

Notes on birds in the Severn and Avon Vale, mainly Gloucestershire October - December 2003

General introduction

The main sites are (from the north):

- Longdon Marsh (Worcs), a nearly enclosed basin north of the M50 motorway, flowing via the Longdon Brook to the Severn above Tewkesbury.
- Avon Meadows (on either side of the Avon north of Tewkesbury), along the border between Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, and including the restored gravel pits at Bredon's Hardwick (Worcs) and the Great Hay Meadow at Twynning (Glos). Just to the east is Kemerton Lake (Worcs), a restored gravel pit in the valley of the Carrant Brook, which flows into the Avon just above Tewkesbury.
- The "Severn Hams" between Tewkesbury and Gloucester, in which the main wetland areas are Ashleworth and Hasfield Hams, Coombe Hill Canal and Meadows, and the Leigh Meadows between the River Chelt and Leigh Brook above Wainlodes. This area also includes Tewkesbury Ham, the Severn between Lower Lode and Haw Bridge, and the Severn from Wainlodes, past Ashleworth Quay and Sandhurst, to Gloucester. Barrow Ponds have been excavated alongside the Chelt, east of the A 38, while near Sandhurst and Maisemore there are a number of abandoned overgrown riverside brickpits.
- Minsterworth Ham, on the west bank of the Severn below Gloucester, opposite the Gloucester Landfill Site (much beloved of gulls) and Sudmeadow.
- Walmore Common, on the west bank of the Severn below Gloucester; also the little marsh at Rodley, west of Walmore, along the stream west of Boxbush Farm.
- Elmore Back, on the east bank of the Severn below Gloucester, opposite Walmore.

Most of these sites are marshes, which flood when the level of the Severn is high, preventing local streams from reaching the Severn, so that they back flood. At Ashleworth, there is a water control structure (sluice or stank), which allows an artificial open area of water to be maintained in winter; the only other large area of permanent open water is the restored gravel pit at Bredon's Hardwick. When the Severn and Avon flood, extensive floods may cover the whole floodplain. The River Chelt holds running water, and is small enough to have muddy edges and banks. Coombe Hill Canal is a long disused and overgrown canal that runs through the centre of Coombe Hill Meadows. Bredon's Hardwick gravel pits, Barrow Ponds, Sandhurst and Maisemore Brickpits, and Walham Pools near Gloucester are artificial excavations.

Weather and flooding: general. Dry, sunny weather continued into October, which was the warmest October in the last ten years, with mainly easterly winds and high pressure over continental Europe extending their effects into the British Isles. Westerly winds only occasionally got the upper hand, and then they were generally from the northwest, bringing little rain. There were some quite cold days at the end of the month, with sharp frosts, and a little light rain. November had temperatures above normal throughout the UK. Nationally, rainfall was average in November, with the main rainfall from 20-23 and on 25-26 November, but much of it seemed to skirt round Gloucestershire. Early November in Gloucestershire was unseasonably mild with little or no rain, light rain on 11 November, SW gales and some rain on 14 November, frost 16 November, then mild again, some light rain after the middle of month, and some frost at the end. Rain in the upper Severn catchment in late November took the river level at Haw Bridge on 3 December to 8.34, the highest since spring. December was close to the average for most meteorological values. A sharp frost on 8 December froze everything. Some rain fell on 12/13 December, bringing the river at Haw Bridge up again to 8.64 on 15 December, but back down to 7.35 on 18 December; it rose again to 8.80 at Haw Bridge on 23 December and 8.62 on 24 December, high tides contributing to this rise in river levels. The end of the month was dull and damp.

As in 2002, there was no autumn flooding. Conditions were desperately dry at all sites in October and November, following the dry summer and shortage of autumn rainfall. Grass withered and ditches remained dry, only beginning to fill very slowly in early November. There was a slight rise in water levels following rain in late November and early December, but still no open water at Ashleworth and only the scrapes were filled at Coombe Hill. In the last ten days of the year, with higher river and ditch levels, some open water appeared at Ashleworth, but only part of the reserve was covered and levels remained much lower than usual. In general, there was a great deal of willow pollarding, some rows of very old trees along roads and over ditches being pollarded for the first time for many years.

Conditions at the main sites

Avon Meadows: Bredon's Hardwick pits remained the only area in the Severn and Avon Vales with open water throughout October and November and, as a result, attracted most of the birds (notably ducks and geese). Some water was pumped from river on to some fields around the pits in late October; this created surface water lasting into December, and attracted Whooper Swans for a short time, plus Fieldfares and Redwings. Other meadows, notably the Great Hay Meadow at Twyning, remained dry throughout.

Ashleworth/Hasfield: Dramatically dry in October and November. The main ditch at Ashleworth dried out completely, so there was no point in putting boards back into the sluice; the three scrapes on the main field stayed almost completely dry, the middle one still holding large fish on 8 October. The dry conditions in the autumn meant that there were no water birds to be disturbed, so trapping and ringing of passerines continued later than usual, last session 16 November. Part of the Ham Road hedge by the hides was re-laid in November, and a new hide in Meerend Thicket was erected; ten willows along the main ditch were pollarded in early November, and five more at the back of the reserve in early December. The main ditch began to fill, very slowly, in early November, but there was still no open water on the main reserve fields. Some icing in mid December following sharp frosts. From about 23 December, water levels began to rise; high Severn levels (from rain in the upper catchment, together with the effect of high tides round 23/24 December) raised ditch levels and caused water to flow back over the sluice into the reserve, providing some open water on the reserve, though levels were still low for the time of year and the northernmost fields were not flooded.

Coombe Hill: Dry everywhere in October, the Long Pool and ditches completely dried out (sheep in the Long Pool in early November!), no water in scrapes; the canal also dried out in some places; water levels in ditches and scrapes rose very slowly in second half of November. New ditch parallel with footpath across east end of reserve now completed; ditch in one field outside reserve, immediately to east, cleaned out and re-profiled. The big field north-east of the reserve, which has been in set aside for several years, was ploughed in mid-November. Scrapes were holding water by 5 December, but the Long Pool was still bone dry; on 16 December the Long Pool had shallow water, and was full by the end of the year, but there was no flooding of the meadows.

Leigh Meadows: Fields dry throughout, though Chelt still flowing. Some surface water on set-aside field south of Chelt on 3 December (frozen on 8 December), more water there on 13 December, frozen again on 16 December, thawed by 23 December; no flooding otherwise.

Sandhurst brickpits: The deeper pits still held water in November, when other marshes were dry, and so acted as a refuge for some Wigeon and Teal.

Walmore Common: Several fields were re-seeded in late summer/autumn. Fields dry in October and November, though more water in the ditches than elsewhere, following decision to keep penstock closed at 5.88. Ditches remained full in December, but no surface water at all.

Minsterworth Ham and Elmore Back: No information for this period, but they were undoubtedly largely dry.

Bird records

Grebes: As usual, nearly all records came from the deeper pools: Great Crested were present at Bredon's Hardwick throughout, with up to 12 in November and seven on 19 December; one at Barrow Ponds on 3 & 13 December. Three Little Grebes, one whinnying, on Kemerton Lake on 4 November; one sitting on the Chelt at Wainlodes on 29 December, just as river levels were rising; where had it come from, and where was it going?

Cormorant: The only sites where Cormorants regularly land are Bredon's Hardwick pits (on a gravel island) and Barrow Ponds (on a large oak on an island), the former attracting much the larger numbers. About twenty at Bredon's Hardwick in early October, 70 (!) fishing there on 4 November, twenty or thirty throughout December. Two perched at Barrow Ponds on 3 December, ten on 30 December. Odd birds were seen flying up and down the river, no doubt en route to these sites.

Herons: Ones and twos at all sites throughout the period, the largest numbers being: up to fourteen at Ashleworth in the first half of October, hunting large fish marooned in the scrapes; six at Bredon's Hardwick on 14 December; five sitting on a ploughed field by the Chelt on 30 December.

Mute Swans: The pair that bred by The Wharf at Coombe Hill was still present in October with two cygnets, adults only on 16 November. Three pairs, two with large young, at various Sandhurst pits on 7 November. Odd ones dotted here and there throughout the period, but no concentrations of any size, and by late December, several pairs seemed already to be taking up territory; pairs of Mute Swans arrived at Ashleworth as soon as water levels began to rise in late December, and were very aggressive to one another, obviously staking out territory.

Whooper Swans: The first birds of the small group which winters in the Severn Hams arrived last year on 22 October, but conditions this year were highly unsuitable at that date: no water at Ashleworth for roosting, no grass at Leigh Meadows (or anywhere else) for feeding. Not surprisingly, the first birds seen went to the only area in the Severn and Avon Vales with some open water, Bredon's Hardwick, where an unringed adult with four cygnets were first recorded on 3 November; on 4 November they were feeding on neighbouring fields, which had some surface water following pumping from the river; but they only remained for a couple of days. No further records in the Severn Vale, but seven adults were recorded in December in the Cotswold Water Park (East), an area where Whoopers are unusual; were these perhaps the Severn Vale wintering flock?

Bewick's Swans: The easterly winds in the first half of October provided ideal conditions for birds to arrive early from continental Europe. The first two birds arrived at Slimbridge on 18 October, with six more on 19 October. Six moved off, but two remained round the European Pen. A pair with a cygnet landed briefly at Walmore Common at midday on 23 October. The first major swanfall of the winter at Slimbridge was on 8 November, when Bewick's Swans were heard arriving in the early hours of a bright moonlit night and 45 were counted at 0730 the following morning; later the same day, nine adults were seen in flight, first at Coombe Hill then Ashleworth, before flying off to the north. On the same day 25-30 swans were seen flying north over the Malverns. Thus, as in previous years, Bewick's Swans, soon after their arrival at Slimbridge, seem to reconnoitre Walmore and the Severn Hams to check on conditions at places where they have fed in previous winters. Numbers at Slimbridge dropped to 27 on 9 November, with only 13 on 11 November, but there were further arrivals in December, with 44 on 5 December, 120 by 8 December, 125 on 9 December, 145 on 15 December, 149 on 26 December, 170 on 30 December. Conditions at Walmore and the Severn Hams remained dry for Bewick's Swans but a single flew over Coombe Hill on 6 December. At Walmore up to ten were recorded in the week of 5-11 December, with more in the second half of the month, despite the dry conditions: 12 on 13 & 21 December, 11 on 23 December (a family party of six plus five adults) and 30 (no doubt reconnoitring again) on 31 December.

No Black Swans, hurrah!

Geese: Usually in winter Canada Geese and other feral geese move back and forth between the Avon Meadows and the Severn Hams, but this year the Avon Meadows was the only site with any numbers, because other areas were so dry: over 250 Canada Geese at Bredon's Hardwick on 4 November with 7 Greylags and a Barnacle; 350 Canadas, 10 Greylags and eight Barnacles on 19 December, when Avon Meadows were covered with goose droppings and the birds had obviously been feeding intensively in the area for some time. They no doubt roosted on the pits. No Canadas at Ashleworth or Coombe Hill before late December (though 40 flew downriver over Wainlodes early in the morning of 12 October), but 80 Canadas and ten Greylags at Ashleworth on 29 December. There were 25 Canadas at Barrow Ponds on 3 December and 30 on 30 December. A group of about 40 Greylags (one of them with much white in the wing), usually accompanied by a Bar-headed Goose, was based at Barrow Ponds from at least mid-November onwards; what was presumably this flock was seen flying south over Ashleworth on 16 November, at Barrow Ponds on 3 December, in flight over Coombe Hill on 5 December, and feeding on fields alongside the Chelt near Barrow Ponds on 13 December.

Shelduck: Few records: two at Bredon's Hardwick on 14 & 28 December, and one flying over Coombe Hill, giving its display call on 16 December.

Dabbling Ducks: Because of the dry conditions, numbers of surface feeding ducks at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill were practically nil throughout October and November. A few Wigeon and Teal seem to

have settled in early November at Sandhurst, where there was still some water. The main concentration was at Bredon's Hardwick, where the pits had open water throughout, and held good numbers of Wigeon. They began to arrive at Ashleworth and Coombe Hill in late December as soon as there was some open water; where had they come from – Bredon's Hardwick or the estuary?

Wigeon: 100 at Bredon's Hardwick on 5 October, 400 on 4 November, up to 1,200 feeding on fields around the pits on 19 & 23 December; on 31 December 100 were caught and ringed, which should provide further information about their movements within the Severn Vale. Ten at Kemerton Lake on 4 November. 55 at Sandhurst on 7 November were no doubt birds which in wetter conditions would have been at Ashleworth; Sandhurst offers shelter and freedom from disturbance, but is surrounded by quite tall trees so that, once aloft, they have difficulty landing again; four at Barrow Ponds on 3 December, ten on 30 December. Numbers increased rapidly at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth once there was open water and grass to graze: 60 at Ashleworth on 3 December, nine on 15 December, 200-300 from 24 December onwards; 39 at Coombe Hill on 3 December, and 220, the first appreciable numbers of winter, on 24 December, 300 on 30 December.

Teal: 100 Bredon's Hardwick on 5 October, 300 on 4 November, 150 on 19 December. The little flock seen at Ashleworth in September had disappeared in October, though there was a single bird, probably pricked, in the first week of October; five on 6 November; they had no doubt taken refuge at Sandhurst where there were 20 on 7 November. Five at Walmore on 18 November. Sixty at Ashleworth on 3 & 6 December, 65 on 15 December, 75 on 29 December, 100 on 31 December; 125 at Coombe Hill on 24 December.

Mallard: 190 at Bredon's Hardwick on 5 October, 250 on 4 November, 200 on 28 December. 90 on a duck-pond by the Chelt near Barrow Ponds on 3 December. 50 or more at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth at the end of the month.

Gadwall: three pairs at Sandhurst on 7 November; a pair at Ashleworth on 29 December.

Pintail: a single at Bredon's Hardwick on 19 & 22 October, ten on 19 December. 25 circling over Longdon on 7 November, an early date even for a normal wet year. 30 at Bredon's Hardwick on 23 December. Ten at Ashleworth on 28 December, and twenty at Coombe Hill on 30 December.

Shoveler: remarkably few: one at Bredon's Hardwick on 5 October, two at Ashleworth on 28 December, six on 29 December.

Diving ducks: Pochard and Tufted Duck were present at Bredon's Hardwick for most of the period, Tufted being more numerous early on with 25 on 12 October, 45 on 8 November, 35 on 14 December; two Pochard on 19 October, then 25 on 8 November, 45 on 21 December. Six Tufted and two Pochard at Kemerton on 4 November. Two Pochard at Barrow Ponds on 30 December. Two Tufted at Sandhurst on 7 November.

Raptors: Single Sparrowhawks were seen throughout the period at many sites, including Avon Meadows (December), Ashleworth (October, November and December), Coombe Hill (November and December) and Leigh Meadows (November and December). Buzzards were also widespread and noted throughout the period: Kemerton (November), Coombe Hill (October to December), Ashleworth (October to December), Leigh Meadows (October to December), Sandhurst (November), Walmore (November); up to four individuals were recorded, often giving their mewing calls from a perch or in flight, even mewing in the rain, so this call is not related to display, though it may be territorial.

Kestrel: singles at Bredon's Hardwick October to December, at Ashleworth on 11 & 12 October and throughout November and December (two on 20 December), at Leigh Meadows on 16 November and 30 December, at Coombe Hill on various dates October to December, at Maisemore Ham on 11 October, and Walmore on 20 October. Two observations of Merlin, each time females, represented a good showing: at Walmore on 18 November and at Leigh Meadows on 8 December. One Peregrine, sometimes two, were seen regularly on the pylons at Ashleworth from October to December, with singles in flight over Sandhurst on 7 November and on pylons at Leigh Meadows on 30 December. They did not seem to be less in evidence than usual, despite the lack of open water and ducks as prey.

Rails: As in earlier parts of the year, there were incredibly few records of Water Rail; one seen in dry conditions on 1 October at Ashleworth, and one heard in Long Pool at Coombe Hill on 24 December.

Moorhen: up to half a dozen along the canal at Coombe Hill from October to December, and several at Sandhurst pits on 7 November. Coot are usually few and far between in autumn and winter on the Severn marshes; the only records came from deeper sites where they are usual in winter: 150 at Kemerton on 4 November, present throughout at Bredon's Hardwick with 25 on 19 December.

Waders: Wintering numbers remained extremely low, in strong contrast to the estuary at Slimbridge where a couple of thousand Lapwings and several hundred Golden Plover were in residence by mid-December.

Thus there were remarkably few records of Golden Plover: just three at Bredon's Hardwick on 23 December. For Lapwing: small flocks (up to 32) on reserve at Coombe Hill in mid-October. None on the Avon Meadows or Great Hay Meadow on 4 November; three at Kemerton on 4 November, but at Bredon's Hardwick 10 on 5 October and 16 November, 120 on 6 December, 250 on 19 December and 200 on 23 December. 45 flew downriver, high over Ashleworth, on 23 November. Eight on wet set-aside at Leigh Meadows on 3 December, four in frozen conditions on 8 December. There was just one record of Dunlin, a single at Bredon's Hardwick with Lapwings on 19 December.

Snipe were clearly affected by dry conditions and hard ground, and no numbers were recorded until water levels began to increase in December: at Leigh Meadows, two in the bed of the Chelt on 12 October & 16 November, fifteen on wet set-aside on 3 December, couple in the bed of the Chelt in frozen conditions on 8 December; at Ashleworth, one 25 October, 6 & 12 November, two on 11 November & 29 December; at Coombe Hill one on 8 November, one on a scrape on 5 December, but 15 on 16 December, 20 on 24 & 30 December; eight at Walmore on 18 November; one on the Avon at Twyning on 19 December. Jack Snipe: one at Walmore on 27 October, one at Ashleworth on 19 November, one at Coombe Hill on 1 November, two on 24 December, one on 31 December.

One Green Sandpiper at Ashleworth on 1 October, and another at Coombe Hill on 11 October were probably migrants. A favourite winter haunt of this species is the running water of the Chelt in the Leigh Meadows, but there was a poor showing this year: one on the Chelt on 16 November, another or the same bird on the same day at Coombe Hill, one at Leigh Meadows on 3 December; but none found there in cold weather on 8 December, nor later in the month; had the hard weather caused it to leave? A single Curlew was seen flying southwards over Ashleworth and calling on the evening of 11 October – bizarre date, a migrant moving south? Six at Walmore on 12 October were no less bizarre.

Gulls: Few gulls landed in the dry fields, though they were often seen flying over, no doubt en route to the Throckmorton Landfill site, and there were of course plenty at the Gloucester Landfill Site. Small numbers of the four common inland species at Bredon's Hardwick throughout and a Great Black-backed Gull on 21 December. 50 Black-headed over wet set-aside at Leigh Meadows on 3 December.

Kingfisher: Seen now and then throughout the period: one on the Avon by Twyning on 19 December; one on the Severn above Ashleworth Quay on 6 & 23 November; one at Sandhurst on 7 November; two at Walmore on 12 October, one on 27 October; one on Coombe Hill Canal on 1 and 8 October; one over the Chelt on Leigh Meadows on 30 December.

Owls: Little Owl: one calling from Stonebow in evening of 11 October is the only record, and the paucity of records is remarkable; they were formerly numerous in old pollarded willows. Tawny Owl: calling from Ashleworth Quay on evening of 11 October, perhaps adults chasing young away? No sign of Long-eared Owls at the roost used in previous years.

Pigeons: A Stock Dove at Leigh Meadows on 23 December; 16, perhaps 60, at Coombe Hill on 24 December; 14 at Ashleworth on 29 December.

Woodpeckers: Occasional Great Spotted at most sites throughout the period.

Passerines:

Skylarks: small numbers of day migrants flying southeast in October: 15 at Coombe Hill on 8 October, ten on 12 October, but half a dozen going NE on easterly wind on 19 October; totals at Coombe Hill in October usually about 20 or 30, but 50 on 18 October. Some wintering on meadows at Coombe Hill: 15 on 5 December, 12 on 16 December, 3 on 24 December, 20 on 30 December.

Late hirundines: 5 Swallows at Wainlodes on 2 October, 3 at Ashleworth on 8 October; 6 House Martins at Coombe Hill on 8 October.

There were fair numbers of Meadow Pipits, no doubt passing migrants, recorded in October: 40 at Coombe Hill on 1 & 8 October, up to 25 for the rest of the month; at Ashleworth 50 on 4 October, 75 or more on a mown field during the day on 8 October, 70 coming to roost on evening of 11 October but less about (only ten) on morning of 12 October, 20 on 19 & 22 October, five in fields at Leigh Meadows on 12 October. Wintering numbers however did seem much smaller: at Leigh Meadows five on 6 November, seven on 13 December, a couple on 23 December; at Ashleworth only a single on 6 November, 10 on 12, 16 & 23 November, five on 5 December, 14 on 20 December, couple on 29 December; two or three at Coombe Hill on 24 December; but 40 at Walmore as late as 18 November.

Grey Wagtails are frequent in winter along the Chelt: one on 12 October, 3, 8 & 16 December, also one Coombe Hill on 22 October, one at Ashleworth Quay on 23 November, one at Haw Bridge on 3 December; one at Ashleworth on 19 November and 5 December. (They are also regular in Gloucester town centre in winter!) Pied Wagtails were present in fair numbers on the wet set-aside at Leigh Meadows: two on 3 December, but 8 on 16 December and 15 on 30 December.

Stonechats have become familiar as autumn passage migrants in the area, with some staying to winter: two Stonechats at Coombe Hill on 5 November, and a solitary female on 30 December. At Ashleworth one on the evening of 11 October, a pair (one ringed, probably a bird previously ringed in September) on 12 October, then one or two on many dates in November and December and three on 15 November; a single male at Leigh Meadows on 13 & 16 December. There was a single record of Wheatear early on, at Coombe Hill on 1 October.

The first Redwings noted were ten at Coombe Hill on 8 October and the first Fieldfares seven at Coombe Hill on 12 October. 30 Fieldfares with 30 Redwings went NE against an easterly wind on 19 October at Ashleworth, followed by a flock of 100 Fieldfares; why do they return to the north east ("flying backwards") on easterly winds in autumn? Thereafter numbers of wintering thrushes, mainly Fieldfares but many Redwings, plus some Song Thrushes and Blackbirds, were impressive in the thick hedges: several records of 300 Fieldfares and 150 Redwings. Big numbers Leigh Meadows in December (up to 500 Fieldfares and 150 Redwings, but in general less evident in December than earlier in the season; in late December feeding more on fields as rising ground water pushed worms and other invertebrates to the surface.

The last Sedge Warbler trapped at Ashleworth was on 5 October, a late date. A pair of Blackcaps was seen alongside Coombe Hill Canal on 5 and 16 November, and a single on 6 December. Chiffchaff song was heard at Coombe Hill on 8 October and Sandhurst on 7 November; one was seen alongside the Severn by Ashleworth Quay on 23 November. Goldcrests were frequent in the hedges: up to five at Ashleworth, from October to December, two or three at Coombe Hill in October and November, several Sandhurst on 7 November. A Firecrest was netted at Sudmeadow on 15 December.

Jays were much in evidence in October at Coombe Hill and Leigh Meadows; a few seen in November at Coombe Hill, Sandhurst and Walmore. Walmore seems to have become the preferred site for Ravens in the county: 14 there on 27 October, and 40 (!) on 18 November; elsewhere smaller numbers, though they seem more frequent than in previous years: one at Sandhurst on 7 November, one at Ashleworth on 16 & 23 November but four on 5 December, one at Leigh Meadows on 3 December and two on 30 December.

No sign of the Starling roost found some years near Corse and Staunton, behind Ashleworth.

There were few finch flocks of note: a real flock of 100 Chaffinches on maize stubble in frost on 16 December at Leigh Meadows, but decreasing later in the month, 50 at Ashleworth on 13 December. A single male Brambling was noted near a set-aside field by the Chelt on 30 December. A few Goldfinches: 30 at Leigh Meadows on 12 October, 50 at Ashleworth on 18 October, five Coombe Hill on 22 October; about fifteen on Leigh Meadows on 13 December. Linnet: two or three at Coombe Hill on 8 October, six on 22 October. A single Redpoll, considered to have been a Mealy Redpoll, at Ashleworth on 10 December was an unusual observation.

Bullfinches remain numerous in thick hedges, notably at Coombe Hill and Ashleworth; small groups of up to ten at both sites from October to December; up to five at Leigh Meadows in December. One at Sandhurst on 7 November.

Yellowhammers are not numerous in the lower parts of the floodplain, but some did occur: six in hedges by set-aside at Coombe Hill on 8 & 22 October; one in flight over Ashleworth on 16 November and ten on 24 December. Two at Leigh Meadows on 13 December, five on 16 December, but over 20 on a set-aside field at slightly higher level on 30 December. Reed Buntings are common breeders in summer, but decrease considerably in autumn and winter. There were still four or five at both Coombe Hill and Ashleworth on 8 October; seven (one adult & six immatures) trapped Ashleworth on evening of 11 October, six more (two adults & four immatures) on morning of 12 October; still present on 19 October but only four trapped. From November numbers were smaller: at Ashleworth, one or two on 6 & 12 November, half a dozen (four trapped) on 16 November, one or two on 18 & 23 November, one heard on 15 December. At Coombe Hill, three or four on 5 December, one on 16 December, four or five in mild weather on 24 December. At Leigh Meadows one found, not without difficulty, on 13 December, two on 16 December. By late December, some seemed to be preparing for the breeding season: a male perched high in a bush, chirping territorially at Avon Meadows on 19 December, and another at Coombe Hill on 24 December.

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Compiled by M. Smart from his own observations and those of Gordon Avery, Les Brown, Colin Butters, Sue Carman, John Coates, Colin Evers, Mervyn Greening, and Andy Jayne.