

THE BIRDS OF BISHOP'S STORTFORD

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INTRODUCTION

This is the seventh report of the Bishop's Stortford and District Natural History Society Bird Group since its formation in 1974 by members of the Society with an interest in ornithology. The report covers the six year period 2002 to 2007 and also includes previous records for those species that have been observed in the past but not in the period under review.

The Bishop's Stortford Bird Group has traditionally sought to record species within a notional five to six mile radius of the town centre, covering parts of Hertfordshire and Essex, although this arbitrary limit has never been applied strictly. In this report records have been included from outside this area, particularly to the north and north west where habitats are similar, in order to provide a broader perspective for the publication. However, Stone Curlew, Quail and Dotterel records from the chalk hills further north are not included, since these habitats are not typical of the local area.

The Bird Group has about thirty members at present and an informal get-together takes place on the first Monday of each month (or the second Monday if the first is a bank holiday) at 8.00 p.m. in the Bricklayers Arms, Hadham Road, Bishop's Stortford (located at the junction of Bells Hill and Hadham Road). These meetings offer the opportunity for members to exchange information, to plan field trips and to discuss topics of interest. As indicated above, these meetings are completely informal and new members and visitors are most welcome to attend. In addition to the monthly meetings, the Bird Group has a web site on which full details can be found of the Group's activities, including sightings, trip reports and links to other relevant sites. The web site can be accessed via <http://www.btinternet.com/~bsbirdgroup/>

A report such as this is only possible as a result of the efforts of many members of the group. Thanks are due to the many observers who have provided the records and in particular to the diligent recording of species undertaken by the outgoing Recorder, Stephen Patmore, whose database of records made the report possible. Many members have contributed to the preparation and production of this report, and grateful acknowledgements are made as follows:

Taxonomic analysis: David Arch, Mike Ashworth, Hugh Coe, Mick East, Jim Fish and Chris Swan.

Survey Work: Hugh Coe.

Field Trips: David Arch.

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Finally the Bird Group would like to express its gratitude to the Stansted Airport Community Fund for their generous financial contribution to the printing costs.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

During recent years many changes have been proposed to the English names of birds and these culminated in the publication by the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) of an official list of names that they recommend be used in place of the previously used English names. In some instances the new names were proposed to remove confusion or illogicality; for example the Robin encountered in Europe is a totally different

bird from the Robin in the USA, similarly the Common Gull is by no means the most numerous of the gulls. However, many birdwatchers feel that other recommendations, such as prefacing the names of many of our most recognised species with Eurasian, European, Northern, etc. are both irritating and unnecessary, since if any doubt exists, we have a perfectly well established system of Latin names. In this report we have used the common English names, listed in the order proposed by K.H. Voous (1977), since these are the names with which most people are familiar (and are also the names used in all but the most modern editions of bird books) and we have also shown the Latin names. For anyone interested, the BOU recommended names are listed on their web site (www.bou.org.uk).

A few of the species listed below, such as Mandarin and Ruddy Shelduck, may be regarded by some observers as escapes, or, at best, feral birds. However, in the absence of definitive evidence that these birds are escapes, they are being given the benefit of the doubt in this publication. Species that are known to be escapes or feral birds are listed separately in the appendix to this systematic list.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Common breeding resident.

A common resident breeding on Stansted Airport Lagoons, and in smaller numbers along the River Stort and at some smaller pools and pits around Bishop's Stortford.

The number of breeding pairs along the Stort valley is much reduced from the 1980s but there is still a build up in winter with records of 15 individuals seen at Spellbrook in 2003/4 and similarly 14 in 2005/6.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Resident breeding species.

Present throughout the year on Hatfield Forest Lake. Generally two or three pairs bred successfully through the 1980s and 1990s and juveniles were seen in both 2000 and 2001. From the records it seems that no young were raised in the four years 2002 to 2005 but a single pair was successful in 2006, raising 4 young and again in 2007 when only one juvenile was seen.

In 2007 a pair nested at Beggars Hall Fishing Pond with 3 juveniles seen on 5 July 2007.

In winter single birds were observed at Spellbrook Lock in March 2004 and December 2005 and at Stansted Airport Lagoons in December 2005 and March 2006.

RED-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps grisegena*

Very rare visitor.

There is only one record, that of a single bird seen on Stansted Airport Lagoons on 21st December 1997.

SLAVONIAN GREBE *Podiceps auritus*

Very rare winter visitor.

There is only one record, that of two birds at Tednambury Marsh on 17th February 1985.

BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis*

Very rare visitor.

Occurring rarely in this area, an adult bird in winter plumage was seen on Stansted Airport Lagoons from 3rd to 10th October 1999. There is also one recent record of two birds present on Stansted Airport Lagoons in September 2005.

FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*

One old record.

A single bird was reported on a tip at Bishop's Stortford Town Meads on 31st October 1956.

MANX SHEARWATER *Puffinus puffinus*

Very rare vagrant.

No recent records. Exhausted birds have been found after storms, one in Hatfield Forest in September 1979 and two at the M11 roundabout in September 1980.

LEACH'S PETREL *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

One old record.

Following a great storm in October 1952 a single bird was found in Rye Street, Bishop's Stortford on 1st November 1952.

GANNET *Morus bassanus* (formerly *Sula bassana*)

Very rare vagrant.

A juvenile bird was seen flying west over Stocking Wood on 26th September 1982.

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Non breeding resident, winter visitor.

Seen throughout the year from many locations in the area, either flying at height or at rest in trees. Its particular haunt is Hatfield Forest Lake where the recorded wintering roost has risen from 4 individuals on 20th October 1991, through 13 on 4th April 1998, to over 30 recorded on 15th November 2002. Smaller numbers are seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons and Pishiobury Park along the Stort valley.

SHAG *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Very rare vagrant.

The first local report was of a bird found walking in West Street, Sawbridgeworth on 24th February 1988. More recently a single immature bird was seen in the company of some 30 Cormorants at Hatfield Forest Lake for two days in September 2005.

BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris*

Very rare winter visitor.

There are only two records, both at Maymeads Marsh during freezing conditions on unspecified dates in the period 1985 – 1989 and mentioned in the fourth edition of this report.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

Increasingly common visitor.

The first local record was of a single bird at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 4th August 1999. Since that time this species has spread rapidly, establishing breeding colonies notably in Kent and also in the south and westward into Wales.

There are now typically three or four sightings each year, mostly of single birds flying over or occasionally feeding at roadside pools. In 2005 an injured juvenile was found in Parsonage Lane, Bishop's Stortford but later died in care.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

Non breeding common visitor.

Outside the breeding season this is a solitary species and single birds can be seen feeding along the waterways of the Stort valley and at the many pools and lakes in the area. With their characteristic silhouette and flight pattern they are often seen passing over both residential areas and open country.

The nearest breeding colonies are at Amwell, south of Ware and in the Lee Valley Park south of Harlow.

BLACK STORK *Ciconia nigra*

Very rare vagrant.

In an exceptionally rare sighting, a single bird seen flying north at Latchmore Bank on 6th June 1983 is the only local record and was only the second record for Essex.

WHITE STORK *Ciconia ciconia*

Very rare vagrant.

Only two records. A single bird was seen circling to the south of Newport on 2nd April 2001 and a single bird was seen in the area of Trims Green and Allen's Green on 17th April 2006.

SPOONBILL *Platalea leucorodia*

Very rare visitor.

Only one record. A single immature bird was seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 8th April 1993.

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Resident breeding species.

Mute Swans are reported mostly in ones and twos with the exception of family groups when up to 5 juveniles may accompany the parents. In the past Mute Swans nested in Bishop's Stortford town centre but now successful breeding appears to be limited to the Stort valley between Spellbrook and Sawbridgeworth.

Outside the breeding season small numbers are recorded on the local pools and lagoons. The largest count in recent years was ten at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 19th October 2003.

BEWICK'S SWAN *Cygnus columbianus*

Rare winter visitor.

The first local record was a flock of 35 flying over Spellbrook on 1st January 1979 and a single bird was seen over Patmore Heath on 16th March 1995.

It is thought that a bird of this species was among a large flock of Whooper Swans seen on the night of 22nd November 1998.

WHOOPEE SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

Rare winter visitor.

All records are of birds flying over the area. A flock of more than fifty was seen over Dane Park, Bishop's Stortford at night on 22nd November 1998. Four birds passed over Newport on 23rd October 2000 and fourteen to the west of Bishop's Stortford on 19th November 2001. The most recent sighting is of two birds flying high over Sawbridgeworth on 12th January 2005.

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons*

Rare winter visitor.

A flock of 10 was seen at Hadham Park on 10th November 1993 and two birds were at Stansted Airport Lagoons in December 1996. There are no recent records.

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*

Occasional feral visitor.

Almost identical to the domestic farmyard goose, there is a feral population of Greylag Geese that resides and breeds in this locality. The numbers seen are generally small and breeding has occurred, with young reported at Beggars Hall fishing lake on 23rd June 2004; Bishop's Stortford fishing pool on 18th April 2007 and Beggars Hall fishing lake on 31st May 2007. A pair nested on Hatfield Forest Lake in 2004 and 2005 but no young were seen. The largest flock reported is of forty birds on a farm pool in the Thorley - Trims Green area on 26th August 2002, also thirty five birds were seen at Mathams Pit on 22nd October 2007.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

Common resident breeding species

Considered by many to be a nuisance, the Canada Goose can be seen grazing in open spaces and parks around the area and flying noisily between pools and feeding areas.

Breeding sites include Hatfield Forest Lake with up to 34 juveniles recorded in 2004, Wickham Hall with 7 juveniles in 2004 and Southmill Lock with 5 juveniles in 2003.

The birds are present throughout the year with the largest accumulation wintering on Hatfield Forest Lake where the number of adult and immature birds has reached 80 plus in 2003/04, 100 in 2004/05, 180 in 2005/06, 60 in 2006/07 and 180 in 2007/8.

BARNACLE GOOSE *Branta leucopsis*

Occasional feral visitor.

Single birds were seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 20th September 1990 and during August and September 1991. Four were present in August - November 1994 and five in February 1995. Another was seen at Tednambury Farm in March 1992 and again in March 1993. A single bird was reported at the Stansted Airport Lagoons on 18th September 1999. There are no recent records.

BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicla*

Rare winter visitor.

Three birds were present at Wickham Hall on 19th January 1988. Single birds were seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons in March and October 1990. There are no recent records.

EGYPTIAN GOOSE *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Rare feral visitor.

Escaped birds have formed a feral population in East Anglia. The first local report was from Stansted Airport Lagoons on 2nd June 1987. Five birds were seen at Newport in August 2000 and there is one recent record of a single bird at Hatfield Forest Lake on 30th September 2007.

RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*

Very rare visitor.

The first record was of a single bird on Stansted Airport Lagoons on 3rd October 1993.

On 3rd November 2007 a single first winter male appeared on Hatfield Forest Lake and remained in the area until 4th December 2007. It spent some time on the Stansted Airport Lagoons where it was joined on 30th November by an adult female.

SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Occasional visitor, has bred locally.

Typically just one or two birds can be found on Stansted Airport Lagoons and Hatfield Forest Lake. It is possible with this limited presence that these are the same birds moving between the two locations. The largest count, just five birds, was at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 26th April 2004.

Following reports of breeding in 1992 and 1994 there is only one recent record in June 2005 when the pair fledged and raised just one juvenile.

MANDARIN *Aix galericulata*

Rare visitor.

The first local record was from Hatfield Forest Lake on 28th September 1981.

Subsequent reports from this location are mostly of single males but three females were present on 12th September 1986 and a pair in November 1996. In December 2005 a male stayed for over a month and a single male was present on several days through November and December 2007. Elsewhere there are reports from Braughing, Newport and Audley End.

A pair was present at Patmore Heath for several days in March 2005 and again on the Albury Hall Estate on 14th April 2006

WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Uncommon winter visitor.

Mainly ones and twos reported from Hatfield Forest Lake, Stansted Airport Lagoons and Wickham Hall Lagoon. A group of six, five males and a female was at Mathams Pit on 4th January 2004.

GADWALL *Anas strepera*

Regular winter visitor. Has bred locally.

Present throughout the year on Hatfield Forest Lake and Stansted Airport Lagoons. The numbers present in the summer months remain in single figures whereas wintering birds have continued to increase with over 30 at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 4th January 2007. The largest count of fifty plus was recorded at Harlow Gravel Pits, Gilston on 26th February 2006.

Individuals and small groups have also been found on the St Michael's Mead Lake and along the Stort valley at Thorley Wash, Spellbrook and Pishiobury Park.

There are only two records of breeding, both at Stansted Airport Lagoons, the first in July 2000 and the second confirmed by the presence of 5 young on the 26th June 2002.

TEAL *Anas crecca*

Common winter visitor.

As a winter visitor most records are for Stansted Airport Lagoons and Hatfield Forest Lake with numbers of 50 plus at each location during January and February. Numbers drop sharply in March with only one or two birds remaining through the summer and autumn. Despite this year round presence there are no records of breeding.

Other locations including Thorley Wash, Mathams Pit, Sheering Lower Road Scrape and Wickham Hall also report small numbers through autumn and winter.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common breeding resident.

Mallards can be found on almost any small stream or pool, pit or stretch of open water. The young can be seen from April onwards, even in the centre of the town. Their willingness to nest away from water, sometimes in close proximity to human habitation, is well known.

The birds congregate in autumn and typical records are of 30 on St Michael's Mead Lake, 54 on Mathams Pit, 20 on Hadham Hall lagoon, 10 on Wickham Hall lagoon and 59 on the River Stort between Southmill Lock and Spellbrook.

The main concentration of wintering birds is at Hatfield Forest Lake and to a lesser degree Stansted Airport Lagoons. The number of birds gathering on Hatfield Forest Lake has fallen and continues to decrease, possibly as a result of increasingly milder winters, with some 180 in January 2003, 120 in January 2006 and 118 in December 2007. Conversely the numbers wintering in the Stort valley, St Michael's Mead Lake and Elsenham railway pit appears to be increasing.

PINTAIL *Anas acuta*

Occasional autumn and winter visitor.

Records listed in the 1996 and 2001 Reports show that on two or three occasions each year single birds were seen to visit the area, mostly between August and December.

In the six years 2001 to 2007 there has been a marked decline in the numbers visiting. In that period just three birds have been recorded, a female at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 19th October 2003, a female at Hatfield Forest Lake on 19th January 2005 and a male at Stansted Airport Lagoons 18th October 2006.

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*

Rare passage migrant.

The earliest record is from Tednambury Marsh on 24th April 1975 and later from Hatfield Forest Lake on 8th May 1992. All other reports are from the Stansted Airport Lagoons, males on the 30th April 1993 and 18th June 1994 and an immature or female stayed from 27th August to 6th September 1995. An adult female was seen on 27th March 1999 and the most recent report is of a single male, also on Stansted Airport Lagoons, on 7th June 2002.

SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*

Regular non breeding visitor.

The Shoveler occurs regularly in small numbers on Hatfield Forest Lake and Stansted Airport Lagoons from June through to March of the following year. There is no record of breeding on these local waters even though one or two birds usually remain in the area.

RED-CRESTED POCHARD *Netta rufina*

Very rare visitor.

A single female reported on Hatfield Forest Lake in November and December 2001 lingered in the area until 3rd February 2002. The only other record is of a pair, also at Hatfield Forest Lake, on 7th and 8th November 2006.

POCHARD *Aythya ferina*

Common non breeding visitor.

Most records are for Hatfield Forest Lake where numbers build between November and March. The maximum numbers recorded are 33 in January 2006, 24 in January 2007, similar to those reported in the 1990s.

There are no records of breeding in this area.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK *Aythya nyroca*

Very rare visitor.

No recent records. A single female seen at Hatfield Forest Lake on 28th November 1994 remains the only local record.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

Common resident and winter visitor.

Numbers build up each winter, particularly on Hatfield Forest Lake where up to thirty birds have been seen. The highest number recorded however is from Stansted Airport Lagoons with 60 plus on 22nd September 1990 and again on 19th January 1991.

Breeding is reported every year at Stansted Airport Lagoons with young recorded in July 2002, August 2003, July 2004, June 2005, June 2006, and July 2007 (2 broods including one of 7 young).

Breeding birds with young have also been seen at Wickham Hall lagoon in July 2003, July 2004 and July 2006; Bursteads Ponds, Spellbrook in July 2005; Hadham Hall lagoon in September 2006 and at St Michael's Mead Lake.

A notable exception is Hatfield Forest Lake where according to the annual Breeding Bird Survey the last successful breeding was in 2001.

SCAUP *Aythya marila*

Rare winter visitor.

The first record was from Stansted Airport Lagoons on 31st October 1992 and further sightings on 22nd January 2000 and 9th – 10th April 2000.

More recently two first winter females arrived on the Stansted Airport Lagoons in December 2006. One of these stayed until 7th January and later moved to Hatfield Forest Lake where it remained until 9th March 2007.

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Very rare visitor.

Three were reported from Hatfield Forest Lake on 19th October 1986.

GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*

Uncommon winter visitor.

There are no recent records. Single birds were recorded at Hatfield Forest Lake on 11th November 1981 and 12th December 1982. There are also five records from Stansted Airport Lagoons, a female on 28th November 1990, two birds on 28th November 1994, and single females on 28th March 1998, 22nd January 2000 and 20th February 2000

SMEW *Mergus albellus*

Very rare winter visitor.

The adult male Smew is probably the most striking and attractive of our wintering ducks. Unfortunately only females and an immature male have been seen locally.

A single first year male was observed on Hatfield Forest Lake on 22nd – 23rd January 2004 and a female was present from 25th December 2005 to 4th January 2006.

There is only one previous record, a female on Tednambury Marsh in February 1985.

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*

Uncommon winter visitor.

Early sightings were along the Stort Valley with three females seen in January 1982, a single female in January 1985, four birds in February 1985 and a single female in November 1987. A pair was seen on Stansted Airport Lagoons in January 1993.

Recent records are of single birds at Hatfield Forest Lake on 7th March 2004 and 25th December 2005.

A single female was present on the Stansted Airport Lagoons on 26th December 2006 and a single male on 1st January 2007.

Most recently up to 5 birds were seen on Hatfield Forest Lake between 12th November and 4th December 2007.

RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Very occasional visitor.

This bird has been a rarity in the local area despite a rapid expansion elsewhere.

Early sightings were single birds at Hatfield Forest Lake in September 1986 and Stansted Airport Lagoons in October 1988, August 1991, August 1994 and October 1997.

A pair was present on Stansted Airport Lagoons for two months in the summer of 2002 but did not breed.

The last report was of a single male on Stansted Airport Lagoons in July 2005.

In 2005 an officially sponsored cull began and the species has effectively now been wiped out in this region.

HONEY BUZZARD *Pernis apivorus*

Very rare passage migrant.

The only record during this period is a single bird at Patmore Heath on 24th March 2006, the previous record being the large influx of September 2000.

BLACK KITE *Milvus migrans*

Very rare passage migrant.

The single bird at Gilston on 2nd July 1988 remains the only record.

RED KITE *Milvus milvus*

Rare visitor now becoming more widespread following the re-introduction programme in the Chilterns.

The area to the north west of Bishop's Stortford has provided more than 50% of the records received. Other records include one being mobbed by Crows over Parsonage Lane, Bishop's Stortford, before flying towards Hatfield Forest on 30th May 2004. Most records are of single birds in the months March to June and are detailed below:

25th March 2004, Hadham Park.

2nd April 2004, Farnham.

15th May 2004, Patmore Heath.

25th May 2004, The Moors, Upwick.

June 2005, Little Hadham.

26th September 2005, one reported over Spellbrook School.

12th April 2006, one flew east over Stocking Wood.

30th April 2006, one over lake in Hatfield Forest.

11th May 2006, one flew east at 1.20 p.m. over Pishiobury Park.

4th June 2006, Farnham Road.

30th July 2006, Thorley Wash.

30th March 2007, Albury.

14th April 2007, Green Tye, circling, then flew NE over Mathams Wood.

24th April 2007, Albury.

6th May 2007, Standon, flying south.

20th May 2007, Wareside, flying south at 9.50 a.m.

11th June 2007, North Hall Farm, Henham.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Rare passage migrant.

There have been three records of wandering individuals; at Mathams Wood on 2nd September 2005 flying NW at 12.55 p.m. and again on 7th September 2006 over the wood, whilst one was observed at Perry Green flying NNE at 3.40 p.m. on 28th April 2007.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

Very rare passage migrant and visitor.

Three records during the period under review are all indicative of wandering wintering birds, two of which were observed to be "ringtails", i.e. females. A ringtail was observed at Wickham Hall on 22nd January 2003, a single bird was seen jousting with Common Gulls over the A120 near Stansted Airport on 21st February 2007 and a ringtail was reported circling NE at Stortford Park Farm at 11.09 a.m. on 4th November 2007.

MONTAGU'S HARRIER *Circus pygargus*

Very rare visitor. New species for the district.

Two records have been received, both of birds flying over to the south west and west of the district. On 28th April 2007 one was observed over oilseed rape at Pockendon Field, Horse Cross, whilst on 11th August 2007 a possible ringtail flew over harvested fields at Allen's Green.

Harrier records, together with the timings and locations suggest that the general area covering the SSW-W-NW of Bishop's Stortford is a migration route.

GOSHAWK *Accipiter gentilis*

Rare passage migrant. Increasing.

This large, heavily built bird is seen increasingly in the area and has possibly bred, since birds have been observed displaying in 2007. Records (individual birds unless stated otherwise) comprise:

26th January 2004, Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford.

9th February 2004, Rushy Mead, circling the reserve at 12.04 p.m., then flew south.

2nd April 2004, Albury Hall.

15th June 2004, Upwick.

2nd January 2006, Patmore Heath, flying WSW.

22nd March 2006, Hollingson Meads, flying west along River Stort valley.

28th March 2006, Elsenham.

3rd April 2006, Sawbridgeworth Marsh, disturbed at close quarters in Little Valet Homes.

17th April 2006, Patmore Heath.

29th March 2007, Tilekiln Green. Four birds displaying simultaneously.

12th April 2007, Albury.

30th April 2007, Much Hadham, apparently displaying.

8th October 2007, NNW of Bishop's Stortford in an oak tree.

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Resident.

Just over 250 records for the period under review suggest increasing numbers. Records include one mobbing the Red Kite at Green Tye on 14th April 2007, a large female attacking Feral Pigeons at Chalk Farm, Sawbridgeworth on 23rd June 2006 and one being mobbed by Swallows at Spellbrook Lane West on 19th June 2007. With birds being seen displaying and carrying prey, breeding is almost certain.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

Resident.

Recorded no fewer than 172 times during the period under review, the Buzzard now has a strong foothold in the area and has been seen as single birds or as groups of up to four birds.

ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD *Buteo lagopus*

Very scarce winter visitor.

There have been no new records since the one observed at Southmill Lock on 1st November 1988.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

Very rare passage migrant.

Three reports have been received during the period under review; one at Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 13th September 2003, one observed flying south mid-afternoon on 4th September 2004 at Sawbridgeworth Cricket Ground and one at Farnham on 24th April 2006 that had crashed into netting by a garden pond and was later released at Rutland Water.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Common resident.

Frequently seen throughout the area and may be under-recorded.

RED-FOOTED FALCON *Falco vespertinus*

Very rare vagrant.

The last record was a bird observed from Stansted Airport Lagoons drifting towards Hatfield Forest on 27th May 2001.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Scarce winter visitor.

This small raptor is now a yearly visitor to open farmland to the north west of Bishop's Stortford. All reports are of single birds:

- 23rd October 2004, Patient End.
- 21st November 2004, Furneux Pelham.
- 2nd March 2005, Stansted Airport, hunting Meadow Pipits on airport perimeter.
- 4th March 2005, Silkmeads Farm, Hare Street.
- 12th March 2005, Farnham Green area.
- 28th April 2005, Sawbridgeworth Marsh.
- 19th September and 10th October 2005, Patmore Heath.
- 2nd December 2006, Stocking Wood.
- 19th October 2007, Furneux Pelham.
- 4th November 2007, Patmore Heath, in a garden briefly.

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

Uncommon summer resident and passage migrant.

The Hobby was recorded as a breeding species in the area in 1985 and 1987, but not subsequently. However, this elegant raptor has increased during the last two years, with 25 records in 2006 and 45 in 2007. Three were seen over Patmore Heath on 11th July 2006.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

Rare but increasing.

Recent records are listed below:

- 28th May 2004, Bishop's Stortford.
- 9th August 2005, Twyford Gardens, Bishop's Stortford.
- 26th August 2005, Berden.
- 26th August 2005, Manuden.
- 22nd August 2006, Mathams Wood, circling, then flew NE.
- 11th August 2007, Harlow, in thermal over Pinnacles Industrial Estate.
- 21st October 2007, Hatfield Forest, flying over lake and marsh at treetop height.
- 25th November 2007, Sawbridgeworth Marsh, stooped on daylight-roosting Wood Pigeons.

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE *Alectoris rufa*

Fairly common resident.

Large numbers are released by the shooting estates. The extent of plumage variation suggests that hybridisation is taking place with other introduced partridge species.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix*

Declining resident.

There have been only 18 records, mainly to the north and north west of Bishop's Stortford with up to 8 birds seen at a time. Breeding was recorded at Farnham, Upwick and Wickham Hall in 2006.

QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*

Very rare summer visitor.

Three local records have been received. On 23rd May 2004 one was heard calling at Bamber's Green, one was observed in flight over the M11 near junction 8 on 21st June 2004 and one was flushed at the edge of a field between Moor Hall and Mathams Wood on 12th May 2005.

PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*
Very common resident.

Local shooting estates regularly release birds.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*
Fairly common resident.

This elusive resident is more often heard than seen. The best areas are the marshes along the River Stort valley from Rushy Mead to Sawbridgeworth Marsh and Stansted Airport Lagoons, with occasional birds at St. Michael's Mead Lake and Hatfield Forest Lake. Breeding has been noted at Stansted Airport Lagoons and Thorley Wash.

SPOTTED CRAKE *Porzana porzana*
Very rare passage migrant.

There have been no new records since the birds heard calling at Maymeads Marsh in May 1984 and May 1985.

BAILLON'S CRAKE *Porzana pusilla*
One historic record

A single bird was seen on the ground and in flight at close range from a hide at Bishop's Stortford Sewage Farm in February 1968.

CORNCRAKE *Crex crex*
One historic record.

A bird was heard calling in Bishop's Stortford from 2nd to 5th May 1959.

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*
Very common resident and winter visitor.

Widespread and locally common with breeding reported. Numbers regularly as high as 30 to 40+ have been observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons. One was observed sitting on nest with six eggs under the footbridge at Twyford Lock in 2005.

COOT *Fulica atra*
Locally common resident and winter visitor.

Mainly seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons and Hatfield Forest, but also on the River Stort. Peak counts at Stansted Airport Lagoons frequently at reach 20 – 25+, with a record of 48 observed on 14th September 2007. Breeding and young have been observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons, Hatfield Forest, the River Stort and Henry Moore Foundation Lake.

CRANE *Grus grus*
Very rare visitor.

Only one additional record has been reported in the period of this review, with a single bird observed in a ploughed field opposite Chaldean Farm, Much Hadham, on 27th October 2005.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*
Very rare passage migrant.

The only new record is of a single bird at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 19th April 2006.

AVOCET *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Very rare passage migrant.

No new records since the two birds that flew into Stansted Airport Lagoons on 6th August 2000.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*
Uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant.

Most records are from Stansted Airport Lagoons but birds have also been recorded at Bamber's Green and at Mathams Pit. Single juveniles were seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 26th June 2002 in the company of 10 adults and on 27th June 2002 in the company of one adult, whilst 2 juveniles were recorded on 7th August 2004 and one to two juveniles during August 2007. Given that this species favours inland scrapes and pits it is feasible that breeding has occurred at Stansted Airport Lagoons.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*
Passage migrant and scarce breeding species.

Stansted Airport Lagoons again dominate the records, with 1 to 3 birds recorded in 2002, 2006 and 2007, whilst 3 birds were seen at Bamber's Green on 30th April 2005. Although one juvenile was seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 6th August 2007, one month after the sighting of an adult there, no evidence was found for breeding at that site.

DOTTEREL *Charadrius morinellus*
Very rare passage migrant.

A new record for the area was established on 11th September 2004 when a single bird in fresh moult was observed at Green Tye.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*
Fairly common winter visitor and passage migrant.

One of the pleasant features of the winter months every year is the occurrence of Golden Plover in all suitable arable habitats, sometimes in spectacular numbers. Notable flocks include 500+ at Taylor's End in February 2002 and 500+ in the Allen's Green and Trims Green area in November 2004, and again in March and September 2005 and in November 2007. An immense flock of 1500+ was also observed at Tednambury Marsh on 14th November 2005. This species is occasionally recorded outside the winter period but most records relate to the months of November to March.

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*
Rare passage migrant.

There have been no new records, the last being 2 birds at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 23rd September 1990 and 24th May 1992, the only previous record being 15 observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 14th September 1988.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*
Scarce breeding species and common but declining winter visitor.

Breeding may have taken place at Stansted Airport Lagoons in 2002, where 9 adults and 2 juveniles were seen on 26th June. In 2002, a pair was observed displaying at Elsenham. Two adults and 4 juveniles were noted at Bamber's Green in suitable habitat on 21st May 2005, but a breeding attempt at Sawbridgeworth Marsh in 2007 was not successful. Outside the breeding period, large wintering flocks occur each year in suitable arable habitat. Notable flocks have included 350+ at Bloodhounds' Wood in October 2002, up to 200+ at Stansted Airport Lagoons on several occasions, 300 to 350 birds in the Allen's Green/Trims Green area in 2006 and a flock in excess of 1000 birds in the Thorley/Spellbrook area in December 2003.

KNOT *Calidris canutus*
Very rare passage migrant.

There have been no records since the single bird reported from Newport on 13th September 2000.

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*
Very rare visitor.

There have been no records since 1st June 1991, when a single bird was present at Stansted Airport Lagoons.

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*
Rare passage migrant.

A juvenile bird was observed at Sheering Lower Road Scrape on 8th September 2007, this being the first record since 1998 when a single bird was observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons.

TEMMINCK'S STINT *Calidris temminckii*
Very rare passage migrant.

There have been no new records since the summer-plumaged bird observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 11th May 2001.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER *Calidris melanotos*
Very rare vagrant.

No new records have been reported, the last being a single bird at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 10th to 12th September 1989.

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*
Very rare passage migrant.

No new records, the last being two birds at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 25th August 1991, one of which remained until 30th August 1991.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*
Regular but uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Single birds were observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 11th March and 14th July 2006 and on 3rd May 2007, whilst single birds were also seen at Mathams Pit on 22nd August 2006 and at Hatfield Forest Lake on 10th September 2006.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*
Scarce passage migrant.

A single male was observed on 21st April 2007 at Stansted Airport Lagoons.

JACK SNIPE *Lymnocyptes minimus*
Winter visitor and passage migrant.

This species is a regular winter visitor and may be under-recorded since they tend to sit tight and thus are not easily seen. Regular locations are Sawbridgeworth Marsh, where up to four birds have been seen in 2006, Stansted Airport Lagoons and in a more suburban environment at St. Michael's Mead Lake, where an obliging 1 to 2 individuals gave good views in January 2006 and again in April 2007.

SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*
Rare breeding species, but fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor.

Once a regular breeding species, only one possible breeding attempt has been recorded in the period under study, when two birds were present at Thorley Wash and were observed displaying on 14th May 2004. Most records are now for the months outside the breeding season, and Snipe are regularly recorded in small numbers during the winter months at suitable wetland habitat including Stansted Airport Lagoons and Sawbridgeworth Marsh. Larger groups have included 60+ at Taylors End in February 2002 and 28 at the same location in March 2003, and more recently 5 birds at St. Michael's Mead Lake in early 2006 and up to 18 birds at Sheering Lower Road Scrape in the latter part of 2007.

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*

Scarce breeding bird and more common winter visitor.

The unusual breeding display, known as “roding”, was once a regular feature of spring evenings at Hatfield Forest, but no reports have been received for the period under study. Nevertheless, Woodcock are undoubtedly present in the area, particularly during the winter months when numbers may be augmented by birds arriving from colder climates. Usually observed when flushed, most records involve small numbers of birds at locations such as Stansted Airport Lagoons, Sawbridgeworth Marsh and Hatfield Forest, but larger groups have been flushed during shoots, with 20+ recorded at Bloodhounds’ Wood on 5th February 2005.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Very rare passage migrant.

A full summer-plumaged adult was at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 24th July 2004 and a similar bird on 22nd July 2006. Three were reported flying low over Hockerill on 3rd October 2005. Single birds were at Sheering Lower Road Scrape on 6th and 9th August 2007 and at Allen’s Green on 16th September 2007.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*

Very rare passage migrant.

Approximately 25 birds flew over Patmore Heath early in the morning of 29th April 2007, the only previous record being of a summer-plumaged adult at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 4th August 1997.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

Scarce passage migrant.

The only record during the period of this report was of a single bird flying north at 5.20 p.m. on 3rd May 2007 at Stansted Airport Lagoons.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

Rare visitor and passage migrant.

No new records have been reported, the last being from Stansted Airport Lagoons on 16th January 2000.

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*

Very rare passage migrant.

There have been no new records since the adult in full summer plumage at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 18th June 2000.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Single birds (occasionally 2) were observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 26th June 2002, 19th July 2003 (2 birds), 16th July 2006, 21st April 2007, 18th July 2007 and 8th August 2007. Elsewhere, single birds were seen at Hatfield Forest Lake on 6th August 2006 and at Spellbrook Lock on 22nd December 2006.

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

Scarce passage migrant.

Recorded in small numbers most years at Stansted Airport Lagoons on single dates in July or August, and also from Hatfield Forest Lake on single dates in July and August 2004 and from Sheering Lower Road Scrape in August 2007. During August 2007 juveniles were observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on many dates, with 7 on 15th, 5 on 16th, 4 on 17th and 5 again on 18th.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

Regular winter visitor and passage migrant, occasionally summering.

Recorded in ones and twos each year, predominantly in the months July to September, with a scattering of records from other months, from Stansted Airport Lagoons. Other sightings have been recorded from Hatfield Forest Lake, Hadham Hall Lagoon, Thorley Wash, Mathams Pit, Wickham Hall Lagoon and Sheering Lower Road Scrape.

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*

Rare passage migrant.

Single birds were observed at Patmore Heath on 23rd April 2002, Hatfield Forest Lake on 18th July 2004 and Sheering Lower Road Scrape on 20th August 2007.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

Regular passage migrant.

Recorded in small numbers (typically 1 to 4) every year, predominantly in the months July, August and September with some records in April, May and June. Regular locations are Stansted Airport Lagoons, Hatfield Forest Lake, Mathams Pit and Sheering Lower Road Scrape.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

Very rare passage migrant.

No new records have been reported since the two birds observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 8th May 1993.

GREY PHALAROPE *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Very rare vagrant.

There have been no further reports since the bird present at Bishop's Stortford Sewage Farm for one week in October 1950.

ARCTIC SKUA *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Extremely rare autumn and passage migrant.

There have been no new records since the dark phase bird seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 6th September 2000.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Very rare winter visitor.

A single adult was observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 2nd December 2005, this being the only new record since the bird that was also seen at the same location on 27th January 2001.

LITTLE GULL *Larus minutus*

Very rare visitor.

A single adult seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 14th July 2007 is the first record for the area.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

Very common visitor in almost all months of the year.

One of the features of the British agricultural scene in recent years is the occurrence of large flocks of Black-headed Gulls at inland sites, sometimes following the plough but often simply loafing in fields. In addition, birds are almost always present on suitable lakes and lagoons in the area. Notable flocks include 900+ feeding in a field being ploughed near Stansted Airport Lagoons on 24th July 2006, 550+ at Mathams Pit on 22nd August 2006, 600+ at Allen's Green on 29th September 2007 and 550+ at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 23rd October 2007.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

Common visitor, mainly in winter.

With maximum numbers recorded between November and March, the Common Gull may be seen in flocks of 20 to 100 and occasionally 200+ on suitable agricultural land and local playing fields. In the period under review, the Common Gull has been recorded in all months except May and June.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*

Common visitor, mainly in autumn and winter.

Peak numbers coincide with the autumn passage (July to October) although this species has been recorded in all months of the year. Notable flocks include 60+ at Hatfield Forest Lake on 30th August 2002, 60+ at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 24th July 2006 and 220+ loafing in a ploughed field at Trims Green on 22nd August 2006.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

Common visitor, mainly in winter.

Records of the Herring Gull have declined, but the largest flocks have been observed in the autumn migration months of July to October, with 20+ recorded at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 24th July 2006, 30+ at Mathams Pit on 22nd August 2006 with 20+ there on 11th September 2006 and 27 birds observed flying SSW over Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 25th November 2007.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL *Larus michahellis*

Rare visitor, but numbers increasing.

There have been eight additional records during the period under review:

4th August 2005, Mathams Pit: two first-summer birds.

4th August 2005, Twyford Lock: four first summer birds in ploughed field with Lesser Black-backed Gull flock.

24th July 2006, Stansted Airport Lagoons: two first summer birds and one third summer bird.

22nd August 2006, Mathams Pit: four first summer birds and one adult in a ploughed field.

7th July 2007, Stansted Airport Lagoons: one third summer bird.

16th July 2007, Trims Green: one adult and one first year bird feeding in a field undergoing muck spreading, and again on 25th July 2007.

22nd October 2007, Mathams Pit: one adult.

The Yellow-legged Gull is now recognised by the BOU as a separate species and it is always worthwhile to scan flocks of gulls for these birds.

CASPIAN GULL *Larus cachinnans*

Very rare visitor. New record for the area.

A putative third summer bird was observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 24th July 2006.

GLAUCOUS GULL *Larus hyperboreus*

One historic record.

A single bird observed at Bishop's Stortford rubbish tip on 5th and 6th January 1957 remains the only record.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

Fairly common visitor.

This species is usually observed as single birds either on arable land or flying over, although larger late summer flocks have been seen in the Spellbrook area, with 28 on 26th August 2006 and 10+ on 29th August 2007.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*

Very rare winter visitor.

There have been no further records since the single adult seen at Harlow Mill on 24th January 1988.

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*

Rare passage migrant.

One was observed flying SE over Hatfield Forest Lake at 7.00 a.m. on 29th July 2007, this being the first record since 2001.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Regular passage migrant and uncommon breeding species.

Following the reinstallation of a Tern Raft on Hatfield Forest Lake by The National Trust, the Common Tern has bred successfully on the lake in 2006 and 2007. Juveniles have also been observed at Hatfield Forest Lake in 2002 and 2004 and at Stansted Airport Lagoons in 2006 and 2007. The Common Tern may be seen regularly in the area in all months from April to August, with most records coming from the Stort valley, Hatfield Forest Lake and Stansted Airport Lagoons.

LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons*

Very rare passage migrant.

There have been no records since the single bird recorded at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 14th May 1990.

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*

Very rare passage migrant.

An adult observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 18th July 2002 is the only record since the five birds recorded at Wickham Hall Lagoon on 13th May 1999.

LITTLE AUK *Alle alle*

Very rare vagrant.

There have been no new records since the bird found dead, presumably storm-driven, beside power lines at Manuden on 5th November 1987.

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia*

Very common resident.

Flocks of over 100 birds may be seen in Bishop's Stortford town centre, usually around the flour mill, with smaller flocks on local fields.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*

Fairly common resident.

The Stock Dove may be under-recorded, since it is easily overlooked. Widely but thinly distributed throughout the area, birds are known to have nested in Hatfield Forest and have been observed displaying at Stansted Airport Lagoons and at Spellbrook Lock. Post-breeding and wintering flocks include 50+ observed at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 13th February 2005, 30 to 40 in the Trims Green area in April 2006 and 37 in the Pishiobury Park and Sheering Lower Road Scrape area on 18th November 2007.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

The Woodpigeon is widespread as a breeding bird throughout the area and very large winter flocks have been observed, with more than 1000 birds recorded at Sawbridgeworth Marsh, Stortford Park, Trims Green and Wickham Hall on occasions in recent years.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

Very common resident.

The Collared Dove is abundant and widespread. Notable post-breeding and winter flocks include 40+ at Wickham Hall on 26th September 2002 and on 26th October 2004, 54 at Trims Green on 7th October 2007, 140+ at Moor Hall, Thorley on 22nd August 2006 and 166 at Gilston Church on 31st December 2007.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*

Uncommon and decreasing summer visitor.

The plight of the Turtle Dove can be gauged from the fact that only 24 observations have been reported in the period covered by this report. There have been no confirmed breeding records although territorial behaviour has been observed at Hatfield Forest, Allen's Green, Patmore Heath, Stansted Airport Lagoons and Feakes Lock.

RING-NECKED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*

Rare visitor, but increasing.

The Ring-necked Parakeet is widespread in the London area, with winter roosts of many thousand birds occurring at Esher Rugby Club, so it is perhaps not surprising that sightings appear to be increasing in this area. Single birds were observed at Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford on 15th May 2002, Stocking Pelham on 21st November 2002, Farnham in late April 2005 and Sheering Lower Road Scrape flying north on 8th September 2007, whilst two birds were seen at Pig Lane, Bishop's Stortford on 27th March 2006.

CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

Common summer visitor, but decreasing.

The Cuckoo is widespread in the area but appears to be in decline. Reliable locations include Hatfield Forest, Sawbridgeworth Marsh, Thorley Wash and the adjacent River Stort valley, Patmore Heath and farmland to the west and NW of Bishop's Stortford. The earliest recorded arrival was at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 2nd April 2005 and the latest record was also from Stansted Airport Lagoons on 28th July 2007.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Uncommon resident, but increasing.

Recorded sightings have increased from just four in the 1990 – 1995 report, through 13 in the 1996 – 2001 report to an impressive 56 records in the current period. Evidence of breeding in straw bale stacks was reported from three areas in 2005. Most records are of single birds, but two were reported from Wickham Hall in 2002 and 2003 and two were present in the Thorley Wash area from 3rd September 2006 to 15th March 2007.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*

Fairly common resident, but possibly declining.

Most records are from Hatfield Forest and from the northern part of the local area and some observers have reported an apparent decline in numbers, particularly from Hatfield Forest. The Little Owl is the most diurnal of British owls and daytime records include two birds present at Obrey Way, Bishop's Stortford from 8th June to 1st July 2007.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

Common resident.

Being almost exclusively nocturnal, the Tawny Owl may easily be overlooked and is more often heard than seen. An encouraging trend is an increase in the number of records of birds making contact calls at night. A pair with young were observed in a tree at Pearse House field on 9th May 2005.

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*

Rare winter visitor.

All records are of single birds:

7th August 2004, Albury.

2nd December 2005, Barkway.

2nd April 2006, Sawbridgeworth Marsh, flushed from Sallow scrub early a.m.
8th February 2007, Thorley Wash, being mobbed by Magpies late p.m.
7th April 2007, Little Hallingbury, flushed from hedgerow.
24th November 2007, Much Hadham.

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

Very rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

One was observed at Barkway on 3rd March 2005 and one was seen flying over a stubble field at Stortford Park Farm on 26th April 2006, these being the only records since the bird recorded at Barley on 18th December 1999.

NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Very rare passage migrant.

There have been no new records since the bird recorded at Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 12th May 2001 through the Hertfordshire Bird Club web site, which is only the second record for the area.

SWIFT *Apus apus*

Common summer visitor and passage migrant.

The Swift is a common sight overhead during the summer months in the Bishop's Stortford area, with several breeding sites in the town where suitable buildings remain. Impressive flocks on migration include 100 at Trims Green on 19th July 2005, 120+ at Stansted Airport on 25th July 2007 flying west in a 30 minute period, followed by 290 flying east in a 30 minute period at the same location the following day. On 22nd July 2007, 120 were observed flying south in a single flock at Thorley Church.

KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

Fairly common resident.

The Kingfisher may be observed along the River Stort valley and at Hatfield Forest Lake and there have been numerous records during the period under review, together with some records from other suitable habitat in the area. Breeding is assumed to have occurred in the Stort valley based on observations of adult birds carrying food in May and June 2005, inspecting a nest hole in April 2006 and carrying food in June 2007.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops*

Rare vagrant.

One was reported from Oaklands Park, Bishop's Stortford on 23rd April 2003 whilst a well-watched individual was present in the Summercroft School/Pearse House/Hockerill area and latterly in the Bishop's Stortford Castle Gardens/Grange Paddocks area from 23rd April to 18th May 2007. These represent the sixth and seventh records for the area.

WRYNECK *Jynx torquilla*

Very rare passage migrant.

Two unverified records from Farnham include a single bird feeding in a garden on 3rd September 2002 with two birds present on 7th September. The previous records are of single birds at Newport Sewage Works on 3rd September 2001 and at Henham on 31st August 2000.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

Common resident.

With its tendency to feed on ants in open grassy areas, bright colours and characteristic call, the Green Woodpecker has been recorded on numerous occasions. An average of 5 to 6 breeding territories have been recorded in Hatfield Forest in recent years and elsewhere juveniles have been recorded at Mathams Wood, Stansted Airport Lagoons, Spellbrook and Stortford Park Farm.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos major*

Common resident.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker is recorded from all suitable woodland habitats throughout the area and in addition this species is frequently observed in gardens where it visits bird tables and peanut feeders. Breeding territories have averaged five to six in Hatfield Forest bird surveys in recent years.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos minor*
Uncommon resident.

The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is easily overlooked, spending much of its time high in the canopy of trees. There are far fewer records in recent years than for the other two woodpeckers and this species is now decidedly uncommon. Nevertheless, birds have been recorded at Hatfield Forest and along the River Stort valley, with occasional sightings in gardens in the area. On an encouraging note, two fully fledged juveniles were observed at Southmill Lock on 6th June 2006 and adult birds have been observed during the breeding season in 2007.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*
Widespread resident breeding species and winter visitor.

It is considered that the extra birds reported in flocks from July after the breeding season may contain birds arriving here from elsewhere. Another theory is that some breeding birds may be overlooked and these families are only recorded in the non-breeding months from July. Singing males can be heard in most open arable habitat when territories are taken from February. Breeding takes place between March and June and the breeding season records come from about twelve sites.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*
Regular summer visitor but no local breeding reported.

There are no reported breeding sites in our area. The earliest arrival date in the six years of this report was 28th March in 2004 and the latest departure date was 3rd November in 2007. The full dates given below show that sometimes there are only three months in the year (December, January and February) when this species cannot be seen in the Bishop's Stortford area.

2002: 28th April at Hatfield Forest Lake and 7th September at Stansted Airport Lagoons.
2003: too few records available.
2004: 28th March at Hatfield Forest Lake and 22nd August at Furneux Pelham.
2005: 15th April at Hatfield Forest Lake and 29th August at Stansted Airport Lagoons.
2006: 30th March at Mathams Pit and 3rd September at the same site.
2007: 15th April at Stansted Airport Lagoons and 3rd November at Tednambury.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*
Regular summer visitor. Breeds.

Breeding was reported at only six sites during the six years and the extent of this under-reporting can only be gauged by further work. Flocks of 200 plus are reported in August and September in some years.

The earliest arrival and latest departure dates for the six years are shown here:

2002: 1st April at Hatfield Forest Lake; 3rd September Bishop's Stortford College.
2003: 26th May (!) at Wickham Hall and 3rd September at Dane Park, Bishop's Stortford.
2004: 3rd April at Whittington Way and 16th October at Tesco, Bishop's Stortford.
2005: 7th April at Thorley Wash and 17th September at Hadham Hall Lagoon.
2006: 3rd April at Trims Green and 23rd September at High Wych.
2007: 6th April at Patmore Heath and 2nd October at Trims Green.

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW *Hirundo daurica*
Very rare summer vagrant.

The first record for the local area on 4th June 1999 at Stansted Airport Lagoons has now been followed by a second. On 28th and 29th May 2002 a single bird was seen at Hollingson Meads in the Stort Valley in North Harlow by many observers. This site contains old gravel workings and lies on the southern edge of the 290 square kilometres of land centred on Bishop's Stortford that the bird club tries to cover.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*

Regular summer visitor. Breeds.

Breeding records come from about seven sites. Because these birds tend to be colonial nesters it may be that they are more numerous than Swallows in the Bishop's Stortford area. Large numbers of birds are seen on passage, moving through from other locations. 200+ were reported from Stansted Airport Lagoons on 7th September 2002 and from Dane Park, Bishop's Stortford on 3rd September 2003.

The earliest arrival and departure dates for the six years are given here:

- 2002: 5th May at Hatfield Forest Lake and 16th October at Wickham Hall.
- 2003: 17th April at Bishop's Stortford Maltings and 14th September at Stansted Airport Lagoons.
- 2004: 9th April at Albury and 7th October at Patmore Heath.
- 2005: 7th April at Thorley Wash and 1st October at Stansted Airport Lagoons.
- 2006: 6th April at Hatfield Forest Lake and 8th October at Mathams Pit.
- 2007: 4th April at Wickham Hall and 25th September at Stocking Wood.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

Very rare visitor.

Although this species bred in Hatfield Forest until 1985 there have only been two records in the six years covered by this report. On 2nd September 2005 one bird was heard calling in flight at St James Church, Thorley. On 15th August 2007 one bird was seen in flight at Stansted Airport Lagoons.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*

Birds are recorded in each month of the year. Breeds.

The only declared breeding records again seem to come from around Stansted Airport. There were many records in the second half of 2007 but while this would have followed the breeding season and may have involved passage birds rather than local birds, some work to identify other breeding areas would be helpful in the coming years.

ROCK PIPIT *Anthus petrosus*

One historic record

A single bird was seen at Bishop's Stortford Sewage Farm on 24th March 1967.

WATER PIPIT *Anthus spinoletta*

Very rare visitor.

There have been no records in the thirteen years since the bird seen at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 1st January 1995.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava flavissima*

Small numbers arrive as summer visitors. Breeds.

Breeding records come from the areas around Stansted Airport, the Moor Hall barns and Trims Green to the west of town, and at Darney Wood. Numbers have declined compared with earlier years.

BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava flava*

Very rare visitor.

Two records submitted were considered to be of this form. The first was at Trims Green on 24th April 2006. The second was on 18th April 2007, at Tednambury Marsh.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

Birds are recorded in each month of the year. Breeds.

This species has become an established part of the summer breeding scene in the past six years. Display activity can be seen at many of the locks on the River Stort and on the river at Grange Paddocks. Nest sites in urban areas present no problems and breeding in the town centre is successful in most years. A pair also has bred by the lake in Hatfield Forest and another at Stansted Airport Lagoons.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarellii*

Common resident. Birds are recorded in each month of the year. Breeds.

This familiar black-and-white wagtail is at home in urban areas. Breeding is still under-reported and post-breeding flocks can often be seen on sports fields. Winter flocks can be more than 25 and when a roost is seen dispersing, more than 100 birds can be involved.

WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba alba*

Rare visitor on passage.

This form was not reported separately in the period under review until 2006. There were four records in April 2006 and a further two in the autumn on 3rd September and 1st October 2006. In 2007 there was one April record on 18th at Stansted Airport Lagoons and two records in September, one around Stansted Airport Lagoons on 14th and the next day another observer reported one from Sheering Lower Road Scrape.

WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulus*

Winter visitors in most years.

Although birds were not seen in two of the six years under review (2002 and 2006) the Waxwings that did appear in the other years became local celebrities. Many people not normally interested in going to see new species were able to enjoy watching them. Birds were recorded in the immediate Bishop's Stortford area in two of the four years. In 2003 a flock favoured first the Birchanger Services car park and then moved to Bishop's Stortford railway station car park. On Friday 9th February 2007 a group spent the morning in the railway station car park again.

In the other two years the nearest flocks of Waxwing were in Harlow, outside our reporting area. Birds were present throughout the first three months of 2004 and in February 2005 there was a flock of 26 at the Tesco store in Church Langley. Individual birds were seen in Sawbridgeworth on various dates, but it is the opportunity to see flocks of these colourful birds that brightens some winters. The club website and messages posted on the club's Yahoo message site can alert members to these flocks if telephone messages have not done the job first.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Abundant and widespread resident. Breeds.

Common throughout the year and a feature of many gardens.

DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis*

Abundant and widespread resident. Breeds.

Common throughout the year and a feature of some gardens.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

Abundant and widespread resident. Breeds.

Common throughout the year and a feature of most gardens and hedgerows.

NIGHTINGALE *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Very rare summer visitor.

No records have been received since 2nd June 2002. In that year single singing males in Hatfield Forest were reported from 11th April. Evening walks to enjoy the singing of these birds have therefore been a disappointment recently. Reasons for the decline in Hatfield Forest can only be surmised when some of the other previously popular locations in Essex (for example at the Essex Wildlife Trust reserves at Abberton and Fingringhoe) and others in Hertfordshire are not thought to be showing similar declines.

BLUETHROAT *Luscinia svecica*

Very rare passage migrant.

There have been no records since 29th April 1978, when a Bluethroat of the white-spotted form was found dead in a garden in Spellbrook. The skin is now in the Norwich Castle Museum (Gladwin and Sage 1986).

BLACK REDSTART *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Very rare passage visitor.

Three records for this species came in the final year covered by this report. Single birds were recorded on 7th February 2007 at Summercroft School, Bishop's Stortford and on 30th March 2007 at Long Border Road, Stansted Airport. On 6th September 2007 a single bird at Wickham Hall became the third record.

REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Very rare passage visitor.

There were four records in the six years covered by this report, all of which involved single birds. The first record was a female seen on the west (Hertfordshire) bank of the River Stort on 17th April 2005. On 12th April 2006 a male was seen at Mathams Wood. Later that year a female or immature was seen at Thorley on 11th September. The final record was a female at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 17th August 2007.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*

Regular passage migrant but still uncommon.

There were eighteen records in the six years covered by this report. Apart from two April records, 17th April 2006 at Trims Green and 28th April 2007 at Tednambury, all of the other records were reported in late August and September with one record on 1st October 2006 at the Stansted Airport Lagoons and another on 3rd October 2006 at Thorley Wash.

STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

An increasingly common bird, not usually present in breeding season. Recorded in ten months of the year. No breeding records.

There were twelve records in the six years to 2001. In 2002 there were two records and there were none in 2003. From 2004 the numbers seen have increased each year. In 2007 alone there were 20 records. Although previously considered a winter visitor, birds have been recorded in all months except April and June. There was only one May record with a bird on 2nd May 2007 at Wickham Hall. Regular winter locations in recent years include Thorley Wash and Stortford Park.

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Regular passage migrant, but still uncommon.

From 2006 the number of birds reported in the established pattern of northward journeys in April and May, and return journeys southwards in August and September increased from the handful reported in the six years of the report to 2001 to 19 in 2006 falling to 11 in 2007. In general, the sightings were made to the west of Bishop's Stortford at locations such as Trims Green, Allen's Green, Farnham, Manuden and Albury.

RING OUZEL *Turdus torquatus*

Very rare passage migrant.

There were three records in the six years under review. On 23rd October 2005 there was an autumn record at Stansted Airport Lagoons. In 2007 there were two April records; on 26th April at Long Border Road, Stansted Airport and on 27th April near the church at Bush End.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

Abundant resident. Seen in all months. Breeds.

As with Robin, Dunnock and Wren this species is observed in almost all, if not all, private gardens and can also be seen in woods and hedgerows. Flocks of up to 80+ in September 2002, 60 in 2005 and 50 in 2006 give support to the evidence of ringing records that additional birds come in from Europe for the winter. It may be that some of the birds we see in the breeding season travel westwards to spend the winter in different surroundings.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

Common winter visitor; one of the two winter thrushes.

Every year there are reports of winter flocks of more than a hundred of these large thrushes; and sometimes more than 200. Often the flocks are a mixture of both Fieldfare and the smaller Redwing in varying proportions.

The latest departure dates and earliest arrival dates are:

- 2002: Left (last recorded) 5th March and arrived back (first noted) on 1st November at Stortford Park.
- 2003: Left 30th March and arrived back on 16th October at Hadham Hall Lagoon.
- 2004: Left 8th April and arrived back 10th October in Hatfield Forest.
- 2005: Left 28th March and came back to Stortford Park on 19th September.
- 2006: Left 6th April and returned on 1st November to Bishop's Stortford cemetery.
- 2007: Left 10th April and arrived back on 7th October in Hatfield Forest.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

Less common resident than Blackbird. Seen in all months. Breeds.

In common with all of the other species around Bishop's Stortford there were many more records in 2006 and 2007 than in any of the previous years. This may be a consequence of increasing reports from observers rather than any separate change in bird numbers.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Common winter visitor; the other of the two winter thrushes.

This thrush is smaller than the Fieldfare and birdwatchers have to remind themselves each winter of the Redwing's flight outline to avoid confusion with Starling and Song Thrush.

The latest recorded dates and earliest reported arrival dates are:

- 2002: 5th March at Dane Bridge and 20th September at Dane Park, Bishop's Stortford.
- 2003: 15th April at Bury Green and 12th October at Hatfield Forest.
- 2004: 30th March at Stortford Park and 8th October at Patmore Heath.
- 2005: 2nd April at Hoggate's Wood and 18th September at Hatfield Forest.
- 2006: 9th April at Hatfield Forest and 22nd October at Stansted Airport Lagoons.
- 2007: 10th April at Hatfield Forest and 27th September at Hatfield Forest.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

Less common resident than Song Thrush. Seen in all months. Breeds.

Only about five breeding sites are reported. There was a post breeding flock of 32 over Patmore Heath on 23rd August 2006. In July 2007 there were flocks of 20 plus in Hatfield Forest and at Stansted Mountfitchet.

CETTI'S WARBLER *Cettia cetti*

Very rare summer visitor and passage migrant.

A bird heard calling from the Tednambury Marsh at dusk on 21st December 2007, was the first record for the area since a singing male was heard at Spellbrook on 18th June 1979 for about two weeks and another from the Hatfield Forest Lake area on 29th and 30th August 1981.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

Regular but scarce summer visitor and passage migrant.

The Grasshopper Warbler has a high frequency "reeling" call that can be heard from April through to July. Its preferred habitat is marshy land or wet scrub typified by locations along the River Stort where it once bred in significant numbers.

The only areas in which it has been recorded recently are the Stort valley from Thorley Wash to Sawbridgeworth Marsh. During 2007 it was present in the Thorley Wash area from 18th April to 30th June with up to 5 males reeling on 22nd April and 3 males still reeling on 22nd June.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Formerly locally common summer visitor and passage migrant, numbers now much reduced.

Sedge Warblers were once found on any watercourse, pond or lake in the area and were heard singing from April to July. The majority of recent records are from the Stort valley between Thorley Wash and Sawbridgeworth Marsh; this area is also a migration route. Nine were reported from Thorley Wash on 2nd May 2004 and 6 between Twyford and Spellbrook Locks on 17th May 2007. They have not been reported from Hatfield Forest since 1996 but are still reported irregularly from Stansted Airport Lagoons.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Locally common summer visitor and passage migrant.

Stansted Airport Lagoons hold the area's largest populations with 10 sightings and 6 males singing on the 8th June and 20 on 21st July 2007 including recently fledged juveniles. Smaller numbers are still present in the Stort valley with 4 at Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 15th June 2007. Records for Hatfield Forest are significantly lower with 1 on 16th July 2006 and 1 on 7th May 2007.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

Fairly common summer visitor and passage migrant.

Recorded regularly although more localised and less common than the Whitethroat. Most records are of single birds. Three males were singing along the River Stort between in the Spellbrook area on 17th April 2007, 4 males were singing by Hatfield Forest Lake on 7th May 2007 and 8 at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 19th August 2007. Successful breeding was reported at Stansted Airport Lagoons with a juvenile seen on 15th July 2007.

WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Common summer visitor and passage migrant.

Generally widespread and fairly common, although numbers have never fully recovered from the national population crash of 1969. Whilst birds normally start arriving from late April to early May, during 2003 arrivals were not reported until the last week of May. The Stort valley holds good populations with 10 at Thorley Wash on 2nd of May 2006 and 9 between Twyford and Spellbrook locks on 7th May 2007, whilst at Stansted Airport Lagoons 6+ were recorded on 3rd August 2007.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*

Fairly common summer visitor and passage migrant.

Generally distributed in woodlands, but has a preference for thicker cover than other warblers. Birds are regularly reported from Hatfield Forest where 6 males were singing on 7th May 2007, and 3 on 10th June 2007, whilst at Grange Paddocks 3 males were singing on 20th June 2006 and 3 on 11th May 2007.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

Common summer visitor, passage migrant and winter visitor.

The Blackcap is present in most woodland. Spring migrants usually arrive in April and depart in September. Hatfield Forest has a stable breeding population as numerous as that of the Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler. In recent years it is regularly seen in gardens during the winter months at bird feeders.

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Very rare summer visitor.

One calling during the evening of 25th April 2006 in Mathams Wood was the first record since one was observed singing in Birchanger Wood from 1st to 9th June 1987.

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*

Common summer visitor, passage migrant and rare winter visitor.

Usually the first of the migrant warblers to arrive, the distinctive "chiff-chaff" call heralds the arrival of spring, usually in the last week of March. Widely distributed throughout our area and found in most woodland. Most birds have left on the autumn migration by the end of September although there are records of wintering birds with one at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 7th January 2007 and one calling at Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 22nd December 2007.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Common but declining summer visitor and passage migrant.

Found in all wooded and bushy areas of our region from April to September.

Arrivals in 2007 were late and numbers slow to build up. The Hatfield Forest breeding bird survey for the 2007 season shows that the Chiffchaff was more numerous with 21 records against the Willow Warbler with 11 records.

Stansted Airport Lagoons hold good populations with a build up of 20 + on 19th August 2007 prior to the autumn migration.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

Thinly distributed resident, but common winter visitor and passage migrant.

Seen most frequently in late autumn and winter, the Goldcrest mostly favours coniferous habitats and is regularly found in gardens and urban sites with mature conifers, such as churchyards.

An autumn flock of 50 + was recorded at Albury Hall on 26th August 2002 and another of 30+ in Bishop's Stortford cemetery on 29th September 2007.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*

Very rare passage migrant.

A single bird observed at Hatfield Forest on 4th November 2007 was the first record since one also seen in the forest on 26th and 27th October 1987.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*

Summer visitor, much reduced in numbers.

The Spotted Flycatcher continues its decline, mostly noted from gardens where

it was once regularly reported. St James's Churchyard, Thorley illustrates this decline with 7 birds reported on 22 July 2004 (2 adults and 5 juveniles) and 7 on 29th July 2005, reducing to 2 on 11th July 2006 and 1 on 5th September 2007. At Hatfield Forest 6 were recorded on 27th August 2006 (2 adults and 4 juveniles) and at Elsenham Hall 5 were observed on 25th August 2007.

PIED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Rare passage migrant.

Recent reports are of a male catching flies from power lines on 23 April 2003 at Farnham and 1 at Patmore Heath on 4th September 2005.

BEARDED TIT *Panurus biarmicus*

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

There have not been any records since a single bird observed at Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 3rd February 1991, although during the 1970s and 1980s small flocks of up to six birds were occasionally reported from Sawbridgeworth Marsh and Hatfield Forest Marsh.

LONG TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

Common resident.

Widely distributed and common in winter flocks with many records of 30 to 40 birds and one record of 45+ on 5th October 2007 in Spellbrook Lane. Smaller parties of up to 12 birds are reported as frequent visitors to gardens and residential areas. The species has benefited from the recent milder winters.

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris*

Locally fairly common resident.

The Marsh Tit is found locally in small numbers in many woodland areas around Bishop's Stortford. Hatfield Forest has a steady population with 9+ recorded on 17th January 2006. Smaller numbers are recorded from the Stort valley with the Wallbury estate having regular records of 2 to 3 birds.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus*
Uncommon resident.

Unlike the Marsh Tit, which it closely resembles, the Willow Tit has declined dramatically in numbers and there have only been 12 reported sightings in the last 6 years. A pair of birds were observed at Takeley in 2002 and single birds were reported from Hatfield Forest in 2004, from Sawbridgeworth Marsh in 2005 and from Patmore Heath and Albury in 2005 and 2006. In Hatfield Forest a pair of birds were seen displaying courtship behaviour on 26th March 2007, the only record of possible breeding in recent years.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*
Fairly common resident.

The Coal Tit is not as numerous as the Blue and Great Tits but is frequently found in woodlands and residential areas with mature conifers. Outside the breeding season it will join wintering groups of other tits and is a regular visitor to gardens and bird feeders.

BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*
Abundant resident.

Abundant in all woodlands, field hedgerows, and residential areas.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*
Common resident.

Widespread in all woodland areas, also frequently seen in residential areas and a regular visitor to gardens and bird feeders.

NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*
Fairly common resident.

Recorded in most open wooded areas around Bishop's Stortford and an occasional garden visitor in winter. Hatfield Forest has a good population with 10 + recorded on a visit on 17th January 2006.

TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*
Fairly common resident.

Recorded in most suitable wooded habitats in the area, and perhaps under-recorded owing to its somewhat secretive behaviour. Hatfield Forest and the Stort valley are areas where it is most frequently seen.

GOLDEN ORIOLE *Oriolus oriolus*
Very rare passage migrant.

Since 1980, when two birds were reported in Elsenham on 6th May, two further observations have been reported: one female in the Gilston area on 28th May 2006 and another single bird at Little Hallingbury on 22nd May 2007. Thus May becomes the month to look out for this migrating species which, in spite of the male's bright plumage, is so easily overlooked.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE *Lanius collurio*
Historic records only.

Now absent from the area, the only records are from the 1930s and 1940s, the most recent being a pair that nested in Galloway Road, Bishop's Stortford in June – July 1949 and reared young.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*
Rare and declining winter visitor.

Since 1999, when a long staying bird was observed in the Pishiobury area from 12th February to 7th March, no further sightings of this spectacular species have been made. Prior to this, reports of single birds from several locations were noted for 1998, 1988, 1984, 1983, 1981, 1980 and 1975.

JAY *Garrulus glandarius*

Common and widespread resident and winter migrant.

Widely distributed in all wooded areas and increasingly reported as a garden visitor. As a winter visitor, the arrivals can be spectacular in such places as Hatfield Forest, when migrants arrive to take advantage of the acorn crop during October and November.

MAGPIE *Pica pica*

Abundant and widespread resident. Increasing.

This species has increased considerably over the last two decades and large roosts are reported from areas such as Tednambury, where 110 were noted on 19th November 2005 and 115 on 4th February 2007.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

Abundant and widespread resident.

Since the last report the significant increase in numbers has continued. Gregarious in nature, it is difficult to count as a breeding species. However, it is clear that it has spread into the more urban areas where breeding in chimneys offers an alternative to the tree holes normally adopted. It also occurs in large roosts with other corvids and the following counts indicate the larger roosts observed: Tednambury: 200+ on 23rd May 2005, Hatfield Forest: 250+ on 17th January 2006, Trims Green: 200+ on 22nd August 2006, Sawbridgeworth Marsh: 600+ on 2nd December 2006, Stansted Airport Lagoons: 500 on 3rd November 2007, Sawbridgeworth Marsh: 309 on 11th December 2007. There was also an interesting record of an albino reported from Little Hadham on 7th November 2007 which had been observed over 'several weeks'.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

Common resident but in slow decline.

No surveys of this species have been carried out since the last report, making an assessment of the status of the Rook a matter of informed guesswork. There is no doubt that the many rookeries that occur in the area are still active, although possibly with fewer nests. Some sites have suddenly disappeared – literally overnight, (e.g. Bells Hill) to re-establish itself a year or two later at the nearby site of Bishop's Stortford College. Large post breeding flocks occur about the woods and fields which then join roosts of up to 200+ birds with other corvids through the winter periods from such locations as Tednambury Marsh, Stansted Mountfitchet and Farnham.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Common and widely distributed resident.

The Carrion Crow remains under-reported, tending only to be remarked upon when post-breeding foraging flocks and winter roosts are observed, such as at Trims Green with 200+ observed on 2nd March 2005 and 100+ on 22nd August 2006 and Allen's Green with 200+ observed on 15th September 2007.

HOODED CROW *Corvus cornix*

Rare visitor.

There have been no new records since 25th October 1985, when a single bird was seen near High Wych, the only other record being two birds observed at Hollingson Meads on 27th March 1971.

RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Very rare visitor. New species for the area.

The Raven is now observed with increased frequency in Hertfordshire and pairs have now been noted in the breeding season. The first and only record in the Bishop's Stortford area occurred on 8th October 2005 when a single bird was observed on the top of a building adjacent to the flour mill in Dane Street, Bishop's Stortford.

STARLING *Sternus vulgaris*

Declining resident, passage migrant and winter visitor.

The previous report noted a decline in this species and although no objective research has been carried out to establish its current status, there are clearly fewer about throughout the spring and summer months. During autumn and winter, numbers are boosted by passage and winter migrants, with post-breeding flocks and winter roosts occasionally providing spectacular avian events. The most significant flocks are as follows: Bloodhounds' Wood: 300+ on 12th March 2003, Trims Green: 2000+ on 29th September 2005, Braughing: 2000+ on 5th November 2006, Stansted Airport: 2000+ on 23rd February 2007 and Stansted Airport Lagoons: 910 on 3rd November 2007.

ROSE-COLOURED STARLING *Sternus roseus*

Very rare vagrant.

The only record for this species is from Much Hadham on 25th October 1952.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Declining resident.

Since the last report in 2001, the decline in House Sparrow numbers has been dramatic. A few colonies survive in and around the town, but the foraging birds of farmyards now appear to be but a distant memory. This is all very much in line with national data that indicate a marked reduction in this species in the south east of England.

TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*

Rare winter visitor.

In the 1990 report the Tree Sparrow was described as 'widespread'. For the six year period of this report, only one has been observed among a winter flock of finches and buntings in a shelter belt adjacent to Stocking Wood on 22nd December 2006.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

Abundant and widespread resident, winter visitor and passage migrant.

A widespread species, the Chaffinch is common in and around the Bishop's Stortford area. It breeds in considerable numbers in Hatfield Forest where most habitats appear to be suitable. Quite soon after breeding, foraging flocks can be seen among loose grain following harvesting, together with set-aside or shelter belts. For the period of this report the largest flocks reported were 150+ at Patmore Hall on 4th December 2003 and 100+ at Mathams Wood on 22nd August 2006.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Reported annually from a variety of locations either in mixed flocks or at garden bird feeders, with 5 at Sawbridgeworth on 14th January 2006 and 8 in Hatfield Forest on 16th November 2007. The record from Little Hallingbury of around 250 on 16th January 2000, where they were foraging in a harvested linseed crop with other finches and buntings, remains a unique occurrence.

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

Abundant resident, passage migrant and winter visitor.

The Greenfinch appears to be increasing in our catchment area, most notably in gardens and in Hatfield Forest. Post breeding, resident birds are joined by migrants to form foraging flocks when quite large numbers can occur. A flock of 100+ was noted in Hatfield Forest on 13th January 2002, 100+ at a large roost in a Stansted Airport car park on 3rd April 2007 and 40+ reported from Sawbridgeworth on 8th August 2007.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

Common, widespread resident and passage migrant.

An under-reported species. Our last report was unable to provide evidence of breeding, but there have been more reports from observers during the breeding season in all the years covered by this report, indicating a widespread presence throughout this period. Significant numbers appear each year in post-breeding flocks from July onwards, the most notable being 60+ at Stansted Airport on 17th August 2007, 100+ at Sheering on 21st August 2007 and 100+ at Thorley on 13th October 2007.

SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*

Regular winter visitor.

The Siskin arrives in winter in variable numbers from year to year. They can most reliably be seen feeding quietly in alders, frequently with Goldfinches and Redpoll. They are also regularly observed at peanut and seed feeders in gardens. Some of the more notable flocks (all associated with alders), are listed as follows:

- 20+ at Rushy Mead on 17th February 2002.
- 30+ at Spellbrook on 3rd November 2005.
- 80+ along the River Stort (Pig Lane to Spellbrook) on 12th November 2005.
- 100+ at Twyford Lock on 15th December 2005.
- 300+ at Rushy Mead on 14th January 2006.
- 60+ at Hatfield Forest on 3rd November 2007.
- 30 at Rushy Mead on 18th December 2007.

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*

Declining resident though relatively common passage migrant and winter visitor.

The Linnet remains under-reported in the area. One member undertook some invaluable farm hedgerow walks by counting Linnet territories over 2 km lengths of hedgerow. His results are as follows: 3 pairs holding territory near Hatfield Forest on 7th April 2003, 2 pairs holding territory at Farnham on 23rd April 2003 and 1 pair at Allen's Green on 7th May 2003. As a post-breeding and winter visitor it can occur in large flocks, the largest being 500+ at Trims Green on 23rd September 2005. Areas such as this, comprising large, open arable fields, have provided winter feeding opportunities for finches and buntings over the years that set-aside has been in operation and the Linnet appears to be particularly well adapted to this winter farming regime.

TWITE *Carduelis flavirostris*

Very rare winter visitor.

Only two records exist for this species in our area: a single bird at Bishop's Stortford Golf Club on 2nd February 1940 and three at the Bishop's Stortford Sewage Farm on 22nd November 1981.

LESSER REDPOLL *Carduelis cabaret*

Regular but thinly distributed winter visitor.

This species has not been recorded in Bishop's Stortford during the summer months since 1997 and must therefore no longer be considered as a breeding species. As a winter visitor small parties are noted, frequently with Siskins in alders along the Stort valley or in Hatfield Forest. 2005 was a particularly good year with fifteen separate observations through the autumn and into the winter of 2006.

MEALY REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

Rare winter visitor.

Prior to this report there were only two records for this species. One bird was seen at Grange Paddocks on 6th January 1944 and another single bird at Maymeads Marsh on 27th November 1985. During the period of this report three further observations have been made with one at Twyford Lock on 23rd November 2005, one in Hatfield Forest on 13th January 2006 and one at Cannons Mill Lane on 20th April 2006.

TWO-BARRED CROSSBILL *Loxia leucoptera*

One historic record.

One bird shot at Tharbies, near Sawbridgeworth on 11th January 1890 remains the only record.

CROSSBILL *Loxia curvirostra*

Uncommon visitor.

Prior to this report only two records for this species existed: two at Stansted Airport Lagoons on 29th July 2001 and four at Newport on 1st October 1999. Since then, the Crossbill has been observed on a further four occasions as follows: 6 at Thorley on 27th June 2002 in one of our member's garden, observed feeding in larch canopy over several hours, 6 in Hatfield Forest on 25th May 2003 feeding in oak canopy, 6 flying over Bishop's Stortford College playing fields on 31st May 2006 and 6 in Hatfield Forest on 16th January 2005, a notably early date.

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Thinly distributed resident but in decline.

The Bullfinch is widely distributed throughout our area but post-breeding parties are much smaller than hitherto. It is, of course, an easily overlooked species but the Hatfield Forest year-on-year surveys indicate that fewer birds are breeding there and it is assumed that this will be reflected in the size of winter parties being observed. During the past six years there have been two winter observations of groups of ten birds, both in Hatfield Forest. However, groups of up to six or more are regularly reported each year from different locations. Recent BTO research shows a marked increase in nest failure rates affecting both egg and chick stages. Research suggests that the problem may relate to a decline the quality of woodland understory or edge habitats.

During 2005, there were two reports of the 'Northern' Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula pyrrhula pyrrhula*, a slightly larger and more brightly coloured bird than our native variety. Although these birds were outside the area that we normally cover, for interest, details are as follows: one was observed at Church Langley on 8th February 2005 and 'several' were seen at Reed on 12th February 2005.

HAWFINCH *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Uncommon visitor, formerly 'locally fairly common'.

Prior to 1990 the Hawfinch was a frequent sight in the treetops in Hatfield Forest during the winter periods. In 1968 it was estimated that four pairs were present in the Forest and the 1990 report suggested that more than one pair bred regularly. Since then, only single birds have been reported from the Forest. It is however, worth drawing attention to the spectacular group of finches and buntings that occurred in a harvested linseed crop at Little Hallingbury on 14th January 2000 which included up to twenty Hawfinches feeding among the group. This record was included in our previous publication.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citronella*

Declining resident and widespread winter visitor.

The Yellowhammer continues to decline as a breeding species but can still be seen each winter throughout the open countryside surrounding Bishop's Stortford where it joins other finches and buntings to feed in set-aside. Unfortunately, with the demise of the set-aside regime now gathering pace, it is likely that this will result in a substantial reduction in species such as the Yellowhammer. As a breeding species, the Yellowhammer does well at Stansted Airport Lagoons and at Allen's Green.

Post-breeding and winter flock records include: 100+ at Wickham Hall on 23rd January to 15th February 2003 and 100+ at Stortford Park on 6th February 2007. Elsewhere, winter flocks were noted from Tednambury Marsh, Trims Green, Takeley Church, and Green Tye.

CIRL BUNTING *Emberiza cirlus*

Very rare vagrant.

There are just two records for this species. It was last recorded at Twyford Mill on 11th November 1957, with one earlier observation on 9th March 1947. With a new introduction programme under way in the south-west of England, coupled with climate change, it is just possible that this species might begin to be seen again locally in future years.

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Locally common resident but continues to decline at winter roosts.

The ongoing Hatfield Forest survey shows that the Reed Bunting has declined by 25% over the last four years and appears to reflect what is reported elsewhere. However, as a breeding species it has always been widespread in our area, with the Stort Valley and Stansted Airport Lagoons well represented. Notable reports of territories include 10 at Tednambury and 6 between Pig Lane and Spellbrook, both in 2007. In winter, the Reed Bunting joins other finches and buntings in foraging for food in set-aside and, notably in shelterbelts. While these also provide small roost habitats, the more significant continue to be such locations as Sawbridgeworth Marsh which benefits from a monitoring regime. Here, the largest roost size recorded was of 53 on 6th November 2007.

CORN BUNTING *Emberiza calandra*

An uncommon, declining resident and winter visitor.

The decline of this large, dull looking bunting began in the early seventies when it began to recede into the north eastern areas of Hertfordshire. Only the Allen's Green and Trims Green areas now remain as reliable breeding strongholds of the Corn Bunting, with Trims Green recording 3 territories on 13th June 2004, 6 on 17th April 2006 and 3-4 on 17th May 2007. It was also a bird of the winter roost, joining other buntings at such locations as Sawbridgeworth Marsh, Hatfield Forest Marsh and Tednambury Marsh. To illustrate the dramatic decline of this species, 130 Corn Buntings were noted at Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 30th March 1987 and 40 were at Hatfield Forest Marsh on 24th December 1988!

In our 1985-1989 report, the recorder drew attention to active roosts in April while breeding territories had already been established in the Allen's Green area. His view then was that the roosting birds may have been associated with passage movement up the River Stort valley from the Lea Valley.

APPENDIX 1 - ESCAPES

The following species are believed to be escapes from captivity or birds from feral populations:

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

A single bird was observed at Hatfield Forest Lake and Stansted Airport Lagoons on various dates in 2003 and 2004.

ROSS'S GOOSE *Anser rossii*

One was observed at Bury Lodge on 31st December 2007, on a pond together with a range of other feral ducks.

CAPE SHELDUCK *Tadorna cana*

A female was present at Stansted Airport Lagoons for 5 minutes on 12th May 2002, before flying off.

WHITE-CHEEKED PINTAIL *Anas bahamensis*

A single bird was seen at Spellbrook Lock on 29th January 2006.

HARRIS'S HAWK *Parabuteo unicinctus*

Single birds were observed at Bloodhounds' Wood on 31st October 2002 and at Bishop's Stortford High School on 23rd June 2006; the latter bird definitely being an escape since it was wearing jesses.

INDIAN PEAFOWL *Pavo cristatus*

One was observed at Stansted Mountfitchet on 18th July 2007.

EAGLE OWL *Bubo bubo*

A male was observed calling at Hatfield Broad Oak on 24th February 2005.

BLACK-HOODED PARAKEET *Nandayus nenday*

Two were observed at Thorley Wash on 9th June 2005.

PINE GROSBEAK *Pinicola enucleator*

A splendid red bird was well watched at Gilston between 8th and 21st July 2007. Following widespread publicity, it was reclaimed by its “owner” and it transpired that the bird was, in fact, a colour-fed female and not a male as had been supposed.

SUBMISSION OF RECORDS

A report such as this is only possible as a result of the dedicated submission of records by observers. In view of the vast number of records accumulated during a typical 5 year period, this information can only realistically be maintained if records are submitted electronically.

The preferred method of record submission is by email to Bishops_Stortford_Bird_Group@yahoogroups.com

(Note that there is an underscore _ between the words Bishops_Stortford_Bird_Group)

The ideal input is to give species, date seen, location, grid reference, number seen, and habitats and, if relevant, other observers present. If the location is one of those shown in the Gazetteer section of this report, then the inclusion of the grid reference is unnecessary.

SURVEY WORK 2002 -2007

Over the period covering this report, ornithological surveys tend to have been fewer than hitherto. However, the Bird Group has now embarked on a commitment to participate actively in the new Bird Atlas, organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). This survey will endeavour to assess the status of our winter visitors as well as that of our breeding species between 2007 and 2012. It was in 1968 that the BTO launched its first Breeding Bird Atlas, followed in 1988 by the New Breeding Bird Atlas. The current four year project will thus provide a direct species by species comparison, with the two previous surveys. Alongside this, the Hertfordshire Natural History Society and Bird Club has embarked on its own survey to run alongside the BTO survey, where the aim is to cover all tetrads in the county during the four year period. This is, of course, a major commitment and we rely heavily on our members to support it. The reward, of course, is the knowledge that future generations will have a clearer understanding of the changes to our local natural history. To this end, we can well recall the excitement on uncovering the 1953 BSNHS records which included references to many species so changed in status by time and circumstance.

The Hatfield Forest Breeding Bird Survey has continued to be carried out on a year-on-year basis since 1996, having been set up in 1976 and repeated in 1983 before becoming an on-going exercise in status monitoring. This survey has focussed attention on a number of species, notably the Common Tern which visited the lake on an annual basis but frustratingly disappeared to breed elsewhere. The National Trust agreed to construct a tern raft and, within two years, this graceful bird had adopted this breeding facility to delight the many visitors.

Individual members also carried out surveys of their own. Tom Lewis walked a number of 2 km. hedgerows to assess the number of breeding species. While this was only carried out over two years as a trial, some of the data has helped to assess the status of some species for this publication. Another member, Jono Forgham has completed a survey of part of the Stort Valley.

In the current year (2008), a half day survey of the breeding birds of the entire Hatfield Forest area is planned for 18th May when Bird Group members will be joined by both BSNHS and National Trust members. While this will not be as thorough as the normal Hatfield Forest Survey involving eight visits each year to sample habitats in the forest, it will be interesting to see if any new species emerge from this 'mass' approach.

As can be seen, the survey work carried out by members of the Bird Group provides invaluable data on the status of our bird populations, providing a baseline for all future studies into the health our local wildlife. It is to be hoped that the results of such labours will continue to be both the stimulus and challenge for future members of our group.

FIELD TRIPS

The Bird Group arranges a variety of field trips, both in the local area and to more distant sites. Most of these are to locations within south east England and East Anglia, the objectives being to see rare or uncommon birds and to see regional specialities at their best during the various seasons, but overseas trips have also been arranged in recent years.

UK trips outside the Bishop's Stortford area.

Bird Watching on monthly field trips leaving from Bishop's Stortford railway station (but by car) is just one of the options for bird watchers who live locally. The bird group has seen these day trips gently develop from perhaps three times a year up to the early nineties when destinations included North Norfolk in January for the geese and waders, and late in the day visits to Breckland for summering Nightjar.

During the most recent ten years or so there has been one trip each month, and sometimes more. Many people want to do some of their birdwatching outside the local area and it is convenient sometimes to go in a group. Dates are published on the future trips page of the club website but there are no published destinations. This choice is made as late as possible to try to ensure that bird sightings reported by others that are within reach of the town can be acted upon if those travelling, and more importantly the drivers, agree to target that species and that location as part of a route for the day. Recently, Saturday has been our favoured day. In the summer the departure time is usually 0730 hrs and 0630 hrs in the winter. Join us if you would like to take advantage of this opportunity.

Monthly reports for 2006 and 2007 have been published on the trip reports page of the website together with the species seen on each of the trips.

As well as the traditional venues the group has been working its way through other excellent bird watching sites, and the available species. Twenty of the more popular sites are listed here from the four most visited counties:

Essex: Abberton, Fingringhoe, Hanningfield, Thames Estuary (north) and Walton.

Kent: Dungeness, Grove Ferry, Isle of Sheppey, Oare Marshes and Stodmarsh.

Suffolk: Beccles, Dunwich, Lackford, Lakenheath Fen and Minsmere.

Norfolk: Cley, Hickling, Holme, Snettisham and Titchwell.

Overseas Trips.

Although some of the members of the group have travelled the world as individuals and on family holidays or on bird trips organised by others, the group's overseas trips have concentrated on locations within Europe, including France, Spain and Finland, together with a trip to Morocco.

LIST OF OBSERVERS

The following observers have contributed records for the period under review:

David Arch
Milly Arch
Mike Ashworth
Steve and Jack Butler
Hugh Coe
Bill Conner
Ron Cousins
Brenda East
Mick East
Jim Fish
Jono Forgham
Ellen Franklin
Mike Franklin
Roger Gilbert
Andrew Hardacre
Alex Harvey
David Hill
Barrie Hills
Mike Harris

Mark Hows
Tom Lewis
Bill Montague
Mary Moverley
Tony Moverley
Keith Overall
Andrew Palmer
Stephen Patmore
Mark Pegrum
Nick Sampford
David Sampson
Andrew Sapsford
John Slee
Graeme J Smith
Peter Smith
Chris Swan
Denis Whiffen
Colin Wills

GAZETTEER

All sites and places mentioned in the text are listed below together with the approximate OS Grid Reference, which should enable locations to be found on the relevant Ordnance Survey 1:50000 and 1:25000 maps. Most locations are within the 10 km squares TL41, TL42, TL51 and TL52, with a few in TL31, TL32 and TL33.

Albury	435246	Latchmore Bank	497187
Allen's Green	455168	Little Hadham	440228
Audley End	525380	Little Hallingbury	505175
Bambers Green	575230	Manuden	492267
Barley	400385	Mathams Pit	463184
Barkway	385355	Mathams Wood	462182
Beggars Hall	528200	Maymeads Marsh	455119
Berden	468298	Moor Hall	468188
Birchanger Wood	504225	Much Hadham	430190
B/S Sewage Farm	499196	Newport	520340
Bloodhounds' Wood	467225	Patient End	428270
Braughing	395250	Patmore Heath	445255
Bury Green	452212	Perry Green	437175
Bury Lodge	524228	Pishiobury Park	477134
Bush End	548205	Rushy Mead	498196
Chaldean Farm	423205	Sawbridgeworth Marsh	492160
Dane Bridge	440195	Sheering Lower Road Scrape	485135
Darney Wood	410235	Silkmeads Farm	393311
Elsenham	535265	Southmill Lock	493205
Farnham Green	465254	Spellbrook	487175
Feakes Lock	484135	Standon	395225
Furneux Pelham	430280	St. Michael's Mead Lake	471193
Gaston Green	498170	Stocking Wood	457213
Gilston	445127	Stortford Park Farm	470213
Green Tye	445185	Taylors End	540215
Hadham Hall	452228	Tednambury Marsh	495168
Hadham Park Farm	461223	Thorley Wash	493185
Harlow Mill	470128	Tilekiln Green	522213
Hatfield Forest Lake	542198	Trims Green	472173
Henham	545285	Twyford	492193
Henry Moore Foundation	438174	Upwick	450245
High Wych	465144	Wallbury	493178
Hoggate's Wood	479226	Wareside	390156
Hollingson Meads	457123	Wickham Hall Farm	474230
Horse Cross	415233		

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