

# HAMPSTEAD HEATH 2020 Bird Report



## Introduction

An annual ornithological report for Hampstead Heath was produced between 1946 and the early 2000s. Since then, following the departure of some of the more active birders, annual reports have not been produced and no formal system for keeping the Heath bird records has been in place. For the most part, one or two dedicated birders (and a fair number of occasional visitors) have kept their own records and reported these to local bird recorders by a number of methods, in particular by posting sightings on the London Bird Club Wiki.

The last couple of years have seen a gradual increase in birding activities on the Heath. A couple of additional birders started to 'patch' the Heath during 2019, adding their records to the [London Bird Club Wiki](#) and [eBird](#). A Breeding Bird Survey was initiated by the Heath & Hampstead Society in 2020, and some highlights from the survey are provided in this report. But it was the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 which really saw an increase in the number of people regularly noticing and watching birds on the Heath. Suddenly there was a thriving community of people interested in sharing bird news and local knowledge - and before we knew it, we had agreed to write an annual bird report! So here it is, we hope you enjoy it. Long may it continue!

If you have any observations or feedback on this report, please email us at: [hampsteadheathbirds@gmail.com](mailto:hampsteadheathbirds@gmail.com)

## Overview of the site

Hampstead Heath (known locally as "the Heath") is a large, ancient London park, covering 320 hectares (790 acres). It sits astride a sandy ridge, on a band of London clay. It is one of the highest points in London, rising to 134 metres (440 ft) above mean sea level, and has long been a popular place for Londoners to take the air. The view from Parliament Hill, in the south-east part of the Heath, is protected by law.

The Heath is rambling and hilly, with large grassy spaces, areas of scrub and ancient woodland. Its two stream valleys have been dammed to create a dozen large ponds, three of which are open-air public swimming pools. Elsewhere around the site are a number of smaller ponds.

The Heath includes the stately home of Kenwood and its estate. Other features are a lido, at Gospel Oak, several playgrounds and an athletics track on Parliament Hill Fields.

The Heath is a Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Metropolitan Importance. One third of the Kenwood Estate is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (London's smallest).

It is mainly managed by the City of London Corporation, although the Kenwood Estate is the responsibility of English Heritage. The site lies within the London Borough of Camden, except for the Hampstead Heath Extension which comes under Barnet.

Kenwood is fenced in and closed at night. Otherwise the Heath is accessible round the clock.

## Map and location information

The map below is the Heath map maintained by the Corporation of London, with some additional labelling of locations added based on the local knowledge of Heath birders.



## List of observers

Magnus Andersson (MA)  
Liz Andrew (LA)  
Dean Ashton (DA)  
Tim Blackburn (TB)  
Reuben Braddock (RB)  
Adrian Brooker (AB)  
Jamie Cedar (JC)  
Mimi Chan (MC)

Matt Evans (ME)  
Noah Patrick Hearne (NPH)  
Niall Keogh (NK)  
Samuel Levy (SL)  
Pete Mantle (PM)  
Dominic Mitchell (DM)  
Dave Porritt (DP)  
Liz Valentine (LV)

## Photographers

Magnus Andersson  
Jamie Cedar  
Mimi Chan (including cover photo)  
Samuel Levy

Dominic Mitchell  
Neville Robinson  
John Weston

## 2020 Highlights

This year was the first in many years in which more than 100 species of birds were recorded on Hampstead Heath, with the final total being 105. This was undoubtedly down to an increase in observers compared to recent years and increased time spent in the field. Special mention here goes to Jamie Cedar who was an almost daily visitor to the Heath during 2020 and achieved a personal year list of 101 species.

While there were no real rarities reported during the year, there were some species which were seen for the first time in a number of years, including **Golden Plover** (first records since 2010) and **Pied Flycatcher** (first records since 2013). With regard to Pied Flycatcher, it is interesting to note that Hampstead Heath was previously regarded as one of the best places to see this species in the London area; it may well be that this continues to be the case but a lack of observers, especially in the Kenwood area, has meant that no sightings have been reported in recent years.

The year was of course notable for another reason – the Covid-19 pandemic caused great disruption to the lives of people across the globe, including Londoners, where Covid restrictions meant that people were limited to just one exercise period each day. This particularly hit the spring migration period hard, with some observers not able to visit as often as desired. However, there were some upsides too – the closure of the swimming ponds meant that these were not as disturbed as usual, and a pair of **Common Tern** took advantage of this by taking up residence on the jetty at the Men's Bathing Pond for much of the summer period. In some years Common Tern can be difficult to connect with on the Heath so the presence of this pair was most welcome.

One real highlight of the year was a good number of sightings of the not-so-common **Common Crossbill**. This is not an annual species at the Heath and in some years only a few sightings are reported across the whole of the London area, e.g. just 14 sightings in 2019, all of which were in the outer parts of the London recording area. This year was clearly an irruption year for the species, with 71 sightings reported across the London area during July alone. The Heath was one of the sites which recorded the highest numbers of sightings, including the first record of the year flying over on May 13<sup>th</sup> (JC). 2020 was also a very good year for **Siskin** and **Lesser Redpoll**. The Heath is traditionally one of the better sites for these species in the London area, but this year was particularly good. The signs were good from as early as July, when 4 Siskin were observed flying over hedge 2 on the 12<sup>th</sup> (RB). From then on, records continued throughout the autumn, and good numbers were present throughout the winter, mainly in the Kenwood area, including a mixed flock of 185 in Kenwood on 3 October (DA, JC), the highest count in many years. This included a striking leucistic Lesser Redpoll which was seen on a number of occasions by Jamie.



*The leucistic Lesser Redpoll (Jamie Cedar)*

The title of 'Bird of the Year' however probably has to go to **Common Redpoll [Mealy]**. In view of the good numbers of wintering Redpoll on the Heath, it is perhaps surprising that this species is not reported more often. However this year's record is the first that we are aware of since 1991, when a bird was reported to be present between 9 and 16 February. This year, Samuel Levy, whose main patch is Totteridge Valley in North London, got the reward for a number of visits to the Kenwood area, discovering two birds among the Lesser Redpoll flock on 2 December, and managed to take a photo of one of them – an excellent record.

Other selected highlights:

- The first spring **Stonechat** records since 2017 including a very early bird on 7 February.
- A female **Ring Ouzel** which stopped briefly on Parliament Hill on 18 April. This species is less than annual and can be very hard to connect with on the Heath.
- A female **Bullfinch** first found in December 2019 by Dave Porritt and seen on a couple of occasions during January and February. This species used to be regular on the Heath but is now less than annual.
- The first non-flyover **Reed Bunting** records for some years, with a bird by Highgate no1 in January and a pair at the Model Boating Pond on 1 April.
- A very good year for **Spotted Flycatcher**, with birds recorded on 17 days during autumn passage.

## The Hampstead Heath Bird Survey 2020 - Jeff Waage

In 2020, the Heath and Hampstead Society organised a survey of nesting birds on Hampstead Heath. This was prompted by a lack of Bird Reports for the Heath since the early 2000s, and a concern that bird species actually nesting on the Heath had declined. The last estimate of nesting bird species had been made by Hardwick in 1992, based on historical evidence in previous decades. A group of volunteers, with cooperation from City of London, organised the survey. Standard BTO bird survey protocols, based on 1 km square random plots, were considered too broad to pick up desired patterns of bird activity on different specific parts of the Heath, but the survey used a number of elements of the BTO approach. Eight transects of about one km each were laid out to cover different parts of the Heath. These were walked at 1-2 week intervals by two observers in the early morning between early April and end June. Records were made of the location and identity of birds showing *nesting-related behaviour* along each transect (and up to 25 metres either side of the transects). Six behaviour categories were used: Singing, Gathering Nest Material, Carrying Food, Carrying Faecal Pellets, Seen at Nest Site, and Territorial Behaviour. Some of these behaviours clearly gave more evidence of actual nesting than others.

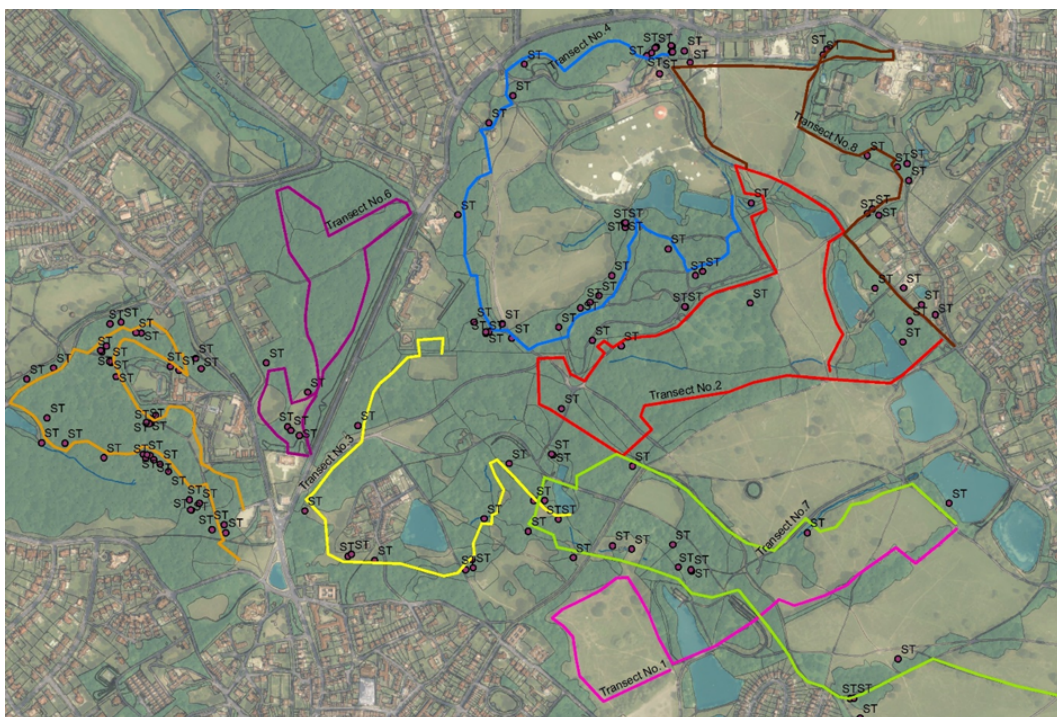


Figure 1. The seven 2020 nesting bird survey transects, overlaid on a map of the Heath. Points on the map indicate all records of Song Thrush nesting-related behaviour (mostly Singing) across six fortnightly transects from early April to end June.

A total of 3170 records were collected in this way for 35 bird species. Analysis was made on a subset of 2179 records from six runs of each transect at roughly fortnightly intervals, to allow comparison between transects and their areas. Overall, the ten most recorded birds in order of total records, were Wren, Blackcap, Robin, Chiffchaff, Blackbird, Stock Dove, Blue Tit, Song Thrush, Wood Pigeon and Great Tit. However, comparing species “abundance” using these records should be made with caution. Birds that make frequent, territorial songs, like most of those just listed, will be recorded far more often than birds that do not, like corvids and woodpeckers. Note also that our transects allowed for very little sampling of birds associated with ponds.

Determining the exact number of breeding pairs for a particular species was impossible, although software that allowed spatial clustering of species songs over successive weeks did permit identification of separate likely territories for birds like thrushes, which could be developed further. For instance, Figure 1 shows how Song Thrush records are rather clumped, possibly representing discrete territories.

Because the transects lay in different parts of the Heath, rough comparisons could be made as to what areas were most “bird diverse”. Seven areas were defined: West Heath, Sandy Heath, Kenwood and four parts of the East Heath. The Shannon Weaver biodiversity index was calculated for each, and the results suggest that the four East Heath areas each supported a slightly greater diversity of nesting species than Kenwood, West Heath or Sandy Heath. Some very distinctive habitat associations were found. For instance, Common Whitethroat were recorded on a very small number of similar brambled borders between hedgerow/woodland and meadow.

Finally, the survey was used to explore what birds might be at risk of being lost from the Heath. In discussion, the observers in the study agreed a classification of nesting bird species into categories related to their numbers and distribution on the Heath. Our hypothesis was that birds with many records of nesting related behaviours across all parts of the Heath were the least at risk, whereas those with very few records and only in a few parts of the Heath would be most at risk. Using this, we classified nesting species as low risk (green), moderate risk and deserving of monitoring (amber) or high risk and possibly in need of active conservation (red). In our classification, we also raised the risk level of a species if it was red/amber listed on the UK Birds of Conservation Concern 2020 list. On this basis, we estimated seven species to be in the “red” category: Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Mistle Thrush, Common Whitethroat and Pied Wagtail. We put seven more in the “amber” category and deserving of monitoring: Green Woodpecker, Coal Tit, Chaffinch, Song Thrush, Goldcrest, Dunnock and Treecreeper. We compared this classification with data from our survey, using its estimates of abundance (total records) and patchiness of distribution (generated by calculating the coefficient of variation of records across the seven sections of the Heath). This tended to support our subjective classification – in most cases our red and amber listed species were those with low abundance, very patchy distributions or, particularly, both. There were interesting patterns – for instance Mistle Thrush were recorded in all parts of the Heath, but appeared very uncommon, while Jackdaw were very localised in Ken and North Woods, but very common there. Some of our red and amber species, like Goldfinch and Pied Wagtail, were recorded mostly on the edges of the Heath and appeared to be more common in surrounding suburban areas.

It was intended that this survey could be improved on in 2021 and then repeated every few years to monitor changes in the nesting bird community on Hampstead Heath.

## Spring arrival / autumn departure dates for some of the commoner migrant species

### Spring

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
<i>Sand Martin</i>	-	08-Apr	-	-	<b>25-Mar</b>	-	03-Apr	-	13-Apr	-
<i>House Martin</i>	22-Apr	08-Apr	02-May	06-May	<b>05-Apr</b>	24-Apr	06-Apr	12-Apr	22-Apr	08-May
<i>Swallow</i>	05-Apr	<b>01-Apr</b>	30-Apr	05-Apr	04-Apr	03-Apr	04-Apr	10-Apr	07-Apr	02-Apr
<i>Swift</i>	<b>22-Apr</b>	30-Apr	02-May	06-May	30-Apr	09-May	10-May	02-May	29-Apr	13-May
<i>Wheatear</i>	<b>16-Mar</b>	25-Mar	01-Apr	25-Mar	03-Apr	24-Apr	09-Apr	13-Apr	17-Mar	02-Apr
<i>Whinchat</i>	29-Apr	29-May	-	-	-	<b>24-Apr</b>	11-May	30-Apr	07-May	-
<i>Common Redstart</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13-Apr	<b>01-Apr</b>	-
<i>Hobby</i>	26-Apr	-	30-Apr	09-May	12-May	25-Apr	09-May	27-Apr	01-May	<b>20-Apr</b>
<i>Willow Warbler</i>	06-Apr	02-Apr	08-Apr	30-Mar	03-Apr	11-Apr	04-Apr	15-Apr	<b>19-Mar</b>	29-Mar
<i>Common Whitethroat</i>	16-Apr	20-Apr	22-Apr	25-Apr	30-Apr	22-Apr	23-Apr	<b>15-Apr</b>	27-Apr	20-Apr
<i>Lesser Whitethroat</i>	25-Apr	30-Apr	<b>12-Apr</b>	30-Apr	21-May	26-Apr	-	18-May	01-May	08-May
<i>Yellow Wagtail</i>	19-Apr	<b>10-Apr</b>	-	11-May	30-Apr	18-Apr	21-Apr	15-Apr	01-May	-

### Autumn

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
<i>Sand Martin</i>	<b>07-Oct</b>	15-Sep	06-Sep	13-Aug	-	10-Sep	06-Sep	-	06-Oct	29-Aug
<i>House Martin</i>	11-Oct	15-Oct	01-Oct	<b>21-Oct</b>	29-Sep	18-Oct	11-Oct	24-Sep	06-Oct	08-Oct
<i>Swallow</i>	13-Oct	25-Oct	30-Sep	09-Oct	09-Oct	11-Oct	11-Oct	06-Oct	<b>30-Oct</b>	14-Oct
<i>Swift</i>	01-Sep	<b>03-Sep</b>	01-Sep	21-Aug	12-Aug	29-Aug	29-Aug	20-Aug	17-Aug	02-Sep
<i>Wheatear</i>	16-Sep	26-Sep	-	04-Sep	06-Sep	02-Sep	23-Sep	15-Sep	05-Sep	<b>04-Oct</b>
<i>Whinchat</i>	10-Sep	21-Sep	-	16-Sep	<b>23-Sep</b>	07-Sep	21-Sep	31-Aug	22-Sep	03-Sep
<i>Common Redstart</i>	10-Sep	27-Aug	-	-	11-Sep	10-Sep	06-Sep	-	05-Sep	<b>15-Sep</b>
<i>Hobby</i>	21-Sep	15-Sep	<b>04-Nov</b>	22-Aug	12-Sep	19-Aug	14-Sep	31-Aug	08-Sep	16-Sep
<i>Willow Warbler</i>	04-Sep	27-Aug	17-Aug	21-Aug	25-Aug	30-Aug	31-Aug	13-Sep	12-Sep	<b>15-Sep</b>
<i>Common Whitethroat</i>	11-Sep	17-Sep	-	01-Sep	30-Aug	06-Sep	<b>23-Sep</b>	16-Sep	07-Sep	15-Sep
<i>Lesser Whitethroat</i>	10-Sep	<b>10-Oct</b>	13-Sep	27-Sep	-	28-Aug	09-Sep	15-Sep	21-Sep	29-Aug
<i>Yellow Wagtail</i>	22-Sep	14-Sep	06-Sep	24-Sep	12-Sep	19-Sep	15-Sep	<b>05-Oct</b>	17-Sep	15-Sep

NB: Cells highlighted in yellow show the earliest recorded arrival date and latest recorded departure data for each species since 2011.

## Systematic list

### **Canada Goose**

Breeding resident. Present for much of the year although only one record between August and December. A pair reportedly bred on the Vale of Health Pond (LA). A high count of 17 was reported on 21 April.

### **Greylag Goose**

Occasional visitor to the Heath. Several sightings through the year, with most involving birds flying over or landing briefly before being chased off by dogs. A high count of 5 birds on 8 May by a visiting birder.

### **Mute Swan**

Regular breeding resident, present all year. At least two pairs bred; a pair with 7 cygnets on Highgate No 1 Pond (see picture below) and a pair with 6 cygnets at Hampstead No 2 Pond.



*The famous Wallace and Mrs Newbie with their brood of 7 on Highgate No 1 Pond (Mimi Chan)*

### **Egyptian Goose**

Resident. Two pairs present for much of the year. Birds seen prospecting for nests but no confirmed breeding reported. A high count of 9 birds on dates in June and October.



### **Mandarin Duck**

Breeding resident, present all year. The Heath remains a stronghold for this species. At least two pairs bred; broods of 6 at Ladies Pond and 9 at Stock Pond were reported on 20 May (MA), although subsequent sightings indicate high mortality rates. As is typical, numbers increased through winter, with a high count of 37 birds on 6 December (RB).



*Female Mandarin Duck with brood of nine (Magnus Andersson)*

### **Shoveler**

Winter visitor. Birds present from January to mid-April and then returning from September onwards. This year a lone female was seen on several occasions through the summer months, associating with Mallards on Hampstead No 2. A high count of 18 birds on three dates in September and October. Birds favour Highgate No 1 and Hampstead No 1 Ponds.

### **Gadwall**

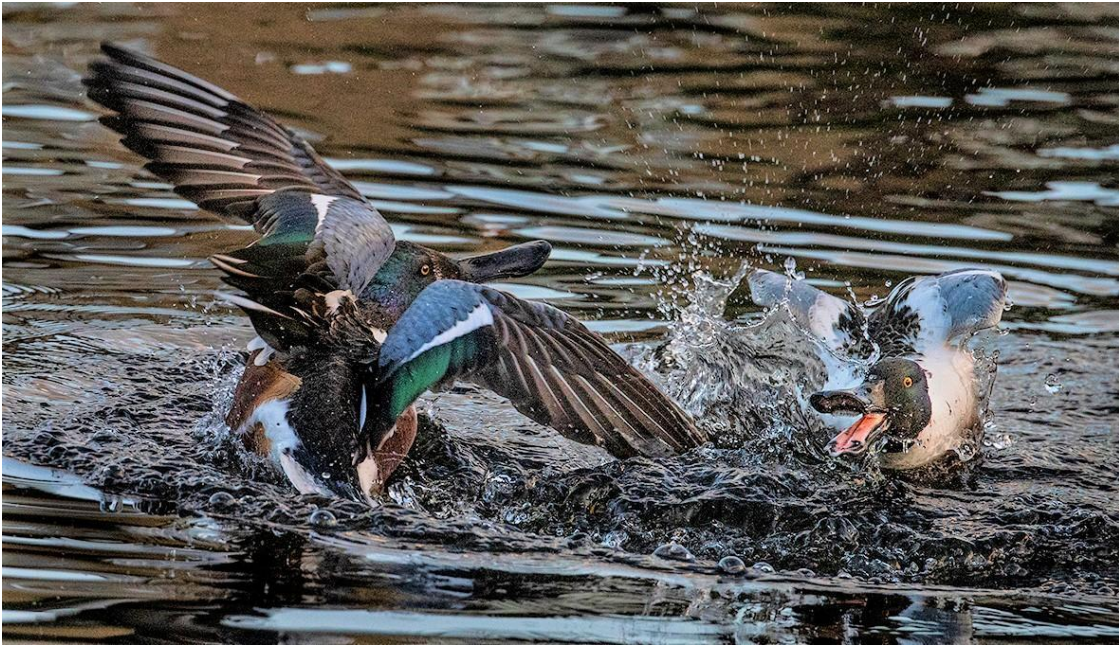
Resident but no recent breeding records. A pair remained at Wood Pond in Kenwood throughout the year, occasionally joined by an additional bird, but no breeding attempts noted. A high count of 5 birds on dates in January and August.

### **Mallard**

Common breeding resident, present all year round across most ponds on the Heath. A high count of 89 birds recorded across the Heath on 26 July (NK).

### **Teal**

Occasional visitor, mostly in winter. One atypical record was of a female bird in non-breeding plumage, observed several times on Hampstead No 1 Pond through August and September, with most sightings around dusk. It was first seen on 29 August (JC) with the final sighting on 18 September. Sightings of two or more birds on Wood Pond were reported during October and November (JC).



*Drake Shovelers fighting (John Weston)*

### **Pochard**

Very occasional visitor to the Heath. Just one sighting this year, of a drake on Men's Bathing Pond on 6 November (JC).

### **Tufted Duck**

Breeding resident, present all year across many of the ponds on the Heath. A brood of 3 ducklings was reported on 26 July at Hampstead No 1 Pond (NK). High count of 61 on 24 December (RB).

### **Little Grebe**

Occasional breeder but no breeding records this year, with no birds observed during the breeding season. One bird present on Wood Pond during much of the winter. High count of just 2 birds on 4 March (JC).

### **Great Crested Grebe**

Breeding resident. Present all year, mainly on the Highgate Ponds, with a high count of 6 birds on 20 May and 27 July. Two pairs observed through March but only one pair observed to breed, on Men's Bathing Pond. Likely helped by the closure of the pond to swimmers for much of the breeding period due to coronavirus restrictions. The breeding pair were observed with up to four young initially, but subsequent sightings indicate that just one or two young survived.

### **Grey Heron**

Non-breeding resident, present all year round in small numbers. Usually adults but young birds also occasionally seen, possibly having bred at one of the nearby colonies, e.g. at Regents Park. Occasionally seen to predate young birds, particularly Mallard ducklings. High count of 4 on 25 January (SL) and 24 August (NK).

**Little Egret**

Occasional visitor, usually seen flying over. Typically singles but a high count of 3 birds seen flying over Ladies Pond at 0740 on 16 August (LV). Records this year in April, July, August and October.

**Cormorant**

Non-breeding resident, present all year round, usually in small numbers but occasionally into double figures. Can be seen on most of the ponds on the Heath. May often be seen drying wings on the rafts, or perched on the trees by the Model Boating Pond. High count of 19 on 7 November (visiting birder).

**Sparrowhawk**

Breeding resident, present all year. A pair successfully bred on West Heath, producing 3-4 fledglings (MC). Another nest was found and a pair were observed mating on 9 May (LA) but this nest is believed to have been abandoned.



*Male Sparrowhawk with prey (Mimi Chan)*

**Marsh Harrier**

Scarce on passage. A first sighting this year since 2017, with a bird observed flying high east over Kenwood at around 1500 on 16 October (JC). Notes from the observer: 'no colour visible but long tail and fairly thin, fingered wings fairly obvious. Steady flapping flight'.

### **Red Kite**

Occasional visitor on passage. Some wandering birds also seen at other times of the year. Sightings of this species were recorded in eight months of the year; February, July, August and November were the only blank months. Most birds were seen passing over Parliament Hill, but birds were also seen flying low over the woods, including a bird near Lime Tree Avenue on 30 December. A high count of 3 birds over Parliament Hill was recorded on 26 March (PM).

### **Common Buzzard**

Possible breeder and regular on passage. Sightings were reported in most (if not all) months of the year. A pair were regularly seen in the Kenwood and Sandy Heath area during the breeding season and breeding is suspected. A high count of 8 birds seen flying over Parliament Hill during autumn passage on 1 September (JC).

### **Water Rail**

Winter visitor. One was seen on a number of occasions near Viaduct Pond and Bird Bridge between January and March. One bird was also seen at the Sanctuary Pond on 4 March (AB).

### **Moorhen**

Breeding resident, present all year. Several broods on various ponds. High count of 16 on 26 July (NK). This count included young birds observed at three ponds: a juvenile at Highgate No 1 Pond, four unfledged young at Viaduct Pond and one juvenile at Hampstead No 1 Pond.

### **Coot**

Common breeding resident, present all year across most ponds on the Heath. Multiple broods on various ponds with chicks seen between May and July. High count of 46 birds on 26 July (NK).

### **Golden Plover**

Scarce on passage, usually as flyovers. First sightings of this species on the Heath since 2010. Two flyover records, on 18 October (JC, PM) and 4 November (JC). The 18 October record was of a lone bird flying south at 0842 in the morning. A record shot of the bird was captured by JC.

### **Woodcock**

Winter visitor, typically present on the Heath between November and March, with Kenwood often the best location to catch up with this species. One spring record on 17 March over the bandstand adjacent to Parliament Hill at 1340 (TB). Three autumn/winter records, all in the afternoon, on 30 November (1417 in Kenwood), 5 December (1610, location not reported) and 6 December (1455 in Kenwood).

### **Common Snipe**

Occasional visitor to the Heath on passage. Four spring records of single birds on 31 March, 2, 3 and 6 April (all JC), and two autumn records, both of two birds, on 31 August (visiting birder) and 11 October (JC). All flyover records although the 3 April bird may have landed near the Hampstead Ponds.

### **Common Sandpiper**

Occasional visitor on passage. First sighting since 2017. This is likely due to lack of observers although numbers may also be decreasing in line with national downward trend. One sighting on 18 September, flying around Hampstead No 1 Pond and calling (JC).

### **Black-headed Gull**

Winter visitor and on passage. Birds usually start arriving back on the Heath during July with numbers building up during the winter and remaining until March. Large flocks of birds are often seen feeding on Parliament Hill fields during winter. A high count of at least 255 was observed on 5 January (NK).

### **Common Gull**

Winter visitor. The first returning birds generally arrive in October and leave around the same time as Black-headed Gulls in March. Usually seen in small numbers on Parliament Hill Fields and on Highgate Ponds, particularly on the Men's Bathing Pond. A high count of 10 birds observed on 18 January (JC) although anecdotal reports were received of larger numbers on the Heath Extension.

### **Herring Gull**

Non-breeding resident, present all year. Higher numbers in winter. High count of c60 on 29 February (JC).

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull**

Non-breeding resident, present for most of the year in small numbers. High count of 6 on 3 June (RB).

### **Great Black-backed Gull**

Occasional visitor, usually as a flyover in winter. Just one record of this year, of an adult and first winter flying west over Parliament Hill on 19 January (PM).

### **Common Tern**

Occasional visitor, has bred on Highgate Ponds in the past. In some years no sightings have been reported so 2020 was an excellent year for this species, with a pair taking up residence on the Men's Bathing Pond between May and July, undoubtedly helped by the closure of the pond to swimming due to the coronavirus pandemic. First sighting on 3 May (visiting birder) and final sighting on 27 July. High count of 3 birds on 3 and 4 May.

### **Feral Pigeon**

Breeding resident. Present all year. Probably bred although no breeding records received.

### **Stock Dove**

Breeding resident. Present all year. Breeds throughout the Heath but with a stronghold in the Kenwood area. A high count of 25 birds on 24 August (NK).

### **Woodpigeon**

Common breeding resident. Present all year. Bred widely throughout the Heath. Large numbers of birds roost on the Heath in autumn and winter, with large flocks often seen leaving the roost shortly after first light. A high count of 2,700 reported on 4 November with c1,300 seen leaving roost and c1,400 migrating west in the morning (JC).

### **Collared Dove**

Occasional visitor to the Heath, breeds nearby. Sightings of single birds flying over in January and September and a pair in October. One bird seen perched in a tree at the back of Highgate No 1 Pond in June (RB).

### **Tawny Owl**

Breeding resident. The only regular owl species on the Heath. One confirmed breeding record this year, although a number of pairs likely bred. Two well grown owlets were regularly seen and heard near Viaduct Pond during the first half of June. These birds showed particularly well and drew visits from a number of local birders.



*Tawny Owl owlets (Dominic Mitchell)*

### **Swift**

Summer visitor, breeds nearby. First record on 22 April, with the last record on 1 September. High count of 60 on 7 August (PM).

### **Kingfisher**

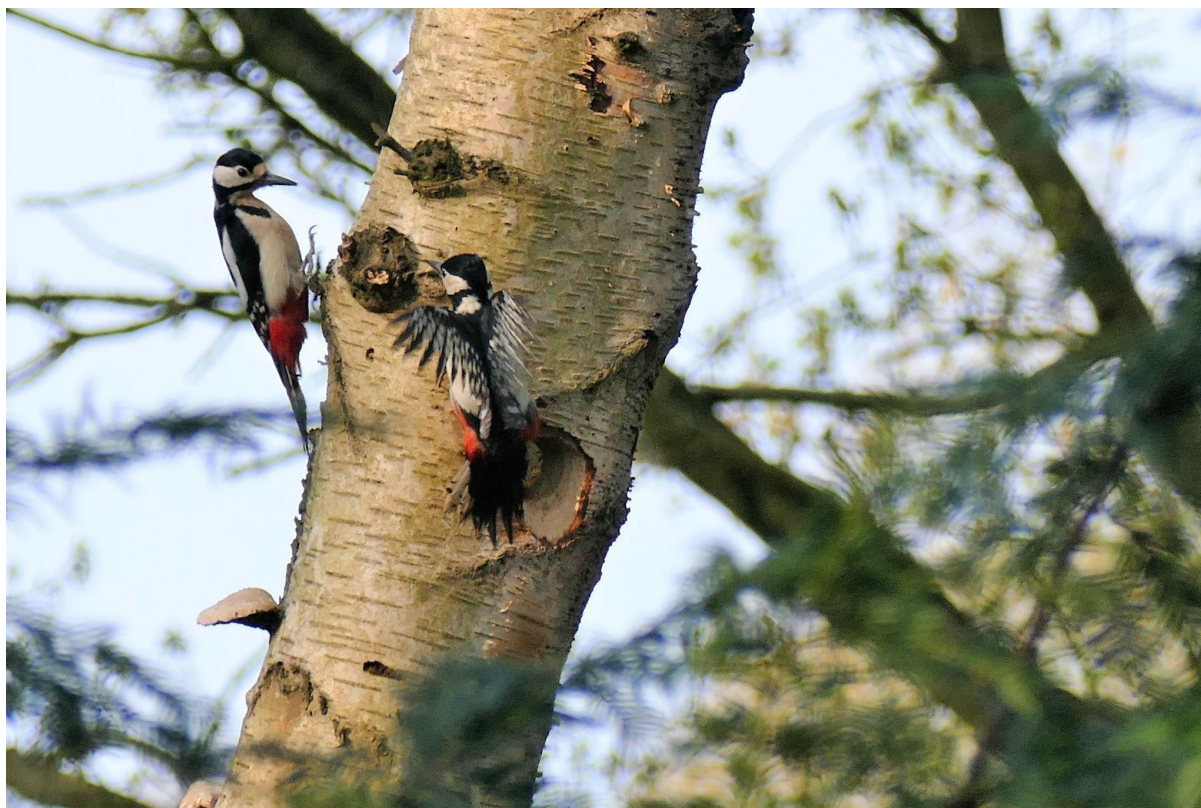
Breeding resident, present all year round. Most regularly seen at the Highgate Ponds, with birds often seen commuting between these ponds. One juvenile bird seen on 27 July (RB).

### **Green Woodpecker**

Common breeding resident. Commonly seen and heard across most parts of Hampstead Heath, often giving away its presence with its distinctive yaffling call. Often seen feeding on anthills on the ground, particularly on Pryors Field and West Meadow in Kenwood. A high count of 4 birds was reported on several dates in 2020.

### **Great Spotted Woodpecker**

Common breeding resident, the commonest woodpecker on the Heath. At least 6 nests were found across the Heath this year, and noisy youngsters were seen being fed at some of these.



*Great Spotted Woodpecker pair (Neville Robinson)*

### **Kestrel**

Breeding resident, present all year. One confirmed breeding record this year from Kenwood, with five chicks seen to fledge on 15 June (LA).

### **Hobby**

Summer visitor, likely breeds nearby. First sighting of the year on 21 April, final sighting on 21 September (both JC). High count of two birds on 28 August and 1 September.

### **Peregrine Falcon**

Fairly regular visitor, with sightings possible at any time of the year. Usually seen flying over. At least 16 sightings during 2020, with the most records (6) during October - possibly due to increased observer effort during this month. High count of two birds seen on 22 March and 20 October (PM).

### **Ring-necked Parakeet**

Abundant breeding resident. Noisy presence across all of the Heath. No systematic counts undertaken but resident numbers are likely in the hundreds.



*Kestrel fledgling (Mimi Chan)*

**Jay**

Common breeding resident. A high count of 14 on 4 January (JC). Can be particularly evident in autumn when birds start collecting and stashing acorns, but no large numbers observed this year.

**Magpie**

Common breeding resident. A high count of 30 on 4 January, although this is likely an approximate count (JC).

**Jackdaw**

Common breeding resident. The ancient woodland in Kenwood holds the largest breeding colony of this species near central London. A survey was carried out during 2019 and 34 nest holes with pairs were observed (see p201 of the 2019 London Bird Report). The highest estimated count of birds observed during 2020 was 40 (on a number of occasions), but no systematic counts this year.



**Rook**

Scarce on passage. Just two records this year, one in spring and one in autumn. One bird flying NW on 31 March and two birds flying north on 11 October (both PM).

**Carrion Crow**

Abundant breeding resident. Large numbers present all year round, and there is a large roost on the Heath. A high count of 120 recorded on 30 December (RB) although real numbers likely much higher. Birds rely on food from humans, with some Heath visitors regularly feeding them and large groups often gathering at Parliament Hill cafe looking for scraps.

**Coal Tit**

Breeding resident. Present across the Heath in small numbers. Probably under-recorded as many observers focus on more open areas of the Heath, e.g. around Parliament Hill Fields, where numbers are lower. A high count of 7 on 10 February (DM).

**Blue Tit**

Abundant breeding resident. High count of 33 on 25 January (SL).

**Great Tit**

Common breeding resident. High count of 16 on 18 January (JC).

**Skylark**

Occasional visitor on passage, mostly observed flying over in autumn during visible migration watches. One sighting in spring (9 March, RB) and observed on eight days during autumn between 14 October and 5 November, with a high count of just 2 on two dates.

**Sand Martin**

Uncommon on passage. This species is most often recorded flying over the Heath and it has been some years since birds were seen lingering over any of the ponds. Recorded on five days during 2020, all in the autumn: two days in August, two in September and one in October. First bird on 1 August with the last seen on 7 October. High count of 4 on 13 Sept (JC).

**Barn Swallow**

Passage migrant. First spring bird on 5 April, with birds seen on 11 days, and highs of just 6 on 19 April and 6 May. One record on 24 July of a bird flying north was unusual. The first bird of the autumn proper flew south on 5 August and the last record of the year was 13 October. Birds seen on 21 days, with high counts of 30 on 30 Sept and 7 Oct being lower than usual.

**House Martin**

Passage migrant. Unlike Sand Martin, this species can often be seen lingering and feeding over the Heath in autumn. First spring birds on 22 April, with birds seen on 4 dates, and a high of 5 on 19 May. Autumn is the best time for this species, with birds seen on 17 dates between 16 August and 11 October, and a high count of c300 on 30 Sept (PM).

### **Long-tailed Tit**

Breeding resident. Present all year round with the largest numbers usually seen in winter when feeding flocks move around the Heath. This species tends to suffer from high nest failure rates, with only the best hidden nests surviving predation from Magpies and other corvids. Successful breeding was confirmed with a 'big family group feeding young' reported on 28 May (RB). High counts of 30 on 1 and 25 Jan (JC, SL).

### **Willow Warbler**

Regular passage migrant. First spring birds on 6 April, with birds observed on just 5 days, lower than usual. However, the autumn more than made up for it. A first early returning bird was heard singing quietly on 27 July, with good numbers then observed regularly throughout August and a final sighting on 4 September. The stand out date was undoubtedly 24 August when an incredible 50 birds were estimated to be in the Kenwood area (JC) - this is the highest count of this species that we are aware of on the Heath.

### **Chiffchaff**

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant, increasing winter visitor. The first bird of the spring was on 7 March, and birds were then seen all the way through to 15 October, with one outlier on 5 November. Birds were observed on territories across the Heath and successful breeding was confirmed, including two young birds observed on 6 June by Hedge 3 (RB). A high count of 27 was reported on 24 August during autumn passage (NK).

### **Reed Warbler**

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant. First arrival on 29 April and birds observed singing throughout the breeding period on a number of the Highgate Ponds. A high count of just 3 birds on 27 July (RB). A pair observed carrying food in the small reedbed at the NW corner of the Model Boating Pond was the strongest breeding evidence observed during the year; no juveniles were observed. One record of particular interest was a male [recorded singing](#) from the same spot on 27 July and including lots of mimicry in its song, with up to ten species mimicked.

### **Blackcap**

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant, increasing winter visitor. The first bird of the spring was seen on 15 March and the final birds of the year on 28 September. Successful breeding was confirmed, with young birds and family parties observed at a number of locations around the Heath. A high count of 16 birds on 20 May (MA).

### **Garden Warbler**

Declining passage migrant. Previously bred on the Heath but no recent records. One spring record on 12 May on Parliament Hill (PM) and six autumn records, all single birds, with the first on 27 July and the last on 31 August.

### **Lesser Whitethroat**

Summer visitor and passage migrant in small numbers. The first bird of the spring appeared at Hedge 3 on 25 April, with two other spring records on 29 April and 2 May. A bird observed in a blackthorn clump on Parliament Hill on 12 July hinted at a possible breeding attempt (a pair was confirmed to have bred at the same location during 2021). Birds were observed on nine further days during the autumn, with the final record on 10 Sept.

### **Common Whitethroat**

Breeding summer visitor and passage migrant. The first bird of the year was observed on 16 April, a fairly early date for this species. Successful breeding was confirmed with two juveniles observed by Hedge 2 on 3 June. A high count of six birds during autumn passage on 20 and 23 August. The final bird of the year was seen on 11 Sept.



*Common Whitethroat (Neville Robinson)*

### **Firecrest**

Scarce visitor. One this year, found by PM on 23 Sept in Hedge 3. Quite elusive and not seen on subsequent days.

### **Goldcrest**

Fairly common breeding resident. Multiple birds were heard singing throughout the breeding season. A high count of nine birds on 30 January (SL).

### **Wren**

Very common breeding resident, breeding across the Heath. Peak count of 31 on 24 April.

### **Nuthatch**

Breeding resident in good numbers across the Heath, present all year round. Successful breeding observed, including a newly fledged bird at Sanctuary Pond on 3 June (RB). Peak count of seven birds observed on 1 January, although real numbers undoubtedly significantly higher than this.

### **Treecreeper**

Breeding resident in fairly small numbers, present all year round. Often joins tit flocks during winter. Breeding confirmed, including a noisy family party with juveniles by the Men's Bathing Pond on 20 June (RB). High count of four, also on 20 June.

### **Starling**

Resident and passage migrant. No recent breeding records from the Heath itself but breeding has been observed in nearby residential streets. Loud parties of adults and juveniles can often be observed feeding on the Heath in May and June. Large flocks can sometimes be observed flying over during autumn passage and there is a regular winter roost in the clumps of blackthorn on the south side of Parliament Hill. The high count this year was of c400 birds on 17 October when c250 flew West and c150 were feeding on the cricket pitch.

### **Ring Ouzel**

Scarce passage migrant, less than annual on the Heath, although some undoubtedly slip through unseen. One record this year with a female seen briefly on the south slopes of Parliament Hill on 18 April (JC).

### **Blackbird**

Common breeding resident. Breeding confirmed with young birds seen on a number of occasions. Can be difficult to find in the late summer months when adults are moulting. Supplemented in winter by continental migrants, and a few can usually be seen migrating through during autumn passage. A high count of 23 observed on 27 April.

### **Fieldfare**

Passage migrant and uncommon winter visitor. The best time to see this species is during autumn passage when good numbers can be seen migrating over the Heath. They are much less common in winter, although cold weather can occasionally result in an influx of birds. Birds were recorded on two days in Jan, one day in Feb and one day in April. The first bird of autumn was recorded on 3 Oct, with birds then seen regularly throughout October and November. A high count of c60 was seen on 17 Oct (JC). Finally, a group of 20 visited the Heath on 25 Dec (JC).

### **Redwing**

Passage migrant and winter visitor. Feeding flocks of up to 100 birds were observed from January through March. The last birds of the spring were observed flying north on 3 April and the first returning birds of the autumn on 27 Sept. A high count of c600 flying north on 11 Oct opened the floodgates, with counts of over 100 seen on each of the following six days. Good numbers were then present into December, with c160 birds on 17 Dec (RB).

### **Song Thrush**

Breeding resident. No noticeable autumn passage of this species this year. Breeding confirmed - a juvenile bird reported on 4 August (RB). High count of 10 on 18 January (JC).

### **Mistle Thrush**

Breeding resident in small numbers. Breeding confirmed with young birds seen on a number of occasions, including three with parents on 3 June. A peak count of 12 on 30 Jan (SL).

### **Spotted Flycatcher**

Passage migrant and former breeder. No spring records this year (as is typical) but an excellent year overall for this species, with birds seen on 17 days in autumn. The first birds appeared on 16 August and the final one of the year was seen on 28 September. A high count of 4 on 8 September (JC).

### **Robin**

Very common breeding resident, breeding across the Heath. High count of 28 on 24 December (RB), but this was not a full count for the whole Heath.

### **Pied Flycatcher**

Uncommon passage migrant. This year saw the first records of this species since 2013, with a higher than average number of records being reported from across the London area. Three female/immature types were first seen together on the same birch tree by Sphagnum Bog in Kenwood on 16 August (RB). One bird was additionally seen in the same area on 20 and 24 August (JC).

### **Common Redstart**

Uncommon passage migrant. Two autumn records of this species this year: an adult male seen briefly in Kenwood on 24 August (JC) and a female in the clumps on Parliament Hill on 10 September (PM).

### **Whinchat**

Passage migrant. Three records this year, one in spring and two in autumn. An adult male spent a day by hedge 2 on 29 April (JC). One bird was at Sphagnum Bog on 28 August (JC) and 2-3 birds around Parliament Hill on 10 September (JC, PM).

### **Stonechat**

Passage migrant. A very good year for this species on the Heath, with a good number of birds during both spring and autumn passage. Spring passage was particularly notable as this species is rarely recorded on the Heath during this time, with the most recent spring record being in 2017. This year, birds were reported on at least ten days, with the first reported as early as 7 February (PM). Autumn was equally good, with birds reported on at least 13 days between 11 September and 4 November. Birds were especially concentrated around the large thistle patches near Tumulus, with up to six birds frequenting this area between 26 September and 9 October.



*Stonechat in flight (Mimi Chan)*

### **Wheatear**

Passage migrant. An early arrival this year, with three birds on Parliament Hill on 16 March (PM). Last bird of the spring on 14 May. Birds reported on eight days during the autumn between 13 August and 16 September. High count of 4 birds on 21 April.

### **House Sparrow**

Breeds near to the Heath, but uncommon on the Heath itself. However, birds were regularly seen this year in brambles adjacent to the back gardens of Tanza Road, attracted by the feeders put up by a local resident. High count of 10 in February and December.

### **Dunnock**

Breeding resident. High count of 8 on 13 February. Breeding confirmed - a young bird seen on 30 June (RB).

### **Yellow Wagtail**

Passage migrant. Usually only seen or heard as flyovers with grounded records very uncommon. The first of the year flew over on 19 April, and the last on 22 September. Recorded on 5 days during spring, and ten during autumn. High count of 3 on 7 August.

### **Grey Wagtail**

Occasional visitor to the Heath, likely breeds locally. Can be seen around the ponds at any time of year, but not common. Most frequently seen as flyovers during autumn passage. A high count of 4 flying over on 1 October.

### **Pied Wagtail**

Breeds near to the Heath, common visitor. Can be seen throughout the year. Most commonly seen near the tennis courts, bowling green and cricket pitch on the SE side of Parliament Hill. Highest numbers recorded as flyovers during autumn passage. A high count of 20 flew over on 23 October.

### **Meadow Pipit**

Common passage migrant, uncommon winter visitor. Up to three birds were seen on three days during January (JC), an unusual occurrence on the Heath. One of the commonest migrants during autumn migration, mostly 'tseep-tseeping' overhead, but with a few that come down to feed on Parliament Hill and the other open grassy areas. Recorded on just 4 days during spring as the covid restrictions put paid to the usual vismig sessions. The first returning birds of the autumn were recorded on 6 September, with the final bird of the year on 26 November. A high count of 112 over Parliament Hill on 10 September (JC).

### **Tree Pipit**

Uncommon passage migrant. Recorded on 7 days during autumn passage, from 23 August to 16 September. Most observations of this species on the Heath are flyovers but a couple were seen perched at Sphagnum Bog on 23 August (JC).

### **Chaffinch**

Breeding resident, but declining. Present all year round in small numbers but can be very hard to find after the breeding season, with birds seemingly dispersing to other areas. Good numbers can be observed in October and November during autumn passage, although not in such large numbers as in the past. A high count of c220 on 17 October.

### **Brambling**

Uncommon passage migrant and scarce winter visitor. A reasonably good year for this species, with flyovers recorded on 5 days during the autumn passage between 14 October and 5 November. A high count of 4 on 15 October.

### **Hawfinch**

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor. Two records this year, both flyovers: one on 12 October (JC) and one 7 November (JC, RB).

### **Bullfinch**

Former breeder, now a scarce winter visitor. Two records this year, both near hedge 2. A female was first found here in December 2019 (DP), and then just twice more, once in January and once in February - possibly all the same bird.

### **Greenfinch**

Breeding resident, present all year round. Favours the south side of the Heath around Parliament Hill, uncommon elsewhere. A high count of 21 birds outside of autumn passage, 75 during autumn passage.

### **Linnet**

Passage migrant and former breeder. Now mostly recorded as flyovers with grounded birds very uncommon. Recorded on ten days during spring (27 Mar-4 May) and 22 days during autumn (7 Aug-20 Nov), with October being the best month (12 bird days). A high count of ten on 9 and 12 October.

### **Common Redpoll [Mealy]**

Rare winter visitor. The first record of this species that we are aware of since 1991. Two seen in a flock of Lesser Redpoll in Kenwood on 2 December (SL). Not seen subsequently despite quite a bit of searching.



*Common [Mealy] Redpoll  
(Samuel Levy)*

### **Lesser Redpoll**

Passage migrant and winter visitor. A very good year for this species, with birds around for much of both winter periods. This was in contrast to 2019 when very few were seen. In particular, good numbers were recorded regularly in the Kenwood area between October and December 2020, with smaller numbers also ranging more widely across the Heath, sometimes with Siskin. A high count of c100 on 31 December (JC).

### **Crossbill**

Scarce passage migrant. An excellent year for this species, possibly the best ever on the Heath. One recorded flying over on 13 May (JC) was the first in the London area in 2020 and was just the sign of things to come, with sightings continuing through to November. The regularity of sightings suggested that birds were likely feeding somewhere on the Heath but none were found.

### **Goldfinch**

Resident, breeds locally although not known to actually breed on the Heath itself. Numbers can increase in the winter periods as resident numbers are swelled by migrant birds. A good place to look for them is in the London plane trees on Highgate Road as they enjoy feeding on the fruits of the plane tree. A high count of c30 birds on 7 February.

### **Siskin**

Passage migrant and winter visitor. Hampstead Heath is one of the best places to see this species near central London; the Heath has many alder trees which are the main food source for Siskin. Returning birds were seen unusually early this year, with one seen as early as 26 June. Good numbers were seen during autumn passage and remained through the winter, with a high count of c150 on 3 October.

### **Reed Bunting**

Passage migrant and scarce winter visitor. In most years some are recorded flying over in autumn, but birds on the deck are rare. This year bucked the trend, with no birds recorded flying over in the autumn, but two records of birds around the Model Boating Pond (one on 29 Feb and a pair on 1 Apr) were the first 'on the deck' records for some years.