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

HATFIELD FOREST WINTER BIRD WATCH
Sunday 14th December 2025

Introduction

The group's long involvement with Hatfield Forest has resulted in the production of many reports, particularly on the birds of the forest. However, the group had not previously undertaken a Winter bird survey and as a result it was agreed to do such a survey this year. The weather was gloriously sunny all morning.

Some members came equipped with a bird identification app on their mobile telephones which not only confirmed what was being heard but also gave rise to some additional identification results.

Acknowledgements

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

Participants

Georgia Arnold, Nick Barber, Bob Reed, Pat Richards, James Rowland, Marion Swan, Chris Swan, Dave Webber.

Methodology

Traditionally the Forest has been divided into five areas, described as northwest, northeast, southwest, southeast and lake. This year the surveyors sampled all five areas, one of which was surveyed on 18th December for logistical reasons and this is not expected to have had a significant effect on the results. The surveyors covered as much of their areas as was practicable and recorded the total numbers seen for each species.

Results

The results are presented in an Excel spreadsheet that lists the bird species in alphabetical order by their common English names since this enabled easier recording during the survey and also enables quick reference in future.

Discussion

As with the Spring surveys of this year and previous years, it must be remembered that a survey such as this is not claimed to be comprehensive; it is simply a "snapshot" of those species observed on a particular occasion. As a result, a repeat survey a few days or even a few hours later may give different numbers of species, and indeed even additional or fewer species compared with this exercise. Nevertheless, since the methodology is essentially unchanged, the results of this survey form a baseline which may be compared with future surveys to help determine how the various species are faring. Some duplication may occur; for example, the corvids are very mobile and it can be difficult to obtain accurate counts as the birds constantly come and go. In this Winter survey, the Redwing

and Fieldfare observations were also complicated by the birds flying away as they were being counted, particularly on the Hawthorn bushes in the Lake area where they may well have been under-recorded as a result. Also, the Buzzard records in this survey may be of different birds or just one or two birds covering large areas of the forest.

Comments on some of the individual species are summarised below:

- Great Crested Grebe: absent again in this survey.
- Gadwall: none recorded which is unusual since they are present locally.
- Tufted Duck: none recorded which is also unusual since they are present locally.
- Black-headed Gull: have now become regular with a total of 44 birds counted on the lake.
- Kingfisher: present again so it is worth checking for possible breeding site in 2026.
- Ring-necked Parakeet: although only one was observed they are becoming more common in the area which may in future be detrimental to other hole-nesting species.
- Firecrest: one was detected in the Lake area by a mobile phone bird sound app, present in a large Tit flock but it was not actually seen.
- Raven: one was observed and observations are becoming more frequent in the region.
- Tit species: very encouraging results with high numbers of Blue Tit, Great Tit and Long-tailed Tit, with Marsh Tit recorded in two areas.
- Linnet: observed in four of the five areas indicating that they are regular Winter visitors.
- Redpoll: observed in two of the areas and are known to be present elsewhere in the region at the moment. They seem to favour Silver Birch tree seeds and are worth looking out for.

Regarding the possibility of observations of other Winter visitors such as Brambling and Waxwing, these species were included in the check list since they have been reported in the region but none were observed during the survey. While the record of Firecrest is uncommon, there are earlier Autumn/Winter records of single birds in the Forest on 26th and 27th October 1987 and on 4th November 2007. As for recent 2025 records it is comforting to know that single birds have been reported from The Naze on Monday 8th and on Saturday 13th December, from Stevenage on Tuesday 16th December and a report of two birds present at Chipperfield Common, Hertfordshire on Saturday 13th December, so they are clearly around in the region at the moment.

One rather worrying aspect of the survey was the relatively low number of Chaffinch and Greenfinch records which seems to reflect trends reported elsewhere but on a brighter note Goldfinch were recorded in four of the five areas and a male Bullfinch recorded in the Northeast area is very encouraging since this species is now amber-listed. The missing Gadwall and Tufted Duck records may be due simply to these birds moving temporarily to another location due to disturbance, since both species are usually present. One of the Mallard seen on the lake was clearly a hybrid but was counted together with the standard birds.

There are several items of good news. As indicated above, the Forest holds high numbers of several Tit species and it was delightful watching these during the morning as they foraged for food. Members of the Thrush family were also well-represented, including Redwing and Fieldfare and as indicated above, Linnet and Redpoll observations are encouraging.

The total of 46 different species recorded in this survey is very good for a brief Winter survey and the total number of birds counted is a very satisfying 936.

Chris Swan
18th December 2025

Winter 2025 Record Sheet

Species	NW	NE	SW	SE	Lake	Total
Blackbird	21	11	10	6	5	53
Black-headed Gull	0	0	1	0	43	44
Blue Tit	23	17	9	3	15	67
Brambling	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bullfinch	0	1	0	0	0	1
Buzzard	1	2	1	1	0	5
Canada Goose	0	3	0	1	2	6
Carrion Crow	4	5	2	2	2	15
Cetti's Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chaffinch	0	0	6	0	1	7
Coal Tit	2	3	0	0	0	5
Collared Dove	0	0	1	0	0	1
Coot	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cormorant	0	0	0	0	3	3
Dunnock	2	2	3	0	5	12
Fieldfare	1	0	0	0	2	3
Firecrest	0	0	0	0	1	1
Gadwall	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goldcrest	3	6	2	0	1	12
Goldfinch	4	14	4	1	0	23
Great Crested Greb	0	0	0	0	0	0
Great Spot Woodpe	3	1	0	0	1	5
Great Tit	13	9	6	2	6	36
Green Woodpecker	0	1	2	2	0	5
Greenfinch	2	0	0	2	0	4
Grey Heron	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greylag Goose	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hawfinch	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jackdaw	7	15	54	5	12	93
Jay	5	6	3	1	0	15
Kestrel	0	2	1	0	0	3
Kingfisher	0	0	0	0	1	1
Lesser Black-backe	0	0	0	0	0	0
Linnet	14	0	1	2	6	23
Little Egret	0	0	0	0	0	0
Long-tailed Tit	21	28	17	2	14	82
Magpie	0	3	1	1	0	5
Mallard	0	0	0	1	61	62
Marsh Tit	0	1	2	0	0	3
Mistle Thrush	1	5	3	1	5	15
Moorhen	0	0	0	1	3	4
Mute Swan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nuthatch	12	3	5	0	5	25
Pheasant	0	1	0	0	0	1
Pied Wagtail	0	0	0	0	0	0
Raven	1	0	1	0	0	2
Redpoll	0	1	1	1	1	4

Winter 2025 Record Sheet

Red Kite	0	0	0	0	0	0
Redwing	26	0	29	2	9	66
Reed Bunting	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ring-necked Parak	0	0	1	0	0	1
Robin	15	11	10	3	5	44
Rook	0	0	0	0	17	17
Song Thrush	6	4	4	4	1	19
Sparrowhawk	0	0	0	0	0	0
Starling	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stock Dove	0	0	0	0	1	1
Tawny Owl	1	0	0	0	0	1
Treecreeper	2	0	0	0	0	2
Tufted Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waxwing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Woodpigeon	36	23	24	3	28	114
Wren	13	4	6	0	1	24
Yellowhammer	0		0	0	0	0
Total	**239**	**182**	**210**	**47**	**258**	**936**