

**STORT VALLEY NATURE GROUP
INCORPORATING FOREST NATURE
AND
BISHOP'S STORTFORD AND DISTRICT NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**HATFIELD FOREST BIRD WATCH
Sunday 21st May 2022**

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 fifteenth 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 thirteen members attended on the day and this enabled surveys to be made in all of the five areas into which the forest has previously been divided for this purpose. The weather was bright and sunny and the forest looked magnificent in the early morning sunlight, with vast numbers of buttercups in flower on the forest plains and plentiful new foliage on the trees. No survey was undertaken in 2020 due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. As a result, the accompanying species count spreadsheet compares this year's results with those for the three years 2019, 2021 and 2022.

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

Kim Barber, Nick Barber, Annette Boeree, Anne Brolly, Chris Brolly, Keith King, Rebecca King, Keith Mash, Mark Ratcliff, Pat Richards, Bob Reed, John Slee, Chris Swan.

Methodology

Traditionally the Forest has been divided into five areas, described as northwest, northeast, southwest, southeast and lake. This year the surveyors sampled all five areas. 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:

Northwest: Anne Brolly, Chris Brolly.

Northeast: Annette Boeree, Mark Ratcliff, Pat Richards.

Southwest: Kim Barber, Keith King, Rebecca King.

Southeast: Nick Barber, Keith Mash, Bob Reed.

Lake: John Slee, Chris Swan.

Results

The results are presented in an Excel spreadsheet that lists the bird species in the taxonomic order proposed by K.H. Voous since this is the order used in most bird books apart from those published in recent years. For purposes of comparison and interest, the total numbers of birds recorded in the 2019, 2021 and 2022 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. 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.

There are several encouraging aspects of this year's survey. A male Reed Warbler was holding territory in the reed bed and a male Reed Bunting was exhibiting territorial behaviour in the marsh area. Judging by the numbers seen, Jackdaws and Rooks have had another successful year. A single Common Tern was observed this year flying over the lake but there is now severe competition from Black-headed Gulls, with at least one nest, possibly two, seen on the new tern raft, plus another two nests elsewhere on the edge of the lake. Other breeding evidence included Mute Swan and Coot with occupied nests on the decoy lake. Additionally, a Cetti's Warbler was calling near the dam, a new record for these surveys and reflecting their success in establishing themselves elsewhere in the area. On a more worrying note there was again no evidence of Great Crested Grebes and it is likely that they have moved elsewhere to breed as a result of disturbance on the lake. Also, no hirundines were seen this year, reflecting apparent low numbers reported elsewhere but there is still time for the Swallows to make a return to the fishermen's shelter to breed.

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. Also, it is difficult to establish where the local Rooks are breeding since the lush canopy growth in the trees near Bush End made it difficult to see any nests although numerous Rooks were flying in and out of the trees.

Yet again no Cuckoo calls were heard this year, reflecting the national trend where the Cuckoo is becoming a scarce visitor. The total of 50 different species recorded this year is encouraging and the total number of birds counted was a very satisfying 586.

Chris Swan
23rd May 2023