

THE BIRDS OF EWELME WATERCRESS BEDS

October 2002 to November 2004

1 Introduction

Towards the end of September 2002 I began keeping a record of bird sightings in the area of the watercress beds below the bridge.

Throughout the 2 years I have tried to walk the length between the downstream end of the site and the road bridge, in both directions on a weekly basis. All of the species of birds seen during the walk were recorded. I pondered for some time if I should include species flying over or just those seen within the area and decided to include everything observed during the walk. My thinking was that it would be very difficult to decide where to draw the line. For example it would seem right to count swallows low over the water but at what height should they be excluded? It seemed easier all round to count everything. Also, that Kestrel hovering overhead might well have landed if I had not been present.

I have covered two complete years in this note from the first comprehensive listing on 12 October 2002 to 31 October 2004. There are some "casual" records just before the start of the period which seemed better to include.

The Table towards the end gives details of the frequency of sightings and compares the two years.

The map in the centre shows the area covered in the survey.

The photographs were all taken by the author, most of them within the site but some from elsewhere, locally and the sketches are reproduced by kind permission of Peter Abbott.

2 Systematic list with status of all birds seen in and from the site

This section lists all of the birds seen by the author during the weekly surveys of the Ewelme Watercress Beds. It also provides my estimation of their current status. It should be noted that the information is based solely on the authors understanding and knowledge and if any reader would like to comment on this section of the report contributions would be most welcome and any further information will be incorporated in later versions.

The small table gives the position within the frequency of sightings table and the percentages refer to the proportion of trips on which the species was seen in the two years covered by this note.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

This large grey and white bird with long neck and dagger like yellow bill is a fairly common sight on the beds and in flight over the village.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
28 th	27%	17%

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

The only wild goose seen from the watercress beds but perhaps wild is not the best description of this large goose which is present in this country as a result of introduction from its native North America. I have only a single record of a pair in the pasture between the beds and Cottesmore Lane on 4th April 2004. They could well have been prospecting for a nest site but, as they were not present again, presumably didn't find anywhere to their liking..

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
60 th	0%	2%

Teal *anas formosa*

This, the smallest of our native ducks, is a very uncommon winter visitor to the beds with only a single sighting on 1st February 2003. This may well have been a regular visitor in the days of the trout pond as away from the coast the seeds of spike-rush and creeping buttercup together with aquatic midge larvae are common items of their diet. These are more usually associated with ponds and lakes rather than flowing water. Teal were fairly regularly seen on the lake at Grundons Pit a few years ago.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
64 th	2%	0%

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

A very common resident duck of the Watercress Beds which breed in the bankside vegetation.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
5 th	71%	100%

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Fifteen years ago it would have been unthinkable to see this species featured in a list of local bird species but since the re-introduction programme by the RSPB, English Nature and Joint Nature Conservation Committee this magnificent raptor is frequently seen soaring over the cress beds and surrounding area.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
20 th	49%	44%

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Numbers of Sparrowhawks have increased dramatically since the banning of DDT and they are now almost as numerous as Kestrels. Sightings increased slightly from 2002/3 (16%) to 2003/4 (20%) but the change was probably not significant with this species spending little time on the site, views being restricted to a rapid low level hunting pass which is easily missed.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
31 st	16%	20%

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

If that large bird soaring high over the area hasn't a forked tail it is probably one of these. Numbers of Buzzards have increased as Red Kites have become established but whether there is a connection is unclear though probable. *The frequency of sightings was 26% in the first year but quite a bit lower at 9% in the second.*

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
33 rd	26%	9%

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

The most common raptor in the area, often seen hovering over the site searching for voles, which constitute a large part of their diet. 23rd in the “league table” with a large increase in sightings between the two years from 20% to 39%.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
23 rd	20%	39%

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

A very rare visitor to the skies above Ewelme. It’s main diet consists of dragonflies but they will also catch and eat Swallows and Martins. This latest fact often gives away a Hobby’s presence in the area as the Swallows and Martins form a close flock and call loudly as they ascend skywards when a Hobby is hunting locally. Just a single sighting in each year covered by the survey.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
58 th	2%	2%

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

This, the larger of the two partridges and with a distinctive black and white face is fairly common in the fields around the village though not often seen during my regular visits – just 4% and 7% in the two years. This species, introduced from the continent, is more common than the rapidly declining Grey Partridge, mainly due to many being bred for release by gamekeepers locally.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
49 th	4%	7%

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Nationally the decline in numbers of Grey Partridge is causing great concern but this species can still be seen in reasonable numbers on the farmland surrounding the site though only a single sighting has been recorded and that was in the first year of the survey – 2002/3.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
62 nd	2%	0%

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

This very distinctive game bird was introduced to this country more than 900 years ago and is commonly reared for game shooting. Although favouring woods and copses it is fairly common in the area and observed on around half of the survey visits. The actual frequency of sightings recorded was 55% and 50% in the two years and Pheasant held 17th place in the table.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
17 th	55%	50%

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

We are lucky enough to play host to several of these delightful little secretive skulker during the winter months. They require thick-reeded shallow lakes and sedge marshes for breeding and so the watercress reserve is not suitable but perhaps one day? They can be very difficult to see but with patience good views of them can be had – easier in very cold weather when they venture out in the open more. This species was seen on 24% of visits during 2002/3 and 7% during the second year. Sightings and winter populations are very dependent on weather conditions so this apparent change may not be significant.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
34 th	24%	7%

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

This common bird of ponds, rivers and almost anywhere wet can be seen all the way along the beds. This dark brown and black bird with a red bill and forehead is usually seen walking along waterside banks with jerking, chicken-like movements of the head. They breed on the site in small numbers. This is number four in the frequency of sightings table being seen on 84% and 91% of visits during the two years.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
4 th	84%	91%

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Sightings of this attractive wading bird of farmland and wet meadows have been restricted to small flocks over-flying the watercress beds.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
52 th	4%	2%

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

This long billed wading bird, can be seen in small numbers most winters. Unfortunately it is difficult to obtain more than a fleeting view as they fly up from the lower beds. Numbers and indeed their presence at all is very dependent on temperature – during cold icy spells numbers can be in double figures but as soon as the temperature rises above freezing they seem to disperse to locations with more available food.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
42 th	13%	7%

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

This large wading bird with a long downward curving bill is more normally associated with muddy coasts and estuaries but we are lucky to have them breeding close by. The airfield is their favoured site and from about February to June or July they can be heard over the area. They commute between the airfield and surrounding damp meadows and occasionally overfly the watercress beds. There is an interesting record of a Curlew on the airfield sighted on 4 April 1999 wearing plastic coloured rings. This was reported to BTO and the bird was identified as one that was ringed as part of a PhD study at Scoughall, just east of North Berwick on the Firth of Forth on 15th April 1985. It was ringed as a male in its second year making it 15 years old in 1999. I was never able to determine whether this bird was breeding locally or resting on its journey north but as Curlews can live for up to about 30 years there could be several years left to check this out.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
47 th	4%	9%

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

The commonest gull in the area is Black-headed Gull and these are widespread, in the winter months. They can frequently be seen flying overhead travelling between Oakley Wood rubbish tip and various water bodies. They can occasionally be seen in the summer, but they are mainly confined to flying along the river. These summer birds are probably from the local breeding population from either Radley or Farmoor. This gull's name can be somewhat confusing as the adults in breed finery have chocolate brown heads rather than black and young birds or adults during the first part of the winter have only a dark "smudge" behind the eye.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
29 th	13%	24%

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Larger than Black-headed Gulls and easily told apart by their dark upper wings. Commonly seen flying overhead in the winter and this species tends to occur more frequently than their smaller cousin in the summer. These summer birds are normally young birds not yet mature enough to breed.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
30 th	15%	22%

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

This species, better known in city centres, can occasionally be seen in the area. They have been seen on hanger roofs at RAF Benson and over Ewelme village. This name tends to be used for any pigeon/dove that is not one of the other recognised species and covers racing pigeons and various hybrids.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
45 th	11%	4%

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

This small relation of the Woodpigeon is best distinguished by the lack of white on the neck and wing and it's generally blue/grey appearance. Stock Doves nest in holes in trees and are closely associated with farmland where they feed on seeds and grain. With the changes in farming practices this species is in serious decline but can still be seen fairly regularly over the beds.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
37 th	9%	15%

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

The white neck flash and broad white wing bar across the open wings easily identifies this, the largest of the pigeons. It is a common species throughout the area and can occur in large numbers.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
1 st	98%	96%

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

The Collared Dove represents an amazing success story. They first arrived in this country back in the 1950's and bred for the first time in 1958 in Norfolk. Since then they have rapidly spread throughout the country and seem to have taken to gardens like the proverbial duck to water. Not quite so common outside gardens but a frequent visitor to the site.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
19 th	42%	54%

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

In the past the arrival of this summer visitor was a sign that spring had arrived. In recent years, however, the decline in numbers of Cuckoos might lead one to believe that spring, or at least the Cuckoo never arrives. The favoured species for the Cuckoo to parasitise are Reed Warbler, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail and Redstart. Of these only the Dunnock is common around the cress beds. I have only a single record of this species on 25 May 2003 at the back of the Trout Pond.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
65 th	2%	0%

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Although Swifts look rather like members of the Swallow family they are not related but are more closely linked to the Nightjar. A regular summer visitor which nests in the roof space of some of the older houses in the village. It does, however, require a location where it can fly straight in and drop vertically out in order to gain flying speed. These remarkable birds virtually live on the wing, feeding, drinking, collecting nest material, mating and sleeping whilst flying. It has been estimated that each parent flies some 500 miles (800 kilometers) a day collecting food and cold wet weather may force them to forage far from the nest for long periods. The eggs are resistant to chilling and the young can withstand several days of starvation when they become torpid at night, their temperatures falling from the normal 38°C to as low as 21°C.

Seen regularly over the beds and village between mid May and early August.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
32 th	18%	17%

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthi*

Probably the most exotic of the birds to be seen in at the Watercress beds. Unfortunately views are often restricted to a streak of bright blue as the Kingfisher flashes past low over the water. It has been recorded as having bred on site but not in recent years. More commonly seen during the winter months indicating that they probably breed further downstream near the Thames.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
35 th	13%	17%

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

The Green is our largest woodpecker, well known for its loud cackle from which it gets its country name of "yaffle". It is associated with woodland and large trees but its fondness for feeding on ants brings it down to lawns and open fields.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
57 th	2%	2%

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

The Great Spotted Woodpecker is mainly a woodland bird but seen occasionally in gardens and elsewhere. Some people can be confused between this species and the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but the difference in size is very obvious. The Great is about the size of a Blackbird whereas the Lesser is only the size of a Sparrow.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
48 th	9%	2%

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

This ground dwelling bird occurs in the farmland surrounding the beds and on the airfield but is more often heard than seen when in its characteristic towering song flight. They sing from a considerable height, often making it difficult to see the bird. There has, in recent years, been a considerable reduction in numbers of Skylarks, in part due to a lack of suitable winter stubble for feeding and also because of the lack of insects during the summer for feeding young.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
59 th	4%	0%

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

The Swallow is a regular summer migrant, arriving in late March and April and most have gone by mid October. They breed in barns, sheds, garages and other outbuildings with open access, so that they can fly straight in to the nest, which is usually built on top of a beam or ledge. They are often seen in fast acrobatic flight in search of flying insects over the beds. They are gregarious during migration, gathering in large numbers over suitable feeding areas.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
22 nd	31%	41%

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

The House Martin is a regular summer visitor, most of which arrive during the second half of April and depart to Africa between mid August and mid October. They build a nest of mud, shaped like a cup, which is stuck to the underside of eaves on a house, especially where the roof rafters project outside. They nest in the village of Ewelme but, unfortunately, their numbers have declined markedly in recent years.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
25 th	22%	30%

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

This species is an irregular visitor to the beds, mostly as a passage migrant and winter visitor. They used to be seen on the edge of the airfield and occasionally strayed over to drink or feed from the beds below the bridge. This seems to occur less often now as illustrated by the zero return in 2003/4.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
51 th	9%	0%

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

This is the most graceful of the wagtails with its nimble actions and handsome plumage. The grey head and back, contrasting with bright lime yellow under the tail, eases identification. They are resident on the Watercress Beds throughout the year and one or two pairs breed on the site. One pair successfully bred in an artificial nest box during both years of the survey.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
9 th	91%	72%

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

The elegant black and white plumage and graceful actions of the Pied Wagtail are a familiar sight around human habitation. However, they are not as common on the Watercress Beds as one might expect. It is possible that the Grey Wagtails “rule the roost” and chase off the Pied but I have no evidence to support this.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
44 th	13%	4%

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A very common resident. Sometimes overlooked because of its habit of skulking in deep undergrowth but rather spoils the secretive behaviour by singing very loudly for such a small bird. Very common on the beds especially in the winter where, because of the warm water, their food source of mainly insects, is plentiful.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
8 th	87%	76%

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

A very common resident again attracted to the warm winter conditions for insect food.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
12 th	73%	70%

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

A very common resident.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
10 th	89%	72%

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

A very common resident.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
2 nd	96%	87%

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Harsh chuckling calls from passing Fieldfares are a characteristic sound of farmland in winter. They arrive from Northern Europe, in late October and return over a protracted period from February to April. It is a very dark looking thrush, about the size of a Blackbird. It can be easily recognised as it flies away, as it has a very dark tail with a whitish grey rump. Small flocks can sometimes be seen feeding on fallen apples or Hawthorn berries in the area.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
56 th	2%	2%

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Widespread but in serious decline, especially since 1975 though from personal observation I think there could be a bit of a recovery in recent years. Although it is hard to imagine now, the Song Thrush was more common than the Blackbird before 1945.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
27 th	27%	20%

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

The Redwing is a common winter visitor from northern Europe (mostly Finland and Russia), arriving in October and departing between March and April. It is our smallest thrush, even smaller than the Song Thrush. Apart from its reddish underwing, it can be recognised easily by its very distinctive eye-stripe and heavily streaked underparts. Like the Fieldfare, small flocks can sometimes be seen feeding on fallen apples or Hawthorn berries at or around the beds.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
41 st	13%	9%

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Our largest resident thrush with grey brown plumage on the back and round spots on the breast (they are streaked on the Song Thrush). The Mistle Thrush is widespread but not common. They tend to be associated with larger trees and open fields. Seen on three visits in the first year of the survey but not since.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
53 rd	6%	0%

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Can be identified from Common Whitethroat as they are slightly smaller but more importantly, greyer plumage, a darker head and darker legs. It is not as common as the Whitethroat and is much more likely to go unnoticed as it is more skulking and is quite happy to sing from the middle of a bush. Prefers old hedgerows with thick undergrowth and adjacent rough grassland. Seen on two visits during the second survey year.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
54 th	0%	4%

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

As the name implies it has a white throat, warm brown shoulder feathers and brown legs. This species breeds close to but probably not in the area of the Watercress beds. It prefers hedgerows which have a good undergrowth and tend to be quite conspicuous, choosing to sing from taller shrubs. Recent studies show that the number of these birds depends, not only on their breeding success, but on the conditions in their winter quarters in Africa. Common Whitethroats arrive in April and depart in September.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
50 th	7%	2%

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

A bird remarkable for having no distinguishing markings, noticeable for its drab dull brown plumage. Garden Warblers bred within the reserve during both years of the survey. They favour open woodland and scrubland so the area suits them. Unlike most of the warblers which have very distinctive songs, that of the Garden Warbler is very similar to the Blackcap. As birds are recorded by song as well as sight it is possible that some of the Garden Warbler records refer to Blackcap and vice-versa – especially early in the season before I get my ear in.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
39 th	15%	9%

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

With good views the Blackcap is easily recognised but they have an annoying habit of sitting in hedges well above head height when the black cap of the male or brown of the female can be very difficult to see. They breed in thick hedges. Our local breeding birds migrate to Mediterranean Countries but Blackcaps are not uncommon during the winter, these birds having migrated here from Europe. Blackcaps breed in the area below the bridge.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
51 st	51%	22%

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

You are usually alerted to the presence of Chiffchaffs by the song of the Chiffchaff which is a monotonously repeated “chiff chaff”. They look very similar to the Willow Warbler but I am yet to see one of these here. They differ in only have the barest hint of yellow on the breast and the legs are blackish brown. They are associated with thick, often tall, hedges, arriving mid March and departing mid September. Like the Blackcap some over winter though they are more easily overlooked. They breed in the bushes beside the watercress beds.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
26 th	27%	24%

Goldcrest.

This, the smallest of our birds, was fairly common considering their preference for conifer trees and the absence of these trees in the survey area below the bridge. The relatively high recording rate was mainly due to winter records when these birds are wider ranging, often associating with mixed foraging flocks of tit species.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
38 th	13%	11%

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

The Long-tailed is not a true Tit and differs from all the other tits in that it is the only one not to nest in holes. They favour thick, tall hedges of Hawthorn or Blackthorn where they build a domed nest decorated with Lichen and lined with as many as 2000 feathers. I would have expected more sightings of this species but perhaps the increase in the second year of the survey will be sustained as the newly planted boundary hedge develops.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
43 th	6%	13%

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*

A very common resident making full use of the nest boxes provided.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
3 rd	93%	83%

Great Tit *Parus major*

As its name would suggest this is the largest member of the tit family. They can be easily recognised by the shiny black cap and bib joined by bold black lines enclosing white cheeks and a black stripe down yellow bib and belly. The Great Tit is a common resident with similar habits to the Blue Tit though they tend to feed on the ground more often. They have a wide variety of calls and song and, "that strange bird call you hear in the woods" is more often than not a Great Tit. They also nest in the wooden nest boxes.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
7 th	82%	83%

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

A colourful woodland member of the crow family, but rather secretive. It is mainly sedentary and feeds on a wide variety of food such as small vertebrates, including small birds and their eggs and chicks and in winter on beechmast and acorns. Only a single sighting of this species in the first year of the survey.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
63 rd	2%	0%

Magpie *Pica pica*

The Magpie is a widespread and common resident whose numbers steadily increased from 1960 to 1990. The population is now stable. Like the Jay it will feed on a wide variety of foods. It has been blamed for the decline of many of the farmland and song birds but, although it may be a factor, it is minor compared with the general shortage of food in winter on modern farms.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
13 th	73%	63%

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Jackdaws nest in holes in trees and will readily take over a chimney if the fire is no longer in use. They are widespread and common and tend to be associated with the buildings alongside the watercress beds rather than the beds themselves.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
14 th	62%	74%

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

The Rook is a common resident in the area and, with the large Rookery just down the road at Fifield Manor, they spend a great deal of time flying over the site or feeding on the adjacent airfield.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
6 th	75%	96%

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

The number of Carrion Crows has been steadily increasing in recent years. They nest locally and are scavengers, eating a wide variety of foods. Despite the belief that large black birds in flocks must be Rooks and ones or twos must be Crows this is not always a reliable method of identification. Crows will gather into flocks of a hundred or more birds. The best way to separate them is by looking at the bill; long, pointed and greyish white on Rooks, shorter, stumpier and black on Crows.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
24 th	31%	24%

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

A widespread and common resident, but whose numbers are declining. They nest in any hole that is large enough, often in roof spaces if there is access. After the breeding season Starlings gather into flocks of several hundred. These flocks can become quite large when immigrants arrive from Eastern Europe but nothing to compare with the 1950's when there were sometimes flocks in excess of a million birds.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
15 th	53%	70%

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

A bird strongly linked to mans activity. Although widespread and common it has been in steady decline since 1979 both on farms and in gardens. They nest in holes but will occasionally make a very untidy domed nest in ivy or trees. They will also sometimes take over a House Martins nest. They breed in houses alongside the beds and can be seen on forays to the beds to feed and drink.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
16 th	47%	65%

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

The Chaffinch is widespread and a common resident whose population is stable. They breed in the reserve, building a neat, cup shaped nest in hedgerows. The population levels increase in winter due to immigration from Europe.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
11 th	84%	76%

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

The Greenfinch is a widespread and common resident whose population is stable. It is a regular visitor to the watercress beds throughout the year though less so during the summer as they often nest in evergreens which, apart from Ivy, we are short of.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
18 th	44%	59%

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

A favourite for cage bird enthusiasts early this century, but thankfully no longer - at least in this country. The Goldfinch is a seed eater, which does well on unkempt areas, especially where teasel, burdock or thistles flourish. They were only seen on about one in ten visits during the two years covered by the survey but I would expect this to increase as some of the improvement schemes take effect.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
40 th	11%	11%

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

The Linnet is present throughout the year. In winter they gather into large flocks, augmented by birds from Europe and are to be seen on rough ground and stubble where they feed on weed seeds. They have been in serious decline since 1974 though recently they have benefited from set-aside and have taken a liking to Rape crops. One of the biggest changes noted between the two years covered by the survey with a decline from observed on one in four visits in the first year to no sightings at all in 2003/4. This was probably due to one or more pairs breeding locally in the first but not the second year.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
36 th	26%	0%

Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

This small finch has undergone several major fluctuations in population size, being numerous early this century and during the late 1960's and 1970's, but since then has declined again. It favours damp Birch woodland, so it is not seen during the breeding season. A pair, or possibly three birds, were seen feeding on weed seed on two occasions in December 2003.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
55 th	0%	4%

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

The adult male Bullfinch is unmistakable in splendid pink, grey, black and white plumage. Females retain the black cap and white rump but are much drabber. They feed on fruit as large as sloes, and, in late winter when seed supplies run out, Bullfinches turn their attention to young tree buds, and for this reason was once regarded as a pest. Numbers have declined rapidly since 1975 and the days are long gone when they were so numerous that boys earned a few coppers by scaring them from fruit trees in orchards.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
46 th	6%	9%

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

The Yellowhammer is probably best known for its song which is often written as "little bit of bread and no cheese". They are widespread and common along hedgerows and rough grassland associated with open farmland but, somewhat surprisingly, rarely stray on to the nature reserve. Numbers have been declining since 1988 which may, in part, be due to the change to autumn sown cereal crops with the resultant lack of winter stubble fields.

Posn	2002/3	2003/4
61 st	0%	2%

Posn.	Species	% visits recorded	
		02/03	03/04
1	Woodpigeon	98.2	95.7
2	Blackbird	96.4	87.0
3	Blue Tit	92.7	82.6
4	Moorhen	83.6	91.3
5	Mallard	70.9	100
6	Rook	74.5	95.7
7	Great Tit	81.8	82.6
8	Wren	87.3	76.1
9	Grey Wagtail	91.1	71.7
10	Robin	89.1	71.7
11	Chaffinch	83.6	76.1
12	Dunnock	72.7	69.6
13	Magpie	72.7	63.0
14	Jackdaw	61.8	73.9
15	Starling	52.7	69.6
16	House Sparrow	47.3	65.2
17	Pheasant	54.5	50.0
18	Greenfinch	43.6	58.7
19	Collared Dove	41.8	54.3
20	Red Kite	49.1	43.5
21	Blackcap	50.9	21.7
22	Swallow	30.9	41.3
23	Kestrel	20.0	39.1
24	Carrion Crow	30.9	23.9
25	House Martin	21.8	30.4
26	Chiffchaff	27.3	23.9
27	Song Thrush	27.3	19.6
28	Grey Heron	27.3	17.4
29	Black-headed Gull	12.7	23.9
30	Lesser Black-backed Gull	14.5	21.7
31	Sparrowhawk	16.4	19.6
32	Swift	18.2	17.4
33	Buzzard	25.5	8.7

Posn.	Species	% visits recorded	
		02/03	03/04
34	Water Rail	23.6	6.5
35	Kingfisher	12.5	17.4
36	Linnet	25.5	0
37	Stock Dove	9.1	15.2
38	Goldcrest	12.7	10.9
39	Garden Warbler	14.5	8.7
40	Goldfinch	10.9	10.9
41	Redwing	12.7	8.7
42	Snipe	12.5	6.5
43	Long-tailed Tit	5.5	13
44	Pied Wagtail	12.7	4.3
45	Feral Pigeon	10.9	4.3
46	Bullfinch	5.5	8.7
47	Curlew	3.6	8.7
48	Great Spotted Woodpecker	9.1	2.2
49	Red-legged Partridge	3.6	6.5
50	Whitethroat	7.3	2.2
51	Meadow Pipit	8.9	0
52	Lapwing	3.6	2.2
53	Mistle Thrush	5.5	0
54	Lesser Whitethroat	0	4.3
55	Redpoll	0	4.3
56	Fieldfare	1.8	2.2
57	Green Woodpecker	1.8	2.2
58	Hobby	1.8	2.2
59	Skylark	3.6	0
60	Canada Goose	0	2.2
61	Yellowhammer	0	2.2
62	Grey Partridge	1.8	0
63	Jay	1.8	0
64	Teal	1.8	0
65	Cuckoo	1.8	0

NB.Posn. refers to the average over the two years 2002 – 2004

8 species were seen in 2002/3 and NOT in 2003/4

4 species were seen in 2003/4 and NOT in 2002/3

Species with at least 10% fewer sightings:

Blue Tit	Blackcap
Wren	Buzzard
Grey Wagtail	Water Rail
Robin	Linnet

Species with at least 10% more sightings:

Mallard	Greenfinch
Rook	Collared Dove
Jackdaw	Swallow
Starling	Kestrel
House Sparrow	Black-headed Gull