be remembered that 10 common species were not counted. In almost all other woodland surveys published the Chaffinch has proved to be the commonest breeding bird, and at 15 pairs per square kilometre, the Hatfield Forest figure is well below the published density of 50-145 pairs/km² for broad-leaved woodland. Birchanger Woods (30 hectares) held 8 pairs in 1975 and 3 in 1976 - about the same concentration as Hatfield Forest. 1975 surveys in the Farnham area gave 4-6 pairs/km² (or about 1 pair to a km of hedge) and a survey at Brent Pelham gave figures almost double those for Farnham. 34 pairs were counted along the R Stort between Twyford and Harlow Mill in 1975. It came 14th in order of commonness. How much the Chaffinch has been reduced as a breeding bird is a matter of speculation since no quantitative figures are available from the past. No large winter flocks have been reported, the largest being one of 30 at Bloodhound Wood on Jan 18, 1976.

Brambling

Uncommon winter visitor. Only at Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm are sometimes reasonable numbers found. 30 were present on Feb 16, 1974 and about 20 between January and March 1976. On March 29, 1975, one was seen in Birchanger Woods and 2 in a garden on the west side of Bishops Stortford. Up to 5 were present in Hatfield Forest, March 21-April 3, 1976.

Corn Bunting

Common resident. The breeding area of this species stretches from Allens Green right up to and beyond the Bishops Stortford-Much Hadham road. Within this

limited area it is a common bird, and may be seen sitting on wire fences, etc, throughout most of the summer. Outside this area the only records were of singing males at Gt Horstead on June 4, 1975 and at Hatfield Broad Oak on April 17, 1974.

Yellowhammer

Very common resident. One of the commonest birds of open country with hedgerows. A survey in the Farnham area in 1975 gave a breeding density of about 10 pairs/km², or 2 pairs per km of hedge, and at Brent Pelham 12-15 pairs/km² or 3 pairs per km of hedge. These figures are very high compared with most published figures for similar country, and we must regard this area as one of the most favourable for this species. 13 pairs were present in Hatfield Forest in 1976, which again gives a density of about 10 pairs/km² for the open areas.

Reed Bunting

Very common resident. Abundant along the R Stort, 87 territories being present between Twyford and Harlow Mill in 1974 and 100 in 1975. This bird is moving into drier habitat, and is now often found well away from water. Of the 10 territories in Hatfield Forest in 1976 only 5 were in the Marsh or along the stream. 4 were in the oak/larch plantation, and another on a wood edge.

House Sparrow

Abundant resident, particularly in urban areas.

Tree Sparrow

Common resident. At least 8 colonies, each consisting of a number of pairs, were present in Hatfield Forest in 1976. 14 territories were listed in the 1975 R Stort census, and there are breeding colonies at Bishops Stortford and Stansted Sewage Farms. The species appears well distributed in rural areas where old timber provides suitable nesting sites.