



BIRD WATCH

The Bulletin of the Blackburn & District Bird Club

Registered Charity No. 1007190

Bulletin No. 54

Sept 2011

Brockholes a Success

.Brockholes opened its doors to visitors on Easter Sunday and was officially opened in May by Simon King OBE, the President of the Wildlife Trusts. Over 2500 people visited on Day 1 in glorious sunshine and the overwhelming reaction of the majority of visitors was 'WOW'. Very quickly, Brockholes began to establish itself as a place to go, especially for families, and the way the events are being supported week in week out shows that the concept has been a brilliant success. Most of the feedback is positive but there is no use in pretending that there haven't been any problems. There have and I discuss these on page 3.

The Nature Reserve itself is going from strength to strength and the target habitats are really starting to deliver and meet their objectives. The best way to measure the success of a newly created reserve is to measure the numbers of breeding birds as an indicator. Lapwings have increased from 2 pairs in 2007 to 12 pairs this year, 3 pairs of Redshanks have bred – none did in 2007. The islands have been very successful with 12 pairs of Little ringed plovers this year against 3 pairs in 2007 and 3 pairs of Ringed plovers against none. The reed beds and areas of sedge have exploded this year with 46 pairs of Sedge warblers, 42 pairs of Reed warblers and 53 pairs of Reed buntings against 2007 totals of 12, 18 and 23.

The Reserve is slowly maturing and the biodiversity of species improving all the time. The Reserve has been alive with Dragonflies and Damselflies all summer and 16 species have been recorded. The

wild flowers too have been wonderful, I don't think I have ever seen so much Purple loosestrife in my life! A 'Bio Blitz' day was held in June and despite atrocious weather, volunteers found an incredible 445 species of plants, birds and insects. Brockholes is also delivering what it always does – a stream of short staying birds, especially at migration time. This year the star bird has been a Spotted sandpiper, which is an American vagrant, very similar to our own Common sandpiper. So all in all a very successful first summer.



Spotted sandpiper

In this issue you will see that Jonathon Fry has taken over the Club's Garden Bird Watch with a more academic analysis of this year's results on page 6. Jonathon has persuaded the Committee that it would be better to hold the bird watch in January to coincide with the RSPB Garden Bird Watch in future years. There are several advantages, the main one being that garden bird populations are more stable in January which will enable us to produce more reliable data on

trends etc. We will also be able to compare our results with the national picture and of course those members who already take part in the RSPB exercise will not be asked to do a separate watch in March. The disadvantage is that it won't be possible to give everyone a reminder in the March issue of Birdwatch, consequently I need to ask everyone to make a note in their diaries that next year's Garden Bird Watch will now be in January over the weekend of 28-29 January. Incidentally, Jonathon has earned himself a year's placement at Brockholes as part of his University course, so we wish him well and hope he keeps us up to date with what's happening.

Last time we reported that we were putting up Barn owl boxes on private land in Mellor. Dave Hilliard spent two afternoons fixing up the boxes in suitable sites. Very soon afterwards there was great excitement when Kath Entwistle saw not one but two Barn owls sat on the fence near to the Mellor Brook junction roundabout on the A59. Then soon afterwards, both Jennifer Dean and I saw a Barn owl sweep across Abbots Brow at different times of the day. All sightings were less than half a mile away from the boxes, but so far they do not seem to have taken them over. Barn owls are still being reported from the property in Mellor where they bred last year and the bird that Dave Hilliard sees from his house is almost certainly one of these birds. So it is looking very hopeful, especially as this year has been a good vole year. We just need a youngster to find one of our boxes over the winter and we could be in business!
Ed

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Spring Walks

It was a perfect day to greet spring when we walked up **Dunsop Valley** in **March**. Birds were very active in the sunshine and wader species such as Oystercatchers, Lapwings and Curlews were already back on territory. Several male Goosanders were also back on the river and it was heartening to hear Goldcrests singing after the hard winter. A white Pheasant, which was not an albino, was interesting. We stopped for some serious raptor watching about a mile up the valley and were rewarded with several displaying Kestrels, Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and the bird we had come to see, a magnificent Goshawk. John and Jonathon had been up to Whitendale earlier in the week and had photographed an Eagle owl, but after the long trek up there we could not locate the bird. However we were not disappointed as we did see a pair of Hen harriers displaying and sky diving over Beatrice Fell and that was worth the long walk in itself. On the way back we heard a Red grouse which seemed very close to the path. Sure enough it was and we were treated to some fabulous views of the bird making its way down from the heather to a pool in a ravine, where it drank for several minutes. A perfect finale to a perfect day and 35 species.

April saw us making our annual pilgrimage up the **Langden Valley** on a

lovely sunny day. There was a light breeze too, perfect for raptors – but unfortunately our target bird the Hen harrier did not make an appearance. However we did see two Sparrowhawks, a Kestrel and three Buzzards and there were plenty of other interesting birds to enjoy. A Dipper and a Common sandpiper obliged right at the start of the walk, joined by an active Grey wagtail. A very late Brambling was with Siskins along the stand of pine trees and we soon saw that Willow warblers were everywhere. Further upstream we saw Oystercatcher and Curlew back on territory and an abundance of Meadow pipits busily establishing their patches. Two Wheatears were at higher ground but we failed to see a single Stonechat. We heard a Ring ouzel calling in a gully and when we got up to the castle we saw another in a separate territory. On the way back home we called in at Moor Piece to see that at least two Pied flycatchers were back, a very satisfying end to a fabulous day of 36 species.

Our evening trip to **Brockholes**, also in **April**, was a great success with a turnout of 24 members. Reed and Sedge warblers were in full song together with Whitethroat and Chiffchaff, and there was a good variety of ducks on the water. Our walk through Boilton Wood around to the

smaller pools could not have been better timed because all the spring flowers including Bluebells were in full bloom. It was a great pity that the ambience was spoiled by the activities of a few locals who were certainly not there to enjoy the wildlife. The wader scrapes on No1 Pit were hosting several pairs of Little ringed and Ringed plover with Common sandpiper, and Lapwings and Redshank were nesting in the marsh. An unseasonal Scaup was also on No1 Pit and Great crested grebes were displaying. As we got back to the Meadow Pool we found that the Whimbrels had just come in to roost and 93 were counted. All in all a very pleasant evening and a total of 41 species.

Marton Mere was the venue for our last walk of the spring in **May**. It was a cold grey morning and rain threatened, nevertheless we managed to record a good variety of warblers. Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Garden warblers, Reed and Sedge were all singing but surprisingly we did not hear a single Willow warbler. There were the usual suspects to be found on the mere and we watched a young Grey heron fishing. The highlight was undoubtedly a Common sandpiper which obligingly came right up to the hide and posed for the photographers amongst us. Total species seen 25.

Notes from Mavis

Mavis Smith kindly allows us to include her daily sightings from Darwen Moor in the Club's Bird Report. Sometimes she includes her personal notes on unusual sightings and they are interesting to read. These are her latest:

Great White Egret. 21/4, 0815hrs approx – bird flew low across Bull Hill on A666. Same size as Grey heron, slow deep wing beats like a grey heron. Dark bill seen briefly indicating adult bird. Seen regularly on trips abroad so a familiar species to me. The bird, which turned up later in Ribble Valley had a distinctive 'kink' in the neck. Bird flew directly south to north and I thought it may have

come from Belmont or Rivington.

Honey buzzard. Well known to me from trips abroad and increasingly on passage through Lancashire. Positive ID on all birds – gliding/soaring with wings flat and distinctive head shape. Males with dark carpal patches.

Firecrest. A site 2nd bird for me in over 30 years of local patch watching! This female was just below Sunnyhurst Res in the company of 3 or 4 Reed buntings. Excellent close-up views of Goldcrest-sized bird but with distinctive white supercilium and noticeable rusty tinge on shoulders.

Brockholes Reporting

When Simon King opened Brockholes he called it an amazing place. And indeed it is. The site has been transformed from an industrial gravel pit into what it used to be before it was even farmed - a Lancashire flood plain bordered by ancient woodland and river. Already the marshy areas and wet meadows are teeming with wild flowers, dragonflies, butterflies and a host of other insects. Sixteen species of Dragonflies have been recorded this summer and twelve types of Butterflies. You only have to look at the photographs on the Brockholes Facebook and Flicker web sites to see what a wonderful diversity of life there is. The birdlife is exploding and visitors have piled in all summer.

Of course there have been gripes from some people –there are not enough ‘good’ birds, the vandalism is off-putting, there are too many kids, they should have spent the money on hides instead of a posh centre, members should not be charged for parking etc etc etc. To answer some of these complaints you have to remember that the grant to buy the site in the first place came with certain conditions, one of which was that Brockholes must generate enough income to pay for itself into the future. Another was that the site must become a ‘destination’ for the Northwest so a dedicated bird reserve was never on the cards, especially when the place could not boast a unique selling proposition as Leighton Moss and Martin Mere could. So the mission with Brockholes from the start was to create a reserve that would restore the site to what it was in ancient times and to attract visitors, many of whom had possibly never engaged with wildlife before.

The visitor centre was created to attract an estimated 250,000 visitors per year who would generate income towards the £100,000 running costs and hopefully be inspired to think more about wildlife and conservation. The restaurant and shops were designed to be tasteful and high quality, and an events manager was appointed to ensure that there was always something going on to attract people and to build up a loyalty

base of returning customers. People would be encouraged to come not just for a look round and a coffee, but to attend cinema or kids club, go to the open air theatre productions, join in a guided or keep fit walk, sample a food festival or bridal fair etc etc. The conference centre/function/activities room is there to make money as well as serve as a base for LWT’s many projects involving the community. But the main income generator is the car park and this brings us to the thorny issue of LWT members having to pay them too. LWT thought long and hard about this but the tax consultants advised that if the trust gave a monetary benefit to members that was not available to non members, all subscriptions would be subjected to VAT. And LWT simply could not afford to lose 20% of their subscriptions, they would be bankrupted. That is why members also have to pay to visit the site. But the Trust has not given up and they are still trying to find a solution that will be acceptable to all concerned.

As far as children are concerned, I really do not understand why people complain. The play area has been cleverly designed to be behind the car park and away from the pools, woods and river where most of the birds are to be found. There is plenty of space for children to play and let off steam, the only birds they might have disturbed this year were the Grasshopper warblers that chose the long grass just behind the play area to nest. But the birds seem to have raised two broods and delighted many visitors, so no harm done.

As for bird diversity and numbers, I believe people have got to appreciate that Brockholes is principally flood plain and wet meadow habitat with corresponding species. The reed beds are becoming established but they are still not extensive enough to attract the rarer species that places like Leighton Moss can boast. The islands are already proving to be a big success with 12 pairs of Little ringed plover, which is incredible and the wildfowl will soon be building up for winter on the pools. And of

course Brockholes will always be a hot spot at migration time with literally anything likely to drop in. What I am trying to say is that people just need to realise what sort of reserve Brockholes is and they need to be patient! The breeding bird survey this year has proved that bird numbers are increasing dramatically and as the Reserve matures they can only improve further.

Vandalism is an ongoing problem, as was predicted. Two hides were burned down early on and another had to be closed due to obscene graffiti and mindless damage. All the seats have been stolen, apart from the benches that are fixed at the back of the hides. Motor cyclists are still getting on site despite all the new barriers and I know that at least one member has already complained to the Trust about being harassed by them as he walked through the woods with his family. As a Reserve Guide I have to say that it has been very difficult trying to explain the situation to visitors. LWT have devoted much time and energy to try to win over the locals but with only limited success. There is a hard core of older teenagers who resent LWT taking over their playground and they are determined to make life as difficult as possible, and to destroy as much as they can. That’s probably the reason why the Visitor Centre has been built to float on water and is protected by drawbridge as well as cctv. It will never be possible to stop people coming across the footbridge at night so I do think the Trust needs to think again about wooden hides. I know breeze block is not attractive but something on the lines of those at Pennington Flash with fixed benches at the windows would be a much better option than those we have now. I hope LWT can be persuaded because that is one thing they could do to make the site better for bird-watchers.

The next issue will feature volunteering at Brockholes and hopefully, Jonathon will also share some of his experiences as a full-timer at the Reserve.

Ed

Bulgaria Trip Report 2011

I was impressed by Bulgaria as a bird-watching venue when we visited in 2009 for the Black Sea autumn migration. I was even more impressed when I visited the Rhodopi Mountains in May .

We spent the first few days in the Eastern Rhodopis in the south of the country. The road network in Bulgaria is not good and it was a long journey to our overnight stop in the Sakar Hills which are foothills of the Rhodopis. Nevertheless we saw some great birds on the way including Storks, Red-backed shrikes, Syrian woodpecker, Black-headed buntings and the biggest Bee-eater colony I have ever seen. A Nightjar entertained us as we ate our evening meal on the terrace and next morning we were woken by Semi-collared flycatchers, Golden orioles and Red-rumped swallows, What a great start!

Our first bird watching venue that day was a dry hilltop in the Sakars topped by a shrine and a mobile phone mast. Here there were many Isabelline wheatears, Crested larks, Tawny pipits and Eastern Orphean warblers, and overhead we had fantastic views of 3 Eastern Imperial eagles, 2 Lesser spotted eagles and a pair of Long-legged buzzards. Driving further south we stopped in an area of open woodland and had good views of a Masked shrike whilst nearby we found Woodlark, Cirl bunting and Calandra lark. From there we drove further into the mountains to the Vulture Feeding station near to the village of Madzharovo only to find it closed! However we were still able to view the Griffon vultures flying around the crags, and many were obviously sitting on eggs up on the ledges. There were plenty of other species to see here too including Crag martins, Alpine swifts, a Blue rock thrush, Black-eared wheatears and best of all a Rock nuthatch going in and out of its nest hole in the rock face.

It was getting rather late and we still had a couple of hours driving on poor roads to our next base, the largely Turkish village of Krumougrad. The hotel was basic but clean and I was somewhat taken aback to find my room was directly opposite the loudspeaker on the minaret of the local mosque! However

this did not turn out to be a problem as this particular mosque only called the faithful to prayer on Fridays – at lunch-time. The next day dawned bright and sunny and we drove a few kilometres to the Krumovitsa river valley, a tributary of the great Maritsa River. And so began one of the best days birding we had ever had. On one side of the valley the road wound high above the river and the fertile flood plain below and there were jagged rocks both above and below us. Scanning the summits above we picked out at least 5 Chukkars sat right on top of the peaks. There were more Black-eared wheatears, Cirl and Black-headed buntings and all you could hear were their songs and those of dozens of Bee-eaters, Golden orioles and Turtle doves flitting about below. We looked to the skies and saw Long-legged and Honey buzzards displaying and we looked down and spotted a Roller feeding in a ploughed field, repeatedly flying up to its vantage point. We heard another Rock nuthatch below us and this time we were able to see clearly how they plaster the entrance to a small crevice with mud to make a nest, and then make a perfectly rounded entrance hole.

On the other side of the river the road was lower and ran through fields and woodland. We started to search for Sombre tit but all we could hear were Nightingales and Lesser-spotted woodpeckers calling. Suddenly a Scops owl started calling from the dense cover and all the birds in the wood began alarm calling. We could hear fluttering and movement in the branches and the owl flew out into the open right in front of us, hotly pursued by several small birds. It did this three times until it tired of all the harassment and flew off. The smaller birds dispersed including a superb Sombre tit which flew to an open area and started to sing. Brilliant. We had lunch in an old orchard on higher ground and a Barred warbler sang quite unperturbed in a nearby bush. We saw both Booted and Short-toed eagles soaring overhead and a Little owl eyed us from a tumble-down roof opposite. But the icing on the cake there was a Wryneck landing in the dead tree right above us. Moving further upstream to open country we had excellent views of a singing eastern Oliva-

ceous warbler, and Lesser grey shrikes and Red-backs seemed to be on every bush and post. As we scoped a Hobby chasing Swallows someone noticed a Black stork on its nest on a ridge above and then when we turned towards the river we found another feeding in the shallow water. I have never been so close to this species before and it was fascinating to see it using its wings to shade the water and to run up and down after prey. Then someone spotted a Golden oriole singing just above its nest, which was swinging in the breeze. Finally to cap it all we came across a Tortoise trundling along, possibly an eastern race Hermann's. The other thing to mention about this valley were the flowers and the butterflies, there were dozens of species that I had never seen before although I could identify a Swallowtail and a Purple emperor. It was quite simply a naturalist's paradise and we literally had to drag ourselves away.

Next day we began the long journey from the eastern Rhodopi Mountains to the Western range. As we climbed higher into the more prosperous skiing area, the habitat changed to conifer forest and when we stopped for lunch we found familiar species such as Bullfinches and Coal tits and to our delight, lots of Firecrests singing loudly. We were hoping to see Nutcrackers in the treetops but unfortunately we dipped on that species. But we were amazed to hear and see several Ring ouzels in the forest. They were of a different race to those seen in the UK and they looked different too having much scallier breasts and preferring different habitat. We arrived at our hotel in Yagodina in the afternoon after driving through some spectacular scenery of mountains, alpine meadows, deep gorges and fast flowing rivers. Needless to say we lost count of the numbers of Dippers and Grey wagtails spotted! Our small family hotel was lovely, very Tyrolean looking and with delicious traditional food. Looking out from my balcony I could see that Red-rumped swallows were nesting above me and Black redstarts were going in and out of the wooden barn at the bottom of the garden. Turtle doves were purring in the meadow beyond and both Pallid and Alpine swifts whirled over-

Bulgaria (cont from page 4)

head. It couldn't get better than this!

It did because next morning we drove a few kilometres to the Trigrad Gorge to see the bird of the trip. We were dropped off near to the entrance to a tunnel and congregated in a very small lay-by on the edge of a sheer drop of hundreds of feet. Then we had to turn our backs to the drop and look upwards to the face of the gorge across the very narrow road. About 30' up there was a large crevice and you could see that fresh vegetation had been piled inside. It was only a matter of minutes before a female Wallcreeper came out of the nest and clung to the rock and she started calling the most high pitched whistling call I have ever heard. From out of nowhere a stunning male flew down and presented her with a huge insect and then flew off. She went back inside and only 5 minutes later the same thing happened again, but this time both birds flew around above our heads before going back into the nest. We watched all this in stunned silence and I

don't think any of us will ever forget the sight of those beautiful birds with their fluttering red butterfly wings and piercing calls. According to the local guide, this was just one of several regular nesting sites along this road and the birds were used to people watching them. Nevertheless we quickly moved on so as not to disturb the birds further.

Further along the gorge we stopped for coffee close to the entrance to some famous caves, and as we were watching a Rock bunting and the antics of a family of Ravens our guide said that he could hear a Marsh warbler singing. We could hardly believe that a wetland warbler would be breeding up here, but sure enough there he was in some bushes in the corner of the car park! We carried on through the gorge until we came to a beautiful Alpine meadow where Tree pipits were still displaying but where White wagtails already had young as did the Grey wagtails. Going higher still, almost at the Greek border, we saw our first Whinchats and Northern wheatears and some Ortolan buntings showed really well as they fed around a small

plot of vegetables. How anyone could eat these beautiful little birds I cannot understand.

It all came to an end next day when we had to return to Sophia, but we all agreed that the birding had been spectacular and that Bulgaria was a wonderful destination. I would not hesitate to go again but the road network is poor and the language and alphabet impossible. That means having to pay a lot of money to a specialist tour company and a very strenuous itinerary. But there is another way and quite by chance an ex-pat Brit has just contacted me with details of his B+B just an hour away from the Trigrad Gorge. He does various excursions from his hotel including one to the Gorge . www.fourseasonsretreat.co.uk. And if anyone is brave enough to go to the Trigrad Gorge under their own steam the hotel I can highly recommend is the Hotel Yagodina in the village of the same name. As well as the Wallcreeper site being only a few kms away, you can also go on excursions to the Devil's Throat Caves from here and on bear watching expeditions. *Ed*

More Moments of Magic

I wrote about my birding moments of magic in the last issue and called on members to share their memories with us all. Regrettably only two people responded and I cannot believe that there is no-one else with something to contribute. Please have a think and let me know about your memorable moments when you have been out bird-watching or just in the garden.

Margaret Sutcliffe rang me first to remind me of the time we were in Lesbos and we saw a Short-toed eagle do an amazing thing. We were driving to the north of the island and saw the eagle coming towards us at quite a low altitude. Of course we all jumped out of the car to admire it as it soared above us but then we noticed it had caught a large snake, which was dangling beneath it. What amazed us was that it then transferred it to its beak and sucked it in just like a child can suck up a strand of spaghetti. It was incredible and as Margaret said it was something we will never forget. Margaret had also had another unforgettable experience when she was taking a winter holiday in Marbella with another member, Jean Davies. They had been on the balcony of their apartment and suddenly noticed that a strange bird was walking up the wall opposite. When they looked closely they saw that it was a Wallcreeper – a Wallcreeper at sea level on the Mediterranean! Although Wallcreepers are high altitude breeders they do come down to lower levels for the winter and they are often found in quarries and on castle walls and rock faces on the continent. This one had obviously decided it needed some winter sun and was probably quite happy finding insects on building walls instead of more traditional haunts. (I have since made a mental note to check buildings more carefully should I ever take a winter holiday abroad again.)

The other person to share her moment of magic was Jennifer Dean.

She thought it may be something of nothing to anyone else but she had been absolutely thrilled to see a Barn owl swoop right in front of her as she drove up Abbots Brow in Mellor one evening this spring. She was so surprised to see the bird so close to home and she says she cannot forget the sight of the beautiful ghost-like bird flying straight in front of her. I am sure many members will know just how she feels; there is nothing quite like the sight of a Barn owl and you do remember every one. And Jennifer's experience was music to my ears because that Barn owl was only one field away from the Barn owl boxes we have put up this year. So thank you Jennifer and thank you Margaret.

Come on Blackburn Bird Club – there must be more ----- *Ed*

Notice of AGM

The twenty-first Annual General Meeting of the Blackburn and District Bird Club will be held at St Silas's Church Hall at 7.30pm on Monday 7th November 2011.

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 20th AGM held on 1st Nov 2010
2. Chairman's Report
3. Membership Secretary's Report
4. Treasurer's Report and Accounts
5. Election of Officers and Committee
6. Appointment of Auditors for the coming year
7. Any Other Business

Garden Bird Watch 2011

Bird Species	Total Nos	Mean/garden	Frequency (%)
House Sparrow	150	3.49	60.47
Starling	131	3.05	51.16
Blue Tit	115	2.67	88.37
Blackbird	96	2.23	86.05
Chaffinch	82	1.91	48.84
Goldfinch	78	1.81	32.56
Magpie	77	1.79	76.74
Woodpigeon	72	1.67	67.44
Great Tit	68	1.58	76.74
Jackdaw	59	1.37	34.88
Collared Dove	54	1.26	67.44
Robin	52	1.21	69.78
Dunnock	48	1.12	62.79
Greenfinch	43	1	27.91
Coal Tit	38	0.88	53.49
Carrion Crow	37	0.86	44.19
Long tailed tit	30	0.7	27.91
Siskin	19	0.44	16.28
Wren	12	0.28	25.58
Nuthatch	12	0.28	18.6
Bullfinch	12	0.28	11.63
Rook	10	0.23	11.63
Pheasant	9	0.21	13.95
Tree Sparrow	9	0.21	4.65
Song Thrush	7	0.16	16.28
Lapwing	6	0.14	2.33
Sparrowhawk	5	0.12	11.63
Jay	5	0.12	11.63
Mallard	4	0.09	2.33
Feral Pigeon	4	0.09	4.65
Treecreeper	4	0.09	6.98
GSWoodpecker	3	0.07	6.98
Herring Gull	2	0.05	2.33
Brambling	2	0.05	4.65
Lesser Redpoll	2	0.05	2.33
Reed Bunting	2	0.05	2.33
Canada Goose	1	0.02	2.33
Lssr B. B Gull	1	0.02	2.33
Pied Wagtail	1	0.02	2.33
Mistle Thrush	1	0.02	2.33

Some changes have been made to how the results are analysed this year. Firstly the mean number of birds per garden has been calculated, for example this means when a total of 150 House Sparrows were recorded on average each garden had 3.49 birds (or 3). Secondly, the frequency of birds over all the gardens has been calculated. For example House Sparrows were present in 60.47% of the gardens surveyed. Finally a big change for the 2012 garden bird watch will be that it will now take place over the weekend of the 28th and 29th of January, to coincide with the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch.

This year House Sparrow was once again the most numerous garden bird in the recording area, with a mean of 3.49 per garden, compared to 3.2 per garden in 2010. Therefore on average there are only 3 sparrows per garden in both these years. So there are fewer than in 2008, when they hit a high of 5.5 per garden. But although they have declined it appears that they are now holding their own (remain at a steady number) and will hopefully begin to recover in the next few years. Starling again is second in our list, with 3.05 per garden. In 2007 Starling averaged at 6.4 per garden, declining to 3.2 in 2010 and 3.05 in 2011. So although still averaging about 3 birds per garden, the decline has been sharp over only a few years, and appears to be continuing at this stage, although only slight and not as drastic as in previous years. According to the RSPB (2011) declines seem to be due to changes in farm practices causing declines in the food items used to feed chicks. Shortage of nesting sites seems to be another cause of decline.

Blue Tit overtook Blackbird and Goldfinch to be the third most numerous bird recorded this year. It was also the most frequent garden bird, occurring in 88.37% of gardens. They have increased from 2.08 in 2010 to 2.67 in 2011. This was reflected in this years RSPB Big garden bird watch, according to the RSPB many of the smaller garden birds have bounced back this year. Blackbird follows to be the fourth most numerous garden bird and is the second most frequent bird over all the gardens, 86.05%. Goldfinch dropped from third to sixth this year, from 2.31 per garden in 2010 to 1.81 in 2011. So this year they are not as numerous or as frequent it would seem compared to 2010.

Chaffinch has gone up three places this year from 1.43 per garden in 2010 to 1.91 in 2011. This and the fact that Great Tit has risen by one place confirms that the smaller garden birds have fared better than last year. Magpie moved back into the top ten from thirteenth in 2010, going from 1 per garden to nearly 2 (1.79). But Jackdaw has dropped in our gardens from 1.55 per garden to 1.37, possibly indicating that they are not as reliant on gardens as other species. Tree sparrow gained four places this year and are obviously increasing in some gardens. Of note was a Barn Owl seen by Dave Hilliard flying across the front of his house during the weekend. 41 gardens were used in this years survey and 61 members and 1 non member took part.

Thanks for all your help.

Jonathan Fry.

Reference—

RSPB (2011).

Population trends and conservation. Accessed on 27th June 2011, from http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/s/starling/population_conservation.aspx